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MASTER GARDENER Gazette

Last fall I attended the virtual 2024 Advanced Education Conference, the theme of which was Gardening in a Changing Climate. There were many high-quality classes and instructors, so I appreciated that a lot of the courses were recorded for later review. Let me highlight a couple of my favorites.

Rebecca McMackin's keynote, "Adventures in Ecological Horticulture," provided inspiring advice on how to consider organisms that live in our area when we design our gardens and choose native plants that support those critters.

Karen Wright's class on "Native Bees and the Washington Bee Atlas" was eye-opening. Did you know that Washington State has over six hundred native species of bees? Since 2023, Karen Wright has adopted the Oregon Bee Atlas model to create a Washington Bee Atlas. Volunteers fan out across Washington to locate and identify various bee species. The information gathered will be used to assess conservation status and to make plans for the future.

As I look out of the window onto my own garden during this chilly winter, I know that all kinds of critters appreciate the leaves I left and the plants I chose last year as well as the decision to keep as many trees as possible on the land. I am looking forward to spring!



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
newsletter@icmgf.org



Holiday partygoers enjoy the great food and good company at our annual event

From the President

When I retired six years ago my colleagues asked me “What are you going to do with yourself?” I smiled and said, “things I’ve been wanting to do.” I know what you’re thinking, but I really did have a plan.



Early on in life I was intrigued by my father’s stories of growing up in the country, where they grew vegetables and fruit, fished, and hunted. Continuing with his own family, he tended a small vegetable garden in our yard and caught shrimp, fish, and crab in the local waters of the South Carolina Lowcountry. In the early 80s he took classes in a new program called Master Gardener. I remember his excitement about learning composting methods and the large pile he tended faithfully. The tomatoes he grew were out of this world.

If this wasn’t enough to spark an interest in gardening, my mother cultivated my love of ornamentals, with her beautiful yard full of camellias (sasanqua and japonica), azaleas, portulaca and her favorite in the summer – gladiolus. And oh boy, the house plants.

So, after over thirty years of working in biotech, raising a family, and dabbling with gardening in what little spare time was left, in fulfillment of my plan to “do what I want,” I enrolled in the Master Gardener program in 2020. Not only have I immensely increased my knowledge of horticulture satisfying my love for science and learning, but I have also made wonderful friends, found connections with community, and am having an awesome time volunteering. So far, my plan has been a rousing success!

As the new ICMGF Board President, I’d like to extend a warm welcome to the new Board member, Rosemary Easley, who is replacing Carol Anne Ebert as the Camano Island Rep for the remainder of the term. Many thanks also to Kim Baxter, Lisa Phillips and Chris Dimm for agreeing to serve two more years.

And, above all, thanks to all of you for your support and encouragement. I look forward to working with you to make our plans a success too.

Cathy Lofton-Day, ICMGF President

The Intern Experience

by **Scottie Kuper, Class of 2024**

Editor’s Note: The Intern Experience is a regular feature where we ask interns for their perspective on training and interning. We hope you enjoy the variety of impressions you get from our newest colleagues.

Years ago, when I first started growing veggies and perennials in Issaquah, I retained a lovely English woman, an accomplished cottage gardener. She spent 6-8 hours per week keeping my flower beds neat and tidy. Me, I’d merely pull the detritus from last season’s attempts and start over every time, instantly landscaping with irresistible starts from the local nursery. I didn’t know the difference between compost and mulch; who cared? Glory days! I was feeling flush.

Economizing years later in retirement, I thought I’d take the Master Gardener training and do-it-yourself. My eyes opened wide, astonished and inspired by the collective experience and knowledge my colleagues already possessed...

“You SAVE seeds to plant LATER? You make NOTES of what worked and what didn’t?? You take bulbs out of the ground, rinse them off, wrap them in cozy winter blankets, then put them back IN later!?!? Then you wait and watch?... OMG that person identified a black speck on a leaf and all I see is green. PULeeze.” Who ARE these people and where did they come from?? I was spellbound. I was humbled.

Fast forward to six months after graduation...

This stubborn overachiever leased 800 sq ft of pea patch at Greenbank and adopted two lots at the Education Garden. I’m producing fertile soil, retaining and propagating plants instead of replacing them, and nurturing the wilted and forlorn versus extracting them.

The best part of all... unexpected new friendships that I know will endure far past my newfound ability to knowledgeablely uproot a dandelion. Master Gardeners – miracles still do happen.

From the Program Coordinator

Happy New Year! Reflecting on the past year, I am deeply grateful for your dedication to the mission of the Master Gardener program. Through our many outreach efforts, you have helped our Island County neighbors become better gardeners and more responsible stewards of our precious natural resources with relevant, unbiased, research-based horticulture and environmental stewardship education.



My hope is that volunteering has also enriched your own life. There are documented health benefits to both gardening and volunteering, including improved physical and mental health, fostering social connections with other like-minded volunteers, and providing a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Whatever your reason for volunteering, thank you!

As we begin a new year, I'm excited about the opportunities to make a difference. Here are a few ways you can get involved:

Garden with us – Help maintain and develop our Education, community, and school gardens. Your regular presence is invaluable in ensuring that our plants thrive, and our gardens remain educational, beautiful, and bountiful.

Connect with the community – Answer gardening questions at plant clinics and outreach events. These are important ways people learn about the work we do in the community and a great way to encourage new volunteers to join us.

Share your knowledge – What are you passionate about? Share your knowledge with others by leading workshops and classes on gardening techniques and sustainable practices. Your experience can inspire and educate both youths and adults.

Join in special projects – Help with organizing and fundraising for events like WGWS, Plant Sale, and the Whidbey Island Fair. Your creativity and skills can help us raise funds for our outreach.

Support volunteers – Provide guidance and support to new and existing volunteers, helping them feel welcome and confident in their roles.

If you need help getting involved or have questions about volunteering, please let me know.

There are many wonderful organizations making a difference in our community. I am grateful for your commitment to the WSU Extension Master Gardener program and look forward to working with you in 2025!

Learn more about the health benefits of gardening and volunteering:

- [Volunteering and Subsequent Health and Well-Being in Older Adults: An Outcome-Wide Longitudinal Approach](#)
- [Gardening Is Beneficial for Health: A Meta-Analysis](#)

Get ready for the Whidbey Gardening Workshop!

The 36th annual Whidbey Gardening Workshop is coming soon, with many volunteer and learning opportunities.

On Saturday, March 15, 2025, we will be “Focusing on Our Priorities.” This year we go in depth on the nine priorities of WSU Master Gardeners, such as biodiversity, water conservation, and adapting to climate change. With over 40 classes and Make ‘n Takes, we encourage gardeners to bring these practices into their own gardens. The Marketplace will include our supporting vendors, the raffle, and bookstore.

Our keynote speakers, Kelly Dodson and Sue Milliken, are the owners of Far Reaches Farm, and the founders of Far Reaches Botanical Conservancy, a nonprofit organization committed to acquiring and conserving horticulturally and botanically important plants.

Volunteer opportunities will be available on [GivePulse](#) in early January, or by contacting wgw@icmgf.org. We look forward to a festive event again this year and thank everyone for helping make it so!

Meet Our Newest Master Gardeners

Scottie Kuper, Greenbank
Class of 2024

I confess. I'm an introvert. I have a tendency to overthink things, I'm solitary, I recharge with books, knitting, dogs, and now weeding! I've enjoyed an adventurous life. I've lived and traveled to over 40 countries, toured a dozen of them via horseback, and watched an elephant calf birthing in the wild in Africa.



I'm high on tolerance but low on patience. I bore easily and have "start-itis." I start big projects, many naively so. The first sewing project I ever embarked on was a three-piece suit for my then boyfriend. I submerge myself in the new, totally consumed, acquiring tools, accouterments, and just enough knowledge to discover my incompetence before setting it aside and moving on to the next shiny thing.

I'm stubborn, too, which is helpful when that new endeavor is harder than I'd imagined at the start (more often than not). I DO think weeding is my new calling.

Garrett Carney, Freeland
Class of 2022

I'm originally from Idaho, most recently relocated from San Francisco. I went to school at Arizona State University for a Bachelor's in Sustainability with a concentration in Economics.



I grew up in a family of gardeners and was exposed to landscaping and gardening at a young age. I have always loved plants and prior to relocating to Whidbey Island, I was involved with operations of a vertical farming hydroponics business.

Upon relocating to the Island, I wanted to get involved outside and working with plants which led me to the Island County Master Gardeners.

The knowledge I gained from this has been particularly helpful with my current occupation as a Project Manager for Pacific Landscapes of Whidbey. My unique understanding and perspective from the lens of a Master Gardener has helped enhance our design and installation for large scale landscapes.

I'm thrilled to be an official Master Gardener!

Suzanne Shwetz, Greenbank
Transfer from University of Maryland Master Gardener program, Class of 2013



I've always been in awe of nature. A good day is planting myself in a quiet spot where I can absorb and observe. After living in DC for 20 years, returning to the PNW and UW Husky roots, I am in my happy place.

In 2013, I dug into nature – trained as a Master Gardener, then as a Master Naturalist. I did plant clinics, urban gardening, meadow planting, guided walks, garden TLC, and workshops. I advocate for "leave the leaves," pesticide-free gardening, composting, removal of invasives, native plants, and good weeds.

I worked with Chesapeake Natives, a non-profit, to propagate and educate the public on native plants. I am also trained in the "art of hand pruning." Zooming on to Whidbey, I became a Sound Water Steward in 2022. Now here, I am eager to find my place with local Master Gardeners and grow with WSU Extension's rich programs.

Plant Detectives

by Loren Imes

What do noxious weeds, pear rust, and soil testing all have in common? They were among the most frequently discussed topics at our Ask a Master Gardener clinics in 2024. These questions, along with many others, highlight the importance of our clinics and the wide range of gardening challenges faced by Island County residents. Before diving into the specifics, let's reflect on the overall impact of our clinics this past year.

Clinic Participation and Impact. In 2024, over 35 Island County Master Gardener volunteers participated at 42 clinic events across the county, addressing more than 300 recorded questions. May and June were our busiest months, while September had the most questions due to two large events held at Greenbank Farm. Big events with lots of people seem to be an effective way to raise awareness of the work that we do, so for 2025, we plan to attend more community events including Camano 101, The Great Whidbey Seed Swap, and Wings over Whidbey. If you know of other events we should attend, please let me know!

Common Questions and Resources. Providing accurate answers using approved resources is crucial for maintaining the reputation of Master Gardeners as the “go-to resource for communities seeking research-based, innovative solutions for their ever-changing horticulture and environmental stewardship needs,” as highlighted in our Master Gardener [Vision Statement](#).

The clinic question form that is filled out at each event is an important tool to track the basic impacts mentioned above, and also gives insight on the types of questions asked to suggest resources that should be highlighted to help you give the most accurate, research-based answers. Here are the types of questions that were asked and clinic resources that should be used to help respond.

Plant-Specific Questions

- **Disease and Pest Problems** such as scab, rusts, powdery mildew, aphids, apple maggots, and tent caterpillars ([WSU Hortsense](#))
- **Plant Health Issues** that are likely cultural, such as why leaves are yellowing and why a plant isn't flowering or setting fruit ([WSU Factsheets](#) in clinic binders and *Sunset Western Garden Book*)
- **How to Grow** various vegetables, fruits, and flowers ([WSU Factsheets](#) in clinic binders, *Sunset Western Garden Book*, and *Gardener's Guide*)

General Gardening Practices

- **Soils and Amendments** questions such as testing, pH, amending, and fertilizing plants ([WSU Factsheets](#) in clinic binders and soil testing pamphlet)
- **Planting and Care** questions about when to plant, how to transplant, how to prune, and how to water ([WSU Factsheets](#), *Sunset Western Garden Book*, and *Gardener's Guide*)
- **Weed and Pest Control** questions on noxious weeds, weed management, and pests ([WSU Hortsense](#) and clinic pamphlets)

Plant Identification and Recommendations

- **Plant ID** questions about unknown ornamentals and weeds ([Google Lens](#) with proper verification of plant morphology and plant ID keys from list of [Approved Resources](#))
- **Plant Selection** questions about choosing the right plants for specific conditions, such as shade, drought, or poor soil ([Great Plant Picks](#), *Sunset Western Garden Book*, and *Gardener's Guide*)

Looking Ahead to 2025. I am excited that we will continue to provide helpful and accurate horticultural advice to our community. By reviewing past questions, using approved resources, and improving our practices, we can ensure that our Ask a Master Gardener clinics remain a valuable resource for Island County residents. At one of the last office clinics of the season, attendees offered suggestions for how we might strengthen our diagnostic capabilities and anticipate monthly questions. Ideas included offering recorded refresher sessions on best practices, continued and better use of the clinic blog, a monthly garden problem FAQ, and improved clinic tip sheets for common problems. What would help you?

Thank you to all the Master Gardener volunteers who dedicate time and knowledge to answering questions at the clinics. Your efforts have made a significant impact in our community.



Tandy Scott and Deb Mitchell
at Greenbank Farm Harvest Faire

From the Education Garden

A prominent Master Gardener mantra is “**Right Plant, Right Place,**” which we hear and say incessantly. But sometimes we inherit plants that we might have issues with. What then? We might yank them out or transplant them. But what if the plant is a 100-foot-tall multi-stemmed tree that has been in place for decades and which would cost \$10,000 to remove?

This is exactly the situation we faced in the Shade Garden. The tree in question is *Ulmus thomasii*, known as a **Cork Bark Elm** or Rock Elm. For much of its life, the elm had considerable competition from other trees, including native cherry, two mature willows, a large Douglas fir, and another centerpiece tree. Over several years, storms and disease brought most of those trees down.

With the competition gone and over a fairly short period of time, the Cork Bark Elm became the dominant tree, sending root sprouts far and wide. Sprouts have shown up in the Native Garden, the Pond Garden, the wetland, the Rhododendron garden, and all through the hillside bed of the Shade Garden. Due to the high cost of removal, the elm will remain, and we will keep cutting root sprouts indefinitely – probably long after the parent tree succumbs.



A “flash mob” of Master Gardeners is a sight to see!

What have we learned? This tree is suited for moist loamy soils to rocky hillsides and is not described as sprouting prolifically, thus it seemed appropriate for this area. However, the tree is *not* native to the Pacific Northwest and once relieved of competition, it became an unwanted, aggressive plant and a constant headache. We are reminded every day that “Right Plant, Right Place” is a mantra worthy of careful attention on every dimension of a plant’s many characteristics!

What else is going on at the Education Garden? Thanks to Anita Merrill’s great idea – and subsequent work to implement that idea – we will soon have a **Little Free Library** at the garden. Stay tuned for the opportunity to swap gardening-related books.

The Education Garden became the site of **haunting images during the Halloween** season, thanks to partnering with the Port of Coupeville. The Port has hosted many festive seasonal events that contribute to increased traffic in our Education Garden. Master Gardeners help to enhance those experiences.



Susan Dakis shares her decorating skills

December brought the annual installation of lights and **holiday decorations.**

Thanks to Carolyn Mercer, Judy Nylander, Barb Douglas, Gretchen Schломann, Ilze Zigurs, and Susan Dakis, among

others, for creating a festive winter wonderland for visitors during the holiday season.



Garden bounty shared at year’s end

Meet the Class of 2025

We are excited to welcome a new class of Island Master Gardener trainees who have embarked on their journey to becoming volunteer community educators. This enthusiastic group, which includes six Camano trainees and one from Whidbey, has been eagerly diving deep into the basics of botany, soil science, and other horticultural education while learning about the Extension resources that will support them as volunteers.

The new trainees are Beverly Bradly, Jamie Halterman, Suzanne Kieffer, Mary Kinsley, Amanda Krass, Janet Wick, and Jean Yoho. They were warmly welcomed by many of our Camano Master Gardeners, who provided a delicious potluck lunch at the first class and who shared some words of wisdom on making the most of their training.



Under the guidance of experienced Master Gardeners, the trainees have been learning valuable knowledge that will empower them to contribute significantly to our Ask a Master Gardener plant clinics, community gardens, and educational programs. Class teachers include Barb Faville, Gary Ketcheson, Bobbi Peskuric, Deb Mitchell, Lisa Phillips, Jim Peskuric, and Don Krafft.

After the class members complete their training in mid-February, Judy Coddington will help lead the effort to mentor the new interns. We look forward to the wonderful impact these new trainees will make as they grow and bloom during their internship. There will be a celebration on the last day of training so they can meet you – stay tuned for details.

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.

Advanced Education Conference. Island County was well represented at this year's annual Advanced Education Conference, either attending via Zoom, serving as virtual class hosts, or by taking advantage of recorded sessions. This year's theme was Gardening in a Changing Climate. Volunteers who participated include Kim Baxter, Susan Dakis, Barb Faville, Line Goulet, Mary Hollen, Gary Ketcheson, Leif, Carol Ann Leonessa, Cathy Lofton-Day, Deb Mitchell, Idonna Pieper Nelson, Judy Nylander, Bobbi Peskuric, Jim Peskuric, Tandy Scott, Sarah Van Alstyne, Warren Weisman, and Ilze Zigurs.

In addition to those who attended the conference as participants, three volunteers hosted class sessions: Jenni Wilson hosted two classes, Understanding and Bridging the Generations and The Beauty of Weeds; Marcia Meyers hosted Lovely Lawn Alternatives; and Carol Anne Ebert hosted Volunteer Vitality: The Wellness Benefits of Extension Volunteer Programs.

News from Camano Island. We are GROWING! Though we are all Island County Master Gardeners, only a small proportion of us live on Camano Island. That will soon change as the new trainees wrap up their coursework and officially join us in early spring. We look forward to getting to know each of them as we work together at plant clinics, education workshops, the plant sale, the Whidbey Gardening Workshop, local fairs, new program development, and community projects.



A special thanks to Loren Imes for making the training available on Camano Island this year. We really appreciate Loren's dedication to the Island County Master Gardener Program on Camano!

...continued on next page

Camano Education Garden. Excitement is building in the Camano MG group! The group has grown over the last few years and the need for a dedicated space for community outreach has become front and center. To meet this need, Carole Matthews is leading a team that is developing a proposal for an education garden around the Multipurpose Building located at the Island County Annex on Camano.



Adjacent to a public park with pickleball courts and a baseball field, this space is envisioned to be a place for the community to gather, learn, and enjoy. Island County is still working through details on the feasibility of such a project, but the team is hopeful it will move forward. Stay tuned for updates on our progress.

Camano School Gardening. The Camano team also heard from representatives at Island County Public Health recently about how Master Gardeners can assist with a new school garden at Elger Bay Elementary. Idonna Pieper Nelson, the main contact for this initiative, is optimistic that it will become a regular volunteer activity for the Camano MGs. A few new trainees have already expressed interest in helping.

Foundation Presidency.

Jim Peskuric was sadly devoured by a large spider around his neck as Ilze Zigurs and Julie Lary looked on at the October ICMGF meeting and is no longer our Foundation President.



Halloween jokes aside – in reality, Jim completed the end of his second term as President and stepped down, happily transitioning the role to Cathy Lofton-Day. Thank you, Jim, for leading the Foundation for the past four years!

Holiday Wreaths.

Tristan Levine invited the Master Gardeners to join her in early December at the Education Garden for a holiday wreath-making activity. She and Sarah Van Alstyne collected a large assortment of beautiful greenery and Tristan provided wreath forms, wire, and a multitude of wreath “bling!” Several Master Gardeners made wreaths as well as two members of the public. It was educational and fun!



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Holiday Party. Volunteers had a tree-mendous time at the holiday party on Whidbey, filled with laughter and festive good cheer. As usual, a delightful spread of delicious food and drink provided by our multi-talented volunteers was the centerpiece of the event, surrounded by the warm and festive atmosphere created by Melissa Evans and her team of holiday elves: Ann Holmberg, Julie Lary, Cathy Lofton-Day, Carolyn Mercer, and Judy Nylander. A raffle of holiday themed items and an Ugly Sweater contest rounded out the afternoon’s festivities with cheers and laughter.

The afternoon also included a recognition of the service of our volunteers. Their giving of time and talent truly reflects the holiday spirit. The Master Gardener program relies on the dedication and hard work of our volunteers, and this was the perfect opportunity to honor several Master Gardeners for their Years of Service:

- 5 Years:** Sue Gibson, Line Goulet, Jim Peskuric, Gretchen Schlomann
- 10 Years:** Barb Douglas, Ilze Zigurs
- 15 Years:** Nancy Hindes
- 20 Years:** Gayle Taylor

Thank you, volunteers, for your many years of dedicated service to the WSU Extension Master Gardener program. Your commitment to providing our Island County neighbors with research-based gardening and horticultural information is truly appreciated. We are incredibly thankful and proud of each and every one of you!

Upcoming Events

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

January 9	Board Retreat
January 23	Board Meeting
January 30	General Membership Meeting & CE (Zoom only)
February 18	Meet the class of 2025
February 20	Board Meeting
February 27	General Membership Meeting & CE (Zoom only)
March 15	Whidbey Gardening Workshop
March 20	Board Meeting
March 27	General Membership Meeting & CE

LOOKING FARTHER AHEAD

April 27	Spring Potluck
May 10	Plant Sale



Thank you to the recipients of the Service Awards for all your years of dedicated service!



Holiday cheer personified – Anza Muenchow, Rosemary Easley, and Gretchen Schlomann

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.