ISLAND COUNTY MASTER GARDENER FOUNDATION

WSU EXTENSION Island County

A JOINT QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2026

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MASTER GARDENER Gazette

Oh, Fall! With its soft sunshine, cool days, and pumpkin spice lattes, it is a wonderful time of year. Are you planning or planting your winter veggies? Are you preparing your garden for winter frosts? Or are you, like me, putting all your deck plants into the greenhouse? Wherever you are in your gardening, take some time out to peruse this issue of the *Gazette*, which is celebrating four years of publication.

Learn about the projects Master Gardeners are working on all over Island County. New picnic tables and a learning center have been added to the Education Garden. Food is being donated to food banks that serve our communities. Interns from the Class of 2026 are starting to get certified and we warmly welcome them. As Master Gardeners, we are doing so much to contribute to the well-being of the residents of both our beautiful islands!



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







Smiling faces and a sunny day make the summer social a special time

Type here!

From The President



It's hard to believe that fall is already upon us. I hope everyone is well into their fall planting and dividing perennials for next year's Plant Sales. We have accomplished so much again this year.

Through everyone's hard work, our fundraisers – the Whidbey Gardening Workshop and the Plant Sales on Camano and Whidbey – have provided us with sufficient funds to support all the plans in our current budget. Some of these projects include the renovation of the cottage alcove to a visitor information center and the purchase of picnic tables for the Education Garden at Greenbank. Funds also support our Program Coordinator through a donation to WSU Extension, purchase of supplies for the Coupeville Community Garden and the Camano Center Trail and covering speaker fees for our Summer Education Series.

Although it is tough to fill Loren's shoes, many volunteers have chipped in to ensure events are in GivePulse, impacts are approved, and everyone is notified of various activities happening in Island County and beyond. Special thanks to Ilze Zigurs for doing the lion's share of this work.

The Board has been busy as well. WSU Extension has updated the document governing the interaction between County Master Gardener Foundations and the WSU Extension Master Gardener Program, called the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). As part of the process of reviewing and understanding this new agreement, we are also reviewing our Foundation Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws to reflect changes in Washington state law and to harmonize with the new MOA. One of our newly minted Master Gardeners, Laura Valente, has played an instrumental role in this effort. Her expertise has been invaluable.

One of the updates required by state law is that changes to the Articles must be approved by the Foundation members. So, all of you will be involved in this process too!

As I near the end of this term on the Board, I want to thank you all for your advice, encouragement, and support. It has been a pleasure to serve as ICMGF President during these last two years.

Cathy Lofton-Day, ICMGF President

REMINDER
Update Your Volunteer Hours

We were fortunate in past years to have Loren's periodic reminders of the administrative things that we need to do. One of those important things is to enter our volunteer hours in GivePulse – an especially critical task as we approach the end of this calendar year.

Our Interim Island County Director, Sarah Bergquist, will be sending out the annual recertification form, so be sure to post your hours in anticipation of that process.

In the spirit of keeping us on track while a new Program Coordinator is being recruited and hired, we provide these friendly reminders.

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

Need a few more continuing education hours?
Here are some online options.

- **Member meetings**. Recordings of Foundation member meetings you were not able to attend in person.
- **Evergreen Thumb Podcast.** A twice-monthly podcast produced by WSU Extension Master Gardener volunteers and sponsored by the Master Gardener Foundation of Washington State.
- **Staying Mission Driven.** A (semi) regular meeting where you can hear directly from the state Master Gardener Program Lead, Jennifer Marquis, on program updates and statewide initiatives. Watch recorded videos on the YouTube channel.

Need help with GivePulse?

- Contact Jana McGeehee in the WSU Extension Office, or Ilze Zigurs

From the Education Garden

The Stansberry Cottage is an iconic part of the Education Garden, named after Donna and Steve Stansberry in recognition of their significant roles in founding and growing the gardens.

The alcove that is an extension of the cottage has served many purposes over the years, including a barbecue site for work party lunches, a storage location for plants and tools, and a general catch-all for things that had no home elsewhere.

Now, the alcove is undergoing a major transformation into an information kiosk. Holly Grason first had the idea to use the alcove for educational outreach, to which she was keenly committed. One of the last things she did with us was to lead a road trip to visit Master Gardener demonstration gardens in nearby counties to get ideas for what might be done.

Gretchen Schlomann, Kim Baxter, and Loren Imes formed a Visitor Engagement Team that took on the challenge of designing the new space. A key goal is to provide gardeners with information they can use at home. The focus will be on a series of topics like pollinators, managing garden pests, water-wise gardening, companion planting, and much more.

In fact, this is an area where each of you can contribute your own expertise! Please look again at the call for contributions that Kim Baxter sent or contact her for questions.



Kim Baxter and Gretchen Schlomann show their painting skill – and ability to work around nesting birds!

Our existing educational efforts at the Education Garden consist of information podiums, a self-guided brochure and map, plant labeling, docent tours, and the Extension Master Gardener website with details on each garden area. We also have posters in specific areas to explain the specific process being demonstrated, including vermicomposting, cold composting, and self-irrigating planters.

The kiosk will be our newest component, to be named the Education Garden Learning Center. As we gain experience with what people find most useful, the Learning Center will become an essential part of next year's celebration of the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Master Gardener Education Garden. Watch for announcements as we begin to plan that event early next year.

Work parties in the Education Garden continue through the fall and winter on Wednesdays from 9 am to noon, weather permitting. All Master Gardeners and Interns are invited to join the fun or just stop by to visit.



Summer sunshine,
and a full wheelbarrow of weeds –
a satisfying day at the Garden

Plant Detectives – Interpreting Soil Tests

by Warren Weissman

I suspected I had a soil nutrient problem. After converting turf areas to beds planted with ornamentals, I had tried to decipher the murky color readings of at-home soil tests and had tried diagnosing presumed plant nutrition issues with a dichotomous key. Finally, I realized that I had neglected a key principle of problem-solving: detectives should first get all the facts. So, I had my soil professionally tested.

Simply Soil Testing of Burlington was in an Island County Master Gardener pamphlet. After collecting samples from two groups of beds, I requested tests for the six macronutrients, five micronutrients (no test was available for chloride, molybdenum or nickel), organic matter and pH. I identified the two areas as containing ornamental plants, shrubs and trees, information the lab would use to make recommendations. Key test takeaways:

Organic Matter. Organic matter is an indicator of overall soil health, microbiological activity, water holding capacity, total Nitrogen content, and reserves of several nutrients. It was high in both samples, above the 4-7% range generally viewed as useful. This was not surprising, since I had amended the soil with compost and used arborist wood chips as mulch. There is no need to add more organic matter going forward.

Soil pH. Soil pH affects nutrient availability (as opposed to total nutrient content) and toxicity, but I knew the impact depends on the plant.

- One test came back with a pH of 6.09—in the neutral range, good for most plants unless I planted anything acid loving in those beds.
- The other test showed a pH of 5.75 (slightly acidic), with a recommendation to add lime to increase the pH. But I had not specified that the area was planted only with acid-loving small conifers, so the acidity was not a concern.

Nitrogen(N). Both tests showed low N, but the test measures only the nitrate form of N. Had I recently fertilized with N in ammonium form, it would have been overlooked by the test, but I had not. Water leaches Nitrate easily from soil, probably explaining the chlorosis (yellowing of leaves) I was seeing. I quickly fertilized with an N-only fertilizer, one providing immediately available nutrition as well as delayed-release nutrition, and I will more regularly supply my beds with an N-only fertilizer.

Phosphorus and Potassium. Both tests showed high phosphorus. Potassium was high in one case, but medium in the other, and I surmised that the high mobility of potassium in sandy soil was probably leading to rain-related leaching in the beds with less tree cover. I added potassium to the beds that tested medium and will avoid balanced fertilizer going forward due to the environmental degradation caused by excessive phosphorus.

Other Macronutrients. Both tests showed very high levels of calcium and magnesium, presumably from the balanced fertilizer I had applied, and because my soils are not very acidic. Sulfur was high in both cases. There is no need to apply these nutrients.

Micronutrients. None of the micronutrients came back as deficient. This confirmed my sense, based on a dichotomous key, that the symptoms I was seeing were not micronutrient deficiencies.

Plant problem diagnosis is more accurate with all the facts. WSU publications suggest testing soil every 2-3 years, but I plan to test annually for a few years to assess nutrient trends. I will sample even more thoroughly going forward and I will also investigate the timing of soil testing to understand how moisture levels and temperature may affect nutrient availability. I hope readers will benefit from the lesson I learned about professional soil testing to get all the facts.



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.

Whidbey Island Fair. The Master Gardener booth at the Whidbey Island Fair continued its tradition of outstanding work, thanks to Melissa Evans and her team of volunteers as well as those who donated plants. The theme this year was Deer and Rabbit Resistant Plants, which were labeled and described to help educate the public on what works in our county. A children's planting station was also popular. Congratulations to all who helped and whose efforts resulted in being awarded a Grand Champion Blue Ribbon!





Stanwood-Camano Community Fair. The Camano Master Gardeners once again joined Snohomish County Master Gardeners for a joint plant clinic at the Stanwood/Camano Community Fair. They shared knowledge and practices with each other and provided lots of information and tips to gardeners from both Camano Island and Snohomish County. Everyone agreed this is a great way to collaborate.

Picnics at the Education Garden. Two new picnic tables have been added to the Education Garden, with the first one funded by our own Foundation. The second table was a gift via a surprise grant from the Coupeville Peony Fund and Whidbey Community Foundation. The new metal tables will last many years without needing refinishing, saving time that can be spent attending to plants.



Summer Garden Party. The weather was warm and the flowers were blooming for the annual summer garden party. As always, the food was outstanding and the raffle was great fun. Sarah Bergquist joined us to present certificates to the interns who have completed their hours to become certified Master Gardeners: Chris Shelton and Laura Valente. Pat Bieler could not attend but has also finished her hours and will be presented with her certificate at an upcoming Camano meeting.

This is the second of our festive gatherings that Melissa hosted at her home this year, and we owe great thanks for her gracious hospitality.



Sarah Bergquist, Laura Valente, and Chris Shelton

Community Gardens. Volunteers at the Lord's Garden and Coupeville Community Garden (CCG) have spent a successful summer growing food for those in need in our community. The Lord's Garden, led by Dave Thomas, has had an amazing year so far, with 22 different fruits and vegetables donated, including 405 cartons of raspberries, 94 cartons of blackberries, 290 pounds of cabbage, and 211 pounds of onion, to name just a few.

Donated produce goes to senior and low-income communities in Oak Harbor and Coupeville. Dave starts each weekly work party with a lesson on relevant topics in gardening, as shown in the photo.



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This year the Coupeville Community Garden donated over 300 pounds of vegetables, including rhubarb, squash, tomatoes, and peas, to local food banks all over the Island. They are also growing flowers that attract pollinators and are saving seeds for next year.



Deb Mitchell, Jim Peskuric, and Line Goulet

Greenbank Harvest Faire. Fall weather was abundantly in evidence at this year's Harvest Faire at Greenbank Farm. But despite wind and cool temperatures, Master Gardeners hosted a clinic table in the midst of other booths, along with *ad hoc* docent tours of the Education Garden. Thank you to Jim Peskuric for organizing the clinic table.



Thank you to Gretchen Schlomann and Kim Baxter for completing and setting up the Education Garden Learning Center just in time for the Faire! The Center will be a great resource for providing changing seasonal information on local gardening issues.



The Master Gardener Education Series at Greenbank Farm ended in September with a final class on Clematis by Laura Watson. This year's series covered a wide range of topics, from guidance for growing specific plants to critical issues of biodiversity and regenerative ecosystems. Hearing our own Master Gardeners speak is always a great reminder of the talent in our group, complemented with experts from other organizations. We owe a sincere debt of thanks to Sarah Van Alstyne and C-J Nielsen, who once again organized this excellent series.

Plant Clinics. Master Gardeners have been volunteering at plant clinics all around Island County, informing the public, answering questions, and identifying species of plants and critters. You can still volunteer at one of the following places and dates: Oak Harbor Country Store on October 4, or in Freeland at South Whidbey Tilth on October 4, 11 and 18. Go to GivePulse to register and participate in the last clinics of the season.



Island County Master Gardeners will once again host our popular one-day Workshop at Oak Harbor High School focusing on building more productive gardens today while ensuring a healthier environment for the future.

If you are interested in volunteering, there are many options. Volunteers are needed to help set up the Marketplace, install signage, work in the hospitality room, staff the Raffle and Bookstore tables, welcome and register participants, take everything down at the end of the day, and much more.

Workshop day is always festive, so join in the fun with your fellow Master Gardeners.

Contact Cathy Lofton-Day at president@icmgf.org

The Secret Lives of Master Gardeners

by Jaci Manning

You might find Jim Peskuric at an Island County Master Gardener Foundation (ICMGF) fundraising event or at the Education Garden, but did you know he is also on the Board of Trustees at the Pacific Rim Institute for Environmental Stewardship (PRI)?

Amazingly, the day of this interview he was working on a funding pitch for Senator Patty Murray and her staff.



A retired aircraft engineer, former President of ICMGF, and now PRI Board Chair, Jim has spent many years in the dirt. Literally! It all started during the pandemic. Jim voiced: "I could think of no better place to be during the pandemic than in the prairie, restoring native habitat."

Along with PRI board members and staff, Jim is working to restore native prairie habitat throughout the North Puget Sound basin. PRI's 175-acre property is home to 50-80 rare wildflowers, some of which do not grow anywhere else in the region. Harvesting these seeds makes PRI one of the largest northwest prairie seed bank suppliers in western Washington.

Jim spoke of how PRI helped to delist the Golden Paintbrush (*Castilleja levisecta*) plant. Threatened in June 1997, under the Endangered Species Act, it took 25 years to increase the population from 4 to 100,000 on PRI property.

The next priority for PRI is to use its paintbrush population to help recover the endangered Taylor's Checkerspot butterfly (*Euphydryas editha taylori*). This species was listed as endangered in October 2013 and relies on the Golden Paintbrush to complete its lifecycle.

Jim and staff work with several local native tribes to support the annual Camas bake ceremony and other traditional celebrations. The tribes harvest Camus (*Camassia quamash*) bulbs, careful to identify and avoid the poisonous Death Camas look-alike bulb (*Toxicoscordion venenosum*).

Jim's most rewarding accomplishment happened this August when he closed a deal with the Whidbey Camano Island Land Trust and the Navy to establish conservation easement protection on the property. In Jim's words, he is grateful to "know that generations to come will be able to walk a northwest native prairie in bloom."

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

Election of Board Members for 2027

We will elect the open ICMGF Board positions for next year at the member meeting of October 29, 2026.

Many thanks to the Nominating Committee – Jim Peskuric, Gretchen Schlomann, and Ilze Zigurs – for assembling an excellent slate of candidates.

We owe a special thanks to these candidates, all of whom are running for re-election after already serving at least one term in their positions. Their willingness to continue working on our behalf is deeply appreciated.

The candidates are:

President – Cathy Lofton-Day
Secretary – Kim Baxter
North Area Rep – Lisa Phillips
South Area Rep – Christine Dimm

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

Meet Our Newest Master Gardeners

Pat Bieler, Camano
Class of 2026



I am relatively new to gardening. After my gardener quit last year I decided that I would take on the gardening myself. The only problem was I did not really know much about taking care of plants. I saw an ad for a Master Gardener plant clinic at my local hardware store, so I went with all my questions.

The Master Gardeners were extremely helpful and very patient with me. I kept coming back each month with more questions until one day they suggested that I should go to Master Gardener school, so I did. This year I was on the other side of the plant clinic table!

I am a retired teacher and have been able to combine my love of teaching with my newfound skills in gardening by volunteering in the school garden at my local elementary school. I plan to continue working with kids in the garden and teaching lessons in the classroom.



John Gibson, Langley
Class of 2026

Living in Bakersfield, California, in one-hundred plus degree heat did not instill in me a love of gardening, and I approached it like storming an enemy strong point. Moving to Whidbey Island and with my wife Sue's encouragement, I began to look at it as a healthy lifestyle choice.

I found myself attending events with Sue, including most of her Master Gardening classes. Eventually I realized that my mind had recalibrated and I decided to take the class myself.

I now look forward not only to working in our garden but planning our future gardens and supporting others learning to garden on Whidbey. My time in the garden is now more a comfort than a burden. I hope to continue to learn from other Master Gardeners and increase my skills.

Laura Valente, Freeland
Class of 2026



After retiring from a 30-year career as an administrative law judge, I pursued my dream of becoming a Master Gardener. I was certified in July of 2026.

When I'm not gardening, I practice non-profit organization law with my husband, Meade Brown, in Freeland. Meade and I have lived on Whidbey for 24 years.

I enjoy the volunteer opportunities and continuing education classes and look forward to volunteering with other Master Gardeners. My favorite achievement was turning the 120-foot parking strip in front of my house into a pollinator garden last year.

Central Whidbey Needs YOU

Our Area Representatives serve a key role in coordinating events in their area, especially plant clinics. We appreciate the work that North, South, and Camano Area Reps do.

But sadly, our Central Area has been without a rep for a while, with Loren filling in on an interim basis. If you live in the Coupeville area, please consider volunteering.

Contact Cathy Lofton-Day for details on the job, which is both rewarding and meaningful.



Upcoming Events

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

October 29 Annual ICMGF Board Meeting*
Annual ICMGF Membership Meeting, elections, & CE

December 6 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 7, 2027 ICMGF Board Retreat

March 20, 2027 Whidbey Gardening Workshop

May 8 & 15, 2027 Plant Sales, Whidbey and Camano



Some of the faces of our dedicated Island County Master Gardener volunteers

ICMGF OFFICERS

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

AREA REPS
South – Christine Dimm
Central – open
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 Ilze.

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.