

Rutgers Master Gardener Association of New Jersey

Minutes of RMGANJ Meeting, March 9, 2023

Attendance:

Atlantic:	
Bergen:	Herb Arbeiter,
Burlington:	Nick Hendershot, Dave Parsons
Cumberland:	Keiko Warner
Essex:	Trina Ehntholt
Hunterdon:	Tricia Deering, Dewey Goodwin
Mercer:	Betty Scarlata
Middlesex:	Jerri Barclay, Kathy Dopart
Monmouth:	Bob Magovern, Bill Schutte
Morris:	
Ocean:	Suzanne Keane, Roberta Quinn
Passaic:	Monica Chalgeri, Joe D'Errico, Rashmi Dhekne
Somerset:	Cindy Hedin
Sussex:	(Pat Schanzlin)
Union:	Kristin Kiefer
Rutgers University:	Nick Polanin

Nick Hendershot called the Zoom meeting to order at 9:02 am and welcomed the group to the meeting, introducing delegate Rashmi Dhekne, Passaic. Joe D'Errico, Passaic President, was a guest.

Secretary's Minutes from December 8, 2022 RMGANJ Meeting: Cindy Hedin, Recording Secretary, reported that on Tuesday, 3/7/23 she emailed the RMGANJ minutes from the December 8, 2022 meeting. Cindy noted that "Nick's department" will be changed to "the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources." A motion to accept the draft minutes was made, seconded (Trish/Betty) and approved.

Cindy noted a correction to the November 2022 minutes, "Qualtrics" replacing "Qualtex." In the absence of any objections, the change will be made without another vote.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Roberta Quinn, Treasurer, reported that the current balance, as of 2/24/23, is \$13,467.55. A motion to accept was made, seconded and approved. The double charge, \$285.50, for refreshments from the Conference was corrected in January.

MASTER GARDENER'S COORDINATOR'S REPORT: Nick Polanin, head of the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, wished everyone a happy new year. That department meets 3 times per year, spring, Sept. & Dec. All Master Gardener coordinators will be invited to attend those meetings. Among that department's open positions are a statewide coordinator of Consumer Horticulture and Master Gardeners, and the Somerset County Master Gardener coordinator (Nick P's position in Somerset County). Rutgers administration has advised there will be a 9.5 % budget cut for the coming fiscal year. Some unions within Rutgers have been without contracts since July, 2022.

Most Master Gardener programs & meetings are returning to in-person or hybrid sessions. Covid forced us into the digital age, but many feel it's time to rekindle the personal connections that in-person activities foster. The Annual Report will be restarted and will inform all of the great programs and service provided by Master Gardeners.

Trish asked a question about Teams as repository for county information/data. Could it be a statewide mechanism for storing MG information. Nick likes Teams. County coordinators could set up for individual counties, or could use Better Impact. What is the storage capacity of Teams? In Teams, there would need to be control of editing which would be determined by users' permissions. Who now has access to Teams? Nick will follow up. Needs delegates list. Cindy will send to Nick. Joe will send new Passaic delegates info.

Dave asked when will we go back to in-person meetings? Old facility on the Cook Campus had no facilities for a hybrid option. Some county offices do have hybrid capabilities. We should go back to in-person. There are approximately 32 delegates/alternates. Betty reported that Meredith Melendez has set up a drive for each team through Onedrive. 365 Outlook is not required on an individual's computer to

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access that team's drive. Do we need a common thing for the entire RMGANJ? Nick will investigate access to Teams.

Conference Survey results—65 responses from the registrants (77 in room, 140 on line), a pretty good response rate considering the usual is 10+%.

How many watched the recorded presentation after the conference-- 180 Rebecca Magron;, 115 Matt Elmore. Brian's talk was not recorded

Should those videos be available for the public? (they were) The consensus was that they should be as a matter of public information. Nick P. gave the example of a Help Line (2017/18) diagnostics video that has had more 3000 views since it was posted.

Regarding attendance at RMGANJ meetings, Nick H. will send out survey 1) will you be active? 2) in-person or hybrid? There are only 17 online today out of the 36 delegates/alternates on the roster.

Old Business --

The 2023 Conf committee, Dave, Betty, Keiko and Nick H., met and had a good discussion. Is there a better facility? Access to food courts would mean there would be no need for lunch. Cost? 7 months til this year's October event. Perhaps we should consider 2 conferences, perhaps on in the spring at Snyder Farm, or the research farm in Allentown. What might be incentives to bring folks in person, a better facility, or a tour of the soil lab, herbarium, garden, greenhouses or green wall? Face-to-face and personal interaction are important. The October conferences have drawn 200+ in past years

A wide-ranging discussion of dates, venues and themes touched on many considerations. Looking at the calendar, Dave P. moved and Keiko seconded that the Conference be held on October 21 with Oct. 14 as a back-up. The motion carried. The availability of parking and food vendors at the Douglass Student Center make it a good choice. Nick P. will check the availability of the space and hybrid capability and costs. Bill Schutte commented that we need to move quickly.

Many possibilities as to the theme/topic—Insect pests, invasives, climate change, What is/has done Rutgers in plant history & development were discussed. Ideas—Rutgers Breeding Program-dogwood, strawberries, turf grass, climate resiliency, soil health. Do we have a list of past presentations-Trisha may be able to put together a list, others to add. Ellen ??? might have a list. Betty & Suzanne offered to comb their files for past topics. Dave Parsons shared some possible program themes such as Indecent Insects, Natural Natives, Indoor plants and Absolutely Arboreal,

Nick Hendershot suggested "Transforming your home indoors and out," Suzanne Keane seconded and the motion carried. Nick Polanin in chat: The diversity of presentations and speakers in that theme will be a good incentive to attend!

Rashmi suggested there should be a presentation on house plants in light of the proliferation of them during Covid, with attention to consequences for pets

Considering the proximity to the Douglass Student Center of Rutgers Floriculture Greenhouses under the supervision of Nicki Graf, perhaps a tour could be arranged Or a tour to the Living wall (done 3 times before, problem getting someone to come in on a Saturday) limited group sizes within greenhouse, perhaps a display could be brought to Douglas center, Facebook page-

https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063636906991&ref=page_internal

New Business --

Betty asked about trends in HelpLine volume over 10 years. Ocean has seen a big decrease, especially during Covid as diagnostics had to be left at the door. Hunterdon has seen a decrease too and has developed promo brochure. Monmouth's Coffee Talks were well received with 235 registrants from 9 states. In Union County, Kristin Kiefer reported that Helpline is picking up. Comments included "People go to the Internet instead of calling HelpLine. However, experience can be better than Google; Facebook posts increase awareness. Some counties don't have direct email access so contacts and responses go through coordinators.

One feature of in-person-GREAT SNACKS!

It was asked if the final minutes could be available earlier. Cindy pointed out that the minutes are not final until the vote is taken at the next meeting. Counties should submit their reports as close to the meeting date as possible. For example, reports for February should be sent as close to the March meeting as possible.

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COUNTY REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

Atlantic –

Bergen - The monthly meetings began in-person beginning January.

January:

Jason Gabosky, professor in urban forestry, Department of Ecology, Evolution and Natural Resources at Rutgers, presented “Giving Trees Space and Watching Them Grow.” A guide to urban tree management.

February:

John Beirne, Curatorial Director of Horticulture at Reeves-reed Arboretum in Summit, presented “For the Love of Flowering Trees.”

Volunteer sites are beginning to open for the spring.

Garretson Forge and Farm had their opening day celebration on March 5. Heirloom and organic vegetable, herb and flower seeds were made available to the public by the Garretson Community Seed Library at no cost.

The “Potting Shed”, our bi-monthly newsletter, continues to provide interesting articles and notifications of online events.

Burlington – RMG of BurlCo started a new Master Gardener class on Tuesday, January 17th. There are thirteen candidates enrolled.

RMG of BurlCo expanded County Extension Office helpline desk coverage to two volunteers at a time starting the first week in February.

RMG of BurlCo will start the “Traveling Helpline” Program at various Burlington County Library System locations. Two events are scheduled each month beginning in April and continuing through November.

RMG of BurlCo will start monthly virtual “Master Gardener Talks” sponsored by the Moorestown Library beginning the first week in April.

Cumberland

Essex -

Hunterdon -- Beginning in Jan , we have started in person monthly general meetings, we also provide a zoom link for those who can not attend in person.

Our Enrichment team continues to provide excellent speakers for our General Meetings.

Our New Class of Master Gardeners is continuing in person and zoom, and is anticipated to graduate in April.

Many of our teams are starting with organizational meetings and some preliminary work had started.

We anticipate activating our Help Line soon

We all are looking forward to getting our hands into fresh soil this Spring.

Mercer

Middlesex - Middlesex County Master Gardeners has been in existence for 35 years this year. A celebration is being planned for October and will include the graduation ceremony and an awards ceremony.

On January 17th Angela Monaghan gave an excellent talk on Creating a Cut Flower Garden.

Seeding has begun for the plant sale and various gardens at the EARTH Center.

The February 21st Speakers Meeting featured An Advanced Training on Native Plants. The purpose was to discuss how to communicate to the public the importance of native plant ecology.

Rows for the Hungry is anticipated to double in size to approximately 2 acres. The team is developing an education program aimed at school age children with an eye to teaching science, gardening, agriculture and interaction in the outdoor classroom which is the Rows for the Hungry.

The Middlesex Master Gardeners Book Club continues to meet virtually each month. Saturday April 1 will be the last book of the season. They will be reading and sharing The Home Place: Memoirs of a colored Man's Love Affair with Nature by J Drew Lanham which is on the Longwood Garden Book Club list.

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The Children's Garden will host a summer series at the Earth Center on for Saturdays. Topics covered include seed starting, pollinators, weather and harvesting. The Children's Garden is adding a library area with books this year.

March 21 will be the MG Garden auction. It's our biggest fundraiser of the year and an opportunity to add some gardening supplies while supporting the Gardens.

Monmouth -- Monmouth started the year with our plant sale preparation. Some MGs volunteered to grow vegetable plants for the sale, plant selections are being made and plans for our Speakers Tent programs are being made. Also in preparation is our Junior Master Gardener Program. We will have 18 children ages 9 to 11 years old participating this year. Our program starts indoors with an activity and a lesson which will be followed up out in the JMG garden. Two students will share a garden, and as indoors, there will be a mentor per student. The class will begin in late April, every Saturday until the middle of June concluding with their graduation from the program. Students are encouraged to return on Saturdays throughout the summer to weed and harvest their vegetables. Some students will choose to enter the County Fair with their very best vegetables.

February has brought our Coffee Talks to hundreds of folks throughout the state as well as other states! So far we have heard programs on Ferns by Kevin Akey, Bees by Angela Juffey and Seed Starting by Bill Errickson, our Ag. Agent. February 25th is our last Coffee Talk, presented by Debbie LaGattuta on Dahlias. We hope you all had a chance to attend and enjoyed the talks!

Also busy is our Scholarship Committee. Applications have been posted on-line and so far they have been coming in and being reviewed by our committee. To qualify for an application, students must Monmouth County residents and either are attending a college/university in September as a freshman, or are already attending a college in or out of state. Each application is carefully screened and evaluated by all committee members.

Other committees are gearing up as well such as Hort. Enrichment, the Native Garden and the Helpline Roundtable is starting a new season on-line with monthly meetings. It is a great time for Helpline topics to be discussed as well as garden or yard dilemmas that are being experienced by many which will be addressed. In addition, our Speakers Bureau has several talks lined up for March and April. Our talks have been very popular with garden clubs throughout the winter. Diane Larson continues to have her Helpline on-line program through our Monmouth County Libraries.

And lastly, the Monmouth County Master Gardeners were so pleased to welcome 31 new interns on February 23rd with a Welcome Breakfast and an orientation of our program. Thank you to all of our MGs who brought delicious food and to Sandra McLaughlin for organizing the breakfast to welcome them!

Morris

Ocean - During January, the Greenhouse leaders held their annual lectures for prospective MG team members. In February, the team started seeds and plugs for the specialty annuals for which they are known come the plant sale. The Wright House, our veggie house, started up this month and the team is happy to be growing again.

In early February, we had our Graduation Luncheon with 38 Interns from '20 and '22 receiving RMG certification. They were congratulated by Commissioner Joseph Vicari who said also that OCMGs were much appreciated throughout the county. The second part of the program was the awarding of year pins and hours awards.

Next came the Awards of Excellence announcements: for 2021, our Speakers' Bureau was recognized and for 2022, the Display Garden Team and Jill Jordan ('19) were recognized. These teams got us "back in the spirit" and Jill worked hard to revitalize the shrub garden after Covid.

Helpline and Tick Lab are active mornings now with one MG staffing each. The Intern class is at its halfway point and they are signing up to do their practice in Helpline and Ticks with their Mentors at the end of April. They will visit the greenhouses soon.

Passaic –

Somerset –

Sussex

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Union – Union County Master Gardeners have been busy wrapping up the 2022 season and preparing for 2023.

The Demo and Sharing Gardens had a very successful year, our 4th highest yield ever. We harvested over 2400 pounds of produce and distributed it to over 22 Food Pantries, Kitchens and other organizations in need in our county. The Garden is now open and seed starting will begin next week. Plans for mulching, trees, native plantings, etc. are underway.

Our new MG class of 2023 is now in session; a hybrid experience with students both in person and via Zoom. It is a joint effort with Bergen, Burlington, Essex, Passaic and Union Counties.

Executive Committee meetings were held on February 1 and March 2, 2023, chaired by our new President, Pat Paul. Recent topics of discussion included:

The establishment of a new Lorax Tree and Shrub Committee

Updating the website and organizing historical documents,

Planning the Spring Garden Sale on May 21, 2023 and participating in the Wild Earth Fest on April 30, 2023.

Planning for new Children's, Senior's and Speaker programs, there are already some requests.

ADJOURNMENT: MMS Nick H./Suzanne Keane. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 10:39 am. The next meeting is 4/13/2023 at 9 am by Zoom.

Respectfully Submitted

Cindy Hedin, Recording Secretary