

# From the Potting Shed

Feb. 1, 2025

[www.mgofbc.org](http://www.mgofbc.org)



## Say it with ... orchids



Roses are still the most popular flower for Valentine's Day, but we like these orchids, too. If you like orchids, check out Penn State Extension's Feb. 18 webinar about orchids. See "Webinars" on page 2.

### Meeting news: Tuesday, Feb. 18 via Zoom

## Hot Topics on the Hotline

### Joel Flagler and Karen Riede

The Bergen County MG hotline (officially the Helpline) has come a long way since its establishment in the mid-1980s. The hotline began with Dr. Ralph Pearson, who started the MG program in New Jersey in 1984 and the hotline a few years later.

At our Feb. 18 meeting, Joel Flagler, who took over as the Rutgers Cooperative Extension agriculture agent for Bergen County in 1987 when Pearson retired, and Karen Riede, horticultural assistant from 2017 to her retirement in September, will discuss "hot" hotline topics and how the hotline has changed.

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Links are clickable and are noted in [blue](#).

### From the President's Desk

#### **By Theresa Schneider, Class of 2016**

I'm not one for New Year's resolutions, but I don't mind setting goals and tasks to accomplish for the year. My personal gardening list is pretty long (conduct maintenance on my rain garden; nurse "drought-stressed" shrubs back to health; protect veggie garden from neighborhood deer... ). You get the idea. My Master Gardener list includes looking into how I can help with the hotline and the Rutgers Fact Sheet task force.



What are your personal gardening and Master Gardener volunteer goals for 2025? What continuing education might you need to achieve those goals, and how can the MG of BC and Rutgers Cooperative Extension help? Share your thoughts at our Feb. 18 Zoom meeting or via email at [info@mgofbc.org](mailto:info@mgofbc.org).

### ***Zoom link for the Feb. 18 MG meeting***

Click [here](#) to join our Feb. 18 meeting via Zoom. The link will be active at 7 pm. Announcements will begin at 7:15 pm followed by the speakers. Please keep your microphones muted. Thank you!

## WEBINARS

*All times are Eastern.*

**Feb. 8, 9-11 am:** Penn State Extension sponsors Second Saturday Gardening Series: Outdoor Container Gardening. Fee: \$10. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Feb. 8, 9:30-10:45 am:** Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Monmouth County sponsors The Seedy Side of Gardening: Starting Plants from Seed for a Beautiful Flower Garden. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Feb. 12, 7:30 pm:** Bergen-Passaic Chapter, Native Plant Society of New Jersey sponsors Keystone Plants to Restore Insect Populations; speaker Carolyn Summers, author of "Designing Gardens with Flora of the American East." Click [here](#) for more information and to register.



*Pixabay photo*

**Feb. 13, noon-1 pm:** AARP Virtual Community Center sponsors Tips for Starting and Growing Healthy Seedlings Indoors. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register. AARP membership not required.

**Feb. 15, 9:30-10:45 am:** Rutgers Cooperative

Extension of Monmouth County sponsors Earth-Friendly Solutions for Your Gardening Woes: The IPM Approach. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Feb. 17, 6:30-8 pm:** Penn State Extension sponsors Winter Wonderings: Woodland Treasures. Fee: \$10. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Feb. 18, 6:30-7:30 pm:** Penn State Extension sponsors Beyond Grocery Store Orchids. Fee: \$10. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Feb. 19, 7-8:30 pm:** Penn State Extension sponsors A Chickadee's Guide to Gardening; speaker Doug Tallamy, co-founder of [Homegrown National Park](#) and author. Fee: \$15. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Feb. 19, 7-9 pm:** Native Plant Society of New Jersey sponsors Making More Native Plants; speaker [Ken Druse](#), author and photographer). Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Feb. 22, 9:30-10:45 am:** Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Monmouth County sponsors Don't Curb Your Enthusiasm for Hell Strip and Mailbox Gardens. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

## MG OF BC NEWS

### *Tell us what you think!*

The MG of BC board wants to know what you think: What keeps you interested in MG volunteering? What topics or skills would you like to explore in 2025? What MG volunteer opportunities interest you?

Click [here](#) to take a brief interest survey to help the board determine what programs we may offer to enhance your MG experience in the near future. The survey is available to MGs, interns, and those who are no longer volunteering. The survey will remain open until Feb. 7. Your responses are anonymous.

Results will be included in a future issue of the Potting Shed. Be sure to share your thoughts by Feb. 7!

### *Still haven't paid your 2025 dues?*

MG of BC dues are \$20. Please make your \$20 check payable to the Master Gardeners of Bergen County, and mail to MG of BC, PO Box 824, Saddle River, NJ 07458. To ensure we have your current contact information, you need to complete a form online or on paper.

- Click [here](#) to fill out the MG of BC Membership Renewal and Directory Update form online.
- Or**
- Print the form enclosed with the Potting Shed email and mail with your check to the address above.

*(Continued on page 3)*

(MG of BC news, continued from page 2)

### **Retirement lunch for Joel is Feb. 28**

After 35 years of service, Joel Flagler will retire March 1 as the Rutgers Cooperative Extension agriculture agent for Bergen County. The RCE staff invites you to a lunch to honor Joel Feb. 28 from noon-2 pm in the Learning Center, 4th floor, 1 Bergen County Plaza, Hackensack. Lunch and donation toward a gift is \$30 per person

Make your check for \$30 payable to  
**Bergen County 4-H Leaders Association**  
and mail to:

Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Bergen County  
1 Bergen County Plaza, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Hackensack, NJ 07601

**RSVP by Feb. 17**

**For information not provided here,  
contact Monique Bliss at  
201-336-6780 or  
[bergen4h@njaes.rutgers.edu](mailto:bergen4h@njaes.rutgers.edu)**

### **MG volunteers had a very busy 2024**

#### **By Suzanne Danzig, Volunteer Records chair**

I would like to congratulate the Master Gardeners of Bergen County for logging a substantial number of volunteer hours in 2024. Our members recorded 7,235 outreach hours, 1,024 administrative hours, 301 hours for special projects, 103 hours on the hotline, and 97 teaching hours.

You have all been very busy, and each volunteer site is most grateful for your efforts. Well done! Now keep up the wonderful work.

Be sure to enter your 2025 volunteer and continuing education hours on [Better Impact](#) as you earn them rather than wait weeks or months to record them.

**Note:** The deadline to enter your 2024 hours and have them count for Rutgers Cooperative Extension purposes was Jan. 15.

## **GARDEN CLUB MEETINGS**

**Feb. 3, 4:30 pm: Sundial Garden Club**, Hillsdale Public Library, 509 Hillsdale Ave., Hillsdale. Speaker: MG Robyn Lowenthal. Subject: All About Coleus.



**Chris Kozar**

**Feb. 6, 7:30 pm: Garden Club of Harrington Park**, upstairs in the Harrington Park Library, 10 Herring St., Harrington Park. Speaker: MG Chris Kozar. Topic: Getting Ready for Spring.

**Feb. 7, 1:30 pm: Demarest Garden Club**, United Methodist Church at Demarest, 109 Hardenburgh Road, Demarest.

Speaker: Ray Slaman, arborist: Subject: Four Stages of Plant Growth.

**Feb. 12, 7 pm: Wyckoff Area Garden Club**, Wyckoff Public Library, 200 Woodland Ave., Wyckoff. Speaker: Eric Rohsler, fifth-generation nurseryman, Rohsler's Allendale Nursery. Subject: New Perennial Plant Varieties with an Emphasis on Extending Seasonal Interest. Refreshments at 6:30 pm.

**Feb. 20, 7:30 pm: Garden Club of Teaneck**, Richard Rodda Community Center, Room MP1, 250 Colonial Court, Teaneck. Drive up the hill to the rear parking lot. Speaker: MG Robyn Lowenthal. Subject: Vegetable Gardening 101.



**Robyn Lowenthal**

**Feb. 24, 7:30 pm: Ho-Ho-Kus Garden Club**, Ho-Ho-Kus Community Church, 400 Warren Ave., Ho-Ho-Kus. Speaker: Allie Lim, Hungry Harvest Garden. Topic: Vegetable Gardening: Lessons Learned.

## BEYOND THE GARDEN GATE

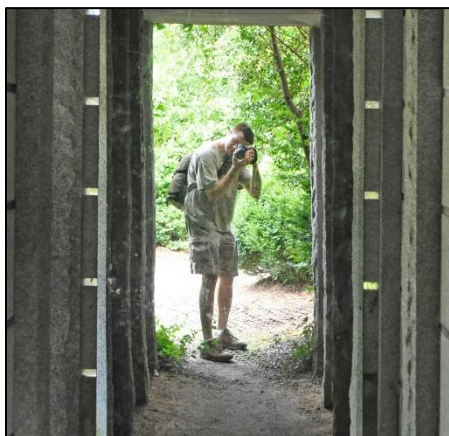
### **Joseph Cooper: His Skylands Manor HOH videos are a labor of love**

*[Editor's note: "Beyond the Garden Gate" is an occasional column featuring what Master Gardeners do when they're not in their gardens. This column is by Miriam Taub with Joseph Cooper.]*

Thanks to Joseph Cooper, there are videos of the Skylands Manor Holiday Open House featured on YouTube going back to 2011.

Joseph's creation of the 2024 HOH decorations video (5½ minutes) and a separate video of the assembly of the Great Hall Christmas tree (3½ minutes) are labors of love to share with viewers from the comfort of their couches.

The Holiday Open House is an annual fund-raiser sponsored by the Skylands Association. For the event, garden clubs and other organizations volunteer to decorate Skylands Manor according to a theme chosen a year before. For 2024, the MG of BC decorated both the Withdrawing Room (labeled as the Living Room in the video) and the Octagonal Hall based on the event's overall theme of A Gilded Age Holiday.



Joseph Cooper

The physical decorating began in late November when cartons of trees, wreaths, garlands, ornaments, and other adornments were brought to Skylands Manor by volunteers. Before their arrival, Joseph

set up cameras and equipment to document the assembly of the massive Great Hall tree. He also set up time-lapse cameras in four other rooms for the future production of a time-lapse video of volunteers in action.

Joseph's journey into creating HOH videos began during his time as an MG intern (Class of 2008) when



Photo by Joseph Cooper

The MG of BC decorated the Withdrawing Room (aka, Living Room) above for the 2024 Holiday Open House.

he volunteered to help decorate the Great Hall for the 2007 HOH event. During the decorating he recalled overhearing a fellow volunteer wishing she brought her camera.

Inspired by this comment, he brought his own the next day. Between climbing ladders and adding decorations, Joseph said he captured plenty of photos of the volunteers at work. Once the three days of decorating were done, he took pictures of the finished rooms. Later, he compiled the photos into a slideshow, which he shared with fellow volunteers via his personal website.

Among his viewers, the publicity committee of the Skylands Association found the slideshow appealing and asked if the organization could use it and the photos to promote both the event and the New Jersey Botanical Garden. From there the HOH photography and slideshow evolved into an annual project. Fast forward a few years and, in 2011, the slideshow/videos were posted for public viewing on YouTube. For the past three years the slide show has evolved into time-lapse photography and videos.

Some years Joseph has produced separate videos featuring room decorations, assembly of the Great Hall tree, and/or the volunteers in action. For 2024, he produced a video of the [tree assembly](#) and a video of the [room decorations](#); a video of volunteers is in the works.

**(Continued on page 5)**

(HOH videos, continued from page 4)

## Joseph Cooper's Skylands Manor HOH videos are a labor of love



Photo by Joseph Cooper

Skyland Manor's grand staircase flanked by poinsettias.

Despite what you see in TV ads, none of these videos was shot with a smartphone. Instead, Joseph uses a variety of professional cameras to record both still images and videos. For a drone effect, he uses a 360-degree camera mounted on a 10-foot retractable pole. Considering his height and arm reach he can position the camera as high as 18 feet off the ground and even higher if he stands on a table, he said.

To produce the Great Hall tree video, Joseph set up eight video and time-lapse cameras on booms to capture footage from a variety of angles and heights. He said that this approach provided unique perspectives and resulted in about 100 hours of recorded material.

For the decorations video, Joseph said he filmed entirely at ground level after sunset once the volunteers had departed. This allowed him to concentrate on his "creative vision." He filmed each room three to four times from different angles and movements using a gimbal-mounted camera to ensure smooth, steady shots while walking backward to capture the scenes. This process yielded about two hours of footage.

After four days of shooting, Joseph made his way to the editing room. "I've literally over 100 hours of footage," he said. "You really have to sift through it all to find the moments needed to produce a video." He figured he watched the footage between 60 and 70 times before he felt it was complete.

Each year, Joseph said, he tries to make his HOH videos look different. For the 2024 decorations video, Joseph used a reverse-embossing technique in gray to end each room's segment.

Once the videos were completed, Joseph found and licensed the use of music that synchronized with the video. The music must be at least 2½ minutes long; then he "re-engineers" it to the length of the video, he said. All in all, each video involved about 50 hours of editing.

Joseph is quick to credit all the volunteers — planners, assemblers, decorators, greeters, and docents — who make the HOH a success. And all for our viewing pleasure!

*Joseph Cooper has been a photographer for more than 25 years specializing in real estate, gardens, sculptures, and special projects. His photography has been showcased in three books, various magazines and newspapers, online videos, and television programs. Recent projects include the PBS documentary [Treasuries of New Jersey](#) and the [sculpture exhibit](#) at The Mount, the estate of Edith Wharton in Lenox, MA.*

### Visit us on social media

- **Facebook:** Visit Master Gardeners of Bergen County | Hackensack NJ | Facebook. A pop-up box will appear requesting that you log in or create an account. If you don't have a Facebook account, click on the "x" in the upper right corner of the pop-up box to close it, and you'll have access to the MG of BC Facebook page.
- **Instagram**



## VOLUNTEER SITE NEWS

### ***'Rare opportunity' for MGs to lead horticulture therapy program***

***By Lynette Stewart***

MGs at the Bergen New Bridge Medical Center's horticultural therapy program were recently given an extraordinarily rare opportunity that lasted four months.

In September, the center's director of therapeutic recreation, Kristin Mullins, asked Janet Stofkoper and me if we would be willing to run the therapy sessions as the horticultural therapist had to take an unexpected medical leave.

While Janet was hesitant at first, I felt it was an amazing opportunity that wasn't likely to ever come again. It was positive validation of the program and of our years of working and training with Ilona Robinson, the hort therapist. It was also a chance to revisit horticultural therapy practices and activities led by Joel Flagler at Garfield Middle School, Ridgewood, and at the Southeast Senior Center for Independent Living (SESCIL) in Englewood as special projects during my internship [Class of 2017].

With help from MG volunteers Linda Bourke, Karen Clemments, Pat Pacheco, Theresa Schneider, and Janet Troy we conducted what we called "garden sessions" for the long-term-care residents twice a week for four months. We developed activities focused on people-plant relationships.

Some of the activities included end-of-season seed collection and explanation of how those seeds developed; identifying herbs through sight and smell, then making herb bundles to dry and use in sachets. We made "egg heads" from empty eggshells and used grass seeds to grow hair.

We directed residents in the construction, painting, and decorating of their own floral arrangements using small pumpkins. We potted up plants brought inside from the outdoor bed and the enclosed porches and made wreaths and bookmarks from dried leaves and flowers from the MGs' own gardens.



***MG of BC volunteers in the Bergen New Bridge Medical Center greenhouse. From left: Pat Pacheco, Janet Stofkoper, Theresa Schneider, Lynette Stewart (site coordinator), and Linda Bourke.***

In addition, we potted daffodil and tulip bulbs for our upcoming spring plant sale. The residents also planted amaryllis bulbs; made snow globes; and made Christmas cards adorned with paint, stamps, and the leftover dried leaves and flowers for friends, family, and aides. In January, we planted perennial flower seeds.

It was taxing at times to organize the volunteers and be sure we had coverage for every session; to design and execute activities with the residents; and to collect supplies — all while maintaining an overflowing greenhouse. However, it gave us a sense of purpose and of giving back.

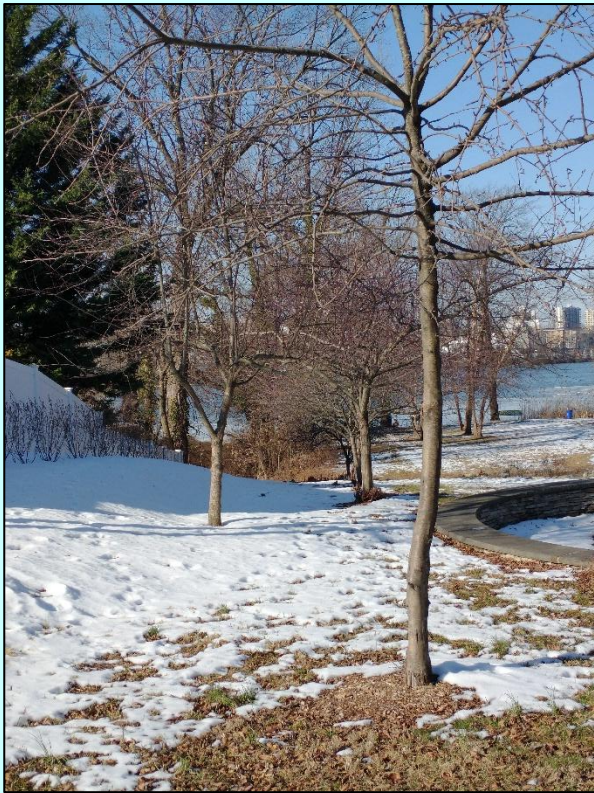
We got a chance to work one-on-one with the residents and get to know them on a more personal level. We were more than happy to help continue garden-themed activities for the residents in Ilona's absence and the residents were more than happy and eager to attend. I enjoyed every minute of it and hope our team did also. Last week we received good news that Ilona has returned. Welcome back, Ilona!

***Lynette Stewart is the MG of BC site coordinator for Bergen New Bridge Medical Center's horticultural therapy program***

***(Continued on page 7)***

(Volunteer site news, continued from page 6)

**At the Mary S. Topolsky Garden: These crab apples need your help**



Get a jump on your 2025 volunteer hours by pruning the crab apples (above) at the Mary S. Topolsky Garden, 640 River Road, Teaneck. (Park on the side streets.) The pruning starts Feb. 20 at 10 am. Contact Harriet Steiner, site coordinator, at 201-741-6756, or Peter Cammarano, at 201-835-3471, for more information or in case of potentially inclement weather. That’s the Hackensack River in the background. Enjoy!

**TRIPS AND TOURS**

**Philadelphia Flower Show March 1**

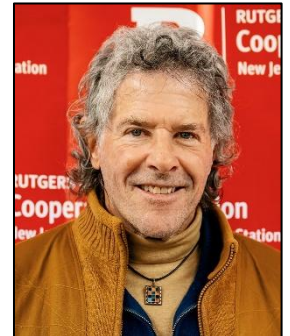
Step into the [Philadelphia Flower Show](#) where the 2025 theme, “Gardens of Tomorrow,” invites you on a journey into the future of gardening. This inspiring theme envisions a future where our actions today will nurture a healthier planet. Click [here](#) for more information about the Gardens of Tomorrow.

The fee is \$125 per person for a two-hour tour and admission to the show. Transportation, meals, and optional lodging are extra.

Contact Suzy Basu, Trips and Tours chair, at [mgofbc.trips@gmail.com](mailto:mgofbc.trips@gmail.com) to reserve your spot for the Philly Flower Show. Guests are welcome to join you.

**(Hot topics, continued from page 1)**

In the beginning, “The hotline was basically two desks with two phones staffed by two MG volunteers,” Joel explained. “In the years that followed, I beefed up the marketing of the hotline service and used it to promote RCE. It was hugely popular through much of the 1990s. Many years we counted as many as 6,000 calls.”



**Joel Flagler**

That changed as a result of the Internet. “In the later 1990s, people starting using computers to find their own answers and numbers dropped off markedly,” Joel continued. “The hotline was always promoted as an unbiased source of problem-solving info. We have nothing to sell. We just give the facts as determined by Rutgers NJAES [New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station] and other research-based sources.”



**Karen Riede**

Karen emphasized the research aspect that went into the information provided by Rutgers and those working the MG hotline. She also attributed the decrease in call volume to each county’s hotline to the ability to find information online on your own.

However, she warned “to be cautious with the information found in the artificial intelligence summaries now found when searching a topic.” She advised: “We urge sources from scientific-based research — .edu, .gov, and .org, and to stay away from .com sites, which are found to be less research-based and have many ads.”

Hear them both at our Feb. 18 meeting. The Zoom link is on page 1.