

# The Grapevine

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Kristin Overbey

### Welcoming 2026 Together

A new year brings fresh energy, and I'm excited to begin 2026 as president of the association alongside our new officers and board members.

We are all looking forward to a year full of teamwork, enthusiasm and a shared commitment to our mission of "Helping Others Grow." A heartfelt thank you to Jackie Larson, our past president, and all outgoing officers and board members for their dedication and guidance, which has set the stage for a strong year ahead!

Looking back, 2025 was a year full of accomplishments — expanding community outreach, nurturing our developing demonstration garden and offering a wide range of free educational programs — all made possible by the success of our plant sale and garden walk and the dedication of our wonderful volunteers.

I look forward to seeing everyone at our upcoming events! Here's to another wonderful year of learning, giving back, and sharing time with fellow gardeners!

Petra Julian,  
Susan Kimmel  
and Kristin  
Overbey at the  
Crown Point  
Community  
Foundation's  
Nonprofit  
Academy  
Conference on  
Oct. 28, 2025.



## 2026 Board of Directors

Our newly elected Board of Directors for 2026 through 2028 are:

Marcia Davidson (Class of 2020)

Beth Shelhart (Class of 2023)

Linda Vivirito (Class of 2021, second term)

Officers for 2026 are:

President: Kristin Overbey (Class of 2021)

Vice president: Linda Vivirito (Class of 2021)

Secretary: Joyce Duriga (Class of 2022)

Treasurer: Loretta Sullivan (Class of 2017)

Past-President: Jackie Larson (Class of 2017)

Check out the latest news and  
board activities on [LCMGA](#)  
[Members Only](#) at  
[lakecountymastergardeners.org](http://lakecountymastergardeners.org)

Lake County Master  
Gardeners do not need to create  
an account to login. To access  
the login credentials, please  
contact us.

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.



# Thyme-Sensitive Updates

## Past president reflects on two years of service

By Jackie Larson

Past President

As I conclude my two years serving as president of the Lake County Master Gardeners Association, I am filled with gratitude and admiration for this remarkable group of people. It has been an honor to work alongside such dedicated volunteers who embody our mission of "helping others grow."

The hundreds of hours you have collectively donated are more than just time spent in gardens – they are investments in our community. Because of your commitment, we have been able to provide grants to organizations that champion purposeful gardening projects, projects that not only beautify our surroundings but also educate, nourish, and inspire. These efforts ripple outward, touching lives in ways that go far beyond the soil.

Our small but mighty community of Master Gardeners has shown what can be accomplished when passion meets service. Whether it's answering questions, guiding a neighbor through their first vegetable plot, or assisting in the design and maintenance of expansive native gardens, each act of generosity strengthens the bond between people and the land. You have helped foster resilience, sustainability, and joy in Lake County, one seed at a time.

I am deeply proud of what we have achieved together. From the smallest seedlings to the largest community projects, your work has made a lasting impact. As I step aside, I know the association will continue to flourish under new leadership, rooted in the same spirit of curiosity, kindness, and stewardship that has always defined us.

Thank you for your hard work, your wisdom, and your unwavering dedication. It has been a privilege to serve, and I look forward to watching our gardens – and our community – continue to grow.

## ⌚ Earn MG hours by 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](mailto:lakecountymastergardeners@gmail.com).



The new stone pathway has been installed in the Demonstration Garden at the Purdue Extension offices. Keep an eye out for exciting developments in the garden in 2026.

Would you like to help with the Demonstration Garden? Email Kristin Overbey at [koverbey5515@gmail.com](mailto:koverbey5515@gmail.com).



MASTER GARDENERS  
"Helping Others Grow"

January 2026

# Thyme-Sensitive Updates

## Welcome to the newest Purdue Master Gardener interns



The new Master Gardener interns pose for a photo on Dec. 5 at the Purdue Extension Lake County Office.

The following people completed the Purdue Extension's Master Gardener course in the fall:

- Virginia Angellotti
- Giovan Clifton
- Clayton Haynes
- Kenny Sandine
- Josephine Awah-Kanneh
- Lisa Dekker
- Rhonda Hillegonds
- Ashley Sharpe
- Maria Booker
- Jean Dohmeier
- Michael Kobe
- Collin Smallegan
- David Borst
- Jan Duncker
- Bonita Maclin
- Cynthia Smit
- Kelly Brown
- Julie Duttlinger
- Kathy McMenamin
- Denise Torok
- Debra Cavey
- Amanda Ernst
- Kathy Plant
- Jewel Willis Thomas
- Alison Harber
- Felisha Powell
- Janice Wilma

## Grant applications available for this year

We are happy to share that we are now taking applications for our 2026 grant program.

The Lake County Master Gardeners Association offers grants ranging from \$200 to \$600 to support gardening and horticulture projects located in Lake County.

Eligible applicants include schools, nonprofit organizations, churches and community groups working on new or existing projects. An educational aspect is preferred but not required.

Visit [lakecountymastergardeners.org](http://lakecountymastergardeners.org) for applications.



## Get a jump on spring planting through winter sowing

On Jan. 11, Purdue Extension Horticulture Program Assistant Dolly Foster will lead a class for Lake County Master Gardeners and guests about winter sowing. The following text was edited for space from her handouts explaining the process. For more information, check out Dolly's website at [hort4u.weebly.com](http://hort4u.weebly.com).

Winter sowing is a method of starting seeds outdoors during winter. It is best for seeds that need to be stratified (a short cold period) to germinate.

Start with milk jugs, clear water jugs or deep plastic food containers with clear lids. Light must be able to penetrate the container and it must be deep enough for proper root development. Four inches of potting mix is necessary for natives and other perennials.

For our area of Zone 5b/6, you can use any perennial or hardy annual or plant that needs stratification. Tender annuals and veggies should be sown after the first day of spring.

Winter sowing gives you really strong seedlings to plant at the appropriate time that go through little or no transplant shock.

### Items you need:

- Milk jugs or plastic containers that allow light to pass through, at least 3" to 4" deep
- Bleach, water or hot soapy water
- Large rubber band and ruler
- Box cutter and utility scissors
- Potting mix. No water polymers, fertilizer, garden soil or seed mix
- Garden marker (waterproof, UV resistant), plant pens or grease pencil
- Plant labels or blank tags
- Long handle spoon or similar device
- Clear poly, wide masking or duct tape
- Watering bottles or watering trays
- Seeds

### Directions:

1. Clean containers with 10% bleach solution and let them dry. Hot water and dish soap also work.
2. Make 6 to 10, 1-inch "V" shape cuts in the bottom of the container for drainage. This is very important. Poor drainage allows algae to take over the jugs and smother seeds.
3. Mark 4 inches off the table on the side of your container. This is the soil level and cutting line. Place a rubber band around the jug and draw a line. On a milk jug the cut line should start right next to the base of the handle to keep the handle intact.
4. Cut the container along the line. Leave the area at the handle to create a hinge, which makes taping up the jug easier.



5. Fill the container with dampened potting soil up to 3.5 inches. Most seedlings need a few inches to start strong, deep roots. Use your fingers to tamp down the soil to get the air out. Add a little more soil then fluff it up. You should have nearly 4 inches of soil when you finish.

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# News You Can Use



6. Plant your seeds. The number of seeds planted depends on the seed size and how many plants you need. Cover the seeds according to the seed package. Look this information up online if you don't have the seed package.

7. Label the container on the outside and inside.

8. Join the top of the jug to the bottom with 2 inches of tape. Then, tape around the opening you cut. The tape should not have any gaps. It needs to keep warm air inside.

9. Do not place the cap on the jug. Jugs need to vent excess heat on sunny days like a greenhouse. Place your containers outside in a sunny area.

10. Watch your containers and water if the soil looks dry or the container feels light. Monitor condensation on the inside of the jug. If it begins to disappear, it's time to water. This will be necessary on very sunny, dry winter days above 35 degrees and as the weather warms. Watering is crucial for germination.

11. When the plants are growing bigger in April, open the container but do not remove the top. Close the tops on cold nights when there could be frost. By mid-May the top of the jug can be removed permanently.

12. At the appropriate time for each type of plant, transfer them to the ground or pots to share. Keep seed packages or look up planting instructions online.

A last word on your containers. They should be deep enough for proper root development. Shallow food containers will not work. However, if you plan on transplanting quickly you can use any plastic containers. Some containers can be used from year to year.

## Resources:

- Hort4U on YouTube for a video class
- Winter Sowing Forum on Facebook: Winter Sowers
- The Seed site (germination rates)
- Tom Clothier.hort.net (germination rates)



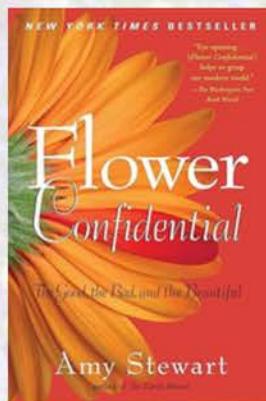
# News You Can Use

## Inspiration for the journey

As Master Gardeners we are always learning and expanding our knowledge and feeding our desire to learn more. One way we do that is through reading books, social media posts or listening to podcasts. The following is a selection of inspiration from Lake County Master Gardeners:

### "Flower Confidential: The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful"

By Amy Stewart



You won't look at cut flowers the same way again. Amy Stewart takes readers on an around-the-world, behind-the-scenes look at the flower industry and how it has sought — for better or worse — to

achieve perfection.

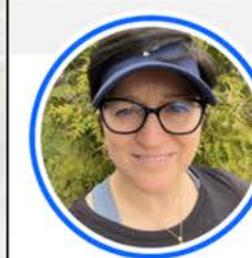
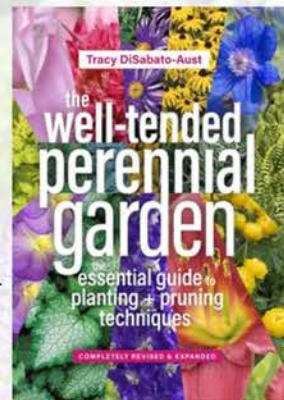
She tracks down the hybridizers, geneticists, farmers and florists working to invent, manufacture and sell flowers that are bigger, brighter and sturdier than anything nature can provide. There's an eccentric horticultural legend who created the most popular lily; a breeder of gerberas of every color imaginable; and an Ecuadorean farmer growing exquisite roses, the floral equivalent of a Tiffany diamond. And, at every turn she discovers the startling intersection of nature and technology, of sentiment and commerce.

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](mailto:jmduriga@gmail.com).

### "The Well-Tended Perennial Garden: The Essential Guide to Planting and Pruning Techniques"

By Tracy DiSabato-Aust

Whether you are a new gardener or a green thumb, "The Well-Tended Perennial Garden" will help you successfully plan, plant and tend your garden. This hard-working guide includes thorough details on the essential practices of perennial care — included deadheading, pinching and thinning — along with growing information for specific species and cultivars, on-trend garden design advice, a monthly planting and maintenance schedule and details on native plants and gardening for wildlife.



Facebook

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Amy Powers, [powersplants.com](http://powersplants.com), [@PowersPlants](https://www.facebook.com/PowersPlants) on Facebook and [@powers\\_plants](https://www.instagram.com/powers_plants) on Instagram. Amy Powers is a professional garden coach and master gardener who lives in the Chicago suburb of Arlington Heights and offers a treasure trove of practical landscaping and gardening advice. She uses examples from her work with clients and in her own garden to teach her 460,000 social media followers (Facebook, Instagram) about best practices in gardening, horticulture, arboriculture and more.



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# Meet a Master Gardener

## New home brings new challenges for master gardener

Our Master Gardeners hail from various professional backgrounds – from accountants and teachers to journalists and doctors.

Tom Worthington has spent his life as a veterinarian taking care of quadrupedal creatures. He carries that passion to living organisms of the plant variety as a Master Gardener.

He and his wife Doris take pride in putting their personal touch on their home landscape and their previous homes were featured on the 2016 and 2023 garden walks.

Having recently moved to Lowell, Tom and his wife are creating a new garden that highlights native plants and materials.

### Why did you become a master gardener?

I moved back to the Midwest from southern California so needed to relearn how to garden over again and thought it would be good to help others learn about gardening.

### Are there any crossovers between gardening and veterinary medicine?

Well, life is life, and those things we choose to have need our care; it is important to properly diagnose disease and treat accurately.



MG Tom Worthington and his wife Doris personally designed and installed the rock and gravel in their backyard garden.

### You regularly volunteer at the Lake County Fair. What is your favorite part of that event?

Interacting with the public and also getting to know other Master Gardener folks and learning from them.

### You and your wife are landscaping your new property in Lowell and your previous homes have been on the garden walk twice. What is your inspiration?

I do a lot of reading on gardening, and a lot of looking at other homes and gardens, and public gardens, and had an extensive garden in SoCal that I continue to use design elements from. And I learn a lot by what does not work!

At our old house in Crown Point, Wayne Gruber helped me pick out some foundation plants as I was newly back to the Midwest, and he gave good ideas on layout.

Both of our Indiana homes have poor soil so I use a lot of raised beds, which are very useful to highlight plants and give height and depth.

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# Meet a Master Gardener

## Do you have any tips or strategies on how to get started in a blank space?

I think getting other experienced gardeners and landscape centers to help with ideas is very useful, and getting some good books on foundational planning. Also, drive around and take photos of what you like, and don't be afraid to stop and ask about the gardens you like.

## What are your favorite plants?

There are too many to list! So many of my favorites were left behind in California. You can grow lots of exotics there!

I am a big perennial fan, and vegetable garden fan. I also like to have uncommon trees, like my two new baby Gold Rush Dawn Redwoods.

## How are you using native plants in your landscaping at your Lowell home?

I like having things that the Lord put in place in the area I live, to look good naturally and to fit into the ecosystem.

I can well remember my fourth- and fifth-grade spring field trips to area parks to see wildflowers as the Christian school I attended taught us about the glory of God's creation and how it all works in harmony.

My wife has greatly encouraged this as she loves to raise butterflies. We are again establishing a separate pollinator/native garden, but also use natives scattered throughout the landscape along with more common cultivated plants.



MG Tom Worthington and his wife Doris designed and created the raised beds in their backyard garden.

We now live on what was a prairie long before it became a corn field so we want to bring some of that back. We have also planted over 1,000 baby native trees.

## What challenges have you had in landscaping your new space?

Soil is a challenge as our home is on an eroded hill. Fortunately, the good black dirt is down below so I can bring it back up in raised beds.

The biggest challenge is not trying to do it all at once – and watering new grass this past summer, and managing the entire property and deciding how to use it all.

We are so blessed and way spoiled by this beautiful property!



MG Tom Worthington and his wife Doris.



# Did You Know?

## Interesting Facts About Hostas from American Hosta Society

By Tammy Borden

American Hosta Society

Hostas come in every size and shape imaginable, are easy to grow and shade tolerant. These herbaceous perennials are grown mainly for their beautiful foliage, but many boast beautiful blooms, too.

But did you know these other hosta facts?

- Hostas are the most widely grown ornamental perennial in the United States.
- They are an herbaceous perennial, meaning they die back each fall and emerge again in spring.
- Hostas are extremely hardy and grow in zones 3–9. They will not grow well in southern states like Florida or Arizona because they need a dormant period under 40 degrees for a couple months each winter.
- One common name for Hosta still used in some garden centers is Plantain Lily, and are sometimes still referred to as Funkia. But the real name for hosta is simply Hosta.
- Hostas are native to Japan, Korea, and China.
- They were first imported and grown in Europe in the late 1700s.
- By the mid-1800s, hostas were grown in the United States.
- Today, there are dozens of species and thousands of cultivars available to the home gardener as a result of hybridizing and tissue culture propagation.



- Hostas were originally propagated by dividing crowns. This is a slow process if large numbers are desired. Tissue culture is the preferred process to meet today's need of large numbers of hosta species and cultivars entering the market.
- Flowers on hostas come in a range of colors including white, lavender, and purple. Hybridizers are working to breed other colors, including shades of red, yellow, and pink.
- Growing hosta seeds from most varieties will not produce the same variety as the parent plant. Only Hosta ventricosa will produce seeds that are identical to the parent plant.

There's a lot to love about hostas! Be sure to explore more at [americanhostasociety.org](http://americanhostasociety.org) to learn interesting hosta facts.

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