

Northeast Tennessee Master Gardener Board Meeting
Ramsey Agricultural Center
May 4, 2026

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Karen Rowell, Janet Smith, Mary Cain, Donna Fowler, Michelle Hejny, Sherry Ragsdale, Barbara Voight, Brenda Snyder, John Hitchcock, Melody Rose, Carl Voight, Brenda McKinnis, Gus Vizgirda, Ben Staton

MEMBERS ABSENT: Adam Watson, Betts Leach, Sarah Cox, Susie Morrison, Don Davis, Nancy Schilling

CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME

Karen Rowell called the meeting to order.

SECRETARY'S REPORT:

Mary Cain noted inaccuracies in some of the dates. Once Janet Smith agreed to amend these errors, Mary Cain moved to approve the minutes, which Sherry Ragsdale seconded. The board then voted to accept the minutes with the revised dates.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

Michelle Hejny presented the budget as of 05/01/26.

John Hitchcock made a motion to approve the report and Karen Rowell seconded. The Board then voted to accept the report.

PROJECT REPORT AND GRANTS FOR 2026: Don Davis

Don Davis was absent. Karen Rowell noted that there are typically no more than eight funded projects. A new initiative at the Senior Citizens Center/Lincoln Park involves Master Gardeners maintaining raised beds for senior lunches and Meals on Wheels, led by Charles Honeycutt. Melody Rose offered to add the project to the hour recording app. Carl Voight reminded the board that Don Davis must finish the approval process first.

PROGRAMS FOR 2026: Brenda McKinnis

Brenda McKinnis announced that the upcoming Membership meeting is scheduled for June 1, 2026, at 6:30 p.m., hosted at Karen Rowell's residence. Karen Rowell will present a program focusing on Purple Martins and guidelines for transplant planning. Due to limited parking available at the venue, Boones Creek Baptist Church has kindly granted permission for Master Gardeners to use their parking area. Melody Rose will provide a shuttle service from the church parking lot to Karen's home using the Extension van. Water and snacks will be supplied for attendees.

The subsequent member meeting will take place on August 3rd at 6:30 p.m. at Warriors State Park. Melody Rose will deliver a presentation covering strategies for cultivating fruit. Additionally, Melody Rose indicated her intention to consult with the Cattlemen's Association regarding potential collaboration for coordinating the December Christmas Dinner at the Ramsey Center. She noted that, as part of this partnership, Master Gardeners would be responsible for breaking down and cleaning up the event space following the dinner.

Brenda McKinnis announced that Carver is sponsoring a workday on Friday, May 15th from 2:00 pm to 6:00pm. She invited all Master Gardeners to attend.

The Class of 2025 Plant Sale: Gus Vizgirda

Gus Vizgirda reported that the April 25-26 plant sale at Exchange Place was successful, with sales exceeding \$2000. He noted a good mix of new and experienced volunteers. When Michelle Henjy asked about improvements for next year, Gus suggested more space and clearer pricing information. Ben Staton stated that it was good that the plant sale was partnered with an existing event at the Exchange Place because it ensures more customers. Karen Rowell suggested that the plant sale become an annual project for every new intern class.

MEMBERSHIP/CERTIFICATION REPORT: Mary Cain

Mary Cain noted that 130 Master Gardeners were recognized for volunteering, though some have not collected their certificates. Ben Staton proposed sending PDF certificates to cut costs, but Mary was concerned some members might struggle to print them. Melody Rose suggested peer voting for awards, yearly recognition of new interns, and a PowerPoint for gold leaf recipients. The Board will continue discussing certificate alternatives.

PUBLICITY: Brenda McKinnis (Nancy Shilling)

Brenda McKinnis reported that Master Gardeners continue to contribute articles to the "Ask a Master Gardener" column in local newspapers. She recommended that Gus Vizgirda prepare an article regarding the Class of 2025 Plant Sale, to which he agreed.

2026 Intern Class Report: Melody Rose

Melody Rose reported that 17 interns have successfully graduated, with most having completed the required 40 volunteer hours for their first year in the program. She also announced that a picnic is being organized for the following week to celebrate the interns' achievements. Beginning June 8th, the interns will deliver presentations on assorted topics to fulfill the final requirement of the program. These presentations will take place at the Ramsey Center, and all Master Gardeners are invited to attend.

Karen Rowell proposed alternating the intern class schedule between day and night each year so both retired and working individuals can easily attend Master Gardener Classes. Melody Rose noted that evening classes provide more opportunities for younger and employed people to join and believed night sessions would benefit both groups. Ben Staton said that he could not have attended a day class. Barbara Voight mentioned that some retirees are uneasy about driving at night. The board decided to revisit this topic in the future.

COMMUNICATIONS: Sherry Ragsdale

Sherry Ragsdale shared that Signup Genius is effectively promoting events and helping with volunteer recruitment. Janet Smith asked to use the app to find volunteers for "The Kids at the Bay" event on May 16th, and Sherry agreed to do so.

Melody Rose noted that new interns were not receiving Genius Sign up event emails. Sherry Ragsdale asked for a list of intern email addresses to address this.

NEWSLETTER: Betts Leach (Absent)**FACEBOOK: Sarah Cox (absent)****MENTORS: John Hitchcock**

During a meeting, John mentioned that the interns had been paired with Master Gardeners. The program has begun successfully.

WEBSITE: Carl & Barbara Voigt

Barbara stated that they are continually updating information and links on the site. She requests pictures whenever there are any new events.

WASHINGTON COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT: Adam Watson (absent)

SULLIVAN COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT: Melody Rose

Melody Rose stated that the Master Gardener State Conference will be held on May 27-29 at UT Campus. She encouraged all Master Gardeners to attend.

NEW BUSINESS:

Michelle Henjy would like to redo the way Master Gardener merchandise is sold. Instead of selling the items during membership meetings, setting up a link on the website so that members could order directly online. She requested suggestions from the board during the July meeting.

Karen Rowell reported that the Harvest to Hope needs new raised beds to replace the old ones. Mary Cain asked if this is a sanctioned project in which Karen certified that it was. The board will continue this discussion at the next meeting on as to how to help with this project.

NEXT MEMBERSHIP MEETING plans:

06/01/26 at 6:30 pm at Karen Rowell's home.

Next Board Meeting Plans:

07/06/26 at 6:30 at the Ramsey Agricultural Center

Addendum: The meeting date was changed to 06/13/26 due to some board members traveling during the July 4th Holidays.