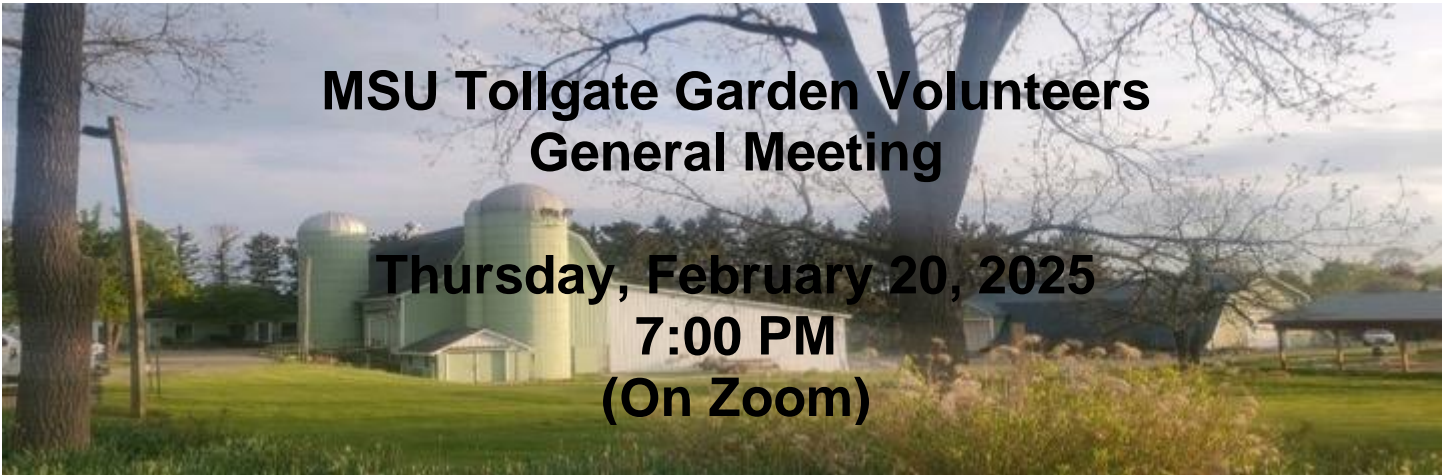


The Tollgate Farm News

VOLUME 31

ISSUE 2

FEBRUARY 2025



Secret Love Life of Birds

Reminder: Tollgate gardeners and supporters meet on Zoom in January, February and March.

Join gardeners on Zoom shortly after Valentine’s Day to learn about the love lives of birds. In an adult education program, we will look at everything from medieval folklore around birds as symbols of love to modern DNA testing that provides insight into whether monogamy among birds is fact or myth. The program includes how birds “do it,” why some birds have more elaborate attraction techniques than others, and what to watch for in your backyard as we transition from winter to spring mating behaviors.

Naturalist and educator for nearly 20 years, **Laurel Zoet** has worked for Michigan DNR, Huron-Clinton Metroparks, West Bloomfield Parks and Recreation, and nature centers. In 2013 she started a nature education business to travel the state teaching about Michigan wildlife and ecology at schools, libraries, scout troops, and senior facilities. In 2017 Laurel and her husband opened Wild Birds Unlimited nature shop at the Green Oak Village Place Mall in Brighton, Michigan, to connect people to nature through the hobby of backyard bird feeding.

Laurel teaches in-store nature education programs and offers community outreach programs to garden clubs, churches, libraries, Audubon groups, and others. She donates speaker fees to programs that provide bird feeding stations, and bird food, to local senior living and other care facilities, and classroom teachers so they can connect students to nature right outside the classroom window.

TOLLGATE GARDEN VOLUNTEER IMPORTANT DATES AND EVENTS 2025					
FEB	MEETINGS		MAR	MEETINGS	
4	TGAC Meeting – Zoom	7:00 pm	4	TGAC Meeting – Zoom	7:00 pm
20	TGV General Meeting - Zoom	7:00 pm	20	TGV General Meeting - Zoom	7:00 pm
FEB	WORKDAY ACTIVITIES		MAR	WORKDAY ACTIVITIES	
	No workdays in February		1	Pruning	9:00 am
			8/9	MapleFest – No Workday	
			15	Grass Cut Back – all gardens	9:00 am
			22	Pathway/Demo Mulching	9:00 am
			29	Multi-garden work	9:00 am

The Tollgate Farm News

FARM UPDATE FROM THE RESIDENT FARMER - *Destiny Pearson*

Happy February everyone. I hope you are enjoying winter. I assume the spring itch is starting and you're all ready to be back on the farm working in your gardens. I know I'm ready for some warm weather and some green grass in my animal fields! We have been doing lots of planning and prepping here on the farm, including tapping trees and ultrasounding goats.



On the first of the month, we had a group of volunteers out to tap Tollgate's Maple trees in preparation for our maple syrup production. We appreciate these volunteers coming out to brave the cold! Along with tapping the trees, processing sap and bottling, some of these volunteers will be assisting with Maplefest and educational programs happening here at Tollgate. **Maplefest will be on March 8th and 9th from 8:30 am – 1:00 pm.** See page 5 for the information flyer and registration link.



Up in our animal barn our expectant mothers on the farm are also enjoying extra hay and their quiet time. We have 6 pregnant goats and are expecting around 12 kid goats in late March.

We cannot wait to start seeing everyone next month and hope you are staying warm and healthy this winter season!

Destiny

Photos provided by Destiny Pearson

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT - *Renee Cottrell*

“In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy.” - William Blake (English Poet, 1757-1827)

Though the cold days of February are still with us, planning and activities have begun. Thanks to the Maple Syrup Team volunteers the trees have been tapped and lines secured in preparation for the upcoming sap run season and MapleFest event. Our Area Garden Leaders (AGLs) are also working on plant selections, planning and budgets towards the beautification and care of the gardens. See the article in this issue on AGL/Team opportunities.

February Reminders:

- The **garden activity calendar** has been posted for 2025. Saturday group workdays scheduled to start March 1st - **see link on page 6.**
- Our **membership meetings will continue to be in Zoom format until April.** We then plan to move to in person meetings. Great topics and speakers are scheduled that you won't want to miss!
- Carmen Hamilton is requesting **volunteer assistance for MapleFest March 8 & 9th**, check out the opportunities – **see link on Page 5.**
- Derek Plotkowski, PhD, MSU Ext. Fruit Educator will be offering a **FREE fruit tree pruning class with a hands-on component on March 15th** at Tollgate, following our scheduled group work day. **For event information click here: [Event Flyer](#).** **To register click here: [Fruit Pruning Registration](#)**
- Tollgate Garden Volunteers **membership renewals continue!** Renew NOW to avoid disrupted communications for the 2025 season. **See Membership info on Page 6 for details and contacts.**

Renee Cottrell, President, Tollgate Garden Volunteers, rncottrell4@att.net

The Tollgate Farm News

PAR Report - Kathryn Fitzpatrick

Winter has blanketed the landscape in white, but we have been busy planning greenhouse activities, which will begin right after MapleFest. We will be starting seeds for spring transplants for outdoor planting when the soil warms. In Michigan, this can be a moving target.



To help us work more comfortably and address physical limitations and challenges we will be incorporating adaptive tools (e.g. standing weeder, ergonomic hand weeders, and cultivators). The PAR Garden will be piloting the use of these tools for possible broader use at Tollgate. We will also be using sticky traps to help evaluate the insects feasting on our plants. These strips won't provide protection or minimize the populations but should give us a good idea of the need for IPM.

The PAR Garden was founded in 2002 with a charter to provide fresh produce to those who are food-challenged locally. Over the years various teams have toiled to produce an annual average of close to 3,000 pounds of fresh produce. The garden, which consists of thirty 30'x4' beds in an enclosed area at the farm, is maintained by a dedicated group of volunteers with the support of MSU Tollgate Farm staff. Our labors include prepping the beds for planting, planting, maintaining the irrigation, weeding, IPM, harvesting, preparing the produce for distribution and storage, and winterizing the garden.

Hope to see you in the garden this year or perhaps in the greenhouse very soon,
Kathryn Fitzpatrick

NURSERY NOTES - Peg Palmer

February is typically the calm before the storm for the Nursery! The fall/winter chores of cleaning sprinkler heads, sorting, replacing and organizing an estimated 600 "Plant Tags" stored in large 3 ring binders will soon be completed. While these are tedious chores, they are a reminder that spring must be just around the corner!

This is also a time when I really start to wonder about how our overwintered pots will fare come spring. Typically, it is the repetitive freeze/thaw conditions of a Michigan winter that challenges the roots of perennials growing in a plastic pot. This year has been consistently cold, but maybe too cold? We surround the pots with mulch, but this insulation isn't as effective as plant roots directly in the ground, possibly with an added layer of mulch on top. We will have to patiently wait a couple more months to see how our plants have fared.

The Nursery typically opens for donations in early to mid-April, shortly after the Spring PLANTS WANTED list is published in late March. We have been publishing PLANTS WANTED lists in the spring and fall for several years to provide suggestions and guidance on what plants we have successfully sold in the past. We're hoping that this list provides you with ideas of what plants in your garden you can divide and share with us. It's looking very cold and wintry right now... but Spring is coming! Please keep the Nursery in mind as you start your spring garden clean up, and look for the PLANTS WANTED list in your inbox!

Peg

The Tollgate Farm News

AGL Information

Linda Piasecki and I plan to schedule time before March to make labels for your gardens. Please email me with your **label needs now**.

Thank you to the many AGLs who have already sent in budget requests. You'll soon be getting email confirmations. If you haven't yet done so, **our next TGAC meeting to approve your budget is March 4**. You can use the links below if you still need a form.

Marilyn Alimpich

masoleil@sbcglobal.net

[2025 Garden Budget Planner](#)

[Tollgate Label Template Excel Version](#)

[Tollgate Label Template Word Version](#)

Know Your Plants: Investigating Plant Toxicity

In researching plants for that perfect addition to your garden, how often do you investigate a plant's toxic properties? How often do you come across a mention of toxicity for any plant described in a catalogue or on a plant tag? The purpose of these toxic substances in plants is for protection. They discourage insects and foraging animals. Most plants are relatively harmless to humans in that the bitter taste or initial irritation discourages further ingestion and thus limits exposure to levels that do not have lasting harm. You need to know which are dangerous at low exposures. Gardeners should be more informed about their plant selections, knowledgeable of educating visitors to the garden and taking care when working with plants that have toxic properties. **Some take away points:**

- "Poisonous" does not need to mean deadly. The dose and exposure determine the level of safety.
- Some plants can be poisonous to humans if eaten, some if you touch or get sap on your skin
- Some plants have all parts that are poisonous, others only certain parts-including pollen
- People, pets and livestock can have variable susceptibility to toxic compounds in plants.
- Because of their physical immaturity, children are more sensitive to many chemicals that do not necessarily cause the same reactions in adults.
- Know your plant's botanical name for researching for specific properties

Here are some further references:

North Carolina State Extension plant search is not totally inclusive but a good start:

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/>

Michigan State Extension education article:

https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/parents_and_children_gardening_together_safety_first

Poison control also has a search function: <https://www.poison.org/>



Photos provided by Renee Cottrell

The Tollgate Farm News

Find Yourself a Rewarding Team Experience!

Throughout the Tollgate Gardens we have sites that would greatly benefit from a little extra attention and hence, the concept of the Area Garden Leaders (AGLs) and Teams. These teams with a lead volunteer would contribute to the overall management of a specific garden by monitoring the needs of the garden, participating in the designated maintenance activity and directing work at the site. The following gardens are requesting assistance and will provide orientation. Joining a team does not prevent you from working in other gardens on Saturday work days. Please take the time to review some of the opportunities listed below. Contact Renee if you are interested.

- Demonstration Gardens: AGL Lee Kindermann - requesting co-AGL and team members
- Founders/Rose Garden: AGL Joe Pyden - requesting team members
- Rock Ledge Garden: Seeking an AGL and team members
- Office and Heritage Gardens: AGL Susie Sherman seeking co-AGL and has need for team members
- Enabling Garden: Renee Cottrell Seeking an AGL and additional team members
- Plant A Row (PAR) garden: AGL Kathryn Fitzpatrick requests co-AGL and additional team members
- Children Gardens: Native prairie AGL Karen Harris requesting co-AGL and team members
- Children Gardens: Vine maze AGL Paula Brose requesting co-AGL and team members
- Children's Garden Collection: Renee Cottrell currently oversees Children's Entrance, Fence, Pond, East Tollbooth and is seeking AGLs and teams
- Rain Garden: AGL Connie Marcangelo welcomes any interested team members
- Sakura Japanese Garden: AGL and members needed. A smaller garden area surrounding the tea house, great potential for design development, is more remote location compared to other gardens.

Check out the garden overview included in the new volunteer orientation to see which garden fits you.

[Tollgate Garden Overview](#)



Michigan State University Extension
Tollgate Farm and Education Center

- Maple-themed activities
- Wagon rides to the sugarbush
- Tour the sugar shack
- Tap a maple tree
- Taste maple sap
- Enjoy an 'all-you-can-eat' pancake celebration
- MSU Dairy Store ice cream

Register Today!
Hourly Limited Timeslots
from 8:30 am – 1 pm
\$18 per person
2 year and under free



**MSU Tollgate Website
Registration Link:**
[Maplefest Event Registration](#)

**Carmen Hamilton is requesting
volunteer assistance - check
out the opportunities:**
[Maplefest Sign Up Genius](#)

MSU Tollgate Farm and Education Center - 28115 Meadowbrook Road Novi, MI 48377. 248-347-3860

The Tollgate Farm News

Membership Update February 2025

Thanks to everyone who renewed their membership this month!

Beth Anthony
James Bretz
Renee Cottrell
Bonnie Boak
Mary Bohner
Monica Chrzaszcz
Susan Cooper
Debra Cox
Pat Dalter
Renee Green
Sue Griffor
Jillian Hall
Roy Hybl
Beverly Hydo
Michele Jayne
Lee Kinderman
David Komraus
Lynette Leroux
Barbara Macek
Richard Macek

Constance Marcangelo
Paul Needle
Priscilla Needle
Patti Nehr
Tonya Nudi
Susanne Ocko-Halttunen
Joseph Pyden
Carrie Richardson
Martha Rotter
Pamela Scott
Julie Semroc
Eric Simmons
Hilary Sproule
Colette Stimmell
Anna VanHyfte
Debra Westermann
Kurt Westermann
Karen Worley

Thanks to those who have renewed their memberships! It's always more fun to bring a friend! Do you know anyone else who wants to become a Tollgate Volunteer? They don't have to be a master gardener to participate. Feel free to send them our recruiting flyer - [Join Us at Tollgate](#) - for more information.

Look for an announcement next month about the new 2025 badges for every member.

tlrehab@gmail.com

[2025 TGV Membership Form](#)
[2025 Member Levels Reminder](#)

Member Spotlight

Will return with 2025 Activity Days

Links to Forms & Other Info

[Tollgate 2025 Activity Calendar](#)

[Garden Orientation PDF](#)

[Tollgate Garden Web Pages](#)

[Other Tollgate Garden Volunteer Info](#)

MSU Tollgate Volunteer Sign-In:



Or [MSU Tollgate Volunteer Sign-In](#)

NOTE: If you are unable to access or print any necessary forms from the links, please notify Renee, who will arrange to provide copies. Copies will also be available at all in-person TGV meetings.

Take a Tollgate Picture

Send photo files in separate emails, if necessary, to Judy Warren, Tollgate Calendar Editor, at TGFarmPhotos@gmail.com

Photos are also appreciated for the monthly Farm News. Photo files can be sent to:

Napowell77@gmail.com



Photo provided by Renee Cottrell

The Tollgate Farm News

TOLLGATE IN WINTER



Photos provided by Renee Cottrell

The Tollgate Farm News

AROUND THE FARM



Photos provided by Norm Powell

The Tollgate Farm News

Activity Days: January - October

- Activity Day hours are 9:00 am – Noon, unless otherwise noted on the Activities section of the first page of the newsletter and the full year calendar (see Links page).
- Volunteer Activity Day and Meeting Information will be communicated by email.
- Active members will continue to get email reminders of these activities.
- Lunch will be provided on scheduled workdays.
- We strongly recommend you bring your own tools for your garden activities. All tools borrowed from the Tool Shed should be cleaned and sanitized with the wipes provided, prior to returning the items to the Tool Shed after use.

Tollgate Garden Advisory Committee (TGAC)

Volunteer Liaison – Destiny Pearson

248-347-3860 Ext.251 pears278@msu.edu

President..... Renee Cottrell

Vice President Marilyn Alimpich

Secretary..... Theresa Bridenbaugh

Treasurer..... Karen Harris

Membership

& Hospitality..... Teresa LaRosa

Communications Kathy Johnson

Programs..... Jackie Stengel

Farm News Editor Nancy Powell

Event Coordinator.....Lori Heiden

- The TGAC meets monthly virtually **on Zoom on the first Tuesday of the month at 7:00 PM**. All Tollgate Garden Volunteer members are welcome to attend and should contact Destiny Pearson for meeting link.
- Contact information for individual TGAC members and Area Garden Leaders (AGL) are available by contacting Renee Cottrell at rmcottrell@att.net to have message or contact forwarded for response. Contact info can also be found in the Garden Binders in the Volunteer Communication Center.
- Tollgate Volunteer Membership is renewed annually. The 2025 Tollgate Garden Volunteer membership is valid from **January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025**.

- For membership questions or to update your current membership information, email Teresa LaRosa at tirrehab@gmail.com
- For general Tollgate information and questions, contact Destiny Pearson or see Website: <http://tollgate.msu.edu/volunteering/>
- TIP: If you aren't getting The Tollgate Farm News email, check your SPAM folder

MSU Tollgate Farm and Education Center



28115 Meadowbrook
Novi, MI, 48377-3128
tollgate.msu.edu