ISLAND COUNTY MASTER GARDENER FOUNDATION

WSU EXTENSION Island County

A JOINT QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

October 2025

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- From the President
- From the Education Garden
- From the Program Coordinator
- Master Gardeners Around Island County
- Plant Detectives
- Meet Our Newest Master Gardeners
- The Secret Lives of Master Gardeners
- Upcoming Events

MASTER GARDENER Gazette

The summer with its hot, sunny days is over and now we are starting to prepare for the next growing season. Are you already thinking about your winter vegetable garden? Or are you preparing your spring flowers? Read the From the Education Garden article for resources to maximize your bounty using a permaculture guild.

Do you have apple trees on your property and are unsure about the variety or cultivar? The Plant Detectives article will help with that identification. You can also read about how Master Gardeners from Camano and Whidbey are working together to share knowledge through their presence at plant clinics and fairs held throughout our county.

And don't forget to read about the David Gibby Search for Excellence Award and watch the video which showcases our work of sharing best practices with the public at the Whidbey Gardening Workshop. You will find all this and more in this issue!



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.

Carol Ann Leonessa, Editor, Master Gardener Gazette
newsletter@icmgf.org



Fellowship and fun at the summer picnic



Type here!

From the President



Yay! I survived my first year as president of our Master Gardener Foundation. It has been a bit of a challenge to engage with you as much as I would like given my "remote" location. However, the encouragement and appreciation I have received from many of you has been reassuring.

I'd like to share several highlights for the year which stand out for me. First, our fantastic, creative MGs have been recognized twice for the outstanding service they provide for our community. The Whidbey Gardening Workshop received first place for the David Gibby International Award for Excellence in the Community Service category. Also, our beautiful, fact-filled "Birds in the Garden" display at the Whidbey Fair won Grand Champion in the Educational Category.

This year has also provided opportunities to collaborate and connect with MGs in other counties. At the Stanwood/Camano Fair, which serves both Snohomish and Island Counties (Camano), we shared a plant clinic/recruiting booth with our Snohomish MG colleagues.

We also hosted the Joint Counties Forum in June (King, Island, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom counties), and one outcome of the meeting was the creation of a Joint Counties Grant Group to investigate and disseminate information and ideas for grants and other funding opportunities in NW Washington. We hope this group will also serve as a sounding board for developing best practices.

Lastly, several Island County MGs joined Snohomish County for the first day of the Advanced Education Conference at Willis Tucker Park. Dubbed the "Shared Learning Experience," the group watched the awards, where our Gibby Award was featured, the Keynote address, and several other speakers. A fun pot-luck social event was held during the lunch hour.

If you have not yet done so, please be sure to complete the ICMGF Board survey. It is important to hear from everyone. Board elections will be held at the Annual Board and Membership meeting on October 30, 2025. Hope to see you there.

Cathy Lofton-Day, ICMGF President

From the Education Garden

Have you heard of permaculture guilds? Would you like to learn more? You can see that concept in action, as Raissa DeArmond builds and evolves a guild in one area of the Cottage Garden.

Permaculture is a well-known concept that refers to systems that are sustainable, self-sufficient, and regenerative. A guild is simply an association or community that comes together for a common goal.

In the context of gardening, a permaculture guild is a community of plants that work together for each other's benefit in multiple and interrelated ways. These complex guild interrelationships take the concepts of biodiversity and companion planting to a whole new level.



Raissa is implementing this concept in the Cottage Garden, in the planting bed around the plum tree. Her goal is to demonstrate a mini ecosystem with plants – both edible and non-edible – that serve specific ecological functions, work together well, and look interesting. In the process, she hopes to demonstrate pest deterrence – a common challenge in our gardens. To read more about permaculture guilds, follow the links on these topics: designing food forest guilds; building fruit tree guilds; sample guilds.



In other Education Garden news, our latest flashmob event resulted in an enthusiastic crowd, generating a large biomass pile of elm tree sprouts.

Regular Wednesday work parties continue even as we get into the winter months. Join us when you can or just come and stroll through the gardens at your leisure. And, if you have gardening books you are ready to give away, please consider bringing them to the Little Free (Gardening) Library, which is now in full operation.

From the Program Coordinator



It's autumn! As the leaves begin to turn and the air grows crisp, a new Master Gardener training session is getting underway. As volunteers with WSU Extension, you've all experienced firsthand the whirlwind of information that comes with training. But amid the readings and presentations about soil science, pollinators, and integrated pest management, I hope that something else begins to take root: a sense of community.

Island County Master Gardeners are more than individuals who love gardening. We are a team, working together in small to large groups. Whether it's two volunteers staffing a plant clinic, small groups tending the Coupeville Community Garden and Lord's Garden, the small army needed to steward the Education Garden, or the entire team coming together each year to host the award-winning Whidbey Gardening Workshop, our collective efforts make a lasting impact and accomplish what none of us could do alone.

As autumn reminds us of the importance of preparation and reflection, this season is a perfect time to revisit four values that build community and make our program thrive.

Communicate with Respect. We are a diverse group committed to sharing environmental stewardship education across Island County. Respectful and supportive communication is essential to our success. Teams flourish when we listen actively, speak kindly, and create space for all voices.

Every interaction with fellow volunteers or the public should reflect WSU Extension's values. The Master Gardener Code of Conduct serves as our guide, outlining how we show support for each other and our community. By embracing diverse perspectives with curiosity, compassion, and respect, we create a welcoming and professional environment where everyone can grow.

Share Research-Based Knowledge. Our mission is rooted in research-based, sustainable gardening practices. While personal experience enriches our understanding, our public outreach must be based on the research and resources introduced during training. When someone asks a gardening question, we don't just share what worked in our backyard – we explain the "why" behind our recommendations and show the relevant resources. This empowers our community with deeper knowledge and fosters resilient landscapes.

Cultivate Community Connections. Our work is about more than plants. It's also about people, both within our organization and in the broader community. Within our organization, friendships among Master Gardeners are essential to our success. Whether we're working together in the Education Garden, catching up at monthly Foundation meetings, or in planning meetings for the Whidbey Gardening Workshop, we build a network of support, friendship, and shared passion. These internal connections foster a sense of belonging and strengthen our ability to work together effectively.

Publicly, our outreach efforts allow us to connect meaningfully with our neighbors on Whidbey and Camano Islands. By consistently providing trusted information at plant clinics and community events, we help residents grow healthier gardens, conserve water, and support local ecosystems. These efforts reinforce our role as environmental stewards and an important resource in the community. Together, these relationships, both internal and external, foster a shared sense of place and purpose.

Embrace Lifelong Learning. Gardening evolves, and new research, changing climates, and emerging best practices mean there's always more to learn. That's why continuing education is not just a requirement, it's a vital part of being an effective volunteer. By completing a minimum of 10 hours of continuing education annually, we stay informed on important topics like soil health, climate resilience, and pest management. Lifelong learning ensures we remain trusted sources of current, relevant advice for our community.

Together, we are more than a collection of volunteers. We are educators, mentors, and community builders. By being respectful to one another, relying on research-based knowledge, cultivating community, and embracing lifelong learning, we ensure that the WSU Extension Master Gardener program remains a trusted and invaluable resource.

As we move through this season of change, let's recommit to these values and continue growing together. Thank you for being part of this vibrant, impactful community.

Loren Imes, Program Coordinator

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.



Award Video. As part of receiving the prestigious Extension Master Gardener David Gibby Search for Excellence award, a video was produced to showcase the Whidbey Gardening Workshop at the International Extension Master Gardener Conference, hosted by the Texas Master Gardener Program. The video, featuring Barb Faville, Cathy Lofton-Day, and Loren Imes, highlighted the dedication and teamwork of Island County Master Gardener volunteers and offered a glimpse at the structure of the event to help other programs replicate the event in their communities. The video and a companion poster produced by Gretchen Schlomann were shared at the virtual award presentation.



July Master Gardener Education Series. More than forty people attended the July class, taught by Tobey Nelson. Tobey provided a creative discussion of groundcovers, urging us to leave no sections of soil bare to the ravages of sun and moisture loss. She encouraged us to expand our concept of what serves as a groundcover plant, including shrubs that shade the surrounding soil with graceful branches.



Camano July Meeting. Master Gardeners living on Camano Island met in July at the home of Amanda Krass. After hearing updates on the continuing investigation into creating a demonstration garden on Camano Island and planning for the booth at the Stanwood Camano Fair, Amanda gave an informative presentation on winter sowing of perennial and annual flowers in her beautifully landscaped backyard garden.



Whidbey Island Fair. Our Whidbey Island Fair team brought home another ribbon this summer with an award-winning educational display! Melissa Evans grew a beautiful array of lush flowers and vegetables, while Jenni Wilson developed posters highlighting common backyard birds and the habitats that support them.

Their combined efforts earned the Grand Champion ribbon for Educational Displays. A big thank you to the many volunteers who greeted fairgoers of all ages, answered questions, and helped make the display a resounding success!



Stanwood Camano Fair. Master Gardeners on Camano joined forces with the Snohomish County Master Gardeners to answer plant questions and share science-based gardening advice at this year's Stanwood Camano Fair. Cathy Lofton-Day brought some plant decorations from the Whidbey Fair, and "volunteer" Jasmine chose to join the fun. When asked which fair she enjoyed more, Whidbey or Stanwood Camano, she had no comment.

Summer Picnic. Island County Master Gardeners took a well-deserved break to spend time relaxing and sharing a meal at the summer picnic. Hosted by Dave Thomas in his lovely Oak Harbor garden, the event featured a wonderful main course and potluck organized by Melissa Evans.

Cathy Lofton-Day handed out Star Awards to three affiliate volunteers, each of whom played a big part in making repairs and improvements to the Stansberry Cottage and toolshed at the Education Garden. Thank you to Brant Baxter, Larry Douglas, and Paul Marshall. Your efforts supporting the Master Gardeners are deeply appreciated!

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August Master Gardener Education Series.



Gary Ketcheson gave an engaging and well-attended talk on "What To Do About Soil." Nearly half the more than 30 people who attended were from the community, and Gary's inviting style kept them interacting. His discussion of the basics of soil properties and challenges specific to Whidbey Island kept everyone attentive. Gary included recommendations on regenerative practices throughout and ended with a compelling reminder of the connections between soil health and plant health and, ultimately, our own health.



September Master Gardener Education Series. Over 30 people attended the final talk of the season in the Education Series. Sue Nicol, a retired horticulturist and consulting arborist with over 40 years of experience, spoke on "Assessing Tree Health and Diseases." Sue reminded us that trees are ecosystems, with many organisms living together. Her in-depth presentation on tree structure and health was enlivened by examples from the audience and the surrounding area. Sue cautioned us that our native Western Red Cedars are suffering from global warming, and she recommends watering them. A fun fact was that not all trees that lean are a problem. Cook pines, which are related to the Monkey Puzzle Tree, lean towards the equator all over the world!

Harvest Faire. Master Gardeners welcomed attendees to the annual Harvest Faire at Greenbank Farm in early September.





In addition to the festivities, visitors had the opportunity to ask gardening questions and tour the Education Garden with the help of our clinic volunteers and garden docents.



Ask A Master Gardener. Plant Clinics continued throughout Island County over the summer. Master Gardeners answered questions, gave research-based garden advice, and shared the priorities of the WSU Extension Master Gardener Program with the public. We have no more clinics scheduled over the winter months but be on the lookout for opportunities to volunteer and share your wisdom at next year's spring and summer Plant Clinics and at the 2026 Whidbey Gardening Workshop.

Master Gardener Training Class of 2026

A new class of twelve Master Gardener volunteers begins training in early October. They will be the first to use the newly updated curriculum and online training materials. Trainees view recorded lectures and complete the readings and exercises on their own time. They meet online each week for a statewide review session and in-person every two weeks for additional volunteer training. They will complete their training in February of 2026.

Also new this year is the opportunity to earn a Washington Gardener Certificate by completing the same coursework as Master Gardener trainees, minus the in-person classes. There are a number of Island County residents registered to earn this certificate. This option is ideal for those who have limited time to volunteer and for those in horticultural professions, since they will benefit from learning to become better gardeners and stewards of our environmental resources.

Please watch for opportunities to meet the members of the Class of 2026 as they work their way through the process of becoming Island County Master Gardeners!

Plant Detectives

by Jamie Halterman

During the Whidbey Island Fair in July, the Master Gardeners had a display booth and the opportunity to "Ask a Master Gardener." As everyone who has worked at a clinic booth knows, we get a wide range of questions. One visitor had family property on South Whidbey with apple trees planted by his grandfather, possibly 100 years ago. His simple question – "How do I know what type of apple trees these are?" – started a good amount of research and discovery about apples.

According to WSU's Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center, there are over thirty varieties of apples grown commercially in Washington State and over 7500 varieties grown worldwide. With so many varieties of apples, from heirlooms to commercially grown cultivars, determining the specific apple is a challenge.

Plant identification involves observing a plant's physical characteristics, including leaf shape, margin details, arrangement on the stem, and other specifics. It also includes flower characteristics such as color, shape, and number of petals. Since domestic apples are all the same genus and species, those physical characteristics are similar, leaving the differences with the fruit as the most distinguishing characteristic. So, what are some helpful clues to help us in identifying apples?

- Appearance
  - Size: small, medium, large, or extra-large
  - Shape: conical, oblong, round or flat, or some variation
  - Color: red, green, white, striped, or yellow
- Flavor and use
  - Flavor describes the levels of sweetness and acidity, or tartness. Does flavor improve with storage?
  - Firmness ranges from crunchy to soft.
  - How is the apple used: eaten fresh, used for cooking, or making cider?
  - How long does the apple last in storage?
- Bloom time and harvest
  - When does the tree flower and first produce fruit?
  - When is the fruit harvested: early (August), mid-to-late (September), or late (October)? Does the tree tend to drop its fruit before harvest?
- Tree size
  - Is the tree root stock or grafted? Apple tree grafting began in the 19th century, but grafting to contain tree size (dwarf grafting) did not begin until later in the 20th century.
  - Was the tree pruned and kept contained in size, or has it grown freely and is uncontrolled in appearance?
- Location
  - Is the tree located in an older orchard, i.e., trees planted in rows, many feet apart?
  - Is it a single tree or small group of trees; maintained and growing in a yard, or an old farmstead?

After gathering initial information, we can consult resources about common Puget Sound apples for comparison. One helpful site is NW Fruit, which is the Western Washington Fruit Research Foundation in Mount Vernon. This site has region-specific information and a history of heirloom apples in the Puget Sound, complete with descriptions of a variety of heirlooms. The orchards at NW Fruit are open to visitors year-round and include many different cultivars to view and sample.

WSU has publications about apples and tree fruit, including the Fruit Handbook for Western Washington (EB0937) or Apple Cultivars for the Puget Sound, (EB1436, archived and available in the Coupeville extension office). FruitID provides a searchable database and an identification tool. The Sunset Western Garden book is always a comprehensive reference. Online nurseries such as Raintree or One Green World have information on available trees, although they may not be useful for identifying a specific variety.

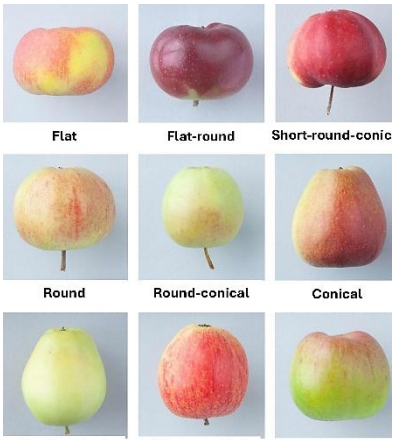


Photo adapted from fruitid.com

One new technique called DNA Fingerprinting uses leaf samples to match an existing known apple variety. These tests cost $50 and are available from My Fruit Tree, a lab within the Department of Horticulture at WSU in Pullman.

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Identifying apples involves a careful assessment of physical characteristics, flavor, and use, along with location and growing history. Using trusted research publications and consulting with other Master Gardeners can help determine the fruit's variety.

More modern techniques, such as DNA fingerprinting, are also available if the homeowner desires more specific information. Practicing identification of apple varieties will increase your appreciation for the unique qualities and potential for these fruit trees within our island landscape.



Save The Date!

The award-winning Whidbey Gardening Workshop will focus on one of the nine priority areas of the statewide Master Gardener Program – growing food locally using sustainable techniques to improve individual and community health and wellness. As always, a variety of other topics will be presented, including ornamental plants, garden maintenance, garden design, and much more.

Our keynote speaker for 2026 will be John Christianson, a Certified Nurseryman from the Washington State Nursery Association, a Master Gardener, and the owner of Christianson's Nursery in Skagit Valley. He has won numerous awards at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show for his display gardens and is considered an expert in roses and rose gardens.

If you would like to volunteer to assist Barb Faville (Chair) or Raissa DeArmond (Hospitality Chair), or for any other Workshop position, contact Barb at wgw@icmgf.org.

Put March 21 on your calendar and join us for another inspiring Whidbey Gardening Workshop!

Meet Our Newest Master Gardeners



Beverly Bradly, Camano
Class of 2025

I am so pleased to join the Island County Master Gardeners. I am originally from Canada, and my previous gardening experience has been in the far north or in the mountains, so I still have much to learn about gardening by the sea.

My hobbies are gardening and reading and being a lifelong student. I travel as often as I can but am always glad to get back to our green island. I like to grow flowers and berries, and next spring I will experiment with flowering bushes and a wild (think clover and wildflowers) backyard.



Jamie Halterman, Coupeville
Class of 2025

Growing up in southeastern Wyoming, at an elevation of over 6,000 feet, the short growing season made gardening a challenge. After moving to Washington, my sister and I rented a house on a raspberry farm in Skagit County and asked if it was possible to grow a garden, somehow oblivious to the surrounding Skagit farmlands. The farmer gave us a strange look, and said "yes, gardens grow pretty well here."

The first year our vegetable garden produced more than we could eat, and everyone we knew enjoyed the abundance.

My husband and I moved to Whidbey 15 years ago and started vegetable and flower gardens. It's been a fun trial-and-error experience for us to see what will grow and what the deer will "resist." Going forward, I plan to enhance our pollinator gardens and convince my husband to give up some of his lawn for natives and meadowscapes.

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Suzanne Kieffer, Camano
Class of 2025



Born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, I spent a lot of time outdoors exploring the woods behind our house. I loved finding a stand of trillium or bleeding hearts in the woods or building a "secret" camp under an old cedar next to the creek. In sixth grade, my class went to Camp Waskowitz for a week of outdoor education. There we learned about our native plants and trees and the importance of stewardship, increasing my love and interest in nature.

My professional life was unrelated to the outdoors, but I would work in my garden whenever I could. It was always a soothing and satisfying retreat. After retirement, I enrolled at Edmonds College and completed the Landscape Horticulture program which led me to the MG program. I have come full circle, it seems, happily continuing to learn more about plants and trees and the value they bring to our lives.



Stephanie Lugo, Oak Harbor
Class of 2024

I am a retired U.S. Navy veteran who served as a Patternmaker, Master at Arms, and Explosives Ordnance Technician. After earning a degree in Animal Sciences from Colorado State University, I pursued a lifelong love of adventure through mountaineering, rock climbing, ice climbing, and equestrian sports.

Today, I own a small woodworking business in Oak Harbor, with my husband Mark and our two sons, ages 14 and 18. I stay active in my community by coaching 4H Youth Shooting Sports, teaching at our local homeschool co-op, and participating in the Island County Master Gardener Program. When I'm not working and volunteering, I enjoy fishing and spending time in the garden.

Janet Wick, Camano
Class of 2025



I have gardened in Western Washington most of my life, first in Normandy Park with my mother, then on my own. I have grown a variety of vegetables, berries, fruit trees, shrubs, perennials, and annuals in different environments. I've tried my hand at vines and espalier.

For the last 12 years, I lived on Camano in the summer and the rest of the year on St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands where I learned to grow tropical plants, including orchids. On Camano, I created a garden that is active in summer and could take care of itself while I was gone. I've planted seedlings that grew into majestic trees. In some gardens, I started from scratch, while in others, it was more of a reclamation. I learned through books or trial and error, applying what I learned about botany and native plants while studying Wildlife Management in college.

Last year, we returned to Camano full time. I wanted to become more active in this community, revitalize my NW gardening skills, and make new friends. Being a Master Gardener volunteer has helped me do that and more! I learned ways to help people grow better gardens, and I learned that I still have a lot to learn! I am grateful for the knowledge and experience that Master Gardeners share, and for being able to work with this amazing group of people!

Election of 2026 Board Members

We will elect the open ICMGF board positions for next year at the October 30, 2025, meeting. Many thanks to the Nominating Committee – Julie Lary and Jim Peskuric – for assembling an excellent slate of candidates. And thank you to the candidates for their willingness to stand for election and to serve on the board.

The candidates are:

- **Vice President** – Heather Diamond
- **Treasurer** – Paul Rowe
- **Central Area Rep** – Anita Merrill
- **Camano Rep** – Rosemary Easley
- **State Rep –** Carol Anne Ebert

Please attend in person or via Zoom and cast your vote!

The Secret Lives of Master Gardeners

Do you ever wish you knew more about your fellow Master Gardeners, beyond the volunteer work you share with them? Learning more about all the other things we do helps to build community, so let's try it! We will start small – one project and person at a time – and see where it takes us.

Since this is pumpkin season, let's begin with Kim Baxter and her giant pumpkin patch. You may know Kim from the unique variety of pumpkin starts that she donates to the plant sale every year. But Kim also grows pumpkins for an entirely different project.

Kim has been fascinated with pumpkins and gourds ever since a third-grade field trip in California. Three years ago, she attended a giant pumpkin weigh-off at Christianson's Nursery. They were giving away free seeds with a membership to the Pacific Northwest Giant Pumpkin Growers and Kim was hooked.

Kim became a board member of the club and has been growing giant pumpkins ever since. You can grow a big pumpkin in just 150 square feet, so Kim invites you to join in the fun!



If you are involved in an interesting project or activity that is outside your Master Gardener work and that you would like to share, please contact us.

Annual Re-Application Begins in October

It's almost time to begin the annual re-application process to remain active as a WSU Extension Master Gardener in 2026.

This month, you will receive an email from GivePulse inviting you to complete a short recertification survey.

To maintain your active status:

- Record your required hours in GivePulse
- Submit your recertification survey via GivePulse
- Have a current background check on file (Loren will let you know if yours needs updating)

Minimum Hour Requirements:

- Certified MGs: 25 volunteer hours + 10 continuing education hours
- Emeritus MGs (10+ years of service): 1 volunteer hour + 5 continuing education hours

The survey is quick and easy, so please complete it when you receive the email. If you have questions or need help entering your hours, Loren is happy to assist.

Your dedication as a Master Gardener Volunteer is deeply appreciated by Washington State University Extension.

Thank you, and we look forward to continuing this important work with you in 2026!

Upcoming Events

For details on events, go to the Foundation website or the WSU Extension website or the MG emails.

October 30 Annual ICMGF Board meeting*
Annual ICMGF Membership meeting, elections & CE

December 7 Holiday Party

*Board meetings are open meetings. If you would like to attend, please contact the board president for details, president@icmgf.org.

LOOKING FARTHER AHEAD

January 8, 2026 ICMGF Board Retreat

March 21, 2026 Whidbey Gardening Workshop

May 9 and 16, 2026 Plant Sales, Whidbey and Camano





Teaching the next generation at the award-winning Master Gardener booth at the Whidbey Island Fair

ICMGF OFFICERS

President – Cathy Lofton-Day
Vice President – Jenni Wilson
Secretary – Kim Baxter
Treasurer – Paul Rowe

AREA REPS

South – Christine Dimm
Central – Deb Mitchell
North – Lisa Phillips
Camano – Rosemary Easley

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 the Resources page 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 bylaws & agreements
- selected CE videos

Need the password? Contact Sue Gibson.

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.