

Master Gardeners Garden Fair a blooming success

Story and photos by Jackie Finch

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With intense concentration, Lyndin LaFever studies the rack of stickers on display at the annual Garden Fair. Turning the rack slowly, the 7-year-old picks out her favorite.

Why? "I like the colors and what it says," Lyndin says, holding out the sticker to display its message – Protect Wilderness. "That is important," she notes.

A beautiful spring day brought a huge turnout of plant lovers of all ages to the Garden Fair presented by Monroe County Master Gardeners at Switchyard Park.

"We've been busy ever since we opened," says Laurie Sullivan, helping visitors make bird feeders out of pine cones at the Family Activity Booth offered by Monroe County Master Gardeners.

The popular booth at the entrance to the Switchyard Park Pavilion had about 1,000 pine cones that volunteers had gathered for the activity. Laurie showed how to brush the cones with a mixture of vegetable shortening and corn meal flour and then gently put the sticky cone in a bowl of bird seed.

With a string attached, the free bird

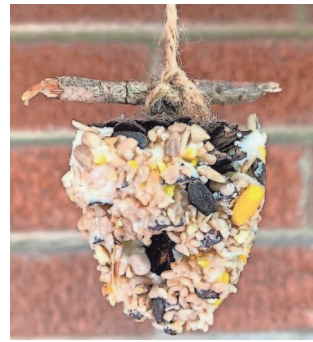


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Lyndin LaFever admires the stickers.



The pine cone bird feeder was a popular spot.



A pine cone bird feeder.



Warm Glass Wonder glistens in the sunlight.



Michael Bell sells maple syrup produced at the Hinkle Garton Farmstead.

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Lyndin LaFever chooses her favorite sticker.

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Garden Fair

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...were maple sugar candy, maple cream and maple sugar. The reasonably priced products help raise funds for garden and grounds projects at the Hinkle Garton Farmstead.

For Heather Jones, the Garden Fair was a chance to introduce her Small World Pruning business that she had established in 2015. To help make learning fun, Heather was offering a Tree IQ Test with plenty of sweet rewards of cookies and candies.

"Can trees move their branches by themselves?" Heather asks a stopper-by. The answer is surprising "yes."

How? Changes in the water status and other aspects of trees causes branches to move downward at night, almost as if falling asleep. "Trees

...treat was ready to hang wherever birds liked to gather. "You can make it with peanut butter, too," Laurie says. "But we know some people are allergic to peanuts so we used vegetable oil and corn meal instead."

Arts and crafts on display

At a nearby booth, artist Sue Westhues relaxed while visitors enjoyed her wide variety of decorative gourd art. "The hardest part of painting the gourds is cleaning them first," Sue says, adding that she has been creating gourd art for about three decades.

At the Hinkle Garton Farmstead table, Michael Bell was selling maple syrup produced at the farmstead. Also available

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Eryn Cusack displays her Earthborn Designs Art.

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move their branches about six times a night," Heather says.

Hungry visitors were finding their way to the Garden Thyme Café at the back of the Pavilion. Along with cookies and brownies, the menu also offered fruit cups, cheese sandwiches, drinks, pulled pork sandwiches and much more.

At the Local Folks Foods booth, Steven and Anita Spencer were busy showcasing their food products and greeting friends from area farmers' markets. All their products are preservative-free and contain no high-fructose corn syrup, oils, artificial colors or gluten ingredients, Steven says, offering samples.

Relating the story of how the family's Bloomington business, Earth Drops Handcrafted Soaps, began in 1996, David Lehman says, "We blame it on my wife's mother's skin condition."

His wife Cheryl says her mother had tried many soaps, most of which just made her skin considerably worse so Cheryl decided to research and make soap herself.

"Her grandmother and other relatives used to make their own handmade soap so Cheryl came up with Milk & Honey Oatmeal Soap. It has no chemicals, no artificial additives, preservatives, colorants or fragrances added," David says. "It made a big difference for her mother."

When the family's dog

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Edward Oehlman explains to Logan Peters how to plant a free Gray Dogwood seedling.



Owner of Small World Pruning, Heather Jones gives a Tree IQ Test to showgoers.

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Storm began having skin issues that resulted in expensive veterinarian pills and shots that made the problem even more difficult, the couple created Pet-ables Natural Handcrafted Soaps. "The soap is great for any kind of animal," David says.

Local Master Gardeners program

The Master Gardeners program began in Washington State in the 1970s and Purdue University sponsored the first Indiana program in 1978. Master Gardeners in Monroe County was chartered and the first meeting was held in 1989. The local group is connected to the statewide organization which includes training and education.

Over the years, several hundred local community members have taken the required training to become certified Master Gardeners. Currently, the Monroe County Master Gardeners Association has about 100 members.

A registered non-profit organization, the mission of Monroe County Master Gardeners Association is to promote the art, science and pleasure of gardening. The group works in cooperation with the Purdue Extension Service-Monroe County.

The first Garden Fair was held in 2010. Proceeds from the Garden Fair go to a grant program established in 2011.

Noting the terrific turnout for the Garden Fair, Edward Oehlman, Purdue University extension education agent for agriculture and natural resources, was distributing free Gray Dogwood seedlings, a native Indiana tree.

Since 2018, Garden Fair has been a non-invasive species event. Invasive species are dangerous to native plans and pollinators and can threaten habitat and feeding opportunities for wildlife, as well as being a threat to human health.

Edward also provided instructions on how to plant the seedlings. "The seedlings will flower two years from now with small white flowers," he says. "Then the tree will get white berries which the birds love. So you will be planting something that is beautiful and helps birds, too."



(Left) Cheryl and David Lehman with their Earth Drops Handcrafted Soaps.



David Lehman shows how to use a wooden soap dish to make soap last longer.

"Her grandmother and other relatives used to make their own handmade soap so Cheryl came up with Milk & Honey Oatmeal Soap. It has no chemicals, no artificial additives, preservatives, colorants or fragrances added."

David Lehman Earth Drops Handcrafted Soaps



Steven and Anita Spencer showcase their Local Folks Foods.



Sue Westhues creative gourd art



Creative names of Local Folks Foods