

The First Bloom

GARDEN CLUB FEDERATION OF PENNSYLVANIA

District I



**A triannual publication of
GCFP District I
February 2026**

Wendy Fox, Elverson and Uwchlan Garden Clubs

The First Bloom

FEBRUARY 2026

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Cover Photo: Wendy Fox, Elverson and Uwchlan Garden Clubs

All District I members are encouraged to submit a gardening article, personal gardening recognition or other pertinent information to share with others.

Editor: [Marilyn Small](#)

Deadline Dates for Submission: Summer Issue - June 1
Fall Issue - October 1
Winter Issue - January 15

Member of National Garden Clubs (NGC) Donna Donnelly, President
Central Atlantic Region (CAR-SGC) Beverly Kazickas, Director
Garden Club Federation of Pennsylvania (GCFP) Pat Wolanski, President

Click [HERE](#) for a
winter birds field guide brochure
from the PA Game Commission

stockcake.com



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FOUR SEASONS GC OF

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RADLEY RUN GARDEN &

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THE GC OF SPRINGFIELD

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WAYNE WOODS GC

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“Every gardener knows that under the cloak of winter lies a miracle... a seed waiting to sprout, a bulb opening in the light, a bud straining to unfurl. And the anticipation nurtures our dream” ~ Barbara Winkler

Pam’s Points

It is a sunny, cool day in January as I write this. When I look at my garden’s winter landscape, I am drawn to the early hellebores already blooming their fresh white flowers, and to the red berries of the winterberries and holly trees. My large sycamore glistens in the sun, its white trunk and branches on full display.

My pond and streams still hold remnants of the flowers and plants that died back after the frost, and the fish are hopefully hibernating in their tunnel. If the water warms enough, they may briefly appear and beg for food. They don’t digest food during winter and won’t be fed until the water is consistently above 50 degrees, so they have a long wait ahead.

They remind me not to grow too anxious for the warm weather promised in spring, but instead to enjoy time indoors—reading, paging through seed and plant catalogs, and drinking hot tea in front of the fireplace.

When I look at photos from summer, I can hardly believe the contrast: lush green ferns have given way to dark brown, fertile fronds; bulbs that once produced colorful blooms now rest underground until their time to reappear; perennials once glorious now simply exist, their structures all that remain. Grasses that were tall and vibrant have turned a soft tan and will be cut back later, when new green shoots emerge. Coneflowers once in full bloom now hold nearly bare seed heads, visited only occasionally by a bird.

The cycle continues. I don’t wish away the beauty of winter—I enjoy it—but I do love the hope and promise of warmer days and the colors of spring soon to come.

And speaking of spring, I’m sure excitement is already building for your upcoming plant sales and club flower shows, busy planning, propagating, and imagining gardens and rooms filled with color and texture, making this one of the most anticipated times of the year. These events not only offer a wonderful selection of flowers and plants but also provide opportunities to share knowledge, showcase creativity, and connect with fellow plant enthusiasts who share a passion for gardening.

Looking ahead, I encourage everyone to mark your calendars for our [March 9 Zoom Meeting](#), “Using Native Plantings to Improve Water Quality” by Brian Winslow, Watershed Conservation Director at the Brandywine Red Clay Alliance. This virtual gathering will give district members a chance to stay informed about District I activities and events, and reconnect during the doldrums of winter. Whether you’re a longtime member or new to the club, the meeting promises to be an engaging way to stay involved and inspired as we count down to a busy and bloom-filled spring.

Pam



DISTRICT I NOVEMBER MEETING AND DESIGN CHALLENGE

On November 12, District I members gathered for a meeting and the 3rd Annual Floral Design Challenge. Six teams from seven clubs participated in the challenge each making beautiful fall arrangements. Each team was given a container with oasis and a bundle of grocery store flowers. Supplemental items for arrangements were available for all to use in their designs. Members enjoyed watching the teams work together to assemble their design. A raffle was used to decide the winning entry by having the most tickets.

Congratulations to **Mary Ann Hanagan** and **Linda Southerling**, Four Seasons Garden Club, for their win.



Meredith Dragish and Katharine Briglia, Spade and Trowel Club



Lorraine Troiano, GC of Bala Cynwyd and Pat Neff, Country Gardeners



Barbara Dougherty and Lynne Biggin, Covered Bridge GC



Terry Miller and Marie-Helene Rising, Uwchlan GC



Gail Smith and Suzanne Polgar Radley Run Garden Club



Mary Ann Hanagan and Linda Southerling, Four Seasons GC





LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING YOU **MystERIE by the Bay**

April 26-28, 2026

What could be BETTER than:

- fantastic views
- presentations to pique your interest in birds, food, and horticulture
- seeing old friends
- programs to delight and teach
- making new ones
- great shopping
- stories about shipwrecks and murder
- and chocolate!

Discover **MystERIE** at the Sheraton Bayfront Hotel and Convention Center, Erie

Joyce Milberg, Convention Chair

CONVENTION INFO [HERE](#)

TRASH TO TREASURE at the CONVENTION

Chair Carol McConnell, Uwchlan Garden Club, I

MystERIE by the Bay -- "A Boat for Your Book"

DUE TO DISTRICT DIRECTOR PAM WALSH BY APRIL 16

Lake Erie often offers a peaceful, sometimes mysterious, beautiful setting—so when the opportunity arises, hop on a boat, relax, and make the most of the day. Bring along a great book—perhaps a mystery set in a garden—and enjoy some quiet reading time on the water.

Your Challenge:

Build a boat using all types of recycled/repurposed materials, dried flowers, glass, stones, wood, or metal.

Specifications:

Dimensions: No larger than 15" by 15" mounting surface. Height no taller than 18".

Weight: Less than 20 pounds including mounting surface.

Materials: Any type of repurposed material (plastic, wood, metal, glass, and stone) may be used. As much as 20% of the design may be paint and glue, and remember to use dried flowers, not fresh.

Each entry should include a 3" x 5" card.

Front: Title of entry and list of materials.

Back: District, Garden Club, designer(s) name(s), and mailing address.

Entry may be the work of more than one person.

Only One Entry from Each District

Selection method is determined by the District.

District entries must be submitted at the convention by Sunday, April 26, from 1-5 p.m. Judging is at 5:15 p.m.

Not to be judged under the same standards as a flower show.

SCALE OF POINTS FOR JUDGING

Conformance (height, width, weight).....	20 points
Artistic Concept (creative use of recycled materials)	50 points
Expression (interpretation of theme)	20 points
Execution (workmanship)	10 points
TOTAL	100 points

NGC SCHOOLS

Environmental



Gardening



Flower Show

Become a Flower Show Judge!



Landscape Design



For more detailed info and registration go to <https://gardenclub.org/our-schools>

NGC GRANTS and PROGRAMS

NEW! **“Blooming Beginnings” Flower Show Award**
 To clubs hosting their first ever NGC Flower Show. Receive a Brick Paver in the NGC Path of Success at NGC Headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri. More info [HERE](#)

NEW! **Blue and Gold Star Memorial Grant**
 Renew and refresh your club’s Blue & Gold Star Memorials, with a special emphasis on planting red, white, and blue flowers in celebration of America’s 250th Anniversary on July 4, 2026. More info [HERE](#)

NEW! **NGC Video Café** -- Free videos on Gardening Tips, Club Resources, Floral Design, Webinars, and more! More info [HERE](#)

Espoma Grant
 Receive Espoma plant food and potting soils to support your club’s projects. - October 1 - May 31 More info [HERE](#)

Ames Tools Grant
 Apply for high-quality tools to help your club complete its projects efficiently. January 1 - March 1. More info [HERE](#)

Natural Disaster Grant
 Apply for garden-related restoration efforts to replant parks, and municipal gardens due to natural disasters. More Information [HERE](#)

Youth Pollinator Gardens Grant
 Up to \$200 is available for projects that include educational materials on the vital role pollinators play in nature and youth involvement More Info [HERE](#)
 Youth Pollinator Power Book [HERE](#)

Plant-A-Tree - formerly Penny Pines
 New donation process guidelines. [HERE](#)

Native Plant and Wildflowers Educational Program
 Up to \$500 is available to be used toward an educational program on the subject of native plants and wildflowers. More Information [HERE](#)

Subscribe to *The National Gardener*

The official publication of National Garden Clubs published quarterly. Subscribe [HERE](#)



2026 NGC CONVENTION
 May 4 - 6, 2026
 St. Louis, Missouri





CLUB NEWS



GARDEN CLUB OF BALA CYNWYD - Lorraine Troiano

At the opening October meeting, author Mike Weilbacher discussed his book "Wild Philly." We enjoyed hosting members from the Villanova Garden Club, Greene Countrie Garden Club, and The Garden Club of Springfield at that meeting.

An excursion to [Chanticleer in October](#) included a 90-minute tour of the mansion and gardens. It was a treat! The Youth Committee led a "Spiders" artistic workshop at Ludington Library. The timely topic was perfect for Halloween.

A trip to the [Barnes Museum was our November meeting](#). We were fortunate to have member [Joan Kokoska](#), a docent at the Barnes, lead us through the main exhibits and the visiting Rousseau exhibit. It was a memorable trip!



In December, District I Director Pam Walsh installed our officers: First Vice President [Helen Horstmann](#), Treasurer [Garance Prior](#), Assistant Treasurer [Patrice Hegarty](#), Recording Secretary [Barbara O'Connell](#), and Corresponding Secretary [Pat Whitmore](#). We thank all the officers for their service to GCBC!

Our December program was creating a [woodland gnome](#) using fresh greens. Everyone enjoyed making them. Larger gnomes were made at a separate horticultural workshop led by Garance Prior. Judges Council Chair [Louise Heilig](#) hosted a floral design workshop at her home. Members learned the art of [leaf manipulation](#) and the elements and principles of design.

We are looking forward to the [June 20th GCFP State Garden Party!](#) The Henry Foundation for Botanical Research, the Barnes Arboretum, and a beautiful private historic garden will be on our tour! Be sure to buy your tickets to see these and other wonderful gardens.



District I Meeting and Presentation

Monday, March 9, 6:30 p.m. on Zoom

Brian Winslow, Watershed Conservation Director
[Brandywine Red Clay Alliance](#)

Topic: Using Native Plantings to Improve Water Quality

Check your email closer to the date
 for more details and the Zoom link.





THE COUNTRY GARDENERS - Bonnie Kushnerick

This year, our mission has been to bring more greenery into our homes and communities while exploring ways to support our health and improve the environment.

This fall, we learned how to **plant lush container gardens** and create **kokedamas**, a Japanese gardening art form where a plant's root ball is encased in a ball of soil, wrapped in moss, and secured with string.

We also spent time with residents at Fair Acres, crafting pinecone turkeys and decorating small seasonal hoops.

The landscaping at the entrance to the PA Veterans Museum and our **Blue Star Marker** was in need of some care, so several members replanted the area ahead of the Veterans Day parade. We plan to add new perennials to the space this spring. In December, we sampled a variety of delicious tea-based mocktails in preparation for holiday entertaining.



Our third annual **fundraising wreath-decorating workshop** was a great success, welcoming 65 attendees. This year, we added a Saturday morning session that gave parents and children the opportunity to work together to create a wreath for their family. Be sure to check out the many beautiful designs on our **Facebook page!**

We are also excited to launch a **Sprouts group** in partnership with the children's programs at the Middletown Library. More details will be shared in our next newsletter.

Our **January luncheon** at Il Granaio was a success. Looking ahead, in **February**, our **Houseplant S.O.S. program** will help keep indoor plants thriving. March will feature a program on using **plants to create natural dyes**, and in April, we'll focus on improving our **cell phone photography** skills to capture our growing outdoor gardens.

ELEANOR TICKNER'S PEONIES

Eleanor Tickner, peony farm owner, speaker, author, instructor, entrepreneur, all-around peony expert, and 2024 recipient of the GCFP Horticulture Excellence Award, passed away in March 2025 before being able to accept this prestigious award.

Her exceptional peony farm, *Eleanor's Peonies*, in Glen Mills is being dismantled and all of her peony plants are being offered for sale. If anyone is interested in some unusual varieties, please contact her daughters, Butch or Donna Tickner at 484-574-0998.





- Debbie Wright

October began with Elverson Garden Club members learning about *Plants for Problem Spaces*, presented by veteran landscape architect Rich Hawk.

Later in the month, under the leadership of Co-Chairs **Vanessa Peterson and Lisa Cherpanich**, many club members came together to host an NGC Standard Flower Show. The show, "**Famous Quotes**," drew inspiration from renowned authors such as Robert Frost and Dr. Seuss. Entry categories included an extensive horticulture section, a variety of design classes, botanical arts, and photography. We were also delighted by the enthusiastic participation of two local schools in a novice design class. Throughout the show's public opening, we were overwhelmed by the number of visitors.

Once again, Elverson Garden Club members helped decorate **Hibernia Mansion**, a historic mansion open to the public each year for Christmas tours. A team of 18 club members transformed the dining room into "The



North Pole," creating a truly magical holiday experience.

A bright spot in the gray winter months is our (post) **holiday gathering**, which celebrates another year of friendship, gardening, and shared ideas. This year's event was held at French Creek Golf Club, where we enjoyed good weather, a strong turnout, and plenty of holiday cheer.



Next on the Elverson Garden Club agenda is participation in the **Philadelphia Flower Show**. The club will compete in the doorway class with an entry titled "**CHEERS: To Health and Happiness!**" Members are embracing a speakeasy-inspired theme while letting their creativity shine. In addition, several individual members will participate in other areas of the show.

The official start of the 2026 club year begins the week after the Flower Show with a **welcome-back potluck dinner**. This gathering offers a wonderful opportunity to review our show results and share early spring horticulture entries as new blooms emerge in members' gardens.

In May, the club will once again participate in **Sheep and Wool Day at Springton Manor**. Plant donations and other garden-related items will be sold as a fundraiser for the club. Our booth will feature a selection of native plants, along with educational and fun activities for visiting children.



Marcia Bitner, Keith Simonetti, Carol Simonetti, Wendy Fox, Debbie Wright, Vanessa Peterson, Lisa Cherpanich, Robin Spurlino



FOUR SEASONS GARDEN CLUB - Tina Burke

Our October program was presented by **Beth MacMillan** and **Mary Ann Hanagan**. Members were provided with glass bowls and succulents to create terrariums.



The November program, also presented by **Beth MacMillan** and **Mary Ann Hanagan**, featured "Bird Seed Ornaments." Using pine cones and peanut butter as the base, members dipped the cones in bird seed to create feeders for the birds.



Kennett Square was decorated with winter greens and stems in containers provided by the borough. Containers along State Street and several side streets were filled by our club members in collaboration with the **Spade and Trowel Club**.

On December 3, our club **celebrated Christmas** with a delicious dinner of homemade dishes prepared by members, with **Craig Rybinski** providing a variety of poinsettias to decorate the tables. There was also an optional Pollyanna gift exchange.

On December 6, we held our annual **Christmas Centerpiece Workshop**, our primary fundraiser of the year. Participants received a Lomey dish with oasis, along with an assortment of greens and decorative accents to create a beautiful Christmas centerpiece. Breakfast was also provided for the 20 participants.



WAYNE WOODS GARDEN CLUB - Anne McCrary

What a busy fall we've had at Wayne Woods Garden Club!

Our **October** hands-on meeting was a fun evening as members created lovely **grapevine wreaths** and learned to tie bows.

On **October 12**, several members enjoyed a **walking tour** of the gardens and mansion at **Stoneleigh**.

On **October 16**, member **Susan Dearden Bryan** led a **flower arranging workshop** for the Sisterhood at Temple Brith Achim. Members **Anne McCrary** and **Cathy Koffs** assisted as 24 participants created lovely mini arrangements!



Debbie Quinn



Paige Ryan & Kris Bundschuh

On **October 21**, we gathered to **make arrangements for Meals on Wheels** recipients, one of our community service projects.

At our November meeting we welcomed **Horticulturist Thom Mrazik**, a Montgomery County Master Gardener, for a wonderful slide presentation highlighting the beauty and diversity of **peonies**. We learned about different varieties, best practices for planting and care, proper pruning timing, and simple methods for propagating new plants.

We ended the year with **welcoming two new members** at our December meeting and celebrating the holiday season with a fun hands-on activity.



COVERED BRIDGE GARDEN CLUB - Sue Heist

At our first meeting of the 2025-26 season, we welcomed several **new members** as well as guests. We were able to view the initial stages of the **pollinator garden** being installed at the Duportail House, where we now hold this luncheon meeting and our plant sale in the spring. Judy DiFilippo, founding Board President of the Duportail House, spoke about the history of the house and its establishment of it as a non-profit preserving local history in Chesterbrook, PA.

Before our next meeting, a group of our members sponsored and led **three classes of students** per day over a period of three days for the planting of **spring bulbs** at the Valley Forge Montessori School, located on Valley Forge Park property. The park has been the recipient of many donations in the past. Students were provided with worksheets about bulbs and an introduction to how the planting would be done. Each student received a brightly colored plastic trowel to be used for the planting. The trench was dug in advance.



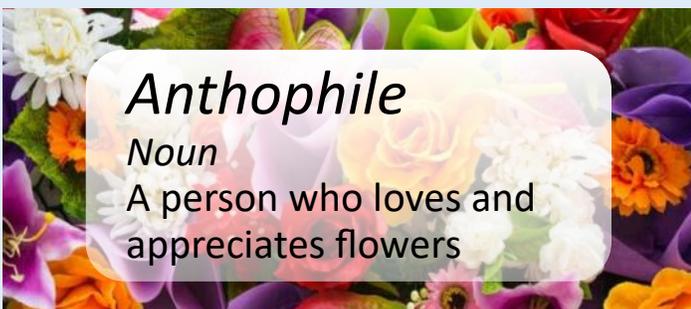
In October, our club visited **Laurel Woods Cemetery**, where we were given a guided tour of this beautiful example of a landscape cemetery. Members brought bagged lunches and beverages, and cookies were provided to the attendees courtesy of the club. This was quite appropriate, as back in the day, visitors to the cemetery would do the same during a visit.

Our **November meeting** featured members assembling a **fall centerpiece** under the guidance of fellow member, **Lori Coll**. The arrangements were made in a rectangular wooden box, which could be one-sided or two-sided. With the meeting so close to Thanksgiving, it was a welcome addition to the harvest table.



December featured our usual **luncheon** at Overbrook Country Club, with members contributing gift cards, which were collected to be given to Ann's Heart, a local Phoenixville charity for the holidays. Table boxwood tree centerpieces made by two members were distributed by numbers drawn at each table.

WORD NERD



Anthophile

Noun

A person who loves and appreciates flowers



Dendrophile

Noun

A person who loves trees and forests



SPADE AND TROWEL CLUB - Meredith Dragish

The Spade & Trowel Club kicked off the holiday season with a wonderful program given by Jocelyn Kline of Longwood Gardens. She discussed the creative process behind this year’s holiday theme and showed us a few of the projects she was creating for the new conservatory area.

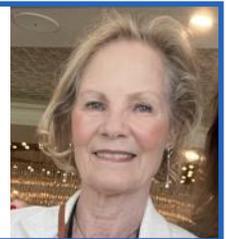
Our annual appearance at the **Creamery at Kennett Square’s Holiday Village Market** was our most successful year yet! We sold a variety of holiday arrangements, ornaments, greens, and holiday bulbs. Many thanks to all of our wonderful members for their help in creating our offerings and working the sales booth. Special thanks go out to the HVM Committee, **Shannon Hevener, Julie Fellingner, Katharine Briglia, Fran Wilson, and Meredith Dragish** for being amazing organizers, creators, hosts, math wizards, and Sign-Up Genius masters.



Suzanne Pusey and Dede Frederick led our annual tableside arrangement creation at our December meeting. Members brought greens from their gardens and made 90 beautiful holiday arrangements that were given to patients at Heartland Hospice in Chadds Ford and the Friends Home in Kennett.

This spring we will prepare for both the Philadelphia Flower Show, chaired by Vice President **Heather Nicolas**, as well as our Bi-Annual In-House Flower Show, chaired by **Denise Klein**.

Congratulations to **Denise Klein**, who recently completed the requirements needed to become a Flower Show Judge. We are so proud of her accomplishments!



Jill LaPenta, Suzanne Pusey, Julie Fellingner

THREE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FROM NATIONAL GARDEN CLUBS

Does your Blue Star Memorial Marker area need to be refreshed?

Blue and Gold Star Memorial Grant

Renew and refresh your club’s Blue & Gold Star Memorials, with a special emphasis on planting red, white, and blue flowers in celebration of America’s 250th Anniversary on July 4, 2026.

More info [HERE](#)

Would you club like to host your first ever Flower Show?

“Blooming Beginnings” Flower Show Award

to clubs hosting their first ever NGC Flower Show. Receive a Brick Paver in the NGC Path of Success at NGC Headquarters in St. Louis, Missouri. More info [HERE](#)

Learning Should Never Stop

NGC Video Cafe

Free videos on Gardening Tips, Club Resources, Grants and Awards,, techy Tips, Virtual tours, Floral Design, Webinars, and more! More info [HERE](#)



Radley Run
Garden & Social Club

RADLEY RUN GARDEN and SOCIAL CLUB

- Muriel McDaniel

Our 50th **Annual Luncheon and Fashion Show** took place on December 4. Its purpose is to raise money to provide scholarships for students of horticulture at two learning institutions, West Chester University and Williamson College of the Trades. Attendees enjoyed lunch, shopping with vendors, raffle baskets, and fashions by W Boutique of Newtown Square.

On October 31, scholarship money raised at last year’s Luncheon and Fashion Show was awarded to West Chester University by **Pat Kelly**, our Scholarship Chair. A check for \$7,500 was presented to WCU President Laurie Bernotsky and members of the WCU Foundation. Williamson College of the Trades was awarded that same amount earlier in the year.

Despite planning this big event, there was still time for other activities.

- At our October meeting, one of our members, **Karen Singer**, an expert on Bonsai, shared her expertise with us.
- On October 21 we visited Yeager’s Farm in Phoenixville for a hayride and pumpkin picking.



- At our November meeting, **Gail Smith** gathered materials and demonstrated how to make pumpkin centerpieces for Thanksgiving.
- First Friday walking tours were organized by **M.A. Kowalski**.
- We are fortunate to be located close to Longwood Gardens, and on November 11, a group of us enjoyed the Chrysanthemum Festival.
- In November, we visited Grey Tower Castle at Arcadia University.
- And last but not least, for our January meeting, we gathered at Osteria Ama in West Chester for a celebratory luncheon.



Ginny Crego, M.A. Kowalski, Nancy Adams, Darah Torres, Muriel McDaniel, Ellen Barron, Carol Palmer

PROTECT YOUR NATIVE GARDEN FROM WINTER SALT DAMAGE

Don't let winter salt undo your hard work!
Be Salt Smart and read all about protecting your plants HERE.

The Conservation Foundation





GARDEN CLUB OF SPRINGFIELD - Louise Sheehan

Our meetings have been filled with creative, service-oriented, and educational activities. Club members **decorated journals**, using fabric, ribbon, and trim. Our annual **floral design workshop**, provided by Matlock Florist in West Chester, awed us with beautiful arrangements and holiday wreaths.



In celebration of the holidays, our **December** meeting was held at **Anthony's Restaurant in Springfield** and included a gift exchange.

We continued our tradition of **decorating the Colonial Plantation Farmhouse** at Ridley Creek Park. In providing a holiday theme, our members brought

natural floral materials that were used throughout the house.

In November, several of our members visited **Sterling Nursing Home in Media** and assisted residents in creating a floral arrangement.

In December, the club **wrote holiday cards** for the residents and delivered them to the home. Our **Horticulture Therapy Program** also spent time with participants from Peaceful Living, an organization that provides services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and helped them create covers for journals, using various materials.



VILLANOVA GARDEN CLUB - Meg Cave

We celebrated the holiday spirit with a **festive dinner and auction** at Overbrook Golf Club, all beautifully decorated for December entertaining. As members gathered for cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, and dinner, the always-popular silent auction drew enthusiastic bidders. Themed baskets, wine, artwork, plants, and fashion

accessories attracted plenty of attention, helping us raise funds for our **\$1,000 summer internship** at Jenkins Arboretum. Gross receipts totaled nearly \$1,500, surpassing last year's results.



December grew even busier with our **annual workshop and holiday luncheon** at Appleford. Members worked with small terracotta containers that had been decoupled in advance with seasonal illustrations by a committee. The finished arrangements were created to bring cheer to seniors served by **Meals on Wheels**. Executive Director Erika Bhatia shared that the 40 arrangements consistently bring grateful smiles. We concluded the day by celebrating our efforts with a special buffet luncheon prepared by committee members.

To complete our year's calendar of events, we will enjoy **three educational presentations**: the importance of forest fires, the biodiversity of beetles, and the use of native plants in gardens throughout the seasons. In addition, we will learn about **container gardening** with Sally McCabe from PHS and take a **spring tour of Henry Botanical Garden**.



UWCHLAN GARDEN CLUB - Terry Miller

Our club enjoyed an active fall and holiday season. The speaker for our **October** meeting was Leslie Wehr, who spoke about

the beautiful **hillside garden she designed**. She offered suggestions for garden design, enhancing existing plantings, and fully enjoying outdoor spaces.

November's meeting welcomed a favorite, **Jenny Rose Carey**. Jenny returned to share insights from her newly released book on bulbs, with copies available for purchase and inscription.

At our meetings, we continue to encourage members to participate in a **"Design of the Month"** to become familiar with different design styles. October's **design was angular**, and **November's focused on transparency**. We also include a horticulture lesson each month.

The upkeep of the **planters at the Downingtown Library** continued with a fall redesign complemented by pumpkins and seasonal flowers. We also maintained the gardens at the historic Meetinghouse where we gather. The grounds benefitted from the **Espoma and Ames**



grants received this year, and plans are underway for new community outreach proposals.

Club members rallied together during the first week of December to prepare for the **annual Christmas Fair** on December 6. Machine- and hand-tied wreaths were

assembled using fresh greens, and designers were available to customize them with picks, ornaments, and bows. A wide array of indoor and outdoor arrangements, critters, wood slab ornaments, hanging decorations, antique sleds, baked goods, jams, jellies, and mustard were prepared for purchase. A **Children's Corner** allowed youngsters to make gingerbread house ornaments. Income over expenses exceeded \$11,000.

There was no regular meeting in **December**; instead, members gathered at Ludwig's Grille and Oyster Bar for a **celebratory luncheon** on December 11. Attendees were invited to bring festively-wrapped gardening books to exchange, along with a note explaining why the book was shared, in support of the **"GCFP Reads"** program. It was a lovely time of celebration. Uwchlan looks forward to the New Year with added enthusiasm as we **welcome several new members!**



THE PROUST PHENOMENON OR PROUST EFFECT

You may have known about it, but didn't know its name. The Proust Phenomenon describes how a scent, like that of a specific flower, can instantly trigger vivid, emotional, and involuntary memories from the past, transporting you back to that moment. Named after Marcel Proust's famous madeleine moment in *In Search of Lost Time*, this occurs because the brain's **olfactory system** has a direct link to the **limbic system** (emotion & memory centers), making smell-triggered memories uniquely powerful and nostalgic. Find out more [HERE](#)





STATEWIDE GARDEN TOUR TICKETS GO ON SALE!

Nancy Cuttic, Chair, Pennsylvania Garden Party

The PA Garden Party, GCFP's first-ever statewide garden tour, will feature 90 gardens across Pennsylvania on Saturdays, June 20, and June 27, 2026, rain or shine. We welcome everyone to enjoy the gardens of the following District I clubs:

- 6/20/26 The Garden Club of Bala Cynwyd/Villanova Garden Club
- 6/27/26 Spade and Trowel Club
- 6/20/26 Springfield Garden Club
- 6/27/26 Uwchlan Garden Club

A **\$25 ticket buys a tour book** with garden addresses, descriptions, maps, GCFP information, and ads from the businesses and good people who have supported this exciting project. The tour book, which will be mailed beginning in April, **serves as the ticket** for admission to the gardens across the state on both Saturdays.

Tickets will be on sale from March 1, 2026, until June 6, 2026, by check or credit card by visiting the GCFP website pagardenclubs.org. After June 6, tickets will be available on the day of at the gardens for \$30.

To conserve on resources and postage, members are encouraged to purchase tickets for themselves and club members at the GCFP convention in Erie, PA, on April 27 and 28, 2026, and distribute during club meetings in May and June.

Here is your chance to pile in your car with friends and explore as many gardens as possible from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Cross over into Bucks and Lancaster Counties to broaden your tour.



COMMITTEE REPORTS



HORTICULTURE – Sharon Richardson, Uwchlan GC

2026 SPRING PLANT SALES

- March 15 Order Deadline - [York Conservancy Seedling Sale](#), Pick-Up Date April 16th
- April 24-26 [Jenkins Arboretum Sale](#), 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- April 25-26 [University of Delaware AG Days](#), Friday 3 - 7 p.m. and Saturday 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
- April 25-27 [Delaware Valley Rhododendron Society Plant Sale](#), Berwyn Baptist Church, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- May 1-3 [Tyler Arboretum Plant Sale](#), 8 a.m. - 2 p.m.
- May 2 Chester Co. Master Gardener Plant Sale, E. Bradford Twp. Building, Sat 9 a.m. - 4 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.
- May 2 Horn Farm Plant Sale, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., 4945 Horn Road, York
- May 2 [LaDew Garden Festival](#), 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- May 7 [Philadelphia Chapter of the Herb Society](#), Historic Yellow Springs Meadow, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
- May 8-9 [Herb & Garden Faire](#), Landis Vally Village and Farm, Landisville
- May 9 [Dahlia Society Tuber Sale](#) in front of Longwood Gardens Visitor Center 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
- May 9 Uwchlan Garden Club Plant Sale, Uwchlan Meetinghouse, Lionville, 8 a.m. - 2 p.m.
- May 9 Delaware County Master Gardeners Sale, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Delaware County Extension office grounds, Smedley Park, 20 Paper Mill Road, Wallingford, PA 19064
- May 9-10 [Brandywine Conservancy Wild Flower, Native Plant and Seed Sale](#)
- May 16 Montgomery County Master Gardeners, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. , Montgomery County Fairgrounds, 1015 Bridge Road, Collegetown, PA 19426





COMMITTEE REPORTS Continued

**AWARDS** – Marilyn Small, Uwchlan GC**Awards Announcements Soon!**

Award deadlines are past. I hope that clubs submitted awards to recognize your achievements. We'll have to wait for the results announced at the convention in Erie, April 26-28. Good Luck to all District I clubs who entered.

If your club did not enter any applications for awards and would like to do so next year, please contact me for information and help. In the meantime, you can look over the [GCFP Awards Manual](#) and other documents and accompanying information on the GCFP Website under "Awards."

As always, if you have any questions about awards, please contact me mmsmall@comcast.net.

PHS LIAISON – Sharon Fullerton
GC of Bala Cynwyd**The 2026 Philadelphia Flower Show****February 28 - March 8**

The *Rooted: Origins of American Gardening* exhibit opens to members on February 27 and to the public on February 28. Registration for Artistic and Horticultural classes is open through January 31 via the [PHS Flower Show](#) website, where you'll find entry forms and procedures for:

- Arrangement
- Horticulture
- Pressed Plant Material
- Botanical Arts
- Photography

For added convenience, all horticultural classes may be entered as EAD (Entry All Days).

Please consult the [Exhibitor's Guide](#) for detailed information on entry delivery and pickup. The show runs through March 8. Note that vendor parking has changed; updated details will be included in exhibitor packets.

Visit the [website](#) for ticket information. Show activities include:

- Butterflies Live
- Potting Parties with Tu Bloom
- Floral Crown Making
- Personalized Candle Making
- A variety of wellness events

And there may still be time to [sign up to volunteer!](#)

Best of luck to all exhibitors!




GCFP Awards Page
on the
GCFP Website
pagardenclubs.org


Seed Money

Marjorie Stillwell Sears, Old
York Road GC, XI

Be sure to apply for "**Seed Money**" to support your club's planting projects. This funding opportunity is designed to help clubs launch new or expand established projects that promote planting, beautification, and environmental stewardship.



The **application deadline is February 15, 2026.**

Recipients will be announced at the GCFP Convention in Erie, April 26–28, 2026.

You can access the fillable Seed Money Application on the GCFP website by navigating to the "Awards" section.

[Seed Money Application](#)



COMMITTEE REPORTS Continued



CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL - Janet Fassbender, The Country Gardeners

ROAD SALT POLUTION



Hold the salt, please! Winter salting of roads and parking lots is a major contributor to pollution of freshwater local streams and groundwater, not only in winter but year-round. A Penn State analysis showed that salt entering the watersheds comes primarily from parking lots (50%), municipal roads (27%), state roads (9%), and uncovered salt piles (7%).

After a winter storm last year, measured salt levels in Tookany Creek in Pennsylvania were **above the concentrations found in seawater**. High salt content diminishes the available oxygen in local streams, disrupting aquatic life, including insects that feed fish. But the salt levels do not dissipate by summer; they actually accumulate in riverbed sediment. A new study conducted by Stroud Water Research Center in Avondale measured freshwater salt levels in the fall of 2025, months after any application of road salt. They found that across 700 locations in Pennsylvania, 61% exceeded the EPA-recommended limit.

What can we do? Experts recommend that brining roads before a snow-storm reduces salt usage by 75%. In January 2025, the Pennsylvania Road Salt Action Working Group was formed to explore and recommend ways to reduce road salt application. But, even if we were to stop applying salt to roads today, it would take 20 years for the salt accumulated in stream water to be removed.



GCFP TRIP TO FRANCE - October 8-22, 2026

Gardens of Paris, Normandy, and the Loire Valley

France's gardens tell stories as rich as the soil from which they grow. Journey from the grandeur of Versailles' royal parterres to the historic garden estates of Normandy, where elegant terraces and botanical collections thrive. Continue south to the Loire Valley's château gardens, where Renaissance vision meets botanical splendor. Along the way, savor local cheeses, regional wines, and garden vistas that transform with the changing light. Follow Pierre Dupont's footsteps as we visit gardens that he visited as his inspiration for Longwood Gardens. We'll also visit the Chantilly Plant Days, the International Festival at Domaine de Chaumont, and experience a floral design demonstration at Chateau of Chenonceau. Contact Sharon Richardson sharonrichardson22@gmail.com.

District I Presidents' Luncheon

Friday, June 5, 2026

Chester County Solid Waste Authority
7224 Division Highway, Navaron, PA 17555

Ever wonder where all those items you recycle really go? Learn how our trash becomes treasure and how our landfills are managed to ensure minimal environmental impact.

Check your email for more details.





HORTICULTURE – Sharon Richardson, Uwchlan GC



*The Herb Society of America
Philadelphia Unit*

I have never seen anything quite like our local Herb Society’s Annual Plant Fair. Held rain or shine on Thursday, May 7, the sale takes place in a large open field at Historic Yellow Springs. Long tables line three sides of the rectangular field, displaying herbs in alphabetical order, with multiple varieties of each.

87th Annual Herb Sale

Thursday, May 7, 2026
10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
at
Historic Yellow Springs
1685 Art School Road
Chester Springs, PA 19425

Cash or Check Only

In the center of the field, another square of tables features specialty plants, including scented pelargoniums (often called geraniums) and a remarkable selection of salvias. Herb Society members have propagated the pelargoniums for years and there will be 60 varieties on sale. Their small but elegant flowers may be white,

pink, lavender, or mauve, and the foliage provides their signature fragrance.

Salvias are another special highlight, representing an incredibly diverse plant family of more than 900 species. They range from culinary garden sage to annuals, perennials, and woody shrubs, offering something for nearly every garden. There are so many colors to choose from!



Salvia Bumbleberry

There will be a separate tent for Made By Members (MBM) sale – don’t miss it! An Herbal Delight lunch may be pre-ordered [on line](#).

I LOVE this plant sale! My advice: Arrive early for the best selection, bring a wagon, and remember—cash or personal checks only.



HERB SOCIETY 2026 HERB OF THE YEAR

TURMERIC



This flowering plant in the Ginger Family is known for its pungent golden orange rhizome. It has been used as a culinary spice, a dye, and as medicine. It’s active ingredient, “curcumin,” is know for its potent anti-inflammatory antioxidant properties. More info on turmeric [HERE](#).

HERB SOCIETY 2026 NOTABLE NATIVE SHRUB

GREEN EPHEDRA, *Ephedra viridis* Cov.



Green ephedra (*Ephedra viridis* Coville) is a perennial, evergreen shrub native to arid and semi-arid regions of the southwestern United States. It is adapted to dry environments, with jointed green stems that carry out photosynthesis and small, scale-like leaves that reduce water loss. More info on the green ephedra [HERE](#).

HERB SOCIETY 2026 NOTABLE NATURALIZED HERB

ST. JOHN’S WART, *Hypericum perforatum*, L.



Hypericum perforatum L. (St. John’s wort) is a perennial herb with bright yellow, five-petaled flowers and leaves dotted with translucent oil glands. It is native to Europe and widely known for its traditional use in herbal medicine, especially for mild depression and wound healing. More info [HERE](#).

YOUTH CORNER

LONGWOOD GARDENS YOUTH WORKSHOPS

BUBBLE BOTANICALS

- * Saturday, February 14, 2026
- * 12 noon - 1:30 p.m.
- * Whimsical mobile using air plants
- * Ages 9-14
- * \$40 - More Info [HERE](#)



HOME TWEET HOME

- * Saturday, March 14, 2026 12 noon - 1:30 p.m.
- * Build your own birdhouse and learn about different types of birds and how to protect them.
- * Ages 9-14
- * \$40 - More Info [HERE](#)



Fees includes all-day admission to the gardens for one youth and one adult on the day of the class.

SCOUT PROGRAMS

- * Sats. & Suns. @ 10:30 a.m.
- * Nature Trail Adventure
- * Tree Discovery
- * Plant Discovery
- * Nature of Happiness More Info [HERE](#)

TEEN VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

- * Explore careers in horticulture and journey behind the scenes while connecting with others in an enriching environment.
- * High School Students Grades 9-12
More Info [HERE](#)

HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES FOR KIDS - Get the kids off the couch and into nature with these fun activities you can do in your own back yard. More Info [HERE](#)

MORRIS ARBORETUM & GARDENS - NATURE EXPLORERS SUMMER CAMP University of Pennsylvania

- * Weeks of June 29, July 6,, 13, 20, 27, August 3
- * Ages 4-5 and 6-10 More Info [HERE](#)

MCKAIG NATURE CENTER - BOY AND GIRL SCOUT BADGE PROGRAMS - More Info [HERE](#)

PENNSYLVANIA GAME COMMISSION - WILDLIFE ON WI-FI: Lessons for All Grade Levels and Free Wildlife Learning Resource Kits More Info [HERE](#)



Would you like to see one of your personal photos showcased on the cover of the next "The First Bloom?" Send your best shot of a "first bloom" from your garden or yard, or a special shot of a seasonal "first bloom" of one of your club's tours or projects.

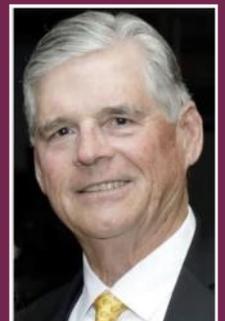
- * Keep in mind that the next issue is June 2026; late spring "first bloom" shots would be best.
- * Be sure to take some winter pics for the February 2027 issue.
- * Pics must be a vertical size, not horizontal.

Send your photos to Marilyn Small
mmsmall@comcast.net.

IN MEMORIAM

The members of District I wish to express our sincerest condolences to District I Director Pam Walsh.

Her husband, Joe, passed away peacefully at home on January 27. We wish Pam and the Walsh family peace at this difficult time.



UPCOMING DISTRICT I CLUB EVENTS

Open to the public. Support our fellow clubs.

Saturday, May 9, 8 a.m. - 2 p.m. Uwchlan Garden Club - Spring Plant Sale at the Uwchlan Meetinghouse, 3 N. Village Avenue, Exton. There will be a variety of annual and perennial plants, including veggies, herbs, and natives. Container gardens garden art, and fresh floral arrangements will also be available for purchase.

Pennsylvania Garden Party Garden Tours - 9:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Saturday, June 20 - Garden Club of Bala Cynwyd/Villanova Garden Club and Garden Club of Springfield

Saturday, June 27 - Spade and Trowel Club and Uwchlan Garden Club

NATIONAL GARDENING CELEBRATIONS

What will your club do to celebrate?



Keystone Gardener

Official Publication of the Garden Club Federation of Pennsylvania

Get all the latest GCFP news and info at your fingertips: May, July, November.

Check out GCFP's Keystone Gardener online newsletter (KG Online) [HERE](#).

Get the password from your District Director.

NGC, GCFP, and DISTRICT I 2026 CALENDAR

- March 9 District I Online Meeting, 6:30 p.m.
- April 16 Club Trash to Treasure entry deadline to DD Pam Walsh
- April 26-28 GCFP Convention in Erie
- May 5-6 NGC Convention in St Louis, MO
- June 8-9 GCFP Board Meeting, Boalsburg
- June 5 Presidents' Luncheon
- June 20 & 27 Pennsylvania Garden Party - GC of Springfield, GC of Bala Cynwyd/Villanova GC, Uwchlan GC, Spade & Trowel Club
- September 10 District I Annual Meeting and Luncheon - Host: Covered Bridge Garden Club



CALLING ALL WRITERS!



If you would like to submit an original seasonal gardening article or poem to be published in the next newsletter, send it by the submission deadline date to

Marilyn Small, Editor mmsmall@comcast.net