

Master Gardener Projects (published 2025-01-03)
Contributed

There's still time to enroll! 2026 **MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM** Enroll now for classes at the Sullivan County Extension office beginning January 27, 2026. Go to [2026 Tennessee Extension Master Gardener Program/Training | Sullivan County](https://extension.tennessee.edu/2026-tennessee-extension-master-gardener-program-training-sullivan-county) for details.

“Featured Project” – Healing Gardens at Johnson City Medical Center, Woodridge Hospital and Ronald McDonald House

Master Gardeners continue to plant and maintain gardens at the Johnson City Medical Center, Woodridge Hospital and Ronald McDonald House. Construction on the Children's Hospital is almost complete and the barriers around those impacted gardens are coming down. We are excited to restore the gardens back their previous state.

We have gotten advance warning that construction in the Emergency Department area will impact several more gardens in the coming year. Meanwhile, we continue to get very positive feedback from patients, visitors and staff who appreciate having tranquil respite areas where they can relax and enjoy calming landscapes.

“Featured Project” – Discovery Garden at the Hands-On Museum in Gray

The Discovery Garden is located at the Gray Fossil Site and the Hands On! Discovery Center. NETMGA adopted this project in January 2021 before the garden area was open to the public. The Hands On! Discovery Center Discovery Garden is approximately 10,000 square feet of native shrubs, trees, grasses, flowering perennials, and vines. It serves as a sustainable pollinator garden and a learning experience for the 90,000 visitors to the museum each year. The garden formally opened in May 2022 and was certified as a Monarch Butterfly Waystation that same year.

Many of the plants in the garden are identical to or in the same family as ones that existed at this site over 4 million years ago. Our Master Gardeners enjoy a great relationship with the museum staff and coordinate plantings with them to ensure that any new plants are representative of plant fossils found on the site. Our volunteers typically meet Friday mornings and on other days for special projects and events.

We are continuing to help the Gray Fossil Site with maintenance of the water fountain near the museum entrance, addition of landscaping around the main entrance sign, and maintenance of the rock display also near the entrance to the museum. We have also added more water lilies, water irises, and hyacinths to the fountain. We hosted arborist Ed Sheffy of RowanTree Service in March of this year to show us the latest techniques in tree and shrub pruning. We have also harvested seeds from the garden and conducted a seed viability program with garden visitors.

Priorities in maintaining the garden are:

- Relevance to the paleontological history of the site
- Inspiring wonder and creating drama through the use of texture, size, fragrance, and color of the plants in the garden
- Maintaining a habitat for insects, birds, and small mammals and modeling sustainable gardening practices
- Maintaining a “community of plants” for museum guests to enjoy
- Sharing our knowledge of these plants with the museum visitors and summer camp youth, as well as conducting garden tours during museum events.

“Featured Project” – Exchange Place Living History Farm

The Master Gardeners do a variety of things at Exchange Place Living History Farm. Our major project is to maintain the Demonstration Garden where we grow heirloom and new hybrid varieties of a wide variety of vegetables. Some of vegetables we grow are varieties that are not widely known locally including Asian yard long beans, Yacon aka Peruvian Ground Apple, and Bok Choy. We also maintain two flower beds creating pollinator attraction.

At the various Exchange Place events such as the Spring, Summer and Fall festival we man the garden so that we can answer questions about growing different vegetables and how we are able to grow vegetables 3 seasons and harvest four seasons using row cover. We also educate about raised beds and using compost and mulch for vegetable gardening. We work for two hours on Wednesday mornings for roughly 10 months of the year.

Other sites where we volunteer are: Branch House in Blountville, Carver Peace Gardens in Johnson City, Church Hill Senior Center in Church Hill, Harvest of Hope in Kingsport, The Nature Center at Steele Creek Park in Bristol, Old Deery Inn in Blountville, Rocky Mount Living History Museum in Piney Flats, Tipton-Haynes State Historic Site in Johnson City, Unicoi County Hospital in Erwin and Warriors’ Path State Park in Kingsport.

To find out more about all our projects, go to: <https://www.netmga.net/projects-and-photo-gallery/>

If you want to be a part of doing a lot of good deeds, sign up for the classes and expand your world.

How do I ask a question?

If you have questions for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide..