

Chilton County Master Gardeners Monthly Meeting

February 10, 2026

Clanton Recreation Center

Welcome

Hugh Nichols, President opened the meeting at 9:30. Clem Clapp offered the Pledge of Allegiance.

Program

Sonja Johnson introduced today's speaker, Keith Evans of Sugar Hill U-Pick Farms in Verbena.

Mr. Evans and his family have been growing strawberries for 20 years. Because strawberries "are the most unforgiving plant in the world" they present many challenges for the grower to overcome. Keith, his wife Michelle, and her sister Rachel along with her husband Scott Penton co-own the enterprise. There are some 52 acres with 190,000 strawberry plants under cultivation. The farm also has other produce (peaches, beans, peas, okra, etc.).

Keith told the story of his upbringing and working on the farm. Never did he dream his homelife would lead toward his vocation. He said he was blessed and grateful.

The prepared slide show included pictures and descriptions of the year-long strawberry growing business. Steps include clearing the previous year's plants, fumigating the soil, laying rows along with irrigation, creating mounded rows and spreading plastic sheeting, and finally setting the plants using specialized tractor equipment. Next is spraying, fertilizing, and protecting from extreme cold with frost blankets. It is a lot of work. Hired H-2A employees supplement the family's hard labor.

A most challenging fungal pathogen is neopestalotiopsis and the pesky nutgrass/nutsedge is a never-ending battle. It takes vigilance and persistence to stay ahead. Keith talked about bumble bees being more advantageous than honeybees.

He discussed the sources of his plants and various types to produce large, sweet fruit. During the picking season the shelf life is 3-5 days. An interesting fact is that strawberries do not become sweeter or riper after they are picked.

There were several questions and lively discussion with each.

The membership thanked Mr. Evans for providing an interesting presentation. Sonja presented a small gift and took a picture with Keith.

At 10:30 Hugh announced a 10-minute break.

Awards

Trisha (and Audrey for prepared slides/pictures) presented the annual awards.

Perfect attendance for 2025: Amy Baker, Lanell Baker, Diane Clapp, Hugh Nichols, Trisha Williams, Kerry Rush

Top Hours: Harriett Jackson (353.5) Pat Farmer (290.8) Betsy Smith (284)

Top Intern Hours: Sonja Johnson (218.25)

Top CEUs: Harriet Jackson (41)

Helpline Stars: Beverly (15) Pat (7) Hugh and Donald (5) Cal, Diane H, Sam, Becky (3)

The Project of the Year is "Sharing the Love of Reading and Gardening" targeting the Libraries of Chilton County by the 2025 Intern Class Project

Finally, the *Master Gardener of the Year* was awarded to Kerry Rush.

Pictures, certificates, pins, and gracious applause accompanied each award presentation. Congratulations to all honorees and to the membership for an impressive 2025!

Birthdays

The February birthday is Diane Handley.

Treasurer's Report

Kerry announced that the financial audit was completed by outside reviewers. There were no findings or corrections. This demonstrates financially sound practices of the Chapter and meets the fiduciary requirements of the Bylaws.

Kerry Rush gave the financial report.

January 2026	For February Meeting
Beginning Balance	10,472.44
Total Deposits	0.00
Total Withdrawals	0.00
Total Checks	0.00
Net Balance Checking	10,472.44
Cash box	100.00
CD balance	8,555.15
Ending Balance	19,127.59

Kerry reported the Black Kow potting soil proceeds will be deposited to the general ledger account from which the purchase was made to benefit the Demo Garden expenses.

Kerry gave an update on the Advisory Council's recent meeting.

- A point of emphasis was payment of dues by December 31st each year. CCMGA excelled in this requirement.
- The AMGA 2026 State Conference in Huntsville (May 6-8) is nearly full. Register now if you're interested.
- An email was sent by Kerry Smith about an online store for monogrammed MG items, including early bird discounts.

- The AMGA Steering Committee has three main initiatives to meet the objectives. They are: (a) Program Guidelines for Helpline, (b) Social Media, and, (c) Review of Advance MG Certification.

Secretary's Report

Donald said there was a change to the minutes that were emailed. Sonya has been added to the Seed Exchange Committee. With no other changes, the January member meeting minutes were accepted.

Gardens Update

Kerry, Cal, and Amy gave the Demo, Extension, and Rec Center report. Essentially there is nothing to report since it is the off-season. There will soon be a workday announced on short notice when the weather warms a bit to work on lilies at the Demo Garden to prepare them for the plant sale.

Conservation Group Report

As reported last month Hugh said a prescribed burn at the Clanton Flats to benefit the Cane Brake Pitcher Plants is planned for the spring. More details to come.

Hugh has been invited to be the guest speaker at a Wetumpka MG meeting on Conservation.

Education Committee Report

Pat Farmer said that Hugh and Skip have the first session of the Junior Master Gardener Program on March 2nd.

Flyers are available for the Fig Propagation workshop at the CREC on March 5th. Please come and spread the word.

A trip to Aldridge Gardens with David Doggett is now planned for April 8th at 1:00 p.m.

Peach Award

Lanell Baker is the recipient of this month's Peach Award. She was recognized by Amy Baker for "helping with everything and for choosing to wear a smile." Lanell with her certificate and Amy posed for a picture.

Other Topics

Helpline

Beverly Williamson thanked those that had volunteered to work the Helpline. She passed around a signup sheet for future Fridays.

Ask a Master Gardener Opportunity

Wally Walters introduced Katherine Reece, Director of Friends of Chilton Animals. Ms. Reece promoted the **First Annual Pawsitively Hoppy Easter Fundraiser** to be held March 28th at Goose Pond Park. She said her organization provided pet food to seniors and other marginalized citizens so that they do not have to use their resources for pet food. Target groups are Meals on Wheels, Senior Connection, DHR Rescue, etc. The organization also provides sterilization services for pets of qualified individuals.

Ms. Reece invited the CCMGA to host an "Ask a Master Gardener" table/exhibit at the upcoming fundraiser. Hugh said he would confer with others to see what might work.

Ms. Reece said plants or flowers of some type would be welcome to adorn the Easter Bunny Picture Booth at the event.

Plant Sale is April 11th

Trisha is looking for two members to learn and become future coordinators for the Plant Sale. She passed around volunteer lists. As usual, collect boxes to be used for customer's purchases. Trisha offered tips and reminders for the group (labeling, acclimation for plants to the outdoors after the winter season, size of containers to use, etc.). She provided several tips and reminders for a successful Plant Sale. Skip made an appeal for Country Store items and looks forward to operating the store again this year.

Seed Exchange

Sam gave a report and demonstrated a prototype of a display for a Seed Exchange. The sample box had envelopes to display seeds and seeds in envelopes ready to be shared. Messages on the display offered where to find more information and promoted CCMGA. The concept includes leaving the resource at the Extension Office while it is not in use. The membership thanked the committee for their early work on this creative innovative project.

Arbor Day

The tree giveaway is planned for February 24th at the City Hall parking lot at 8:00 a.m. The preparation working is February 23rd at 9:00 a.m. at the Extension Office. Plenty of volunteers are needed for the popular community event.

August MG Class

Please help recruit for this year's class. Registration opens in June. Collect emails for prospective interns and forward to Brandy at the Extension Office. The minimum class size is 10.

Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:50.

Donald Jones, Secretary