The Grapevine

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Kristin Overbey

As another gardening season begins to wind down, I find myself reflecting on all that our Lake County Master Gardeners have accomplished this year.

From sharing our knowledge with the community to volunteering at events, tending gardens, supporting local projects and helping others discover the joy of gardening, our members continue to make a difference.

What makes this organization special isn't just what we know about gardening—it's what we do with that knowledge. Every plant we share, question we answer, garden we tend and person we encourage helps our community grow.

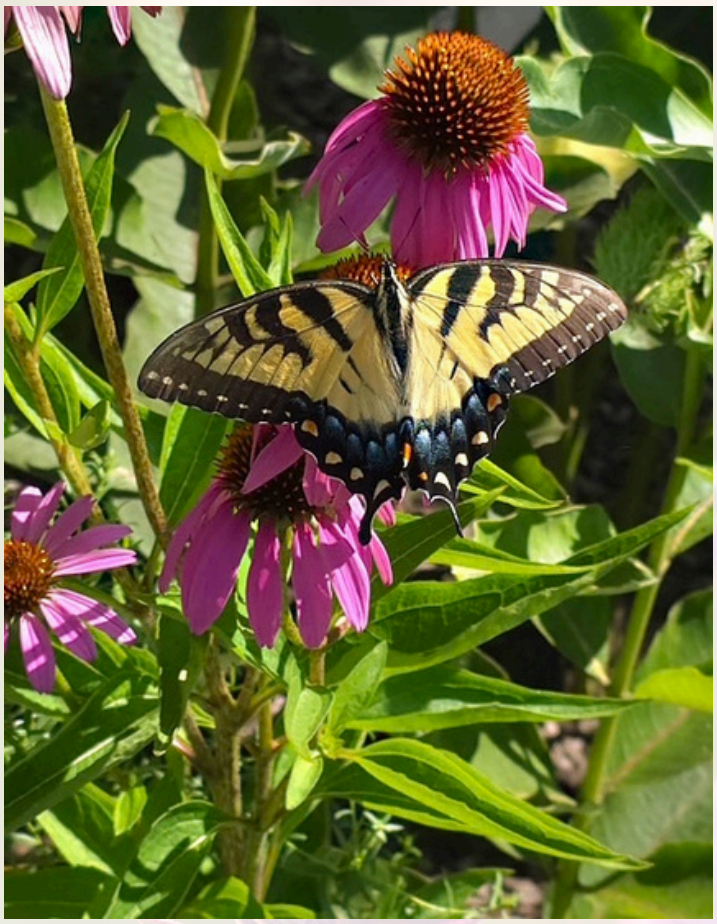
As we head into the fall season, there is still plenty to do in the garden. Now is a great time to plant spring-flowering bulbs, divide and transplant perennials and plant trees and shrubs while temperatures are cooler and roots have time to establish. Adding compost to garden beds can help prepare the soil for next year.

Don't be too quick to clean everything up. Leaving some seed heads and plant stems can provide valuable food and shelter for birds and beneficial insects throughout the winter.

Most importantly, take some time to enjoy the beautiful fall colors and appreciate the garden before winter arrives.

I hope you'll take a moment to enjoy your own gardens, celebrate what you've grown and appreciate the time and effort you've given to others this year.

I'm grateful for each of you and all that you bring to LCMGA. Thank you for helping make our organization what it is and for continuing to live out our mission of "Helping Others Grow."



A Swallowtail butterfly on one of Kristin's purple cone flowers.



A bouquet of flowers from Kristin's garden.

Join us for our upcoming education programs

NOV 5
6:00 P.M.

Orchids 101

with Dr. Scott Stewart

Online via Zoom

Learn the basics of orchid care, repotting, watering, and getting them to bloom again.



DEC 1
6:00 P.M.

Designing with Fragrant Flowers and Aromatic Foliage

with Christopher Barrett Sheridan

Online via Zoom

Explore the fascinating world of floral fragrance and learn how to use scent in your garden design.





What our survey says about education events

Each year, the Education Committee surveys those who have attended LCMGA's educational offerings to learn what is working and what they want more of. The following is what we learned.

Topics with the strongest interest

Native plants led the survey, followed by flowers—annuals and perennials, garden and landscape design, and vegetable gardening and pollinator gardening. Container gardening and composting/soil health were also strong topics.

Open-ended comments repeatedly asked about practical subjects such as pruning, invasive plants, deer-resistant plants, companion planting, good vs. bad insects, fungal/disease problems, tomatoes, propagation and soil improvement.

Program formats

The strongest format choices were in-person presentations and Zoom presentations. Hands-on workshops and demonstrations came in second equally, followed by garden tours, field trips and question-and-answer sessions. This supports continuing a mix of presentation and experiential formats.

When people are most likely to attend

Weekday evenings were the highest time choice followed by weekday afternoons, Saturday mornings and Saturday afternoons and Sunday afternoons respectively.

Who responded

The majority of respondents described themselves as intermediate-level gardeners, followed by master gardeners, then advanced and beginners. There is a good mix of master gardeners and community members.

Planning implications for 2027

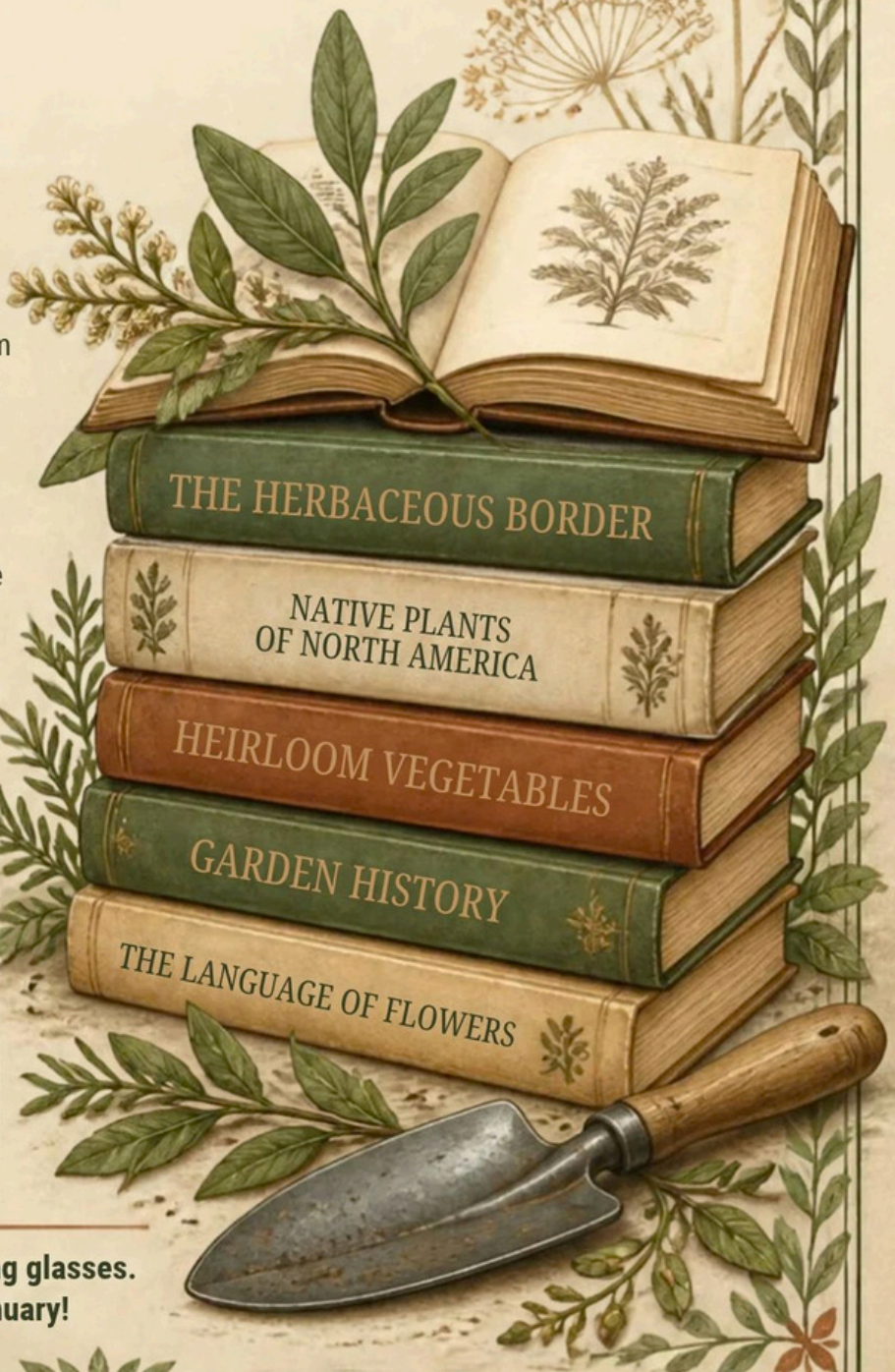
1. Continue both Zoom and in-person programs.
2. Add more hands-on workshops, demonstrations, tours and field trips.
3. Prioritize native plants/pollinators, garden design, practical plant care, soil health, pruning and pest/disease topics.
4. Keep weekday evening programming a priority, while retaining some daytime and weekend opportunities.
5. Use plant sales and other LCMGA events for short demonstrations, mini-workshops or educational tables.

Read Between the Rows
Introducing the Master Gardener Book Club

Calling all bookworms (the garden-friendly kind)! This January 2027, we're planting the seeds of something new: a Gardening Book Club, and we'd love for you to grow with us.

Each month, we'll pick a book to dig into, then gather at the library one evening to swap thoughts, share stories, and maybe trade a tip or two. Whether you love heirloom tomatoes, native plants, garden history, or a good story with dirt under its fingernails, there's a seat saved for you.

This is purely for fun – a chance to connect with fellow Master Gardeners away from the garden beds. While you won't earn education or volunteer hours for participating you'll enjoy plenty of good company!



Ready to join or have questions?
Contact Linda Vivirito at
crazycatsmom@hotmail.com

or

Laura Eller at
dlreller78@gmail.com

Bring your curiosity and your reading glasses.
We can't wait to see you in January!

MGs take trip to Ball, Cantigny gardens Aug. 31



MGs pose for a photo at Cantigny Park on Aug. 31. The Education Committee organized the field trip to The Gardens at Ball in West Chicago and Cantigny Park in Wheaton, Illinois.

Near right, Jane Elder and Linda Vivirito pose for a photo at Cantigny Park. Far right, a display garden at Gardens at Ball.







Above, a fall display at Gardens at Ball. Far right, Jean Dohmeier, Janice Wilma and Cindy Smit pose in front of sunflowers at Gardens at Ball.



What causes leaves to change colors?

By Jenna Nees
Purdue Extension Putnam County
Extension Director



Right now, it is amazing to look outside and see all the splashes of red, yellow, orange and green that the trees are providing us with. This beautiful scenery is one of the multiple reasons living in the country in Indiana is great. Yet the question does remain, what causes leaves to change into various shades of red, yellow and orange?

Chemistry is the driving force behind the leaves changing colors. Throughout the summer, chlorophyll gives leaves their green color and is essential in the photosynthetic production of food needed by the tree. Once the days grow shorter and temperatures begin to fall, chlorophyll production slows down. When this occurs, other pigments begin to appear giving leaves their brown, red, orange, purple, and yellow hues.

The color the leaf takes on depends on which chemical is more prominent: anthocyanin, carotene, xanthophylls, or tannin. It is never completely certain which chemical will be more prominent, but tannin is more prevalent in the brown to dark red leaves of oaks, walnuts, and hickories.

When leaves start to change colors, the outer margins of the leaves will change first. Slowly the color will move further into the leaf, leaving the midrib to be the last green segment. This is due to how the plant receives its nutrients from the roots and other parts of the tree.

Temperature, light, and water supply are the primary factors that influence the pigment of the leaves resulting in no two autumns ever being alike. Red colors often develop on exposed leaves due to the bright light they receive. A similar result occurs when there is a mild drought. Color intensity will decrease if there are several rainy days near the peak of coloration.

The biggest impact that weather has is delaying the onset of the fall colors due to a late summer drought. Therefore, it is generally said that the best fall foliage occurs when there is a dry, late summer with rain in early fall or when there is heavy rain and bright sunshine with the gradual drop in temperatures.

The bad part about the leaves changing colors is that the color never lasts as long as we wish it would. Instead, the leaves eventually fall to the ground resulting in a yard that is covered in crumbly red, yellow, and orange decaying leaves. Fallen leaves can be a good item to compost since they have enough microorganisms on them to start the composting process fairly easily. If you add grass clippings to the compost, it will provide the added nitrogen needed to speed up the process.

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The resulting compost is great to use as a soil conditioner. Adequate moisture for composting leaves is about 40-60% moisture. Therefore, it is a good idea to wet the leaves in the compost. If too much moisture is provided, then the compost will begin to smell. To help with the composting process, it is best to turn the pile from time to time to allow air to enter it and the decomposing to occur. Similarly, the pile may need turned to maintain the proper temperature in the compost.

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MG Janice Wilma is helping people learn about indigenous gardening

By Joyce Duriga
Grapevine editor

When Janice Wilma became a master gardener she hit the ground running. A retired librarian, Janice has taken the lead on an indigenous garden at the Cedar Lake Historical Association with a few other MGs.

She has served on the plant and garden walk committees and has attended this year's LCMGA field trips.

Janice first connected with Purdue Extension when a maple tree in her yard was dying. She called the help line and shared that the tree had holes all through it. A master gardener explained that a sapsucker woodpecker had made the holes and then bugs got inside the tree and killed it.

Janice kept in touch with Purdue Extension online afterward and when she saw they were offering a master gardener course she knew that would be a perfect fit for her now that she was retired from being a librarian in Jasper County.



Janice with her husband David.

The Grapevine: Why did you want to become a master gardener?

Janice Wilma: I really did not know anybody here in Lake County. Everybody I knew was down by where I worked in Jasper County. So I thought this would be a good way to get to know some people that live near me and to learn a lot of stuff that I don't know.

I can name a few flowers. I can pull weeds. I can plant a few flowers. Sometimes they make it, sometimes they don't. I thought I would learn a lot and it would be fun so that's why I took the master gardener class.

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The Grapevine: You became involved in master gardener work right away through a project at Cedar Lake, which also received a grant from LCMGA.
Janice: The Cedar Lake Historical Association has a partnership with the Potawatomi people because The Museum at Lassen's Resort building is on what used to be Potawatomi land. They have a couple of different presentations inside the museum that they give to third-grade students because part of their curriculum in Indiana is studying the Potawatomi people.

The association wanted to also install an indigenous garden.



[The Grapevine: Janice and her husband David knew the executive director of the association, Julie Zasada, because they have organized model train shows at the museum. Before she knew it, Janice was leading the project. Several of her fellow Master Gardener interns also live in or near Cedar Lake and joined Janice in setting up the planters and installing the plants.]

The Grapevine: Tell us about the plants.
Janice: We got a couple hundred dollars' worth of plants. I was a little nervous because they were so tiny, but, oh my gosh, it looks fabulous now. Four of the planters have indigenous plants that represent an indigenous garden. One big middle one represents the three sisters system of planting where they planted the corn in the middle and then they put green beans right next to the corn. The green beans climbed up the corn. Then they put squash around that so the squash leaves held in the moisture and kept down the weeds.

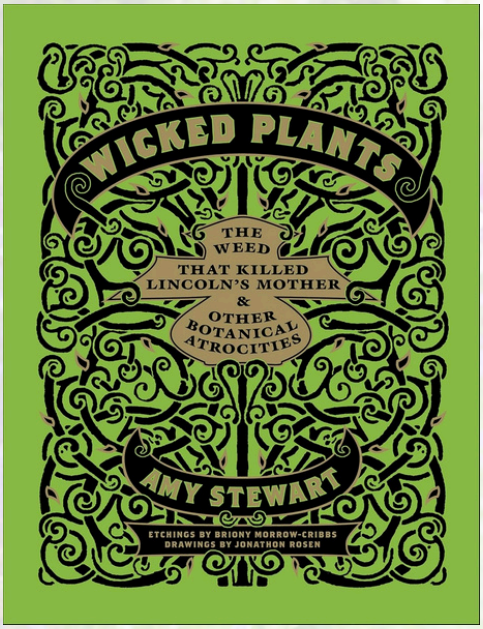
The Native Americans would pick this big plot of land and would plant the corn first. When it was about two weeks old, they put in the bean plants. And then they put in the squash all around it.

The Grapevine: What project have you enjoyed volunteering for so far with LCMGA?
Janice: The plant sale. It was my first experience with something that LCMGA sponsored. I found all the Master Gardeners to be incredibly helpful. And the people who came in to buy plants were so happy and just so excited. It just rubbed off on everybody.

Everybody was happy to help the people coming in. The people coming in were excited to be there, excited to be buying their plants, thrilled to be starting their gardens, happy to be supporting us and all the master gardeners. Luckily, I was put in a section with an experienced master gardener, so I saw how it all ran. That really convinced me that, yes, this is where I should be.

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:

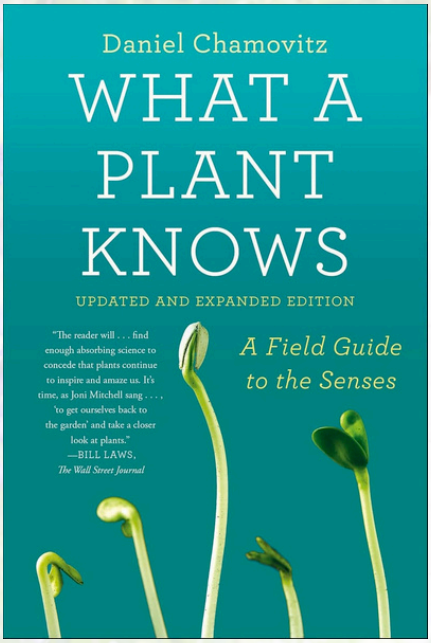


"Wicked Plants: The Weed That Killed Lincoln's Mother and Other Botanical Atrocities," by Amy Stewart

In "Wicked Plants," Amy Stewart takes on over 200 of Mother Nature's most appalling creations.

It's an A-to-Z of plants that kill, maim, intoxicate and otherwise offend. You'll learn which plants to avoid (like exploding shrubs), which plants make themselves exceedingly unwelcome (like the vine that ate the South) and which ones have been killing for centuries (like the weed that killed Abraham Lincoln's mother).

Menacing botanical illustrations and splendidly ghastly drawings create a fascinating portrait of the evildoers that may be lurking in your own backyard. Drawing on history, medicine, science and legend, this compendium of bloodcurdling botany will entertain, alarm and enlighten even the most intrepid gardeners and nature lovers.



"What a Plant Knows: A Field Guide to the Senses," by Daniel Chamovitz

**Recommended by MG Linda Vivirito

The renowned biologist Daniel Chamovitz builds on the original edition to present an intriguing look at how plants themselves experience the world—from the colors they see to the schedules they keep and now, what they do in fact hear and how they are able to taste.

A rare inside look at what life is really like for the grass we walk on, the flowers we sniff and the trees we climb, "What a Plant Knows" offers a greater understanding of their place in nature.

**If you have a suggestion a 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.

Earn MG hours for reading this newsletter

Did you know you can earn MG hours by reading this newsletter?
+ Record 30 min. of education hours for reading the newsletter
+ Record volunteer hours for contributing to the newsletter

Purdue Extension's new regional structure: What it means for master gardeners

By Julie Jones
Regional Operations Leader, Northwest Region: Serving Jasper, Lake, Newton and White counties



For more than a century, Purdue Extension has connected the research and expertise of Purdue University with the people and communities of Indiana. That mission remains the same, but Purdue Extension is making significant changes to how we organize and deliver our work.

The new structure will allow Extension to make the best use of funding and staff capacity while creating a sustainable organization for the future. As part of this change, Purdue Extension is moving from a primarily county-based structure to 12 regions across the state.

Lake County is now part of the Northwest Region, which includes Lake, Porter, LaPorte, Newton, Jasper, Starke, Pulaski and White counties. Bringing these counties together gives us new opportunities to build on our collective strengths.

So, what does this mean for Extension Master Gardeners? Our local Extension presence remains. The Purdue Extension Lake County office will still be here, and our Demonstration Garden will continue to provide a place for learning and community engagement.

Horticulture educators will serve as Regional Extension Master Gardener (EMG) Coordinators, providing guidance for EMG programs in their region. This transition is expected to be fully in place by January 2027. Nikky Witkowski will take on this role for the Northwest Region, serving as regional horticulture educator while coordinating EMG activities across all eight counties, including training and volunteer development.

Nikky is looking forward to reconnecting with the people she has worked with in the past and getting to know those who are new to her. As she puts it, "Some of the Extension Master Gardeners may remember me, while others may be new, but I look forward to working with all of you in Lake County! I had some great times with you in the past and look forward to future great times and learning how to work with everyone on a larger scale!"

The regional approach allows educators to focus more deeply on their areas of expertise. Becca Koetz will lead the region's work in urban agriculture, including community gardens, urban food production, soil health and safety, composting, controlled-environment agriculture and local food systems—areas aligned with the interests and volunteer activities of many Extension Master Gardeners.

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Extension Master Gardeners will also have access to other members of the Northwest Region's Agriculture and Natural Resources team. Jamie Reed will specialize in livestock, while Marty Huseman and Jesi Davenport will focus on field crops. The team brings a broad range of agricultural expertise and opportunities for programs and partnerships that cross county lines.

The new regional structure applies to Purdue educator positions; county and grant-funded staff positions will remain county-based.

There will be things to learn and adjustments to make as we move into this new system. Existing EMG coordinators will work with the new regional coordinators to help make the transition as smooth as possible for volunteers.

What won't change is the heart of the program: people sharing knowledge, helping their communities, and putting Purdue research into practice. For our Extension Master Gardeners, that means continuing the work you already do in Lake County while having new ways to connect across the Northwest Region. We're excited to see what comes next—and grateful to have you as part of it.

Achievements recognized by Purdue University

Each year during our annual fall banquet, Purdue Extension Educator Rebecca Koetz presents awards to Master Gardeners who have earned certifications for their work with the program. During this year's banquet on Oct. 29, the following people will be honored:

Certified

Josephine Awah-Kanneh
David Borst
Debra Cavey
Giovan Clifton
Kerry Connor
Abigail DeBoer
Jean Dohmeier
Jan Duncker
Laura Eller
Alison Harber
Rhonda Hillegonds
Joelle Jacques
Kenny Sandine
James Seidler
Cindy Smit
Deborah Szymborski

Advanced

Kerry Connor
Jean Dohmeier
Jan Duncker
Laura Eller
Rhonda Hillegonds
Joelle Jacques
Kathy Plant
Anne Scheffer
Therese Williams

Bronze

Josephine Awah-Kanneh
Marcia Davidson
Joyce Duriga
Debbie Herndon
Lori Lane
Rosemarie Nugent
Beth Shelhart
Evelyn Wofford

Silver

Elizabeth Caruana
Catherine Cheatle
Kristin Overbey
John Ploof
Angela Rupp
Loretta Sullivan
Linda Vivirito