

The Dirt | September, 2024

Mobile County Master Gardeners



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The President's Message

by Carol Williams

Dear Mobile County Master Gardeners,

We are gladly welcoming in September with its cooler and maybe drier mornings. I hope you are planning your fall garden. If you aren't sure what to plant, check out the app "SOW" available in the Apple App store or Google Play. Currently their recommendations are limited to planting seeds in anticipation of cooler weather, allowing us to set out our home-grown plants then.

Prattville, Alabama is the site of next year's AMGA Conference, April 3-5. They have invited the creator, host and executive producer of the Emmy award-winning PBS Series, *Growing a Greener World*, Joe Lamp'l. Several of our Board members declare that he is a very talented and knowledgeable speaker so this should be well worth it. Of course, several other notable speakers will also be featured. Watch for registration details in the email with the winter AMGA *Pathways*.

A sign-up sheet and registration form will be available at our September 11 General Meeting for the Annual Bus Trip. This year we're going to the Crosby Arboretum located in the Pearl River Basin near Picayune, Mississippi. This nature conservatory is operated by the Mississippi State University Cooperative Extension System. The date of the trip is Wednesday, October 23, 2024, leaving ACES about 8:00 AM and returning about 4:00 PM. The last time that we toured this nearby Arboretum was 2009 (Thank you, Jo Ann Hayes.)

Registration is open until September 16 for the AMGA Fall Seminar on Thursday, October 10 at Auburn University. Make your plans early and carpool. I have registered. It's only \$40, including lunch. Remember that Botanic is only 15 minutes away in Opelika for great plant shopping and food. Let me know if you are interested in carpooling.

The Mobile County Extension Office, with the Alabama Extension state office, is working on a campaign called Discover Alabama Extension so every resident hears about ACES and what they offer. If you have Facebook, ACES is asking that you "like" the Mobile office page and encourage others to as well. Open Facebook and in the search bar type *Mobile County - Alabama Extension*. This will open the Mobile County ACES page. Click on "follow" and today, August 25, you can click on "like" a picture of Master



Gardeners working Saturday at the Kensington Health & Rehab Center. Thank you, MCMGs!

We all enjoyed the August General Meeting with the manager of Calagaz Camera, **Paul McManus**. He shared his photographs of flowers in Mobile Botanical Gardens that he shot with his cell phone camera. Then we had a great question and answer session with Paul encouraging us to use our cameras more often. They are so convenient and can now produce excellent pictures. Of course, Calagaz is eager to print any keepsakes that you send them. Thank you to all who moved furniture to accommodate our membership in a smaller than usual venue. Kudos to **Cindy Findlay** and **Lydia Criswell** for your leadership.

The September Board of Directors meeting, open to all members and interns, will begin at 10:00 AM Wednesday, September 4 in the ACES Small Auditorium. Interns are welcome to attend to get those required BOD hours. (A note to **Interns** and **Mentors**: the calendar is now available in the office to schedule time required for training and working on the Helpline. Sign up as soon as possible as spaces fill quickly.)

Wednesday, September 1, our September General Meeting will be held in the ACES Large Auditorium with refreshments at 9:30 AM and meeting at 10:00 AM. Our outstanding Bill Fink, MCMG, will be speaking on fall gardening. He always has unique answers so come with lots of questions. Don't miss another General Meeting! We always learn so much and enjoy being in the company of gardeners!

Carol Williams, President
Mobile County Master Gardeners
251-367-0473

(No one sent in a guess for August. If you have a suggested answer for the following riddle, email your name and the answer to Carol Williams at readingweeder72@hotmail.com. If you're correct, you'll win 2 raffle tickets at our September meeting. You must be present to win!)

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.

(Hint: Unfortunately, this plant rarely thrives in our humid and hot weather, but we all enjoy it when we can.)

Garden Giggles

Summer wife to husband: I love you, mower and mower.
Encouragement for a new gardener: Just romaine calm.

See email above to answer.



Chronicles

by Cindy Findlay

August found us busy as our little friendly bees! August 1st, **Jackie Jenkins**, once again welcomed the 2024 Intern Class with a Meet & Greet Brunch. The event was a resounding success! As always, Jackie pays such attention to details like the food, decorations, and take aways. Everything on point! Both interns and mentors enjoyed the morning.

The Intern Class 2024 has 22 interns and began on Aug 8 with Soils and Soil Testing! **Jack LeCroy** put them right to work! We also have a member "auditing" the class, **Genie Schneider**, MCMG class of 2012. Welcome back Genie!

Our Board of Directors met on the FIRST Wednesday Aug7, with a full agenda. All are welcome and invited to every BOD. The Monthly General Meeting was held on the SECOND Wednesday Aug 14, we were all very cozy in the small auditorium, but we made it work. Jane Finley and I have been working on some new shirt colors, long sleeve, hats, and a patch for order. This was a result of the survey that was sent out. Pre orders only.

We had 9 Birthdays in August so Happy Birthday to you! Please keep our members who are sick, going through something we may not know about, or we just haven't seen in a while, in your thoughts and prayers!

Another word about the Intern classes. Their schedule is out. If there is a topic you want to revisit, or if you want to come visit the class, come in and listen. You will be delighted at what you will learn! On Aug 22, Penny Smith from the Auburn Experimental Station, came to give the lecture on Propagation. She is amazing and has such knowledge! Anyone in attendance was lucky to have been there that day!

On Saturday, Aug 24, a community workday at Kensington Health & ReHab Center in Downtown was held from 9-11am. The goal that day was cleaning out old plants from hanging containers and cleaning small raised beds from around the building. All who showed up to assist brought tools and implements to get the job done. Thanks to all that attended...I have no names at print time.

Have a safe and Happy Labor Day!



Mark Your Calendars

Bob Howard says plan ahead for a MG bus trip to Picayune, MS. Crosby Arboretum on October 23. Yay! Road trip!
More details to follow.

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. Theme at the
conference is "Fountains of Knowledge." Details will follow.

AI in the Garden



Editor's Note: Hardly a day goes by that you don't read about an AI update in either print media, TV news, or on the internet. Is AI used in home gardening? Read on...

Artificial Intelligence or autonomous intelligence commonly known by the acronym AI, is defined by Mr. Webster as follows: the capability of computer systems or algorithms to imitate intelligent human behavior. In other words, AI deals with computers completing tasks that were previously only performed by humans.

AI known as "Weak AI" has been around for some time. Most of us are at least aware of, and probably have used, this AI such as Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa, and Google's Assistant. Even the Picture This plant ID app is in this group. "Strong AI" is the AI that is under the most scrutiny. This AI is referenced as Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini, and OpenAI's ChatGPT. (Note here that this newsletter, with the Constant Contact platform, offers the Copilot option which this writer has not employed, nor will it be-as long as brain cells continue to fire! This may change moving forward, but that is the current thought.)

For the home gardener there are AI apps that can provide information especially useful for a novice gardener: suitable plants for the space, garden layout, and growth requirements. Keep in mind some of these AI apps require a fee and this same information is available from other sources. Check out your app store for further information.

The real AI impact is at the higher education level. Many universities across the nation which offer agricultural curricula are putting AI in place as major course work. **Every** university in the South with an agriculture curriculum in place is utilizing AI in course work, research, and actual field work. (See source list) Example: use of AI and drones in the field identifying weeds and appropriate post emergent, soil moisture, and general crop growth. Keep in mind here that AI is an especially valuable tool for commercial crops that will increase food production and prepare students for fast-changing jobs.

In summary, AI is here to stay with more agricultural applications in development and use every day from the higher education level on down. AI use in the home landscape is available but limited. Be mindful of AI content as it tends to be generic, however, stay tuned, home gardeners, more is coming our way!

Compiled by Terra Firma

Sources:

aaes.auburn.edu
msstate.edu.ai-driven-innovations
agriculture.auburn.edu>feature
ifas.ufl.edu>artificial intelligence
lsuagcenter.com
research.uga.research
education.ky.gov>tech
TechRadar, Lance Ulanoff, April 2024



A Houseplant We Can All Enjoy

Yes, the heat outside is oppressive. So, for a change let's focus on a houseplant inside enjoying the AC like us.

African violets, *Saintpaulia ionatha*, and a member of the Gesneriaceae family originated in Africa along the Tanzanian

and Kenyan borders.

Violets enhance any home decor and fortunately are easy to grow and propagate. Violets grow well in a potting mix of equal parts of peat, perlite, and vermiculite. If more violets are wanted, there are a couple ways to propagate them, and both begin with cuttings best done in spring and summer, although anytime would actually work. To take a cutting, lightly water the violet first, and using a sterile knife, cut a stem in a 45-degree angle about 2 inches long.

- Place cutting in water and set in indirect light.
- Place cutting in the same potting soil as described above. Then place in a plastic bag for humidity in indirect light.

Both methods will take about 3-4 weeks for roots to develop and a little longer for small leaves to appear. Pack your patience and you will be rewarded with additional violets in shades of pink, white, or shades of purple.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:
Mackenzie Nichols, BH&G, October 2023

Welcome 2024 Interns!

Twenty-two new 2024 Master Gardener interns welcomed on Aug 8 at a catered luncheon are currently in classes every Thursday with **Jack LeCroy** and state extension personnel performing training. It will be interesting to see group projects, how volunteer hours are accumulated, and especially those 5-minute presentations. Stay tuned for intern bios to be sent out to the membership soon.

Welcome interns!

Helpful Horticultural Acronyms

AAS-All American Collection

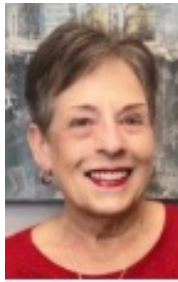
TDN-Total Digestible Nutrients

GH-Greenhouse Grown

GRF-Grafted

BR-Bare Root

DT-Drought Tolerant



Master Gardener of the Month

by Bob Howard

Our Master Gardener for the months of June and July was introduced to gardening by her late husband. Although she lived in a rural area, she considered herself a “city girl” until her boyfriend whisked her off to a small farm where they raised and shared crops with family and friends. She became an accomplished cook, canner and preserver.

In 2018, and honoring a long-time dream, Lydia Criswell took the Master Gardener class and began a new phase of her gardening experience. During the intervening years, Lydia has accumulated 1,850.25 Lifetime Service Hours – with 600 hours so far in 2024. That total will continue to grow as Lydia is now very involved with the Intern Class for this year.

Congratulations, Lydia Criswell, our Master Gardener of the Month.

Crew 22 Update

A "persevering and persistent posse" is an alliterative phrase that describes Crew 22, members of the 2022 MG class that continue to make lives in group settings richer. Mulherin Home was a recipient of the group's landscape enhancement. A recent luncheon and tour took place at "The Retreat" behind Saad's Health. Their next project is under consideration, and you can rest assured that the usual suspects will be involved: **Paul Ezelle, Carol Mackey, Earl Gochey, Carolyn Rooks, Kathy Deckbar, Mary Ann Tomberlin, Patti Hicks, and Lisa Davis.** Crew 22, we are so proud of all you do!



Dirt Under Your Nails

Growing a Brassica: Broccoli

Broccoli, *Brassica oleracea*, a member of the mustard Brassicaceae family,

is a form of cabbage grown for edible flowerets and stalks. Broccoli is a cruciferous vegetable related to cauliflower, cabbage, Bok choy, kohlrabi, and greens like collards, mustard, and turnips.

There are 3 types of broccolis: Broccoli Raab, Heading broccoli, the most consumed broccoli, and Baby broccoli.

All broccoli types grow best in cooler seasons in most regions. Choose areas in the garden with well-draining soil where this plant has not been grown before to decrease the possibility of previous pests and disease. Broccoli grows well in full sun or partial shade. A soil test prior to planting is recommended to ensure N-P-K is adequate. Broccoli appreciates soil moisture, so mulch, mulch, mulch.

Pests love broccoli even more than humans. Aphids, cabbage loopers, cabbage worms, and white flies are among frequently observed broccoli pests. Contact Extension for best pest control.

Gardeners can initiate some control by planting companion plants which attract pollinators and beneficial insects. Suggested companions for broccoli are rosemary and marigolds, both of which exude scents NOT liked by many insects. Even planting carrots is helpful because broccoli and carrots occupy different soil levels.

Broccoli, besides offering nutrition (amino acids, antioxidants, vitamins B and C) is a tasty veggie steamed, roasted, and added to soups and casseroles.

It will be cooler soon, so let's grow some broccoli!

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Sources:

National Garden Bureau, July 2024

Patricia Shannon, Southern Living, July 2024

Reviewing the Goth Gardening Trend

The plant growing trend known as Goth gardening is still alive and gaining traction. Originally appearing as popular in the 90's with dark clothing and visibly blackened makeup, the Goth movement has transitioned from human appearance to the plant world.

Goth gardens usually include plants flowering with intense, saturated colors. Black, purple, and burgundy roses, pansies, and dahlias are often chosen along with intensely colored foliage such as heucheras, black elephant ears, and ornamental grasses with dark tones.

Along with dark flowers, decor also lends itself to the Goth aesthetic. Stones, rusty implements, and vintage outdoor furniture adds to Goth style.

Goth gardening may fit your personality. Adding a few plants and decor in this style may awaken your inner Goth.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:

BH&G, Christianna Silva, Jan 2024

Kudos to Jacob Kelley

Extension Agent Jacob Kelley was interviewed Aug 15



by Fox10 News about the current army worm infestation in Alabama crops. His expertise regarding this pervasive pest invasion due to seasonal, dry, hot weather was relevant and newsworthy to the farming community as well as home gardeners. Good job, Jacob!

Speaker's Bureau Update

Saturday, Aug 17, Master Gardener **Theodore "Ted" Atkinson** (2023) spoke to the Watershed and Wellness summit about home gardening.

Like Ted, 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

Crabgrass

Crabgrass, *Digitaria sanguinalis*, is a summer annual weed, and is a landscape nuisance much maligned by gardeners and homeowners. Because the lower stems branch out, the weed earns its name because it mimics the appearance of crab claws.

Despite the nuisance factor, crabgrass dies off after the first frost. But during its active life cycle, it reproduces mainly by seeds which germinate spring through summer when the soil temperature is at least 55 degrees for 3 consecutive days.

Prior to observing crabgrass, apply a preemergent herbicide. Numerous products are available but contact local Extension for a recommendation. Later application of a post emergent before seeding occurs may also be recommended. If crabgrass hasn't taken over the entire lawn or hardscape, hand pulling is doable, especially if the soil is moist. Keep the lawn at a medium height for best results.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:
extension.umd.edu/resource/crabgrass

Gone Bananas?

Oh, no! Peanut butter's good friend may be in trouble. About 5 years ago banana plantations in Latin America noted that banana production was slowing down due to a fungus which previously was confined to Asia and Australia. The fungus commonly known as Panama disease is identified as *Fusarium oxysporum f. sp. cubense*.

This fungus is infecting the largest group of bananas grown commercially,

Cavendish bananas. Once identified, the soil contains the fungal spores and will be unusable for years as long as the spores are present.

Cavendish bananas are consumed globally, so unless a solution is found, this banana may become extinct. What is being done to date? One potential solution being studied at U. of Maryland is genetically engineering an antifungal protein from another soil bacterium, *Bacillus amyloliquefaciens*.

Bananas are delicious and nutritious providing vitamins, fiber, and good carbs. Let's hope that Panama disease can be controlled soon so Elvis' favorite food combo is always available.

Compiled by Terra Firma

Source:
NIH News, Sept 2019
umd.edu/project7639



Bugs and Hisses

Dragonflies

Editor's Note: Move over, Cicada! There's a new bug in town, and it's heading South! Not a bad thing, though. Read on...

Preying on mosquitoes, flies, and other small insects, dragonflies, *Anisoptera sp.*, can catch these insects while in flight often near bodies of water.

Entomologists say that dragonflies migrate in swarms July through October from Canada to the northeast and then on to the Gulf Coast and Mexico. Migration is spurred on by breeding, and in addition, weather can initiate migration, especially if there is a lot of atmospheric air movement such as remnants of tropical storms.

Dragonfly facts:

- Dragonflies are estimated to have evolved over 300 million years.
- There are approximately 5,000 known species of dragonflies.
- In their larval stage, dragonflies are aquatic.
- At the end of the larval stage, dragonflies crawl out of water, the exoskeleton emerges, and wings emerge and dry out. They are ready to fly!
- The head of a dragonfly is nearly all eye which gives the insect vision from all angles.
- One species of dragonfly called a globe skimmer migrates the longest of any insect, 11,000 miles across the Indian Ocean and back. Frequent Flyer!

Dragonflies are often depicted in artsy, crafty settings, but all in all, an amazing beneficial insect to be appreciated at your next sighting.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:
aces.edu.resource/dragonfly, McQueen, Ray, and Smith, Oct 2018

Master Gardeners Say Spring Isn't the Only Planting Season

Spring has passed and summer will soon do the same. So, is it too late to plant and harvest vegetables and flowers? No, it is not, and, in fact, there are reasons why the fall months offer gardening advantages.

- Cooler temps for plants and gardeners.

- Warm soil allows quick root growth before soil freezes in climates that freezing always or even infrequently occurs.
- Rain occurs frequently-we hope.
- Fewer pests and diseases.
- Head start for large flower blooms.

Regarding fall planting Master Gardener **Leslie Maycock** agrees wholeheartedly and in her own words says, "The bug pressure is much less AND it's cooler." These two reasons alone are reason enough to consider a fall garden. Leslie's planting tips are to prep soil before planting with compost and Black Cow. In addition to more tomatoes, Leslie plans on growing celery, garlic, kale, and carrots. Of course, Leslie keeps her eye on frost dates.

Let's follow Leslie's lead and try a garden in the alternative autumn months!

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source:

Stephen Winterfeldt, Wayside Gardens



From the Greenhouse

Gardening ABCs

Forest Bathing-originating in Japan, this is taking the opportunity to walk in the outdoors, a forest, or even your own backyard.

Gardening vs horticulture-the former is the practice of growing and the latter is the science of growing.

Dioceous-male and female flowers are found on separate plants. A male and female plant are required for pollination. Example; ginkgo.

Damping Off-decay of young seedlings at soil level after fungal attack.

Foliar Fertilizing-application of fertilizer to leaves.

No Till-no further tilling of soil after initial tilling.

Vermicomposting-process of worms converting organic materials into worm castings.

Xeriscaping-use of low maintenance plants which replace lawn grass capable of growth without large amounts of water.

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.

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