



DIRTY DIGS

Autauga County Master Gardeners Association Newsletter

April, 2018



Finally, some warm weather! While I worried about the freezes killing our fruit earlier this year, we were blessed to see our plum trees survive and full of tiny green plums, our pear trees

full of baby pears, our grape vine growing tiny, tiny clumps of green grapes everywhere which will eventually turn into hundreds of jars of grape jelly. Our peach tree still has some pink blossoms, but most have turned into tiny peaches. Our 3 fig trees, for which I was prepared to say a eulogy, have miraculously started to display some green. And, last but certainly not least, our persimmon tree is showing life with a few green leaves. Hello Spring!

Last year, someone brought pomegranate seedlings to a meeting as door prizes and Tim and I were fortunate to get one. We planted ours in a large pot in our front entry, and today Tim counted 15 baby pomegranates! It is amazing what a little sunshine and warmth will do for plants. So too, will a kind word given to those around us grow friendship and comradery. Maya Angelou said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." We have an amazingly friendly and enthusiastic group in ACMGA who are willing to help, to grow, and to volunteer when opportunity knocks. Glenn Huovinen had a vision for a pollinator garden alongside our Demonstration Garden. That is now a reality

with JC Scofield taking the lead on putting in plants that will attract those beautiful bumble bees, butterflies, honey bees and other pollinators. We have been given the opportunity to make changes and improvements to Prattville Garden through grants, one which has been awarded and another which we hope to receive. Keep your focus on how Master Gardeners can change visions into action, thereby making our community a better place to live.

Jr Master Gardeners

By Bea Hill

So, it is getting to be Spring! How wonderful! We look forward to this time every year. The earth is awakening from its winter sleep and it makes the Master Gardeners' want to get outside and get their hands dirty. After all – we don't call our newsletter the "Dirty Digs" for nothing.

I was asked to write a short article about the Junior Master Gardener Program being conducted at the Marbury Middle School. The last few weeks have been with the 6th graders and next 9 weeks will be with the 8th graders. Spring Bruner, a teacher and sponsor of the garden club, has encouraged her class to become involved in gardening. Last year was a successful year for the garden club. Their little garden produced well



www.alamy.com - CB8WFJ

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And they had a fair amount of produce. However, school is out before it starts producing its bounty. When the class returns in the fall, much has been gathered by the adults that are helping, but there is much left to be done. As Master Gardeners we understand the work that Fall, and Winter bring.



The classes have weeded and cleaned their garden plot, added soil enrichment to their grow beds and are starting to plant. Glenn Huovinen and Beatrice Hill have given a presentation on squash and tomato growing. Recipes were discussed on how to make tasty dishes using squash and tomatoes.



Glenn gave the class 6 tomato plants and Beatrice gave them radish seeds to plant. We really want the students to get a taste of some of the products that

result from their hard work. They plan to donate their produce to the Food Bank this year. The plan at the present is for each student to grow and nurture his/her own tomato plant. Four radish seeds are to be planted in each gallon pot with the tomato. The students will have the radishes to eat before school is out.

The next presentation will be on soil testing and getting ready to plant. We will keep you informed as to the progress being made. We have about 9 more classes before school ends for the summer.



A Thought From A Master Gardener Don Armstrong

Master Gardeners always have a smile on their face. Because they have tulips (two lips).



Daniel Pratt Elementary By Paula Seamon and Rose McCauley

On March 10, Rose McCauley and Paula Seamon attended a garden workday at Prattville Elementary. Lisa Tucker requested that we come and offer help and instruction on how to set up a composting bin.

The volunteer students, parents and teachers were busy with the colorful and educational gardens that they are providing for



took us on a tour of vegetable for the



students at the school. They on an extended the flowers beds, table beds, and learning areas students.

We talked to them about the benefits of



composting on our gardens and the environment and did a hands-on demonstration on the composting bin that had been donated to them. We also provided them with literature to

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help in their instructing the students. We talked about using worm composting to teach the students to reuse-recycle and reduce.



Spring plant SALE

April 28, 2018

The plant sale is coming up on us fast. It seems like there is hardly any time to get ready. All the re-potting and sprucing up the plants we are going to bring.

Everyone who has any mini-blind slats, now is the time to get them down to the chapel. We will be needing wagons also, so the people can buy more plants. There will be three days before the sale to bring plants to Prattville. Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday before the sale.

Make sure the plant has whether it is a perennial, or annual, what kind of light requirements it needs. If you can have a picture of the plant in bloom that helps even more.

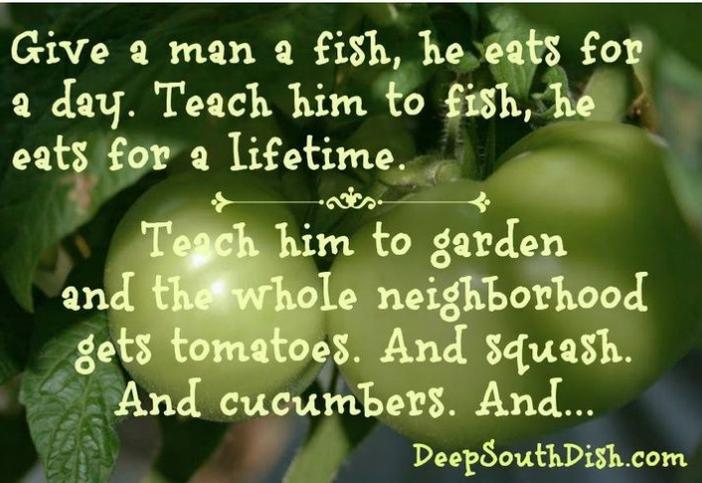
As always we are asking for a lot of volunteers to help make this a very successful plant sale. Every

year there is a great sale and this year should be also.



March Meeting Tim McCoy

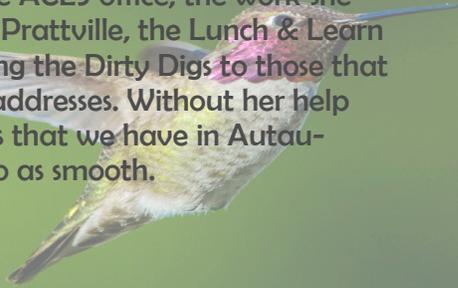
The featured speakers were Sondra Henley, Steve McAnally, Harriet Jackson, and Susan Cleckler from CCMGA. They presented a power-point presentation with handbooks about how to become a 501(c)3. They spoke of the steps that were taken for them to become a 501(c)3 as an unincorporated association. Rose McCauley asked that everyone make sure their contact information was up to date on the Master Gardener Service Report page. Ofie McCoy reported that our association had been awarded a grant from AMGA to replace the turf in Prattville. Our association has been invited to CCMGA's plant sale May 8th. The Home Depot has donated a gas-powered limb saw for our raffle on City Fest. The next Lunch & Learn will feature Dr. East. He will be talking about blueberries. Ofie let everyone know that the next City/ACMGA class will be on hummingbirds with Fred Bassett. Glenn reported on the work that Jr. Master Gardeners is doing at Marbury Middle School. Lee Thomas spoke on the work that he has been doing with Tuskegee University. We are going to host CCMGA on a tour of the Wilderness Park, Prattville, the Demo Garden, and Don and Glenda Armstrong's gardens on April 11th. Lunch will be served at the Armstrong garden. Charlie French reported on the upcoming tour of the Jim Scott gardens May 16th. Shari McCandless wanted to give a big thank you to Charlie and Patrick Cook for the work pruning the trees at Prattville



DeepSouthDish.com

Hummingbird Award

Marjorie Hannah was the recipient of the March Hummingbird award. Marjorie received this award for all the work that she does whenever there is a meeting in Autaugaville, all the work she does at the ACES office, the work she does at meetings in Prattville, the Lunch & Learn classes, and delivering the Dirty Digs to those that do not have email addresses. Without her help the special meetings that we have in Autaugaville would not go as smooth.



Making a Crooked Line Straight

When Autauga County Master Gardeners hear of a job that needs to be done, their next step is ACTION! Tim McCoy recently heard from Shari McCandless, di-



rector of the Prattville Garden, that the pavers around the chapel were very crooked and needed a second paver on top. That's when Tim decided to act. Within a few days,

Mr. Tim had secured the additional pavers needed and started pulling up the old, crooked pavers. He leveled the ground where the formerly crooked pav-

ers were to be replaced, added a second paver on top to make a nicer looking wall, and within two work days, the job was done. Kudos to all MGs who take on those little maintenance jobs (and the big ones, too) which keep our projects looking great.



10 THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT YOUR GARDEN

LAUREN PIRO

Gardening is hardly a straightforward practice—goodness knows it takes skills, dedication, and more than a little luck to grow flowers and veggies. But while certain facts about gardens are perplexing (like the delicate nature of herb garden growing), some are just plain fun silly or even mindboggling. And because we love all things gardening, we couldn't help but share this random assortment.

1. A sunflower is not just one flower. Both the fuzzy brown center and the classic yellow petals are actually *1,000–2,000 individual flowers*, held together in a single stalk.
2. There are more microorganisms in one teaspoon of soil than there are people on earth. It's aliiiiive! OK, in all seriousness, that fact might make you itchy, but microbes are important for keeping your soil full of nutrients.
3. Plants really do respond to sound. Talking to plants to help them grow is a well-known old wives' tale, but *studies have shown* vibration (like music, or perhaps even the sweet sound of your voice) can affect plant growth. Plus, the Myth Busters (in an admittedly not-so-scientific study), compared a silent greenhouse to one where they piped in a voice soundtrack, and found that plants in the latter grew more.



4. Butterflies might be more attracted to your weeds than your flowers. Colorful blooms aren't the chief reason these insects love your garden—it's more about the fragrance and nectar. According to the Smithsonian Institute, new cultivars of popular flowers have been bred for enhanced color and size, but have often lost their fragrance in the process. So everyday weeds, like dandelions and clovers, might actually be the most appealing things in your yard to butterflies



- (they hate pesticides, too). Taking care to choose *heirloom flower seeds* can get them to also fly your way.
5. A little baking soda can help you grow sweeter tomatoes. A regular sprinkling of this kitchen staple into your plant's soil can help reduce acidity, which *sweetens up your crop*.
 6. Some of your favorite fruits are actually in the rose family. Apples, pears, peaches, cherries, raspberries, strawberries, and more are *rosaceae*, making them cousins to the *long-stemmed Valentine's Day variety*.

Rosaceae (Rose Family)

- About 100 genera, 3000 species
- Rose, raspberry, blackberry, strawberry, prunus (peach, cherry, apricot, almond, plum), apple, pear, quince
- Examples

– <i>Rosa hybrida</i> cv. Royalty	Royalty rose
– <i>Pyrus communis</i> cv. Bartlett	Bartlett Pear
– <i>Malus domestica</i> cv. Fuji	Fuji Apple
– <i>Fragaria ananasa</i>	Strawberry

7. The right orchid combination can smell like your favorite dessert. Did you know that vanilla bean comes from an orchid variety? And it's not the only sweet-smelling kind: "An oncidium hybrid called Sharry Baby smells like chocolate," says George Hatfield, president of the *Santa Barbara Orchid Show*. "It's 'baking cookie' aroma has made a winner." And that's not all: The cymbidium Golden Elf smells lemony, and the Phalaenopsis violacea has a cinnamon scent. "Just like you'd combine Jelly Belly beans to create new flavors, you can combine orchids to create a garden that smells like a dessert buffet," says Hatfield.



8. You can change a hydrangea's color by altering the pH level of the soil. A more alkaline soil will result in pinker blooms, while more acidity will produce blue blooms. To *coax your plant to the blue side*, add more organic matter to your soil, like egg shells and



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coffee grounds (though the acidity in used coffee grounds can vary greatly, so you might try a *high-acid fertilizer*, too. The change won't happen overnight, but eventually you should succeed in manipulating your soil's pH level.

9. Deer can jump eight feet high. They

might require a running start to reach such heights, but a tiny fence often isn't enough to keep these garden nibblers away. Try a taller one, plant thorny or pungent plants as a natural barrier, or scare them off with lights or wind chimes.



10. You don't need to be a dedicated composter to reap similar benefits. Call it cheating, but applying used coffee grounds, eggshells, chopped-up banana peels, and other organic matter directly to your soil (no composting required) can offer plants nutrients as they decompose. For already-growing beds, scatter and bury the items within the first few inches of soil.

Steps to Planting Tomatoes

When to plant tomatoes

Before you consider planting tomatoes, it's very important to know the average [last frost date](#) for your area plus the current daytime and nighttime low temperatures. Check the Internet, Farmer's Almanac, your local garden center or ask an experienced gardener for recommended plant dates.

Harden off tomato seedlings

When the [average frost free date](#) has arrived, and the soil temperature has reached 50 degrees F it's time to move your plants outdoors. One week before, it's a good idea to "harden off" the young tomato plants by placing them in a protected spot like a [cold frame](#). Move them outside during the day and into the garage at night. This process will help the plants withstand unpredictable weather conditions.

Where to plant tomatoes

Finding a sunny location is the most important consideration when planting tomatoes. Eight hours of direct sunlight is ideal. If your garden or patio is obstructed by vegetation or buildings and there is no way to get eight hours, you can actually still grow tomatoes in as little as three hours of sunlight. However, those plants won't produce nearly as much fruit. Here are a few ideas if your location is sunlight deficient: Plant tomatoes near a reflective wall. Plant tomatoes on a southerly or southeasterly slope. If [growing tomatoes in containers](#), rotate the containers to sunnier spots if possible.

Soil for Tomatoes

Your [soil for tomatoes](#) is the second most important location consideration after the amount of available sun. Avoid tree roots when choosing your location. Shallow-rooted trees such as plums, maples, willows, and poplars will spread their roots all the way out to the extent of their branches. These roots will steal the moisture and nutrients from the soil. If you must plant near these trees you could dig a 3-foot trench and line it with an impenetrable sheet of metal or plastic to block the roots.

Is there a best time of day for planting tomatoes?

It's less of a shock to the tender tomato seedlings if you plant them when the sun isn't bearing down. If possible, transplant the seedlings into the ground in the cool of the evening. If the soil is dry moisten it prior to planting.

How deep should I plant tomato seedlings?



Because feeder roots will form anywhere along a tomato stem, it's smart to get a strong root system by planting the seedling's root Continued on pg. 7

ball about three to four inches below ground in a small trench. Remove any leaves that would be buried, and lay the bare stem along the trench. The goal is to grow a six to eight-inch root ball.



Gently lift the top of the plant so that at least a few inches of stem with leaves remains above ground. Don't worry, the top will straighten itself out in a few days. Developing a strong root system will pay dividends in a more vigorous plant later. Fill the trench with soil and firmly press to ensure the soil is in contact with the roots. Planting in a shallow trench is particularly good in cool climates because the soil nearer the surface is warmer.



If your tomato seedling is already good sized, such as those in 1-gallon pots, then instead of trenching you can plant deeply in an upright position. Don't forget to label the variety when planting tomatoes; you'll want to know which varieties grow best in your garden.

Watering newly planted tomatoes

Leave a slight depression in the soil at the base of each plant to catch water. Water your seedlings right after planting with diluted seaweed, fish emulsion, or tomato fertilizer solution. Once planted, [watering your tomatoes](#) becomes the most important facet of caring for your plants.

Caring for newly planted tomatoes

Shield newly planted tomato plants from harsh direct sun

for the first few days with overturned pots or row covers. Prepare to protect the plants if there is a possibility of late frost.

Step-by-step guide to planting to-

1. Choose your sunniest location.
2. Fertilize the soil a few days before using [tomato fertilizer](#).
3. Moisten the soil if it's very dry.
4. Remove any blossoms from seedlings.
5. Space plants 12- to 18-inches if staked, 3-feet apart if unstaked, in rows 3-feet apart if staked, 4-feet apart if not.
6. Make a 3- to 4-inch trench, remove leaves and bury 6 -inches of stem in the trench, or upright if transplanting from a larger pot.
7. Fill the trench with soil then water with a fertilizer solution.
8. Place a label marker near the plant to identify the variety.
9. Prepare to use [frost protection](#) practices if cold nights threaten.

Follow the above steps and you will be off to a great start!



How to grow and care for Aloe Vera Plants

It's not just a sunburn soother. Grown at home, aloe vera can provide some tropical flair to your desktop or garden as an easy-going succulent. Keep your potted friend happy with these quick care tips.

Growing Aloe Vera Indoors

Good news for black thumbs: Aloe has won over many home gardeners for its hardiness and tolerance of forgetful waterers. To keep it happy, **plant aloe in a terra cotta pot with well-drained dirt.**



Your best bet is to mix equal parts sand and potting soil or buy a special succulent mix. The terra cotta also dries faster than other plastic or glazed containers.

Repot your aloe if the weight of the plant causes tipping, but otherwise don't worry about giving it lots of space. This plant thrives in snug conditions.

Place your aloe in a bright, sunny place.

Otherwise it will go dormant and stop growing.

Water the plant heavily about once every two weeks, waiting until the soil dries out fully.

Since this is a desert species, keeping the dirt moist will cause the roots to rot. Limp or brown leaves also signal you've overdone the H₂O.

If you like, you can move your potted plant outdoors for the summer, but don't put it in direct sunlight right away. Gradually place it in a brighter spot every few days to prevent overexposure.

Growing Aloe Vera Outdoors



If you live in a warm climate year-round (Zone 10 or higher on the USDA Plant Hardiness Map), you can nurture your aloe outside. Freezing temperatures will kill the leaves, but **you really have to worry about frozen soil, as that will kill the roots;** and no new sprouts will grow.

When picking a spot, **look for a well-drained bed.** You won't need to water your aloe with the exception of droughts. **If it hasn't rained in months, give it a good soaking** and then let the soil dry out again.

Caring for Aloe Vera

As a bonus, **your aloe will produce a tall stalk of small, bell-shaped flowers;** from time to time. Once the blooms fade, you can snip the stem off at the base.



Even better, **aloe plants also produce new, smaller plants** perfect for propagation. If you notice one of these "babies," dump out the dirt and tease apart the roots of the different plants, re-

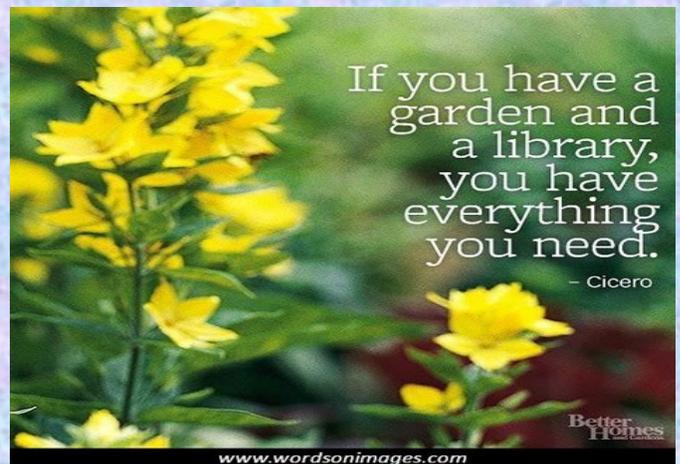
planting in separate containers.

If you're keen to give aloe plants to friends, **you can try starting your own plants** by cutting off a few leaves. Trim to



about 3 inches from the leaf tip; then put the cut ends down in a container of potting mix. While not every one will take, some will sprout tiny new leaves at the base. Wait until this new plant grows a few inches before repotting again

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CHILTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

PLANT SWAP

May 8, 2018

10:00 AM

Special Guest: Michael Thomason

AMGA Vice President

Demonstration Garden/CREC

120 County Road 756

Clanton, AL 35045

What to Bring

- A plant from your garden (rooted in) or purchased and an identification label
- Any plants you want to share – please make sure plants include a description, bloom time, color of bloom, sun/shade requirements. These can be brought in a box w/plant information on the box
- Covered Dish To Share
- Chair

You don't
want to miss
any of these
seminars.

2018 Classes

Presented by Autauga County Master Gardeners Association & City of Prattville

classes!

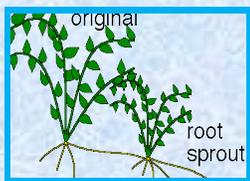
All classes are held at the Doster Center at 9:00 am

March 24— “Introduction to Hummingbirds in Alabama” presented by Fred Bassett. Don’t miss this exciting presentation from a man who devotes his live to hummingbirds and travels around the United States banding them.



May 11— Karen Weber will present “Growing A Beautiful Garden” and share ideas about plants, pruning, ergonomics and bulbs.

July 14—”All About Bonsai” presented by Mark Waldo. Learn how to choose plants for bonsai, pruning techniques and examples using the instructor’s many plants. Another class you will not want to miss.



September 15— “Tips and Demonstration on Plant Propagation” presented by Rona Watson. Double your plants through propagation.

November 7—”Holiday Decorating” presented by Charlotte Hall who will discuss how to decorate for the holidays through natural materials.



PINAPPLE RAISEN NUT BREAD

MARAJORIE HANNAH

INGREDIENTS:

1 C Sugar
1 C Vegetable Oil
1 C Crushed Pineapple drained
3 C Flour
1 Tsp Baking Soda
1 Tsp Salt
1 C Chopped Pecans
3/4 C Brown Sugar packed
3 Eggs
1 Tsp Rum Extract
1 Tbsp Ground Cinnamon
1 Tsp Baking Powder
1/2 Tsp Ground Cloves
3/4 C Raisins

DIRECTIONS:

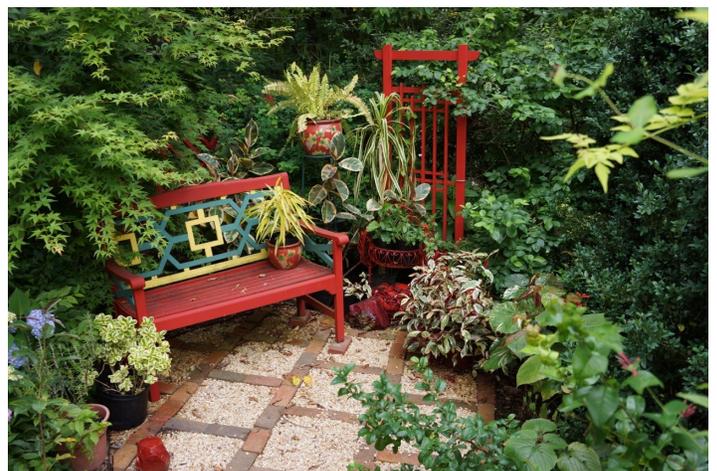
Beat sugar, oil, and eggs in a large bowl. Sift flour, cinnamon, baking soda, baking powder, salt, and cloves. Stir into egg mixture. Fold in pecans and raisins. Spoon into 2 greased loaf pans. Bake at 325 F. for 50-55 minutes or until toothpick near center comes out clean. Cool for 10 minutes before removing from pan. Makes 2 loaves.



The Little Garden - Poem by Amy Lowell

A little garden on a bleak hillside
Where deep the heavy, dazzling mountain snow
Lies far into the spring. The sun's pale glow
Is scarcely able to melt patches wide
About the single rose bush. All denied
Of nature's tender ministries. But no, --
For wonder-working faith has made it blow
With flowers many hued and starry-eyed.
Here sleeps the sun long, idle summer hours;
Here butterflies and bees fare far to rove
Amid the crumpled leaves of poppy flowers;

Here four o'clocks, to the passionate night above
Fling whiffs of perfume, like pale incense showers.
A little garden, loved with a great love!



Lunch and Learn 2018

1st THURSDAY of EVERY Month

12:00-1:00 PM

Trinity United Methodist Church
610 Fairview Avenue, Prattville 36066

- 4 January** Gardening 101
Amanda Borden, Advanced MG
- 1 February** Roses
Gloria Purnell, Master Rosarian
- 1 March** Butterflies, Bees, and Other Pollinators
Dr. David Held, Entomologist AU
- 5 April** Blueberries
Dr. Chip East, Horticulturist ACES
- 10 May** Figs
Dr. Arlie Powell, Petals from the Past
- 7 June** Herbs
Tia Gonzales, Medicinal Plant Garden AU
- 12 July** Cooking with Herbs & Spices
Janice Hall, Food Safety & Quality, ACES
- 2 August** Plant Propagation
Don Armstrong, Master Gardener
- 6 September** Drought Tolerant Plants for the South
Dr. Sue Webb, Petals from the Past
- 4 October** Shade Loving Plants
Jane McCarthy, Master Gardener
- 1 November** Growing Citrus Trees in Containers
Tom McLemore, Master Gardener
- 6 December** Insects-Good Guys or Bad Guys
Dr. Fudd Graham, Entomologist, AU

For more information, contact
Autauga County Extension Office 334.361.7273

BRING A SACK LUNCH

DRINKS PROVIDED



Monthly Meetings

Second Thursday of each month at First Baptist Church, Prattville (unless otherwise notified)

⇒ All odd-numbered months: January, March, May, July, September, November will have 6:00 p.m. meetings.

⇒ Most even-numbered months: February, April, June, August, October will have 9:00 a.m. meeting.



Things to do.....

- ◆ Start spray program for all fruits
- ◆ Prune spring flowering shrubs after flowering
- ◆ Plant tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, sweet potatoes
- ◆ Plant gladiolus, fancy-leafed caladiums, milk and wine lilies, and gloriosa lilies.
- ◆ Plant container roses from nurseries or garden centers



**Autauga County Master Gardeners
Assoc.
c/o Autauga County Extension Office
2226 Highway 14 West
Autaugaville, AL 36003**

PLACE
STAMP
HERE

To: