

# The Dirt | December, 2024

Mobile County Master Gardeners



Master Gardeners,

What a wonderful season this is for Mobile County Master Gardeners! As I write this, the Pinecone Party is underway, drilling and painting and designing embellishments for the beautiful holiday greenery Mobilians are ordering. It's an amazing process that brings together so many creative elements for our largest annual fundraiser. From the proceeds, we help fund scholarships at Auburn University for horticulture majors from Mobile or nearby counties. We donated \$2,500 this year.

Our most recent Intern Class of 19 people graduated on November 14, fulfilling most of their 50 hours of volunteering on MG and community projects and concluding 13 day-long classes. Each made interesting presentations of what they have learned or what they love most in the horticulture world. They have learned to help teach the public how to solve their gardening and lawn problems as well as encouraging the planting and maintenance of home gardens and orchards. Along with Master Gardeners throughout our nationwide organization, we support the efforts of the Cooperative Extension services here in Mobile.

I have had the privilege of serving as president of MCMG this year. It has been an honor and a great learning experience for me and all the directors and committee chairpersons on our board as well as all our members who have completed thousands of hours of volunteer work. A small sample of what you MGs have done this year: Assisted in the ACES office, volunteered for the Speakers' Bureau, planted and maintained our DREAM Garden with seasonal plantings and harvests of hundreds of pounds of food for charity, participated in Providence Foundation's Festival of Flowers (Who knew camellia leaves could make such a beautiful table cover?), assisted at the spring and fall plant sales at Mobile Botanical Gardens, created our own Spring Festival with speakers, vendors, food trucks, and thousands of vegetable plants; represented MCMG at the Market in the Park in Mobile and Semmes in spring and fall, demonstrated horticulture in the Literacy Camp at George Hall Elementary, represented MCMG at Global Wellness Day as well as City Hall, assisted with the Intern Class, worked in Community Gardens, supported ACES efforts reviving vegetable gardens at Wilmer Hall, cleaned overgrowth and landscaped Kensington Place and Mulherin Home; maintained and publicized MCMG on our website and Facebook page, and will have published 26 "Ask a Master Gardener" columns in *Lagniappe* this year, all written by MCMGs or ACES members.

In support of the Greenery Sale, you have volunteered to create ornaments with cotton bolls and okra; drive hundreds of miles to pick up wreaths; collect, wash, and sort dozens of buckets full of greenery from the Auburn Ornamental Horticulture Station; design, embellish, transport, and sell arrangements at both the Jon Archer Center and Mobile Botanical Gardens, bring food for volunteers, and clean up afterward! And much, much more!

Wow! What a compilation of success with lots of joy and

## MCMG Officers

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friendship as you have all worked together to achieve so much! There is no way to thank you all except to encourage you to encourage and care for each other as friends and neighbors making our community a better place to live. Thank you to those who have so faithfully served on the Board of Directors as officers, directors, and chairpersons. Our last BOD meeting for 2024 is scheduled for Wednesday, December 4, at 10:00 AM. The JAC will be packed with Greenery Sale work so we will likely meet on the stage in the auditorium. All BOD meetings are open for members and interns so plan to drop in, if you can. (Spring Festival 2025 will be on our minds and agenda.)



We will celebrate everyone's wonderful contributions at our annual Awards Banquet, on Sunday, December 15, beginning at 5:30 PM, hosted by Mobile County Alabama Cooperative Extension System, represented by **Jack LeCroy and Diane Anthony**. We do have so much to celebrate and look forward to a Happy New Year!

Carol Williams  
Mobile County Master Gardeners  
251-367-0473

## Messages From Kerry Smith

(Announcements from EMG Program Coordinator – for local MGA newsletters)  
Hello Alabama Extension Master Gardeners –

This is a short note with two announcements I shared at the November 5 AMGA Advisory Council meeting. You'll also hear these at your MGA's monthly meeting, but this provides a double-check in case you're unable to attend your local meeting.

Search for Excellence (SFE) awards. I encourage every MG Association to nominate an outstanding group project for these. There are six categories. Choose the one that best fits your community contributions through an outstanding project. The deadline for award submissions is January 1 each year. Find the SFE Guide and SFE Application outline here [Resources - Alabama Master Gardener Associations | Alabama Cooperative Extension System - ACES.edu](#) Extension

Master Gardener (EMG) Volunteer Program Memorandum of Understanding ([MOU](#)). With 32 MG association in Alabama, each group is unique in various ways – your projects, members' interests, activities, community's needs, etc. And yet, we are all part of a single program family. The MOU describes our commitment to this family. It was part of each intern's training, and last year became part of each EMG volunteer's Service Report. Signing the MOU maintains everyone's active status in the Service Report. Note that your signature will be requested again in January 2025 because of revisions. The upcoming changes will provide document clarity and maintain alignment with policies at Auburn University and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

Please contact me with any questions. Thank you for everything you do to support this important Extension program.

Kerry Smith  
Alabama Extension Master Gardener Program Coordinator  
Auburn Department of Horticulture  
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by Cindy Findlay

On Thursday, Nov. 14<sup>th</sup> the Intern Class Of '24 presented their presentations which completed their course work! Now they are working on their hours for full certification! Let me say a little more about these presentations these 'Interns' or more appropriately, graduates; Jack should give any MCMG that comes to their presentations a CEU!

They are remarkable, informative, creative and so worth time spent learning from them! What a great job they did! Thank you, Class of '24!

This year, Jackie Jenkins, the Intern Coordinator, had a luncheon for the Interns and their Mentors after all of the classwork was officially over and certificates were awarded! The Mentors and other Master Gardeners brought luncheon dishes, and we all ate well! See photos below.

Oh, but the day did not end there! When everyone was full and had visited and clean up began, set up for the Pinecone Party began. Thank you to each and every one who helped, not only on Thursday, but also the next day!

The Pinecone Party! We had a wonderful turnout, especially of the Class of '24 We worked, we laughed, we lunched, and we got it done! (See photos below enjoying a rustic lunch.) Thanks to **Paula Reeves** for guiding us in the right direction! This year we were so happy to include **Theresa Davidson's** Okra painting into the day. We hope next year we can have a larger station for her decorations.

Theresa's Okra Party was held Friday Nov. 22, and the party was so much fun! The painted okra came to life with faces, dress, hair, hats, wings, and so many other things! Everyone decided to finish more on Monday morning, Nov. 25.

Everyone is getting ready for our 2024 Greenery Sale. We are all working hard to make this year's sale a great success! Remember, y'all, wear your Red Greenery Sale T-Shirt!



**Sonny Hughey, John Mitchell**



**Jan Wood, Mary Ann Tomberlin, Donna Kelly, Shirley Reynolds, Kathy Deckbar, Mary Katherine Faralli**



**Lisa Davis, Margie Wilcox, Marianna Parker**



Cindy Findlay, Theresa Davidson, Barbara Boone, Marion Platt

Joy Earp, Kathy Ertell



## Mark Your Calendar

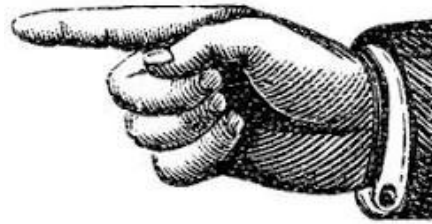
Dec 5-7--->Christmas Shop at JAC and items at MBG  
Preorder pickup Dec at JAC

Dec 15--->end of year Christmas banquet at JAC

Save the Date: April 3-5, 2025, to attend 2025 AMGA Conference & Business Meeting located in Prattville, AL Hosted by Autauga County Master Gardeners Association. Theme at the conference is "Fountains of Knowledge." Details will follow.

### We Need You!

Remaining fall activities are still in full swing closing out 2024. That means upcoming Christmas items to be made for sale online or in person at JAC. Look for reminders and details for all these events. If you would like a Pinecone Party T-shirt or a Greenery Sale T-shirt (new this year), contact Cindy Findlay. See In the Loop for dates and times. Also save the date for the end of year banquet, now scheduled for Sunday, December 15, at 5:30 PM.



## Master Gardener of the Month

by Bob Howard

Our Master Gardener of the Month is a long time Mobilian who takes great pleasure in watching things grow – especially plants she gets from friends. After a long career working for Infirmary Health Systems, she retired to days of reading, traveling and gardening. In preparation for retirement, she signed up for the Master Gardener class – and everything that goes with it.

She is a constant, reliable contributor in so many areas – she spends hours in the Grandma's Garden section of the Dream Garden tending the plants and the general

décor of that garden.

She has gathered greenery for our annual Greenery Sale both as a laborer and as a leader. She not only clips it and collects it, she and her cohorts wash it so the designers can have plenty of material to work their magic.

She has been a mainstay of the Market in the Park program since 2021, and she led the expansion of that program into the Semmes community.

She has led the collection of our dues for the last two years – and is collecting them again this year.

There is simply little that Master Gardeners do that she does not find some way to contribute and to be a part of this Association – and always with a smile on her face and a twinkle in her eye.

We, her friends, know her as Mo! I am proud to give this Master Gardener of the Month Award to **Catherine Moates**.

**Congratulations, Mo, our Master Gardener of the Month!**

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## Extension Volunteers Enhancing the Community

Mobile Master Gardeners relish giving back to the community. Giving back ticks off so many boxes: beautification of the grounds where gardens are restored and plantings are installed, healthy vegetables for resident consumption, and teaching staff members and/or residents about plant maintenance, not to mention fresh air and exercise for MGs. Future work at Wilmer Hall, and in progress Kensington Rehab Center and long-time project Taylor Park are featured below.



Wilmer Hall above is the upcoming site where vegetables will be planted for residents. This project is moving from on from the planning stage and **Jack LeCroy** has enlisted volunteers for the project to be headed up by Jack and **Jacob Kelley**. An organizational meeting was held Nov 14 at JAC. Also keep in mind the Wilmer Hall food drive. Items to be brought to JAC.

Below photo at the bottom is our always faithful Crew 22 at a recent luncheon. And why not? In between working at Mulherin Home, an army marches on its stomach. Attending: **Patti Hicks, Carol Mackey, Lisa Davis, Shirley Reynolds, Carolyn Rooks, Sharon Clasemen, Mary Ann Tomberlin, Paul Ezell, and Earl Gochey**.





Pictured above top at Kensington: Theresa Davidson, Marion Platt, Paul Barnes, Marianna Parker, Carolyn Rooks, Kristin Coates, and John Mitchell. **Note correction:** Kristin Coates, NOT Alissa Gochey.

Below middle and bottom 2 photos at Taylor Park shows students planting. Our MUG liaison, **Pat Hall**, reports that this planting is in the shape of a butterfly which is appropriate for a Pollinator Garden. Remember the phrase "Build it and they will come?" Well, apparently this is true in this case since bees, butterflies, and other pollinators are indeed coming. Application has been made to the American Butterfly Association to be a certified Butterfly Garden and Monarch Waystation. Pat thanks Master Gardeners who have assisted with this project. Buzz on...

### MBG Plant Sale

Mobile Botanical Gardens on October 24-26 was the site of the annual Fall Plant Sale. Volunteer Coordinator **Theresa Davidson** sought volunteers and assigned duties as needed: plant information, tallying plants, checking out customers, and assisting with plants to customer vehicles. For those MGs volunteering, assisting customers is a win-win, as it is an opportunity to learn plant IDs and maintenance.



MG volunteers assisting customer with plant purchase at MBG



Plant holding area for customer continued shopping



More MG and MBG volunteers assist customers at MBG

## Making Connections

Pictured below top at Market in the Park are **Jackie Jenkins, Ed Deas, and Bill Fink** who is regaling his eager listeners with gardening tales. **Bob Howard**, the cameraman not seen in top photo, is the faithful Master Gardener who is at the park venue every Saturday that Market in the Park is open. Photo below includes interns and MGs: **Pat Hall, Margie Wilcox, Bob Howard, Ed Dean, Sonny Hughey, and Bill Fink**. Azalea Trail Maids in their antebellum finery, added to the festivity of the day. Many gardening questions answered, literature passed out, contacts made. In fact, almost 300 contacts made this fall, and about 900 for the year. Extension mission fulfilled: educational outreach, connections made.



## Dirt Under Your Nails

Kalanchoe

Many plants are known for foliage, but this superstar plant, *Kalanchoe blossfeldiana*, is known for its bold blooms in red, orange, pink, or yellow. Kalanchoe are the showiest of succulents with thick, fleshy leaves.

Kalanchoe will grow well outdoors as a perennial as long as the temperatures don't go below 45 degrees F. Kalanchoes in temps lower than 45 degrees F need to become houseplants. *K. blossfeldiana* is the most often encountered kalanchoe, although there are over 100 varieties.

These succulents grow best in bright but indirect sunlight. Wet feet are not conducive to growth, so maintain these plants in well-drained soil. Minimal watering is sufficient; allow soil to dry in between watering. DO NOT OVERWATER!

Repotting every 1-2 years encourages blooms, especially if placed in terra cotta pots, as terra cotta dries quickly.

Kalanchoes are not susceptible to a whole host of insects, however, observe for aphids and mealy bugs. One caveat for kalanchoe fanciers: they are toxic to pets, so place your plants out of dog's and cat's reach.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:

Adriana Copaceanu, Backyard Garden Lover, Aug 2024



## Cover Crops

Cover crops are usually not intended to be harvested like cash crops, however there are exceptions. Cover crops are used extensively on large farms; home gardeners can plant a cover crop for the same reasons, but on a much smaller scale.

For home gardeners, at this time of year, most, but maybe not all, summer vegetable crops are harvested, and annual flowers are nearing their end, both either in raised beds or in the ground. Spring planting season will come again, but what can a home gardener do to plan for a jumpstart come spring? Mulching of course. Planting a cover crop is another option for several reasons.

Cover crops offer several benefits to a farmer or home gardener. In fact, a cover crop has been described as "a gift that keeps on giving."

- Adds nitrogen to the soil.
- Attracts beneficial insects, decreases pests.
- Feeds the soil ecosystem.
- Increases soil organic matter.
- Weed control.



Pictured above is a cover crop of sweet peas in a home garden. Sweet peas planted in cooler weather after the warm season is over or in early spring is a win-win for the gardener: pretty blooms, pea pods, and all the benefits of legumes for the soil.

Compiled by Terra Firma

Sources:

Gardening Know How, Bonnie Grant, Aug 2024

This Is My Garden, Jim and Mary Competti, Aug 2024

This Is My Garden, Jim and Mary Competti, Oct 2024

Aces.edu/Farming, Cover Crops for Alabama ANR-2139



## Gobble, Gobble That Pumpkin

...or at least allow your backyard critters to consume that leftover Jack-o'-Lantern which guided Trick or Treaters to your door or added autumnal presence to your front porch.

It is estimated that a billion pumpkins wind up in landfills. There is good news, though! Having served their time, pumpkins can be disposed of in an eco-friendly way and not by "porch pirates" looking to abscond with decorative touches to the pumpkin.

1. Pumpkins decompose quickly so compost them.
2. Feed those pumpkins to chickens or livestock. Just remember to remove any candle wax or decorations.
3. Repurpose for backyard wildlife in general.

Any or all of these suggestions help maintain sustainability and provide needed end-of-season nutrition.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:

Epic Gardening, Oct 2024

## Almost here...It's Greenery Sale Time!

The busiest time of the year is here. Many hands are involved with the Greenery Sale including marketing, design classes, the Pinecone Party, greenery collection and cleaning, design of holiday-related items, and finally pickup and sales. So far, the "hands" involved: **Cindy Findlay, Theresa Davidson, John Mitchell, Jan Wood, Kathy Ertell, Pat Hall, Sonny Hughey, Kathy Deckbar, Melissa Curtis, Dr. Dana Nettles, Mary Catherine Faralli, Marianna Parker, Mary Ann Tomberlin, Pam Noerr,**

Margie Wilcox, Crystal LeBlanc, Paula Reeves, Wendy Hogan, Emily Arellano, Alice Marty, Michael Decosta, Carol Williams, Shirley Reynolds, Ginny Beall, Joy Earp, Lisa Davis, Bob Howard, Barbara Boone, and Mary Townsley. So many "hands" making light work! \*\*

Profits for all the aspects of the Greenery Sale are used to further qualified horticultural students at Auburn University.

\*\* Greenery Sale photos to follow next newsletter.

## Enjoy Holiday Cacti

Tis the season to enjoy those beautiful Thanksgiving and Christmas cacti. During the flowering season do the following:

- Keep the cacti soil slightly moist.
- Keep the cacti in indirect light.
- ENJOY the blooms for about 4 weeks!!
- Keep these cacti out of cat's reach since they can cause abdominal distress.



## Bravo Boudreaux!

Often a welcome visitor, **Boudreaux** is pictured with his pet parent, **Marion Platt**. He is a 6-year-old Australian Shepherd, and we Master Gardeners consider him the unofficial official canine greeter at Jon Archer. Wherever Marion is, that's where Boudreaux is, loyal and faithful. Boudreaux is loved by all!

## Speaker's Bureau Update

Libraries often provide opportunities to reach out to people for more than book lending. They also provide the setting for informational programs such as horticulture and gardening. AND besides lending books, some libraries also have initiated seed lending. The Moorer Branch on McGregor Ave. currently has a program in place. Library hours are M, W, F, S 9:00-6:00 pm, and T, Th 9:00-8:00 pm.

**DO YOU HAVE A PET TOPIC YOU ENJOY? WE NEED SPEAKERS! WE CAN HELP YOU GET STARTED! Stay tuned for a meeting to get better organized in January, 2025.**

If you would like to be involved with the Speaker's Bureau educating and reaching out to our community with gardening and sustainability topics, please contact **Barbara Boone** (251-680-8263) or **Alice Marty** (251-709-1125).

## Hortimetrics

Joy in all the land! You are observing germination and now first leaves-or transplants look healthy. So far success! Next step is to mulch as directed to prevent weeds and preserve soil moisture. How much mulch to procure? You may have DIY mulch on hand, but you may need to purchase more mulch.

Mulch is either sold in bags in cubic yards, but it can also be sold by the yard. No matter which option, here is a way to calculate how much mulch is needed. The following is a simple equation to determine the amount:

**[Square footage of bed] x [mulch depth in inches] /324 =mulch in cubic**

yards.

Source:  
Patricia Shannon, Southern Living, March 2024.

## A Timely Holiday Knowledge Nugget

Do you know where those cute little hard sticks we plug into holiday hams or add to the Mulled Cider come from? We are referring to cloves. Is there is clove tree, vine, or a seed pod? Read on...

Actually, cloves do come from a tree, *Syzygium aromaticum*, and are used as essential oil, seasoning, and medicines. Along with other spices like cinnamon and nutmeg, they were very valuable and highly prized during the European Spice Wars.

It is possible but difficult to grow cloves in the U.S. because it takes 50-70 inches of rain per year. Hmm...maybe we should pursue growing a clove tree?

The clove itself is a flower which is picked just before opening and allowed to dry, making this a labor-intensive activity. So, while you are incorporating cloves into your holiday menu, remember the really hard work has already been done.

Source:  
National Gardening Association, Sept 2024



Pinecone Pavillion



Arboretum Layout



Hiking the Arboretum

## Fall Road Trip!

Rising early and boarding a bus to Picayune, MS on October 23, started a beautiful day in fall for 19 intrepid visitors touring and hiking through Crosby Arboretum. Crosby, operated by Mississippi State University Extension, is a 104-acre interpretive site maintained by MSU along with 700 acres of off-site natural areas.

The Crosby Arboretum is dedicated to educating the public about their environment. This mission is carried out by preserving, protecting, and displaying plants native to the Pearl River Drainage Basin ecosystem, providing environmental and botanical research opportunities, and offering cultural, scientific, and recreational programs. The Arboretum displays three basic habitats: Savannah, Woodland, and Aquatic all of which we Master Gardeners observed and enjoyed.

Any time of year would be a good visiting time, but seeing Fall foliage was a special treat. The Pinecone Pavillion provided a delightful spot for an enjoyable outdoor lunch. Frank Lloyd Wright, the renowned architect, would have been a welcome lunch participant. However, since Frank was absent, we made do with plenty of fresh air, wild, native plant species (60/cubic meter), and bird twitters aplenty.

The Arboretum is within an easy drive from Mobile to this Mississippi

location. Need a forest bathing experience? Head to Picayune, MS Crosby Arboretum.

By Barbara Boone



Crosby Pond



Crosby Entrance



## From the Greenhouse

### Making Home Decor with Pinecones

**Editor's Note:** There are so many opportunities to make holiday decor out of natural elements such as pinecones. Here is an easy project, even easier than that pinecone turkey you made back in kindergarten.

Fall is a great time to forage for natural elements in which to cobble together holiday decor suitable for your own home or to give as gifts. Cones by themselves are beautiful things. A perfectly symmetrical cone is nature's gift to us. So many objects or decorations can be economically fashioned from them. This is a guide to making DIY scented pinecones. So, let's craft on...

Steps to making scented cones:

1. Gather fresh, unblemished, non-faded cones. If wet, allow the cones to dry so the individual bracts spread in their natural state. (FYI ask permission to gather cones if not your property.)
2. If dirty, rinse cones with water which will reopen soon.
3. Bake cones in the oven set at 200 F for about 1 hour to eliminate any insects.
4. Because the cones are very porous, they will take up any essential oil you choose. Place cooled cones in a plastic bag and add in a spray bottle 10-20 drops of the oil of your choice and 1/4 cup warm water. Spray the bag of scented cones to the desired scent strength and allow to dry for a few hours to a day.
5. It may be necessary to respray cones to maintain the scent.

Now you have cones to use as table centerpieces, mantle decorations, or to give as economical but well received gifts.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:  
Home and Garden, Oct 2024

The November General Master Gardener Meeting took place in the large JAC auditorium. Jacob Kelley spoke that day on citrus pruning. So nimble was Jacob, he jumped up on the stage sans shoes to make a point on the screen. Consummate speaker with or without shoes!



**Remember, see separate In the Loop for all MCMG date, time and location activities. Plus, how to capture MG volunteer hours, especially important for new interns wishing Master Gardener certification ASAP!**

### **Mission Statement**

The Alabama Master Gardener Volunteer Program is an educational outreach program provided and administered by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

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