



SPRING 2026

OUR MISSION is to enhance University City through artfully designed public gardens, community involvement, partnerships, and environmental education.



Dig in – For a Healthier You

It was a long, hard winter. Did you know that warmer, lengthening days not only cure the “winter blues,” but being outside working in a garden *also* has scientifically-proven positive effects on mood and overall health?

Attend the Spring Plant Sale *PREVIEW PARTY* Friday evening, April 24, from 5–7 PM and get a boost with hardy perennials, bright annual flowers, trees, shrubs, herbs, and vegetables, along with wine, cheese, and appetizers.

Reserve your place in advance at ucityinbloom.org or purchase your \$25 ticket at the door.

(continued) ►

Dig into Plant Health

Beneficial soil dwelling bacteria have an anti-inflammatory effect and strengthen our immune systems. U City in Bloom invites you to partake of this free prescription by attending this year's UCB Spring Plant Sale.

Browse the blooms – the Sale is free and open to the public on Saturday, April 25, from 9 AM – 2 PM, and Sunday, April 26, from 11 AM – 1 PM at the Heman Park Community Center, 975 Pennsylvania. Take home a boxful (or two, or three...) of young plants, get your hands dirty, feel better!

Knowledgeable gardeners will be on hand to advise you which plants best fit your particular landscape, sunny, shady, wet, or dry. The sale features an ample supply of plants native to our area in keeping with UCB's emphasis on incorporating them in its gardens to support native wildlife and insects.

Proceeds from the Sale are used to plan, plant, and maintain the scores of U City in Bloom's community gardens and large



planters throughout our community. In the month prior to the sale, volunteers will be dividing perennials from UCB gardens along with contributions from local gardeners and potting them up for sale.

If you have plants to donate, or wish to volunteer to help with this work, contact Linda Fried at lindafriedster@gmail.com.

Join the Fun, Join the Run

The Annual University City Memorial Day Run is more than a race; it's a beloved holiday tradition that has brought the community together for more than 50 years. **On Monday, May 25**, runners are invited to be part of the excitement of the 5K, 10K, or the Fun Run for kids and parents.



Whether you're a competitive runner, casual jogger, or just want to cheer from the sidelines, the 52nd Annual Memorial Day Run offers a high-energy start to the holiday weekend and welcomes in summer. The 5 and 10K races begin at 7:30 AM in front of the University City Public Library, 6701 Delmar, with the always-popular Fun Run at 9:15 AM, beginning just northwest of City Hall.

Run, volunteer, or come out to cheer for your neighbors. **For race details, registration, or volunteer opportunities, visit ucitymemorialdayrun.org.**

Turn Off Outdoor Lights While Birds are Migrating

U City in Bloom's emphasis on using native plants supports our native birds. Did you know that our area sits right in the middle of the Mississippi Flyway, a corridor used by migratory birds on their annual spring and fall journeys? Nearly half of all birds that migrate use this route, and about 40% of all waterfowl use it.

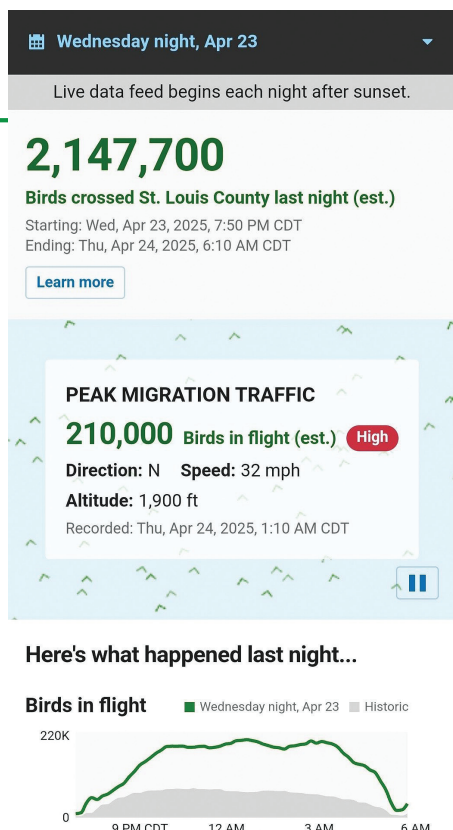
From early March through mid-June, and August through November, an amazing number of birds pass unseen overhead during the night hours. Artificial light can confuse their innate sense of direction. During the peak times of migration, you can help birds reach their destinations safely by turning off yard lights, string lights, up lights, and any other lighting that is primarily decorative and not necessary for safety. Even the Arch goes dark all month during April and September.

The wonderful app, BirdCast, shows you just how many million birds are passing overhead as we sleep. The illustration shows St. Louis County data for April 23 last spring. There is



more fascinating information on BirdCast, including the types of birds that are likely to be overhead, for each 24-hour period.

Give our feathered friends a little help, turn off your outdoor lights.





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A Letter From Our Director of Horticulture

Jesse Gilbertson

I write this on a brisk day that is getting colder by the minute. Anxious wind is buffeting my house and rattling the windows. Just yesterday it was near 70 degrees, and I was wearing shorts and a T-shirt. That is the nature of our weather in Saint Louis with the only consistency being the annual droughts we all dread. As Spring fast approaches, I wonder if it will be endless rain, making it impossible to work, or just cool temperatures and cloudy skies prolonging our wait for plants due to lack of sun. But maybe, like the last couple of years, it will be a long-extended spring or worse, a short one with a quick jump into our summer heat and drought. There are never any promises about the weather here.



But springtime does bring optimism, and I know I can count on that. The strong little tips of snowdrops are already making their way to see the sun. These harbingers of spring come early if you know where to look and are actually more representative of late winter. They bring to mind the many daffodils and tulips that will come soon after sharing the stage with bursting cherry blossoms, cloudy magnolias, purple redbuds, and glowing dogwoods that we all love. They are the promise. The promise of sun and warmth and renewal and of discovery. A promise always kept.



For U City in Bloom our own spring cycle travels alongside the promise of the plants we love and appreciate. We will enjoy over five thousand tulips planted in our gardens by volunteers and staff this past fall. They are such a force of color and add so much drama to our gardens. I'm always asked when passersby see us planting them, "What colors did you choose?" Go take a look and see for yourself; you won't regret it. The impressive tulip displays in the gardens at Centennial Commons or the Delmar Roundabout, the High School, Jackson and Pershing, and at Oakbrook and Delmar will be stunning; we can promise that with certainty.

Perennials will begin to push their leaves and blooms from winter dormancy with green, gold, and purple foliage and flowers

of every color imaginable. We celebrate this regrowth with our annual Spring Plant Sale where we bring to you perennials from our own gardens and those donated from fellow gardeners. We will take your perennial divisions too and you can be a part of our ever-growing operations and fund raising. There is something heartening about knowing plants you have enjoyed and nurtured are now giving pleasure in other gardens. We will have annuals picked out by our staff and a host of helpful volunteers to give advice and help you with your spring garden plans. All of this helps to fund our promise of future springs to come.

Trees perhaps have the most promises to keep. Besides their beauty, they will provide shade and cool the surroundings while muffling the urban noise. Insects are invited to feed and lay eggs and help feed the birds that live and thrive in their boughs and branches. This spring we anticipate the leaves of the new trees UCB has been planting in the Loop to replace the many that have died and been damaged over the last several years. Every spring we plant trees on Earth and Arbor Day, and we look forward to inviting you out to help. We will also bring you some tours of the trees we love and care for in the parks and gardens. And don't forget about the winding trails in Ruth Park Woods where we await the leaves of over four hundred native trees and shrubs planted over the last few years.

It wouldn't be a UCB spring without new projects and upgrades. We are excited to announce that we will be renovating the Delmar Roundabout with new permanent shrubs and perennials to highlight the ongoing floral and tulip displays chosen so artfully by our staff. We will continue our work to renovate and enhance the medians at Midland and Olive where the views would otherwise only be barren concrete and cars. There are two new satellite paths in Ruth Park Woods, and we are happy to announce that they are open and waiting to be explored. We are most excited to announce

a new vegetable garden to be built at our homebase next to the dog park on Vernon. This will be a space for community gardening and education with our UCB family and partners, coinciding with a renovation of our growing facilities there.



As I look up from my computer with these thoughts of all these promises of spring to come it seems as if the sun is trying a little harder to break the clouds and the winds have settled to a softer breeze. When these gloomy days of winter seem endless just know there is an unbroken promise of green grass, waving flowers and an undiscovered path this spring.

 U CITY IN BLOOM

NatureScapers

News From the Woods
Barbara Brain and Kathy Freese

It feels odd to be writing an article for UCB's Spring newsletter at the end of January when we're experiencing much colder and snowier weather than usual. Ruth Park Woods and the Bird Habitat Garden are safely tucked under a thick blanket of snow so there's little work to be done there until conditions change. My thoughts are definitely turning to spring though, and it will be spring, or almost, by the time you read this, so it's a perfect time to talk about our garden maintenance practices. But first an update on NatureScapers activities in 2025.



We had a busy and productive year in spite of breaks to accommodate the weather - cold, rain, heat, and drought. We continued our work in the Bird Garden during the growing season, weeding, cutting back where necessary, and enjoying the changes throughout the year. The spring rains resulted in spectacular blooms, but the garden struggled in the summer drought - the

normal ups and downs that every garden experiences. We avoided working in one area while a mother duck incubated her eggs. I worried that our activities would disturb her, but she ignored us and successfully hatched her large brood.

We kept up the momentum on our restoration efforts in the woods, too, and it's encouraging to look back at what we've accomplished. Most of our efforts have been focused on the creek trail that was densely covered with bush honeysuckle just over a year ago. Now, the only honeysuckle to be found is perched on the edge of the riverbank and it is awkward to get to. Rest assured though, we'll figure out how to tackle that too. Before being snowed in, we had moved on to a couple of areas above the creek trail that were infested with Japanese honeysuckle vine. This vine winds itself around whatever is in its path, sometimes to the extent that it's impossible to tell what's underneath it. It's very detailed work to remove it so we make slower progress than when we're demolishing bush honeysuckle.

One of the downsides to clearing so many invasive plants from the creek trail is that we've opened up a not so scenic view of the backside of businesses along Crixdale Avenue. I foresee a lot of tree and shrub planting in our future to establish a barrier that's attractive to humans while offering sustenance to wildlife. We also created two more large brush piles and extended the dead hedges that give us an excellent way to use the huge amount of debris we create and also provide wildlife with more places to shelter. They certainly provide some visual interest, too.



On one of our Saturday work mornings last April we were joined by an enthusiastic group of Washington University law students.



We removed a bumper crop of bush honeysuckle that day and I'm looking forward to hosting another law student group this coming April.

With the lengthening days and milder temperatures in March, many gardeners are anxious to get outside and get dirty. But being in a hurry to do "spring cleanup" could deprive pollinators and other invertebrates of necessary shelter: chrysalides housed in dried plant stalks; butterflies, moths and other beneficial insects hunkered in the leaf layer; and native bees snuggled in underground nests waiting for consistently warm temperatures.

"Cleanup" with a very light touch is in order. Leave as many leaves as possible where they fall as insects will emerge at various times and some may not show themselves until summer. When trimming plants leave 12" - 15" stems for bees to nest in. For more information, check out this article. <https://www.xerces.org/blog/dont-spring-into-garden-cleanup-too-soon>.

Adult mourning cloak butterflies overwinter in the leaf layer. Several emerged very early last spring in my garden and were attracted to the black walnut tree stump. Happy Spring!



Volunteer Groups

U City in Bloom welcomes groups of all sizes who are interested in opportunities to help beautify our community. Helping to improve our community through service is a wonderful way to involve your group members, employees or neighbors in a positive and rewarding way.



For more information regarding group or corporate volunteering, please visit: ucityinbloom.org/volunteers/groups/.

Don't Forget the Little Guys

Jesse Gilbertson, Director of Horticulture

There is something magical underfoot in many gardens and parks. Asleep for most of the year, resting so they can put their all into their early spring show, are the earliest and the smallest of the bulbs. Their time to shine is before the trees put out leafy canopies and perennials gobble up all the space. They are a welcome sight after a long winter and a necessary food source to help the early pollinators on the warm days of late winter and spring. I'm talking about snowdrops, crocus, scillas and chinodoxa.

The snowdrops (*Galanthus sp.*) tend to start first in February sending little spears of green up through the soil detailed with a white tip that eventually grows and droops like a pure white water drop opening three larger petals (tepals) with the blossom continuing to hang like a drop of snow. A lonely clump is lovely, but en masse they are an absolute spectacle.



"Tommies!!!" A hearty exclamation upon being spotted is a must.

Crocus tomasinianus, also called snow crocus, is one of my absolute favorite spring flowers and among the crocus genus I enjoy this lovely little blossom the most. Later crocus species are usually richer and deeper purples or bold golds. The softer more delicate colors of Tommies feel more



appropriate on a cool winter day. Though not in U City, Oak Knoll Park just south on Big Bend has millions of these lovely, soft pale lavender flowers naturalized throughout the park under the trees. I stop every year from the end of February into early March to walk among them. They absolutely glow in the sun.

There are many species of Scilla, but we primarily see *Scilla siberica* or Siberian squill. It is another excellent small bulb

for naturalizing. The nodding bell-shaped vibrant blue blooms are about 4-6 inches high, and they can cover a lot of ground absolutely begging for attention.

Chinodoxa or Glory of the Snow is a lovely little six-petaled star of blue, pink, or white bursting upward in little clusters. Blooming in March, they are very low-growing, but they put on quite a show, especially if they are contrasting with other early bloomers or snow, as their name implies.

All of these little guys I listed are certainly pretty on their own, but they make a bigger impression in masses and naturalized in drifts. Their bigger cousins like daffodils and tulips can make a big impression with just a couple flowers. These little bulbs planted in groups can conjure images of fairytale forests or English woodlands where they carpet the forest floor. When I plant these bulbs, I usually plant them in clusters of 3 to 5 bulbs per hole, so they have a bigger impact right away. These smaller bulbs don't cost as much as their more popular larger counterparts so buy lots of them. For a natural look consider planting the center of the drift closer together and spreading the holes out wider as they get further away from the center of the planting.

Perhaps my favorite thing about these flowers is the shared symphony they create with the other early bloomers. Trees and shrubs like witch hazel, cherries, magnolias, and redbuds bring a heavenly component to these denizens of the rich earth. Hellebores and primroses are blooming right alongside and share their spring green foliage too. It's a special treat to see snowdrops and winter aconite sharing the same scene. Winter aconite is perhaps our earliest yellow bloomer with a yellow that glows like the

sun. Get swept up in the show this spring



and take some time to bend down and admire the little guys.

We Love Our Volunteers!

Volunteers are the heart of U City in Bloom and the key to over forty years of success in our community. We can always use your help – in the gardens, at special events, for fundraising and all the behind-the-scenes tasks, such as maintaining our website and social media.

U City in Bloom thanks Libby O'Connor, who is retiring from our Board, for her years of service as our Volunteer Coordinator. We welcome Bobette Patton to the Board and are grateful that she has offered to continue Libby's vital work. Bobette has been a University City resident since 1988, has served on the University City Arts and Letters Board, and currently is a member of the

EDRST Board (Economic Development Retail Sales Tax Board). She is a Master Gardener and one of the UCB volunteers working with the students at Pershing Elementary School.

She'd love to hear from you if you are interested in volunteering in any way with U City in Bloom!

Visit ucityinbloom.org/volunteers/ to get in contact with Bobette.



Save the Dates, Upcoming Events



First Day of Spring!

Annual Plant Sale



Memorial Day Run



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Giving Tips for 2026

When contributing to U City in Bloom, here are a few new 2026 IRS donation rules to keep in mind:

- Individual taxpayers, who do not itemize, will now be able to claim a charitable deduction up to \$1000. Married couples filing jointly may deduct up to \$2000. Note that the deductions apply to cash gifts only to qualified public charities (i.e., it does not apply to donations of goods nor securities, etc.)

- For taxpayers who itemize, there are many new rules for 2026, including a new 0.5% of adjusted gross income floor applies, meaning a portion of donations may not be deductible*

* UCB does not provide tax nor legal advice. Consult with your advisor for your own tax situation.

UCB tax id: 43-1540073

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