



Official Publication

# Master Gardener Thymes

Volume 23, Issue 1 Jan-Feb 2026

## Another Year to End; A New Year to Start!

As the year comes to an end I reflect on what 2025 brought, both good and not so good. I believe that doing this prepares me to meet the new year...new opportunities, new things to try, etc.

I'm excited about ideas I have to start a new pollinator garden at my house, and to revamp my existing gardens. What are your plans for 2026?

New seed and flower catalogs are arriving and they are great to look at when planning (it's too cold to go outside!).

I also like to get my CEUs for 2026 as early as possible. There are learning opportunities at the end of this newsletter.



shutterstock.com · 1712681494

### NETMGA JANUARY BOARD MEETING

The next NETMGA Board meeting will be a Potluck Luck Lunch Meeting on **January 5**, 12:00pm; Ron Ramsey Regional Agriculture Center, 140 Spurgeon Ln, Blountville, TN 37617.

### NETMGA FEBRUARY MEMBERSHIP AWARDS DINNER

**February 2**. More information will be provided soon.

### WHAT'S INSIDE:

- NETMGA News
- Mark Your Calendar!
- Featured Project
- New Year's Gardening Resolutions
- January/February 2026 Calendar of Events

## **NETMGA News!!**

### **NETMGA December Christmas Dinner and Program Recap**

We had another wonderful Christmas meeting with Eugene Wolfe presenting music, songs, and stories to bring back memories of earlier Christmas days.

We had approximately twenty volunteers to make the event possible. Our organization is so blessed to have such a serving group of gardeners. The decorations were lovely thanks to Susie Morrison and her decorating team. Teresa Gaffner led the kitchen team and what a wonderful job they did serving everyone in an efficient and speedy manner. Donna Fowler led the greeters and registration folks for an easy way to begin the evening. Thanks to all who helped!

The evening began with recognition of Master Gardeners that we have lost this year. Nancy Shilling honored Carolyn Martin with a history of her life and accomplishments as a Master Gardener. Phyllis Morgan was honored by Terri Agold. Phyllis and Terri were Master Gardeners at Carver Peace Gardens. Phyllis was instrumental in advancing the Jr. Gees (Kids gardening program) as well as assisting with the expansion of the raised bed program and beautifying the garden.

Melody Teague and Karen Rowell each welcomed the attendees with a brief welcome. Karen Rowell led the election of the 2026 Board Officers which will begin their term in January 2026.

Eugene then presented his program with the same kindness, caring and love that he did last year. Everyone closed the program with a song – We Wish You a Merry Christmas.

It was a wonderful event and a good way to begin the holiday season.



### **February Membership Meeting**

The Annual Awards Banquet will be held February 2, 2026. Watch for more information coming soon.

### **Program Committee**

There will be meeting in January, and we are always looking for helpers! At this meeting we will be reviewing the responses of the survey master gardeners completed in October and November to plan the meetings for 2026.

It looks like there will be a lot to do in 2026 as well as having fun with our fellow master gardeners.

**Melody Rose** sent the following in an **email** to all the master gardeners.

“As we gear up for 2026, we have a few things for you to consider...

1. *Wilderness Wildlife Week* in Pigeon Forge (January 5-8) is a fun event for kids and adults alike (and great for CEU hours and to learn about new programs we can implement here). Check out their website here: [Wilderness Wildlife Week in Pigeon Forge, TN](#)
2. The *Pick TN conference* is January 15-17 in case anyone is interested: [Pick TN Conference - Home](#)
3. *TEMG Intern Training* begins February 3rd. We are doing asynchronous this year. If you want to assist with some teaching, please let me know. Susie, Gus, and Earl are all on board to assist...so again, please send me an email ASAP, as I am going to have a meeting with those interested in early January.
4. Frank and Sue D. are heading up the Garden Show at Meadowview this year in Paulina's absence. The dates for that are March 6-8. They will be in contact, along with Sherry, at the first of the year for sign-ups as well.
5. I am scheduling a few *Learning Journey's* FY26. We will load up with 12 in the van to explore and learn. Cost will be \$10.00/person to help cover fuel. Keep these dates in mind FY26 if you are interested (I'll be sending additional details in January):
  1. *Wildflower Walk* (large spring ephemeral display, especially trout lilies and my favorite presidential plant) at Norris Dam (day trip). It's an easy 3-mile in and out walk along the Clinch River.
  2. Herb Fest in Asheville on Friday, April 24th (day trip) with lots of native plants to choose from (and some great classes).
  3. TEMG State Conference is May 27-29 in Knoxville (and your state hort team is planning, so we are gearing up for a fun and fabulous opportunity for learning and networking). More details coming in January...2-night stay.
  4. Fall Gardener's Festival in Crossville, August 24-25 (overnight stay).
6. Here are some key dates you don't wanna miss from our State Hort team:
  1. *May Food Production Lunch & Learn* series focused on sustainability practices in home food production with sessions that focus on composting, soils and cover crops, disease resistance, and planting for pollinators and beneficials on May 5th, 12th, 19th from 12:30-1:30 eastern via zoom

2. Office Hours Live Diagnostics Visits with our Whole Hort Team on June 12th, July 10th, August 15th and September 11th
3. Get all the information about both of these series by signing up using the Google Form linked here: [Google Sign Up Sheet for 2026 UT Extension May Month and Summer Office Hours Sessions](#)
7. For 2025 class members: Exciting opportunity to get in on our *Leveraging Leadership Series!!!* We will send invites in March to 2025 class participants statewide; host two zooms (July and August); and have an in-person day in Crossville on September 22nd... You don't wanna miss this!

Those are all the things I am aware of right now, BUT I do have gardening (fruit, veggie, herbs, companions) classes on slate FY26. I am finalizing details for that now.

Again, thanks to all who have input hours and completed their MOA's! I greatly appreciate y'all getting that knocked out before the holidays.

Take care, friends...I will see you in 2026!

- **Melody Rose**

## **Publicity Committee**

The Publicity Committee consists of writers for Ask-A-Master Gardener articles team and a new Community Team. The NETMGA Community Team will be going to local events to provide information about NETMGA. Laurin Hagy has been leading this team for the last few months, and we are looking forward to this new opportunity to spread the news about master gardening in northeast Tennessee. This group will be available to attend functions at project sites as well as requests from local events. Laurin was able to showcase our program at Rocky Mount, JC Public Library, Jonesboro Garden Gala and more. We are hoping to be present at Farmer's Markets in 2026. If you are interested in working with this team, just let Brenda McKinnis ([jbmckinnis4@gmail.com](mailto:jbmckinnis4@gmail.com)) know.

Ask-A-Master-Gardener articles for your reading pleasure can be found on the NETMGA website: <https://www.netmga.net> – ASK-A-MASTER GARDENER tab.

Some of the most recent articles include:

- Winter Sowing
- Garden Journals
- Why I Became a Master Gardener
- Planning Your 2026 Garden (1/17/2026)

## Mark Your Calendar!

### January SAPS Program - Nancy Lawson, The Humane Gardener



Nancy Lawson, author, naturalist, and founder of The Humane Garden, will present "A World of Discovery: Nurturing sensory wildscapes through creative land-healing practices" on Thursday, 26 **January 15, 2026** at 7 pm in a free Zoom presentation. This program is sponsored by Southern Appalachian Plant Society (SAPS). To join, register in advance at the SAPS website <http://saps.us>. For more information, call 423-348-6572 or e-mail [sapsnews@gmail.com](mailto:sapsnews@gmail.com) . Registration deadline is noon on January 15.

Much has been written about landscaping to create a sense of place for humans. But who has a better sense of place than the plants and animals who've inhabited our communities for millennia? What do we miss when we focus more on the human-cultural sense of aesthetics than on the sensory experiences of our wild neighbors? Conventional practices interfere with other organisms' abilities to interact with their environment in hidden and unintended ways. The lexicon of landscaping often reinforces these dynamics. Through science, heart, our powers of observation, and a more expansive language for our approaches to land-healing, we can learn to mitigate these disruptions and create sensory refuges in an increasingly noisy world.

Nancy Lawson is the author of *The Humane Gardener: Nurturing a Backyard Habitat for Wildlife* and *Wildscape: Trilling Chipmunks, Beckoning Blooms, Salty Butterflies, and other Sensory Wonders of Nature*. A nature writer, habitat consultant, public speaker, and founder of The Humane Gardener, she pioneers creative wildlife-friendly landscaping methods. Nancy co-chairs Howard County Bee City in Maryland and co-launched a community science project, Monarch Rx, after observing a little-known butterfly behavior in her own garden. Her books and other work have been featured in *Science Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Oprah magazine*, *Entomology Today*, *Ecological Entomology*, and *American Gardener*. Her most recent book, *Wildscape*, received an honorable mention in the American Horticultural Society's national book awards and was a finalist for the 2024 AAAS/Subaru Prize for Excellence in Science Books.

### February Herb Saplings Meeting

Herb Saplings meeting will be held **February 5** at 7 pm at Exchange Place. Kat Hayes, owner and director of Herbalachia, will speak on Herbal Support for Stress and Resilience. For more information, e-mail [sapsnews@gmail.com](mailto:sapsnews@gmail.com)

## February SAPS Program - “Beyond Monarchs and Honeybees - The Case for Diversity”

Entomologist Randi Eckel will present “Beyond Monarchs and Honeybees - The Case for Diversity” on Thursday, **February 19, 2026** at 7 pm in a free Zoom presentation. This program is sponsored by Southern Appalachian Plant Society (SAPS). To join, register in advance at the SAPS website <http://saps.us> . For more information, call 423-348-6572 or e-mail [sapsnews@gmail.com](mailto:sapsnews@gmail.com) . Registration deadline is noon on February 19.



Butterflies and honeybees have been getting a lot of press – and a lot of folks have stepped up to help them, which is good. But with more than 10,000 species of native butterflies, moths and bees in the US, as well many other creatures that depend upon native plants, it is critical that we look beyond just two species. In this presentation Dr. Eckel will examine communities, specialists, and the critical role of diversity in our midst.

Dr. Randi Eckel has been working with native plants for over 35 years. She founded the mail-order native plant nursery Toadshade Wildflower Farm in 1996 to further public awareness and availability of native plants. A life-long naturalist, lover of nature, entomologist, and confirmed plant and ecology nerd, Randi specializes in the interactions between plants and other living things. She is known for her lively and engaging lectures and workshops on growing and propagating native plants, and offers interesting, nuanced information on the complex issues facing native plants and native plant communities.

### ***“Featured Project” – Rocky Mount State Historic Site***

Rocky Mount has been blessed with many dedicated Master Gardeners who care for a variety of gardens.

We have a 1791 vegetable garden, where vegetables are used in the kitchen, and surplus is taken to nonprofit facilities. There is also an herb garden next to the kitchen that provides herbs for cooking and for medical purposes. Throughout the year we teach children about their uses and have seminars for adults. The enslaved garden is planted with a variety of plants that would have been used by the enslaved.



There is Mrs. Cobb's cutting garden; these plants have no other purpose than to be beautiful. Another garden that only the wealthy could afford. Also, in front of the Cobb house is the shade garden. Rocky Mount also has a very large pollinator garden in front of the museum that blooms every year. There is a big orchard with wide variety of fruits; a favorite spot for visitors to pick a great snack. Then there are the front gate gardens and the front sign gardens that are great examples of native plants.



The trails near what is called the Pig Pond have been enhanced and we are planning to add a storybook station where nature and historical books will be offered on a regular schedule. The trail enters into an additional trail going thru the historical grassland or to the Pig Pond - another great place to picnic and bird watch. Rocky Mount has been designated as a great place for birdwatching.

Across the road from the Historical Site is Sonja's Garden, near the large rebuilt tobacco barn. The Tobacco Barn is planned as a museum to show the story of tobacco and how it was part of Tennessee history. The gazebo and the new pergola provide places to sit and enjoy the garden over the seasons.

Neighbors and visitors love to just relax and view the large pond and have a picnic. The pond has been called an outstanding place to observe insects and birds. ETSU students use it for class work, and it has been used as a graduate thesis. It is a place that is prime for a great future gardening project.

Also, in the area around the Tobacco Barn there are several areas of reforestation projects. Another potential project that needs work is the original spring, the dam area and the stream across the road from Cobb house. All this land is part of one of the oldest continuing farms in Tennessee. With over fifty acres there are just so many other projects to enhance the area and help tell the story of Tennessee farmland and the native grasses.

Come visit us and help us to tell our story.

# **New Year's Gardening Resolutions**

- Botanical Interests

Here are some ideas to spark your New Year's gardening resolutions:

**Expand Your Plant Knowledge.**

Commit to learning about about new plant species and their unique care requirements.

**Inspire Others to Garden!**

Share your gardening passion with friends and family, and help them discover the joys of gardening.

**Reduce Waste**

Implement eco-friendly practices in your garden, such as composting and reducing plastic use.

**Document Your Journey**

Keep a garden journal to record your successes, learnings, and inspirations.

Visit Botanical Interests website to find more helpful information as well as free e-books.

<https://www.botanicalinterests.com>

**Horticultural information and resources for Tennessee gardeners**

<https://uthort.tennessee.edu>

## Projects List

**Boundless Playground at Warriors' Path State Park** Kingsport  
Gwyn Duncan 423-239-0460 [geduncan@charter.net](mailto:geduncan@charter.net)

**Branch House Family Center** Blountville  
Pat Mazurkiewicz 423-323-1644  
[robmazur@chartertn.net](mailto:robmazur@chartertn.net)

**Carver Peace Gardens** Johnson City  
Penny Rutledge 423-612-4785  
[pennyrutledge2@gmail.com](mailto:pennyrutledge2@gmail.com)  
Brenda McKinnis 423-946-2769 [jbmckinnis4@gmail.com](mailto:jbmckinnis4@gmail.com)

**Church Hill Senior Citizens Center Garden**  
Marcia Vandermause [chscgarden@yahoo.com](mailto:chscgarden@yahoo.com)

**Discovery Garden at Gray Fossil Museum**  
John Hitchcock 423-525-8587 [jghitchcock25@gmail.com](mailto:jghitchcock25@gmail.com)

**Exchange Place Living History Farm** Kingsport  
Earl Hockin 423-817-5473 [ehockin@yahoo.com](mailto:ehockin@yahoo.com)

**Harvest of Hope Community Garden** Kingsport  
Dave Rogers 423-502-2459 [dave\\_carla@chartertn.net](mailto:dave_carla@chartertn.net)

**Johnson City Hospitals** Johnson City  
Barbara Voigt 423-467-2013 [voigt7b@comcast.net](mailto:voigt7b@comcast.net)

**Old Deery Inn** Blountville  
Kate O'Lenic [ebkateo@gmail.com](mailto:ebkateo@gmail.com)

**Rocky Mount Living History Site** Piney Flats  
Don Davis home 423-854-0152, cell 423-943-2392  
[donfdavis@aol.com](mailto:donfdavis@aol.com)

**Steele Creek Park** Bristol, TN  
Robin Feirabend 423-764-3336 [Feierabe@ETSU.edu](mailto:Feierabe@ETSU.edu)

**Tipton Haynes Historic Site** Johnson City  
Vern Maddux 423-440-9236  
[vjorm@gmail.com](mailto:vjorm@gmail.com)  
Betts Leach 423-571-8662 [BettsL@aol.com](mailto:BettsL@aol.com)

**Unicoi County Hospital** Erwin-Paused due to Flood  
Gina Clark 423-956-2426 [gclarkx4@gmail.com](mailto:gclarkx4@gmail.com)

### NETMGA Yearly Projects List:

**Kingsport MeadowView Home Show**  
Paula Peralta 916-580-7256 [pjblessed1@gmail.com](mailto:pjblessed1@gmail.com)

**Bristol PepperFest**  
Wes Walker 804-824-5308 [wes.walker@me.com](mailto:wes.walker@me.com)

**Kingsport Tomato Festival-TBD**

**Master Gardeners:  
Report your hours each month!!**



**2026 OFFICERS**

**PRESIDENT**  
Karen Rowell  
423-737-0332  
[karenrowell94@gmail.com](mailto:karenrowell94@gmail.com)

**VICE PRESIDENT**  
Susie Morrison 423-279-8521  
[susie.mgarden@gmail.com](mailto:susie.mgarden@gmail.com)

**TREASURER**  
Michelle Hejny  
423-676-4583  
[michellehejny@gmail.com](mailto:michellehejny@gmail.com)

**SECRETARY**  
Janet Smith  
276-806-1254  
[eskimowinters@hotmail.com](mailto:eskimowinters@hotmail.com)

**ADVISORS**  
Melody Rose 423-900-3610  
[mtrose@utk.edu](mailto:mtrose@utk.edu)  
Adam Watson 423-753-1680  
[adam.watson@utk.edu](mailto:adam.watson@utk.edu)



**2026 COMMITTEES**

**MEMBERSHIP/CERTIFICATION**  
Mary Cain  
423-361-0223  
[cainm01@yahoo.com](mailto:cainm01@yahoo.com)

**PROJECTS** Don Davis  
423-854-0152  
[donfdavis@aol.com](mailto:donfdavis@aol.com)

**MENTORS** John Hitchcock  
423-525-8587  
[jghitchcock25@gmail.com](mailto:jghitchcock25@gmail.com)

**2025 CLASS REPRESENTATIVE**  
Brenda Sneyd  
423-426-4167  
Fernando Valdez  
423-440-4081

**PROGRAMS/PUBLICITY**  
Brenda McKinnis  
423-946-2769  
[jbmckinnis4@gmail.com](mailto:jbmckinnis4@gmail.com)

Donna Fowler  
423-292-1628  
[Fowlerdc4@gmail.com](mailto:Fowlerdc4@gmail.com)

**WEBSITE** Carl Voigt  
423-467-2013  
[voigt7@comcast.net](mailto:voigt7@comcast.net)  
Barbara Voigt  
423-467-2013  
[voigt7b@comcast.net](mailto:voigt7b@comcast.net)

**COMMUNICATIONS**  
Sherry Ragsdale  
423-963-6648  
[srags0618@gmail.com](mailto:srags0618@gmail.com)

**NEWSLETTER EDITOR**  
Betts Leach  
423-571-8662  
[BettsL@aol.com](mailto:BettsL@aol.com)

**FACEBOOK**  
Sarah Cox  
423-213-9024  
[mrs.sarahecox@gmail.com](mailto:mrs.sarahecox@gmail.com)

**Feed the birds!**



## JANUARY and FEBRUARY 2026 Calendar of Events

**Covid-19 occasionally affects events. Please note that some programs, events and tours may require masks for participants. Before going you might want to confirm that event has not been cancelled or postponed.**

CHECK THE SITES BELOW MONTHLY FOR CLASSES, SEMINARS, WORKSHOPS:

Monday Musings, Greene County TN Extension

Information and Registration: <https://sites.google.com/utk.edu/mondaymusings/home>

Knoxville Botanical Garden and Arboretum Classes/Workshops: [Learn — Knoxville Botanical Gardens \(knoxgarden.org\)](http://knoxgarden.org)

North Carolina Arboretum Classes Schedule:

<https://www.ncarboretum.org/education-programs/adult-education-classes/>

Asheville Botanical Gardens: [ashevillebotanicalgarden.org](http://ashevillebotanicalgarden.org)

Tennessee Native Plant Society Seminars: <https://www.tnps.org/tnps-speakers/>

Appalachian Highlands Chapter of Wild Ones:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/783213076410695/about>

Tennessee Valley Chapter of Wild Ones/Programs and Events:

<https://tnvalleywildones.org/programs-events/public-programs/>

UT Gardens Classes: [UT Gardens - Event Registration](#)

Wild Ones Webinars: <https://wildones.org/webinars/>

**Orchid Society of East Tennessee** meets first Sunday of every other month (Feb. through December), 2 pm Gray Community Center.

<https://www.facebook.com/OrchidSocietyOfEastTennessee/>

JAN 5 NETMGA Board Meeting

12:00pm in the Demo Kitchen Room at Ron Ramsey Agricultural Center; Blountville, TN 37617. This will be a potluck lunch meeting.

JAN 15 January SAPS Meeting

7:00pm. Nancy Lawson, author, *naturalist*, and founder of *The Humane Garden*, will present "A World of Discovery: Nurturing sensory wildscapes through creative land-healing practices". Via Zoom. See details on page 5 of this newsletter.

JAN 17 Winter Garden Seminar at Warriors' Path State Park

10:00am – 12:00pm. “Growing Native Wildflowers from Seed” Expert Naturalist and TN Native Plant expert Rosanna Ohlsson will teach us how to start native wildflowers from seed, and how to keep them thriving in our yards & gardens. We will also learn the protocols of what and what not to collect, plus where, when and how to collect. The seminar will be held at the Recreation Building on Duck Island. Cost: \$5. Registration & Information: <https://tnstateparks.com/events/details/#/?event=winter-garden-seminar-WPSP-2026>

JAN 24 Backyard Bird Boost at Warriors' Path State Park

1:00am – 2:30pm. This seasonal workshop is designed to give park visitors a hands-on opportunity to create homemade suet blocks for birds. This program offers a simple way for participants to support local wildlife while enjoying a fun and creative outdoor activity. Cost: \$5. Registration & Information:

<https://tnstateparks.com/events/details/#/?event=bird-boost-wpsp>

FEB 2 NETMGA Membership Meeting & Awards Dinner

Watch for more information coming soon.

FEB 5 Herb Saplings Meeting

7 pm at Exchange Place. Program: *Kat Hayes, owner and director of Herbalachia, will speak on Herbal Support for Stress and Resilience.* For more info, email

[sapsnews@gmail.com](mailto:sapsnews@gmail.com)

FEB 19 February SAPS Meeting

7:00pm. Entomologist Randi Eckel will present “Beyond Monarchs and Honeybees - The Case for Diversity”. Via Zoom. See details on page 6 of this newsletter.