



Leaf Notes

The Newsletter of Lee County Master Gardeners



Winter 2012

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The 2012 Garden Tour Is Coming Soon!



Photo by Jolly Roberts

The Purves Garden with a Mediterranean theme is slated for the 2012 tour.

by Jolly Roberts, MG Class of 2003 & Sarah Fair, MG Class of 2010

Please tell everyone you know to mark their calendars for Saturday, May 19 (10 a.m. to 5 p.m.) and Sunday, May 20 (1 p.m. to 6 p.m.). We're lining up a great collection of gardens for this year's tour.

Thanks to the generosity of local gardeners who have agreed to participate, we are fortunate to be able to share the pleasure and 'know how' of gardening and garden design. As usual, we'll need help to make it a success. It depends on all of us doing our part during this fun-filled weekend.

Our garden tour is so much more than a fundraiser and popular community event. It is the most effective way we have of letting the public know who we are and what we do. And, it gives us the opportunity to strengthen our ties with the community.

We're in the final stages of planning the tour and are currently looking for this year's volunteers to work in the gardens. Each garden will require:

- 2 tour coordinators – who will fill and manage volunteer positions for their gardens, and along with the homeowner,

prepare a garden history and label and list significant plants

- 2 ticket table volunteers for each shift
- 2-3 garden guide volunteers for each shift
- Parking attendants as needed.

Garden coordinators will soon be calling active members to solicit help filling the volunteer schedules. The more participants we have, the more time our own members will have to tour and enjoy the gardens too.

Due to staffing needs, you are encouraged to sign up a good friend or family member to volunteer with you on your shift. Some positions have already been filled. If you have a preference for what you would like to do during the tour, please call us as soon as possible.

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Sarah Fair (478-607-0805) sfair100@yahoo.com.



Photo by Jolly Roberts

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Up & Coming Events

- Feb 17-May 11, Fridays, 10am-3pm, Lee Co. Master Gardener Course, Lee Co. Extension office.
- Feb 18, 8am-12noon, Lawrence Farm, 3327 Moores Mill Rd, Auburn. 1st Mulch Sale; others on Mar 3 & 10, Apr 14 & 21 & May 5 & 12. Contact Toby Hoover for info: 334-275-0102.
- Feb 24, 8:30am-3pm, Palisades Park, Oneonta, Wild Things! II, Native Plant Mini-Conference by Blount Co. MGs. Fee. Contact Sherilyn Osborne, 205-681-9896 for info.
- Feb 25, 9am-12noon, Davis Arboretum, Arbor Day Tree Giveaway. 12:30pm, MG Anniversary Tree Planting. 9am-3pm, Native Azalea & Toomers Oak Seedlings Plant Sale.
- Feb 29, 9am-12noon, Extension office, Seed-Starting Workshop. \$10 fee. Contact the Extension office to register or volunteer: 749-3353.
- Mar 7, 11:30am, Extension office, Monthly Meeting. Brown bag lunch. Speaker: Heath Davis of Plant World on Container Gardening.
- Mar 22-24, Birmingham, "The Magic of Gardening," 2012 AMGA State Conference. For info: <http://209.133.251.124/AMGA-2012Conference.html>.
- March 31, 8am-3pm, Garden in the Park, Opelika Municipal Park. <http://www.keepeope-likabeautiful.com/garden-in-the-park/>.
- May 19, 10am-5pm & May 20, 1-6pm, LCMG 2012 Garden Tour.

Notes from the President

by MG President Dennis Pinkard, MG Class of 2007

Greetings and Happy New Year! As the New Year begins, there are several things to discuss with our association. First, we recently had our semi-annual evening meeting and program at the Lee County Extension office. Fellowship is what our evening meetings are about, and we had a chance to relax and visit while enjoying the excellent potluck dishes. There were about 50 attendees. Following the meal, Jolly and Sarah provided a slide show review with music of our 2010 Garden Tour gardens.

Second, we planted our first of several trees in celebration of 30 years of Master Gardeners in the state. This tree, a persimmon, was planted at the Historic Tree Trail in Auburn's Town Creek Park on the 5th of January. The trail opened in September 2006 as a place for the public to walk and learn about historic trees. Trees planted there have a historic significance, and a plaque provides a story of the importance of each tree. *Diospyros virginiana*, common persimmon, is a medium-sized tree with edible fruit, interesting bark and colorful fall leaves. Those participating in the planting shown in the photograph on page three include Becky Large, Charlot Ritenbaugh, Patrick Thompson, Jolly Roberts, Dennis Pinkard, James Jennings (city employee), Kerry Smith (state program manager), Justin Daughtry (city employee) and Patti Householder. (Not pictured, our photographer Sarah Fair.) We have trees yet to plant at the Opelika Sportsplex and Davis Arboretum.


Third, we are beginning the count down toward our Garden Tour on May 19-20, less than four months away. There is much work to be done, and our coordinators need your help. Jolly and Sarah are working to make this the best tour ever. There is a job suited to any of you who can assist. They will need our support and patience.

Fourth, the Helpline is starting in March this year. Please contact Lynn Bell, our coordinator, at 334-821-7894 or kdbell@bellsouth.net and sign up for several opportunities to respond to callers from across the state. We are just over one month from the start.

Lastly, January rains surely have ended the drought, and this, hopefully, sets us up for a beautiful spring. We'll be back at our projects before we realize it.

See you in the garden,
Dennis

Getting Results with Grafting

By *Chuck Browne* 

One of the great mysteries to people when it comes to horticulture is the subject of grafting. My knowledge and experience with this practice, quite honestly, was somewhat limited to my college course work 26 years ago...until recently.

As many of you know, my wife, Cathy, works in the Auburn Horticulture Department in pecan research. Part of her duties includes grafting new varieties of pecans to existing trees for evaluation. Certain times of the year, that's all she does for weeks at a time. Cathy uses a method called the "four-flap banana graft." It kind of sounds like a cool name for a band. The banana graft works well on pecans. I've tried it on other trees with mixed results. Needless to say, this type grafting is the one I'm now most comfortable with and which has produced the most success.

Our own Dr. William B. Shell has become one of the best grafters anywhere on Japanese maples. He uses a side-veneer graft that utilizes very small scions of wood. I've only tried this method a few times, and it's obvious I need more practice. One take out of 10 was all that succeeded.

A few years ago, Chip East and I began grafting Japanese persimmons. I've had some success using a cleft graft (on larger trees) and the four-flap banana graft. Chip prefers the whip graft, which is used on apples and pears. From our unscientific results, his method seems better.

Last year, I put 11 scions of someone's granddaddy's pear on to a Bartlett, which was purchased at Wal-Mart. All 11 of the grafts took. This will probably never happen to me again.

My point is that for all those years, I knew the concept, but had little success. This is mainly because I never did it regularly, and when I did, success was limited. It was not until I began grafting on a regular basis that I began to see results.

Grafting can seem impossible or at minimum, mysterious. Sometimes they take, other times they won't. Dr. Shell reminds everyone that "you've got to match the cambium of the root stock and the scion." Other tips include work quickly so the cambium does not dry out. Do not touch the cambium layers before matching them up.

Use suitable scions. If they are collected for any length of time, keep them cool, moist (but not wet) and packed in sawdust, cedar shavings or moist newspaper in a Ziploc bag in the bottom of the refrigerator until using. Cathy uses an ice chest with wheels on it when she grafts in the pecan orchard.

We will hold a grafting seminar sometime in April at E.V. Smith Research Station. Date and time has yet to be determined.



Photo by Sarah Fair

A small group gathered at the Historic Tree Trail in Auburn to plant a Japanese persimmon tree along the path. Pictured are Master Gardeners (l to r): Charlot Ritenbough, Patrick Thompson of the Davis Arboretum and honorary MG, Jolly Roberts, Dennis Pinkard, James Jennings (city employee), Kerry Smith (MG Program Manager), Justin Daughtry (city employee) and Patti Householder. Not pictured, Sarah Fair.

Potpourri # 20

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

I just finished reading the latest issue of Garden Pathways, the Alabama Master Gardeners newsletter, and I must say, I am impressed by all the goings on of the Master Gardeners across the state – and also all the hours volunteered. As I read the particular activities presented by some of the chapters, it dawned on me that good things are happening, and not the least are the activities of our local Lee County Master Gardeners.

I received my MG certification in 1998, and I think about the first thing I did was go over to the School of Horticulture, chase down Professor Ken Tilt and ask if I could help propagate Japanese maple seed. I was already working with Harold Johnston at his Japanese maple nursery in Tallassee, bless his departed soul, and I wanted to get some depth into the cultivation and lore of the maple. Ken was delighted to have another pair of free hands, and I was grateful to have the opportunity to work in such an environment.

I gravitated to the Japanese maple garden plot located over behind the arboretum. It must have contained about 100 Japanese maples that had been contributed to the

school about five or so years ago by Harold and planted by Ken's students. I immediately became caretaker of the plot. I continued that up until about five years ago when AU Building and Grounds began digging up the maples and dispersing them across campus. Sad for me, but I am sure great for the campus.

Back to our story. In 2000, Willis Goolsby and I laid out Kiesel Park garden, plowed and harrowed it, then tilled in about a ton of lime. Other members of that famous '98 class pitched in and laid out and planted the best flower and vegetable garden in the history of Alabama (see photos). I think the first year we contributed more than a ton of veggies to the Food Bank. I was in charge of growing the okra, and I must say, I had to engage the services of Jack of beanstalk fame to help harvest the pods, they were so tall and strong and productive. There was Betsy, Jana, Pat, Diane, Milt, Willis, Robert, Barbara and Jaya, and a host of others who contributed. Then, sadly, the weeds nearly took over. Eventually, wonder of wonders, we inherited Carol and Dennis and our present supercharged group. Now Kiesel is exploding with new vigor and on the way to becoming a real show place.

One of our members is Carol Griffin. Carol has a deep feeling that Master Gardening should include continuous instruction, and



Photo by William Shell

she is an instructor extraordinaire in the area of plant propagation. She does it most passionately. I have had the opportunity on a couple occasions to be her right-hand man, and let me tell you, it was a joy. Ready, willing and professional, that's Carol.

I notice that Patrick Thompson from the Davis Arboretum is planning a native azalea group, and I really look forward to that. Lots of excitement!

Finally, a word on the Third Annual Japanese Maple Grafting Party. This is a group of Japanese maple lovers who will meet for the third year in a row at Coach Pat Dye's Quail Hollow Gardens Nursery and hunting lodge the middle of February. Just think for a minute of having the opportunity to hand pick a group of your friends from around the Southeast and meet with them over the better part of three days to exclusively focus on a mutual passion. Good companionship, great sharing of knowledge, good booze for those who partake and don't forget the food. A super steak dinner is planned for Saturday night. Sunday morning we will have a pruning workshop along with a great demo on how to sharpen our grafting knives and maybe a tip or two on photography. Also, we will have the opportunity to roam Coach Dye's 750 acres of lakes, beautiful water features and thousands of Japanese maples. Sunday afternoon, we will somewhat reluctantly go our separate ways, knowing that each new friend is just a phone call or email or facebook page away, ready and willing to share all things Acer.



Photo by William Shell

2012 Master Gardener Course Schedule

- Feb 17 9-10am Orientation
10am-3pm Soils & Plant Nutrition, Dr. Charles Mitchell
- Feb 24 10am-12noon Pesticide Safety, Fudd Graham
1-3pm Composting & Helpline Training, Mallory Kelley
- Mar 2 10am-3pm Fruit Culture, Chip East
- Mar 9 10am-3pm Vegetable Gardening, Shane Harris
- Mar 16 10am-12noon Plant Diseases, Ed Sikora
1-3pm Diseases Lab, Shane Harris
- Mar 23 10am-12noon Care & Maintenance of Ornamentals, Chuck Browne
1-3pm Backyard Wildlife, Roger Vines
- Mar 30 10am-3pm Turf & Lawn Care, Dr. David Han
- Apr 6 10am-12noon Entomology, Dr. Charles Ray
1-3pm Weed Science, Dr. Stephen Enloe
- Apr 13 10am-3pm Plant Physiology, Toby Hoover
- Apr 20 10am-3pm Plant Propagation, Mallory Kelley
- Apr 27 10am-12noon Container Gardening, Dani Carroll-Alexander
1-3pm Backyard Pollinators, Dani Carroll-Alexander
- May 4 10am-12noon Annuals & Perennials, TBA
1-3pm Herbs, TBA
- May 11 10am-3pm Landscape Design & Plant Selection Tour, Kerry Smith

Note: Topics are subject to change.

Veggie Seed-Starting Workshop

Planting vegetables by seed can be very rewarding, and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System is offering a workshop to get you started! The workshops will be held in two different county locations:

Monday, February 27: The Macon County Extension office from 3:30-5:30 p.m. and Wednesday, February 29: The Lee County Extension office from 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

We will provide instruction on everything you need to know to start your veggie garden by seed. You will learn about timing, soil selection, seed depth, lighting, humidity, fertilizer, seed storage and transplanting. Questions about growing other vegetables will be answered as time allows.

You will get your hands dirty at this workshop! A wide selection of tomato varieties, pepper and eggplant seeds will be available for you to plant and take home to grow and transplant into your garden. The Extension office will also provide helpful handouts with additional information on growing many other vegetables.

For more information, to sign-up or volunteer, contact: Lee County Extension at (334) 749- 3353 or Macon County Extension at (334) 727- 0340. Cost is \$10 per person; fee includes all materials. Pre-Registration and payment are required.

2011 Hours Awards for LCMG

Bronze Stars – 100-299 lifetime hours

- Steve Crannell
- Julia Freeman
- Jolly Roberts

Silver Stars – 300-499 lifetime hours

- Larry Dalrymple
- Beth Dorman
- Sarah Fair
- Debbie Hartman
- Jan Holt
- Becky Large
- Peggy Mitchell
- Linda Nowlin
- Barbara Whatley

Gold Stars – 500-999 lifetime hours

- Ralph Womer

Gold Badge – 1,000-1,999 lifetime hours

- Patti Householder

Thanks to ALL the LCMG for entering your hours in the online reporting system. It truly helps the Alabama Master Gardener Program receive funding from the state.

2012 Mulch Sales

The LCMGs will be selling mulch donated from West Frazer Wood Yard on Saturdays again this spring. Approximately 600 cubic yards will be delivered to the Lawrence Farm at 3327 Moores Mill Rd. in Auburn and will be available for sale at \$25 per cubic yard to the public (about \$30-60 per pickup load).

Dates for the sale are: February 18 (tentative), March 3 and 10, April 14 and 21 and May 5 and 12 from 8 a.m. to 12 noon. Loading will be accomplished by Chuck Browne and Wayne Smith.

Toby Hoover is in charge and will be needing volunteers to help each Saturday. Contact him at 334-275-0102 or toby.hoover@charter.net.

Wild Things! II

NATIVE PLANTS THAT ENHANCE OUR LANDSCAPES

FEBRUARY 24, 2012

PALISADES PARK, D. S. LOYD BUILDING
1225 Palisades Pkwy, Oneonta, AL 35121
8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

\$10 fee for program, snacks and drinks

For information contact Sherilyn Osborne,
205. 681.9896 or sherilynosborne@bellsouth.

A Gardening Challenge

by Charlot Ritenbaugh, MG Class of 2010

Many in our LCMGA have years of experience and tremendous talents in making things grow. Most of you are truly Master Gardeners with a capital G. I am still a gardener with a little g. Last spring and summer, however, I did try something new. After you read about my “experiment,” I hope a few of you will try this method of “container” gardening and share your results with our membership.

The foundation of my container gardening experiment was two bales of straw, not pine straw or hay bales, but the stalks or stems that are left after grain such as oats or wheat is thrashed or harvested. This straw is used for bedding in stables or stalls. You also see these bales used for fall decorations with pumpkins, Indian corn and corn stalks bundled together.

After “conditioning,” these golden bales became both the container AND the fertile organic growing media in which my spring planted annuals and vegetable seedlings would thrive throughout the growing season.

“Conditioning” takes about 10 to 14 days depending on daytime temperature. You will need a fertilizer with a high nitrogen content that is immediately available, not a slow-release fertilizer. I located 33-0-0 (ammonium nitrate) locally. The fertilizer and water will create an optimum environment inside the bale for a microorganism “party” to rapidly compost the interior of the bale.

Here is one variation of how to get those microorganisms composting.



Sweet potato vine and pentas grown in a straw bale.

- Days 1-3: Water the bales thoroughly, keeping them constantly wet.
- Days 4-6: Sprinkle each bale with ½ cup of ammonium nitrate, then water the fertilizer “into” the bale.
- Days 7-9: Reduce the amount of fertilizer to ¼ cup and continue to water it in well. There may be a slight odor of decomposition and bales might begin to feel warmer.
- Day 10: No more ammonium nitrate but add 1 cup of 10-10-10 per bale, watered in well.

Bales are ready for planting. If you transplant young plants, small holes can be pulled apart for the root balls. You



Heirloom cherry tomatoes nest in the straw.

will want to fertilize every two or three weeks. If you prefer to start plants from seed, sow them in topsoil spread on top of the bales.

For more in-depth information, these links will get you started:
www.strawbalegardens.com
www.nicholsgardennursery.com/straw-bales.htm

Above are two photos of my efforts for 2011. Let's see what you Big Gs can do!



MGs, spouses and guests enjoy a potluck supper for the first meeting of 2012.



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