



Washington County Master Gardeners Newsletter • July 2026

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

- **Please do not respond directly to this email with questions, comments, or observations.** Your message will go to a rarely monitored mailbox which will result in frustration for everyone involved. Instead, send your email message to the contact person listed in the article, or to wcmgnewsletter@gmail.com.
 - **The *Garden Thyme* is best viewed in your browser (instead of viewing it within your email).** Just click on the link at the top of this page that says "View this newsletter in your browser."
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JULY MEETING

Hunger in Arkansas

We hope to see you at our next WCMG monthly meeting on Tuesday, July 7, at 6:30 p.m. at the Washington County Extension Office. Our guest speaker is WCMG Dr. Peggy Sissel, who will present a program entitled "Hunger in Arkansas."

Dr. Sissel's research, teaching, writing, advocacy, and community service has been dedicated to the healthy development of children, families, and communities. Currently retired, she has worked as an associate professor of education and director of a university research center, a nonprofit executive, and small business owner. A pioneer in health literacy, in 1994 she was the first professional in Arkansas to raise awareness of the role low literacy can have on health care access and understanding. In 2002 she co-founded the statewide nonprofit Reach Out and Read Arkansas, whereby pediatricians are trained to advise parents about the importance of reading to babies during the well child visit. Over a 15-year period that program distributed almost one million books to families in medical clinics across the state. In 2005 Dr. Sissel founded and managed a company for



20 years which produced educational materials and provided consulting services in the area of emergent literacy and brain development.

Dr. Sissel holds a doctorate from the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University and received her master's degree from Michigan State University. The recipient of numerous awards, she is a former Kellogg Fellow and has served on dozens of boards and committees for groups around the nation. Her 50+ publications range from scholarly books, book chapters, and articles, as well as children's picture books, a curriculum guide, and teaching tools. She has regularly been invited to speak to groups and to provide information to the media about issues that affect children and families.

Peggy trained as a Master Gardener in Pulaski County in 2022–2023, and transferred to Washington County in 2024. She currently volunteers at the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History, Headquarters House, and the Veterans Healing Harvest Garden, and is co-team leader of the Garden Explorers program.

Taking Care of Business

We will vote on these items at our July 7 monthly business meeting.

May 2026 Business Meeting
Minutes

April 2026 Treasurer's Report

June 2026 Business Meeting
Minutes

May 2026 Treasurer's Report

Also to be voted on at the July 7 business meeting: Bylaws Exception

From President Pam Butler:

When we approved the revisions for the bylaws last October, we couldn't have foreseen the challenges with the nomination timeline for the officers and members-at-large. If we keep to the current timeline in the bylaws, elections will be held at our annual business meeting in November. This will leave the newly elected officers and board members only a few weeks to learn their new duties.

To avoid this, the current officers and members-at-large met in a specially called meeting and approved an exception for this year only. This temporary change replaces "annual" with "September" in several places to allow the nomination process to begin a few months earlier. This gives the Nominating Committee more time to recruit candidates and provides the candidates a longer time to learn their duties after the election in September. The proposed temporary changes (exceptions) are shown in **red** in the bylaws excerpts below.

The Bylaws Committee will consider permanent revisions later this year. For now, you, the membership, must vote in a regular business meeting to approve the temporary changes and provide an exception for this year only. We will vote on this at the July meeting.

If you have any questions, please [email me](#) or ask me at the meeting.

PROPOSED TEMPORARY CHANGES TO THE BYLAWS

From ARTICLE VI – Nominations and Elections

6.1 – Nominations Committee

- a. The Nominations Committee shall consist of three (3) members appointed by the President and approved by a majority vote of the remaining Executive Committee members, excluding the President.
- b. At least one (1) of the Nominations Committee members shall be a current ex-officio or past member of the Executive Committee.
- c. No one on the Nominations Committee shall be nominated for election.
- d. The Nominations Committee shall select its chair.
- e. The Nominations Committee shall be appointed at least three (3) months before the elections are conducted at the ~~Annual~~ **September** Business Meeting.
- f. The consent of a member to be nominated and serve adhering to the Bylaws and Policies & Procedures shall be obtained in writing or electronically.
- g. The slate of nominees for election to the Executive Committee shall be sent in writing (electronically when possible or by regular mail when an email address is not provided) to the general membership at least ten (10) days prior to the ~~Annual~~ **September** Business Meeting.
- h. Nominations close ten (10) days prior to the ~~Annual~~ **September** Business Meeting to allow adherence to item 6.1 f.

6.2 – Elections

- a. Elections shall take place at the ~~Annual~~ **September** Business Meeting.
 - b. Elections shall be by secret ballot if there is more than one (1) nominee running for the same position.
 - c. There must be a minimum of fifteen percent (15%) of the active membership present to conduct business.
- See 5.1.d-f for rules for voting at Membership Meetings.

From ARTICLE VII – EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

7.1 – Executive Committee Member Expectations

- a. Executive Committee members are expected to make attendance and informed participation at WCMG Membership Meetings and Executive Committee meetings a priority.
- b. Executive Committee officers and members may be removed from office if they are unable to perform their Executive Committee duties or do not comply with the WCMG Code of Conduct.
- c. Between the election in ~~November~~ **September** and the end of their terms in December, Executive Committee members will train their incoming counterparts about their duties, timelines, and procedures.

ALSO AT THE JULY MEETING

Service Pin Awards

Years of Service pins will be awarded at our July 7 meeting. All award recipients are encouraged to attend so we can properly recognize your contributions to WCMG!

5 Years. Nan Abbiatti, Alfi Anderson, Judy Cohea, Linda Hall, Teri Kinsey, Serenity Lewis, Annie Moore, Kathryn Sampson Stinson, Vicki Spencer, Karen Takemoto, Adriana Treadway, Carol Van

Scyoc, Janice Walker.

10 Years. Steve Brizzi, Paula Dutton, Martha McBride, Pat McKeown, Terry Merchant, Deby Prince.

Lifetime (15 Years). Margaret Barron, Dawn Fisher, Chuck Rutherford, Judy Smith, Joyce Starr.

Lifetime Plus 20 Years. Jayne Laster, Annette Pianalto.

Lifetime Plus 25 Years. Shirley Durning, Jan Hayes, Diane Standefer.

From Your President

PAM BUTLER

20 Things I Learned at the State Master Gardener Conference

1. **Jason Reeves** grows his hostas in black pots. Morning sun is okay for them.
2. He uses chicken grit in the bottom of his pots to keep the voles from eating the roots of his hostas.
3. **Jared Barnes** suggests we should "wild" our landscapes to make the best use of our resources. This results in naturalistic and ecological gardening.
4. Dr. Barnes uses a [Grimes Triangle](#) to determine the stress and disturbance tolerance of plants. This helps to match the right plant with the right place.
5. He also uses a [bloom calendar](#) to find seasonal combinations of blooming plants. I want to make one!



SPECIES	JANUARY			FEBRUARY			MARCH		
	E	M	L	E	M	L	E	M	L
Hamamelis virginiana									
Claytonia virginica									
Carex albicans									
Narcissus pseudonarcissus									
Narcissus tazetta									
Glandularia canadensis									
Glandularia canadensis 'Kathy's Kandy'									
Prunus persica									
Rhus aromatica									
Erythronium albidum									
Narcissus x odorus									
Fothergilla milleri 'Redneck Nation'									
Spiraea prunifolia 'Plena'									
Magnolia 'Susan'									
Xanthorhiza simplicissima									
Ipheion uniflorum									

Dr. Jared Barnes' bloom calendar.

6. **Rand Retzloff** said my cup plant needs more sun. The reason it's called a cup plant is because its leaves come together at the stem to form a cup that holds water. I wonder how tall it will grow in the full sun? This is also an example of "right plant, wrong place."



Pam's cup plant.

7. Several speakers mentioned "keystone plants" as good ones to use in our landscapes. [Here's a list of keystone plants by ecoregion.](#)

8. **Diana Polcar** showed pictures of her different gardens through the years. She talked about plants that have native sounding names but have been bred for beauty and are not good pollinator plants.

9. She recommended looking the plants up to make sure they have the characteristics you want. The plant tag may not give all the facts.

10. **Theo Witsell** told us about native grasslands in Arkansas and about the unbelievably wide variety of native plants we have growing in the wild in Arkansas. These natives include 21 kinds of milkweeds, 34 goldenrods, 52 kinds of hawthorns, 5 echinacea, and 16 sunflowers.

11. He had slides from places around the state that included prairies, marshes, woodlands, savannahs, glades, and other types of native areas.

12. Fayetteville is built on an age-old prairie.

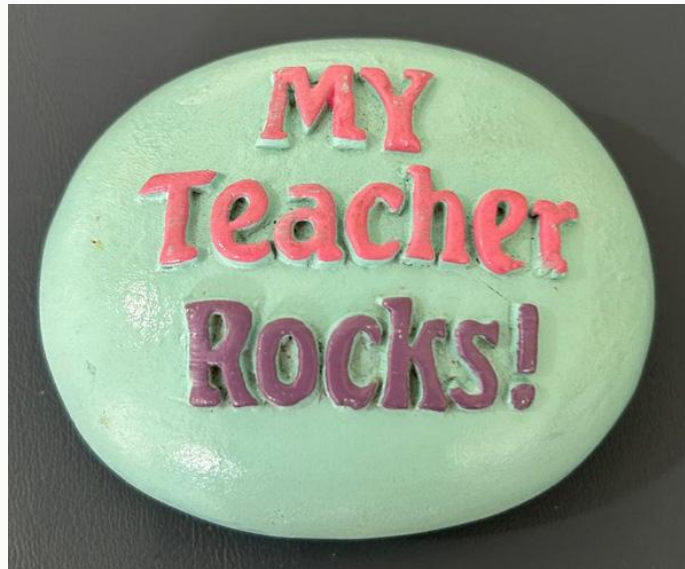
13. **Wendy Shoffner** spoke on using native plants in landscapes. She emphasized the importance of choosing plants that help our pollinators, birds, and serve as host plants for butterflies.

14. She gave us a list of keystone trees and shrubs she likes and well-behaved trees and shrubs.

15. She said we have 400-650 species of native bees in Arkansas. Ninety percent of these are solitary. Seventy percent of these are ground nesters, and the other thirty percent are cavity nesters.

16. **Janet Carson** ended our conference with a slide show from her garden. With her usual wit and humor, she told us about alfalfa pellets which should be applied in January, and about using organic mulch in a neutral color. She doesn't like red mulch at all!

17. She uses moisture granules (hydrogel) sparingly in her pots, which always have drainage holes.
18. She fertilizes her potted plants every two weeks using a water soluble fertilizer. (Her example was Miracle-Gro.)
19. Her favorite color is orange.
20. It's easy to bid for and get items you don't remember bidding on in the silent auction. I won a rock that says "My teacher rocks." I'll be happy to share!



Round Up Your White Elephants

DORIS CASSIDY and KATHY LAUNDER

Washington County Fair Committee co-chairs



Photo by [Giorgio Trovato](#) on [Unsplash](#).

Please gather up gently used items for our "White Elephant" sale at the Washington County Fair in August.

We will take

- Kitchen items – pots, pans, dishes
- Gardening supplies – plants, old tools, pots and gardening supplies
- Knick-knacks – you may not need it anymore but it might be someone else's treasure

We will not take clothing, shoes, or furniture.

Please bring your items to the July and August meetings. We will gladly take them. Happy sorting!

Garden Gate Tour Thrives Despite Rain

RUTHANNE HILL

Garden Gate Tour Committee



Visitors and WCMG volunteers alike enjoyed touring the gardens.

Photo courtesy of Garden Gate Tour Committee.

Saturday, June 6 brought the on-again-off-again rain common in the spring, but not even rain could deter over 500 plant lovers and gardeners from participating in the 2026 Garden Gate Tour.

Featuring seven private gardens and centered around the Extension Office Sanctioned Project, this was the largest tour, in number of both gardens and participants, since WCMG began hosting the event. Last month's event drew 555 attendees with a record 479 tickets sold, an increase of 207 tickets compared to the 2024 event. "An increase this large in just two short years wouldn't have

been possible without the hardworking committee and incredible garden hosts and volunteers," said two-term chair Laura Underwood. An additional 76 tickets were given to Master Gardeners volunteering on the tour and several lucky KUAF listeners.

The Garden Gate Tour is designed to bring people together in beautiful spaces while providing information pertinent to new and experienced gardeners alike. On their evaluation form, one anonymous participant shared, "I was inspired by seeing how other people design their gardens and handle landscape challenges. I also liked how all the gardens were different, showcasing different interests and emphases in the gardens."



WCMGS Jody Miskell and Mary Crumley shared their gardening wisdom with tourgoers.

Photo courtesy of Garden Gate Tour Committee.

The educational topics vary from tour to tour. This year's offerings included booths on water quality, soil testing, and food preservation, as well as information on the many resources and programs available to the community through the Washington County Extension Office. The Extension Office staff, experts in their respective fields, provided educational booths and sponsored a prize drawing for participants who visited each booth. Two rain barrels and five rain gauges were given away to seven lucky tour participants.

Another highlight was having Mariette Spidel represent the WCMG "Ask a Master" program at one of the gardens. A raincoat-clad Spidel cheerfully spent the entire day fielding questions and discussing gardening issues with appreciative tour participants.

"The Garden Gate Tour would not be possible without the help of our extremely dedicated volunteers," said volunteer chair Danna Grear, noting that many members volunteer each year. For this year's event, 33 Washington County Master Gardeners volunteered over 150 hours of their time to weed, plant, and mulch, helping the garden hosts get ready for the big day. On the day of the event, 80 volunteers contributed more than 350 hours greeting guests, checking tickets, and doing whatever was needed to ensure the day went smoothly.

Each Garden Gate Tour takes a full year to plan and prepare. While still wrapping up last month's event, the Garden Gate Tour Committee is already working on plans for next year. "We're currently in the process of selecting the gardens for 2027," said Gear, 2027 Garden Gate Tour chair, "and excited about several parts we'd like to expand and several new things we hope to add." Gear declined to share more saying, "You'll just have to wait and see, but you're not going to want to miss it!"



Light rain on tour day made garden colors pop!
Photo courtesy of Garden Gate Tour Committee.

YOUR IMPACT IN 2026

Volunteer Hours Snapshot

STEVE SHEARMAN

Vice President

The latest Volunteer Hours report offers a powerful look at what Master Gardeners are accomplishing together this year—and the results are impressive. Every hour you contribute helps sustain our gardens, support our programs, and extend our educational reach into the community.

Who's entering hours? As of June 15, 151 Master Gardeners and Trainees—only 57% of our members— have logged volunteer hours in 2026. That means nearly half of our volunteer activity may not yet be fully captured. These numbers guide the Executive Committee in allocating support,

sustaining projects, and demonstrating the value of our work to the broader community. If you've been volunteering but haven't logged your hours, now is a great time to catch up—your contributions matter and deserve to be counted.

Garden Gate Tour Leads the Way

With 820.75 hours, the Garden Gate Tour is currently the top single project in volunteer time. This reflects the incredible effort behind one of our most visible and impactful events. From planning to execution, your dedication makes this signature program a success year after year.

Education: At the Heart of Our Mission

We've logged an outstanding 3,469.5 educational hours so far this year. That's an incredible testament to our commitment to sharing knowledge, mentoring others, and strengthening our community through horticulture.

Top 5 Sanctioned Projects Cumulative Hours (February 15 to June 15)

1. BGO – 969.0
2. Garden Gate Tour – 820.75
3. Headquarters House – 805.0
4. Elkins Community Center – 642.0
5. Ask a Master Gardener – 416.75

Biggest Growth (May 15 to June 15)

1. Garden Gate Tour – +537.0
2. BGO – +236.3
3. Elkins Community Center – +204.0
4. HQ House – +193.0
5. West Fork – +86.5

Every hour you volunteer contributes to something bigger: beautiful, thriving gardens and meaningful educational outreach. Whether you're tending plants, answering questions, or supporting events, you are making a visible and lasting difference. As we move deeper into the season, your continued involvement—and your timely reporting—help ensure that all of this important work is recognized and sustained.

YOU ASKED FOR IT!

Project Chart and Passport Calendar

PAM BUTLER

President

Some people have mentioned how helpful it would be to have information about the sanctioned projects as they work towards filling their passports. Please use the [WCMG Projects Chart](#) and the [Passport Calendar](#) to help you finish your passports. The Projects Chart includes all the Sanctioned Projects including non-passport projects as well as the new Drake Field Terminal project.

Feel free to print these to have on hand. (The Projects Chart is an 8.5"x14" document, so bear that in mind if you're printing it out.)

Meet the Trainees

LYNETTE TERRELL

Carol Phillips

My love for gardening began early. My family had a farm on the Red River. We had a huge vegetable and fruit garden, enough for everyone who lived nearby to pick and enjoy. We would can and freeze. My mom made the best pickles. I can remember having purple fingers from shelling peas. We also had a home in town with beautiful flowers. Mom was a state president of the Garden Club.



Due to my work in medicine, I did not have time to garden while working. Soon after retirement, I started planting flowers and a few vegetables. Things were haphazard, driven by pictures from catalogues. Many choices were not the best for this environment. I have definitely benefited from the MG classes and training. My garden is much more organized and successful. Butterflies and hummingbirds love my yard!

Laura West

I was born and raised in southern Louisiana. As a child, we always had a vegetable garden and fruit trees. I was introduced to gardening early. I should say, I was introduced to picking, cleaning, and prepping the vegetables. My parents did the planting. My favorite fruit tree has always been the fig tree. When we picked figs, I would eat more than I would put in the bucket. As an adult, I did not plant a vegetable garden. My parents always grew enough for all of us.



When I moved to the New Orleans area in 1995, I became interested more in flower gardens. When we moved to Fayetteville in 2011, I quickly found out the soil here is nothing like the soil in Louisiana. I went from nice soil to rocky soil. Needless to say, I was struggling to get things to grow and look nice.

I retired in 2024 and wanted to volunteer somewhere. I heard about the MG program and it was perfect. I can learn how to have a beautiful yard and how to grow my own vegetables while volunteering. I absolutely love this program. I have met so many incredible people and have learned so much already.

My family says I have a talent for decorating for holidays and decorating our deck with plants. I have a good eye for what goes together.

Being from southern Louisiana has helped me to be a great cook.

Headquarters House WCMG Project Recognized

JAN LEFLER

Headquarters House Gardens co-chair



Headquarters House sanctioned project co-chairs recently represented WCMG in receiving an award from the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Back row, from left: Jan Lefler, Janice Walker. Front row, from left: Betty Nichols, Kristi Campbell, Kathy Launder. Photo courtesy of the Marion Chapter NSDAR.

The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR) presented its 2026 Historic Preservation Award to the Washington County Master Gardeners for their excellent volunteer work preserving Headquarters House Museum gardens.

Kristina Merriman, Marion Chapter NSDAR regent, and Dr. Laurie Anderson, Marion Chapter NSDAR historian, cited the Master Gardeners' "dedication to researching the era for appropriate plants [and] planting them and tending to their care over the decades [which] represents not only historical preservation efforts, but lends to the historical context of the 1853 Greek Revival structure in an outstanding way."

A certificate and medal were presented to WCMG volunteers on May 9. Following the morning program, Master Gardeners provided a walking tour of the Headquarters House Historic Gardens for DAR members.

It was an honor for WCMG to receive this recognition.

June Photo of the Month Contest: "Vegetable Gardens"



FIRST PLACE
"Purple Flower" by Swathi Munagala



SECOND PLACE

The July photo contest theme is "Perennial Flowers." Deadline to enter is July 15. Contest details are available on the [Photo of the Month Competition](#) webpage. Questions? Email wcmgphotos@gmail.com.

Introducing Our Photography Committee!

PAM BUTLER

President



Photo by [Landon Martin](#) on [Unsplash](#).

The Photography Committee has been newly formed this year, but the names and faces may already be familiar from the many other projects and committees where they are actively involved.

- **Kitty Sanders** is the chair. She and **Kathryn Birkhead** photograph our award recipients for publication in the *Garden Thyme*.
- **Caleb Israel** records our monthly meetings (so you may watch later if you can't attend in person).
- **Susan Young** takes the headshots for new Master Gardeners for our photo directory on our website. If you need a new headshot for the directory, please contact [Susan](#).

The purpose of our Photography Committee is simply to take the posed photographs for awards and new member headshots and to record our regular meetings. It is not designed to cover every WCMG event in the county.

Our members are the best photographers for sanctioned projects and other WCMG events.

We encourage everyone to use your phone or camera to take photos as you volunteer at different projects.

- **For sharing within our WCMG organization**, photos are easily uploaded to our private WCMG Facebook group (you need to be a member of the group to share photos) or may be sent to Judy Smith for publication in the *Garden Thyme*. Sharing your photos helps us stay connected, and I look forward to seeing your photos shared in our Facebook group!
- **If you would like to share WCMG-related photos on our public Facebook page and Instagram accounts**, and if you have permission from all folks seen in the image(s), send the photos to [Laura Underwood](#) or [Mariette Spidel](#).
- **Please use discretion** when photographing children. Permission (preferably in writing) is needed for those who are underage if faces are recognizable. And always be considerate of fellow volunteers. If anyone isn't comfortable appearing in a photo, it's okay to exclude him/her.

We hope you continue to enjoy the photos and the monthly meeting recordings from our Photography Committee. If you have any questions, [please reach out to me via email](#).

Gardening and Community Events

This calendar features events close to home. To stay in the know about MG and UADA gardening-related activities across Arkansas, [sign up for the state calendar of events](#) sent by the Extension Service headquarters in Little Rock.

July 3, 9:00–10:30 a.m. HIKING THROUGH THE CONSERVATION OF THE OZARK CHINQUAPIN TREE. Lake Fort Smith State Park. Free. [For more information](#).

July 7, 5:00–7:00 p.m. TERRIFIC TUESDAY NIGHT. Also on July 14, 21, and 28. Botanical Garden of the Ozarks. Free, but tickets required. [For more information](#).

July 8, 1:00–2:00 p.m. APPLE ORCHARD TOUR. Prairie Grove Battlefield State Park. Free. [For more information](#).

July 16, 12:00–1:00 p.m. GROW YOUR OWN GROCERIES: BRUSSELS SPROUTS. Zoom program by UADA extension agents. Free. [For more information](#).

Contact Information

The *Garden Thyme* email address is wcmgnewsletter@gmail.com. Please use this address for submissions and for questions and comments specific to the newsletter. For other needs, please contact the appropriate officer or chairperson listed in your WCMG Member Resource Guide.

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE

[Judy Smith](#), managing editor/submissions; [Mary McCully](#), editor/submissions and videos; [Pam Butler](#), reporter; [Lynette Terrell](#), reporter; [Susan Young](#), production assistant.

Send all newsletter submissions to Judy Smith.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

[Pam Butler](#), president; [Steve Shearman](#), vice president; [Carole Ball](#), secretary; [Julie Murray](#), treasurer; [Caleb Israel](#), assistant treasurer. Members at large: [Kim Coslett](#), [Mary McCully](#), [Judi Sartwell](#). Ex officio: [Alfi Anderson](#), past president; [Colin Massey](#), Washington County extension agent for agriculture and horticulture.



WCMG Facebook Group
(private)



WCMG Facebook Page
(public)



WCMG Instagram



WCMG Website



WCEX Website

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