



## Reflections of a New Master Gardener



Ron Bashant works on his lawn and garden at his new house in Waverly.

by Ron Bashant, MG Class of 2012

I'm a new, card-carrying Master Gardener... just received my badge and certificate! What a journey! I have reflected often on those weeks of completing requirements of the Alabama Master Gardener Course. The course, conducted in Lee County by Mr. Chuck Browne, began in February 2012. As I think about the time since then, I'm continually struck by how much I got out of the course... especially those things not listed in the syllabus! As daunting BUT useful as the academics were, it's not the academics of the course that have been my most vivid memories. What I remember most and continue to enjoy to this day are the people I met, the places in the Auburn-Opelika area I saw for the first time and the experiences I had volunteering in and about the community. These wonderful prizes have been valued and unexpected benefits of my journey to Master Gardener.

Last winter, as I signed up for the LCMGA program, I expected to receive useful information in course work that would help me with my new lawn and garden. We had just moved into the new house we had built in Waverly the previous year... complete with newly planted landscaping. I hoped the LCMG course would help me not only maintain what I had, but also help me develop the landscape into a showplace!

Having been in the Air Force for 26 years of moving around followed by 17 years of teaching high school and middle school science in Europe, I never had time to make a long-term investment in a lawn and garden. I would need plenty of help learning to garden properly. I envisioned the LCMG course providing the expertise, skill and confidence to take on my new garden.

I would have many surprises, though, as I went through the classes held in the Lee County Extension classroom. The first "awakening" I would have was the people taking the course with me. Rather than being aloof personalities, serious gardeners and everyone knowing each other, it was just the opposite. We were all different people from different backgrounds with a broad spectrum of knowledge and experience in gardening and very social. We shared a love of gardening, a desire to learn and genuine interest in each other. In our class we have so many wonderful and interesting people... retired, semi-retired, self-employed, spouses, singles and parents of school-age children.

As a result of our joint friendliness, we decided as a class to share the duty of preparing lunch a couple of times during the class. These lunches turned out to be absolutely outstanding home-cooked specialties. We always had enough for the instructors and Extension staff who ate with us. What fun! These lunches brought us together as a class. In fact, as we spent these times completing our volunteer hours and hours on the dreaded Help Line, we became very close friends. We continually encouraged each other and gave feedback on our various gardening and volunteer experiences. We are planning our first class reunion in November just to catch up on our individual lives "after classes."

Another real surprise from the Master Gardener experience has been learning about the wonderful gardens, public parks and garden-related programs in the Auburn-Opelika area. The volunteer part of the MG

*(Continued on page 8)*

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Master Gardeners are encouraged to submit articles, ideas, notices. Please send materials to:

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### Up & Coming Events

- Nov 5, 5-6pm, Rouse Life Sciences Bldg, Rm 112, Native Plant Workshop & Sale. For info contact Dee Smith at 334-844-5770.
- Nov 7, 11:30am, Extension office, Monthly Meeting. Brown bag lunch. Program: Decorating Birdhouses with Barbara Whatley.
- Nov 9, 11am-1pm, Extension office. Holiday Open House. Crafts, baked goods & canned items for sale. Register by noon Nov 5 to display your homemade items by calling 334-749-3353. Refreshments by the Lee County Farm & City Committee.
- Dec 7, 11:30am, Extension office, Monthly Meeting. Brown bag lunch. Program: Melanie Constance on Fruit & Vegetable Carving.
- Jan 11, 2013 (Friday), 6-9pm, Greystone Manor, corner of E Magnolia and Debardeleben St, Auburn, Monthly Meeting. Bring finger foods. Wine is permitted as are spouses or guests.
- Jan 25-27, 2013, Callaway Gardens, 27th Annual Southern Gardening Symposium. Speakers, workshops, marketplace, plant and garden items, auctions. Fee. For info call 706-663-5153 or email [education@callawaygardens.com](mailto:education@callawaygardens.com).
- Apr 15-17, 2013, Florence, "JAZZ Up Your Garden," 2013 AMGA State Conference. For info: [www.amgaconference.org](http://www.amgaconference.org).

## Notes from the President

*by MG President Dennis Pinkard, MG Class of 2007*

I have been traveling frequently on my motorcycle during this fall season. One of the trips was related to my duties as a Master Gardener. I attended the Alabama Urban Forest Association Conference in Orange Beach. While there I won a 3-gallon fringe tree during a door prize question-answer period. Luckily, other Auburn folks were there who hauled it back for me. It is now safely planted in my backyard among the native azaleas.

It is hard to believe that we are headed to the winter season, and another year for most of our gardening has passed. That is unless you have lots of planting or transplanting of ornamentals planned.

For this, our last newsletter of the year, we need to reflect on our achievements. We can look back on the year 2012 of LCMGA and be proud of the many accomplishments: Our newly elected officers began a two-year term and have worked exceptionally well together as servant leaders; our membership grew to an historic high level; our three major gardens have all dramatically improved and have project funds that will permit continued improvement; we implemented our form of project management; we had our most successful Garden Tour ever; we launched an LCMGA website; we gained ground with our mulch sales; we scrutinized our finances and approved an annual budget, providing us our best ever look into the future; we implemented a Friends of LCMGA class of membership; we donated and planted trees around the area to celebrate 30 years of Alabama Master Gardeners; we implemented three standing committees, Project, Caring, and Budget; and we mentored and initiated the most advanced and well-prepared Master Gardener class any of us can remember.

During this year we have experienced turn over in key areas of board membership and project leadership. It is characteristic of a good organization that we can replace leaders without losing momentum.

While we have implemented processes to solve many of our organizational issues, we need to look to the future and continue to innovate and improve our processes, grow our friendships, simplify and eliminate wasteful activities, embrace change where needed, create new ways to support our mission, grow our future leaders and recruit and mentor prospective new members. Your board will continue as servant leaders, and we encourage you to provide us your ideas.

Thank you for your commitment and support to the LCMGA!

Let's grow together,  
Dennis

## Prolonging the Tomato Growing Season into the Fall

by Chuck Browne *Chuck Browne*

A couple of weeks ago, the Alabama Cooperative Extension System's Horticulture Program Planning team met to review and evaluate last year's programming, as well as develop a work plan for the upcoming year. One of the more successful series, which has been taught statewide for the last few years was the "Homegrown" workshops featuring produce like blueberries, backyard fruit, backyard veggies and tomato growing

The tomato is the most popular garden vegetable (some may argue fruit) grown in America. Our series included a seed-starting workshop in February followed by an advanced follow-up workshop in July. The thought was that we could address diseases, insects, disorders and any other problems encountered while trying to produce tomatoes. We also added a blind taste test component which proved to be one of the most enlightening sessions in the courses I attended.

I've heard Dani Carroll say on many different occasions "I don't want the first tomato of the season...I want the last one." I agree. Actually, I want both. But in reality, it's much easier to have the last ones if a few gardening adjustments are made.

With all our diseases and insects, it is difficult to carry a spring planted tomato plant into the fall. It's not impossible, but it is hard to do. It is much easier to plant a "fall crop" in June or July. These fruit will mature in September and October.



Four fall tomato varieties from Chuck's garden: La Roma, Yellow Pear, Solar Fire and Brandywine

Photo by Chuck Browne

Begin your seeds in late May for your fall crop. This is also a good plan for peppers as well. A good rule of thumb is to plant fall tomatoes by the 4th of July. This is usually peak season for vegetable production, and it's hard to motivate yourself to get out there in the heat and plant for fall. However, unless carefully tended, spring planted tomatoes will usually begin "firing up" from early blight. Other diseases such as septoria leaf spot will take their toll. Spider mites and stinkbugs usually have developed high populations by July. All this usually causes me to pull up the early ones to reduce pest populations.

One of the benefits I received from our tomato workshops were fall transplants in July. Around the first of October we began harvesting some of the larger varieties set out in July. The smaller cherry and salad tomatoes started coming in a few weeks earlier.

The average first frost in this area is around the first of November. However, if you can get your fall tomatoes through the first couple of frosts, I've seen them produce fruit well up into December. Despite best efforts, it's

inevitable that the first killing freeze will eventually get them unless they are in a heated greenhouse. That's when you can harvest every single one of the green ones left and store them wrapped individually in newspaper in a box. Choose a cool dark area to allow them to ripen. Hopefully, you can have your own home-grown tomatoes with Christmas dinner or celebrate New Year's with a tomato sandwich.



### Mark Your Calendar 2013 Alabama Master Gardener Conference

April 15-17, 2013 in Florence, AL  
hosted by The Shoals Master Gardeners  
at the Marriott Spa & Hotel

"Jazz" up your garden is the theme for the 23rd state conference. Our speakers will jazz you up with new garden plans and ideas to take home to your garden. Scheduled are James Farmer, Erica Glasener, Walter Reeves, Troy Marden, Daniel Spaulding, Hayes Jackson, David Tomblin and Don Shadow.

Pre-conference events on Sunday, April 14th include a Garden Tour with transportation available to local gardens. Or you may visit Ivy Green, birthplace of Helen Keller and the Buffler Home and see how this community was founded by Germans.

Herb workshops in the early afternoon or maybe a round table discussion with our state leaders and then back to your hotel to relax before we meet you with a local jazz band. Hope to see you April 2013!

## Potpourri # 23

by Dr. William B. Shell, MG Class of 1998

August of 2010, my wife, Dee, and Linda, her friend from Greenville, S.C., leased a condo in Silverthorne, Col., for a month. Silverthorne is located about 50 miles west of Denver at an elevation of 10,000 feet. The purpose in all of this was to escape the August heat of the Southeast. Suzette, my daughter, and I flew out for a week. We all did the same thing this year except our destination was Port Angeles, Wash. Port Angeles is located above Olympic National Park to the west of Seattle. You can cross the Strait of Juan de Fuca and wind up in Victoria, B.C. in Canada. More about that later.

Suzette and I flew direct from Atlanta to Seattle, picked up a rental car and drove two-and-a-half hours to Port Angeles. On the way we stopped off for a Nutty Buddy and arrived after dark on a Wednesday and were greeted with a nice warm supper prepared by Linda and Dee.



After sleeping under a warm blanket, I popped up the next morning and at first light went out and surveyed the horse farm where our house was located. The first thing I ran into was a mama deer and two fawns placidly eating crab apples off of about 12 trees planted in the pasture. Actually, there were three fawns, but the mama deer kept driving the third one away. I assumed it was an orphan. I had the trusty Nikon digital camera and was able to photograph this scene every morning for a week. Later on in the morning, we hopped in the car and drove 15 miles to Hurricane



Ridge in Olympic National Park. Hurricane Ridge has a visitor's center and consists of lots of skiing trails in the winter and many hiking trails throughout the whole year. Lots of wildflowers and meadows provided ample opportunity to photograph. Suzette, Linda and I hiked up the side of a mountain. I hiked about 500 yards and Linda and Suzette completed that trail on up the mountain about 3 miles. On the way up, Linda had slipped and fallen and lost her PB and J sandwich. After we had all returned to the bottom of the trail, down came three guys and one had Linda's PB and J. It took some effort on Linda's part to regain custody of her sandwich, which she ate forthwith.

On Friday we drove to Rialto Beach over on the Pacific Ocean, which was covered with black sand and huge driftwood. Some of the fallen trees had a diameter of more than 10 feet. I had on four layers of clothes and still nearly froze to death (delightfully so).

On Saturday we attended an old-fashioned county fair in Port Angeles. We saw great exhibitions of cows, pigs, hogs, dogs, cats and goats. Also lots of 4-H boys and girls competing on horseback. There also were beautiful exhibits of quilts, afghans, spinning wheels and every type of canned goods under the sun. Lots of food and great people.

On Sunday we drove to the Dungeness Spit, which extends into the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Here again we were able to photograph lots of driftwood and a lighthouse 5 miles up the beach. Also, there were fog-bound islands off the shore covered in trees.

Monday we caught a ferry from Port Angeles across the strait to Victoria, B.C. We photographed many beautiful old buildings before heading out to world-famous Butchart Gardens. There were more flowers than you have ever seen — and more people too. The gardens had their origin in an old Portland cement quarry at the turn of the century. It is composed of about 55 acres and contains 26 greenhouses and entertains more than a million visitors a year. It stays open year round until 11 p.m. and is really worth several visits.



Photos by William Shell

Tuesday morning Suzette and I drove to a friend's Japanese maple garden located on the side of a mountain. We had met Bart and Maryelle Eykeman in England, Belgium, Oregon and Japan at various Maple Society symposiums. Washington State and Oregon are really the mecca for propagating and growing Japanese maples. Nowhere on the planet do they grow better. Bart's garden was really one place I didn't want to leave. I had a great meal and got some great shots of the gardens.

Tuesday afternoon Suzette and I headed back to Seattle via ferry, caught a couple of rooms at the airport and flew out Wednesday morning for Atlanta.

I strongly recommend the great Northwest to visit in the summertime. There is probably no place on the continent that offers more scenic beauty — a real photographer's paradise. I think I will return next year and might not come back.

# GARDENERS GONE WILD

Early on September 27th, an energetic group of Master Gardeners arrived at the Caroline Dean Wildflower Trail. They had responded to the newly initiated Quarterly Volunteer Request, which supports our MG projects by focusing on priority tasks at CDWT, Grandma's Garden and the Kiesel Demonstration Garden. They came with their work gloves and tools and a determination to make a difference.

These 10 gardeners, some small in stature, attacked invasive plants and vines. They dug up pesky privet with picks and shovels. They learned the value of a good-sized weed wrench. At the end of the morning, two very large piles of debris confirmed their hard work. These Master Gardeners had successfully opened up more of the trail area for the September 29th visit from members of the Alabama Wildflower Society. AWS members were bringing wildflowers from around the state to plant in honor of Caroline Dean. The trail looked lovely for their visit with more spaciousness and fewer undesirable trees, shrubs, vines and weeds.

Twice during October, a cross-section of MGs gathered at Grandma's Garden to prepare the space for the Syrup Sopping/Lee County Historical Fair Weekend. Another group responded to the call to get Kiesel Garden Demo Garden spruced up for special events at the park during October including a Thursday music series at the pavilion, Woofstock, weddings and other gatherings that draw visitors who can enjoy and learn from the garden.

The season is winding down now but one more session has been planned for the Caroline Dean Wildflower Trail. Please join us for whatever time you can offer.

— Charlot Ritenbaugh

## CAROLINE DEAN WILDFLOWER TRAIL INVASIVE PLANT REMOVAL WORKDAYS

9 am to 12 pm

Thursday, Nov. 8th and Friday, Nov. 9th

Bring gloves, clippers, and shovel.

We appreciate your support!

Contact information: Billie Oliver  
334-749-2679, billieoliver@gmail.com



Photo by Charlot Ritenbaugh



Photo by Charlot Ritenbaugh

**Top:** Diane Blue tackles a tough vine at CDWT.

**Middle:** Patrick Thompson and Terri Briggs of Davis Arboretum use the weed wrench.

**Bottom:** (l to r): Beth Dorman, Patrick Thompson, Billie Oliver, Linda Nowlin, Dee Smith, Diane Blue, Charlot Ritenbaugh, Becky Large, Terri Briggs & Debbie Hartman.

**Left:** Sarah Fair works on "Grandma" for the fair.



Photo by Becky Large



# Blue Ribbon at the Fair

by Charlot Ritenbaugh,  
MG Class of 2011

Master Gardeners are known to accept unique challenges to secure those precious hours of volunteer service. Kelly Haynes, Billie Oliver, Jane Jones, Deb Hartman, Anne Morgan and Barbara Whatley did just that when they volunteered to create a LCMGA display at the recent Lee County Fair.

After I assisted the 4-H leader with pre-opening activities for the fair in 2011, a LCMGA exhibit at the fair in 2012 became # 7 on my "LC-MGA Actions Status" list. Our Lee County Extension office is vitally involved with the fair each year. It was a no brainer that by providing a booth featuring Master Gardeners we would be supporting the LCES and their hard work.

So in less than four weeks, the above mentioned task force pulled together an idea, divided the tasks, accepted the challenge by Chuck Browne to enter as a competitive display and walked away with a blue ribbon AND \$200 in prize money for our association. Master Gardeners are special. Congratulations to the workers, the supporters, and the association. Job well done!

**Top:** Our prize-winning display.

**Middle:** (l to r) A few of our intrepid crew: Billie Oliver, Kelly Haynes, Anne Morgan and Charlot Ritenbaugh.

**Bottom:** (l to r): Billie Oliver, Bob Ritenbaugh and Anne Morgan work on the poster.



Photo by Kelly Haynes



Photo by Kelly Haynes



Photo by Charlot Ritenbaugh

## Kiesel Demo Garden

by Charlot Ritenbaugh, MG Class of 2011

The Demonstration Garden at Kiesel Park has a long history with the LCMGA. The idea for a demonstration garden started with Chuck Browne and the MG interns in the class of 2000. I seem to learn different things about the garden each week.

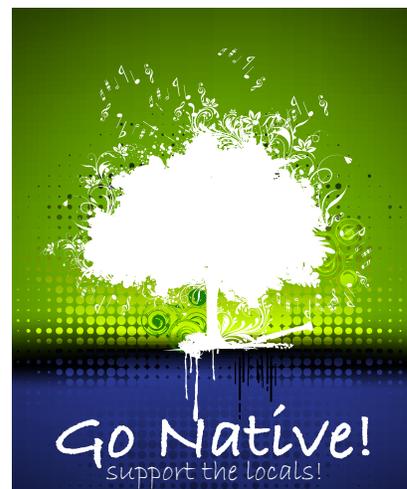
I spent a wonderful afternoon in September with Dr. Bill Shell viewing some great "historical" photographs from the inception of the Demonstration Garden as a very large garden plot. In these photos, the garden was young, and the MGs laboring there were young too!

So many of our members are credited with playing important roles in the development of the Demonstration Garden you can visit today. As this is my first chat about the gardens, I want to thank Carol Womer, who with the help of her husband, Ralph, has provided constant leadership and service to make the LCMGA Demonstration Garden at Kiesel Park a beautiful and peaceful environment for the citizens of Auburn and Lee County.

Barbara Whatley is planting cool season cabbage, brussels sprouts, lettuce and broccoli at the Kiesel Demo Garden veggie plot.

Last week two AU students and ROTC members provided a few hours of community service in the garden. They couldn't miss the dozens of Gulf fritillaries, but stepped back when they saw the same number of spiked caterpillars devouring the leaves of the maypop (*Passiflora*) vine. The bright fuchsia fruits on the beautyberry (*Callicarpa*) caused them to quickly pull out their smart phones to snap some photos. With some guidance they discovered the colors in the muhly grass (*Muhlenbergia*), the fragrance of the ginger lilies (*Hedychium*) and the produce of the pepper plants and fig trees. As is true of most work in service, I believe these young men benefited from their time in the garden as much as the gardens benefited from their work.

A perfect environment for sharing the wonder of our earth is at our fingertips. I look forward to working with all of you to maintain this precious resource.



## Native Plant Workshop & Plant Sale

*Let us help you connect with native Alabama.*

The Davis Arboretum at Auburn University and the student-run Environmental Awareness Organization (EAO) will co-sponsor an informational workshop and offer an opportunity to order native plants for your landscape.

We'll briefly discuss why native plants are so important and what ecological services they provide. We'll look at some of the best plants that are available to order and be on hand to answer questions or assist with ordering.

Monday, November 5th  
5:00pm – 6:00pm  
Rouse Life Sciences Bldg, Room 112  
Corner of College St. & Samford Ave.

For a list of plants available and the order form, check the arboretum website: [www.auburn.edu/cosam/arboretum](http://www.auburn.edu/cosam/arboretum) and click on the first item under News/Announcements.

*(Continued from page 2)*

program took me to an elementary school, 4-H judging and classes in Tallapoosa County. I've worked in some pretty amazing places including private residences.

Finally, I must say something about the wonderful staff and volunteers of the towns, cities, counties and our state who have such a love of gardening and dedication to those of us who enjoy gardening. We are truly blessed to have such a talented group and to have access to so many local resources. The more I have learned from Master Gardening, the more I realized how much I didn't know, but I do have the knowledge to find out the information via the Help Line experience. As uncomfortable as I was in the beginning of working with the Help Line, I now have come to enjoy the experience and have learned a lot about gardening. This positive experience, like so many, is the result of the talent and selflessness of volunteers and organizers.

I have moved now to my next phase of Master Gardening – the Lee County Master Gardeners Association. This phase has brought a whole new set of wonderful people and experiences. But, I continue to marvel at the willingness of people to be helpful and friendly. Although I have garnered much from Master Gardeners, I have been so busy on so many wonderful projects at so many wonderful venues that my own garden looks only marginally better! But, I really understand what's wrong with it. Just kidding.



The new AMG license tag for the front of your car is available for \$20. To purchase, contact Kathy Bass at [amgafundraisingchair@gmail.com](mailto:amgafundraisingchair@gmail.com) or call 256-457-6530.



## Caroline Dean Wildflower Trail

*by Billie Oliver, MG Class of 2012*

Master Gardeners are working steadily to remove invasive plants from the Caroline Dean Wildflower Trail. A special workday on September 27th removed Chinese privet and poison ivy from the area near the new water faucet. Two Auburn University ROTC volunteers also joined in removal efforts.

In recognition of Caroline Dean (seated in the photo), co-Presidents Dr. Richard Cobb and Nancy Cobb and other members of the Alabama Wildflower Society (AWS) brought a diverse collection of wildflowers, native shrubs and small trees, including Georgia aster and Alabama snow-wreath, which are both rare in nature. Dan Felman holly, pyramid magnolia, fringe tree, and kalmia 'Pristine' were planted amid native azaleas and oakleaf hydrangeas. Alabama croton, hearts-a-burstin', calycanthus, viburnum, bottlebrush buckeye, and yellow root were added along the trail. Sunflowers, purple cone flowers, Barbara's buttons, phlox, ferns, dwarf crested-iris and other perennial starts were sprinkled near pathways. Spencer Roy, Suzanne Montgomery, Carolyn Hunter, and Robert Dean worked diligently assisting AWS members with planting while Caroline Dean enjoyed her friends and watched the planting. A super team of Master Gardeners completed the AWS planting on Oct. 8th. Master Gardener mulch surely helped with the trail planting.

A two-day work session for removing invasive plants from other areas of the trail is scheduled for Nov. 8th & 9th. Opelika Parks will contact their volunteer list to see whether they can offer support on those mornings from 9-12. Please bring gloves and tools if you can join the effort.



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