

The Compost

A Newsletter celebrating University of Maryland Extension Master Gardeners of Charles County (CCMGs) Projects

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CCMG Coordinator Update

by CCMG Coordinator Julia Rycyna

Fall is a busy time of year to close up gardens and get ready for next year. Thank you to all who attended our events and the volunteers who made them possible.

If you or your organization in Charles County would like assistance with planting techniques or design, or would like to request a gardening presentation, please complete this [form](#).



Monarch Mania

by Janet McGrane

The Cobb Island Citizens Association (CICA) sponsors Monarch Mania each October with the primary focus on tagging and releasing monarchs caught on the Island. Master Gardeners have participated each year providing educational information and children's arts and crafts.

This year's event was held at the Cobb Island Volunteer Fire and EMS building. Mike Callahan gave a presentation on the monarch life cycle, butterfly migration and instructions on tagging and releasing the butterflies. Both children and adults enjoyed participating in the tag and release of over 30 monarchs, a much larger number of butterflies than previous years.



POLLINATORS

A MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM



MGs from left to right Michelle Chenault, Molly Moore, Janet McGrane, Kathy Davis and Harriet Beck



Master Gardeners provided information and answered questions on native plants, pollinator gardens and vegetable gardens. The children especially liked the crafts table: creating butterflies, decorating egg carton caterpillars and wearing monarch masks.

More detailed information on the monarch life cycle, tagging monarchs and collection of data is available at monarchwatch.org and monarchjointventure.org.

Left: MGs Michelle Chenault & Kathy Davis at children's craft table

Southern Maryland Food Bank Project

by CCMG Brent Burdick, photo credit: Brent Burdick

The "Seeds of Hope," Community Learning Garden, for the Southern Maryland Food Bank and its Outreach Programs, is coming to a close for this year.

The Food Bank Garden hosted only one Outreach activity since mid-summer. At the end of July, Boy Scout Troop 417 visited the garden one evening. After touring the garden and discussing gardening activities, the Scouts harvested and replanted potato baskets, and planted a succession crop of green bush beans.



Left: Boy Scouts
harvesting
potatoes

Right: Boy Scouts
planting bush
beans



Following that Outreach activity, two Scouts requested and separately met the Food Bank Project leader to discuss input for their respective gardening-related Eagle Scout Projects. One Scout received input on constructing raised beds for a garden at a non-profit activity. The other Scout received input on planting trees around a church/school.



MG Brian Larson harvests
pole beans



MG Joyce Linwood always
puts a flower in her
headband



MG Derex Thompson is tall
but not as tall as the 15 foot
sunflower

Southern Maryland Food Bank Project Cont.

So far this year (as of October 31), **473 pounds of produce were harvested** from the garden and given to the Food Bank for its meals programs. (This was down from last year's total of 723 pounds.) Not much is left to harvest this year – a few tomatoes, some peppers, and a few herbs. The Project Team is in the process of closing down the garden for this year. In November, the Food Bank Project Team will have a meeting to reflect on how they did this year and to tentatively plan for next year.



MGs Gail Black and Deborah Croan plant garlic to over-winter

Food Bank Tours

MG and UME-related program groups can schedule Food Bank Garden tours/activities by contacting the CCMG Project Coordinator. Other community members and groups can schedule garden tours and other gardening learning activities by contacting Catherine Wright, Program Assistant, catherine.wright@cc-dc.org, (301)-274-0695.

Grow It Eat It Education Project

by CCMG Meg MacDonald



GROW IT • EAT IT

A MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

On October 18, 2025, Grow It Eat It (GIEI) Education project held its final workshop of 2025. The workshop, titled Winterizing the Garden and Composting, was held at the Extension office and featured tips on preparing the vegetable garden bed for a better spring harvest, protecting garden tools and equipment from freezing, and making use of the last of the fall harvest. Topics included importance of soil testing, sheet mulching, and cover crops. The final section was about making compost, which is a great way to prepare your own soil amendments for spring.

Multiple items were available on an exhibit table, including several herbs that had been harvested from some MGs gardens. Project Team member Tina Bailem demonstrated how to dry herbs simply by using a brown bag and string, and she helped participants make their own dried herb bags to take home. Team member Beth discussed how to protect berry plants and bushes over the winter. Several CCMG volunteers were on hand to answer questions.

The October 18 workshop capped a year of free public workshops offered by the GIEI EDU Project team, whose mission is to teach members of the public how to grow their own food in an economic and environmentally sustainable way.

The project team members – Tina Bailem, Michelle Chenault, Beth Grem (co-lead), Lori Guido, Kathy Jenkins, Meg MacDonald (co-lead), Kay Redman, and Terry Thir – are busy planning next year's workshops. Stay tuned!

Senior Education Programs (SEP) Project Activities (formerly the Victoria Park Senior Living Project)

Author- Michelle Chenault

The Clark Garden at the Clark Senior Center is winding down but still beautiful! The Clark Gardeners (Senior Plus participants) have still have some annual and perennial flowers, potatoes (white), sweet potatoes, mustard greens, kale and carrots growing in the raised garden bed and buckets or other types of planters. We have completed the curriculum of therapeutic horticulture instruction in the form of 10 classes to the Clark Gardeners during 2025. We will close out the year with short sessions for additional harvesting and cutting and drying herbs for use with craft activities in 2026.



Left: MG Janet McGrane helping participants and staff plant bulbs. Credit: MG Terry Thir

Right: MG Rose Markham and Linda Ivko helping participants plant bulbs Credit: MG Terry Thir

News regarding the other senior centers:

- Indian Head Senior Center (100 Cornwallis Square, Indian Head, MD 20640) SEP presented "Who Polluted the Potomac" to the Indian Head Green Thumb Club (for their Environment Day on August 21, 2025). The session was very interactive and enjoyed by all. They plan to hold an event annually, and invite the SEP Team to present. Discussions are in progress to improve the landscape for this garden to make it easier to maintain and more accessible.
- Nanjemoy Senior and Community Center (4375 Port Tobacco Rd., Nanjemoy, MD 20662) The Nanjemoy Green Thumb Club was very pleased with the results of their garden this first year. They are actively planning for next year. One task on their list is preparing their rain barrels for use in 2026, using the instructions prepared by the SEP Team. The SEP team is continuing to provide consultation for each Green Thumb Club (GTC), at these sites.
- Waldorf Senior and Recreational Center (90 Post Office Rd., Waldorf, MD 20602) This center does not have an active on-site garden. However, the seniors are very active with their own horticulture activities. Plans for horticulture classes for 2026 have started.

Melwood Horticultural Therapy Programs

By Ebony Malone

Photos by Suse Greenstone

University of Maryland Extension Master Gardeners of Charles County assisted Melwood's summer camp in horticulture therapy. The summer camp consisted of students ranging from ages 6 through 18. The campers were emersed in the garden from the ground up. They learned about pollinators in the pollinator garden.

Their hands-on activities encompassed planting seeds, weeding, laying landscape fabric, installing irrigation, transplanting, trellising and the joy of the harvest. Over 800 lbs. of produce were grown and distributed to local food banks and to Melwood's Chef Andrew, who highlighted the produce in several meals for the camp participants and staff.



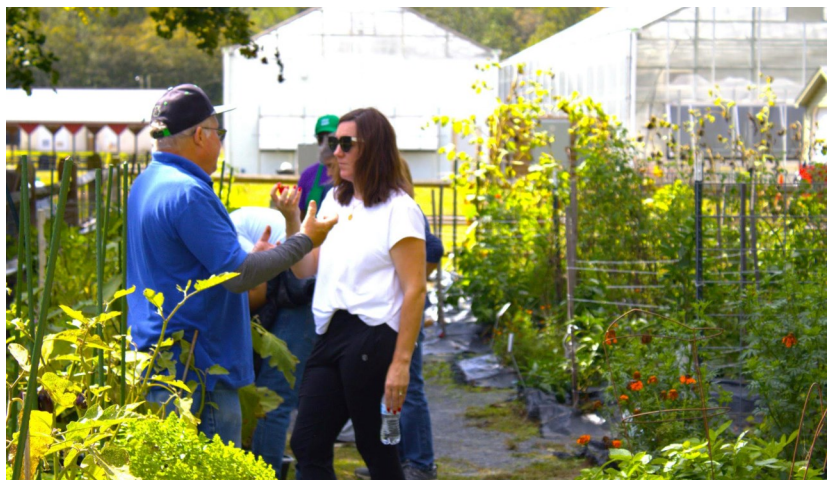
MG Tiffany Daniel with senior staffers during garden tour prior to activities



Pollinator Mural

As the summer camp staff and students departed in August, the Master Gardeners continued their work by shifting into fall crops for the garden and giving a facelift to the 6'x16' Pollinator Mural located in the MG pollinator garden. Seasonal nature crafts are also underway with the creation of flower arrangements and pumpkin painting.

The collaboration between the University of Maryland Extension Master Gardeners and Melwood's summer camp has made a lasting impact on both the campers and the community. Through horticultural therapy and hands-on learning, young participants developed skills, enjoyed the bounty of the harvest, and contributed meaningfully to local food banks. This partnership truly embodies the spirit of growth and giving, leaving a memorable legacy for all involved.



MG Brian Larson explaining garden details to senior staffer

Bel Alton Demonstration Garden

By Terry Thir

Photos by Terry Thir and Linda Ivko

This fall the the Demonstration Project held two workshops: "Seed Collection and Packaging" and "Creating Native Gardens for all Seasons." Participants took home native seeds after cleaning and packaging seeds from the demonstration garden. Our goal is to get native plants into homeowners landscapes to support wildlife and our ecosystems. Information was shared about our team experiences in designing, planting, growing, and caring for native plants. These gardens are located in front of the UME Bel Alton Extension office.

Dr. Julia Rycyna, Home Horticulture Educator & Master Gardener Coordinator, opened the native garden discussion and helped field questions from participants. Project co-leads, Kathy Jenkins and Terry Thir, talked about the history of how the gardens originated, designs, progression, and lessons learned. We realized as time went by that adjustments had to be made in the gardens. After extensive research, we realized not all plants behaved the way we expected them to grow. Kathy quoted, "We didn't know what we didn't know!"

One of the major objectives and benefits of installing the native gardens, was to provide food and habit for birds, butterflies, bees, insects and small mammals. Kathy shared resources from known experts Doug Tallamy and Nancy Lawson, so participants could expand their knowledge. As part of our project outreach, we have expanded educational workshops utilizing the gardens.

Participants were invited to tour our gardens and to attend our upcoming January native winter-sowing workshop. It was a very informative and fun workshop.



MG Terry Thir and Kathy Jenkins during Q&A



MG Terry Thir presented on larval host plants



MG Kathy Jenkins presented on lessons with native gardens in fall

Upcoming Events

Dates TBD

January 2026 —

Winter Sowing Workshop

April 2026 —

Vegetable Garden Planning

April 2026 —

Backyard Buffer Program

April 2026 —

Celebrate La Plata



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Click on photo above to visit our website.
Check us out on Facebook.



If you have a landscape, insect, or plant disease question, please use the [Ask Extension webpage](#) to submit photos and other details.

Or check out the [Home and Garden Information Center](#) for more Gardening resources



The mission of the Charles County Master Gardeners is to support the University of Maryland Extension service by educating residents about safe, effective, and sustainable horticultural practices that build healthy gardens, landscapes, and communities.

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