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# GARDEN THYME



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PURDUE EXTENSION PORTER COUNTY 155 INDIANA AVENUE, SUITE 301 VALPARAISO, IN 46383

— *In this Issue*

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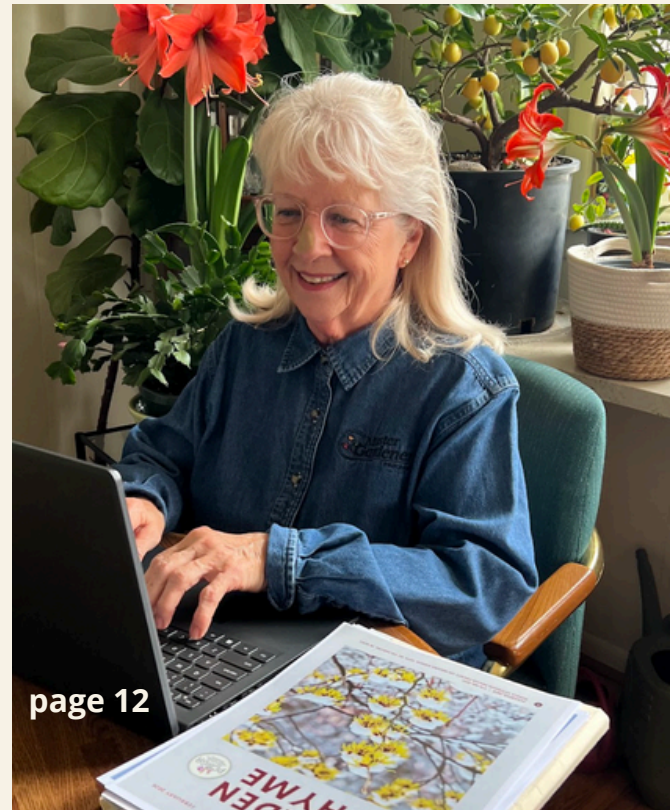
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The Porter County Master Gardeners Association (PCMGGA) is a not-for-profit corporation that promotes the education and pleasure of gardening in cooperation with Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service in Porter County, Indiana.

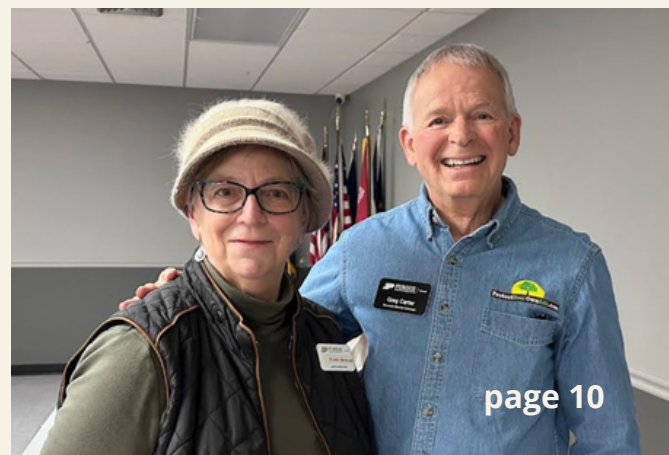
Photo Credits (top to bottom): Wilma Willard, Greg Carter



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## — *My Plant, My Project*



**Basil** is a favorite! **Laura Hrusovsky** simply “loves to eat it.” **Gordana Gerbick** notes she likes holy basil for its flowers and making tea. **Kayla Tracy** loves the smell (and taste.) Perhaps the most common use of basil leaves is in making classic pesto sauce: a delicious combination of fresh basil leaves, pine nuts, Parmesan cheese, garlic, and olive oil. Use your pesto as a condiment for pasta, a flavorful spread on sandwiches, or a robust dressing for salads.

# Our Favs: Veggie & Herb Edition



BY GREG CARTER, PCMG CLASS OF 2011

Most NWI Master Gardeners eagerly eye May 15: the kinda, sorta ‘unofficial’ day when we can transplant those precious seedlings from our basement greenhouse to our gardens without fear of a late spring frost.

Spring. Gotta be every gardener’s favorite time of the year. The grass is a vibrant green, trees are budding, and best of all: veggies and herbs are getting their start.

Nothing beats freshly picked tomatoes, snap peas and chives. Beyond that is the joy of taking cukes and zucchinis to the neighbors’ house. (Well, actually, you deliver your excess zucchinis under the cover of darkness.)

Whether your garden is a small plot inside the city limits or a quarter acre in unincorporated Porter County, gardening satisfies the soul as much as it puts produce on the dinner table. Here’s to your efforts in this coming growing season.

Our 2025 survey of PCMGGA members asked about their favorite vegetables and herbs. Your mouthwatering anticipation starts now.

*(continued on page 03)*

Photo Credit: Laura Hrusovsky



No surprise that **tomatoes** came in first in our survey of favorite veggies/herbs. **Melinda Bateman, Lois Peterman, and yours truly** all placed it at the top of our list. **Jack Steffen** adds that they are “easily grown.” And he has “homemade tomato sauce all year long.” From the mighty Beefsteak to the palm size Early Girl to the classic heirlooms, there is a tomato for nearly everyone. Yellow, striped and familiar red can be found.

**Mary Baird** likes that “**potatoes** are so easy to store.” The very versatile potato perhaps shines the best when it is baked, once or even twice stuffed. Whole potatoes baked in the oven create fluffy interiors with crispy skins. Serve as a side dish or stuffed with toppings like cheese, beans, or chili for a complete meal.



**Cilantro** loves to strut its citrusy flavor. **Wilma Willard** says it “tastes great in everything, especially Pico de Gallo.” Very fragrant, it’s perfect for Mexican dishes like guacamole, salsa, tacos, and huevos rancheros. All benefit from using it as a garnish. Try it in soups, on sandwiches, in chili, on rice, with roasted vegetables, etc. We recognize that some people think cilantro is yuck!

**Beets.** “I love to eat them,” proclaims **Marlene Vanderlin**. While likely not a frequent fan favorite you can bring beets to the table in salads to add unique flavor and color. They pair well with leafy greens, goat cheese, and citrus fruits. Or, try them in pasta salads, especially when combined with radishes, radicchio, and al dente corkscrew pasta. Roasting beets enhances their earthy flavor; serve as a side dish with lemon juice, olive oil, and sea salt.



*Team Thyme thanks everyone who participated in our August 16, 2025 survey of your favorite plants. The results have been VERY interesting and hopefully INSPIRED us to grow something new that fellow EMGs adore. Look for a new survey coming soon.*

*We love to receive your input!*

— *Crafty Creations*

# What's in the Wild?

BY WILMA WILLARD, PCMG CLASS OF 2011

Inviting children into nature is not only a great learning experience for them but should be fun, too! Our Master Gardeners' motto of "Helping Others Grow" includes kids, so think of your children, nephews, nieces, grands, neighbors or friends' children who may enjoy a nature trail, meadow, forest or even a frolic in your backyard for some fresh air and interesting finds.

Let's first consider the value of observation - actively looking and listening to surroundings. This foundational life skill encourages focus, sharpens detail, and promotes memory.

So, head out on a "Nature Walk." Encourage the children to notice small things — the texture of bark, the stages of flowers budding, insect behavior, colors of rocks, shapes of leaves, the sighting of a songbird or a feather. Use the game "I Spy" to sharpen their attention to detail. Ask open-ended questions like "What do you see?" or "Why do you think that happened?" Or try this, "If you were a (log, bug, seed, cloud) how would you spend your day?"

If collection is allowed, use the two ideas here to gather and display the nature your children find fascinating. Let's actively engage children in nature helping them slow down to observe, understand, and find fun in our wild world!

Photo Credit: Wilma Willard




**Arrange it!** Holes are poked into a square of cardboard allowing stems of flowers and leaves to be arranged in a vase.



— *Garden Wanderer*

# Garfield Park Conservatory

BY GUEST WRITER SHARON STUCKY, PCMG CLASS OF 2019



We are so fortunate to have this beautiful facility, Garfield Park Conservatory, so close to us. In Chicago and only 90 minutes from Valparaiso, it happens to be one of the largest and most stunning botanical conservatories in the nation. How fun is that?

A visit will allow you to see and experience thousands of plant species from around the world within eight indoor gardens. The conservatory is open all year long. In addition to the indoor gardens, there are ten acres of outdoor gardens, play spaces for children, a water lily pond and so much more.

In addition, educational programs are offered. The variety of programs offered meet the interests of just about anyone. Chicago Residents can enter for free and they request a donation for non-Chicago residents. Reservations to enter are needed. See website for more details and hours at [garfieldconservatory.org](http://garfieldconservatory.org).

When I visit, I can spend hours there. The gardens are breathtaking and the programs offered are fun and educational. You can go solo, bring the family or spend a special day with your grandchildren. Please go see for yourself. You'll love it.

*(continued on page 06)*

Photo Credits: Sharon Stucky



## Nature Watch

# Pitcher's Thistle | A Rare Wildflower Returns

BY WILMA WILLARD, PCMG CLASS OF 2011

A rare native wildflower nearly vanished. But, after 30 years botanists can ecstatically announce its comeback here in the Great Lakes dunes area.

In 1994, a team of botanists launched a historic reintroduction effort. Why? Sand mining, residential development and recreational activities have historically been threats to sand dunes and their plants. The team collected 4,200 Pitcher's thistle seeds from 54 maternal lines and planted them at Indiana Dunes National Park. The seeds were planted as an experiment in three stages of habitat succession: bare sand, mid-stage areas with a mix of marram grass and sand, and late successional habitat dominated by little bluestem grass.

Pitcher's thistle (*Cirsium pitcheri*) typically blooms from mid-June through September in the Indiana Dunes area, with peak flowering occurring in July. It may look like an ordinary wildflower with its spiky, silvery-green foliage with cream-to-light-pink flowers, but it is quite unique! It requires 3-8 years to bloom, after which it dies. It only propagates from seeds. Pitcher's thistle grows only on the Western Great Lakes sand dunes.

This is a threatened and endangered species; it is essential not to pick or trample them. Today, those plants are thriving. And they're showing how small conservation efforts can help restore entire ecosystems.

The Indiana dunes is home to one of the most diverse plant communities in the national park system. With over 1,100 native species (many rare or threatened) this landscape is more than just a beach, trails, and picnic grounds. It's an ecological wonder, complete with the return of a rare wildflower - Pitcher's thistle!

Read more:

[Pitcher's thistle struggle](#)

[Indiana Dunes wildflowers](#)



— *DNR Division of Entomology & Plant Pathology*

# EEW!?! What's that Bug Doing?

BY CHRISTINE SCHREY, PCMG CLASS OF 2012

Do you wonder what that insect is you're seeing all over your favorite plant? What do you do about it? Or do the leaves on your favorite tree or shrub have strange lines in them? We have an excellent resource for information through our Indiana DNR.

The DNR Division of Entomology and Plant Pathology is made up of 12 nursery inspectors. Each one is responsible for a region of Indiana that can consist of up to 10 counties. They inspect nursery stock that is being grown in the county as well as nursery stock from outside the county or state that is being sold in Indiana. They also assist federal counterparts at the USDA in inspecting any raw goods that are being shipped out of the state or country for sale elsewhere. It could be anything from a houseplant being shipped to Ohio to several containers of corn or soybeans sent to Dubai.

They are also the front line in surveying new pests and pathogens in the state. They set and monitor traps, conduct surveys and outreach to members of the general public – all to hopefully mitigate some of the impact invasive species can have on our state.

They urge us to be cautious when introducing anything new to our environment. We might inadvertently bring in a living organism that may not belong here or might take hold. Whether that's seeds sent from China, a package from a foreign country, just keep an eye on our surroundings.

If a particular disease symptom or an insect pest is new to you, contact your local DNR inspector. Look on the website <https://www.in.gov/dnr/entomology/> or call the toll free number 1-866-NOEXOTIC.

Another way to be aware of what pests are being seen in our area is to sign up for weekly emails in which the inspectors provide descriptions and photos of what they see in their inspections. On the website home page, there is a box that says Weekly Review. Click on that and there is a link to sign up for the Entomology Weekly Review, which comes from May to September.

Megan Abraham, Division Director and State Entomologist said – our biggest mission is to share our work with the general public so that we can enlist citizen scientists like you to assist us in finding new infestations. Without our eyes out there searching in areas you're already familiar with, we wouldn't be able to find these new infestations quick enough to stop them or even slow them down. We would much rather be contacted about something to find out it's a false alarm than to find out we could have hit an infestation in the early stages if only we had known where to look. Some of these critters are fairly cryptic and are good at hiding from us, so keeping your eyes open and letting us know what you see benefits all of us in the long run.

Many thanks to Megan Abraham for this information and the work she and her team do for our state.



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SPOTTED LANTERNFLY



SPOTTED LANTERNFLY EGG MASS



The spotted lanternfly is a pest of major concern and has been spotted in Porter County. It feeds on leaves, branches, shoots, and trunks causing oozing wounds, wilting and death. Egg masses are about one inch long seen here. They overwinter on trees, stones, patio furniture, etc. Egg masses can be crushed or scraped with a putty knife to kill the eggs. More information can be found at Indiana DNR website.

SPONGY MOTH



ASIAN LONGHORN BEETLE



KNOW YOUR BUGS

# — *Volunteer Plug* Cubbies Have Green Thumbs



BY GREG CARTER, PCMG CLASS OF 2011

Cub Scout Pack 929 members got down and dirty at their meeting on March 12th. Earlier Den Mother Dana Liss had contacted the PCMGA leadership to see if someone might be available to teach a seed starting class. Kristin Brennan and Greg Carter responded to the call and toiled in the soil with eleven very eager Cubbies.

The Cub Scout pack meets on Thursday evenings at the Chesterton Legion. The boys chose the gardening project from among other options for their activity.

The boys first perused a variety of flower and vegetable seed packets. Paired with another Cubbie each boy chose three seed packets and then shared their seeds to create their own little greenhouse provided by PCMGA. One Cubbie scoured the other tables to ensure that he had enough tomato seeds; the only thing that he wanted to grow. Everything from tomatoes to pumpkins to lupines to echinacea to morning glory to watermelon should now be sprouting all over Porter County.

There were admiring looks given by the other Scouts at the conclusion of the evening as the Cubbies carried their new mini greenhouses to their car - which might say this could become an annual event. Watch for an opportunity next year to offer your expertise in growing future gardeners. Perhaps there are some future Extension Master Gardeners in the very early stages of learning to love plants.





Join PCMGA for our upcoming Garden Walk on Saturday, June 27 from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM CDT for a special opportunity to explore a curated selection of beautiful private gardens. We currently have seven homes to showcase a variety of unique landscapes, creative designs, and personal touches that make each garden truly one-of-a-kind.

Tickets will be **\$12 online** through EventBrite and **\$15 at Ben Franklin School** on the day of the Walk. Watch for further info, including opportunities to volunteer!

Whether you're a passionate gardener or simply enjoy a peaceful stroll, this event offers inspiration, discovery, and a chance to experience hidden green spaces in our community and celebrate our fellow gardeners.

**9:00 AM - 3:00 PM** | **JUNE 27, 2026** | **7 HOMES**



— *Thank a Master Gardener*

# Suzanna Tudor

## LETTER FROM SUZANNA TUDOR

It has been an honor to serve on “Team Thyme,” since its creation in 2014. Then Extension Educator Lyndsay Phloehn called together an original writing crew of Marcia Carson, Bonnie Girton, Shelli Henry, Kris Sandrick, Beverly Thevenin, myself and designer Nancy Rosene. We gathered at the Extension office one evening, plotting and planning our first issue--with the aid of chocolate chip cookies and potential designs from Nancy. First, a name for our new endeavor was on the agenda. After several possibilities presented by Nancy, *Garden Thyme* won the honor. Pretty catchy we thought! And so our PCMGGA newsletter continues today with the same name.

Through the years, members have come and gone. It was left with Wilma Willard and I remaining to keep *Garden Thyme* publishing, mainly through Wilma’s leadership and design efforts. Today, new writers Greg Carter and Christine Schrey have joined along with designer Sara Tumbas. *Garden Thyme* is in good hands.

As I leave my post on Team Thyme and as a last call out to you members, please keep those articles and ideas coming. This is your newsletter!

*(continued on page 13)*



## NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

When I reminisce about Suzanna Tudor’s longevity and commitment to Garden Thyme, I think “What a champion for communication, information, promotion, excellence and camaraderie!” We tease that she is our invasives guru and grammar cop. But all kidding aside, our PCMGGA owes a big debt to Suzanna’s 12 years of churning out a total of 72 newsletters that the membership has enjoyed. She has outlasted all of the original crew.

Thanks, Suzanna, for sharing your career skills with PCMGGA, your valuable time, and your kind heart - especially with the Team Thyme members! PS: In the future, feel free to submit an article of your liking. You still got it, girl! We appreciate you!

~ Wilma Willard





# GARDEN THYME

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Wilma Willard, Editor-in-Chief

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