

Good Earth News

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100th Realtors Home & Garden Show

by MGV Valorie Sangsland

The 100th Realtors Home & Garden Show is just a few months away. This year, SEWMG will interact with the gardening public in booth numbers 1609, 1611, and 1613.

As in the past few years, the show will span ten days, and will be closed for two days (Monday and Tuesday):

Friday, March 20: 10 am - 7 pm
Saturday, March 21: 10 am - 7 pm
Sunday, March 22: 10 am - 5 pm
Monday, March 23: CLOSED
Tuesday, March 24: CLOSED
Wednesday, March 25: 4 pm - 8 pm
Thursday, March 26: 4 pm - 8 pm
Friday, March 27: 10 am - 7 pm
Saturday, March 28: 10 am - 7 pm
Sunday, March 29: 10 am - 5 pm

On each Friday, Saturday and Sunday, we will have three shifts of four volunteers. On Wednesday and Thursday, we will have a single shift of three volunteers.

Additionally, we will be building a new Home Show Display for 2026, which will be a combination of the concepts of "Right Plant/Right Place" and "Garden Design Considerations." For you new MGV graduates, with your Foundations in Gardening training fresh in your mind, this is a great opportunity to utilize your new knowledge! If you possess

these skills, we'd love to have your help designing the new booth:

Graphic design
Technical/educational writing
Artistic abilities
Trade show booth design

As always, the Realtors Home & Garden Show offers multiple volunteer opportunities to SEWMG members: creating the Home Show Booth and handouts, Show Set-Up, Volunteering for shifts, and Show tear-down. Consider which opportunities appeal to you and get a jump start on your 2026 volunteer hours while it's still too cold to work outdoors.

Please look for additional communications from Heide Burns and I recruiting volunteers for each part of the event. Due to the revised Newsletter schedule for 2026, these volunteer opportunities will be recruited, filled and executed before the subsequent newsletter is published, so please be certain to watch your email for specific communications supporting the many aspects of the 2026 Realtors Home & Garden Show. You may email me directly, vjsland@gmail.com, if you are interested in any of the activities that support SEWMG's presence at the Home & Garden Show.

I hope to see many of you at these events!

Volunteer opportunities

- Create "Right Plant, Right Place" handout
- Design the Home Show display
- Show set-up
- Show tear-down
- Staff one (or more) shifts

Snowdrops, *Galanthus*

by MGV Kelly Kramer

One of the earliest spring blooming bulbs is the Snowdrop (*Galanthus*). These bulbs produce tiny white flowers that usually show up here in late February or early March.

Snowdrops (*Galanthus*) are in the amaryllis family and there are lots of cultivars available. These plants are related to and often confused with Snowflakes (*Leucojum*) which have small white bell-shaped blooms. Both bulbs produce similar white blooms with green tipped petals, although Snowdrop petals tend to be longer and narrower. I feel the main difference is that Snowflake (*Leucojum*) blooms later in spring (often with or after daffodils) whereas Snowdrops (*Galanthus*) bloom very early.

Snowdrop bulbs should be planted in the fall in an area with full or part sun. Since they bloom so early, they are great to plant under deciduous trees. They prefer well drained soil and like many bulbs, they generally do not like clay soils. Plant the bulbs 2-3 inches deep and about 2-3 inches apart, pointy tip up. They look best when scattered in groups for a more natural look.

Each bulb produces a narrow stalk and leaves. One flower will dangle from the top of the stem. Each flower has three large outer petals and three smaller inner petals with green markings. You often do not see the green marking unless you get up close to the plant.

When the blooms are done let the foliage die back naturally. Doing this means the leaves will help produce food for next year's bulbs. The foliage usually disappears by late spring or early summer.

The bulbs will multiply and the best time to dig and divide is when they have just finished blooming. Water thoroughly when replanting. Snowdrops are at home in a woodland setting and look great in a mass planting.



2026 Board

by MGVs Jean Akhter and Jackie Kirchen

2026 SEWMG Board

Jean Akhter - President

2026 marks my thirteenth year as a Master Gardener and my third year serving on the Board of Directors of SouthEast Wisconsin Master Gardeners. Stepping into the role of President for 2026 is my way of serving the organization that I deeply value for its mission, initiatives, and membership. SEWMG offers its members and the local community opportunities to share in the love of gardening while connecting with others.

My professional experience, teaching and administration, and my years of volunteer service will help me as I work on behalf of SEWMG. As we look to 2026, we are excited to host our first conference on September 12th. In addition, I will work to deepen community partnerships and member collaboration. Thank you for your trust. I look forward to working with you throughout the coming year.



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Help Stop the Introduction of Invasive Plants into Wisconsin Gardens

by Melinda Myers

“Defending our Health by Stopping the Spread” is this year’s focus for National Invasive Species Awareness Week (NISAW), Feb 23-27, 2026. This international event is designed to increase awareness about invasive species. Who better to enlist in this effort than gardening influencers like you?

As you plan your outreach efforts for February, consider including mentions of this important topic. Share the importance of avoiding the introduction of invasive plants to our landscapes and include helpful management strategies.

Start your outreach efforts now as gardeners are busy browsing catalogs, reading garden articles and looking for sources of new plants. Encourage people to check their plant wish list for any invasive plants that are classified as prohibited or restricted in Wisconsin before placing any orders online.

Review Wisconsin’s Invasive Species Rule, Chapter NR40 with them. Explain that prohibited plants are those that are not currently found or occur in isolated areas in the state. If introduced into the state, these plants are likely to cause significant economic or environmental harm or harm to human health. Restricted plants are already established in the state, causing harm or having the potential to cause significant harm. Neither can be bought or sold and prohibited plants cannot be possessed.

Although regulations for the sale, purchase and possession of invasive species are in place, some online sellers are not aware, not up-to-date or not concerned with following existing state and federal regulations. Just because you can purchase a plant online does not mean it is allowed in Wisconsin. It is up to us, the individual gardener, to make sure invasive plants do not end up in our gardens, natural spaces and waterways.

Share with others the negative impact these plants have on their landscape and natural spaces. Growing even one or two invasive plants in your garden, shoreline planting or pond can make a big difference. Invasive plants can be vigorous growers and often reproduce faster than our native plants, negatively impacting them and the songbirds, beneficial insects and wildlife that depend upon these plants.

Sometimes we need to make it personal to help encourage action. Let gardeners know these plants also have a negative impact on their health. Invasive populations of honeysuckles, buckthorns and barberries form dense thickets with high humidity beneath the plants, a perfect environment for ticks. Researchers found an abundance of Lyme-disease carrying ticks in areas with dense barberry populations. Another study found the percentage of ticks collected in honeysuckle-infested woods with disease-causing bacteria was 10 times higher.

Managing existing invasive plant populations can be overwhelming. Prevention is an easy and inexpensive first step in the battle against these problem plants. Help your followers

avoid creating more work and expense for themselves while protecting our natural spaces by doing their research before purchasing plants this season.

When in doubt, check the invasive species page on the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources website. Just enter the name of the plant in question to check its status in Wisconsin. This site also contains detailed information on identification, the ecological threat and management options for invasive plants.

You and your followers may also find the Strategies for Managing Invasive Plants webinar recording and handout useful. The handout contains an extensive list of free resources and links on this topic.

Remind gardeners to always dress appropriately and check for ticks when removing invasive plants or enjoying the outdoors. Tick checks done right after you come back indoors and a shower within two hours of time spent outside help reduce the risk of tick bites.

Thanks to all of you who are already spreading the word and actively trying to manage invasive terrestrial and aquatic plants. If you, members of your organization or followers are interested in volunteering to help control invasive plants, email DNRAISInfo@wisconsin.gov. Together we can make a difference!

*Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including the *Midwest Gardener’s Handbook, 2nd Edition* and *Small Space Gardening*. She hosts *The Great Courses* “How to Grow Anything” streaming courses and the nationally syndicated *Melinda’s Garden Moment* radio program. Myers is a columnist and contributing editor for *Birds & Blooms* magazine and was the Plant Doctor on *WTMJ* radio in Milwaukee for over 20 years. Myers’ website is www.MelindaMyers.com.*



Common Buckthorn



Honeysuckle

Navigating Your Digital Garden: Online Systems

by MGV Jackie Kirchen

Hello SEWMG Members,

Since launching our technology initiative in December 2023, we've made significant strides in modernizing our operations as laid out in our strategic plan. We are committed to ensuring a more secure, efficient, and cost-effective organization. These changes are crucial for enhancing accountability and maximizing your member benefits.

Google for Nonprofits: A Secure & Cost-Effective Foundation

We successfully transitioned to the Google Workspace for Nonprofits platform. This strategic move provides several key advantages for SEWMG:

Financial Savings: This robust suite of tools is now free for SEWMG (we were previously paying!), freeing up valuable funds for garden projects and educational programs.

Secure Environment & Ownership: All board work, committee meetings, and organizational documents are now housed in a secure SEWMG environment. This ensures SEWMG maintains full ownership and awareness of all institutional materials, providing continuity and transparency.

Streamlining Operations

This technological shift has allowed us to improve workflows across nearly every facet of the organization. Crucially, these tools allow us to work more efficiently and accurately and use volunteer time for more meaningful, less administratively burdensome tasks.

Board & Committees: All Board work, committee meetings, and documentation for the Speakers Bureau and Special Events teams are now managed digitally, greatly improving collaboration and record-keeping.

Electronic Reimbursements: We have eliminated the cumbersome process of mailing paper forms by implementing an electronic submission process for reimbursements, making it faster and easier for members to be compensated for approved expenses.

Membership and Financial Security (Zeffy)

To further enhance data security and member convenience, we implemented the Zeffy platform for managing our membership processes.

Secure Data Management: All member personal and financial data are now securely managed within SEWMG's own controlled environment, upholding the highest standards of privacy and data security.

Member Convenience: You can easily manage your contact information, view payment history, and opt for auto-renewal. **More Funds for SEWMG:** Because Zeffy eliminates processing fees, more of your membership dollars go directly to our initiatives.

What's Next?

We are currently focused on transitioning the Treasurer's operational processes to integrate with these new systems, which will further enhance our financial transparency and efficiency.

Thank you for embracing these changes! These technological steps are essential to building a strong, sustainable future for SEWMG.



SEWMG Calendar of Meetings and Programs

by MGV Jackie Kirchen

When/Where	What	Description	More Info?
Monday, January 12th 6:30 pm Zoom	WIMGA Annual Meeting Continuing Education (member only, free)	Join us for the WIMGA Annual Meeting on Monday, January 12, 2026, at 6:30pm. You will have an opportunity to meet your Board of Directors and learn about WIMGA accomplishments in 2025 and our Roadmap to the Future. Along with our Annual Meeting, we welcome Jeff Gillman from McMillan Greenhouse, University of North Carolina Charlotte Botanical Gardens: Backyard Bullies, Plant Porn, and the Search for a Meaningful Garden	Check out the last WIMGA Newsletter, watch for emails from WIMGA, or go to https://www.wimga.org/
Saturday, January 31st 9am-11:30am Greendale High School	SEWMG Member Meeting Hands-on Workshops	Agenda 9am-9:30 SEWMG Member Meeting 9:30-11:30 you'll have the opportunity to attend up to 3 SEMWG member led hands on workshops on the following topics: - Winter Sowing - Corms, etc (ranunculus, anemone, oxalis) - Seed starting peppers All workshops include a short intro/education and all supplies.	Watch your email for the full announcement. Register by 1/15 HERE, to helps us ensure we have adequate supplies. You can attend without registration, but we can't guarantee workshop participation.
Monday, February 2nd 6:30 pm Zoom	WIMGA Continuing Education (member only, free)	Courtney Greve, Edible Gardening in Wisconsin: Annuals, Natives, & Fruiting Shrubs	Check out the last WIMGA Newsletter, watch for emails from WIMGA, or go to https://www.wimga.org/
Tuesday, March 3, 10 & 17 6:30 pm Zoom	WIMGA Continuing Education Speakers Series (fee-based event for members and non-members)	-Tuesday, March 3, 2026 Native Shrubs and Trees for Birds & Bees -Tuesday, March 10, 2026 Flowering Shrubs for All Seasons -Tuesday, March 17, 2026 The Art & Science of Pruning to Maintain Tree & Shrub Health	Check out the last WIMGA Newsletter, watch for emails from WIMGA, or go to https://www.wimga.org/
Wednesday, April 22 6:30pm Zoom	WIMGA Continuing Education (member only, free)	Glenn Herold: Hosta Care, Trends, and Varieties	Check out the last WIMGA Newsletter, watch for emails from WIMGA, or go to https://www.wimga.org/
Saturday, April 25 9:00am - 12:00pm Boerner Botanical Gardens	Volunteer Day Event SEWMG Member Meeting Continuing Education (free)	The SEWMG Volunteer Day is your opportunity to connect directly with various garden projects and find the perfect volunteer opportunity for the upcoming season. Plus, you can earn valuable Continuing Education credit, network with other MGs, and shop with local garden related vendors.	Watch for more details in your email and future communications.

Native Plants vs. Nativars - Which to Choose

by MGV Cheryl Lausten

The current surge in native plant gardening is driven by recognition of biodiversity loss and a push for more sustainable landscapes. Modern gardeners are moving away from purely ornamental landscapes toward "functional ecosystems." This shift represents more than a passing fad; it is a change in how we view our backyards—not just as decoration, but as vital habitats. A trip to the local nursery often presents a choice between "wild type" native species and their cultivated counterparts, known as "nativars." So, which to choose?

Since native plants have evolved in a specific region over thousands of years, they are adapted to the local climate, soil, and wildlife and can support significantly more diverse ecosystems than those dominated by non-native species. Wild-type natives are also typically grown from seed, meaning each plant is genetically unique. This diversity is "survival insurance," allowing populations to adapt to changing climates, pests, and diseases over time.

In contrast, a "nativar" is a plant selected by humans for specific desirable traits—such as unique flower colors, compact size, disease resistance, or variegated foliage—and then propagated, usually by cloning (vegetative propagation). While nativars are derived from native species, their ecological value can differ significantly from their wild ancestors.

Modifying a flower's shape or color can disrupt the relationship between the plant and its pollinators. Nativars bred for "double flowers" often sacrifice reproductive parts to produce those petals. This often results in little to no pollen or nectar for pollinators. A shift in flower color can make the plant invisible to pollinators that rely on specific visual cues. One of the most significant involves foliage color. Nativars bred for dark red or purple leaves contain elevated levels of anthocyanins. Insects

may avoid feeding on these leaves because the chemicals make the tissue less nutritious or palatable. Plants with variegated (multi-colored) leaves have less chlorophyll, which can reduce their photosynthetic efficiency and nutritional value to herbivores. Because most nativars are propagated vegetatively (cloned) to maintain their unique traits, they lack genetic diversity. A landscape filled with a single clone of a nativar is a monoculture and will be wiped out if a new disease strikes. In contrast, a patch of seed-grown wild natives would have some resistant individuals that survive. Phenological mismatch is also a problem with some nativars. They are bred to bloom earlier or later than the wild type and disrupt the delicate timing between the flower opening and the emergence of the insects that rely on it.

Nativars do have some positive qualities. Due to their propagation methods, nativars can be more widely available, can be bred for compact habits, and be selected specifically to resist mildews and rusts that plague the wild type, potentially reducing the need for garden fungicides.

If possible, plant "straight species" or "wild type" native plants, preferably those grown from locally sourced seeds (local ecotypes). These provide the highest level of ecosystem services and genetic resilience. If you must use a nativar, choose those that are bred for traits that address a specific garden problem, rather than just showy changes.

For maximum environmental benefit, stick as close to nature's original design as possible, embracing the genetic diversity and functional beauty of wild native plants and be sure to avoid invasive non-native plants which actively degrade natural habitats.



2025 SEWMG Holiday Party

photos by MGV Laurie Baker

SEWMGs holiday party was held at Alioto's Restaurant in Wauwatosa on December 10. The annual event was coordinated by MGV Diane Thieme. Ann Loper, chair of the Lifelong Gardening committee, was honored with SEWMG's Lifetime Achievement Award.





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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."