

# THE COLONIAL MASTER GARDENER

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Celebrating 42 Years of Helping our  
Neighbors Grow!

*A publication of the  
James City County Williamsburg Master Gardener Association*

**FEBRUARY 2025**

## 2025 JCCW MGA BOARD

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VCE ANR Agent  
Luke Gladden  
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PLEASE NOTE: Our Board meets on the 3rd Friday of each month at 9:30 a.m. in Room B in person at the Williamsburg Regional Library on Scotland Street and via Zoom. All members of the JCCWMGA are welcome to attend.

ZOOM Information for the Board Meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87435548954?pwd=iunWkENTgVHUCsxRGKioJUovii0AA1.1>  
Meeting ID: 874 3554 8954  
Passcode: 23185

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## COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

Project Leaders: Marion Guthrie & Wayne Koenig

Newsletter Editor: Marion Guthrie

Blog Director: Elizabeth McCoy

Social Media Manager: Linda Becker

Social Media Reporters:  
Crystal Skeeter-Davis, Emily Coyner, Jay Templin, Michele Garrard

Video Producer: Crystal Skeeter-Davis

Webmasters: Dave Banks & Wayne Koenig

Writers: Judy Kinshaw-Ellis, Beverly Davis, Elizabeth McCoy, Michele Garrard

**The submission deadline for the upcoming March 2025 newsletter is February 17.**

Send your submissions to our editor, Marion Guthrie, at [vp-communications@jccwmg.org](mailto:vp-communications@jccwmg.org) and copy our vice president of projects, Gary Griffith, at [vp-projects@jccwmg.org](mailto:vp-projects@jccwmg.org).

The newsletter layout is graciously donated by [Odd Moxie](#).



The James City County Williamsburg Master Gardener Association is a volunteer-driven non-profit that supports the outreach mission of the Virginia Cooperative Extension by utilizing research-based information to educate the public on the best practices in sustainable horticulture and environmental stewardship in our communities, which include Williamsburg, James City, Charles City, Upper York, and New Kent counties.



Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.



# President's Message

DAVE KLEPPINGER '16

When I first became a Master Gardener, I could not help but be impressed with the knowledge and expertise of the seasoned Master Gardeners all wearing the identical Master Gardening badge which had just been issued to me. Their impressive capabilities were in full display on home visits when these Master Gardeners effortlessly demonstrated their depth of knowledge on anything and everything from native plants, pathogens, right place, plant biology, remedial treatments, and so on and so on and so forth. Quite frankly, it left me feeling humbled and insecure.

I've learned a great deal since those early days primarily through osmosis. The opportunity to volunteer alongside my learned peers has made me a more effective and confident Master Gardener. But there are times when I need to know something and am trying to remember whom among my peers spoke so knowledgeably to that homeowner several years ago, about the difference between aphids, scale, whiteflies and mealybugs and the characteristics of their damaging effects to plants.

What I'd like to do this year is to create a roster of subject matter experts. We'll soon be talking to project leaders about subject matters that are important for their Master Gardener volunteers to possess in order to improve the success of the projects they lead. We will also ask all Master Gardeners to indicate what subject matters they self identify as expert or have a strong interest in becoming an expert.

More on how we'll use the Subject Matter Expert Roster next month.

WE'RE ALL  
SUBJECT  
MATTER  
EXPERTS



# Our 2025 Leadership Team

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## ELIZABETH MCCOY '18

Our new leadership team took office in January, with a combined 81 years of Master Gardening experience to guide them in leading our organization this year. Most have been gardening since childhood and bring tremendous knowledge and practical experience to their work as Master Gardeners.

## Dave Kleppinger, '16, President

[president@jccwmg.org](mailto:president@jccwmg.org)

I have been a Master Gardener since 2016 and Tree Steward since 2023. I also serve on the Ford's Colony Roads and Project Maintenance Committee and gain insights from its Landscape Design Subcommittee and Landscape staff.

I have loved gardening since I gardened and landscaped as a kid growing up in the Garden State. I became a Master Gardener because I've enjoyed landscaping and landscape design my entire adult life. I studied commercial landscape design in graduate school, which opened my eyes to how plant material can meaningfully impact the physical and visible environment. As a result, I've always enjoyed identifying optimal right plant - right place options.

Highlights of my service as a Master Gardener include interfacing with the public both on home visits and while leading CW Arboretum tours. I am most proud of the opportunity I've had to work with a team of talented Master Gardener Tree Stewards creating and growing the CW Arboretum. And what I've learned on this project enabled me to lead a team of Tree Stewards to create the accredited Ford's Colony Arboretum.

I also enjoy helping homeowners overcome the issues they have with their lawns and landscaping. For decades I struggled with having something better than the worst looking lawn on the street.

Please get to know these outstanding individuals who have stepped up to positions of leadership this year. You may learn a few new things about old friends and colleagues from their interviews. Many hands make light work, and our leadership team will need every member's support and assistance to make 2025 an outstanding year of service to our greater community.

This motivated me to understand how best to cultivate a healthy crop of turf while minimizing adverse environmental impacts. Today I'm the lead "Lawn Ranger," although my own lawn is just 1000 square feet.

Beyond gardening: I grew up in the Delaware Valley so I'm an avid Philadelphia sports fan. Go Birds! I enjoy golfing with friends, doing genealogical research, traveling the world with Fran and participating in service projects with my Rotary club. I also like to escape inside historical fiction set in medieval times. Despite having lived in Virginia since 1980, I'm still a wisecracking, cheese steak eating Philly street corner guy.

My goals for 2025 as an MGA officer are to optimize every EMG's experience as a VCE volunteer by improving the quality of our projects.

## Anne Hunt '23, President Elect

[presidenelect@jccwmg.org](mailto:presidenelect@jccwmg.org)

I grew up in Williamsburg and loved gardening alongside my grandparents from a very early age. I learned the proper digging of a hole, the time of year to prune, and the joy of sitting back at day's end looking out on nature in its glory.

As an adult, I gardened in Virginia and later in Tucson, Arizona, where I became a Master Gardener in 2015. This attainment fulfilled a dream I had nurtured for decades. I love the learning associated with the Master Gardener Programs, the camaraderie with fellow MGs, and, most importantly, the wide variety of outreach and education programs designed to help and inspire people to garden for their health and the planet's health.

Like all of my fellow MG's, I bring a lifetime of experiences to our organization. I'm a proud graduate of Lafayette High School and Longwood University (BA, MA English). From there, I enjoyed a 30-year career in Marketing. As an older adult, I returned to school and earned an associate's degree in interior design (another dream fulfilled). I am an avid reader, writer of short stories, dabbler in poetry, gardener (of course), and, importantly, a lover of a good jigsaw puzzle.

I love applying my organizational, technical, and creative skills to projects that are big and small. My proudest (and most fun) project with the Tucson MG Program was taking our in-person Plant Clinic online during the pandemic. We were able to help thousands of residents with their gardening questions and challenges while simultaneously capturing all of the data for research purposes. Very importantly, our team worked together to build an online Plant Clinic program that continues today.

I look forward to getting to know each and every JCCW Master Gardener in the coming years. It is important to me to accomplish our mission as an educational gardening program so that we as a group are strengthened just as we help strengthen our community.



## Vickie Rockwell, '19, Past President

[pastpresident@jccwmg.org](mailto:pastpresident@jccwmg.org)

A Master Gardener since 2019, I have loved gardening since childhood. My grandparents always had a space in their gardens for me to plant lettuce, carrots, and radishes.

I became a Master Gardener to be part of the community and share my love of gardening. I want to be up-to-date and knowledgeable regarding the latest information and trends for the garden.

My favorite projects and proudest accomplishments: I really have enjoyed all the projects that I have worked on: Waterwise, The Colonial Williamsburg gardens, WBG, ARC, and Jamestown. The camaraderie of working with our Master Gardeners makes the work fun and the results beautify the environment.

Beyond gardening, my special interests include working with my professional society, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, to foster STEM education and reading. My professional background is board and organizational governance, and I worked for the City of Houston Tax Incremental Reinvestment Zone 1.



## Dot Finnegan, '20 VP Administration

[vp-admin@jccwmg.org](mailto:vp-admin@jccwmg.org)

I have been a Master Gardener since 2020. I'm also a member of The World Wildlife Foundation, Doctors Without Borders, and The Cornell Ornithology Lab, participating in its annual Feeder Watch.

I have loved gardening since I began digging weeds at home when I was 7 years old. I became a Master Gardener to gain more of an understanding of gardening, especially the plants in my garden as well as what might also flourish there. I also wanted to gain knowledge that might assist neighbors through my volunteering with various projects.

My favorite project is the plant sale. I have enjoyed helping with organizing, sharing plants, and assisting with the sale. It publicizes our endeavors and brings joy to so many folks in our area, while also financially supporting our other projects. One of the things that I appreciate about our unit is that members may contribute in a variety of ways according to their own interests and abilities, without judgment.

My goals for 2025 and beyond include:

- To continue to engage in the pruning clinic and the plant sale.
- To document our meetings as well as participate in the stewardship of the organization.
- To continue to send cards to members who are sick or who have lost loved ones.
- To communicate our endeavors to the public through local media.

Beyond gardening, I taught the history of higher education and have knowledge of the land-grant movement out of which came the Extension Service. I am interested in continuing my academic research. I enjoy The Cornell Ornithology Lab and its annual Feeder Watch, reading, and playing pool with friends.





## Gary Griffith, '14, VP Projects

[vp-projects@jccwmga.org](mailto:vp-projects@jccwmga.org)

I became a Master Gardener in 2014 in Manhattan, Kansas and later transferred to our association, JCCWMGA, in 2022. I have loved gardening since working in my father's nursery and growing vegetables when I was a kid. My interest is in biology, especially botany. I love the beauty, variety, and complexity of plants and their importance in our lives.

Highlights of my service as a Master Gardener include working with the elementary school students at Clara Byrd Baker in the school garden, seeing their delight at being in the garden and with growing veggies. My favorite projects and proudest accomplishments are restarting the garden club and rebuilding the garden at Clara Byrd Baker after it was closed down during Covid.

My goals for 2025 as an MGA officer include:

- To continue administrative support for the projects.
- To help Project Leaders where needed.
- To begin implementing relevant recommendations that have been made with the 2024 surveys.

Beyond gardening, I have a degree in biochemistry and 11 years of professional laboratory experience in soil testing. I taught Microbiology in Malaysia before returning to Kansas State University for thirty years of professional service in lab management and research. My wife of 48 years and I moved to the Williamsburg area in 2019. I enjoy helping and encouraging others, creative wood projects, household repairs, playing the guitar, and Bible study.



## Crystal Skeeter-Davis, '23, VP Internal Education

[vp-internal-ed@jccwmg.org](mailto:vp-internal-ed@jccwmg.org)

I have loved gardening since I was a little girl. My grandparents grew up in farm families. I gardened each summer with them and have beautiful childhood memories of their vegetable gardens. I'll never forget eating tomatoes and grapes off the vine, riding on my grandpa's tractor, and watching my grandmother trade flowers with family and neighbors.

I became a Master Gardener because I enjoy spending time with friends who enjoy growing. I also wanted to improve my skills and encourage others to try gardening. My favorite projects: I enjoy the "communication garden." As a communications team member, I feel like I work with all the gardens. It's an honor to help projects educate the public and share their beautiful gardens with other MGs and our community.

My goals for 2025 and beyond include: My goal is to bring meaningful education programs to the membership and to the public. I also want to visit each project and help them share what is special about their project with our friends and neighbors. I want to share the love of gardening with the public and encourage young people to plant something, even if it is just a little pot on a windowsill.

Beyond gardening, I'm married to the love of my life and the mother of a son and daughter. I've been privileged to serve as the Director of multiple victim services programs. I was responsible for coordinating crisis response in collaboration with law enforcement, military advocates, and medical personnel across the peninsula and for providing supportive services to victims of violence. After over 20 years of public service, my husband and I established Parenting SCIL. Our business provides dispute resolution services and parent education for Juvenile & Domestic Relation courts across the 9th judicial district. I enjoy crafting, reading, and learning about holistic wellness in my free time.



## Marion Guthrie, '19, VP of Communications

[vp-communications@jccwmg.org](mailto:vp-communications@jccwmg.org)

I have been a Master Gardener since 2019 and Tree Steward since 2020. I developed an interest in gardening as a child while working with my Dad in the family garden. The decision to become a Master Gardener was driven by my wish to improve my gardening knowledge and skills, as well as to form new social connections after retiring to Williamsburg. Notable experiences include acquiring my Master Gardener certification and receiving approval from the Board to establish and oversee the Communications Team.

Of a myriad of favorite projects, my proudest accomplishments are the formation and the work of the Communications Team. We manage our Association's communications to over 200 members as well as disseminating gardening education to the public in the greater Williamsburg area. The team creates and distributes content through our monthly newsletter, on Better Impact, and on our website ([jccwmg.org](http://jccwmg.org)) which includes original blog posts, and regular social media posts. We also handle the creation and distribution of YouTube videos, Association news releases, and publicity for special events.

My goals for 2025 as an MGA officer are to continue to improve the delivery of gardening information and educate the greater Williamsburg gardening public about best practices in sustainable horticulture and environmental stewardship.

Beyond gardening, I'm interested in entomology, recycling, and climate change. I had a great business career in marketing and sales holding senior executive posts primarily for financial services companies while raising my three daughters before retiring to Williamsburg where I enjoy my grandsons, my friends, and being a Master Gardener.



## Wayne Koenig, Secretary '24

[secretary@jccwmg.org](mailto:secretary@jccwmg.org)

I have loved gardening since childhood growing up on a farm in the Texas Panhandle, where we and our neighbors grew our own vegetables and fruits. Now, my particular interest is in landscape and flower gardening.

My favorite projects and proudest accomplishments: I enjoy volunteering on the Communications Committee and working with all the great master gardener volunteers associated with it. I have enjoyed the technical and mental challenge of learning how to administer the JCCWMG website and all the other aspects of our social media platforms.

I also enjoy volunteering at the Brickyard Landing Riparian Buffer Garden because it is a new and growing project. It's fun to be involved in establishing a new garden, planting new plants, and watching them grow while knowing what they will eventually grow into.

My goals for 2025 as an MGA officer include: To continue to be involved in and learn about our Association's mission and projects because there is so much to learn and do. To continue to work within the organization to provide our master gardeners with social media tools and platforms to communicate with each other and with our gardening public.

Beyond gardening: I enjoy woodworking and working around my house and garden. I am enjoying my retirement from working with training and education program requirements for the Army by doing things I enjoy and having fun doing them.

photo courtesy of Marion Guthrie



## Linda Neilson, '18 Treasurer

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Since becoming a Master Gardener in 2018, I have cultivated a lifelong passion for gardening, inspired by the beautiful gardens my mother maintained during my childhood. My mother had such a “green thumb” that she could make anything grow.

I became a Master Gardener to gain knowledge and work with people who enjoy gardening. Highlights of my service as a Master Gardener include volunteering in the Water Wise Garden activities and plant sales over the years.

My favorite projects are Landscape Love, Turf Love, Therapeutic Gardening, and the Water Wise Demonstration Garden. As a Master Gardener, I'm especially interested in native plant species and the history of specific plant groups. I'm looking forward to contributing to our local efforts to promote biodiversity and native plants in home gardens.

My goals for 2025 as an MGA officer include finding ways to streamline the budget and requisition processes.

Beyond gardening, I enjoy reading, golfing, genealogy, and digging into British history from Alfred the Great to King Charles III. My professional background is in information technology along with expertise in Microsoft products used for budgeting and cash flow processes. This experience helps in my role as Treasurer.



## Marilyn Riddle, '01, VMGA Representative

[Vmga-rep@jccwmg.org](mailto:Vmga-rep@jccwmg.org)

I have loved gardening since watching my mother and paternal grandfather garden and then eating those delicious veggies that they grew! My mother and both grandfathers maintained their vegetable gardens as a point of pride in their small Southern towns, and they used them to reduce the food bills in all three households. Today, I continue that interest by knowing where the best farmer's markets are located within a 50-mile radius of home.

I became a Master Gardener because I wanted to expand on the knowledge that I acquired watching and helping my mother work in our family vegetable garden of my youth. My favorite projects and proudest accomplishments include working in the initial horticultural therapy program at The Williamsburg Landing while I was an intern, under the guidance of Dr. Diane Relf, the first MG coordinator for Virginia. Barbara Gustafson ably assisted her. We won a national award as a result.

I also enjoyed the Orr Garden, when it was the Reid Garden at Colonial Williamsburg, both as a worker and as the project coordinator. I served as chair of two CW Gardens for three years. I prepared and conducted a tour there for USDA officials who were conferencing at the Williamsburg Inn, with one day's notice. Their questions, during the tour and through emails afterward, were lessons I used going forward with that project.

In the last few years, I have enjoyed serving as the VMGA representative. It has also been a very educational experience as well as a social one. My goals for 2025 as an MGA officer include increasing the membership of VMGA by continuing to tell the story of that group's impact on state issues. The VMGA has sponsored some particularly successful programs.

Beyond gardening, I am the proud mother of two sons, both Virginia Tech graduates, and one daughter, a UVA graduate. I am a retired high school math teacher and an advocate for public

education. I am a member of both the VEA-R and NEA-R. I am involved at all three levels as a state leader in DKG and a past state president in this women teacher's honorary organization, where I continue in an advisory role.

As a member of P.E.O., I chair an interview team that seeks doctoral candidates for our national scholarships. We have been successful twice in the last four years and await results again in this competition. I am also a state officer in NARFE (active and retired federal employees) which includes being a liaison to Congressman Wittman from the state board of NARFE. We are the only advocate organization for this group. I am a regular advocate for JCCWMGA to VMGA, and I serve as Early Greeter Chair at Williamsburg UMC.



## Luke Gladden, '24, VCE ANR Agent

[vceagent@jccwmg.org](mailto:vceagent@jccwmg.org), or [luke03@vt.edu](mailto:luke03@vt.edu)

I have recently been appointed Extension Director for the Colonial Water and Soil Conservation District, and I have worked with the JCCW Master Gardeners since 2024.

My love of gardening is a byproduct of my love for nature, and I have long had an interest in horticulture. My mother is an avid gardener, and that exposure helped introduce me to the plant world. I enjoyed several horticulture and plant-based courses in college that deepened my interest in horticulture, especially plant nutrition and disease diagnosis.

My goals for 2025 as the VCE agent include becoming more involved and knowledgeable about the numerous projects that the Master Gardeners undertake. I wish to provide assistance to the MGA Board and to the group as a whole. I am excited to work with you all and get to know you better!

Beyond gardening, Literature is a passion of mine and I love to read. I have a bachelor's degree in environmental science with a focus in Entomology. Entomology is my special interest, and I can be a little bit of a nerd about insects. I have done research on the impact of trash on local waterways, eco-anxiety, and fertilizer nutrient impact on plants.

Since I majored in Environmental Science in college, a variety of topics related to sustainability, renewable energy, and water are of interest to me. Music has also been a large part of my life, both listening to it and playing instruments myself. I can play the trumpet, mellophone, French horn, and piano.



# Master Gardener Meeting Programs

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## Edible Landscaping with Les Parks

Are you searching for a sustainable and rewarding approach to gardening that blends beauty with functionality? Edible Landscaping may be your solution. Find out! You're invited on February 6, 2025, at 9 a.m., to the Williamsburg Regional Library when Les Parks, the Director of Horticulture at Norfolk Botanical Garden, will share his many years of experience in transforming outdoor spaces by incorporating plants that provide food, including fruits, vegetables, herbs, and edible flowers, into the garden design.

This Master Gardener presentation is, as always, right before our business meeting; it's free, counts towards your Continuing Education (CE) hours, and you can bring a friend. Although it's better in person, you can also log in to Zoom and click on Join a Meeting. Enter your Meeting ID and click "Join". Here is the Zoom link and meeting ID: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82108796113?pwd=3X7YO9ErCRcHj17dC2hmvSram4Yg79.1>  
Meeting ID: 821 0879 6113, Passcode: 23185.

## Working with Children

Isaiah Morton, the James City County 4-H Agent, will present Working with Children on Thursday, March 6, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. in the Williamsburg Regional Library. In order to remain certified Master Gardeners are required to take this training session every 3 years, and our new 2025 interns need to complete the training as well.

Our speaker, Isaiah, is a graduate of Randolph-Macon College and the Associate 4-H Extension Agent for James City County with Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE). With over a decade of involvement in 4-H, he has a lot of experience working with youth. In 2021, he was hired by the Jamestown 4-H Educational Center and was part of the summer staff in both 2021 and 2023. In 2022, he served as the emergency hire/camp coordinator for the City of Richmond, further reinforcing his passion for empowering youth and fostering essential life skills. As the James City County 4-H Agent, Isaiah Morton will share best practices in youth leadership drawing inspiration from the agents and 4-H staff who guided him throughout his journey.

This session is best seen in person so members and interns can sign in to confirm they have attended. Those on Zoom must sign in via chat and watch the entire session to verify their attendance. Our VP of Administration, Dot Finnegan, ([vp-admin@jccwmg.org](mailto:vp-admin@jccwmg.org)) will update the Better Impact credentials for everyone who attends. Please join us to meet and greet our new interns and get a refresher in this must-have training session presented by Isaiah Morton.

Although better in person you can join via Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82108796113?pwd=3X7YO9ErCRcHj17dC2hmvSram4Yg79.1>  
Meeting ID: 821 0879 6113  
Passcode: 23185



# Business Notes

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## NEW DAY FOR BOARD MEETINGS

Our monthly Board Meeting has changed from the third Thursday of the month to the third Friday of the month. We still have Room B reserved at the Library, but on Fridays now. Also, our Board Meetings will be on Zoom as well. Here is the Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87435548954?pwd=iunWkENTgVHUCsxRGKioJUovii0AA1.1> Meeting ID: 874 3554 8954, Passcode: 23185.

## CIVIL RIGHTS AND RISK MANAGEMENT TRAINING

In order to be compliant, VCE now requires us to watch the Civil Rights Training video every year. The Risk Management training video only every three years. If you have not watched the Civil Rights Training video recently, please do. Please check the date for your viewing of the Risk Management video and if need be watch it. Dot Finnegan, our VP of Administration ([vp-admin@jccwmg.org](mailto:vp-admin@jccwmg.org)) will update your Re-enrollment date to the end of this year once you have completed this (or these) task(s).

To access the videos:

1. Log into BI
2. Go to Profile
3. Go to Training
4. Civil Rights Training Video

## OUTDOOR EDUCATORS WANTED

James City County Parks and Recreation is searching for outdoor educators, and our own Judy Kinshaw-Ellis thought you might know of likely candidates. These are usually intermittent/on-call positions. This is the kind of position Judy has with the county, and she generally works once a month. However, Parks and Recreation is adding some programs for elementary school groups, and they may increase other activities. If you know of anyone who might be interested in this type of position, please pass along this link.

<https://careers.jamescitycountyva.gov/jobs/instructor-i-ii-iii-outdoors-williamsburg-virginia-unit-ed-states>

## HAVE YOU PAID YOUR DUES?

2024 membership dues were due at year-end 2024. If you haven't paid them yet, here's what to do. Your dues are \$25.00, and payment options are online by check and credit card. If paying by check, make it out to JCCWMGA, and note "2024 Dues" on the check. Then mail it to JCCWMGA, PO Box 1951, Williamsburg, VA 23187-1951. Pay easily online at [jccwmg.org](http://jccwmg.org). Questions? Contact Linda Neilson, our Treasurer, at [lezelln@cox.net](mailto:lezelln@cox.net).

## JOIN THE COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG GARDENS AND TOURS

It will be spring before you know it, and the Colonial Williamsburg Demonstration Gardens and Public Tours project will be back in the Catherine Orr Garden, the Shields Tavern Garden, and the Governor's Palace Herb Garden. We're always delighted to have new people join us, and old friends rejoin us. If you want to be included for the next gardening year, contact Barbara Floyd ([bmfloyd57@gmail.com](mailto:bmfloyd57@gmail.com)).

## LANDSCAPE LOVE IS COMING SOON!

Preparations are underway for the upcoming Landscape Love season. We will begin accepting homeowner applications on March 10, and visits will begin in April. Last year's volunteers will hear from us soon about their intent to return for the new season. Training information will follow shortly after that. If you are interested in being a new volunteer, contact Barbara Floyd at [bmfloyd57@gmail.com](mailto:bmfloyd57@gmail.com). We're always happy to have new volunteers! Join us!

## VCE EMG INTRANET

Here is a useful web link for the VCE EMG INTRANET, which has both policy and information on Extension Master Gardeners Programs. Check it out: <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/master-gardeners/>

## CONTINUING EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES ON BI

There are several exciting CE opportunities coming up over the next several months. The CE Bulletin provides training titles, dates and links for additional information and registration. What is the best way to check on the latest CE Opportunities? Click on the CE Opportunities Bulletin under “Association Quick Links” or the “Files/Document” portal on Better Impact/My Impact. You will find the most up-to-date version of the document. If you have questions or need information, please email Crystal Skeeter-Davis at [vp-internal-ed@jccwmg.org](mailto:vp-internal-ed@jccwmg.org).

## VIRGINIA MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION (VMGA)

The next meeting of the [VMGA](#) is on Sat, Feb 8, and starts at 10:00 a.m. The meeting is approximately 1 ½ hours. It is offered on Zoom only. It's easy to join just click on this link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87665116059?pwd=f2VI6owFR5Xd6mx-AMP142rUlfO0cop.1>

Here is the meeting ID, 876 6511 6059, and Passcode, 589396. For more information contact Marilyn Riddle, [vmga-rep@jccwmg.org](mailto:vmga-rep@jccwmg.org).



# Congratulations, Class of 2024!

## MARION GUTHRIE '19

The James City County Williamsburg Master Gardener Association (JCCWMGA) celebrated the graduation of the 2024 class of Master Gardeners on Thursday, December 5, in the Williamsburg Regional Library's Auditorium. Dave Kleppinger, the Association's 2025 president-elect, introduced our speaker, Janet Spencer, the Southeast District Director of the Virginia Cooperative Extension. Janet has been with the VCE since 2005, and she has served as our interim coordinator since 2017.

After congratulating the graduates, Janet discussed the addition of several key individuals over the past year to the VCE and how we all benefit from this influx of leadership which strengthens Virginia Cooperation Extension. This includes Ed Olsen, Extension Specialist who oversees the state extension Master Gardener program; Grace Stern, State Master Gardener Coordinator assisting Ed; Devon Johnson, Communications and Media Coordinator; Dean Mario Ferruzzi, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences; Dr. Mike Gutter, Associate Dean and Director for VCE; and our new Extension Agent, Luke Gladden.

Janet also shared accomplishments of the state MG program and of our own program:

- From the 2023 Report for the State MG units:
  - 62 MG chapters
  - 4,900+ volunteers
  - >800,000 contacts
  - 480,000 hours of service
  - \$14.6M economic contribution to the state
- From our own extension, JCCWMGA, in 2024:
  - 26 projects
  - 28,000 contacts
  - >15,000 hours
  - \$500,000 economic contribution to area
  - Our program contributions would be the equivalent of 8 full-time positions to the county office

After Janet's speech, graduates enjoyed a reception with members, families, and friends at the Stryker Center. While working on their Master Gardener Certification, these graduates logged approximately 2400 volunteer hours on our master gardener projects which is 2½ times more than needed to graduate! We are all very proud of this exceptional graduating class.



# 2025 Plant Sale!

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**GARY STREB '11**

In case you haven't yet heard, we are having our annual plant sale on Saturday, May 10, 2025, from 9:00 a.m. to noon, at the Williamsburg Botanical Garden in Freedom Park. We will be busy preparing and setting-up on the day before, Friday, May 9, starting at 8:00 a.m. until we are done around noon.

The key to our success is maximum Extension Master Gardener participation, working together as a dynamic team, focusing on fun social interactions and sound financial gains. Now is the time to mentally prepare what you plan to do to support our biggest financial event of our year! Plants, plants and more plants. New propagation, divisions, rescues and purchase of starter plants are good ways to collect specimens for your donation. Consider clearing out garden-related items in your garden shed or garage for the Green Thumb Market. Hand crafted "art" has done extremely well at previous sales. If you need pots to get started, please let me know. We have plenty in various sizes.

As I write this, we find ourselves still in need of a few dedicated volunteers to lead functional teams of fellow EMGs. Plant Acquisition, Logistics/Customer Service, and Intake/Quality Control are all critical responsibilities and offer a great opportunity for an individual or team effort. If you want to take Set-up Day and Sale Day, volunteers will again be scheduled via SignUp Genius. Take a look at the job descriptions again and let me know what leadership role you'd like to support.

This year we will sign up on Better Impact for easier access. Be on the lookout at our monthly business meetings, also in the Colonial Master Gardener Newsletter, and special blast emails for lots of information as we get further into the planning phase. Bottom line: Mark your calendars and get ready for our Plant Sale 2025 on Saturday, May 10!

I hope to see each and every one of you involved. Contact me with any questions, concerns or comments.

Gary Streb (Class 2011)

Plant Sale 2025 Project lead

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# Why Grow Your Own Vegetables?

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**JANET ROCHESTER '24**

Why grow your own vegetables? Different people have different reasons. Most people want to have a source of fresh vegetables for their families. There is nothing like going to your own garden to pick a lettuce for a salad, a tomato for a sandwich, or a harvest of green beans for dinner. For people in underserved areas, a home garden may be one of their best sources of fresh vegetables.

Your vegetables will be fresher than you can find in a store and may be cheaper because you are not paying the harvesting, transportation, and distribution costs. You will have some expenses growing your vegetables, but they are minor once they become ongoing costs.

You will have the choice of what vegetables to grow. Commercial vegetables have been bred to be picked mechanically, sorted, packed, transported, and set out for display in a store without suffering damage, so they have to be tough. The home gardener has none of these concerns, so can grow vegetables with thin skins, short shelf life, and flavor. This last quality is shared by many heirloom varieties and varieties that may have been saved in your family for many years. You can also grow vegetables required for a particular cuisine that are not generally available in stores.

If you are concerned about pesticide usage, you will know exactly what, if any, pesticides have been

used on your vegetables. A small home garden can be successful without using any pesticides.

A vegetable garden is an excellent way to introduce children to gardening. From preparing the soil, planting the seeds, watching for germination, measuring growth, and finally harvesting something that they and all their family can eat, children learn about plant life and our dependence on plants for our everyday food.

Do not be discouraged if you have less than the ideal space, limited time, or physical limitations that prevent you from starting a traditional garden. Vegetables can be grown in small or shady places, in containers or raised beds, amongst your ornamentals, or up a wall. If you choose the right plants and give them what they need, most challenges can be overcome. Gardeners are very creative, and plants are adaptable!

This article is part of the Home Food Production Initiative under the direction of the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) partnering with the James City County Williamsburg Master Gardener Association to educate and support local gardeners. Our goal is to help people increase their food security, improve their nutrition, and build a more sustainable future.



# Ecology Corner

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## Increasing Wildlife Habitat or Saving Water? Native Plants Can Help

**JUDY KINSHAW-ELLIS '15**

Ten years ago, I knew very little about native plants. In our last home, we hired a landscaper to draw up a design to help attract birds to our yard. Little did I know that those plants that attracted birds were plants native to where we lived. After moving to Virginia and completing Master Gardener training, the idea of including native plants into any new landscaping became a bit more of a priority.

Authors like Doug Tallamy, PhD, *Bringing Nature Home*; Kim Eierman, *Pollinator Victory Garden*; and the Xerces Society, *Attracting Native Pollinators*; all advocate for adding more native plants to your property to help increase native fauna. While these publications focus on insects, enhancing insect populations helps feed birds.

Although much of the current focus in our region is on increasing our native insect and bird populations, another positive element of planting natives is that once established, they need less supplemental watering. The low-water component of planting natives got its start in the xeriscaping trend that started in some of the drier areas of the country about 50 years ago. Xeriscaping is not specifically focused on native plants, but they can be a component of those plantings.

As water becomes more expensive here, adding native plants to our landscapes is a good way to preserve that natural resource, not to mention the appeal of lowering that water bill. If you are making a new bed on your property, consider using native plants. If you are replacing plants that have died or have outgrown their spaces, take a look at what natives are available. Whether you want to save water or increase wildlife habitat, adding natives is a good solution.



Cup Plant (*Silphium perfoliatum*) is native to Virginia, but not specifically James City County. However, many gardeners grow it because butterflies such as our state butterfly, like this the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, and birds like Goldfinches love it.



Obedient Plant (*Physostegia virginiana*), while not particularly obedient, attracts a wide variety of bees and insects.

# Brickyard Takes a Break

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**JUDY KINSHAW-ELLIS '15**

In the last 15 months, a dedicated group of volunteers has planted more than 230 trees and woody shrubs, more than 1500 grasses and perennials, and seeded a meadow with more than 20 species of native flowers and grasses. It is so exciting to see the project develop and grow, and it would not have happened without the help of our volunteers, our grant funding, and our county parks and grounds employees who have provided all kinds of support to the project.

The meadow planting in December was a fun project and did not require the heavy lifting of the previous plantings. Volunteers marked and raked beds to get them ready to seed. Then on the day we planted, volunteers raked between the beds as others followed behind them and planted meadow grass seeds. In addition to the purchased seeds, we had quite a few seeds that were donated by Native Plant Society members. Everyone who helped took packs of donated seeds and planted them in the areas that had yet to be planted. It was quite a way to end a year of hard work.

Donna Benson ([mid520@mac.com](mailto:mid520@mac.com)) and Judy Kinshaw-Ellis ([kinshawellis@gmail.com](mailto:kinshawellis@gmail.com)), Brickyard project leaders, taking a much-needed rest for the months of January and February. The recent snowfalls will help the seeds settle into the soil and will provide moisture to our trees that were planted in November. Thank you to the numerous volunteers who have made this project come to life this year. If you have not seen the park yet, take a drive out and take a look.



Photos by Marion Guthrie



Photo by Judy Kinshaw-Ellis

# Sue Liddell, a Special Lady, an Extraordinary Master Gardener

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**SUE LIDDELL '95, PATSY MCGRADY '10, and MARILYN RIDDLE '01**

Identified by her distinctive caps and snow-white hair, Sue Liddell is also known for over 25 years of service to Master Gardeners (MG). Sue started with Master Gardeners in Fairfax in 1994 and transferred in 1996 to the James City County Williamsburg Master Gardeners (JCCWMGA), our association. She and her husband, James, recently left Williamsburg and moved to Missouri to be closer to family.

Her dedication included her involvement in a variety of projects including in the 1990s, a two year pilot program of Roots and Shoots for second graders at Matthew Whaley. After two years the successful pilot was turned over to the school and Sue became a Lawn Ranger working with Bob Winters.

She then became a key player in starting Peninsula Tree Stewards and developing the first training program in 1998. Working with Delores Vaughn, Sue put together a working group that developed the concepts for what a Tree Steward would be and then the specifics for the first Tree Steward training program in the state. She served as the coordinator of the Peninsula Tree Stewards from 1998 through 2009 and led TS training classes in 2001, 2004, and 2009.

Sue explained, "Tree Stewards became my main interest, and I was TS Coordinator with Peggy Manning for 13 years. But I also volunteered with Colonial Williamsburg as a tour guide for the Tall Treasures tree tours and maintained the George Reid Orchard with George Anderson. I volunteered with the Pruning Team, Landscape Love, Speakers' Bureau and helped at the Farmers' Market."

Sue was also a super-mentor to all the Tree Stewards in the area. She showed them how to hold on to scientific standards, working together across city and state boundaries, and celebrating our love of trees. All this while maintaining perfect calm and

making everyone welcome. Carol King, the current coordinator of Peninsula Tree Stewards referred to Sue as "one of my life heroes."

Because of Sue, the Tree Stewards received the Arbor Day Community Service Volunteer Award from the Williamsburg Council of Garden Clubs in 2003. Under Sue's leadership, the Tree Stewards undertook many varied projects such as inventorying the trees at Cedar Grove Cemetery and Bicentennial Park in Williamsburg, various government buildings in York County, and the 4H Education Center walkway in JCC.

Sue served as president of the James City County Williamsburg Master Gardeners in 2015. She also was a project leader for the CW Shields Garden and worked with Becky Sutton and Barbara Floyd to maintain the George Reid and Shields Tavern Gardens in CW. During a time when we had no agent, she worked with Sally Sissel to continue MG training classes. She also established a garden program for Methodist Respite working with Barbara Schroeder and Charlie Clapper. Sue is a special lady with many unique gifts, and we all wish that she didn't have to move away.





# Improving the Master Gardening Experience

## Findings & Recommendations

DAVE KLEPPINGER, '16

Early in 2024, the JCCWMGA Board set in motion an evaluative process with the goal of improving the quality of our projects which would in turn enhance the Master Gardening experience. An ad hoc committee was established consisting of President-elect Dave Kleppinger, VP-Projects Gary Griffith, Mitzi Balma, Rick Brown, Jen Campbell, Angela Cingale, Barbara Floyd and Jeff Mellinger. Projects leaders were interviewed and Master Gardeners were surveyed. The ad hoc committee reviewed all the thoughts and ideas received from project leaders and Master Gardeners and submitted the following findings and recommendations to the Board and membership. This year the Board will work with project leaders and the membership to begin implementing these recommendations.

### KEY FINDINGS

- 77% of active Master Gardeners (MGs) have 10 years or less experience
- 72 EMG survey respondents (40% of active EMG's) prioritized (in order) community service, project focus, the act of gardening and day/time of project activity when deciding on those projects in which to participate
- 74% of total 2023 MG hours were associated with projects involving public outreach, schools/public education & demonstration gardens
- 50% of the membership performed 81% of the total 2023 MG hours
- 63 MGs volunteered over 300 hours in 2023
- Less than 5% of MG's volunteered less than 50 hours in 2023
- Only 1 project leader indicated a successor was in place to take over leadership of the project. At least one project leader indicated there was no successor and this was their last year as project leader. And several project leaders indicated they were hesitant to step down for fear the project would cease to exist for lack of a project leader.
- Projects leaders in 10 of 25 MG projects contributed in excess of 25% of their projects' total volunteer hours in 2023
- Volunteer participation in projects in 2023 varied from as few as 1 EMG to as many as 49 with the median being 15
- 6 of 22 projects in 2023 recorded having less than 10 volunteers.
- 51% of MG's volunteered in 2 or fewer projects in 2023
- 46% of survey respondents did not identify a project in which they would not volunteer
- As of June 30, 2024, 38 MG's have not entered any 2024 volunteer hours



## PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Project leaders should meet on a quarterly basis for information sharing and exchange, to discuss challenges and explore opportunities to collaborate, etc. Board members should be encouraged to attend.
- Project leaders should consider employing team building retention strategies to increase both camaraderie and communications.
- Project leaders need greater opportunities to inform EMG's and solicit volunteers. Project activities should be highlighted at every monthly business meeting.
- The Better Impact Opportunities Calendar should be displayed at every monthly business meeting. Projects leaders are encouraged to regularly post the dates and times of EMG volunteer opportunities.
- The descriptions and photos of approved projects (activity) should be regularly updated and enhanced in the Better Impact Opportunity List.
- Project leaders should submit an article or captioned photos on their projects so project updates can be routinely featured in the monthly newsletter and Association social media platforms.
- Publicize and emphasize volunteer hours. Provide a monthly report of volunteer hours by project and call attention in that report and the newsletter to EMGs by name who hit significant milestones in volunteer hours or performed noteworthy service.
- Consider holding a project fair for EMGs as an annual meeting program event.
- If every EMG working in 2 or fewer projects were to redistribute their hours to include volunteering in one additional project, all currently approved projects could add between 3 & 4 additional volunteers.
- Project leaders are encouraged to be patient with new volunteers, to consider the possibility that something not done to your satisfaction might be because of insufficient direction or training, and that new volunteers should have the opportunity to be more than "weeding serfs."
- The Board needs to work with the public school system to facilitate a uniform financial, administrative and educational policy in support of school garden projects.
- Building project leadership succession ladders needs to be a point of emphasis throughout the year, every year. Past project leaders become assistants to the current project leaders resulting in project leadership being supported by three individuals.
- At the beginning of the year, all project leaders should be provided with simple but standardized operational procedures and guidelines, bylaws, tax exempt paperwork, the budget, Board and VCE liaisons and any other information to increase clarity of task and reduce ambiguity and misunderstanding.
- The Board needs to be more hands-on with projects and project leaders throughout the year.
- A budget line should be created and funded each year to enable ambitious and successful projects to be able to request and secure additional funds.
- Projects should be regularly publicized on social media to inform the public of opportunities to take advantage of available Master Gardening expertise, services and activities.
- Low activity Water Steward projects (Water Matters and Shoreline Evaluation) should consider combining.
- If possible, increase the ability of project leaders and team members to have greater access to tax exempt paperwork to purchase materials without having to pay sales tax.
- Acquire professional quality public facing exhibit materials including a tent and tablecloths with our logo, stand up exhibit display boards, easels and literature racks.



Comprised of over 200 master gardeners, the James City County Williamsburg Master Gardener Association serves the gardening public in Williamsburg, New Kent, Charles City, Upper York, and James City Counties.

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