

The Tollgate Farm News

VOLUME 32

ISSUE 1

JANUARY 2026

MSU Tollgate Garden Volunteers General Meeting

Thursday, January 15, 2026
7:00PM
(A Zoom Meeting)

LEARNING FROM THE PAST

Reminder: Tollgate gardeners and supporters meet on Zoom in January, February and March

Lifelong learner and professional gardener Gail Morrell returns to share new observations, ideas and lessons learned from years of gardening. Gail enjoys exploring nature, plants, pests, gardening tools and techniques. Based on her extensive knowledge of gardening, she provides information on problems to avoid, things to try, successes to build on, practical tips and suggestions for best results in the garden.

A garden maintenance enthusiast, Gail established her own gardening company. After many years managing the grounds of a gated community, Gail returned to her roots and works as the head gardener on estates in Bloomfield Hills. She was an instructor and Practical Gardening Trainer at the Michigan School of Gardening and a past president of the Troy Garden Club and Association of Professional Gardeners. Gail loves her time in the garden and sharing experiences with gardeners.

TOLLGATE GARDEN VOLUNTEER IMPORTANT DATES AND EVENTS 2026

JAN	MEETINGS		FEB	MEETINGS		
17	TGAC Meeting – Zoom	7:00 pm	17	TGAC Meeting – Zoom	7:00 pm	
15	TGV General Meeting - Zoom	7:00 pm	19	TGV General Meeting - Zoom	4:00 pm	
JAN		WORKDAY ACTIVITIES		FEB	WORKDAY ACTIVITIES	
17	AGL Planning Meeting	10:00 am			No workdays planned	
					for February	

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FARM UPDATE FROM THE RESIDENT FARMER - *Destiny Pearson*

Happy New Year from the Farm!



We hope everyone enjoyed a wonderful holiday season and had a chance to relax and recharge. As we step into 2026, we're excited to get back into action! The farm will be buzzing again as we start planning our program year and preparing for winter camp. Over the past couple of months, we've been settling into the house, and December was extra special as we celebrated Frankie's 3rd birthday! She was lucky enough to have snow for the big day and spent time sledding down the hill in her new backyard. Living on the farm has been wonderful so far, and we have been treated to wildlife, quiet snowy nights and some stunning sunrises and sunsets, even if the snow has us dreaming of warmer days ahead. We're looking forward to starting the season with all of you and making this year a great one.

See you soon, and here's to an amazing year together!



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

Photos by Destiny Pearson

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT - *Renee Cottrell*

“In the depth of winter, I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer.”
~Albert Camus, French-Algerian writer, philosopher, Nobel Prize winner 1957

A happy 2026 Tollgate gardening season to all! I hope everyone enjoyed your holidays and are ready to make 2026 a good year. Your Tollgate Garden Advisory Committee (TGAC) is working on finalizing the Activities schedule and Garden Teams are starting to plan for the new season.

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The usual January reminders:

- Memberships are renewed every year, please fill out a 2026 TGV membership form NOW ON LINE, see link in this issue
- Our January through March Meetings will be via Zoom, April-October in person. Set a reminder now on your phone so you don't miss out on these meetings. All Active status volunteers are invited to the Garden Team meeting Saturday Jan. 17th at 10am in the Conference Center. See previous emails and calendar section in this issue
- If you need to make contact with any TGAC or area garden Team leader, please call or e-mail Renee and we can forward these contact requests to the correct recipients
- First time NEW garden members will receive a welcome email contact from Teresa Larosa with a summary of important information to know. Keep her contact handy for any follow up questions

A finalized Activity Calendar should be ready to be posted on the web site by the end of January and will be included in the February newsletter. You may want to save these dates now!

- Maplefest March 7th and 8th
- New volunteer orientation and Pancake Breakfast for all TGV members on Saturday April 25th
- Spring Plant Sale Saturday June 6th
- TGV Garden Open House Thursday July 16th (rain date Friday July 17th)
- Fall Plant Sale Saturday September 19th

See you soon on Zoom! Stay safe and warm, have fun with the garden catalogs and your friends and family. Thank you for being a Tollgate Garden Volunteer!

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

PAR Report - Kathryn Fitzpatrick

Happy 2026! Sending a special thank you to all volunteers who have provided the labor of love and care to this special garden, and to encourage any new volunteers to check us out. This new year's resolution for the garden is to establish a collaborative plan with the CSA team to better support the farm, the community, our wonderful volunteers, and those in need.



Our review of 2025 pointed us to planning another renovation of the beds – to level and set barriers to eliminate erosion and soggy areas for some of the beds, and new improved raised beds in collaboration with the Eagle Scouts if our plan is approved. Many of the PAR Garden beds will be seeded with cover crops or covered with black plastic for the season.

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The pathways will be mulched in a manner that allows for minimal weed pressure and easier maintenance. Much of this will be possible due to a most generous donation by one of our volunteers.

The PAR Garden plan and layout have been drafted, and the final layout including the CSA fields will be settled this month. The seed order for the PAR Garden crops is ready. A tentative plan for the PAR portion of the crops in the CSA fields has been drafted.

Stay tuned for a SignUpGenius schedule for the Greenhouse where we will be starting many of the crops for the joint PAR/CSA garden beds starting in the March / April timeframe.

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

Kathryn Fitzpatrick

Photo by Kathryn Fitzpatrick

AGL Information – *Marilyn Alimpich*

Happy New Year AGLs,

Hopefully, your new year's resolutions will include attendance at our January 17th Area Garden Leader meeting and submission of any plant labels needed in your gardens. Many labels have been created since the plant label project began about three years ago. However, if you have new plants, or missing labels, now is the time to submit your list to me. Linda Piasecki and I would like to complete this year's labels before the end of March, so don't hesitate to submit your labels now. A link to the form is attached.

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						

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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 confirmation 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 –

Alimpich, Marilyn	Drew, Lisa	LaRosa, Teresa	Schmidt, Dorothy
Andrews, Denise	Essayan, Edward	Maddaford, Brian	Schroer, Larry
Antosz, Phyllis	Fitzpatrick, Kathryn	Marcangelo, Constance	Scott, Pamela
Bolterstein, Cindy	Frost, Garrett	Mose, Monique	Semroc, Julie
Bolton, Suzanne	Hack, Cheryl	Mueller, Sherry	Smith, Stephen
Bolz, Anne	Hall, Jillian	Nagi, Theresa	Sproule, Hilary
Bridenbaugh, Theresa	Harenchant, David	Needle, Paul	Stengel, Jackie
Brose, Paula	Harris, Karen	Needle, Pricilla	Swim, Caitlin
Campbell, Garry	Heiden, Lori	Nelson, Jim,	Tomaszewski, Judie
Carter, Angeline	Hodges, Cathy	Ocko-Halttunen, Susanne	Toth-Reinelt, Dioniza
Chraszcz, Monica	Hybl, Roy	Pearson, Destiny	Turner, Nancy
Clark, Lindsay	Johnson, Kathy	Piasecki, Linda	Warren, Judy
Cottrell, Renee	Johnson, Joe	Powell, Nancy	Westermann, Kurt
Cox, Debra	Kearney, Debra	Powell, Norm	Worley, Karen
Daniel, Doris	Kindermann, Lee	Prentice, Roy	Xiao, Melody
DiPonio, Jacob	Klepinger, Mark	Rotter, Martha	Zhong, Kathy

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PLANT OF THE MONTH



Winter Photo by
Linda Piasecki

Information provided by
Michigan Natural Features Inventory MSU Extension
Missouri Botanical Garden

PRAIRIE DROPSEED

Xeriscape, according to the Merriman-Webster Dictionary, is a method of landscaping developed for arid and semiarid climates that utilize drought-tolerant plants, mulch, and efficient irrigation.

While Tollgate Farm is not considered an arid climate, the plants within the xeriscape garden are drought tolerant. One of those plants is the prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*). It is a clump-forming, perennial grass which usually grows in prairies, prairie fens and open grounds in the Lower Peninsula. In the Upper Peninsula it can be found in the alvar grasslands. Its fine-textured, hair-like green leaves form an arching mound approximately 15" tall and 18" wide. These leaves turn reddish orange in fall and fade in winter. Flowers on its panicles can grow up to 30" tall in summer. They are pink and brown and can have a unique scent. Mature seeds drop from the flower in autumn, giving the plant its common name. Prairie dropseed is attractive in all seasons.



Photo provided by Missouri Botanical Garden

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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

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PUTTING ROSES TO BED



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TOLLGATE WINNER SURPRISES!



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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

& Hospitality.....Teresa LaRosa

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 Teresa LaRosa at tlrrehab@gmail.com
- 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

