



The Dirt MBGNA Volunteer Newsletter

Vol. #2, Spring 2006

COORDINATOR'S CORNER By April Pickrel

Welcome to the latest edition of The Dirt! 2006 promises to be a year full of terrific volunteer opportunities at Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum, and we hope you get the chance to enjoy many of the great ways our volunteers make a difference at our institution. High on our list of volunteer priorities is the upcoming 26th Annual Spring Plant Sale. For all you gardeners out there who are already starting to plan your garden for the year, this is the sale to shop, and volunteer! The public sale is May 5 and 6, 2006, but we'll need help as early as May 1 for set up. What's the best part about volunteering for the sale? Meeting great people who share your love of gardening and some of the best plant selection around.

Not far behind, we'll kick off our spring and summer outdoor garden season, and we'll be looking for Garden Ambassadors to help welcome visitors to our gardens during our peak times on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Ambassador training is provided to give you a great

overview of the gardens and some history of the facility. It's a great way to meet our wonderful visitors and get to know MBGNA better.

Shakespeare in the Arb will be the highlight of our midsummer events. This year's production of Love's Labors Lost will bring student performers together with our fabulous natural scenery to present a wonderful evening for our eager audiences. But our productions can't be a success without the help of some hearty volunteers, willing to trek the hills and vales of the Arb! Performance dates are June 9-11, 15-18, and 22-25. We'll need help in the box office as well as ushers to help the audience as they move with the performers from scene to scene. And if you've always wanted to come see a performance, but have found it hard to come by a ticket, volunteering is the best way to see the play. There's not a bad seat in the house, or valley!

How else can you be involved? Along with volunteering for special events such as the Plant Sale and Shakespeare in the Arb, there are numerous opportunities to use your time and talents at MBGNA. We continue to need interpretive

guides (docents); garden ambassadors; ecological restoration stewards; garden assistants and customer service volunteers for our gift shop. Working with staff and other volunteers will give you the training and support you need to feel comfortable in your assignment, meet some great people, and engage with our visitors.

As a final note, coordination of volunteers will be shifting to Barbara Major over the course of the late winter/early spring. Barbara's commitment to MBGNA's volunteers has always been one of her most striking assets, and she has years of experience in the field. I know you'll find working with Barbara to be one of the best of your volunteer career!

As always, feel free to contact us directly, either April Pickrel at 734-615-9460 or Barbara Major at 734-647-8528. I hope you enjoy this latest edition of our newsletter!

**RAIN GARDENS – RAIN,
RAIN, YOU CAN STAY**
By Monica Milla

Want a beautiful, low-maintenance garden that also

slows and cleans storm water runoff? Rain gardens do exactly that and they are easy to create in any home landscape.

Rain gardens let about 30 percent more water soak into the ground than lawn, and keep 90 percent of pollutants out of our creeks, streams, and rivers. How? Rain gardens simply use water that would otherwise run off your property each time it rains. They collect the water from downspouts or driveways and give it a chance to filter slowly into the ground rather than flow off quickly into the storm sewer. When the water comes in contact with the soil and plant roots, excess nutrients and pollutants are naturally filtered out. The rain garden also allows water to cool; it can be as hot as 140° F coming off the roof.

A rain garden can be created by directing a downspout into an existing garden, by installing plants in a low area where water pools up, or by creating a garden in an area of lawn where water tends to run off. Making a rain garden is similar to creating any other kind of new garden: You will need to evaluate your site, create a design, select the plants, dig the site, amend the soil, and plant the garden. The specifics vary based on your soil, level of incline, and existing drainage pattern. For step-by-step instructions and sample designs, see www.raingardens.org.

In general, though, the garden must be located away from building foundations and utilities, with runoff diverted to it. A rain garden is a bit lower than

its surrounding area. Think of it as a slight depression or a saucer-shaped indent that contains amended soil. You need to dig up slightly more soil than you replace to create this shape. You will also need to amend the soil with compost or humus so it can better absorb the water.

The amended soil should be between four and twenty-four inches deep. The deeper the good soil, the more water it can absorb and filter, but a minimum of four inches will suffice. The amount of soil to remove and replace depends on the condition of your existing soil: If you have good soil, you will need to dig out very little and make no further amendments. However, if the area has heavy clay or very sandy soil, you'll need to dig a bit deeper and make major amendments. You will need to judge your depth by the amount of amended soil you want to use, the size of your garden, and the strength of your lower back.

When it comes to choosing plants, go native! Native plants, those that grew in this area prior to settlement, are ideal for using in rain gardens. They have adapted themselves to thrive in our climate without any care from humans. Many natives are drought-tolerant, so you don't have to water them. However, they can also handle a good downpour and don't mind standing in water for a while. Native plants, such as swamp milkweed, Joe Pye weed, New England aster, and wild bergamot, provide food and shelter for birds, butterflies, and

bees. For a longer list of native plants, see <http://tinyurl.com/c7g7p>.

Finally, mulch the garden with leaves or a shredded wood mulch to retain moisture and suppress weeds. For photos of local rain gardens, see www.socwa.org/rain_garden_registry.htm.



Illustration: Ruth Zachary/Rain Gardens of West Michigan

VOLUNTEERS, THE KEY TO A GREAT PLANT SALE

By Amy Rundquist

It's hard to believe spring is just around the corner. Which means the MBGNA 26th Annual Plant Sale is just over the horizon. For those who haven't experienced some aspect of the annual MBGNA plant sale you must. It is truly amazing how well run the sale is given the amount activity and number of plants that are sold during the three days of the sale. The success of the sale is the result of the efforts of many staff and committed volunteers, almost 200 last year! Kudos to David Read and Mark Johnson, plant sale committee co-chairs, who spent a tremendous amount of time running around to ensure everything was running smoothly for the 25th Annual Plant Sale in 2005.

Upon arrival for my shift, I have to admit I was dreading it. Yes the snow from the beginning of the week had melted. Nonetheless, it was rainy and cold. Was this the way I wanted to spend my morning - freezing? Stationed at the checkout area, what I didn't expect was the widespread conversation among the volunteers and customers. Often the discussion was educational for all. Individuals were more than willing to recommend to others what plants they have had success with and where. What we didn't know we took the opportunity to find out. It was also a personal motivation to inventory what to add to my own garden. The day definitely surpassed my expectations and was a very enjoyable experience.



Photo courtesy of David Read

Shoppers pick out their plants in the Ornamental Grasses area

Reflections from Aunita Erskine

One of my best experiences working at the sale was doing the ornamental grasses table. I had noticed that someone was needed at that table, and I knew NOTHING about them- so I educated myself and had a ball! I got a few good books and took

them with me for reference. The best part about it was talking to the customers about how they used the grasses in their landscape. I always say that whenever I volunteer I learn a lot and this is one time that that was really true! Just don't tell anyone how dumb I was before I started. It's my best volunteer trick.

Reflections from Carrie Bachman Riedeman

For more than 10 years, the Spring Plant Sale at MBG has been one of my favorite annual events. Volunteering as a cashier at the sale was my introduction to the Gardens, and I've never left! I now serve on the Director's Council, chair the Events Committee, and along with being a member of the Plant Sale Committee for several years, still cashier two shifts at every Sale.

The Sale is my signal that the Michigan gardening season is 'open for business.' The plant selection is incredible and the prices can't be beat -- but the best part is knowing that my purchases support the Gardens and the Arb. I get the enjoyment of planting and nurturing them, while also nurturing the great programs and facilities of MBGNA. I'm usually my own best customer!

Another reason I love the Spring Sale is the people. My fellow volunteers, the MBGNA staff (almost my second family!), and our customers -- I'm surrounded by fellow gardeners! Working the register, I get to greet and chat with others who are just as

eager as I am to get planting. We ooh and aah over certain plants, share our experiences and growing tips, and basically just get goofy with anticipation. I love the energy and enthusiasm the Sale generates.

Working the Sale, and being part of the group that makes it happen, gives me a great sense of pride. Every year we look for ways to make the event better, and from behind the register, I get to see the results first-hand in the swarm of happy customers. It's another chance for me to be an ambassador for MBGNA, and let people know what a treasure we have in these two facilities. My hope is that their experience at the Spring Plant Sale, as it was for me, is just the start of a mutually rewarding relationship with the Gardens and Arb.

The annual plant sale will be open to the public May 6 & 7, 2006. See the volunteer interest form at the end of this newsletter for opportunities to get involved. If you would like more details, contact Barbara Major at 734-647-8528 or bamajor@umich.edu. It's a wonderful way to get out and begin the spring season!



Photo courtesy of David Read

Horticulturist Adrienne O'Brien and volunteers set up for the 2005 Spring Plant Sale

ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION FROM A VOLUNTEER'S PERSPECTIVE

OR

TRUE CONFESSIONS OF A WOODS WEEDER

Aunita Erskine

As a gardener, I am the first to admit that I love all plants: big ones, small ones, fuzzy ones, green ones, blue ones, red ones, purple ones, and yes, even brown ones (with which I seem to have a lot of experience). My fascination with plants goes back to my grandmother who grew wonderful heirloom irises and peonies. Some of my earliest memories of natural areas were the sandy, gravelly fields in northern Oakland County with expanses of puffy purple spotted knapweed which slapped my shins as I raced along the rough paths on my battered Schwinn. The lake near my house was ringed with the bright fuchsia of purple loosestrife, and in my own backyard I laughed at the small flocks of cedar waxwings getting drunk on honeysuckle berries.

When I first became aware that these plants were introduced European species that had become a serious threat to Michigan native plants, I was confused. What was wrong with these plants of my childhood? The lovely fields of white flowered garlic mustard, the semi-evergreen hedges of buckthorn, and the cut-flower graces of Dame's rocket? All of these plants have culinary and

landscape use and were innocently imported as such.

As I learned how to identify Michigan native plants, those which grew here before European settlement, the problem became clear. Once these species escaped into wild areas, there were no natural competitors. They upset the Michigan native ecosystems by taking over and creating a monoculture of vegetation. There are many nuances to this problem which is a huge field of study. In order for an ecosystem to be truly healthy a wide variety of plants is needed to support a wide variety of insects, birds and other animals that depend on them to complete their life cycle.

Thus began my personal crusade as a volunteer to help "weed the woods". This is not a formal term used by the relatively new field of restoration ecology, but to a gardener's mind, that's what it amounts to. What enjoyment I get out of digging up spotted knapweed and plucking out pesky garlic mustard! Others more athletic than myself derive satisfaction from lopping off and dragging away tons of buckthorn, honeysuckle, and other woody bad guys. The best thing about this constructive destruction is the camaraderie and conversation among the volunteers in the whole process.

Unfortunately the natural areas of Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum are no strangers to the onslaught of invasive plants. For a few years now Nichols Arboretum has hosted volunteer workdays on

the second Saturday of each month to help remove these invaders and pave the way for the return of Michigan native plants. The arboretum has certainly changed in the years since I was a student at U-M. The Dow Prairie has been released from its soccer field prison. The wooded areas are beginning to support a diversity of flora, along with the floodplain and Huron River banks.

Now for the first time Matthaei Botanical Gardens are hosting restoration workdays which will be held on the fourth Saturday of each month. Workdays are usually held from 9-noon at each site. For more information contact Barb Major at 734-647-8528 or bamajor@umich.edu. It's a wonderful way to get outdoors and learn about the flora and fauna of our area.

Just a few years ago at the beginning of the Red Trail at Matthaei, I overheard a visitor remarking on the sheer density of those little white flowers of the garlic mustard which completely covered the forest floor all the way down to Fleming Creek. After a few years of concentrated volunteer efforts I will be pleased and proud to hear visitors remark on the incredible diversity of the wildflowers, trees, shrubs, and birds in all the natural areas of Matthaei Botanical Gardens.

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION PERKS

An added benefit of being a regular MBGNA volunteer is inclusion in special recognition events and unique opportunities

such as going on field trips, having your picture in a newsletter or annual report, writing for the volunteer newsletter, or taking advantage of the following collaboration between cultural institutions of SE Michigan.

National Volunteer Week April 22 – 30

If you have volunteered on a regular basis this past year at MBGNA, you will be mailed an invitation to participate in a reciprocal free admission collaboration between 13 major cultural institutions in Southeast Michigan during National Volunteer Week. This is a thank you for your generous contribution of time helping with the many and varied projects here at MBGNA.

Volunteer Recognition Party June 4

As a way to express our thanks for all our wonderful volunteers who give their time, talent, and energy on a regular basis to support our mission and vision, an ice cream social will be held at Nichols Arboretum on Sunday, June 4 from 2-4 p.m. Regular volunteers will receive an invitation to enjoy a leisurely walk along the riverfront and meander to the amphitheater to enjoy ice cream, entertainment, and desserts while socializing with staff and other volunteers. Bob Grese, our Director, looks forward to greeting our invited volunteers and their guests. Golf carts will be available to “motor” anyone unable to walk the distance.



Photo courtesy of David Read

Grasses in their winter splendor in the Gateway Garden

For all events and activities at Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum, please see our calendar at www.sitemaker.umich.edu/mbgna/events. And if you have other great ideas about how you can volunteer, contact Barb Marjor at 734-647-8528 or bamajor@umich.edu

***Please contact
bamajor@umich.edu to make
suggestions, contributions,
or to have your name
removed from the mailing list.***

THANK YOU!

Many thanks to those who contributed to making this newsletter possible:
Aunita Erskine, Jennifer Goewey, Barbara Major, Monica Milla, Carrie Bachman Riedeman, Amy Rundquist, Carole Buttrum, Dorothea Coleman, Deb Myers and our generous writers and photographers.

UNIVERSITY MICHIGAN BOARD OF REGENTS

David A. Brandon,
Laurence B. Deitch
Olivia P. Maynard
Rebecca McGowan
Andrea Fischer
Andrew C. Richner
S. Martin Taylor
Katherine E. White
Mary Sue Coleman (*ex-officio*)

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN MATTHAEI BOTANICAL GARDENS

26th ANNUAL SPRING PLANT SALE

May 5-7, 2006

VOLUNTEER INTEREST FORM



Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ + _____
 Home Phone: (_____) _____
 Work Phone: (_____) _____
 Email: _____@_____
 Are you a member of the Friends of MBGNA? yes no
 New Spring Plant Sale Volunteer? yes no
 Emergency Contact Name: _____
 Emergency Contact Phone: (_____) _____

Set Up (pre-Sale: Unload trucks, price plants, stock tables, gift shop set-up etc.) Please check your choice(s)

Mon., May 1:	9 a.m. – Noon _____	1 – 4 p.m. _____	Thurs., May 4:	9 a.m. – Noon _____	1 – 4 p.m. _____
Tues., May 2:	9 a.m. – Noon _____	1 – 4 p.m. _____	Fri., May 5:	9 a.m. – Noon _____	
Wed., May 3:	9 a.m. – Noon _____	1 – 4 p.m. _____			

Sale Days Please check your choice(s)

Fri., May 5th	2:30 – 5:00 p.m. _____	Sun., May 7th	8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. _____
(Friends Night)	4:30 – 7:00 p.m. _____		Noon – 4:30 p.m. _____
restock/close tents	7:00 – 8:00 p.m. _____	teardown/clean-up	4:00 – 6:00 p.m. _____
Sat., May 6th	8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. _____		
	Noon – 4:30 p.m. _____		
restock/close tents	4:30 – 6:00 p.m. _____		

Select task(s) Please check your choice(s)

- ____ cashiers
- ____ credit card machine
- ____ check out (tally orders)
- ____ restock plant tables
- ____ membership table
- ____ plant pick up area
- ____ plant holding table
- ____ rover
- ____ evening close
- ____ runners



____ Sales Assistant: In order to answer customer questions, the following positions require a knowledge of the subject. Reference books are available. Please check your area(s) of expertise:

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| ____ accent plants | ____ roses |
| ____ ferns | ____ scented geraniums |
| ____ grasses | ____ shade perennials |
| ____ ground covers | ____ sun perennials |
| ____ herbs | ____ woodland flowers |
| ____ vines | ____ plant information table |
| ____ rock garden plants | |

All volunteers are encouraged to attend an orientation on Saturday, April 29th from 9 - 11 a.m.

Orientation is mandatory for NEW volunteers and cashiers.



UNIVERSITY OF
MICHIGAN
MATTHAEI
BOTANICAL
GARDENS

Please return completed form to:
 Volunteer Coordinator,
 Matthaei Botanical Gardens
 1800 N. Dixboro Rd.
 Ann Arbor, MI 48105-9406
 734-647-8528
 FAX 734-998-6205
www.sitemaker.umich.edu/mbgna