

JCMG Hortline Happenings – 2022 Annual Report

Reported by Esther Retish, Carl Hensley, Mary Hensley

Summarized on December 2, 2022

The ISU JCMG Hortline Team is pleased to provide an update on our operations, services, and activities in 2022.

Operations --The Hortline activities have continued to function on site at the ISU Johnson County Extension and Outreach Office throughout 2022. Our on-site staffing had resumed in mid-2021, once the Johnson County offices reopened, subsequent to ISU assessments of vaccination trends and other public health conditions related to staff, volunteers and visitors. Throughout the pandemic closures in 2020 and 2021, the JCMG Hortline was continued remotely by Carl and Mary Hensley.

Contacts and Questions -- The Hortline Team volunteers track the number of contacts they receive, including the numbers and categories of questions asked, along with a brief summary of responses. Individuals contacting the Hortline often have several questions on one or more topics.

Contacts reach the Hortline Team via telephone calls, e-mail correspondence, and also by the resumption of in-person visits to the ISU Extension & Outreach office.

Master Gardeners actively staffing the Hortline include: E. Retish, M. Hensley, C. Hensley, J. Bultman, L. Diggelmann, K. Fosse, G. Kealey, M. Mayfield, B. Penno, L. Schreiber, M. Starry, S. Stump, and J. Wellborn.

Across our most recent three years of data, the types of questions most frequently asked relate to the categories of “Trees & Shrubs,” “Weeds & Pests,” “Vegetables & Small Fruits” plus “Flowers.” Below is the distribution of questions by category for Jan. 1 through Dec. 6, 2022:

Trees & Shrubs –	29
Flowers –	25
Vegetable & Small Fruits –	15
Weeds/Pests –	14
Houseplants –	3
Lawn –	5
General Info. –	12
Other –	10

Responses to these 113 questions were provided for 70 individual contacts. The overall volume of contacts and

questions is less than received in the prior two years, which had encompassed the pandemic period and the derecho aftermath. For example, the total individual contacts of 70 received in 2022 is roughly half of the 144 received in 2021. Strategies for enhancing community awareness of JCMG Hortline services in 2023 are included in the following section.

Additional Communications and Outreach – Linda Schreiber reports the JCMG Hortline service and its hours of operation on social media sites. She has also updated the Hortline informational poster intended for distribution to the local public libraries.

Carl and Mary Hensley recently suggested taking steps to include ISU JCMG Hortline informational items (such as the refrigerator magnets) included in “welcome baskets” offered locally to newcomers to the community.

Carl and Mary Hensley are also currently investigating the opportunity to establish an informational table at the Iowa City Farmer’s Market staffed by Master Gardeners to promote the ISU JCMG Hortline and answer gardening/plant questions for the public. According to the Iowa City Farmers Market 2022 Vendor Handbook

this appears to be a viable no-cost proposal for 2023. Shannon Bielicke has indicated this would be feasible.

Other activities of the JCMG Hortline Team -- The Hortline activities in 2022 included not only staffing the Hortline, but also a variety of connections with other JCMG initiatives throughout the year. Examples include the following collaborations with: *Thymes* Newsletter articles, Annual Plant Sale and Flea Market, JCMG Library collection, Iowa City Public Library reference list, plus Hortline staff giving presentations for the new on-site “JCMG Online Resources Class.” Further details follow.

Thymes JCMG Newsletter – Mary Starry has submitted occasional articles for the *Thymes*, in which she has highlighted recent questions to the Hortline in the form of a quiz, thus providing interesting educational material while also featuring Hortline service to the community.

Mary and Carl Hensley wrote the “JCMG Hortline *Thymes* in 2022” Project Report, which was printed in the November, 2022, issue of the JCMG *Thymes* Newsletter.

Annual JCMG Plant Sale and Flea Market – Over the past couple years, the Hortline staff members, including Dr. Gerald Kealey, Esther Retish, the Hensleys, and ISU

personnel including Shannon Bielicke and other staff and faculty, have been systematically reviewing the contents of the JCMG Library. This process was completed in Spring, 2022, and resulted in over 50 books being donated to the Annual JCMG Plant Sale and Flea Market.

JCMG Library – An ongoing goal of the Hortline Team is to purchase newer publications and useful resources for the JCMG Library. Esther Retish has an annually set fiscal budget, approved by the Steering Committee, that encompasses not only Hortline requirements that arise but also funding to purchase enhancements to the ISU Johnson County Master Gardener Library collection.

Iowa City Public Library (ICPL) initiative – Mary and Carl Hensley, along with others, provided their lists of favorite books and resources to JCMG Beth Fisher, for her Iowa City Library project that included compiling a reference list of gardening books to be made available at the ICPL.

JCMG “Online Resources Class” -- On Oct. 5, 2022, Carl and Mary Hensley presented information about the Hortline during this on-site Fall Master Gardener training session. Also, during this program, Carl Hensley and Shannon Bielicke used the internet to demonstrate how to conduct searches that deliver results from trusted

educational sources such as Arboretums and Universities. This new initiative seemed to fit quite well into Shannon's agenda for this class, and the information was well received by the class participants.

Recruitment initiatives -- Esther Retish communicated within the Steering Committee the importance of on-going recruitment for Hortline staffing.

The presentation by the Hensleys at the Fall MG training session included a hearty welcome to the new class of MG trainees to participate in Hortline during their internship year. Carl and Mary Hensley noted that the Hortline has volunteer-hour opportunities all year, even throughout winter. The Hensleys also emphasized that they and other experienced Hortline staff are very pleased to provide training and orientation, working alongside any new MG volunteers interested in Hortline.

Mary and Carl highlighted some favorite reasons they and others enjoy participating in Hortline, including:

- 1) You are always learning yourself by researching and responding to questions that arise on Hortline;
- 2) There is considerable satisfaction in assisting others to be successful in their gardening endeavors; and

3) It is also an opportunity to connect directly with ISU faculty and staff at the Johnson County Extension & Outreach Office and also to contact PIDC or others located on the ISU Ames campus, as needed.

Subsequently, Esther Retish received contacts from four of these new MGs who are already expressing interest in being trained and participating in the JCMG Hortline. On-site training is now in progress and nearly completed.

Leadership Updates -- Esther Retish announced in late November that she will be stepping down from her position as Chair of the JCMG Hortline. She has provided many years of dedicated and devoted service in this role. The members of the ISU JCMG Steering Committee and the volunteers of the Hortline Team appreciate her positive impact on the ongoing success of the Hortline and heartily congratulate her!

Carl and Mary Hensley announced in October their plans to conclude their Hortline Co-Chair positions at the end of December, after having served in this capacity informally and formally across the past three years. This period included their jointly assuming a leadership role for Hortline services throughout the pandemic period. The Hensleys' Co-Chair services also included developing

Hortline volunteer training materials, initiating a teaching module for new MG cohorts, writing for the *Thymes*, and preparing Annual Reports for 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Going forward, Esther Retish is pleased to announced that Mary Starry has graciously agreed to assume Chair responsibilities. Mary Starry has begun her new role by incorporating the use of the “SignUpGenius” App for scheduling Hortline staffing beginning this December.

Summary -- We continue to receive much positive feedback from individuals that they have appreciated the information and assistance provided by the Hortline Team and that they have been able to rely on our service in researching gardening questions and providing relevant educational resources for their many gardening endeavors!

Many thanks for everyone’s continued support of the Hortline, a long-standing JCMG Core project that is a key element of the ISU Johnson County Master Gardeners’ overarching mission encompassing educational and community services.

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MLH & CEH