



Greenfield Garden Club Newsletter

APRIL 2015

Vol. 23, No. 3

Mysterious crop circles explored at April 16 meeting

Imagine waking on a crisp fall morning and looking out the window to discover that the cornfield across the valley has been stamped with an enormous swirling star-within-a-circle, or perhaps a series of interconnected spirals. You'd certainly wonder who or what created this mysterious pattern, known as a crop circle.

More than 10,000 crop circles have been reported around the world, primarily in England, so a lot of people have seen them and wondered, too: Who made them? And how?

The Garden Club's April meeting promises to be intriguing and will certainly leave you wondering, too! On Thursday, April 16, Amherst educator John Root will present **The Majesty and Mystery of Crop Circles**, at St. James' Episcopal Church, 8 Church Street, Greenfield. The program is free, with donations gladly accepted.

Some people believe crop circles to be the efforts of extraterrestrials to communicate with us via symbols. Officials have pooh-pooed the UFO theory and instead proclaimed them the work of wallabies half-crazed from



eating opium poppies or caused by the boisterous mating dances of hedgehogs. Skeptics say crop circles are hoaxes, the work of stomping pranksters in the dead of night – especially so after two elderly British men claimed they had created all of them. Theories and claims abound.

While there is much controversy over who or what creates crop circles, there is no doubt about their beauty. Photographs from planes and helicopters show intricate designs from geometric stars to swirling fractals.

Some are impressively large, covering as much as four acres. Mr. Root will show slides of the astonishing variety of crop circle patterns. He'll explain what researchers have documented: surprising effects on the field's plants and soil, on electronic equipment, and on animals and people.

As always, Garden Club meetings are open to everyone, so feel free to invite family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors to puzzle with you over the mystery of crop circles.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Garden Club meetings are the third Thursday of each month.

April 16, 7:00 p.m. **Magic & Mystery of Crop Circles**, St. James' Episcopal Church, Greenfield

May 21, 6:00 p.m. **Make a Glass Globe Terrarium**, Greenfield

June 18, 6:00 p.m. **Tour the Gardens of Julie Fisher**, Ashfield

Also of interest to Garden Club members:

Saturday, April 25, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.: **Garden Expo at Five Acre Farm**, Northfield. Greenhouse tours, vendors. Use your 10% member discount on purchases.

President's Report

Laura Schlaikjer

Welcome Spring! We've never been more grateful to see you than after this long, cold winter. We are finally swapping our knee-high insulated boots for our low-slung mud boots and gardening clogs. Flannel sheets are being replaced by percale. Just the sight of green grass makes our heart sing! Those breezes freshened with melting snow feel good on our faces, and instead of freezing our nose hairs they bring scents of damp earth and new life. Birds have their colorful plumage back, and their spring calls fill the air. Isn't it marvelous to be alive with all our senses working at full throttle? I never did get a chance to make that recipe for snow ice cream, but I am glad to wait until next year now!

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President's report —continued

We have a great program this month. Our friend John Root is coming back, and this time with his program on Crop Circles. I will be calling on those of you who have volunteered to bring sweets and finger foods to this meeting. Is there a recipe you have been meaning to try? Here's your opportunity!

Conversations are coming along regarding the Extravaganza. Please contact me with your ideas and suggestions if you are not able to make a meeting, either steering or monthly. Even more importantly, I want you to pay close attention to your gardens this spring, with the plant sale in mind. We need to build up our donations of perennials and possibly plant extra annuals on purpose. The past few years, when we were experimenting with a date change, we had to supplement our stock heavily with plants purchased through Five Acre Farm and Spatcher Farm. In order to raise money for our grant program, we need more donated plants. We are also seeking vendors. If you have a favorite crafter that you'd like to see at our event, please tell me their name and contact info if you have it. Thank you for all your help and support!

Officers 2015

President

Laura Schlaikjer 774-4594
depalma_3@yahoo.com

Vice President

Dolly Gagnon 774-4031
dgagnon@recorder.com

Treasurer

Jean Wall 773-9069
jeanwall1@verizon.net

Recording Secretary

Jeanne Canteen 774-6605
jeanne@trowbridgegroup.com

Corresponding Secretary

Elise Schlaikjer 773-1683
roselise@verizon.net

What to do in the Garden in April

Compiled by Dolly Gagnon

Zone 5's average last frost date is April 15, but don't count on it. After the first day of Spring, many of us are eager to get out in the garden and begin spring planting. A little caution is called for since the weather can be unpredictable and a late freeze or snowstorm can undo a lot of hard work. Prepare to protect seedlings in the garden from frost by preparing cages and stakes that you can cover with cloth on cold nights.

PERENNIALS

Clean your **perennial beds** by hand to avoid damaging emerging shoots. Then apply a balanced, organic fertilizer over the old mulch and top dress with fresh mulch.

Apply a trowel-full of wood ashes and one of manure or compost to your **peonies** — more if you have large plants. If your peony never blooms, it is either planted too deep or in a too-shady location.

Lift and divide **chrysanthemums**, then plant the rooted divisions 18 inches apart.

If the ground has thawed, divide and replant perennials such as **asters, bee balm, and hostas**.

Remove and destroy old leaves of your irises and remove any surrounding debris in which the eggs of the dreaded **iris borer** may have spent the winter.

Fertilize spring blooming **bulbs** in March or early April. Plant summer and fall flowering bulbs as soon as the soil has warmed.

ANNUALS

Plant cool season annuals like **pansies** as soon as the ground has thawed and dried, usually by the end of March or first of April.

Usually by the beginning of April, you can plant hardy annuals such as **geraniums** and even **petunias**. A light frost usually does them no harm but a hard freeze will.

VEGETABLES

To enjoy abundant harvests before hot weather arrives, plant **peas, lettuce** and **spinach** early this month.

Use **row covers** to protect seedbeds from birds and late frosts. Once the seedlings are a couple of inches tall, it is usually safe to remove the covers. Don't leave the covers on too long since pollinators need to have access to the flowers.

Set out hardened-off seedlings of **cab-bage** and **broccoli** a couple of weeks before the last frost date. When you plant the young seedlings in the ground, set them deeper than they were growing in the pot, so the soil level is just below the first set of leaves.

Start cucumber, cantaloupe, summer squash and watermelon **seeds** indoors in peat pots since vegetables that vine do not transplant well when the roots are disturbed. Don't put these **seedlings** or those of tomatoes, peppers or basil outdoors until ALL danger of frost is past, then wait another day or two.

Locate plants in a new section of the garden on a **three-year rotation** schedule to help prevent disease problems. Keep a garden diary to help keep track of where and what you planted.

Newly planted seeds and emerging seedlings need careful **watering**. Keep the soil moisture moist, but not soggy. Outdoors, newly planted seeds need more frequent watering to offset wind and dry weather.

TREES/SHRUBS

Apply **dormant oil** to shrubs and fruit trees early in the month to kill most insect eggs. Make sure you do this while plants are dormant and air temperatures will be above freezing for at least 24 hours.

Plant **bare root trees** when the soil is thawed and dried, usually in early April.

Early in April, before growth begins, prune dead, broken and wayward branches from hybrid tea, grandiflora and floribunda **roses**. You know it is time to prune roses when the forsythia blooms, just ahead of dandelions blooming and lilac leaves appearing. Apply a slow release granular fertilizer. Treat blue hydrangeas with aluminum sulphate to keep them blue. Put down lime to turn them pink.

Bee safe: say nix to neonics

by Susan Farber

Beware! Poison! Danger! Death! You won't see warnings like that when you go shopping for a six-pack of annuals or a five-gallon perennial. Nevertheless, most of the plants at big-box stores and many nurseries mean certain death for bees. The culprit: neonicotinoids (pronounced *neo-NICK-uh-tee-noid*).

Neonics (as they're commonly called) are a synthetic form of nicotine that kills insects by attacking their nervous systems. Widely used by conventional farms and nurseries, they're sprayed onto seeds before they're planted; sprayed onto plants at every stage of growth; and mixed in with potting soil.

Two qualities of neonics make them especially dangerous. First, they are *systemic* insecticides – that is, the plant absorbs the chemicals so that every part – roots, leaves, pollen, nectar – becomes saturated with the poison. And second, neonics stay around for a long time.

Suppose a commercial nursery sprays all its seedlings with imidacloprid, a widely-used neonic, to deter aphids – a common practice. You buy their tomato plant or day lily but have no way of knowing that it's poisoned. You plant the tomato or lily in your yard, and when it blooms, bees visit the flowers, sicken and die.

If that weren't bad enough, through the plant's roots and decomposing leaves, the poison enters the soil and is

taken up by next year's growth. One study found neonic persisting in the soil six years after an application to woody plants.

It's true that neonics will kill aphids and other pests you don't want chewing up your garden. Also killed are butterflies and beneficial insects like lacewings, lady bugs, parasitic wasps. Most alarming, neonics are highly toxic to honey bees, bumblebees, and solitary bees.

What can bee-friendly gardeners do?

1. You can **educate yourself** and **spread the word**. An excellent place to start is by reading the *Gardeners Beware* report available from Friends of the Earth: www.foe.org/beeaction

2. Neonics are in many garden sprays sold to homeowners. **Don't use them**. Avoid any product containing acetamiprid, clothianidin, imidacloprid, and thiamethoxam, or that claims "systemic" protection. You can find a list of products to avoid on page 27 of *Gardeners Beware*.

3. **Plant only bee-safe plants**. Grow your own from untreated seed in organic soil, and for those you need to buy, help create consumer demand for neonic-free plants. Buy from organic growers at your farmers market. Tell nurseries and big-box stores you want to buy neonic-free plants.

Unless you're dealing with a certified organic grower, *caveat emptor* when asking about neonics in plants: garden center workers are unlikely to know or may reassure you with false information.

To help in your search, our local pollinator-friendly landscaper Tom Sullivan lists neonic-free nurseries on his website:

pollinatorswelcome.com/uncategorized/bee-safe-nurseries/

Be aware, too, that this issue is complex. My favorite nursery has true ecological ethics but still uses neonics in limited situations because the alternatives (other than bankruptcy after losing full greenhouses to bad bugs) are chemicals that are even more toxic to people and the environment.

Bigger, badder news

"Neonicotinoid pesticides aren't just harming honey bees, they have also been shown to kill other helpful insects critical to sustainable food production and healthy ecosystems, such as wild bees, bats, butterflies, dragonflies, lacewings, and ladybugs. Further, this class of pesticides may also be severely impacting bird populations as well as earthworms, mammals, amphibians, and aquatic insects. Outbreaks of infectious diseases in honey bees, fish, amphibians, bats and birds in the past two decades have coincided with the increasing use of systemic insecticides, specifically several neonicotinoids, with research suggesting a cause and effect link."

from "Gardeners Beware," Friends of the Earth

Any good news?

Ontario is in the process of reducing neonicotinoid use in corn and soybean fields by 80%. Currently most farmers routinely plant neonic-treated seeds. Under the new rules, farmers would have to prove they have an insect problem before they could purchase treated seeds.

The European Union banned neonics in 2013, but countries are allowing loopholes for farmers to use the pesticides. The ban is seen as progress but not completely successful.

Progress in the U.S. is coming in small bits, as towns and local governments enact bans. A judge in Minnesota ordered the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to stop using neonics at wildlife refuges. Minnesota's legislature is pondering a 5-year ban, citing declines in the state's \$9-13 million honey business.

In the U.S. House of Representatives, Saving America's Pollinators Act is stalled in committee, where it has languished for years. The bill would direct the EPA to ban neonicotinoids. Environmental groups are encouraging citizens to speak up in support of the Act.

Treasurer's Report

Jean Wall

Balance on March 28, 2015.....\$4,019.10

Income (March):.....\$278.26

Dues, Annual Mtg, Programs, Interest

Expenses (March)..... \$2,018.50

Grants, Newsletter

All financial matters and membership dues should be directed to Jean Wall at 413-773-9069 or write to:
40 High Street, Greenfield MA 01301.



Greenfield Garden Club

PO Box 309
Greenfield MA 01302-0309

MEMBER DISCOUNTS

These vendors have agreed to provide the listed discounts for members who show their membership card when making a purchase. We appreciate their support! Please respect their offers by remembering these generous discounts are for club members only and only when your card is presented.

Backyard Birds – 15 Strong Ave., Northampton
10% off regularly priced items except thistle birdseed

Baystate Perennial Farm
36 State Road (Route 5/10), Whately
10% off regular priced plants

Chapley Gardens
397 Greenfield Road (Route 5/10), Deerfield
10% off regular priced plants and pond supplies

Five Acre Farm – 110 Hinsdale Rd., Northfield
10% off regular priced plants

Glenbrook Gardens
56 Glenbrook Drive, Greenfield
10% off regular priced plants and products

Greenfield Farmers' Cooperative (Agway)
269 High Street, Greenfield
10% anything garden related

LaSalle Florists
23 LaSalle Drive (Route 5/10), Whately
10% off regular priced plants

O'Brien Nurserymen – 40 Wells Road, Granby, CT
10% off plants

Silver Garden Daylilies – 23 Picket Lane, Greenfield
10% off daylilies

Sugarloaf Nursery – 25 Amherst Road, Sunderland
10% off regular priced plants

Warm Colors Apiary
2 South Mill River Road, South Deerfield
10% off

Wilder Hill Gardens
351 South Shirkshire Road, Conway
10% off plants and consultations

Any vendors interested in offering our gardeners a discount, please contact the Steering Committee.