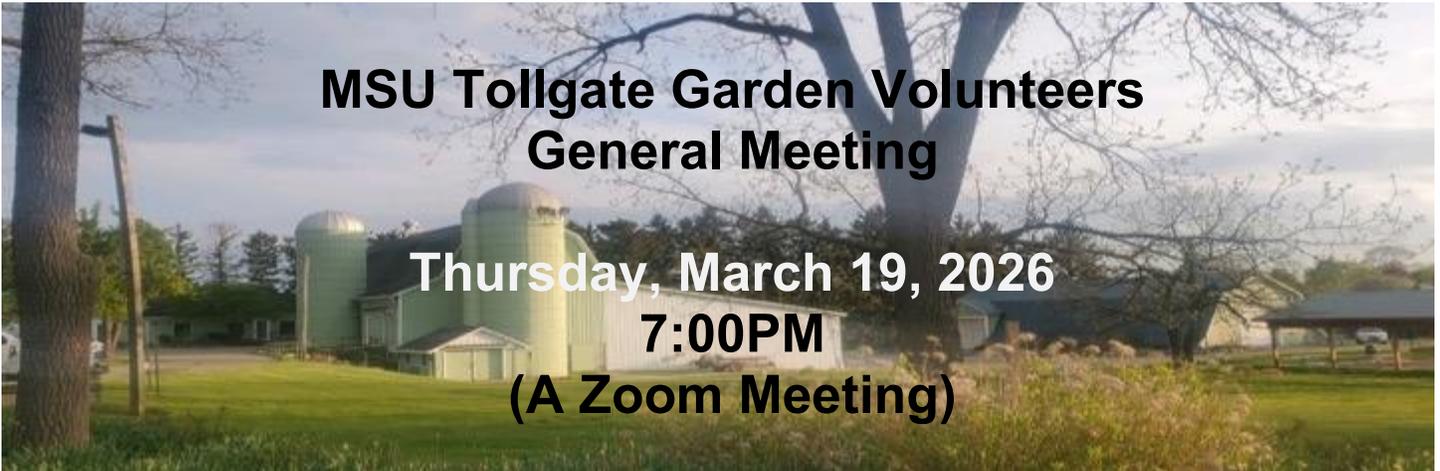


The Tollgate Farm News

VOLUME 32

ISSUE 3

MARCH 2026



MSU Tollgate Garden Volunteers General Meeting

Thursday, March 19, 2026
7:00PM
(A Zoom Meeting)

HOMEGROWN NATIONAL PARKS

Reminder: Tollgate gardeners and supporters meet on Zoom in January, February and March & return to in-person in April.

Join gardeners on **Zoom** to learn how easy it can be to provide the essentials: food, water, cover, and a place to raise young to offset habitat loss for birds, bees, butterflies and more. In a small suburban yard, a container garden on a balcony, or a multiacre parcel of land, people are finding joy creating a welcome haven for wildlife. Naturalist and educator for nearly 20 years, **Laurel Zoet** will introduce the concept of “homegrown national parks,” a grassroots effort to regenerate biodiversity in our corner of the planet.

Laurel Zoet has worked for Michigan DNR, Huron-Clinton Metroparks, West Bloomfield Parks and Recreation, and nature centers. In 2013 she started a nature education business to travel the state teaching about Michigan wildlife and ecology at schools, libraries, scout troops, and senior facilities. In 2017 Laurel and her husband opened Wild Birds Unlimited nature shop at the Green Oak Village Place Mall in Brighton, Michigan, to connect people to nature through the hobby of backyard bird feeding.

TOLLGATE GARDEN VOLUNTEER IMPORTANT DATES AND EVENTS 2026					
MAR	MEETINGS		APRIL	MEETINGS	
3	TGAC Meeting – Zoom	7:00 pm	7	TGAC Meeting – Zoom	7:00 pm
19	TGV General Meeting - Zoom	7:00 pm	16	TGV General Meeting – in person	7:00 pm
MAR	WORKDAY ACTIVITIES		APRIL	WORKDAY ACTIVITIES	
7/8	MAPLEFEST – no work day	9:00 am –3:00 pm	4	Easter Weekend – General garden day	9:00 am
14	Pruning	9:00 am	11	Rose/Pond	9:00 am
21	Grass cut back - all	9:00 am	18	Office/Heritage/Rain	9:00 am
28	Pathway/demo mulching	9:00 am	25	Children’s/Xeriscape New volunteer orientation pancake breakfast	9:00 am – 12:00 pm

The Tollgate Farm News

FARM UPDATE FROM THE RESIDENT FARMER - *Destiny Pearson*

A Sweet Success Against All Odds

This year's Maplefest was definitely one for the books. We dealt with a water main break, a torrential downpour, mud everywhere, you name it, and somehow still managed to serve over 850 guests. Honestly, I'm still amazed at how well everything came together.



Saturday really tried to test us. It started off with more water coming from the sky than our pipes! The kind of morning where you look outside and think, time to go back to bed. But as the day went on, the rain backed off, the skies stayed cloudy but dry, and people still showed up ready to enjoy the day. By the afternoon, the farm felt alive, and you could smell maple steam drifting from the sugar shack like a little promise that the day was turning around. Then came Sunday and what a difference. It was absolutely beautiful, (water pressure returned) and the crowds came out in full force. Parking was a whole operation, and teamwork was the only reason it went smoothly.

Volunteers and staff jumped in to make sure every single person who walked in could enjoy the day without stress. It was one of those days where you look around and go, yep, this is what makes Maplefest special.

And speaking of special...our volunteers. The maple volunteers were out there cooking and helping from early morning straight into the evening. I also saw so many garden volunteers out helping with shifts and willing to stay later when help was needed at other stations. We truly couldn't do this without you all. Actually, as I'm writing this, many volunteers are still out in the sugar bush and sugar shack working away, and I even saw a pond volunteer out starting the spring work. Your dedication keeps this place running even when the rest of us are catching our breath.

Even with the challenges, Maplefest turned out to be a huge success. It reminded me once again how strong, hardworking, and supportive this community is. Rain, mud, broken pipes, none of it stopped us.

Meanwhile, the farm itself is starting to wake up. I'm seeing new growth popping up in some of the beds, and after the winter we had, I think we're all more than ready for green grass and blue skies. Personally, I'm good with never seeing another snowflake but we all know Michigan likes to keep it interesting and we will probably see snow at least one more time before spring.

But fingers crossed...let the gardening begin!



Photos by Linda Piasecki

Destiny Pearson
Livestock Coordinator/Assistant Farm Manager
MSUE Tollgate Farm and Education Center
28115 Meadowbrook Road Novi, MI 48377
O: 248-347-0269 ext.251
C: 248-931-7173

The Tollgate Farm News

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT - *Renee Cottrell*

“Behold, my friends, the spring is come: the earth has gladly received the embraces of the sun, and we shall soon see the results of their love!” Sitting Bull, Teton Dakota Indian chief 1931-1890

Spring comes to Michigan in many forms. It may be slow or it may come in a rush of warm temperatures and early rains! We are ready to begin our season but are at the mercy of the weather and its unpredictability. The banks of snow have melted, and the early bulbs are soon to poke their shoots up, hellebores to push forth their hope-filled blooms and shrub buds to swell. Every season has something wonderful to share at Tollgate and it's worth a fight with orange barrels to make a visit. Thank you to the staff and volunteers who make Tollgate a season long adventure in the gardens

Area Garden Leaders are planning early season pruning, path mulching and waiting for the soils to warm up and dry before the bulk of our gardening begins in April. Please see the activity calendar and join us for the group work activities on Saturday mornings! Consider joining one of the garden teams or leading a team in the care of your garden of interest.

[What is an AGL?](#)
[Gardens in need of an AGL](#)

A reminder for members to renew for 2026 membership, an online process: See the link in this issue to renew online! We would love to expand our membership and active gardeners. Consider bringing a guest/friend to experience a Saturday work activity, meet our experienced members, see the wide variety of garden experiences available and spark their interest in joining our group.

Check out the articles in this issue for the latest news. We hope you Zoom in for the membership meeting on March 19th at 7 pm. In person meetings will begin in April!

Thank you for being a Tollgate Garden Volunteer.

Renee Cottrell, President
Tollgate Garden Volunteers
248-251-4505
rmcottrell4@att.net

NURSERY NOTES

My thanks and gratitude to Peg Palmer and Deb Kearney for all they have done as co-AGLs in the Nursery and the wonderful coordination, organization and leadership that has made the Nursery/Plant Sales so successful. We wish them the best as they move on to other enjoyable activities. We will do our best to repeat their proven processes until we can find interested members to take the lead.

Sliding into March has us flirting with fluctuating temperatures and variable snow cover. These freeze-thaw cycles are tough on plants and more so to potted plants. Every season there are some losses of plants in the Nursery that succumb to root rot or heaving damage due to moisture trapped in the pots.



The Tollgate Farm News

The Nursery team takes steps to minimize these losses: Mulching in the pots for control of temperatures, Heeling-in of plants to keep roots in the ground for those plants which are susceptible to moisture/root rot and potting practices to minimize excessive water collection.

The plan is for the Nursery to open April 11, 2026, to accept plant division donations for the Spring plant sale. We will have an on-site potting/division day on May 2nd. We would appreciate donation from your gardens based on the "Plants Wanted" list that will be distributed later this month. Please keep us in mind as you plan for your garden spring divisions. We would also appreciate donations of one-gallon pots as you clean out your sheds and garages on those brief nice March days when you just HAVE to be outside! Just drop them off inside the yellow gate on the south side of the Nursery trellis structure.

Renee

PAR Report - Kathryn Fitzpatrick



Warmer weather is in the air! The greenhouse activities await, as well as starting on preparing the garden beds for planting. If you are interested and available, please check out the 2026 MSU Tollgate Farm PAR Garden & CSA Greenhouse Schedule SignUpGenius at the following link: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/5080B4FA8AA28A2F85-61529677-2026#/> There will be instructions and assistance for these activities, so please join us, even if you aren't familiar with these tasks.

We will start with getting the greenhouse and transplant trays ready, start transplants per the crop growing requirements, water once or twice daily depending on the weather, as well as work on preparing the garden beds in the PAR Garden. The first crop that needs to be started are alliums, which are featured in the Plant of the Month article this month.

The garden beds will need to be leveled, and compost / soil added where needed, barriers established at the south end of several of the beds to address erosion and water accumulation, and re-covered where the black plastic may have blown off. Most likely, there will be plenty of weeding needed, as well, in the walkways and exposed beds.

Hope to see you in the garden this year or perhaps in the greenhouse in the spring,

Kathryn Fitzpatrick



Photo by Kathryn Fitzpatrick

The Tollgate Farm News

AGL Information – Marilyn Alimpich

Thanks to all you AGLs who have submitted your 2026 Budget Planner requests for approval. For the few who haven't done so, our next TGAC review takes place on Tuesday, April 7th.

Linda Piasecki and I created some plant labels on Tuesday, March 10 with the help of Destiny Pearson and Monique Mose. We hope to complete the task in two or three more sessions. If you have any last-minute label requests, please get them to us now.

If you have any questions, please contact me at: masoleil@sbcglobal.net, or call or text 734-730-6565.

See you in the gardens,

[2025 Garden Budget Planner](#)

[Tollgate Label Template Excel Version](#)

[Tollgate Label Template Word Version](#)

Marilyn Alimpich

masoleil@sbcglobal.net

Template Example (Word Version)

Common Name	Genus	Species	Cultivar	Garden	Trademark#	Tags
Example						
Eastern Redbud	Cercis	canadensis	'Northern Herald'	Farmhouse		1
Verify spelling and correct names using plant tags or site such as Missouri Botanical Gardens						

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Garden

As I look ahead to the upcoming growing season, I'm excited to share updates about Tollgate's **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)** program and a new collaboration that strengthens our mission of community-centered, sustainable agriculture.



The CSA remains a crop-share program in which members pay before the season begins and receive a weekly bag of fresh, seasonal produce starting in mid-June. Beyond providing delicious vegetables, the CSA fields serve as hands-on learning spaces where interns, campers, and volunteers learn planting, weeding, trellising, and harvesting techniques. This aligns with Tollgate's broader sustainable agriculture focus on place-based education, community food systems, and connecting people with the land.

Additionally, I am continuing Tollgate's partnership - which started last year - with the Living and Learning Center Northville, whose members participate in work-based learning by helping plant, harvest, and package produce throughout the season. It is incredibly rewarding to see these work groups enjoying their time at Tollgate.

This year, I am thrilled to partner with the **Plant-A-Row (PAR) volunteers** to grow vegetables side-by-side. While PAR's primary mission continues to be donating all produce to local nonprofits addressing food insecurity, the CSA will also donate leftover produce each week. By joining forces, we hope to create a stronger sense of community among CSA and PAR volunteers while expanding our collective impact.

The Tollgate Farm News

If you're interested in becoming a CSA member, please complete the CSA Interest Form [linked on our website](#). The website also has details on pricing, pick-up times, and what to expect this year. Each year the CSA has a select number of memberships available; new memberships for 2026 will begin to be awarded in mid-March.

Monique Mose
Sustainable Agriculture Program Instructor
Michigan State University Extension
Tollgate Farm and Education Center
28115 Meadowbrook Road
Novi, MI 48377
Office: 248-347-0269 Ext.219
Cell: 989-395-1840

Additional Garden Information

Our Membership is now Digital!

We're excited to announce that our membership form is now available online!

To get started, use the link provided or scan the QR code to access the digital form.

Important Instructions:

- Please fill out every line of the form unless the question specifically says otherwise.
- When you're finished, make sure to hit "Submit" to complete your registration.
- The submission conformation page will contain instructions on how to make your donation.
- Be sure to print the final page for your records and to keep the donation directions handy.
- If you have any questions, please email Destiny Pearson at pears278@msu.edu



Thank you for being part of our growing farm community!"

[Tollgate Membership Form 2026](#)

Thank you to the following who have already signed up for membership –

Anderson, David
Boak, Bonnie
Bodzin, Linda
Burke, Barbara
Deeds, Amy
Dickerson, Sandra

Earp, Tricia
Gelnak, Cheri
Green, Renee
Haering, Mary Carole
Hamilton, Carmen

Justin, Janelle
Nudi, Tonja
Poole, Judith
Sherman-Hall, Susie
Woloszyn, Lenora

The Tollgate Farm News

Key Pruning Basics for Zone 5b

Timing:

- **Dormant Season (Jan - Early April):** Best for most trees, shrubs, and fruit trees (apple/pear).
- **After Flowering:** Spring-blooming shrubs (lilacs, forsythia) should be pruned immediately after blooming.
- **Avoid:** Heavy pruning in late summer or fall (Sept-Nov) can stress plants before winter.

Technique:

- **The 3 D's:** Remove **D**ead, **D**iseased, or **D**amaged branches first.
- **Airflow & Light:** Remove branches that cross, rub together, or grow toward the center.
- **Cut Location:** Cut just outside the branch collar (the swelling where the branch meets the stem) to allow for proper healing; don't leave long stubs.
- **Tools:** Use sharp, clean tools to ensure clean cuts.

Specific Tips:

- **Limit Removal:** Never remove more than 25-30% of a plant's total canopy in one year.
- **Suckers/Water Sprouts:** Remove vertical shoots growing from the base or branches in summer.
- **Fruit Trees:** Prune to a central leader (one main trunk) for apples and cherries, or an open-center for peaches.
- **Conifers:** Best pruned during the dormant season to minimize sap/resin flow.
- **Oak Trees:** Should only be pruned when temperatures are below freezing to prevent oak wilt disease.

See this MSU extension Link for more details:

https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/tips_on_tree_and_shrub_pruning

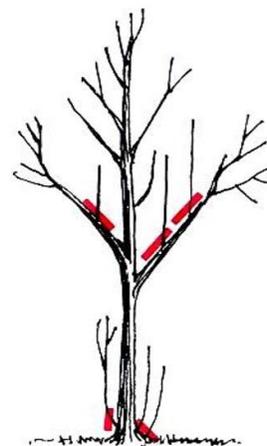


Photo by Linda Piasecki

The Tollgate Farm News

PLANT OF THE MONTH

ALLIUM CEPA

PAR Garden activity starts in March in the greenhouse with alliums. Alliums are a key cool season crop in Michigan, generally grown for a summer/fall harvest. Early planting is critical to encourage foliage growth before bulbing is triggered by long days in June, so starting transplants in the greenhouse and getting them in the ground while it is still cool is preferred. The Allium family is a genus of perennial flowering plants in the Amaryllidaceae family. These bulbs / rhizomes are characterized by their distinct pungent aroma, sulfuric compounds, and spherical, umbrella-shaped flowers.



<https://www.gardeningetc.com/advice/alliums-care-and-growing-guide#:~:text=BY%20GRAHAM%20RICE,MAY%209%2C%202022>



Alliums growing in MSU Tollgate Farm Greenhouse - April 2025 by Kathryn Fitzpatrick

Alliums include both edible varieties like onions, garlic, leeks, shallots, and chives, and ornamental varieties known for their purple, white and pink globe-shaped flowers. The edible alliums are staples in most homes and are included as a main crop in the PAR Garden, with a focus on reliable storage cultivars such as Patterson, Calibra, and Safrane.

The ornamental perennials are popular in gardens for their unique, long-lasting blooms, deer resistance, and ability to attract pollinators with late spring/early summer flowers.

Onions require full sun, and fertile, well-drained soil with a pH of 6.0-7.0. They require plenty of water due to their limited root system and must be kept weed free as they are a slow growing crop. When the necks start to fall over, they are pulled and cured in a well-ventilated space out of direct sunlight, or sun-cured in the field for 2-7 days before moving them to a dry location. They are cured until the tops are completely dry, at which time the tops can be clipped off and the onions put in storage for use in many wonderful dishes.

Article information based on:

- Johnny's Seeds Allium Vegetable Sheets
- MSU Extension Articles on Alliums



Photo by Linda Piasecki

The Tollgate Farm News

Final 2/3/2026

**MSU Tollgate Garden Volunteers
Activity Calendar-2026**

January		February		March	
6-TGAC Meeting 7:00 PM		3-TGAC Meeting 7:00 PM		3-TGAC Meeting 7:00 PM	
15-TGV General Meeting via Zoom 7:00 PM		19-TGV General Meeting via Zoom 7:00 PM		19-TGV General Meeting via Zoom 7:00 PM	
17-AGL Planning Meeting 10:00 AM				<u>Activity Days</u> 7/8 Maplefest no work day	
				14-Pruning 9:00 AM	
				21-Grass Cut Back-all 9:00 AM	
				28-Pathway/demo mulching 9:00 AM	
April		May		June	
7-TGAC Meeting 7:00 PM		5-TGAC Meeting 7:00 PM		2-TGAC Meeting 7:00 PM	
16-TGV General Meeting 7:00 PM		21-TGV General Meeting 7:00 PM		18-TGV General Meeting 7:00 PM	
<u>Activity Days</u>		<u>Activity Days</u>		<u>Activity Days</u>	
4-Easter Weekend		2-Entrance/Nursery-plant div 9:00 AM		6-Spring Plant Sale 9AM-2PM	
General garden day 9:00 AM		9-Farmhouse/Demo 9:00 AM		13-Rose/Entrance 9:00 AM	
11-Rose /Pond 9:00 AM		16- Shade/Hosta 9:00 AM		20-Office/Heritage/ Rain 9:00 AM	
18-Office/Heritage/Rain 9:00 AM		23-Memorial Weekend		27-Pond/12Mile 9:00 AM	
25-Children's/Xeriscape 9:00 AM		General garden workday 9:00 AM			
New volunteer orientation 9:00 AM		30-Rockledge/planting/12Mile 9:00 AM			
Pancake Brunch 12:00 PM					
July		August		September	
7-TGAC Meeting 7:00 PM		4-TGAC Meeting 7:00 PM		1-TGAC Meeting 7:00 PM	
16-TGV Open House 6-8 PM (Thursday-no mtg)17th rain date		20-TGV General Meeting 7:00 PM		17-TGV General Meeting 7:00 PM	
<u>Activity Days</u>		<u>Activity Days</u>		<u>Activity Days</u>	
4-July4 Weekend		1-Entrance/Rain 9:00 AM		5-Labor Day weekend	
NO planned garden workday		8-Pond/12 Mile 9:00 AM		General garden workday 9:00 AM	
11-Children's/Xeriscape 9:00AM		15-Heritage/Office 9:00 AM		12-Xeriscape/children's 9:00AM	
18-Hosta/Demo 9:00 AM		22-Nursery/plant division 9:00 AM		19-Nursery Fall Plant Sale 9AM-12 PM	
25-Farmhouse/PAR 9:00 AM		29-Rockledge, Nursery divisions Demo 9:00 AM		26- Farmhouse/Rose	
October		November		December	
6-TGAC Meeting 7:00 PM		3-TGAC Meeting 7:00 PM		1-TGAC Meeting 7:00 PM	
15-TGV General Meeting 7:00 PM		7-Recognition Dinner 4:00 PM			
<u>Activity Days</u>		<u>Activity Day</u>		12-Hanukkah	25-Christmas
3/4-Pumpkinfest no workday		14-Rose winterizing 10:00 AM		26-Kwanzaa	
10-Nursery Clean up 9:00 AM		26-Thanksgiving			
17-Pond clean up 9:00 AM					
24-Fall Clean up 9:00 AM					
31-Fall clean up 9:00 AM					

****All activity days, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED, begin at 9 am and are subject to change. Please consult the newsletter or call 248 347-3860 ext 251 or look for e-mails for updated information.**

Visit on web: www.tollgate.msu.edu

The Tollgate Farm News

Membership Update January 2026

To all of you who donated to help the Tollgate Garden Volunteers make Tollgate a more beautiful place. Your donation is greatly appreciated! The support that you have provided will continue to help our program prosper and grow.

THANK YOU!

Please take a moment to renew your 2026 membership and receive your new identification button for the season!

Thanks!
Teresa LaRosa

[2025 Member Levels Reminder](#)

Links to Forms & Other Info

[Garden Orientation PDF](#)

[Tollgate Garden Web Pages](#)

[Other Tollgate Garden Volunteer Info](#)

MSU Tollgate Volunteer Sign-In:



Or

[MSU Tollgate Volunteer Sign-in](#)

NOTE: If you are unable to access or print any necessary forms from the links, please notify Renee, who will arrange to provide copies. Copies will also be available at all in-person TGV meetings.

Take a Tollgate Picture

Send photo files in separate emails, if necessary, to Judy Warren, Tollgate Calendar Editor, at TGFarmPhotos@gmail.com. Photos are also appreciated for the monthly Farm News. Photo files can be sent to: Ductapegirl212@gmail.com



Photo by
Linda
Piasecki

The Tollgate Farm News

MAPLEFFEST 2026!



The Tollgate Farm News

Activity Days: January - October

- Activity Day hours are 9:00 am – Noon, unless otherwise noted on the Activities section of the first page of the newsletter and the full year calendar (see Links page).
- Volunteer Activity Day and Meeting Information will be communicated by email.
- Active members will continue to get email reminders of these activities.
- Lunch will be provided on scheduled workdays.
- We strongly recommend you bring your own tools for your garden activities. All tools borrowed from the Tool Shed should be cleaned and sanitized with the wipes provided, prior to returning the items to the Tool Shed after use.

Tollgate Garden Advisory Committee (TGAC)

Volunteer Liaison – Destiny Pearson

248-347-3860 Ext.251 pears278@msu.edu

PresidentRenee Cottrell

Vice PresidentMarilyn Alimpich

Secretary.....Theresa Bridenbaugh

TreasurerKaren Harris

Membership

CommunicationsKathy Johnson

ProgramsJackie Stengel

Farm News Editor.....Linda Piasecki

Event Coordinator Lori Heiden

- The TGAC meets monthly virtually **on Zoom on the first Tuesday of the month at 7:00 PM**. All Tollgate Garden Volunteer members are welcome to attend and should contact Destiny Pearson for meeting link.
- Contact information for individual TGAC members and Area Garden Leaders (AGL) are available by contacting Renee Cottrell at rmcottrell@att.net to have message or contact forwarded for response. Contact info can also be found in the Garden Binders in the Volunteer Communication Center.
- Tollgate Volunteer Membership is renewed annually. The 2026 Tollgate Garden Volunteer membership is valid from **January 1, 2026 to December 31, 2026**.

- For membership questions or to update your current membership information, email Renee Cottrell at rmcottrell4@att.net
- For general Tollgate information and questions, contact Destiny Pearson or see Website: <http://tollgate.msu.edu/volunteering/>
- TIP: If you aren't getting The Tollgate Farm News email, check your SPAM folder

