The Grapevine

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Kristin Overbey

Garden plans are already in the works for many of us. I know I have stacks of seed catalogs on my table, and it's exciting to start seeing the first bulbs popping up — sure signs that spring is on its way!

The year is already off to a busy start for our Master Gardeners, and there are no signs of slowing down. We welcomed Noel Kingsbury, Anna Ball and Bryan McKay as guest presenters. They shared valuable information, practical tips and plenty of inspiration for gardeners of all experience levels.

Behind the scenes, our committees are busy preparing for our two biggest events of the year — our annual Plant Sale and Garden Walk. This year, the plant sale, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary, will take place in the large industrial building at the Lake County Fairgrounds, giving us plenty of space for all the wonderful plants and eager gardeners!

The Garden Walk will feature gardens in St. John, Schererville and Munster — showcasing the creativity, beauty, and passion of gardeners throughout our community.

Be sure to visit our website for dates, times, and ticketing information. We hope to see everyone at both!

Thank you to every master gardener who continues to volunteer their time, talents, and enthusiasm, and to the many community members who support us by attending our events.

Your participation and encouragement help further our mission of "Helping Others Grow" and strengthen our community of gardeners.

Spring crocuses shooting up in Kristin's garden.

Check out the latest news and board activities on LCMGA Members Only at lakecountymastergardeners.org

Lake County Master Gardeners do not need to create an account to login. Contact us to access the login credentials.

Not a member yet? Learn how to join the Lake County Master Gardeners and be part of our growing community! Visit our website for details.

The Dirt on Latest Events

Master Gardeners share LCMGA news at Porter County show

MGs joined Porter County Fair chairperson Linda Vivirito to staff the LCMGA table at the Porter County Master Gardeners annual Gardening Show on Jan. 31 at the Porter County Expo in Valparaiso.

Volunteers greeted people, sold tickets for a raffle and collected new sign-ups for LCMGA's email list. Plans are underway for next year's show.

Congrats to MG Loretta Sullivan for taking home a first-place ribbon in the show's photo contest for plants in black and white!

From left, Kenny Sandine, Anne Scheffer, Vicki Bush, Jean Dohmeier, Beth Shelhart and Susan Kimmet pose for a photo at the LCMGA's table.

Spring social showcases our Master Gardeners' talents

Master Gardeners and Interns took advantage of the excitement of spring and gathered for a social and seed swap on March 24 at Lake County Public Library's Merrillville Branch.

During the event, Master Gardeners shared their expertise and advice. Michael Kobe gave tips on how to photograph flowers. Barb Popiela provided advice on how to start a cut flower garden. Marcia Davidson provided tips on growing plants for tea. Kenny Sandine demonstrated how to sharpen gardening tools. Lynn Barbee also brought donations from her employer Home Depot.

Above, Michael Kobe shares tips on how to photograph flowers during the spring social on March 24.

Right, Marcia Davidson shares samples of plants that can be used to make tea.

The Dirt on Latest Events

Annual LCMGA meeting kicks off gardening season

Over 40 MGs turned out on the sunny second day of Spring, March 21, for the LCMGA Annual Meeting held at Griffith Izaak Walton League.

The hospitality committee – Jackie Larson, Angie Rupp and Beth Shelhart – decorated the main room in the clubhouse with spring flowers and bright tablecloths. Beth Shelhart made garden-forward garland out of seed packets.

MGs dined on a lunch of soup, salad and breadsticks from Olive Garden and heard from committee chairs about the current activities of LCMGA.

After the meeting, some MGs took advantage of the unseasonably warm weather to walk the grounds.

LCMGA President Kristin Overbey shares news with members.

Beth Shelhart waves from the raffle table.

Beth Caruana and Pam Schopp-Young talk before lunch.

Earn MG hours for reading this newsletter

Did you know you can earn MG hours by reading this newsletter?

- Record .5 education hours for reading the newsletter
- Record volunteer hours for contributing to the newsletter

Feedback appreciated

Do you have an idea for a topic to feature in this newsletter? We welcome your feedback. Please email lakecountymastergardeners@gmail.com.

Plant Sale turns 25, features moon garden, heirloom veggies

By Veronica Williams and Pam Metzger
Plant Sale co-chairs

The 25th LCMGA Annual Plant Sale will take place on May 9 from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. at the Lake County Fairgrounds Industrial Building.

The sale also features Trash to Treasures – gently used gardening items and tools – a sample of a moon garden with plants for sale, heirloom vegetables and more.

The plant sale is a fundraiser for grants and scholarships.

We will have different types of tomatoes, peppers and herbs for sale as well as perennials, shrubs, trees and house plant starts.

Many of our plants come from the gardens of Master Gardeners as donations. However, we don't accept plants that are recognized as invasive such as vinca vine, English ivy, pachysandra, Wintercreeper, clustered bell flower, chameleon plant and flowering pear tree.

You can bring your potted plants and vegetables to the fairgrounds on May 8 between noon and 3 p.m. Plants must be potted and labeled before dropping them off. Or you can drop them off before May 8 at the homes of committee members who will hold them until set up day.

MGs can also volunteer to work at the sale or help with clean up. Sign up on MG Manager. For the sale day, we need a few wagons to help patrons get their plants out to their cars.

Questions? Email veronicapet1@sbcglobal.net or metzgerp75@gmail.com.

Shirley Haney looks over items before the sale begins on May 8, 2025. Photos by MG Lee Hartsell.

Teresa Procter adjusts a sign at the Trash to Treasure table during the 2025 plant sale.

Early drop-off sites

Drop off plants May 1-8 at the following homes:

- **Loretta Sullivan, 1026 170th Place Hammond, 46324**
- **Debbie Herndon, 2531 W. 136th Court Crown Point, 46307**
- **Barb and Tony Popiela, 8936 W. 89th Ave. St. John, 46373**
- **Petra Julian, 5545 S. Liverpool Road, Hobart, 46342**

Lake County MASTER GARDENERS
"Helping Others Grow"

2026 GARDEN WALK

POLLINATING PATHWAYS

JUNE 28, 2026
9AM-3PM

FEATURING GARDENS IN ST. JOHN, SCHERERVILLE & MUNSTER

PURCHASE VIA EVENTBRITE!
TICKETS ARE $15

PURCHASE NOW TO BE ENTERED INTO MULTIPLE RAFFLE DRAWINGS ON THE DAY OF THE WALK!!

PROCEEDS HELP FUND OUR MISSION OF "HELPING OTHERS GROW," PROVIDING GRANTS, SCHOLARSHIPS, AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR THE COMMUNITY.

www.lakecountymastergardeners.org

Lake County Master Gardeners Association, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) corporation.

Thyme-Sensitive Updates

Lake County Master Gardeners announces grant recipients

This year, Lake County Master Gardeners Association awarded $10,002 in community grants ranging from $300 to $600 to the following organizations:

- **Munster Community Garden, Munster**
  Continue to grow their community garden creating a welcoming, vibrant space for learning, wellness programs, education and sharing their harvest.
- **Cedar Lake Parks Foundation, Cedar Lake**
  Beautification project at the Bartlett Wahlberg Park.
- **Planting Possibilities, Highland**
  Program "Seeding Success Prevocational Farm." Outdoor horticultural setting for training programs for adults with disabilities.
- **Crown Point Rotary, Crown Point**
  Planting vegetables at two gardens for distribution to St. Jude House in Crown Point.
- **Miller Garden Club, Gary**
  Development of new gardening podcast.
- **Crown Point Garden Club, Crown Point**
  Additional enhancements to the garden by the covered bridge at the Lake County Fair Grounds.
- **Crown Point Courthouse Garden Club, Crown Point**
  Additional planting in the garden on the east side of the courthouse.
- **Oases Botanic Gardens, Gary**
  Expand their educational experience with books, pamphlets to offer self-guided tours of their gardens.
- **Cedar Lake Parks and Recreation, Cedar Lake**
  Ongoing beautification project of Potawatomi Park.
- **Wolf Lake Community Garden, Whiting**
  Project creating vegetable and herb gardens as well as a native plant garden to be expanded in the future.
- **TradeWinds Services, Merrillville**
  Continued growth of their garden projects including the establishment of two new gardens.
- **Cedar Lake Historical Association, Cedar Lake**
  Establishment of an indigenous garden as part of an outdoor experience for Potawatomi heritage. To be part of an expansive area by The Museum at Lassen's Resort.

We extend a special thank you to the anonymous donor who gave $500 to support the efforts of LCMGA!

Seed Team collects, cleans, packages seed for MG events

From left, Jan Dunker and Cindy Smit package seeds during a Seed Team event at the Purdue Extension Lake County Office on March 23.

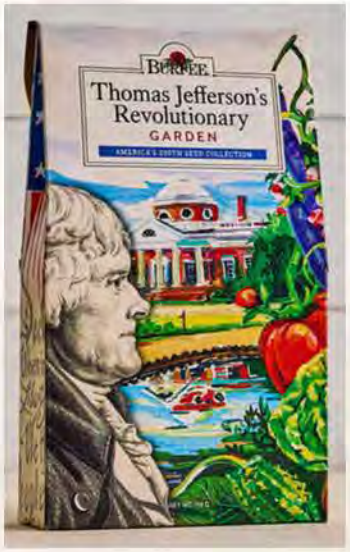
Thanks to the native plants thriving in LCMGA's Demonstration Garden at the Purdue Extension Lake County Offices in Crown Point, our MGs have harvested seeds to give away at all our events.

Led by Dolly Foster, Horticulture Program Assistant at Purdue Extension Lake County, and Master Gardener Angie Rupp, MGs began collecting ripened seed pods and heads from the Demonstration Garden last fall, drying them and removing the seeds.

After cleaning the seeds, they sorted them in containers by species. This spring, Master Gardeners filled small paper envelopes with seeds and labeled them, readying them for distribution.

"The biggest point of this is to share the knowledge of the need for more native plants," said Dolly Foster. "We need to be taking out invasive species from our gardens and replacing them with native plants because the environment is really teetering on turning into a desperate place for pollinators and wildlife."

To join the Seed Team, contact Angie Rupp at ahrupp10@gmail.com.



New historical seed collections available

As our country prepares to celebrate its 250th birthday this summer, so does the garden community.

The American Horticulture Society partnered with Burbee, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello and George Washington's Mount Vernon to create limited edition seed collections based on what was growing in gardens in 1776.

In addition to seeds, the collections contain planting instructions, quotes, recipes and inspired artwork. The collection educates gardners about heirloom plants and herbs that are a part of history. The collections include: The Declaration Bouquet, Martha Washington's Kitchen Garden, A Colonial Dooryard Herb Garden and Thomas Jefferson's Revolutionary Garden.

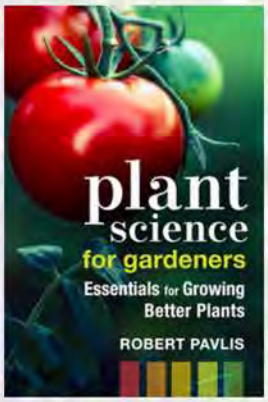
Visit burbee.com for more information and to order.

News You Can Use

Inspiration and resources for the journey

As Master Gardeners we are always expanding our knowledge and feeding our desire to learn more. The following is a selection of resources for your consideration:

"Plant Science for Gardeners: Essentials for Growing Better Plants"
By Robert Pavlis



Robert Pavlis is a well-known speaker and educator with over 40 years of gardening experience. He is the owner and head gardener of Aspen Grove Gardens, a six-acre botanical garden where he grows 3,000 varieties of plants.

"Plant Science for Gardeners" helps readers understand the basic biology of how plants grow so they can become a thinking gardener with the confidence to problem solve for optimized plant health and productivity.

Pavlis will be our featured speaker May 13 on the topic of "Designing Front Yard Gardens."

The 2026 Year of Plants
National Garden Bureau, ngb.org
Each year the National Garden Bureau selects one annual, one perennial, one bulb crop, one edible, one houseplant and one shrub as its "Year of the" crops. Plants are chosen because they are popular, easy-to-grow, widely adaptable, genetically diverse and versatile.

This year's plants are the azalea, ficus, hot pepper, crocus, sedum and impatiens.

The bureau offers free, downloadable materials about each plant, including graphics, speaker presentations and "did you know" fact sheets.

The Joe Gardener Show with Joe Lamp'l
joegardener.com or wherever you get your podcasts
Joe Lamp'l is the "joe" behind joegardener and the founder of the top-rated podcast, The joegardener Show, as well as the popular gardening website, joegardener.com and The Online Gardening Academy.

The podcast tackles common challenges for seasoned and new gardeners and features leaders in the industry. He's also the creator and host of the Emmy award-winning national public television series, Growing a Greener World, currently in its 13th-season.

If you have a suggestion for book, website, social media account, app, tool, etc. you would like to share with your fellow MGs, email your suggestion to Joyce Duriga at jmduriga@gmail.com.

Jeanne Luers' family spread Christmas cheer on tree farm

By Joyce Duriga
Grapevine Editor

Master Gardener Jeanne Luers' name is bandied about at many meetings of LCMGA because she is the person behind the emails sent to members and the public about upcoming events.

A familiar face at events with her petite frame and signature hat, Jeanne is part of the Luers family who operated a Christmas tree farm in Crown Point for many years.

Countless families in the region visited the tree farm every holiday season to select and cut down their own fresh trees. While the farm closed in 2018, the memories live on.

The tree farm started when Jeanne's husband John planted one acre of trees. He was a commercial loan officer who liked to keep busy, Jeanne says, so he decided to plant trees.

He grew up with his dad working on farms, so he always loved getting his hands dirty doing something.

"He might have been a banker, but he was a farmer at heart," Jeanne said. "Then his dad thought it was cool and he put in 65 acres of trees."

His dad was Bud Luers who owned the 640-acre farm. Eventually, John's brother Doug took over the day-to-day operation of the farm.

A lot of work is involved in growing Christmas trees, Jeanne explained.

It can take up to eight years until a tree is large enough to sell.

"People don't realize you can't even sell a tree until it's like eight years old because it's not big enough. It's quite labor intensive," Jeanne said.

The areas around the trees had to be mowed regularly and the trees needed insecticides to stay healthy. Someone from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources visited each year to check for diseases.

"But the most labor-intensive part was you had to hand prune each tree," Jeanne explained. "Sixty-five acres was a heck of a lot of trees."

Everyone had their own way of pruning, she said. For example, Bud Luers loved fat trees.

"They were too fat, that's just my opinion," Jeanne said, adding that her son had a deft hand at pruning.

Bud and his wife Betty had five children so many of them worked on the farm each year and so did their children.

Armed with a machete, a large-brimmed hat and shin guards, Jeanne's son spent his summers pruning the trees with coyotes for company.

They all pitched in around the holidays. Since her family lived next to the farm they were always there.

Continued on next page

Meet a Master Gardener

Jeanne Luers gives instructions during LCMGA's annual meeting on March 21.

"My family loved Christmastime. My kids were very involved too. I was relegated to answering the phones. I didn't mind because that meant I didn't have to go out into the cold," Jeanne said.

On weekends, her kids handed out saws as people arrived and collected them when they were done. They also handed out lists of what kinds of trees were available and directions around the farm.

"The youngest always got to collect the saws as people were going out," she said.

The tree farm grew nine types of trees: Scotch Pine, White Pine, Austrian Pine, Norway Spruce, White Spruce, Blue Spruce, Serbian Spruce, Douglas Fir and Canaan Fir.

Norway Spruce trees are better than Blue Spruce because they have less disease, Jeanne says. She also likes the Canaan Fir because "it smells cool."

"We had a lot of people who came every year. They were disappointed when it closed," Jeanne recalled. "Everyone was joyous. They were coming with kids and grandkids and picking out trees. It was always a nice experience for everybody, including the people that worked there."

Spring flowers blooming in the Demonstration Garden

Hundreds of spring bulbs that our MGs planted in the Demonstration Garden last fall made an appearance this spring, brightening the space.

Extension updates

New workshop trains MGs to present talks to the public

By Dolly Foster
Horticulture Program Assistant

As many of you know, the purpose of being a Master Gardener is primarily to educate the public on sound gardening practices backed by Purdue University.

Last year as I started my new position, Becca Koetz, extension educator for Purdue Extension Lake County, and I brainstormed new programs to start for the MGs. We both felt strongly that we needed to increase the Speakers Bureau so I started planning.

What resulted was 12 MGs completing the new four-session course "Train-the-Trainer" that covered topics like finding new trends in gardening and how to develop a topic into a presentation, overcoming stage fright, writing a Power Point presentation and how to present without a Power Point presentation.

We had a great time over the four weeks and, in the last session, the students made presentations on topics such as: Forest Bathing; The Four-Season Garden; Start Small, Grow Big!; Window Herb Gardening; Mind the Ps When Planting Fruit Trees; Three Sister's Planting; Garden design; Rooms to Grow In; Horticulture Therapy; Health in Hort; Tea Gardening; Benefits of Houseplants and Edible Flowers.

I hope you all have a chance to see these presentations!

Becca adds that you can also teach through doing. For example, Indiana University Northwest's Community Garden appreciates MGs leading hands-on workshops in the garden. Gabis Arboretum does too. MGs could even teach about native plants in the front of the Demonstration Garden at Purdue Extension Lake County!

If you enjoy leading guided hikes, talking with kids about frogs or flowers, or teaching people how to plant or prune their garden, consider leading a workshop or short talk on these topics.

We can add hands-on workshops to the Speakers Bureau list as well. Reach out if you have a topic that you think would be a great addition to share with community groups looking for garden education.

Class participants (not in order of appearance in photo) are Maria Booker, Oakley Molinaro, Laura Eller, Jackie Grutzius, Joy Kolar, Carmen McKee, Beth Shelhart, Joelle Jacques, Janice Wilma, Liz Menges and Linda Vivirito. Master Gardener Joy Kolar is not pictured.

Next Master Gardener basic training starts in August

Wednesday evenings, 5-8:30 p.m., Aug. 12-Dec. 16
In-person at Lake County Extension Office, 2291 Main Street, Crown Point,
Registration deadline is Aug. 1. Cost: TBA (payable online)
Questions? Contact Dolly Foster at 219-755-3240