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MASTER GARDENER Gazette

"Spring is nature's way of saying Let's Party!"—Robin Williams

I love this quote because the coming of spring, with the opening of flowers and buds on the trees, reminds me of getting ready for a party. All the colors, shades, and hues wash away the greys of winter and show that life is renewed.

I hope you were able to join us for the Whidbey Gardening Workshop this year as we celebrated the coming of spring. There were lots of activities in the Marketplace including book signings, the Raffle, and the myriads of vendors. And let's not forget classes to grow those beautiful flowers, vegetables, and fruits. So have a party in your own garden and enjoy the beauty you worked so hard to achieve!



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



The magic of setup at the Whidbey Gardening Workshop happens via the hard work and good cheer of an abundance of Master Gardeners!

Meet the Newest Master Gardener Interns

Please welcome the Island County Master Gardener Class of 2026! This dedicated group of ten new interns is ready to join us to support WSU Extension's mission of providing relevant, unbiased, research-based horticulture and environmental stewardship education to the community.

The interns are Pat Bieler and Chris Shelton from Camano Island; John Gibson from Langley; David Pope, Vikki Stein, and Laura Valente from Freeland; Celine Geraghty and Troyann Johnson from Coupeville; and Marion Leach and Jaci Manning from Oak Harbor.

Throughout their training, the class explored the nine Master Gardener [program priorities](#), gaining an understanding of how these principles guide their work as volunteers when answering gardening questions, teaching classes, or helping in the Education Garden.

They recently completed their first hands-on volunteer experience as classroom hosts at the Whidbey Gardening Workshop, where they welcomed participants, supported instructors, and experienced the impact of community education in action.

Working with their mentors and with support from fellow volunteers, the Class of 2026 will continue gaining experience across our program activities as they work to complete their internships. We look forward to watching them grow in knowledge, confidence, and service as they become an integral part of the Island County Master Gardener community.



Left to right: Chris Shelton, John Gibson, Pat Bieler, Marion Leach, Laura Valente, Vikki Stein, Celine Geraghty, Troyann Johnson
Not pictured: Jaci Manning and David Pope

From The President

The ICMGF Board held our annual retreat once again in January. In preparation for our meeting each Board member considered the following questions:



- Are there any services we should be providing our community that we are currently not doing?
- How can we engage better with our community using existing programs, for example, the Education Garden?

The results of the recent survey were also considered in answering the questions. Apart from needing a Demonstration Garden on Camano, our members reported being happy with the current community services that we provide, so many of the ideas proposed were focused on how to be more efficient in our volunteer efforts. Many creative ideas were discussed during the session.

Two of these ideas stood out as opportunities to greatly increase efficiency and reduce individual workloads through forming teams for special functions. The first would centralize educational outreach through an Education Committee. The committee would manage educational content across all MG events – WGW, Member Meeting CE, the Education Garden Summer Series, and so on – through creation of a database for speakers and topics. A team has been tasked to develop a proposal for consideration by the Board at its April meeting.

Consolidation of ICMGF advertising and marketing activities was also suggested. A team approach would expand offerings and add structure. Different events such as WGW and plant sales could then use the group's expertise for outreach. This would improve continuity of message and management of the web and social media accounts. It would break services away from focusing on a single event to a central location. Work on establishing this group will begin soon.

If you have an interest in participating with either of these groups please let me, Loren, or any Board member know.

Cathy Lofton-Day, ICMGF President

From the Program Coordinator – Volunteers Make it Happen!

As we celebrate the successful completion of the 37th Whidbey Gardening Workshop, I am continually humbled by the passion and dedication of our volunteers, whose commitment sustains our program year after year. Large and small, your efforts make a measurable difference in advancing our nine statewide [program priorities](#), turning research-based horticulture education into practical help for our neighbors across Island County.



Our collective impact last year was impressive:

- At our **Plant Clinics**, **34 volunteers** assisted more than **430 Island County neighbors**, turning each conversation into a teachable moment on environmental stewardship.
- In the **Education Garden**, **24 volunteers** showed up every Wednesday, contributing **1340 hours** to the care of a treasured public garden and beautiful setting for **140 community members** to learn at our summer **Education Series**.
- At our two **Plant Sale** locations, **56 volunteers** raised thousands of dollars to support our outreach while encouraging hundreds of neighbors to grow more of their own food, incorporate native plants, and support pollinators.
- And we're already off to a great start in 2026! The **Whidbey Gardening Workshop** took hundreds of planning hours by **23 volunteers**, followed by more than **400 hours** from **60 volunteers** to deliver the event. **260 participants** attended **40 classes** resulting in over **1000 hours** of learning!

Quite simply, the impact on our community would not exist without your time, energy, and leadership. You make a measurable difference in helping build a more resilient Island County.

As we enter the prime spring season for gardeners, your involvement will continue to shape how we reach and support our community. How will you share your time and talents to expand our reach and increase our impact? What ideas do you have that will strengthen our program?

Thank you for all you do as community educators for the WSU Extension Master Gardener program in Island County. We truly could not do this without you, and it is a privilege to serve alongside such a committed group of volunteers.

Loren Imes, Program Coordinator

2026 Plant Clinics

Volunteer at one of five plant clinic locations!

CAMANO ISLAND

Last Saturday of the month, March to September
11 am to 1 pm

Camano Plaza Ace Hardware

370 NE Camano Dr., Camano Island

Contact Adena Ray

OAK HARBOR AND NORTH WHIDBEY

First Sunday of each month, April to October
10:30 am to 1 pm

Country Store

31686 State Route 20, Oak Harbor

Contact Lisa Phillips

COUPEVILLE AND ALL COUNTY VIA ZOOM

Tuesdays, April to October
10 am to 12 pm

WSU Extension Office and Zoom

406 N. Main St., Coupeville

Contact Loren Imes

SOUTH WHIDBEY

Saturdays, April 18, May 23, June 20, July 18
11 am to 2 pm

Skagit Farmers Country Store

5463 Cameron Rd., Freeland

Sundays, May, June, September, October
11 am to 2 pm

South Whidbey Tilth Farmers Market

2812 Thompson Rd., Langleys
(off Highway 525 at Thompson Rd.)

Contact Christine Dimm

Plant Detectives: Hydrangeas

by Jamie Halterman

Welcome to spring! As gardeners head back to their landscapes, Master Gardeners are often asked when and how to prune hydrangeas. This month, we take a closer look at pruning and general care of hydrangeas to help answer the question, “Why didn’t mine bloom?”

Pruning Hydrangeas. When and how to prune hydrangeas depends on whether they bloom on new wood (current-season growth) or old wood (growth from the previous year). Pruning at the wrong time can remove developing flower buds, resulting in little or no bloom. Realistically, hydrangeas only require deadheading after flowering, and for the removal of dead, damaged, or crossed branches. Regular pruning is not necessary unless the shrub needs shaping or is overgrown.



Hydrangeas Blooming on New Wood. There are two main types of hydrangeas that bloom on new wood: panicle (*Hydrangea paniculata*) and smooth (*Hydrangea arborescens*). These varieties can be pruned in late winter or early spring, before new growth begins.

Smooth hydrangeas have large, round flowers in shades of white to pink with heart-shaped leaves. Prune by cutting back stems to 12 to 18 inches above the ground, cutting the branches above any new buds.

Panicle hydrangeas have large, cone-shaped blooms on thick stems with dark green leaves. The flowers begin white and fade to green, pink, or red by the end of the season. These are trimmed by removing one-third of their top growth each year.

Hydrangeas Blooming on Old Wood. Oakleaf (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) and climbing hydrangeas (*Hydrangea anomala*) bloom on old wood. Because they bloom on buds formed the previous year, any pruning should be done after these plants flower in the summer.

Oakleaf hydrangeas have leaves shaped like those on an oak. The leaves are darker green during the summer, turning red or purple by fall. Oakleaves are early bloomers, with cone-shaped flowers that begin white in the spring and fade to pink by the end of the summer.

Climbing hydrangeas have dark green, heart-shaped leaves and white lacy flowers. These hydrangeas need minimal pruning. Flowers are produced from side shoots on the vines, which can be pruned in the fall, cutting back to the last healthy bud.

Hydrangeas Blooming on Old and New Wood.

Mophead and lacecap hydrangeas (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) bloom on both previous and current-year growth.

Mopheads are the more traditional variety recognized as a hydrangea, having larger, rounded blooms. Lacecap hydrangea blooms have flat, short flowers in the center surrounded by showier flowers around the edges.

Both mophead and lacecap hydrangeas can be deadheaded after they bloom until early fall. Plants can be thinned by removing dead, damaged, or crossed branches. Remove any branches that are very woody, lighter in color, and possibly hollow.

General Care and Blooming Tips. Regardless of variety, hydrangeas prefer well-drained soil that is rich in organic matter. Morning sun and afternoon shade are best, as they do not grow well in full, direct sun.

Hydrangeas like to be well watered. Water when the top couple of inches of soil are dry and water deeply at the base of the plant. Overhead watering can lead to disease. Hydrangeas benefit from the addition of mulch that will improve soil quality as the mulch breaks down.

Gardeners who are new to growing hydrangeas may consider a soil test. A soil test has a two-fold benefit as it determines both fertilizer needs and the pH level in the soil. Hydrangea color can be influenced by the pH level, with more acidic soil resulting in blooms in shades of blue and more alkaline soil resulting in blooms in shades of pink.

Hydrangeas also benefit from slow-release fertilizer in early spring, as new growth becomes visible. Soil tests would help to not over-fertilize, which results in fewer blooms and more leaf production.

When planted and tended correctly, hydrangeas are a beautiful addition to any garden. If you’re unsure which hydrangea you have or when to prune, the WSU Extension office has several resources, including the always helpful *Sunset Western Garden Book*.

From the Education Garden

The Vegetable Garden is on the move! When Susan Dakis began tending the veggie area at the Education Garden a decade ago, it consisted mainly of a couple of raised beds squeezed between an espaliered apple and a fence. As interest in vegetable gardening increased, and with growing local food named as a WSU Master Gardener priority, it became clear this area needed more attention.

Moving to a larger and more open area provides more space, better accessibility, and enhanced opportunities for education. The new space will allow not only for better navigation

within it but will also focus on how gardeners with limited mobility can stay active in vegetable gardening. Susan's goal is to make this area a place where people would say: "Oh, I could do that!"

The garden already has a custom-built trug that allows for wheelchair access. A tiered, vertical gardening tower is planned. Are you intrigued and would like to help? Do you have ideas for accessible structures we might include? Contact [Susan Dakis](#) or stop by the Education Garden during our regular Wednesday work parties from 9 am to noon.

Also underway is a project to replace the plants around the Cloudstone Sculpture near the pond. This area needed revitalization, so we took the opportunity to create a design for a Heath and Heather garden.



Kim Baxter, Lisa Phillips, and Judy Nylander begin to plant



Kim Baxter, Susan Dakis, Barb Douglas, and Lisa Phillips anticipate spring

We started by educating ourselves on the differences between Heaths (*Erica*) and Heathers (*Calluna*), and we will use this small garden to share that knowledge with the community. We chose plants with varied height, color, bloom time, and texture. We welcome you to come and see the results!

2026 Master Gardener Education Series

The **Education Garden at Greenbank Farm** hosts the Master Gardener Education Series on the third Sunday of the month, **May to September, 1 to 2 pm**. Many thanks to Sarah Van Alstyne and C-J Nielsen for assembling this excellent series of classes.

All classes qualify as Continuing Education for Master Gardeners. Invite your friends and neighbors – let them know these classes are FREE and open to the public.

May 17, All About Dahlias, by Dave Thomas. Learn about all aspects of growing and propagating dahlias, for experienced growers and novice enthusiasts.

June 21, Regenerative Ecosystems, by Muri Mitschak and Jim Peskuric. Discover how regenerative ecology goes beyond simply sustaining our environment to empower us to actively improve and renew the world around us.

July 19, Soil Blocking for Your Fall Garden, by Madeleine Spencer. Learn about soil blocks to start your own veggie garden seeds, including techniques and tools, veggies best suited for fall, and benefits of the method.

August 16, The Importance of Biodiversity, by Tobey Nelson. Find out about new research on the wildlife benefits of combining ornamentals with natives in our gardens, including types of beneficial plants.

September 20, Clematis: Queen of Climbers, by Laura Watson. Learn about details of care, simplified pruning, and recommendations for easy clematis to try in your garden.

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.

Graduation Party for Class of 2026. After 15 weeks of study, presentations, and homework, there was reason to celebrate as ten new Master Gardener trainees completed their training and were officially welcomed into the Master Gardener community.

The graduation party for the Island County trainees was held following their final class in late February at the Extension office. In true Master Gardener fashion, the celebration featured a potluck lunch, with new graduates mingling with their mentors and connecting with fellow Master Gardeners as they marked this important achievement. Congratulations to the new Interns and thank you to all who helped welcome them!

NW Flower & Garden Festival. Several Island County Master Gardeners volunteered at the State Foundation booth at the NWFGF in February. The focus of the booth was integrated pest management. Visitors were invited to “spin the wheel” and answer questions about control of plant pests and diseases. It was a big hit with the kids along with free wildflower seeds and stickers and a fantastic learning experience for all. Garden tools were given away to all making donations to MGFWS and a lucky gardener won the raffle for free tuition to Green School. Many questions were answered at the Master Gardener Plant Clinic.

Seed and Plant Swap. In March, Island County Master Gardeners partnered with South Whidbey Tilth and Deer Lagoon Grange at the Seed and Plant Swap. In addition to offering a chance to peruse hundreds of seed packets, the event included a rummage and garden book sale by donation.



Julie Lary presented a class on making a Seed Snail. A lively group of Master Gardeners staffed the plant clinic table, including Melissa Evans, John Gibson, Sue Gibson, Julie Lary, and Laura Valente.

Intern Capstone Projects.

Three interns presented their capstone projects at the ICMGF member meeting in March to great appreciation from the audience.



Pat Bieler showed her design of a sensory garden, which could be used in the planning for the demo garden on Camano. Troyann Johnson discussed her design of a native plant area at the Island County Historical Museum in Coupeville. Laura Valente presented details of her article on butterfly gardens which she plans to submit for publication. Congrats to these and the other interns for their work on these projects.

WGW 2026 Celebrates Spring. More than 260 participants, 20 vendors, and 60 volunteers celebrated spring on March 21 at the 37th annual Whidbey Gardening Workshop. The unique format of the keynote was a great success, performed as a radio show featuring John Christianson, rose expert and owner of Christianson’s Nursery.

As usual, a great variety of classes was offered, from growing vegetables to strawberries to rhododendrons and other flowers. First-time class offerings included Hugelkultur, Futurescaping, Winter Sowing, Garden Microclimates, and Plant Ecophysiology. Regular favorites such as Composting, Pruning, and Integrated Pest Management were also popular. Thirteen Island County Master Gardeners and six Master Gardeners from other counties were instructors this year. Many positive comments about classes were overheard in the hallways.

The Marketplace was busy with book signings, Make-n-Take classes, and demonstrations. Seed Snails, Air Plants and miniature garden Make-n-Takes were well attended. Demonstrations of Straw Bale Gardening and Living Walls, along with the Plant Clinic, answered many attendees’ questions. Besides vendors such as glass blowers, bird house makers, and a metal artist, the Marketplace also hosted twelve non-profits including the 4-H Coffee concession.

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The raffle was once again a high point in the Marketplace. Participants were excited to see the abundance of Raffle items arranged in 24 different “baskets.” These amazing gift baskets included goodies such as hotel stays, gift cards, and a hand-blown glass jellyfish. Many of our sponsors, including Hansen’s Garden Center in Bayview, Home Depot, The Coachman Inn in Oak Harbor, and Callahan’s Firehouse in Langley, also contributed to the raffle.

A huge thank you to the volunteers, who tirelessly spent time setting up, staffing booths and tables, and helping participants and instructors. At the end of the day, volunteers took everything down and returned Oak Harbor High School to its original condition. Finally, WGW 2026 could not have been a success without our chair, Barb Faville, who is enjoying a well-deserved vacation. Thank you to Barb and the entire team of volunteers for another successful year for the Whidbey Gardening Workshop!

It's Plant Sale Time!

Two Locations. Two Dates!

Plant Sale

SATURDAY MAY 9 Greenbank Farm 765 Wonn Rd	9 am - 1 pm <small>BOTH SALES</small>	SATURDAY MAY 16 Camano Multi-Purpose Center 141 East Camano Drive
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PERENNIALS • SHRUBS • NATIVES • VEGGIE STARTS • GARDEN ART

Our annual Plant Sale will be held on two successive Saturdays on Whidbey and Camano Islands – from 9 am to 1 pm at both locations. The staggered dates allow volunteers to join the fun on both days and see “how the other half lives!”

For the first time, we are adding public education areas that introduce new projects taking place on each island. On Camano, we will have a Keystone Species table. On Whidbey, we will have a Citizen Scientist table. Designated plants will be available for purchase and donation to these projects. Plant Clinics – a favorite of the public – will also be held at both locations.

To volunteer for either plant sale, please register on [GivePulse](#).

The Secret Lives of Master Gardeners

That cheerful photographer you may have encountered at the Whidbey Gardening Workshop in the last couple of years is Idonna Pieper Nelson. Idonna has been a Master Gardener on Camano since 2022 and is always ready to try new projects. But did you know that Idonna is also a talented painter?

Idonna had always loved art but was told at an early age that she had zero talent so there was no use even trying to be an artist. During her years as a single mom with significant careers, she had no time to challenge that assumption. But once she found time, she signed up for a watercolor painting class. Six months later, the class voted her “Most Improved Artist,” and her art has flourished ever since.



From the beginning, Idonna combined painting with her love of the outdoors. She now serves as the Manager of The Roaming Artists, a group of friends on Camano Island who meet regularly for outdoor painting sessions.

Idonna described a recent day that exemplifies why she loves painting. The group went to Bowman Bay, painting in the shade as artists do. Because it was so cold, the paper kept absorbing paint, and the color became very intense. When the sun shifted and it got hot, the paint finally dried and it all came together – the scene, the surroundings, the painting, and the painter.

Idonna sees a clear relationship between painting and gardening, in that they both depend on the power of observation. She puts that observation to good use in the forest surrounding her home. Her training as a Master Gardener helped open her eyes to that forest – to see things from the big picture overview to all the fine detail, in art as in gardening.

If you are involved in an interesting project or activity outside your MG volunteering that you would like to share, please [contact us](#).

Upcoming Events

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

April 23	Board Meeting*
May 3	Spring Potluck (Freeland)
May 9	ICMGF Plant Sale (Whidbey)
May 16	ICMGF Plant Sale (Camano)
May 17	MG Education Series at Greenbank Farm
May 21	Board Meeting*
May 28	General Membership Meeting & CE
June 18	Board Meeting*
June 21	MG Education Series at Greenbank Farm
June 25	General Membership Meeting & CE

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

LOOKING FARTHER AHEAD

August 29 Summer Picnic



At the Whidbey Gardening Workshop, Master Gardeners teach, answer questions, look after participants, and even host a radio show!



ICMGF OFFICERS

President – Cathy Lofton-Day
Vice President – Anita Merrill
Secretary – Kim Baxter
Treasurer – Paul Rowe

AREA REPS

South – Christine Dimm
Central – Loren Imes
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 by-laws & 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.