

The Dirt | August, 2024

Mobile County Master Gardeners

The President's Message

by Carol Williams

Dear Mobile County Master Gardeners,

August is already upon us. Those long, warm days of June and July are past, as are all our tomatoes, peppers, squash, berries, and cucumbers. I hope that you made the time to pick some blueberries and share a watermelon or two with neighbors. It all goes so quickly. Okra will be here for a while still. If possible, let some continue in your garden until they are large and dry so it can be used for our Greenery Sale. We have some talented artists who can convert that dried okra into the most charming ornaments for our Greenery Sale, \$15 a piece! Also, as October arrives, watch out for ripe cotton bolls that our artists can also use.

As you know, our 2024 Intern Class will begin on August 8. With 22 registered, this is the largest class we have had. They come from diverse careers: doctor, nurse, teacher, lawyer, gardener, and many others, but all eager to take a deep dive from their home garden and the gardening culture of Mobile and our surrounding areas. **Dianne Sellers**, '02, the New Class Coordinator, will have help from **Lydia Criswell**, '18, for Canvas and other tech, and **Harry Surline**, '18, our president emeritus, will also be a class helper. Contact Dianne Sellers to let her know if you would like to help. If you are a mentor, feel free to join your Intern for lunch or at other times to encourage them and answer their questions. Don't forget to plan on the October bus trip.

www.crosbyarboretum.msstate.edu. All members and Interns are invited. It will be the first time MCMG has visited there! **Jack LeCroy** will let the Interns know when it is time to schedule you and your Intern for the Helpline training. That is a highlight of the class for me as it is such fun for our Interns to learn how to solve a real problem for others with gardening interests.

Next time you enter hours, check on that page, called My Page, for your status. By now, all MCMGs should be "certified active." If you are any other status, or are having problems entering hours, please contact **Emily Arellano** to find out what you may be missing.

Our August Board of Directors meeting will be held in the Small Auditorium at ACES beginning at 10:00 AM, Wednesday, August 7. All members and interns are welcome.

I'm looking forward to catching up with everyone at our August 14 General Meeting. Refreshments start at 9:30 and the meeting begins at 10:00 AM with our speaker, Paul McManus, a professional photographer who will share his particular skills for shooting gardening and other outdoor photographs. Everyone is welcome. Certified MCMGs can count all their drive time and refreshment preparation time with the rest of the time they spend at any regular or called meeting of MCMG. The speakers' time will continue to be entered as CEUs.



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
janehfinley@bellsouth
.net



Looks like a wonderful August is coming up! See you soon!
Carol Williams, President
Mobile County Master Gardeners
251-367-0473

July Riddle: Answer: Morning glory *Ipomoea purpurea*.
Emily Arellano solved the riddle for us.

August Riddle:

When autumn comes, I'm a painter, my leaves turn fiery hues, reds, oranges, and yellows, a spectrum of warm clues. A harbinger of cooler days, in forests I stand tall, A seasonal spectacle, I bring beauty to the fall.

Garden Giggles

Gardening is still good therapy . . . even if you kill everything!

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



Chronicles

by Cindy Findlay

Here we are fellow Master Gardeners, right in the middle of the Summer! Love it or hate it, we are experiencing all 4 seasons this year, warm, hot, hotter, and hottest. We, as Master Gardeners, are always up to the challenge.

Marsha Stolz, Mobile County Master Gardener (MCMG), leads our Dream Garden every single day! She is helped by **Mary Anne Days**, MCMG, overseeing the herb garden, **Glenda Eady**, MCMG, giving tours of our Educational Garden. **Bob Howard**, MCMG is our contact for the Shade Garden and **Catherine Moates**, MCMG keeps "Grandma's Garden" in bloom and works hard to keep it de-weeded (a never-ending fight). Many other MCMG's are seen helping in the various gardens. **Paul Barnes**, MCMG is seen pulling weeds and helping whenever needed.

Jackie Jenkins, MCMG has been busy with the new Intern class. She and her committee, Janice Walters and Sharon Claseman, worked hard pairing the Mentors with the Interns, mailing out the letters to both Intern and Mentors. This year the committee had to add on in person interviews! So, thank you so much, Jackie, for all your hard work putting everyone together and making it all happen.

Thank you, Mentors, for stepping up and giving of your time and experience: Barbara Bingham, Barbara Boone, Janine Burnet, Sharon Claseman, Lisa Davis, Mary Catherine, Faralli, Cindy Findlay, Todd Golomb, Bob Howard, Donna Kelly, Alice Marty, Earl McLaughlin, Catherine Moates, Marion Platt, Beth Poates, Paula Reeves, Carolyn Rooks, Shirley Reynolds, Mary Ann Tomberlin, Nina Ward, and Carol Williams.

Our Corresponding Secretary needs your help!

First: Classes of '22 & '23 birthdays did not get added to our data base. There will be a Sign In Sheet for this at a monthly meeting. By the way, just month and day to be added.

Second: Let someone know if we have a member who is ill, had surgery, had a loved one passing even a pet! We need to be supportive. A card makes everyone smile. But we need to know about it. Let anyone know so word gets around!

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. Or, as always, feel free to call me 251-786-4245.

See y'all soon and remember to plant with love and harvest with joy!



Mark Your Calendars

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

October 10 in Auburn is the day and location for the AMGA Fall Seminar. Great speakers and lunch included with registration.

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. Details will follow.

The Real Gardeners of Mobile County say...

...imagine our own virtual reality program in progress. Common and readily available drought resistant perennials that survive the sizzle and won't fizzle are Yarrow, Petunias, Agastache, all Sages, Lamb's Ear, Purple Coneflower, and Monarda.

They also say that IF you find cicada carcasses, add them to your compost bin because their chitinous shells contain nitrogen which will enhance soil microbes. Payback for all that noise!

Hurricane Season Is Baa-aack! Let the Cleanup Begin!

Part 2: After the Storm

Editor's Note: 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. Added is a photo of the names for 2024 storms. Let's hope we don't make it to the

W's.

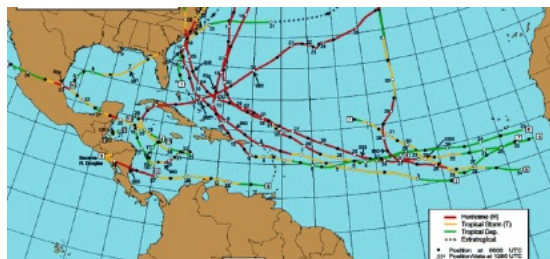
After a long stormy day or night, here's what we as gardeners need to do in our landscape after the storm has passed:

- Assess any damage in the landscape. Remember safety first!
- Look for uprooted plants and fallen branches, removing potential hazards.
- **Look for downed power lines.**
- Report power outages. In fact, it would be helpful to put the power company phone # in your contacts list prior to the storm.
- Remove crushed plants if it is determined they are beyond repair, otherwise try to replant roots. Bent plants may need a stake.

Let's all hope those storm names are not needed--or at least the storms blow in the other direction. (Note Diva is not in the list.) Remember to have a beverage and a treat on hand for those Alabama Power heroes!

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:
Southern Living, Meaghan Overdeep, June 2024
IF/IFAS Extension/Storm damage
NOAA Storm Report 2024



Out My Window

by Debra Morrow

Editor's Note: This is another piece from Debra who again has gifted us by gazing out a window in her home to match love of nature and emotion. By the way, the name Harriett appropriately has Germanic origins meaning "home ruler."



Harriett

Two years ago, I wanted to replace the front porch lamps: two wall ones on either side of the front door and one on the ceiling. They worked fine and were attractive. But I wanted something to compliment my simple Arts and Crafts style house. I looked for months among my virtual options: too expensive, too ornate, too big, along with a few maybes. One of the maybes became the best option, but the company did not sell ceiling lamps. I bought the wall lamps anyway and began looking elsewhere for a replacement ceiling lamp.

One year later, I still had the same ceiling lamp. Over the months, it was easy to ignore since I was going to replace it. The lamp grew ghastly: covered in pollen, plant debris, gecko droppings, and insect litter. My not finding a replacement right away, however, gave me pause for a more practical option. I could remove the lamp without replacing it. The porch, roughly eighty-four square feet, was well lit by the two wall lamps. Settled. The ceiling lamp would become a donation. That never happened either. The ceiling lamp became my nemesis: mattered and crusty, cyclops's metal eyelids and forty-wattage orbit squinted everyday at me.

Last year, at about six o'clock one morning, I opened the front door's sheers to see the day on my short street. The cyclops squinted. But the sun refocused me on the silken strand from a spider. The strand's attachment was from the grayed wooden theater bench to the cyclops. About a yard and a half from bench to clops. I had to know more. She was there...on cyclops's eyeball! Eight claws and long legs folded, tucked, and resting under a dim gray wad of spideryness. On my garden porch!

I prepared to watch her weave her web that evening. I worked out a time range based on when I had entered the front door the previous evening and she and her web were not present. Right before dusk, I made my way to the window. Done! The web was done! An artistry of knots, loops, zigs, and zags. A tatted lace textile for my Arts and Crafts cottage – taking up almost half of the right side of the porch...in front of the mailbox. I had missed the weaving. But the artist was present. An orb weaver – waiting for the cornucopia of moths, mosquitos, and gnats. The next evening, I peeked about an hour before dusk. There she was, unfolded, stretched out, and hanging from the cyclops's bottom eyelid. I waited. She waited. Two hours. My own cyclops peeking from the sheers had disturbed her. I checked throughout the night before going to bed. No web; and she had not moved. I admired her patience. I apologized to her and went to bed. When nature called about two o'clock in the morning, I checked. Harriett's web was complete. I was relieved. On the third evening, I waited about an hour before dusk, again. I did not peek from the sheers but from the barely opened blinds. I was rewarded. She emerged and jumped from the cyclops with silk in tow and landed on the bench. She anchored to each end of the bench and plant containers, tethering to the cyclops in between each anchor. Twenty minutes later, Harriett had woven a simple, utilitarian, and beautiful web. Each night for about two weeks, Harriett was efficient and effective, respite during the day on the cyclops and anchoring and tethering to it during the night for nourishment.

My garden porch ally – The cyclops winks.

Hibiscus Savvy

by Alice Marty

Editor's Note: Lucky us MGs to read Alice Marty's hibiscus knowledge where she addresses hibiscus hardiness in our area.

Well, how about a hardy hibiscus? Yes, some hibiscuses are hardy in Alabama. Local gardeners have long loved the tropical hibiscus, *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*, seen commonly in southern and central Florida landscapes. The evergreen shrubs with dark, shiny leaves come in many color combinations. Unfortunately, zone 8-9 winters will frequently prove them to not be hardy. Some of us are fortunate to have them planted in microclimates within our gardens where they will survive the cold. Yet it is best to grow them in pots so you can move them inside to enjoy as house plants during the winter months.

Unlike their tropical counterparts, hardy hibiscus, botanically known as *Hibiscus moscheutos*, is more cold-hardy, vigorous, and long-lasting. They are fast-growing plants up to 8 feet tall and 4 to 6 feet wide. They are close relatives of the tropical hibiscus, but they have much larger flowers. The impressive blooms measure 6 to 12 inches across. They have the largest blooms of any cultivated perennial.

These plants are native to marshy areas of North America. Being herbaceous perennials, they lose their leaves, and the branches die back with the coming of winter. Then, the plants resprout from the ground the following spring. They are root-hardy to zone 4 with some protection.

Hibiscus moscheutos is attractive to hummingbirds, butterflies and bees. So much so that the Rose Mallow Bee (*Ptilothrix bombiformis*) uses its flowers in courtship. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/pollinators/pollinator-of-the-month/rosemallowbee.shtml>

For years, the only hardy hibiscus colors available were white, pink, and red, but over the last two decades, plant breeders have provided new colors and combinations. Mauve, hot pink, and purple combinations with ruffled edges and overlapping petals are now on the market. Hardy hibiscus flowers, though tough, look delicate, resembling crinkly crepe paper. Each exotic bloom lasts only one day, but many open each day over a long blooming season until frost.

The new hybrid varieties show off foliage ranging from bright green to burgundy and almost black. In 2018, 'Summer Carnival,' a dark magenta plant blossom with variegated foliage, was patented by Michigan based breeder Walters Gardens. Once considered too large for some gardens, many of the newer varieties have been scaled down. The two—to three-foot plants are ideal for large pots. Indeterminate is a term usually used to refer to tomatoes. That trait has been bred into newer hibiscus varieties, meaning more blooms from top to bottom of each stem, not just at the tips.

A hibiscus needs a minimum of six hours of sun each day. It can be afternoon sun if it receives supplemental water the first year. Remember, they were marsh plants at one time, yet a well-draining area works best. After being in the ground for a season or two, they can tolerate dry or moist conditions. They are not particular about soil and will grow in most areas with added water-soluble fertilizer. Of course, improving the planting site with aged compost/manure will ensure better growth. Hibiscus work well planted as specimens or interplanted with perennials. Staking should only be needed for the first year. Pinch back new shoots when there are 4 to 6 leaves to encourage better branching. More branches equal more flowers.

Cut dormant, old, stems to three to six inches above ground level in the spring. An important thing to remember: Hardy hibiscus is very late to emerge in the spring. Be patient! They make up for their late start with rapid growth and should bloom from May through October.

The major insect pest of hardy hibiscus is the caterpillar-like larva of the hibiscus sawfly, *Atomacera decepta*. Several of these larvae often feed on the same leaf or plant and can quickly defoliate the entire plant. The least toxic way of eliminating

the sawfly larvae is by picking them off. Find them on the bottom side of the leaves. Neem Oil or Insecticidal soap works, but it must be sprayed on the larva. With eggs hatching daily you will have to be vigilant. The hibiscus sawfly larva is not a caterpillar so Bacillus thuricide BT will not work.

Another pest is the hibiscus gall midge. It causes buds to turn yellow and drop off the plant before opening. The gall midge lays eggs in the blossom end. When the eggs hatch, the larva damage the inside of the bud before falling to the ground to pupate into an adult three weeks later. Picking off and destroying any yellow buds including those on the ground is the first step in controlling the Gall Midge. A systemic insecticide containing Imidacloprid or Spinosad should then control the problem. Always read the entire label before using any insecticides or fungicides.

The primary diseases are leaf spots caused by *Cladosporium*, *Cercospora*, *Phyllosticta*, and other fungi. An effective way to prevent leaf spot diseases is to avoid overhead watering, or at the very least water in the early morning hours so the leaves have a chance to dry quickly. Space out your plants to create better air circulation. Try using a fungicide specifically labeled for hibiscus. These fungi can remain in fallen leaves for up to three years. It is imperative to keep the area under and around plants clear of plant debris.

Source:

<https://www.plantdelights.com/blogs/articles/tips-growing-hardy-hibiscus>



Master Gardener of the Month

by Bob Howard

Next Master Gardener of the Month announced at the August General meeting. Stay tuned! In the meantime, rest, relax, and stay cool.

Crew 22 Camaraderie and Still Making Life Sweeter at Mulherin

June 19 was the date Crew 22 lunched at Hope Farm in Fairhope and toured the container garden. Lunch was enjoyed by **Mary Ann Tomberlin, Lisa Davis, Carolyn Rooks, Paul Ezelle, Carol Mackey, Kathy Deckbar, and Earl Gochey.** **Dominique Kline**, farm manager at Hope Farm, was also present.



Dirt Under Your Nails

Growing Green Beans

Home grown green beans like Blue Lake and Kentucky Wonder varieties are iconic and popular garden vegetables. They are easy to grow, easy to harvest, and nutritious.

Green beans are grown as bush beans or pole beans in our area depending on available garden space. Bush beans need no support while pole beans need support for vining. Beans are sown directly in soil when the soil temperature is at least 55 degrees, requiring 6-8 hours of sunlight.

Now the question of fertilizer. Beans do not require a lot of fertilizer. They are legumes which means that nitrogen is fixed in the soil due to a beneficial relationship with the *Rhizobium spp.* bacteria where the plant receives nitrogen from the bacteria in exchange of sugars from the plant.

These legumes are subject to the typical garden pest problems such as beetles, aphids, and spider mites, however they can be controlled with IPM methods.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Next newsletter addresses brassicas.

Sources:

Legumes and Nitrogen Fixation, Micayla West et al, Aug 2023
extension.uga.edu, July 2022
Photo commons.wikimedia.org

Talk About Tomato Trouble!

No matter what is growing in your garden, a good tomato harvest is the Holy Grail of gardeners. Other veggies are good to have, but bragging rights belong to tomatoes. However, if your tomato harvest is less than brag-worthy, here are a few common reasons why and possible solutions:

1. Blossom end rot-due to lack of calcium in the fruit. After soil testing, add lime.
2. Blossom drop-due to higher temperatures above 85 degrees. Plant where tomatoes receive less afternoon sun and/or use shade cloth.
3. Cat facing-often due to nitrogen level in soil. Perform soil test.
4. Yellow, curling leaves-likely due to fungus, bacteria, or virus. Remove yellowed foliage and do not allow soil to splash on the foliage. If yellowing is advanced, remove plant. Initially consider varieties resistant to these microbes.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:

National Garden Bureau, July 2024

What moth lays eggs to become a tomato horned worm?
The Hawk moth also known as a Sphinx moth is the
tomato grower's nemesis.

Weedonomics

A gardener says: "Hmmm, I don't remember planting this!"

Weeds are a gardening fact of life. No matter how big or small your gardening landscape, container, or raised bed is, weeds are going to eventually show up. A few weeds can be hand-picked easily, but we need an organic way to eliminate a few or a lot of weeds efficiently.

One way to do this to bypass using herbicides like Roundup is a DIY recipe we can cobble together ourselves. Not only is it easy, but it is safe for the environment, does not harm pollinators, is safe for pets and children, and is budget friendly.

What you will need:

4 parts **horticultural vinegar (20-30%)**

1 part water

1 T dish soap (acts as surfactant which reduces surface tension)

Mix and add to a spray bottle. Apply during hot, dry weather, saturating the weeds.

Be careful not to apply on plants you want to grow. Reapplication every 2 weeks

may be necessary on well-established weeds with deep roots. **Note:**

Vinegar=acetic acid. Grocery store 5% vinegar will not work!

A flower falls, even though we love it: and a weed grows, even though we do not love it. -Dogen

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:

BH&G Laura Landers, July 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**. *Note that the Herb Society was **not** involved, and this notification is published here as a correction.* 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



Bugs and Hisses

Beneficial Nematodes

human pathogens. It is good to know these organisms have some *horticultural* value.

Editor's Note: As a laboratorian in a former life, nematodes were NOT considered beneficial. Quite the contrary, as these parasites are considered

Who knew that a nematode (*Heterhabditis spp.* or *Steinernema spp.*) could be considered a beneficial organism in the garden or anywhere! Usually, the pathogenic nematodes get the highlight, but these days there's an alternative nematode that forages on garden pests.

Using beneficial nematodes has been gaining popularity because it is considered an organic, chemical-free way of combatting pests, notably grubs in the soil.

Here's how beneficial nematodes work: the adult stage of the nematode enters the body of the host. Inside the nematode grow bacteria which release chemicals, killing the host insect such as a grub. The nematode feeds on the insect host until totally consumed.

There are several ways of procuring beneficial nematodes such as gels or granules, but spraying after receipt is the most efficient method. There are any number of vendors that sell beneficial nematodes to home gardeners. However, this is where research and seller investigation should be done before purchase.

Application in the South is most effective in warm weather. Note that purchase of beneficial nematodes can be costly because nematode growth and prep is labor intensive, so contacting Extension for application information is recommended.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source: [aces.edu/resources/Crop Production](https://aces.edu/resources/Crop%20Production), July 2021
Garden Paths, Dr. Helga George, June 2021
This Is My Garden, Don Hickey June, 2024



The Kudzu Konundrum: Good Intention, Bad Outcome

Editor's Note: This is the first article in a series focusing on invasive species.

Kudzu is the green vine that has been said to consume the South. How did this plant arrive here to be that ubiquitous green vine everywhere in our landscapes, roadsides, and fields?

Native to Asia, Kudzu, pronounced kuzu (koo-zoo) in Japanese with

scientific name *Pueraria montana var. lobata*, came to the U.S. via the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition where it was touted as a wonderful ornamental plant with sturdy vines.

However, it was not solely the appearance that interested the horticultural world. Kudzu was considered a placebo to fields losing soil in the Dust Bowl and as a food source for cattle.

Kudzu has large leaves with 3 lobes, is a woody vine, and is a member of the legume and pea family. The sturdy woody vines have tuberous roots that with time can extend down as far as 12 feet. The vines like loamy soil, but they will actually grow in any soil type or terrain, flat or hilly.

The South has all the elements for rapid kudzu growth up to 1 foot per day: soil, temperature, and humidity. Years later after its introduction, kudzu was recognized as the nuisance it has become. 13 states have kudzu listed as a noxious weed. In Alabama alone it has been estimated to cover 250,000 acres.

Kudzu is hard to control. Some farmers actually allow cattle to forage 3-4 years which works as a control to some degree. Chemicals are usually not stated here in this newsletter as a horticultural control, but this may be the last and best deterrent method to employ. Contacting Extension is recommended.

Yes, a good intention but a bad outcome.

Compiled by Terra Firma

Source:

The Nature Conservancy, August 2019

ces.mcsu.edu

aces.edu/resources/ History of Kudzu, Loewenstein, et al, March, 2022



From the Greenhouse

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

This is more a reminder than a new tip, trick or hack. The reminder is how to take care of your garden tools because quality tools are expensive, so it pays to apply a little TLC to keep them in good condition ready to use again as needed.

Here is what you need: a large bucket, sand, and motor oil, even used oil, (Remember Diva tries to save \$\$ whenever possible.)

Fill the bucket about 2/3 full and add about 1/2 qt oil. Mix well. Plunge tools with edges into the sand/oil mixture until clean. Besides cleaning this process assists in keeping edges sharp, making this a win-win.

Compiled by Dirt Diva



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



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

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