NETMGA
Northeast Tennessee Master Gardener Association
Official Publication

Master Gardener Thymes

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It's almost Fall, Ya'll!!

Football season has begun, gardening season is winding down, it's time to plant fall cole crops, pansies, or asters, and soon the leaves that are still clinging to the trees will bloom into beautiful colors!

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



NETMGA SEPTEMBER BOARD MEETING

The next NETMGA Board meeting will be on **September 14** at 6:30pm; Ron Ramsey Regional Agriculture Center, 140 Spurgeon Ln, Blountville, TN 37617.

NETMGA OCTOBER MEMBERSHIP MEETING

NETMGA Membership Meeting will be **October 5** at Ron Ramsey Regional Agriculture Center, 140 Spurgeon Ln., Blountville, TN. See page 2 for information.

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- NETMGA News
- Ask A Master Gardener
- A Totally Honest 5-Step Guide to Weeding Your Garden by Gus Vizgirda
- Mark Your Calendar!
- Project Reports
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NETMGA News!!

NETMGA August Membership Meeting Recap

We are winding down another gardening year. So much fun, and work to accomplish four great Membership Meeting programs this year. The Master Gardener Intern presentations have been very well researched, prepared and presented interesting and well-prepared presentations.

The August Picnic meeting this year was held at Warrior's Path State Park.

Buzzing with Fun at Monday Night's Membership Meeting!

Things were buzzing at our Monday night meeting as Melody challenged everyone to put their insect identification skills to the test! Participants went on an insect scavenger hunt featuring photographs of 25 creepy, crawly and sometimes surprisingly helpful insects found in our gardens, landscapes and turf. Armed with a simple but unique clue for each insect, everyone competed to see who could correctly identify the most mystery bugs. Once the answers were revealed, Melody shared the good, the bad and the buggy—explaining which insects are beneficial friends, and which ones can cause trouble in the landscape. When the final scores were tallied, Donna Fowler emerged as our insect-identification champion, earning bragging rights and a brand-new long-sleeve polo shirt! Congratulations, Donna, and thanks to everyone who joined in the buggy fun!

Upcoming 2026 NETMGA Membership Meetings

(Watch for Signup Genius for more information closer to the event)

NETMGA October 5 Membership Meeting

Ron Ramsey Regional Agricultural Center. Time for a master chef covered dish meeting with another fun program provided by Master Gardener Kestutis "Gus" Vizgirda. We will open the doors at 5:30 to setup covered dishes and begin the meal at 6:00 p.m. Gus will present a program on Blueberry Production in Northeast Tennessee. Come join in learning while having fun talking and visiting with gardening friends.

About our speaker:

Kestutis Vizgirda, known to most simply as "Gus", joined our Northeast Tennessee community in August 2024 after retiring from a 34-year career as a California winemaker. Alongside his work in the cellar, Gus shared his grapevine passion as an instructor in viticulture and winemaking at Mt. San Jacinto College and San Diego State University's Division of Extended Studies.

While grapevines were his primary focus for decades, Gus has shifted his attention to small fruit production, now working to specialize in apples, raspberries, and blueberries. A member of the NETMGA Class of 2025, he lives in Jonesborough with his wife and their two German/Australian Shepherds.

Gus loves delving into garden research and is excited to present his latest findings on

successfully growing blueberries in Northeast Tennessee. His 30-minute talk will cover essential cultural practices for local soils, and he will have full copies of his research project available for anyone interested in digging deeper into the data.

Gus also is a contributor to the Ask a Master Gardener articles in the Johnson City Press.

December 7 – Christmas Dinner and Program
More to come on the December program; so just a few tidbits of information to give you something to look forward to --- We will be meeting at the Ron Ramsey Center, Dinner will be provided by the Cattlemen's organization, and our guest speaker will be Terry Shaw, Howling Hills Publishing.

Ask-A-Master Gardener

The Ask-A-Master Gardener team consists of 12 Master Gardeners. If you have ever thought of writing an article, you can reach out to any of the Northeast Tennessee Master Gardeners listed below to learn more:

Kate O'Lenic, John Hitchcock, Nancy Shilling, Earl Hockin, Patty Neas, Wesley Walker, Susanna Barry, Stephanie Foster, Gus Vizgirda, Adam Watson, Melody Rose, and Brenda McKinnis and several other Master Gardeners and Sullivan and Washington County Extension Agents.

This team meets once a month via zoom to discuss topics of gardening interest for the coming months as well as the season. We all enjoy researching and writing articles that will be of interest and educational to northeast Tennessee.

You can find these articles and more at the NETMGA.net site, under the Ask-A-Master Gardener Tab. https://www.netmga.net/ask-a-master-gardener/

If you get the local newspaper via mail or weblink, articles are available there. And last but not least, Sarah Cox is adding the newsletters to the NETMGA Facebook site. Coming soon you will have the opportunity to read an article written by Gus - **A Totally Honest 5-Step Guide to Weeding Your Garden.** The article is included below for your enjoyment.

A Totally Honest 5-Step Guide to Weeding Your Garden

By Gus Vizgirda

Let's be real for a second: nobody actually *likes* weeding. You're on your knees in the dirt, your back hurts, your phone is covered in mud, and you're basically playing a giant, frustrating game of tug-of-war against plants that didn't even ask permission to grow there.

If you’re stuck doing yard work this weekend, you probably look at a patch of weeds and see pure torture. But if you change your mindset, weeding doesn’t have to be a terrible chore. It can actually be a hilarious, legendary battle against nature.

Here is the ultimate, totally unscientific 5-step guide to surviving—and maybe even enjoying—the great backyard weed war.

Step 1: Suit Up Like a Video Game Character
Before you step outside, you have to dress for battle. You can’t just walk out there in your nice Master Gardener green t-shirt. You need to unlock your inner garden warrior.

Find the oldest, ugliest, most beat-up sneakers in your closet—the ones that are basically held together by duct tape and hope. Throw on a massive, floppy straw hat that makes you look like a character straight out of *Animal Crossing*, and pull-on heavy rubber gloves that make it impossible to use your phone touchscreen. Stand on your back porch, look out over the yard, and give the weeds your best dramatic warrior stare. The crabgrass won't care, but your neighbors will definitely think you’re taking the chore seriously.

Step 2: Pick an Expensive Tool, Use It Once, and Lose It Immediately
A huge part of the weeding experience is looking like a professional and then immediately fumbling the play.

You might already have a fancy, stainless-steel digging tool or a specialized stand-up weeder with a patented claw mechanism. Walk around with it proudly like it's a legendary sword. Use it exactly two times. Then, set it down in the grass to check a text message. Spend the next 45 minutes wandering around the yard trying to find where you dropped it. Eventually, give up entirely, go into the kitchen, and grab a dull cereal spoon to dig with instead. It’s way less efficient, but hey, you’re making your own fun now.

Step 3: Master the "Snap and Pray" Pull Technique
When it comes to actually pulling the weeds, science says you’re supposed to dig deep and get the whole root out so the plant doesn't grow back. But let’s be honest: that takes way too much work.

Instead, use the "Snap and Pray" method. Grab a giant weed by the base, channel your inner weightlifter, and yank it upward as fast as you can. When the stem inevitably snaps cleanly at the soil line—leaving the entire root perfectly safe under the soil—just celebrate anyway. Throw the top of the weed into your bucket and pretend you won. Will the exact same plant grow back twice as big by next Tuesday? Absolutely. But that is a problem for Future You. Today, you got the visual victory.

Step 4: Make a Peace Treaty with the Bermuda Grass
By hour three, the sun is beating down, your water bottle is warm, and you will start to realize that the weeds are actually winning. This is especially true if you are dealing with Bermuda grass, which has underground roots that spread like a massive zombie invasion under your garden beds.

Don’t lose your mind. Just sit cross-legged in the dirt and accept defeat. Have a talk with the grass. Offer it a treaty: *"Look, grass. If you stay on the left side of the zucchini plants, I will leave you alone and let you have the right side."* Accepting that you can’t completely defeat nature is a great lesson in compromise. Plus, it gives you a great excuse to stop working early.

Step 5: The High-Risk Wheelbarrow Grand Finale
Once your bucket is full of dead weeds, it’s time for the best part of the day: the victory lap. Dump all your hard work into a rusty wheelbarrow and try to balance the massive pile over the single, half-flat front tire.

Push the wheelbarrow toward the compost pile as fast as you can, pretending you’re in a racing game. For maximum drama, make sure you hit a hidden tree root or a bump in the lawn at top speed. Watching the entire afternoon's worth of weeds spill spectacularly right back onto the clean grass is the perfect way to finish the day. It also guarantees that you’ll have plenty of "fun" weeding to do again next weekend.

Mark Your Calendar!

September Herb Saplings Meeting

Herb Saplings Meeting will be **September 10**, 7 pm at Exchange Place. “Turmeric, 2026 Herb of the Year, and Other Important Healing Herbs” with James Mulcahey and Billie Wisecarver. Bring an herb snack to share if you have time.

12 Common Mistakes in Landscape Design & How to Avoid Them



Landscape architect, retired UT professor, and author Garry Menendez will present his popular talk, “12 Common Landscape Mistakes and How to Avoid Them,” on Thursday, **September 17, at 7 p.m. at BrightRidge Auditorium,** 2600 Boones Creek Road (Hwy 354) in Johnson City. Sponsored by Southern Appalachian Plant Society (SAPS) the program is free and the public is invited. For more information phone 434-282-3982, email sapsnews@gmail.com, or see http://saps.us.

One of the areas where folks feel most tempted to bypass the advice of professionals is in the creation of gardens and landscape design. It’s very true that gardening is an extremely rewarding endeavor and the feeling of accomplishment that comes with creating a beautiful space is unmatched. But when it comes to choices about the design of our gardens, we’ve all made a mistake or two. Blending his knowledge with humor,

Garry Menendez will show us some common not-so-good landscaping practices and offer tips to help avoid them. Garry is sure to inspire you to see your property with new eyes just in time for fall planting! Signed copies of his garden design book, *A Home for Your Gnome***,** will also be available for purchase.

Garry Menendez is a registered Landscape Architect and Professor Emeritus in the Department of Plant Sciences at The University of Tennessee. His primary areas of interest include residential garden design, and native plant communities. For fifteen years he led students on study abroad experiences throughout Europe and Japan which focused on historic gardens and architecture, culture, and on-site sketching. Garry currently maintains a small private practice focusing on environmentally sensitive landscape design. In addition to his new garden design book, A Home for Your Gnome, he has authored several articles featured in such publications as The Tennessee Gardener, Landscape and Irrigation, and Garden Guide. Throughout his tenure at The University of Tennessee, Garry has received awards for advising, writing, community service, and teaching, including the National Alumni Association's Award for Outstanding Teaching. To see more of his work and talents visit Sustainable Landscape Architecture in Tennessee - Garry Menendez ASLA and Home - A Home for Your Gnome.

Exchange Place Fall Folk Arts Festival

Exchange Place Living History Farm, 4812 Orebank Road in Kingsport, will hold its 54th annual Fall Folk Arts Festival on Saturday, **September 26**, from 10 am to 5 pm, and Sunday, **September 27**, from 12 noon to 5 pm. This celebration of traditional arts and crafts and the harvest season will feature artisans demonstrating and selling a wide array of heritage folk arts, along with autumn plants and seasonal items. Visitors will see nineteenth century skills such as coopering, sorghum making, lye soap making, blacksmithing, spinning and weaving, and hearthside cooking. There will also be food and music, and **young'uns** can try their hand at ol' timey chores and play with activities scattered around the farmstead. Admission is $5 for adults and free for children under 12. For more information, 423-288-6071 or **epfestivals.gf@gmail.com,** or https://exchangeplacetn.org/. Master Gardener volunteers are needed to staff a shift at the Master Gardener table and help with children's activities. To volunteer please contact Joy Moore at 434-282-3982 or email jemmoor@gmail.com.

October Herb Saplings Meeting

Herb Saplings Meeting will be **October 1**, 7 pm at Exchange Place. "Getting Out of Fight or Flight with Herbs" with Seth McLaughlin, Family Nurse Practitioner, Advance Practice Holistic Nurse. Bring an herb snack to share if you have time.

Horticultural information and resources for Tennessee gardeners
https://uthort.tennessee.edu

“Featured Project” – Old Deery Inn

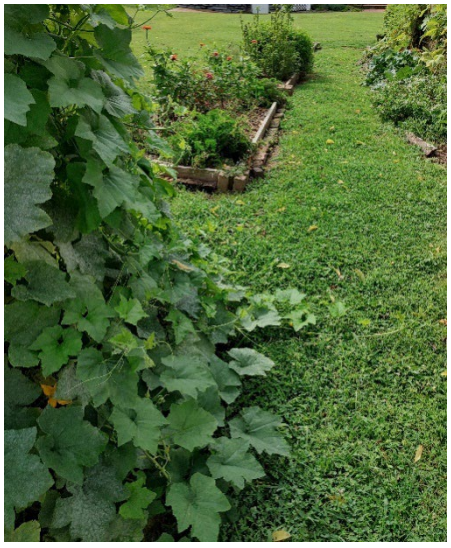
Old Deery Inn and Museum in Blountville is under the care of the Sullivan County Department of Archives and Tourism. The property is situated on Highway 126, just off SR-394. It is a gem that many people may miss as they drive by. The original building was a log cabin built between 1780 and 1790. The Inn survived fires set during the Battle of Blountville during the Civil War.

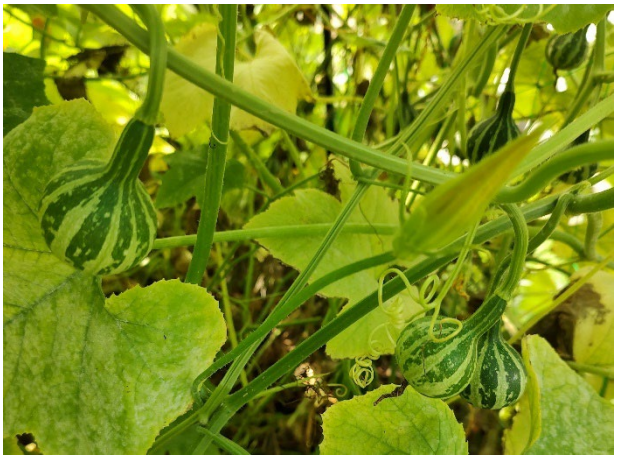
The Inn is being restored by the Sullivan County Historic Preservation Association but is still open for tours. The grounds are chock full of fascinating buildings and the museum is wonderful.

A point of interest is the Smithsonian gates on east side of the Inn. These wrought-iron gates were at the Smithsonian Institute from 1879 until 1910. Also fascinating are the guests who stayed at the Inn, including Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, Andrew Johnson, Louis Phillipe Orleans, the King of France, and the Marquis de LaFayette. The inside doors have been autographed by three Tennessee governors, including Frank Clement, Buford Ellington, and Lamar Alexander, and the front door by President Jimmy Carter.

This site became an official Northeast Tennessee Master Gardener Association project in June 2024. We are enhancing existing gardens and creating new areas to reflect the history of the site. Our first priority was to remove invasive plants, clean up the existing gardens and create or revise gardens to better reflect 1800s life.

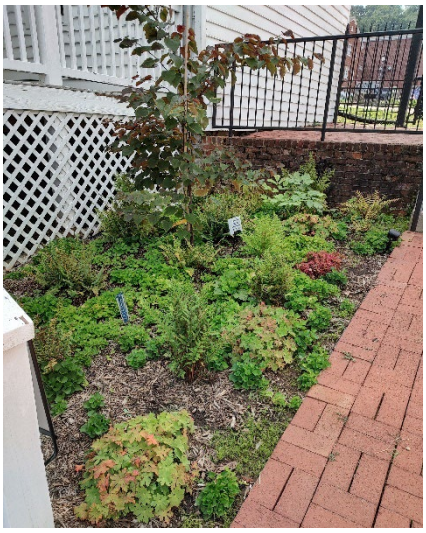
There are 4 raised bed areas that have been reimagined. One is a dye and medicinal plant garden, another is planted with flowers appropriate for the period, the third one is growing spinning gourds, a toy used by children in the 1800s, and the fourth is representative of vegetables raised during the period. The vegetable garden was recently cleared now that the crops of potatoes, onions, corn and green beans have been harvested. Oats are now planted for a cover crop.)





We also cleared out an area surrounded by a split rail fence which has become a pocket prairie.





The areas right off the street behind the Smithsonian gates were converted into native fern gardens which we gathered from the caretaker's mountain cabin. And the grounds by the lower kitchen of the inn is in the process of transforming into a formal herb garden.

We also have an herb garden with a sundial that is a perfect focal point for the grounds. Just for fun, we added a horse hitching post near a building to enhance the 1800s feel of the grounds.





We added a magnolia tree, two holly shrubs and a redbud tree to diversify more of the grounds. As requested by the folks at the Department of Archives and Tourism, we are using native plants as much as possible.

There is a lot of work ahead for the amazing team working on this huge project. We would greatly appreciate additional help in making this a NETMGA showpiece.

Anyone interested in helping can contact Project Leader: Kate O'Lenic
Email: ebkateo@gmail.com.

"Featured Project" – Warriors' Path State Park

When I became a Master Gardener in 2004, Nina Hedrick became my mentor through the Buds and Sprouts program. In 2006, as Darrell's Dream Boundless Playground was being built at Warriors' Path State Park, someone reached out to Nina about having Master Gardeners maintain the playground's plantings. Neither of us knew much about native plants at the time, but we learned together over the years.

Nina and her husband, Bob, had a beautiful garden at their home, and they opened it for many tours and gatherings. She loved hostas and was generous in sharing them, along with many other plants. Nina was particular about a couple of things: she liked plants to be labeled, and she believed every gardener should keep a list of their plants. I am not always consistent with labels, but I do keep a spreadsheet of my plants with a few details about each one. I update it every year, marking out plants that have not survived or that I have given away, and adding new ones. It has become a very useful record.

Nina became more than my Bud and my mentor; she became a dear friend. This spring, she was moved to memory care, and every time I work at the Playground, I think of her. I also think of her when I walk around my yard and see the plants she gave me, when I keep my spreadsheet up to date, and when I try to remember to label my plants.



Nina and Gwyn with the bench dedicated to Nina and Northeast TN Master Gardeners at the Boundless Playground at Warriors' Path State Park in December 2018.

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
Brenda McKinnis 423-946-2769 jbmckinnis4@gmail.com

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
Barbara Voigt 423-467-2013 voigt7b@comcast.net

Old Deery Inn Blountville
Kate O'Lenic ebkateo@gmail.com

Rocky Mount Living History Site Piney Flats
Don Davis home 423-854-0152, cell 423-943-2392
donfdavis@aol.com

Steele Creek Park Bristol, TN
Robin Feirabend 423-764-3336 Feierabe@ETSU.edu

Tipton Haynes State Historic Site Johnson City
Vern Maddux 423-440-9236
vjornm@gmail.com
Betts Leach 423-571-8662 BettsL@aol.com

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!





SEPTEMBER and OCTOBER 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)

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

Asheville Botanical Gardens: 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/

Evergreen of Johnson City Seminars: www.evergreenofjc.com

Evergreen of Colonial Heights Seminars: www.egardenplace.com

Tennessee State Parks: Happenings | Tennessee State Parks

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/

SEP 5 Growing Fall Veggies and Herbs
10:30am. Evergreen of Johnson City; Registration is requested. Call 423-282-3431 or click here: https://evergreenofjc.com/event/growing-fall-veggies-herbs-seminar/

SEP 5 Dig In & Design: Fall Container Workshop
10:30am. Evergreen of Colonial Heights. Create your own Fall flower planter. $40 Workshop Fee. All supplies provided. Registration is required; https://egardenplace.com/events

SEP 6 Houseplant Social at Evergreen of Colonial Heights
https://egardenplace.com/events

SEP 10 Herb Saplings Meeting
7 pm at Exchange Place. Topic: “Turmeric, 2026 Herb of the Year, and Other Important Healing Herbs” with James Mulcahey and Billie Wisecarver. Bring an herb snack to share if you have time.

SEP 12 Fall Festival at Evergreen of Johnson City
10:00am-3:00pm.

SEP 12 The Second Season: Fall Vegetable Gardening
10:30am. Evergreen of Colonial Heights. Speaker: Earl Hockin. Registration is recommended; https://egardenplace.com/events

SEP 14 NETMGA Board Meeting
6:30pm at Ron Ramsey Agricultural Center; Blountville, TN 37617.

SEP 17 September SAPS Meeting
7:00pm. Landscape architect, retired UT professor, and author Garry Menendez will present his popular talk, “12 Common Landscape Mistakes and How to Avoid Them,” *at* **BrightRidge Auditorium,** *2600 Boones Creek Road (Hwy 354) in Johnson City.* See details on page 5 of this newsletter.

SEP 18-20 Fall Naturalists Rally at Roan Mountain State Park
For information and registration: 3cc564_3084591f1d564634a0dd397885d061ca.pdf

SEP 19 Prepping Houseplants for Winter
10:30am. Evergreen of Johnson City; Registration is requested. Call 423-282-3431 or click here: https://evergreenofjc.com/event/prepping-houseplants-for-winter-seminar/

SEP 19 Spring Lawns Start in the Fall
10:30am. Evergreen of Colonial Heights. Fall and Winter Lawn Care. Registration is recommended; https://egardenplace.com/events

SEP 26 All About Fall Blooming Perennials
10:30am. Evergreen of Johnson City; Registration is requested. Call 423-282-3431 or click here: https://evergreenofjc.com/event/all-about-perennials/

SEP 26 East TN Landscaping: What Works, What Doesn’t, & Why
10:30am. Evergreen of Colonial Heights. Tips to improve your landscape success. Registration is recommended; https://egardenplace.com/events

SEP 26-27 54th Annual Fall Folk Arts Festival at Exchange Place Living History Farm
See details on page 6 of this newsletter.

OCT 1 Herb Saplings Meeting
7 pm at Exchange Place. Topic: “Getting Out of Fight or Flight with Herbs” with Seth McLaughlin, *Family Nurse Practitioner, Advance Practice Holistic Nurse.* Bring an herb snack to share if you have time.

OCT 3 Growing Fruit Trees

10:30am. Evergreen of Johnson City; Registration is requested. Call 423-282-3431 or click here: https://evergreenofjc.com/event/growing-fruit-trees/

OCT 3 Beyond Mums: Planting Trees, Shrubs, & Perennials for Fall Color

10:30am. Evergreen of Colonial Heights. Registration is recommended; https://egardenplace.com/events

OCT 5 NETMGA Membership Meeting

Ron Ramsey Regional Agricultural Center. Time for a master chef covered dish meeting with another fun program provided by Master Gardener Kestutis “Gus” Vizgirda. We will open the doors at 5:30 to setup covered dishes and begin the meal at 6:00 p.m. See page 2 of this newsletter for more information.

OCT 10 Planting Bulbs and Cool Season Containers

10:30am. Evergreen of Johnson City; Registration is requested. Call 423-282-3431 or click here: https://evergreenofjc.com/event/planting-bulbs-and-cool-season-containers/

OCT 10 Backyard Birding: Preparing Birds for Fall & Winter

10:30am. Evergreen of Colonial Heights. Registration is recommended; https://egardenplace.com/events

OCT 17 Achieving Fall Color with Trees and Shrubs

10:30am. Evergreen of Johnson City; Registration is requested. Call 423-282-3431 or click here: https://evergreenofjc.com/event/achieving-fall-color-with-trees-shrubs/

OCT 17 Plant Now, Bloom Later: Fall Bulbs for Spring Color

10:30am. Evergreen of Colonial Heights. Registration is recommended; https://egardenplace.com/events

OCT 24 Fall-O-Ween

11:00am-3:00pm. Evergreen of Colonial Heights