

Volume 25, Issue 5

Oct/Dec. 2025



South East Wisconsin Master Gardeners

Good Earth News

SEWMG Newsletter Changes

by MGVs Sandy Manning and Janet Wintersburger

The newsletter committee is making changes to the publication dates for the Good Earth news. We will publish four times a year starting October 2025. This will cause some adjustment as those submitting articles will need more forward looking. It will reduce the amount of time officers, committee chairs and others need to commit to supplying articles.

Here are the topics for the next year with deadlines.

October-November-December

Deadline September 1

Publication Date end of September

In this issue

State Fair Gardens
Container Contest
Photos of MGVs there

Annual Picnic
Summary/photos

Holiday Party
Day, Date, Time, Location & Cost
Reservation Form & deadline

Annual Meeting
Date, time, location

Cher Lausten article

Member Resources WI Horticulture

Conquering the system

January-February-March.

Deadline December 1

Publication Date First week of January

Topics
Introduce President
Past involvement with SEWMG
Plans/Aspirations for 2026
Photo

Introduce Officers
Background, involvement with SEWMG
Photos

Realtors Home Show
Theme/display
Dates
Materials
Volunteer

State Fair
Dates

Articles by
Kelly Kramer Gardening
Cher Lausten Article

Other SEWMG initiatives
Fundraising

April -May-June

Deadline March 1

Publication end of March

Topics

President's Article

Planned Activities

Kelly Kramer Gardening
Article Cher Lausten

July-August- September

Deadline July 1

Publication end of July

Topics to be announced.

President's Letter

by MGV Jackie Kirchen

Annual Meeting

We invite all members to join us at the annual meeting.

Saturday, November 8th, 10:30 AM-12:00 PM
Retzer Nature Center S14 W28167 Madison St, Waukesha

Agenda for the meeting:
Annual reviews from Board and Committees
Bylaws revisions review and vote
2026 Board vote
Time for chatting and networking
Tech support and assistance with member renewal and ORS questions

Additional details on the agenda, materials, and virtual attendance option will be sent to members via email about 30 days before the meeting

SEWMG Board Members Needed

The success of SEWMG is all thanks to our dedicated volunteers, who have an incredible impact on our organization and communities. Your commitment is what drives our success! Being on the board is a wonderful experience—you get to work with an amazing team of people and help guide the future of SEWMG.

We are currently seeking our next Vice President, Treasurer, and First Year Director for 2026. If you're interested in taking on a leadership role, please reach out to any Leadership Committee member (below) or any Board member.

We've accomplished so much together, and with your help, we can make sure SEWMG keeps growing and serving our community for years to come!

Thanks from the Leadership Committee

Ray - Ray.Corn@sewmg.org
Ellen - Ellen.Grissom@sewmg.org
Nicki - Nicki.Hanley@sewmg.org

Changes to the SEWMG Membership Process

WHAT:

We're making some updates to improve how we manage membership. SEWMG will begin using a secure online non-profit fundraising and donor management system, called Zeffy, to track memberships and collect payments.

WHEN:

The new system will be announced to members via email prior to

the Nov. 8 Member Meeting. An announcement will be sent with instructions and contacts for assistance. We will also have time available following the business portion of the Member Meeting to help members register online.

WHY:

SEWMG continues to implement the strategic plan, which includes improvements to organizational oversight, efficiency and member experience.

We're looking to replace our current membership management process, which requires a lot of manual effort and is prone to errors. Our goal is to save time and improve accuracy for everyone involved. Going forward, we're asking members to manage their own contact information. This new process will not only ensure your details are always up-to-date, but it will also help us streamline our administrative tasks so our volunteer team can focus on other essential SEWMG activities.

The new system streamlines our financial processes by directly linking payments to member information. This also eliminates processing fees, which will save SEWMG money and allow us to allocate those funds to other initiatives.

Benefits of the Zeffy system:

Members will enter and manage their own data.

Members have access to payment history, membership expiration Automated receipts, membership information, with clear contacts and links

Members will have the option of auto-renewal

Free payment processing, with optional donation by users

Membership and payment info in linked in one system, with easy reporting and automation

Other tools, services SEWMG can use (like donations, event registration)

Other things to know:

Members will be required to sign up for the membership online. SEWMG will offer support and assistance if needed. More information will be shared in the announcement.

It is the preference that payments be made through this secure online system as well, as the tracking of payment data is a benefit of using this system. It also reduces the need for manual entry and depositing. If you are not able to pay online, there will be an option to submit your membership info and pay via check. Instructions will be provided during registration.

Container Contest at the 174th Wisconsin State Fair!

by MGV Mary Wolverton

The 2025 State Fair Container Contest brought color and fun to our garden. No two were alike and container choices were imaginative. The contest engaged our visitors and nearly 4,000 votes were cast.

First place went to Amber Lockett. She delivered her container with a month to go before delivering her baby. Her entry brought a gardener holding a massive display of hot summer blooms including passiflora, pentas, angelonia, lantana and salvia. Colorful wellies and garden tools complemented the red, purple and orange flowers.

Mark Bahr took second with a minimal plant selection of coleus and hypoestes. He caught the eye with planters of concrete globes accented with butterflies.

A fairy garden in a hollow log brought third place to Kirsten Villegas. Tiny bright flowers from dipladenia and petunia were tucked into crevices. Fairies and butterflies danced amid the blooms.

Egyptian papyrus showed up in two containers. Sue Moncrieff surrounded an impressive stand of Prince Tut grass with sedum, geranium, superbells, verbena and petunia in a decorative white wash tub. Natalie Lester brought a stunning wood planter (created by her husband) filled with an arrangement in pinks and silvers with petunia, coleus, mandevilla, salvia and dusty miller centered on Queen Tut dwarf papyrus.

Sarah Bellehumeus served up tea in a basket filled with herbs used to make tea. The design was completed with a tea pot and cup.

A container designed to glow in its shady spot at the back of our center garden was created by Sue Bahneman. She included gorgeous yellow canna in a bed of coleus and petunia.

Lori Vanover filled a bushel basket with a tapestry of delicate flowers and foliage in pink, rose and silver from agastache, dusty miller, sweet potato vine and spider flower.

Deb Kopydlowski once again repurposed a clever container. This year a wicker baby buggy was filled with pink flowers and silver foliage from vinca, angel wings begonia, supertunia, evolvulus and felicia.

Our thanks to the contestants for their support of this project and to the daily volunteers who kept these arrangements watered and deadheaded.



Navigating Your Digital Garden: Online Systems

by MGV Jackie Kirchen

Overall Goal: To provide a clear, concise, and helpful guide for UW-Extension Master Gardeners on the purpose, use, and access of the key online systems they will encounter.

Target Audience: Current UW-Extension Master Gardeners (especially new ones, but also a good refresher for seasoned MGs).

Systems and sites reviewed here:

- Canvas
- ORS
- WIMGA Website
- SEWMG Website
- SEWMG Google Workspace

Let's dig into the specific online systems that will help your Master Gardener journey thrive, making your efforts more organized, connected, and impactful. Below, you'll find a breakdown of the key online systems you'll likely interact with as a UW-Extension Master Gardener. For each tool, we'll explain its purpose, why you'll find it useful, and how to access it, along with a few pro tips to help you get the most out of it.

UW Extension Systems

Both Canvas and ORS are systems used and managed by UW Extension. These are used by all MGs in the state.

Canvas

- **What It Is:** Canvas is UW-Madison's primary online learning management system. Think of it as your virtual classroom for formal Master Gardener training.
- **Why You'll Use It:** If you're enrolled in initial Master Gardener training, advanced training courses, or specific continuing education modules that require structured learning, Canvas is where you'll access course materials, submit assignments, participate in discussions, and receive announcements from instructors.
- **Where to Find It / How to Access:** Access to specific Canvas courses will be provided upon your enrollment in a training program. You'll typically receive an email with direct links and login instructions. You will also use your UW NetID and password. Get more log in and help info here.
- **Key Things to Know:**
 - **Explore modules:** Familiarize yourself with the course layout – materials are often organized into modules or units.
 - **Technical support:** If you encounter technical issues within Canvas, your course instructor or UW-Extension IT support (often linked within Canvas) are your best resources.

ORS (Online Reporting System)

- **What It Is:** Your official portal for logging all your valuable Master Gardener volunteer hours and continuing education hours. It's how we keep track of the incredible impact our program has across the state.
- **Why You'll Use It:** To record every hour you spend on approved Master Gardener projects, educational events, and training. Submitting your hours ensures you meet your annual certification requirements and helps us demonstrate the program's vital contribution to the community, which is crucial for continued funding and support.
- **Where to Find It / How to Access:** You can access ORS directly through the UW-Extension Master Gardener website. Look for the 'Toolbox' section (mastergardener.extension.wisc.edu/toolbox/) and then find the link for 'Online Reporting System (ORS)'. You'll

log in using your UW NetID and password.

• Key Things to Know:

- **Log hours regularly:** Don't wait until the last minute! It's much easier to remember your activities if you log them weekly or monthly. Remember the deadlines for submitting hours to maintain your certification.
- **Technical support:** If you encounter technical issues within Canvas, your course instructor or UW-Extension IT support (often linked within Canvas) are your best resources.

WIMGA (Wisconsin Master Gardener Association) Website

- **What It Is:** The WIMGA website (wimga.org) is the online home for the statewide Wisconsin Master Gardener Association. While you belong to your local association (like SEWMG), WIMGA connects all Master Gardeners across Wisconsin. When you join SEWMG, you are automatically a WIMGA member.
- **Why You'll Use It:** This site is your resource for information pertinent to all Wisconsin Master Gardeners. You'll find details on statewide events, leadership information for WIMGA, important announcements that affect the entire state program, and resources that transcend local chapter specifics.
- **Where to Find It / How to Access:** Simply visit wimga.org. The site is publicly accessible, though some specific resources might be linked elsewhere or require a login.
- **Key Things to Know:**
 - **Statewide Focus:** Remember this site is for information relevant to all Wisconsin MGs, separate from the local SEWMG site.
 - **Education Opportunities:** WIMGA offers ongoing free or inexpensive educational opportunities that fulfill certification continuing education requirements..

SEWMG Systems

SEWMG has several electronic systems used by members, as well as by the Board, committees and projects.

SEWMG Member Website (sewmg.org)

- **What It Is:** This is the Southeastern Wisconsin Master Gardener (SEWMG) Association's dedicated website. It's your primary hub for all things specific to SEWMG.
- **Why You'll Use It:** The SEWMG website is essential for staying up-to-date on local events, monthly meeting schedules, committee activities, volunteer opportunities specific to our area, local news, and important announcements relevant to SEWMG members. You can find contact information for members, leadership and committee chairs here as well.
- **Where to Find It / How to Access:** Simply visit sewmg.org. Some areas of the site may require a member login (separate from your UW NetID), which you would set up as part of your SEWMG membership.
- **Key Things to Know:**
 - **Check the calendar:** The event calendar is regularly updated with upcoming meetings, workshops, and volunteer projects.
 - **Explore committees and projects:** Learn about the various committees and how you can get involved.
 - **Technical Support:** Use the Contact Form on the website to request assistance..

SEWMG Google Workspace (for Board & Committees)

- **What It Is:** Google Workspace is a collection of cloud-based productivity and collaboration tools provided by Google. For the SEWMG Board and committees, this typically includes Gmail for email, Google Drive for file storage and sharing, Google Docs,

Digital Gardening continued

Sheets, and Slides for creating documents, spreadsheets, and presentations, and Google Calendar for scheduling.

- **Why You'll Use It:** If you're a member of the SEWMG Board or a specific committee, Google Workspace is your primary suite of tools for communication, document collaboration, and organization. You'll use it to share meeting agendas, minutes, reports, project plans, and other committee-specific files. It allows for real-time collaboration on documents, ensuring everyone is working on the most current version.
- **Where to Find It / How to Access:** If you are in a role that

requires access, the Tech Committee will contact you to assign an organizational Google account

- **Key Things to Know:**

- **Cloud-Based and Collaborative:** All files are stored online, meaning you can access them from any device with an internet connection. You can see who is working on a document and make comments or suggestions.

Security and Data Retention: Organization retained and accessible, with safeguards for storing and sharing organization and member data.

Master Gardener Honored with Beautification Award

by MGV Laurie Baker

In July 2025, Master Gardener Laurie Baker was recognized by the City of New Berlin with its prestigious Beautification Award, celebrating her outstanding contributions to the community's landscape and spirit. Laurie's garden, a vibrant reflection of creativity, care, and horticultural excellence, stood out among this year's nominees for its thoughtful design and joyful impact on the neighborhood.

To mark the honor, a Beautification Award sign was proudly placed in Laurie's yard—inviting neighbors and passersby to admire the space and celebrate the achievement. In addition to the public recognition, Laurie received a commemorative Golden Shovel, a symbol of lasting appreciation for her dedication to making New Berlin bloom. The shovel is hers to keep, a golden reminder of the beauty she cultivates both in her garden and in the hearts of those around her.

Laurie's work exemplifies the mission of the SE Wisconsin Master Gardeners: to educate, inspire, and beautify through the power of plants and community. Congratulations, Laurie, and thank you for helping New Berlin grow with grace!



Master Gardener Picnic

by MGV Diane Thieme

On August 25th, 85+ MGVs and guests gathered at the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the SEWMG annual appreciation picnic and silent auction fund raiser. We had special entrees made by Mark Pawlak, Dan Cummings, and Clare Bergquist. The meals were completed with tasty potluck side dishes, salads, appetizers, and decadent desserts. MGVs are such good cooks and bakers! No one went home hungry.

Throughout the evening, members studied the 28 silent auction baskets to plan their bidding decisions and strategies. Every basket had multiple bids, and several had bidding wars going until bids closed. Thank you to the 32 members who generously donated items, large or small, to make up the baskets. Laurie Keane and I had great fun spreading everything out on my floor and then picking and choosing items to create the baskets and eight door prizes. We had a tremendous variety of items to work with to challenge our creativity. I hope you enjoyed seeing the preview emails showing some of the baskets. The auction raised a record amount of \$1810. Thank you to all who contributed to the success.



SEWMG Holiday Party

by MGv Diane Thieme

We gathered for a very nice picnic and silent auction in August. Now the leaves are starting to turn and the holiday season is fast approaching. Our next social event will be our annual Holiday Party on Wednesday, December 10, 2025. Put on your festive holiday clothes and join everyone at Alioto's Restaurant in Wauwatosa for social hour, delicious dinner, party favors and door prizes. See the attached reservation form for all the details. Return it to me with payment by November 30.

Join fellow SEWMGVs to celebrate the season

Wednesday, December 10, 2025

Alioto's Restaurant

3041 North Mayfair Rd., Wauwatosa

6:00 Cash Bar 7:00 Dinner - \$28 per dinner Party Favors Door Prizes

Name (please print)

Guest Name (limit 1 guest)

Dinner Choices: All dinners include Salad, Italian Bread, Coffee, Tea, or Milk & Sherbet
Self Guest

Petit Filet, au jus, Button Mushrooms, & Potatoes

Grilled Seasoned Shrimp, Vegetables, Potatoes, Cocktail Sauce

Eggplant Parmesan served over Pasta (Vegetarian option)

Check total _____

Reservations due by November 30, 2025

**Checks payable to: SEWMG & mailed to
Diane Thieme, 3033 N. Newhall, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211**



Watersheds and the Vital Role of Wetlands

by MGV Cheryl Lausten

Understanding watersheds is essential for nurturing our local environment. A watershed is all the land where water drains to a common point, like a river, lake, or the ocean. Everything we do on the land, from fertilizing our gardens to managing runoff, has a direct impact on the water quality downstream.

Within these watersheds are crucial ecosystems known as wetlands. These are areas where water saturates the soil either year-round or seasonally. Wetlands are "nature's hardworking filters and sponges". While "swamp," "marsh," "bog," and "fen" are often used interchangeably, each refers to a distinct wetland type with unique vegetation, water sources, and water chemistry.

Swamps are forested wetlands dominated by woody plants, primarily trees and tall shrubs. They are found in floodplains or at the edges of large lakes, with waterlogged soils that still support significant tree growth. Their vegetation typically includes water-tolerant trees like bald cypress, red maple, various species of willows and oaks, along with smaller trees and bushes. Swamps usually receive water from surface sources like rivers, lakes, or runoff, leading to slow-moving or stagnant water with fluctuating levels. They have nutrient-rich, mineral soils and a neutral to slightly acidic pH. Swamps are vital for water filtration, flood control, erosion prevention, and as biodiversity hotspots, supporting a vast array of plant and animal species. They also play a role in carbon sequestration, storing significant amounts of carbon in their vegetation and soils.

Marshes are wetlands dominated by herbaceous, non-woody vegetation such as grasses, sedges, rushes, and reeds, and are home to abundant wildlife. Trees are absent. Marshes often have standing water from various sources, including precipitation, surface water, and sometimes groundwater, with water levels that can fluctuate daily, seasonally, or annually. They are typically nutrient-rich with a neutral to alkaline pH and mineral soils, accumulating little to no peat. Marshes can be tidal salt marshes along coastlines, tidal freshwater marshes, or inland freshwater marshes.

Bogs are highly acidic, nutrient-poor freshwater wetlands primarily fed by rainwater. They are characterized by thick layers

of peat and are dominated by sphagnum mosses, which create the acidic environment, along with specialized, acid-tolerant plants like sedges, ericaceous shrubs (e.g., cranberries), and stunted conifers. This makes them unique, often supporting specialized plants like carnivorous species due to the limited nutrient availability. Bogs are commonly found in cooler, northern climates.

Fens are also peatlands that accumulate peat but are less acidic and more nutrient-rich because they are fed by groundwater and surface runoff in addition to precipitation. Fens support a more diverse range of vegetation, including sedges, grasses, wildflowers, and sometimes shrubs, though tree cover is often sparse. Their peat can be composed of different plant materials and may be less acidic than bog peat.

Wetlands are critical for numerous reasons. They function as natural water purifiers, filtering out pollutants, excess nutrients, and sediments as water flows through them. Wetlands also function as giant natural sponges, absorbing significant amounts of rainwater and snowmelt, which reduces downstream flooding and helps maintain steady stream flows during dry periods. The dense plant life in wetlands also helps with erosion control by stabilizing shorelines. Furthermore, they are biodiversity hotspots, providing essential habitats for countless species of fish, birds, and amphibians. Furthermore, wetlands help regulate our climate by storing carbon.

Recent catastrophic flooding in various parts of the country was driven by unusual and intense weather patterns, often amplified by climate change, but the loss of natural areas like wetlands certainly makes the outcomes much worse. Wetlands don't cause floods, but their absence means there's less natural infrastructure to absorb and slow down the immense volumes of water. When we pave over natural landscapes or drain wetlands for development, we lose their invaluable capacity to manage water. This leads to faster, higher, and more damaging floodwater.

By supporting wetland conservation and adopting sustainable practices in our own gardens, we can contribute to a healthier water future for everyone.

Speaker's Bureau Update

by MGV Jean Akhter Co-Chair

As of September 29th, Speaker's Bureau volunteers
Have made 26 presentations
To approximately 490 attendees
On 11 gardening topics.

We have four more presentations scheduled in October and November this year.

The top three topics most frequently requested are as follows:
Composting Short Course (5 times)

Butterflies in the Backyard (4 times)
Container Gardening (4 times)
The following three topics were each requested 3 times this year:
Seed Starting 101
Raised Bed Gardening
Natural Landscaping in an Urban Environment

If you are interested in volunteering for Speaker's Bureau in 2026 for the first time, please reach out to Jean.Akhter@sewmg.org

2025 Wisconsin State Fair Recap

by MGValorie Sangsland

Although the 2025 Fair was cut short by the thousand-year flood rains that began the evening of Saturday, August 9th, our SEWMG Master Gardeners still managed to interact with over 16,500 visitors this year which was right on track with the number of visitors per day in 2024.

Those visitors seemed really enthusiastic about the gardening topics covered in the literature we had at the fair. Even taking into account about 400 documents drenched in the final rainfall, our visitors took over 10,000 documents home to study and use to improve their gardening experiences. This represents a 34% increase over 2024. The most popular topics this year were Daylilies, Hosta, Native Plants, Milkweed, and Drought-tolerant plants for Wisconsin.

We welcomed at least twenty first-time State Fair volunteers this year, including some brand-new graduates of the University of Wisconsin MG program who heard about us from the "Find a Master Gardener" advertisement I created in the ORS. I received very enthusiastic emails from several of these new MGs, both after they attended orientation, and after they worked their shifts. One new MG, Jim Gorski, said he greatly enjoyed his time at the Fair, and only wished he had signed up for more shifts! That's wonderful to hear, and for those SEWMG members who have not yet volunteered at the Realtors Home & Garden Show or at the Wisconsin State Fair, take the word of these new members: these events are FUN! We hope to see you next year!





Find us on Facebook or Instagram



Instagram



Facebook

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Our Mission Statement

"We are Master Gardeners who serve as a resource in the art and science of gardening to cultivate community connections."