



THE HIDDEN GEM

1 May, 2026

President's Message

"All things seem possible in May." — Unknown

Happy May! As the soil warms and the garden truly awakens, we enter the busiest—and perhaps most hopeful—month of the year.

Community Spotlight: Libertyville in Bloom

Take a stroll through town to enjoy the fresh containers designed by our spring planting team. Keep an eye on the Butterfly, Blue Star Marker, and North Library gardens. A personal favorite is the Prairie Smoke in the Library Garden; its pink, feathery seed heads are irresistible. We will expand the library beds with more pollinator-friendly perennials to support our local bees and butterflies.

Get Involved: Senior Planting Day

Join us for Senior Planting Day, a perennial favorite for members and seniors alike! Help our local senior community at the Civic Center design and plant beautiful custom containers to take home and enjoy. It's a wonderful way to connect, share some gardening tips, and brighten someone's day. May 21st at 11 am. [Sign Up](#) Online or contact Annie Cochran.

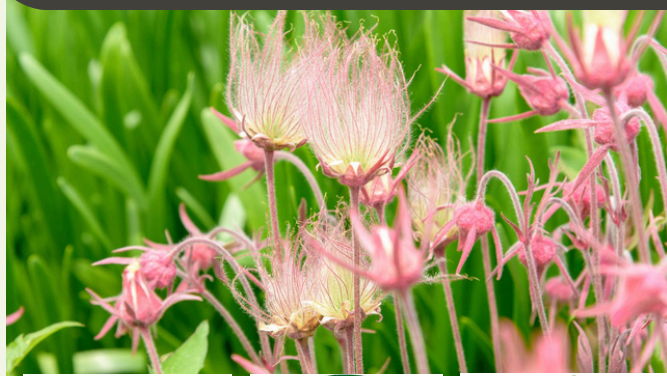
Let's get growing! I can't wait to see Libertyville in full bloom,

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.

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- Upcoming Events



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, Sally Steele

Vol. 5 Issue 3

CIVIC PLANTINGS

ANNIE COCHRAN, CIVIC CHAIR



Our spring planting team, Barb Grollo, Risé Barkhoff, Liz Leonard, Therese Schaefer, Mary Gay Kay, Barbara Stevens (not pictured)



GCI ANNUAL MEETING & AWARDS

3

2026 GCI State Awards:

- *GCI "Garden Club of the Year" Medium Size Club
- *Gloria Greene Award for Design, 1st Place
 - *Garden Walk, 1st Place
- *Club Publication 1st Place: Newsletter
 - *Planting for Pollinators 1st Place:
 - Cook Library North Bed
- *Mary Zgonena Memorial Award for Environmental Excellence, Honorable Mention
 - *Club Achievement, Gold Seal
 - *Club Horticulture, Gold Seal

Sally Steele and Ann Baker attended the 2026 GCI annual meeting in Glen Ellyn on April 20th. Our state organization is geared up to celebrate our country's 250th anniversary and preparing for its own anniversary - 100 years in 2027.

The announcement of the club awards was a highlight - congratulations Town & Country Garden Club of Libertyville on another outstanding year of exceptional club activities and service to the community.

MEMORIAL TREE DEDICATION

Saturday, August 8, 10 a.m.

Butler Lake, Libertyville

(by new playground, north side of Lake Street)

Memorial Tree Dedication & Celebration

We invite everyone to join us for a special morning of remembrance and community as we dedicate our new memorial Kentucky coffetree. We are honored to welcome Mayor Donna Johnson, who will be in attendance to share a few words.

Following the dedication ceremony, please stay for light refreshments. This event is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate and honor those who have left a lasting impact on our club, our families and the community of Libertyville.



by Laura Edwards, University of Illinois Master Gardener

Advantages of Using Compost in Your Garden

During a recent U of I Extension Garden Learning Series presentation, Merleanne Rampale (SWALCO Education Director), discussed the importance of compost use in the garden. Defining compost as nature's way of recycling, Rampale explained how composting converts organic materials into a dark, earth-smelling soil conditioner. Compost is full of slow releasing nutrients. When added to garden soil, it can replace the use of fertilizers. Compost improves soil structure and increases water retention.

Why use compost in your garden? Rampale highlights nine reasons to do so.

Compost:

Enriches the soil and improves the soil structure.

Protects plants from pests and disease.

Adds micronutrients, nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium to the soil.

Brings soil pH to optimum level.

Promotes aeration in clay and sandy soil, allowing for better water drainage and air circulation. This promotes stronger roots.

Provides better habitat for beneficial microbes, bacteria, and fungi.

Is more cost effective than fertilizers.

Promotes higher crop yield.

Produces healthier food in vegetable gardens.



In keeping with our Garden Club conservation efforts, the use of compost is key to protecting our environment. Compost decreases waste in the landfills. Compost facilities produce less methane gas emissions compared to landfills. Using compost can decrease or eliminate the use of chemical fertilizers, combating pollution from run off chemicals. Compost conserves water holding 5-20% of its weight in water.

All in all, the use of compost in gardens is a win-win. Purchase compost at area garden centers. Look for free compost giveaways this spring. Tossing a few handfuls around the base of your plants is all it takes. I give my plants some “Black Gold” every spring and fall. Easy application, rewarding results! Happy spring!

CONSERVATION CORNER

ANNE STRANBERG, CONSERVATION CHAIR

A few years ago, I shared information that Ace Hardware was accepting old paint for ecologically proper disposal. This was funded by PaintCare, a non-profit organization founded by paint manufacturers to offer a sustainable solution to all the old paint gathering dust on garage and basement shelves. In addition, Paint Care also lobbies for paint stewardship laws, and was successful in Illinois.

The Illinois Paint Stewardship Act (Public Act 103-0372), signed in 2023, requires paint manufacturers to fund and operate a statewide, eco-friendly program for managing leftover paint, effective December 1, 2025. Managed by PaintCare, the program provides over 250 free drop-off sites, including retail stores, for latex and oil-based architectural paints.

The program is funded by a PaintCare fee added to the price of new paint sold in Illinois, based on size: \$0.00 (half pint or less); \$.45 (more than half pint to less than one gallon); \$.95 (one to two gallons); \$1.95 (two to five gallons). A nominal fee to pay for such an impactful service!

So gather up that old paint AS IS and drop off at these area locations:

JC Licht - Libertyville, Mundelein, Vernon Hills

Ace Hardware - Libertyville, Mundelein

Sherwin-Williams - Libertyville, Mundelein

To share this amazing sustainable option with your friends and neighbors, use this link to the [Drop Off Site Locator](#), and find the nearest drop-off they can use.



MEMBER OF THE MONTH: JENNIFER RIELLY

I am the youngest of four daughters and grew up on the North Side of Chicago with a large backyard. My mother loved to garden, favoring peonies, roses, and clematis. My paternal grandmother, from Ireland, lived two blocks away and grew vegetables; I remember the scent of cherry blossoms from the many trees in her yard.



My husband Tom and I have two daughters, a son, two son-in-laws, one daughter-in-law, and four fantastic grandchildren. Tom and I started our

family in Chicago, later moving into my childhood home when my parents downsized. The backyard became a haven for our kids—climbing trees, playing, and picnicking on the patio—while I cared for the land and introduced container gardening. I've always loved being in the garden.

I was educated in city private schools and attended Marquette University with a double major in History and Education. I earned a masters degree from National Louis University and added continuing education at Northwestern University for teaching advanced & gifted learners. I taught in Lake Forest, took a break to have the children, and then returned to the same district.

It became a long commute, so Tom suggested we move further north. We landed in Libertyville. The house gave us a lot more room, but a smaller yard with evergreens, four apple trees and a few rose bushes. Since we have lost trees to disease and weather events, our yard has been a work in progress. It is very rewarding when passersby compliment the garden while I am working on it. My current favorite plants are daffodils for spring and zinnias and dahlias for summer. I'm considering expanding the garden to grow more cut flowers, as I love making arrangements and gifting them. In our travels across 49 of the 50 states and several countries, Tom and I visit botanical gardens. The unique plants from Argentina to Juneau, Alaska to Canada delight the senses. Did you know in Juneau there is a 13 acre public garden on the bay with a 300 year old apple tree? In spring, we are reminded of our trip to Amsterdam and the tulips at Keukenhof Gardens.

When I moved to Libertyville, many of my neighbors were Garden Club members. Because of the six meeting requirement, I waited to join until retirement. Town and Country Garden Club of Libertyville has been a very rewarding and enriching experience.

In the words of Thoreau "If the day and night are such that you greet them with joy, and life emits a fragrance like flowers and sweet-scented herbs, is more elastic, more starry, and more immortal - that is your success."

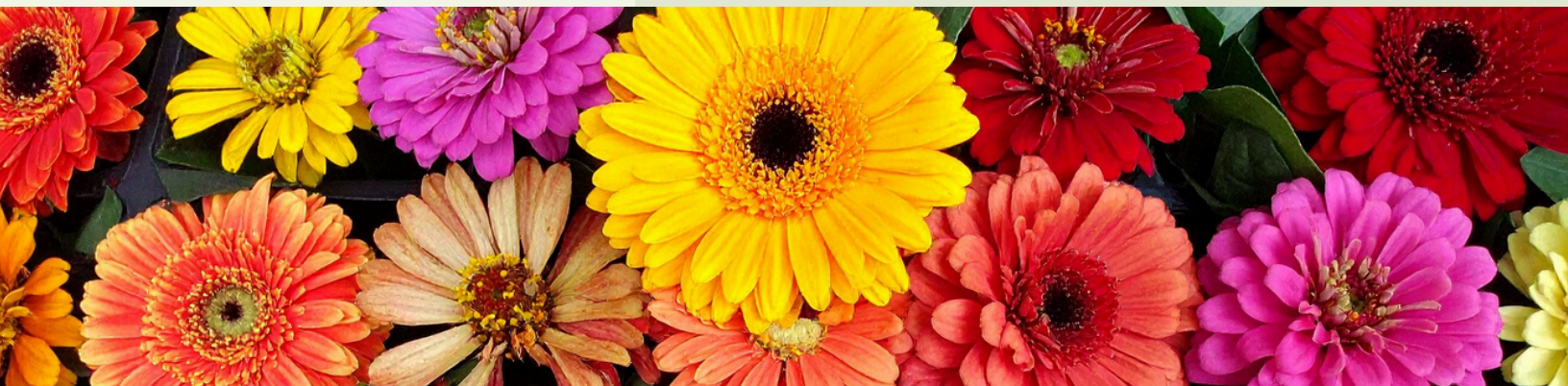
NATIVE OF THE MONTH: PUSSYTOES

A member of the Aster family, Pussytoes are found across much of the eastern half of the continental United States including northern Illinois. They are common, low-growing perennial groundcovers found in dry prairies, open woodlands, and savannas, acting as important host plants for the American Lady butterfly. Pollinating insects visit the flowers, and some birds eat the seeds. They thrive in poor, rocky, or clay soils in full to partial sun, forming dense, matted colonies with silver-green fuzzy foliage and white, cat-paw-like flowers that bloom in April and May. According to the [Illinois DNR](#), Pussytoes are excellent for native gardens, as they require no maintenance once established and are drought-resistant.



PLANT OF THE MONTH: ZINNIAS

Zinnias are easy, sun-loving annuals that thrive in warm weather, well-drained soil, and minimal fuss—making them a favorite for gardeners of all levels. They bloom prolifically from early summer until frost in a wide range of bright colors, and the more you cut them, the more they produce, which makes them excellent for bouquets. Beyond their beauty, zinnias play an important role in the garden ecosystem: their nectar-rich flowers attract pollinators like butterflies and bees, while also supporting beneficial insects that help keep pests in check. Durable, cheerful, and low-maintenance, zinnias bring both color and ecological value to any garden space.



The Garden Clubs of Illinois 2026 Summer Meeting

Hosted by District II
Monday, July 13, 2026
8:30 am - 3:00 pm
Naper Settlement
523 South Webster, Naperville,
IL

Where Are the Stars?

Guest speaker: Valorie Blaine

[Click for info/registration](#)

June 5

"Landscaping Within"

Sponsored by GCI LANDSCAPE Design Council
Panfish Park and the Glen Ellyn Police Department
65 S. Park Boulevard, Glen Ellyn, Illinois

10 Am Check In - Optional "Walk in the Park!"

Located behind the Police Department.

Take a walk and check out an urban nature setting.

11 AM Lecture followed by a live demonstration of

Landscapes the Ohara way. E-Ling will create
several arrangements that will be raffled off to

some lucky attendees.

Tea and Cookies will be served

[Click HERE for info/registration](#)

On the Road Again

A National Garden Clubs, Inc. Standard Flower Show

Presented by
Garden Clubs of Illinois, Inc.
at
Lincoln Square Mall
300 S. Broadway Avenue, Urbana, IL 61801

July 23-25, 2026



Admission is free and open to the public
4-8 pm, Friday July 24
and
8 am-Noon, Saturday July 25

Member of
National Garden Clubs, Inc.
Central Region

2026 Fall Central Region
Convention
Oct. 5th & 6th

ZOOM

Set up your watch parties
as we wait for details of
presentations

UPCOMING EVENTS



Hidden Gems Garden Walk

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

May 16

**Lincolnshire Garden Club
Spring Plant Sale**

Community Christian Church
1970 Riverwoods Road
Lincolnshire, IL
9:00 am - 1:00 pm

You'll find flats of annuals, gallon
sized perennials, native plants,
hanging baskets and more.

For more information

[CLICK HERE](#)

2026 Garden Learning Series

May 13th, 6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m., Virtual
Amazing Annuals
Lake County Extension Master Gardener
Kim Hartmann

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Grayslake Greenery Garden Club

Annual Plant Sale

Saturday May 16, 9 am -12 noon

Parking lot next to Grayslake Village Hall

Homegrown perennials, annuals, vegetables, native
starter plants and tropical plants from Club Members
gardens and gently used garden treasures.