

# GROW-ZONE

A Quarterly Journal Review of our Seasons

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## Goldilocks in the Gardens

Visitors will have the pleasure of finding some new timbered characters throughout the gardens this year...



In late winter, Jay happened upon some chainsaw sculptures that were for sale by a local artist, and he was inspired! He got in touch with Luke Worth, the artist and owner of Meadowlark Chainsaw Carving LLC, located in nearby Sheboygan Falls, WI. He and Jay had a meeting to make plans for several wood sculptures to be created. These new art installments can now be enjoyed throughout the gardens. Goldilocks and the Three Bears can be found hanging out in the Bear Woods, and this rabbit bench that Luke is standing next to was placed near the rabbit enclosure in the Children's Education Farm. Keep an eye out for these and more wooden sculptures during your next garden visit.





## A Winter's Morning in the Gardens...



Though we didn't have many winter storms this past season, we enjoyed beautiful scenery in the gardens when it did snow. Warmer temperatures near the lake creates the perfect environment for snow to stick to all surfaces, as seen in the photo of the horse sculpture (above, left). Our two favorite farm mascots, Jayke and Buddy, often enjoy searching for mice in the fields after light snowfalls. (above, middle)

Lake Michigan can be unpredictable at all times of the year, but especially during the winter. Cold winds circulate and create waves that can be heard from more than a mile down the road at times. But every now and again, you can catch a glimpse of a calm, serene winter lake glistening in the sun. In the above right photo, you can see small "icebergs" floating past the farm on a sunny afternoon in February.

## ...Transitions to a Spring Afternoon...



It is hard to imagine the thousands of perennial plants lying in wait underground, while the earth is frosty and snow covered. But towards the end of February, we begin to see small green sprouts bursting forth, first in sunny spots, until eventually it's hard to find a patch of ground without a dash of greenery. These daffodils, crocuses, and spring beauties are among the first flowers to make an appearance each spring.

## ...In the Blink of an Eye!





## Maple Syrup Season 2025

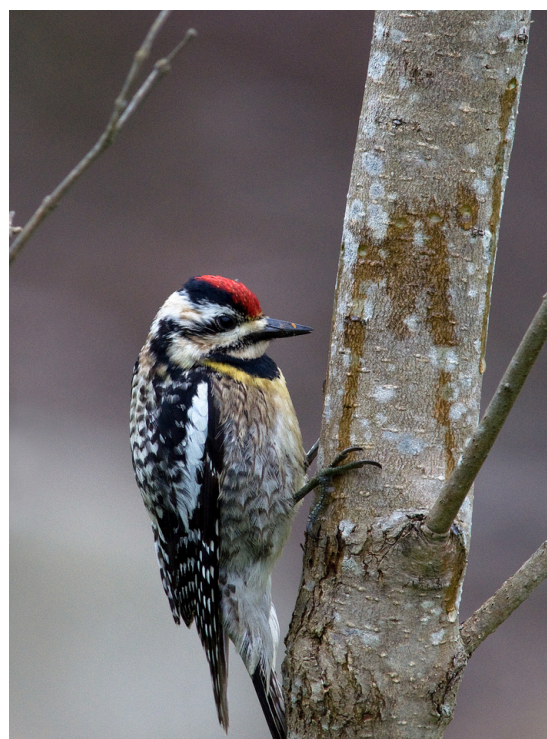
On Friday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 20 sugar maple trees were tapped in the Bear Woods and along the nearby ravine that runs into Lake Michigan. By the following Monday, there were already 55 gallons of sap ready to be collected...and the cooking process had begun! It takes about 40 gallons of sap to boil down into 1 gallon of syrup using the evaporator that we've installed atop a gas grill. Sap collections were fairly consistent throughout the three-week season, and we were able to make six batches of syrup that yielded a total of 4.2 gallons. We used a little extra syrup to make maple butter during one kitchen experiment – it was delicious!



**Above:** Our largest sugar maple tree was “double tapped” to experiment which side of the tree experienced more sap flow – the sunny side or the cold side. Unexpectedly, the cold side of the tree facing away from the sun ran first and faster in the case of this long-lived tree!

## Native American History

The temperature fluctuations that we experience in the Midwest is crucial to the production of maple syrup. The Native American tribes that once inhabited this land knew this and would set up “sugar camps” in this area to take advantage of the yearly bounty. Because of stories that have been passed down from tribal ancestors, it is believed that they first discovered the sweet sap within these trees by observing animals. This yellow-bellied sapsucker woodpecker is known to peck holes into sugar maple trees to drink the sugary sap that drips out. Chipmunks coming out of hibernation have also been historically observed nibbling branches to lick the tree sap. More recently, local maple syrup farmers have even seen white tailed deer sticking their heads into uncovered sap buckets to take a drink!



**Above:** A yellow-bellied sap sucker woodpecker perches on a young sugar maple tree in early spring.



## Ephemeral Wildflowers

The Bear Woods is a wonderful habitat for ephemeral wildflowers, a unique group of plants that grow in the understory of deciduous forests. Species like trilliums, Virginia bluebells and spring beauties take advantage of the sunlight that filters through the trees early in spring. They rush to spout leaves and flowers, get pollinated, and return to dormancy underground, all before the trees towering above grow their new leaves, thus shading out the understory. More species of ephemerals were introduced via plugs last fall and late winter along a new foot path that was built on the south end of the woods. Visiting school groups enjoyed ephemeral wildflower scavenger hunts by walking along this new circuit in April!



Wild Ginger



Spring Beauties



Trillium



Shooting Star



Virginia Bluebells

## Fungi Farming



We've taken on another new venture in the Bear Woods – mushroom farming! Our own Laura Behr directed this project in early April, inoculating cut logs with plugs filled with mushroom spores. Two types of edible fungi were planted, Nameko and PoHu oyster mushrooms. These types of fungi grow well on dead and rotting wood, so we used some box elder, beech and willow logs that had just been cut by our arborists. These logs were drilled and then filled with fungi plugs, which then had to be hammered to fit snugly. Wax was coated over each plugged hole to ensure the young fungal spores were protected from the lakeside elements, giving them time to spread throughout the logs. By the end of this summer or early fall, we should begin to see fungi growing on these stacks of logs spread throughout the Bear Woods.



**Above:** Laura Behr uses a hand drill to bore holes into an ash log. She shared her knowledge and past experiences farming fungi as she led this project with a team of garden staff.





## /// **Barn Construction** ///

A new barn is being constructed on the west side of the property. Contractors began work on this project in April. These photos show the project's first steps: laying the groundwork and lengthening the bioswale to account for the increased need for drainage in this area.



## **Transportation Museum Addition**

Beginning in the month of March, the construction for a new addition to the Transportation Museum has been underway. In just a few short months, the foundation and basement section have begun to take shape. In this new addition, the first floor will feature a fully furnished dining and lounge car, along with several display cases for railroad artifacts. The idea is to give you the feeling that you're riding in an authentic train car! The basement level will house a working model train that Jay has been collecting various themed elements for over time.



## **Planting Season Volunteers**

The planting season truly begins in the month of April, and we thankfully get some extra helpers during this time, when we need it most! The Lutheran High School students participate in an annual school-wide service day, and they are always willing to help us move compost into our vegetable gardens. Some students

even got a crash course on radish planting from Rob Pragalz. (left photos)

The local Sheboygan County Cancer Care Fund's members also participated in their annual Restoration Day planting activities out in the Turkey Trot Trail, where they planted native

trees and shrubs to increase the biodiversity of plant species in this trail system. (right photos)





**Phenology** - “the study of cyclic and seasonal natural phenomena, especially in relation to climate and plant and animal life.”

**Date:** February 20, 2025

**High Temp:** 27; Sunny

**Notes:** The first male northern cardinal is heard singing his territorial mating song - a sure sign of spring approaching



**Date:** March 18, 2025

**High Temp:** 41; Overcast

**Notes:** The weeping pussy willow shrubs outside the Bee Shed are opening their bud scales; a wolf's bane flower was spotted blooming outside of the Farm House



**Date:** April 15, 2025

**High Temp:** 46; Partly Cloudy

**Notes:** Cliff, Bank & Tree swallows are swooping through the prairie this morning and perching in trees together; the first daffodil is blooming near the Tennis Court Garden



**Date:** April 28, 2025

**High Temp:** 77; Sunny

**Notes:** The first hummingbird was spotted, along with the first Oriole of the season; marsh marigolds are blooming in Jayrassic Park