

The Dirt



NEWSLETTER OF THE MONTROSE BOTANICAL SOCIETY: SPRING 2026



Looking south from end of Promenade

An artistic rendering of the proposed Children's Discovery Garden as seen from the south end of the Promenade at the Montrose Botanic Gardens. The garden will greatly expand MBG's capacity to engage children and their families in the wonders of nature. The complete set of drawings is available for viewing at montrosegardens.org/childrens-garden.

A SNEAK PEAK: CONCEPTUAL DESIGN FOR CHILDREN'S DISCOVERY GARDEN

by Brenda Bafus-Williams, MBS President

After working the last five months of 2025 with DHM Landscape Architects out of Durango, our Planning Team finalized its conceptual design for a Children's Discovery Garden in mid-January. When built, this new garden will greatly expand the usable space as compared to the current Happy Hollow, as well as provide ample shade and a variety of opportunities for exploration and engagement.

To get a sneak peak of the conceptual design with its 3-D renderings, visit montrosegardens.org/childrens-garden.

The Planning Team - comprised of Peggy Justis, Anne Britton, Liz Mauch, Sara Ungrodt, Rob Clapper and Brenda

Bafus-Williams - will be working over the next few months with Lori Sharp at ThinkSharp Consulting to conduct a feasibility study and develop a capital campaign plan for the new Children's Garden.

With an estimated price tag of \$850K to \$1M (minus any in-kind donations), this next step in building out our Master Plan is the most ambitious yet.

Anyone interested in helping turn the conceptual design into a reality is encouraged to contact an MBS Board or Planning Team member, or send an email to info@montrosegardens.org.

MBS BOARD

President

Brenda Bafus-Williams

Vice President

Anne Britton

Treasurer

Peggy Justis

Secretary

Anne Schuttig

At Large

Laulii Hillier

Kathy See

Board meetings on the fourth Wed. of each month unless otherwise posted.

2:00pm - 4:00pm at:

Old County Courthouse
Room 350
Montrose, CO

Horticulture

Sara Ungrodt

Operations & Maintenance

Rob Clapper

Photography

Jim Cencer

Private Events

Linda Bentley

Montrose Botanical Society

P.O. Box 323
Montrose, CO 81402

Visit the Gardens at

1800 Pavilion Dr
Montrose, CO 81401

Free admission; dawn to dusk

www.montrosegardens.org

[facebook.com/
montrosegardens](https://facebook.com/montrosegardens)

info@montrosegardens.org

A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION: BUILDING BETTER SOILS

By Liz Mauch

My vegetable garden did not thrive last summer; probably due to a combination of not watering it regularly (life got too busy to drag the hose out!), the hot weather, and soil that was tired and needed amending. This year, I resolved to research ways to improve the soil. Along with adding fresh compost, I decided to try adding some worm castings to the soil. Worm castings are made by earthworms eating their way through organic matter, and are an organic alternative to synthetic fertilizers, providing nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium and magnesium. They also improve soil texture which helps with both drainage and moisture retention.

Coincidentally, I was inspired by MBS member Linda Corwine's timely article in the March 21 edition of the *Montrose Daily Press* about healthy soils. She is experimenting with bio-char this year in her gardens, and I'm tempted to try it, too. Bio-char is a carbon rich material produced in a kiln from wood products heated at very high temperature and low oxygen.

I found both products for sale at BuildASoil, a Montrose-based business that specializes in products to build soil health, supporting organic and no-till gardening. Their factory/warehouse is located on North Townsend, and they sell an extensive line of products in quantities suitable for both commercial and home gardeners. Owner Jeremy Silva gave the MBS members a tour of his factory several years ago, and I've been wanting to try his products. Check out buildasoil.com for product information and to

learn how to place an order for pick up at discounted factory rates.

I bought a cubic yard bag of worm castings, which I've added to my raised vegetable garden beds. I'm considering buying a bag of bio-char too. Being an optimist in my gardening efforts and always willing to learn more, I am hopeful that my efforts result in healthier soil and more productive tomato plants this year.

PS: I'm also setting up an automatic watering system to make up for my forgetfulness/ laziness to hand water.

RED, WHITE, BLUE & YOU

The Botanic Gardens will be welcoming a new neighbor on our western edge as construction of the Montrose Veterans Memorial Plaza begins this spring. Also inspiring some flag waving this year is the 250/150 celebration as our nation marks 250 years of independence and Colorado hits 150 years of statehood.

Is it any wonder, then, that we're planning to splash our Entry Gardens with some red, white and blue flowers this year? If you're interested in sponsoring one of the two Entry Gardens with a \$600 donation, we'll feature your name (or business name) on a sign near the front gate that also says, "In honor of our Veterans". Email us at info@montrosegardens.org if you're interested!

Some of the benefits of your MBS membership!

Present your MBS membership card to receive these generous discounts:

Abel's Ace Hardware

10% on gardening items

Chelsea Nursery (in Clifton)

10% on plants, shrubs & trees

San Juan Gardens

10% on plants

Camelot Gardens

10% on nursery trees & shrubs

Cooper Soils

10% on soils & mulch

With an MBS membership card, you can gain free admission to over 380 beautiful botanic gardens in the American Horticultural Society's Garden Network.

Find the complete listing at ahsgardening.org/ahs-garden-network/

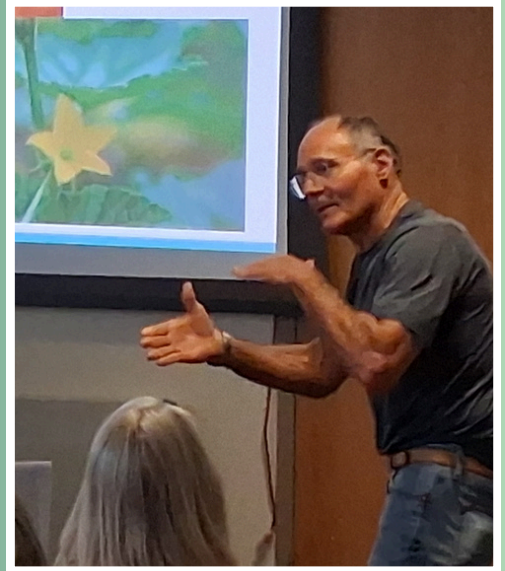


AHS GARDEN NETWORK

American Horticultural Society



J.P. Cencer 2026



Clockwise from top left:

- * Eighteen Weed Warriors participated in the first workday of the season, including two newbies!



PHOTO PATCH

- * Master beekeeper Steve Manis shared strategies for protecting pollinators in your garden during a March program.
- * A snowstorm on March 6 blanketed the Gardens but...
- * ...the storm did little to delay the weeks-early blooming of many plants like this Korean Spice Viburnum on March 25.
- * Our horticulturist, Sara Ungrodt, demonstrated pruning techniques on the Historic Homestead's mini-orchard on March 14.



Sara Ungrodt 2026



J.P. Cencer 2026

TAKE THE CHALLENGE: GO BEYOND MEMBERSHIP IN 2026!

By Peggy Justis, MBS Treasurer

Greetings, fellow Society members! We had a very successful 30th Anniversary year. See the 2025 financial summaries below.

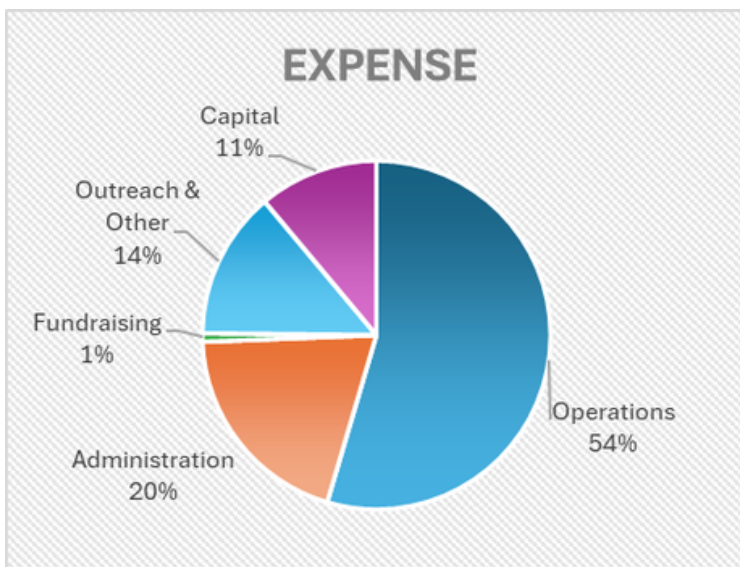
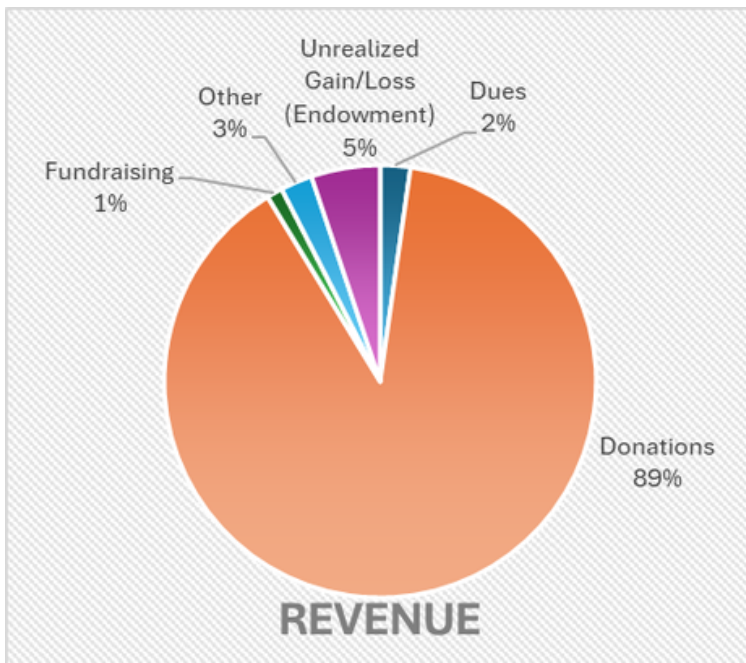
In connection with last year's activities, I would like to challenge each of you in 2026 to go beyond membership...

- **In your giving.** Your gifts have a tremendous impact. We have switched our Endowment Fund to Western Colorado Community Foundation (WCCF). It has been earning well already. If you want to contribute to a long-lasting fund, controlled by WCCF, where the MBS will benefit from the earnings for years to come, check out montrosegardens.org/donate today!

Other options for giving on that same webpage include the General Fund and our recently established Capital Fund to benefit the planning and development of the Children's Discovery Garden

- **With your IRA.** The Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) is a great way to make a tax-free gift to the Gardens while satisfying your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD). You can also make a QCD once you reach 70 ½ years of age, before you're required to make an RMD.
- **In your estate planning.** MBS has received two very generous bequests recently which have made developing more of the Gardens a reality. Bequests or beneficiary designations are favored methods of giving that can seed the future of the MBG.
- **In your time and talents.** Become a part of a vital volunteer community! Join a committee, project team, program team, Weed Warriors, or even the Board. Many opportunities exist. (See Smokey the Bear on next page!)

To all of you who have given so much over the last 30 years, THANK YOU! May the next 30 years be just as successful!



2025 Statement of Activities

REVENUE

Dues	\$ 12,066
Donations	\$477,369
Fundraising	\$6,388
Other	\$12,760
Unrealized Gain/Loss (Endowment)	\$27,684

TOTAL REVENUES **\$536,267**

EXPENSES

Garden Operations	\$34,175
Administration	\$12,407
Fundraising	\$492
Outreach & Other	\$8,600
Capital	\$6,952

TOTAL EXPENSES **\$49,147**

NET GAIN/LOSS **\$473,641**



Balance Sheet as of December 31, 2025

ASSETS

Current Assets	\$642,288
Beneficial Interest in Endowment Fund Held at the WCCF	\$244,155
Fixed Assets	\$90,293
TOTAL ASSETS	\$976,736

LIABILITIES & EQUITY

Liabilities	\$0
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$693,340
Restricted Net Assets	\$283,396
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	\$976,736

MEMBERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT: CHARLIE AND DIANE WINGER

by Liz Mauch

I had the pleasure of interviewing Charlie and Diane at their home in March. I knew they pack a lot of adventure into their lives, but where to start this interview? They write books, are world travelers, hang out in the desert, scale tall mountains, climb frozen waterfalls (Charlie), participate in senior Olympics, and still find time to volunteer for the MBS as Weed Warriors. Wow.

Both Charlie and Diane have degrees in computer science and met in Denver at a social gathering for computer programmers (Sounds a bit geeky, doesn't it? But they hit it off.) Charlie had his own company and Diane eventually joined him. They have enjoyed the freedom of being self-employed, as it has allowed them to head out on extended trips all over the world. Charlie said he ate a lot of ramen noodles when he came home, almost penniless after his adventures, so he would call up past clients looking for work so he could put food on the table.

Charlie has climbed mountains all over the world; at last count, he's climbed mountains in 24 countries (including the U.S.) He'd see a postcard of a mountain range such as the Sierra Nevada Range and decide that he needed to climb the tallest peaks - which he did. In total, they count 2,000 mountains that Charlie has climbed at least once. I say, WOW! again! Diane has accompanied Charlie on many climbs, and is an accomplished rock climber herself. She also completed the 630 mile long South West Coast Path in England. She wrote a novella entitled *The Long Path Home*, inspired by her walk.



Speaking of books, the Wingers have written three guidebooks on rock climbing, high point adventures, and hikes in the Great Sand Dunes. In addition, Diane has written 16 novels, including an 8-book series about the adventurous Ellie Dwyer. That series has sold over 100,000 copies. Curious? Visit www.wingerbooks.com.

They enjoy participating in Senior Olympic games, especially the Huntsman World Games in St George, Utah. This yearly event attracts over 12,000 competitors from around the world and is run by over 3,000 volunteers. Charlie and Diane have both medaled at the Huntsman, securing gold and bronze in Power Walking events. They will return to compete this fall!

Volunteerism runs in the Winger's veins, too. Charlie has worked on trail maintenance and construction with the Ouray Trail Group for 10 years. Diane serves on the Board of the Montrose Library Foundation. They've been members of the MBS since 2011.

The Wingers' backyard is lovely. Twelve years ago it was a water-intensive grass turf, but with the help of a landscape designer and some friends, they removed the sod and replaced it with a waterwise selection of shrubs and trees. They are also nurturing a wildflower seed garden, which I learned requires great patience, optimism, and not giving up on those seeds!

When they started volunteering as Weed Warriors at the Botanic Gardens, there were only weeds growing to the east of the Entry Garden where the Valley Garden is now, and the gravel part of the Pavilion parking lot was dirt. Charlie mowed down the weeds in both areas. They take great pleasure in seeing how the Gardens have expanded, and in continuing to volunteer as Weed Warriors. They see this as a way of giving back to the community.



THE MBS BOARD INVITES YOU TO GET MORE INVOLVED IN SUPPORT OF OUR CHERISHED BOTANIC GARDENS! SOME OF THE OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE:

- Posting on Facebook
- Being a docent at the Gardens
- Designing posters
- Tabling at community events
- Writing grants
- Participating in children's programming
- Serving on the Board as an At-large member
- Sharing ideas for Garden of Lights planning
- Updating What's Blooming on MBS website (with or without web experience!)
- Writing for *The Dirt* (e.g., Member in the Spotlight)

Email info@montrosegardens.org if you're interested!

WHERE WOULD WE BE WITHOUT OUR WEED WARRIORS ?

What could you do with over 2,000 hours of volunteer labor? In 2025, the Montrose Botanical Society's 34 Weed Warriors poured that considerable amount of effort into maintaining our Gardens as a vibrant community asset!

MBS expressed its gratitude to these dedicated gardeners at our annual luncheon on February 24. Everyone, from our first-year newbies to our seasoned veterans with up to 19 years of service, received a round of applause and a token of MBS appreciation. A special shout-out goes to Bryan Cashion, a Weed Warrior himself, for keeping track of all those hours worked.

Our Weed Warriors meet every Wednesday morning from April through October at 9:00 am to Noon -- earlier when it gets hotter. Please consider joining us this year!



One year
Art Clifford
Cara Hettich
David Paprocki
Diane Miller
Dodie Guinn

Two years
Laulii Hillier
Anne Schuttig

Three years
Cindy Larson
Carol Schroer
Greg Wilburn
Anne Wilburn
Brenda Bafus-Williams

Thank you to our 2025 Weed Warriors!!

Four years
Leslie DuBois
Debby Ingram
Peggy Justis

5 to 9 years
Nadine Carlotto
Rob Clapper
Janice Hein
Liz Mauch
Mary Nelson
Terri Simon
Linda Walline
Susan Woody

10 to 14 years
Fran Adams
Linda Bentley
Bryan Cashion
Liane Muller
Charlie Winger
Diane Winger

15 to 19 years
Anne Britton
Connie Kolker
Lynn Lewis
Carol Pyle
Sara Ungrodt
Cindy Youngstrom

Upcoming Free Programs

- April 4: **Essential Strategies for Drought** with MBS member Steve Manis. Montrose Regional Library, 11:00 am - noon
- April 29: **Get Your Roses Ready to Rock!** Rose pruning techniques with Master Gardener Laulii Hillier at 10:00 am - noon at the Montrose Botanic Gardens.
- May 23: **Planting Day in Happy Hollow** at 10:00 - 11:00 am at Montrose Botanic Gardens, with Montrose Regional Library's bookmobile on hand. For kids 3 to 11 years old with an adult.
- June 6: **Ute Ethnobotany for Kids** at 9:00 - 10:00 am at the Montrose Botanic Gardens with Native Plant Master Mary Menz. For kids 3 to 11 years old with an adult.
- June 20: **Getting Creative with Soils** with Liz Mauch at 9:00 am at the Montrose Botanic Gardens. Learn about soil properties while creating with clay. For kids 6 and up with an adult.



Welcome to our newest members!

Jeanne Berry
Kris Duckworth
Richardson
Chris & Chad Harper
Evelyn Kaufmann
Deborah Kelly
Nora McCray
Bonnie Oren
David Paprocki
Penelope Powell
Peggy Reeve
April Sayer
Kaisa Simon
Linda Wilson

Thanks to our Generous Donors & Patrons

John and Anne Britton
CAM Electric
Bryan Cashion
Charlotte Duckett
Tim Edgar
John & Nancy Eloe
Darrell Hartigan Estate
Maya and Todd Haynes
Michiko Hitchcox
Jolie Clarke Lehman
Cherie MacDonald
Steve Manis

Sally McClintock
Carol and Jerry Pyle
Lauren and Jeff Riddle
Emily Schneider
Kathy See
Molly & Chuck Shaver
Spiritual Awareness Center
Sara Ungrodt
Barbara van Schaik Estate
Brenda Bafus-Williams & Kevin Williams
Mike and Anita Winter