Volume 26, Issue 4
Oct/Dec. 2026



South East Wisconsin Master Gardeners

Good Earth News

2026 Wisconsin State Fair

by MGV Val Sangsland

If you were one of the 96 volunteers who worked the 132 shifts at the 2026 Wisconsin State Fair, I want to personally thank you for your enthusiasm and spirit of volunteerism. The State Fair Garden team continues to leave us with a lovely, well-tended garden that provides many garden and plant types as examples for us to discuss with our visitors. Our visitors continue to have positive interactions with all of you, and tell us that they make a point to come back year after year.

We had a focus this year on invasive plant species and developed four new Fact Sheets describing four specific invasive plants: Buckthorn, Creeping Bellflower, Reed Canary Grass, and Tree of Heaven. Courtesy of our State Fair Garden Team, we had live examples of each species to provide a lasting impression for our visitors, and take-home documentation on the best way to eradicate each.

A few statistics about this year's events.

- We had nearly 16,000 visitors stop by our area during the eleven days of the Fair, in spite of quite a few rainy days.
- They took home 7570 educational documents.
- We were actually able to complete all 11 days of the fair without enduring a major flood event!

The 2027 Wisconsin State Fair will run from Thursday, August 5 through Sunday, August 15 and registration will start just after Memorial Day. When you're planning summer trips for next year, please be sure to keep the dates of the State Fair in mind, so you don't miss your opportunity to take part in our largest annual community educational event!







Realtors Home and Garden Show 2027

by MGV Val Sangsland

Watch your email for Save the Date – 101st Realtors Home & Garden Show March 2027

The Realtors Home & Garden Show will be held from Friday, March 19 through Saturday, March 27 at the Exposition Center at Wisconsin State Fair Park.

2027 Show Dates & Hours

Friday, March 19:	10 am - 7 pm
Saturday, March 20:	10 am - 7 pm
Sunday, March 21:	10 am - 5 pm
Monday, March 22:	CLOSED
Tuesday, March 23:	CLOSED
Wednesday, March 24:	4 pm - 8 pm
Thursday, March 25:	4 pm - 8 pm
Friday, March 26:	10 am - 7 pm
Saturday, March 27:	10 am - 7 pm
Easter Sunday, March 28:	CLOSED

Load in for our booth will be Wednesday, March 17. Volunteer orientation will be Thursday, March 18.

Save the dates if you'd like to join us for a springtime opportunity to share your gardening knowledge with the public!

SEWMG Fall Luncheon Announcement

by MGV Renée Destrampes

Based on feedback from SEWMG volunteers, the 2026 holiday party will take on a fresh new format this year. Instead of a December celebration, we'll come together for a Fall Luncheon following the SEWMG Member Meeting and educational presentation on November 7.

Retzer Nature Center, S14 W28167 Madison St, Waukesha



To help us plan for lunch, an RSVP email will be sent out in early October.

This year's program will feature an engaging presentation, Demystifying Compostability: What "Compostable" Packaging Means for Your Garden by chemist Ben Loef.

Attendees will also be able to explore a handson display of compostable materials and learn which items can be successfully used in home composting.

We hope you'll join us for learning, lunch, and time together as a gardening community.

2026 Party Committee
Renée Destrampe & Dave Setzke Co-chairs, Ray Corn

Benefits of Native Plants

by MGV Janet Wintersberger

As we have noticed, and as UW Madison climatologists have confirmed, our weather is warmer and wetter than in the past. Our summer consisted of drought and episodes of heavy rain. We have also experienced (and it's been confirmed) we have a longer growing season.

Lisa Johnson, UW Madison's Dane County Horticulturalist, shared her thoughts at the Knowledge in Bloom conference. Using native plants in our gardens have several benefits. When planted in areas that meet their cultural requirements, native plants are lower maintenance and tolerant of tough conditions such as drought and poor soil. They are also 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. By establishing native plants together, we create a habitat for many birds, butterflies and other pollinators.

A native garden doesn't need to be a prairie, although that's what commonly comes to mind. The Wild Onrs organization provides many garden design plans. An extensive design by Danielle Bell and Susan Hall may inspire you. https://nativegardendesigns.wildones.org/designs/milwaukee/

Lisa Johnson suggested several resources to get growing with native plants. Explore them and add native plants to your garden.
-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



State Fair Container Contest

by Mary Wolverton

Our Container Contest Engaged Visitors

Thanks to all of our State Fair Container Contestants. This a crowd pleaser which gives our volunteers an opportunity to engage with visitors by inviting them to pick their favorite.

For the first time we had a tie, a Tiki-tie, as our visitors couldn't decide who did did it best. Sue Bahnemann and Kirsten Villegas shared the top spot with different visions on a theme.

Sue Bahneman caught our visitors' eye with a dramatic Tiki crowned with Crimson Fountain Grass Pistachio Cream Ray Petunia and Creeping Jenny. A Black-eyed Susan vine created a ponytail to provide interest from all sides.

Kirsten Villegas' Tiki was truly tropical with Elephant Ear, Begonia, Millet, Golden Pothos and Bird of Paradise to top it off.

Carmen Ortiz took the third spot with her educational display showing us how to have a complete pollinator garden in a single container with milkweed, butterfly flower, black-eyed Susan, leadplant, corydalis, beardtongue, sage, baby's breath, purple coneflower and pearly everlasting. She provided labels to show which butterflies would seek this display out and a swallowtail caterpillar moved in before Fair's end.

Deb Kopydlowski gave us a bride and groom complete with Euphorbia Diamond Frost, Lemon Coral Sedum, Rose Picotee Begonia, Trailing Red Mazoo, Calliope Geranium and Red Coleus. The formal wear was embellished with pearls and diamonds.

Karla Geiger's theme was a sensory foliage collection. Touch was sought by the Silver Ragwort Dusty Miller, Sight by Tradescantia Zebrina and Spotlight Green Angelwing Begonia, Smell by Creeping Jenny, Hearing by the fronds of Purple Majesty Miller and Taste with herbs.

Natalie Lester again brought an amazing Prairie School container crafted by her husband. She Filled it with Reed Grass Queen Tut papyrus and Americana Coral Geranium topped off with a coleus she developed herself and named Rosie's Firecracker for the red, white and blue color scheme.

Amber Lockett's massive display was a dramatic explosion of pinks and silvers limited to three plants - dusty miller, petunia and coleus.

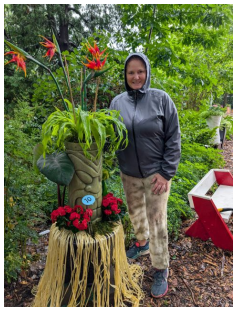
Lori Vanover brought a fairy garden with bright pinks from Easy Wave Pink Passion Petunia, Celosia Intenz, Lobelia Starship Deep Rose and Phygelius Colorburst Rose.

The two Marys, Eichelberger and Gerhke, assembled a welcome garden in a wheelbarrow. They tucked in Firecracker fuschia, Sweet Talk cuphea, Salley Fun and Blue Emotion Salvia, Vermillionaire cuphea, Happy Days Halo Dahlia, Vert Green Vinca, Solenia Yellow Begonia and compact white logos.

Our thanks to all the contestants. These containers brighten our August garden and our visitors linger to check them all out before voting.

If you are interested in competing watch for next April's email.






Annual Meeting and End of Year Information

by MGV Jane Browne, In-House Education

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

Saturday, November 7,
11:00 AM-1:00 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 and First Year Director for 2027. 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!
Jackie- Jackie.Kirchen@sewmg.org
Nicki - Nicki.Hanley@sewmg.org
Carol- Carol.Belonger@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. 7 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.

Japanese Anemone

by MGV Kelly Kramer

As summer turns to fall, many of our perennials are wrapping up their bloom season. But perennial Japanese Anemones are just getting ready to bloom.

These perennials have either single or double petal flowers which are held on tall thin stems above short foliage. They are often called “windflowers” since the tall stems move easily in the breeze. The Greek word for wind is “anemos”. The stems can also bend in high winds and rain. Although there are some short height cultivars, most range from 2 to 5 feet tall. The tall varieties are good for the middle or back of the border. Flower colors are available in white and shades of pink or purple.

They do have specific maintenance and site requirements that must be taken into account before planting. First is the ever-popular requirement of well-drained soil. Japanese Anemones are shallow rooted plants and cannot handle a long period of drought, and the flip side is the roots can also rot in water logged soil. I suggest siting them in an area with well-drained soil, then lightly mulch around the plants to help keep the roots cool.

While they can take a fair amount of sun, given adequate moisture, I feel they perform best in part shade. Too much shade will cause the plants to become leggy and require staking.

I grow a variety called Honorine Jobert which has white flowers and is about 4 feet tall. This is an old garden hybrid discovered in France in the 1800’s. It gets sun in the morning till about noon then light shade for the rest of the day.

Although they are a clump forming perennial they will spread by creeping rhizomes. Prepare for the maintenance of digging out unwanted plants to keep them in check.

I thought I was prepared. I thought they couldn’t possibly spread THAT much. Well, my plants must be VERY happy because they send runners and new plants are popping up quite easily and quite frequently. I have a small garden and don’t have a lot of real estate for them to take over a garden bed. Digging out those unwanted plants and rhizomes is a bit higher maintenance than I like; but I just love the blooms in September and October so for right now I’m keeping them.

Deer and rabbits usually leave them alone but Japanese beetles can be a problem. Fingers crossed I haven’t seen any Japanese beetles on them yet!

They respond well to deadheading and with their tall stems they make great cut flowers. When cutting the plant be sure to wear gloves since the sap can be a skin irritant.

These plants also like a good snow cover to protect the roots over winter. If we don’t have a lot of snow (which seems to be becoming the norm) then provide some mulch for winter protection.

They are late to show up in spring so if you’ve recently planted them place a marker near the area so you know where they are.



Year End President's Letter

by MGV Jean Ahktar

As the years keep rolling by, I never cease to be amazed at how fast yet another year has passed. 2026 is no different. In January I shared with you my goals as President of SEWMG—to host our first conference and deepen community partnerships and member collaboration. October is upon us and our first conference, Knowledge in Bloom, was a success. I reached out to local businesses for their support, and they came through. I discovered that we live in a generous community that is willing to support our mission—To serve as a resource in the art and science of gardening to cultivate community connections

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As I prepare to hand over leadership of SEWMG for 2027 to Teja Shubhachint (VP 2026), I invite you to step up and serve SEWMG. For over a decade as a member of this valuable organization, I was happy to let others lead. I have recently learned that without our personal commitment to lead, we will cease to exist as an organization. SEWMG does way too much good in our communities for us to fade away. The world needs organizations like ours to add beauty and harmony in our homes and communities. I hope and trust that you will join me in committing to this wonderful organization. It has been an honor to work with you. Looking forward to seeing you all at our annual holiday party and member meeting. Details for the event are in an article in this issue by Renée Destrampe. Happy fall to one and all!

MGV Picnic and Fundraiser

by MGV Diane Thieme

This year's silent auction fundraiser at the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center was packed with expected and unexpected excitement. About 74 SEWMG members and guests braved the forecasted weather to attend the appreciation picnic and auction.

They arrived to find tables of delicious food, door prizes and 26 beautiful auction baskets packed with garden supplies, art, food, wine and so much more. Unfortunately, weather got progressively worse until tornado alarms suddenly went off on 74 phones. Everyone was herded into the theater to safely have their dinner on the stage. Fortunately, bidding had essentially been completed by that time. Winners of the door prizes and auction baskets were announced from the stage to members in the theater seats. While the weather had an impact on the number of attendees, those who attended were treated to tasty food and time to share with old and new friends.

The auction, which raised $1,480 for the association, could never have happened without the generosity of the 29 association members who donated cash and a variety of large and small items. Those donations allowed Laurie Keane and I to create the 26 fun themed baskets that winners took home. Despite the unusual circumstances, the evening was quite successful. Thanks to all who participated as donors and attendees.

SEWMG Conference: Knowledge in Bloom

by MGV Jean Ahktar

On a warm September day, over 50 gardening enthusiasts gathered at the Urban Ecology Center (UEC), Washington Park, Milwaukee for our first annual Knowledge in Bloom conference. It was September 12, 2026. Attendees received a warm welcome and enjoyed morning snacks as the UEC teemed with activity around us—a native plant sale was unfolding in the front yard and a free, drop in community canoeing day was set to start on the lagoon.

With sunshine streaming through the bank of windows opening onto the Washington Park Lagoon, Melinda Meyers kicked off our event with her presentation, Planning & Planting for a Colorful Year-Round Garden. She was followed by Lisa Johnson, Horticulture Educator for Dane County, who spoke about Gardening with Unpredictable Weather in Mind: Trends, Challenges and Adaptive Strategies.

After Lisa's presentation, we were ready for lunch. The brief lunch was jammed with activity. Melinda Meyers signed copies of her latest book, Midwest Gardener's Handbook, Second Edition—All You Need to Know to Plan, Plant & Maintain a Midwestern Garden, while conference goers bid on an array of goods and services in our silent auction and lunched on Jimmy John's subs, chips, and cookies.

After lunch we learned how to implement iPhone Photography in the Garden, presented by Terri Hart-Ellis, Master Gardener, Master Naturalist and Professional Photographer. Terri shared images of her photo art and taught us how to use editing features on the iPhone to create our own art in the garden. Terri's presentation brought the conference to a close, and lucky winners of the silent auction left with their treasures in hand.

The conference was a year in making and took over 400 hours of volunteer effort to plan and execute. We thank the Conference Committee: Jean Akhter, Karla Geiger, Jackie Kirchen and Jane Browne for their dedicated service. Thank you to our volunteers who helped in many ways: Nicki Hanley, Diane Thieme, Lou Ocampo, Marie McGinnis, Jim Gorsky, Kathy Intravaia, Susan Guensburg, and Diane Wilke-Zemanovic. Thanks to Mary Wolverton who shared with me her vision to have a conference three years ago and to Jane Browne who got the ball rolling for us last year. And finally, we thank our generous sponsors—WE Energies Foundation, Bluemel's Garden & Landscape Center, WIMGA, and First Citizens Bank –and the many small businesses and individuals who contributed to the silent auction.

Let me share some of the feedback we received. "I just want to congratulate you and your team on putting together an interesting and well organized conference!" Another member wrote, "The venue was perfect, the speakers were engaging and relevant, and the day was flawlessly managed. If you do try to make this an annual event, you have set the bar pretty high!"

So SEWMG membership, I leave you with an invitation to join us next fall for another engaging day of learning and fellowship. Think fall—think SEWMG Knowledge in Bloom conference!

knowledge in bloom
SOUTHEAST WI MASTER GARDENERS

Seeds and Cold Stratification

by MGV Cheryl Lausten

As the gardening season is winding down, now is the time to think about saving seeds from your favorite plants. Harvesting seeds from your summer garden is a rewarding way to preserve favorite varieties and share regional plants. Beyond the joy of sharing, saving seed—especially from native plants—is critical for local ecology. Locally saved native seeds preserve unique ecotypes, genetic strains adapted to your region's specific soils, weather patterns, and pollinator populations. Unlike mass-produced commercial seeds, locally adapted native seeds build resilient gardens that better support native bees, butterflies, and wildlife.

You have saved the seeds, but do you know what to do to ensure the best germination when planting time comes? If you sow harvested native seeds immediately in warm soil, you might be disappointed. Native seeds carry a built-in survival mechanism called **embryonic dormancy**. They *must* experience cold moist stratification before they can physically germinate.

In temperate climates, plants drop seeds in late summer and fall. If those seeds sprouted during an unseasonably warm autumn week, the tender seedlings would perish during the first hard freeze. To prevent this, native plants evolved a biochemical safety lock. The seed is genetically programmed to remain asleep until it experiences a sustained period of cold stratification—a signal that a full winter has passed and spring has safely arrived.

Dormancy and germination are driven by two opposing plant hormones: **abscisic acid (ABA)** and **gibberellins (GA**).

During seed development, the parent plant fills the seed with ABA, which acts as a molecular brake to halt cell division and keep metabolic activity near zero. To release this brake, seeds must first undergo **imbibition**, by absorbing moisture through their outer coat. Water activates internal enzymes, allowing the seed to respond to environmental temperatures.

When hydrated seeds sit in sustained cold conditions between 33 and 40 degrees Fahrenheit during cold stratification, cold-activated enzymes slowly break down ABA over several weeks. As ABA levels drop, ambient spring warmth signals the seed to produce gibberellins. This growth hormone acts as the accelerator, producing enzymes like amylase that convert stored starches into usable sugars. Powered by this energy, the embryo expands, ruptures the seed coat, and sends down its primary root.

Because moisture is required for the seed to metabolize ABA, placing dry seeds into a cold freezer will not work. The seeds must be damp for the internal chemical transformation to occur during cold stratification.

Gardeners can replicate this natural process using two simple approaches:

- **The Refrigerator Method**: Mix clean seeds into a barely damp paper towel or sterile vermiculite, seal them in a labeled zip-top bag, and place them in the refrigerator for artificial cold stratification. Native species like Purple Coneflower, Butterfly Weed, and Wild Bergamot usually need 30 days of cold storage, while Wild Columbine requires 60 days. Always squeeze out excess water, as overly wet media encourages mold.

- **Winter Sowing Outdoors**: For a low-maintenance alternative, use winter sowing to achieve outdoor cold stratification. Sow seeds in modified gallon milk jugs filled with damp potting soil during January or February. Left outside in a semi-sunny spot with the caps removed, the containers function as mini greenhouses. Nature manages chilling cycles, snow cover, and spring warming automatically, yielding sturdy seedlings ready for transplanting.

Germination charts and directories can be found online. For example, check out prairiemoon.com, klamathsiskiyouseeds.com, wildflower.org, and tomclothier.hort.net.

By preserving locally adapted seeds and understanding the cold stratification and hormonal cues that govern dormancy, seed savers can protect native biodiversity and ensure successful germination season after season.

Online germination charts and directories:

prairiemoon.com

klamathsiskiyouseeds.com

wildflower.org

tomclothier.hort.net



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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."