

The Dirt | July, 2024

Mobile County Master Gardeners



MCMG Officers

President:
Carol Williams
251.367.0473
readingweeder72@h
otmail.com

Vice President:
Bob Howard
251.423.2605
rhoward51@gmail.c
om

Rec Secretary:
Lisa Davis
251.422.8537
ddavis6507@aol.com

Corr Secretary:

Treasurer:
Jane Finley
251.605.0625
janefinley@bellsouth
.net

The President's Message

by Carol Williams

Dear Mobile County Master Gardeners, "Summertime, and the living is easy . . ." For MGs, June has held lots of volunteering, including a gardening-themed summer literacy camp at George Hall Elementary School. Reports from volunteers declare that the camp was well attended, kids were very attentive, the participating teachers offered excellent help, and the volunteers hope that this can be repeated next summer. **Bob Howard and Mo Moates** have led MG volunteers at Market in the Park in Cathedral Square each Saturday morning and added Market in Semmes on Thursday afternoons in June. On June 8 MG volunteers joined Mobile Urban Gardens in celebrating Global Wellness Day in downtown Mobile. We had many volunteers encouraging the public to garden and consider becoming Master Gardeners next year. MGs will return to the Market in the Park for the fall sessions in October and November.

This spring and summer, MGs have offered our contacts a small sign-up form to add them to our email list announcing special upcoming events, such as our Greenery Sale and Spring Festival. This has also helped us track our contact numbers at events more accurately. **Mary Townsley's** form, which she has posted to our MCMG Resources page (mobilecountymastergardeners.org) is proving its worth in expanding our public impact. If you lead an outreach event, the printed forms are available in index card boxes in our MG area in the office.

Now, July is our month with neither a Board of Directors meeting nor a General Meeting, a time to rest and recharge, but we will still need volunteers in the office to help answer the phone and meet the public asking for advice. Please sign up on **Diane Anthony's** calendar to help.

This July we are also preparing for our largest Intern Class yet. **Jack LeCroy**, Diane Anthony, myself, and vice president, Bob Howard, have had an opportunity to interview our new interns and I believe that they will be an outstanding class. Jackie Jenkins trains and advises our class mentors and has already signed up a number of MGs to mentor. Please let Jackie know if you would like to be a mentor or to help her with any of the work for the class (jjackiejenkins108@gmail.com).

Dorothy White, our longtime Intern Class Coordinator, has decided to step down from that job. She has been such a patient ("-20 out of what?") and kind help to all of us who have interned under her care. We will miss her. Please feel free to email Dorothy (HaroldanDorothy@bellsouth.net) to wish her "Happy trails!" and thank her for her time and consideration for us all. **Dianne Sellers**, '02, who has helped with the class in the past, is stepping into Class Coordinator with this Class of '24. She has already sent a message through Diane Anthony that she will need help and snacks for the class. Be sure to contact Dianne



(kdcscellers818@gmail.com) to sign up as soon as possible. Since the class is large, we will also need help during the class meetings so contact Dianne Sellers to let her know that you would like to help. She'll need people to help with set up, to bring snacks, to arrange the room from time to time, and in general to volunteer to help on some Thursdays through November 7. Enjoy our July break and get plenty of rest as August will begin a busy season for us all.

Carol Williams, President
251-367-0473

June Riddle: s Answer: corn

July's Riddle:

Each morning I open, a trumpet-like bloom,
By afternoon's end, I've sealed my room.
My vines are twining, with flowers so blue,
A herald of morning, fresh and new.

Garden Giggles

Ah, it's summer thyme!

Why are potatoes always arguing? They can never see eye-to-eye.

Please email your answer to Carol Williams.
(readingweeder72@hotmail.com).



Chronicles

by Cindy Findlay

On Friday, May 31, **Carmen Flammini**, Home Grounds Agent in Baldwin County, gave a wonderful presentation, "Behind Monarch Science," to 35 people at Jon Archer Center. The meeting was planned for two hours, but Carmen was so informative and knowledgeable, and the audience was so interactive that the class continued for an extra hour. A follow-up session in Baldwin County may be soon, possibly including a hike in the fall, looking for *Asclepia* aka milkweed, monarchs' favorite plant for depositing their eggs.

Our Farmers Markets have been busy throughout June. We set up our Mobile County Master Gardener (MCMG) Information Booth on Thursdays at the Semmes Farmers Market and on Saturday mornings at Market in the Park at Cathedral Square. **Bob Howard**, **Catherine Moates**, and many MCMG volunteers talked to approximately 30-35 people each week in Semmes and 60 or more people

Downtown! They talked with the public, giving out gardening information, and, despite the heat, keeping a smile on their faces to represent the best of MCMG.

Jackie Jenkins is rolling up her sleeves and getting ready for our new class of Interns! On June 5, she held a Mentor Training program for both new and experienced mentors, teaching what it takes to be a good mentor. Jackie does this every year and this year 24 people attended. Thank you, Jackie, for the leadership and education you always put into our Mentorship program.

Saturday, June 8, "Global Health Awareness Day" was celebrated in Spanish Plaza. **Carol Dorsey**, MCMG, and **Pat Hall** from Mobile Urban Growers (MUG) had an information booth set up. Approximately 60 people participated, including many MCMGs. This was the first year the City of Mobile held this event.

MCMG Carol Dorsey and Pat Hall from MUG, along with other MCMGs, worked hard on Mondays and Tuesdays, June 3-27 with a Summer Literacy Camp at George Hall Elementary School. The garden-themed curriculum was "hands on – to take home"! They saw approximately 50 children per session.

A little birdie told me that Pat Hall of MUG is on the list of new Interns! Welcome!

I am trying to create a complete list of birthdays for MCMGs. If your birthday does NOT appear in the directory, please email me your day and month only at: cndyfindly@gmail.com.

Remember

Our Monthly General Meetings are now on 2nd Wednesday.

Volunteers for State Helpline on Monday and Office Helpline Tuesday-Friday are still needed.

Monthly Zoom Class on 3rd Thursday of the month 6-7pm.



Mark Your Calendars

What a year! Leap year, eclipse, and now cicada-geddon! Don't forget those 2 cicada broods appearing now. Although cicada broods are designated on a map north of us, please take photos if cicadas spotted in your area. See Cicada Charlie below.

Pollinator Week June 17-23. Celebrate bees, birds, and butterflies!

Bob Howard says think ahead for a MG bus trip to a Picayune, MS. on October 23.



Garden edibles safe for your pet to eat:

Cantaloupe, broccoli, blueberries, apples, carrots, green beans, cauliflower, strawberries, pumpkin, and cucumbers.

Nooo-oo! Hurricane Season Is Baa-aack!

Part 1

Pictured below is an example map for the potential route of a hurricane known as a Saffir-Simpson tracking chart. Some call it a spaghetti map, but no matter what you call it, preparation before and action after a storm is key, especially since NOAA predicts 17-24 named storms. So, before hurricane force winds start blowing and before heavy rain starts falling, think about your landscape and remember to do the following:

Before the hurricane:

- Store hanging baskets, wind chimes, and bird feeders.
- Store pots inside.
- Store garden tools inside.
- Store soil and fertilizers inside.
- Turn over any container that contains water.
- Reinforce garden shed windows.
- Remove tree branches as needed.
- Stake newly planted trees for extra support.
- Bring potted plants indoors.
- Tall plants or trellised plants should be laid down.
- Make sure vining plants are secure.
- Turn off irrigation systems.

Part 2 After the Hurricane next newsletter

Source:

Southern Living, Meaghan Overdeep, June 2024



Sago Savvy

Sago palms, *Cycas revoluta*, belongs to the cycad family. This member of the cycad family labeled a palm is not really a palm, although the term "cyca" means palm in Greek. Cycas are gymnosperms and not true palms which are angiosperms (flowering plants). The species name *revoluta* originates from Latin for "rolled back" which describes sago fronds. "Sago" refers to the type of edible starch that can be extracted from these plants in Asian countries.

Originating in Japan, Sagos grow well in subtropical locations in full sun or partial shade. Fronds can grow up to 5 feet long and about 9 inches wide. The trunk is dark brown and appears shaggy. Sagos are of 2 genders, male or female. Male Sagos have a cone shape in the middle of the plant while females have a globe-

like shape with orange seeds.

As a food source, sago bark was used as food in Japan during times of food insecurity, but only after careful preparation, as the bark contains a powerful neurotoxin dangerous to humans and animals. No ingestion, please! However, the fronds are often used in floral displays.

Sagos do well outside and indoors, and in our area overwinter well, although these plants are subject to scale and mealy bugs. One way to eliminate these pests is to trim all fronds which will elicit new growth visible in about 2-3 weeks. (See photos below). Another control method is documented in the following publication: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/IN253>.

Sago palms have an almost prehistoric appearance, or at least a tropical vibe. These plants always make me imagine dinosaurs nearby. If Sagos are not already in your landscape, try one for its appearance, but watch out for a scary T-Rex!

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:

U of Florida Institute of Ag Sciences, 2022

Photos B. Boone



Sago 2 weeks post trim



Sago 6 weeks post trim



Sago 8 weeks post trim



Master Gardener of the Month

by Bob Howard

Our Master Gardener of the Month is a member of the Class of 2022. After completing a career with the Chevron Plant in Pascagoula, he pursued his avocation – Gardening. Since his entry into the Mobile County Master Gardeners, Earl Gochey has amassed almost 700 service hours – Keep in mind that he sat for his first class less than 2 years ago! Since then, he has been involved with many of our activities but also lends his skills and services to the Mobile Botanical Garden's Marketplace and the Mulherin Home. I remember his Intern presentation – a fascinating explanation of the chemistry around the changing Fall colors – and beautifully illustrated by his excellent photography. Earl was instrumental in the success of our Spring Festival in March, and I am sure he will be a valuable member of our association for years to come.

Congratulations, Earl Gochey, Master Gardener of the Month!

Crew 22 at Mulherin Making Life Sweeter

The faithful members of Crew 22, Earl Gochey, Paul Ezelle, Mary Ann Tomberlin, Kathy Deckbar, Carolyn Rooks, Carol Mackey, and Lisa Davis worked at Mulherin Home on Monday, June 10, trimming hedges and weeding flower beds. No photos this visit because as reported "we looked awful." Understood! It's just too hot to look cool and red carpet ready in this heat!



Dirt Under Your Nails

Zinnias, Petunias, and Marigolds-Oh My!

Zinnias, petunias, and marigolds are the floral workhorses yet low maintenance flowers in the summer garden. Often considered "old school," annuals all, they can be colorful companions or true showstoppers depending on the variety.

Petunias

When it comes to eye catching blooms, petunias (genus *Solanaceae*) are hard to beat. Once started to bloom, they are like the Eveready Bunny, they keep on blooming. The older standard petunia was, and still is, a great addition to containers and flower beds, but Wave petunias developed in the mid 1990's bloom in large numbers on long vines, making them an excellent choice for hanging baskets.

Maintaining petunias is an easy process:

- Space petunias so that they have enough room to spread.
- Petunias can grow in partial shade, but they thrive in full sun. In fact, more sun means more blooms.
- Fertilize lightly every 10-14 days, preferably with a liquid fertilizer.
- Water so that the plants are hydrated but not saturated.

Zinnias

Other powerhouse bloomers are zinnias (genus *Asteraceae*). Zinnias have many attributes in addition to stunning cut flowers, as their sturdy stems hold up well in floral arrangements and their blooms are long-lasting.

But zinnias are more than just a pretty face. They are often planted with vegetables as companions because they attract insects away from vegetables. They are also drought and heat resistant, making them an excellent choice for our area. Zinnias also attract pollinators which makes us ask what's NOT to like about zinnias?

Zinnias are easily sown directly from seed when the soil temperature approaches 70 degrees F or at least after threat of frost. Plant 1/2 inch deep into the soil, allowing about 6 inches between plants. Zinnias do best when they are watered routinely but not too much. Fertilize with an all-purpose fertilizer monthly. Dead head to keep zinnias producing fresh blooms.

Marigolds

If there is a "beginner" flower for novice gardeners, a marigold (genus

Tagetes) is the plant for them. With their bright yellow/orange blooms, they are a standout. Like zinnias, marigolds can be started from seed in warm, fertile soil, and once germinated and full-on growth, marigolds like full sun, although some shade can be tolerated.

Marigolds need routine watering but do best when watered from the soil level and not overhead. Blooms do not do well watered directly. Be sure and deadhead to keep bloom production ongoing. Fertilize every 4-6 weeks.

Marigolds is the ultimate companion plant to vegetables, as they emit a chemical, alpha-terthienyl, that can rid nematodes, bacteria, and fungi that can feed on vegetables.

The trifacta of flowers above may be considered old fashioned, but they are as popular as ever for their beauty and all they do in our gardens.

Legumes will be the focus next month.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Sources:

Old World Garden Farms, Jim and Mary Competti, May 2024

A Tisket, a Tasket...Hang in There, Basket!

Hanging baskets are landscape jewelry. Whether thriller, filler or spiller, they are eye catchers. Here's how to keep hanging baskets looking their best:

- Fertilize routinely with worm castings used as a slow-release fertilizer.
- Fertilize preferably with a liquid fertilizer about every 7-10 days.
- Water consistently, not too much, not too little.

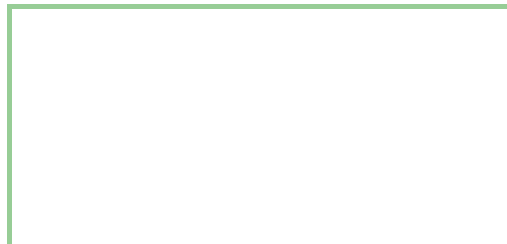
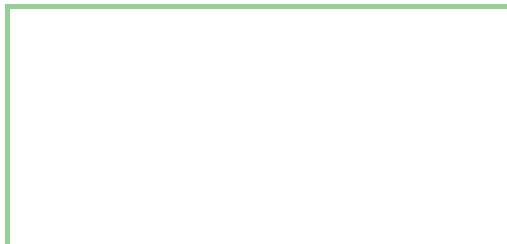
Fertilizer with an appropriate phosphorous and potassium will keep those flowers blooming and looking gorgeous.

See below where a hanging basket in the background adds to the overall garden. Also, not a basket, but also hanging, is **Bill Fink's** allium harvest. Beauty of another kind from the Master Gardener King of Alliums! Allium on, Bill!

Source:

Gardening Know How, April 2024.

Photos courtesy Bill Fink





Onions



Garlic



Global Wellness Day, a Community Gardens Event

The Spanish Plaza shown above was the venue for the Global Wellness Day held on June 8. The theme for the day was physical and mental health, reminding us that gardening is so much more than plants. Those in attendance representing and sharing a tent were Mobile Urban Growers, Mobile County Master Gardeners, and Mobile Botanical Gardens: **Donna Kelley, Carol Dorsey, Pat Hall, Theresa Davidson, Lydia Criswell, Susan Hilton, Judy Stout, Ted Atkinson, Carol Williams, Barbara Boone, and Libby March**. A special shout out to **Bethany O'Rear, ACES B'ham**, who made a special effort to provide Grow More Give More How to Grow cards at this event.

Summer Literacy Camp

Mobile Urban Growers, Inc. was contacted by the Mobile Arts Council to help with a garden themed summer Literacy Camp at George Hall Elementary School during the month of June 2024. The program, funded by an Amp Up the Arts grant, gets the students in the garden participating in plant-based activities, such as amending soil in raised beds, planting seeds and transplants, and producing plant-themed art projects. Mobile Master Gardeners helping with the camp are **Ted Atkinson, MD (2023), Lydia Criswell (2017), and Carol Dorsey (2016)**. To maximize the number of students participating, sessions are 20-30 minutes long with multiple groups rotating through the garden on Mondays and Tuesdays in June. The groups range from four students to ten students. During the first week of camp we

gardened with 54 children. Feedback from the parents was all positive and included "best day ever at school."

Update and photo courtesy of Carol Dorsey



Why Succession Planting?

Succession planting has its benefits. Here are 3:

1. Replacing each harvested crop with a new one maximizes space and boosts production,
2. Young, healthy plants yield more than older ones.
3. Continuous growth helps keep weeds from popping up.

Compiled by Dirt Diva



Cachepot...What Is This?

What is a cachepot? A cachepot is a fancy houseplant container that can house a utilitarian plant container. You know we Southerners like to gussy up anything ordinary and make it "purty." Cachepot from the French means "hide a pot" and that's exactly what a cachepot does. Cachepots have no drainage holes; that is the job of the utilitarian container placed in the cachepot.

Because cachepots have no drainage hole, water plants outside the cachepot to prevent standing water and possible root damage, especially those plants that don't like "wet feet."

The next time a space could use upgrading, think about a decorative cachepot.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:
Kathryn Yarbrough, Southern Living, Feb 2024



Is It OK to Butt In?

It is, *IF* you are involved with the Fuzzy Butt project, a program planned and executed by MG **Debra Morrow** (2024) and held in conjunction with the Mobile Herb Society. Debra planned this program with a goal of allowing 22 students from local schools to observe and record bumble bee sightings. With concern over the decline of bees, the Fuzzy Butt program provides an excellent opportunity for probing reasons for the decline, and how to carry on the rudiments of a scientific study. Students having fun AND learning! Butt in and Buzz on!

Photos courtesy of Fox10 video



Editor's Note: Water quality is a topic of importance, especially regarding "forever chemicals." Information and knowledge are the intent here, not panic. Part 1 described these chemicals and governmental response. Part 2 focuses on impact to our local environment, especially home gardeners.

Water, Water Everywhere, But Is It Safe?

Part 2

As described in Part 1, "forever chemicals" once ingested will not be eliminated in

the human body. PFAS can get into the body via garden plants if they are grown in soil or water containing PFAS. Usually this happens when PFAS-containing water is applied to plants. When this happens, PFAS can be transferred from the water through the soil, where they may be taken up by the plant roots.

How to tell if your garden has elevated levels of PFAS may be by investigating the history of your growing area. The highest levels tend to be associated with land that had sewage sludge applied to the soil. Elevated levels have also been found in some well water and surface water. If this water has been used for irrigation, PFAS may build up over time. Other sources could be topsoil or soil amendments. If none of these possibilities for PFAS have been determined, then the likelihood of elevated PFAS levels is reduced.

A recent MAWSS testing report dated January-December 2023 included Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) to be as follows:

PFOS ppt MCLG 0, MCL 4.0, Highest Detected 1.30, Range 0.76-1.30
PFOA ppt MCLG 0, MCL 4.0, Highest Detected 2.50, Range 1.1-2.50

ppt=parts/trillion
MCLG=Maximum Contaminant Level Goal
MCL=Maximum Contaminant Level

The above data obtained from MAWSS suggests drinking water is within the goal level. To further increase confidence in your drinking water, investigate installation of a residential charcoal water filter.

Compiled by Barbara Boone
Reviewed by Jack Lecroy

Sources:
[epa.gov/pfas](https://www.epa.gov/pfas)
[cdc.gov/biomonitoring/PFAS_FactSheet](https://www.cdc.gov/biomonitoring/PFAS_FactSheet)
MAWSS Consumer Confidence Report, May 2024



Bugs and Hisses

Natural Ways to Repel Mosquitoes

In the June newsletter **Neil Milligan** wrote an outstanding article on mosquitoes. Believe it or not, mosquitoes play a role in the ecosystem by keeping insect populations under control. The downside to their role is that they are a true nuisance and health risk to humans. How to mitigate the harm in a safe manner without harm to pets or people with harsh chemicals? Removal of sources of standing water is one way, but if mosquitoes are still around, another way is through the use of certain scents. Apparently, those bloodsuckers do not like some essential oils. The following is a partial list that can be utilized to at least reduce the mosquito population:

- Citronella- *Cymbodonon nardus*, a relative of geraniums, citronella has the natural chemical citronellal
- Rosemary- *Rosmarinus spp.*, with a woody scent liked by humans, but detested by mosquitoes, can be used in an oil infusion to repel mosquitoes.
- Lemon Balm- *Melissa officinalis*, a relative of mint, the citrusy scent will keep mosquitoes at bay.
- Coffee- *Coffee arabica* with a strong coffee is enjoyed by many, but not by mosquitoes. Spreading used coffee grounds around will repel mosquitoes.
- Garlic- cut *Allium sativum* cloves of garlic repel mosquitoes.
- Marigolds- contain the active ingredient of pyrethrum, a mosquito repellent.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:
BH&G, May 2024



Wanted Dead or Alive!

How many times have you looked at slow growth or what you thought was growth in spring and wondered if the plant was alive? Some plants produce leaves during even the chilly days of spring, some do not do so until weeks later, as the plant may still be in stages of dormancy. Here are steps to determine whether that plant is indeed dead or alive:

- Branches are weak and break easily.
- Even if branches break easily, check the root system, especially for shrubs like hydrangea.
- Check under the bark for dormancy by scratching and looking for green tissue.
- Know the plant's dormancy cycle.
- Ornamental grasses are slow to emerge from dormancy, so be patient for growth.
- Evergreens remain green all year, so if growth is brown, brittle, or dropping branches, the plant is likely dead or dying.

The key here is to be patient and wait out the plant's life cycle before pulling up the roots and heading to the compost bin.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:
BH&G Megan Hughes, April 2024

From the Greenhouse



Editor's Note: This month "From the Greenhouse" features a hack from my Tip, Trick or Hack file.

We all enjoy a fresh bouquet of flowers whether purchased or grown with the fruits of our labor in our own garden. One way to preserve cut flowers longer is to add mouth wash to the cut stems. Why mouthwash? Mouthwash is used to keep our breath fresh (as a daisy?) and to reduce the bacterial count in our mouths. The same is true in a water filled vase where bacteria accumulate around a trimmed flower stem. The antibacterial component of mouthwash reduces bacteria and enables a longer life for the stems. Who doesn't want to enjoy a longer lasting bouquet of our favorite flowers?

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:
BH&G Sharon Greenthal May, 2024

Buds2Blooms

Features blooms, fruits, and vegetables grown and maintained by MGs in the Dream Garden at the Jon Archer Center. Dream on!



Hydrangea



Clematis



Firecracker



Daylily



Yarrow



Bee Balm



Blueberries



Caladiums



Corn



Figs



Mission Statement

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

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A & M University and Auburn University) is an equal opportunity and employer. www.aces.edu



Mobile County Master Gardeners | 1070 Schillinger Rd. N. | Mobile, AL 36608 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)