



# roots

The monthly newsletter of the Sevier County Area Master Gardeners Association

APRIL 2026





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## April Meeting Info

### April 20, 2026 6:00 PM

## Topic: Bat Rehabilitation Speaker: Susie Kaplar

Susie Kaplar with Bat Education and Rehabilitation will be our guest speaker on Monday, April 20, 2026. Susie is licensed by the State of Tennessee to rehabilitate bats and has been since the summer of 2024 when Tennessee started allowing bats to be rehabilitated.

She will speak to our group about how bats, although generally misunderstood, are very important to our ecosystem. Susie is a passionate and dedicated bat educator. Her passion shows through her presentations so come prepared with lots of questions.

**FYI - She will be bringing one of her "education bats". However, no one will be allowed to touch it.**

## On The Cover

Trillium is a genus of about fifty flowering plant species in the family Melanthiaceae. Trillium species are native to temperate regions of North America and Asia, with the greatest diversity of species found in the southern Appalachian Mountains in the southeastern United States.



# President's Column

Spring has barely sprung, but things are hopping for our organization. The day of our February meeting, we welcomed Cat Lawson, our new Master Gardener Coordinator. Cat, as the saying goes, "jumped in with both feet", and has already been making an impact.



Then in early March, we welcomed our new intern class. Hopefully you met several of them at the March meeting. This is our largest intern class (EIGHTEEN!) since the Class of 2016 that numbered 25. We are so happy to have their enthusiasm and quest for gardening knowledge. I know they will all become assets to our group as they complete their training and their internships.

interact with our customers to help them to choose "right plant, right place" and to provide gardening advice.

The greenhouse is buzzing with activity and happy plants. Thanks to the "Green Crew" that has been lovingly tending to the plants and keeping them watered and thriving. Our last planting day will be Tuesday, April 7th, when the squash and herb bowls will be seeded. Then on Saturday, April 25th we will hold our annual plant sale, which is an "all hands on deck" event.

Speaking of providing gardening advice, I wanted to alert you to the upcoming Friday Office Hours coming up through UTHort that is offered the 2nd Fridays of June, July, August, and September. These sessions are an opportunity to ask questions regarding fruits, veggies, turf grass, native plants, and everything gardening. If you have questions or have been asked questions by members of our community, this is a great way to get answers from the experts. We will post the notification link as soon as we have it available. Dr. Natalie indicated that she has cleaned out the previous notification list do to bounce backs, so even if you were previously registered, you may need to re-register.

This is our primary fundraiser for the year, so be sure to invite your friends, neighbors, and family members to come out to support us and to buy our wonderful plants for their enjoyment and nourishment in the coming months. We will need your help getting our flyer posted in as many online and public places as we can. It's also a fun event to

One last item to put on your calendars is the TEMG statewide conference coming up Wednesday through Friday, May 27th-29th on the UT Knoxville campus. We got a sneak preview from Dr. Natalie at a leadership Zoom meeting last month and

it's going to be an incredible program that you won't want to miss. We will have the registration link available as soon as we receive it.

I hope to see many of you at the end of the month as we host our annual plant sale where we will help gardeners in our community by answering their gardening questions and offering them our beautiful master gardener grown veggies, flowers, and other plants and raise funds for our programs throughout the year.

Happy Gardening,  
Karen



Sneak peak from the greenhouse of the planted herbs.

# Meeting Minutes

## March 16, 2026

### Program

Leo and Linda Lubke presented a program on Certifying Your Garden.

### Call meeting to order

The meeting was called to order by President Karen Less at 7:20 PM.

### Secretary's Report

Minutes of the February 16th meeting were printed in the March newsletter. There were no additions or corrections to the minutes and they were approved as printed.

### Vice President's Report

No Report.

### Treasurer's Report

Treasurer Darlene Kemp reported on the February financial report, which was accepted for audit. The deadline for paying dues is April 30th. Darlene also reported on the upcoming financial audit.

### Committee Reports

#### Program

Patsy Farmer reported that the April 20th program will discuss bats and will be given by bat expert Susie Kaplar of Bat Education and Rehabilitation.

#### Junior Master Gardener

Darlene Kemp reported that 9 children were in attendance for the first Tiny Tillers class. They enjoyed a tour of the greenhouse

and painted flower pots.

#### Demo Garden

The gazebo has been sanded and will be painted on the 20th. Demo Garden Work Days will be April 1st, 10th, and 22nd.

#### Greenhouse

Planting days will be March 18th and April 7th. The greenhouse has also been approved to receive a donation of five bags of seed starter from Coast of Maine company through a special grant program they have.

The soil will be picked up tomorrow at Curt's Ace Hardware in Pigeon Forge. The Senior Center gardens also applied and received five bags. Arrangements will be made to highlight these donations on our Facebook page and we will do some trials to see where we get better outcomes.

#### Plant Sale

The sale is scheduled for Saturday, April 25th. We will have the "garage sale" outdoors this year.

The flyer will be available soon, both electronically and in a paper copy. We want to have it uploaded to our Facebook pages, as well as individual Facebook pages. We also want to get it on all the "Speaks Out" and "Next Door" pages.

A sign-up sheet was passed around at the meeting. Diane will need help on Friday, the 24th to get the "garage sale" items ready. Examples of things that can be donated are tools,

books/magazines, pots, garden art, and other garden-related items in good condition.

We also accept donations of plants for the sale. These must be inspected, so they will need to be on site no later than early Saturday morning, April 25th. Donated plants are not permitted in the greenhouse, so Cat has reserved the small conference room for plants that cannot be left outside. Plants must be labeled with the name of the plant.

Set up time will be 7 AM on the 25th, and the sale will run from 10 am to 2 pm. We need pop-up tents, but probably have enough tables available. Let Diane know if you have pop-up tents we can use.

#### Sevier County Fair

No Report.

#### Intern Class

Diane reported that we have 18 interns, which is the largest class we have had since 2016. Last week the group attended a grafting session led by Dr. Natalie Bumgarner.

Members were encouraged to continue dropping in on Tuesday mornings during the class sessions.

#### Senior Center

Work days are scheduled for March 19th, April 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd, and 30th. Plant sale Saturday, May 2nd, 10 AM to 2 PM

# Meeting Minutes Continued

## **Tomato Seed Project**

Patsy reported that seven schools have been visited so far, and we have another six scheduled during March. Things have gone very well so far.

## **Social Media**

Darlene reported traffic on both the Master Gardener and Junior Master Gardener Facebook pages. The Master Gardener page had 7,497 views in the past 28 days. The Junior Master Gardener page had 2,374 views in the past 28 days.

We need your assistance on these pages by making sure you check "Follow" on the pages and also "Like" on posts.

We are still seeking a co-coordinator to help Darlene with social media. Anyone who has some social media experience is encouraged to talk with Darlene for additional information.

## **Newsletter**

Deadline for getting articles to Mandy for the April newsletter was March 15th (yesterday), so please submit anything outstanding as quickly as possible.

## **Wilderness Wildlife Week**

The 2027 dates have not yet been announced.

## **Master Gardener Coordinator**

Cat reminded the group that Tree Day sorting will be on Thursday

and pickup will be Friday. Volunteers are needed for both days.

Cat is also interested in having an Ask-A-Master Gardener table at all the Sevier County farmer's markets—Seymour, Gatlinburg, and the Co-op in Sevierville. She mentioned a webinar open to the public for anyone interested in being a vendor at farmer's markets. Contact her for additional information.

## **New Business**

### **Search for Excellence**

The 2026 TEMG Search for Excellence categories and submission criteria have been announced by UT. The board decided that we would submit entries in five of the nine categories. We will submit a member for Individual Extension Master Gardener of the Year recognition. Members were asked to email Karen Less or Cat Lawson with their nomination no later than Friday, April 3rd.

Nominations for all awards close May 1, awards will be announced at the TEMG State Conference in late May.

### **Statewide Leadership Zoom**

Karen and Cat attended the statewide Zoom this past Friday. One of the topics of discussion was a special leadership course that was piloted last year to second and third year master gardeners. This program will be expanded this year. Second year master gardeners were

encouraged to participate when the invitation is sent out. Dr. Natalie Bumgarner has purged the email notification list for the UT Zoom sessions, so anyone previously on the list will need to sign up again. The link will be provided when it becomes available.

There are two series being planned that members may want to participate in. Information will be provided under Educational Opportunities in the newsletter. These sessions last about an hour each, and are excellent at giving master gardeners answers to their questions or difficult questions from community members. Sign up for notifications will be available this spring.

Members were advised to purchase fertilizer as soon as possible and expect to pay more due to the amount of fertilizer ingredients that are produced in the Middle East.

## **Adjournment**

The meeting was called to a close at 8:15 pm.

## Meetings and Events

2026 Intern Training, Tuesdays through April 21st.

Monthly Meeting, Monday, April 20th, 6:00 PM

Master Gardener Plant Sale, Saturday, April 25th, 10 AM to 2 PM, Extension Office.

Senior Center Plant Sale, Saturday, May 2nd, 9 AM to 1 PM.

Tennessee Plant Show Kingsport, Saturday, May 9th. [Info Link](#)

May Board Meeting, May 18th, time TBA.

Monthly Meeting, Monday, May 18th, 6:00 PM.

## Volunteer Opportunities

Greenhouse Planting Days: April 7th – Squash, Herb Bowls at noon,

2026 Intern Class begins ends April 21st. Volunteer hours are earned by helping with classes.

Senior Center Work Days, Thursdays, April 2, 9, 16, 23, and 30 All days start at 9 AM.

Demo Garden work days Wednesday, April 1st, Friday April 10th, Wednesday, April 22nd. All days start at 10 AM.

Master Gardener Plant Sale  
Friday, April 24th Price items for Garden Garage Sale 12:00 – 5:00 PM.

Saturday April 25th Plant Sale 7:00 AM – 3:00 PM.

Senior Center Plant Sale, Saturday, May 2nd, 9 AM to 1 PM.

## Educational Opportunities

CEUs can be earned for attending the 2026 Intern class as a participant.

May Lunch and Learn live zoom food crop webinar series- May 5, 12, 19, 26 (12:30-1:30 ET/11:30-12:30 CT)- Live delivery and launch of NEW Smart Gardens curriculum that will be available throughout the year.

UT Hort Friday Office Hours, Friday Office Hours June 12th, July 10th, August 14th, September 11th 10:00 AM. Email reminder notification sign up available this spring.

TEMG State Conference, Knoxville, Wednesday through Friday, May 27-29, 2026. [LINK HERE](#)

Buncombe County (NC) Master Gardener Video Series  
[LINK HERE](#)

Discover Life in America 2026 Park Science Colloquium  
March 5, 2026 9AM - 4PM In person or Zoom  
[LINK HERE](#)

# February Financials

Sevier County Area Master Gardener Association February 2026 Financial Report								
Item	Month Account Summary			Year Summary as of Month End				
	Income	Expense	Balance	Budgeted Income	Expense	Actual Income	Expense	Funds Remaining*
Beginning amount	as of 01/31/26		9244.31					
Added approved items	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
County Fair	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
December meeting	0.00	0.00	0.00	930.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Demo garden	0.00	39.99	(39.99)	0.00	800.00	0.00	39.99	760.01
Dues	300.00	0.00	300.00	900.00	0.00	575.00	0.00	575.00
Greenhouse	0.00	87.27	(87.27)	0.00	200.00	0.00	269.63	(69.63)
Plant sale	0.00	0.00	0.00	3800.00	300.00	0.00	0.00	300.00
Senior Center	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Tomato seed project	0.00	192.00	(192.00)	0.00	750.00	0.00	338.66	411.34
Virtual meetings	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	175.00	0.00	0.00	175.00
Wilderness Wildlife	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
4H Scholarship	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	600.00	0.00	0.00	600.00
<b>Ending: 02/28/26</b>	<b>300.00</b>	<b>319.26</b>	<b>9225.05</b>	<b>5630.00</b>	<b>3125.00</b>	<b>575.00</b>	<b>648.28</b>	<b>3051.72</b>

\* Budgeted expense minus actual expense; for Dues, actual income

Our February Financial Report balanced to the penny!  
Our ending balance for February is \$9,225.05.

ANNUAL DUES: We are sluggish in receiving annual dues this year. To date, we have collected \$575 in dues.  
Our budgeted and expected income, from Dues, is \$900.

DUES PAYMENT: Please make your annual dues payment before the end of the month. The cost is \$25.

You can pay with check or in cash. Payment can be made at the UT Ag. Ext. Office – 752 Old Knoxville Hwy., Sevierville.

Dues can also be given directly to Darlene Kemp – Treasurer.

# Junior Master Gardeners

## Tiny Tillers

The first class of the Tiny Tillers Junior Master Gardeners program welcomed nine excited children and their parents, with both mothers and fathers joining in the fun.

The session began with a tour of the Master Gardeners Demo greenhouse. For many families, it was their very first time inside a greenhouse, and the experience sparked curiosity and wonder as they explored the sights and smells of growing plants.

After the tour, students and their parents enjoyed painting plant pots that had been prepared for the activity. This creative moment brought out lots of smiles and anticipation, as everyone looked forward to planting green bean or tomato seeds in the April class.

Tiny Tillers is all about hands-on learning; kids discover how plants grow, explore the natural world, and develop responsibility by caring for their own mini garden. It's the perfect way for young gardeners and their families to learn and grow together.



## Contacts

### Board

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Steve Greenwell, Member-at-large  
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### Project Coordinators

Greenhouse  
Shauna Bayless

Demonstration Gardener /Intern Class /  
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Patsy Farmer

Junior Master Gardener  
Tiny Tillers  
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## Improving Soil Quality Naturally

Healthy soil is the foundation of productive agriculture and thriving gardens. Soil that is rich in nutrients, well-structured, and biologically active supports strong plant growth while reducing the need for synthetic fertilizers and chemicals. Fortunately, soil quality can be improved naturally using sustainable methods that enhance its structure, fertility, and biodiversity.

### Add Organic Matter

One of the most effective ways to improve soil naturally is by adding organic matter. Materials such as compost, decomposed leaves, manure, and plant residues enrich the soil with nutrients and improve its structure.

Organic matter helps soil retain moisture, promotes beneficial microorganisms, and enhances nutrient availability for plants. Regularly incorporating compost into the soil can significantly boost fertility over time.

### Practice Crop Rotation

Growing the same crops repeatedly in the same area can deplete specific nutrients from the soil. Crop rotation involves planting different types of crops in succession to maintain nutrient balance.

For example, rotating legumes with leafy vegetables or grains can naturally replenish nitrogen levels in the soil, reducing the need for chemical fertilizers.

### Use Cover Crops

Cover crops, also called green manure crops, are plants grown primarily to protect and enrich the soil rather than for harvest.

Common cover crops include clover, rye, and vetch.

These plants prevent soil erosion, suppress weeds, and improve soil fertility. When they decompose,

they add valuable organic matter and nutrients back into the soil.

### Mulching

Mulching involves covering the soil surface with materials such as straw, leaves, wood chips, or grass clippings. This practice helps retain moisture, regulate soil temperature, and reduce weed growth.

Over time, organic mulches break down and contribute nutrients to the soil while improving its structure.

### Encourage Beneficial Soil Organisms

Healthy soil is full of life. Earthworms, bacteria, fungi, and other microorganisms play a crucial role in breaking down organic material and releasing nutrients. Avoid excessive chemical use and maintain organic matter levels to support these beneficial organisms. Their activity improves soil aeration, nutrient cycling, and overall soil health.

### Reduce Soil Disturbance

Frequent tilling can damage soil structure and disrupt beneficial organisms. Minimizing soil disturbance helps maintain the natural soil ecosystem.

Practices such as no-till or low-till gardening preserve soil structure, improve water infiltration, and protect microbial life.

### Conclusion

Improving soil quality naturally is a long-term investment in sustainable agriculture and gardening. By adding organic matter, rotating crops, planting cover crops, mulching, supporting beneficial organisms, and minimizing soil disturbance, farmers and gardeners can build fertile, resilient soils.