

VOLUME 12 / ISSUE 3

AUGUST 2026



GARDEN THYME



PCGARDEN.INFO | 219-465-3555

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

— *In this Issue*

Table of Contents



In this Issue	01
Our Favs Perennial Edition	02
Garden Wanderer Madeira	06
PCMGA Adventures Kankakee Sands	09
Local Gems Brincka Cross Gardens	10
Garden Walk Reflections	11
2026 Garden Walk Review	14
Meet a Master Gardener	19
PCMGA Scholarship Winner	20
2026 Grant Recipients	21
Purdue Landscape Report	22



Equal Opportunity Statement: It is the policy of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service that all persons have equal opportunity and access to its educational programs, services, activities, and facilities without regard to race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin or ancestry, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, disability or status as a veteran. Purdue University is an Affirmative Action institution. This material may be available in alternative formats.

The Porter County Master Gardeners Association (PCMGA) 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.



page 10



page 14



page 21

— *My Plant, My Project*



Following right behind those snow-braving crocuses are your faithful **daffodils**. Planting several varieties can extend your boom time up to a month. **Lois Peterman** especially likes them because they are “deer resistant,” a welcome trait for many of us tussling with our four-legged friends.

Our Favs: Perennial Edition

BY GREG CARTER

Every spring, even before the final snowfall of the season, northern Indiana gardeners welcome the sight of crocuses emerging. They are the first of a number of flowers that brighten our landscapes throughout the spring and summer.

Predictable and pretty, perennials add color to the evolving palette of our gardens. Technically called herbaceous perennials, these plants die back each fall only to bless us with their return in the spring. As hardy perennials make up 90%+ of plant species, it's a modest statement to say that there are thousands of varieties that will thrive in our Porter County gardens.

What are some of Porter County Extension Master Gardener's favorite perennials? Our 2025 survey revealed a nice cross section.

(continued on page 03)





Susan Spelde nominated the humble **hosta** as her favorite perennial saying “It’s all about the foliage for me. So many to choose from and so easy to grow. They can light up the shade.” A chartreuse leafed hosta can brighten any shady area on the north facing section of your garden.



Purple coneflower is **Jack Steffen’s** favorite. After they’ve shown their vivid colors during the summer Jack notes that “gold finches come to feed on its thistle seeds in the fall.” Coneflower’s roots and leaves are widely used in herbal medicine.



Black-eyed susans get a strong affirmation from **Christine Schrey**. She likes that “it is reliable. It comes back, grows heartily, and produces beautiful flowers that last a long time.” Its bright yellow flowers attract many different butterflies, moths, and bees.



Gordana Gerbick loves her dinner plate **hibiscus** for its outstanding flowers. With a breadth of colors ranging from white to pink, red, blue, orange, peach, yellow and purple, a hibiscus brightens any garden. The accompanying photo shows the gorgeous color it lends to Gordana’s garden.

Our favorite perennials:

The continuous bloom of **geraniums** through the growing season was the nod for **Zann Wilson**. **Wilma Willard** likes the **stokes aster** for its beautiful hue of periwinkle blue blooms. The **blanket flower** blooms all summer and is easy to care for, which were **Laura Hrusovsky’s** deciding factors. **Marlene Vanderlin** chose the widely popular **daylily** for its beautiful array of colors in the summer. **Purple clematis**, the Jackmanii being an exemplary variety, was what **Mary Baird** found faithful and beautiful.

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’d love to receive your input!





— *Garden Wanderer*

Jardim Monte Palace Tropical Garden

BY GREG CARTER

The **Madeira island group** lies about 500 miles southwest of Portugal, of which it is a politically autonomous region. With its mild Mediterranean subtropical climate and volcanic soil you would not be surprised to find superb gardens. The Jardim Monte Palace Tropical Garden is just one of several on this small island in the mid-Atlantic ocean.

Its 17 acres spread out over a slope that includes fauna, sculptures, birds, fish and history. The forest is a true treasure trove of biodiversity, containing numerous native plants and representing a unique ecosystem, one of the oldest in Europe. Madeira's magnificent native forest has been recognized as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

The garden's Buddha statues, pagodas, bridges, and lanterns are a reflection of Portugal having been an early European power to explore and begin trade with Japan. In the Oriental Garden there is a monumental panel of 166 tiles entitled "Portuguese Adventures in Japan," illustrating the early days of the link between Portugal and Japan.



Walking through the garden you will find swans, pools with koi, preening peacocks, and photo friendly flamingos. As you continue down the walking paths, small bars in the garden encourage visitors to take a break or snack, listen to musicians in the center of the park, all while enjoying magnificent views of the city.

The park can be accessed either by a cable car route or a (stomach challenging) hill climbing bus. The former is recommended.

[The most beautiful Madeira gardens and how to visit](#)



Photo Credits: Kathy Carter & Greg Carter





— *PCMGA Adventures* Kankakee Sands Bus Trip

BY MARCIA CARSON, GUEST WRITER

PCMGA members went on an adventure to Kankakee Sands Nature Preserve on June 12. My expectations were probably not much different than the other travelers. We're going to see bison up close and LOTS of them!

What we actually saw and learned was quite different. We were in the middle of what had been 16,000 acre Beaver Lake. The lake was a hub for fur traders, fishing, muskrat and beaver trappers, and the island in the middle was shelter for horse thieves and counterfitters, with a ferry to transport stolen horses!

By 1874 the lake had been completely drained for farmland, and life changed. Homes, villages, and poor farmland became the norm. Over 100 years later, in 1996, the Indiana Chapter of The Nature Conservancy purchased property and became manager of 8,000 acres.

What was the draw for Master Gardeners? It's the plants! In 1997 restoration began with ground preparation and hydrological modifications. Former agricultural fields of 300 to 500 acres were seeded with 200-600 native grass and flower species. Now each year, over 2 tons of seed which are harvested from the on-site plant nursery or collected from private and public properties within 5 miles of the site, are spread. As a result of this restoration of native plants, over 240 species of birds, 75 species of butterflies, the plains pocket gopher, slender glass lizard, northern leopard frog, least bitterns, and other native species have returned to Kankakee Sands. All because of the vegetation!



Now, back to the bison! We all know that in the past bison roamed freely in Indiana prairies. They didn't just reappear, as many other animals. In 2016, the original 23 were purchased and brought to Kankakee Sands Nature Preserve. One hundred bison now roam over 1100 acres of prairie. This is the max that the prairie can sustain. They are moved regularly to new fenced-in areas. Passerby can see the bison, but you may have to really look for them since they don't necessarily pose near the road for visitors! (However, they did for us - see photo!)

There is lots to see when you visit on your own. Take the trails through the nature preserve (not where the buffalo roam!) and in the surrounding area, observe the native sedges and wildflowers, amphibians and butterflies, go birdwatching at the overlook, and enjoy the winding trails through the black oak savanna. What a miraculous restoration! [Kankakee Sands Nature Preserve](#)



Photo Credit: Wilma Willard

— *Exploring a Local Gem*

The Many Secret Gardens of Brincka Cross Gardens

BY LINDA ALESSI, GUEST WRITER

If you have never visited Brincka Cross Gardens at 427 Furnessville Road in Furnessville (Pine Township, Porter County, Indiana), a first trip may make you fall in love with everything growing there.

Brincka Cross is a 68-acre Porter County Park featuring four acres of sculpture gardens, walking paths, and spectacular plantings surrounded by untouched natural woodland. The gardens were originally owned and designed by William Brincka and his partner, Basil Cross — both artists and devoted horticulturists. Bill was a professor at the Art Institute of Chicago, and Basil was an antiquities buyer for Marshall Field's in Chicago. Together they designed and planted individual "garden rooms," each tailored to its soil and light. The park now holds more than 300 varieties of hosta — many of them hybrids the pair created themselves — along with over 200 varieties of daffodils, 18 magnolias, and a large collection of rhododendrons. Set within the dunes' unique microclimate, Brincka Cross Gardens shelters flowers, shrubs, and trees that would not survive elsewhere in the region.

So how did this gem come to be? For 45 years the two men planned, planted, and welcomed others to help. Alongside the gardens they designed and built the Mid-Century, Japanese-inspired home that still stands on the property. After their passing, the estate was entrusted to the Porter County Parks Department, ensuring their life's work would be preserved and shared with the public.

The Brincka Cross Gardens Foundation leads ongoing restoration efforts, with longtime supporter Olga Petryszn leading a capable board. Recent projects include a new butterfly garden and, thanks to dedicated volunteers, the planting of thousands of daffodil bulbs. The historic home is available to rent for weddings and celebrations, and a newly constructed shelter helps the park host events of all kinds. Whether you come to wander the sculpture gardens, photograph a rare bloom, or simply breathe in the quiet of the dunes, Brincka Cross rewards every visit. And if you fall in love — as most visitors do — consider giving back. Volunteers are always welcome to help plant, weed, and preserve this living work of art for the generations still to come.

Come discover Porter County's best-kept garden secret. It has been waiting for you all along.



Photo Credit: Linda Alessi



GARDEN WALK REFLECTIONS

BY ZANN WILSON, GUEST WRITER

Photo Credit: Nancy Rosene

As I've drafted the garden descriptions which accompany the ticket booklet PCMGA Garden Walk, it has been my pleasure to visit all the selected gardens for many years. I have noticed that there are wide differences in gardens any given year, let alone over many years of our successful Garden Walks. But, one thing for sure is that each of these carefully chosen properties, reflect the spirit of the gardener who tends them. There is no garden without the gardener.

Maybe stuck with a previous owner's mistakes or blessed with mature plants of great value, each location evolves to become something new under the care of a fresh set of eyes. Some Garden Walk gardens are designed by professionals, then tweaked to accommodate the vision of the gardener. Some are simple creations of serendipity. Some are works in progress. It may be filled with self-seeding natives or manicured to perfection, but all have this in common – they are a reflection of the gardener's vision.

I so greatly admire the aspiration of each gardener, the intention to create their place of joy. Characterizing these spaces for the garden descriptions in the ticket booklet into a few select words isn't the whole job. More is capturing the flavor of each garden, the mood it evokes, and seeing the overall picture of the gardener who loves it.

Whether small or large, refined or simple backyard, each garden – yours and mine – carries a unique and intentional spirit. This connection between garden and gardener is apparent in every garden everywhere every time. Look at the garden, see the gardener.







— *Garden Walk Review*

In the Minds of the Gardeners

BY CHRISTINE SCHREY

This year six gardeners generously invited about 400 guests to see their gardens on June 27, 2026. Some gardens were orderly and well mulched. Others were more like a walk in the woods. Some gardens were sunny. Some were shady. Some had more flowers. Some were more green. Some had vegetables too. There was something for everyone.

Many of these gardeners started as children. Many find joy in sharing seeds and plants with others. For many, their creativity grows in the art they've created. Thank you to all the homeowners for their hard work and gracious invitation to view their creations.

JO & JOHN BRUGOS

As I visited the gardens, I talked with the homeowners. Jo and John Brugos are birders and much of their garden is dedicated to feeding the birds. Jo said she loves to sit quietly on the patio and listen to the birds. When I asked what you might want to tell a fellow gardener, Jo said, "Just try it, even if somebody tells you it won't work."



DIANE STEVENS

Diane Stevens' garden felt woodsy, not manicured, but planned with plenty of groundcover to keep the garden weed-free. Hanging flower pots added color. When I asked what you would tell a fellow gardener, Diane said, "Go natural, don't do exotic plants, grow what's natural where you are."

(continued on page 14)

Photo Credits: Nancy Rosene



CHERYL & RANDY ADAMS

Cheryl and Randy Adams have added beautiful garden art to the plants. A mannikin greets you, dressed complete with hat and shawl. Cheryl turned the necessity to cut down a tree into a gnome house. When a fallen tree destroyed one corner of the garden, Cheryl and Randy built a swing suitable for a nap. Cheryl said she never sits still, but she likes to rest on the swing.

LYNNE SUNDWALL

Lynne Sundwall's garden is about 80 percent native plants, including some that decided where they wanted to grow. She says it's not difficult to grow natives. It's peaceful to watch the birds and insects thriving on what she grows. It makes her smile. Lynne recommended Doug Tallamy's book *Homegrown National Park* for growing native plants.



DAN & PATSY LINERT

Dan and Patsy Linert have been creating their garden since 1986. Dan loves to sit on the patio and watch the sun come up, looking out at the peaceful garden, and the animals who enjoy it too. Dan's advice to fellow gardeners is, "Don't look for perfection. There's always a weed or a rabbit or a squirrel." Dan and Patsy often divide the larger plants and give them away so the garden remains more manageable.



ANN & DAVID WELLS

Ann and David Wells have collected geodes and use them as garden art. They also have an extensive vegetable garden, especially tomatoes which he invites the neighbors to pick for themselves. David is concerned for those who may not be able to buy fresh vegetables and so provides a place they can come to pick their own.



AND THANK YOU TO OUR CHAIR, MARY LAROQUE!

Mary LaRoque chaired this year. She said, "The Garden Walk is a well-oiled machine, so that made it easy." Her biggest challenge was to find gardens when three had to drop out for health reasons. The most fun was working with the homeowners. New this year, they asked homeowners what worked well for them, and what didn't. Thank you, Mary, for all your hard work. And thank you to the volunteers, without whom the Garden Walk would not be possible.





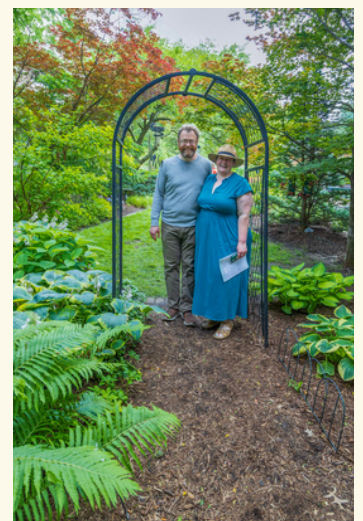




Photo Credits: Nancy Rosene

Meet a Master Gardener Shari Stucky

BY SHARI STUCKY, GUEST WRITER

It was because of my passion for nature, flowers, plants and gardening that I took the Master Gardener Class in 2017. This love is generational and began with my great, great grandmother. I am very passionate about learning and absorbed so much valuable information in the Master Gardener Class. From the class, I often utilize basic plant botany and how to recognize, prevent and treat diseases. I am able to diagnose when a plant has a disease - most recently a fungus on my tomato plant.

Gardening sparks my creativity and I am always trying something new. This season I am creating a wild flower garden from seed. Next year, it will be a moon garden. Poppies are new plants that have been added to our garden this season. Designing and adding new plants, especially flowers, brings me so much joy. There is always a new yard project to start!

I have had the opportunity to volunteer for PCMGA in many capacities. For the Gardening Show, I solicited ads for the program booklet, sold raffle tickets and worked the volunteer sign-up table. Other volunteering has included tree sales, our Garden Walk, and my favorite - writing articles for the newsletter.

I am married and looking forward to retiring in one year after working 35+ years in the Behavioral Health field. It has always been important to me to help others and make a difference. I have met so many fellow gardeners and enjoy sharing tips and ideas with others. Being a member of both a local garden club and PCMGA has been so rewarding. Happy gardening everyone.



PCMGA Scholarship Winner

An Interview with Marlena Bobrowski



Left to right: Marlena's sister Caterina, mother Trina, Marlena, Kathy Ruble, father John in celebration at the May PCMGA meeting.

BY WILMA WILLARD

Our talented 2026 PCMGA Scholarship winner is Marlena Bobrowski who received a \$2000 scholarship for her first year of Landscape Architecture studies at Purdue. She was recognized for her excellent references and grades. Below is my interview with Marlena.

Wilma - Why do you want to study horticulture architecture? What intrigues you?

Marlena - I have always enjoyed being outdoors and working with plants, so landscape architecture felt like the perfect fit. What intrigues me most is combining creativity with nature to design outdoor spaces that are both beautiful and functional. The profession will allow me to make a positive impact by creating sustainable spaces for everyone to enjoy.

Wilma- What is your personal experience with gardening and landscape design?

Marlena - I have experience with gardening, landscaping, and helping maintain outdoor spaces. I enjoy planting and taking care of plants. I also like designing garden layouts. This summer, I have gained additional hands-on experience working for a local landscaping business where I help with planting, landscape installation, and plant care.

Wilma - After you graduate, what would be your dream job? In what part of the country/world?

Marlena - My dream is to become a licensed landscape architect and work for a design firm that creates parks, community landscapes, and public spaces. I'd love to stay in the Midwest, especially in Indiana or surrounding states, but I'm also open to working wherever I have the opportunity to design meaningful outdoor spaces.

Final comments

Marlena - I really appreciate you taking the time to feature me in the Garden Thyme newsletter. I'm honored to have received the 2026 Porter County Master Garden Association Scholarship! Thank you again, Marlena Bobrowski

Photo Credit: Nancy Rosene



2026 PCMGA Grant Recipients

BY CO-CHAIRS MARTHA SEROCZYNSKI AND KATHY RUBLE

The 2026 PCMGA Philanthropy Committee successfully oversaw the distribution of \$7,000 in funding this spring. The committee approved 10 grants which will “Help Others Grow”!

- **St Agnew Day Services:** Funds for mulch and edible garden supplies for adult clients.
- **Valpo Family YMCA:** Expansion of their children’s teaching garden.
- **Shirley Heinze Land Trust:** Creation of a permaculture-focused demonstration garden.
- **St. John’s United:** Support for ongoing efforts to grow food for local food pantries and churches.
- **Hilltop Children’s Garden:** Purchase of garden supplies and tools for children.
- **TradeWinds Services:** Installation of raised garden beds at a new group home for their Healthy Eating Program.
- **Thomas Park Bandshell:** landscaping support for the Duneland Garden Club following park repairs.
- **Jibek Mbwakawen:** Funding for a turtle-shaped Potawatomi garden to integrate indigenous practices with sustainable teaching.
- **Liberty Bible Church:** Support for “Bouquets of Blessing’ program providing bouquets to community members in need.
- **Brinka Cross Garden:** Planting peonies and lilacs as part of a park renovation project.

Thanks to all the recipients for applying for our PCMGA grants. Congrats on your fine projects! More information about these good works can be gained by contacting our Philanthropy Committee.

Purdue University Landscape Report

Who Knew? The Plant Doctor is IN!



BY CHRISTINE SCHREY

As my husband walks around our property with the dogs, he often sees something on a tree or bush or plant that doesn't look right. So when he gets back, he asks. My response is often, "I don't have a clue." No matter how many years I've been a Master Gardener and gardening, I am always discovering how much I don't know. Often that has to do with some problem with a plant. I could do a Google search, but that isn't always trustworthy. So what do I do?

If you find yourself in the same position, I have some very reliable resources to share with you from none other than Purdue University.

First is the Purdue Landscape Report, found at purduelandscape.org. They provide science-based, timely information for Midwest landscapes for garden centers to home gardeners like us. You can subscribe to their emails on the website. Some recent features include articles on drought resistant flowers and landscape weed management which talks about the overwhelming effectiveness of mulch alone.

The Landscape Report has a link to the Purdue Plant Doctor, purdueplantdoctor.com. Enter the name of the pest or disease or the name of the plant. It will take you to some basic information to help you with your question. This is not an extensive list, but it is a place to start with many of the problems we are likely to see. The Quick Guides are valuable. They include how to use Plant Doctor and videos of some typical problems.

The Landscape Report also has a link to PPDL – Plant and Pest Diagnostic Lab. You can submit samples – physical, photo, or turf. The Lab will work to diagnose the disease or insect problem.

If you need more information than is provided and choose to do a general Google search, be sure to include in your search description the word extension. It will take you to other universities. I've also found botanic gardens can be a good source of information.

The Landscape Report and related links are easy to use. Now you can go from "I don't have a clue!", to "Who knew?", to "I Do!" and HELP OTHERS GROW!





GARDEN THYME

IS A PUBLICATION OF THE PORTER COUNTY
MASTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION WWW.PCGARDEN.INFO

- EARN 0.5 HOURS OF EDUCATION CREDIT FOR READING THE NEWSLETTER
- EARN VOLUNTEER CREDIT FOR CONTRIBUTING TO THE NEWSLETTER
- WEB-BASED EDUCATION HOURS
- PURDUE CONSUMER HORTICULTURE
- PURDUE EXTENSION MASTER GARDENER EVENTS CALENDAR

Team Thyme

Greg Carter, Writer

Christine Schrey, Writer

Sara Tumbas, Graphic Designer

Wilma Willard, Editor-in-Chief

VOLUME 12
ISSUE 03

Photo Credit: Kathy Carter