



Official Publication

Master Gardener Thymes

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Spring Will Be Here Soon!

In February I watch for two blooms to let me know that Spring is not too far away: Herbivore (Lenten Rose) and Crocus. This year has been no different, despite the 10"-12" snow in early February.

I'm ready to get my hands dirty in the soil; how about you? Have you planned your garden?

If you are working on your CEUs for 2026 be sure to check out the area learning opportunities in this newsletter.



NETMGA MARCH BOARD MEETING

The next NETMGA Board meeting will be a Potluck Luck Lunch Meeting on **March 2, 12:00pm**; Ron Ramsey Regional Agriculture Center, 140 Spurgeon Ln, Blountville, TN 37617.

NETMGA APRIL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

April 6. More information will be provided soon.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- NETMGA News
 - February Meeting Recap featuring Melody Rose, Karen Rowell, and Projects
- Mark Your Calendar!
- Featured Project
- Gardening in Small Spaces
- March/April 2026 Calendar of Events

NETMGA News!!

NETMGA February Awards Dinner Recap

The NETMGA Annual Awards Membership Meeting was held on 2/16/2026 after being postponed due to the wonderful winter weather earlier in February. After a delicious, covered dish dinner, Melody Rose, ANR Extension Agent III & Master Gardener Coordinator, presented a program to update the NETMGA Master Gardeners on changes and opportunities coming for 2026.

Melody shared the importance of reporting hours as the value of a volunteer hour is utilized to demonstrate the value of the program at the local, regional, state and federal level. These are shared with stakeholders to emphasize the importance of home horticulture programs across the state of Tennessee. The value of volunteer hour in 2025 was \$34.76. This translates to a total economic value of \$477,416.59 to Sullivan, Washington, Carter, Johnson, and Unicoi Counties. Here is a snapshot of hours reported by NETMGA FY25:

- 11,717.90 Service Hours reported = \$407,665.74
- 1,707 CEU Hours reported = \$59,386.53
- 13,424.90 Total Hours Reported
- 49,353.90 Miles reported = \$10,364.32
- Total economic value = \$477,416.59

For those who appreciate data, here is a glance at where hours were reported FY25:

Service Hours Breakdown

5,941.8 hours reported in Community Outreach Events

2,441.2 hours reported in Sustainable Landscaping

1,902.05 hours reported in Community Vegetable Production and Education

1,432.85 hours reported in Administrative and Organizational Support

CEU Hours Breakdown

565.15 hours reported in Landscape Plants

455.65 hours reported in Other

294.85 hours reported in Fruit & Veggie Production

186.4 hours reported in Wildlife and Pollinators

127.2 hours reported in Leadership and Organization Support

77.75 hours reported in Pest ID and Management

Melody also stressed the importance of having hours reported to the database and dues paid by December 15 every year. This allows both she and Mary Cain to confirm NETMGA membership for the following year, submit reports to the state in a timely manner, and ensure a smooth transition from one year to the next. She also stated hours are to be reported for NETMGA sanctioned projects only; often NETMGA members are asked to help with projects for family or a community project. However, if it is not one of the 15 projects the NETMGA Board has approved, the hours cannot be included in the

hours submitted to NETMGA.

The 2026 Intern training began January 27th! 18 individuals are participating in the asynchronous program this year. The interns are responsible for viewing the lecture and pre-lesson activities portion of the education prior to the Tuesday evening classes. Six NETMGA Master Gardeners (Gus Vizgirda, Donna Fowler, Frank DiCarlo, Sue DiCarlo, Susie Morrison, and Harold Morrison) are assisting Melody Rose with the program. The class just finished their 4th meeting.

Several activities for 2026 are being planned and as the event time gets closer, information will be distributed. The activities include learning journeys to Norris Dam to view spring ephemerals; a learning journey to Asheville's Herb Fest, herbal classes, TEMG State Master Gardener conference in May (Knoxville), and Fall Gardeners Festival in August (Crossville).

For year 2026, the UTHort Team has initiated three levels of training moving forward: the first level is the MG Intern training; the second is the *Leveraging Leadership Series* (201) -- the collaboration foundation that uses a 2-year cohort model to connect new certified EMGs to each other and to the people, culture and resources in our program; and the third is Volunteer Content Teams (301 and beyond). The long-term team model that pulls EMGs into the applied research process and ensures that our program has a good feedback loop with invested volunteers.

CEUs will be offered in May by the UTHort Team:

The May Food Production Series (May 5th, May 12th and 19th) provides all you need to know about sustainable practices for selecting and managing fruit and vegetable crops in your home food production spaces!

2026 Office Hours for Horticulture (June 12th, July 10th, August 14th, and September 11th) featuring LIVE visits and conversations with our wide Extension horticulture team! All at 10:00am ET/9:00am CT

Register for both of these here: [2026 UT Extension Horticulture May Food Production Series AND Friday Office Hours Sign-Up](#)

Additional activities Master Gardeners can participate include:

Info page: [Home Garden Vegetable Trial | Master Gardener Program](#)

Online Order form: [2026 University of Tennessee Home Vegetable Trial Order Form](#)

Smart Yard – Nine activities to grow your knowledge base: <https://tnyards.utk.edu/>

Melody asked those in attendance to consider the Search for Excellence Award. The link for more information on this award is: [Search for Excellence 2026 - Google Drive](#). This would give the NETMGA gardeners a chance to showcase what we are doing here.

Karen Rowell, Board Chairman for NETMGA, gave a motivational presentation after Melody completed the Extension Agent Update. Karen informed the gardeners that we are better connected to the State than ever before. Since Melody arrived, more educational programs have been planned, and information has been shared with the gardeners of events taking place across the state. The educational activities for Master Gardeners have grown immensely and will be available throughout the year.

Karen then reviewed the Board Approved Projects. Branch House, Carver Peace Gardens, Church Hill Senior Center Garden, Discovery Garden at the Hands On! Discovery Center, Exchange Place Living History Farm, Harvest of Hope Community Garden, Hospital Gardens: Johnson City Medical Center, Woodridge Hospital & Ronald McDonald House, The Nature Center at Steele Creek Park Native Plants Garden, Old Deery Inn, Rocky Mount Living History Museum, Tipton-Haynes State Historic Site, Boundless Playground at Warriors' Path State Park, and Short Term Projects & Events

Good project leadership is essential for a successful project. There are issues that make it difficult for some of the projects to be successful. Examples include geography, struggle to get volunteers, and Branch House limits visitation. The biggest concern is that we need volunteers to adequately support projects.

The following accomplishments and needs were reported by Project Leaders:

- Tipton Haynes State Historic Site – Nature Garden in front of Tipton-Haynes building was destroyed by construction to the building and installation of grease traps. We were left with red clay and gravel. We must replace all the native pollinator plants we have planted there over the years. First step was to amend the soil, so we put down a thick layer of soil conditioner, then a layer of newspaper, then a thick layer of mulch. We hope to start replanting in 2026. Watch for volunteer opportunities.
- Boundless Playground at Warriors' Path State Park – Master Gardeners have been maintaining the playground since 2006. We need help with monthly (or more frequent) maintenance days. Currently this is the second Wednesday, April – October.
- Exchange Place Living History Farm – The Exchange is NETMGA demonstration garden focusing on Heirloom and Hybrid vegetables, extending garden seasons, and attracting pollinators. The need for volunteers currently is only for special events.
- Discovery Garden at Hands On! Discovery Center – Originally started as a “Bermuda lawn” in 2019 and is now an asset to the park. We are most proud of our new entrance sign garden. Projects we have worked on include pruning shrubs and trees, building our insect population, and seed collection/propagation projects. Special gardening events are held throughout the year, and volunteers are needed to help with the events.

- Rocky Mount Living History Museum – Currently there are several beautiful garden areas. The most recent garden is Sonja's Garden. There are several volunteers but more are needed to continue to develop gardening areas around the museum.
- Hospital Gardens – The team is most proud of the fact that they use their gardening skills for the purpose of bringing comfort and hope to people who are undergoing emotional stress. The healing gardens are designed to reduce stress for medical and surgical patients and their families at JCMC, psych patients including abuse victims at Woodridge, and anxious parents at Ronald McDonald House. In addition, staff members at all three locations take advantage of the peaceful gardens, often taking their breaks outdoors.

Their latest project has involved renovation of the JCMC ICU rooftop garden. Over the last year we have worked to improve the soil, bringing in over 200 bags of amendments, as well as nearly 100 bags of mulch. We have added a variety of shrubs, perennials, bulbs and annuals to beautify a neglected space.

The Hospital Gardens need is for more workers. We were unable to spend much time in the front yard of the Ronald McDonald House last year. We could use people to specialize at Ronald McDonald or join the hospital team and rotate among all three locations.

- Churchill Senior Center Garden – Giving produce back to the community – Focus Project. Things we are the proudest of at the garden: 16 straight years of donating fresh produce back to the community. All of the garden's production is given to the Of One Accord Food Pantry, the Church Hill Senior Center for their lunch program, and to Meals on Wheels for shut in seniors. To date we have donated over 43,800 pounds. Encouraging the youth of the community to garden and to volunteer by participating with Volunteer High School groups for special workdays and being a TN Promise approved volunteer program so that high school students can fulfill their volunteer hour requirement each semester. Things we need the most: Volunteers! Please contact us via email chscgarden@yahoo.com.
- Carver Peace Gardens - Carver Peace Gardens are an organic community garden that was started by a Master Gardener in 2006 as a joint project with Johnson City Parks and Recreation. It became known as Carver Peace Garden because it was so quiet and peaceful. In 2025, the number of gardens grew to 67 - 4 x 8 beds and 12 - 4 x 4 beds and over 30 community gardeners. In 2025, the gardeners reported producing over 54 bushels of produce. The gardeners also work with the Carver Park and Recreation staff to teach children about planting and harvesting vegetables and flowers. Our goal is to make sure they learn Walmart is not the true food source. Volunteers are needed to help with the garden and with the children's program. At least 8 gardeners are needed for the after-school 12 week sessions in the spring and 7-week summer camp program. The volunteer time for each program is approximately two hours.

- 15th Project – Leadership and other projects that don't need heavy lifting. Physical work is difficult for some of the Master Gardeners. But there are leadership opportunities in areas outside the physical garden areas. Serve as a Board Member or Committee Leader by acting as an understudy. Board of Directors and Committee Leaders meet every other month (when there is no membership program) 6:30 pm first Monday of the month. This is an open meeting, and everyone is welcome. Needs for the 15: 1) New ideas and energy, 2) Bench strength = more volunteers, 3) Willingness to serve. Karen made a plea for those who aren't volunteering. Other positions or areas to serve include events, writing articles for ask-a-master gardener newspaper columns, public events, home shows, community events, farmer markets, and STEM workshops where 700 students attend. So many opportunities to meet others in our community and share our love of gardening and the wonderful services offered by the NETMGA.

April Membership Meeting

April Master Gardener Membership Meeting will be held at the Ron Ramsey Agricultural Center on **April 6**, 2026. Kim Whiston will present a program on Landscaping with Native Pollinators. Mark your calendar and watch for more information closer to the date!

Publicity Committee

The 2026 Intern training began January 27th. In addition, Master Gardeners conducted two community events with over 100 people in attendance in February! What will happen when the weather gets warm?!. And there are more events being planned. Thanks to Laurin Hagy for leading this effort we now have materials to set up the Master Gardener community event information table.

Be sure to read the information about the NETMGA Plant Sale that will be held during the Exchange Place Living History Farm event in April. This is the Master Gardener's class of 2025 event. They need plants and purchases made at their event. It is the largest plant sale in this area. A Signup Genius was distributed for both plants and volunteer assistance.

Ask-A-Master Gardener writers are working hard to get wonderful articles out to the community. Two new writers were recruited at the Annual Membership Meeting. Welcome Gwen Ellis and Gus Vizgirda to the writing team.

The list of recent articles (found here: <https://www.netmga.net/ask-a-master-gardener/>) –

- Reading the Leaves: Appalachia's Natural Gardening Calendar, by Wes Walker, Master Gardener
- Trees for Pollinators, by Kate O'Lenic, Master Gardener
- Winter's First Defense: Why Your Apple Orchard Needs Copper Now (published 2026-02-28), by Gus Vizgirda, Master Gardener
- Planning for Winter Interest in Your Garden, by Brenda McKinnis, Master Gardener

Plant Sale - Exchange Place Spring Garden Fair April 25 and 26, 2026

Spring is just around the corner, and we are excited to kick off the 2026 gardening season with a great opportunity to join the NETMGA Class of 2025 for a FUNraiser Plant Sale to benefit NETMGA! It's also a great way to add TEMG volunteer service hours! Here's how you can help.

The Spring Garden Fair has been an annual event at Exchange Place for 40 years. This event continues to grow and promises to be the best one yet! In addition to NETMGA plants being sold, there will be over 60 vendors selling a wide variety of annuals, perennials, native plants, succulents, cacti, vegetables, trees, shrubs, houseplants, and garden-related items!

We're asking all Master Gardeners to donate plants to sell at the 2026 Spring Garden Fair at Exchange Place to raise funds for NETMGA. So, get your seeds started, plants potted up, bulbs and tubers divided, and garden-related items gathered! Let's raise some money!

Instructions for using the SignUp Genius:

Please complete the section - To drop off plants (4/24) at either Ron Ramsey Agricultural Center or the Exchange Place (select where you will drop off your items). There is also a comment section to let the organizers know what you will be bringing and the quantity.

Complete Plant drop-off date and location section for April 24:

Exchange Place Living History Farm ([4812 Orebank Road, Kingsport](#)) Friday April 24, 10:00am - 4:00pm

Ron Ramsey Agricultural Center ([140 Spurgeon Lane, Blountville](#)) 10:00am - 4:00pm

Comment Section: Please indicate the type of plants and number of plants you will donate in this section.

Please complete the survey and help us RAISE SOME MONEY FOR NETMGA!!

Gardeners **come on out and shop during the event**. You can find the NETMGA plants and volunteers at the Exchange Place near the double gates on the main part of the property. We will also be located next to the NETMGA / SAPS / UT Horticultural information tent. This is the largest plant sale in the area!

Event: 2026 Exchange Place Spring Garden Fair

Where: Exchange Place Historical Site ([4812 Orebank Road](#) in Kingsport)

When: **Saturday, April 25**, 2026, 10:00am - 5:00pm; **Sunday, April 26**, 2026, 12:00pm - 5:00pm

There will also be a Children's event at 1 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. When you sign up to work at the Plant Sale, please select the times 12-2:30pm if you would like to help with the Children's event.

Mark Your Calendar!

March Herb Saplings Meeting

Herb Saplings meeting on **March 5** at 7 pm, Exchange Place in Kingsport. Kat Hayes, owner and director of Herbalachia, will speak on Herbal Support for Stress and Resilience. Bring an herb snack to share if you have time. Anyone interested in herbs is welcome.

Green & Growing Gardening Seminars

Keep Kingsport Beautiful will hold its “Green & Growing” gardening seminars every Thursday in March at noon at the Kingsport Chamber, 400 Clinchfield Street. Sponsored by A-1 Expert Tree Service, all seminars are free and open to the public.

March 5 – Christy Shivell, owner of Shy Valley Farms. “Rewilding Appalachia: Simple, sustainable techniques to create habitat-rich landscapes with native plants.

March 12 – Matt Fioramonti, manager at Evergreen in Colonial Heights. “The Spring Bloomer.”

March 19 – Joy Moore, TN Master Gardener. “Welcoming Pollinators to Your Yard.”

March 26 – John Woodworth, local organic farmer and owner of Ziegenwald Dairy. “Seed Saving 101.”

SAPS March Program – Cool Season Vegetable Gardening

Lucas Holman, Horticulture Extension Agent and County Director, UT/TSU Extension for Wilson County, TN, will discuss “Cool Season Vegetable Gardening” on Thursday, **March 19**, at 7 p.m. at Kingsport Higher Education Center, 300 W. Market Street, Kingsport, TN 37660. Sponsored by Southern Appalachian Plant Society (SAPS) the program is free and the public is invited. For more information phone 423-348-6572 or email sapsnews@gmail.com , <https://saps.us/>.



Gardeners don't have to wait until April to start growing vegetables, and gardening doesn't have to end when frost wipes out the warm season crops in October. Learn about practical ways to grow a wide variety of tasty cool season vegetables in Tennessee. Lucas will discuss timing, supplies, and his favorite cultivars. He will even look at some of the gardening trends that you see on social media – should you believe everything you see on Facebook?

Lucas Holman taught high school agriculture, including the greenhouse program, for almost 10 years. About 8 years ago he made a career shift to Extension. He is now the award winning Horticulture Extension Agent and County Director for the UT/TSU Extension office in Wilson County, TN. He received his B.S. in Agriculture from Tennessee

Tech University and his M. A. in Curriculum and Instruction from Tennessee Tech University. He and his wife Bonnie own a small farm where they focus on Dorset sheep, daylilies, and other unique perennials and shrubs. They are also blessed with three daughters – Ellie Pearl, Addie Opal, and Millie Ruby.

Bluebell Wildflower Walk with Connie Deegan

The local chapter of the Wild Ones would like to invite the Master Gardeners to a 'Bluebell Wildflower Walk' on **March 27th**, from 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm with Connie Deegan at Winged Deer Park, 204 Carroll Creek Rd in Johnson City, TN 37501. You might remember Connie Deegan from the entertaining presentation she did on 'Snakes in Tennessee' for our Awards Dinner in 2024. Connie has worked as the Johnson City Park Naturalist for over 15 years and runs the summer nature camps and does a lot of nature themed public programming for the city. Please join us to see the bluebells and other native plants in the park. If you are interested in using native plants in your garden, click on the following link to learn more about them and your local Wild Ones Appalachian Highlands Chapter:

<https://appalachianhighlands.wildones.org/>

April Herb Saplings Meeting

Herb Saplings meeting on **April 2** at 7 pm, Exchange Place. Herbalist Sharon Nelson will speak on *Foraging in the Springtime*. Learn about common plants to forage in NE Tennessee/SW Virginia. You will leave the session confident to immediately apply your knowledge to find these plants and make recipes from what you gather. Bring an herb snack to share if you have time.

SAPS April Program - How to Successfully Grow Hydrangeas



Kim Whiston, garden coach and owner of Rock House Gardens in Jonesborough, Tennessee, will discuss "How to Successfully Grow Hydrangeas" on Thursday, **April 16**, at 7 p.m. at BrightRidge Auditorium, 2600 Boones Creek Rd (Hwy 354) in Johnson City. Sponsored by Southern Appalachian Plant Society (SAPS) the program is free and the public is invited. No registration is needed. For more information phone 423-348-6572, email sapsnews@gmail.com, or see <https://saps.us/>.

Hydrangeas are one of the most popular and easy-to-grow ornamental gardens plants. Learn how to grow and care for them as well as how to select from the almost endless varieties on the market.

Kim Whiston operates Rockhouse Gardens and is an East Tennessee garden coach specializing in garden design and installation, water garden design and maintenance and ornamental trees. Her facility also offers a nice and different selection of plants for sale. Kim has over 30 years of experience in the horticulture industry. She is a former president

of the Tennessee Nursery and Landscape Association. She has many gardens of her own. Perennials, shrubs, trees, and water gardens are all a part of her personal gardens at her home. Her knowledge of plants and her practical experience has helped to assure successful design outcomes for her clients.

Exchange Place Spring Garden Fair

The 40th annual **Spring Garden Fair is Saturday, April 25, from 10 am – 5 pm and Sunday, April 26, from 12 – 5 pm at Exchange Place Living History Farm**, 4812 Orebank Road in Kingsport. The oldest garden fair in the region and a favorite among gardeners, the festival will feature thousands of plants for sale - perennials, annuals, trees and shrubs - with the emphasis on natives, herbs and heirlooms (including a wide variety of heirloom tomatoes), along with garden-related arts and crafts. Visitors will see heritage breeds of animals and spring activities on a mid-nineteenth century farmstead, as volunteers shear the sheep, spin and weave the wool, cook on the hearth, and shape iron over the forge. Children's activities abound as volunteers help children create plant and nature crafts and learn gardening skills. Enjoy food on site or to take home along with live music from local artists. Admission is \$5 for adults and free for children under 12. For more information, call 423-288-6071.

The Fair is also an educational event that fills the grounds and buildings of the historic site. Gardening experts on specific topics and Master Gardeners will be available to answer home gardening questions throughout the weekend. The Fair strives to be environmentally friendly with recycling and re-using. Visitors are encouraged to bring their own plant carriers and to bring used nursery pots (quarts and larger) for reuse.

Help Wanted

Master Gardeners have long been an important part of the Spring Garden Fair. Exchange Place has a core group of experienced volunteers who are organizing the Fair, but we would love fresh input from other Master Gardeners. If you would like to help on the SGF

committee we would welcome your ideas and skills. If you can spare any time the Fair weekend to help with staffing the Master Gardener table, set-up, hospitality, take-down, children's activities, or parking, we would be grateful. Volunteer time counts as TEMG hours. To volunteer for this fun event or for more info, contact Joy Moore at jemmoor@gmail.com

Exchange Place invites small-scale/hobby growers to participate in the Spring Garden Fair to increase the variety of plants available. The vendor fee is 10% of gross sales. For more information email epfestivals.gf@gmail.com or see https://exchangeplacetn.org/?page_id=103 . **Registration deadline is March 15, 2026.**

“Featured Project” – Carver Peace Gardens

The Carver Peace Gardens are organic gardens located at Carver Park in Johnson City. The gardens are a project of the Johnson City Parks & Recreation Department, the Carver Recreation Center, and the Northeast Tennessee Master Gardener Association.

The gardens were originally developed in 2006 with ground garden plots for the community residents. The gardeners rented an inground plot for their use on an annual basis. In the fall of 2020, the Master Gardeners, Community Gardeners, and the Manager of Carver Park determined that it was time to transition to raised beds. In 2021 the first raised beds were rented and plants began to grow. The raised beds are rented annually on a first come first serve basis to community members for a nominal fee. In 2025, the number of gardens grew to 67 - 4 x 8 beds and 12 - 4 x 4 beds with over 30 community gardeners and managed by the Master Gardener Project Team. In 2025, the gardeners reported producing over 54 bushels of produce.



In May 2025, the garden held a workday with all the gardeners and Master Gardeners who help maintain the Carver Garden. Several gardening activities were completed to maintain and prepare the garden for a busy, garden season.



Team Leaders (Carver gardeners) were established to work with a specific number of beds. The team leaders assisted with gardening questions, reminded gardeners in their blocks of updates that occurred throughout the growing season, and reminded them to report their produce yield.

One program which the Carver Peace Gardeners are very proud of and part of the mission of NETMGA is providing education to elementary and middle school children (Jr. Gees). In 2021, Nancy Shilling began working with the children in the afterschool program to teach them about gardening. The program has grown over the years. Several wonderful Master Gardeners are currently working under the coordination of Janet Smith as the Carver children's education program continues to grow. The Master Gardeners work with 30-40 children who attend the after-school program at Carver for one hour a week in the

spring and fall after school program (total of 22 weeks). During the summer the Master Gardeners provide gardening education during the 7-week Carver Park Summer Camp. There are 80-90 children attending during this time. The children are divided into two groups, and the Master Gardeners teach two classes of ~40 children, in back-to-back sessions of ~40 children each during the summer. We were pleased to be able to provide an advanced group for the middle school Jr. Gees in the fall of 2025.

The main goals of the education classes are to teach basic gardening skills and promote a better understanding of where food comes from. Under the mentorship of Master Gardeners, the students learn how to plant, maintain, and harvest raised bed vegetable gardens in the cold frame that was built last year and seven 4x4 beds that are devoted to their program. Weekly lessons include soil management, composting, food preparation, recycling, container gardening, growing flowers, the importance of pollinators, and environmental stewardship. Through these programs, Master Gardeners are also hopefully instilling a joy for gardening and creating great memories for the children they mentor.



For all the classes, the children are divided into 6 small groups, with one Master Gardener overseeing the group. The Master Gardeners rotate teaching the content of the class, then Master Gardeners assist with the hands-on activities. Without the volunteers, the Jr. Gees program could not maintain the excellent educational programs that are offered. So, you can see we will need over 130 volunteer hours to provide this service in the spring and fall and over 80 volunteer hours to provide the service for volunteer hours.



The Master Gardeners meet several times a year to assess how things are going with the

garden and the Jr. Gees program. Some of the duties we perform at our weekly garden times are Inventory of tools, assessment of beds and other items used, maintenance that needs to be completed, prepare for the Jr. Gees classes, and determines how pollinator beds are doing. The Jr. Gees program for the next season is discussed, and an outline of classes is developed. During the meeting, new ideas are discussed, and plans are made to implement the schedule for all of the above. The Master Gardeners at Carver are wonderful to work with and we would not be growing and able to provide the service to Carver Park without them.

This spring we will begin to work with ETSU students on a new project, Rooted Alliance. One of the students in the Public Health program wrote a grant and was awarded money for raised beds to grow food to be given to those in need. Carver Peace Garden will receive at least 10 new 4x8 beds and work with ETSU students to develop a method of growing and donating food to our community. This is also exciting for Carver Park, the community, Master Gardeners, and the gardeners at Carver Peace Gardens.

In the fall of 2025, we had a wonderful meeting and discussion of why we are master gardeners, what we want to accomplish for the remainder of 2025, and what is priority to accomplish in 2026. We organized the comments into 3 major areas of focus in 2026 – communication, education, and children's programs.

- ♣ Communication – To help gardeners; provide classes, provide a social media site, topics for education should focus on upcoming activities appropriate to the season for gardeners and community. Section Leader will continue to monitor gardens and discuss any questions with gardeners. Nancy has volunteered to provide gardening articles for distribution.
- ♣ Education – Urban Gardening, classes as above and more, continue STEM classes for children, provide classes to the community and public bringing in Master Gardeners to provide education on food security, square foot gardening, and vertical gardening. Continue to work with the Boy Scout troop to assist with the development programs at Carver.
- ♣ Children's Program – Continue to work together to develop classes for spring, fall, and summer camp classes. Master Gardeners discuss topics appropriate to the time of year and volunteer to teach or assist with the classes. At least 6 Master Gardeners are needed for each class.



Master Gardeners are necessary to help with activities that are needed to keep the garden running smoothly. The activities include maintenance of the pollinator beds, upkeep of tools, ensuring the beds and water systems are working for the gardeners, general maintenance of the gardens, providing compost and fertilizer for the gardener as well as providing guidance on gardening activities. Some Master Gardeners participate in everything we do at Carver Peace Garden, while others chose to only participate in certain activities. We welcome new gardeners to join us and find their niche. To find your gardening joy and share your expertise please call Brenda McKinnis (423-946-2769), or Penny Rutledge (423-612-4785).

“Featured Project” – Tipton-Haynes State Historic Site

At Tipton Haynes State Historic Site, Master Gardeners maintain several gardens: wildflower/butterfly/pollinator gardens, a small kitchen garden, and what is called the slave garden.

In the front Nature/Pollinator gardens, our focus is variety and visual appeal for visitors to the site, AND for butterflies, bees, and other pollinators. Having been designated a Certified Monarch Waystation in 2014 we emphasize native plants and those that attract and/or serve as hosts for Monarchs and other caterpillars.

The front gardens contain many plant varieties, including Common milkweed, Butterfly weed, Anise hyssop, Eastern Red Columbine, Lavender, Anise sage, Black-eyed susan, and Purple coneflower, (to name a few). These plants provide a succession of blooms through the growing season that provide nectar for butterflies and hummingbirds and food for caterpillars. We also have several native azaleas, oakleaf hydrangea, summer sweet (clethra), bloodroot, and ostrich ferns along the walkway.



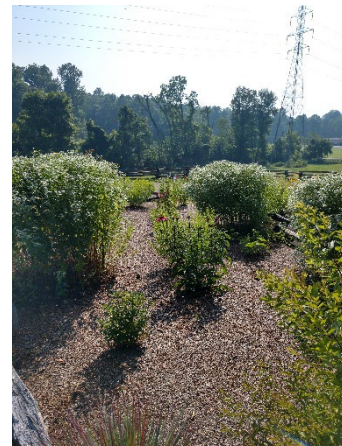
In late 2024 the State of Tennessee began making improvements to the Tipton-Haynes site that has impacted one of our Nature/Pollinator Gardens. The work was completed in Summer of 2025.

In late 2025 we started to rebuild by amending the “soil” that construction left (red clay and gravel, mostly, along with two buried grease pits). First, we put down a layer of soil

conditioner, then a layer of newspaper, and finished with a thick layer of mulch. We will see what plants have survived and then make plans to replant this area.



A few years ago the parking lot was revamped, adding a median with a new place to plant! Our goal was to present color and beauty to site visitors as they enter the grounds. We planted Winterberry Holly, Coralberry, Beauty Berry, Mountain Mint, Amsonia, and Goldenrod, as well as Coneflower, Creeping phlox, Butterfly weed, Passion flower, Little bluestem grass, Anise hyssop, Blackberry lily, and Husker's Red penstemon. We added a large native wildflower area meant to greet visitors as they entered the site. In addition to the native varieties, we also plant zinnias and cosmos to provide additional nectar throughout the summer for emerging new butterflies as well as for visiting butterflies. This area is growing and flourishing!



Our pollinator gardens host Monarch caterpillars, Black Swallowtail caterpillars, Gulf Fritillary caterpillars, and Pipevine Swallowtail caterpillars.

In 2023 we improved a shady area to make it more welcoming to visitors by improving the soil then planting Coral bells, Hostas, and Green and Gold ground cover. The following year we added Allegheny Spurge, St John's Wort, and Wild Ginger.

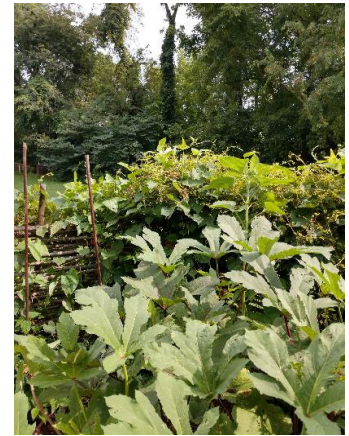


The vegetable gardens at Tipton/Haynes consist of two small plots in the historical area. The Kitchen Garden is representative of a small garden near the house that would have grown those vegetables that need a little extra care and be handy for meal preparation. We emphasize heirloom varieties where we try using varieties grown in Thomas Jefferson's Monticello gardens. Colonel Tipton knew and corresponded with Jefferson, so we infer that maybe they exchanged gardening information.



We have some perennial plants: strawberries and rhubarb, along with herbs: sage, oregano, lavender, and rosemary. Garlic is planted in the fall around the edges. In spring we plant broccoli and cabbage, onions, carrots, beets, lettuce, spinach, and chard. As it warms up, we add Heirloom tomatoes, peppers, and Scarlet runner beans. We also add some of the annual herbs.

The Slave Garden, as it is called, is located behind the restored slave cabin, home to George, the Haynes family's slave. It was usual for slaves to have a small garden to provide some of their own food. Historical information is scarce so we choose to plant vegetables that originated in Africa, such as okra, field peas, peanuts, and watermelon, plus some New World plants that George might have adopted: potatoes and squash.



This garden, formerly fenced in a wattle style using branches and tree trimmings, such as George might have used to keep out the wildlife, was rebuilt in 2025.



Our emphasis in the kitchen and slave gardens is to display for the education of visitors to the historical site; we don't try to maximize production. We do produce quite a bit of food, though, which we share with the staff, but mostly we just have a good time.

We welcome any Master Gardeners who are looking for a place to share fun and earn volunteer hours; please contact us! We typically work on Thursday, but are flexible if you want to help on another day. Contact: Vern at vjornm@gmail.com or Betts at BettsL@aol.com.

Gardening In Small Spaces

By Earl Hockin

Increasingly many people don't live in homes with yards suitable for traditional gardening. There are means to grow some vegetables and attractive plants if they have a minimum of 6 hours of direct sunlight; however, most vegetables do better with longer periods of sunlight. Thus, if possible, locate your vegetable gardening in southern facing locations that are shade free for at least 6 hours.

The easiest way for most would be to use containers. Any sort of container, if it has drainage holes will work. Even old buckets will work if they have drainage holes created. If the container lacks drainage holes it is likely that the soil will become too saturated and root rot will develop. It is important to use a good quality potting mix, not garden soil. Good quality potting soils are designed for drainage and aeration which is required by the roots. Typically, they contain peat moss or coconut coir which retain water. I prefer using coconut coir as it is collected by taking bark from coconut trees. Whereas, peat moss stores about a third of the world's soil carbon more than all the forests combined. When the moss is harvested it releases this carbon into the atmosphere adding carbon dioxide thus significantly impacting climate change. Good potting soil also contains perlite or vermiculite which ensure aeration and drainage plus good quality organic materials which support the microorganisms and fungi that alter soil minerals into forms absorbable and useable by the plants. It is important to also add sources of nutrients. Such as compost or worm castings, and organic fertilizers like blood meal and bone meal.

Virtually anything including vegetables, herbs, flowers, and even small fruit trees can be grown in containers. Several friends grow various varieties of fig trees in containers. They

sit them outside after the last frost in spring and bring them inside to locations like their garage or basement before the first frost in autumn. Herbs such as Basil, Thyme and Parsley are very suitable for growing in containers. I personally choose to grow mint only in containers to prevent it from taking over the garden area, which it does using its rhizomes and runners. Other herbs that do well in containers include Rosemary, Oregano, Chives, and Cilantro.

Containers are available in a variety of different materials. Plants that prefer growing in drier soil like Rosemary and Thyme do well in clay pots. Plants that like warm temperatures like sweet potatoes, and hot peppers do well in metal containers. It is possible to get fabric containers and the advantage to these is that overwinter you can empty the containers into compost, clean the bags and store them indoors.

Deep rooted vegetables like eggplants, tomatoes, peppers, carrots, and parsnips should be grown in pots that are at least 12 inches deep, but preferably even deeper. Shallow rooted vegetables like lettuce, radishes, spinach, basil, Swiss chard, and parsley can be grown in containers that are only six to twelve inches deep.

When growing tomatoes in containers it is recommended to grow dwarf varieties such as Rosella Purple, Dwarf Sweet Sue, Uluru Ochre, Rosella Crimson, and Summer Sweet Gold. Some examples of dwarf sweet peppers are Sweet Pickle, Sweet Banana, and Fushimi and if you want hot pepper try Early Jalapeno. The best eggplant to grow in containers is Patio Baby.

Resources:

<https://www.tnstate.edu/extension/documents/growingvegetablesinminigardenscontainers.pdf>

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/426/426-336/SPES-255.pdf

<https://extension.umd.edu/resource/growing-vegetables-containers/>

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

Branch House Family Center Blountville
Pat Mazurkiewicz 423-323-1644
robmazur@chartertn.net

Carver Peace Gardens Johnson City
Penny Rutledge 423-612-4785
pennyrutledge2@gmail.com
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Church Hill Senior Citizens Center Garden
Marcia Vandermause chscgarden@yahoo.com

Discovery Garden at Hands On! Discovery Center
John Hitchcock 423-525-8587
jghitchcock25@gmail.com

Exchange Place Living History Farm Kingsport
Earl Hockin 423-817-5473 ehockin@yahoo.com

Harvest of Hope Community Garden Kingsport
Dave Rogers 423-502-2459 dave_carla@chartertn.net

Johnson City Hospitals Johnson City
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Tipton Haynes State Historic Site Johnson City
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Unicoi County Hospital Erwin-Paused due to Flood
Gina Clark 423-956-2426 gclarkx4@gmail.com

NETMGA Yearly Projects List:

Kingsport MeadowView Home Show
Paula Peralta 916-580-7256 pjblessed1@gmail.com

Bristol PepperFest
Wes Walker 804-824-5308 wes.walker@me.com

Kingsport Tomato Festival-TBD

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



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Feed the birds!



MARCH and APRIL 2026 Calendar of Events

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

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

North Carolina Arboretum Classes Schedule:
<https://www.ncarboretum.org/education-programs/adult-education-classes/>

Asheville Botanical Gardens: [ashevillebotanicalgarden.org](https://www.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](https://www.utgardens.org/event-registration)

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

Evergreen of Johnson City Seminars: www.evergreenofjc.com

Evergreen of Colonial Heights Seminars: www.egardenplace.com

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/>

MARCH 2026 Green and Growing Gardening Seminars will be held on Thursdays in March at 12pm. See details on page 8 of this newsletter.

MAR 2 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.

MAR 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

MAR 7 Weed Wrangle-Garlic Mustard Pull at Warriors' Path State Park
1:00-4:00pm. Information: [Event Details — Tennessee State Parks](https://www.tnstateparks.com/event-details)

- MAR 7 Weed Wrangle at Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park
9:00am-12:00pm. Information: [Event Details — Tennessee State Parks](#)
- MAR 7 Weed Wrangle at Roan Mountain State Park
2:00-5:00pm. Information: [Event Details — Tennessee State Parks](#)
- MAR 19 March SAPS Meeting
7:00pm. Lucas Holman, Horticulture Extension Agent and County Director, UT/TSU Extension for Wilson County, TN, will discuss “Cool Season Vegetable Gardening.” Kingsport Higher Education Center, 300 W. Market Street, Kingsport, TN See details on page 8 of this newsletter.
- MAR 21 Spring Hike-Wildflower Walk at Warriors’ Path State Park
9:00am-12:00pm. Information: [Event Details — Tennessee State Parks](#)
- MAR 21 Gardening Seminar Series at Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park
9:00am-12:00pm. Ben Hunter will share his tips & techniques for growing the garden of your dreams! Information: [Event Details — Tennessee State Parks](#)
- MAR 23 Grafting Workshop
4:00-7:00pm at Ron Ramsey Ag Center in Blountville. Scion wood, rootstock, and all the necessary tools, supplies, and information to get you growing a successful apple graft provided! Cost: \$35 includes five grafts to take home. Information: [Grafting | Sullivan County](#)
- MAR 27 ‘Bluebell Wildflower Walk’ with Connie Deegan
6:00-7:30pm at Winged Deer Park in Johnson City. See details on page 9 of this newsletter.
- MAR 28 NOLI - Walk with A Botanist at Rocky Fork State Park
10:00am-12:00pm. Join Dr. Steven Price for a leisurely stroll to learn about the wildflowers and other plants found in Rocky Fork State Park. Information: [Event Details — Tennessee State Parks](#)
- APR 2 Herb Saplings Meeting
7 pm at Exchange Place. Program: Herbalist Sharon Nelson will speak on Foraging in the Springtime. For more info, email sapsnews@gmail.com
- APR 6 NETMGA Membership Meeting
Watch for more information coming soon.
- APR 10-11 Washington County, VA Garden Faire 2026
Friday: 9:30am-6:00pm; Saturday: 9:30am-4:00pm. Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center, Abingdon, VA (I-81 Exit 14). Cost: \$7 per day; Children under 12 free. Information: www.gardenfaire.net

APR 16 April SAPS Meeting

7:00pm. Kim Whiston, garden coach and owner of Rock House Gardens in Jonesborough, Tennessee, will discuss *"How to Successfully Grow Hydrangeas"* at BrightRidge Auditorium, 2600 Boones Creek Rd (Hwy 354) in Johnson City See details on page 9 of this newsletter.

APR 17-19 47th Annual Spring Nature Festival at Warriors' Path State Park

Come enjoy a weekend full of outdoor discovery, with "mini-seminars" and guided hikes on a wide range of nature discovery topics, led by expert naturalists from across our region. Information: [Event Details — Tennessee State Parks](#)

APR 24-26 67th Annual Roan Mountain Spring Naturalists Rally

Information/Brochure: [3cc564_4ffe53be64d749889a1cd8303aec1a69.pdf](#)

APR 25-26 40th Annual Spring Garden Fair at Exchange Place in Kingsport.

10:00am-5:00pm-Saturday; 12:00-5:00pm-Sunday. See details on page 10 of this newsletter.