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**Get ready.....
It's coming soon, to a
Darien park near you!**



**Darien's annual memorial
Arbor Day celebration**

**Friday, April 30, 2010, 9:30 am
Westwood Park, 75th and Fairview**

We will honor the lost lives of some of Darien's own special citizens. Local school children are invited to attend to learn about the importance of planting trees.

This half hour event is a whole community celebration, with the City of Darien, Darien Park District, Darien Police and Fire Departments, with Morton Arboretum often in attendance.

Our school children will raise and learn about butterflies, which they will release during the celebration. A sing-a-long "Tree Song" will be orchestrated by Sharon Convalle, while an ecumenical blessing is administered by our very own Tree Chaplain, Fr. Gavin. Seed packets, and tree and "green" literature are given to each child.

All of this is made possible through the generosity of The Gift of Carl Foundation, a 501 c-3 public charity. Visit www.giftofcarl.org for donations and more information.

Additional information will be made available soon. Check Darien's website at www.darien.il.us for any questions, or contact Kathy Minardi at kathymindari@comcast.net.



Ready, Set
BL   **M!**

With winter still spreading its white wonder it might seem hard to imagine that spring is right around the corner. Now that all the holiday decorations are packed away, it is time to start preparing for the blooming colors of spring! Your yard, garden, flower beds and planters are crying out for attention.

Prepare early and you will not be disappointed.

This month your Neighbors magazine is happy to share the insights of 3 valuable sources to help you prepare to Ready, Set and Bloom into spring!

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Ready, Set, Bloom!

Simple landscape improvements to tackle this spring

by *Jeanne Lombardo*

With the long winter days behind us and the promise of warmer days to come, now is the perfect time to start landscape improvements such as mulching and spring lawn maintenance. Turf damage caused by a tough winter; too much salt, snowplows or tire ruts can be repaired easily at this time.

Start by raking up the damaged grass and any debris that accumulated over the winter. Loosening up the existing soil with a garden rake and adding a thin layer of new soil is the best method to prepare the ground for new seed. Choosing the right seed is where most people get confused. Your local garden retailer will have prepackaged "lawn repair" seed mixes that will blend in with your existing grass. In our area these mixes will include bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, and fescue seed. The best time to apply seed is when the existing grass starts to green up, usually in mid to late April. Newly seeded areas need to be kept moist until the grass starts to grow, then water less frequently. Do not apply fertilizer or weed control to these areas until all the seed has germinated.

Fertilizing in the spring will help the lawn withstand summer drought stress, weeds and diseases. Spring is when grass is actively growing, which is the best time to apply fertilizer. Again, local garden retailers have fertilizers specially blended for spring application. These fertilizers are typically high in nitrogen, which aids in keeping the grass greener throughout the summer. Follow the application rates that are on the bag and you can't go wrong.

Crabgrass is a weed grass that doesn't appear in the lawn until summer but germinates in the spring. Applying a preemergent herbicide in the

spring will prevent the crabgrass seeds from germinating. The timing of this application is crucial for effective control. It needs to be applied when crabgrass seeds are germinating which is not easy to determine by looking at the lawn. In our area, crabgrass preventor needs to be applied in late April or early May. If you never had crabgrass in your lawn, you don't need to apply a preventor. Applying chemicals without just cause is wasting your time and money.

Spring is the best time to apply mulch to landscaped beds and tree rings. Mulch conserves moisture, controls weeds and eventually decomposes, adding nutrients to the soil. To start, remove all dead plant material and leaves from the beds. There should be a defined edge between grass areas and landscaped beds. Starting with a neat, weed free edge in the spring will reduce the amount of time spent on lawn maintenance the rest of the summer. There are many different types of mulch available and all the choices can be overwhelming. The best one for residential properties in our area is a dark hardwood mulch. It has the best consistency, is good for suppressing weeds, and visually mimics our natural soil color. Trees and shrubs should have a three to four inch layer of mulch, while perennial flowers should have only one to two inches. Annual flowerbeds should not be mulched unless you use an extremely fine product, such as cocoa shells, that won't harm the small, delicate stems. Keep mulch away from the crown (base) of the plants to prevent disease or rot.

Too much mulch can be harmful to the plants. Most beds do not need to be mulched every year. A two to three inch layer is all that is needed to be

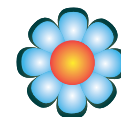


beneficial to the plants. In the spring, existing mulch can be turned or raked using a garden rake. This process will make the mulch look fresh as well as aid in the decomposition process. Sometimes a yellowish fluffy substance often referred to as "dog vomit fungus" grows in mulch. It is really a slime mold but is harmless to plants and usually goes away within a week.



Spending a little time and a few dollars on your lawn in the spring will make it easier to maintain all summer.

Jeanne Lombardo and her husband, Charley, are 11-year residents of Darien. She has a bachelor's degree in ornamental horticulture from the University of Illinois and worked in the landscaping industry for 10 years before becoming a full time mom to Jack & Mia. Her landscaping talents can be seen in the Hinswood subdivision where she volunteers.



The Perfect Solution... Planters

Planted containers are an appropriate addition to any size landscape. Whether on the balcony of a condo, welcoming visitors at your front door, or providing season-long interest on a patio, this special touch can easily be added with minimal planning. The key to success is to determine whether your container will be in sun or shade, crucial information when making your plant selection. If you already have a container, then you know the size and therefore how many plants you will need. Make sure the container has a hole in the bottom for proper drainage. Next, visit your favorite garden center and check out their plant selection. Walk around, gain inspiration and learn from their displays, pots that are already planted up and of course the plants themselves. Select plants being mindful of color combinations and be certain your choices have the same water and light requirements. Whether you prefer pastels or jewel tones, add a white or yellow plant to create contrast. Remember that color comes from foliage as well as the flower itself.

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Ready, Set, Bloom!

Garden blooms at local Junior High

by Larry States

The Cass Junior High Garden idea was originated by Marianne Tamosaitis, Cass Science Teacher. She wanted to give her seventh grade students the opportunity to experience the environment of ecosystems and plant subjects she was teaching. The garden would be established along side the science lab on the south side of the school building with immediate access from the lab.

In early 2004, Marianne approached the University of Illinois Extension in DuPage County and asked for help in developing the garden. The Extension provides many services to the community, one of which is the expertise of Master Gardeners. Master Gardeners are a group of volunteers trained by the University of Illinois educators to provide a network of gardening programs and horticultural

activities to educate the public. They help others "learn to grow" by answering questions, identifying insects, diseases and other plant problems. Master Gardeners staff educational display booths, present garden lectures and demonstrations, support community projects, and deliver lessons to youth.

Master Gardener, Larry States, met with teacher, Marianne, and the garden design and schedule plans were laid out. The first step was to amend the soil. The school's landscape service removed the grass sod and Marianne's husband, Victor, rototilled the soil. The first "hands dirty" work session was scheduled with student volunteers to amend the soil with mulch and peat moss that were donated by teacher Sharon Vandembrouke's husband. The 12' by 18' garden was ready for planting in the spring of 2004. The Hidden Garden Center donated the first flowers.

Subsequently, the PTC and Darien Rotary made financial donations for plants and supplies. The second student work session was in May to plant the first flowers and vegetables in the garden. Marianne and Master Gardeners tended to the garden periodically during the summer. In the fall, the new seventh grade students volunteered after school to weed, fertilize, mulch and plant bulbs. The routine of the spring/fall volunteering by the students continue to this day.

Since it is a "sun" garden, it has been planted with Asters, Sedum, Coneflowers, Golden Rod, Black-eyed Susan, Russian Sage, Purple Fountain Grass, Iris, Forsythia, Alberta Spruce, and many more plants. The Morton Arboretum contributed two specimen trees. Unfortunately, one was lost in a summer draught. This was a lesson to the students that even the best gardeners lose some plants. In 2008 the size of the garden was doubled.



Over the past six years, over twenty-four Master Gardeners have assisted in guiding the students in the development of their garden. A more important fact is several hundred seventh grade students have had a hand in the development of this garden.

The eagerness and energy of the students when working in the garden is commendable. Even when the weeding has to be done and you hear, "EEK - there is a white crawly thing." This is followed with a smile as it is explained, "that's a grub -- get it out of the garden or that's just a worm

-- he's good for the garden." The Cass Garden success is attributable to the efforts of the seventh grade students, parents and support organizations over the past six years and especially the dedication and enthusiasm of teacher Marianne Tamosaitis.

Larry States was encouraged by his wife Patti to apply to the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Program 15 years ago, because of his strong gardening interest. The victory garden he started as a child apparently sparked his gardening interest. He is a Graduate of the University of Pittsburgh and retired from Rockwell International. He moved to Naperville in 1974. He has four children and nine grandchildren. Most of his Extension volunteer time is spent working with the children's educational programs. The programs are: Cass Jr. High (Seventh Grade Garden), Easter Seals (Preschool), Downers Grove North High School (Special Ed), Squirmin Herman - Worms Program (Third Grade) and County Fair 4-H Judge.

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