

GARDEN VOICE



COUNTY 76 NEWSLETTER

4th Quarter October 2025

Volume 29, Number 4

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

In this 2025 final edition of the County 76 Garden Voice, I am completing the duty of announcing 'The Best in GROW' award winning nomination. You may be thinking, 'I've never heard of that award'. . and that may be true (because it's newly imagined), but I think you will agree when I present the evidence.

The winner of the Best in GROW award is *Arkansas Master Gardeners*. They began this year with stated objectives: 1) Increase sharing of horticultural information; 2) Develop community horticultural programs; 3) Enhance 4-H programs; and 4) Develop a Master Gardener volunteer network that is administratively self-sufficient. [See [The Arkansas Master Gardener Program Management Guide](#) on our Master Gardeners Only webpage.] And they have seen many successes in every area.



Giving generously to others. Master Gardeners give time, knowledge and funds, and MG giving makes it possible to increase our giving every year. Did you know that four (4) County Sanctioned Projects received scholarships in 2025? Also, four (4) Arkansas High School seniors who are majoring in a plant-related field at an Arkansas College or University received scholarships.



Remaining resilient and responsible. When you are faced with change or loss, being able to go on is one key to success. As Master Gardeners, we have experienced changes in plans and resources. We have experienced loss in the passing of dear members. When faced with change, Master Gardeners step-in and step-up and get it done:)



Organizing with an optimistic outlook. Even if you search, I don't think you could find another group that is this large (around 4,000 statewide) and this talented. Do you think Master Gardeners are only good at digging holes and watering plants? That would be incorrect. You will find so many accomplished professionals among us, you will be amazed. We have members who are engineers, architects, chemists, teachers/professors, CPAs and many more. No wonder we get so many things done and make such a difference in our communities.



Welcoming and wise. Master Gardeners have room for all sorts of growers. Those who have grown up in the agricultural community and those who have not. Those who are young and those who are not. Those from the 'big' city and those from the rural regions. When someone is fortunate enough to become part of

Arkansas Master Gardeners, s/he will find all sorts of practical ideas. You can learn about everything 'plant' from the tiniest seeds to the giant trees. . . .and talk about getting something when you give something. What have plants done for you this year? It's more every year, isn't it?

So now that we agree about the Best in GROW winner, please allow me to write a word of special appreciation to the Master Gardeners who are members of our County 76 group. To say you are hard-working, dedicated, and a ray of sunshine to our programs is just the beginning. You are all that and so much more. I wish there was space to write it all.

As we enter 2026, I look forward to all that will come with working together. We have an excellent Executive Board and outstanding State Leaders. We will have wonderful experiences – the kind that makes us so proud to be Arkansas Master Gardeners.

Best wishes for your continued growing success!

Becky Gibson
President



MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

~Business~

- Becky Gibson called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Everyone was welcomed and the day's agenda was presented.
- With one correction, the minutes from July 22, 2025, County 76 General Meeting will be filed. Paragraph two (2) states 'the minutes of July 22' which will be corrected to 'the minutes of April 22'.
- Gail McClure, Treasurer, reported on the 2025 County 76 Budget to date. Gail briefly went over the 3rd Quarter (July, August, September 2025) and Year-to-date budget line items. Our CES C76 income for the 3rd Quarter is \$16,351.00 and expenses total (\$16,963.97), resulting in a deficit of (\$612.97). The Year-to-date income is \$28,246.75 and expenses total (\$52,226.08), creating a deficit of (\$23,909.33). Our account balance at the end of the 3rd quarter is \$97,444.02.
- Becky shared that the nominating committee for the 2026 Executive Board was Becky Gibson, Don Casteel, and Rose Ann Houston. Becky presented the slate of nominations for our 2026 Executive Board. A motion to accept the slate of officers presented was made by Leisa Stotts and seconded by Hilde Simmons. Members unanimously approved.

County 76 Executive Board - 2026

President	Don Casteel (Benton Co.)
1st Vice President	Kathy Launder (Washington Co.)
2nd Vice President	Rose Ann Houston (White Co. & Independence Co.)
Secretary	Diann Arington (Garland Co.)
Treasurer	Barbara Nivens (Clark Co.)
Assistant Treasurer	Debbie Atchison (Faulkner Co. & Garland Co.)
Past President	Becky Gibson (Pulaski Co.)
Member-at-Large (Board Appointed)	Ren Ray (Saline Co.)
Member-at-Large (Board Appointed)	James Lamb (Hempstead Co. & Red Dirt MG)

- Following the Budget Report, Becky shared a Thank You note to County 76 from Ms. Kassidy Clark. Kassidy is one of the recipients of the 2025 Janet B. Carson High School Senior Scholarship. She is from Searcy County and is attending Arkansas Tech University with a major in Agriculture Education. Kassidy's note was most thoughtful. She shared her appreciation for the scholarship and told how it helped with her tuition. Kassidy is one of the reasons Master Gardeners are dedicated to supporting young people who are the future of the world of growers. We wish her success.
- Randy Forst, Arkansas Consumer Horticulture/Master Gardener Coordinator, shared what he has accomplished since our last meeting.

Consumer Horticulture Programs

- Horticulture Faculty Meetings (3)
- Agents MG101 Training – LRSO
- AG In-service Training Meetings (2)
- Agent Pruning Plan In-service
- Consumer Vegetable Curriculum Planning Meeting
- Village Pine Garden Club
- What's Up Wednesday – Horticulture Agent Update (3)
- Agent Mentor Meeting with Garland County Agent, Daniel Lam

County Horticulture Master Gardener Presentations

- PNG Planning Meeting (2)
- Master Gardener Appreciation Planning Meetings – Hope (2)

- MG Appreciation Planning Meeting – Garvan Woodland Gardens
- Arkansas County Advanced Training
- White County Wrap-up State Conference Meeting
- Faulkner County State Conference Planning Meetings (3)
- Ouachita County Ornamental Grass Program
- Master Gardener Monday Zoom Meetings (3)
- Master Gardener International Conference (3 days)
- Master Gardener Appreciation Day – Hope
- Crittenden County Program
- Crittenden County Advanced Training – 1 day
- Pulaski County Advanced Training
- Greene County State Conference Planning Meeting
- PNG Leadership Conference (2 days)
- Garland County Advanced Training
- St. Francis County Garden Fall event
- Master Gardener Fall Zoom Training
- Carroll County Program Meeting
- Arkansas County 30th Birthday Event

Randy reminded us that the 2026 Master Gardener Conference, *Gardening for Good*, will be held in Faulkner County on June 2– 4, 2026.

This year's Master Gardener Training, including the Fall Online, Self-paced training and the Fall Zoom Training (classroom setting), has 401 candidates in training in 24 counties.

~Education*

Susan Colles introduced the County Sanctioned Project scholarship winners representing the counties receiving the scholarships. Each project received up to a \$1000 scholarship.

Come Garden with Carroll County, Cynthia Osborne shared that their project is a raised bed project growing vegetables for a local food bank, Loaves and Fishes. This year they had 120 hours logged by Master Gardeners working this project. They provided 100 pounds of vegetables for the food bank.

Arkansas Heritage Garden (Drew County) Sharon Silzell shared their project is at the Monticello Sports Complex. The garden is composed of raised beds and walking paths intertwined with histories of Native Americans, settlers and African free and enslaved populations. They have a medicinal herb garden and a Native American vegetable garden in raised beds. Their goal is to provide educational opportunities, raise awareness and raise profile for the Master Gardener community. They offer self-guided tours using signs with QR codes.

Watson Primary School Garden (Madison County) Susan Watkins shared their project as a raised bed project at the school. They work with the students during the school year and they have a summer program. The beds were made by using skid steer tracks donated by the Kubota dealer. They are self-watering beds and are lined with heavy

duty 8 mil plastic. They added a layer of stones and inserted a small PVC pipe at the top of stones for drainage with landscape fabric on top of stones and the garden soil on top with a larger PVC pipe in the center of the bed for watering.

Lincoln Community Garden (Washington County) Jim Sposato stated this project is a greenhouse for vegetable growing by 7th grade students. The JBC scholarship money was used for solar panels for the greenhouse. The goal is for the students to grow and eat more fresh vegetables and to donate vegetables to local food banks and senior centers.

THE PROJECT PATCH*

County 76 2026 Project Leaders

Advanced Training Chair: Juanita Nesbitt (Pulaski Co.) Co-chair: Karol Zoeller (Pulaski Co.)	Fundraising Chair: Susan Colles (Pope Co.) Co-chair: Sheila Waddell (Jefferson Co.)
Plant, Nurture, Grow Chair: Phil McConnell (Saline Co.) Co-chair: Harold Abbey (Pulaski Co.)	Recruitment, Retention, Recognition Chair: Rose Ann Houston (White & Independence Co.) Co-chair: Becky Gibson (Pulaski Co.)

Recruitment, Retention, Recognition [RRR]

Don Casteel, Chair

Don shared that 76 nominations from 19 counties have been received for state awards. He reminded us that for 2026 there will be one award per category with no large/small county divisions. He also shared that RRR presented 5 breakout sessions at PNG conference. They are working on speaker recommendations for A to P in June or July 2026.

Advanced Training

Joellen Beard, Chair; Valerie Smith, Co-chair

JoEllen informed the membership the 2026 chairs will be Juanita Nesbitt and Karol Zoeller, both from Pulaski County. She shared that there will be 6 hours of Advanced Training offered at the State Conference. She encouraged all counties to consider hosting an Advanced Training class in 2026.

Fundraising

Susan Colles, Chair; Sheila Waddell, Co-chair

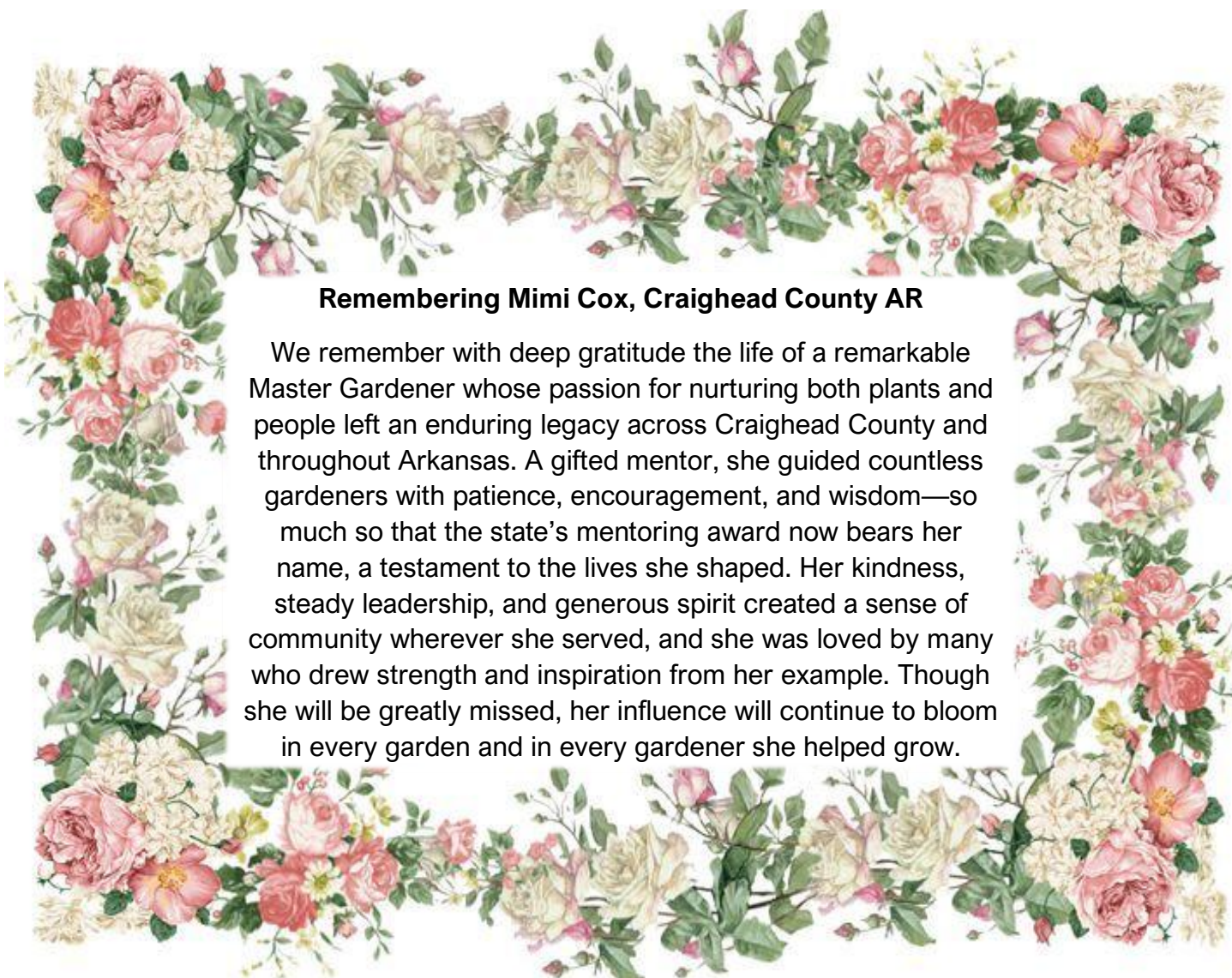
Susan shared funds earned at the PNG conference was estimated to be \$1800 at the opportunity tables, \$1400 was earned for Randy's Barn Brunch, and \$424 for Root Slayer sales. Fundraising at the State conference will include Root Slayer tool orders, Silent Auction items and decorated "Sassy MG" planters.

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

Phil McConnell, Chair

Phil shared there were 175 attendees at PNG conference. There were many positive comments on the speakers and overall conference on the evaluations. The Hat Parade was a fun and successful time with approximately 20 participating. The 2026 PNG Leadership Conference will be Saturday, September 19 at the State Extension Office in Little Rock. The number of attendees will be the number of attendees accommodated by the facility.

**A special thanks to our Secretary, Diann Arington (Garland Co.), for providing the write-ups of our presenters and project reports for this newsletter.*



Remembering Mimi Cox, Craighead County AR

We remember with deep gratitude the life of a remarkable Master Gardener whose passion for nurturing both plants and people left an enduring legacy across Craighead County and throughout Arkansas. A gifted mentor, she guided countless gardeners with patience, encouragement, and wisdom—so much so that the state's mentoring award now bears her name, a testament to the lives she shaped. Her kindness, steady leadership, and generous spirit created a sense of community wherever she served, and she was loved by many who drew strength and inspiration from her example. Though she will be greatly missed, her influence will continue to bloom in every garden and in every gardener she helped grow.

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Some Pictures . . .



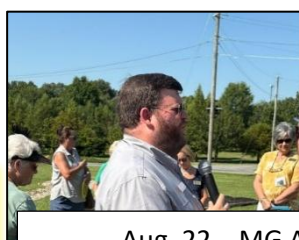
Ren Ray
Saline Co.
Advanced Training
Project



Oct. 11 – Forst Barn Brunch
Ratcliff AR



Oct. 17– Randy
& Broadleaf
Evergreens
Garland Co. AT



Aug. 22 – MG Appreciation
UA Southwest Research & Extension



Sept. 18 – Advanced Training
Our 1st Level 5 MG
Melody Parsley (Pulaski Co.)



June 5-7
MG State
Conference
White Co.



Oct. 1&2
PNG Conference

Thursday, January 29, 2026, 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!



Aug. 1 – Seeds
AT Presenters
Grand Prairie
Center
Stuttgart,
Arkansas Co.

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