

Central Missouri Master Gardener Newsletter



The Latest Dirt

DEC 2025

Newsletter of the Central Missouri Master Gardeners

Vol. 184 No. 01



From the Chair

Hello fellow Master Gardeners, the year is coming to a close. We can look back on a wonderful growing season this year and enjoy the fruits of our labor along with all the volunteers that made it possible for things to look so great around our town.

As we start the new year, we have great news to get our year off right. We are going to launch our new CMMG website.

Thanks to Warren Auld, Kristy Manning, Kathy Vitela and Janey Outlan for starting and creating our website.

We debuted our website at the last member meeting, and received great reviews. We should be launching it before the end of December at which time you will be able to look at it and contribute as a member.

We are always looking for people to contribute tips and answer question that we get from the public in our "Ask a Master Gardener's Section", along with editors and pictures of our work parties and other current events.

As a reminder, you need to post all this year's volunteer and education hours before the end of December. It has been a pleasure to serve as your chairman this year as we move into 2026, we start off running with two new spring sales. One at the end of March for early for spring flowers and cold crops. And our annual spring sale in May, taking the whole weekend both Saturday and Sunday from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on both days.

We are really going to need a lot of volunteers this year. So, everyone will be able to get in a lot of hours just between now and in time for the sales.

Have a wonderful and safe holiday season, from your CMMG board members.

Ed Vitela
Chairman 2024-2026
CMMG Chair, Edward Vitela
2024-2026

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***NEW History Corner *NEW**

Central Missouri Master Gardeners present

Christmas in the Garden

Dec. 4, 5 & 6
5:00pm to 8:00pm

There will be a special guest appearance by Santa Claus on Sunday, Dec. 6 from 4:00-6:00pm. Bring your camera!

Come enjoy our beautiful Demonstration Garden all lit up for the Christmas holiday. We will be serving hot chocolate and hot apple cider.

Admission to the event is one non-perishable food item per person. All food items collected will be donated to the Samaritan Center.

Directions from JCO
Take US 64 North across the MO River Bridge toward Holla Summit.
Once across the bridge, take the Airport exit.
Turn left onto Cedar City Drive.
Take a left onto 4th street.
The Demonstration Gardens are at the corner of 4th street & Cottonwood street.



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8 Bugs You Should Never Kill in Your Garden

By [Carol J. Alexander](#)

[Birds & Blooms Editorial Policies](#)

Updated on Oct. 01, 2024

Not all garden bugs are created equal. Some pollinate flowers or feed on destructive pests. Meet eight bugs you should be happy to see.

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GETTY IMAGES

Mealybug Destroyer

[Mealybugs](#) are those annoying armoured beetles that you'll often find in your garden or indoor greenhouse. They're a problem for gardeners because they feed on plant juices, and carry and spread plant disease. Enter the mealybug predator, or *Cryptolaemus montrouzieri*. Specifically brought from Australia for pest control, the mealybug destroyer is harmless to plants and humans, but as a larvae and adult, eats [aphids](#) and other soft shelled pest insects, and of course, mealybugs.

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LIGHTSPRING/SHUTTERSTOCK

Praying Mantis

The largest and most formidable of garden insects is the [praying mantis](#). This “faithful” insect features a large triangular head with bulging eyes and a long body in which they conceal their wings. Mantises have enlarged forelegs used for catching and holding prey. Yes, to satisfy their enormous appetites, these predators feed on other bugs like aphids, caterpillars and beetles. If you find this [beneficial insect](#) in your garden, do not kill it. If you find one somewhere else, put it in your garden.

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ANCHA CHIANGMAI/SHUTTERSTOCK

Spiders

If you are terrified of spiders, understand they mean your garden no harm. In fact, they weave their webs to catch those bugs you don't want eating your plants. Will they bite you? Probably not. And if they do, chances are the bite will kill you is pretty slim. Your average garden spider is non-lethal, at least to humans.

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MAHIRART/SHUTTERSTOCK

Lady Beetle

Commonly known as the [ladybug](#), the lady beetle (*Hippodamia convergens*) eats aphids, mites, other soft-bodied bugs and all the eggs she can find. Not only is the ladybug a bug you want to keep around. Some gardeners even buy them in bulk to introduce them to their garden.

Do not, however, confuse the lady beetle with the Japanese or [Asian beetle](#) (*Harmonia axyridis*). This invasive species, while equally harmless in the garden, is a pest that invades homes and buildings in large numbers, just like the dreaded [stink bugs](#).

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BRETT HONDOW/SHUTTERSTOCK

Braconid Wasp

If you love tomatoes, you will love what the Braconid wasp can do for you. An enemy of the dreaded [tomato hornworm](#), this wasp lays its eggs just under the skin on the back of the worm. When the eggs hatch, the larvae feed on the insides of the hornworm, literally eating it alive. The larvae then chew their way out through the skin and spin a cocoon on the back of the hornworm. Of course, the hornworm eventually dies. And your tomatoes are saved!

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MAURICIO ACOSTA ROJAS/SHUTTERSTOCK

Bumblebee

Everyone knows about the threat to the [honeybee](#) and the concerns about colony collapse disorder. But, maybe you didn't realize that *all* of our plant pollinators are threatened. In fact, several species of [bumblebee](#) are included on the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's list of endangered species](#). These harmless bees are important because they pollinate plants that other native bees or European honeybees cannot.

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BOZA C/SHUTTERSTOCK

Green Lacewing

In its larval stage, the green lacewing is known to devour over 200 aphids in a week, as well as other soft-bodied pests. That's a lot of bugs. They continue this feeding frenzy for two to three weeks before spinning into tiny cocoons. The adults feed on nectar and pollen but continue the beneficial cycle of eating aphids by laying up to 200 eggs on the underside of leaves.



TOMASZ KLEJDYSZ/SHUTTERSTOCK

Aphid Midge

The tiniest of [flies](#), the aphid midge stands tall on its slender legs with its antennae positioned backward over its head. Its larvae are bright orange and feed on soft-bodied pests. Because they eat 60 different species of aphids, these beneficial bugs are invaluable in the garden. In fact, they can wipe out aphids faster than the lady beetle or green lacewing.

Introducing beneficial insects to your garden is one way to manage your bug population. However, there are other [natural methods of insect control](#) for critter-proof gardens and planters.



Rudbeckia, Echinacea, Yarrow, Coreopsis, Liatris, Day Lily, Gladiolus, Hosta

How to Improve Your Soil Quality Over the Winter



By [Karuna Eberl](#); Reviewed by [Melinda Myers](#); Fact-checked by [Kirsten Schrader](#)

[Birds & Blooms Editorial Policies](#); Updated on Oct. 18, 2024

These easy ways to treat and improve your garden soil quality now and through winter will set you up for a successful spring growing season.

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Give Soil a Quality Boost in Winter



LanaG/Shutterstock

Before winter, find a soil protection method that works for you.

Despite the chilly temps, it's time to think ahead and [prep your garden beds](#) for the winter. It's easy to improve your soil quality with simple materials such as compost, mulch or weeds.

Once soil temperatures drop below 45 degrees (use a soil thermometer to check yours), organisms within will slow down and hibernate. Good, treated soil protects roots, as well as [hibernating insects](#) and microbes, from freezing.

“Living soil has the same basic requirements that wildlife and people do: food, water, shelter and air,” says Mary Phillips, head of National Wildlife Federation’s Garden for Wildlife. “And without those, it starts to die. But winter is ever-changing and you can still improve soil.”

Why Treat Your Soil?



tanitost/Shutterstock

Place fallen autumn leaves around your plants.

By adding nutrients and organisms, soil treatments make it more viable for plants to live. These treatments can also rid soil of harmful chemicals or amend it if it is too acidic or [rocky](#), or has too much clay or [sand](#).

“While some gardeners have perfect soil, for the most part suburban soil is less than perfect,” Mary says. “Turning poor soil into plant-friendly soil is not difficult once you understand the components.”

The Right Methods to Improve Your Soil Quality

To keep soil healthy and improve its quality over winter, consider no-till. Tilling disrupts healthy soil structure and biodiversity. If you do till, it's a task for early spring.

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“At the end of a growing season, garden soil may feel loose,” Mary says. “That is due to the chains of roots and mycelium running through it. These microscopic threads will slowly rot throughout the winter, along with roots left behind by veggies and [weeds](#), creating healthy, organic matter.”

Here are more ways to keep your soil and its inhabitants happy and snug over winter.

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Add Compost



Animaflora PicsStock/Shutterstock

Add compost, such as leaves and rotting fruit, to shield beds in winter.

Pile it on uncultivated garden beds that would otherwise remain bare until spring. Then cover with mulch, a low row cover or an old blanket. Compost enriches and binds soil, allowing air and water to move through. Organic matter also retains moisture, allowing it to absorb and store nutrients. “Amend, amend,” Mary says. “Most importantly, organic matter is food for microorganisms and other forms of soil life. The cover helps regulate heat and moisture and cushions the bed, reducing compaction caused by snow and rain.”

Use Mulch



Jon Rehg/Shutterstock

Protect and improve your soil with mulch.

Over winter, mulch retains moisture and protects soil and roots. “[Mulching materials, such as leaves](#), are free for the raking, and they do a great job of protecting soil from the ravages of winter,” Mary says. Wood chips or straw work too.

Grow Cover Crops

Native cover crops are ideal, or those that are noninvasive, such as local species of [goldenrod](#), wild rye, common yarrow, vetch and peas. These support [beneficial insects](#), provide cover, prevent erosion and return nitrogen and other nutrients to the soil. Because they are adapted to your local climate, they require little to no irrigation or maintenance.

“Cover crops also act as living mulch to shelter soils and control weeds in the off-season,” Mary says. In the spring, chop your overwintered cover crops directly into spring soils a few weeks before you plant.

Tolerate Weeds



DEV IMAGES/Getty Images

Weeds protect soil and provide cover and food for wildlife. [Dandelions](#), bittercress and other winter weeds penetrate down into the soil with their long, thin taproots, improving drainage.

“Weeds that grow in summer tend to be large, aggressive plants that take over, but winter weeds are different,” Mary says. “There is seldom a crop present for them to smother, and [common weeds](#) such as henbit and chickweed often form green mats of foliage that protect the soil from erosion.”

To keep any of those winter weeds from reseeding too heavily, hoe them down in early spring and add them to your compost pile.

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RECIPE TIME

Marry Me White Bean Soup

By [Amanda Stanfield](#) Published on October 6, 2025



Ingredients

Original recipe (1X) yields 6 servings

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped (about 1 cup)
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped (about 1 tablespoon)
 - 1 teaspoon dried oregano
 - ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper
- ½ cup chopped drained julienne-cut sun-dried tomatoes in oil with herbs
 - 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 (15-ounce) cans no-salt-added white beans, rinsed
- 4 cups unsalted vegetable broth
 - ½ cup heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons cream cheese, softened
 - 1 (5-ounce) package baby spinach (about 5 packed cups)
- 1¼ cups grated Parmesan cheese, divided
 - ¼ cup chopped fresh basil

Directions

1. Melt 2 tablespoons butter in a large Dutch oven over medium heat. Add chopped onion; cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 3 minutes. Add chopped garlic, 1 teaspoon oregano, ½ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper; cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 20 seconds. Add ½ cup chopped sun-dried tomatoes; cook, stirring, until slightly darkened, about 2 minutes. Add 1 tablespoon lemon juice; stir until absorbed, about 20 seconds.
2. Stir in rinsed beans and 4 cups broth. Bring to a lively simmer over medium-high heat. Stir in ½ cup cream and 2 tablespoons cream cheese; cook, stirring, until the cream cheese is melted, 2 to 3 minutes.



Photographer: Morgan Hunt Ward, Prop Stylist: Phoebe Hauser, Food Stylist: Emily Nabors Hall.

3. Add 5 ounces spinach; cook, stirring occasionally, until wilted, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat. Add 1 cup Parmesan; stir until melted.
4. Divide the soup into 6 bowls. Top with ¼ cup basil and the remaining ¼ cup Parmesan.

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Tips from the EatingWell Test Kitchen

These are the key tips we learned while developing and testing this recipe in our Test Kitchen to make sure it works, tastes great and is good for you too!

- We recommend stirring the cheese into the soup off the heat to prevent it from clumping.
- We found that toasting the oregano, crushed red pepper and garlic enhances the flavor of the soup.
- Feel free to substitute the white beans with chickpeas or red beans, and you can also add shredded chicken to make the soup even heartier.
- We suggest grating Parmesan cheese from a block rather than using pre-grated. Block cheese melts more evenly, whereas pre-grated cheese often contains stabilizers that help maintain its shredded texture but can interfere with melting.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY December



Narcissus



Holly



Poinsettia

Several plants represent December birthdays, including narcissus (think forced bulbs), hollies and poinsettias. Hollies show a desire for a happy home, while poinsettias stand for good cheer.

Narcissus like 'February Gold', shown here, signifies modesty and faithfulness.



Judy Stacey and Santa

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Meetings are held at the Missouri River Regional Library, 214 Adams St, Jefferson City, MO
Unless informed otherwise! We hope to see you there!

Online Reporting Site: Hours must be entered at https://vms.momg.org/sec_Login/ please remember you need to enter hours on a computer, not a tablet or a phone. Again, all hours must be entered on line.

Enter your hours again starting in January.

Any emails that need to be distributed to ALL MG's should be sent to CMMG Cole County Master Gardener: cmmgsecretary@gmail.com – please don't call in messages

CMMG Official WEBSITE-- <https://extension.missouri.edu/counties/cole/extension-master-gardener> Central Missouri

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Master Gardeners Friends of the Garden

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