

Rutgers Master Gardener Association of New Jersey

Minutes of RMGANJ Meeting, March 10, 2022

Nick Hendershot called the Zoom meeting to order at 9:05 am. Sharon Asterino, our new vice-president, welcomed the group to the meeting, noting one new member, Trina Ehntholt from Essex

Attendance:

Atlantic:	
Bergen:	Herb Arbeiter
Burlington:	Merry Bogert, Nick Hendershot, Sharon Astorino
Cumberland:	Betsey Simpson, Keiko Warner
Essex:	Terry Felper; Trina Ehntholt, Alice Poueymirou
Hunterdon:	Tricia Deering, Dewey Goodwin
Mercer:	Judy Colburn, Betty Scarlata
Middlesex:	Jerri Barclay, Kathy Dopart
Monmouth:	Bob Magovern, Bill Schutte, Gayle Williams
Morris:	
Ocean:	Suzanne Keane, Roberta Quinn
Passaic:	
Somerset:	Cindy Hedin
Sussex:	
Union:	Dolores Batz-Culp, Deb Murphy
Rutgers University:	Jan Zientek

Secretary's Minutes from RMGANJ December Meeting : Cindy Hedin, Recording Secretary, reported that she had emailed RMGANJ 12/9/21 minutes and received some minor changes. A few minor/typo changes were made, but nothing substantial. She asked for motion to accept, which was made, seconded (Suzanne/Gayle) and approved.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Roberta Quinn, Treasurer, reported that the current balance is \$14,018.3 . A motion to accept was made, seconded and approved.

MASTER GARDENER'S COORDINATOR'S REPORT: Jan Zientek reported that Rutgers University Policy regarding the pandemic is moving gradually towards in-person programing, a feeling of optimism prevails. Some county offices are still closed. Masking is still requested, Plant sales are being scheduled. All Master Gardener groups are resuming hours requirements in 2022 for community service and continuing ed. No one will lose his/her certification due to short hours. Jan will be retiring (after 21 years of service on Rutgers) in late June/early July, exact date to be determined. Hopefully his replacement will be a Rutgers faculty position.

Old Business

Conference Planning: The Planning Committee met yesterday, March 9, to discuss the RMGANJ Conference. Major points considered include:

Date: Several possible dates were considered, but if we want to use the Cook Student Center, the only date available is Oct. 15, 2022 per Jan. In-person attendance may be limited. Jan will investigate.

Location: Cook Student Center is a possibility, need to know capacity and Zoom access. Jan guesses there would be no fee, but will check with Brian Schilling.

Format: In-person and via Zoom, we need to be nimble depending on Covid and last-minute developments. Will the technical assistance to facilitate Zoom be available?

Socializing could be during a post-session informal lunch hour. In-Person is very energizing.

Registration: through OCE (Office of Continuing Education as opposed to OPCE Office of Professional Continuing Education which had been used in the past) on line. Does RMGANJ need to provide a person? Probably no fee. Enrollment straight forward, This system in place for undergraduates, Essex has used the OCE system for its programs. Reports are generated & emailed. What about using Better Impact? Not right now.

Coffee Hour will be on us.

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Speakers/Program: Brian Schilling is committed to speak. Perhaps one or two others. Topics-The Future of Master Gardeners in New Jersey, HelpLine State-wide and ???

Covid concerns: Masking requirements will be determined by Rutgers' policies.

Jan will investigate vaccination/Covid tests requirements for in-person attendance.

Paper-less: Any hand-outs to be emailed/available on-line ahead of time, including speakers notes

Parking: Advanced registration had been required. Will that be necessary for 2022? Jan will investigate.

Gas/Distance:

The original purpose of this conference, way back when, was to present awards. There should be some sort of recognition for efforts during the past two years.

The committee will handle task assignment in the near future. Monmouth volunteered to create a flyer/save the date note for distribution.

HelpLine concerns-digital log book, state-wide, valuable for recognizing developing, state wide issues. Qualtrix maybe Some counties are using it, but not Hunterdon.

Every county should be using Better Impact as of 2020

Caring and Sharing:

If any counties permit bee keeping in their gardens please contact ????? Also meadow maintenance information, please. Union County's Trilside has a meadow.

Tributes and thanks to Jan Zientek for his years of service and dedication. Jan commended Brian Schilling for his appreciation of Master Gardeners.

RMGANJ future meetings in-person perhaps in May. Jan will investigate on-campus locations for in-person meetings. There are other, off-campus locations possible. Jan and Nick will confer on possible locations.

COUNTY REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

Atlantic – no report.

Bergen -- MG of BC continued to hold virtual meetings in January and February. The March meeting will be held virtually. Research is in progress to hold hybrid subsequent meetings.

January

Guest Speaker: Dorothy Smullen, mushroom lover and nature and garden club speaker for 35 years, discussed the fungi kingdom and its importance in our world in her "Mushroom Mania" presentation.

February

Guest Speaker: Don Torino. President of the Bergen County Audubon Society, presented "Gardening for Butterflies". Don discussed specific native plants that are both hosts and nectar sources for our butterflies.

Volunteer Sites:

The Hermitage held there annual spring "maple Sugaring" event in February. Master gardeners are collecting the sap and there will be a big boil off in a few weeks when the tapping season is over. The Garretson Community Seed Library, located at Garretson Forge & Farm in Fair Lawn, is celebrating its seventh year as a resource for free heirloom and open-pollinated seeds and a source of information about the importance of maintaining local seed varieties and preventing the loss of genetic diversity among seeds and plants. Members obtain small packages of seeds to grow, and — if successful — collect the seeds at harvest and return seeds to the seed library.

Burlington – no report

Camden

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Cumberland -- Over the last few months our program has begun preparing for a successful year. Our committees are organizing again, and we have a lot planned for the spring. We have created numerous new partnerships within the community, as one of our main goals for 2022 is to be more visible and engaged with the residents of our county. We have over 30 people enrolled in our online Gardening Education Series and hope many of them will join us as interns. Our office recently reopened to the public and we look forward to helping folks again!

Also our propagation team has been busy planting many natives. Everything looks amazing. (*Secretary's note: In her report, Betsy included several photos of many very healthy looking seedlings.*)

Essex - no report.

Hunterdon -- Hunterdon has started some in person activities with small groups, including some prep work on our education garden.

Our new class continues using a hybrid system of half the class meeting in person, and the other half via zoom. Our Hunterdon Central team is working with the school officials as to how to work within the existing regulations. Our Help line continues to answer questions and is preparing for the up coming season.

Mercer -- Leadership and administration Dr. Kathryn Homa assumed the role of Mercer County Horticulturalist and coordinator of the Master Gardener program on January 24th. Dr. Homa's expertise in ornamental horticulture and plant pathology will be invaluable to the Master Gardeners!

Executive Committee and General meetings were held monthly, December through March, via Zoom. Attendance at meetings continued to be strong through the winter months with over 80 participants at each of the General Meetings.

After a vote by the Executive Committee, beginning in April Mercer County Master Gardeners will conduct hybrid-format monthly meetings: MGs may attend in-person at Extension or via Zoom. At present, masks, social distancing, and sign-in protocols continue to be required at all Mercer County facilities, including Extension. On-site, in-person committee meetings continued to be an option for Master Gardeners throughout the winter.

Activities/volunteerism

Helpline was staffed throughout the winter by members of the Helpline Mentors committee and a small number of highly experienced volunteers, with office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:00 – 3:00 p.m.

A two-hour Helpline refresher training was led by Dr. Homa and the Information Resources Committee (IRC) in March. The volume of inquiries coming into Helpline is already increasing, and Helpline staffing hours and public access are being expanded to accommodate.

Small-group, in-person Helpline training for interns from the Class of 2020 began March 8 and will be conducted three days/week through April. The training is being conducted by Helpline Mentors. The MG organization remains committed to supporting this most recent class as they work towards certification in 2022. The interns' support of MG programs has been critical over the past two years; the class remains motivated and committed to supporting the program and attaining certification.

The opportunity for Master Gardeners to tour other county's educational gardens is being trialed; Somerset County MGs will visit the Mercer Educational Gardens in May, with a reciprocal tour/visit being contemplated for June.

Planning is underway for two of Mercer County's most significant volunteer events: Plant Expo on May 14th and Insect Fest on September 10th. Significant changes to the site of the Mercer Educational Gardens will add an additional layer of complexity to the post-pandemic reinstatement of these activities, but their return is well supported by the MGs.

School programs will also resume in 2022, albeit with altered protocols. Teachers will now provide the hands-on support for children in the gardens, with behind-the-scenes training and support from Master Gardeners. MGs will be raising vegetable, herb and flower seedlings for school gardens as Mercer County pivots from 'gardening *with* the children to gardening *for* the children' in 2022.

Throughout the winter, the County's Speakers Bureau, Community Education, and Community Outreach committees continued to offer high-quality, educational programs to the wider community, partnering with organizations such as the State Library of New Jersey and the Xerxes Society.

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In celebration of the holidays, Princeton invited the MGs to “festively foster” one of several balled and burlapped conifers donated by the Shade Tree Commission and sited in downtown Princeton for the holiday season. The tree, artfully decorated with collected natural objects from garden and woodland and ornaments bearing MG of Mercer County contact information, was voted one of three best-decorated trees in town. Hopefully this was the beginning of an ongoing tradition for the town and the MGs.

Middlesex

Monmouth To date we continue to meet virtually for our meetings. However, in April we will have our meetings in-person, and can't wait to actually see each other! We will all be masked and no food will abound (what!?), but we will be together! Since our last State meeting Monmouth County has been busy making plans for our Junior Master Gardener Program which will begin the end of April, our Spring Garden Days plant sale in May, ideas for our spot in the County Fair in July and ideas for our Bugs, Birds and Beyond children's event sometime in October.

February brought our Coffee Talks every Saturday morning to over 200 homes with each talk. We started with Seed Starting given by Cheryl Sikora, then Raised Beds given by Jane Zysk, Native Grasses given by Bill Errickson and Beneficial Insects given by Kevin Akey. All MGs and our Ag. Agent did a wonderful job making each talk interesting, fact-filled and loaded with links to go to for more information. Our speakers also continue to give talks virtually and in-person to garden clubs and organizations. Coordinator, Diane Larson, also continues to hold on-line Helpline sessions in conjunction with the county libraries. All talks and Helpline sessions have been well received. Many thanks go to our Speakers Bureau from whence the speakers came and to our co-chairs, Laura Dreifus and Debbie LaGattuta for their organization of our Coffee Talks!

The end of March will bring in the new Class of 2022...Yeah! Many of these class members are from the original Class of 2020 and will complete the program and finally graduate in November. In fact, planning for graduation has begun. Everyone is just a-buzz with excitement to get started and back to some type of normal! Our PAR garden will be up and running by April, and I'm sure all other Ag. Property gardens will be under spring cleaning and getting ready for new editions and more than a touch of beauty.

All in all, Monmouth County is ready to rock n' roll, and maybe your county is too! Here's to a wonderful start to the 2022 growing season. We wish you all well, stay safe and well and have gardening fun!

Morris

Ocean - Ocean County MGs are starting to meet in-person with restrictions. Our March meeting was Hybrid with some joining on Zoom. Requests are coming in for speakers and garden design help. The Helpline and Tick ID are opening morning hours with a limit on number of volunteers which includes 2020 Interns as well as Veterans. Our greenhouses are in operation now. Many hands are returning to our site at the county park to continue revitalizing the shrub, perennial, and community garden areas. The Display Garden in front of our RCE building is getting a facelift with more native plants and one bed dedicated to pollinator plants. MGs took advantage of some of the webinars, coffee talks, etc. that our coordinator, Susan Servidio, has been posting monthly. A butterfly tent event is in the planning stages for a weekend in August. Our first one, before pandemic, was a great success.

Yesterday, we had an Awards ceremony with about 40 members in-person who received year pins or hours awards. It was very simplified due to the pandemic, but a happy time anyway.

Passaic – no report

Somerset – no report

Sussex

Union – no report.

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ADJOURNMENT: The next meeting is April 14, 2022 at 9 am by Zoom. The meeting adjourned at 10:22 am.

Respectfully Submitted
Cindy Hedin, Recording Secretary