



# Rhea County Master Gardener News

## President's Corner

The fair was a tremendous experience. We had extensive conversations with at least 100 people and we provided a lot of information on gardening and the Master Gardener program. Plus, we had a really good time. The pavilion has opened up a whole new dimension for us. It is really nice to discuss gardening looking at the showcase beds or sitting in the shade on the picnic tables. We had much more in-depth conversations there than in the congestion of the booths. The posters, planters and displays were really, really good. The seed packets were a big hit and will get a lot of folks started in fall gardening. I have never been to a fair that I enjoyed as much as this one. Thanks to everyone!

Here are some topics we will be discussing at our meeting on September 17:

**PUMPKINFEST**—We are considering a booth at Pumpkinfest in Dayton on October 30 and 31. We would buy gourds and provide them to kids along with painting materials and supervision so that kids could create their own painted gourd. We could also hand out pamphlets and sell any remaining fall seed kits. Diane Pfeiffer had suggested this idea.

**FARM CITY DAY**—We are also considering a booth at Farm City Day on October 6 if we can find enough kids to do the presentations. This year, they want kids to give the talks to make it more fun and interesting for the kids attending. The kids doing the presentations must be about 9 to 12 years old, interested in gardening and willing to give the

same short talk perhaps 10 times. We would have Master Gardeners standing by to help answer questions. This repetitive lecturing is not easy even for adults. We will see if enough kids are available from the grandchild pool or other resources. Teachers may be able to nominate kids. We would repeat the Fall Garden program as we have many of the posters from the Fair. We could buy decorative cabbage and other seedlings from Lowe's. We could ask each class a question and the kid that gave the correct answer could get a fall garden seed packet.

**PAVILION & GREENHOUSE**—This fall and winter we should complete the pavilion or build the greenhouse, but not both at the same time. It would probably be best to complete the pavilion now and to do it completely rather than in layers over the years. This means that we potentially would frame the walls and windows, install windows and siding, install HVAC duct work, wiring, plumbing and insulation, and then sheetrock and finish work. Later we would build the hoop greenhouse. The greenhouse should be fully automatic for temperature control. We must have thermostatically controlled heat and window openings and exhaust fans. Before we start the greenhouse, we must develop a solid plan for volunteers that will work there daily during greenhouse operation. Things can go wrong quickly, and we really need to have someone in there every day. Someone must "own" the responsibility for the greenhouse. This needs to be worked out before we start.

*John*

John Kueck  
Master Gardener Association President

## Master Gardener Association Meeting

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The next Master Gardener Association meeting will be held on **Thursday, September 17 at 7:00 p.m.** at the **Ag Center and Fairgrounds in Evansville**. Jerry Lamb will be the guest speaker and will give a program on cover crops.

There is also a lot of business to discuss, so please make every effort to attend.

## UT Gardens Plant of the Month: Cardinal Flower

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Cardinal flower, also known as *Lobelia cardinalis*, is a beautiful native perennial found throughout North America. It can be an overlooked flower for the landscape, but don't rule out this great native. It was first found in wetlands of Canada when European settlers entered the area in the 1600s. Wild populations of this plant have been declining as wetlands have been drained and as more land has been developed for human use.

There are numerous common names for this plant, including scarlet lobelia and red lobelia. The bloom, which is usually scarlet, is what really sets this plant apart from other summer-flowering perennials. A raceme forms a single, unbranched inflorescence with multiple small flowers attached. The flowers can range from scarlet to pink or even white. Cardinal flower grows 3 to 4 feet tall with a spread of about 2 feet. Its vertical growing habit adds a strong linear component to your garden. Blooms can be present from early to late summer. In the wild, they begin in late summer and bloom into fall if moisture is adequate.

Cardinal flower is an excellent choice for a perennial border or naturalized garden area. It grows best in partial shade and in moist conditions. However, it can also tolerate full sun in cooler summer climates. The native varieties are often found growing along streams or other wet, natural areas. Because of its love of moist conditions, it is an excellent selection for a rain garden.

If you are not growing Cardinal flower in a rain garden, you will want to amend your soil with organic matter such as compost and mulch to help keep soil moisture levels to its liking.

This perennial is one of those "plant it and forget it" selections and does not have any serious pest or disease problems. Cardinal flower can also be propagated by clump division or seed. Just be sure to be able to identify young shoots so as not to remove seedlings when weeding. It is cold hardy from Zones 3-9.

There are several cultivars for this plant including 'Alba' with white flowers, 'Heather Pink' with pink flowers and a new introduction called 'Black Truffle' which is sure to stand out with its dramatic, dark chocolaty-purple foliage and bold red flowers. Superior to other dark-foliaged lobelias on the market, 'Black Truffle' holds this deep color throughout the growing season.

One reason I enjoy this plant is that it produces nectar for humming birds and butterflies. When it blooms at the UT Gardens, you can almost always see a humming bird or butterfly flying around getting a snack. Another plus is that deer tend to leave it alone!

*Derrick Stowell*  
*UT Gardens, Knoxville, TN*

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