

Southwestern Indiana Master Gardener Association, Inc.

(SWIMGA)

Member Handbook

Growing Together | Serving Our Communities

Revised August 2026

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Serving Vanderburgh • Warrick • Gibson • Posey Counties

A Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service Partner Organization

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Section 1

Welcome from SWIMGA

A Letter to Our Members — New and Returning

Dear Fellow Gardener,

Welcome — or welcome back — to the Southwestern Indiana Master Gardener Association, Inc. (SWIMGA). Whether you are just completing your Purdue Extension Master Gardener training and stepping into your first volunteer role, or you are a seasoned member who has spent years nurturing gardens and communities across our four-county region, we are genuinely glad you are here.

Gardening teaches us something powerful: that good things take time, that small efforts accumulate remarkable results, and that the most beautiful growth happens when we work together. That is precisely the spirit at the heart of SWIMGA. From our nine founding members who gathered in Vanderburgh County in 1988 with a shared passion for plants and community, to our nearly 260 members today, this association has always been about more than horticulture — it is about connection, learning, and the deep satisfaction of serving others.

As a SWIMGA member, you join a community of curious, generous, and knowledgeable gardeners who show up year after year — at the Display Garden, at county fairs, at school gardens, and at countless community events — because they believe that sharing knowledge makes every garden, and every neighborhood, a little more beautiful.

This handbook is your guide to everything SWIMGA: our history, our mission, how we are organized, what is expected of members, how to get involved, and where to find help when you need it. We hope you will keep it close and refer to it often. It is written by and for fellow gardeners, and it reflects the warmth, rigor, and community spirit that defines who we are.

Thank you for your time, your talent, and your commitment to growing — in every sense of the word. We cannot wait to see what we will cultivate together.

With gratitude and green-thumbed enthusiasm,

The SWIMGA Board of Directors

Southwestern Indiana Master Gardener Association, Inc.

hello@swimga.org • www.swimga.org

 *Every great garden begins with a single seed of curiosity. We are so glad you planted yours with us.*

Section 2

Our History

From a Simple Question to a National Movement

Every lasting institution begins with a problem worth solving. In the 1970s, a Cooperative Extension Horticulturist in Washington State found himself overwhelmed — not by weeds or pests, but by people. Homeowners, backyard gardeners, and community members flooded extension offices with questions about growing food, tending lawns, caring for trees, and managing garden pests. There simply were not enough trained professionals to meet the demand. His solution was elegant and enduring: train volunteers from within the community, equip them with research-based horticultural knowledge, and ask them to give back by teaching others. The Master Gardener program was born.

The concept spread rapidly across the United States. By **1975**, Purdue University had recognized the program's potential and launched Indiana's own Master Gardener initiative, bringing research-backed horticulture education to Hoosier communities through the Purdue Cooperative Extension Service. Indiana's program grew steadily over the following decade, quietly building a network of trained volunteers who would eventually transform community gardening across the state.

SWIMGA Takes Root in Vanderburgh County

In **1988**, a small group of nine passionate gardeners in Vanderburgh County began gathering to do something remarkable: to learn proper gardening techniques together, and to share that knowledge freely with their neighbors. There were no grand plans, no formal organization — just a genuine love of growing things and a desire to serve. They came together around tables and in backyards, exchanging cuttings and ideas, asking hard questions and researching answers. That small circle of nine became the seed from which everything else grew.

By **September 1991**, the group had grown enough in both membership and ambition to formalize their efforts. They organized officially under the name *Vanderburgh County Master Gardeners Association*, establishing the foundation of the organization we know today. The move from informal gathering to

recognized association was a turning point — it meant accountability, structure, and the ability to take on bigger projects in the community.

Expansion and a New Name

In **1992**, the association adopted its first formal bylaws and expanded its geographic reach beyond Vanderburgh County. Recognizing the growing interest and participation from neighbors in Warrick, Gibson, and Posey counties, the organization rebranded itself as the **Southwestern Indiana Master Gardener Association, Inc. (SWIMGA)**. The new name reflected something important: this was not a local club, but a regional force for horticultural education and community service.

With the expanded geographic scope came expanded ambitions. Early community projects took root quickly — the first major garden project was established at **Mesker Zoo in Evansville**, setting a template for the public garden partnerships that would follow. From there, community gardens spread from Mt. Vernon to Newburgh, appearing at schools, churches, and public spaces throughout the four-county region. Each garden was more than a plot of soil; it was a classroom, a gathering place, and a living demonstration of what good horticultural stewardship could accomplish.

The Crown Jewel: The Master Gardener Display Garden

Among all SWIMGA's accomplishments, perhaps none is more beloved than the **Master Gardener Display Garden**, established in **October 2005** on the historic grounds of the former Evansville State Hospital. Spanning approximately **1.2 acres**, the Display Garden is SWIMGA's flagship project and a living showcase of horticultural excellence. It features more than 20 unique and carefully maintained garden spaces, from native plant habitats and formal ornamental beds to a productive vegetable plot that punches far above its weight in community impact.

That vegetable plot alone donates more than **5,000 pounds of fresh produce every year** to the local food pantries — a staggering contribution that reflects the deep connection SWIMGA members feel between the joy of growing and the responsibility of giving. For many families in our four-county region, the fruits and vegetables tended by SWIMGA volunteers make a real and meaningful difference.

A Community in Full Bloom

Over the decades, SWIMGA's community presence has only deepened. Members have shown up at **Arbor Day** and **Earth Day** celebrations, at the **Vanderburgh and Gibson County Fairs**, and at Yard &

Patio and Home Shows to answer questions, distribute resources, and spark conversations about gardening. They have partnered with **Habitat for Humanity** to provide landscaping assistance for new homeowners. They have organized recycling and Tox-Away projects that connect environmental stewardship to everyday life. And they have hosted the beloved **Tour de Fleur** garden walk, opening the doors of beautiful private and community gardens to the public and inspiring a new generation of gardeners along the way.

In **October 2018**, SWIMGA marked a milestone worth celebrating: its **30th anniversary**. Evansville Mayor Lloyd Winnecke recognized the occasion by officially proclaiming **October 9, 2018**, as *"Southwestern Indiana Master Gardener Association 30th Anniversary Day"* a tribute to three decades of service, learning, and community building. It was a moment of civic recognition that spoke volumes about the organization's impact on the region.

SWIMGA by the Numbers

Milestones

- National MG Program Founded 1970s — Washington State
- Indiana MG Program Launched 1975 — Purdue University
- SWIMGA Founded 1988 — 9 founding members.
- Formally Organized September 1991
- SWIMGA Name & Bylaws Adopted 1992
- Display Garden Established October 2005
- 30th Anniversary Proclaimed October 9, 2018
- Current Membership Nearly 260 members
- Annual Produce Donated 5,000+ lbs. to local food banks
- Display Garden Size 1.2 acres / 20+ garden spaces

Where We Stand Today

Today, SWIMGA is a thriving nonprofit organization with nearly 260 members, a robust calendar of educational programs and community events, and a regional reputation built on decades of reliable, research-based service. We operate in close partnership with the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service, ensuring that everything we teach and demonstrate reflects the best available horticultural science. From the nine gardeners who first gathered in Vanderburgh County to the hundreds who now span four counties, the spirit of curiosity, generosity, and stewardship remains unchanged.

 *Every great organization, like every great garden, grows one season at a time. We are proud of how far we have come — and excited about what is still blooming.*

Section 3

Mission, Vision & Values

Our Mission

"The Southwestern Indiana Master Gardener Association, Inc. (SWIMGA), a nonprofit organization formed to educate the community about proper horticultural practices, in cooperation with the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service and in conjunction with Purdue University Master Gardener Program, shall:

- Educate members and the general public on horticultural techniques.
- Demonstrate proper gardening, tree care, lawn care, and pest control techniques as recommended by Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.
- Provide service to the community through improving the environment, helping others to build and maintain gardens, and empowering the community to have a healthy lifestyle through gardening.

— SWIMGA Mission Statement (SWIMGA Bylaws)

Our Vision

SWIMGA envisions a four-county region where every community — from urban neighborhoods in Evansville to rural towns in Gibson, Posey, and Warrick counties — has access to research-based horticultural knowledge and the opportunity to enjoy beautiful, productive green spaces. We see a future where gardens are not luxuries but community assets, where every school has a teaching garden, every family has access to fresh produce, and every neighbor can find a Master Gardener willing to help.

Our Core Values

Value	What It Means to Us
Education	We are committed to lifelong learning and to sharing research-based, accurate horticultural knowledge with members and the public alike.
Service	We show up — in gardens, at fairs, in schools, and wherever our community needs us. Volunteer service is the heartbeat of SWIMGA.
Community	We belong to and build our communities. Our work strengthens neighborhoods, schools, and public spaces across our four-county region.
Stewardship	We care for the land, the environment, and the resources entrusted to us — modeling responsible, sustainable gardening practices.
Collaboration	We work together — with Purdue Extension, with other nonprofits, with local governments, and with each other — because no garden grows alone.
Excellence	We hold ourselves to a high standard. Our advice is accurate, our gardens are well-tended, and our programs are thoughtfully designed.

 *A mission without values is just words on paper. A vision without action is just a dream. Together, we both make real one volunteer hour at a time.*

Section 4

Becoming a Master Gardener

Becoming a Purdue Extension Master Gardener (EMG) is a rewarding journey that combines rigorous training, hands-on volunteer service, and a commitment to lifelong learning. This section explains the steps from initial training through full certification and the requirements for maintaining your status year after year.

4.1 The Purdue EMG Training Program

The gateway to becoming a Master Gardener is the **Purdue EMG Basic Training course** — a comprehensive program covering the science and practice of home horticulture. The course curriculum includes:

- Ornamental horticulture and landscape plants
- Home vegetable gardening
- Tree and shrub care
- Lawn care and turfgrass management
- Integrated Pest Management (IPM)
- Soils, nutrients, and composting
- Plant diagnostics and problem-solving.
- Related horticultural topics.

At the conclusion of the training, participants must **pass a final exam with a minimum score of 70%**. The exam tests comprehension of the course material and ensures that all certified volunteers are prepared to provide accurate, research-based advice to the public.

Want to Enroll in Basic Training?

Contact the Vanderburgh County Purdue Extension office for information about upcoming Master Gardener Basic Training classes:

Sara Dzimianski, Purdue Extension

sdzimian@purdue.edu •  [\(812\) 547-7084](tel:(812)547-7084)

New classes are offered periodically. Contact Sara early — spots fill quickly!

4.2 Intern Status

After successfully completing Basic Training and passing the final exam, participants are recognized as **Purdue EMG Interns**. Intern status is an exciting milestone — you have the knowledge; now it is time to put it to work in the community.

As an Intern, you must complete **40 hours of approved volunteer service within two years** of completing Basic Training. These hours should be in activities that educate the public about horticulture or support SWIMGA's community programs. Your county coordinator can help you identify approved volunteer opportunities and ensure your hours are properly recorded.

Important: Intern Time Limit

The 40-hour volunteer requirement must be completed within **two years** of finishing Basic Training. If you have questions about meeting this deadline or need guidance on suitable activities, contact your county coordinator or the SWIMGA Membership Committee right away.

4.3 Certification

Upon completing your 40 volunteer hours within the two-year window, you earn full **Purdue Extension Master Gardener certification** — a recognition of your training, your service, and your commitment to the community. With certification comes the privilege of using the title "Purdue Extension Master Gardener" and the responsibility of representing both Purdue University and SWIMGA in everything you do as a volunteer.

Certification also requires the following administrative steps:

- **Sign the Purdue EMG Volunteer Application and Agreement (Form EMG-1)** — this agreement outlines your rights and responsibilities as a certified volunteer.
- **Annual registry checks** — you must submit to annual checks on the national and Indiana sex and violent offender registries as a condition of your certification if you are participating with the youth of the community.

4.4 Transferring from Another County or State

If you are an already-certified Master Gardener relocating to the SWIMGA service area, the pathway to joining is streamlined — your prior training is recognized and valued.

Transfer Type	Requirements
In-State Transfer (from another Indiana county)	Provide records from your previous county coordinator verifying completion of Basic Training, your accumulated volunteer hours, and your active standing in the program.
Out-of-State Transfer (from another state's MG program)	Must pass the Purdue EMG open-book final exam with a minimum score of 70%. This ensures familiarity with Indiana-specific and Purdue-recommended horticultural practices.

Contact [Sara Dzimianski](#) at the County Extension office to initiate a transfer and discuss your specific situation.

4.5 Annual Requirements to Maintain Certification

Maintaining your Purdue EMG certification is an ongoing commitment — and a rewarding one. Each calendar year, certified Master Gardeners must meet the following requirements:

Requirement	Details
12 Volunteer Hours	Complete at least 12 hours of approved volunteer service in activities that educate the public about horticulture or support EMG program goals.
6 Continuing Education Hours	Complete at least 6 hours of approved continuing education or training. SWIMGA's educational programs, workshops, and speakers frequently count toward this requirement.
Annual Agreement Form (EMG-2)	Sign the Annual Agreement Form each year, affirming your continued commitment to the program's standards and policies.
Working with Minors Training	If you volunteer in activities involving youth, you must complete the Purdue University Working with Minors Safety Training before participating.

Tracking Your Hours

All volunteer and continuing education hours are tracked in the **Purdue MG Manager** online system. Members are responsible for logging their own hours in a timely manner. See **Appendix C** for step-by-step logging instructions, and **Appendix B** for a quick-reference summary of annual requirements.

 *The journey from curious beginner to certified Master Gardener is one of the most rewarding paths in our community. Every hour you give grows something beautiful — in the ground, and in the lives of the people you serve.*

Section 5

Membership

5.1 Categories of Membership

SWIMGA welcomes members at different stages of their Master Gardener journey and community involvement. Each category of membership reflects a different level of participation and carries corresponding rights and responsibilities.

Membership Category	Description	Voting Rights	Hold Office
Active Member	Certified Purdue EMG in good standing who meets annual hour requirements, pays dues, and actively participates in SWIMGA programs and activities.	Yes	Yes
Intern Member	EMG Intern who has completed Basic Training but is still working toward the 40-hour volunteer requirement for full certification.	Yes	No
Alumni Member	Former Active Member who no longer meets the annual EMG hour requirements but wishes to remain connected to the SWIMGA community. Pays dues; may not vote or hold office.	No	No
Honorary Member	Individuals recognized by the Board of Directors for extraordinary contributions to SWIMGA or to horticulture in the region. Dues-free; may not vote or hold office.	No	No

5.2 Membership Dues

Annual dues are established by the SWIMGA Board of Directors and are reviewed periodically to ensure they remain appropriate and accessible. Dues are payable at the beginning of each calendar year and help fund SWIMGA's educational programs, garden projects, communications, and operational needs.

Financial Hardship

SWIMGA believes that financial hardship should never be a barrier to membership. Members having trouble meeting dues obligations are encouraged to contact the **Treasurer confidentially**. Arrangements can be made discreetly and respectfully.

5.3 Rights and Responsibilities of Members

Your Rights as a SWIMGA Member

- Vote in officer elections and on proposed bylaw amendments (Active Members)
- Hold elected office and serve in leadership roles (Active Members)
- Access member resources, newsletters, and educational programming
- Participate in all SWIMGA programs, garden workdays, and events.
- Be treated with respect and dignity in all SWIMGA activities.

Your Responsibilities as a SWIMGA Member

- Meet annual volunteer and continuing education hour requirements to maintain certification status.
- Uphold SWIMGA's mission and represent the organization with integrity.
- Follow the SWIMGA Bylaws and the Purdue Extension Master Gardener Policy Guide (MG-5)
- Treat all fellow members, community partners, and the general public with respect and professionalism.
- Log volunteer and education hours accurately and in a timely manner in Purdue MG Manager
- Pay annual dues on time.

 *Membership in SWIMGA is a privilege and a partnership. The more you invest in this community, the more it grows around you — and the more you grow within it.*

Section 6

Governance

SWIMGA is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors elected by and accountable to its Active Members. Our governance structure is designed to be transparent, participatory, and aligned with our nonprofit mission.

6.1 Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is SWIMGA's governing body, responsible for setting organizational direction, overseeing finances, approving programs, and ensuring the association operates in accordance with its Bylaws and Purdue Extension policies.

- **Composition:** President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and up to five Directors-at-Large
- **Elections:** All officers and directors are elected by Active Members at the Annual Meeting
- **Board Meetings:** Held monthly and open to all members to observe.
- **Quorum:** A majority of seated Board members constitute a quorum for conducting official business

6.2 Officers — Roles and Responsibilities

Office	Primary Responsibilities
President	Chief executive officer of SWIMGA; presides over all Board and general membership meetings; serves as the primary liaison to Purdue Extension; appoints committee chairs subject to Board approval.
Vice President	Assumes the President's duties in their absence; oversees committee coordination and ensures committees have the support they need to carry out their charges. Responsible for meeting speakers

Office	Primary Responsibilities
Secretary	Records and maintains all meeting minutes; handles official correspondence; maintains the official membership roster and records of the association.
Treasurer	Manages all SWIMGA financial accounts; prepares the annual budget for Board approval; files required tax and nonprofit compliance reports; provides monthly financial reports to the Board.
Directors-at-Large (up to 5)	Represent the interests of the general membership on the Board; serve on and support committees; serve two-year staggered terms to ensure continuity of leadership.

6.3 Elections

SWIMGA's leadership is chosen democratically by its Active Members. The election process is designed to be open, fair, and welcoming of fresh leadership at every level.

- Nominations may be submitted by the **Nominating Committee** in advance of the Annual Meeting or accepted **from the floor** at the meeting itself.
- Elections are held at the **Annual Meeting** (typically October or November)
- Officers serve **one-year terms**; Directors-at-Large serve **two-year staggered terms**.
- No officer may serve more than **two consecutive terms** in the same office.

Interested in Leadership?

Every SWIMGA member brings something valuable to the table. If you are interested in serving on the Board or in a committee leadership role, speak with any current officer or the Nominating Committee chair. Leadership in SWIMGA is a wonderful way to deepen your investment in the organization and the community.

6.4 Removal and Vacancies

-
- An officer may be removed by a **two-third vote of the Board** for conduct inconsistent with SWIMGA's mission or Purdue Extension Master Gardener policies.
 - Vacancies created by resignation, removal, or other circumstances are filled by **Board appointment** until the next regular election, ensuring continuity of leadership.

 *Good governance is the trellis that supports everything SWIMGA grows. When our structure is strong, our community can climb as high as it dares.*

Section 7

Committees

SWIMGA's work is carried out largely through its committees — dedicated groups of members who take on specific areas of responsibility and bring programs to life. Committee involvement is one of the best ways to deepen your connection to SWIMGA and make a tangible difference.

7.1 Standing Committees

Committee	Purpose & Function
Board	Composed of the President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Board Members.
Membership Committee	Recruits and welcomes new members; manages the onboarding process; coordinates orientation programs for new Master Gardeners and Interns to help them navigate SWIMGA and the EMG program.
Education Committee	Coordinates educational programs for members; arranges guest speakers, workshops, and field trips; identifies continuing education opportunities; tracks member education hours to ensure compliance with annual requirements.
Garden Projects Committee	Oversee all SWIMGA community garden projects, including the flagship Master Gardener Display Garden; schedules and coordinates volunteer garden workdays; maintains project records and ensures all gardens meet SWIMGA and Purdue Extension standards.
Communications Committee	Manages SWIMGA's website, member newsletter, social media presence, and public relations. Serves as the voice of SWIMGA to both members and the broader community.
Finance / Budget Committee	Assists the Treasurer with preparation of the annual budget; reviews financial policies and recommends improvements; ensures fiscal responsibility and transparency.
Nominating Committee	Solicits and vets qualified candidates for elected offices; presents a complete slate of nominees at the Annual Meeting and facilitates the election process.

7.2 Special / Ad Hoc Committees

From time to time, SWIMGA undertakes projects or events that require focused attention beyond the scope of a standing committee. In these cases, the Board may create a **special or ad hoc committee** with a specific, defined charge — such as organizing the Tour de Fleur garden walk, planning an Annual Conference, or managing a one-time capital project.

Special committees are **dissolved upon completion of their charge**, returning their members to general committee service and ensuring SWIMGA's organizational structure remains lean and purposeful.

7.3 Joining a Committee

Every member is encouraged to participate in at least one committee. Committee service is an excellent way to apply your skills, meet fellow members, and contribute meaningfully to SWIMGA's mission beyond garden workdays alone.

How to Get Involved

To join a committee, simply contact the relevant committee chair or reach out to the **President**.

Not sure which committee is right for you? Here are some starting points:

- *Love growing things?* → Garden Projects Committee
- *Enjoy teaching and learning?* → Education Committee
- *Creative writer or social media enthusiast?* → Communications Committee
- *Good with people?* → Membership Committee
- *Event organizer?* → Fundraising or Ad Hoc Committees

 *A garden flourishes when every plant finds its right spot and contributes to the whole. Committees are how SWIMGA places the right person in the right role — and watches the whole garden thrive.*

Section 8

Meetings

SWIMGA meetings are the heartbeat of our organizational life — places where we learn together, make decisions, share updates, and strengthen the bonds that make our community so special. All members are encouraged to attend regularly.

8.1 Annual Meeting

The **Annual Meeting** is SWIMGA's most important gathering of the year, typically held in **October or November**. This is the meeting where the organization's business for the coming year is set in motion.

- **Officer elections** — Active Members vote to seat new leadership.
- **Annual reports** — officers, committees, and the Treasurer present year-in-review summaries
- **Budget approval** — members review and approve the financial plan for the coming year.
- **Bylaw amendments** (if any) proposed changes to the governing documents are presented and voted upon

All Active Members are strongly encouraged to attend. Voting at the Annual Meeting is one of the most important rights of Active Membership.

8.2 General Membership Meetings

General Membership Meetings are held **monthly or as scheduled by the Board** throughout the year. These meetings typically include a featured educational program (often a guest speaker or demonstration), committee reports, and member business items. All members — Active, Intern, and Alumni — are welcome and encouraged to attend.

8.3 Board of Directors Meetings

The Board meets **monthly**, typically in advance of the general membership meeting. Board meetings are **open to all members as observers** — only Board members may vote, but any member is welcome to attend and listen. If you have a matter, you would like the Board to consider, contact the Secretary to request time on the agenda.

8.4 Special Meetings

A special meeting may be called by the **President** or by a **written petition signed by at least 10% of Active Members**. The agenda of a special meeting is strictly limited to the purpose stated in the meeting notice — no other business may be conducted.

8.5 Meeting Conduct

- All SWIMGA meetings are conducted according to **Robert's Rules of Order** (current edition), except where SWIMGA's Bylaws provide otherwise.
- All members are expected to participate respectfully, constructively, and in a spirit of collaboration.
- **Virtual meeting options** may be available for some meetings — contact the Secretary for current format information.

 *Every great garden is tended regularly, not just once a season. Meetings are how we tend our organization — showing up consistently, doing a little at a time, and watching the whole community flourish.*

Section 9

Finances

As a nonprofit organization, SWIMGA is committed to responsible stewardship of its financial resources. Every dollar we raise supports our mission of education, service, and community gardening. This section explains how we manage those resources transparently and responsibly.

9.1 Fiscal Year

SWIMGA's fiscal year runs from **January 1 through December 31**.

9.2 Budget Process

Each year, the Treasurer, working with the Finance/Budget Committee, prepares a proposed annual budget for Board review. The Board approves the budget **before the start of each fiscal year**, ensuring that resources are aligned with organizational priorities. The approved budget is reported to the general membership at the Annual Meeting.

9.3 Expenditures and Authorization

Expenditure Type	Authorization Required
Routine expenditures within the approved budget	Treasurer authorization only
Expenditures outside the approved budget or above a Board-set threshold	Full Board approval required
All checks	One authorized signature required

9.4 Financial Transparency

- The Treasurer provides **monthly financial reports** to the Board of Directors
- An **annual financial summary** is presented to all members at the Annual Meeting
- SWIMGA's financial records are open to any Active Member upon **reasonable written request**.

9.5 Fundraising

- SWIMGA may conduct fundraising activities that are approved in advance by the Board.
- All fundraising must align with SWIMGA's nonprofit status and mission.
- Grant applications must be authorized by the Board before submission.
- Members with fundraising ideas or grant opportunities are encouraged to bring them to the Fundraising Committee

9.6 Dissolution

In the event that SWIMGA is dissolved, all remaining assets shall be distributed to one or more nonprofit organizations with purposes similar to SWIMGA's mission, as determined by the Board in compliance with Indiana nonprofit law. No assets shall benefit any individual member.

 *We tend our finances the same way we tend our gardens — carefully, transparently, and always with an eye toward long-term health. A well-managed budget is the soil from which great programs grow.*

Garden Projects & Community Service

10.1 The Master Gardener Display Garden

If SWIMGA has a crown jewel, it is the **Master Gardener Display Garden**. Established in October 2005 on the historic grounds of the former Evansville State Hospital, this breathtaking 1.2-acre garden is SWIMGA's flagship community project — a living, growing testament to what Master Gardeners can accomplish when they work together with dedication and creativity.

The Display Garden features **more than 20 unique and beautifully maintained garden spaces**, each designed to showcase different aspects of horticultural excellence: native plantings, ornamental beds, sensory gardens, shade gardens, and more. Visitors come to be inspired, to learn, and to see what is possible in their own backyards.

At the heart of the Display Garden is its **vegetable plot** — a powerhouse of community impact. Year after year, SWIMGA volunteers tend this plot and donate all of its harvest — more than **5,000 pounds of fresh produce annually** — to the local food banks. That produce makes a direct, meaningful difference in the lives of families throughout our region.



Display Garden at a Glance

- **Location:** Grounds of the former Evansville State Hospital
- **Established:** October 2005
- **Size:** Approximately 1.2 acres

- **Garden Spaces:** More than 20 unique areas
- **Annual Produce Donation:** 5,000+ lbs. to local food pantries

10.2 Community Gardens Across the Four-County Area

The Display Garden is SWIMGA's most prominent project, but it is far from the only one. SWIMGA members maintain community gardens throughout **Vanderburgh, Warrick, Gibson, and Posey counties** — at schools, churches, parks, and public spaces. Projects stretch from Mt. Vernon to Newburgh and many points in between.

Each community garden carries the same core purpose: to demonstrate good horticultural practices, to provide a welcoming green space, to educate the community, and in many cases, to produce food for those who need it most. Every SWIMGA garden is a classroom without walls.

10.3 Volunteering for Garden Projects

- Members sign up for garden workdays through the **Garden Projects Committee** — watch for announcements in the newsletter and on the website.
- Approved workday hours may count toward your **Purdue EMG annual volunteer requirement** — confirm with your county coordinator that the activity qualifies.
- Proper attire (sturdy shoes, sun protection), personal tools if available, and adherence to any site-specific safety precautions are required; details are provided at each workday briefing.

10.4 Starting or Proposing a New Garden Project

Have an idea for a new community garden or gardening initiative? We want to hear it! SWIMGA has a track record of turning great ideas into lasting community assets — but new projects must follow an approval process to ensure they align with our mission and resources.

1. Contact the **Garden Projects Committee** to discuss your idea.
2. Work with the committee to develop a project proposal.
3. Obtain **Board approval** for the project.
4. Involve the **Purdue Extension educator** for any project that may use Purdue Extension resources or publicly represent the program.

10.5 Community Programs and Events

Garden projects are just one dimension of SWIMGA's community presence. Our members show up wherever gardeners and community members gather. Annual community programs and events include:

Event / Program	Description
Tour de Fleur	SWIMGA's signature public garden walk — a beloved bi-annual event that opens beautiful private and community gardens to the public.
County Fairs	SWIMGA participates in both Vanderburgh and Gibson County Fairs, providing horticultural education and answering gardening questions.
Habitat for Humanity	SWIMGA volunteers provide landscaping assistance for Habitat for Humanity homes, giving new homeowners a beautiful, welcoming start.
Arbor Day & Earth Day	Community celebrations of trees and the environment, often featuring SWIMGA educational exhibits and demonstrations.
Ag Day	Agriculture education outreach connecting SWIMGA's horticultural expertise with the region's agricultural heritage.
Recycling & Tox-Away Projects	Environmental stewardship events that connect SWIMGA's commitment to sustainable gardening with broader community well-being.
Home & Yard Shows	SWIMGA maintains an educational presence at consumer home shows, answering gardening questions from the public.
Fall Conference & Educational Events	Bi-annual educational program for members and the community, featuring speakers, workshops, and demonstrations.

 *A garden does not serve itself — it feeds the bees, the birds, the people walking by, and the families at the table. Our community programs are SWIMGA's garden in full bloom, generous and open to all.*

Communications & Resources

11.1 Newsletter

The SWIMGA newsletter is your go-to source for member news, upcoming events, educational tips, volunteer opportunities, and garden project updates. It is published regularly throughout the year and distributed primarily by **email**. Members who prefer a print copy may request one from the Communications Committee.

11.2 Website

Everything you need to know about SWIMGA is available online at **www.swimga.org**. The website hosts event calendars, archived newsletters, garden project information, membership resources, educational content, and the latest organizational news. Bookmark it and check it often!

11.3 Social Media

SWIMGA maintains active social media accounts to engage members and the broader community. Members are encouraged to follow our accounts and share content — but always in accordance with **Purdue Extension Master Gardener media guidelines**, which prohibit endorsing commercial products or posting content that could misrepresent Purdue University's research.

11.4 Member Directory

A member directory is maintained by the Membership chair for **internal use only**. Member contact information is considered confidential and may not be shared outside SWIMGA without the member's explicit consent. Requests for directory access should be directed to the Secretary.

11.5 Purdue Extension Resources

Purdue Extension Educational Resources

- **Purdue Extension Education Store:** edustore.purdue.edu — hundreds of publications on home horticulture, pest management, soils, lawn care, and more
- **Local Purdue Extension County Offices** — your first stop for research-based horticultural guidance specific to our region
- Members should direct *commercially crop, commercial pest control, and pesticide liability questions* to their Purdue Extension educator — these topics are outside the EMG volunteer scope

11.6 Purdue MG Manager

The **Purdue MG Manager** online system is the official platform for recording and tracking volunteer hours, continuing education hours, and certification status. Every SWIMGA member is responsible for logging their own hours accurately and in a timely manner. Hours not recorded may not count toward annual requirements. See **Appendix C** for a step-by-step guide to logging hours in MG Manager.

 *Information is one of the most powerful tools in any gardener's shed. Stay connected, stay informed, and never stop learning — the resources are here for you.*

Section 12

Volunteer Expectations & Professional Conduct

As a SWIMGA member and Purdue Extension Master Gardener, you are an ambassador for both organizations — and for the science of horticulture itself. This section explains what it means to represent SWIMGA with integrity, professionalism, and care.

12.1 Being a SWIMGA Ambassador

Every time you wear your Master Gardener badge, staff a garden event, or answer a neighbor's question, you represent Purdue University and SWIMGA. The advice you give and the way you conduct yourself reflects on both organizations. This is a responsibility we embrace wholeheartedly — it is part of what makes being a Master Gardener so meaningful.

- Always provide **research-based, unbiased information** drawn from Purdue Extension resources and current horticultural science
- Do not endorse specific **commercial products, companies, or services** in your capacity as a Master Gardener volunteer.
- Represent SWIMGA and Purdue Extension with **professionalism, courtesy, and humility**.

12.2 Scope of Advice

EMG volunteers are trained and authorized to provide recommendations in the area of **consumer horticulture** — home gardening, lawns, ornamental plants, trees, and related topics for non-commercial use.

Know Your Limits

- **Commercial crop questions** → Refer to a Purdue Extension educator
- **Commercial pest control questions** → Refer to a Purdue Extension educator
- **Pesticide liability questions** → Refer to a Purdue Extension educator
- **When uncertain about anything** → Say so honestly and help the person find the right resource

12.3 Pesticide and Pest Management Recommendations

When advising on pest management — including insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides — always follow **published Purdue Extension recommendations**. Promote wise, effective, and environmentally responsible pest management decisions. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) principles — using the least-toxic, most-targeted approach available — should guide all pest control recommendations.

12.4 Nondiscrimination Policy

SWIMGA and all Purdue EMG volunteers are committed to serving every person without discrimination. Our programs and activities are open and welcoming to all, regardless of:

- Race, color, or national origin or ancestry.
- Religion or creed
- Sex, gender identity and expression, or sexual orientation
- Age, marital status, or parental status
- Disability or veteran status
- Genetic information

This policy applies to all SWIMGA programs, events, and volunteer activities. Any concerns about discrimination should be reported to an officer or the Board of Directors immediately.

12.5 Photo and Media Release

As part of the Purdue EMG Volunteer Application and Agreement (Form EMG-1), members are asked to agree to a photo and media release, authorizing SWIMGA and Purdue Extension to use photographs or video taken during volunteer activities for educational and promotional purposes. **Members who do not wish to be photographed or filmed** during volunteer activities should inform the photographer or videographer at the time.

12.6 Working with Minors

SWIMGA is committed to providing safe, welcoming environments for young people. Members who volunteer in activities involving youth must:

1. Complete Purdue **University Working with Minors Safety Training** before participating in any youth-focused volunteer activity.
2. Submit to annual **sex and violent offender registry checks** as part of annual certification requirements.
3. Follow all applicable SWIMGA and Purdue Extension guidelines for working with young volunteers and program participants.

12.7 Conflict Resolution

Healthy organizations address conflicts openly and respectfully. If a concern or conflict arises during SWIMGA activities:

1. Members are encouraged to **resolve concerns directly and respectfully** with the other party whenever possible.

2. If direct resolution is not possible, the concern may be brought to the relevant **committee chair** or a SWIMGA **officer**.
3. If the matter remains unresolved, the **President** will address it.
4. The **Board of Directors has final authority** on matters of conduct inconsistent with SWIMGA's mission or Purdue Extension policies.

 *Professionalism is not about being formal — it is about being trustworthy. When our community trusts us, our reach grows. When our reach grows, our gardens — and the people they serve — flourish.*

Section 13

Amendments to This Handbook

This handbook is a living document, reviewed and updated annually by the SWIMGA Board of Directors to ensure it remains current, accurate, and useful to all members.

What You Want to Change	Process
Handbook policy amendments	Suggested amendments may be submitted in writing to the Secretary at any time. Policy amendments may be adopted by a majority vote of the Board .
SWIMGA Bylaw amendments	Require a two-thirds (2/3) vote of Active Members present and voting at a general or annual meeting. A minimum of 14 days' advance and written notice of the proposed amendment must be provided to all Active Members before the vote.

How to Suggest a Change

If you believe this handbook could be improved, we genuinely want to hear from you. Submit your suggestion in writing to the Secretary at **hello@swimga.org** or by mail at Box 173, Inglefield, Indiana 47618-0173. All suggestions are reviewed by the Board and given serious consideration.

Appendices

Appendix A: SWIMGA Contact Directory

Note: Officer and committee chair contacts are updated annually. Contact the Secretary at hello@swimga.org for the current list of officers and committee chairs. The information below reflects standing organizational contacts.

Contact / Role	Contact Information
SWIMGA General Inquiries	hello@swimga.org • www.swimga.org Box 173, Inglesfield, IN 47618-0173
SWIMGA President	Contact via hello@swimga.org (current name updated annually)
SWIMGA Secretary	Contact via hello@swimga.org (current name updated annually)
Purdue Extension — Vanderburgh County Sara Dzimianski, <i>County Extension Educator</i>	sdzimian@purdue.edu (812) 547-7084
Purdue Extension Education Store	edustore.purdue.edu
Purdue MG Manager (Hour Logging)	Contact your county coordinator for access link and login assistance

Appendix B: Purdue EMG Annual Requirements Summary

Requirement	Hours / Action	Deadline
Volunteer Service Hours	12 hours minimum of approved volunteer service	December 31 of each calendar year

Requirement	Hours / Action	Deadline
Continuing Education Hours	6 hours minimum of approved education or training	December 31 of each calendar year
Annual Agreement Form (EMG-2)	Sign and submit to county coordinator	As requested annually (typically early in the calendar year)
Registry Checks	Sex and violent offender registry checks (completed by coordinator)	Annually
Working with Minors Training	Complete Purdue University Working with Minors Safety Training	Before volunteering with youth (then renewed as required)
SWIMGA Dues	Pay annual dues as established by the Board	Beginning of each calendar year

✓ Pro Tip

Log your hours as you go — don't wait until December! Timely logging in **Purdue MG Manager** ensures your records are accurate and reduces end-of-year stress. Your county coordinator can help if you fall behind.

Appendix C: How to Log Hours in Purdue MG Manager

Purdue MG Manager is the official online system for tracking your volunteer service and continuing education hours. Here is how to log your hours:

1. **Access MG Manager:** Log in at the Purdue MG Manager web portal. Contact your county coordinator (Sara Dzimianski / sdzimian@purdue.edu / (812) 547-7084) for the current access link and your login credentials if you are new to the system.
2. **Navigate to Hour Entry:** From your dashboard, select the appropriate category — *Volunteer Hours* or *Education Hours*.

3. **Enter Activity Details:** Record the date of the activity, the type of activity (e.g., "Garden Workday — Display Garden," "SWIMGA Educational Speaker," "County Fair"), and the number of hours completed.
4. **Select Activity Category:** Choose the correct activity category from the drop-down menu. If you are unsure which category applies, ask your county coordinator.
5. **Save Your Entry:** Confirm and save. You should receive a confirmation screen. Keep a personal record of your entries as a backup.
6. **Review Your Totals:** Check your running totals periodically throughout the year to ensure you are on track to meet the 12 volunteer / 6 education hour requirements by December 31.
7. **Need Help?** Contact Sara Dzimianski at the Extension office or the SWIMGA Education Committee for assistance with MG Manager.

Appendix D: Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
EMG (Extension Master Gardener)	A volunteer certified through the Purdue Extension Master Gardener program who has completed Basic Training and the required volunteer hours.
Intern	A participant who has successfully completed Purdue EMG Basic Training but has not yet fulfilled the 40-hour volunteer requirement for full certification.
Active Member	A SWIMGA member who is a certified Purdue EMG in good standing, meets all annual requirements, and pays dues. Active Members may vote and hold office.
Alumni Member	A former Active Member who no longer meets annual EMG requirements but remains connected to SWIMGA through dues payment. May not vote or hold office.
Annual Agreement (EMG-2)	The annual form signed by each certified EMG volunteer affirming their continued commitment to the program's standards, policies, and requirements.
MG Manager	The Purdue Extension online system used by EMG volunteers to log and track volunteer service hours and continuing education hours.

Term	Definition
County Coordinator	The Purdue Extension educator is responsible for administering the Master Gardener program in each county. For SWIMGA's region, the primary contact is Sara Dzimianski.
Board of Directors	SWIMGA's elected governing body, composed of the President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and up to five Directors-at-Large.
Fiscal Year	SWIMGA's financial reporting year, running January 1 through December 31.
MG-5	The Purdue Extension Master Gardener Program Policy Guide — the governing policy document for all Purdue EMG programs statewide. SWIMGA members are expected to be familiar with and comply with MG-5.

Appendix E: SWIMGA Bylaws and Policies

The full text of the SWIMGA Bylaws and official organizational policies is the authoritative governing document of the association. The Bylaws are maintained by the **Secretary** and are available to any member upon request.

How to Obtain the Bylaws

To receive a copy of the current SWIMGA Bylaws, contact the Secretary at hello@swimga.org or by mail at Box 173, Inglesfield, Indiana 47618-0173. The Bylaws are also available through the member resources section of www.swimga.org. Members are encouraged to read the Bylaws in full — they are the foundation upon which everything SWIMGA does is built.

In all cases where this handbook and the SWIMGA Bylaws conflict, **the Bylaws govern**. In all cases where SWIMGA policies and the Purdue Extension Master Gardener Program Policy Guide (MG-5) conflict, **the MG-5 Policy Guide governs**.

Keep Growing!

To every SWIMGA member — new and seasoned, intern and certified, once-a-week gardener and full-season veteran — **thank you.**

Thank you for showing up at the Display Garden on a hot July morning with your gloves and your trowel. Thank you for answering questions patiently at the county fair. Thank you for teaching children that seeds become amazing when they are given the right conditions.

Thank you for donating 5,000 pounds of vegetables to neighbors who needed them. Thank you for staying curious, staying generous, and staying rooted in the mission that brought us all together.

Gardening teaches us that growth is rarely dramatic — it happens quietly, steadily, day after day, one act of care at a time. That is exactly how SWIMGA has grown from nine passionate gardeners in 1988 to the thriving, beloved community of nearly 260 members it is today. One conversation, one workday, one garden, one person helped — and then another, and another, season after season.

You are part of that story now. Go plant something wonderful.

Southwestern Indiana Master Gardener Association, Inc. (SWIMGA)

Box 173, Inglefield, Indiana 47618-0173

hello@swimga.org • www.swimga.org

Serving Vanderburgh • Warrick • Gibson • Posey Counties

In cooperation with the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service

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