

GARDEN VOICE



COUNTY 76 NEWSLETTER

2nd Quarter April 2025

Volume 29, Number 2

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

A wonderful unintended consequence of what we experienced during the recent pandemic was the fact that Master Gardener training and plant sale events were spread out in our state rather than mostly occurring in the larger towns. Pre-pandemic, our choices for getting together were sometimes limited to Central or Northwest Arkansas, and now, we have many more opportunities to visit and learn in other towns and counties in our state. No matter what part of the state, or the size of the community, each is unique and has much to offer.

Our current events are of outstanding quality and provide valuable learning and connecting opportunities – most likely in a location near you 😊 I wish I had space and time to send compliments and appreciation to every Master Gardener who has made County Seminars and Plant Sales happen. I have attended several – and they do not disappoint! Please follow the opportunities listed in our Statewide Constant Contact emails from Julie Treat at the State Office to Calendar your experiences.

In a few days, we will experience this year's State Master Gardener Conference in Searcy, White County. As is traditional, you can attend training by local and national experts, purchase from local (and other) vendors, visit local gardens and landmarks, experience delicious food and meet others with a heart for 'all things plants' like yours. Just about the most fun you can have is participating in the Silent Auction which is sponsored by the County 76 Fundraising Project. (It's where you can buy a Spirit Pole or a Lamp Pole and scholarship money is raised.) At the same time, you will be immersed in the uniqueness of being in Searcy, in White County "*Past the Garden Gate*". Our conference will take place June 5 – 7, 2025, at Harding University.

Did you know that Master Gardener Hosting County groups meet regularly and plan for two (2) years with Randy Forst and Julie Treat before the state conference is held? That's why the State Conference is no accident.

I have spent some time thinking about my personal experience in Master Gardeners. If you are new, or lifetime, I hope you have found that we are of many backgrounds. Whether you have a plot or a pot, you are a contributing member. I always want to be surrounded by the best people and experiences – and that's what I've found. You will make friends for a lifetime. You will know others who have different interests but are

willing to share. My house and yard are filled with flowers and plants from my MG friends. I'm reminded of that every year.

I wish you success. What you do makes a difference locally and statewide. Just remember – your plants are rooting for you:)

Smiles,

Becky Gibson

County 76 President



L: Cotton Candy Fern
– Pope Co. Conference



R: Mt. Hood Daffodils
– Pass Along

MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

~Business~

- Becky Gibson called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. She welcomed everyone and shared the day's agenda.
- Minutes from the January 28, 2025, County 76 General Meeting will be filed with two corrections.
- Gail McClure presented the 1st Quarter 2025 County 76 Income and Expense report. The report shows a net income loss of \$1,828.39 with a Workday CES balance of \$100,424.60. Gail offered to provide a spread sheet with detailed data to the Project Chairs upon request. Gail noted that we carry a large balance and were aware of the need to spend some of that down. We have done that by giving additional scholarships. When asked if we could use an accounting program other than Workday. Gail shared that the University does not allow us to purchase any other software programs. The Treasurer's Report stands accepted as presented and will be filed.
- Susan Colles, Co-Chair, gave the Scholarship Committee Report. She shared a letter of thanks from Elly, a 4H recipient of a scholarship to help her attend the 4H conference.

Janet B. Carson County Sanctioned Project Scholarships 2025

Fourteen (14) applications were received and rated by the committee.

The following scholarships have been approved by the Executive Board and awarded.

- *The Come Garden with Carroll County Project*
Carroll County - \$1,000.00
- *The Arkansas Heritage Garden Project*
Drew County - \$1,000.00
- *The Lincoln Community Garden Project*
Washington County - \$1,000.00

Susan explained that the committee has requested that an additional \$500.00 be approved for a JBC County Sanctioned Project Scholarship which was rated very high and only asked for \$500.00. This request was approved by

the Executive Board, Gail explained that this would require a motion to amend the budget. Joellen Beard made the motion to amend the budget to include an additional \$500 scholarship. Kate Spontak seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Janet B. Carson High School Senior Scholarships 2025 - 2026

Eleven (11) applications were received. The following recipients were chosen to receive a \$2,000 scholarship.

- *Levi Babb*, Faulkner County
Arkansas State University, majoring in Crop Science
- *Kassidy Clark*, Searcy County
Arkansas Tech University, majoring in Agriculture Education
- *Lawson Petrus*, Lonoke County
University of Arkansas, majoring in Crop Science
- *Luke Walker*, Washington County,
University of Arkansas, Majoring in Crop Science & Plant Pathology

Students will be awarded their certificates and recognized in their respective counties.

- Randy Forst, Arkansas Consumer Horticulture/Master Gardener Coordinator, shared information about his life & work.

~From the Farm~

- Roses are blooming. Randy favorites: Gold medallion (fragrant) and apricot drift rose (disease resistant & fragrant).
- Randy has 102 mama ewes. They breed for 8 years and then retire to the 'geriatric pasture'. They have no more rams, no babies, no anything – just a good life. The only group that has access to that pasture is the little lambs, so they can have extra feed time. There are 7 geriatric ewes, and a three-month-old lamb bred them. They are so excited. . .because. . . babies. One mother had twins and one of them was so small he wasn't cared for. Randy found him, bottle fed him and he is thriving. His name is "Tater Tot".

~From Extension~

- The new Administrative Assistant in Horticulture working with Randy and Julie is Jessica Daves. She is also a new Master Gardener from Saline County. She completed training in Garland County.
- Randy listed County Master Gardener presentations and events.
 - Washington County: 19 new master gardeners (in-person).
 - Cluster training hosted by Garland County: Saline, Grant, Montgomery, and Hot Springs counties involved; 50+ participants.
 - Three District financial trainings have been held.
 - Craighead County Spring Garden Event.
 - Hot Spring County (Malvern)
 - White County State 2025 Conference planning meetings (3)

- Faulkner County 2026 Conference planning meetings (3)
- Garland County Cluster Training (2)
- Master Gardener Monday (3)
- Hempstead County: Cover crop program
- Greene County 2027 Conference planning meetings (3)
- Master Gardener Advanced training: Apple grafting event
- Pulaski County: Bird program (very successful)
- Garland County: Presentation given last week
- Randy shared Consumer Horticulture Events
 - Randolph County: Tree fruit pruning training.
 - Arkansas County Cut Flower Association
 - Sharp County: Raised bed gardening
 - Clark County: Cover crops
 - Randolph County: Berry production training
 - Grow Your Own Groceries: Vegetable container gardening program
 - "What's Up Wednesdays": Horticulture Agent Update (3)
- Many plant sales are coming up. This coming Saturday, April 26, there are 21 plant sales. Plant sales are a great fundraiser.
- This year's *Annuals to Perennials* session for mentors and mentees will be a virtual program on Thursday, July 10, 2025, 6 – 8 p.m. Our speaker is Joe Lamp'l.
- Our annual Plant, Nurture, Grow Leadership Conference will be held at the 4H Center in Ferndale on Wednesday and Thursday, October 1 & 2, 2025. It is open to all Master Gardeners across the state. Registration is limited to 140 participants.
- This year's Master Gardener Appreciation Day will be at the Hope Southwest Research Station on Friday, June 20, 2025. Participation is limited to 300 Master Gardeners due to lunch shifts. We will learn about American Selection Trials conducted by Anthony Bowden, Assistant Professor – Ornamentals Specialist with CES/Horticulture. Randy and Julie will be helping plant plants for Appreciation Day.
- Please find tips, tricks, and good gardening advice on Randy's Blog, *The Arkansas Garden*.
- We should feel free to email Randy and Julie to schedule a presentation.
- Following Randy's Update, a member asked him about the availability of Financial Resources for our County Master Gardener groups which were mentioned in Katy Brantley's presentation through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (e.g., EQIP program). Randy responded addressing the fact that our Master Gardener organization is a part of Extension Services of the University of Arkansas.

- If a local group wants to apply for financial incentives, it must go through the University of Arkansas. In other words, the University must work with you.
- An individual can serve as the applicant/representative, but they must still work through the university.
- You must be thorough and follow the requirements. For instance, I know there are Land Requirements. You need some sort of written letter or something to say that you are responsible for that land and you have permission to use that. It might just be a lender. It doesn't have to be a formal lease where you're paying.
- The Farm Service Agency can provide guidance on what qualifies for financial incentives.



*L: Randy presents at
Craighead Co. Seminar
R: Tilted pic of Tator Tot
in Randy's hand*



~Education~



Our guest speaker was Katy Brantley, Arkansas Urban Conservation Specialist with UADA - The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The NRCS was originally known as the Soil Conservation Service. The NRCS works with agricultural producers to protect natural resources and implement conservation solutions to on-farm concerns. Working with ranchers, farmers, and even gardeners of all sizes and locations, NRCS provides free technical assistance and will help producers develop a conservation plan.

Conservation Principles of Practice were listed.

- 1) Minimizing disturbance and tillage.
- 2) Maximizing biodiversity above ground to help with diversity below ground.
- 3) Maximizing soil cover with plants and mulch.
- 4) Keeping roots in the ground as long as possible.

Over 100 conservation practices exist. These are popular practices for specialty crop producers:

- High tunnels - Useful for extending the growing season. Provide protection from rainfall, cold, wind, and sun (with shade cloth). Used for high-value crops like tomatoes, strawberries, peppers, lettuce, cut flowers, and herbs. Crops must be grown in the natural soil profile. Key considerations: Suitable site with adequate sun and drainage. Water source for irrigation since rainfall is excluded. HOA or city ordinances may

regulate these structures. We have a great resource - the high tunnel educator for the state through extension.

- Low tunnels - Provide similar benefits to high tunnels but are smaller, more mobile, and less expensive. They can protect crops from pests using insect netting. They can use shade cloth in the summer and fabric or plastic in the winter for temperature protection. Low tunnels are versatile. They can be used in gardens, farms, high tunnels, raised beds, or containers.
- Mulching - Mulching helps control soil erosion and improves moisture management. Depending on the mulch, it can maintain or increase organic matter in the soil. There are synthetic (plastic or landscape fabric) and natural mulch options.
- Soil carbon amendment (compost, biochar) - Compost is made from organic waste and adds organic matter back into the soil. It improves soil and biological health and function. You should test garden soil before adding inputs. Be sure to use mature compost that is completely decomposed and safe for plants. Proper composting kills most weed seeds.
- Soil and Mulch - Katy advises against using 100% mulch. She suggests mixing it with topsoil or potting soil for structure. Leaves and mulch can be used as fillers in the bottom of beds, with soil and compost piled on top. This approach requires ongoing input as the filler breaks down.
- Pollinator planting - Quail Forever biologists provide wildlife technical assistance and share resources. Leslie with Quail Forever is focused on monarchs, native bees, and pollinators. They can help tailor native plant species lists, source seeds from vendors, and provide pollinator planting signs. They develop wildlife habitat planting plans and help with site preparation and maintenance of native plantings.
- Micro-irrigation systems - Helps establish an irrigation system. Engineers can design systems to meet specific crop and area water requirements. They provide uniform, consistent, and controlled watering. These often involves drip systems. They can incorporate timers, irrigation scheduling, and soil moisture sensors.
- Rainwater catchment systems – These captures rainwater from high tunnels or other buildings. They manages runoff water and save money on irrigation. Iowa State has a video and publication on how to build a rainwater catchment system on a high tunnel. This involves using gutters to direct water into storage containers.
- Pest management - Transitioning to organic certification opportunities are available. Partnering with the Calf Farm in Grantville (Center for Arkansas Farms and Food).

Katy then informed on the resources of The Natural Resources Conservation Service.

- Financial Assistance Programs - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial assistance to implement conservation practices. It is a cost-share

program with set payment rates for each practice. There is no minimum ag income or size/location limitations. Applications are accepted throughout the year, with a cutoff date in November. It is a competitive process.

- EQIP Eligibility - Applicant must be an agricultural producer (owner or renter) with an interest in the products produced. They need to show control of the land for the proposed contract. Must address resource concerns on the property.
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) - CSP is for farmers, ranchers, and forest producers who have a good conservation baseline and want to do more. They work with the local office to identify opportunities for enhancements on existing practices. It is a five-year contract with no minimum acreage requirement, but the entire operation must be enrolled. There is a base payment for existing conservation and payments for implementing enhancements. It is best for those already farming the land, planning to continue, and engaged in conservation.
- Farm Service Agency (FSA) - FSA registers farms and assigns a farm number, which needs to be eligible for financial assistance. FSA offers microloans for smaller operations and farm storage facility loans (e.g., grain bins, refrigerated storage). FSA manages disaster assistance funding, including the Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP).
- Online Resources - [Farmers.gov](https://farmers.gov) is a user-friendly website with information and resources. It provides access to paperwork, local stats, and data. Conservation Concerns Tool: Breaks down resource concerns into major categories and subcategories.
- Small Scale Producers Resources - Consolidates resources and technical information for small-scale producers, including resources outside of the NRCS. Web Soil Survey: A free service to learn about soil properties on any land area. It provides soil maps, chemical/physical properties, and suitability/limitation data.
- Ecological Site Descriptions - Provides historical reference data about a site before human intervention, including dominant plant species, physiographic features, and climate features.
- People's Garden Initiative - A USDA-wide program connecting community gardens focused on sustainability, local food production, and pollinator habitat. It includes food-producing gardens, wildlife habitats, and beautification projects. The program focuses on education and training, providing information about conservation and food production.

Other NRSC benefits include access to webinars, resources, and a network of gardens.

Katy Brantley brought information which helped us with awareness of the vast work of the NCRS Arkansas. She was patient and generous with her offer of assistance and resources.

THE PROJECT PATCH

Recruitment, Retention, Recognition [RRR]

Don Casteel, Chair

The activities of the RRR Project are vital to both County 76 and Arkansas Statewide Events. A change is needed in the format of Annual State Awards. Basically, we follow Bylaws for our Leadership. Our Leader positions are either 1 or 2 years. If a leader serves longer than that, it is due to the willingness of the person to lead and approval of the Executive Board. We have depended on the skills and dedication of Liz Hale to do this work for the last three years, and she has done an outstanding job. In the past, Liz has partnered with Hilde Simmons and Mimi Cox. Liz will not be able to continue this work in 2026.

There is a huge amount of detailed work to give two awards for nine categories. This will be close to impossible for someone who is new to this position. To simplify our system, Randy has suggested that we move from having two awards in 9 categories to one award in each category. To make this change, approval must be given by the RRR Project Members, the Executive Board, and the Membership.

Don Casteel presented this information to the RRR Members. The result of a balloted vote was in favor of making the change by 9 to 1.

Prior to the afternoon General Meeting, the Board met in ad hoc session and voted in favor of making the change.

Before conducting a general membership balloted vote, Don presented a detailed explanation of the State Award policies and procedures. Ballots from members were in support of this change 39 to 2.

As a result of this, there will be one Master Gardener Award for each category for the 2025 awards. Nominations for 2025 awards will be turned-in this Fall with a deadline of January 15, 2026. Winners will be honored at the 2026 State Master Gardener Conference.

If you or someone you know is interested in working with the State Master Gardener Awards, please email County76armg@gmail.com

Advanced Training

Joellen Beard, Chair; Valerie Smith, Co-chair

Joellen shared the Advanced Training events for this year.

- **Compost Happens** will be *Friday, September 5, 2025*, and sponsored by the Washington County Master Gardeners in Fayetteville. Presenters will be experts in the field. In addition, this full day training will offer an optional facility tour following training.
- **NGC Garden School – Course 3** is a continuation of Courses 1 & 2 in the National Garden Club's Training. This will be *Friday and Saturday, September 12 & 13, 2025*. It is a collaboration with Hughes Town & Country Garden Club and Crittenden County Master Gardeners. This training will be in West Memphis or Marion. Last year, this was 13 Advanced Training hours.

- **Evergreen Year Round** was approved for *Friday, October 17, 2025*. It will be hosted by Garland County Master Gardeners. Training will be 5 – 6 hours and will include experts, also sharing about evergreen plants.
- **Seeds: Saving, Germinating, Harvesting and Storage** will be Friday, August 1, 2025, at the Farm Research Center in Arkansas County between DeWitt and Stuttgart. Speakers include Michael Washburn with Seed Saver Exchange and John Korkendall.

Joellen encourages everyone to think about organizing an Advanced Training. It is not hard; there is a streamlined process. You can begin to think about speakers and hands-on activities. Questions about proposed training are welcome.

Fundraising

Susan Colles, Chair; Sheila Waddell, Co-chair

- Susan told us there are 20 submissions for solar porch lights from 13 counties, and 13 spirit poles for auction, also from 13 counties.
- State Conference Silent Auction Donations are to be brought in by Thursday morning, no later than noon.
- Silent Auction Volunteers are needed, especially on Friday, to close the auction.
- We are selling Root Slayer shovels (\$50.00) and trowels (\$20.00) which are pre-ordered.
- We are selling Rain Jackets with the Master Gardener logo (samples available). Colors available: maroon, porous green, and royal blue. Also sold by pre-order. Sizes are small through 3X. They are \$38.00.
- Orders for all items: deadline is tomorrow night (April 23, 2025) at midnight.
- Plans for Fundraising at the PNG Leadership Conference in October will be discussed at the July meeting.

Plant, Nurture, Grow Leadership [PNG]

Linda Soffer, Chair; Phil McConnell, Co-chair

- Linda told us this year's PNG Leadership Conference is Wednesday and Thursday, October 1 & 2, 2025.
- Registration: \$25 per person (without lodging).
- The location of this year's conference will be the same as last year's, C.A. Vines 4-H Center, 1 Four H Way, Little Rock AR 72223.
- Lodging rates at Ferndale: \$89.75 for single, Double: \$70.25, Triple: \$53.50 per person. This year's registration and lodging are the same as last year's thanks to the early planning of our PNG Project.
- Most sessions, topics, and speakers are assigned.
- Input from membership is welcome regarding session topics.
- Contact Linda Soffer at 870-540-5099 or lsoffer@outlook.com
- We will have a party in the garden as we did last year. Our theme will continue, "Life's a Party in the Garden". We are planning a Hat Parade and Contest.
- Our conference planning is continuous with monthly meetings.



Media Relations

Mike Wilbanks, Coordinator

Mike Wilbanks, Craighead County, has been invaluable in the successful production of our Arkansas Master Gardener Calendar for many years. We are so grateful for his continued willingness to do this – and be the best at it:)) He brought much information.

- Entries continue to arrive for the C76 MG twelve Month Calendar.
- Four new qualified applicants have been secured for the overall judging of the photographs for the 2025 calendar. One from out of state and three from Arkansas.
- Old photographs can be used if they were not a previous winner in the Master Gardener competition.
- *Some reasons for disqualification*; no vegetation, out of focus, no supporting data even after clarification requested.
- Original photographs only from exhibitors taken from inside the state borders of Arkansas.
- Photos must contain plant material.
- This is NOT an animal calendar.
- Photos judged on Creativity, originality, composition, and technical merit.
- Four (4) entries per person. Only one per season. jpeg format only.
- Multiple seasonal entries from the same season will result in all entries for that season to be disqualified.
- Vertical submissions will be cropped to horizontal format. Thusly, most of the image will be lost.
- This is an example of how the photo(s) must be labeled using your own information:

Your name, your county name, name of entry, season of photo.

Paul Jones, Benton, Dogwood Berries, WI

If you do not properly name your photo(s), (e.g.image412264),and adhere to the above entry labeling conditions, they will not be considered.

County 76 Meetings:

Tuesday, July 22, 2025

Tuesday, October 28, 2025

State MG Conference (White County):

Thursday, June 5, 2025 –

Saturday, June 7, 2025

MG Appreciation Day (Hope):

Friday, June 20, 2025

Annuals-to-Perennials:

Thursday, July 10, 2025

Plant, Nurture, Grow Conference:

Wednesday, October 1 –

Thursday, October 2, 2025



The Garden Voice is looking for County 76 volunteers. If you write, edit, and/or proofread text; take and send photos; or use graphics and WORD templates in Windows and .pdf formats, please email

County76ARMG@gmail.com

Thank you.

It's A Bird's Life

Advanced Training Visitors

Great Horned Owl

Peregrine Falcon

Harris' Hawk

From

Raptor Rescue

El Paso, AR



WE WELCOME A NEW MEMBER

Brenda Tillman

White Hall

Jefferson County

Plant, Nurture, Grow Leadership



Tuesday, July 22, 2025, 10:00 am
The next
County 76 Membership/Project Meeting
State Extension Office
2301 S. University Ave, Little Rock, AR 72204
We look forward to seeing you there!

Pursuant to 7 CFR §15.3, the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture offers all its Extension and Research programs and services (including employment) without regard to race, color, sex, national origin, religion, age, disability, marital or veteran status, generic information, sexual preference, pregnancy or any other legally protected status, and is an equal opportunity institution