

Eau Claire Area Master Gardener News



October 2021

Diana Alfuth - Prairie Positives and Pitfalls 09/20/21 ECMG meeting

by Aruna A

Diana Alfuth is an outreach specialist with the University of Wisconsin Madison Division of Extension Horticulture. She has about a twenty-six-acre farm she has named Prairie Farm and has years of experience in the field of prairie plantings.

Prairies are ecosystems dictated by weather and rainfall. They thrive in hot dry summers and cold winters. Most of the vegetation dies down at the end of summer. The vegetation seen in prairies consists of grasses (eighty percent with the height of the grasses determined by the rainfall and soil moisture) and forbs (twenty percent of which are wildflowers).

In Wisconsin, most of the prairie is in the west and southwest, with a small patch in the northwest. On the map the prairies follow the ice age glacial melt. The prairie is an endangered ecosystem. When Europeans arrived about 150 years ago about six percent of the state land was native prairie, now it is under one percent

Prairie plants have a larger percentage of their biomass below ground. At the end of summer, they die down and add to the organic matter thus creating deep rich topsoil up to a foot deep (by contrast lawn grass adds up to just four inches). Prairies support a habitat for a large species in both summer and winter including grassland birds, pollinators and other Insects, as well as large and small animals. To be an effective ecosystem, the prairie needs to be large, with at least 100 acres.

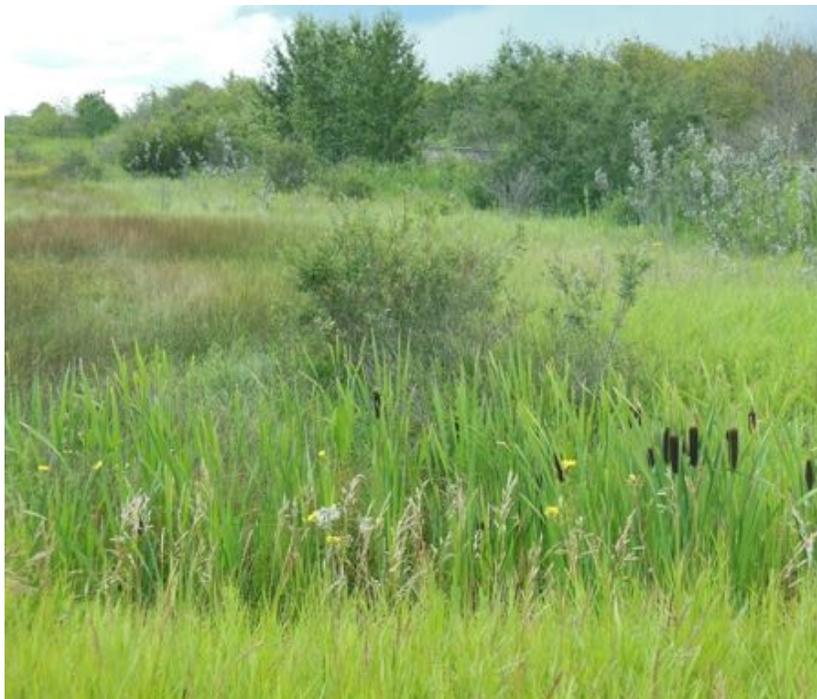
Alfuth provided a summary of her key points for establishing and managing prairies, (see inset). It sounds simple, but:

- A prairie takes several years to establish. Some plants take up to eight or nine years to bloom.
- It is not maintenance free, takes regular maintenance, as it creates fertile soil and aggressive weed growth.
- Nature takes over eventually depending on rainfall and soil moisture.

She also shared her experience of creating a prairie in Western Wisconsin. It helps to know what was there before (e.g., trees, farm). Working with Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), not so great farmland was converted into non-farming prairie/tree/pollinator fields.

All in all, it was an informative talk and we learned also that having a wildflower field doesn't make it a prairie!

For information on the "Prairie Positives and Pitfalls -- Key Lessons from Diana Alfuth" insert see page 3.





Local Master Gardener News

Changing e-mail? Moving?

If you do, please remember to notify the ECAMG and the newsletter editor of your new e-mail address and/or mailing address so you don't miss any Eau Claire Area Master Gardener happenings!



Email your new information to Carol Cox at c7w6c2200@charter.net or notify her by snail mail at 1908 Hogeboom Ave., Eau Claire, WI 54701 (or call her at 715-783-

ECAMGA Board

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Judy Mitchell	jmitchell@pobox.com	715-877-1354



**Bulletin Board
Postings Stories
and
Opportunities!!!**



Note:

The ECAMGAV Board minutes may be accessed at <https://www.eauclaireareamastergardener.org>.

Dues are due!

Annual dues of \$15 are due every year on September 30th. Payment can be made online at our website (eauclaireareamastergardener.org), or by check. Checks should be made payable to ECAMGV, and returned to:

Eau Claire County UWEX
Attn: MGV Treasurer
227 1st St West
Altoona, WI 54720

The dues (and the other fundraising efforts) of the ECAMGVA go to support the various educational events of the organization. At right is a photo from a past ECAMGVA educational meeting.



ECAMGV

2021 Calendar

September 30: **DUES WERE DUE FOR COMING YEAR!**

October 7: Deadline for Annual Photo Contest

October 18: Teaching Kids in the Garden - Joy Weisner and Pam Warren-Armstrong, UWEX Foodwise Program.

November 22: Dr. Kristina Beuning on UWEC Greenhouse (in-person tour if pandemic permits)

December: Annual Meeting and Christmas Party

*My heart says chocolate and wine,
but my jeans say, please, please,
please, eat a salad!*

-anonymous

*Prairie Positives continued from
Page 1...*

Prairie Positives and Pitfalls -- Key Lessons from Diana Alfuth

1. Prairies are one of the most endangered ecosystems, and animals, especially grassland birds, are among the most endangered species.
2. Prairie types (shortgrass, mixed or tallgrass) is dependent on rainfall and soil moisture, and prevalent in areas with hot, dry summers and cold winters.
3. Prairies are best in large blocks, with less "edges" to best provide cover for grassland birds and protection from predators, but even small areas or individual prairie plants can be beneficial for certain birds or insects.
4. Establishing a prairie is theoretically simple:
 - a. Remove ALL existing vegetation.
 - b. Provide for good seed to soil contact either by planting with a seed drill or having bare soil to rake seed into.
 - c. Plant in June, when soil is warm
 - d. Mow several times the first and second years to cut off annual "weeds" before they set seed.
 - e. Watch for invasives or perennial weeds and control them early, which might involve spot treatment for herbicides.
5. Lack of good preparation will cause problems FOREVER!!!!!! Areas where I didn't get existing vegetation killed off out-competed the young prairie plants.
6. NEVER fertilize, and prairies establish better in non-fertile soil because the non-prairie plants will not be as aggressive.
7. The more different species planted, the better.

Master Gardener Volunteers,

Join us for a 7 p.m. presentation on October 18th by Extension Educators Pam and Joy. Reaching children to learn about growing food is one of the most critical things we can do as Master Gardeners. Here is some information about the evening program. A brief update will be provided about board activities.

Learn how to work with youth in a Kid's Garden!

The main goal of the kids' garden is to expose children to a variety of vegetables and fruit through tending the garden with the hope of increased consumption of vegetables and fruits.

Pamela Warren-Armstrong has been a FoodWise Nutrition Educator for the past twenty years and has worked with Kids' Gardens throughout that time! Pamela started out with a small garden site on Hobart Street and worked two gardens at both McDonough Park and the North River Front gardens over the years.

Joy Weisner has been a FoodWise Nutrition Educator for fourteen years and has been involved in gardening since before she was hired. She actually helped build the NRF Kids' garden! Between the both of them, they have more than 35-years of experience working with students in schools, after school and even summer school



**Some
people
are like
clouds,
once they
disappear
it's a
beautiful
day.**



***Memory Lane**...Susan Frame presenting at one of the Winter Garden Seminars. Picture by Carol Cox*



The Quest

By Judy Mitchell

Have you ever wondered when apples are truly ripe? Well, there's a Learning Store publication for that. Let us renew our quest for gardening knowledge this month by studying UWEX Publication 3743-E When are apples ripe? (available at <https://learningstore.uwex.edu/>).

I have an Ashmead's Kernel apple tree in my yard with russet-colored apples that mature late in the season. I have trouble telling when the fruit is ripe. Publication 3743 provides a guide: Learn about your cultivar from nursery catalogs or Learning Store publication 2105. Check the color of the apple's skin, the ground color, the seed color and the firmness. Then taste and smell it. It takes some experience. You need to check a few samples as the fruit matures and it helps to know if the fruit matures all at one time or must be spot picked.

There is a good section on what to do to protect your apples from an early frost, and basic instructions on how to properly pick and store apples. Whenever I look up apples in the Learning Store I am stunned by how much there is to know. Ground color was a new term to me. If you do not know what ground color is when it comes to apples, you can find out by reading this publication.



Photo from Pinterest

Rex Begonias by Carol Cox

As we prepare our gardens for the winter season soon to be upon us, we might well be bringing in house plants that summered outdoors. I have a collection of house plants that are in that category. Since I really am a "lazy gardener" at heart, I want the sheltering of those plants to be as carefree and painless as possible until I can again get them back outdoors in spring.

I have learned that there are certain houseplants, just like people, that make much better houseguests than others. One of my all-time favorites are the Rex begonias. First of all, the foliage is spectacular, and the texture of the leaves is very attractive as can be seen from the two in the photo on the left. With all of the breeding that has gone on with Rex begonias, you will be hard put not to find one (or maybe a dozen) that will not strike your fancy.

While the flowers on these plants are fairly insignificant (and often times, depending on how lazy and inattentive I am and where I have placed them in my house, they may not even bloom), the overall appearance (leaf color shape and texture) of the plants are gorgeous. They prefer lower light situations (I have one favorite that often spends the winter at the inner wall of my living room) and they don't like to be overwatered (my kind of plant)! In fact, giving them too much water and fertilizer will guarantee that you will kill them as this can lead to rot and foliage burn.

The leaf sizes vary depending upon the specific cultivar but can grow up to nine inches long and five inches wide, with a mounding habit that generally reaches twelve to eighteen inches high and wide. I enjoy the plants as single pot specimen plants (in the winter in my house) or use them as part of my outdoor container arrangements during the summer. This is a plant that I guarantee you will come to enjoy.



Events



Beaver Creek Reserve
S1 County Road K
Fall Creek, WI 54742
715-877-2212

Interested in learning more about some of the sights and sounds of Beaver Creek Reserve? Go to their home page (<http://www.beavercreekreserve.org/>) and scroll down to the very bottom of the page and click on the item entitled "What are our bluebirds and birdhouses up to – View our live bird cams" and you will end up on the Beaver Creek YouTube channel where you will enjoy the "Trailside Treasures" that are available at Beaver Creek. And, right next to that, is a link to the wildlife rehab resources available in the area.

Reminder! Take those photos for entry in the 9th Annual ECAMGVA



Contest deadline is ***October 7, 2021***. For full rules and information go to the July 2021 issue of the newsletter (page 3)



Bits and Pieces



Some interesting and/or helpful sites:

<https://balconygardenweb.com/pruning-hydrangeas/>
<https://balconygardenweb.com/pruning-hydrangeas/>

This is a pretty straight forward and easy to understand site concerning the pruning of hydrangeas.

<https://www.thespruce.com/putting-the-garden-to-bed-1402182>. This is an informative article on putting your garden to bed for the winter with helpful suggestions on what to prune back in the fall and what should wait until spring to be pruned. It also has some info on protecting plants from animal damage over winter.

<https://extension.umn.edu/planting-and-growing-guides/protecting-trees-and-shrubs-winter>. A U of Minnesota site with info on protection of shrubs and trees over winter.

<https://plantaddicts.com/winter-care-for-ornamental-grasses/> This site has information on winter care for ornamental grasses that is quite informative.



Bonsai is an artform that is ancient and intriguing.

For more go to:

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/Ad4NpUMsDEdfxaQ2RINTinS2V4wSM91F01A2rGhBJk7umPOcAS8eljk/>

to see more interesting bonsai.



Again, from Pinterest, a simple and, it would appear, inexpensive idea for an arbor to contemplate for next year in the garden.

Cover Crops (“Green Manure”)

by Frankie Weinberger



photo from internet

The use of cover crops, sometimes called “green manure” or “catch crops” makes an excellent alternative to commercial fertilizers for providing both nutrients and organic matter. Rather than hauling truckloads and multiple bags of soil amendments, planting cover crops after the harvest in early spring, summer or fall can provide many of the same benefits. Cover crops can serve many functions like providing nutrients such as nitrogen, organic matter for soil creatures, insulation from heat in summer and cold in winter, weed suppression, loosening compact soils, and protection from erosion of topsoil.

In larger scale agriculture, cover crops not only add nutrients and organic matter, they also serve a tremendous purpose between harvests of protecting bare soil from drying and eroding (like the Dust Bowl in the 1930s), as well as sequestering carbon from the atmosphere into the soil. The use of cover crops and minimal tilling are important principals of regenerative farming, helping both the soil and the atmosphere by reducing the carbon load. Wide-scale use of cover crops in agriculture has the potential to significantly reduce the effects that excessive carbon has on global warming.

There are many types of cover crops that can be grown in different seasons, ranging from annual to perennial, and fast-growing to slow-growing. Nitrogen-fixing cover crops include alfalfa, red and white clover, hairy vetch, peas, and sunn hemp. Other cover crops commonly grown are annual ryegrass, buckwheat, deep till radishes, millet, oats and winter rye. Several of these green manure crops are highlighted below.

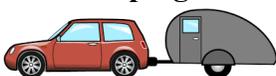
Garden peas can be planted in early spring (or early fall). Choose a variety with a short growing season so you can harvest the peas before the heat or cold sets in. For example, plant a 55-60 day pea variety in late March or early April, and remove right before planting main crops at the end of May. After harvesting the peas, vines can be cut off at the soil line, and either added to compost pile or dug under the soil to decompose. Roots can be left in the soil to decompose, and, seedlings such as tomatoes can be planted immediately into the area.

Buckwheat is a fast-growing multi-season cover crop that can be planted 1-2 weeks before last spring frost up to 4-6 weeks before first expected frost. Deep roots mine for nutrients. Young leaves and seeds are edible. It will be ready to dig under in 6-8 weeks after it starts blossoming. It is easy to turn under mechanically with a shovel. Although it is a great pollinator, it will re-seed numerous plants if allowed to go to seed.

Deep till or “tillage” radishes are a winter cover crop. They are planted in late summer and allowed to grow slowly, and then plants can be left whole for roots and leaves to decompose in the spring. Their large size provides abundant nutrients to soil creatures and plants, and aeration of the soil. The radishes are edible, although more variable than other radish cultivars.

Hairy vetch combined with winter rye can be planted in early fall for a winter cover. They grow slowly in the fall and then rapidly in the spring. They provide excellent winter soil insulation, break up compact soil through their deep roots, nitrogen fixing (hairy vetch) and weed suppression (decomposed rye residue contains a weed suppressing compound). The rye acts as a nurse to vetch by protecting it from frost and providing a surface for vine growth. They can be mowed or turned under in the spring after flowering - before they grow too tall and become too difficult to turn under mechanically. Wait for 3 weeks to plant anything into the area due to growth suppression compounds from the winter rye.

“Camping...where you spend a small fortune to live like a homeless person.” -anonymous



The Signs of the Times Say that Fall is Here!



EYE CANDY



From Down To Earth – picture by Carol Cox



Photo of fallen leaves from Lori Kempen's back yard.



Sweet Autumn Clematis
-pictures this row by Carol Cox



One of the hardy hibiscus. They don't come up until mid-June so it is a good idea to mark where they are planted lest they get dug out.



A favorite plant combo from 2021



Cute hand painted mushroom pot from Pinterest – hevemilydee.shop.



Also off of Pinterest from Reusero.com (the Diy & Crafts Blog).



A simple watering system For herbs from ithinkwecouldbefriends.com.

Looking for Master Gardeners with some good pictures from their garden, either this past year or other years, who would be willing to share them with the newsletter readers. Would like at least 3-4 pictures in this section per newsletter from our own ECAMGVA members. Contact c7w6c2200@charter.net

At my funeral, take the bouquet from my coffin and throw it into the crowd to see who is next.
-Anonymous



Nothing lasts forever, certainly not day lilies, but they are certainly beautiful while they do. Here the blooms have just fallen.
-Photo by Dana Cox



Some of the loveliest lilies are the Martagons and they grow in shade too!
Photo by Dana Cox

September by Helen Hunt Jackson

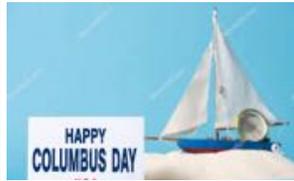
The golden-rod is yellow;
 The corn is turning brown;
 The trees in apple orchards
 With fruit are bending down.
 The gentian's bluest fringes
 Are curling in the sun;
 In dusty pods the milkweed
 Its hidden silk has spun.
 The sedges flaunt their harvest,
 In every meadow nook;
 And asters by the brook-side
 Make asters in the brook.
 From dewy lanes at morning
 The grapes' sweet odors rise;



*Photo (from Google) of Fireworks Solidago rugosa,
 "Fireworks" goldenrod...*

At noon the roads all flutter
 With yellow butterflies.
 By all these lovely tokens
 September days are here,
 With summer's best of weather,
 And autumn's best of cheer.
 But none of all this beauty
 Which floods the earth and air
 Is unto me the secret
 Which makes September fair.
 'T is a thing which I remember;
 To name it thrills me yet:
 One day of one September
 I never can forget.

Unless otherwise noted, articles for this newsletter are submitted and/or written by ECAMGA members or the newsletter editor, Carol W. Cox. Unless otherwise noted, graphics are from clipart. Newsletter layout by Carol W. Cox



For more Eau Claire County UW Cooperative Extension information go to our website:

www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/eaucnaire

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Fax: 715-839-6277

M-F 8AM-5PM



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