

The Thymes

JANUARY 2025

“Anyone who thinks gardening begins in the spring and ends in the fall is missing the best part of the whole year; for gardening begins in January with the dream.” - Josephine Nuese -



A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT, Margo Carroll

A New Season of Growth

Dear Master Gardeners,

Happy New Year! I'm so excited to begin this new role as your President! Stepping into this position feels like tending a garden—balancing vision, care, and collaboration to help things grow. I look forward to working alongside you to continue nurturing our organization's fantastic work. Our mission has always been to share the love of gardening, promote sustainable practices, and educate our community. Our group thrives on fresh ideas and opportunities to express interests and creativity. Here's where I'd love to see us focus our passions this year:

1. Strengthening Community Connections at Our Plateau Discovery Garden

Our Garden is turning 20! Happy 20th Anniversary! As we celebrate our Plateau Discovery Gardens- (A Tennessee State Botanical Garden) 20th anniversary, we have an excellent opportunity to showcase our garden's beauty and purpose to the community. I'd like to see us make the garden a priority. Our Master Gardeners created this garden; we are fortunate to have the garden and the UT

facilities, and many other Master Gardener groups across the state wish they were so lucky.

I propose we get out in the garden more and get out there with our gardening friends. Let's put together "Garden Teams" and adopt areas of the garden and care for and maintain those areas in enjoyable, fun, and rewarding ways.

2. Creating More Learning Opportunities

Gardening is all about learning, and we can explore so much more together. This year, I'd enjoy group trips to nearby gardens, places of interest, and inspiration. How about our members sharing more of their knowledge and gardening expertise at the membership meeting or even doing "how to" workshops at our meetings? Remember that you are welcome to sit in on the 2025 Intern Classes; this is a great way to refresh your knowledge and meet new members. And I can't recommend attending the Regional State Master Gardeners Conference enough—it's a chance to learn, connect, and be inspired.

3. Celebrating Each Other

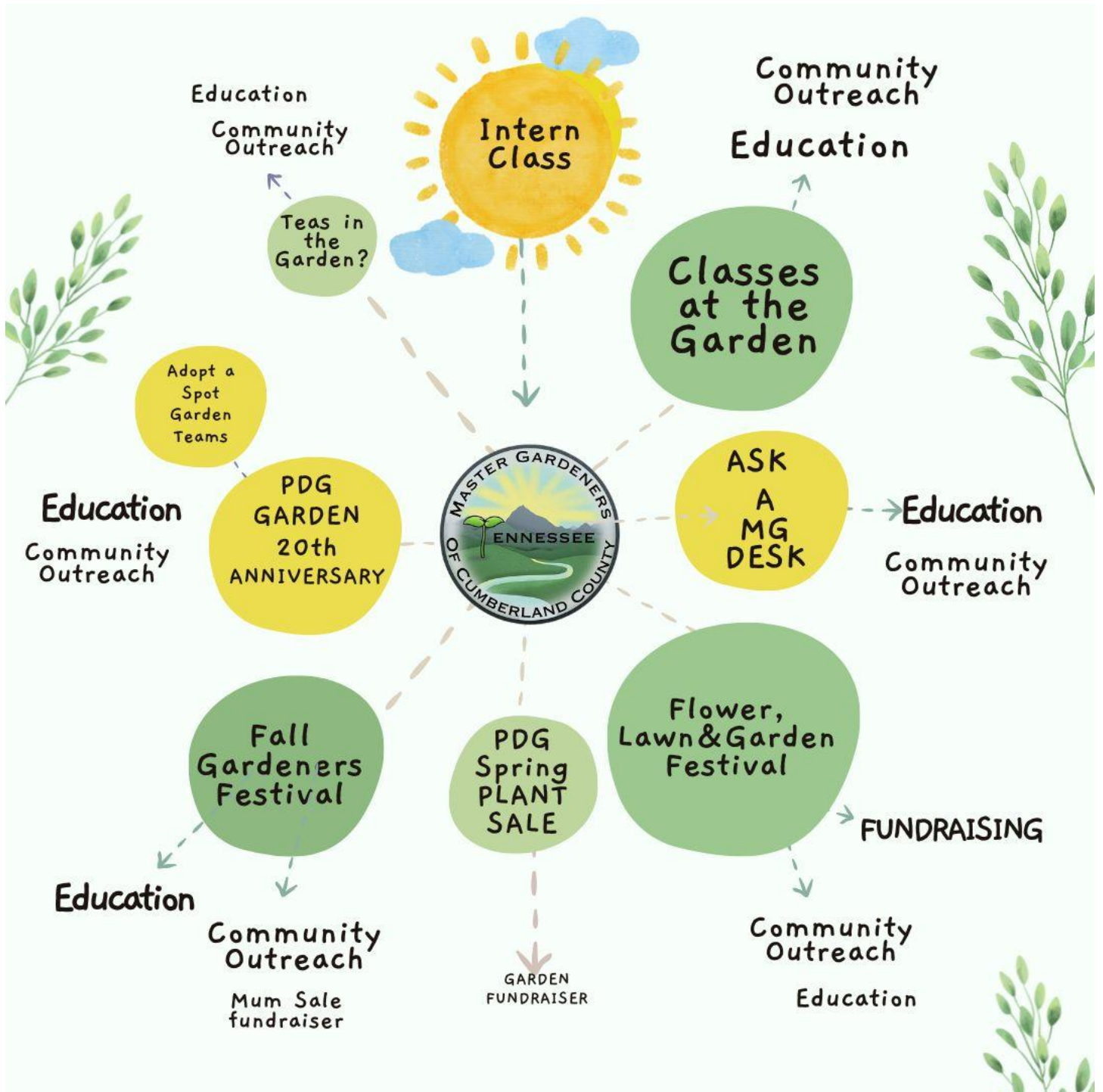
Lastly, the heart of this group is you—our outstanding members. Your hard work, creativity, passion, and can-do attitude make everything we do possible. Let's celebrate those contributions and successes, whether spotlighting projects, applying for "Search for Excellence" recognition, or enjoying each other's company at events.

I'd love to hear your ideas and thoughts as we move forward through the new year together. Like a garden, our organization flourishes when we collaborate and support one another.

Thank you for trusting me in this role. I'm excited about all the great things we'll accomplish together and can't wait to see how we grow this year!

Warmly, *Margo*





An Invitation to Visit Sandhill Cranes in the Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge
Laura Riester

Some of our Master Gardeners are new to this area and may enjoy visiting the Sandhill Crane Festival to be held January 18, 2025 @ 8:00 am – January 19, 2025 @ 4:00 pm. For details of the festival and updates, visit:

<https://www.tn.gov/twra/wildlife/birds/sandhill-crane-festival.html>

For the past few weeks, we could hear the sweet gurgling sound of the Sandhill Cranes as they fly high over Cumberland County on their way south. About 30 or so years ago, these birds started choosing the neighborhood of Birchwood, Tn for overwintering. This is just a little over an hour's drive from Crossville. Each year there seem to be more Sandhill Cranes congregating in the Wildlife Refuge, recently about 20,000 of them. The Sandhill Crane Festival presents a great opportunity to learn more about the migration and behavior of these birds. Many other waterfowl such as eagles, White Pelicans and Whooping Cranes may also be present. They will fly over Cumberland County again as head north again during February. A few years ago I made my way down to the Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge to witness the Sandhill Cranes in February, but they had already left. Photo credit: Bob Howdeshell



<https://www.tn.gov/twra/wildlife/birds/sandhill-crane-festival.html>

2025 COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

Ask a Master Gardener Desk	Debbie Ward
Bulb Sales Spring & Fall	Lina Ferris, Carolyn Jozwiak
Classes at the Garden	Julia Wood
Community Outreach	Connie Farley
Crossville Planting Projects	Carolyn Jozwiak
Decorating	Janet Coe
E-Mail Coordinator	Alan Baker
Fall Gardeners Festival	Leslie Mullican
Flower, Lawn & Garden Festival	Leslie Mullican, Margo Carroll
Garden Teas	Sue Partch
Hospitality	Rita Reali, Andrea & Tony Cappanola
Intern Class Hosting & Welcome Team	Rita Reali, Julie Lesco / Greg Recht, Barbara Blackford, Carla Lund
KinderGarden	Sue Maruska
Membership Contact list	Alan Baker
Merchandise / Publications, Membership clothing	
Newsletter	Jan Pitzer
PDG Spring Plant Sale	Leslie Mullican
PDG Coordinator - Representative	Vicki May
PDG Umbrella Committee Rep.	Mike Barron
Plant Growing & Propagation	
Plateau Discovery Garden UT Mem	Erin Fletcher
Publicity	Kristi Dubois, Erin Fletcher
Rain Barrel Program	
Social Media	
Facebook - Members Group	Alan Baker
Facebook - Public Page	Erin Fletcher
Instagram - Public Page	
YouTube - Public Page	
Search For Excellence	
Speakers Bureau	Carol Burdett
Website	Kelsey Whitefield, Alan Baker

Gardener's To-Do List for January

(Excerpted, in part, from *Southern Living* magazine, circa 1990's; author unknown)

- **Houseplants** – Flowering plants, such as gloxinia and kalanchoe, may still be in good supply following the holidays. Paperwhite bulbs sprout so fast you can literally watch them grow and flower. Consider buying a few to brighten up your house.
- **Mulch** – Winter winds and dry spells are harsh on plants. Replenish mulched areas that have become thin. A 3–4-inch layer of mulch can protect roots and conserve moisture.
- **Birding** – Feed and water your feathered friends in the yard. Also, see Sandhill Crane article (page 3).
- **Herbs** – Fertilize windowsill herbs organically or with a water-soluble fertilizer that has a high middle number, such as 5-10-5. Check for discolored foliage and small webs, signs of spider mite infestation. To control, rinse the foliage thoroughly with water, then spray with insecticidal soap according to directions.
- **Plant markers** – Inspect or add plant markers to keep up with the location and identity of plants in your garden. Metal strips are the most weather resistant.
- **Hardwood cuttings** – Try rooting some hardwood cuttings. Take 6 to 8 inch cuttings from plants such as azaleas and hollies. Dip the cut end in rooting powder and place in a planting mix or sand. Water frequently.
- **Pansies** – For more profuse flowering, pinch back flower buds after hard freezes. The new growth that results will be fuller, with more blooms.
- **Relax in a comfy armchair** – Gather your seed catalogues, graph paper, or garden journal and pencils. Dream and plan your 2025 garden. The possibilities, on paper in January, are unlimited!



Remember to send your articles for next month's newsletter to Jan Pitzer at jprp1990@gmail.com

“Hoo” are the Owls of Tennessee?

Kristi DuBois

Photo credit: Stephen Lyn Bales

Sitting on our back deck enjoying the late afternoon sun, I hear that familiar refrain emanating from the forest: “Who cooks for you? Who cooks for y’all?” I wish I knew the answer because I’m feeling peckish but very, very lazy.

The barred owl that is asking that insistent question can’t be lazy about dinner, however. His work “day” and quest



for food has just begun.

Most owls are nocturnal, meaning they hunt at night and sleep during the day. They find prey in the dark with light-catching “monster” eyes and offset ear holes, one upper and one lower to pinpoint the exact location of an unsuspecting little mouse. Their facial disc is, in fact, “like a satellite”, capturing minute sensory input on the ground from way up in a tree, says Stephen Lyn Bales, a naturalist and writer who worked in owl rehabilitation and education at Ijams Nature Center in Knoxville for 20 years.

Bales gave his entertaining “Owl-ology” talk for the November meeting of the Cumberland County Master Gardeners, sharing fascinating facts, convincing owl calls, and endearing stories about the various owl friends he made during his time at Ijams.

Besides having extra sensitive sensory abilities, owls can rotate their heads a full 270 degrees looking for hapless prey, says Bales. This is because they have 14 neck vertebrae; humans have only seven. They can also sneak up on rodents with silent flight; scientists are still trying to figure out exactly how.

When they catch their prey, owls swallow the animal whole or tear it apart with their sharp hooked bills. They can’t chew; their stomach actually does “the chewing”, after which the waste is regurgitated in pellets. These pellets are fun for children to dissect, says Bales, but only after they have been baked in an oven to kill harmful bacteria – a very smelly process indeed.

During his talk, Bales described six species of owls in Tennessee. At 3.2 pounds, the great horned owl is the largest owl species in the state. This large owl has monster feet that can pick up an animal weighing more than it does, such as a skunk, says Bales. (I know this because I once had to fend off a great horned owl sizing up my cat with hungry eyes.) Great horned owls also have imposing “ear” tufts that are not actually ears, but feathers meant to scare enemies, informs Bales.

November is courting season for great horned owls. Males claim about four acres of territory for nesting and wait for a female to arrive. These owls don't build their own nests; they typically nest in old crow or hawks' nests, says Bales. Their call is a monotone, "Who's awake? Me too!", which Bales can imitate quite convincingly.

The barred owl, who always asks who cooks for me, is the second largest owl in Tennessee, weighing in at about 1.6 pounds, says Bales. It has large expressive eyes and stripes on its chest like bars. The barred owl loves to shelter in the hollows of sycamore trees near water, where it can hunt for frogs, fish, and crawdads, explains Bales.

Also found in Tennessee is the eerie-looking barn owl with a ghost-white face framed by a black "heart" outline. These one-pound owls are meadow birds, says Bales.

They historically nested in caves but have now moved to barns for the steady mouse supply. Bales says barn owls are somewhat threatened because many meadows are being developed.



A very common owl in Tennessee that is not often seen because it is camouflaged and "the size of a can of cola" is the eastern screech owl, says Bales. Coming in two colors, gray or red, screech owls are startled-looking owls with outsized "ear" tufts.




They nest in trees or small boxes and don't need much territory, explains Bales. They make their namesake alarm screech or a quite ghost-like "OOOOOOOOOOO." Unfortunately, Bales laments, screech owls are often hit by cars.

Two more owl species found in Tennessee but more often in the Smokies than on the Cumberland Plateau, are the northern whet owl and the short-eared owl, says Bales. Weighing in at a mere 2.8 ounces, the tiny cat-faced northern whet owl lives most of the year at high elevations like Clingman's Dome and makes a call like the sharpening of a saw.

The short-eared owl is often seen in the meadows of Cades Cove in the winter, says Bales. Unlike many other owls, they hunt during the day.

Stephen Lyn Bales' "Owl-ology" lesson is just a sample of the many splendid things we learn about the flora and fauna of Tennessee as Cumberland County Master Gardeners.

Please encourage one of your friends or family members to join us this year! The 2025 Master Gardener course begins in late January 2025, and enrollments are being taken at our website: ccmga.org 

December's Last Blast!

Janet Russell

On December 20th about 10 Master Gardeners braved a brutally cold, windy morning to help the Friends Group of Cumberland Mountain State Park plant native sprigs/plugs into what will become a meadow-scape along the paved storybook trail across from the park office. We look forward to Spring and hope to see the beginnings of the Wildflower Garden!



Short Articles Sought for Flower, Lawn and Garden Festival Newspaper Insert

Kristi DuBois

Last year's Flower, Lawn, and Garden Show insert in *The Crossville Chronicle* was a collaborative effort of many Master Gardeners, who submitted short articles and photos on their adopted areas of the Plateau Discovery Gardens and Tea in the Gardens. All the articles came together very well in a lovely, cohesive description of what we love about the gardens. This year I would like your help again with the newspaper insert on the Flower, Lawn, and Garden Festival. The theme will be "What I Love and Have Learned Being a Master Gardener."

Some questions to get you started on ideas:

*What do I love about being a Master Gardener?

*What special Master Gardener project has brought me a sense of accomplishment and joy?

*What have I learned from being a Master Gardener or taking a class? What are some tips I can pass on to readers?

*What is my area of interest and/or expertise in gardening?

What information could I pass on to readers?

You don't have to write a book—just 150 to 350 words or so, and if you could include a high-quality photo or two, that would be a plus. If you want to share your ideas but need help with editing or even writing up your ideas, I can help with that, and if you need someone to take photos, we can find someone to do that too.

Please let me know in the next couple of weeks if you'd be willing to help. My email address is kristidubois1@gmail.com

2025 CCMG PROPOSED BUDGET

updated 12 28 24

CCMG BUDGET REVENUES	2025 PROPOSED SPENDING BUDGET	PLANNED GROSS INCOME	EXPENSES	PLANNED NET INCOME	2024 ACTUAL
CD & ALMANAC SALES	\$ 600	\$ 1,200	-\$600	\$600	\$786.00
DONATIONS (UNSPECIFIED APPLICATION)		\$ 200	\$0	\$200	\$608.00
DONATIONS AT CLASSES		\$ 200	\$0	\$200	\$386.00
PLANT SALES NET	\$ 5,000	\$ 7,000	-\$5,000	\$2,000	\$15.00
BULB SALE ONLINE		\$ 800	\$0	\$800	\$800.00
GARDEN TEAS	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	-\$1,000	\$0	\$1,311.00
2025 FLOWER GARDEN FESTIVAL		\$ 27,500	-\$7,605	\$19,895	\$21,067.00
MEMBERSHIP DUES		\$ 1,100		\$1,100	\$1,130.00
MEMBER MERCHANDISE CLOTHING	\$ 500	\$ 500	-\$500	\$0	\$0.00
RAIN BARREL SALES		\$ 600		\$600	
CCMG PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS	\$ 1,000	\$ -	-\$1,000	-\$1,000	\$0.00
YEAR END BANQUET TICKETS				\$0	\$0.00
MEMORIAL BENCHES	\$ 500		-\$500	-\$500	
LAVENDER GROWING FUNDRAISER	\$ 181	\$ 400	-\$181	\$219	
DECORATION COMMITTEE	\$ 500		-\$500	-\$500	
BOARD CONTINGENCY	\$ 500		-\$500	-\$500	\$458.00
GENERAL ADMINISTRATION	\$ 125		-\$125	-\$125	
LIABILITY INSURANCE	\$ 300		-\$300	-\$300	
MALPRACTICE INSURANCE	\$ 125		-\$125	-\$125	114
WEBSITE	\$ 300		-\$300	-\$300	225
CONFERENCES	\$ 300		-\$300	-\$300	\$300.00
HOSPITALITY	\$ 100		\$100	\$100	\$0.00
INTERN CLASS HOSTING HOSPITALITY	\$ 250		-\$250	-\$250	0
MONTHLY MEETING SPEAKERS	\$ 400		-\$400	-\$400	375
PDG	\$ 2,000		-\$2,000	-\$2,000	344
PDG KINDERGARDEN	\$ 300		-\$300	-\$300	40
CLASSES AT THE GARDEN	\$ 1,000		-\$1,000	-\$1,000	235
				\$0	
FALL FESTIVAL - UT	\$ 3,000		-\$3,000	-\$3,000	3320
INTERN PDG - UT	\$ 4,000		-\$4,000	-\$4,000	4000
	\$ 21,981	\$ 40,500	-\$29,386.00	\$11,114.00	

LATE BREAKING NEWS - FROM CARLA LUND

1. Flower, Lawn and Garden Festival will be here in April. As the Silent Auction chairperson, I am asking the CCMG members to donate something awesome to the Silent Auction. Please don't donate perishable food items.

I am ready to collect what you have beginning Jan. 11, the start of the Intern Master Gardeners Class. I will be there each Tuesday from 9am to about 11 am. You can either drop it off at the Country Store or call me and I will pick it up. Thank you for your participation.

2. Reminder that the Members meetings are held at the Country Store on the 1st Tuesday of each month. We are all strongly encouraging members to come to these meetings, they are for you! This is where you find out what is happening in this group and where you will get some CEU's each month.