

# Good Living

Thursday, August 4, 2016 • Section C



## Sweet joys of 4-H

By MITCH MAERSCH

Ozaukee Press staff

Lori Polzin and her extended family have won a myriad of 4-H ribbons in a plethora of categories at the Ozaukee County Fair.

Family's champions in baking and other Ozaukee County Fair competitions have learned lessons in life from their long involvement with 4-H

Polzin, her sister Holly Hupfer and Holly's daughter Allison take this week off each year to bake and put the finishing touches on their entries.

But, the Town of Cedarburg residents said, the fair is more about camaraderie than competition.

"4-H is a family deal. We work together as a family," Polzin said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3C

ENTERING BAKING AND other categories at the Ozaukee County Fair has been a lifelong learning experience for (from left) Lori Polzin and her sister Holly Hupfer, both of the Town of Cedarburg. Polzin has helped friend Addie Larson (right) with her entries for years and encourages more people to get involved with 4-H and the fair. Photo by Sam Arendt

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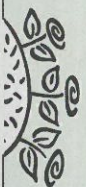
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## Ozaukee Gardener

.....Elizabeth O'Connell.....

### Lavender manages to thrive in garden's worst soil

Modern lavenders (*Lavandula*) are hybrids of several plants native to the shores of the Mediterranean and areas of western Asia and India. They are short-lived perennials in colder zones like ours that develop woody stems and shrub-like habits. Sited in the proper location, however, lavender can be a long-lasting addition to local gardens.

Lavender favors lean, well-drained, rocky soil and needs full sun. The plants are drought tolerant when established and actually like the alkaline soil in our area. The fragrant flowers may be dark purple to lilac, pink, white or rarely yellow.

Our lavender grows in some of the worst soil in our garden and in one of the worst locations. The bed is full of gravel from driveway and foundation repairs that were needed when we purchased, baked by reflected heat from the concrete drive and piled with packed snow in the winter months. Despite the conditions, the lavender has thrived there for more than 20 years.

Our original lavender plants were two short cultivars recommended for our climate. 'Hidcote' was the larger of the two, about 15 inches tall and wide with dark purple flower spikes. 'Munstead' was a shorter plant, about 12 inches tall with flowers that were a bluer shade of lavender. I was advised to give each plant plenty of room since lavender needs good air circulation, not to fertilize the plants and to be sure to let the end-of-the-year foliage stand through the winter to protect the crown from the cold.

Fast forward a couple of decades and our lavender bed has never been empty, although the original plants are all long gone. I can't even say I have either, 'Hidcote' or 'Munstead' anymore since the plants are all self-sown, hybrids produced by local pollinators. Our variety of lavender is about 15 inches tall and wide with pale purple, intensely fragrant blossoms.

The transition happened slowly and with no real help from me. Over time the old plants just got smaller, then finally disappeared. They were replaced by seedlings, a side benefit of the old foliage and end-of-season flowers in the garden over the winter.

Over the years I've also grown pink- and white-flowered lavender, but neither was as appealing as the traditional purple blossoms. None have shown signs of disease. I've read that soil that's too wet will cause lavender foliage to yellow. Lavender packed too closely together will show browning from fungus on the leaves and should be thinned to increase air flow.

There are a lot of varieties of lavender available today for northern gardeners, even some that have the larger, long-stemmed flower spikes of the commercial varieties. The best known is a Peace Tree Farm introduction, 'Phenomenal.' It's about 30 inches tall and wide with 5-inch-long flower spikes on foot-long stems. Hardy to zone 4a, 'Phenomenal' also shows less winter dieback than older cultivars.

Oil extracted from lavender flower buds is not only used in cosmetics and perfumes. The antiseptic qualities of the oil mean it has medicinal applications as well. There are also indications that lavender oil capsules and aroma therapy may have positive impact on sleep and anxiety problems. Lavender's scent has some advantages for gardeners, too. The same fragrance that humans find attractive repels deer, rabbits and other varmints that pillage garden plants.

*O'Connell and her husband Tom Hudson garden at their historic home on Grand Avenue in Port Washington and are members of the Port Washington Garden Club. Comments or questions may be e-mailed to mail@portgardenclub.org.*

## The Cover Story

OZAUKEE PRESS THURSDAY, AUGUST 4, 2016 3C



**FAIR ENTRANTS** LORI Polzin (from left), Addie Larson, Cindy Larson and Holly Hupfer began baking their goodies on Sunday for this week's competition. This is the first year Cindy Larson is participating, after encouragement from her daughter and Polzin.

*Photo by Sam Arndt*

### '4-H is a family deal—you spend quality time with the people you love'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1C

"You spend quality time with the people you love," Allison said.

The family has been involved with 4-H for decades, going back to when Lori, Holly and their three siblings were children. Their father, Roger Polzin, was president of the 4-H Leaders Association. Their brother David runs the Polzin Farms in Grafton and their sister Sharon Ziemer runs a dairy farm in the Town of Jackson and supervises the fair's dairy project. Their brother David lives in Minnesota.

"It has taught me many life skills that many people don't have," Holly said of 4-H. "I can sew a button. Most people don't have a clue."

"I made a quilt I still use," Lori said.

For Allison, who used to spend the entire year submitting entries in 60 categories, 4-H taught her life skills that helped the 23-year-old land her a career with the Boys Scouts. Her employer told her 4-H involvement and skills were big pluses.

Showing animals, Allison said, taught her business skills. She bought an animal, determined feed costs and whether or not she made money after it was sold.

"The animal project is a business itself," she said.

At Augustana College in Rock Island, Ill., the communications major minored in graphic design.

"That's cake decorating right there," she said.

Family members don't always have experience or expertise in some of the categories they enter.

"Usually, it seems like the projects we get most into are the ones we go out on a limb on," Allison said. "Lori said, 'Let's do sheep.' We knew nothing about sheep." Her lamb ended up being named grand champion. It was one of Allison's favorite projects, but she said she didn't win it by herself.

"There were a lot of people who helped me," she said.

"Even though you may have that grand champion animal, you help others along. That's what 4-H is all about," Holly said.

That grand champion banner is prominently displayed wherever Allison lives. It will never be folded, she said.

Sugar cookies, on the other hand, are one of Allison's specialties. She has

entered them in the fair since she was 4 years old when her grandma Arlene helped her make them. The cookies won a blue ribbon or first prize each year except once three years ago.

"I was so mad," she said. "I reclaimed the title the last two years."

Competition, however, is friendly. Family members try to top one another — Holly said months after the fair she will bring out her "first-place Christmas cookies" — but they also root for one another, including other entrants who have turned into friends.

The family does its fair share of recruiting as well. After Polzin helped Addie Larson in 4-H for years, she got her mom involved. This year, Cindy Larson is entering some baking entries.

"Try entering," Polzin said. "Everyone has something they do."

For those who think 4-H only involves

**"People don't realize the treasure we have in a free fair in the county. It's family entertainment. You can go anywhere to ride on rides. You can't go anywhere to see what's in Ozaukee County."**

agriculture and baking, the Polzins and Hupfers know otherwise.

One of 4-H's focuses has been science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Baking entries this year include sugar-free and gluten-free categories.

It hasn't always been that way. Lori remembers being taught how to make a plain muffin when she started with 4-H. "And it was not a good-tasting muffin," Holly said.

"Nobody thought to put a blueberry in there," Polzin said.

But Allison grew up learning to think outside the box. Beyond the ranked ribbons, special awards are given for different elements of projects, something that makes them stand out. Lori cautioned her each year that she may not receive a special award, but Allison always did.

"Don't be stagnant in your life," Polzin said. "What can you all learn?"

Some of the education comes during judging, when the experts analyze entries in a way not unlike that of some reality shows.

A judge in basket weaving once gave Allison advice on what she could do next year, guiding her to the next level.

"You can't say enough about the judge,

es," Polzin said.

One stands out. Bernice Bertl has been judging for decades. Allison said she has judged three county fairs in Illinois, using Bertl as a role model. Allison is amazed at her ability in the food categories.

"She has to be full by the end. I understood her pain, and I didn't eat half of what she ate," she said.

Sometimes, the learning came at a price. One year, Allison made two large, three-tiered cakes, including her sweet 16 birthday cake. Each family member took a layer out to the truck for delivery.

Polzin carried the bottom layer and sat in the front passenger seat. Holly closed the door, which bumped Polzin's elbow. The cake went flying across the car.

Allison cried. Polzin cried. They had taken photos of the cake they showed to the judge.

"She still gave me a first on that cake," Allison said.

**Awards become more difficult as people age out of 4-H. Multiple ribbons may be awarded for youth categories, but adults compete in open class in which the top four entries are chosen.**

That doesn't bother Polzin and family. They're just as excited to try new skills and inspire others than win.

"That's kinda how we learned about candy making. Lori said, 'You should do this,' Allison said.

Polzin, a former 4-H sewing leader known for her sewing, quilting and needlework, has been experimenting with quick breads and looks for recipes on Pinterest. Her favorites are antiques.

"I think my best recipes are the recipes that have been handed down," she said. Polzin has entered her peanut butter cookies 1990, and she is now passing that on to Holly, who is known for her baking. The experience of the fair is one the family hopes more people take the time to see and try.

"People don't realize the treasure we have, a free fair in the county. It's family entertainment," Polzin said.

"You can go anywhere to ride on rides. You can't go anywhere to see what's in Ozaukee County," Allison said.

Beyond that, the 4-H youth entries show development of the next generation.

"There are kids out there making a difference. They're going to be our next leaders because they're learning it," Polzin said.