



SEWMGs Make Our Communities a Better Place

by MGV Jean Ahkter, President

In an effort to secure donors and sponsors for our upcoming conference and other projects, I reached out to several amazing SEWMG volunteers and asked: What are our accomplishments as an organization. Although I have been a member of SEWMG for 13 years, the responses I got were eye opening. In 2025 we:

- Educated over 613 people in 38 presentations throughout the area--benefiting eight local libraries, three public gardens, two museums, three senior centers, and more
- Shared research-based gardening information with 16,549 visitors at the SEWMG gardens in Exploratory Park, Wisconsin State Fair
- Offered advice and information to 2,367 visitors at the Realtor's Home & Garden Show, SEWMG Information Booth
- Teamed up with Greendale High School Community Garden to provide ongoing support for the school garden
- Donated time, talent, and expertise to help maintain the following gardens: Boerner Botanical Gardens, Ten Chimneys, Sharon Lynn Wilson Center for the Arts, Lynden Sculpture Gardens, North Point Lighthouse Museum, and historic Kneeland Walker House & Grounds.

- Provided over 1,000 pounds of vegetables to people in need in Waukesha County through our partnership with ProHealth Care

Learning about the wonderful ways that SEWMG volunteers make our communities a better place made me proud to be a part of this great organization. I, however, had not stepped up to leadership roles within the organization until three years ago. I kept thinking, I don't have to lead the effort. I am happy to let others lead and I will volunteer at the individual level. I have since learned that if we do not secure a core of volunteers who are willing to embrace leadership, our organization may cease to exist. We have so much to be proud of in SEWMG. Please consider stepping up to volunteer for committees and other leadership opportunities. The citizens of Milwaukee and Waukesha counties need you. SEWMG needs you. And the experience can be very rewarding for those who dare to take the leap.



UW-Madison Garden Expo

by MGJ Jane Browne

I experienced the 2026 PBS Garden Green Living Expo in Madison (February 13-15) and connected with gardeners, attended educational presentations, and browsed through an array of interesting vendors in the Exhibition Hall. UW-Madison Extension Horticulture experts were available to answer gardening questions.

On Friday afternoon, just outside the atrium in the Hall, members from Seed Saver Exchange were facilitating a seed swap. Vegetable and flower seeds were available to take home for spring planting.

New this year, was a bouquet bar sponsored by Bee Havens Flower Farm. Attendees could select beautiful blooming flowers, greenery, and ribbons to create their own arrangements. It was perfect for Valentines Day weekend.

The Exhibition Hall had over 150 exhibitors. Gardening organizations like the Daylily, Hosta, and Peony Society were there. I purchased a small bag of peony sprouts that are chilling in my fridge until spring. There were booths with the newest gardening equipment and tools and scores of lawn art. The Exhibition Hall was also the perfect place to purchase vegetable and flower seeds and bulbs.

A variety of food options were available at the Expo too. The concession in the lobby had an assortment of sandwiches, salads, and soups. I devoured the creamy garden tomato bisque and the chicken salad sandwich on cranberry, wheat, and wild rice bread for lunch. I rate the sandwich and soup a solid "A+."

My first event at the Expo was "Garden Talk" with WPR's Larry Meiller, Lisa Johnson, Dane County horticulture educator, and Brian Hudelson, director of the UW-Madison Plant Disease Diagnostic Clinic. This was a live radio broadcast; advance free tickets were required to enter. Larry took questions from callers, e-mails, and the audience. The team answered my question on composting. Larry, a fixture of Wisconsin radio for nearly six decades, is approaching his upcoming retirement from WPR in 2026.



Free seminars and demonstrations were continuous all three days. Plant diseases not to compost, integrated pest management, gardening for hummingbirds, life of a native perennial garden, and feeding wild birds were just a few of the seminar topics. Many of the topics were repeated throughout the weekend and meet the requirements for SEWMG educational credits.

Demonstrations were in the seminar rooms and in the Exhibition Hall. Retired Extension food preservation specialist, Becky Gutzman, gave several talks and demonstrations on preserving without canning. Other demonstrations were on apple tree pruning, growing mushrooms and mushroom extracts.

My favorite talks were by nationally-known gardening expert and author, Melinda Myers. I attended her talk on growing the best tomatoes and houseplants. "The Woollets ladies," Karen and Elaine, also gave two inspiring talks on how wool restores soil and sustainable gardening strategies.

For 2027 I hope you can make a reservation at the Garden Green Expo in Madison - at Hilton's Spark Hotel, usually on the second weekend of February; ask for the Master Gardeners' block of rooms.

Parking is free at the hotel; there is a tunnel that goes to the Alliant Center. It's an ideal location: free parking, nice modern room at a reasonable price, convenient to take a break and bring back purchases from the Exhibit Hall, and most of all, have access to an exciting and meaningful cast of gardening presenters. You won't be bored...or cold.



January Member Meeting and Learning Together

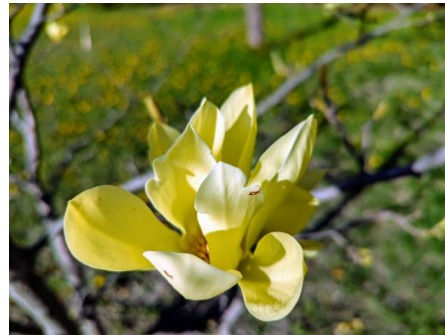
by MGV Karla Geiger

On a somewhat chilly Saturday in late January, SEWMG gathered for the first business meeting of the new year at Greendale High School.

After business was conducted and information shared, members saw [3] brief presentations from members Jackie Kirchen, on corms/tubers like Ranunculus & Anemones, Ray Corn, on starting Peppers from seed & Karla Geiger, on Winter Sowing. Attendees moved into the hallways to plant up pots of Ranunculus, Anemones, Peppers and various seeds in the milk jugs that they

either brought or the school community had saved and provided. Student volunteers helped take the extra planted Milk jugs out the School Garden to start soaking up sunshine. Thanks to those that attended, shared their knowledge, and supported the Greendale School District Garden.

It was a wonderful, collaborative learning experience and plans are in the works for something equally as amazing for next January.



Speaker's Bureau Update

by MGV Beth Peterson, Co-chair

Thanks to our many dedicated speakers who help to further our mission of education by sharing research-based information to the public. As the co-chair responsible for scheduling, I have been thrilled to receive several requests from organizations who became aware of our speakers bureau because they were recommended by their peers from another organization.

By the end of March, we will have given 9 presentations on 6 different topics by 8 different speakers. This includes 5 presentations at the Realtors' Home & Garden Show. Some of our presentations are hosted by private organizations; however, did you know that many are public facing, occurring at community libraries, senior centers and other government-sponsored organizations? And you can earn continuing education credits by attending official Speaker's Bureau presentations given

by an MGV. Below are some public presentations that are scheduled in April:

- 4/4/26 - Milwaukee Public Library - Cramer St - Small Space, Small Budget Vegetable Gardening
- 4/11/26 - Milwaukee Public Library - Tippecanoe Branch - Small Space, Small Budget Vegetable Gardening
- 4/20/26 - Milwaukee Public Library - Zablocki Library - Small Space, Small Budget Vegetable Gardening

Interested in volunteering for the Speakers Bureau? Contact one of our co-chairs:

Jean Akhter at jean.akhter@sewmg.org

Beth Peterson at beth.peterson@sewmg.org

100th Anniversary Realtors Home & Garden Show

by MGVal Sangsland

Since this year's show was the Greater Milwaukee Association of Realtors' 100th Anniversary, we decided to create a brand-new booth topic to share with the public. We selected booth title: "Right Plant, Right Place – Successful Perennial Gardening." The work began with a core Booth Design Team: Cecelia Lorenz, Heide Burns, Jim Surfus, Karla Geiger, Kelly Kramer, Sandy Potter, Teja Shubhachint, and Valorie Sangsland meeting via Zoom in January and February. We researched both the horticultural requirements that must be satisfied to successfully grow perennials (light, moisture, pH, soil type, space requirements), and then we focused on the aesthetic side of the topic (mixing plant forms, tall in back, short in front, continuous bloom, attracting pollinators). Understanding that our visitors might be very new to these concepts, we created a poster outlining how to read a plant label. Proven Winners even allowed us to use their artwork! We also heard that many new gardeners assumed that perennial plants last "forever" so we created a poster outlining the lifespan of many common perennials. Those who like to "rearrange the furniture" can choose short-lived plants, and those with the "once and done" philosophy can focus their garden design around the longer-lived perennials. We introduced the concept of plant forms: mounding, spikey, and trailing and explained that mixing the forms creates a more interesting garden design.

Jim Surfus located a trio of University of Minnesota videos on YouTube conveniently covering our subject. He wrote to the University to request permission to use the videos, and asked if they could send us the originals. They were kind enough to splice the three videos into a single larger video and add subtitles. We purchased a new video photo-frame and set the videos to play on a loop, while displaying the subtitles. This allowed our visitors to watch at their convenience, without the audio distracting our MGs or other visitors. Concerned that the photo frame might be dropped or stolen, we enlisted the help of Cecelia Lorenz's husband Jerry to construct a framework that would attach to the top of the cabana bar and we were in business.

This year the Design Team also used AI to help create images that depicted the points we were trying to make (what happens when plants are in the wrong place vs. the right place, what mixing

plant forms looks like, ways to save your plant labels for future reference, what healthy soil looks like, etc.) We found this much easier than trying to locate photos that depicted the precise points we wanted to make.

We ran our documents and display items through the graphic ministrations of MGVal Susan McDonell to make all our work look cohesive and have proper formatted for printing. Thank you, Susan! You always make us look more professional than we are!

Once we had finished product, we ordered literature (both new and regular favorites). MGVal Kathy McCombe and Maria Gonzalez-Cerra kindly sorted, counted and bundled the literature to make it ready to take to the show.

While all of this was going on, MG Shari Kromrey was soliciting and sorting seed donations for us to give to the visitors to our booth. We've offered free seed packets for the past three years, and the visitors really seem to love them! Shari organized over 3500 packs of seeds into eighteen packs that we provided to shift captains during orientation. Each shift captain brought their pack to their shift, so we didn't have to store all those seeds at the booth, and so that we would always have something available on every shift to offer to visitors.

Finally, on our three-level display rack, we printed 8x10 "biographies" of typical Wisconsin perennials, characterized by soil requirements. These biographies showed zone, size, bloom time, light requirements and soil requirements and included a photograph of the plant in question. Many SEWMG members answered my requests for photos that were used to completed this display. (Thank you!) This display allowed us to group the documents by soil type, so when visitors to the booth said (for example) their yard is mostly clay soil – we could point them to many perennials that work in clay, and they could narrow the choices down by sunlight requirements, etc. It made for an interactive discussion area for our volunteers to use to engage our visitors.

Time to organize the transport of all the items used in our show booth from my home in New Berlin where I had them staged, to the Expo Center at State Fair Park in West Allis. On Wednesday, our team of eight cars transported all the material to West Allis and off-loaded. Then our volunteers stayed to help set everything up. The Set-Up transport team consisted of Chris & Lloyd Vogds, Dena Abramowitz, Heide & Rich Burns, Jim Surfus, John Anderson, Judy McCormick, Kathy McCombe, my husband Jeff Sangsland and I. We were met by our fantastic Pop-Up Display assemblers, Kristie Kroening her partner Alan Nichols. Due to Monday's blizzard, all the giant landscape displays were unable to start their setup that day and were running a full day behind. That meant we could not actually get our cars to our booth, so we had to hoof the items in by hand. Despite these unexpected challenges, everyone kept a positive and helpful attitude. What an amazing team!

We finished set-up Wednesday afternoon and held orientation on Thursday afternoon. The show began on Friday 03/20/2026.



100th Anniversary Realtors Home & Garden Show

by MGVal Sangsland continued

During the show, five SEWMG Speakers Bureau members gave presentations on the Solutions Stage: Patricia Roberts, Carolyn Aita, Kirsten Villegas, Christopher Chitambar, and Ben Rucka.

Finally, I need to thank the SEWMG volunteers staffing the seventy shifts at this year's show. Without these volunteers, none of these earlier activities would have meaning.

I truly believe this year's booth has more educational facets than any of our previous booths, and I am amazed that we were able to create it in less than ten weeks.

What strikes me the most about this year's support activities is that no matter what activity I needed help with, all I needed to do was send an email to our members, and they responded enthusiastically with offers to assist. Thank you everyone for creating a successful Realtors Home & Garden Show in 2026!



Popcorn Cassia

by MGVal Kramer

Popcorn Cassia (*Senna didymobotrya* – formerly *cassia didymobotrya*) is an unusual tropical plant with an interesting scent. Many people say it has the subtle scent of buttered popcorn or peanut butter. Keep in mind scent is subjective. I've known people who love the scent and others who do not. The popcorn like scent is picked up by running your fingers over the leaves. I can also pick up a slight scent of buttered popcorn by gently rubbing the buds before they bloom.

This tropical plant can get very tall in its native zone 10 habitat. Here in Wisconsin, it is an annual plant that will get about 3 feet tall. Popcorn Cassia has bright yellow flower spikes that rise about one foot from green feathery foliage. The flowers open from the bottom of the spike upward. After the flowers are done green seed pods appear which then turn brown. Since this plant is a member of the legume family the seed pods resemble beans or pea pods.

This plant needs full sun and would provide a great vertical interest in the garden or a thriller plant in a large container. It blooms in summer, when the temperatures are very warm, and may continue to bloom into early fall.

This is not a low maintenance annual. It loves hot and humid weather, rich moist well-drained soil, regular fertilizer, and regular watering. Do not let it dry out. If planting in a container,

then plan to water often. And it is poisonous so it should be kept away from small children and from pets who might nibble on the leaves. It is not favored by deer. Unsure if rabbits will eat this or not. I plan on growing it in a container in my garden this year. The photo here was taken at Janesville Rotary Gardens. (Personal note, if you've never been there, I highly recommend a visit to these gardens!)

I've seen this plant in garden centers along with the rest of the summer annuals and despite the name change, I've seen it most often labeled as "Popcorn Cassia". If you have an area of full sun and can keep up with the maintenance requirements, give this fun tropical plant a try.



SEWMG Calendar of Meetings and Programs

by MGV Jackie Kirchen

When/Where	What	Description	More Info?
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.

SEWMG Officer Highlight

Vice President/President Elect Teja Shubhachint



The diversity of experiences our Master Gardeners bring—and the impact they make in our communities—is truly inspiring. I stepped into the VP role to support and collaborate with this dedicated team. I completed the Master Gardener curriculum in 2023 and value the strong foundation it provided in “Right Plant, Right Place” and Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

I have worked in a global medical device company for over 25 years, currently serving in an operational leadership role. I am actively involved in the Wildlife Habitat Cities initiative, where households in suburban communities self-certify their properties as native habitat. In my own yard, I am working to minimize invasive species and increase the footprint of native Wisconsin plants to exceed 70%.

Though I have gardened for many years, I continue to learn so much from volunteering alongside fellow Master Gardeners. I am honored to serve and work with this year’s board.

The Night Shift: Creating a Sanctuary for Nocturnal Pollinators

by MGV Cheryl Lausten

When the sun sets and the activity of honeybees and butterflies fade, a secondary and equally vital ecosystem awakens. This night shift of pollinators—comprised of a diverse array of moths, beetles, and even fireflies—performs an essential service that maintains the health of our natural landscapes. While traditional conservation often focuses on the daytime hours, understanding and supporting these nocturnal workers is a powerful way to enhance local biodiversity.

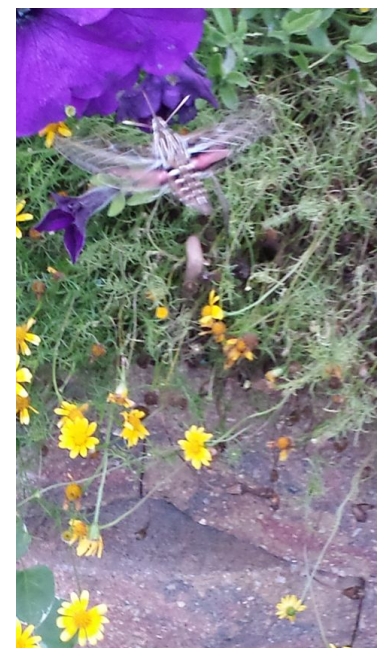
Nighttime pollinators are evolutionary specialists. Moths are remarkably efficient travelers. Because they often fly longer distances than bees, they function as critical links for genetic diversity, cross-pollinating isolated patches of flora. Their physical anatomy is also perfectly suited for the task; the hairy underbellies of many moth species are adept at collecting and depositing pollen. This relationship is so specialized that certain plants have evolved nocturnal syndromes—traits specifically designed to communicate with insects in the dark.

These plants use two primary signals: light and scent. Flowers adapted for the night typically feature white or pale-yellow petals that act as biological reflectors, bouncing moonlight and starlight to create a visible glow. Simultaneously, these species often wait until dusk to release their heaviest concentrations of fragrance. These intoxicating scents create an olfactory trail that moths can follow from great distances. Species such as common evening primrose have blooms that physically burst open in a matter of minutes as the light fades. Others, like foxglove beardtongue and Culver's root, provide bright white vertical landmarks that remain visible throughout the night.

As you look at your garden plans this year, consider that incorporating even a few night-blooming species can transform your space into a 24-hour habitat. Beyond the specialized native varieties, there are several easy-to-find options that thrive in most home gardens. Moonflower, an annual climbing vine with massive, trumpet-shaped white flowers that unfurl at dusk, or Four O'clock, an annual that easily reseeds, and earns its name by opening its fragrant, colorful blossoms in the late afternoon are possibilities. Night-Blooming Jasmine offers powerful scents and is best grown in a pot that can spend the summer on a patio and move indoors to a sunny window before the first frost hits.

A truly functional moon garden also serves as a nursery and must provide host plants for their larval stages. Incorporating trees such as white oak or river birch ensures that these pollinators have a place to grow. Even the ground plays a role; leaving natural leaf litter provides a necessary sanctuary for cocoons to overwinter safely.

Finally, the greatest modern threat to this hidden world is light pollution. Artificial light at night creates a vacuum effect, drawing moths away from their essential work and toward light bulbs where they die of exhaustion. By using motion sensors or switching to warm, amber-toned outdoor bulbs, gardeners can shield these insects from confusion. Protecting the night shift ensures that the pollination cycle remains unbroken, supporting everything from the smallest beetle to the bats that rely on them for food.



6 Garden and Landscape tips for Summer

by Melinda Myers

#1 – March (when many gardeners are making plans)

Whether starting a new garden, renewing an existing planting bed or making major renovations, it is always best to start with a plan. Make a sketch of the existing landscape including planting beds, permanent plants and structures. A plan helps save you time and money and avoid costly mistakes..

#2 - April is Safe Digging Month

Keep yourself and others safe when creating a new garden, installing a landscape feature or anytime you place a shovel in the ground. Just call 811 or file online at www.DiggersHotline.com at least three business days before starting any project that involves digging. They will contact all the appropriate companies who will mark the location of your underground utilities in the designated work area. This reduces the risk of injury and the inconvenience of accidentally knocking out power, cable or other utilities while creating a beautiful landscape.

#3 - Arbor Day is the last Friday in April

Trees provide many benefits to the environment and our health and well-being. These long-lived members of our landscapes and communities provide shade, help reduce energy costs, clean the air we breathe, prevent soil erosion and stormwater runoff, and attract and provide homes for birds and pollinators. National Arbor Day, celebrated on the last Friday of April, recognizes the important role trees play in our environment.

When planting new trees make sure to select one that will fit in the space when mature and thrive in the growing conditions. Select a planting location away from overhead and underground utilities to avoid future conflicts. Avoid plants that can eventually grow into the wires or structures that may interfere with utilities and power transmission, creating a real hazard.

#4 – Early May

You did the right thing and called 811 three business days before you started your landscape project. The public utilities have been marked with flags or paint, but they do not locate private utility lines. These include items like propane lines,

sewer laterals, sprinkler systems, ornamental lighting, pet training lines and electric lines to a barn or garage. You are responsible for locating these before you or your contractor starts digging. Visit the www.DiggersHotline.com or search online to find a private underground utility locator.

#5 - Memorial Day

Many gardeners spend Memorial Day weekend sprucing up the landscape with a bit of digging, planting, edging and more. As you know, landscape projects often take on lives of their own. What started as filling a few empty spaces in the garden became a major expansion after a trip to your favorite nursery or garden center. Play it safe and save money by avoiding underground utilities. Damaging buried utilities can result in inconvenience, injury, death and a bill. If you damage one of the underground utilities without contacting the locating service, you are responsible for the cost of repairs. So, play it safe and save your money by calling 811 or filing online at www.DiggersHotline.com at least three business days before placing the first shovel in the ground. This free service contacts all underground utility companies who will mark the location of their services in your work area.

#6 – June National Pollinator Week

Celebrate National Pollinator Week, June 22 to the 28th by adding pollinator-friendly plants to your landscape. Include a variety of plants with different bloom times to provide season long food for bees, butterflies and other pollinators. Add some host plants, like parsley, dill, lavender, butterfly milkweed, lavender and grasses and shrubs known to attract and support these important members of our communities.

Keep yourself and others safe and avoid the inconvenience of damaging underground utilities with a call to 811 or file online at www.DiggersHotline.com at least 3 business days before you start digging. This free non-profit service contacts the appropriate underground utilities that will mark the location of their utilities in your work area, helping reduce the risk of injury, the inconvenience and a bill to repair damage if this step is skipped.

Habitat for Humanity Plant Share

by Susan Miller, Plant Share Chair

On June 6 the Milwaukee District Garden Clubs will once again work with staff from Milwaukee Habitat for Humanity to hold the Habitat for Humanity Plant Share. The event will be held at 3726 N. Booth St. from 9 A.M. to noon. We will provide plants to approximately 125 families. If this spring you have plants you would like to donate, I would be happy to pick them up or have you bring them to my home.

Perennials, shrubs and houseplants are much needed as are annuals. We also accept gardening tools, books and magazines related to gardening, as well as pots and seeds. If you have questions or are interested in donating, please contact me at sk8trmom@yahoo.com or 414-254-5944. All donations will be helpful!!

State Fair Container Contest

by MGW Mary Wolverton

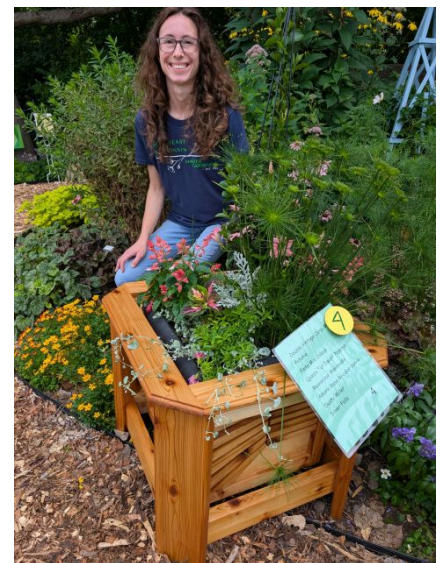
If you have worked the State Fair you know that colorful containers brighten our dusty August garden and provide you the opportunity to engage our visitors by asking them to vote for their favorite.

The container contest will return to the Fair this year. SEWMG members will be asked to create a container, tend it until August, deliver it to the Fair and wait to see what happens.

We have room for nine contestants. Signup will be the first Saturday in May, May 2. An email will go out in advance reminding everyone of the date and providing info on the process. The first nine to sign-up that morning will be the contestants.

There is no theme. Containers need to be transportable. They should be drought tolerant or easy to water. They need to be dropped off the Saturday or Monday before the Fair starts. They need to be picked up the week following the Fair.

The final vote count occurs on the Monday following the Fair. Prizes are modest as the contest exists not for awards but to beautify the garden, show our visitors what can be accomplished with a container and get them engaged in the garden. Stay tuned for the sign-up notice.





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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."