

North Country Gardeners

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Greetings, gardeners

Our 2016 growing season has just started. Perennials are starting to wake up; the rhubarb has already put on good growth, and the asparagus is about a week away from the first cutting as this is written. The rain that we recently received has helped kick-start the green-up.

The UW-Extension North Country Master Gardener Volunteers kicked off the start of the season with their annual **Mini Master Gardener Short Course** program held on Saturday, April 2 at the Bashaw Valley Farm and Greenhouse. It was a cold blustery day outside, but the 30 youth participants and their 17 adult chaperones enjoyed the warmth of the greenhouses. With five stations the kids experienced hands-on learning related to seeds and germination, plant parts, making paper pots, transplanting, and soil. Last year the participating families took home garden tools; this year each family received a gardening book, entitled "Roots, Shoots, Buckets and Boots – Gardening With Children." The families were really appreciative of the book.

Our **14th annual plant sale** got underway with a couple of seed-starting sessions held at the station greenhouse. We will offer 20 varieties of tomatoes and seven varieties of peppers. We cut back on the number of tomatoes offered in previous years from the 1,000 or so down to about 700. The pepper numbers are up this year with about 300 plants available, which is about double that of last year. We will have a few hundred perennials available for purchase this year, the result of last fall's preparation for the new perennial garden renovation. The sale starts at 8 a.m. on Saturday, May 21, at the Spooner Agriculture Research Station.

The **Teaching and Display Garden** located north on Orchard Lane north of Hwy. 70 is undergoing a few changes. The perennial garden is a work in progress, in the middle of a renovation to create a designated Monarch Waystation and Pollinator Garden. Replacement plant selections to attract beneficial insects have been selected, to be purchased and planted this spring. The All-America Selection Display, which has won us several awards, will undergo its transformation. Last year's landscape design contest theme was geometric design, and our clever Master Gardeners came up with planting schemes that created the various geometric shapes that tied us for second place in our category. This year's contest theme is pollinator education. The AAS design committee is busy formulating ideas that will perhaps put us in the winner's circle for the fourth consecutive year.

In addition to our usual displays of vegetables the garden will be hosting several UW-Madison-sponsored vegetable trials. As part of the **Northern Organic Vegetable Improvement Cooperative (NOVIC)** we will be collecting data and performance on new and upcoming pepper and tomato varieties. Related to this we will also be evaluating several varieties of kale, beets, carrots, and cucumbers as part of a local foods systems seed-to-chef trial. The purpose of this multi-site trial is to evaluate soon-to-be-released vegetable varieties for flavor, quality, and culinary traits.

We encourage all to pay a visit to the **display garden** throughout the summer to see what's growing or what might be having problems. Some of the plants are on trial and are part of an experiment to see how well they perform in the soil and windy microclimate of this setting. The 18th annual **Twilight Garden Tour** is scheduled for Tuesday, August 16. This very popular outdoor gathering will include displays, demonstrations, vegetable tasting, and invited guest speakers from 4 to 7 p.m. A new twist is the addition of a proposed speaker's symposium from 1 to 3 p.m. More details to come.

Happy gardening.

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MASTER
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Photo by Kevin Schoessow

'Meet Me in the Garden': This year's focus is on pollinators

By Sue Reinardy, UW-Extension MGV

You are invited to join Master Gardener Volunteers at the Spooner Agriculture Research Station's Teaching and Display Garden for three informational programs this summer. Master Gardener Volunteers, UW-Extension interns, and staff will make presentations and can answer your questions at these sessions.

Please bring your own chair for the Meet Me in the Garden Series. In the case of inclement weather, programs will be held at the Station Building at W6646 Hwy. 70, Spooner.

Native Plants for the Birds, Bees, and Butterflies

Tuesday, June 14
6 to 7:30 p.m.

A natural garden isn't complete without native plants. Native trees provide important shelter and food for birds and pollinators. Native shrubs can attract wildlife and provide several seasons of interest. You

will learn what, when, and where to cultivate native plants that provide food for butterflies, songbirds, hummingbirds, and beneficial insects.

Becoming a Natural Gardener

Tuesday, July 12
6 to 7:30 p.m.

This program will focus on the vegetable and herb gardens. Learn about phrenology, the study of the development of plants and animals as affected by our climate and weather. By using your observations you can know the best time for planting, the blooming and harvest cycles of plants, and the emergence of insect pests.

Monarch Way Station and the Season in Review

Saturday, September 10
10 a.m. to Noon

Master Gardener Volunteers will relate their experience creating a Monarch Way Station at the Teach-

ing and Display Garden and how others can create a habitat for monarchs and other pollinators. Also included in this program will be a review of the 2016 growing season and things learned in the Garden.

Teaching and Display Garden

The Teaching and Display Garden is a joint effort between the Spooner Agriculture Research Station, operated by the University of Wisconsin-Madison College of Agriculture and Life Science, the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension, and area UW-Extension Master Gardener Volunteers.

Location

The Display and Teaching Garden can be found at N5264 Orchard Ln. Orchard Lane is located 1 1/2 miles east of Spooner on Hwy. 70 or a half-mile west of the Hwy. 70/53 interchange.

Tomatoes, peppers top sellers at sale

Perennials from display garden will be featured, too

By Russ Parker, UW-Extension MGV

The UW-Extension North Country Master Gardener Volunteer Association (NCMGVA) will have their 15th annual plant sale on Saturday, May 21, at the Spooner Ag Research Station. The sale will start at 8 a.m. and will run until sold out. Be advised that even though there are hundreds of plants offered for sale, they do go quickly, so buyers should show up early for the best selection.

All of the tomatoes and peppers were started from seed and grown by volunteers from the NCMGVA.

Twenty varieties of tomatoes will be offered at the sale which include many of our customer favorites such as Cherokee Purple, German John-

son, Black Krim, Russian Persimmon, San Marzano, and some cherry types: Mexico Midget, Sungold, and a new hybrid to the sale called Juliet.

Seven varieties of peppers will be available this year, primarily sweet bell types that have produced well for us at the Display Garden and at home gardens in our area. Included in this list are Wisconsin Lakes and King of the North, these being open-pollinated varieties and the hybrids; Giant Marconi, a sweet non-bell type, Healthy, and New Ace. We cut back on hot peppers that we had in previous years, growing just one variety for this year, the early jalapeño.

Last fall we started work on the

perennial garden transformation into a pollinator garden and monarch Way-Station. Perennials that were removed in preparation for this renovation will be sold at the plant sale.

Proceeds from the sale go to support many educational events and demonstrations: the Teaching and Display Garden that is open to the public, east of the Ag Station on Orchard Lane; and youth and adult educational events and grants in horticulture within Burnett, Washburn and Sawyer counties.

Please check our website, <http://www.northcountrymgv.org/>, for a complete listing of plants that will be offered at our sale.

MGVs launch new website for area gardeners

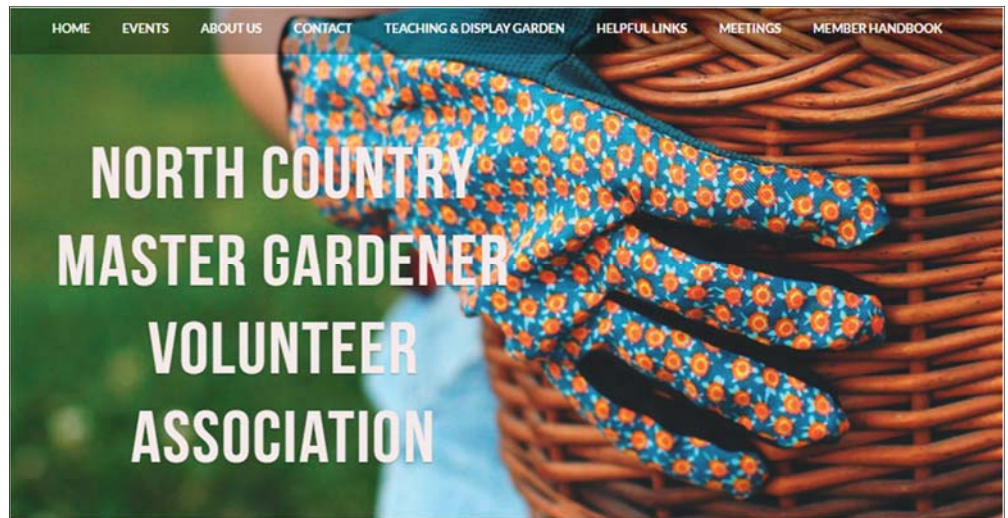
By Sue Reinardy, UW-Extension MGV

The North Country Master Gardener Volunteer Association has a new website at <http://www.northcountrymgv.org/>.

The website provides information about events sponsored through the UW-Extension by and for gardeners in our area of Burnett, Sawyer, and Washburn counties.

It provides helpful links, information on the Teaching and Display Garden, and information for Master Gardener Volunteers.

Also check out <https://www.facebook.com/spoonerag>.



Don't prune any oak trees now or risk disease

STOP! We're now in the time period in which you should not prune or wound oaks because of oak wilt disease. Oak wilt has been confirmed in many Northwest Wisconsin counties. Oak wilt fungus will begin fruiting soon under the bark of trees that were infected and killed last year. The sticky sweet fungal mat attracts beetles which can transport the spores of the fungus to other trees. If you prune or wound a tree you may be attracting beetles to that fresh wound. If those beetles have recently been feeding on an oak wilt fungal mat, they can bring oak wilt spores to your tree and infect your tree. For more information, search "WI DNR Forestry Health" online.

New law is good news for pollinators

(Reprinted, with permission, from the "Wild Ones Journal," January/February 2016.)

Overwhelmingly approved by both House and Senate, the provision encouraging pollinator habitat along the roadsides stayed in the five-year transportation re-authorization bill known as the FAST Act (Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act) and was signed into law Friday, December 4, 2015, by President Obama. That means the federal government will continue to expand its development of more native habitat for pollinators and has provided for funding to do so. This, along with Obama's National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and other Pollinators, also means that all the efforts that Wild Ones and our members have made to spread the word about the importance of native plants to our environment will finally get the boost it needs.

As a result of the historic meeting of the Trilateral Committee that took place in 2014, the federal government has previously taken steps to retain, develop, and maintain native habitat for pollinators as it relates to federal facilities. Because of this new initiative, millions of dollars have been set aside by the U.S. government as well as organizations such as National Wildlife Federation and Pollinator Partnership to work at this task.

According to R. Thomas (Tom) Van Arsdall, director of Public Policy Pollinator Partnership, "Highway right-of-ways managed by State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) represent 17 million acres of opportunity for States to both save money and improve pollinator habitat through Integrated Vegetation Management



Photo by
Julie
Hustvet

(IVM), including reduced mowing and strategic plantings of native forbs and grasses. Such win-win opportunities are also available for roadsides managed by counties and municipalities.

"Section 1415 of the FAST Act directs the Secretary of Transportation to use existing authorities, programs, and funding to assist IVM and pollinator habitat efforts by willing state DOTs. Language is also added to a key funding eligibility account, making it clear that actions to provide 'habitat, forage, and migratory way stations for Monarch butterflies, other native pollinators, and honey bees' are eligible for funding assistance."

The language contained in both the Senate and the House bills was based on the bi-partisan amendment known as the Highways BEE Act. The Highways Bettering the Economy and Environment (BEE) Protection Act (Highways BEE Act) was introduced by Representatives Alcee Hastings

(FL) and John Denham (CA) of the House. The Senate's bill included an amendment by Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (NY) and Jeff Merkley (OR) which added language to encourage the IVM practices as well as the BEE Act.

Congratulations to everyone who wrote to their Congressmen regarding this very important legislation.

To read a summary of the Highways BEE Act go to http://www.pollinator.org/PDFs/Highways_Bee_Act_Summary.pdf.

The complete HR 4790 can be found at <https://www.congress.gov/113/bills/hr4790/BILLS-113hr4790ih.pdf>.

To read the National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and other Pollinators to <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/Pollinator%20Health%20Strategy%202015.pdf>.

More information about Wild Ones is at 877-394-3954 or www.wildones.org.

Volunteers wanted for helping at family events

By Vicki Gee-Treft

Assist with hands-on seed starting activity and demonstrate germination, a plant's vascular system, and crazy containers at fun family events:

- Saturday, May 14, shifts from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Prairie Fling at Hunt Hill Audubon Sanctuary, N2384 Hunt Hill Rd., Sarona.

- Saturday, June 4, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Family Fest at Washburn County Fairgrounds, Spooner. To sign up, contact Vicki Gee-Treft at 715-635-3644 or vgee-treft@hotmail.com.

Dwarf tomatoes bred in worldwide project

By Russ Parker, UW-Extension MGV

While reviewing seed sources (as listed in the Open Source Seed Initiative OSSIseeds.org, covered at the end of this article), I ended up at Victory Seeds where I happened on to the dwarf tomato project.

It was Dr. Craig LeHoullier (USA), a chemist by profession with a passion for gardening, who described some of the early successful efforts in dwarf tomato plant breeding that took place in the early 1900s to Patrina Nuske-Small (Australia) and inspired her to become a plant breeder. Why dwarf tomatoes? The dwarf plants are well-suited to small-space gardening and container growing. Dwarfism is a recessive trait which produces very distinctive plants with a robust central stem and stout compact growth. They behave as if they are very compact indeterminate varieties in the manner that they fruit, the taste of which approaches the best of the large indeterminate plants. The varieties selected to date vary in height with some being more "determinate" than others.

Before this project, dwarf tomatoes were quite rare. Together LeHoullier and Nuske-Small planned out strategic crosses by reviewing the characteristics of the many heirloom and other open-pollinated varieties. It was Nuske-Small who performed the eight initial crosses and decided to name the families after the dwarves of the Snow White story plus one invented name.

What is truly amazing about this effort is that the project founders advertised on the Tomatoland forum to seek out extreme tomato enthusiasts in both hemispheres to help grow out the F1 generation seed and make selections for further propagation. They enlisted over 100 volunteer gardeners worldwide. Nuske-Small managed the southern hemisphere (Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand), and LeHoullier managed the North Hemisphere (USA and Cana-

Variety	Dwarf Family	Days to Maturity
Adelaide Festival	Tidy	80
Rosella Purple	Sleepy	70
Sarandipity	Streaky	65
Arctic Rose,	Grumpy	60
Boronia	Happy	70
Maralinga	Plentiful	75
Uluru Ochre	Rosy	65

da). By utilizing the growing seasons of both hemispheres and shipping seeds of subsequent tomato generations to next hemisphere season growers, they were able to stabilize selections in half the time. This was a worldwide project that had never before been attempted, accomplished by amateurs with great success. The dwarf tomato project, with its start in 2006, has released more than 40 promising selections. LeHoullier and Nuske-Small hope this effort will provide interesting non-hybrid varieties for the gardener and in the future some may become valuable heirlooms.

Victory Seeds of Oregon is where I

purchased seed from seven of the offered dwarf families. I thought it would be great fun to experience the efforts of this worldwide tomato breeding project. The varieties that I selected appear in the table.

The varieties listed in the table are being grown for trial at the Spooner Ag Research Teaching & Display Garden. I welcome all to come out this summer and visit the dwarves.

For more information about the dwarf tomato project:

- Victory Seeds, <http://www.victoryseeds.com/dwarf-tomato-project.html>, gives a complete

SEE DWARF TOMATOES, PAGE 7

Uluru Ochre

is a Dwarf Tomato named after the rock monolith in central Australia. 65 days, produces a good yield of medium- to large-sized (6 to 12 ounces) uniquely colored tomatoes that are essentially the first "black/orange" variety we've seen - orange flesh with green overtones, and somewhat amber/orange/green in appearance. The flavor can be a bit variable season to season, but at its best, it has an absolutely delicious, smoky flavor.



Dealing with meadow voles ('meadow mice')

By Russ Parker , UW-Extension MGVA

While in my garden this spring doing some cleanup chores, my dog hunted the fence line and was quite proud to show me a meadow vole that she had caught. I had laid down some repurposed silage bag plastic last fall in an effort to reclaim a section of my garden from the always invading quack grass. The voles had made tunnels under the plastic, as I later learned. A vole population made it through this past winter, and my dog's catch reminded me of my past experiences with voles. A story to tell.

Meadow voles, sometimes referred to as meadow mice (not really mice), belong to the genus *Microtus*. They are very common, widespread, and likely have been in your garden. They are mostly vegetarians and quite prolific, producing up to six litters per year. According to the UW-Extension Learning Store, publication A2148, vole populations typically peak on a four-year cycle. Weather conditions have a big influence on the vole population cycle.

While "live and let live" is the best policy, there comes a time when rodent numbers get out of hand and action is required if a garden crop is to be produced. Meadow voles can become quite destructive when natural predators are not present to take care of a fast increasing population. It is really disheartening to go out in the morning for a garden review, to find half of a planting leveled overnight by voles. I have experienced winter girdling on blueberry bushes, summer damage with cut pole bean vines, leveled tomatoes chewed off above cutworm protection collars, hollowed out beets and squash, and of all things, repeated cutting of retaining ropes on greenhouse plastic film side flaps.

Poisons are not my choice to control a vole population irruption within a home garden. I prefer to run a



trap line to reduce the numbers.

My early experience in attempting to trap these critters is that they are not readily attracted to bait such as peanut butter when they have other things to eat, but they are fairly easy to trap if one can locate established runways. Voles use runways along "safe" travel routes such as fence lines or barriers to get to their feeding areas. Some of these are dug into the soil or grass and appear as "tunnels." I have a dual fence around my garden: a fence for the deer and a poultry fence to keep the rabbits out. It is along this fence line combo that the voles like to travel and access my garden. I am not the tidiest gardener, rather lazy in fact, and sometimes let the grass grow into this fence where the voles find cover along with a skink population, reptiles that are beneficial to the garden.

Setting unbaited mouse snap traps in these runways is quite effective. The Learning Store publication suggests placing them perpendicular to the tunnel with the trigger or "pan" in the runway – this works! I have also placed them parallel within the tunnel with good success. If using snap traps in these grassy tunnels, make sure that surrounding vegetation will not affect the trap's operation.

Several years ago I discovered that many of my pole bean vines were wilting. Upon close inspection I found that the vines were cut several inches up from the ground. A little unusual for my typical cutworm damage, I commenced digging

around the base of the severed vines looking for the culprit, at which time I just happened to catch a glimpse of a gray critter fleeing the bean arbor area. Voles! Not having a defined vole runway in which to set traps in that part of the garden, I had to create a way to know exactly where they would enter. Voles are not fond of climbing and will fol-

low a wall until they find an opening. This was accomplished by setting up a makeshift temporary barrier. I used 12-inch-wide plywood because of availability around the perimeter of the arbors. I think a heavy cardboard or other barrier material could be used. I set the plywood on edge, supported by stakes, to provide 1 1/2-inch openings on each of the four sides to create access points for the rodents. At each opening, a mouse trap is set on the inside of the enclosure positioned tight to the plywood with the trigger facing the opening. Voles accessing the enclosure to get to their food source will walk right into the traps.

In 2014, a population irruption year, I caught 21 voles over a four-day period, a combination catch in both fence runways and plywood barrier sets. My problem dropped to a tolerable level. One will never catch all of the voles. Several years ago, after reducing the population, I left the traps set for two weeks and caught a chipping sparrow and a toad. I recommend that after an intensive five-day or so trapping session, remove the traps to keep from catching non-pests.

It was suggested to me to get a garden cat to take care of the voles. Perhaps within a closed garden space a cat could be employed, however I do not like the idea of free-ranging cats. It is only during population spikes that voles become a real problem. According to wildlife biologists, cats do not kill sufficient vole numbers to

Think spring... think soil

By Kevin Schoessow, UW-Extension Area Ag Development Agent

As we begin the gardening season, let's not forget about the soil. Any good gardener knows that it all starts with good healthy soil. Being a good steward of the soil is actually quite simple, **keep it covered, minimize disturbance, and feed the soil.**

How to keep it covered: By looking for ways to reduce the amount of bare soil that is exposed. Use organic mulches whenever possible. Organic mulches over time will breakdown and add nutrients and organic matter, they help hold in moisture, smother weeds, and keep soil from eroding. Maximize your plant space density. Think square foot or raised bed gardening. Use succession planting and/or cover crops.

How to minimize disturbance: By looking for other methods to incorporate organic matter and control weeds other than aggressive tillage. Manage weeds early in the season before they get too big with shallow tillage or light hoeing (stirrup hoe, diamond hoe), then mulch. Switch to raised beds or mounds and stir soil with a broad fork or shovel. For plants that need larger area such as vine crops, plant directly into mulch, and only disturb soil for planting hole.

How to feed the soil: By adding organic matter. Use organic mulches (sources locally if possible). Grass clippings, pine needle straw and shredded leaves are fairly easy to find. Other organic sources might be dried sea weed, composted manures, kitchen compost, coffee grounds or shredded paper or bark. Try a living mulch or cover crop such as buck wheat, sweet clover, field peas, oats, annual or winter rye.

Healthy Soil + Healthy Plants = Healthy YOU. Put the tiller away, simplify your gardening techniques, think small space gardening and find ways to add organic matter, add organic matter and add organic matter.

WORKSFORUS

Tips from Sue Reinardy, UW-Extension MGV

I had an opportunity last fall to hear Roy Diblik speak at the Wisconsin Master Gardener Association's annual meeting. He is a noted plantsman and designer who has authored the book "The Know Maintenance Perennial Garden." One tip he provided was to do only minimum clean-up of herbaceous perennial beds in the fall and come early spring (right after the snow has left and before the bulbs emerge) use a mulching mower to go over the beds. This eliminates raking and removing plant debris and provides those plants with their own mulch. I set the



Photos by Sue Reinardy

mower height to about 5 inches to avoid damaging the crowns of the plants. What has normally taken me more than four hours to accomplish was done in less than 45 minutes with the mower and a lot less physical effort.

Dwarf tomatoes

FROM PAGE 3

description of the varieties, including what crosses were made and who named the selections, and provides a list of the growers who helped stabilize the initial cross.

- <http://www.craiglehoullier.com>, LeHoullier's website.
- <http://dwarftomatoproject.net/>, for an overview of the project.

Several of the dwarf tomato variety selections are offered under the OSSI pledge: You have the freedom to use these OSSI-Pledged seeds in any way you choose. In return, you pledge not to restrict others' use of the seeds or their derivatives by patents or other means, and to include this pledge with any transfer of these seeds or their derivatives.

OSSI

The OSSI was created by a group of plant breeders, farmers, seed companies, and sustainability advocates who want to free the seed! This organization was launched in 2014. The patenting of seed by large corporations have placed controls on the farmers that feed the world. The seed that those corporations offer cannot be saved and shared by farmers or gardeners. The OSSI is promoting the development of new varieties to preserve genetics and to offer varieties of seed to be shared and distributed. More information can be found at OSSEEDS.org.



Photos by Renee' Nañez

Station 5 – Incredible Edibles.

Even with the rainy weather, “Little Sprouts” turned out to be a great success, and plans are underway to make this an annual event. It was a rewarding experience and great opportunity to work with children to spark an interest in gardening.

Little Sprouts learn about gardening, germination, soil

By Pat Beetcher, UW-Extension MGV

On April 24, a rainy Sunday afternoon, with the assistance of Master Gardener Volunteer Pat Beetcher, Ruby’s Food Shelf in Siren presented a “Little Sprouts” Mini Master Gardener Short Course for children ages 5 to 10. Thirty “Little Sprouts” – 15 of them Girl Scouts – along with their parents visited five stations to learn about gardening.

The stations consisted of Station 1 – “What is a seed and where do seeds come from?”; Station 2 – Hands-on, “What seed am I?”; Station 3 – “Tools to make my garden grow,” to learn about soil and the seven things a plant needs; Station 4 – “Sunshine

and water,” where the attendees learned about the importance of water and sunshine.

Each “Little Sprout” had the opportunity to plant a bean or pea seed to take home and to plant a seed for “Ruby’s Garden” that will grow produce to be harvested for the food shelf.

The “Little Sprouts” used their “detective skills” and a magnifying glass to solve various “mysteries” by examining seeds in vegetables and fruit, the germination process, and investigated the differences in seed shapes and sizes, soil, and leaves. When their “detective” journey was done, they enjoyed light snacks at

Meadow voles

FROM PAGE 6

provide for adequate control in an irruption year. They also kill a variety of other species, some that are beneficial to your garden.

There are some considerations to deter or protect from voles. Habitat elimination or modification can help; keep fence line vegetation mowed or trimmed, also heavy grass areas should be frequently mowed. If unable to trim fence lines completely, consider using some of the 20 percent acetic acid (vinegar) products, such

as AllDown or Avenger to “kill” weeds or grass. Be aware that thick layers of organic mulch, can be “home” to voles. Consider employing hardware cloth cages (half-inch openings) around blueberry bushes at least 18 inches high and buried six inches deep to keep the voles from tunneling under. Around fruit trees to protect from possible winter damage, the Learning Store publication suggests the use of hardware cloth with quarter-inch openings wrapped around the trunk following the same minimum height and buried depth

dimensions as in the perimeter cage as I have used for blueberries.

There are other metal and plastic barriers that can be purchased at gardening stores for tree protection. With voles having a dislike for climbing heights, perhaps a raised bed may deter them from accessing your vegetable plantings.

So, if you live in vole country always be observant, watch for activity or damage, and be proactive as these rather cute but destructive critters can “catch” you by surprise.