

In this Issue

Understanding Wisconsin
 Micro-Climates

RPMGA:

Navigating ORS
 Board Election Results
 Dues Reminder
 Coffee Chats Return

Garden & Landscape Expo

Rotary Gardens Is Hiring A
 Seasonal Gardener

Volunteer Opportunities

Events for Fun

Education Events Coming
 Up in February and Beyond

Understanding Wisconsin Micro-Climates

Or How to Use Micro-climates to Grow Plants Out of Your Hardiness Zone

What is a microclimate? According to the Random House Unabridged Dictionary of American English, © 2023, the definition is surprisingly simple.

mi•cro•cli•mate (mī'krə klī'mit): **Meteorology; the climate of a small area, as of confined spaces such as caves or houses (cryptoclimate,) of plant communities, wooded areas, etc. (phytoclimate,) or of urban communities, which may be different from that in the general region (macroclimate).**

So, what, exactly, does that have to do with anything as relates to gardening, you might ask?

Well, since you're asking, a lot.

As a gardener you may already know that there are plants that are grown in the south, in zones 6 through 11 that are routinely grown as annuals in Wisconsin. They live on as perennials in their home zones, but here they die off in fall just like any other annual. Some require more days to maturity than others, and others never mature to blossom or fruit, only to vegetation

The climate within a small
 area that differs from the
 surrounding climate



microclimate

Websites

MGV Hours Reporting:
mastergardener.
extension.wisc.edu/
report-your-hours/

**Canvas UW Online
Classroom:**
<https://canvas.wisc.edu/>

RPMGA Blog:
rpmga.blogspot.com

RPMGA on Facebook:
Hit control/click on this
link:
[RPMGA on Facebook](#)

Rotary Gardens:
[rotarybotanicalgardens.
org](http://rotarybotanicalgardens.org)

**Wisconsin Master
Gardener Program:**
mastergardener.
extension.wisc.edu

**Wisconsin Master
Gardener Association
(WIMGA):** wimga.org

when used as an annual.

If your garden spot resides in a microclimate it is possible, even likely, that can work to your advantage when choosing plants or seeds for your garden each growing season.

What is a perennial?

pe·ren·ni·al pə-'re-nē-əl

Synonyms of perennial

1: present at all seasons of the
year

2: persisting for several years
usually with new
herbaceous growth from

a perennating part -
perennial asters

3a: PERSISTENT, ENDURING -
perennial favorites

3b: continuing without
interruption: CONSTANT, PER-
PETUAL the perennial quest
for certainty, a
perennial student

3c: regularly repeated or
renewed : RECURRENT
death is a perennial literary
theme.

perennial noun

perennially pə-'re-nē-ə-
lē adverb

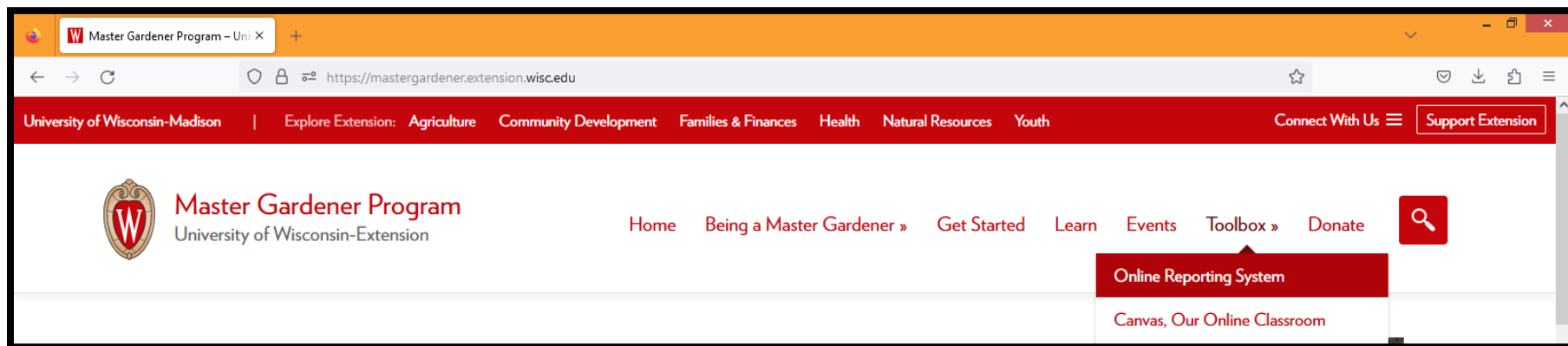
*Webster's New Collegiate
Dictionary*

When choosing perennials routinely used as annuals it's not a big deal which variety you choose, says Kerry Meyer, horticulturist for Proven Winners. "If you get right down to it, the label given the plant isn't important.

Continues on page 15

Annuals come in three rough categories:

1. **Hardy or cool-season annuals**, such as forget-me-not and larkspur, thrive in the cool to moderate temperatures of early spring and fall and can tolerate exposure to light frost without being protected.
 2. **Tender or warm-season annuals**, such as marigolds and petunias, are native to tropical or subtropical climates and require heat to grow and thrive, often growing poorly during cold weather. To ensure their survival, it's best to wait until late spring to add these plants to your garden beds or containers.
 3. **Half-hardy annuals** are most common and fall in the middle-of-the-road. They tolerate a wide range of temperatures, including periods of cooler weather near the beginning or end of the gardening season.
-



RPMGA February Program

Navigating the Online Reporting System, Thursday, February 9, 5:30 p.m., online

Were you frustrated or confused trying to get your volunteer and education hours entered for 2022? You weren't alone! Now that we've all struggled through the experience, let's talk about what we can do about it! Come share what you found irritating, perplexing or difficult and what you didn't. Then help us figure out ways we can make it easier. Do you want a log sheet to track your hours so you can enter them in batches or even all at once? Do you want a document that outlines allowed/not allowed topics for education or that explains what the various "Activities" are supposed to mean? (A resource that's easier to find than having to troll through the Onboarding course.) Let's brainstorm and see what we can come up with so our recordkeeping isn't burdensome. Hopefully ORS will be back online by the day of our discussion, but if not, that won't stop us! **Watch your email for a Zoom link for this program.**

RPMGA Board Election Results

Online voting has closed and the results are no surprise. Running unopposed for 2023/24, Ruth Flescher and Sue Wood were reelected to RPMGA Board positions as president and secretary, respectively.

RPMGA/WIMGA Dues Reminder

Last call: you can still send in your dues for 2023. Please mail them to treasurer Deb Grams: \$15 for RPMGA plus \$5 if you also want to renew your Wisconsin Master Gardener Association (WIMGA) membership. (Note: If you want to join WIMGA, please mail dues no later than February 15: we have to forward them by March 1.) If you can't find the membership form or need the address, contact Deb: debgrams@yahoo.com.



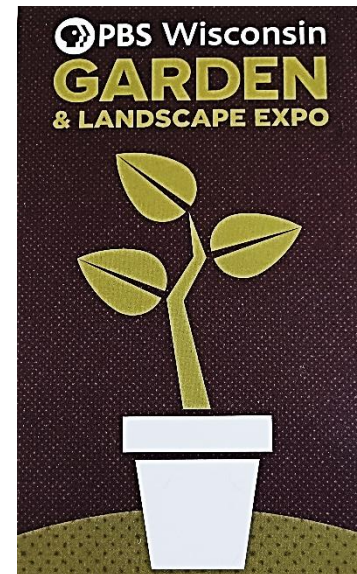


Coffee Chats Return in 2023. Next Date: February 14, 1:00 p.m.

The coffee chats for master gardeners in Rock, Walworth and Jefferson counties will now be hosted by the three associations instead of Extension. We'll continue to meet on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at 1:00 p.m. These are informal sessions and don't count for education hours, but they are a good chance to get to know other master gardeners, to talk about the program and your experiences, and to learn about (or mention) fun things that are coming up. It's also a great place to share your gardening successes, experiences and questions. In general, if you have pictures to share, we'll ask you to submit them a week ahead so the host has time to prepare. Watch your email for a link each month!

Garden and Landscape Expo, Feb 10-12, 2023, Alliant Energy Center, Madison

A trip to Garden and Landscape Expo can be a great start to the growing season. The exhibits are a lot of fun. There's also UW-Madison Extension Horticulture experts, a floral design competition, Nature Cat's Backyard and more. And of course, more than 125 educational sessions, all included with your admission. Many of those can be counted for MG education hours. The schedule is set, so you can click this link to start planning your trip: [2023 Garden & Landscape Expo educational schedule](https://wigardenexpo.com/tickets/). Discounted entry tickets are also available now, both online (<https://wigardenexpo.com/tickets/>) and at participating retailers, including Rotary Gardens. Did you know you can also **volunteer at Garden and Landscape Expo**? As thanks, you'll receive a free one-day admission ticket AND a free parking pass good for the day you volunteer. Not all the volunteer tasks meet the guidelines for MG volunteer hours, but some do. For more on volunteering, go to <https://wptschedule.org/Volunteer/event.php?iIDEvent=18> All proceeds from Garden and Landscape Expo benefit PBS Wisconsin.



Get Paid to Do What You Love. Rotary Is Hiring a Seasonal Gardener!

Among other positions, Rotary needs a Seasonal Gardener. The duties include gardening, groundskeeping tasks, supervision of interns and volunteers and helping to install and remove the Holiday Light Show. For more information, go to <https://rotarybotanicalgardens.org/about/employment>

Volunteer Opportunities

Prairie Planting for Dane County Parks, February 14, 9:00 a.m.-Noon, various locations

Help plant a prairie! Join Dane County Parks to help hand cast seed: we'll provide bags of seed for a given species, you'll spread the seed across the site in areas that species is likely to grow. No prior experience is needed, all training will be provided. Registration required. Go to <https://www.danecountyparks.com/Event/Detail/1441>

Work with Other RPMGA Members to Help With Their Projects

Don't have a pet project of your own to volunteer at? Looking for a way to get in your volunteer hours for 2023? A number of master gardener volunteers in and around Rock County would love to have your help, whether it's for a few days or for the entire season. Here are a few examples:



St. John Vianney Catholic Church 1250 East Racine Street, Janesville. MGJ Judy Latka tends a flower garden (*pictured above*) at this church. If you'd like to help her this year, she'd really appreciate the assist! Contact her at latkajs@gmail.com.

Cemetery Garden near Sharon, WI. MGJ Nancy McDonald tends a flower garden at one of the cemeteries near Sharon, and she, too, would welcome some assistance. To find out more, contact her at mnmcd@sharontelephone.com.

RECAP Gardening Program at the Rock County Farm, 200 US Hwy 14, Janesville. RECAP (Rock county Education and Criminal Addictions Program) is a long running and successful program for individuals arrested in Rock County for addiction-related offenses. Vegetable gardening is used as part of that program, as a type of vocational education (and more), to help individuals reshape their lives in more positive directions. Deb Grams is the lead master gardener at the site, and would love to have assistance. The year includes everything throughout the season, from garden prep, seed starting and transplant, through harvest and garden cleanup. Work for an extended time or just a few dates. You can reach Deb at debgrams@yahoo.com.



Farmers Market Appearances (Janesville, Beloit and potentially others). RPMGA usually puts in two summer appearances at the Janesville Farmers Market and the same at the Beloit Farmers Market. Right now, we have upcoming appearances at each of the Winter Markets (Feb. 25 in Beloit and March 4 in Janesville). We could also go to other markets if volunteers are interested. Are you comfortable talking to people one-on-one about gardening? If you're free on Saturday mornings, all you have to do is show up for your shift and chat with people. Contact Mary Kay Thompson (mastergardenermary@gmail.com) or Ruth Flescher (yafello2@gmail.com) if you're interested.

Events for Fun

Winterfest Lake Geneva 2023, February 1-5, Flatiron Park

This festival is centered around the U.S. National Snow Sculpting Championship. The snow sculpting begins 11 a.m. Wednesday and finishes at 1 p.m. Saturday and is free for anyone to view. Cast your vote for the Viewers' Choice award. (The sculptures remain on display till they melt.) There's also an ice sculpture walk, bonfires and more. For the complete event schedule, go to <https://www.visitlakegeneva.com/wiinter-fest/>

In Full Bloom Orchid Display, February 7-March 5, Nicholas Conservatory, Rockford, IL,

It may be the depth of winter, but Nicholas Conservatory is teeming with color! Our annual orchid exhibit is sure to impress, with hundreds of orchids creatively displayed in the warm tropical exhibition area. This year's display theme is based on the look and feel of classical ballet! Included with regular admission (\$10 or less). The Conservatory is open 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday (closed Mondays). You can find the details at <https://nicholasconservatory.com>

"Orchids" by [Pete Reed](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).





Maple Sugar Fest, Welty Environmental Center, Beloit, Saturday, February 25, 8:00 a.m. – noon

See the tree-to-table process by hiking through the sugarbush in Big Hill Park, practicing the art of tapping sugar maples, observing the process of boiling sap, and tasting the final product by drizzling local syrup on freshly made pancakes and sausages! Other activities include crafts provided by Nature at the Confluence and Youth2Youth, story times, photo ops, and so much more! Breakfast will be \$7 per adult member, \$10 per adult non-member, \$5 per child between the ages of 3 and 12, and children 2 and under are free. Additional sausage tickets will be available for purchase on the day of the event (\$1 per additional sausage). Welty is located in the upper level at 1201 Big Hill Court in Big Hill Park. *We encourage attendees to bring their own utensils for eating breakfast and a mug for hot cocoa or coffee so we can reduce waste from the event.* Tickets for sale at the door.

Education Events Coming Up in February and Beyond

Looking for Level 2 MGV training--The Plants Plus modules? You can find them in the online classroom, Canvas, which you access with your UW NetID at <https://canvas.wisc.edu/> As of now, Plants Plus modules are ONLY available in Canvas. Check regularly for new modules!

Olbrich Botanical Gardens, Madison, WI

Classes are in person at the Gardens unless otherwise noted. Fees listed are for Olbrich Members/General Public. For more info, copy and paste this address: <http://www.olbrich.org/education/classes.cfm> Note: Not all classes offered at Olbrich meet the guidelines for acceptable education hours for the MG program. We have left out any that are clearly unacceptable, yet those programs may be of interest to you! So do take a look at all their listings at the address shown above.

The registration deadline for these 3 classes has passed, but you could try calling to see if it's still possible to get in: (608) 246-4550
February 6, Creating and Maintaining Meadow Gardens, 6-7:30 p.m., \$22/\$28. Register by January 30.

February 7, Tips and Tricks for Aspiring Herbies, 6-7:30 p.m., \$18/\$22, **online**. Register by January 31.

February 8, Secret Ingredients to Olbrich's Annual Containers, 6-7:15 p.m., \$14/\$18, **online**. Register by February 1.

Registration is open for the classes below. If a class is shown as "filled," you can ask to be put on a waiting list. Cancellations do occur.

February 9, All About Jumping Worms, 5:30-7:30 p.m., \$18/\$22, **online**. Register by February 2.

February 13, American Roots: Author Talk with Nick & Alison McCullough, 5-8:30 p.m., \$38/\$46. Register by February 13.

February 15, Birth of a New Perennial Garden, noon-1:00 p.m., \$10/\$12, **online**. Register by Feb. 8.

February 15, Get to Know Your Native Plants: Mullein, Plantain, Violets, 6-7:15 p.m., \$14/\$18, **online**. Register by February 8.

February 21, Bringing the Tropics to the Midwest in the Thai Garden at Olbrich Botanical Gardens, 5:30-7:00 p.m., \$16/\$20. Register by February 14.

"Pavillion" by ibm4381 is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

February 23, Design Inspiration for a Creative Vegetable Garden, 6-7:30 p.m., \$28/\$35, **online**. Register by February 16.

February 27, Understanding Severe Weather, 6-8:00 p.m., \$10/\$12. Register by February 20.

March 1, Plant Layering Options for More Color, Diversity and Habitat, noon-1:00 p.m., \$10/\$12, **online**. Register by February 22.

March 2, Starting Seeds for a Beautiful Yard, 6-8:00 p.m., \$36/\$45. Register by February 23.

March 7, Recycling Garden Debris: Functional and Funky Ways to Conserve Organic Matter for a Healthier Garden, 6-8:00 p.m., \$18/\$22, **online**. Register by February 28.

March 8, Not Your Mother's Garden, noon-1:00 p.m., \$10/\$12, **online**. Register by March 1.

March 8, Gardeners Bootcamp, 5:30-7:30 p.m., \$28/\$35. Register by March 1.

March 12, Hands-On Hydrangea Pruning, 1-3:00 p.m., \$30/\$38. Register by March 2.



Epic Tomatoes from Your Garden, online anytime (recording) until February 28.

In case you missed it, or want to see it again, WIMGA recorded Craig Lehoullier's talk on growing tomatoes and it's available in the "Members Only" section of their website (www.wimga.org) through the month of February. It was an excellent talk, with lots of discussion of heirloom and open pollinated tomato varieties by someone who has grown and bred hundreds of them. Craig introduced a series of dwarf tomato varieties, bred to grow at half the speed, so they only get half the height of regular varieties and they come in a range of sizes, colors and flavors. In the second half of the program he discussed how to grow tomatoes and the issues they can have, whether grown in-ground, in containers or in straw bales. One hour and 45 minutes, but worth the time! You will need WIMGA's members-only password.

Landscape and Grounds Maintenance Short Course, Wednesdays, February 1-22, 1-3:30 p.m., online

Presented by UW experts through Dane County Extension, this series is aimed at green industry professionals but there's a lot here for home gardeners as well. Topics include insect pests, woody plants for screening, crabgrass control, prairie planting, native plants, oak wilt and planning for tree damage from ice storms. Fee is \$25/session. The talks will NOT be recorded. Register by the Friday before the presentation. For details and to sign up, go to <https://dane.extension.wisc.edu/2022/12/16/2023-landscape-and-grounds-maintenance-short-course/>

BIPOC Foodways: From Africa to Madison with Yusuf Bin Rella, Saturday, February 4, 10-11:30 a.m., online or in person at UW-Madison Horticulture Building

Join Yusuf Bin Rella, Chef at UW-Madison DeJope Residence Hall, and Co-founder of TradeRoots Culinary Collective, on a personal journey from Madison, WI to West Africa and from garden to kitchen! Yusuf labels himself as a culinary genealogist, connecting to his ancestors through food and cooking. Yusuf is also an avid gardener, creating gardens that feature diverse traditional and ethnic food systems and farming practices as part of TradeRoots, a Madison-based group of farmers and chefs with roots in Wisconsin and West Africa. Yusuf consulted on the design and planting of Allen Centennial Garden's African diaspora garden this past summer (*right*) and an urban garden at the state capitol featuring plants like Kwanzaa corn, eggplant, collards, and celosia. This program is part of the Friends of Allen Centennial Garden's 2023 Winter Class Series. Fee: \$15 Be sure to select the ticket for the way you wish to attend: in person in Madison or online. (Location information is available at the registration link.) Register by clicking this link: [February 4, 2023 \(Virtual and Live Stream from Horticulture Building, UW-Madison\)](#)





27th Annual Stateline Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference, Monday, February 6, 9:00 a.m. – 3:45 p.m., NIU campus, Rockford, IL

This conference is geared towards growers selling directly to consumers at farmers markets, orchards, pick your own operations, etc. Some of their topics this year may also be beneficial for new/beginning growers. In addition to the keynote speaker, there will be four breakout session times, each with a fruit and a vegetable topic. Fee: \$35. Address: 8500 E. State Street, Rockford, IL. Registration deadline: noon on February 3. For more details or to register, go to

<https://web.extension.illinois.edu/registration/?RegistrationID=26772>

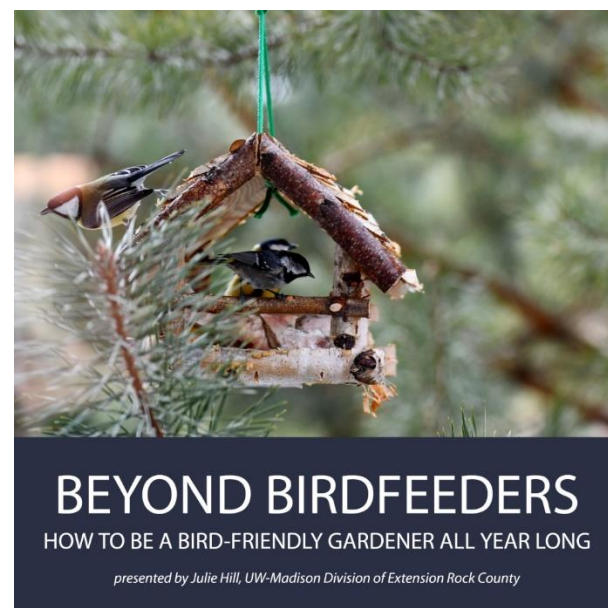
Indoor Plant Care During Winter, Wednesday, February 8, noon-12:30 p.m., online

Join us to learn how you can keep your indoor plants thriving through late winter. You will learn how to recognize common pests on indoor plants and management options. We will also discuss maintenance practices that you can use to minimize indoor plant problems and keep your plants growing healthy. Presenter: Joanne Oosterwyk, DC Smith Greenhouse Manager, UW-Madison. Free, but registration required.

Register at https://uwmadison.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_9YSYwk1IS56sA9xUKqI2UQ

Beyond Birdfeeders: How to Be a Bird-Friendly Gardener All Year Long, Tuesday, February 7, 6-7:00 p.m., Hedberg Public Library (Janesville)

Learn to create a bird-friendly yard. Discover the benefits to both wildlife and people when you prioritize the needs of birds where you garden. Explore gardening practices you can do throughout the year to encourage bird visitors, plus bird feeders, water, and how to improve shelter and nesting sites. Speaker: Julie Hill, Horticulture Outreach Specialist, UW-Madison Division of Extension Rock County. Free, no registration required.



Rejuvenating Neglected Apple Trees, Wednesday, February 15, noon-12:30 p.m., online

Do you have old and overgrown apple trees that need some attention? Make sure to join us to learn about how to properly prune these neglected apple trees to support fruit production and prevent diseases. We will discuss correct pruning techniques including timing and encouraging proper tree structure. Presented by Darrin Kimbler, Agriculture Educator, UW-Madison Division of Extension Iron County. Free, but registration required. Register at https://uwmadison.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_lzav64T8Q2OHcALwvBci5w

Seed Starting with Native Plants, Wednesday, February 15, 6:30-8:00 p.m., online

Want to grow native plants from seed? Join us for this virtual program. Part of Kettle Moraine Land Trust's Armchair Conservation Series. Fee: unknown. For questions or to register, email liza@kmlandtrust.org. A Zoom link will be sent to you a few days before the program.



Herbs, Wednesday, February 15, 6:30 p.m., online

Presented by Walworth County Master Gardener Brenda Williams. This zoom presentation will touch on many subjects revolving around choosing, growing and drying herbs. Such topics as: Which herbs are hardy to our zone? Do all herbs overwinter as houseplants? (Hint: No. No matter how many times the internet tells you, lavender does not make a good houseplant.) We'll also cover which herbs are best directly sown into the garden and which should I just buy as plants. Do all herbs grow well in pots? Can you grow all herbs under lights in your home? Which herbs are annuals/biennials and which are perennials? (Parsley is a biennial, don't even bother to winter it over.) Where does the flavor come from? Are there any herbs I'll regret planting in my garden? When do you cut herbs? What part of the herb do you cut? We'll even

cover a couple of herb myths, like: Does lavender, the herb of love, when placed under a lover's pillow really encourage romantic thoughts? So, don't be left out, tune into this presentation. Watch your email for the zoom link.



Herbs and Edibles, Thursday, February 16, Noon-1:00 p.m., Edgerton Hospital

Continuing his Coffee and Chat series, Mark Dwyer presents this program on growing a variety of herbs and edibles, many of which are AAS award winners. (And many of which will be available at the Healing Garden's plant sale coming up in May.) Free, no registration necessary, but masks are required in the hospital.

Activity of Woody Perennials Through Winter, Saturday, February 18, 10-11:30 a.m., online

Al Kovalesky, UW-Madison Assistant Professor of Horticulture, studies the physiological processes at a molecular level that determine how plants control cold hardiness and dormancy during the winter, and how that leads to bud break and flowering in spring. This knowledge can then be used to inform models predicting phenology to understand how plants can survive in different environments or future climates. His work explores the question: Can we predict adaptation of a plant to an environment based on winter responses? Friends of Allen Centennial Garden Winter Class Series. Fee: \$15. Register by clicking this link: [February 18, 2023](#)



Pollinator Plants for the Home Landscape, Tuesday, February 21, 6-7:00 p.m., online

Learn how to use native pollinator plants in your home landscape. Justin Kroening, owner of Stone Silo Prairie Gardens, will share tips on how to design, plant, and maintain natural gardens to give them an intentional pleasing look. Registration deadline: Friday, February 17. To sign up, call or email Jessica Johnsrud, Assistant Director/Education Coordinator at Woodland Dunes Nature Center and Preserve, Inc.: jessicaj@woodlanddunes.org, 920-793-4007. You will receive an email with directions and a link to the presentation.

Planning for a Seed Saving Vegetable Garden, Wednesday, February 22, noon-12:30 p.m., online

Saving seeds is a great way to keep your favorite garden vegetables for next year, but there are some things you need to know before you plant. You will learn about the different plant life cycles, preventing cross pollination, and which crops are the best for home gardeners to grow for seed saving. Presented by Lisa Johnson, Horticulture Outreach Specialist, UW-Madison Division of Extension Dane County. Free, but registration required. Register at https://uwmadison.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_O4PQVZQITOWZZoc3T8AFxQ

Photo: Darrin Kimble

Growing Healthy Plants: Basics in Plant Disease Management, Wednesday, February 22, 6:30-8:30 p.m., online

Learn about common methods for disease control, their pros and cons, and how you can adapt these techniques for use in your own home garden. Free, but registration required. Go to <https://pddc.wisc.edu/> and check at the bottom of the page for a link to the registration form.



Gardening for the Seasons: Lessons from Lurie Garden, Saturday, February 25, 10-11:30 a.m., online

Using Lurie Garden in Chicago's Millennium Park as a model, Katherine Deery, the garden's head horticulturalist, will explore choosing the "right plant, for the right place," perennials for every season, designing with native plants, mindful watering, and best practices for cutting back your garden for wildlife and insects. With a few simple adjustments to way we garden, a beautifully designed space that considers sustainability and ecology is within everyone's reach. Co-sponsored by Friends of Allen Centennial Garden and the Madison Area Master Gardeners Association. Fee: \$15. Register by clicking this link: [February 25, 2023](#)

Cacti and Succulents: Lessons from Nature, Monday, February 27, 6:30 p.m. online

WIMGA Continuing Education Series: Dr. Dan Mahr was on the Board of Directors of the Cactus and Succulent Society of America for over 25 years. He is an Honorary Fellow of that organization and was director of its Field Trips Program for 20 years, organizing and leading tours throughout the United States, Mexico and other locations. Dan has degrees in Biology and Zoology from San Diego State University and a doctorate is in Entomology from the University of California, Riverside. For over 30 years he was a professor of Entomology at the University of Wisconsin – Madison, where he specialized in pest management on horticultural crops. He and his wife Susan now live in California. Free, but registration required. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting. To sign up, go to this site: <https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZlscuuhqTkpG9BP7JLsXw-zWkAv7ZD1hk9F>

Success with Indoor Plants, Tuesday, February 28, 1:30-2:30 p.m., online

Make your houseplants happy with a little TLC. Plants that thrive in indoor environments require a balance of plant culture and human care. Learn how to create a healthy houseplant environment by selecting the right plants for your indoor space as we discuss cultural requirements, maintenance practices, and key ornamental aspects in growing interior plants. Presenter: Andrew Holsinger, Univ. of IL Extension Horticulture Educator. Free, but registration required. Go to:

<https://registration.extension.illinois.edu/start/four-seasons-gardening-webinar-indoor-plants-2-28-23>

Where Will You Garden? Growing Great Vegetables Series, Tuesday, February 28, 6-7:00 p.m., online

Grow a garden anywhere! Build a garden using whatever space you have. Learn about traditional garden plots, raised beds, salad tables, container gardening, growing vertically, and more. Presenters: Jennifer Fishburn, Sarah Vogel, and Chris Enroth, Illinois Extension Horticulture Educators. Fee: \$10/session. Register at

<https://registration.extension.illinois.edu/start/growing-great-vegetables-2>

Green Thumb Gardening – Winter Vegetable Series 2023, mostly Mondays, 6:00-8:00 p.m., online

The Green Thumb Gardening class series gives you the practical knowledge to keep your home garden thriving! Dane County Extension educators and local horticulture experts will provide in-depth and accessible information for everyone from the novice to the experienced gardener. Register for individual classes at \$12 each or \$80 for the full series. [Click Here to Register](#) or to see topics for the rest of the series. Zoom links will be provided after registration.

February 6 (Monday): Weed Management in Vegetable Gardens

February 13 (Monday): Composting in the Vegetable Garden

February 16 (Thursday): Seed Saving, Harvesting and Storage

February 20 (Monday): Vegetable Garden Insects

February 27 (Monday): Cover Crops for the Vegetable Garden



"[LOVE this vertical garden!](#)" by [Miriella](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

Understanding Wisconsin Micro-Climates, continued

What is important is how the plant performs in your garden. For some of you, the plants we call annuals might actually be perennial. To learn if the 'annual' you are looking at is an annual for you, you need to compare the plant's hardiness zone to the zone in which you garden."

Enter, stage left, the microclimate in your back yard.

As a personal example, I can attest that items planted in my yard perform differently than the same varieties planted at about the same time at Rotary Botanical Gardens. While care and soil condition are both factors in each environment there are significant differences. My home is bordered on each side with other buildings. Houses, in fact. Each are less than 20 away from my home. My back yard is completely fenced with wooden stockade fencing that is 6 feet tall. My side yard on the north works really well for perennials, but my back yard holds moisture and has amazingly fertile soil. My plants are healthy, nearly disease free, and seem to last far longer than those of other gardeners who live scattered around the county. I think I am fortunate enough to be experiencing, here at my home, a microclimate.

What about your garden spot? Where is it located? Does it have a concrete sidewalk, or flagstones or pavers leading up to it, or even through it? Is it nestled next to your driveway or a brick wall? Any of those could serve as heat sinks, absorbing heat during the day, and releasing the warmth in the evenings, providing for warming of the soil and extending the season for your gardens. Are there buildings close by? Closed fences? Both of these things shelter the plants from extremes of weather, an unplanned-for benefit. Do you garden in-ground, or in containers or straw bales? Containers set on a concrete surface will dry out faster than in-ground plants, but they will absorb heat as long as there is direct sunlight on their location, ostensibly lengthening their ability to bear fruit for as much as a couple weeks.



Pushing the envelope

Although it is easy to assume that all microclimates are out of our grasp insofar as changing them, I beg to differ. Consider the microclimate I outlined above. Of the existing hardscaping that exists in my garden space, virtually none of it is natural. Every bit of it is man-made. Sidewalks, buildings, fences. Granted, these aren't things that I can readily move or adapt, but I can adapt my plantings to take advantage of them. Push the envelope.

Start by mapping your space

Sit down with a piece of paper and a pencil and sketch out a simple drawing of your yard. Include existing trees, shrubs, perennials, annual beds, vegetable beds, herb gardens - you get the idea. Make several copies. Why? Because I would like you to investigate several possibilities. Make sense? Use colored pencils to identify shady areas, heat sinks, sheltered spots. This will help you identify whether your landscape is truly a microclimate. Remember, microclimates can be just a few feet square, a long narrow strip by a fence or wall, a curving bed by a sidewalk. Consider tossing out the idea that everything should be neatly planted in rows. Consider pots which can be moved to take advantage of the prevailing light source. When you have identified several possible landscapes, write up a list of perennials, biennials, annuals, herbs and vegetables that you want to include in your garden. Look up propagation and care needs of all those plants, checking for planting time, days to emergence, days to maturity. When you have those all written down, assign them space in your drawings. You may find that there are choices that can be worked into the garden that have longer days to maturity, or can live quite nicely in partial shade.



Dare to experiment

- **Work to establish a warm microclimate** – A word to the wise – establishing garden(s) in a warm microclimate isn't going to allow someone living in Edgerton to grow bananas in the back yard. The most we can expect from working with the vagaries of nature is that we can extend our growing season 2 to 3 weeks each year. If you think of it logically, that's a lot of growing time. Take advantage of it if you can.

A warm microclimate can make it easier to grow cold-hardy vegetables outside your normal growing season. BUT, warm microclimates can also

increase the need for watering and make it harder to grow some vegetables. Some will bolt, like spinach - or go to seed if it gets too warm, like lettuce or snap peas. Remember to take those kinds of characteristics into consideration when planning your microclimate garden.

- **Work to establish a cool microclimate** – Now, why would you want to do that, you ask? True, a cool microclimate is most often seen as a negative, but you can use them to your advantage to increase harvests in your landscape. Global warming has forced some unwelcome realities upon us – realities that we must learn to adapt to and live with if we are to succeed in the garden. As the world warms, cool spots in your landscape can provide relief from the heat and help extend harvest of cool-weather plants well into summer. Are you making the most of cool microclimates? Creating cool microclimates can moderate the effects of drought and help us tame extreme heat. These relatively cool areas will lower plant stresses and improve harvests and require less water. Cool microclimates may have a shorter growing season overall. You can create a cool microclimate in the summer which becomes a warm microclimate in fall and winter.

Five simple things you need to know about microclimates

1. Know the length of your growing season.
2. Know your gardening zone(s) – [Wisconsin USDA hardiness zone map here](#).
3. Make a sun map of your gardens – [TreeHugger is run by a group of scientists and naturalists who believe in science first](#).
4. Learn what shade, part shade, and full sun mean. Search the definitions online, referring to .edu sites.
5. Identify the microclimates in your yard.

Identifying warm and cool zones in your microclimate

- **WARM** - Dry soil/Lots of sun: Plant drought tolerant plants. Is it a good spot for that Mediterranean garden you've been thinking about?
- **COOL** - Dry soil/Shade: A difficult combination often found under large trees, these areas may be cooler than the surrounding areas making them ideal for cool weather plants that wilt in the sun.
- **WARM** - Moist soil/Lots of sun: Here's the spot for a water garden or bog garden. Plant anything that doesn't mind wet feet.
- **COOL** - Moist soil/Shade: Looking for a woodland retreat? This is the perfect place for hostas, azaleas, dogwoods, or Japanese maples
- **COOL** – Moist soil/Mulch, woody debris, plant cover and late afternoon shade.

Back to the drawing board

Plug the characteristics in to your drawings.

Have you identified the characteristics that you hope of modify or enhance? How about a rock garden in that dry sunny place? Maybe some large rocks or boulders, or a pile of loose brick as a sun catcher in the middle of your veggies to absorb heat during the day and release it at night. Plant those tall sunflowers, cannas, or okra where they can be used to block the wind. A plant from a warmer hardiness zone might be able to survive in that little spot that is made up of dry soil and lot of sun. Extend your growing season by planting frost tender plants on the south side of your house using the sun and shelter of the building to create a microclimate especially for them. Choose plants that might benefit from your creation of tiny microclimates in small pockets all over your yard.

Note from the author: This topic erupted out of the mists of research and settled on my desk in time for today's article. I found lots of good, solid, science-based information out in the e-verse, and would recommend you spend a little time cruising the web, studying some of the amazing content out there, readily available and waiting, about microclimates. This article barely scratches the surface of a topic that has a wide range of thought-provoking ideas to challenge our futures. I would caution you to be very careful to vet each article before using it to make changes to your gardens, or to use as guidance for others. Thanks.

Mary Kay Thompson

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