

GARDEN VOICE



COUNTY 76 NEWSLETTER

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

As another season begins to unfold, I am reminded of why we became Master Gardeners in the first place: We love to grow things, we enjoy learning, and we value the opportunity to share our knowledge with others. Gardening has a wonderful way of bringing people together while connecting us to the soil, the seasons, and our communities.



Every garden tells a story. Some gardens are carefully planned, while others (like mine) evolve through trial and error. And, as every gardener knows, not everything goes according to plan! A

plant may struggle, a pest may appear overnight, or the weather may decide to challenge our best intentions. Yet those experiences are part of what makes gardening so rewarding. Each mistake teaches us something, and each success gives us another reason to keep growing.

As Master Gardeners, we have an especially important opportunity to help others discover that same joy. Whether we are answering questions at a plant clinic, volunteering at a community garden, teaching a class, maintaining a demonstration garden, or simply talking with a neighbor, we are extending the mission of our organization. Our

knowledge is most valuable when we put it to work helping others.

I encourage each of you to take advantage of the educational and volunteer opportunities available through our organization.



Attend a program you have never tried, learn about a new plant or gardening technique, and consider sharing one of your own areas of expertise with fellow members. We all have something to contribute. Most importantly, let's remember that our organization is about more than plants. It is about people. The friendships we develop, the experiences we share, and the service we provide to our community are just as important as the gardens we cultivate.

Thank you for the time, enthusiasm, and knowledge you bring to the Arkansas Master Gardener organization. I am proud of what we accomplish together and excited about what the coming season will bring.

So, let's keep learning, keep growing, and keep planting seeds—both in our gardens, in our local Master Gardener organizations, and in County 76.

It's Time to Grow!

Don Casteel, President

MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

~Business~

- Don Casteel called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. He welcomed everyone and presented the day's agenda.
- Minutes of our April 28, 2026, County 76 General Meeting were presented for correction. Some words were missing from the description of one Advanced Training. Following the insertion, the minutes will be filed for record.
- Treasurer Barbara Nivens shared the Financial Report for the 2nd Quarter of 2026. Ending balance for the quarter is \$84,572.48. An update to this balance will occur when an update is received for the Faulkner County State Conference fundraising following the finalization of Clover funds (credit card purchases).
- Becky Gibson, Scholarship Committee Chair, brought information on scholarship activities. As we have several new members, we heard about Janet B. Carson County Sanctioned Project Scholarships and Janet B. Scholarships for High School Seniors. This year there were five County Sanctioned Project Scholarships and four High School Senior Scholarships. Information for winners is posted on the website and forms for applications will be posted soon.
- Randy Forst, Arkansas Consumer Horticulture/Master Gardener Coordinator, brought a report on his work since the last time we met. Randy expressed appreciation for the successful State Master Gardener Conference this year hosted by Faulkner County. He shared information and pictures from the latest Janet Carson group trip to Ireland. The environment is one we would consider excellent for growing. We saw pictures of plants in Randy's office window which were given to him by Kay Roberts. He remembers Kay who passed away in December 2025 from her plant gifts to him. Randy shared his 'Unique Critique' for Plants that Love the Heat. We love to listen to Randy's plant-growing wisdom. He presented plants which are growing in the beds outside the office windows of his and Julie's offices. The plants are Carnival Lantana, Yellow Mandevilla, and Mahogany Splendor Tropical Hardy Hibiscus. (These are trial plants.)
- Randy listed his County Master Gardener Horticulture Presentations & Meetings
 - Carroll County MG
 - Faulkner County State Conference Walk-through
 - Greene County Garden Tour for 2027 Walk-through
 - MGM Statewide Zoom (3)
 - Greene County 2027 Greene County State Conference Planning Meeting (3)
 - MG State Conference – Faulkner County

- MG Appreciation Day Program/Planning
- PNG Planning Meeting (2)
- Howard County MG Program Meeting
- Pike County MG Program Meeting
- Randy shared State Horticulture Presentations & Meetings
 - Grow Your Own Groceries – Strawberries
 - Master Gardener Monday – State Zoom
 - Youth Gardening – E Stem Inservice
 - 4-H Ouachita District ORAMA – Hort
 - 4-H Ozark District ORAMA – Hort
 - 4-H Delta District ORAMA – Hort
 - Annuals to Perennials Mentor/Mentee
 - Agent: WUW Program
 - 4-H State ORAMA – Hort



Randy's Unique Critique for Beat the Heat: (L to R) Two colorways of Carnival Lantana; Yellow Mandevilla; Mahogany Splendor Tropical Hardy

~Education~

Our Presenter was Nicholas T. Dial, Natural Resources Specialist. Nicholas works in the Natural Resources division of the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT). He holds a PhD in Environmental Sciences and a PhD in Biology. His expertise includes planetary economy, habitat management, and water restoration.

Nicholas began with an *ARDOT Environmental Division Overview*:

- Public Involvement Section: Conducts public meetings for highway project
- Archaeology Section: Assesses historic buildings and conducts archaeological surveys for federal compliance.
- Clean Water Act Compliance: Oversees projects impacting waters, supervised by the Corps of Engineers. Biologists survey and monitor project locations. The work of mitigation involves offsetting impacts to US borders, depending on project size, nature, and forest type. Example: I-49 proposed location required three months of field exploration and mapping to resolve impacts.

We heard a summary of ARDOT's Road Maintenance Practices:

- Road width varies from 30 meters (small roads) to 150 meters (large cities).

- Clear Zone: Immediately adjacent to the road, a public safety requirement to keep driving lanes clear of tall vegetation. Planted 2-3 times per year (spring, mid-summer, fall).
- Transition Zone: Where most wildflowers grow on road sides. Planted once a year in the fall.
- Natural Zones: Areas further from the road where trees/shrubs grow, managed based on situation.

Facts on *Project Implementation and Mitigation*:

- Large-scale projects on mitigation properties (forests, woods, fisheries, historic bird pastures) began a few years ago.
- Native Seed Suppliers: Brownstone (collects local genotype seeds, has monoculture farms) and Hamilton.
- Implementation Teams: RDOC team, maintenance crews, and collaborators like Arkansas Forestry Division, Game & Fish Commission, and Quail Forever Arkansas.

An *example Project*: Hot Springs Bypass

- Opened February 2024, from Benton interchange to Hot Springs.
- Required extensive stream mitigation due to numerous stream crossings, culverts, and bridges.
- Two properties were purchased for stream restoration to generate stream credits.
- Blowout Mountains Mitigation Property: Located west of Hot Springs, near US-270, Mount Ida, and Pencil Bluff (8-9 km west of Mount Ida in the Ouachita Mountains).-
- Blowout Mountain Property & Water Restoration details:
 - Purpose: Property was purchased water restoration activities.
 - Hackberry Creek Restoration: Removed a bridge that "impaled" the main water channel and restored the channel.
 - Tributary Restoration: Removed another bridge and restored the tributary.
- Riparian Buffer Activities: Planted trees in previously open pasture riparian areas and preserved existing riparian forest buffers. All activities contribute to stream mitigation credit calculations. (Riparian refers to the transitional areas alongside freshwater bodies.)
- Tree Planting: Thousands of trees were planted by Superior Forestry (10-12 men, 8-9 hours). Trees were cultivated or purchased from native vendors.
- Pasture Restoration Project (35 Hectares):
 - Location: Two specific areas totaling 35 hectares on the Blowout Mountain property.
 - Initial Condition: Lots of tall fescue, a non-native agricultural plant, and lots of broomsedge, essentially no trees.
 - Goal: Identified as a good location for a tree project.
 - Partnership & Planning: Collaborated with Quail Forever, who developed a habitat management plan detailing herbicide use and prescribed fire timing.

We heard the steps of implementing the Blowout Mountain project. So many interesting details and surprises were part of learning about the environmental work of our Arkansas Department of Transportation. Other projects were shared.

Nicholas shared the history and evolution of this program which originated with work by Lyndon Johnson's wife in the 1980s, supported by FHWA for roadside wildflowers in Texas. Our program has really ramped up in the last 5 years – seen through increased drilling operations, mitigation projects and project applications.

Nicholas brought enthusiasm for the Ecological Importance and Education of this work.

- Ecological Value: Emphasizes proximity and ecology, including nectar, bacteria, animals, and the environment. Agriculture is identified as the "biggest danger for bacteria."

- Educational Programs: Currently limited. No significant public information on the agency's website. Public education includes talks and distributing wildflower brochures in rest areas. Other agencies (Natural Heritage Commission, Game and Fish, Quail Forever) conduct more public education.

We wish Nicholas Dial much success as this important work affects us all.

THE PROJECT PATCH

Advanced Training

Chairs: Karol Zoeller & Juanita Nesbitt

- The 2026 Faulkner County State Master Gardener Conference has a registration of 736
- 614 attended this outstanding event
- There were 81 walk-ins

Planned Trainings

- Arkansas Green Industries Association will hold an training for the AGIA Annual Landscape Day on **Wednesday, August 26, 2026**. Attendees will be members of the AGIA and Master Gardeners.
- **Friday & Saturday, September 25 & 26, 2026** - Advanced MG Class, Garden School Course 4, Hosted by Crittenden Co MG Program. Class held at the Crittenden Co Extension Office, 116 Center St., Marion, AR. One day or two-day registration options. Registration fee is paid by cash or check. Print the registration form and mail it in to the address listed on the registration form. Registration deadline is September 1. No refunds after Sept. 1.
1-day class fee - \$60.00 (Friday or Saturday option.)
2-day class fee - \$80.00 (Both Friday and Saturday)
*Friday class - Six (6) Advanced Training Hours are available for attending the Friday class.
*Saturday class - Four (4) Advanced Training Hours are available for attending the Saturday class. [Registration form and flyer](#)
Credit for advanced training hours are for MGs that have completed their first-year volunteer hour requirements.

Fundraising

Susan Colles, Chair; Sheila Waddell, Co-chair

- State Conference Fundraising Success
2026 State Conference Silent Auction

\$7,240.19 Net proceeds

115 Pots and Plants

- Tool Sales

\$3,193.09 Net proceeds

63 Root Slayers

101 Skidger Wicked Little Weeder

81 Skidger 6" Xtreme Weeder

- PNG Leadership Conference
Saturday, September 19, 2026

There will be Opportunity Tables and Randy's Brunch will support the efforts of our Fundraising Project.



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

Phil McConnell, Chair

Date: September 19, 2026

Location: U of A State Extension Office Auditorium and Training Rooms

Target Attendees:

- Master Gardeners who cannot attend on a weekday
- Online trainees
- New and young members
- Seasoned members in a leadership role

PNG Project Committee Meeting Report

- Project Team Met in June
- Conference Schedule & Speakers Finalized
- Registration Open
- Facilitator List Compiled
- Conference Evaluation Form Developed
- Final Task to Prepare Registration Packets



[Media Relations](#)

Mike Wilbanks, Coordinator

The work on the 2027 Master Gardener Calendar is on-target. Watch for ordering information sent through our State Constant Contact system by Julie Treat. It is clear the high standard Arkansas Master Gardeners have set for our calendars will continue in 2027.

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

Becky Gibson, Chair

Rose Ann Houston, our Co-chair, is taking some time away to handle health needs of her husband, Sam, and herself. Rose Ann brings so much to work of RRR. We miss her and look forward to her return.

State Awards at Faulkner County State MG Conference

This year's awards were presented in a well-organized fashion. The heavy lifting was done by Liz Hale in technical steps. Also, we are glad that Ren Ray, Saline County, is training to support all that must be done for this program. We heard many positive comments about the production this year. Special thanks to Patsy Louk, Kathy Launder and Ren Ray for their logistic success.

Annuals to Perennials

This year's A to P was held on Tuesday, July 7, 2026. We had over 400 participants by Zoom from across the state. Dr. David Creech, Director of Steve F. Austin University Gardens, presented. He was informative and interesting. He shared many years of experiences clearly qualifying him as a horticulturist on the highest level. We had positive responses from many county groups.

Our committee has chosen presenters and dates for recommendations to be given to Randy Forst for our 2027 Annuals to Perennials Zoom session.

RRR and County 76 Recruitment

We have implemented activities to make joining County 76 easier for Arkansas Master Gardeners. We have Membership Applications available at our County 76 meetings and we also had a table at this year's State Conference. We had new members join at the Conference. We decided this is a good thing – and we will keep it going:))

Welcome to County 76



Karen Banks
Austin -Lonoke Co.
Advanced Training Project

Kenneth Barfield
Benton - Saline Co.
RRR Project



Patchez Carson
White Hall – Jefferson Co.
Advanced Training Project

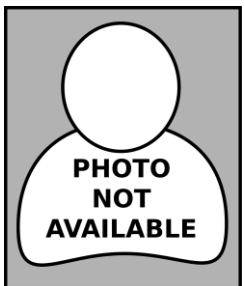


Kelly Chaney
Fayetteville – Washington Co.
Project: TBD

Jessica Daves
Alexander – Saline Co.
Advanced Training Project



Sandra Jackson
Pine Bluff – Jefferson Co.
RRR Project

 Stephanie Lillard Searcy – White Co. <i>RRR Project</i>	Vicki Morgan Mayflower - Pulaski Co. <i>RRR Project</i> 	 Patricia Murray Gillette - Arkansas Co. <i>Fundraising Project</i>
 Donna Overton Conway - Faulkner Co. <i>PNG Project</i>	Jo Sturgill Hot Springs - Garland Co. <i>Advanced Training Project</i> 	 Mary Wormington Texarkana – Miller Co. <i>RRR Project</i>



"It's truly hard to think of anything sad or bad when you are eating a homegrown tomato. . .or squash. . .or okra." ~anon.

Tuesday, October 27, 202, 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!

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