



Volunteering at Community Events

by MGV Meredith Ward Lawrence

This spring I wanted to get a head start on supporting the greater Milwaukee gardening community and so I volunteered at two fantastic local events.

At the end of April, I joined fellow volunteers Tom and Karla at Franklin Library's Arbor Day Event where they gave free tree saplings away to the public. Being an Arbor Day event, a lot of the questions we received were regarding trees, so I found it helpful to review the materials I had gotten from the Foundations of Gardening class before attending. Something I found very helpful at this event was that we had free seed packets people could pick out, which drew people over to our table. This allowed us to strike up conversations about gardening with more folks.

In mid May I volunteered with Jeanne at the Bloom and Groom event held by the Southside Community Center. Similar to the event at the Franklin Library, several booths were set up and the SEWMG table I helped with had literature for people to pick up. This was a neat event because everything was bilingual; however,

even though I do not speak Spanish, it was no problem to communicate with everyone and the community energy was fantastic.

If you would like to learn more about representing SEWMG, keep an eye out for opportunities like this; I find volunteering at the Wisconsin State Fair a great "baby step" to answering more questions at a table. There are also a plethora of resources on the SEWMG website as well as the UW extension website.

Given my experience, here are my quick tips for success at events like this:

Do:

- Rely on your boothmates
- Sign up for future events like this
- Bring a chair! (If allowed at the event)

Don't:

- Overwhelm people with 10 brochures at once
- Hesitate saying "I don't know, but let me find out!"
- Forget to check the weather forecast

Help Wanted - Special Events Committee

by MGV Val Sangsland

Seeking a New Scheduler for the Realtors Home & Garden Show and Wisconsin State Fair in 2027

Heide Burns, who has been doing a fabulous job scheduling Special Events (Realtors Home & Garden Show and Wisconsin State Fair) for the past two years, will be traveling in 2027 and we need a volunteer to step up and learn the process, taking over for Heide next year.

The ideal candidate will be proficient in Google

Forms, Excel and group emails, and must be willing to commit the necessary time to focus on these activities in February/March (Home Show) and June/July/August (State Fair). This individual would be a co-chair of the Special Events Committee.

Heide has kindly agreed to mentor a new volunteer for this activity. Please contact Valorie Sangsland (valorie.sangsland@SEWMG.org) if you are interested in this role.

Help Manage Invasive Plants

by Melinda Myers

It may be old news to you but there are still many gardeners unaware of the identity and negative impact of invasive plants. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) has designated June as Invasive Species Action Month to increase awareness and inspire action to manage these problem plants.

As an influencer in the gardening world, you have the opportunity to inform and inspire others to join this effort. Share the importance of keeping these problematic plants out of our gardens and natural spaces <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Invasives/what>. Encourage gardeners to avoid creating future problems by only buying non-invasive plants from reputable retailers for their gardens and landscapes. Let them know about the wealth of information on the WDNR website and the University of Wisconsin Weed Science Department that can help them avoid adding invasive plants to their landscapes and manage those that may already be in their gardens.

Provide alternatives to homeowners who are reluctant to remove invasive plants currently being used for privacy or screening. Encourage them to plant a garden or hedge of native plants as they begin removing the invasive species. Once they see the increased beauty, pollinator and songbird appeal our native shrubs and perennials provide, they won't miss the wall of buckthorn and honeysuckle greenery.

As you meet with gardeners, you may find some interest in doing more. This is a great opportunity to recruit new members for your organization. It is also an opportunity to enlist their help in spotting invasive species populations early and stopping their spread, helping reduce the amount of time and money needed to eliminate these invasive organisms. Introduce them to the Wisconsin First Detector Network's Wisconsin Invasive Species Calendar, a useful resource as they watch for invasive plants in their community. Encourage them to report any invasive species populations they discover to the WDNR by following their reporting instructions at <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Invasives/report>.

Provide helpful tips on proper disposal, preventing these plants from ending up in someone else's garden, our waterways, or other natural spaces. Remind them to check with their local municipality for disposal recommendations. Most allow residents to dispose of invasive plants in the garbage by placing them in a plastic bag marked "invasive."

Thanks for all you do to help gardeners and homeowners. Working together we can make a difference as we preserve our waterways, lakes, and other natural spaces.

Melinda's website, www.MelindaMyers.com, features gardening videos, audio tips, free webinars, monthly gardening tips, and other gardening information.

President's Letter

by MGJ Jean Ahktar

2026 is racing by and SEWMG is celebrating its membership in many ways. The year kicked off with a member meeting and continuing education at Greendale High School where members had the opportunity to meet up with fellow MGJs, create a winter sowing container, and learn about gardening topics. Then in April we hosted our second member meeting and volunteer event at Boerner Botanical Gardens where members shopped local vendors, learned about bees, and met with representatives of volunteer organizations that offer opportunities for MGJs to earn volunteer service hours.

As summer commences, we are looking forward to even more opportunities to connect with each other in meaningful ways. The State Fair runs August 6-16. It offers volunteers the opportunity to connect with the public and spread the word about SEWMG and sound gardening practices. We look forward to the yearly container contest and all that the State Fair has to offer.

I hope to see you at our annual picnic and member meeting on August 18 at the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts in

Brookfield. The food is amazing, the silent auction enticing, and the fellowship engaging. It is an event you won't want to miss.

Mark your calendars for September 12 and our first annual conference, Knowledge in Bloom, taking place at the Urban Ecology Center, Washington Park. Read all about it in the article in this edition of the Good Earth Newsletters.

The holiday party planning committee is hard at work planning this year's event. We will keep you posted with new developments. I can't wait to see how this year wraps up.

A team of dedicated volunteers are hard at work planning events that offer you the opportunity to connect with other MGJs in meaningful ways. There is an ongoing need for volunteers to serve in leadership roles, on committees, and in a variety of other ways. As you log volunteer service hours this year consider volunteering for SEWMG. You are the backbone of our organization. We need you.

How Wisconsin's Climate is Changing

Source University of Wisconsin

You have likely noticed shifts in the state's weather and seasons in recent decades. Rain has become more frequent during the winter, 80-degree temperatures linger longer into the fall season, and flooding is more common in the spring. These changes are a result of Wisconsin's climate becoming warmer and wetter over time.

Where is the data from? In 1895, reliable, consistent documentation of Wisconsin's weather began. Many climate trends use 1950 as a starting point, as that's considered a time when enough weather observations were being taken to accurately illustrate the climate of a place.

Getting Warmer

Since 1950, the annual average temperature has increased by three to four degrees Fahrenheit across the state. This may not seem like a significant change when we're used to temperatures changing by 20 degrees in a given day. Instead, think of our state's climate as you would your own body temperature. An adult's body temperature is typically around 98 degrees Fahrenheit, but a temperature of 100 degrees is considered a low-grade fever. Add just three more degrees to reach a high fever.

A small change can throw our state (and global) delicately-balanced climate out of whack. Wisconsin is experiencing warmer temperatures across all seasons, at all times of day, but the warming is occurring at different rates.

Daytime Warming

Highs

Average daytime high temperatures have increased most significantly during the winter season, with many counties warmer by 5 degrees compared to 1950. Both spring and fall have seen similar trends in daytime warming, while summer has seen the smallest amount of change. In recent decades, nighttime temperatures, however, have seen a more significant change. Throughout all seasons, most counties have seen average daily low temperatures grow three to four degrees warmer since 1950.

Lows

Low temperatures are warming even more significantly during the winter months, at a rate of one degree per decade on average in many counties. The number of hours below freezing in Wisconsin has decreased significantly since 1950; so much so that March has essentially shifted from a winter month to a spring month in Wisconsin

Longer growing season

Wisconsin now frequently sees temperatures above 75 degrees lasting a week or two longer into the fall season than usual. As a whole, the growing season has lengthened by an average of 18 days across the state. Spring thaw has begun to arrive sooner, melting the snowpack and allowing leaves to emerge sooner than usual.

Getting Wetter

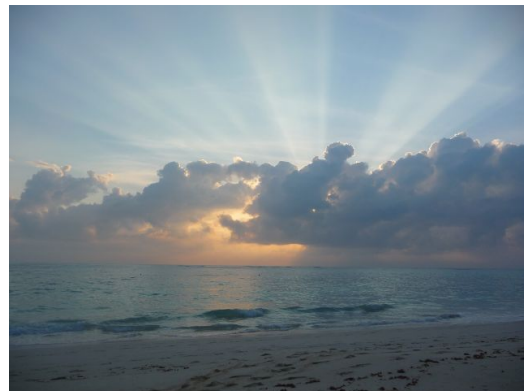
The warming of Wisconsin's climate is closely tied to its increasing wetness. Warmer air can hold more moisture than cooler air. Think of putting wet clothes in the dryer — you likely use the warm cycle, as the warm air will absorb the moisture of the clothes faster than the cool cycle. As our atmosphere grows warmer, its capability to hold more water also grows.

The winter season has changed most significantly, with most counties becoming 20 percent wetter on average since 1950. Central and southern Wisconsin have seen similar increases during the spring.

Summer getting drier

Projections show that summer drying will likely spread across the state in the coming decades. You may have noticed these changes in precipitation during very wet stretches of weather. The 2010s were Wisconsin's wettest decade on record, with 2019 ranking as the state's wettest year. As our climate becomes wetter, farmers struggle to plant in waterlogged fields, pests thrive, and waterfront communities are threatened by rising rivers and lakes. Added moisture in the air has also made Wisconsin more humid, especially during the summer months. Four of the state's five most humid summers have occurred

Consider subscribing to UWM's climatology newsletter : stclim@aos.wisc.edu



Volunteer at the 2026 Wisconsin State Fair

by MGVal Sangsland

This summer's hallmark SEWMG volunteer event, the Wisconsin State Fair, will be held from Thursday, August 6 through Sunday, August 16. We have three shifts per day: Early (9 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.), Mid-Day (1 to 5:30 p.m.) and Evening (5 to 9 p.m.). Each shift will have four volunteers plus a shift captain.

Volunteers rotate throughout the SEWMG garden area in Exploratory Park, greeting members of the public who visit us to ask gardening questions, see what's new in our lovely gardens, vote on the creative container gardens in our annual contest, or just enjoy the lovely shade. This is a great opportunity to enjoy typical Wisconsin weather, and get free admission to the Fair (explore before or after your shift). In 2025, we added a refrigerator so we can offer a complimentary chilled bottle of water to our volunteers.

We will have two orientation sessions (one during the day and

one in the evening) so first-time volunteers can familiarize themselves with our area ahead of their shift. Shift captains are required to attend one of the orientation sessions.

Past volunteers remark on how much they learn from the other volunteers on their shifts, and how much they appreciate the laid-back atmosphere of this volunteer opportunity.

Registration opened on May 30 and will run until all shifts are filled. If your preferred shift is full when you read this article, feel free to register as an alternate, as we typically get several last-minute cancellations and need volunteers able to fill in on short notice.

Thank you in advance for volunteering for SEWMG at the 2026 Wisconsin State Fair!

Annual Information Day & Poster Presentation

by MGVal Jane Browne, In-House Education

On April 25, Saturday morning, the SEWMG hosted a volunteer information event. It was in the lower level of the Boerner Education and Visitor Center at Boerner Botanical Gardens. At this event, Master Gardeners were encouraged to promote the gardens where they volunteer with a poster. It was a casual and chatty atmosphere with an emphasis on networking. 60 members, a few new members and visitors strolled through the multimedia room, with coffee or tea, and cookies or snacks.

Since creating a poster presentation takes time, these were some of the suggestions for members on creating a poster.

- Plan about 7–10 days to complete your poster board
- Start with the title and make it large, descriptive and readable from a distance
- Use pictures of the garden where you volunteer
- Limit text to essential points
- Use short bullet phrases
- Create a handout and make a sign-up sheet for those interested in volunteering at your garden

Posters were available for viewing from 9 a.m. to noon. Each poster had one or two members that answered questions about their garden. There were 30 poster presentations from both Milwaukee and Waukesha Counties. Sharing a garden location with the day and time of gardening stimulated interest, especially if the location was nearby their residence. Some posters provided information on school gardening and working with youths. There were also posters on vegetable gardens that donated their produce. Plus, there were posters about how members could volunteer by educating visitors at the Home and Garden Show, Life Long Gardening, Speakers Bureau, the WI State Fair, etc. Some members were very interested in joining these teams.

At 9:15 a.m. there was a short business meeting in the adjacent room conducted by President Jean Ahktar. Following the business

meeting, there was a continuing education program that started at 9:45 a.m. Jennifer Lazewski, a fellow SEWMG, gave an awesome talk on bees and native plants. Members were able to count her presentation for continuing education. The room was packed with standing room only! Poster boards were on display from 9 a.m. to noon. Coffee, tea, cookies and snacks were available.

Several local vendors were in the hallway.

Brenda Neuman, a SEWMG, with a display of her hand, made greeting cards. She was also selling gardening jewelry made by her mother.

Andy Hemkin, a beekeeper, and honey producer from Big Bend, WI was selling his honey products and candles. He supplies bees and maintains beehives at the Milwaukee County Zoo.

Marty Anderson, a member of the Spring City Garden Club in Waukesha was selling her in-bloom African violets. She is both a grower and judge of African violets.

The Woollets from Argyle WI returned to sell their wool products. They use raw wool from their sheep and local sheep farms, heat the wool to a temperature that kill insects and weed seeds. The wool then becomes pellets for gardens and keeps the deer away.

Tabal Chocolate from Wauwatosa added some sweetness to our event. They save their cocoa bean husks, bag them, and sell them as mulch. Plus, they smell good too! They were selling their chocolate and mulch.

SEWMG yard signs and logo wear were available for sale.

A special thanks to these Master Gardeners for helping to make this event a success:

- Jean Akhtar, SEWMG President
- Karla Geiger, Greendale School Garden Coordinator
- Jacki Kirchen, SEWMG Past President 2025
- Renee Demstrampe, SEWMG Director

Benefits of Native Plants

by **MGV Janet Wintersberger**

Using native plants in your gardens has several benefits. If planted in situations that match their cultural requirements, native plants are lower maintenance. They are tolerant of tough conditions such as drought and poor soil. They are better able to resist the effects of insects and diseases.

A landscape filled with native plants preserves the natural being of an area, while instilling an understanding of the cycles and changes that occur throughout the seasons. A habitat is created for many birds, butterflies and other pollinators when native plants are allowed to establish together.

Select perennials that benefit pollinators like butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds. Create a garden habitat!

Suggested resources if you want to grow only native plants for your location:

- The Gardener's Guide to Prairie Plants by Neil Diboll & Hilary Cox
- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
- Wild Ones
- Wisconsin Flora by Steve Chadde
- Plants of the Chicago Region by Floyd Swink & Gerould Wilhelm
- Michigan State University Regional Plant Lists

Zinnias

by **MGV Kelly Kramer**

A few years ago, I added a cutting garden to my garden space. My favorite annual cut flowers are zinnias.

I cannot think of an annual that is available in more colors and more bloom varieties than Zinnias. Flowers are available in a rainbow of colors and bloom sizes. Flower shapes can be a single flower (like a daisy), domed, or double blooms which remind me of dahlias. There are many cultivars available. Plant heights range from 12 inches tall to 3-foot tall. The tall varieties make excellent cut flowers.

Zinnias are a native to Mexico. They like hot, dry conditions, and require full sun and well-drained soil. They prefer a deep infrequent watering and are drought-tolerant once established.

At the February Madison Garden Expo, I went to a lecture on growing zinnias. It was given by Judy Greenfield, of Greenfield Florals. Judy recommended that zinnias be direct sown when the soil temperature is at least 65 degrees. She said to think of sowing zinnias when it is time to plant out your tomatoes or peppers. Planting zinnias too early can stunt them. I liked the idea of direct sowing the seeds. In the past I started seeds indoors and went through the process of hardening off and

waiting till the weather was very warm to plant them out. Direct sowing sounds like a win with my schedule. Judy also said zinnias like soil on the lean side and not to fertilize them. Too much fertilizer can lead to very tall plants, lots of foliage, and small blooms.

I have never done this, but Judy also mentioned it is an excellent idea to pinch out the tops of the plants when they are small to encourage bushier plants. I will remember to do this step this year.

Japanese beetles like zinnias but so do butterflies. From my experience the odds are you will get more butterflies than beetles, so they are worth the risk. Zinnias are an excellent addition to a butterfly garden.

The zinnia seeds I sowed this year are called Macaron Zinnia Mix which will have soft pastel blooms of cream, coral, and pale pink. I must admit the name "macaron" appealed to me since it is a favorite cookie of mine. I am looking forward to seeing the blooms. There is nothing like a vase of freshly cut flowers from the garden to brighten your day.



Save the dates

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| July 25 and 26 | Garden Conservancy Open Gardens
Waukesha County |
| August 18 | Annual picnic and silent auction
Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts in Brookfield |
| September 12 | Our first conference, Knowledge in Bloom
Urban Ecology Center, Washington Park |

Enjoy Garden Conservancy's Open Days

by MGV Janet Wintersberger

Our members may know MGV Jeff Trader. Some may have even visited his Brookfield garden prior to the annual picnic. His extensive garden is always changing. Four beautiful private gardens in Waukesha County (including Jeff's) will be featured during this year's two-day Garden Conservancy's event, July 25 and 26. For more information on the gardens and for tickets see the Garden Conservancy website, <https://www.gardenconservancy.org/open-days>.

The Garden Conservancy is a national organization which is partnering with the Greater Milwaukee Garden Club. This allows members of the public to visit extraordinary private gardens in the greater Milwaukee area as part of its nationally recognized Open Days program.

SEWMG Conference: Knowledge in Bloom

by MGV Jean Ahktar

SEWMG is excited to host its first annual conference, Knowledge in Bloom. We are thankful to the following community partners who are helping to make our dream a reality:

- **Cultivate partner**, We Energies Foundation
- **Sustain partners**, First Citizens Bank and WIMGA (Wisconsin Master Gardeners Association)

The conference will take place on Saturday, September 12 from 8:45 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. at the Urban Ecology Center, Washington Park, 1859 North 40th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53208. The conference features the following speakers:

- Melinda Myers—Nationally Known Gardening Expert—Planning & Planting for a Colorful Year-Round Garden
- Lisa Johnson—Dane County Extension Horticulture Educator—Gardening with Climate Change in Mind: Trends, Challenges and Adaptations
- Terri-Hart Ellis—Master Gardener, Master Naturalist & Professional Photographer—iPhone Photography in the Garden.

The planning committee—Karla Geiger, Jane Browne & Jean Akhter—are hard at work securing donors for the silent auction. Keep checking the SEWMG website for more details. Donors are updated regularly. Our first donors include: Blue Ribbon Organics (Caledonia), Boerner Botanical Gardens (Hales Corners), From the Hollow (North Prairie), Harry's Ace Hardware & Rental (Franklin), Hemken Honey (Big Bend), Milwaukee Domes Alliance (Milwaukee), Mimosa Restaurant (Franklin), Ten Chimneys Foundation (Waukesha).

If you are interested in volunteering for the conference, please contact Jean. We need the following volunteers:

- Registration table
- Greeter
- Silent auction table
- Lunch/refreshments setup/cleanup
- Post-conference cleanup and loading
- Silent Auction business outreach

Keep checking the SEWMG webpage at <https://sewmg.org> for additional details.

Please join us for this exciting event. Early Registration for SEWMG members only opens on June 15 and runs through July 5 at the discounted rate of \$55 per person.



knowledge in bloom
SOUTHEAST WI MASTER GARDENERS

Allergies, Your Garden, and Conscious Planting

by MGV Cheryl Lausten

The relationship between plant biology and human health is profound. For gardeners, understanding how climate change alters plant behavior—and how different species affect our respiratory systems—is essential for creating comfortable, healthy outdoor spaces.

The pollen landscape is shifting due to two primary climate drivers: rising global temperatures and increased atmospheric carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) acts as an airborne fertilizer. When CO₂ levels rise, plants—particularly wind-pollinated weeds and trees—photosynthesize more robustly. Studies show that elevated CO₂ can cause species like common ragweed to double their pollen output. Furthermore, higher CO₂ concentrations can increase the specific proteins within the pollen grain itself, making the pollen more potent and reactive to the human immune system.

Warmer spring temperatures trigger plants to break dormancy and bloom much earlier in the year, while delayed autumn frosts keep plants active longer. In North America, the average allergy season is now approximately 20 days longer than it was in 1990. Plant hardiness zones are steadily migrating northward. As warmer zones push north, southern plant species are expanding their geographic range, introducing new allergens to northern populations whose immune systems are not accustomed to them. With a longer, more diverse exposure to overlapping pollen cycles, the human immune system stays in a state of high alert for more of the year, making standard seasonal allergies feel far more severe.

To build an allergy-friendly garden, it helps to understand how different plants reproduce. The primary culprit behind hay fever is not the showy flower, but rather the plants with inconspicuous blossoms. Plants that rely on the wind to spread pollen must produce massive, microscopic quantities of it to ensure reproductive success. This dry, lightweight pollen stays airborne for hours and easily penetrates the respiratory tract. Conversely, plants with bright, colorful, or highly fragrant flowers usually rely on bees, butterflies, or birds for pollination. Their pollen is large, heavy, and sticky—designed to adhere to an insect's body rather than float through the air.

To take the guesswork out of landscaping, horticulturalist Thomas Ogren developed the Ogren Plant Allergy Scale (OPALS). This numerical system ranks plants from 1 to 10 based on their potential to trigger allergies or asthma. The scale considers factors such as pollination strategy, pollen grain shape, and bloom duration.

Plants with an OPALS rating of 7-10 cause the most problems and these “pollen bombs” include white oak, ash, birch, Bermuda grass, male junipers and box elders, sunflowers, and daisies.

Those with OPALS ratings of 1-3 cause the least problems and include plants such as female red maple, magnolia, apple, cherry, hydrangea, viburnum, hosta, tulips, and peonies.

A significant reason modern urban and suburban areas have such high allergy scores is a trend Ogren terms botanical sexism. For decades, city planners and commercial landscapers have preferentially selected male-cloned trees and shrubs. Because male plants only produce pollen and do not produce seeds, pods, or messy fruit, they require less street cleanup. However, this widespread elimination of female plants has created a monoculture of pollen producers. In a natural ecosystem, female plants act as pollen traps catching airborne pollen on their sticky female flowers to complete fertilization. By referencing the OPALS scale and intentionally introducing female plants and insect-pollinated species into our private gardens and local green spaces, we gardeners can help balance the local environment and effectively clean the air we breathe.





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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."