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# MASTER GARDENER Gazette

It's January, the holiday season is over, the decorations are put away, the holiday music is off the radio, and all is quiet. Snow covers the barren ground and trees and creates a picturesque landscape. But there are presents that come in the mail in the form of... seed catalogs! There are bulbs to plant and seeds to sprout.

Master Gardeners all over Island County are talking and sharing ideas. There's the Northwest Flower and Garden Show and the Whidbey Gardening Workshop to attend. Groups are getting together to plan work at school and community gardens. Projects that were put on hold for the winter are restarting and new projects are beginning. Plant clinics are being planned and community outreach ideas are being formulated. Winter is not a time of dormancy, but rather a time to dream of and prepare for spring.

So, in the New Year, we look back at all we have accomplished and look forward to new opportunities to learn and grow our environment. Happy New Year to you all!



The newsletter team invites all Master Gardeners to contribute, whether through information on relevant events or suggestions for future articles. Please contact me with your ideas. Happy Spring!

*Carol Ann Leonessa, Editor, Master Gardener Gazette*  
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A festive holiday event and wishes of good cheer to all

## Plant Clinic Detectives

by Jim Peskuric

Where did native plants come from? How did they evolve? We dig into this mystery by first reviewing the geological timescale to understand the early years of the plant kingdom. Two billion years after the earth was formed, the first photosynthesis occurred. It is widely believed that land plants evolved from a group of charophytes, most likely simple single-celled terrestrial algae.

One billion years after that, the first major increase in atmospheric oxygen was detected in the fossil record. With the Cambrian Explosion of 540 million years ago, complex lifeforms exploded onto the scene. Land plants were first detected 479 million years ago. Fossils of ferns were discovered, dating back 360 million years ago, and flowering plants showed up about 200 million years ago.

In more “recent” times, after an asteroid collided with the earth 66 million years ago, the climate cooled, grasses developed, and native plants continued to evolve into what we recognize today. So, the answer is that native plants descended from single-celled swamp algae that preceded complex plants and seeds. The key to their value for the entire ecosystem is in how they have adapted.

Native plants occur naturally in their ecoregion and habitat where, over the course of evolutionary time, they adapt to physical conditions and co-evolve with other species in the system. Plants native to the Pacific Northwest have formed deep root systems and the ability to go dormant in the summer until our rains return in the fall.

Because the climate has changed throughout time and will continue to change due to the burning of fossil fuels, what is considered native to an area today will also change. Some native plants will adapt to climate changes, and some may not. Others may expand their range from neighboring areas with different climates.

Nevertheless, we are fortunate to have a wide variety of native plants throughout the Pacific Northwest, from the shorelines to the mountain tops and everywhere in between. Unravel their mystery in your own yard by planting and encouraging their use in our communities.

## From the President

Happy 2024 everyone! As we embark on another new year, we can be proud of what we have accomplished and be open to changes that might be in store for us.



One example of change is highlighted by the Master Gardener 50th Anniversary celebration. At the Advanced Education Conference last September, the State Foundation and WSU Extension pulled out all stops to mark the occasion. Good times were had by all, we reveled in our accomplishments, and the classes were outstanding. So, what's next? Here we are, fifty years later, and the world is not the same.

Today's technology allows anyone – whether trained as Master Gardeners or not – to use the internet and artificial intelligence to find answers to their gardening questions. I am not saying that this method provides superior results to the science-based advice that Master Gardeners develop, but it is a reality that we must address. We will be discussing this trend at this month's board retreat so you may be hearing more on this subject in the coming months.

In other news, we welcome Lisa Phillips to the Foundation board and appreciate her volunteering to serve as North Area Rep. I hope everyone in and around Oak Harbor will rally around Lisa to help provide research-based gardening advice to the community and seek other ways to reach out locally.

This year the Whidbey Gardening Workshop has the theme of Back to Our Roots, meaning we are going back to an all in-person workshop with no cold-weather field trips. Please step up to volunteer your time wherever and whenever you can for this important annual event.

As for the Island County Master Gardener class of 2024, welcome! (Insert confetti here). Moving the training to the fall was a great benefit, allowing you to jump right in and volunteer for the Whidbey Gardening Workshop in March and the plant sale in May. We are looking forward to working with you to accomplish great things and to form new friendships!

Thanks – *Jim Peskuric, ICMGF President*

## From the Program Coordinator Finding Solutions for Today's Challenges

Happy New Year! It was so fun to be a part of the WSU Extension Master Gardener Program 50th Anniversary celebrations last year. From welcoming visitors to our booth at the Northwest Flower and Garden Festival, to the regional party for volunteers at the Northwest Research and Extension Center in Mount Vernon, to the Advanced Education Conference in Tacoma, we celebrated the growth and achievements of 50 years of environmentally sustainable horticulture education in Washington and around the United States.



Here in Island County, we continued telling everyone about the fantastic work we do in our community – the excellent classes offered through the Whidbey Gardening Workshop, our four Ask a Master Gardener Clinics, visits to home gardens, educational tables at events, public presentations, our beautiful Education Garden and lecture series, the work at community and school gardens, our plant sale, and more! Of course, I'm especially thankful for the organizational work done by our Foundation to support our members and generate funds.

This month I will be tallying up the hours you recorded in GivePulse to help tell the story of our impact in Island County for 2023 and will report back to you in the next newsletter. You are making a difference in our community and this data supports it. Thank you for keeping your hours up to date.

As you think about why and how you want to contribute in 2024 to our mission, how can I help you? If you are not sure where to lend your time and talents, let me know! I want the time you give to the program to align with our mission AND be fulfilling and meaningful to you.

We have so many amazing volunteers doing such great work – read on to learn more and see the [new Foundation website](#) for past newsletter issues. We also have a new class of interns graduating at the end of January who are eager to connect with the work you are doing. Details on the graduation party will come soon. Please join us!

I look forward to working with you this year to teach gardeners ways to conserve and protect our soil and water, to grow their own food sustainably, protect pollinators, and teach the next generation the values of environmental stewardship.

*Loren Imes, Program Coordinator*



[Learn about our 9 program priorities](#)

### Get ready for a gardening adventure, Island County Master Gardeners!

On Saturday, March 2, 2024, we will be going "Back to Our Roots." What does this mean, you ask? It means we will be focusing on learning together, in person, as we did for the first 32 years of the Whidbey Gardening Workshop.

Even more importantly, with climate change and diversity loss, we want to encourage gardeners to explore and practice techniques to bring native species (flora and fauna) into their gardens. So, we will be digging into the roots of gardening in our region to learn how we can make our gardens more resilient.

Our keynote, Jessi Bloom, is an expert in ecological landscaping and will kick off our adventure by exploring re-wilding, forest gardening, and long-term strategies for improving resilience.

Volunteer opportunities are available on GivePulse or by contacting [wgw@icmgf.org](mailto:wgw@icmgf.org). Please sign up to help soon. We look forward to a festive event again this year and thank everyone for helping make it so!



## From the Education Garden

Year-round, many people enjoy the garden – wandering the paths, contemplating, picnicking, and even painting the beautiful views. But what do visitors actually *learn* as they walk around, and how can we take their engagement with the garden to another level? These questions motivated the creation of a Visitor Engagement Task Force, consisting of Gretchen Schlomann, Kim Baxter, Holly Grason,\* and Loren Imes.

The goal is to create ways to help *every* visitor learn something they don't already know about gardening. Most visitors are not necessarily gardeners and especially not horticulturalists, and they may not be interested in a deeper level of scientific understanding. But we should be able to provide information that goes beyond the obvious, awakens people to new ideas, and highlights the program priorities of the Master Gardener Program.

**What has the Task Force done so far?** The first project was to broaden attendance at the summer Master Gardener Education series. The team installed a banner on the side of the Stansberry Cottage, along with a mailbox for flyers, and advertised on Drewslist. These efforts increased public attendance.



The second project was a new docent tour, prototyped at this summer's Harvest Faire hosted by Greenbank Farm. The team created "crib cards" for each garden area, with bullet points on its purpose and interesting features.

Several MGs volunteered to be docents and the tours were well received by visitors. The team will build on this experience to shape a new docent program that is mindful of volunteer time while filling an important educational need.

**What's next?** The team is undertaking a significant revamping of the signage to create a self-directed and permanent yet flexible approach that is appropriate for each area. It will include a series of free-standing signs with weatherproof but changeable inserts to keep information fresh. Signage will provide an overview of various areas, current plantings of interest, and program priorities. QR codes will link to web pages with more detail, plant lists, and WSU resources.

**How can you get involved in the Visitor Engagement project?** We always remind people that volunteering in the Education Garden entails so much more than pulling weeds. Help us organize the docent program, or market the garden by sharing information in your social communities. Share your ideas for enhancing visitor engagement. We look forward to hearing from you!

\* Holly Grason was a valued member of this team until her passing in December. We will greatly miss her and her contributions.



Visit the Education Garden during a Wednesday work party, 9 am to noon, and find out how you can help shape this valued resource. For questions, contact Susan Dakis, Chair of the Steering Committee, [edgarden@icmgf.org](mailto:edgarden@icmgf.org)

## Master Gardeners Around Island County

*This column is a regular feature of the newsletter, highlighting key activities by our volunteers during the months since the previous issue. We depend on you to tell us what's going on, so please contact Carol Ann Leonessa with your news from around Island County.*

The October 19 issue of the *Whidbey Weekly* featured an article written by Lisa Phillips titled “**Be a Bee Ally,**” with ideas on simple steps that gardeners can take to support native bees throughout the year. Teaching ways to help native bees and other pollinators thrive in home and community landscapes is one of our nine [Program Priorities](#). The Master Gardener program shares responsibility for this monthly column with Sound Water Stewards, Whidbey Island Conservation District, and the Marine Resource Committee.

Two fall **apple pressing events** featured Master Gardeners answering orchard-related questions. In Coupeville, Susan Wilcox and Lisa Phillips hosted an Ask a Master Gardener table at PRI’s Ciderfest.

At the South Whidbey Community Center, Jenni Wilson and Deb Mitchell were on hand for the Fall Festival and Cider Press event co-sponsored by Woodhaven High School and other South Whidbey organizations.

Deb Mitchell, our new **Central Area Rep**, wants to recognize Holly Grason for all her hard work and achievements during Holly’s term as Central Rep. Holly and Line Goulet’s leadership ensured that more than 100 pounds of food went to the Coupeville food bank this year and that a dump cart was purchased for the Garden with end-of-year funds. Holly will be sorely missed.

Deb has several plans for the new year. The monthly plant clinic will continue during the early and mid-growing season, with plans for more advertising. Deb has also rented two plots at the Coupeville Community Garden for 2024. She spoke with the mayor about expanding our involvement with the food bank, including teaching classes to food bank recipients about growing their own food.

The food bank is willing to rent one or two plots for their clients who want to grow some of their own food. Deb will build a questionnaire in both English and Spanish that will be handed out to food bank recipients on whether and how they would like to participate – from a hanging pot of tomatoes to a container garden, to an in-ground garden. Several seed packets have already been collected.

The **Crevice Garden** team completed installation of both of the crevice gardens at the Education Garden site and gave a presentation on the project at the October member



meeting. The larger of the two gardens is constructed with quartzite slabs, while the smaller one is made with urbanite, a term coined to refer to re-purposed concrete. Planting will begin in early spring. The surrounding area will be enhanced with a stone bench and a planter box.



Gary Ketcheson, Nancy Hides, and Steve Stansberry have begun upgrading the **wetland in the Education Garden** at Greenbank. They are taking out invasive plants and replacing them with native species, thanks to the Meerkerk grant that provided funding for the project.

**Camano Master Gardeners** had a delightful holiday celebration at Carol Anne Ebert’s home, including Christmas crackers, a delicious brunch, a cookie exchange, and a white elephant gift exchange, with all gifts graciously supplied by Carol Anne and her husband. Thank you to Carol Anne and the members of the Camano community for all your contributions in 2023.

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The **holiday party** on Whidbey was well attended, with ample good cheer, festive food, and an elaborate raffle. We were pleased to enjoy the company of several trainees from the class of 2024, three of whom competed in the Ugly Sweater Contest.

Once again, we proved that there's nothing like a pack of Master Gardeners when you are seeking a delicious meal and cheerful company. Many thanks to Melissa Evans and those who helped to set up and decorate the event.



At the holiday party, we celebrated these **Master Gardeners for their Years of Service:**

- 5 Years:** Barb Faville, Betsy Fay, Carole Matthews, Tristy Nielsen, Liz Post
- 10 years:** Christine Dimm, Melissa Evans, Martha Hollis, Gary Ketcheson, Jan Simpson
- 15 years:** Carolyn Bischoff, Gwen Brass, Judith Juno, Judi Moore
- 20 years:** Anne Baum, Susan Hamilton
- 25 years:** Steve Stansberry



Special recognition was given to Melissa Evans, Carole Matthews, and C-J Nielsen for receiving the President's Volunteer Service Award, which acknowledges volunteers who gave more than 500 hours in 2022.



C-J Nielsen also received the President's Lifetime Achievement Award in honor of volunteering over 4000 hours to the WSU Extension Master Gardener program.

These awards were established in 2003 by the US President's Council on Service and Civic Participation to recognize the important role of volunteers in America's strength and national identity, and to honor individuals whose service positively impacts communities in every corner of the United States.

Congratulations to each of you for your years of service to the WSU Extension Island County Master Gardener program, and for your dedication to serving your Island County neighbors with research-based gardening and horticultural education. We are thankful for and proud of you all!

**The plant sale is coming!**

Our volunteers at the Education Garden are filling the greenhouse at Greenbank with cuttings that by spring will develop healthy roots to support fresh growth.

Many more of you are busy as well, either cutting, seeding, or dividing plants that will be donated. An enormous thank you to everyone who works together to put on our wonderful plant sale!

It's early to get a solid count on donated plants, of course, but once you're confident in your contributions, please send your list to Ilze Zigurs. She will be printing plant labels again this year.

If you have any questions, please email Raissa DeArmond at [plantsale@icmgf.org](mailto:plantsale@icmgf.org). Happy planting!



Barb Douglas and Susan Dakis show their growing bounty

## Upcoming Events

For details on events, go to the [Foundation website](#) or the [WSU Extension website](#) or the MG email list.

- January 18** ICMGF Board meeting
- January 25** ICMGF Member meeting (Zoom only)
- February 22** ICMGF Board meeting
- February 29** ICMGF Member meeting (Zoom only)
- March 2** Whidbey Gardening Workshop
- March 21** ICMGF Board meeting
- March 28** ICMGF Member meeting

## LOOKING FARTHER AHEAD

- May 11** Plant Sale
- Sept 27-28** Statewide Advanced Education Conference, virtual



Moe Bowman, Rosemary Easley, and Julie Lary of the Class of 2024 show their sweater skills



And the Ugly Sweater Contest winner is Liz Post – the ugly part is the back end of the holiday sheep on the back side of the sweater!

## ICMGF OFFICERS

President – Jim Peskuric  
Vice President – Jenni Wilson  
Secretary – Kim Baxter  
Treasurer – Paul Rowe

## AREA REPS

South – Christine Dimm  
Central – Deb Mitchell  
North – Lisa Phillips  
Camano – Carol Anne Ebert

State Foundation Rep — Carol Anne Ebert

## RESOURCES LINKS

The WSU Extension Island County Master Gardener Resources website contains links to

- approved resources
- MG Roster
- GivePulse instructions
- and much more

Visit [island.wsu.edu](http://island.wsu.edu) or point your smartphone camera at the QR code. If you need the password, contact Loren.



The [ICMGF Member Portal](#) on the Foundation website includes

- member picture book
- minutes of Foundation meetings
- minutes of Ed Garden Committee
- Foundation by-laws & agreements
- selected CE videos

Need the password? Contact Ilze.

[GivePulse](#) website for recording your volunteer hours.

**We welcome your ideas and submissions for future articles.** Please contact the newsletter editor, Carol Ann Leonessa, at [newsletter@icmgf.org](mailto:newsletter@icmgf.org).