



# Leaf



# Notes



The Newsletter of Lee County Master Gardeners

## Presidents Message

Dear Gardening Friends,

It has been my pleasure and honor to be part of a rich heritage of strong active leaders in Lee County Master Gardeners. In thinking about what I could share with you as your president. I wondered about what our heritage, who have been these strong active Master Gardeners Leaders and what legacy we are passing on? It has taken many MG to build this legacy. My notes are based on many wonderful conversations with MG, but my notes are limited. If you can add to this history, please send me an email or call me.

In the early 1990's under Chuck Browne's leadership, County Extension Horticulture agent, with Jeff Clary and others, the first Master Gardener class was held in Lee County. Classes were small 8 to 12 folks.

One of the first very active MG leaders was Bill Carpenter, a graduate of one of the first classes. Bill became involved in the Alabama Master Gardeners Association which was formed in 1993 and actually served as their first president. Bill worked closely with Chuck to forming an association in Lee County where he served as our first president.

Early projects came from the group and ideas they wanted the support. Chuck Browne remembers Master Gardener David Newton building a Green House at Wrights Mill Road.

Demonstration Gardens have for many years our way to showcase gardening to the public the first major garden project was developing the demonstration garden at Kiesel. And it remained the only project for several years. Vegetables were first planted in the garden. Later Jolly Roberts designed the multi-area garden at Kiesel which we still have today.

The second garden area was what is known as the Carolyn Dean Wildflower Garden. Carolyn was a frequent teacher in the MG classes and loved wildflowers. The 2012 class started Grandma's Garden at Pioneer Park. Recently we officially recognized the butterfly garden at KPNC.

Presidents and active members in those early years included: Bill Carpenter, Jim Warman, Milton Alexander, Bill Shell, Cristy Hartsfield, and Ron Bashant. During many of these early years there were only three officers, President, Secretary/Treasurer and Newsletter publisher. You will recognize some of our early members who are still members are: Jane Bell, Bill Shell, Barbara Whatley, Angie Conway, Roy Fabbri, Carol Griffin, Margaret Holler, Betsy Jordan, Dianne Blue and Jolly Roberts.

Presidents we can identify are: 2004 -2006 Jaya Krishnagoplon, 2006-2008 Patti Householder, 2008-2010 Maggie Lawrence, 2010-2015 Dennis Pinkard and 2016-2018 Nancy Golson.

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## Quarterly Quote

... and then, I have nature and art and poetry, and if that is not enough, what is enough?

- Vincent van Gogh

## Retiring Officers

**President: Nancy Golson,**

**Vice-President: Susan Price,**

**Treasurer: Jim Disque,**

**Membership: Anne Morgan,**

**Secretary: Carola Pike,**

**Training: Nancie: Gallagher,**

**Advisory Council: Patti Householder,**



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**2019-2020 LCMG Officers**

**President: Linda Nowlin,**

**Vice-President: Lane Sauser,**

**Treasurer: Debbie Murphy,**

**Membership: Steve Carter,**

**Secretary: Lela Loflin,**

**Publicity: Raleine Sillman,**

**Programs : Linda Lee**

The Master Gardeners Program educates volunteers in science-based gardening and landscape practices and helps them effectively extend research-based information to the public as Master Gardeners. The Master Gardener's role is primarily that of "educator."

There are many different ways our volunteers in Lee County help the Alabama Extension System (ACES) expand outreach to the community. We construct and maintain community demonstration gardens and help implement community projects. A variety of garden-related programs and workshops are offered to the public.

**Editors Column**

As we come to the close of 2018, I dedicate this issue to our retiring officers. We are all grateful for their service and hard work as evidenced by our successful projects, grants, etc.

In this issue, I have included an article about the damage plastic bags can have on our environment, and particularly the birds and animals. Also included is a fine article about food waste. Look for more information regarding sustainability in future issues of Leaf Notes and presentations by Earth Friends.

We will also be including short biographies of the new officers, beginning with Linda Nowlin (President) and Lane Sauser (Vice President). See page 6 for their bio's.

Our December meeting took place in the auditorium of the Julie Collins Smith Museum, with introductions of old and new officers, and a program consisting of a discussion of the life of John James Audubon and the Audubon collection housed at the Julie Collins Smith Museum.

Below is a photograph of the officers on the stage.





## Presidents Message

*-Continued*

Garden Tours have become our most extensive outreach project along with our demonstration gardens. In 2006 Jolly Roberts with the support of folks like Tomie Dugas started our Garden Tour with a grant from the state Master Gardeners. Sarah Fair joined Jolly and Tomie in 2012 with great ideas to further extended the tour. Susan Price joined Jolly and Sarah in 014 and extended the tour to bring in sponsors to further build our tour and increase revenue. We have had 7 bi-annual tours and one-night tour. Hundreds of volunteer hours are required to put on this tour.

Dennis Pinkard has been a major figure in MG. He mentored intern classes, established bylaws, develop budget, increased revenue, started the native azalea sale, moved our meetings to weekly rather than bi-weekly, established the Friends of Master Gardeners program, and brought in many members personally. All the while organizing us in his military fashion into a well-functioning organization

Patti Householder has served many years. In addition to being president was Hours Coordinator, served on state Advisory council, and State Board of Directors for 3 years. AND had her 5-acre garden and home on two different Garden Tours.

Another is Lyn Bell who moved here from Hancock County Mississippi after Katrina in 2006. She had served as president of the local MG there. When she arrived in Lee County, at the request of state folks and Chuck Browne Lyn set up, organized the Help Line which started 2007 started and she efficiently managed it for many years.

Margaret Holler is another MG who has given her time and love to KPNC, where she worked years as a volunteer with Dr. Louise Kreher Turner establishing that preserve and beginning the education program. Her main love is the butterfly garden which has become our most recent recognized demonstration garden.

Jolly Roberts and Sarah Fair we have been mentioned before, but several years ago these two members accepted the responsibility for moving Lee MG into social media and have continued those positions. Sarah Fair with the web site and Jolly Roberts manages our Facebook

Tomie Dugas served for many years as our newsletter editor. Now MG Friend David Peterson published our informative beautiful, and award-winning Leaf Notes newsletter.

Now our projects include Mulch Sales, Planting Trees at Lee County Schools, Help Line, Hour Coordinator, Coordinators for Garden Shows and Lee County fair.

One new activity began in 2016, Susan Price organized a new program in which Lee MG provide \$1000 grants to non-profit organizations to enhance their horticultural education. To date we have awarded \$14,000 in grant money. Additionally, we provide a yearly \$1,000 scholarship to a Lee County Horticultural Student and a yearly \$1,000 Chuck Browne award to the History Seekers 4-H club. We also during the last three years have given a book to either the Auburn Public Library or the Opelika Public Library in honor of each program speaker.

Lee County MG this year has over 67 volunteers reporting close to 7,000 volunteer hours with over 15,000 contacts in 2018. Financially we have grown. In 2010 we owed \$2,000, at the end of 2015, our treasure balance was \$17,000. Today, that balance is about \$45,000.

None of this would be possible without our Extension agents: Jeff Clary, Chuck Browne and now Tara Barr as our County Extension Coordinators, Mallory Kelly, and now Dani Carroll as our Regional Horticulture agents and MG Program Coordinators.

Lee County Master Gardeners is about 25 years old, supporting Extension in educational outreach. I am proud to be a Lee County Master Gardener and have served as your president for 3 years.

I want to thank everyone for your support and encouragement and give a special thank you to our officers: Susan Price - Vice President, Carola Pike - recording secretary, Julia Freeman -communication secretary, Jim Disque - Treasure, Pat Giordano - Program Chair, Ann Morgan -Membership Chair, Raleine Stillman - Publicity, Dennis Pinkard - Immediate Past President and Patti Householder our State Association Representative.

Yes, we are a strong capable group with a strong legacy and I thank you for allowing me to be a part of that legacy as each of you are a vital part of the Lee County Master Gardeners Legacy.



## Blessed be the Wind

Without wind most of Earth would be uninhabitable. The tropics would grow so unbearably hot that nothing could live there, and the rest of the planet would freeze. Moisture, if any existed, would be confined to the oceans, and all but the fringe of the great continents... would be desert. There would be no erosion, no soil, and for any community that managed to evolve despite these rigors, no relief from suffocation by their own waste products.

But with the wind, Earth comes truly alive. Winds provide the circulatory and nervous systems of the planet, sharing out energy and information, distributing both warmth and awareness, making something out of nothing.

All winds properties are borrowed. Our knowledge of it comes secondhand, but it comes strongly. And this combination of a force cannot be apprehended but nevertheless has an undeniable existence, was our first experience of the spiritual. A crack in the cosmos that widened to let the tide of consciousness flow through.

We are fruits of the wind—and have been seeded, irrigated, and cultivated by its craft.

*Lyll Watson*



Honoring our retiring president

## Quarterly Quiz



Can you identify this flower?  
*Answer on Page 13*

## A special New Year's Message



by Ecological Consciousness



## Potpourri

—Charlot Ritenbaugh

Fifty miles west of Tallahassee, Florida on the limestone bluffs overlooking the Apalachicola River you'll find the Torreya State Park. This 13,735-acre state park is one of the only remaining places to find the very rare conifer, *Torreya taxifolia*, stinking cedar/stinking yew. Since late September a homeless *Torreya taxifolia* sapling has resided in my very humble nursery for container plants.

Google searches yielded descriptions such as "critically endangered, restricted to limestone bluffs, requires moist, rich, well-drained soil in partial to full shade." These gave me a scare. I continued reading and learned there is a fungal blight driving this tree to extinction. Since most current saplings die when they reach 3 to 6 feet tall, seeds are very hard to acquire. Oh dang, this stinking yew will most likely perish in my landscape. I began to feel as if I possessed a Federally protected bird of prey instead of a fifteen-inch conifer sapling. I just knew the Florida Park Rangers would be raiding my backyard early some morning.

Then Hurricane Michael visited the panhandle and my worries shifted to the survival of those rare yews in their native location within Torreya State Park. Fortunately, most of the stinking yews made it through the hurricane bent and twisted but alive. The authorities have so much more to worry about than my rogue sapling. Whew.

I hope to find a Master Gardener or Friend willing to take on the challenge of caring for this young tree. I received this container grown sapling as a re-gift from its original recipient who received it from the folks at Nearly Native Nursery in Fayetteville, GA. This nursery is a great place to visit. I assume several of these saplings were grown as a project to preserve the existence of this species in the southeastern part of the United States. Please consider providing an accommodating and long-term home for this wandering yew.

A large part of being a Master Gardener is answering questions. During recent summer months, everyone seemed to be asking about an extremely prolific and persistent weed in home lawns and flower beds. Using my trusty guide, Weeds of Southern Turfgrasses, ANR 6016, I found two suspects from the Phyllanthus family, *P. urinaria* and *P. tenellus*.

Common names for this shorter of these gardener's nightmare are Chamberbitter, Niruri, Gripweed or Leafflower. Choose the one that matches your aggravation level. Chamberbitter because it makes you bitter, gripweed because it makes you grumble, or leafflower because it reminds you of tiny pushy Mimosa trees. Most of the literature uses Niruri, Spanish for "break stone." The plant is used in South America and Asia as a remedy for kidney stones.

Both weeds were described to me by a landscaper as "born pregnant." They seem to bear seeds as soon as they shoot out of the soil. Niruri is small, erect and its leaves are angled or grooved. The fruit is green, warty without a stalk and attached to the underside of the branch. The long-stalked Phyllanthus is taller, leaves and fruit are smooth. In this variety, each seed is attached under the leaves by a stalk. Niruri is an annual and the long-stalked version is a perennial.

If you wish to reduce another invasion in 2019 apply a pre-emergent before the soil is warm enough for these weeds to germinate. They start to grow in mid-June when the soil warms to about 70 degrees. To be successful apply a pre-emergent in March or April. If you miss the pre-emergent opportunity you should start post emergent control as soon as you identify young plants in your landscape. To select the safest chemical for your type of turf grass call the Master Gardener Helpline this spring. Ask for the best herbicide for use that won't damage your type of turf grass.

In this battle, you'll most likely add manual removal by pulling hordes of these pests with your own gloved hands. Remember your goal is to never allow another seed of this species to germinate. Discard these weeds, the plant, the roots and the soil attached, away from your compost pile, preferably where the seeds can bake dry in the sun!

*Wishing you many sunny days as winter settles in providing gardens and gardeners alike with valuable down time.*



## **2019 New Officer Biographies**

### **Linda Nowlin-President**

I grew up in a small town in Tennessee with a father who loved growing vegetables. Tomato seedlings sat in milk cartons along his workshop windowsills in the early spring. Most of the vegetables on our dinner table in the summer had been grown in our garden. I enjoyed participating in 4-H projects and going to 4-H Camp each summer. After earning a B.S. degree in Elementary Education at UT Martin, I earned a Masters Degree in Early Childhood Education from UT Knoxville.

During the 47 years that my husband and I have been married, his career in educational administration and university teaching led us to several locations. We have lived in Waverly, Tennessee and in Dothan, Jacksonville and Vestavia Hills in Alabama. Each location had its own gardening challenges and rewards. When our family settled down in Lee County in 2008, I retired after 35 years of teaching.

Taking the Master Garden Course in 2010 and becoming a part of Lee County Master Gardeners has been one of the most enjoyable parts of my retirement. I not only learned a lot about gardening, but have also made many wonderful friends. Working at Grandma's Garden and watching it develop has been a fulfilling experience. I have participated in native plant sales, tree planting and workshops. I have also worked during Garden Tours as a garden coordinator, and helped with publicity and program preparation. My special interests are heirloom plants, herbs and woodland gardens.

Our family moved to Jefferson County from 2013 to 2015. While living there I was able to volunteer at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens with the Native Plant Group and the Herb Army. It was wonderful to return to Lee County. Our daughter is an Auburn grad and still lives here. We love being a part of the Opelika/Auburn community.

### **Lane Sauser-Vice President**

My husband and I moved to Auburn in 1977 when my husband joined the faculty at Auburn University. We thought we would stay a few years and then move on. Happily 41 years later we are here to stay. My husband retired in 2015 from the Harbert College of Business where he taught management.

I have degrees in accounting and finance from Georgia State University and Auburn University and a doctorate in Public Administration from the University of Alabama. I am a CPA and worked in various capacities throughout my career in the private and public sectors. I retired in July 2012 as chief financial officer emeritus for Auburn's College of Agriculture and Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station. I grew up in the Atlanta area helping my grandfather and parents tend to their sunny vegetable and flower gardens. I have fond memories of picking beans and admiring gladiolas and dahlias. I consider myself a city girl so it was ironic that my last position was working with the College of Agriculture.

While I enjoyed my 30-plus years working as an accountant and financial manager, upon my retirement in 2012 I happily traded in budgets and spreadsheets for a new set of tools—the gardening kind! I got the idea of pursuing the Master Gardener program from one of the Vice Presidents I worked for. I really did not know what I was signing up for when I joined the class of 2013. I thought I would learn a lot more about gardening which I did. But I did not know how enriching it would be to meet all these people who have a shared interest. I enjoy working in Grandma's Garden and taking a turn at the Help Line and mulch sales and more.



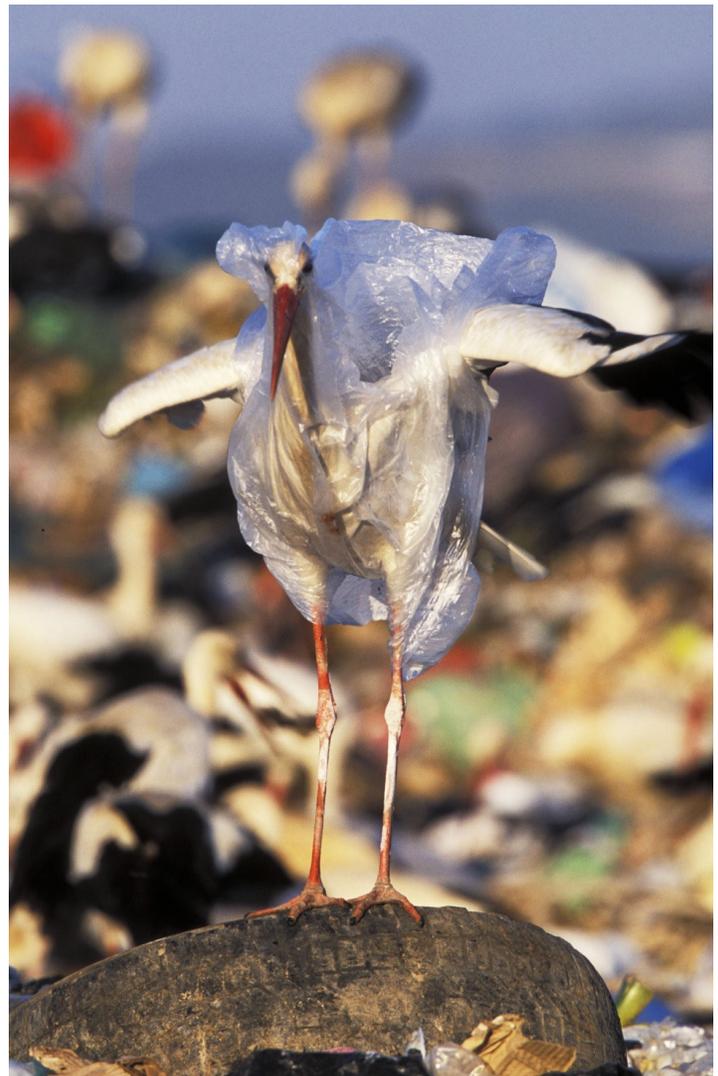
## **THE PROBLEM WITH PLASTIC BAGS**

Plastic bags start out as fossil fuels and end up as deadly waste in landfills and the ocean. Birds often mistake shredded plastic bags for food, filling their stomachs with toxic debris. For hungry sea turtles, it's nearly impossible to distinguish between jellyfish and floating plastic shopping bags. Fish eat thousands of tons of plastic a year, transferring it up the food chain to bigger fish and marine mammals. Despite all of this, plastic bags are in almost every American home because retail giants continue to use them for nearly every purchase made in their stores.

### 10 Facts About Single-use Plastic Bags

1. Americans use 100 billion plastic bags a year, which require 12 million barrels of oil to manufacture.
2. It only takes about 14 plastic bags for the equivalent of the gas required to drive one mile.
3. The average American family takes home almost 1,500 plastic shopping bags a year.
4. According to Waste Management, only 1 percent of plastic bags are returned for recycling. That means that the average family only recycles 15 bags a year; the rest ends up in landfills as litter.
5. Up to 80 percent of ocean plastic pollution enters the ocean from land.
6. At least 267 different species have been affected by plastic pollution in the ocean.
7. 100,000 marine animals are killed by plastic bags annually.
8. One in three leatherback sea turtles have been found with plastic in their stomachs.
9. Plastic bags are used for an average of 12 minutes.

10. It takes 500 (or more) years for a plastic bag to degrade in a landfill. Unfortunately the bags don't break down completely but instead photo-degrade, becoming microplastics that absorb toxins and continue to pollute the environment.



Getty images

Stork covered in a plastic bag in Spain



## **Those Thanksgiving Leftovers? They're Killing the Planet**

Between Thanksgiving and New Year's, Americans throw out 25 percent more trash than the rest of the year. Holiday flights and cross-country road trips spike greenhouse gas emissions. Gifts come shrouded in plastic, which winds up in landfills and oceans.

Not to be too much of a Debbie Downer, but the holidays are tough on the planet. All of that overconsumption at the expense of wildlife and the environment starts with the Thanksgiving feast and the food waste that gets served up with it.

About 200 million pounds of turkey will be [thrown away](#) at Thanksgiving. More than 150 million pounds of potatoes, green beans and other vegetable sides will [never get eaten](#). Bread baskets will be filled with an estimated 14 million pounds of dinner rolls that will simply be dumped after the big meal.

All of that wasted food comes with nearly [half a million metric tons](#) of greenhouse gas emissions. It wastes more than [200 gallons of water](#) per person. And producing that uneaten food contributes to habitat loss, pesticide use and other threats to wildlife.

But poorly planned family dinners don't deserve all the blame for the piles of wasted food at Thanksgiving. Even though more than [40 percent](#) of wasted food gets thrown out by households, [grocery stores](#) play an important role in influencing what you buy in the first place. And nearly as much food waste happens at stores before ingredients even reach your shopping cart.

Earlier this year, the Center for Biological Diversity, where I work, analyzed and graded food-waste reduction commitments and policies in the 10 largest grocery companies in the United States. We found that nine of the companies failed to publicly report their total food waste, and six hadn't made specific commitments to reduce food waste. Even the companies working to address food waste seem to shelve efforts when the holidays roll around.

Grocery stores influence what ends up in your cart. Walmart, which earned the highest grade in the report with a B, leaves waste reduction off the table in its online resources for Thanksgiving.

Its "helpful ingredient checklist" includes four different kinds of meat. The printable version of the checklist assumes you'll be serving three different kinds of pie. Walmart also recommends 1.5 pounds of turkey per person, although many chefs suggest [one pound](#) and a regular serving size is only [2 to 3 ounces](#).

Walmart isn't alone in promoting the kind of indulgent over-purchasing that leads to waste. Supermarket Thanksgiving promotions are laden with pressure to buy more food than you'll need. This may help their sales, but it results in people spending more than necessary and only shifts the burden of throwing out excess food to their customers.

Instead of promoting huge portion sizes, grocery stores should help their customers plan holiday meals that minimize food waste. While customers are grateful for savings when entertaining, sales should be built into per item costs, not based on bulk purchasing.

Although Kroger has a section on their website for Thanksgiving tips and Albertsons/Safeway offers an app that helps shoppers plan their purchases, neither company has taken advantage of these tools to provide resources for customers to rein in holiday waste.

And there's more supermarkets can do. Billions of pounds of edible produce is wasted simply because it doesn't meet strict cosmetic standards for size, shape or color, but no one can tell the difference once it's been chopped, pureed or cooked. Stores should use imperfect fruits and vegetables in their prepared sides, like cranberry sauces, green bean casseroles and other dishes. And, since imperfect produce is often cheaper, this is another way companies can pass cost savings onto customers.

American grocery companies should also publish how much food is being wasted throughout their operations. Without accurate data, it's hard to know just how big the problem is and the most effective ways to address it. By better understanding how much food is wasted during the holidays, stores and customers can adjust their purchases to reduce the environmental cost of the season.

Now's the perfect time for grocery companies to double down on their commitment to fight food waste with increased accountability and customer support that doesn't center on excess. I know my holiday dinner won't be ruined if there are fewer than three desserts, or even if we skip the turkey altogether.

*Stephanie Feldstein is the population and sustainability director at the Center for Biological Diversity.*



## Shorter Winters

by Marlene Cimons , Nexus Media

Shorter winters are stunting the growth of plants

Rising temperatures are shrinking winters, causing plants to bloom early and die young.

Spring has been coming earlier, prompting plants to sprout and turn green sooner than ever before. This is because carbon pollution has been heating up the planet, making winters shorter and springs warmer. Until now, scientists believed this premature blooming might not be all bad, as thriving plants might help slow climate change by soaking up more carbon dioxide from the air.

But new research suggests otherwise, that plants aren't growing more. They're actually growing less, making climate change worse than current models suggest. Scientists studied three decades of satellite data and concluded that many regions can't keep their early spring growth going through summer and into the fall because early growth sucks water out of the soil, leaving little left over for the main growing season. "Because of climate warming, plants grow earlier and more in spring, but they cannot sustain this until summer and autumn," said Wolfgang Buermann, who led the study while at the School of Earth and Environment at Leeds, in the UK, and now is based at the University of Augsburg in Germany. "That means over the entire year, the effect of warm springs on photosynthesis is small. Plants need water to grow. If plants start growing earlier, they take up water earlier from the soils, and then the water is missing in the drier summer season to sustain the growth."

Until now, scientists believed premature blooming might not be all bad. But it turns out earlier blooms result in less overall plant growth, and therefore less CO2 absorption.

There is also the fact that "the lifetime of leaves is limited," he added. "If leaves emerge earlier, they will also die earlier and hence cannot do photosynthesis in late summer." Americans can see this process is already underway. "These changes do not happen at remote places, but in our backyards," Buermann said, pointing to declining summer plant growth in the western United States.

The scientists' findings call into question existing climate models they believe overestimate the amount of carbon that plants absorb due to early growth, meaning the world's climate is in an even more critical state than previously thought, they said. "This changes climate forecasts for the worse," said study co-author Matthias Forkel, of the department of geodesy and geoinformation at Tu Wien, a university in Vienna. "We have to assume that the consequences of global warming will be even more dramatic than previously calculated." Their research appears in the journal Nature.

Los Angeles, CA. Plants absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, reducing carbon pollution in cities.

Current modeling estimates a CO2 uptake four times higher than normal during a warm spring, a projection Forkel called worrisome and overly optimistic. "The climate models show that warmer springs result in more plant growth in summer, but the satellite observations show the opposite," Buermann said. According to the authors' estimates, a lower carbon uptake means more carbon will remain in the atmosphere, warming the planet even more.

Scientists measured the amount of green color in satellite photos to determine how much vegetation covered the Earth's surface season by season and year by year, and they used temperature data to search for those years with colder or warmer than average springs. "We then compared the spring temperature with the vegetation productivity in spring, summer, and autumn, and did this comparison for every point at the globe to the north of the 30th parallel north, from southern Europe and Japan to the most northerly tundra regions," he said.



## Shorter Winters

- continued

Satellite images show that warmer springs produce more vegetation in the spring but less vegetation in the summer.

They used additional data related to local climate and geography “to investigate what processes in ecosystems could cause the effect of spring warming on summer and autumn plant growth,” Forkel said. “We then did the same analysis for simulations from global climate models to check if the models show the same patterns.”

Not surprisingly, the data showed the northern hemisphere does, in fact, become greener in the spring when temperatures are especially warm. However, the findings also showed a reversal of these effects in the summer, causing an overall loss of plant growth, meaning more heat-trapping carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and less water in the soil. “It is likely that heat waves and droughts will occur more often under climate change,” Forkel said. “If plants already used all the water in spring, this could mean that droughts will become even worse in summer.”

Notably, Forkel said, even in a stable climate plants could not soak up all the carbon pollution from cars, trucks, factories, and power plants. “Plants and ecosystem take up around 25 percent of the human-caused fossil fuel emissions. Another 25 percent is taken up by the ocean, and the remaining 50 percent of CO2 emissions stay in the atmosphere. If plants grow more, they take up more carbon but the effect is small,” he said, “far too small to compensate for the human CO2 emissions.”

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Photo from Bowl Workshop by Raleine Sillman



## **Which Houseplants Grow Best in Low Light?**

Heidi Mitchell *Wall Street Journal*  
Nov. 10, 2018

As the days get darker earlier and outside temperatures get cooler, you may have considered doing some gardening inside your home. Houseplants can be healthy additions to almost any environment, and many thrive indoors. One expert, Brie Arthur, a certified horticulturalist and author based outside Raleigh, N.C., digs into the roots of plants specifically bred for indoor living.

### **Grow Some Fresh Air**

Much noise has been made around a NASA study that claimed certain houseplants act as powerful indoor air filters. But many botanists and horticulturalists say the study overstated the chemical-cleansing benefits of indoor plants.

Either way, Ms. Arthur says, plants do have many excellent advantages, like turning carbon dioxide into oxygen, beautifying the environment and teaching the value of nurturing something that isn't yourself. "When you care for a plant, you build a relationship with it," says the plant lecturer and author of "The Foodscape Revolution."

### **Natural Selection**

Many of the plants that are sold for indoor growing are native to rain forests or other densely foliated regions where they get very little light and experience almost no seasonal temperature changes. Such hardy species have been bred for generations to be less likely to defoliate when introduced to slight shifts in temperature or humidity, and to do well in home environments.

"Spider plants, peace lilies, Swiss cheese plants and the super-popular pothos vine are well-adapted for indoor life, whether they have a lot or a little direct sunlight," the horticulturalist says. *Pilea peperomioides* seems to be the hot indoor plant right now.

### **MORE BURNING QUESTIONS**

Many houseplants can do fine with the light from a regular lightbulb and very little direct sunlight, Ms. Arthur says. A dry home is also good, since too much moisture can cause mold. Succulents like aloe are the easiest plants for indoor growers, especially those who travel a lot or who forget to water their plants. Ms. Arthur has some 400 of them in her home. "Whatever you do, resist the urge to water them," Ms. Arthur says. Even the moisture in the air of a sealed-up apartment is enough for these drought-tolerant plants, she says. Plants release oxygen during the day. When the sun sets or the lights go out, photosynthesis stops. However, there are a few oddballs, including some orchids, bromeliads, succulents and snake plants, that release oxygen at night, making them great for placing in a bedroom, Ms. Arthur says, since oxygen levels in the blood tend to lower during sleep. "Live houseplants are also relaxing," she adds. Ferns thrive in hot, moist conditions, so they work well in bathrooms, she notes, while succulents can live happily in a dark corner.

### **Getting Started**

Ms. Arthur recommends picking a plant that you like the look of, and not spending too much. She suggests purchasing a self-watering planter or using a plastic insert with holes that drain water. Plant the roots in soil in these containers before putting the houseplant into a decorative pot. "Those pots can pool water, and no houseplants like to sit in standing water or they'll rot," she says. Overwatering is the most common cause of death of houseplants.



## Which Houseplants Grow Best in Low Light?

—Continued

Ms. Arthur recommends cleaning each leaf with a wet cloth regularly to prevent dust buildup, “which I find very Zen,” she says. Should fungus gnats turn up—“they are a universal problem and come out of nowhere, like fruit flies,” she says—sweep them off the surface of the soil with your fingers, rather than using a pesticide that may bring unwanted toxins into the home.

Ms. Arthur employs a weight test to determine if a plant requires water.

“Pick the pot up and feel how heavy it is. Once you do it a little while, you’ll know what is too heavy and when it needs a drink,” she says. She doesn’t believe touching the soil for dampness is good enough, since the top layer may be dry while the soil below remains damp. If it feels light, take the plastic insert out of the pot and place the plant under a sink tap. Let it drain before putting it back into the pot.

“The trouble is that plants have the same symptoms—leaves turning brown or wilting—from two opposite issues: overwatering or underwatering,” she says. But with practice, a brown thumb can turn green. “Even horticulturalists kill plants,” she says. “The good news is, houseplants aren’t expensive, and a dead plant is just an excuse to go out and buy more, so keep indulging.”



Pilea peperomioides are a popular indoor choice, says horticulturalist Brie Arthur. PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK



## **Bow Workshop**

Oh No! No! No!

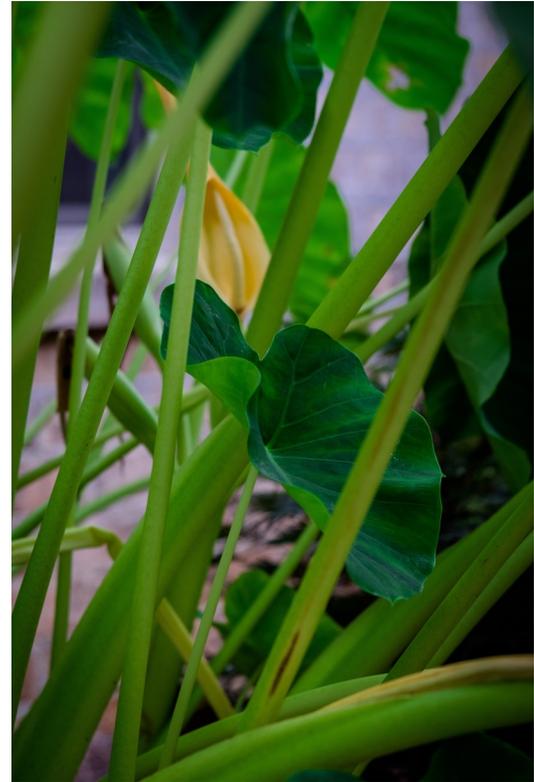
It can't be time to decorate for the Holidays again! Our own Elf, Patti Disque came to the rescue. On November 19, she gathered a group of 14 of us in her own home to teach us how to make big round bows. Although they can easily be bought, these cute curly Q's are expensive, and often don't come in our chosen color of fabric. She found us a tougher group of students than predicted. Never one to give up, Patti helped each of us make two bows, and sent us home with ribbon for 18 more.

Happy Holidays, and Thank you Patti!  
Cathy Shepherd



Photos by Raleine Sillman

## **Answer to Quiz on page 2**



**Common Name(s)** - Elephant ear plant, tarul, dashen, chembu, champadhumpa

**Scientific Name** - Colocasia / Xanthosoma / Caladium / Alocasia

**Family** - Araceae

**Origin** - Oceania, South America, Southeast Asia

**Height** - Up to 9 feet

**Light** - Full sun to partial shade

**Water** - High

**Temperature** - 65-70 °F

**Humidity** - Medium to High

**Soil** - Rich organic soil 5.5-7.0 pH

**Fertilizer** - Medium

**Propagation** - By seed, division, or runners

**Pests** - Spider mites, thrips



## Gourd Workshop

*By Cathy Shephard*

Fall temperatures arrive late in Lee County, but it does not diminish the enthusiasm of decorating with leaves and hay and pumpkins and squash. November 1 found a group of 11 Master Gardeners and Friends eager to learn a new decorating project. Tom Westmorland kindly agreed to teach us his techniques for decorating gourds. He has been doing these gourds for about 30 years. He is well known for his masterpieces throughout the community.

When we arrived, Tom had a display of gourds he has made over the years, including pieces such as a dipper, multiple lidded bowls and Cornucopias. He had gotten us started by cutting our bowls in half for us, but allowed each of us to choose our own piece to work on. Becky chose a large bowl to use for popcorn. I chose a more traditionally shaped gourd. Others chose their gourds based on shape and size, each to their own preference.

Most of the class was spent cleaning the inside and outside of the gourds. We did this by hand, using spoons. Tom then demonstrated how he marks the gourds to burn them, and allowed each of us to try the technique with him. We then used it on our own gourds. He had designed a template using a plastic piece from an electrical switch and a marker. Everyone got to take home one of these templates to finish their project.

The next step involved burning. Although we did not finish this in class, we each got to work with Tom until we had mastered this technique. And Voila- we had learned a new skill. We also made new friends of the members we had not met before, and of course Tom and his helper. We all admitted we had had a great time!

