

GARDEN VOICE



COUNTY 76 NEWSLETTER

2nd Quarter April 2026

Volume 30, Number 2

HEARING FROM THE PRESIDENT



Lead Like a Master Gardener: Cultivating Our Chapter's Growth

As Master Gardeners, we all know that a jaw-dropping, high-yielding garden never happens by accident. It takes a clear vision, a lot of patience, and a deep understanding of how things grow. Lately, as I look out at our upcoming calendar and our amazing group of volunteers, I cannot help but see our organization through a horticultural lens. To keep our chapter thriving this season, we need to apply our backyard expertise to the way we work together. Here is how we can use our favorite gardening habits to lead, connect, and grow.

Pruning for Better Fruit

In the garden, we prune away perfectly healthy branches to redirect the plant's energy into producing the absolute best fruit. The same rule applies to our county and state organization. We cannot say "yes" to every single community request without risking serious volunteer burnout. Leading intentionally means looking at our calendar and pruning away projects that no longer fit our core mission. By narrowing our focus, we channel our energy into high-impact activities that truly make a difference.

Weeding Out the Clutter

Nothing kills the joy of volunteering faster than a mess of weeds. In our world, those weeds are clunky paperwork and outdated, messy processes. They choke out our excitement and steal valuable time. We should be actively auditing our workflows—from how we log volunteer hours to how we run committee meetings. By weeding out unnecessary steps, we clear the ground so everyone can spend less time dealing with bureaucracy and more time actually getting their hands dirty.

Watering Each Other with Appreciation

A garden cannot survive a drought, and a volunteer group cannot survive without gratitude. You are all the absolute lifeblood of County 76 and your county Master Gardener program. Whether you are setting up a silent auction, emailing judges for state awards, planning a state conference or advanced training class for County 76; or you are sweating in a demonstration garden, answering local hotline questions, or mentoring our brand-new interns, your hard work keeps the Master Gardener program alive. My goal is to make sure we are consistently watering our members with real appreciation. Never underestimate the power of a quick shout-out at a meeting or a simple thank-you note.

Nurturing the Soil

Great gardeners focus on the soil, not just the plants. If the ground is hard and depleted, even the healthiest seedling will wither. Our "soil" is our club culture, and it requires constant amendment. We enrich this foundation by building a welcoming space that bridges the gap between our seasoned veterans and our newest faces.

Nurturing our soil means creating accessible mentorship opportunities where decades of local horticultural wisdom can be passed down without intimidation. It means encouraging our new interns to share fresh ideas and modern perspectives without fear of judgment. When we mix that rich, generational knowledge together, we build a supportive community where everyone feels safe to ask questions, experiment, and learn from mistakes. By keeping our culture inclusive and respectful, we ensure that every single Master Gardener can easily take root, thrive, and blossom for years to come.

Thank you for your incredible dedication, your muddy boots, and your shared passion for our community. Together, we are growing something truly beautiful this season!

It's Time to Grow!

Don Casteel

2026 President County 76



MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

~Business~

- Don Casteel called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. He welcomed everyone and shared the day's agenda.
- Minutes from January 29, 2026, County 76 Zoom General Meeting will be filed as submitted.
- Barb Nivens (Clark County), our Treasurer presented the 1st Quarter 2026 County 76 Income and Expense report. The starting balance was \$78,326.02. Records in Workday covering Income & Expenses from January 1, 2026 through March 31, 2026, show the balance to be \$94, 540.10 (includes an amount carried forward from 2025 to balance). Barb asked for comments or questions, and there were none. The Treasurer's Report stands accepted as presented and will be filed.
- Becky Gibson, Scholarship Chair, gave the Scholarship Committee Report.
Janet B. Carson County Sanctioned Project Scholarships 2026
 - [BENTON COUNTY](#) - \$1000.00
 - Benton County Master Gardeners' Project
 - Helping Hands – The Learning Garden for Children of All Ages
 - [GARLAND COUNTY](#) - \$647.88
 - Garland County Master Gardener Project
 - Youth Activities – Park Magnet Elementary

- [MONROE COUNTY](#) - \$1000.00
 Monroe County Master Gardener Project
 Brinkley Mustard Seed Community Garden
- [SEBASTIAN COUNTY](#) - \$1000.00
 River Valley Master Gardener Project
 The Learning Fields at Chaffee Crossing, Inc.

Janet B. Carson High School Senior Scholarships 2026 - 2027



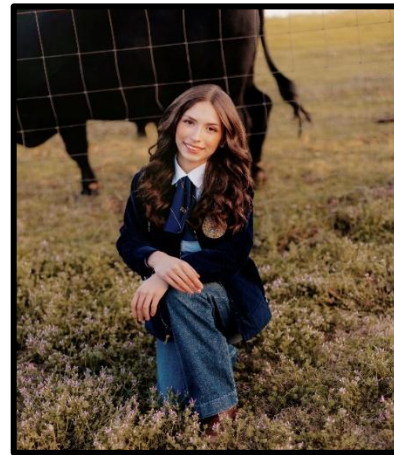
Jameson Villines
 Newton County
 University of Arkansas
 Major - Innovation and Entrepreneurship
 Minor: Horticulture



Joshua Lands
 Craighead County
 University of Arkansas at Monticello
 Major -Natural Resource Management:
 Forestry



Neil Kerperian
 Greene County
 Arkansas State University
 Major – Plant and Soil Science with an
 Emphasis on Agronomy



Serinity Simmons
 White County
 Arkansas State University - Beebe
 Major -Agricultural Education

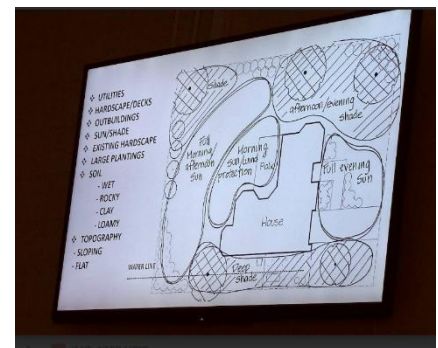
- Randy Forst, Arkansas Consumer Horticulture/Master Gardener Coordinator, shared information about his life & work.
 - County Master Gardener presentations and meetings.
 - ✓ Shared plant society
 - ✓ Faulkner County Preliminary State Conference Meeting
 - ✓ Washington County training
 - ✓ Faulkner County Pruning Presentation
 - ✓ Master Gardener Monday (3)
 - ✓ Greene County State Conference Planning Meeting
 - ✓ Garland County Master Gardener Training (2)
 - ✓ Union County Presentation
 - ✓ Washington County Master Gardener Program (Dec.)
 - ✓ Lonoke County Master Gardener Program (Dec.)
 - ✓ Craighead County Container Garden Program
 - ✓ Master Gardener Appreciation Day
 - ✓ Nevada County Seminar
 - ✓ Jefferson County Garden Show
 - ✓ Garland County Plant Sale
 - 2026 Master Gardener Trainings
 - ✓ Fall online (self-paced): October 6 – December 11, 2026
 - ✓ Fall Zoom Training (classroom setting): On Wednesdays – October 21, October 28, November 4, November 11, and November 18. These are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
 - Professional & Community Engagement Activities
 - ✓ Hosted an Arkansas Flower Growers Association meeting
 - ✓ Conducted various horticultural programs and demonstrations across multiple counties, e.g., vegetable programs, pruning demonstrations, and youth gardening initiatives
 - ✓ Held a successful 2026 Master Gardener Appreciation Day at Garvan Woodland Gardens in Hot Springs despite our concerns over the late frost we had. The location near the lake was helpful with the frost.
 - ✓ Our Arkansas gardener initiative includes completed videos
 - Tomato and pepper seed starting
 - Container planting
 - Upcoming video on trellising as tomatoes grow
 - ✓ This year's MG Conference will be on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday (not the usual Thursday to Saturday).
 - Features great presentations and Advanced Training options
 - Garden tours
 - Approximately 32 vendors

- Over 100 entries for silent auction pots and plants
- ✓ Plant, Nurture, Grow Leadership conference is at the Little Rock State Office on Saturday, September 19, 2026. Capacity is 140.
- ✓ Answers to Questions: The seed starting video is available on YouTube. Gardening tips can be found under Yard and Garden on the YouTube Channel. Also, find discussion on gardening practices and pollinator-friendly plants.

~Education~

Our guest speaker was Terri Waterman from Garland County. Terri retired after 38 years as a Federal Aviation Administration employee (including working as an air traffic controller). Terri and her husband (we know him as the ‘man with the mini excavator’) settled on a large plot of land found on a hillside in Hot Springs. Gardeners in Arkansas know Terri well due to her many years of work and leadership in the Arkansas Federation of Garden Clubs. With that organization, she is the Pulaski District Director, the Arkansas Gardener editor, a State Flower Show Consultant and holds many roles with the gardening school.

Terri’s topic was ‘Elements of Garden Design’. It was exciting to see and hear what she has done and is doing to design her landscape for beauty and usefulness. Terri began with the most important principles of design. The first is know what you have. We saw a drawn plan for existing landscape features. This includes utilities; hardscape/decks; outbuildings; sun/shade; existing hardscape; large plantings; soil type – wet, rocky, clay, loamy; and topography – sloping or flat.



Knowing what you have is followed by knowing what you want. Terri shared that her latest project that was planned and implemented was installing an eight-foot black chain link deer fence with a privacy fence. The fence spans the entire property from the lake to the other end of the property. This investment was made using Terri’s European Garden Tour money, but it is essential for the survival of hostas, roses and hydrangeas as deer had previously destroyed plants, including daffodils.

Planning is so important because it may save you time and work. An example of this is when Terri planned for a fruit tree espalier along the privacy fence. Planning was important because a watering system had to be installed. That is water pipes had to be installed before planting trees. The trees planted were pear, apple, and plum. Over time the trees have grown larger and more beautiful over time.

Terri planted peonies and lilies for color throughout the year. The peonies were initially in pots due to lack of space. Importance of water during the summer months was emphasized. Daily watering may be necessary for plant survival.

Garden design strategy is important. It is recommended to take small bites in garden projects. Focus on one area at a time to avoid feeling overwhelmed. Keep in mind the importance of having an overall plan for garden integration.

Terri has been inspired by stumpery. A **stumpery** is a uniquely sculptural garden feature that uses tree stumps, roots, and logs as the central framework for planting. Popularized by the Victorians, it repurposes dead wood into artistic, terraced habitats designed to support ferns, mosses, lichens, and shade-loving woodland plants. (google.com) We saw the picture and heard about the steps involved in creating her stumpery. Her husband used the mini excavator to move heavy stumps and roots. The organization of stumps is crucial for the design.

Terri shared what she had learned in a training course about the Unity of Three in Garden Design. It is suggested to limit hardscape types to three for better structure. Types mentioned include brick, flagstone, and pea gravel. Mixing patterns and materials can add interest and energy. The desire to create mosaics may place an emphasis on mixing materials for visual interest such as mixing brick up with some other elements. This works well if you have a preference for quirky, charming gardens over formal styles.

Seek unity in design. Unity in building materials is important to avoid confusion. Match outbuildings to home style. Use Unity of Three in plant placement. Odd numbers (3,5,7) create better groupings. Triangular placement is preferred. Layer plants: low, medium and high; for visual interest. Mix plant textures to enhance design. An example would be to incorporate hostas to break up foliage.

It is best to think about seasonal interest and plant placement. Use the Japanese concept of Miegakure – hide and reveal. You could use a hedge to create interest and conceal views. It is important to reflect your personal style in garden design. “You have to be happy, and you have to be the person that is out there looking at it and loving it”.

Terri spent the last few minutes sharing some design techniques and inspirations. She referred to Chanticleer, Pennsylvania as a notable garden. It is known as Chanticleer – A Pleasure Garden. She talked about container gardening as an alternative to traditional beds. It is important to have planting strategy for seasonal color. She told us about spring ephemerals for color. Another pointer: Use a roller measure for accurate measurements on uneven terrain.

Other topics were vertical gardening, creative solutions (used stacked logs for a rose bed and old metal bunk bed pieces for climbing roses to add height and interest. Terri recommended visiting Mount Cuba for plant inspiration and learning. She suggests pruning large shrubs to utilize space underneath for planting.

Everyone enjoyed this time with Terri Waterman. We are glad she came.

THE PROJECT PATCH

Advanced Training

Juanita Nesbitt, Dual Chair; Karol Zoeller, Dual Chair

- We continue to encourage members of County 76 and Master Gardeners to organize seminars or speakers for Advanced Training. We do have committee members who are available to assist with setup.
- There will be an opportunity for six (6) hours of Advanced Training this year in Faulkner County at our State Master Gardener Convention. Attendees must sign an attendance sheet and keep their certificates.
- Advanced Training hours are important because they are necessary for designation as an Advanced Master Gardener.
- There are five (5) levels of Advanced Training. Hours are required beyond the initial forty (40). Information on this is available on the state Master Gardener website.
- Advanced Training Sessions must be recognized and certified by the state program.

Fundraising

Susan Colles, Chair; Sheila Waddell, Co-chair

- Susan Colles introduced the fundraising project team of Sheila Waddell and James Lamb.
- This year's conference project for the silent auction is called 'Pots and Plants'. So far there are 20 counties participating with over 93 pots decorated. We are anticipating close to 100 pots, ranging from 3 inch to 8 inch sizes.
- State Conference Silent Auction items should be brought by noon on June 2nd. Items can still be brought after noon but earlier is preferred for bidding. There is no limit on the number of donations from each county.
- Pre-orders for tools is ongoing; estimated funds raised from tool sales between \$2,500 to \$3,000.
- Our tools include the Root Slayer shovel, a Mini Skidger Weeder with a cutting blade for weeding plants, and a long-handled skidger with a non-collapsible handle.
- The deadline for tool orders is April 30th; a QR code is available for easy ordering.
- Tools must be picked up at the conference; cannot be mailed due to shipping costs. Attendees can pick up tools for others who are not attending the conference.
- Sheila Waddell presented an item for the silent auction – a collapsible cart that can have two cushioned seats for activities like baseball.
- Fundraising project will participate in the PNG Leadership Conference. There will be an Opportunity Table available for buying tickets to win items.

- Randy will host a brunch for 40 people as part of the fundraising. There will be five bid sheets for lunch opportunities with a ‘buy-it now’ price of \$250. Ticket sales will remain at \$20.
- Fundraising is crucial as we award \$12,000 in scholarships and \$5,000 in support seed money for the State Conference every year.

[Plant, Nurture, Grow Leadership \[PNG\]](#)

Phil McConnell, Chair



- This year’s PNG Leadership Conference will be on Saturday, September 19, 2026, for one day only. The decision was made to have it on Saturday to encourage groups to attend who couldn’t make it during the week.
- It will be at the Little Rock State Extension Office.
- The format will include opening and closing sessions for all attendees and three breakout sessions with four class choices each. Lunch will be split between two sessions to accommodate eating arrangements.
- Monthly meetings have been held. The January meeting was via Zoom
- Session topics and speakers were finalized in today’s meeting.
- There is a discussion on advanced training class setup.
- The registration timeline is expected to be announced in mid-July with notices sent out.

[Recruitment, Retention, Recognition \[RRR\]](#)

Rose Ann Houston, Dual Chair; Becky Gibson, Dual Chair

- Ren Ray is collaborating with Liz Hale on the process of this year’s State Awards. Nominations have been sent to out-of-state judges; decisions will be announced at State Conference.
- The change made from last year of going from two awards per category to one award in each category is something that we are watching carefully. Last year there were 76 nominations for all categories, and this year there are 67 nominations submitted.
- This year’s Annuals to Perennials Zoom Training is scheduled for Tuesday, July 7th, 2026, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.
- Dr. David Creech will be the speaker; he is the director of the Stephen F. Austin Gardens in Texas. This event is designed to welcome and celebrate new Master Gardeners and their mentors.
- RRR is working to increase visibility and availability for Master Gardeners to join County 76 by having membership applications available at our meetings and events. Rose Ann Houston has made us a display stating ‘We need you. County 76 wants you.’ We also encourage members to bring a friend to future meetings.

Media Relations

Mike Wilbanks, Coordinator

Don Casteel reminded us of the continuing work on our 2027 Arkansas Master Gardener Calendar. Here are some things to know about submitting photos.

- Old photographs can be used if they were not a previous winner in the Master Gardener competition.
- *Some reasons for disqualification*; no vegetation, out of focus, no supporting data even after clarification requested.
- Original photographs only from exhibitors taken from inside the state borders of Arkansas.
- Photos must contain plant material.
- This is NOT an animal calendar.
- Photos judged on Creativity, originality, composition, and technical merit.
- Four (4) entries per person. Only one per season. jpeg format only.
- Multiple seasonal entries from the same season will result in all entries for that season to be disqualified.
- Vertical submissions will be cropped to horizontal format. Thus, most of the image will be lost.
- This is an example of how the photo(s) must be labeled using your own information:

Your name, your county name, name of entry, season of photo.

Paul Jones, Benton, Dogwood Berries, WI

If you do not properly name your photo(s), (e.g.image412264),and adhere to the above entry labeling conditions, they will not be considered.

County 76 Meetings:

Tuesday, July 28, 2026

Tuesday, October 27, 2026

State MG Conference (Faulkner County):

Tuesday, June 2, 2026 –

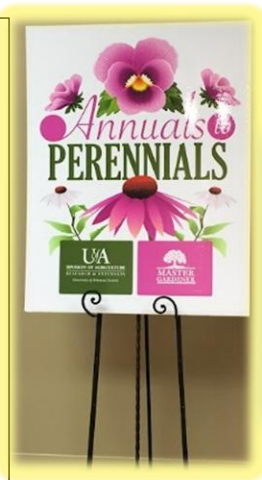
Thursday, June 4, 2026

Annuals-to-Perennials:

Tuesday, July 7, 2026

Plant, Nurture, Grow Conference:

Saturday, September 19, 2026



MG Appreciation Day

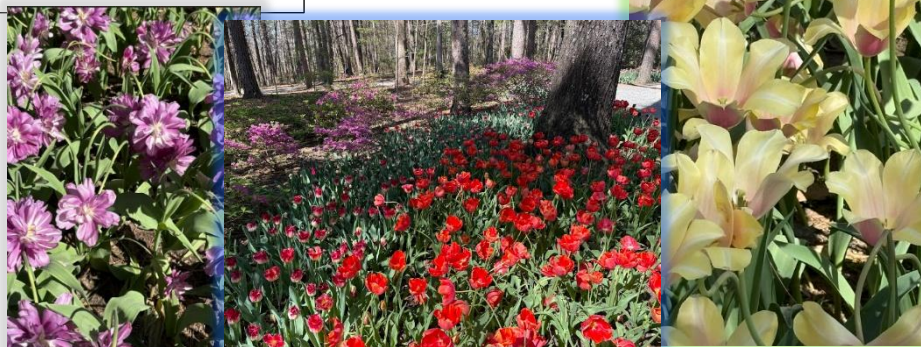
Garvan

Woodland

Gardens

Hot Springs AR

March 19, 2026



Welcome to COUNTY 76

*Jan
Butenschoen*

Maumelle
Pulaski County



*Projects: Plant,
Nurture, Grow &
Recruitment,
Retention,
Recognition*



U of A DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
RESEARCH & EXTENSION
University of Arkansas System



**Tuesday, July 28, 2026, 10:00 am
Is the next
County 76 Membership/Project Meeting
State Extension Office
2301 S. University Ave, Little Rock, AR 72204
We look forward to seeing you there!**

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