

Rutgers Master Gardener Association of New Jersey

Minutes of RMGANJ July 13, 2023 Meeting

Attendance:

Atlantic:	
Bergen:	Herb Arbeiter
Burlington:	Dave Parsons
Cumberland:	Keiko Warner
Essex:	Trina Ehntholt, Susan Norkin
Hunterdon:	Tricia Deering, Dewey Goodwin
Mercer:	Judy Colburn, Angelina Duggan, Betty Scarlata,
Middlesex:	Jerri Barclay, Kathy Dopart
Monmouth:	Bob Magovern, Bill Schutte, Gayle Williams
Morris:	
Ocean:	Suzanne Keane, Roberta Quinn
Passaic:	Rashmi Dhekne
Somerset:	
Sussex:	
Union:	Kristin Kiefer
Rutgers University:	Nick Polanin

Keiko Warner called the Zoom meeting to order at 9:05 am and welcomed the group to the meeting. Keiko asked Tricia Deering to take the minutes because Cindy Hedin was absent.

MASTER GARDENER'S COORDINATOR'S REPORT: Nick Polanin reported that they are in the search phase for the new Rutgers State Master Gardener coordinator position. He expects candidate seminars/talks and interviews to be scheduled for August. The seminars/talks will be open to Master Gardeners, who can ask questions about the talk, but the interviews will not be open to Master Gardeners. Searches are on-going for ANR agents for Warren & Somerset, and MG coordinators for Passaic & Somerset and the Fruit IPM program position. The Mercer MG Coordinator position has been filled.

Nick reported that Nicki Graf has confirmed a greenhouse tour and plant table/sale for the fall conference. She will not, however, be a speaker.

Nick reminded the planning committee that there is paperwork needed for the speakers, they all need to be in the Rutgers system as soon as possible.

Old Business --

Dave Parsons asked Nick Polanin whether progress had been made on finding an on-campus venue that we could use for our monthly meetings. Nick reported that he had not made any progress on the issue. There was discussion about when in-person meetings would begin and whether they would be hybrid or not. It was agreed that the target is the first meeting in 2024 (March) and they would be hybrid. Nick said he would work on finding a venue.

Keiko reviewed the conference responsibilities and asked for volunteers and clarification.

1. **Catering:** a volunteer is needed to work with Nick Polanin's office on catering.
2. **Evaluations:** Nick Polanin's office has the evaluation form, but a volunteer is needed to work with Nick's office on compiling the results.
3. **Facilities:** a volunteer is needed to work with Nick's office on facilities and coordinate with the student tech support.
4. **Program speakers:** Dave Parsons from Burlington volunteered to work with the program speakers since he has already been in contact with several of them.
5. **Registration Desk:** Judy Colburn from Mercer County volunteered to work the Registration Desk. She will check if her county will take on the total responsibility.

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6. **Poster:** Gayle Williams from Monmouth County is responsible for the poster. She asked the conference committee to send her the speakers, talk titles and the final program agenda as soon as possible.
7. **Agenda:** Dave Parsons from Burlington shared the draft program agenda.
8. **Signage:** Kathy Dopart from Middlesex said they will do signs/parking. It was confirmed that since the venue is Douglas Center and there is a parking deck there, people are not needed to direct the parking. Only signs are needed to get to the Douglas Center.

Speakers tentatively are:

- Christopher Obropta –Water Management (<https://environmental.rutgers.edu/fac/christopher-c-obropta>),
- Karl Gercens – House Plants (https://longwoodgardens.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/gercens_speakersbureau_profile.pdf),
- Randi Eckel—Native Plants (<https://npsnj.org/news/npsnj-president-randi-eckel-in-the-news-and-on-the-air/>)

Tricia Deering asked about State Awards/Recognition. There will be no state awards this year, but they will be considered for next year.

Secretary's Minutes from RMGANJ Meeting, June, 2023: Keiko Warner asked that the minutes as emailed by Cindy Hedin be approved. The motion (Suzanne Keane/Gayle Williams) was approved.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Roberta Quinn, Treasurer, reported that the current balance is \$14,944.75. A motion to accept was made, seconded and approved.

Caring & Sharing

Dave Parsons asked Gayle Williams to talk about the Burlington County visit to Monmouth. Monmouth hosted 4 Burlington Master Gardeners and toured their Gardens with a focus on their Plant a Row (PAR) Gardens. The visit was very successful.

Gayle also reported that Monmouth has a Bugs, Birds and Beyond event on 9/30 from 12-4. It is geared towards children, but adults love it also. She invited everyone to attend.

Kathy Dopart from Middlesex reported on their Rows for the Hungry program. They have a 2-acre organic garden dedicated to growing food for donations to food banks. Last year they donated ~6,000 pounds of food. They work with groups of volunteers from different organizations including corporations, and they host class trips. In addition, they have many other gardens.

Kristin Kiefer from Union County reported on their giving garden – last year they donated 2500 pounds of food, they run children's programs, tours for kids and are continuing to work on expanding their outreach.

Kristin asked if any County has a good solution to the problem of where to store Master Gardener documents/information that is accessible to the membership. They have run into limitations using Better Impact. Judy Colburn from Mercer reported that their website has a MG only section where they post minutes, etc. and they also have MS SharePoint folders. However, they find SharePoint somewhat difficult to use. Nick Polanin reported that Somerset uses MS Teams. He reminded everyone that MS Teams invites were sent out to all State Board members in March. The sender is Microsoft Teams.

COUNTY REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

Atlantic – no report.

Bergen -

Burlington – Master Gardeners of Burlington County supported three traveling helplines at the Evesham Township Library on June 13th, the Pinelands Library in Medford on June 27th and the Bordentown Library on July

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11th. Burlington County MGs also supported a virtual Ask-a-Master-Gardener event sponsored by the Moorestown Library on July 5th.

Smith Woods Butterfly Garden (SWBG) project manager—Lyn Avale—reports on a very busy month. SWBG master gardeners started a new meadow garden from sown wildflower seeds and prepared the plot using the “lasagna” method. Within a week seeds were sprouting! In the native host garden only a few swallowtail caterpillars have been reported. Birds are the suspected culprits of low numbers so netting has been added to the SWBG wish list for next season. 90 students from a Trenton school visited SWBG and released close to 30 painted ladies. Most of the new winged visitors quickly landed on nectar plants and began dining. SWBG also hosted a group of 30 pre-school summer campers who helped add informative signage at the SWBG plots.

Rancocas Nature Center Demonstration Garden (RNCDG) project manager—Candace Myers—reports the rain garden has been doing its job this past month and the plants are thriving. Four to six new MGs have been volunteering at the RNCDG each week. Several new native plants have been donated to the RNCDG and the three garden plots are filling up nicely.

Master Gardeners at the Medford Leas Donation Garden (MLDG) have harvested and donated most of the early crops. Our MLDG project manager—Lyn Hecker—notes that the most interesting (and well liked) early crop was *tatsoi*—an Asian variety of *Brassica rapa*. MGs at MLDG are now starting to harvest onions, potatoes, beans and zucchini; as well as a few early tomatoes and peppers. Planning has begun for the sowing of fall crops to include broccoli, carrots, Brussel sprouts, peas, carrots and a variety of lettuces. Four MLDG MGs traveled to Monmouth County and toured their donation gardens. They raved about the trip and are looking forward to hosting and hoping to travel to other county gardens throughout the state.

Cumberland

Essex -

Hunterdon - Our Presentation Team has been extremely busy this past month, with interesting presentations to various community groups.

Our Hunterdon Central Team has been working with the school administration and prepping for next seasons garden at Hunterdon Central High School

Our Sensory Garden team has provided escorted tours of the gardens around our building at the County Complex

Our Educational Garden team continues to develop the gardens around our building.

Our Help Line has been busy with many questions about various insects and "Why is my plant dying"

We continue to have interesting speakers at our monthly meeting.

Mercer - The Rutgers Master Gardeners of Mercer County held their monthly General Meeting May 1. The hybrid meeting was attended by 130 Master Gardeners both in person and on Zoom. County Agent Meredith Melendez announced that the announcement for the horticulturalist position has closed. The organization received a total of 8 applicants, and the hiring committee will begin the process of reviewing the applications in the coming week, with interviews commencing shortly afterward. Meredith expressed excitement about the applicant pool, noting that several promising candidates have applied for the position.

Meredith discussed some of the trending questions received on Helpline, including:
Azaleas: Recurring questions involving the decline of azaleas have been logged, with multiple homeowners sending in pictures depicting similar issues such as dieback and the presence of lichens. Sayen Gardens, a property owned by Hamilton Township, also reported similar issues. While it was difficult to identify the problem solely from the pictures, Meredith explained that the presence of lichens indicated plant stress rather than direct harm. Upon examining the leaves and succulent tissue of the affected plants, Meredith identified the presence of the Azalea plant bug and southern red mite. Although lace bugs were suspected to be present as well, they were not specifically observed. Meredith noted that less toxic remedies would be suitable for homeowners but in the case of Sayen Gardens, a recommendation was made for a targeted application of insecticide. Additionally, the fact sheet “Rhododendron and Azalea Injuries, Diseases, and Insect Damage” (FS1146) was shared with both homeowners and Hamilton township as a resource for preventative and remedial measures.
High Soil pH: Meredith mentioned that Helpline has gotten several pH testing requests from homeowners. She reminded everyone that there is a \$5 fee for conducting the test which she runs herself at Extension.

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Meredith shared one specific question with the group involving soil from an area where a homeowner intended to plant a vegetable garden. The pH of the soil was found to be quite high, measuring around 8.0, exceeding the targeted range of 6.5 to 7 for a home landscape. (The caller explained that the high pH in the soil originated from an excessive application of lime to the soil.) Meredith noted that when the pH is elevated to around 7.4, she usually recommends applying elemental sulfur to lower the pH. However, in this case, the pH was significantly higher, necessitating a more targeted response. Since the homeowner intended to proceed with the vegetable garden despite the high pH, Meredith warned that tomato plants could potentially develop boron deficiency and possibly iron deficiency. She suggested foliar applications of these nutrients as a possible solution. The recommendation was given not to exceed one pound of elemental sulfur per 100 square feet of application, and to time these applications every two to three weeks during the summer to gradually reduce the pH. The homeowner mentioned purchasing a home soil pH test kit and indicated they would bring back soil samples next spring for further analysis.

Poison Hemlock: Another question that came into Helpline related to poison hemlock. While Meredith stated that she had previously encountered the plant in public spaces in other counties, she had not encountered it in a residential yard. Meredith advised the MGs to familiarize themselves with this noxious weed, as it seems particularly prevalent this year. The plant's identifying features include spotting on the stems, hollow stems, and some unique blooming characteristics. She emphasized that although poison hemlock resembles Queen Anne's lace, it blooms earlier and grows more rapidly, becoming large very quickly. Ingestion of the plant is toxic and can be fatal, but even touching it with bare hands can pose problems as the toxins can be absorbed through the skin. There have been reports of severe illnesses in children who have turned the stems into whistles.

Disposal of the plant material was discussed, emphasizing the importance of removing all vegetative material and disposing of it in a dumpster rather than composting it.

Bedbugs: The office has also been receiving numerous samples of bedbugs from schools, prompting the need for proper identification and action. All possible bedbug inquiries must be referred to Meredith, who explained that once the presence of bedbugs has been confirmed, a letter is written to the school documenting their positive identification. Subsequently, the schools will implement their Integrative Pest Management (IPM) program, which is a requirement for dealing with bedbugs in classrooms. It was emphasized that when reporting a bedbug sighting, only the classroom name and teacher's name are necessary for identification purposes, and that there is no need for reporting of the student's name. Although all the information collected with regard to this issue remains confidential, Meredith emphasized that respecting privacy and avoiding unnecessary stigma is always a priority.

Plant Expo--A successful event was held on May 6. Over 750 people attended.

With a focus on label recycling, there were prominent signs were displayed to educate attendees about recycling options for the small zip-lock bags used for the labels. Also highlighted was the NextTrex program, which enables people to recycle these bags at designated collection points in local grocery stores. There was also a designated area at the event exit to collect any unused or surplus labels, encouraging recycling and promoting eco-friendly practices

Tours--The co-chair, provided an update on several upcoming tours. She noted that the tour to Chanticleer on June 20th is already fully booked. The next tour on the calendar will be to several private gardens in Pennsylvania. One of the stops is Craig Wakefield's garden in Jenkintown. Karen encouraged those interested in getting a preview of the garden to visit Craig's Instagram page called "Modern Home Philadelphia," where he showcases various gardens apart from his own. After the tour of Craig's garden, the group will enjoy lunch and do some shopping before proceeding to John Novak's Garden. The tour's flyer, detailing the day's events, will be emailed to the membership shortly.

Community Education Event

The first program was a Compost Demo which, despite rainy conditions, had an attendance of 29 people. The second program, conducted by Kathy Easton, was an early morning birding event with 17 attendees.

Ann then shared one particularly heartwarming response to the birding event from a young girl who attentively took notes and created drawings of the birds she saw--a copy of her charming sketches was shared at the meeting.

The next event is the annual "Evening in the Garden," which will take place on June 15.
Community Outreach

May Events included the annual Azalea Festival at Sayen Gardens and Pennington Day in Pennington Borough.

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4-H Fair

Members were reminded of the upcoming 4-H Fair, which is scheduled for July 29th and 30th at Howell Living History Farm. An email will be sent out soon, requesting sign-ups for the fair, which can also count as Helpline hours. Attendees were encouraged to participate by submitting exhibits in various categories, such as fine arts, crafts, sewing, photography, gardening, and more. The online exhibitor catalog on the 4H Fair site provides descriptions and guidelines for each category.

Middlesex – The Master Gardeners cleaned, planted and improved the grounds at our local 4H Center Building. In exchange, the MG will use their kitchen on July 15th for the famous Canning and Jamming Workshop. Attendees will go home with strawberry jam, blueberry jam and pickles. Our fruit garden has provided most of the berries for canning. Perfect cross pollination!

Tuesday evening, July 18, is our annual Garden Gala. This social event is an opportunity For Master Gardeners and Master Gardener interns to enjoy the gardens and each other.

The Children's Garden has been hosting a very popular Summer Garden Series for kids 5-11. Topics have included Pollination, Weather, Propagation and will conclude on July 22nd with Harvesting.

The Butterfly House is open every Saturday and Sunday June-August, weather dependent, from 10am-12pm. Come see the tiny eggs, caterpillars, chrysalises and new butterflies as they emerge! This is a great space to learn more about these beautiful insects, their habitat and their role as garden pollinators.

The Rows for Hungry begins the season with over 1300 pounds of produce harvested - including 710 pounds of Cabbage - all while settling into the expanded 2 acre plot. All food harvested is donated to Replenish, the Middlesex County's Emergency Food Network and Elijah's Promise. Come visit and get ideas and advice on how your MG program can help alleviate food insecurity in your community.

The Middlesex County Fair is August 7th-13th. In addition to the Extension/EARTH Center promotion table we will be setting up an "Ask A Master Gardener" booth and inviting questions from the general public.

Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Middlesex County will host its EARTH Center Garden Arts and Music Festival from 11-3 on Saturday August 26 at the EARTH Center located in Davidson's Mill Pond Park at 42 Riva Avenue in South Brunswick. The day will be filled with family oriented activities, live arts displays and local musical acts. Master Gardeners and Environmental Stewards will offer horticultural advice while guiding visitors through our teaching gardens including a children's garden, vegetable display garden, the herb garden, Rows for the Hungry and the butterfly house. The Arts Institute of Middlesex County will offer a Share Your Foodways kitchen demonstration and prepare delicious dishes with the bounty of the season. This day is a great opportunity for residents to acquaint themselves with the programs Middlesex County's Office of Rutgers Cooperative Extension has to offer. For more information, please call 732-398-5268 or e-mail david.smela@co.middlesex.nj.us This event is open to all, but we extend a special warm welcome to Master Gardeners from all Counties!

The new Master Gardener Training program begins in September. We look forward to welcoming a new class of Master Gardener Volunteers.

Monmouth - In June Monmouth MGs were pleased to share the Ag. Building gardens with MGs from Burlington County. Of interest to them was the PAR, Plant-A-Row (for the hungry) Garden which is run entirely by our interns. All produce grown in this garden will be donated to county food banks. MG, Geoff Bray, is the PAR Garden mentor and he welcomed and answered garden questions Lyn, Beth, Irene and Lori had about the garden. Coordinator Diane Larson, President Bill Schutte, State Delegate Gayle Williams and MG Anna Goldman were on hand to assist and welcome our guests. A tour of the other gardens was enjoyed and a discussion continued over refreshments. It was a lovely and constructive visit and we were glad to share with fellow MGs.

The JMG (Junior Master Gardener) Program has completed its formal classes inside and out in the garden. Students were encouraged to come back every Saturday to weed and care for their plot and harvest any ripe vegetables. The week of the County Fair those interested in entering the vegetable competition will meet with our MGs to choose the best of their vegetables for Fair entries. We wish them well!

Also at the County Fair, Monmouth's section will feature the Spotted Lantern Fly as their theme. In preparation, we have pre-made SLF trap kits for ourselves and will be giving SLF trap making demos as well as we will have plenty of information about the pest. And, one lucky MG will be suited up in a SLF

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costume just for a little interest! In addition, our Helpline, JMG and compost tables will be manned to answer any questions or possibly sign up any interested Monmouth County residents with children ages 9 to 11 who may wish to be future Junior Master Gardeners 2024.

July 11th MG Jon Gibbons will be giving a tour of his teaching garden, Candide's Garden, located in Lake Como, by Belmar, NJ. Always a very good and interesting tour! Also, our next Trips and Tours Committee trip is scheduled for September 12th to the NY Botanical Garden and is already booked. Trips through this committee are paid for by MGs going on the trip which includes the cost of the bus and admission to the garden.

Morris

Ocean - Our Awards and Installation Potluck Picnic is being held tomorrow at our Ocean County Park facility. Rose rust and Spotted Lantern Flies are the two main topics coming into Helpline. The new Gulf Coast Tick was found in Seaside Park and brought into our Tick Lab. It is bigger than a dog tick.

Second Quarter hours are due into BI. Interns will be notified of their current totals so they are aware of what is still needed to fulfill the Intern requirement. On July 30th there will be an event called "Spots, Dots, and Weeds, Oh My!" at the Ag. Center auditorium. Specimens may be brought in for diagnoses. The Ocean County Fair is this week and we are participating with a Helpline/info table in the 4H tent. The "Pesto Workshop", an event for the public held at the Culinary Arts School in collaboration with the Cuisine Garden and its harvest was successful. One of our Interns had his garden featured Tues. in the Brick Garden Tour. The Interns working on their Fall Garden Day program for the public in Sept have decided on a theme, "Make your Gardens Grow".

An IPM workshop will be held Mon. the 17th with the same theme as last month, scouting outside and virtual diagnostics inside. The Display Garden team has had enough helpers to complete some needed renovations. It is in full bloom now and so pretty.

Two scholarships were given to extremely qualified young people, both of Toms River High School North and both continuing their studies at Rutgers. Congratulations!

Passaic –

Somerset –

Sussex

Union – Master Gardeners of Union County Executive Board does not meet in July and August. Below is a summary of recent activities.

The Board is working on improving our communications and recordkeeping using MS Teams, Better Impact and an internal website for data storage. **DOES ANYONE HAVE A SYSTEM THEY THINK WORKS WELL? I would love to hear from you! Please reach out to me. We are currently using Better Impact for communication and document storage. We are looking for a better system.**

Nominations are in process for the local Wes Philo award, the President's Volunteer Service Awards and the MGANJ Award for Excellence and will be ready for submission when due. Our Demonstration Garden is a very busy place.

A group of MG have restored one rain garden and are beginning work on the second one. 2 new theme gardens will be added to the property this summer.

The Sharing and Annex Gardens have already made donations of over 350 pounds of produce including lettuce, radishes, beets, turnips, swiss chard, collard greens and spinach.

Michele Bakacs will be the speaker for the October 18 meeting in Union County.

A new children's program will be held at the Hillside Library in July.

A children's camp will take place in July and August for 8 – 9 year olds at the Demo Garden. The July 12 camp will feature leaf rubbing, nature painting and a scavenger hunt. All activities are run by MG volunteers.

Madeline F DiNardo is organizing a group to support a new garden at the Children's Center in Plainfield.

James Keane is selling Union MG short and long sleeve TShirts and aprons. Orders due by month end.

We have a new Vendor for name tags, the order will go out in August.

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Our pin party will be October 1, 2023, from 2 to 4pm. A job fair and picnic are in the works.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting adjourned at 10:15 am. The next meeting is August 10, 2023 at 9 am by Zoom.

Respectfully Submitted
Cindy Hedin, Recording Secretary and Tricia Deering for Cindy Hedin