



Hoosier Organic Gardener

January 2024

Indiana Organic Gardeners Association

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IOGA MISSION:

To educate ourselves and others in reasons for and methods of environmentally friendly gardening; and to encourage the reduction of chemical dependency in gardens, lawns and farms.

President's Message

Happy New Gardening Year!

Hi everyone. I'm Steve Beers, your new President.

The new seed catalogs have been coming in. I've already made a few orders. I found a bargain online with "Groco seeds.com." And they are also on ebay. Lots of .99 cent seeds with plenty in each package. The big seed companies have gotten so expensive.

I'm still out there every day it doesn't rain or freeze the ground, improving my garden soil with shredded leaves and compost. After moving to Indy from Brown County, I started with really poor soil. Now five seasons later, it's looking very good.

The new Covid normal is much improved. But today we are left with less active members. It would be nice to get the word out to new folks that enjoy gardening. With the rising food costs that we are experiencing now, any fresh vegetables we can grow is not only super healthy but will save us money at the store.

We need to consider our options to improve membership. Our membership dues are low, but we could consider suspending those for some time.

We could try new reasons to attend the meetings. I would like to try sharing some of our bounty from the garden at the Summer and fall meetings. There's always extra green beans and tomatoes in my garden. In recent years I have grown some great carrots and leeks.

Sharing seeds could be helpful. I always have extra and save seeds of my own too. Ideas like these are more about the meetings that are already popular with some of our core members. So, we need to get the word out to bring new members to the group. That may take a special effort to network or whatever else we can do.

Hope to see you all at the January meeting. Have fun planning that spring garden.

Steve



Steve Beers

Winter Sowing

Winter sowing is basically starting seeds outside in clear plastic mini-greenhouses. Any clear plastic container that will let the sunlight in will work. Make holes in the bottom and top to allow for drainage and air flow and for rain and snow to enter. Make a lid by cutting around the top (about 3" down) of your container but leave part for a hinge. If you are using a 2 liter bottle, cut it in half. Leave the cap off for air circulation and to allow moisture in. Drill holes in the bottom for drainage. You can also use a large clear tote as a mini greenhouse. Fill with small pots.

Use regular potting soil about 3" deep. Plant your seeds (1 variety per container) and label the container. Place in a larger container, soak well and allow to drain. Use duct tape to seal. Once your containers are ready, set them outside where they can get rain and snow. Make sure they don't fall over. Keep the soil moist, adding water as needed.

In January start those seeds that need cold stratification. Perennials can be started in January or February. Annuals, vegetables and herbs should be started mid-March. Keep tops on as long as there is frost. When the weather is warm take the container tops off during the day. When seeds are ready to transplant, water, then take the whole pillow out and break off hunks and plant.

Judy Houser

Improving the Soil

Winter Rye as a cover crop (cover crops also known as green manure), are an easy way to increase the fertility of garden soil. Planted in the fall and turned under and blended with the soil in spring, they decompose and enhance fertility as well as the tilth of the earth. Use them in vegetable and annual gardens or any area that otherwise would be left bare over the winter.

How to do it:

Winter rye (*Secale cereals*) is a popular cover crop for home gardeners (clover, alfalfa, vetch, and buckwheat are also used). In addition to improving the soil, its abundant top growth and root system keeps garden soil from eroding. Winter rye seed can be found at garden and farm-supply stores.

Broadcast winter rye over the entire vegetable or annual garden in late summer to mid-fall, even among the still-growing plants. Scratch the large seeds into the soil where nothing is growing. Don't worry about the seeds scattered among the flowers and vegetables. They will germinate in the shade of the plants' leaves and firmly anchor themselves in the soil.

Keep the rye seeds watered until they start showing growth. They germinate in four to six days, sending up slender red blades all over the garden. As the leaves grow they turn to bright green and will remain so all winter, even though the plants are dormant.

In spring, growth resumes. Turn the rye under when it is about a foot high. After digging it in, wait two weeks to a month before planting. As it decomposes, the nitrogen-rich biomass improves the quality and fertility of the soil.

You can also mow the rye or cut it down with a string trimmer and plant seedlings of early-spring greens and cabbages in among the green manure mulch. Using the cover crop as a mulch is good but not as beneficial as turning it under and incorporating it into the soil.

Doug Rohde

Bean Taste Test



With the variety of beans produced this year, I determined to do a taste test of the Mayflower, Yellow Indian Woman, and Lena Cisco's Bird Egg beans. On the appointed day (cause that's when I felt like it) I put a cup of each in separate containers with water and let them soak all day.

The aroma of cooking beans is not one of Annie's favorite things. but she suffered without complaint while, in late afternoon, I put three pans of beans on the kitchen cook top and proceeded to boil them. They received no additives other than about 1/8th teaspoon of salt and a chunk of raw potato to take the gas out (believe a long-time bean cooker and eater, it does work) and more water as the liquid evaporated. The Mayflowers, upon reaching a boil, whipped up a furious head of foam that threatened to escape onto the burner, then quieted. The others were docile.

After an hour of cooking, I did a three bean test from each pan and found the Indian Woman beans were still a little under done. The other two were soft as they should be. At this point Annie announced that one of the types are "stinky beans". Since beans seem to benefit from more cooking, I left them on for another 30 minutes. I have read that the Indian Woman beans have a "buttery" flavor. They do have a smooth flavor, but they taste as beans do without additives, rather bland in a good sort of way. The Bird Egg beans matched them. The Mayflowers, along with the bean flavor had an earthy tone that added an unexpected dimension (the "stinky" beans?). I may have to try Mayflowers again, perhaps with the appropriate inoculant.

Beans get better with some age, so I put them, still in separate containers, in the refrigerator for three days, then did both a cold and warm taste test. The results were the same as above. So, for the finale, I co-mingled them in a slow cooker with chicken and onion broth we made, some left over ham steak, and leftover baby back rib bones. The disparate flavors came together and complimented each other, like a blended whiskey. But it wasn't the greatest. For the best, cook beans with a smoked turkey leg. Now that is a great pot of beans!

Paul Matzek

Central Indiana Seed Swap

Friday January 26th 3-6pm
Saturday January 27th 8am-3pm.

Hamilton Co. 4H Fairgrounds
2003 Pleasant St.

A free family friendly annual event open to the public hosted by the Seed Swap Committee of Hamilton County Master Gardeners. The event has several exciting informative speakers on a wide range of gardening topics, vendors selling and trading seeds, free seed giveaways, grab bags, garden accessory or garden product vendors, Master Gardener vendors, yummy food vendors, a kids learning activity corner, and more!

What to do with autumn leaves (other than plastic bag them for the landfill)

If you are fortunate enough to garden in the vicinity of deciduous trees, you can easily emulate nature and create your own supply of nutritious leaf mold and put all those autumn leaves to good use.

How to do it:

Collect leaves from lawns, walkways, sidewalks, and other areas where they aren't wanted. (Do not use Black Walnut leaves). The leaf blower works quickly but the leaves have to be raked into piles for transport. A two wheeled garden cart is far superior to a wheelbarrow for this purpose. It holds more, does not tip, is easier to push, and when tipped up to rest on the front end, it takes less storage space. Another way to gather up leaves is to rake them onto a plastic tarp or old bedsheet. After it's piled high, pick it up by the four corners to make a giant pouch and drag the leaves to their final destination. Use a lawnmower or leaf shredder then compost the shredded leaves.

Compost Fundamentals:

Compost is a fantastic natural soil amendment that improves the quality of any garden soil and supports plant growth. But that's not the only advantage of this resource. It is super easy to make and it's free.

How to do it:

Designate a spot for composting that's out of sight but not too long a hike from the kitchen. It should measure at least three feet by three feet. Ideally, keep two compost piles - one finished and ready for use and another for adding new material.

Base your compost pile on a wooden pallet to improve ventilation and speed decomposition. The pallets are often available free from nurseries and building stores.

Here's a trick for remembering compost basics: Green and brown are the colors of compost basics. The green stuff is usually "wet" and high in nitrogen. It includes grass clippings (but never use grass clippings from chemical treated lawns!!!), kitchen waste (no meat or dairy products as they attracts rats, raccoons, skunks, etc.) and spent garden plants.

The brown stuff is dry and rich in carbon. It includes fallen leaves (preferably shredded), straw, hay, wood shavings, and corncobs. The key is to make sure there is both green and brown in your mix.

Keep a small bucket or lidded pail in the kitchen for veggie scraps destined for the compost pile, including fruit waste, eggshells, used tea bags, and so on but never as mentioned, meat, fish, fats, pasta or baked goods.

Keep the pile moist at all times. It should not be soggy but nicely damp and spongy. Water as needed. Level the top of the pile, indenting it slightly toward the center to allow water to penetrate it efficiently. A five foot rebar can be used to plunge in about five holes in the pile to let in air for better decomposition. You can also use a garden fork to aerate the pile every few weeks, turning over parts of the pile. Air is vital for the microbes that are breaking down the organic materials. If the pile starts stinking, it has become anaerobic and needs to be turned immediately. In warmer weather decomposition than during winter months.

To accelerate decomposition, add some finished compost to the fresh pile. The microbes and bacteria already living in the finished compost will help break down the raw materials.

Doug Rohde

IOGA Meeting Minutes

October 21, 2023

The meeting on October 21, 2023 was held at Susan Irwin-Simons' home in Middletown, IN. There were 14 members present.

We met in the garden area near her fabulous garden shed for conversation. There was a wood fire going for warmth. After the pitch-in lunch, President Doug Rohde brought up the subject of the need to find new officers for President, Vice-President and Secretary. Steve Beers agreed to be IOGA's 24/25 President. Tammy Shockley is the new VP and Ann Leatherman agreed to be Secretary. Larry Bills and Steve Swinford are continuing in their positions of Treasurer and Membership. There were a few very brief showers during the meeting.



Following the meeting, members took a tour of Susan's gardens beginning with the chicken/orchard area. Susan has different varieties of chickens but no roosters. She purchased fertilized eggs and tried to get the hens to sit on them. Many of them got broken, but 5 survived so she separated that hen and eggs, The eggs hatched – all roosters. The man she got the eggs from took the roosters and gave her a hen. The chicken coop is not heated. The walls are double insulated and she places bales of straw around the bottoms of the coop for warmth. She also places old straw around the edges of the enclosure for mice to use in the winter. Bees come along in the spring and use the openings.

Next we went into the garden area. Susan grows a large variety of vegetables and herbs, including yarrow, tansy and comfrey, mixed in with the vegetables. She's trying to grow gooseberries. She tries to make use of everything. Lovage is a substitute for green celery.

We walked down toward the pond (which was netted for winter) and along the way looked at her native pollinator area. The fish in the pond are goldfish which are much cheaper than koi and much cleaner.

Before leaving, people who wanted to filled bags with some very rich compost.

Judy Houser, Secretary



Garlic Planting Time



Having determined which bed would be the allium bed next year; I brought up bulbs from the basement and broke them into cloves to plant.

Gravity being what it is, raised garden beds, unbound by some structure, have a tendency to spread. Then the encroaching crab grass fights to make them narrower. By the end of the season they are flatter and narrower than at the beginning. We had had very little rain since the first part of August and I had delayed repairing the beds, but finally, at the end of October, we received $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of rain to soften the soil. The second of November I bolted the rotary plow onto my 1967 Gravely walking tractor and used it to throw the escaping dirt back into the bed to build it back up to normal height. The soil, relieved from its bounds, fluffed up into a dark, soft mesa.

After raking the bed back to a level top I planted 50 cloves of hard neck garlic. That variety produces fewer, but larger cloves and I have tired of the little cloves of soft neck and no longer plant it. We get baseball sized bulbs with fat cloves that, after an appropriate time in the oven can be smooshed onto a slice of bread or straight into ones mouth. Yum!

That took a third of the bed, leaving the remainder for onion planting in the spring. I mulched the entire thing with last year's leaves. Then, in order to hold them down against the blustery breezes, I took down the bean trellis, saving a few more of the yellow Indian woman beans that had managed to make it to maturity before the first freeze, and laid the wire mesh pieces on the leaves.

THE 2024 GROWING SEASON IS UPON US!

Paul Matzak

Upcoming Meetings

IOGA generally meets quarterly on the third Saturday of the month.

Mark your calendar for upcoming meetings.

January 20, 2024
April 20, 2025
July 20, 2023
October 19, 2024



Ask us...!

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Treasurer's Report 4th Quarter 2023



Opening Balance October 1, 2023 \$4,967.72

Expenses	
Newsletter	79.28
Total	\$79.28

Closing Balance December 31, 2023 \$4,888.44

Respectfully submitted by Larry Bills, Treasurer

How do I join IOGA?

Dues are \$10.00 per individual member, and \$12.00 for a dual membership (same address, one newsletter).

To join, make your check out to Indiana Organic Growers Association and mail to:

I.O.G.A.
7159 W 200 N
Tipton, IN 46072-8637



Please include ALL of the following information:

Full Name _____
2nd Name (if dual membership) _____
Address _____
Address _____
Phone Number _____
Email Address _____

I prefer my newsletter to be ___ e-mailed ___ mailed.

IOGA
Meeting
Sat. Jan. 20
12:45

Cool Creek Park Nature Center
2000 E. 151st St., Carmel, IN ([Map](#))
317-774-2500

12:45—1:00	Pitch-in Lunch
1:00—1:30	Introductions, Q&A, and Business
2:00	Holly Faust — Gene Stratton Porter

Please note later meeting time. Another group has reserved the meeting room and won't be out until !
12:15

Lunch: Bring a favorite dish filled with food ("home-made" and/or "organic" appreciated) to share and your plate, fork, and drink. Kitchen facilities will be available.

Program: Holly Faust will give a talk on Gene Stratton Porter.

Directions: From north I-465 in Indianapolis take Exit 31 north onto US-31 N / N. Meridian St.. Take Exit 129A to E. 151st Street. At the traffic circle take the 2nd exit (north). Go past the playground to the Nature Center where we will be meeting. The room is to your right. For more specific directions click on "map" above.

Everyone welcome! Questions- call Margaret Smith at 317-698-0526. Also, please let her know if you plan to attend.

Join us and bring a friend!

.Remember to car pool, if possible.



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