

# GARDEN VOICE



COUNTY 76 NEWSLETTER  
1st Quarter 2025    January 2025  
Volume 29, Number 1

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

As I have worked with the Board of County 76, I have discovered so much more than I ever knew about Arkansas Master Gardeners. Having a view of the work done by Master Gardeners across our state is a wonderful experience.

Recently, Barbara Nivens, a Master Gardener from Clark County joined our state advisory and support group, County 76. When asked why she chose to join, she said, "I enjoy being around like-minded people who care about gardening, people, and making our state a beautiful place to live." This aligns so much with what I have been thinking about lately.

Master Gardeners are truly special people. I have found they have hearts that are alike, too.

**H** – Master Gardeners are happy and hopeful. They are people who look for the positives in people and plants. Every time a site is chosen, soil is prepared, a hole is dug, and a seed or plant goes in, hope goes in the hole, too. Master Gardeners create something to look forward to. Master Gardeners are growers of all sorts. You don't have to have a career in agriculture or own a large farm to belong. Everyone is welcome.

**E** – Master Gardeners are effective and efficient. Effective because change happens in every local project where they partner with host businesses/organizations. Hard work in donated volunteer hours creates beauty and improves the environment. Efficient because the knowledge and experience of gardeners combines best practices with available resources.

**A** – Master Gardeners are adventurous and appreciative. They are adventurous in the projects that are accepted and the beauty created. They are appreciative of those who volunteer their time to work, and those who add resources to enhance the work.

**R** – Master Gardeners are resourceful and reliable. They are problem-solvers. They are not limited to local resources, either. We have outstanding state leaders in Randy Forst and Julie Treat. They work hard to bring the best to us. The University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture knows and honors the work of Master Gardeners. This makes what we do possible. I know about the 'dependable' characteristic of the Master Gardeners hearts. If there is a job to be done, it will be done. As County 76 works to help every year with statewide Master Gardener events, we all have opportunities to enjoy and learn – together

**T** - Master Gardeners are talented and tenacious. There is most always a nice blend of skills in any group of Master Gardeners. It is amazing when we work together and discover all the expertise that exists whether our group is large or small. Master Gardeners keep going – if plan A doesn't work, we search for another plan:)

There is one more important thing I know – if you meet someone who says, “I am a Master Gardener and I belong to County 76”, you can be certain his/her heart is the biggest around – but in the best way possible!!

We are looking forward to a wonderful year of learning and growing together. You will learn more from this newsletter. Thank you for all you continue to do as an Arkansas Master Gardener.

Until we meet again, keep on digging:)

Smiles,

*Becky Gibson*

County 76 President



**Ice 'N Roses  
Hellebore**

## MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

### *~Business~*

- Becky Gibson, President, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. She welcomed everyone and shared the day’s agenda.
- Minutes from the October 22, 2024, General Meeting were approved with one correction. Our 1st Vice President’s name was written as ‘Dan Casteel’ rather than “Don Casteel”.
- Gail McClure, Treasurer, presented the County 76 2025 Proposed Budget for membership approval. She noted the Scholarship changes to allow 2024 recipients to apply for more assistance. A question was raised about the format used for the financial reports and Proposed Budgets. Gail explained that we have a policy to make the annual budget a balanced budget using the carry forward amount from the previous year. Susan Colles explained that the line showing “subsidy from 2024” is what shows the budget as balanced. She explained that this is carried over funds from 2024 and is only used if our expenses were more than income.
- Susan Colles suggested we approve the budget as presented, and then the Executive Board could check the financial reporting format with the Finance Department. Also, an explanation on the statement next to line-item PNG Facilities Rental & Food. Gail explained that, as people pay for housing and registration in one lump sum, the portion covering lodging goes to the lodging provider. County 76 only retains the amount for registration.
- Becky Gibson called for the budget to be approved as presented. Motion to approve by Kate Spontak and a second by Leisa Stotts preceded approval of the County 76 2025 Proposed Budget.
- Gail presented the 4th Quarter 2024 Income and Expense Report. This report stands as presented and will be filed for audit. Gail invited all project leaders to request a detailed list of expenditures if so desired.
- The state team for Master Gardener Online Reporting is Julie Treat, Linda Soffer and Jane Burrow. They presented step-by-step instructions on the reporting of

County 76 Master Gardener hours. They suggested that hours entered are printed and saved regularly in case of computer glitches. Julie stated that as the system can change it is important that the Extension office Page is bookmarked, not the current link. She stated the importance of knowing who your county online manager is as they are kept up-to-date and can help answer questions regarding the reporting of hours. For troubleshooting and support, members should first contact their county managers for issues. In addition, email support is available at [OnlineReporting22@gmail.com](mailto:OnlineReporting22@gmail.com)

- Randy Forst, Arkansas Consumer Horticulture/Master Gardener Coordinator brought an update.
  - You may not know about Randy's other life, but he is a sheep farmer. His favorite milk cow is Daffodil. She has had 6 calves. The newest one was born in December 2024. Her name is Winter Daphne – she is sweet, and Daffodil is a wonderful mother. Also, it is lambing season for him. On our meeting date, he had 73 baby lambs on the ground.
  - Randy shared County Master Gardener Horticulture Program Meetings that were held since we met last.
    - MG Fall Zoom Training (Oct. 23 & 30, Nov. 6, 13, and 20) 340 candidates enrolled
    - Horticulture Faculty Meetings (Nov. & Dec.)
    - Faulkner Co. 2026 State Conference Preliminary Planning Meetings (Nov. & Dec.)
    - White Co. 2025 State Conference Planning Meetings (Nov. & Dec.)
    - County 76 Board Retreat (Nov. 14 & 15)
    - Master Gardener Monday (Nov.)
    - Logan Co. Presentation (Dec.)
    - Saline Co. Sanctioned Project Meeting (Dec.)
    - Hot Spring Co. (Malvern) Garden Program
  - We were reminded of Randy's blog [@The Arkansas Garden](#). You can follow on Instagram and the UADA website.
  - Our future Master Gardener Trainings in 2025: Fall Online (self-paced) is Oct. 6 – Dec. 12.; Fall Zoom Training (Classroom Setting) will be Wednesdays Oct. 22, 29, Nov. 5, 12, & 19. 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
  - In-person training can be hosted by counties with a minimum of twenty (20) participants.
  - Registration for “Past the Garden Gate”, the 2025 State Master Gardener Conference (Searcy, White Co.), will be opened around mid-February. Conference dates are June 5 – 7, 2025. Hotels reserved for the event include Harding Campus (alcohol restrictions), Holiday Inn Express, and LaQuinta.



## *~Education~*

Our presenter was Derek Reed, Horticulture Agent in Pulaski County. Derek has been in that position for two years. He came to that position after developing expertise in horticulture education and commercial hydroponics.

The presentation was Exploring Hydroponics: Commercial and Home. Topics include large scale production, environmental controls, diseases, and pests. Derek encouraged listeners to stop him should they have a question.

The term 'hydroponics' is from two Greek words 'hydro' (water) and 'ponos' (work). The term was first used in 1929 by Dr. Gerick, a California professor. Hydroponics is growing plants in nutrient-rich water solutions. The U.S. Army implemented hydroponics during World War II for food production. Commercial hydroponics began to rise in the 1950s in America, Europe, Africa, and Asia.

There are a few benefits of Hydroponics. There is no soil required, allowing for more growth on less land. You have complete control over nutrients. You should tend to the nutrient availability at least weekly by using sample testing. There should be constant monitoring of pH levels. There is faster growth and higher crop yields.

What about disadvantages? There are high startup and general costs. Hydroponics requires knowledge and experience. Waterborne diseases can spread quickly, and constant monitoring is necessary.

Deep water culture; Nutrient film technique; Aeroponics; and Wick systems (ebb and flow and drip) are types of Hydroponic systems. To select the best system for your purpose, consider the budget, available space, and planned crops. An example of a Deep water system is that plants float on Styrofoam or cork board. A Nutrient film technique is where water drips down from an angled gutter.

There are various growing mediums which include rockwool, coconut coir, perlite, clay pebbles, and peat moss. Also, water quality is vitally important. This means clean, chlorine-free water. Large-scale operations have extensive monitoring systems. Home growers can use pH pens and EC readers. pH determines acidity/basicity and nutrient availability. EC measures concentrated salts in the solution for nutrient availability. Ideal pH for growing lettuce and basil is between 5.4 and 6.0. Ideal EC is between 1.5 and 3.0.

It is recommended to change the water every two weeks. It is very important to monitor nutrient levels to avoid buildup. Macronutrients involved: nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, magnesium, sulfur. Micronutrients: iron, zinc, manganese, copper, boron, molybdenum. Nutrient compatibility is crucial. Make sure to grow plants with the same nutrient requirements together.

Common plants grown hydroponically include leafy greens (e.g., lettuce), tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, strawberries, watercress, and herbs.

Derek's commercial hydroponics experience was in commercial greenhouse management in Davis, CA. The production capacity is 15,000 to 20,000 heads of lettuce per day. The seed to harvest time is approximately 35 days. Greenhouse conditions are monitored with air tubes for temperature. Average temperature maintained around 80 degrees despite external heat. The shipping range includes local grocery stores and distant locations as far away as Denver.

To create optimal plant growth conditions, you work to reduce stress on plants for quicker growth and better health. The optimal temperature range is 65 to 80 degrees. Humidity must be constantly monitored. Too little or too much humidity can lead to diseases and yield loss. Light intensity is crucial. Too much light results in stretched, green or whitish plants. Environmental control methods utilize ventilation systems, heaters, and shade cloth; used humidifiers and dehumidifiers. They implemented a giant pad wall for cooling.

Home Hydroponics are easier to learn and start compared to the past. You can easily control nutrients and adaptability to person needs, and a variety of systems is available. Concerning costs, Aeroponic towers are \$800.00 to \$1,200.00. Small countertop systems range from \$30.00 to \$250.00. Deep water systems can be made from Home Depot buckets.

Home system maintenance includes constant monitoring of water pH and EC. You need to prevent light from entering opaque containers to avoid algae buildup. Also, it is important to use air pumps and air stones to maintain oxygenation in water.

Hydroponics is a rapidly growing industry. Once available only to larger companies, it is now accessible to everyone. Hydroponics allow for rapid production with less time requirements. Maintenance tips for home hydroponic systems.

- Water every other day or every three days is recommended.
- Replace nutrient solutions every other week; every three weeks is acceptable.
- Clean and sanitize system components regularly.
- To sanitize, use a light bleach solution. (Ensure it dries well before planting.)

The status of hydroponic systems in Arkansas was discussed. There are no large systems, but some smaller operations do exist. Mention was made of a facility in Bentonville and one in Rogers.

County 76 is appreciative of the Horticulture Agents, such as Derek Reed, who lead at the County level. We look forward to hearing from more of them in the future.



Commercial Hydroponics



Pulaski County:  
Outdoor PVC Nutrient  
Film Technique &  
Deep Water Tote



## THE PROJECT PATCH

### Advanced Training

Reporting: Becky Gibson for Joellen Beard, Chair

- Joellen Beard, Chair, and Valerie Smith, Co-chair, were out of town. Our meeting was led by Julie Treat.
- Our committee approved three Proposals for Advanced Training and discussed two trainings in the planning stage. The Proposal for Advanced Training is the first form to use in the process of sponsoring an Advanced Training. It is found on the Advanced MG landing page. Scroll down to the Guide for Hosting Counties and open the Proposal form. It is a fillable WORD document. It also includes instructions to turn in the form.

SCAN FOR THE  
ADVANCED MG  
LANDING PAGE



- **Apple Tree Grafting** was approved for Thursday, March 27, 2025. This is a hands-on workshop training sponsored by Randy Forst & Julie Treat. It will be held at the Little Rock State Office from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Participants are limited to 25 – 30. Registration fee will be around \$30.00.
- **Compost Happens** was approved. It will be Friday, September 5, 2025, and sponsored by the Washington County Master Gardeners in Fayetteville. Presenters will be experts in the field. In addition, this full day training will offer an optional facility tour following training.
- **Evergreen Year Round** was approved for Friday, October 17, 2025. It will be hosted by Garland County Master Gardeners. Training will be 5 – 6 hours and will include experts, also sharing about evergreen plants.
- In planning: **Birds - Attracting/Food/Nests/Houses/Birding/Identifying/Songs**

Date to be finalized in April or May 2025. Hosts will be Pulaski County Master Gardeners. **NGC Garden School – Course 3** is a continuation of Courses 1 & 2 in the National Garden Club’s Training. This will be September 12 & 13, 2025. It is a collaboration with Hughes Town & Country Garden Club and Crittenden County Master Gardeners. This training will be in West Memphis or Marion.

## Fundraising

Reporting: Susan Colles, Chair

- Project members are working to prepare for this year’s Master Gardener State Conference in Searcy (White County).
- Two item activities are planned for county participation in this year’s silent auction. They are the spirit pole and the solar porch light.
- The Spirit Pole was a popular item at last year’s conference. Counties can bring a spirit pole to the auction. The Spirit Pole starting bid will be \$60.00. They will have a buy-it-now price of \$200.00.
- The Solar Porch Light is a new item. It is smaller and lighter than the Spirit Poles that were made last year. Susan made a sample Solar Porch Light. The cost to make it was approximately \$20.00. Solar Porch Lights will be auctioned at the state conference with a starting bid of \$25.00. and a buy-it-now price of \$75.00.
- For proper planning, those who will donate a Spirit Pole or a Solar Porch Light must complete a Participation Form and submit it on or before Saturday, March 15, 2025. Find descriptions, photos and Participation Form by scanning the QR Code:



Online path: *Master Gardeners to County 76 to Fundraising*

- Last year, the State Conference Auction also included sales of the Root Slayer shovel and Root Slayer Trowel. The shovel (\$50.00) and trowel (\$20.00) will also be sold through pre-conference orders at this year’s State Master Gardener Conference.
- In addition, Rain Jackets with the Master Gardener logo will be sold through pre-conference orders. They are available in three colors: Wine/burgundy, royal blue, and forest green. Sizes are small through 3X. They are \$38.00.

## Media Relations

Reporting: Becky Gibson for Mike Wilbanks, Coordinator

Our wonderful tradition of the annual Master Gardener Calendar continues. Photo submissions for the 2026 calendar should be made no later than *Monday, July 7, 2025*.

These are the submission rules.

1. Original to Arkansas MG’s only.
2. Color, black & white, or sepia.
3. Must have plant material focus.

4. Taken inside Arkansas borders.
5. Judges' decisions are final.
6. Creativity, composition, technical merit.
7. Landscape only.
8. .jpeg only.
9. Four (4) entries per person. One photo per season.
10. Outdoor photographs are preferred.
11. Photos must be labeled: Your name, Your county name, Name of entry, Season of photos. Example: **AnselAdams,Green,DogwoodBerries,WI**

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

Reporting: Linda Soffer, Chair

Linda told us that Jackie Leech, Craighead County, was planning to Chair PNG, but she has faced some family difficulties and will not be able to be chair. Linda was 2024 chair and is helping Phil McConnell, Co-chair to reorganize and carry on. We are seeking volunteers for the Chair position. Also, please feel free to send suggestions on topics for the conference.

Linda shared information about our 2025 Plant, Nurture, Grow Leadership Conference. She reminded, "PNG Leadership Conference is for ALL active Master Gardeners and County Agents, not just for officers and project chairs."

The location of this year's conference will be the same as last year's, *C.A. Vines 4-H Center*, 1 Four H Way, Little Rock AR 72223. Last year we had positive feedback from attendees for the center which has seen improvements.

Registration fee is \$25.00, and fee for lodging is the same as last year. (Thanks to early planning by the PNG.)

PNG Conference will be on Wednesday and Thursday, *October 1 & 2, 2025*.



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

Reporting: Don Casteel, Chair

**2024 AR MG Awards:** There are 76 nominations from 19 MG programs (9 smaller 10 larger programs). Don thanked Liz Hale for all her work on the process of nominations for this year. There are twelve (12) judges for this year's awards. Also, thanks were extended to Hilde Simmons and Mimi Cox for their contributions.

**2024 AR MG Presidents List:** Hilde Simmons worked on this, and the County Presidents List is completed. This is a lot of work and much appreciated.

**Annuals to Perennials Speaker List:** Dee Nash, Red Dirt Ramblings blogger from OK; Joe Lamp'I, GA horticulture educator, vlogger; Janet Carson; Geoff Lawton (Australian) Randy contacted list and *Joe Lamp'I* was selected. The Annuals to Perennials (A to P) Conference is scheduled for *Thursday, July 10, 2025*. The Zoom will be 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. The topic is: "Digging Deeper: Five Things Smart Gardeners Know that Others Don't".

**Retention and Recognition:** Members discussed rewards and retention strategies. Some counties lack a committee for rewards, falling on the president. Ideas were shared for improving retention.



## Scholarships

Reporting: Becky Gibson

Our 2025 Scholarship Committee is Kay Roberts, Chair, Susan Colles, Co-chair, Don Casteel, James Lamb, Kathy Launder, and Becky Gibson. The deadline for applications for the Janet B. Carson County Sanctioned Project Scholarship was January 15, 2025. Initially, a total of fifteen (15) applications were received. The committee will meet and share results with the Board and Membership.

The deadline for applications for the Janet B. Carson High School Senior Scholarship for 2025 – 2026 is Friday, March 14, 2025.

## COUNTY 76 LEADERSHIP - 2025

### State Leadership

*Randy Forst*, Extension Educator Consumer Horticulture and Master Gardener Coordinator

*Julie Treat*, Horticulture Program Associate

### County 76 Officers

*Becky Gibson*, President (Pulaski County)

*Don Casteel*, 1st Vice President (Benton County)

*Rose Ann Houston*, 2nd Vice President (White/Independence County)

*Diann Arington*, Secretary (Garland County)

*Gail McClure*, Treasurer (Garland County)

*Linda Soffer*, Assistant Treasurer (Jefferson County)

*Kay Roberts*, Past President (Lonoke County)

*Kathy Launder*, Member at Large (Washington County)

*James Lamb*, Member at Large (Hempstead/Red Dirt County)

### County 76 Project Leaders

*Advanced Training Project*

*Joellen Beard*, Chair (Pulaski County)

*Valerie Smith*, Chair (Pulaski County)

*Fundraising Project*

*Susan Colles*, Chair (Pope County)

*Sheila Waddell*, Co-Chair (Jefferson County)

*Plant, Nurture, Grow Leadership Training Project*

*Linda Soffer*, Chair (Jefferson County)

*Phil McConnell*, Co-Chair (Saline County)

*Recruitment, Retention, Recognition Project*

*Don Casteel*, Chair (Benton County)

*Liz Hale*, Co-Chair (Washington County)

County 76 Appointed Positions

*Mike Wilbanks*, Media Relations Coordinator (Craighead County)

*Becky Gibson*, Garden Voice Editor (Pulaski County)

**2025**

**County 76 Meetings:**

**Tuesday, April 22, 2025**

**Tuesday, July 22, 2025**

**Tuesday, October 28, 2025**

**State MG Conference (White County):**

**Thursday, June 5, 2025 –**

**Saturday, June 7, 2025**

**MG Appreciation Day (Hope):**

**Friday, June 20, 2025**

**Annuaals-to-Perennials:**

**Thursday, July 10, 2025**

**Plant, Nurture, Grow Conference:**

**Wednesday, October 1 –**

**Thursday, October 2, 2025**

The Garden Voice is looking for County 76 volunteers. If you can write, edit, and/or proofread text; or take and send photos; or use graphics and WORD templates in Windows and .pdf formats, please email [County76ARMG@gmail.com](mailto:County76ARMG@gmail.com) with your contact information. Thank you.



**Tuesday, April 22, 2025, 10:00 am**  
**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!**



The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture is an equal opportunity/equal access/affirmative action institution. If you require a reasonable accommodation to participate or need materials in another format, please contact our State Coordinator/Program Associate Office as soon as possible. Dial 711 for Arkansas Relay.