NETMGA Northeast Tennessee Master Gardener Association

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Celebrating 250 Years of America!!

How exciting it is to celebrate our country's 250th year of Independence! And how grateful we are to all those who have made our Freedom possible.

I hope all of your gardens are growing and bringing you the joy of fresh vegetables and fruit.

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



NETMGA JULY BOARD MEETING

The next NETMGA Board meeting will be on **July 13** at 6:30pm; Demo Kitchen at Ron Ramsey Regional Agriculture Center, 140 Spurgeon Ln, Blountville, TN 37617.

NETMGA AUGUST MEMBERSHIP MEETING

NETMGA Membership Meeting will be **August 3** at Warriors' Path State Park. More information will be soon.

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NETMGA News!!

NETMGA June Membership Meeting Dinner Recap

We had a wonderful program at the home of Karen Rowell, NETMGA Board Chairman, on June 1, 2026. It is always fun to walk through the gardens at someone's home and see the planting the owner has found interesting and the ideas they have carried out on their property. Karen and Rex Rowell have a beautiful garden. After a snack and social time, the program began.

One of their interests is attracting Blue Martins. Purple Martin population has declined by 24.1% over the last 55 years. That is 2.8 million birds lost. Karen introduced the project the Rowells set up at their home and provided the following information in a handout for the participants. Ed Basconi has also worked with Purple Martins for years and was present to give information on his project to save Purple Martin's and answer questions too.

Purple Martins – Why They Need Our Help

Purple martins (*Progne subis*) are North America's largest swallows and are well known for their graceful flight, social colony nesting, and long-distance migration to South America. In eastern North America, many purple martins now rely on people to provide safe nesting houses or gourds, which has made them one of the most familiar backyard birds of spring and summer.

Key Facts

- **Appearance:** Adult males look glossy blue-black in sunlight, while females and young birds are grayer below with paler bellies.
- **Size:** Purple martins are about 7 to 8.5 inches long, making them the largest swallow in North America.
- **Habitat:** They prefer open or semi-open areas, especially near ponds, rivers, fields, towns, and other places with flying insects.
- **Diet:** They eat flying insects that they catch in midair and even skim water while flying to drink.
- **Nesting:** In the East, they usually nest in human-provided houses or gourds; in parts of the West, they may still use natural cavities such as old woodpecker holes.
- **Migration:** Purple martins breed in North America and spend the nonbreeding season in South America, with many wintering in Brazil and the Amazon Basin.

Life Cycle and Conservation

Purple martins usually nest in colonies, and both parents help feed the young. They gather in large flocks before fall migration and may return to the same nesting area year after year. Although the species is still widespread, local populations can be affected by competition for nest sites, predators, and declines in insect food. People can help by providing well-maintained martin housing in open spaces, using predator guards, reducing pesticide use, and monitoring nest sites to keep out invasive competitors such as European starlings and house sparrows.

Fun Facts

- Purple martins are the **largest swallows in North America**.
- Males often look more **shiny blue-black** than truly purple.
- They catch insects **while flying**.
- Many spend the winter in **South America**.

Resources: www.PurpleMartin.org

Upcoming 2026 NETMGA Membership Meetings

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

August 3 - Warrior's Path State Park – Pavillion 5 – Picnic
Program – What is Attacking My Garden – Pest and Diseases – How to Manage
Speaker – Melody Rose ANR Extension Agent III & Master Gardener Coordinator Sullivan County

October 5 – Ron Ramsey Regional Agricultural Center
Program – Fall Fruit Care
Speaker – Melody Rose ANR Extension Agent III & Master Gardener Coordinator Sullivan County

December 7 – Ron Ramsey Regional Agricultural Center
Christmas Dinner and Program

Ask-A-Master Gardener

Ask-A-Master Gardener volunteers work in partnership with Northeast Tennessee Master Gardeners to expand the educational outreach, providing home gardeners with researched-based information.

The Ask-A-Master Gardeners group initially began in 2021 writing articles for the regional newspaper syndicate to be distributed throughout the region. The group has expanded to include many additional activities. These activities include information booths at various home and farm shows, answering Ask-a-Master Gardener phone calls, and teaching classes in the community. Their presence can be seen in many local historic site gardens events.

Kate O'Lenic coordinates the articles which will be written and submitted to the newspapers. The writers meet once a month to discuss the upcoming month's articles and who will volunteer to write an article. The article is submitted to Kate, who reviews and edits, then submits it to the newspaper contact. The articles are also submitted to the NETMGA web master and the NETMGA Facebook administrator.

Laurin Hagy coordinates the local opportunities for event education. Event education may include project events or community events. Laurin has materials needed to coordinate

with events and will help coordinate providing materials needed.

The articles submitted over the last month include:

Author	Topic (publish date)
Kate O'Lenic	June Garden (6/6/2026)
Univ MD	How to Press Flowers (6/13/2026)
Joy Moore	Getting Started with Herbs (06/20/2026)
Dave Rogers	Harvest of Hope (6/27/2026)

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/

Terrariums – The Easiest Garden You'll Ever Have

By Kate O'Lenic; Published May 30, 2026

I love having plants in my house. But I have 4 cats that love to ruin my indoor plants. And I work outside on so many gardens that I prefer to keep the indoor gardening easy. The answer for me is closed terrariums. They are simple, easy to create and maintain, cat-proof, and provide year-round interest.

To create a closed terrarium, you'll need a nice clear glass or plastic container with a cover that fits snugly. You can buy a container but there a plenty of things you can upcycle to use. For example, clear glass cookie jars or candy jars will work. Large canning jars, apothecary jars or any other covered container can work. Just make sure it is clear and has an opening large enough to reach into to plant and maintain the garden.

To decide the style of container to use, consider where you'll keep it. If you want a terrarium as a centerpiece in your dining room, something a little fancy would be lovely. As a retired pharmacist, I like the idea of an apothecary jar for the kitchen. A cookie jar terrarium would also be fun in the kitchen.

To prepare the terrarium, be sure to keep everything clean. Because it is a closed system and will be humid, it is perfect for growing things other than your plants. Wash your hands or wear clean gloves when handling your materials. Clean the container well with hot, soapy water, rinse well and dry.

A soilless potting mix is needed along with some charcoal powder mixed in. The charcoal adds organic matter and will adsorb odors or chemicals. Organic charcoal is readily available at garden centers and online. Add enough potting mix to accommodate the largest root ball you plan to plant. Moisten the soil but avoid over wetting it. You do not need to add pebbles or rocks to the bottom of the container.

The plants that will work best in a closed terrarium are moisture-loving woodland plants or topicals. Small, slow growing plants or dwarf plants will do well. Since indoor lighting will be dimmer than outdoors, make sure your plants will thrive in low light. Moss, lichens and ferns are good choices. Depending on your taste, you can use a single plant or a

mixture of plants. Resources below have lists of plants with details useful in deciding what to choose.

It is great fun to mix plants of different textures and colors. Adding some decorative stones or small items create more interest. Make a small path with pebbles. Just make sure they are clean before using. Make different levels or curves with the soil. If you decide to use several plants, choose ones with different heights. The terrarium can be whatever your imagination conjures up.

Make sure the plants you choose are healthy. Before putting plants in the container, remove any damaged or yellowed leaves. Also, pre-assemble the plants and any other items outside the container to make sure it is what you want and will fit. It is easy to overdo the number of plants.

There are some tools needed for planting and maintaining the terrarium. You can use you clean hands if you like or a long-handled kitchen spoon can be used for digging in the soil for planting or removing a plant. To tamp the soil down, try a cork attached to a skewer or chopstick. A pair of scissors or small clippers will come in handy when yellowed leaves require removal.

Once you've finalized your plans, plant away! Tidy up any soil that got on the sides of the container. A small amount of water is needed at this point. It is better to use a little water and add some later than trying to evaporate excess water. Add the cover to the container and observe to make sure condensation is present. You are setting up a rain cycle with a light fog of condensation that beads up and rolls down the inside. If there is too much water, remove the cover and let some water evaporate. During the first few weeks, disease, if present, generally appears. Remove diseased material or treat with the appropriate agent.

Maintenance of a terrarium is pretty simple. If you have a very tight-fitting lid, remove it once a week to allow fresh air in. If condensation disappears, add a little water. Water may not be needed for months if the lid is tight. Once a year in spring, a small amount of fertilizer may be added at ¼ the recommended rate. Prune out any leaves or stems that are overgrown or yellowed. Finally, keep the outside of the container clean to allow light in.

Enjoy the creativity of designing a terrarium that will provide interest in the house without a lot of work.

Resources:
"Creating a Closed Terrarium," https://extension.psu.edu/creating-a-closed-terrarium

"How to Design a Closed-System Terrarium,"
https://extension.msstate.edu/publications/how-design-closed-system-terrarium

"Terrariums," https://extension.missouri.edu/publications/g6520

Mark Your Calendar!

Hamlett-Dobson Farm Fest 2026

Hamlett-Dobson Farm Fest will provide old-fashioned family fun on Sunday, **July 19**, from 2-5 p.m. at Exchange Place Living History Farm, 4812 Orebank Road in Kingsport. Farm Fest celebrates the pleasures of country life as visitors step back into the nineteenth century and enjoy fresh summer food like watermelon and corn on the cob, join in activities from bygone days like sack races, hay rides, and cakewalks. Listen to music on traditional instruments, see the farm animals, and try your hand at old time crafts. The event is part of Kingsport's Fun Fest and is free with no ticket or registration required. A shuttle bus will run from Mountain View United Methodist Church to Exchange Place from 1:45 to 5:30 pm to ease parking congestion. This is a fun, family oriented community event, and we need volunteers to help with plant and garden related activities. It's a fun way for Master Gardeners to earn volunteer hours. For more info or to volunteer: 423-348-6572 or jemmoor@gmail.com.

Battle of Island Flats 250th Anniversary Commemoration Features 18th Century Foodways and Appalachian Medicine

Join us for a special 250th anniversary commemoration interpreting the Battle of Island Flats — the first major battle of the Cherokee War of 1776 and one of the opening conflicts of the American Revolution on the southern frontier — on Saturday, **July 25**, from 10 am to 3 pm and Sunday, **July 26**, from noon to 3 pm at Exchange Place Living History Farm, 4812 Orebank Road in Kingsport.

Fought near the Long Island of the Holston in July 1776, the battle saw frontier settlers and Virginia militia from Virginia's New River Valley clash with Cherokee warriors led by Dragging Canoe during a coordinated campaign against the expanding settlements along the Holston, Watauga, and Nolichucky rivers. The battle marked a major turning point in the struggle for control of the southern Appalachian frontier and helped open Southwest Virginia, upper East Tennessee, and eventually Kentucky to expanding settlement.

At this two-day commemoration Cherokee interpreters from the Appalachian region and Virginia militia living historians will bring the frontier world of the 18th-century to life near the very landscape where these dramatic events unfolded. Visitors will experience:

- Living History Encampments – Explore authentic frontier camps and learn about daily life on the Tennessee frontier during the Revolutionary era
- Cherokee Cultural Interpretations – Learn about Cherokee history, lifeways, and the broader Cherokee War of 1776. Displays/activities will include regional Native American artifacts with the tribal archaeologist on hand to answer questions, Cherokee leather crafts and Native American music played by a Cherokee flute player throughout the day
- Historic Foodways – Discover the foods, cooking methods, and survival skills used by frontier settlers and Cherokee communities.
- Battlefield Interpretation - Learn how the battle unfolded through maps, historical

analysis and interpretation of the Island Flats battlefield.

- Historic Weapons Demonstrations – See period long rifles, trade guns and other historic firearms with scheduled firing demonstrations and a display of war clubs with a weapons demonstration by the Cherokee War Chief.
- Primary Sources & Historical Documents – View reproductions of original Revolutionary-era documents relating to the battle and its aftermath.



Of special interest to plant people, on Sunday, **July 26**, at 1 pm, Cherokee Medicine Man Lee "Ewani" Eames will give a presentation on "The Healing Herbs of the Appalachian Mountains." He will bring with him some of the herbs that our ancestors have used for centuries throughout East Tennessee and surrounding areas, that have helped to heal and sustain both European and Native American descendants alike.

Sponsored by Hamlett-Dobson Funeral Homes and Exchange Place, this free event is part of Fun Fest. No ticket or registration is required. For more information and updates, contact 713–825–9131 or wooldrickfritts@gmail.com or see https://www.facebook.com/events/exchange-place-kingsport-tn-1850s-farm/battle-of-island-flats-commemoration/1438188830844429/

Spring in East Tennessee in 2026

By Sue Stanley, MG since 2006, gardening in Knoxville, TN

One of the things I love most about East Tennessee is its four distinct seasons. As a native Californian, I was captivated by the lush greenery that surrounded me when I moved here. In Sacramento, spring seemed to arrive in February, last only about three weeks, and give way to summer by March. Pools near my home opened in April and closed for only two months after Christmas. That was life in the 1970s, so when I moved to East Tennessee in 1977, I fell in love with its long, mild springs, warm summers, moderate falls, and colder winters.

How things have changed! I'm slowly adapting to a new way of gardening. With more frequent thunderstorms, high winds, and heavy rain moving through our area, I've had to learn new techniques to adjust to this new normal.

As a backyard cut flower grower, this year's longer, wetter spring disrupted the hardening-off process because of constant thunderstorms. I had to move my potted seedlings back into the grow room three times and start the process over. When the rain finally stopped, 85-degree weather arrived suddenly, and the plants were not ready for that much heat.

So, back under the shady porch they went to begin the process again. I made accommodation again by cutting back leggy plants, avoiding overwatering, withholding fertilizer, and placing shade cloth over the smallest zinnia seedlings, which I had planted only two days earlier. I also ordered trellis netting with six-inch grids to place over the zinnia bed so the plants can grow straight up through it. I have never used it before, so this will be another learning experience!



My cut flower garden brings me immense joy. I think of my seedlings as my babies, and I want to see them thrive. I am grateful for resources like UT Extension and even AI tools online when I need help learning how to do something. Trying original approaches, experimenting, and continuing to learn are wonderful ways to stay young.

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
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!





JULY and AUGUST 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/

JUL 8 Pollinator Pursuit Activity
2:00pm. Sponsored by Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park. Event Details: Pollinator Pursuit Activity | Tennessee State Parks

JUL 6-25 Summer in the Park at Warriors' Path State Park
9:00am. Daily Event Details: Warriors' Path State Park | Tennessee State Parks

JUL 11 Bonsai Planter Workshop at Evergreen of Johnson City
9:30am. There is a fee for this workshop and registration is required by July 10. Event Details: Bonsai Planter Workshop - Evergreen of Johnson City, TN

JUL 13 NETMGA Board Meeting
6:30pm at Ron Ramsey Agricultural Center; Blountville, TN 37617.

JUL 15 Little Gardner Wednesdays at Evergreen of Johnson City
9:30am. Event Details: Little Gardener Wednesdays - 7/15/26 - Evergreen of Johnson City, TN

JUL 17 Pollinator Pursuit Activity
2:30pm. Sponsored by Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park. Event Details: Pollinator Pursuit Activity | Tennessee State Parks

JUL 19 Hamlett-Dobson Farm Fest
2:00-5:00pm. Exchange Place Living History Farm. See details on page 6 of this newsletter.

JUL 25-26 Battle of Island Flats 250th Anniversary Commemoration
Exchange Place Living History Farm. See details on page 6 of this newsletter.

JUL 29 Little Gardner Wednesdays at Evergreen of Johnson City
9:30am. Event Details: Little Gardener Wednesdays - 7/29/26 - Evergreen of Johnson City, TN

AUG 3 NETMGA Membership Meeting
Warrior's Path State Park – Pavillion 5 – Picnic. Program – What is Attacking My Garden – Pest and Diseases – How to Manage. Speaker – Melody Rose ANR Extension Agent III & Master Gardener Coordinator Sullivan County. More information to be provided.