

SPRING 2024

SCHOOLCRAFT CONSERVATION DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

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Welcome to the Schoolcraft Conservation District's Spring 2024 newsletter! Are you interested in receiving future issues, notifications about upcoming events, and other opportunities to get involved with the district? Visit schoolcraftcd.org/newsletter to subscribe to our mailing list today.

100 N Cedar St.	(906) 286-2890	8am - 4pm MTWF
Manistique, MI	schoolcraftcd@macd.org	10am - 6pm R



UPCOMING EVENTS



AG ROUND TABLE | SCD OFFICE

Join us for a discussion about local agriculture needs, services, current issues, and more while connecting with technicians from Michigan Produce Safety, the Michigan Agricultural Environmental Assurance Program, and the NRCS. Free and open to all!



TREE SALE PICKUP | SCHOOLCRAFT COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS

Did you order trees from us? Pickups will take place on Friday, April 26 from 10 am to 6 pm and Saturday, April 27 from 8 am to 12 pm at the Schoolcraft County Fairgrounds. Please refer to your receipt for your assigned pickup time.



WARBLER WONDERLAND | MANISTIQUE, VARIOUS

Join us on the shores of Lake Michigan for guided morning bird hikes to a variety of Great Lakes habitats, including the Manistique Boardwalk, Kirtland's Warbler habitat, forests, and wildlife areas. Keynote speakers will be featured in the afternoon.



FORESTRY FOR BIRDS | CLEAR LAKE EDUCATION CENTER

Forest management is one of the ways that we can have a large impact on wildlife habitat, especially for forest birds. Come learn about how birds utilize forest habitat, how your management affects that habitat, and what steps you can take to get started.



NATIVE PLANT GARDENS WORKSHOP | SCD OFFICE

What does "native" mean? What are the benefits of planting native plants? How do you select the best plants for your garden? Learn how to design a garden that is eye-catching and beneficial to you, the wildlife, and the local ecosystem alike.



SCD ANNUAL MEETING | FLATIRON BREWING COMPANY

Our annual meeting will be held at the Flatiron Brewing Company this year. Join us as we debut the results of our 5-Year Conservation Needs Survey and to hear from speakers who are experts in specialty crops. Don't miss the good food, drinks, and conversation!



NATIVE PLANT SALE | MANISTIQUE FARMERS' MARKET

Are you interested in buying some native plants? We've got you covered! Pre-ordering will be available on our website this summer, with pickup set to take place on August 21 at our Manistique Farmers' Market booth.



CONSERVATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The SCD works hard to ensure we are reaching out to and involving our community in our mission to promote and facilitate the wise use of natural resources in our county. Part of this effort is a survey we conduct every five years to gather feedback about natural resources and conservation in our county from residents and visitors alike. This survey helps us focus future efforts on conservation priorities identified by our community and is an opportunity for you to influence the future planning and protection of natural resources in Schoolcraft County as well as our future quality of life.

Thank you for assisting us by providing your input! Please participate by going to tinyurl.com/mrxst4un. **Answer before April 26 and include your email address for a chance to win a free fruit tree!**

COMMUNITY GRANT RECIPIENTS



Each year, the SCD awards five \$1,000 Community Grants to help fund projects throughout Schoolcraft County that have a direct impact to the improvement of our natural resources through hands on educational programs or projects that directly impact the environment. We're excited to announce this year's recipients as follows: **Schoolcraft County Road Commission**, who will be improving a Ross Lake Road stream crossing; **Manistique Women's Club**, who will continue developments on the Manistique Community Garden; the **Lake Effect Community Art Center**, who will establish a pollinator garden around the Manistique Central Park Band Shell; **UP Whitetails of Schoolcraft County**, who will work to implement and improve deer habitats in the county; and landowners in Hiawatha who will work to create a vigorous and climate-resilient native plantscape on their land. Congratulations to these recipients!

WELCOMING OUR NEW DIRECTOR

Please join us in welcoming Susan King to our Board of Directors! Susan grew up on a small family farm in lower Michigan. She received her bachelor's degree in Crops and Soils/Agricultural Production from MSU, after which she moved to the UP and operated a farm just north of Manistique alongside her husband Russell for over forty years. Through her work on the farm, she has become very familiar with practicing soil chemistry, soil biology, and overall soil health and conservation. Between 2001 and 2019, she was also employed by the Michigan Department of Corrections, teaching and instructing prisoners in adult education, critical thinking skills, and employment readiness.

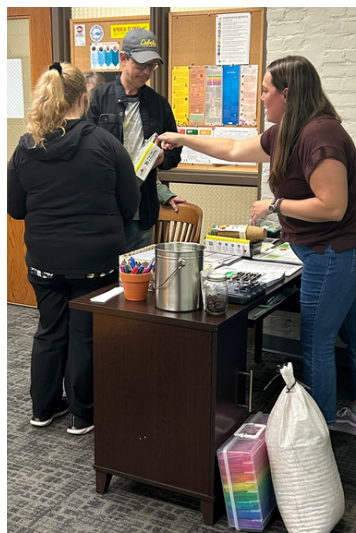
Susan comes to us with considerable prior board experience, having been elected to and served on the Manistique Area Schools Board of Education (four years), the Delta-Schoolcraft Intermediate School Board (six years), and the Hiawatha Township Board (four years). She brings valuable insight to the district and Schoolcraft community, and we're thrilled to have her join our team!

Pair Well Together Don't Pair

We kicked off the spring season with a workshop covering all things gardening, including the benefits of indoor versus direct sow planting, garden arrangements and companion planting, how to make the most of your space, and choosing your plants and seeds. Some key takeaways for your garden planning:

- Grow what you love and know you will use/enjoy.
- When planning the placement and layout of your garden, be sure to choose a spot that gets plenty of sun, and think about what fruits, vegetables, and flowers will pair well together.
- Make the most out of your space by incorporating climbing plants and/or those that thrive in pots (e.g., patio tomatoes).
- Take notes as you go so you can refer back to failures, successes, placements, etc. in the coming years.
- If you start plants indoors, always be sure to harden them off before transplanting outside to ensure their survival.
- Don't like pulling weeds? Straw makes for a fantastic cover!

Attendees received some free scarlet runner bean seeds to get them started on their garden for the year. The workshop wrapped up with a few additional door prizes; congratulations to the winners! If you weren't able to join us and want to learn more, head over to the Workshop Materials page on our website.



Beans: beets, corn, rosemary, squash, sunflowers, **garlic, onion, chives, leeks**



Beets: bush beans, brassicas (broccoli, cauliflower, etc.), onions, garlic, lettuce, **chard**



Broccoli: potatoes, onion, radish, greens, oregano, basil, **peppers, tomatoes**



Carrots: beans, chives, leeks, lettuce, onions, peas, peppers, radishes, sage, rosemary, **dill**



Corn: pole beans, cucumbers, dill, melons, peas, squash, sunflowers, **tomatoes**



Onions: beets, cabbage, carrots, chard, lettuce, strawberry tomatoes, **beans, peas, sage**



Peas: carrots, chives, corn, lettuce, mint, radishes, spinach, **chive, garlic, onion, leeks**



Peppers: basil, carrots, peas, marjoram, onions, oregano, tomatoes, **beans, brassicas**



Tomatoes: basil, beans, dill, garlic, marigolds, onion, parsley, thyme, **broccoli, corn**



Squash: pole beans, corn, lettuce, marigold, melons, oregano, peas, **brassicas**

According to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN, of the 6,000 plants that have historically been cultivated for food, a mere nine account for two-thirds of all global food production today. According to Seed Savers Exchange, in the last century, 75% of edible plant varieties have been lost. This dramatic decrease is alarming: soil health, plant health, pollinator wellbeing, pest and disease control, and food security in the midst of climate change all hinge on agricultural biodiversity, and the plummeting of such biodiversity bodes



ill things for our human societies, wildlife, and ecosystems alike. Given that a mere four companies control 60% of the world’s seed market and tend to favor hybrid and genetically modified seeds, the continued elimination of plant varieties is a very real threat.

Seed libraries present an opportunity to combat these trends. Much like traditional libraries, seed libraries allow area residents to “check out” open-pollinated and heirloom seeds—seeds that have been passed down for generations and produce true to type—for planting. At the end of the harvest season, the seeds from the resulting plants can then be collected and returned to the library for other community members to enjoy the next spring. By participating in seed libraries, communities can both help preserve plant varieties under threat of dying out and promote the agricultural biodiversity that we, our wildlife (particularly pollinators), and our ecosystems rely on.



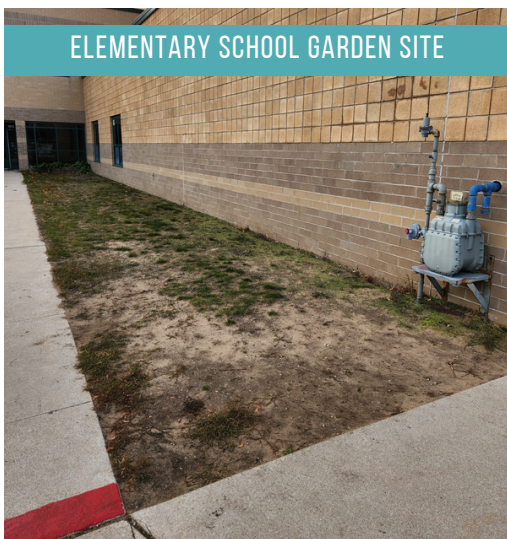
The SCD Seed Library is open for use to all residents of Schoolcraft County. A catalog of seeds in stock can be found at schoolcraftcd.org/seed-library, and seeds can be checked out at any time at our office in the building across from the Manistique School & Public Library. All you need to do is fill out a check out form and you’re set! Returning seeds is encouraged but not required. Donations of open-pollinated and heirloom seeds are welcome! More details about the library can be found on our website at schoolcraftcd.org/seed-library.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL POLLINATOR GARDEN



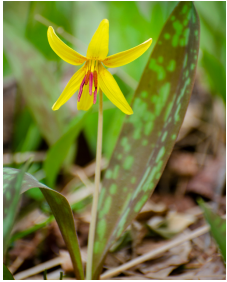
The SCD is very excited to announce we have been awarded a \$1,250 grant from the Wildflower Association of Michigan (WAM) to establish a pollinator garden outside Emerald Elementary School. At present, the area outside the school's front entrance, where the garden will be placed, is a simple strip of lawn that has gone unused (shown below). Transforming this space into a native flower-filled garden will not only help beautify the school and support the pollinators who are under threat due to habitat loss, but it will also provide an area where students can learn about the natural world, biodiversity, pollinators, and stewardship through outdoor lessons and hands-on experiences. Work on the project is set to begin in July and is expected to be completed by the beginning of the 2024/2025 schoolyear. Please reach out if you're interested in volunteering!

WAM, founded in 1986, is a non-profit, member-based organization that is committed to being a resource for residents in Michigan who wish to learn more about native plants and their associated habitats. They advocate for and provide education on native plants and native landscaping through their annual conference, website and other social media, grant program, and newsletter.



SPRING EPHEMERAL FLOWERS

Spring ephemeral flowers are a group of plants that bloom fleetingly in early spring, typically before the canopy trees fully leaf out. They have adapted to take advantage of the brief window of sunlight available before the trees' leaves fill out and block most of it. These flowers often emerge from underground bulbs, corms, or rhizomes and complete their life cycle rapidly, fading away back to dormancy once the trees' canopy becomes dense and shades the forest floor. The next time you go out for a hike, see if you can spot one of these common UP species before they disappear once more.



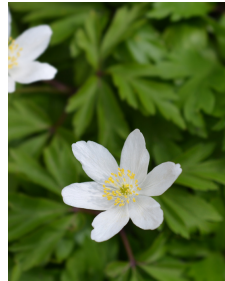
Trout lilies get their name from their mottled-brown leaves, which resemble the pattern on the scales of a trout. These cheerful, yellow, six-petaled flowers are a common find in local woodlands.



Eastern white trillium is easy to spot thanks to its three-petaled flowers and three-lobed leaves. This delicate plant can be killed when picked, so please only enjoy it in its natural home!



Bloodroot, named after the reddish, bloodlike sap found in its roots, is a solitary white flower featuring 8-12 petals. Its center is made up of numerous golden-yellow stamens.



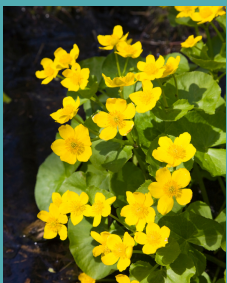
Wood anemone, a European native, looks similar to bloodroot due to its 5-8 white petals, which form the shape of a star, and yellow center. Its leaves are lobed and resemble small ferns.



Cut-leaved toothwort produces small, four-petaled flowers that are usually white, but can have a pink tinge. The flowers grow on slender stalks above the foliage and tend to appear in clusters.



Spring beauty features pink or white flowers with five distinctive pink-striped petals. The leaves are narrow and lance-like, emerging from the plant's base. These flowers often grow in colonies.



Marsh marigolds are bright yellow, bowl-shaped flowers with five to nine petal-like sepals that radiate around a cluster of yellow stamens. These flowers can grow up to two feet in height.



Spiderwort is a three-petaled flower that ranges in shades of blue to purple and can grow 2-3 feet in height. Its leaves are long and thin, often folded lengthwise, giving them a grasslike appearance.



Squirrel corn produces small, white or pink heart-shaped flowers that hang in clusters on slender stems that rise above the fern-like leaves. The outer petals flick out from the heart shape.



Dutchman's breeches are very similar to squirrel corn, and equally fun! Flowers are a vintage white, resembling tiny pairs of pants hanging upside down on slender, arching stems above the foliage.

THE FROGGY SONG OF SPRING

When we think about the signs of spring, most of us tend to jump to things like blooming wildflowers or the chirps of returning songbirds. However, among the spiderwort and robins, there's another, lesser-acknowledged species that hums to life throughout Michigan's woodlands, wetlands, and backyards when warm weather draws near: frogs.

Michigan is home to multiple frog species, many of which can be heard harkening in the spring season with their sometimes cheerful--and sometimes unsettling--chorus. Take the aptly named spring peeper:

SPRING PEEPER



Averaging less .75 to 1.4 inches in length, the spring peeper is Michigan's smallest frog, but don't let its diminutive size fool you: it's also one of our loudest. Found in moist woodlands and other pond-proximate areas, you'll hear the spring peeper long before you see it, and earlier in the year than most other frogs. Its call, a high-pitched and repetitive peep, might easily be mistaken for that of a songbird.

The wood frog is another early harbinger of spring, usually first heard around April 1 depending on the weather. As its name suggests, the wood frog makes its home in woodlands, where it blends in easily with the bark of trees. Many have described its call as being similar to that of a duck or turkey; listen closely for their soft, rolling cackling.

WOOD FROG



With their warty, rough skin and mucousy toes (all the better to grip trees with, my dear), eastern gray treefrogs are, indeed, quintessential frogs. Despite their not-so-Prince-Charming appearance, this treefrog's call is surprisingly pleasant: again, one might mistake their melodious trill, which lasts for about a half-second and repeats every few seconds, for a songbird.

GRAY TREEFROG



The aptly-named northern leopard frog is easily recognizable for its leopard-like spots. A semi-terrestrial species, this frog favors wet fields and forests, but they're fairly versatile in their habitat range and can sometimes be spotted in urban water sources. Its low, guttural rattle is reminiscent to a motor starting up, and is often followed by several grunts.

LEOPARD FROG



The next time you decide to take a dusk or nighttime trek, be sure to keep your eyes peeled--and ears open--for these runty but riotous critters this spring. Or, better yet, let them come to you! Establishing a water source in your yard, whether it's a full-sized pond or simple bucket, is an easy way to provide some much-needed habitat for frogs and other aquatic-loving amphibians.

Despite there being a blustery chill in the air, some intrepid fruit tree enthusiasts braved the cold to join us for our annual Pruning Workshop outside the Manistique Township Hall. District Manager Ashley Reitter gave a crash course on the ins and outs of fruit tree pruning, including its importance to tree health and productive yields, the best time of year to prune, finding the proper equipment, the different types of cuts and where on the tree to place them, and other general tips for successful fruit tree maintenance. She followed this up with a hands-on demonstration on some of the trees on the Township Hall grounds.



Thank you to everyone who attended, and special thanks to the township for use of their space!



Did you miss a workshop? All our workshop resources are available on schoolcraftcd.org/workshop-materials.

TREE PRUNING 101

Equipment: Tools include pruning shears for small branches, loppers for larger branches, and a pruning saw for thick branches. Be sure to use proper safety equipment (such as protective glasses) as well!

Timing: Prune fruit trees during their dormant season (usually late winter or early spring) before new growth begins. This timing minimizes stress on the tree and reduces the risk of disease transmission.

Cutting: Use your pruning shears or saw to remove any branches that are dead, diseased, damaged, or angled downward. Cut back to healthy tissue, making clean cuts just above the branch collar (the swollen area where the branch meets the trunk or larger branch).

Thinning: Once dead, diseased, and damaged branches have been removed, continue thinning overcrowded branches as needed. While you don't want to overdue this step, your goal is to ensure sunlight can reach every part of the tree.

Be sure to also remove tree suckers (shoots that stem from the root system) and water sprouts (shoots that stem from the trunk or branches), as they can sap trees of energy and resources.

BRANCH
COLLAR



SPRING TREE IDENTIFICATION

Springtime in Michigan is full of new life and growth, and trees are no exception. Watching buds appear on trees that have been leafless and dead-looking for months is a welcome change after a long winter, but this new growth comes with an added bonus: it's fantastic for tree identification!

As you look at developing buds, pay attention to the pattern in which they're growing. Michigan trees usually form buds in one of two different arrangements: opposite, wherein buds grow in pairs adjacent from each other on the stem; or alternate, wherein each bud occurs individually along the stem.

Trees with an opposite pattern include maples, ashes, and horse chestnut.

Trees with an alternate pattern include oaks, birches, beeches, and basswoods.

HORSE CHESTNUT



SUGAR MAPLE



GREEN ASH



RED OAK



RIVER BIRCH



BEECH



Although it can be a challenge to identify trees based solely on bark, which can change dramatically over time as a tree ages, color, pattern, and texture give some more useful hints into a tree's species.

BEECH

Smooth and gray



RED OAK

Reddish-gray, vertical ridges



PAPER BIRCH

White and peeling



ASH

Diamond ridges



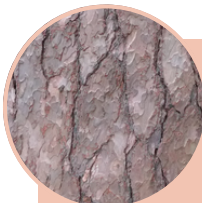
RED MAPLE

Light gray, vertical strips



SCOTS PINE

Reddish-gray with plates



BLACK CHERRY

Gray, scaly



CEDAR

Vertical peeling



In addition to buds and bark, many species of trees and shrubs also bear flowers that can be used for quick IDing. Flowering times can vary between species, so paying attention to when the plant blooms can help you narrow down possible species.

SERVICEBERRY



APRIL

WHITE OAK



APRIL/MAY

CHOKECHERRY



APRIL/MAY

GRAY DOGWOOD



MAY

NINEBARK



MAY/JUNE

CHESTNUT



MAY/JUNE

AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES

UP summers offer incredible opportunities when it comes to both natural beauty and outdoor recreation. Nowhere is this more true than our many local lakes and rivers, which attract thousands of visitors every year. Unfortunately, this high traffic also comes with a high risk of invasive species spread.

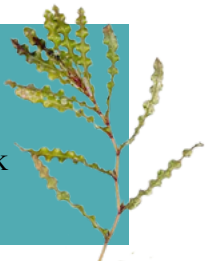
Invasive species are non-native species that take over areas to which they are introduced (often by way of boats, anglers and bait, wading equipment, etc.). Factors like a lack of predators, early maturation, and aggressive behaviors allow these species to quickly overwhelm native species and drain available resources. Eurasian water-milfoil, curly-leaf pondweed, European frog-bit, zebra mussels, and rusty crayfish are just a few of the invasives posing an increasing amount of risk to our local waterbodies.

Eurasian water-milfoil is an aquatic perennial that commonly grows to 10 feet but can exceed 30. It forms dense mats on the water surface, choking out the light to other plants below.



Beyond ecological harms, aquatic invasive species bring with them a myriad of additional economic effects (such as through a decline in sport and commercial fishing, waterfront property values, and tourism) and water-based recreational effects.

Curly-leaf pondweed, like milfoil, is a prolific grower that forms dense mats on the water surface. Its midsummer die-back can also lead to potential algae blooms.



Especially in areas like Schoolcraft, where much of the culture and economy centers around activities like fishing and boating, the ramifications can be tremendous.

European frog-bit is another free-floating plant that forms mats with long, tangled roots. It is especially prominent in slow-moving, shallow water.



HELP PREVENT INVASIVE SPECIES SPREAD!
Whenever you leave a waterbody, remember these four easy steps:

Zebra mussels were introduced to the Great Lakes in the 1980s and have since spread prolifically. They attach to any firm surface and can reach 10,000+ per square meter.



INSPECT your boat and/or equipment for any plant debris or animals (e.g., mussels).

REMOVE any hitchhikers you find.

Rusty crayfish, originally brought to the Great Lakes as bait, severely reduce vegetation and outcompete native crayfish and fish due to their highly aggressive behavior.



DRAIN your boat and equipment thoroughly, and ideally let them dry for a two- to five-day period before bringing them to a different waterbody.

NEVER MOVE plants or animals, including bait that's been exposed to water, between waterbodies.

We will be starting work on our Michigan Invasive Species Grant project this May. If you see any of our team members working on outreach and boat/equipment decontamination, be sure to stop and say hello!