

The Dirt | October 2024

Mobile County Master Gardeners

The President's Message

by Carol Williams

Dear Mobile County Master Gardeners,

October is almost here, with its cool nights and clear days. I hope that everyone escaped serious damage during the storm that canceled our September meeting. We plan to award Master Gardener of the Month for both months at our Wednesday, October 9 meeting, in the Large Auditorium at the Jon Archer Center.

At my home, a giant limb was twisted nearly off one tree but didn't do any other appreciable damage. I'll need to get a licensed tree service to remove it. Remember to always use a licensed and bonded tree service to clean up damaged trees. It is just too dangerous for an amateur.

At our October General Meeting, we will be treated to information and a demonstration of an interesting way to sow seeds this winter in preparation for planting in spring. We thank Leslie Maycock and Alice Marty for planning and presenting this program. You won't want to miss it.

Another fall treat is the return of Market in the Park in Cathedral Square in downtown Mobile, Saturdays, 7:30am-noon, Oct 12 - Nov 16. It is a great time to enjoy our fall weather and meet Mobilians who are genuinely interested in receiving advice about their trees, plants, and gardens.

If you are still looking for another fall opportunity, Bellingrath Gardens is hosting its annual Jack-O-Lantern Jubilee! from 3:00-6:00 PM on Saturday, October 26. We have been offered a booth to give treats to the local families who come decked out in their Halloween best. There will also be food trucks and vendors on the Great Lawn as well as a screening of the movie *Hocus Pocus* at 6:30. As many as 5 MGs can volunteer so entry to the festival is free for them!

Plans for volunteers are underway for the Mobile Botanical Gardens Fall Plant Sale the last weekend of October. Our own Volunteer Coordinator, Theresa Davidson, is also the Volunteer Coordinator for MBG. She has already been scheduling volunteers for unloading truckful of beautifully healthy plants for the public to purchase. The joy of volunteering is that you get to know which plants you would like to buy! I am excited for our intern class because this will be their first opportunity to help at an MBG sale. They will have so many plants to learn about and see for the first time. They are always a great help, especially with the checkout at the sale. I understand that John Olive will be speaking on the First Friday in October at MBG about the plants to be offered for sale.

I hope that you have already signed up for the October 23 bus trip to the Crosby Arboretum in Picayune, Mississippi. It has won



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awards for its high-quality landscape design. If you are planning to design or redesign your home landscape, you may pick up some great ideas. A sign-up sheet/ registration form will be available at our October 9 General Meeting. We will be leaving ACES at 7:30 AM and returning by 7:00 PM. Remember to bring a lunch. We will provide drinks and snacks, but feel free to bring your own, too.

Of course, plans for this year's Annual Greenery Sale are also underway. We will be taking preorders online October 21 through November 25. Pick-up of preorders will be December 5 at the Jon Archer Center AND we invite in-person shopping December 5-7 also at the JAC. In-person sales will also be offered at the Mobile Botanical Gardens' Holiday Market and Greenery Sale, December 5-7, provided by our MCMG volunteers. Before we make the arrangements, we will have a design class, a bow-making class, and a Pinecone Party to be sure that any MG or Intern who wants to, is trained to create the designs for our largest fund raiser of the year. Greenery collection begins the Saturday after Thanksgiving, so remember to sign up to transport, wash, dry, and sort the greenery for the arrangements. With the proceeds of the sale, we fund a scholarship for a local student at Auburn University. This year, it was \$2,500. Contact Paula Reeves or Emily Arellano for more information.

Please bring your Christmas mugs for Cuppa Cheer. You can recycle your mug from last year, too. If you planted okra this year, bring in any large, dried pods to create Christmas Okra Angels for the in-person sales. You can also keep an eye out for fresh cotton bolls abandoned in a nearby field for other created ornaments.

The success of all of this is dependent on you and other MGs who volunteer for each of these opportunities. Theresa will have her clipboards and descriptions available at the October meeting so bring your calendar to mark the dates you have volunteered to help. Bring your snacks and treats to share, too!
See you soon!

Carol Williams, President
Mobile County Master Gardeners
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Nature Riddle/September's Riddle:

In gardens, I spiral, with a scent so sweet,
My colors are varied, a visual treat.
Bees dance around me, from dawn till dusk,
In my fragrant presence, they eagerly bask.

September's Answer: Lavender

October's Riddle:

I capture the sky, the trees, and the bees,
Yet, not a sound, nor a whisper in the breeze.
Look into me, see the world upside down,
In every garden, I'm the crown.

(Email your guess to readingweeder72@hotmail.com. If you are correct, you will receive a raffle ticket at our next meeting!

Garden Giggles:

Rooting for you is my favorite hobby!
Friends overlook your broken fence and just admire your garden.



Chronicles

by Cindy Findlay

September has flown by and can you believe that Fall is here? Pumpkins, fall colors and smells; let's not forget the ghosts, goblins and all things scary of Halloween!

Our 2024 Interns have settled into their new Master Gardener Intern roles quite nicely. Not only are they gaining all of the knowledge from classes, they are also on fire signing up and gaining their hours working on the Helpline.

We (Phoneline Committee) met and are trying to simplify the overall understanding of the Helpline. The Calendar to sign up to work the Helpline is on the MCMG Desk on a blue clipboard. Monday -Friday the process is the same for helping for all days. Only difference being on Monday you actually answer a ring phone! Any questions please call me, Cindy Findlay, anytime.

Our General Meeting was sadly postponed last month due to inclement bad weather. Please plan to attend the October meeting. If you ordered a T-shirt, they have come in. Pick them up at the meeting or catch me when you can. Also on sale again this year will be the Pinecone Party T-Shirts and a new item a "Greenery Sale T-Shirt". See below for this holiday shirt. These two T-shirt options will be open for interns (No Digger Man) to buy and re-orderable every year. We are taking pre-orders/ pre pay now. \$15 2xx-\$18.

Our days in October are full of activities for us to help in. Be sure to look at Theresa's In the Loop to keep up.



Mark Your Calendars

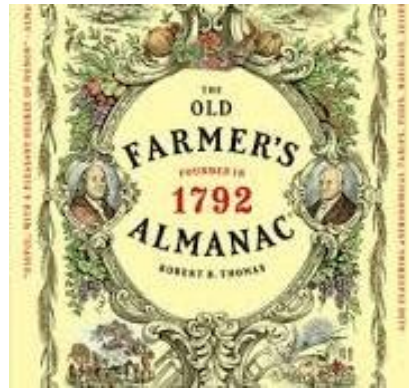
October 10 in Auburn is the day and location for the AMGA Fall

January						
			1	2	3	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Seminar. Great speakers and lunch included with registration.
Join Carol in Auburn?

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.



The History of The Old Farmer's Almanac

An almanac, by definition, records and predicts astronomical events like the tides, weather, sign of the moon, and the rising and setting of the sun. Established by Robert Thomas and existing since 1792, this almanac was proven to have a following due to accuracy, useful advice, and entertainment not available in household periodicals.

At its inception there were very few periodicals available to farming communities and fewer still pieces of literature in households other than the Bible. Based on its popularity, circulation tripled from an initial 3,000 to 9,000 in a year only costing about 9 cents each.

Thomas, the founder, and later editors, using simple calculations available early on, focused on weather information to farmers. The modern almanac also focuses on horticulture and upcoming weather forecasts. Today use of NOAA more complex forecasting metrics incorporated in the almanac for accuracy purports accuracy to be about 80%. It remains to be seen how accuracy fares during further climate change.

The Farmer's Almanac even prognosticates by state. Alabama is predicted to be cool and stormy this fall with more cloudy days than sunny. Let's see how close to prediction this is.

Compiled by Terra Firma

Sources:
Farmer's Almanac, Aug 2024
The Beet podcast, Carol Connare, Feb, 2024.

We Need You!

Fall activities will soon be going into full swing. That means volunteering at the Mobile Botanical Gardens plant sale, the upcoming bus trip, and the Master Gardener Greenery Sale. There will be more details regarding



the Greenery Sale forthcoming, however, a request has been made in advance by Peggy Wright or Marianna Parker for the Cuppa Cheer arrangements:

"Please consider donating your unused Christmas mugs (or solid red or green or blue) for our upcoming greenery sale. Mugs should appear to be new, no cracking or crazing or chips, and no stains. Folks who buy our Cuppa Cheer should be able to use the mug after the greenery dies, if they choose. Last year we received over 40 donated mugs, which meant we didn't have to buy any mugs at all, so the Cuppa Cheers were almost 100% profit! Mugs can be delivered to the Archer center to be picked up. Thank you for any mugs you care to donate. A labelled container will be located on the JAC stage."

Also needed: small pinecones 3 inches in height



Extension and Master Gardeners Do Good Works in the Community

We all lead busy lives. Master Gardeners and Extension employees occasionally step out and work or play in other organizations benefiting the community. The GoRun 5K and 1 mile Fun Run to benefit USA gynecology oncology research held at the USA Mitchell Stadium area was an example Saturday, September 21. **Cindy Knowlton** above (left) and the Hispanic American Business Association of the Gulf Coast organization manned a tent, and **Susan Hilton** (middle) running with her running group, Exercise Warriors, participated in the 5K. Cindy is the County Extension Coordinator at Jon Archer and Susan is a Master Gardener and talented ceramicist, who has many of her ceramics at the Mobile Botanical Gardens gift shop. **Diane Anthony's** organization (right), Mobile County Skallways Jeep Krewe,

benefits others to include many veterans, all recipients sharing about \$23,000. Thanks Cindy, Susan, and Diane for all you do in our community!



Master Gardener of the Month

by Bob Howard

Our Master Gardener of the Month has a love of gardening in her blood. She learned about vegetable gardening from her father in their backyard patch of tomatoes, squash, peppers, and more in Saraland. He taught her the skills he learned growing up in a small mill town in Maine from his father, an immigrant from Sicily.

After graduating from the University of South Alabama, our Gardener of the Month taught in public schools for several years – all while raising 2 children and her husband. Blessed with a shady midtown home, she has converted from growing veggies to cultivating her own tropical jungle in Midtown. And she shares her devotion to ferns, bromeliads, and any type of shade-loving flower. She has successfully infused her daughter with this horticultural virus and soon hopes to start inculcating her granddaughter with the joy of gardening.

Our Master Gardener of the Month loves to volunteer, and she always invites us to join the fun by working hard to keep us informed of all the volunteer opportunities. She updates the MG webpage with the listings of these events. She also creates Volunteer Sign - Up sheets and has them available for us to sign up at each meeting. She shares those sheets with the Master Gardener team leader for each activity.

When the ACES computerized Vol Ops page was not working properly, she reported the issue to Kerry Smith and the ACES team to correct the problems. She continues to stay in touch with Kerry for updates on the resolution of this problem.

Theresa Davidson also works on In the Loop for our Constant Contact link. Her volunteer work does not end there. She works in the greenhouse at Mobile Botanical Gardens as well as other activities at MBG, she attends our Board meetings as a Committee Chairperson and reports on the Vol Ops for MCMG. She can be found at our monthly meetings with Volunteer Sheets in hand, and she also brings food to our meetings – Let's all thank Theresa Davidson, our Master Gardener of the Month!

Congratulations, Theresa Davidson, our Master Gardener of the Month!

Crew 22 Update

Mulherin Home was again the recipient of another landscaping project by the Crew on Sept 9. The landscape has 10 new chrysanthemums of different colors and 4 new hostas. With Fall upcoming, the mums will add much color for Mulherin residents to enjoy. Pictured are **Earl Gochey, Carol Mackey, Paul Ezelle, Mary Ann Tomlin, Carolyn Rooks, Kisa Davis, and Kathy Deckbar.**





Dirt Under Your Nails

Planting and Growing Beets

Editor's Note: This month focus is on beets. Full disclosure? I am not a big fan of beets. Like many others, I am trying to get past them tasting like dirt. Trying to like them, y'all, trying to like them...

Like me, you are either Team Beets or not. I am not, but this cool season vegetable has attributes to be admired: they are fast growing, able to be grown from seed or transplant, grow in cool to cold temperatures, and they are nutritious, packed with vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals. Even the beet tops are edible and nutritious.

After growth in spring and fall gardens in zones 2-11, beets, *Beta vulgaris*, are ready to harvest in about 60 days. Mature beet roots range in size from 1 to 3 inches in diameter and are available in the iconic red color or yellow or white depending on the variety.

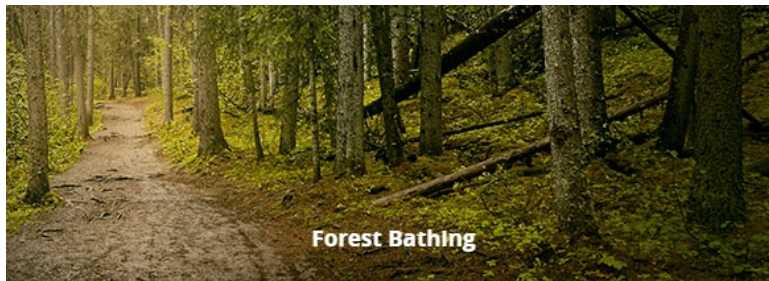
Seeds germinate quickly as early as 5 days sown 1/2 inches deep. Plant transplants several inches apart in full sun. Mulch and water weekly. Fertilize minimally to avoid too many leaves and no root.

Beets have the following possible pests: leaf miners, *Cercospora* fungus, and flea beetles.

Even though beets are at the bottom of my preferred veggie list, wrapped in foil, doused with olive oil and S&P, and roasted in the oven, beets are almost edible. Like I said, I am trying.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Sources:
Leanne Potts, HGTV, Aug 2024



Cooler days and the desire to walk among natural surroundings actually has a name: forest bathing. No soap and water required, though. Just find a place to walk, breathe in fresh air, observe the local flora, and listen for the buzz of insects. Other cultures have practiced the concept of ecotherapy for decades. Let's be mindful and adopt forest bathing.

Source:
National Geographic, 2019.

Gardening By the Moon

Editor's note: There are some gardeners who believe gardening by the moon helps plants grow. Is this a lunar fact or simply "lunacy?"



Gardening by the moon has been practiced for eons by people all over the world from ancient peoples to indigenous Americans. Because gardening by the cycles of the moon is practiced by some avid gardeners, there exists lunar calendars and even apps to help with planting and harvesting with the waxing and waning of the moon. (Waxing is becoming fuller; waning is becoming thinner.)

Lunar gardening is really tied to the tides which corresponds to the fluctuating availability of water to plants and the soil, with the highest levels in the days approaching a full moon (waxing).

The lunar gardening method revolves around planting tasks in the waxing cycle and harvesting tasks in the waning cycle. Flowers and fruit above the ground are planted during a new moon up to a full moon. Root crops, tubers, and bulbs are planted between the full moon and the new moon.

Does the lunar planting system work? Researchers at Washington State University have shown that planting and harvesting by the moon is a myth, not valid, and offers no benefit. Some growers still claim planting by the moon to offer benefit, but researchers "digging deep" found no scientific proof.

Readers of this article, have you ever practiced lunar gardening? If so, please contact the editor and let us know the outcome: boonebama@live.com.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:
BH&G, Erica Grivas, April 2024.

Gardener's Mosquito Alert

Master Gardeners, please protect yourself against mosquitoes which can carry Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE), West Nile virus, dengue fever, and Zika virus. These are serious health issues. Remember to use a mosquito repellent and wear protective clothing.

Speaker's Bureau Update

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).

Weedonomics

Plantain

Editor's Note: This weed called plantain is not related to the yellow banana look-a-like found in the supermarket.

Originating in Eurasia, the weed plantain, *Plantago major*, is a hardy perennial found all over the country, usually in compacted soil in lawns and garden pathways, pastures, and roadsides. This weed has a deeply seated taproot. which makes it difficult to pull. Seedheads also make this weed hard to control, so removing seedheads in spring before seed dispersal is important.

Plantain leaves are edible despite its appearance. The weed is also known for its anti-inflammatory properties purported to be useful infusions for coughs, wounds, dermatitis, and insect bites. Most gardeners do not have the patience for its medicinal attributes, so riddance of the weed is primary.

The image below on the left is the familiar plantain weed. On the right is an implement that is known to assist in removing deep taproots. It really works!

Source:
National Gardening Association, Aug 2024.



Bugs and Hisses

Yellow Garden Spiders

Master Gardeners, look outside your house along the eaves or nearby low hanging tree limbs and search for a large spider and a large web. Chances are you will see at least one spider, a very large spider and a very large web.

Every August and September these spiders, *Argiope aurantia*, appear. There is no need for humans to fear venom from these spiders, as they are only here for two things: insects as prey and search for a mate. We should be glad for their presence because they help control the flying insect population.

These spiders are in an arachnid group known as orb weavers, hence the size of the circular web. The female spiders themselves can grow up to 28 mm while the males are a little smaller. Most spiders have two claws on each foot, but orb weavers have an additional claw which assists in weaving their complex webs. Females have a yellow abdomen while the male is less striking.

Yellow garden spiders are found throughout the U.S., Canada, and south of the border.

Fun Yellow Spider Facts:

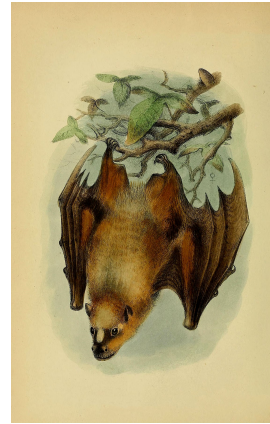
- Webs are spun again every night.
- Male spiders court the female by plucking at her web.
- Females may live several reproductive years, but the male dies after mating. Sorry guys!

Yellow garden spiders are awesome creatures. If you see one, protect the spider and the web. They are our arachnid friends!

Source:
wwf.org/yellow garden spiders, World Wildlife Federation

Bats: Mythical and Misunderstood

Bwahahahaha! Halloween is upon us once again this year. Frightful images appear such as skeletons, witches and bats flying into Dracula's coffin. Thanks to Hollywood, the poor bat has become a much-maligned creature with a bad reputation. Hopefully this article will set the record straight and give bats the credit they deserve.



Bats, *Chiroptera spp.*, are mammals. In fact, bats are the only flying mammals on Earth. They play an essential role in pest control, pollination, and seed dispersal. Recent studies have found that bats save at least a \$1 billion per year in preventing crop damage and pesticide requirements in corn production alone.

There are about 1,400 bat species worldwide of which 40 reside throughout the U.S. They are very light weight and boney, enabling them to fly. Their large ears are important, utilizing sonar frequency allowing for echolocation. They live in deserts, forests, suburbs (yes, maybe in your neighborhood), caves, and cities, especially if there are bodies of water nearby with lots of insects. Note: The Texas Hill Country has one of the largest population of bats in the country.

The majority of the bat diet consists of insects. Hunting at night, it has been estimated that bats consume tons of insects. As mentioned earlier, bats pollinate as well as feed on insects. Bats are the main pollinator of the agave plant which is used for tequila. No bats, no Margueritas! Some bats feed on nectar and fruit. In fact, some flowering plants have evolved to emit a certain scent that attracts bats.

Several species in the U.S. are on the endangered species list, one of which in Alabama is the Indiana bat. Alabama bats are in counties with sinkholes, caves, and low-lying streams which is defined as karst geology.

So, as the Halloween season approaches, keep in mind that bats are not **fiends** but another of our **friends**. Bwahahahaha!

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:
fws.gov, U.S. Fish and Wildlife
nwf.org/Bats, National Wildlife Federation



From the Greenhouse



The 3 R's: Reuse, Recycle, Repurpose

Every gardener has leftover plastic plant containers from previous transplants. The following is one way to use them for decor vs the trash bin. Craft on...

Step 1: Clean the plastic container.

Step 2: Choose paint color. Leftover flat white spray paint was chosen for the container base with leftover burnished gold on the rim of the container.

Step 3: Select small plastic or silk flowers, stems, and leaves, whatever you may have on hand to reuse on the outside container.

Step 4: Spray paint burnished gold on Step 3 items. Let dry.

Step 5: Using hot glue, secure Step 3 items in an angle from bottom to top.

Step 6: Place oasis or Styrofoam or an inside container in the outer container to secure dried or live stems, branches, leaves, or flowers, whatever materials are available in your yard-or your neighbor's yard!

Be satisfied that you have repurposed trash into a usable treasure/BB



Remember, see separate In the Loop for all MCMG date, time and location activities. Plus, how to capture MG volunteer hours!

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 employer. www.aces.edu



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