

Chilton County Master Gardener Monthly Meeting

August 11, 2026: 9:30 a.m.

Clanton City Hall, Room 330

Call to Order

Chairman Hugh Nichols called the meeting to order at 9:30. Clem Clapp led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Program

Sonja Johnson, VP introduced the speaker. Bethany O'Rear is an ACES Regional Extension Agent for Blount, Jefferson, and St. Claire counties. She serves as the Alabama state coordinator for the Great Southeast Pollinator Census and helps lead statewide initiatives such as Grow More Give More. She coordinates three active Master Gardener programs and works closely with volunteers and educators.

Ms. O'Rear discussed the Great Southeast Pollinator Census that is scheduled for August 21st and 22nd. She said the program started in Georgia in 2018. In 2019 there were 4,000 participants in Georgia. The effort then expanded to other states in the southeast. The goals are to create sustainable pollinator habitat, to increase entomological literacy of citizens, and to generate useful data about the pollinator populations. Elements such as pollinator trends, weather effects, and the interaction of honey bees and native bees are critical to investigate. Ms. O'Rear gave examples of groups or organizations that can participate. Essentially anyone is welcome to count pollinators using the guidelines and are asked to report their findings. She advocated creating pollinator gardens or plantings to nurture pollinators and their benefit to society. Pictures of various pollinators, plants blooming in August, and steps to take to count accurately were highlighted. In 2025, Alabama had 2,867 counts turned in (55 of the 67 counties) which included 62 educators who used the census as part of their teaching curriculum. Ways to connect include Facebook, other social media, and the website www.gsepc.org. Available were cards, posters, and counting sheets.

Hugh and Sonja announced the collaboration with Petals From The Past as the partner for CCMGA to count pollinators. Come either or both days (8/21 & 8/22). Bring children or grandchildren as there are guided programs designed especially for them.

Sonja provided Ms. O'Rear with a token gift and the group applauded the presentation.

Hugh recognized July and August birthdays and then the group took a short break beginning at 10:25.

Secretary's Report

Donald asked if there were any changes or corrections for the July meeting minutes that were sent electronically and available on the website. With no changes, the minutes were accepted.

Treasurer's Report

Kerry gave the July financial report. There were no expenses or revenue for the month. As of the end of the month, there is \$12,802.85 in the checking account with total assets of \$21,684.19. Report accepted.

Garden Reports

Kerry gave the Demo Garden report. There was a productive workday yesterday pulling weeds and keeping the grounds in shape. Thanks to new MG interns who pitched in to help! It seems the memorial brick pathway needs some attention to complete the work. The Board has requested options be explored to find a mason or landscaper to continue laying of the memorial and honorary bricks. That effort has begun.

Cal gave the Extension Office report. Weeds have been sprayed and a workday was held on July 20th. Beds are in good shape.

Lanell gave the Rec Center report. She has pulled some weeds and straightened the beds, but a workday is needed. Trisha asked that the group select a day and she'll make an email announcement. It doesn't have to be on a Monday, but a week or so notice would be advisable.

Conservation Report

Hugh said he had taken pictures of the Canebrake Pitcher Plants at the Clanton Flats. Thankfully there are plentiful blooms owing to the ongoing work to preserve this endangered species. He then explained for the newcomers and guests what plants in Chilton County the Chapter has adopted for conservation.

Hugh said seed collection from the local pitcher plants is likely planned for this fall by Kelly Cole with the seed bank in Atlanta.

Education Committee Report

Betsy gave a most encouraging report on the orientation session for the 2026 Master Gardeners Intern Class. There are 15 new members enrolled in this year's session. The kickoff was August 6th and many in attendance were present and helped explain Chapter operations and offered encouragement to the new class participants. Jacob provided the instruction for the first class after refreshments and social time. The classes meet on Thursdays at 9:30 at CREC. A sign-up sheet was available to let Betsy, Trisha, and Jacob know who plans to attend for support. Other members have agreed to lead some labs as part of the curriculum. A round of applause was offered to the interns who attended today's meeting.

Pat gave the 4H report. She indicated next spring's Junior MG program will again be with SPAN. It was such a successful first year, the committee wanted to replicate the design for 2027. Skip and Sharon again volunteered to be liaisons/coordinators for the program along with Pat and Krystal Vaith.

Door prize recipients were Hannah (2026 Intern), Martha, and Beverly.

Peach Award

Amy had delivered Peach Award certificates and pins for Hugh to present. The awards cover the last few meetings. Receiving the Peach Awards were Sharon Hosch, Sam Blackmon, and Johnny Higginbotham. Congratulations to the new recipients! A picture was taken for publicity.

Volunteer Opportunities

Beverly had a sign-up sheet for Helpline. Interns will have an opportunity before too long, but slots remain until then.

Sonja had a sign-up sheet for the aforementioned Pollinator Census at Petals on August 21st and 22nd. Include the number of children for planning purposes.

Pat had a sign-up sheet for Chick Chain, a 4H program on September 19th. Cookies or packable sweets are needed. Also needed are volunteers to assemble the lunch bags.

Sonja had a sign-up sheet for help with the Landowners Tour on October 23rd in Verbena. She is responsible for decorations and needs help.

The 2027 Plant Sale date is April 10th (makeup day April 17th). Divide plants now or in early spring to give them time to be established and ready for sale next spring.

Save your seeds for the Seed Exchange portable exhibit. Dani Carroll will discuss seed collecting at next month's meeting.

Advisory Council Update

Kerry gave the update. Sam has volunteered to be the alternate representative (Betsy had to roll off due to service on the statewide nomination committee). Thank you, Sam! The AC met last week and apparently the

topic of new fines for delayed dues payment was a lively issue. Kerry thanked Membership Chair Trisha for her faithful efforts to make sure chapter and membership dues are paid on time (December 31st of each year). October 9th is the AMGA Fall Seminar in Auburn. Registration flyers are on the table. Featured this year is a sneak peek at new Transformation Garden projects, like the children's garden and vineyards. The 2027 Annual Conference is in Homewood April 7th – 9th and in 2028 it is in Dothan. More details as the time gets closer.

Auburn University has launched a new "Branch and Bloom Society" which is an endowment program to support Extension and Master Gardener endeavors.

Extension Update

Jacob announced a Pepper Jelly workshop in Columbiana on September 1st. Watch for an email from him for details.

Other Business

The Grow More Give More program ends on Labor Day, September 7th. So far, Chilton County has donated 510 pounds. Nice work!

Final door prizes were won by Lanell and Valerie (2026 Intern).

Before the meeting ended, Hugh asked if anyone had read interesting articles or books on gardening lately. Skip shared two: "Sweet Apple Garden Book" by Celeste King Sidley (of the Atlanta Constitution) and, "Malibar Farm" by Lewis Browfield. Hugh added the article that appears in the current "Alabama Living" magazine by our guest speaker today, Beth O'Rear.

Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:15.

There were 28 members present and 2 guests in attendance.

Donald Jones, Secretary