

*Spotlight:*

*Maryann De Bruin*



I've always been interested in gardening, but my options were limited due to moving every few years while the USAF moved my family around Europe and the United States. My husband and I both retired in 1995 while living in Rome, NY, where we stayed for 18 years to raise our children. Our yard in Rome was not large, and quite sunless for the most part, but I did manage to grow a pretty spectacular Jackman's Clematis surrounded by Stella deOro daylilies, and keep alive the tiger lilies, pachysandra and peonies that were already there.

Once our children were on their own, we moved back to where we started, Wisconsin, where we have a larger, sunnier yard, and it didn't take me long to seek out gardening inspiration. My first foray was to the Kaukauna Nature Center, where Tom Wentzel taught a class in propagation. He also told us about the Master Gardener Program, and I graduated in the class of 2015.

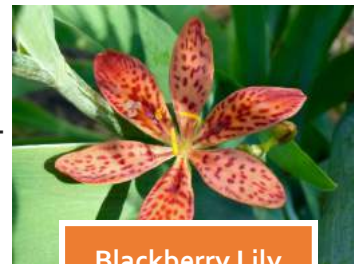


Marigold Mile

For me, the MG Program has been a terrific way to connect with and learn from knowledgeable and generous folk with interests similar to mine. It is rewarding, while out and about, to marvel at the amazing improvements made to the extension property, and to be surprised (every single time) by the warm splash of color along the Marigold Mile. When I was invited by Mike Turner at my very first plant sale potting session to show up bright and ridiculously early some morning

to help plant marigolds, I didn't know what to expect, let alone that it would be an ongoing project, but I'm grateful for the friends I've made helping to make Oneida Street a visual delight as well as to warm the institutional appearance of St. Elizabeth's Hospital.

There have been a few gardening disappointments (curse you, squash vine borers!), and who knew those blackberry lilies grown from seeds purchased at Monticello, possibly descendants of ones grown by Thomas Jefferson himself, would get so freakin' tall, or that after just a few short years after planting, I would need a whip and a chair to control my lovely Japanese anemone, which has earned itself a spot on internet lists with titles like "Perennials You May Regret Planting." But I have been taught about resources to help me do better next year (thank you, Learning Store). And courtesy of the compost pile, my compulsive frugality is soothed knowing that hardly any failure is ever a total waste.



Blackberry Lily



Redbud tree

It is exhilarating (nope, not too hyperbolic a word) to pick, eat, and even have enough to share, Honeoye strawberries (though not this year, unfortunately) from a patch started with a single plant bought at the MG plant sale in 2017. Disturbing a nest of bunnies in the patch last spring was also exhilarating, though in a whole different way. Also from the MG plant sale in 2016, I bought a tiny redbud tree someone had learned to clone. It was like planting a 5" starched thread with leaves, and I had no expectation that something that looked so frail would succeed when subjected to the elements, so it was quite a rush in 2020 when, over 6' tall, it bloomed for the first time.

I have a fondness for anything edible in my landscape, particularly heirloom tomatoes (again, thanks to Tammy Borden, Baker Creek black cherries are always in the mix), and the many herbs planted near my kitchen door. Herbs are indispensable for me, and while not an herb, bay leaves are used similarly, and from Mary Learman I learned it is possible to grow my own. There have been unplanned, but welcome visitors too, like the toad, the turtle and the monarch caterpillar.



Every yard has its challenges, not the least of which, at least in my case is James, the English Cocker Spaniel who has made it his life's work to pee on every single, solitary plant taller than newly mown grass that is not protected by a fence, although in his defense, he is an effective and enthusiastic rabbit assassin. Also he has assured me he would never, ever pee on the tarragon, rhubarb, thyme or oregano, and I have no choice but to believe him. Fortunately there are wonderful growers in the area, such as Oh My Peonies, Field and Forest, Blue Moon Garlic, and many others I can look to for inspiration and guidance. There is also no shortage of inspiration from books, a very short list being "Braiding Sweetgrass" by Robin Wall Kimmerer; "The Secret Life of Trees" by Peter Wohlleben; "The Botany of Desire" by Michael Pollan, and "Life in the Garden" by Penelope Lively.



Bay Leaf



And finally, I have found the Outagamie Master Gardener Program to be an irreplaceable resource and often encourage friends and strangers alike to explore its possibilities as soon as they are able.

