



MASTER GARDENER CONFERENCE

JUNE 2-4, 2026 • CONWAY, AR

U of A DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
RESEARCH & EXTENSION
University of Arkansas System

About Your Registration

The 2026 Arkansas Master Gardener State Conference is limited to the first 400 applicants. All tours, classes, and educational seminars will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

Note that the garden tours are offered only on Wednesday—the tours are repeated morning and afternoon.

NOTE: There is an additional **\$25 charge** per ½ day garden tour to cover the cost of the buses.

You will receive confirmation of your registration via email. We will have the same seminar program in the morning and afternoon.

The registration process is segmented in two ways by registration time and by attendee category.

EARLY REGISTRATION	REGULAR REGISTRATION
Feb. 17 - March 17: Early Registration \$150.00	Mar. 18 – Apr. 15: Regular Registration \$175.00
<p>Feb. 17 – March 2 Priority: ONLY Active MGs, Lifetime MGs, and County Agents</p> <p>March 3 – Mar. 17: All MGs (including sustainers or leave of absence), County Agents, spouses, and guests if space is available</p>	All MGs (including sustainers or leave of absence), County Agents, spouses, and guests if space is available
Notes: Each MG may invite ONE guest. Guests must also register for the conference.	Guests may register starting March 3 – April 15 if space is available.

As you register online, you will be asked your MG status—active, lifetime, sustainer, leave of absence, spouse/guest, or county agent. **Only** active MGs, Lifetime MG, and County Agents may register for the period of February 17 – March 2. Active MGs, Lifetime, and County Agents get preference on tours and seminars. All others (sustainer, leave of absence, spouse or guest will be registered in the order they are received, beginning March 3.

The registration deadline for all participants is April 15. All cancellations are subject to a \$15 handling fee. No refunds after April 15. After that, meal counts are set, and we must pay for you regardless of whether you are there or not.

This conference is only for MGs, County Agents, and a spouse or one guest. We consider this conference a privilege of being a Master Gardener. This conference is not open to the public.

Conference Venue

Our conference site is the Conway Expo & Event Center, 2505 E Oak St., Conway, AR 72032. It is located within 10 minutes from several of the hotels listed below.

Lodging Information

All Rooms for nights of June 2-4, 2026.

*** Indicates complimentary continental breakfast**

***Hampton Inn** - 2400 Sanders Road, Conway, AR
501-327-0200

Special code is CHHMGC

Link: <https://group.hamptoninn.com/9wcvhr>

\$115-\$120 - Deadline March 5, 2026.

***Fairfield by Marriott Inn & Suites** - 2260 Sanders Road, Conway, AR
501-505-8034

Link: <https://www.marriott.com/event-reservations/reservation-link.mi?id=1751993710066&key=GRP&app=resvlink>

Group Name: Arkansas Master Gardeners

\$129-\$139 per night - Deadline April 2, 2026.

***Comfort Suites** -705 Museum Road, Conway
501-329-8548

Link: <https://www.choicehotels.com/reservations/groups/NW67F6>

Group Name: Arkansas State Master Gardeners

King \$94.00, 2 Queens \$94.00, Extra Person \$10.00. Deadline May 1, 2026.

Additional Hotels

Other recommended hotels with a restaurant for breakfast. (Breakfast is not complimentary at these hotels but is available for a fee.)

Garden Inn by Hilton - 805 Amity Road, Conway, 501-329-1444

Courtyard by Marriott - 1301 East Dave Ward Drive, Conway, 501-358-3300

Campgrounds

Woolly Hollow State Park

501-679-2098

82 Woolly Hollow Road

Greenbrier, AR (18 miles north of Conway)

Toad Suck Dam Site Park (Corp of Engineers)

501-759-2005

93 Park Road

Bigelow, AR (8 miles west of Conway)

Miller's Outpost RV Park

501-269-4780

44 N Broadview St.

Greenbrier, AR (12 miles north of Conway)

Fort Javelin RV Park

501-514-2026

399 AR Highway 286

Conway, AR (5 miles east of Conway)

Optional Merchandise for Purchase

Conference T-Shirt Short Sleeve - Bella Canvas unisex size, pre-shrunk made of 52% cotton & 48% polyester. The collar and sleeves are cover stitched for convenience. The color is Heather Blue Lagoon.

Note: If you prefer a loose fit you should size up. \$20.00

Full Apron - Full (22" W x 30" L) Khaki Color, adjustable neck strap, two front pockets, poly/cotton twill UAMG logo screen printed on front of apron. \$20.00

Outdoor Ventilated Wide Brim Hat – Stone color with MG logo embroidered, adjustable chin drawcord, poly air mesh at top and back of crown, moisture-wicking sweatband, elongated brim in the back for additional sun protection. Sizes: **S/M** (6 7/8– 7 1/4), **L/XL** (7 3/8 – 7 3/4) \$ 35.00



Front of Shirt

Back of Shirt



Wide Brim Hat photo



Apron photo

About Art Classes, Garden Tours, Seminars & Silent Auction

Pre-Conference Tour – There is no pre-conference tour for the 2026 MG Conference.

Silent Auction

The Silent Auction is run by County 76, with proceeds defraying the Master Gardener PNG Leadership Conference and supporting the Janet B. Carson Scholarships. All counties are encouraged to donate as many items as possible. The auction will be open on Tuesday from 8:00 AM to 5:30 PM and on Wednesday from 8:00 AM -1:00 PM. Auction items should be picked up Wednesday 3:30 PM - 5:30 PM, after dinner on Wednesday 7:30 PM - 8:30 PM and 7:30 AM – 8:30 AM on Thursday morning

Conference At a Glance

Tuesday, June 2: Registration will begin at 7:30 AM at the Conway Expo & Event Center. Silent Auction and Pre-Order Garden Tool pickup (County 76 Fundraising Pre-Order Sales) are open 8:00 AM to 5:30 PM. The Garden Market will be open from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

- 3-D Greeting Card Art Class **(Optional: \$15):** 10:00 AM– limit of 20
- Watercolor Fun Art Class **(Optional: \$15):** 10:00 AM and 12:00 PM – limit of 18 per class time
- Pressed Flowers Nightlight Art Class **(Optional: \$15):** 12:00 PM – limit of 20

If you are not interested in the classes above, below are some tour on your own options available. These tours are free. Directions to the locations and more information will be sent out to all registered attendees closer to the conference date.

- 9 – 9:50 AM – Faulkner County Urban Farm Project Tour at Conway Library (Free, tour on your own)
- 10:00 AM – 10:25 AM – Hendrix Food Forest Tour (Free, tour on your own)
- 10:30 AM – 11:30 AM – Hendrix Tree Tour (Free, tour on your own)

Wednesday, June 3: Registration will begin at 7:30 AM at the Conway Expo & Event Center.

Garden Tour Information

Garden Tours (Optional: \$25/tour): Morning tours will start loading buses at 7:30 AM, leaving the venue at 8:00 AM and returning for lunch. In the afternoon, buses will start loading at 12:30 PM, leaving the venue at 1:00 PM. **Buses leave on time. It is best to be on the bus early to ensure you are not left behind.**

➤ Cozy Cottages – Light to Moderate walking

You'll be digging the cottage core vibes as you tour these sweet little gardens! We'll begin with a leisurely stroll along the tree-lined streets of Hendrix Village. Believe us, the garden hosts here don't need much space to create a big impact! Enjoy colorful annuals, native plantings, creative container gardening, and more. Need to sit a spell? Kick back and relax as you take in the scene from the lovely porches of our kind garden hosts. FCMG Ouida Wright is opening her traffic-stopping gardens to you for the second stop of the tour. Ouida lives along a busy street, and what a head-turner her gardens are! Ouida delights in finding ways to incorporate the newest ornamental plantings into her gardens;

as you tour, you'll see the evidence of that! An abundance of hydrangea, pollinator-friendly annuals, elegant container plantings, and mature trees are sure to inspire as you roam the paths of this garden. Finally, you'll pay a visit to the FCMG sanctioned Faulkner County Museum Gardens. Find a link to the past as you walk through the undeniably charming Museum Gardens. Setting the scene, the gardens boast an 1830s dog trot cabin surrounded by period-appropriate and pass-along plant varieties. Nearby, you'll find an herb garden featuring culinary and medicinal herbs of historic use. But we're not all history at the Museum Gardens! The Audubon Arkansas certified Museum Gardens serve to educate the community on bird-friendly gardening and exhibit easily-replicable bird-friendly gardening practices and plantings. All walking on flat land.

➤ **Creekside Treasures – Moderate to Strenuous walking**

Shade garden lovers, this tour set is for you! Visit the lovely gardens of FCMG Robin Sprague, who is known for the variety of hostas and ferns she grows. Her gardens feature a plethora of unique shade perennials, attractive container plantings, and a collection of delightfully whimsical garden art. Next on tour, FCMG Sheila Nash will welcome you to explore her beautiful, wooded property located alongside Cadron Creek. Sheila's gardens offer a variety of established shade plantings, as well as a large sun garden dedicated to daylilies, iris, and native sun-loving perennials. Finally, we'll visit the lake front gardens of FCMG Vicki Jaques. Lake Beaverfork serves as the backdrop for Vicki's dramatic shade gardens. Her gardens boast hydrangeas galore, colorful annual borders, garden art, a peaceful, meandering creek, and more. Slightly strenuous with a bit of steep terrain.

➤ **Curious Collections – Light to Moderate walking**

Calling all plant collectors! If you're a "Crazy Plant Person", don't miss these tours! FCMG's self-proclaimed "Crazy Plant Lady" Dee Dee Allen invites you to explore her beautiful gardens. Dee Dee's gardening philosophy? "Buy every plant you want and plant it in your garden!". As you can imagine, her gardens feature an extensive variety of unique and rare plantings, along with hostas, azaleas, and colorful annuals. A garden of wonder and delight awaits you at the second tour stop hosted by daylily hybridizers Pat and Patricia Larsen. Highlights of this large garden include sun and shade perennial beds enhanced with mass annual plantings, large daylily beds of all variety, and art pieces, large and small, serving to enhance the natural beauty of the area. Our final stop is at the lovely gardens of FCMG Karen Hicks. After a tour of Karen's gardens, you'll be thinking, "WHAT?! She doesn't use pesticides?!" Don't worry, Karen will be there to tell you all about how she relies on beneficial insects to take care of the pesky pests. Look forward to enjoying a variety of roses, native plantings, and more as you tour her gardens. All walking on flat land.

➤ **Stop & Smell the Roses – Light walking**

Everything is coming up roses in these showstopping gardens! First on tour are the high tunnel greenhouse and flowering gardens of FCMG Mike Ghidotti. From hosting seed-starting workshops to plant sale potting parties, the gardens (and garage!) of Mike and his lovely wife Karen are a bustling hub for FCMG activities. Features include a 30x50 high tunnel vegetable garden, along with beautiful flowering beds of roses, daylilies, and bright blooming perennials. Next, a stop at the colorful gardens of FCMG Linda Fleming. Linda's gardens offer large flowering beds, sun and shade, bursting with blooming perennials, established trees and shrubs, bright annuals, and more. Third on tour, the award-winning FCMG demonstration garden, The Legacy Gardens. Boasting 6 gardens in one, Legacy really does have it all! As you stroll the gravel paths of the garden, enjoy a variety of natives, bird-and-pollinator-friendly plantings, roses... we could go on, but you should see for yourself! You'll definitely be stopping to smell roses at our final tour destination! There is a blooming surprise at every turn in the gardens of FCMG Queen of Roses Carol Shockley. Along with her love for roses, Carol has a passion for seeking out unique ornamentals and you'll be delighted by the variety of color and texture her

gardens offer. Enjoy a thrilling assortment of sun and shade flowering annuals and perennials, artfully arranged containers, established trees and shrubs, and, of course, ROSES! All flat walking aside from berms at The Legacy Gardens (can walk around berms for viewing).

Education Seminar & Speaker Information

Education Seminars will begin at 8:30 AM as listed in the registration form. Seminars are held in the morning and in the afternoon on Wednesday, June 3.

Meet the Speakers

Keynote Speakers:

Janet Carson - "Surviving Summer in the Garden"

Janet Carson, Emeritus Extension Horticulture Specialist, retired in 2019 after a 38-year career with the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service. She has her BS and MS degrees from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. Janet began her career as a county agent in Pulaski County in 1980 as a horticulture agent. She began the Arkansas Master Gardener program in 1988. Upon completion of her Master's degree, Janet moved to the state extension office to take on the role of statewide horticulture specialist. Since retirement, she lives in Little Rock with her husband and dog Petals, where she continues to write weekly columns in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* on Saturdays and monthly columns in *Arkansas Living* magazines, along with a blog *Plan it Janet*. She leads garden travel programs and now gets to spend more time in her own garden and with her new grandson. She was the 2003 recipient of the John White Award for Excellence in Extension Education, the 2010 Extension Educator Award from the American Society for Horticultural Science, the 2016 extension Employee of the Year, and the 2019 UA Horticulture Outstanding Alumni Award. She has written 2 books, *In the Garden* and *Field to Feast*.

Gardening in an Arkansas summer can be hard on the gardener and the plants. Choosing plants that can take the heat, and working smart, can ensure the garden survives the summer and so do you!

Jared Barnes - "Keep Growing: A Cultural Guide to Propagating More Gardeners"

Jared Barnes, Ph.D., started gardening when he was five years old, and since then he has enthusiastically pursued how to best cultivate plants and cultivate minds. He currently fulfills those passions as an award-winning associate professor of horticulture at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, TX where he stewards the Plantery, SFASU's student botanic garden. He writes a weekly newsletter titled plant•ed that was featured in the *New York Times*, hosts The Plantastic Podcast, and gardens with his wife Karen and daughter Magnolia at their smallholding Ephemera Farm. He obtained his Ph.D. in horticultural science from North Carolina State University in Raleigh, NC; he interned the summer of 2008 at The Scott Arboretum of Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, PA; and he has traveled around the US and into eleven countries to gain a national and global perspective of horticulture. Recent awards include the 2021 Stephen F. Austin State University Teaching Excellence Award, 2019 Perennial Plant Association's Academic Award, the 2017 Keep Nacogdoches Beautiful Sustainability Award, the 2016 Perennial Plant Association's Young Professional of the Year, and a member of *Greenhouse Producer News* 2016 Class of 40 Under 40. His passion has been recognized by peers in interviews in *New York Times*, *People* magazine, *Organic Gardening*, Native Plants Healthy Planet podcast, *Greenhouse Grower*, *AmericanHort Connect*, Ken Druse's *Real Dirt*, and *Nursery Management*, and his articles have appeared in *The American Gardener*, *Fine Gardening* and *Carolina Gardener*.

Propagation is a cornerstone of horticulture. We are incredible propagators of plants, but a challenge we face is how do we propagate horticulturists? In this timely talk, Jared will discuss the great similarities in how we sow seeds and how we expose youth to horticulture, in how we take cuttings and how we help amateur horticulturists continue growing, and in how we graft two different species together and how we bridge a connection between plants and first-time horticulturists. Jared will also show in this talk that by using this language and mind-frame along with our understanding of the art, science, and craft of propagation, we can connect with more people and develop a cultural guide for propagating horticulturists.

Jason Reeves – “Garden Heroes: Pollinator and Host Edition”

Jason Reeves grew up on a farm in west Tennessee, where he fell in love with the plant world. He received his Master’s degree in Ornamental Horticulture and Landscape Design from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In 2002, he became a research horticulturist and curator of the University of Tennessee Gardens located at the West Tennessee Research and Education Center in Jackson, Tennessee. Jason’s colorful plant combinations and unique garden art, made by recycling everyday objects, draws thousands of people to the Center each year. His past experiences include work at the Opryland Conservatories in Nashville TN, Missouri Botanical Garden, Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania, and in private gardens in New Zealand. When he’s not bringing the grounds to life with his imaginative garden displays, he’s evaluating hundreds of new and unique plants for the state’s green industry, speaking at gardening symposiums or traveling the world leading gardening tours, and serving as a contributing editor to *Fine Gardening* magazine. He is also a landscape designer and consultant whose influence may be seen in landscapes across Tennessee in the form of distinct plant combinations. He does all this and manages to find time to garden at home. In 2021 he bought a 45-acre farm where he has planted over 12,000 daffodils and hundreds of trees and shrubs. You can follow him on Facebook at Jason Reeves – in the garden.

Some plants really work overtime! In addition to enhancing beauty in the garden, they also provide important food and habitat to the critters that reside there. This talk focuses on dependable new and older, but underutilized, good garden performers for attracting bees, butterflies, and other pollinators to your domain. Since you can’t have butterflies without caterpillars, Jason will also highlight plants needed to support the full lifecycle of these winged beauties. The talk includes natives along with non-natives such as Vitex Delta Blues®, Cuphea Vermillionaire®, Cassia alata (Candlestick Plant), Asclepias physocarpa (Swan Butterfly Weed), ‘Antares’ fennel, parsley, and Zinnia ‘Zowie Yellow Flame’ that are sure to bring the pollinators into your garden.

Seminar Speakers

Seminars with an asterisk (*) are available for Advanced MG Training Hours.

Jared Barnes, * “The Wild South: Naturalistic Planting and Ecological Design”

Jared Barnes, Ph.D., started gardening when he was five years old, and since then he has enthusiastically pursued how to best cultivate plants and cultivate minds. He currently fulfills those passions as an award-winning associate professor of horticulture at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, TX where he stewards the Plantery, SFASU’s student botanic garden. He writes a weekly newsletter titled plant•ed that was featured in the *New York Times*, hosts The Plantastic Podcast, and gardens with his wife Karen and daughter Magnolia at their smallholding Ephemera Farm. He obtained his Ph.D. in horticultural science from North Carolina State University in Raleigh, NC; he interned in the summer of 2008 at The Scott Arboretum of Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, PA; and he has traveled around the US and into eleven countries to gain a national and global perspective of horticulture. Recent awards include the 2021 Stephen F. Austin State University Teaching Excellence Award, 2019 Perennial Plant Association’s Academic Award, the 2017 Keep

Nacogdoches Beautiful Sustainability Award, the 2016 Perennial Plant Association's Young Professional of the Year, and a member of *Greenhouse Producer News* 2016 Class of 40 Under 40. His passion has been recognized by peers in interviews in *New York Times*, *People* magazine, *Organic Gardening*, Native Plants Healthy Planet podcast, *Greenhouse Grower*, *AmericanHort Connect*, Ken Druse's *Real Dirt*, and *Nursery Management*, and his articles have appeared in *The American Gardener*, *Fine Gardening* and *Carolina Gardener*.

Discover the power of ecological principles in crafting sustainable, resilient gardens suited to the Southern landscape. This talk will guide you through site assessment, understanding local ecology, and designing with nature in mind. Learn how to implement naturalistic planting strategies that enhance biodiversity and withstand regional challenges. Whether you're a novice or expert, this session offers insights for creating vibrant, eco-friendly spaces.

Margaret Cline, PhD., "Learn How to Become a Citizen Scientist & Take Part in Critical Ecologic Research from Your Own Home & Community"

Retired from a career managing technology services for large universities, Dr. Cline has returned to her first love—the study of nature. Specifically, she studies the role of pollinators and pollinator syndromes. She especially enjoys introducing people to the importance of pollination and pollinators and their importance to our food and ecosystems. Of particular interest is to help people learn about protecting pollinators and, in turn, protecting people and the planet.

Science needs your help! All scientific studies have one thing in common: The need for data. But collecting data may be prohibitively expensive or require too much time to be of use or any number of other impediments. However, members of the general public can participate in collaborative projects with professional scientists to collect, report, or analyze data. There are thousands of citizen science research projects going on around the world. No matter what your interests are, there is probably a project that needs your help. This class will help you learn where to look for those projects and how to participate.

Dr. Mieke Corbitt and Dr. Ruth Ann Mathis, "Horticultural Huddle: Strength, Strategy, and Longevity for the Garden Athlete"

Dr. Mieke Corbitt is a Clinical Instructor with UCA's Department of Physical Therapy since 2022, a licensed physical therapist and is a Board Certified Orthopaedic Clinical Specialist by the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties. She is also a Certified Orthopaedic Manual Therapist. Dr. Corbitt received her Doctor of Physical Therapy degree from the University of Central Arkansas in 2008. Her clinical focus for the past 17 years has been orthopedics within the private practice and hospital-based sectors and has additional experience in the acute care setting. She has numerous continuing education certifications, including dry needling, blood flow restriction, and cupping. She has been an avid member of the American Physical Therapy Association and has previously served on the board of the Arkansas Physical Therapy Association chapter. Her clinical interests include sports rehabilitation with return to play and components of outpatient rehab and she continues to be clinically active in central Arkansas at Charton Physical Therapy in Morrilton and Conway Regional Medical Center. She has publications in the *International Journal of Sports Physical Therapy* and *Journal of Sport Rehabilitation* as well as presented in state and national conferences. Dr. Ruth Ann Mathis has been an Associate Professor of the UCA PT Faculty since August of 2024. She is a 1998 graduate of the UCA Masters in Physical Therapy program and received her PhD in Physical Therapy from UCA in 2013. Dr. Mathis has previously taught for 12 years in the DPT program at Harding University serving as the Director of Clinical Education for 5 years. In addition, she has served as manuscript reviewer, dissertation committee member (UCA PhD program) and membership chair for APTA Arkansas.

Dr. Mathis has 27 years of clinical experience in a variety of settings in Arkansas and Mississippi including

inpatient rehab, acute care, outpatient and pediatrics. Her research interests include exercise and diabetes and increasing function and quality of life for amputees and community dwelling older adults. She has published in the Journal of Gerontology & Geriatric Medicine, Journal of Clinical Exercise Physiology, Journal of Geriatric Physical Therapy, Journal of Cardiopulmonary Physical Therapy, and Physical Therapy.

Gardening is a demanding, full-body exercise program and should be treated as a sport, and therefore, gardeners should view themselves as athletes. This presentation, led by local physical therapists, is designed to turn gardening into a sustainable lifelong passion. We will cover five critical areas for injury prevention and longevity of this sport: establishing essential dynamic warm-up and cool-down routines; mastering core control and proper body mechanics during repetitive tasks; understanding tool ergonomics and selecting the right gear; demonstrating the safest methods for heavy lifting, kneeling, and moving bulk materials; and integrating a holistic, age-proofing approach using targeted strengthening, flexibility, and mindfulness. This is a practical session featuring an interactive component where participants will practice key stretches and safe bending/lifting techniques.

Joyce Hardin, “Plants and Forensics: The Use of Plants in Solving Major Crimes of the Past Century”

Born and raised in Central Arkansas, Joyce has a BS in Biology from the University of Charleston (SC), and an MS and PhD in Crop Physiology from the University of Arkansas. She taught at the University of Oklahoma, the University of Central Oklahoma, and for 30 years at Hendrix College. Her rural background and teaching experiences at Hendrix contributed to a passion for gardens and garden history. Joyce is a member of the 2008 MG class (Faulkner County) but she and her husband Tom now reside in Fayetteville, where they moved to be closer to their two adult sons, their lovely wives, and three adorable grandchildren.

This presentation will take a historical approach to the use of botanical evidence in criminal investigations. We will explore the types of botanical evidence used in real cases from around the world. Caution: In discussing the cases, the words kidnapping, murder, and rape will be used but without disturbing graphics.

Casey Johanson, “Night Pollution & Its Affect on Plants, Pollinators & Birds”

Casey grew up in Michigan and discovered her love of the National Parks on a college service-learning trip to Acadia National Park. In 2011, she and her husband decided to settle near the beautiful waters of Buffalo National River where she worked as an interpretative ranger at Buffalo Point. In 2016, she was asked to explore whether or not Buffalo National River might meet the criteria as an International Dark Sky Park. The park worked to reduce its own light footprint, started a dark sky monitoring process, and began offering night sky educational programs to the public. In 2019, Buffalo National River was certified as an International Dark Sky Park and this natural resource that Buffalo National River protects is her favorite topic to talk about.

The night sky has been drastically impacted by humans in recent decades with natural nighttime skies becoming fragmented and increasingly rare as we continue to light our nights. The more light is spread throughout the night sky the more we discover about the impacts that our use of light has on nocturnal ecological processes. It might be surprising to learn that pollination is one process that is linked to a natural dark sky. As the butterflies and bees retreat with the setting sun another group of creatures make themselves available to continue the big and important job of pollinating flowers under the cover of darkness. Come learn about the ways in which lights effect the pollination of our flowers and how you can help pollinators be more successful.

Rose Marie Nuffer, “Container Garden Herbs for Health”

Raised on farms, Rose has always had her hands in the soil. When she accidentally went on a plant walk with an herbalist, she realized that the weeds were edible and medicinal too and that started her passion for learning about all plants and health. She currently works with plants in all aspects of life, raising a small

nursery of plants, doing native plant landscaping, gardening, teaching about medicinal & edible plants and raising children who make and drink tea as well as nibble and share the bounty from their yard & garden.

Small spaces hold a lot of possibilities. Come learn about five herbs that you can grow to make the most of small spaces. Rose Marie will provide instruction on what these herbs need to thrive, when to harvest them, and how to prepare them. She will share some of her favorite tea recipes also for these beneficial herbs.

Sean Pessarar, “Organic Farming Techniques for Thriving Backyard Gardens”

Sean Pessarar is the founder of Mindful Farmer, an Arkansas-based company that designs and manufactures high tunnels, ergonomic tools, and organic farm inputs for small-scale growers. With a background in ecology and farm consulting, Sean started Mindful Farmer to equip growers with the tools and resources they actually need. The company focuses on practical, regionally sourced solutions such as organic fertilizers, potting soil, American-made multifunctional tools, and durable infrastructure to help farmers and gardeners grow smarter, not harder. By combining product innovation with hands-on education, Mindful Farmer helps growers build more resilient, efficient, and sustainable growing systems.

Discover how regenerative farming methods can transform your backyard garden into a productive, low-input food system. This seminar shares practical tools and techniques adapted from professional organic farming, including no-till bed prep, targeted organic fertilization, cover cropping, natural pest and weed management, and creating native habitats to attract beneficial wildlife. Led by Sean Pessarar, founder of Mindful Farmer and a longtime organic grower and educator, this session offers straightforward guidance to help home gardeners grow more with less while stewarding the land.

Diana Polcar, * “What Happened When I Stepped Aside from Pesticides.... Including Attracting Beneficial Insects (naturally) and Making My Garden More Pollinator Friendly”

Diana’s love for gardening started with a few flowers and cacti in a shady garden bed of her first home on an Air Force Base in Del Rio, Texas. Since 2004, Diana and her family have moved 7 times - leaving behind a garden at every house they've lived in, even in Canada! Diana and her family have called Vilonia home since 2018. That same year, Diana established a backyard kitchen garden, affectionately known as Misty Ridge Gardens. Diana's dedication to gardening led her to become a Faulkner County Master Gardener and she earned the honor of Faulkner County Master Gardener of the Year in 2022. Everything she has learned about gardening has come from trial and error, tons of research, and a large community of gardening friends. Beyond the garden, Diana is an inspiring Physical Science teacher at Vilonia Junior High School. When not teaching or gardening, she enjoys pouring over seed catalogs, volunteering with the Faulkner County Master Gardeners, and spending quality time outdoors with her beautiful family.

Are you ready to turn your garden into a vibrant haven for nature’s most beautiful and beneficial creatures? Join us for an inspiring *Gardening for Good* class where you'll learn how to create a thriving paradise that invites butterflies, bees, hummingbirds, and other pollinators — all without pesticides! Discover the secrets to combining cultivated plants with native species to foster a balanced ecosystem, selecting the best plants to attract and support pollinators and birds, and designing your garden to be a pesticide-free sanctuary that benefits wildlife and your plants alike. Every bloom you nurture helps sustain our pollinators, supports local biodiversity, and beautifies your space! Whether you're a seasoned gardener or just starting out, this class will inspire you to grow with purpose. Transform your garden into a sanctuary of life and love — because when we plant for good, we grow a better world.

Jason Reeves, * “Friends in the Shade: Keeping Your Hosta Company”

Jason Reeves grew up on a farm in west Tennessee, where he fell in love with the plant world. He received his Master’s degree in Ornamental Horticulture and Landscape Design from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In 2002, he became a research horticulturist and curator of the University of Tennessee Gardens located at the West Tennessee Research and Education Center in Jackson, Tennessee. Jason’s colorful plant combinations and unique garden art, made by recycling everyday objects, draws thousands of people to the Center each year. His past experiences include work at the Opryland Conservatories in Nashville TN, Missouri Botanical Garden, Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania, and in private gardens in New Zealand. When he’s not bringing the grounds to life with his imaginative garden displays, he’s evaluating hundreds of new and unique plants for the state’s green industry, speaking at gardening symposiums or traveling the world leading gardening tours, and serving as a contributing editor to Fine Gardening magazine. He is also a landscape designer and consultant whose influence may be seen in landscapes across Tennessee in the form of distinct plant combinations. He does all this and manages to find time to garden at home. In 2021 he bought a 45-acre farm where he planted over 12,000 daffodils and hundreds of trees and shrubs. You can follow him on Facebook at Jason Reeves – in the garden.

Shopping for a shady spot previously had limited choices: hosta, hosta, or variegated hosta. Not anymore! The exuberant array of shade plants now found in the nursery industry offer four seasons of excitement. While some options flaunt flowers, other choices bring colorful evergreen or deciduous foliage to the shade garden. This talk focuses on shrubs and perennials for shady spaces that are new to the market or underutilized proven performers.

Rand Retzloff – * “Designing Shade Gardens with Emphasis on using Native Plants”

A native of Little Rock, Rand began work in 1985 in the gardening/nursery industry. Since 1994 he has worked as owner/operator & landscape designer of Grand Designs, a small landscape company that specializes in shade gardens and native gardens in natural settings. Through the years Rand has received several Arkansas Flower and Garden Show awards. The American Society of Landscape Architects has awarded him the “Contractor’s Award of Excellence.” Rand is an Arkansas Certified Nursery & Landscape Professional. His hobbies include golfing, fishing, and playing drums for several bands.

In an ever-changing environment, working with native plants offers a sustainable, low-maintenance approach to landscaping. Native plants better utilize local rainfall, boost biodiversity, and enhance water conservation. Established native plants are uniquely adapted to ever changing local weather, soil, and pest conditions, and provide superior drought resistance when compared to many of the conventional, water-intensive landscaping plants often used in traditional shade gardens.

Madison Srebalus, * “Native Plants in the Landscape Environment”

Madison is a born-and-raised Arkansan, with a passion for nature. She has a Bachelor’s in Environmental Science and worked for state agencies for several years. These jobs took her all over Arkansas. It was during these travels that her love and respect for wildlife deepened. She saw first-hand how native flora supported every critter imaginable, and how unfortunately scarce such plants were. Madison then landscaped her home in native plants grown from seeds she had collected. Continually inspired by the beauty and life these plants brought to her doorstep, she created Buckthorn’s Native Nursery. She believes that everyone deserves to witness and contribute to the critical role native plants play in sustaining our world, and has since dedicated her life to growing and teaching about such plants.

Ever wonder how to employ native plants in your landscape? Come learn how to add native

plants into many of today's popular landscaping styles, selecting the best plants for any particular situation and condition. Find out about alternative native plant suggestions that can replace traditional garden plants and learn about native plant resources. Madison will also address tips and tricks for care and maintenance of native plants, as well as providing pointers on what to expect (and avoid) when gardening for wildlife.

Theo Whitsell, * “Native Grasslands & Open Woodlands as Inspiration for Native Gardens”

Theo Witsell is co-founder and Chief Conservation Officer for the Southeastern Grasslands Institute (SGI), where he oversees science and conservation programs. Prior to his role at SGI, he worked for more than 25 years for the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission (ANHC), the agency that houses that state's Natural Heritage Program and System of Natural Areas. He had several roles in his time there, serving as a land manager before becoming the agency's botanist, ecologist, and Chief of Research before leaving for SGI in early 2024. He has also worked as a consultant for a wide variety of federal and state conservation agencies and NGOs across eastern North America. A botanist at heart, Theo was co-editor of the *Atlas of the Vascular Plants of Arkansas* (2013), co-author of *Trees, Shrubs, and Woody Vines of Arkansas* (2021), and recently completed a book about his field work following the route of naturalist Thomas Nuttall's 1819-1820 trip through what is now Arkansas and Oklahoma. He has authored or co-authored more than 45 scientific papers and book chapters and is a regional reviewer for the *Flora of the North American Project*.

Two hundred years ago, Arkansas's landscape was a complex mosaic of many different natural communities, with great variation in the natural density of tree cover. Closed-canopy forests were present of course, but so were millions of acres of treeless grasslands, savannas, and open woodlands. These open ecosystems collectively supported more than 2,000 species of native plants, most of which can't survive in closed forests. These plants supported a rich diversity of animal communities ranging from tiny grassland-specific insects to Bobwhite Quail, Prairie Chickens, Elk, and Bison. Unfortunately, these open natural communities have declined dramatically, with some types, such as our tallgrass prairies, suffering losses of more than 99.9%. This talk will give an overview of the different types of grasslands and open woodlands found in Arkansas and discuss some of the interesting, beautiful, and ecologically important plant species they support. It will also look to the rare remnants of these open ecosystems to understand their physical site characteristics, the ecological processes required to maintain them, and how they can help gardeners and restorationists plants to sites

Wednesday Evening Dinner with Guest Speaker will begin at 5:30 PM in the expo center.

Thursday, June 4: Meet in the Conway Expo Center for keynote speaker Janet Carson and closing program presentations. Be sure to stay until the end to receive your plant give away.