



THE HIDDEN GEM

1 April, 2026

President's Message

2026 - The Year of the Crocus

The National Garden Bureau designated 2026 as the Year of the Crocus, highlighting this hardy, early-spring bulb for its ease of growth, vibrant color, and as a symbol of renewal. For many gardeners, spotting the first crocus poking through the last of winter's snow is a magical moment - it sets a joyful tone for the months to come.

Ann Baker and Rise Barkhoff helped to set that joyful tone for our club and community. In the fall, this dynamic duo planted an array of crocus at both the Blue Star and North Library Gardens. The first ones to break through will be like a tiny celebration, quickly followed by the sunny daffodils they planted in 2024.

The celebration for our club gardeners continues in April with the planting of the Spring containers. In May, it's the favorite Senior Planting helping seniors plant their own annual pots. Also, we will be adding more pollinator-friendly perennials to the North Library Garden - Wild Petunia, Lavender Bubbles Allium, Beelicious Anise Hyssop and more! Join the party and help - There are still openings on our Civic Teams. Click [HERE](#) or contact Annie Cochran.

Celebrate and enjoy these first days of Spring,
Sue Hazelwood, President, TCGC

Town & Country Garden Club of Libertyville celebrates 74 years of serving the greater Libertyville area with civic plantings, scholarship awards, local charitable donations and our Hidden Gems Garden Walk.



Crocus at Blue Star Marker!



The Hidden Gem newsletter is published eight times/year as a .pdf. Join our mailing list [HERE](#).

Submissions are from Club members; contact us at towncountrygardenclub5@gmail.com regarding an upcoming event listing or with membership inquiries.

Editors: Ann Baker, Laura Edwards, Janet Lichtenberger.

2026 SEED EXPO

BY SUE HAZELWOOD

On Saturday, Sharon Sill, Sally Steele, Amrita Chari, Jeanne Curtin and Michelle Sheldon helped staff our table at the Seed Expo at CLC. The expo had over 2,200 attendees, and over 50 vendors and exhibitors.

We all agreed it was a success. At times, it was hard to see our table because we had so many people signing up for the raffle, looking at pictures of the gardens that will be on the walk, and learning more about our club.

Here are the stats:

- We passed out 430 handouts about our Hidden Gems Garden Walk with link to ticket sales.
- We had 238 people sign up for the raffle to win a free garden walk ticket.
- During the time period, we sold seven tickets on-line.

See below for pictures - Thanks to Sharon, Sally, Amrita, Jeanne and Michelle for doing such a nice job in engaging with all the customers! Also thanks to Annie Cochran, Janet Lichtenberger and Barb Stevens who came out to support us.

Congratulations to our raffle winners:

Linda O'Donohue

Rose Peabody

Kait Stewart

Kimberly Lachman



HORTICULTURE

BECKY SITZ, U OF I EXTENSION MASTER GARDENER

Dividing Perennials in Spring

To keep perennial plants performing at their peak, it is necessary to divide them from time to time in order to maintain vigor and flowering. As a general rule, spring flowering perennials should be divided in fall, while late-summer or fall flowering perennials are best divided in spring.

Dividing perennials in spring is optimal for two basic reasons: plant demand for moisture is low and spring is typically a time of high moisture availability or rainfall. Moisture requirements for plants are relatively low before above-ground plant parts fully develop. If you can transplant early in the season, as leaves first emerge, you have capitalized on the low demand for moisture. Since roots do not yet have to support a full array of leaves, they are able to better handle the shock of transplanting, which invariably reduces the root biomass.

Older plants can be rejuvenated by dividing, giving each plant more space. Additionally, the added space increases air circulation and decreases disease problems.

Happy dividing this spring!

Resource;
University of Illinois
Extension
The Garden Scoop
May 16, 2018



A regional network is racing to save the Midwest's native seeds

Written by [Juanpablo Ramirez-Franco](#) for WBEZ, Public Radio Station

This article describes the work our member, Risé Barkhoff, contributes as a U. of I. Extension Master Gardener at the Chicago Botanical Garden.



Risë's hands!

As climate change intensifies wildfires and other extreme weather events, demand for native seeds is surging. Under the warm light of a hanging lamp, Marty Landorf carefully crumbled the dried flower head of a black-eyed Susan between her fingers, teasing apart the chaff to uncover its puny black seeds. Each one was destined for long-term cold storage alongside roughly 46 million other seeds at the Chicago Botanic Garden.

Every seed in the garden's vault is different. Some seeds have hooks. Others verge on microscopic. A few carry a sharp, deterring scent. And some, like the airborne seeds of the milkweed, the host plant for monarch caterpillars, are fastened to silky fluff that drifts everywhere, hitching rides on volunteers' clothes and following them home.

"Fluff is fun," Landorf said laughing, seated alongside five other volunteers cleaning, counting, and sorting seeds at a long metallic table in the garden's seed bank preparation lab. For all their variation, these seeds share a common trait: They're native to the Midwest. These species genetically adapted over thousands of years and sustain the region's ecosystems. That evolutionary inheritance makes them indispensable for restoring the nation's remaining prairies, wetlands, and woodlands.

The problem: Native seeds are in short supply. And climate change is intensifying demand. "Climate change is affecting our weather and the frequency of natural disasters," said Kayri Havens, chief scientist at the Chicago Botanic Garden. "Wildfires becoming more common, hurricanes becoming more common — that increases the need for seed."

In 2024, the Chicago Botanic Garden, a 385-acre public garden and home to one of the nation's leading plant conservation programs, helped launch the Midwest Native Seed Network, a first step in improving the region's fragile seed supply. The coalition now includes roughly 300 restoration ecologists, land managers, and seed growers across 150 institutions in 11 states. Together, they are researching which species are most in demand, where they are likely to thrive, and what it will take to produce them at scale and get them in the ground.

The collaborative is compiling information on seed collection, processing, germination, and propagation while identifying regional research gaps and planning collaborative projects to close them. For example, the network is currently collecting research on submerged aquatic plants such as pondweeds, and other species that are challenging to germinate, like the bastard toadflax, a partially parasitic perennial herb. "We're addressing these local, regional, and national shortages of native seed that are really just hindering our ability to restore really diverse habitats, build green infrastructure, and support urban gardens," said Andrea Kramer, director of restoration at the Chicago Botanic Garden.

Click [HERE](#) to read the rest of the article about this fascinating effort

CONSERVATION CORNER

ANNE STRANBERG, CONSERVATION CHAIR

Fresh Water for All on the Way

Time Magazine has selected this as one of the outstanding inventions of 2025: subsea desalination of ocean water which can totally change the cost, energy and speed of turning salt water into drinking water. The new approach by Flocean, a Norwegian Co, is to plunge water-filtering pods deep into the ocean. At these depths, the immense hydrostatic pressure naturally pushes seawater through desalination membranes reducing energy consumption by 30-50% compared to land-based operations. Because deep water is naturally cleaner and colder, this process avoids the need for chemical pre-treatment and also eliminates toxic brine discharge. This new technology also uses 95% less land than current conventional facilities making it ideal for coastal cities and island nations.



Global demand for water is going up, driven by population growth, climate change, industrial uses like data centers and manufacturing with water becoming less abundant due to deforestation, over irrigation and droughts



Source:
<https://interestingengineering.com/innovation/worlds-first-underwater-desalination-plant-launch-2026>

FUN FACT: Fresh Water at Sea

- Cruise ships turn seawater into drinking water using reverse osmosis and distillation.
- A large ship can produce 50,000+ gallons per day onboard.
- Water is tested daily to meet international health standards.
- Many ships reuse engine heat to make the process more energy-efficient.

MEMBER OF THE MONTH: MARLENE ELKINS

I have been married for 62 years to David. We have four sons, 11 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren. They are in many states.

I grew up in Southern California, moved to Mundelein in 1973, and to Libertyville in 1976. I started at CLC in 1975 and finished my BA in Humanities /Art History at Barat College in 1987. The art education gave me an appreciation for the beauty and coordination of colors.



After college I worked for the Village of Libertyville Parks & Recreation for 14 years as a preschool teacher for the older children, the four to six year olds. I also taught swimming to children of all ages at Adler Pool and the LHS pool for a few years. These were most enjoyable jobs.

My mother was a gardener who grew up on a farm in Iowa and I learned from her. I like to try new plants. I love seeing things grow and like to see the mature plants and how the plants grow together and show together. I love to harvest them; it gives me a sense of satisfaction. I think the secret of good gardening is patience, which I sometimes have little of.

My favorite flower is the Iris. I like that it comes in so many sizes and colors. It is also the Royal Flower of France.

I became aware of TCGC through posters for one of the early Garden Walks and joined the Club after that walk. I like the Club's camaraderie and sharing of knowledge and ideas.



NATIVE OF THE MONTH: CARDINAL FLOWER

The Cardinal Flower is a striking native plant known for its brilliant red flowers that bloom in mid to late summer. Its tall spikes of color attract hummingbirds, butterflies, and other pollinators looking for nectar. Cardinal flower naturally grows in moist areas such as streambanks, rain gardens, and low spots in the landscape. It prefers rich soil and consistent moisture but can thrive in full sun or partial



shade. The plant typically grows 2 to 4 feet tall, adding vertical color to garden beds and naturalized plantings. Because of its bold color and upright form, it works well in both formal gardens and native meadow plantings. As a North American native, it supports local wildlife while bringing dramatic late-season color to the garden.



PERENNIAL OF THE MONTH: UNIQUE IRIS VARIETIES

'Black Suited': very dark, deep purple bearded variety that blooms in late fall



'Mesmerizer': Beetroot red/maroon top petals and candy red-violet bottom petals, with a dark metallic sheen. Early to midseason bloom and rebloom

'Mountain Laurel': An elegant flower with a whitish, blushed, and rosy lavender face, often with silver veining, mid-season bloom



© Christine Cost

NGC/GCI NEWS

DISTRICT IX ANNUAL MEETING

TCGC AWARDS:

Outstanding Programs:
1st place
Ongoing Civic Project:
3rd Place
All-Star Club: 3rd Place
Merit Certificate: Flower
Show Participation



Another stellar raffle basket created by Jeanne Curtin!



TCGC Member, Ann Baker, was inducted as Vice Director of District IX of GCI

2026 NATIONAL CONVENTION

Meet Me in St. Louis, Where the River Bends and the Arch Reaches the Sky!

St. Louis, MO 5/4 - 5/6

- Learn about the flower shows, gardens & more at Missouri Botanical Garden.
- Uncover the story of Missouri prairie restoration.
- Discover the secrets of Missouri native plants.

[Info/registration Click HERE](#)

GCI'S 99TH ANNUAL CONVENTION

April 20, 2026

Abbington Distinctive Banquets
Glen Ellyn, IL

Red, White, and Blue Across Illinois ~
American's 250th Anniversary Floral
Designer ~ Janet Gallagher AIFD

Click [HERE](#) to register

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, June 27th, 2026

Five exceptional gardens
Meet the gardeners and be inspired by unique
designs and specimens.

Online tickets Available [HERE](#).

Village Hall sales open 6/1.

Members receive tickets 6/3.

Farmers Market Thursday sales June 4, 11, and 25th



Hidden Gems Garden Walk

University of Illinois
Lake County Extension
Master Gardeners

PLANT SALE

Saturday, May 16, 2026
9 am - 2 pm



Rain or Shine
Cash, Check, Charge

University of Illinois
Lake County Extension
100 South US Hwy 45
Graylake IL 60030



WE ARE OFFERING

- Natives, Perennials, Pollinator-Friendly Plants
- Vegetables, Herbs
- Garden Treasures
- Gardening Advice from Master Gardeners

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The
TOWN & COUNTRY
GARDEN CLUB
of Libertyville

Cook Park Tree Walk

A Free Arbor Day Event

Saturday, April 25

9 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. starts

Join our Club President, Sue Hazelwood, University of Illinois Master Gardener, as she identifies and shares insights on distinctive trees throughout Cook Park.

Click for information and to register:

[TICKETS](#)