

“SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE” AWARDS PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS: **January 31 at 11:59 pm**

Search for Excellence (SFE) is an Awards Program of the Wisconsin Master Gardener Association, Inc. (WIMGA).

- The SFE Awards have three categories in which **WIMGA Member Associations** (groups) can demonstrate their outstanding contributions to their communities.
- Each Group is eligible to win up to three “Search for Excellence” Awards per calendar year.
- Project activity must occur within the year leading up to the Award year.
- Groups will compete for Awards based on the following Association membership tiers:
Small: Under 30 / Large: 30 and above
- Groups must be a member in good standing of WIMGA as stated in By-Laws Article III.
 - Pay annual dues for Extension Master Gardener Program participants.
 - Designate a local representative who is a voting member of WIMGA.
 - Officer Roster and By-Laws on file with WIMGA.
- Project must use and provide **university research-based** information.
- Project must show that significant learning took place, with the focus on educating the general public.

All Master Gardener volunteer projects are significant to our communities; however, not all are eligible for an SFE Award. The SFE Awards are designed to recognize **outstanding group projects**, not an individual who does outstanding work. Projects that have previously won any WIMGA SFE Award are not eligible unless project has significantly changed from previous Award submission.

Project submissions must meet the following guidelines to qualify for an SFE Award:

1. PROJECT CATEGORIES

Project must fit one of these categories. A project can only be submitted in one category.

A group can submit up to three applications, one unique project per category.

a. Educational Outreach

- Project seeks to engage and educate the public. This could include classes, seminars, workshops, teaching in gardens, and print/digital materials.

b. Environmental Impact/Sustainability

- Project demonstrates use of research-based information and materials to minimize environmental harm, conserve natural resources, and create sustainable practices and procedures.

c. Next Generation Development and Inclusion

- Project with a focus on families and children including activities, programs, and presentations designed to foster and encourage participation in horticultural learning experiences.

2. JUDGING CRITERIA

- Simple to replicate** (Max 10 pts) – SFE Award winners will be shared so other Associations and groups can replicated these “excellent ideas and programs” in their communities.
Example: A 20-acre botanic garden would be difficult to replicate. Highlighting a project within the garden that is easy to recreate could be eligible. A how to” guide could share the simpler project.
- Practicality, Usefulness, or Relevance** (Max 10 pts) – Meets a need of your community and target audience including number of people impacted by your project.
- Original and creative** (Max 10 pts) – A new idea or an update of a project that creatively offers a new perspective.
- Consistent with WIMGA’s Mission** (Max 20 pts) – WIMGA is the collective voice for Wisconsin Master Gardeners who are cultivating the garden resources that bring our communities to life.
- Clarity and Completeness of Application** (Max 20 pts) – Applications will be judged not on quantity of information but the quality of information presented.
- Significant Learning Occurred** (Max 20 pts) – Specific, measurable outcomes relevant to the set goals were achieved.
- Community Impact Achieved** (Max 10 pts) – Increased knowledge and/or changed behavior of the intended audience as identified in the project goals.

All decisions of judges are final.

3. APPLICATION SUBMISSION

- Applications must be received by January 31 at 11:59 pm
- WIMGA is not responsible for applications not received due to technical issues that prevent delays in the receipt of applications.

4. AWARD PRESENTATION

- Awards will be presented at an April WIMGA membership meeting.

Wisconsin Master Gardeners Association
“SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE” AWARDS – Q & A

1. What is the purpose of the Search for Excellence (SFE) Awards?

The WIMGA SFE Awards program is designed to identify, reward, celebrate, and promote Wisconsin Master Gardener Association group projects. Winning projects will be shared with other Associations and groups so they can adapt and implement these “excellent programs” in their communities. The goal is to create connections between Associations which help foster and deepen community engagement in best horticulture practices.

2. What is the SFE Awards timeline?

Applications Due: January 31 at 11:59 pm

Judging: February - March

Virtual Awards Presentation: April

3. Will applicants be notified that their application was received?

Yes. Applicants will receive notification of receipt.

4. What is the preferred format for submitting an Award application?

SFE Applications must be submitted online using the provided electronic application.

5. When must project activity occur to be eligible for an Award?

Project activity must occur in the year prior to the Award year. Example: A project started in March 2026 could be submitted for a 2027 SFE Award.

6. Can an ongoing project be submitted for an SFE Award?

Yes. A successful project often extends beyond its initial year and/or completion. To be eligible, applicant must demonstrate continuous improvement, willingness to explore new ideas, and an increase in community engagement.

7. Can a project be entered in all three categories?

No. A project can only be entered in one of the three categories. If a project is entered into more than one category in the same year, all entries for that project will be disqualified.

8. How many SFE Awards can an Association apply for per year?

Maximum of three, one per category. If an association enters more than one project per category in the same year, all entries from that association in that category will be disqualified.

9. Can a project be resubmitted for an SFE Award another year if it didn't win an award?

Yes. A project not selected to receive an SFE Award can be resubmitted. The project must be an active/ongoing project of the Association. Resubmission provides the applicant the opportunity to improve the project and strengthen the application. When resubmitting, significant improvement in the project's impact, learning outcomes, and alignment with WIMGA's mission must be demonstrated. When resubmitting, make sure the project meets the current eligibility as guidelines for the SFE Award may slightly change from year to year.

10. Can a project that didn't receive the gold award be resubmitted another year?

Yes. The project must be an active/ongoing project of the Association. In addition, significant improvement in the project's impact, learning outcomes, alignment with WIMGA's mission must be demonstrated.

11. Can a project that was selected as a gold award be resubmitted another year?

No.

12. What are the award levels?

Gold, Silver, and Bronze

13. How many awards will be given?

Up to 18 Awards may be given each year.

Award Levels – 3: Gold, Silver, Bronze

Association Sizes – 2: Under 30 and 30 Master Gardeners and above

Categories – 3: Educational Outreach, Environmental Impact/Sustainability, Next Generation Development & Inclusion

14. If all the project's results aren't positive, will the judges take points off for significant learning occurred and community impact achieved?

No. We all know that learning takes place even when things don't work as planned. Make a note of what didn't work and what the committee learned. As well, how the project could be structured differently to achieve the community impact desired.

15. Will applicants receive feedback from the judges?

Yes. Applicants will receive a final score sheet showing the average of the judge's scores.

16. In case of a tie, will duplicate awards be given?

No. Judges will be required to select only one winner per level, size, and category.

17. What will winners receive?

Receiving a WIMGA SFE Award is validation of the project creators' dedication to cultivating garden resources that bring our communities to life. Winners are recognized and honored for making a positive contribution to their community and sharing their learnings with fellow Master Gardeners in the WIMGA network.

Award recipients will receive:

- A digital award medallion to display on social media and printed for use at project site, etc.
- Prize money: \$100 for Gold, \$75 for Silver, and \$50 for Bronze
- A press release to share with the media and social channels
- Promotion on the WIMGA website and WIMGA bi-monthly newsletter
- Recognition at WIMGA's Virtual Awards presentation in April

18. Who will judge the WIMGA SFE Award submissions?

Judges will be selected from a pool of horticulture experts familiar with the Master Gardener program. Judges with potential conflicts of interest will be asked to excuse themselves from judging a particular category.

19. Will all awards be given?

No. Projects need to achieve a score of 75% or 75 points out of 100 pts or better to be eligible for an SFE Award.

20. Will Award winners be notified prior to the Virtual Awards Presentation?

No. Master Gardeners submitting applications are encouraged to attend (or send a representative) to the Virtual Awards Presentation in April.

21. Could an application for a WIMGA SFE Award be submitted for an International Master Gardener Search for Excellence Award?

Absolutely. The WIMGA SFE Awards program closely mirrors the International Master Gardener SFE Award program. Applicants are encouraged to submit their projects in the International Master SFE Awards competition.

22. Is it possible to submit a photo without a photo release and/or photographer's permission?

The Association applying for an SFE Award assumes all responsibility for:

- Releases for all identifiable people in an image especially persons under the age of 18.
- Obtaining unlimited permission to use photos taken by a professional photographer/creator. This includes images taken by a third-party news outlet, freely available online, and on social media.

By submitting photos, the Association signifies a commitment to handle all legal and practical aspects of obtaining and managing permission for image use and to bear the burden of any related legal claims or disputes that may arise.

No stock photos are allowed.

23. Can non-Master Gardeners such as Lifetime Service recipients, work on the project?

Yes. Non-Master Gardeners, community members, "friends", etc. can participate in the project, however all project participants must be supervised by Master Gardeners in good standing.

24. Will applicants and judges have an opportunity to give feedback on the WIMGA SFE Award program to the WIMGA Awards Committee?

Yes. The WIMGA Awards committee actively seeks constructive feedback to improve the Award program including comments on application, criteria, follow-up, etc.

Wisconsin Master Gardeners Association
“SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE” AWARDS APPLICATION

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: January 31 at 11:59 pm

Do not change the format of this document or your submission will be returned. You may submit up to six photos (maximum size 1.5 mb each, preferably .jpg or .png) for project promotion.

Applications will be judged the **quality** of information not the quantity of information presented.

A. CATEGORIES – A separate application must be completed for each category. Only one entry per category.

Educational Outreach

Environmental Impact/Sustainability

Next Generation Development and Inclusion

B. Master Gardener Association Submitting Entry

Name:

Number of Master Gardeners in Good Standing in your Association: Under 30 30 and above

C. Master Gardener Submitting Entry

Name:

Email:

Phone:

D. Master Gardener Association President

Name:

Email:

Phone:

E. Name of Project:

F. Start Date of Project:

Project activity must occur within the year leading up to the Award year.

G. Was project submitted for an SFE Award prior to this year? No Yes, in (Year)

H. PROJECT OVERVIEW

1. Explain the target audience for this project and how they were identified?

2. List the goals of this project. (Maximum five goals.)

3. Briefly describe the planning, implementation, and results.

4. What were the impacts and significant learnings relative to the stated goals? Other unexpected outcomes?
(List up to five.)

5. Describe project funding. (If applicable, list a maximum of three funding sources.)

6. List any partnerships associated with the project and their support role.

7. Total number of Master Gardeners in good standing participating in the project.

I. DECLARATION OF ACCURACY:

As president of this Association, I certify that this is a project of our Association and the application being submitted is complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Signature:

Date:

Submit completed APPLICATION and PHOTOS to: wimga.awards@gmail.com

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