

July 11, 2008

Special Edition

LIMESTONE COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

Our Community Garden

Celebrating 15 Years 1993-2008



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Thomas Jefferson (1743 – 1826) wrote in a letter to Charles Wilson Peale:

“I have often thought that if heaven had given me a choice of my position and calling, it should have been on a rich spot on earth, well-watered, and near a good market for the productions of the garden. No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden.”

Caroline Page and Jennifer White of DHR (Department of Human Resources) must have felt likewise after a brainstorming session one day about 15 years ago. They reasoned that fresh vegetables would be the perfect life enhancement to supplement the diets of elderly persons who could no longer plant gardens on their own. With the help of Dorothy Skrotzki, they set about making this idea a promise. It was early spring 1993 and the promise begins with space donated by Friendship United Methodist Church.

Blood sweat and tears were the name of the game that first year. Everyone knows gardening in Alabama can be a sweaty adventure. And if you haven't gotten bloodied up at least once in your garden, you must have had another person do the work for you. And tears, well, Jennifer can tell you about tears. For months as she worked in that half-acre garden she found it extremely fulfilling, but by the time the next year came around, the garden seemed larger and the sun seemed hotter. There were no other

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For your consideration:

- The garden took vision to create
- The garden takes hard work to create
- The garden takes knowledge to produce
- The garden gives back more than planted

Early Volunteers at the Friendship United Methodist Church

Leroy Aderholt
Jeff Bass
Becky Bentley
Karen Bethea
Bill Black
Jerry Boyd

Boys and Girls Club
Doug Chapman
George Clark
Jane Coffman
Jerry Davis

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volunteers. She still had the full load of her DHR job. It was an awful lot of work for one person and very few volunteers to handle.

Jennifer remembers vividly getting up very early one morning (as she usually did) and working for a few hours in the garden, thinking, "I just can't do this myself anymore". So, in her garden clothes, hair in disarray, dirt under her fingernails, she dragged her garden-weary body over to Doug Chapman's office at the Cooperative Extension office and begged for some assistance. "HELP," she cried out.

This was Doug's first year on the job as county agent, 1994, so obviously he couldn't turn Jennifer's request down. He remembers that first year as his year of greatest involve-

ment, actually planting and tending to the garden's many needs. He worked with Dorothy Skrotzki at DHR who became involved with getting volunteers and supervising the harvest. At that time, the volunteers were from the Boys and Girls Club, Limestone County inmates, DHR volunteers, and church group volunteers. The garden was a true community relationship with volunteers still being coordinated through Jennifer White's DHR office.

Doug remembers one busy and windy day in the garden when he was spreading lime, just trying to get the job done. Someone from the adjacent building to the garden, where the day care center was located, came out and literally chased the gardeners away. They didn't want lime dust on the children during their

playtime outside. So the gardening continued, but not during the little ones' time at school.

One of Doug's best ideas was to enlist help from the Master Gardener Association, still in its infancy, but with many strong-willed and hearty members. In the years since then, Doug has donated specific varieties of hard-to-find plants and seeds. He has freely given his advice on pest management and his assistance with other problems that usually pop up in the garden. He could always be counted on for assistance and encouragement. Jennifer White thinks Doug's help was immeasurable. She fondly remembers refereeing the men who volunteered when they were attempting to choose the "best" variety of green beans, or corn, tomatoes,

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"Shall I not have intelligence with the earth?

Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?"

Henry David Thoreau



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etc. The volunteers were obviously strong-minded as well!

In the Limestone County Master Gardener Association (LCMGA) minutes of May 1995, it was recorded that Doug Chapman formally asked for volunteers to work the Community Garden. The garden already had many DHR volunteers who were also Master Gardeners (MG's). Now, under the presidency of George Clarke, the Community Garden became the favorite project of both Master Gardeners and Intern volunteers. Not only was the opportunity of working in the garden educational, it was also an opportunity for interns to earn volunteer hours to gain certification as full-fledged Master Gardeners.

Art Tarwater broke the ground at the second site at Friendship United Methodist Church for the garden in 1995. He did all of the plowing, laying out of the rows and the follow-up heavy equipment work. Both George Clarke and Art Tarwater supervised this project during the first year it came under the Master Gardener's control. Edd Hall, a DHR volunteer and Optimist Club member, furnished heavy equipment and assisted in the gathering of the gar-

den vegetables, continuing the work schedule he started earlier with Jennifer White. Jerry Davis, current president of LCMGA and this year's garden leader, worked as a volunteer in 1995 as well as the years prior. He remembers he had already been volunteering at the garden in 1993, the year before he was an MG intern.

One of the early memories of Edd Hall, Jennifer White and Jerry Franks is the watermelon patch. It grew outside the church garden acreage and into the grass. The grass had grown tall after some rains, and the watermelons were sitting there hidden from view. A church volunteer was bushhogging the area and without noticing, cut up a large swath of the watermelons. Some bright red halves were sitting in the cut grass, while the rest of the red and green pieces were flying and spitting in all directions. The odd noise finally made the driver look back to see what was happening, and he had a scared look about him with all that bright red watermelon flesh in the just-cut path. No one knew for sure what he was thinking, but the gardener volunteers all got a big laugh over that event.

Okra was planted for sev-



eral years. It would grow tall, and the morning dew would get you very wet from head to toe while picking it. Jennifer White says "One year, Doug Chapman gave us a new kind of okra to try. It grew a long pod, but was still tender. We had to tell all the seniors that they should not throw this out because it was so big. They thought it

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"Last night we had three small zucchini for dinner that were grown within fifty feet of our back door. I estimate they cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$371.49 each."

Andy Rooney



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would not be worth eating.”

It was fortunate that Friendship United Methodist Church was able to donate use of its land for this project for both the first and second site for the Community Garden. Reverend Calvin Havens never hesitated in offering use of the land and the church even supplied the water for the garden. He believes that first year was about 1993, though he can't offer any documentation. Reverend Havens relates the garden in his memory to the different church building projects during the early 1990's. After a time, the garden was moved to its second location on the property to make way for a parking lot. Later around 1999 it was moved again to make room for a new building.

Unfortunately, with the new building there was no room left on site for the Community Garden.

This time Edd Hall came to the rescue. Edd had a few acres where he planted his own garden and grew some vegetables for resale on Easter Ferry Road. He and his lovely wife, Martha, readily agreed to continue the garden on their land and have hosted the Community Garden and its volunteers ever since. For his beneficence, Edd was made an Honorary Master Gardener. To date he has attended nearly all the meetings and logged in more hours at the Community Garden than anyone else.

Over the years, the Community Garden project leaders have been people of great strength of character and fortitude. They include:

Jennifer White (1993-1994)
George Clark and Art Tarwater (1995-1997)
Jerry Franks (1996-2000)
David Linn (2001-2002)
John O'Neill (2003)
Jim Ladner (2004-2007)
Jerry Davis (2008)

It is due to their stalwart leadership that the Community Garden has continued through the years.

Funding for the Commu-

nity Garden has come from many places. From 1994 to the present, advice, seeds, and seedlings have come through Doug Chapman, Limestone County's Extension Agent. From the beginning, donations came from churches, other community organizations, businesses, and individuals. A community grant of \$1500 was received from Representative Tommy Carter & Senator Tom Butler for a cultivator. An additional grant was received to purchase a storage building, still in use at the Community Garden. Several hundreds of dollars from the LCMGA fund are used yearly for supplies and tools for maximum production. Even now, donations come into the Community Garden. In this year, 2008, MG Jerry Franks and Dave Flanigan (Current President of the North Alabama Daylily Society and longtime friend of the LCMGA) have supplied all of the tomato plants, starting them in their own greenhouses. This will be the largest variety of tomatoes ever planted. Jerry Davis and John O'Neill are keeping the records for the best growers, largest fruit, sweetest flavors, most resistant to diseases and insects, etc. with the final results to be published in the Master Gar-

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And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

Genesis 2:15



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deners Fall Newsletter.

“I used to visit and revisit it a dozen times a day, and stand in deep contemplation over my vegetable progeny with a love that nobody could share or conceive of who had never taken part in the process of creation. It was one of the most bewitching sights in the world to observe a hill of beans thrusting aside the soil, or a rose of early peas just peeping forth sufficiently to trace a line of delicate green.”

Nathaniel Hawthorne,

Mosses from an Old Manse

In 1996 the Community Garden made headlines. While many other community gardens in the state had to stop functioning due to lack of community participation, the Limestone County Community Garden was strong and stable. Master Gardener Jerry Franks was the garden leader from this point to 2000, and gave all his records to Jennifer White. Doug Chapman made the decision on what varieties to plant. During 1996-7-8 this garden served 662 individuals, with produce being distributed through DHR, COA (Council on Aging), CASA and Hospice. It was in 1997 that the grants were received for the cultivator and garden shed. It is believed by this time, the garden had grown to be the largest and most productive

one in North Alabama and possibly in the state. In 1997 the yield was 59 gallons of squash, 171 gallons of tomatoes, 204 gallons green beans, 112 gallons okra, 114 gallons cucumbers, 484 gallons peas and 6000 ears of corn, with turnip greens left in the field for the community to harvest on their own. The Community Garden is still believed to be among the oldest in the entire state of Alabama.

Jerry Franks remembers once when the ground was soaking wet, the volunteers stood around the edges of the garden, hesitating to cross onto the muddy path to pick the beans that were ripe and ready to be harvested. Flick Hargroder was a hard worker in the garden. He decided not to stand around and talk about the work; he would just go out there and pick. Well, he did and lost his boot in the muck, but kept on picking. His boot wasn't found for 2 weeks! Jerry Franks said, "Flick became one of the most dependable workers we had." Apparently mud turns out to be a predicament for the whole family. Lou Ella Hargroder, Flick's wife, also got stuck in the mud, and Jennifer White had to pull her out of the cucumber patch. Then later, Edd Hall remembers Flick's daughter, Mary Gayle Ermert,

got stuck in the mud and fell right in it. "It was Saturday and we had to pick beans fast from the Community Garden because they were being attacked by Japanese Beetles. But it had rained and the garden was very muddy, so we all had to wear boots. Mary Gayle got stuck and fell straight into the mud. She laughed; we all laughed. It was fun, and a funny moment for all of us to see her covered in mud."

An important part of the administration of the Community Garden was communications. Letting the volunteers know when the garden plot was ready to plant, weed, pick the produce, and clean up for the winter. Jeanette Hargrove started working on this around 1997-1998. She reminds us that she did it all by phone. Everyone didn't have e-mail in those days. So, she phoned everyone from a list of volunteers. She called again and again until someone finally answered the phone. She considered herself lucky when she got an answering machine. She was always under the gun to make the calls, because when the beans needed picking, they needed picking "now!" Tomorrow the beans would be bigger, tougher, and less tasty. Tomorrow it might rain.

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Tomorrow it might be 100 degrees in the shade.

In 1999/2000 the new garden in its new location did not yield quite as much since the soil needed to be brought up to speed with amendments and fertilizers. By 2001, when David Linn took over, volunteerism had waned somewhat, but the garden was still producing a good quantity of produce. In those early years, since David lived near the Friendship Church, he usually was one of the first to arrive and start the gardening for the day. It seemed natural for him to take on full responsibility later, as a Master Gardener, since he already had the working knowledge and knew everyone involved. "It seemed like it was something I wanted to do, and it was the reason I joined the [Master Gardener] group." David Linn still has his own vegetable

garden. He obviously loves the hobby.

John O'Neill never meant to get into agriculture when he became a Master Gardener. Nevertheless, he kept the garden going after David's term as Project Leader. John is a quiet man, but he has streak of quiet fun that comes out every now and then, bringing grins to all faces. "Early on a recent Saturday [2005] as a handful of Master Gardener interns gathered at the community garden site off Easter Ferry Road to await instruction on the morning's task, Master Gardener John O'Neill approached with a pink plastic flamingo tucked under each arm. Pressing their wiry legs into the plowed earth, John performed a solemn introduction. "Interns," he said, "I'd like you to meet Flora and Fauna, the Master Gardener mascots. They go everywhere we do." For the next couple of hours, Flora and Fauna observed silently as interns and graduates worked together to clean bean pole supports of last years tendrils; inventory tomato cages and metal stakes; check and repair soaker hoses; and see that tillers were in working order." Later John moved on to something he knew more about, and currently heads the MG Plant Sale project. He still helps out

in the Community Garden though, keeping his fingers in the figurative "vegetable pie."

When Jim Ladner was handed the reins in 2004, there were no MG interns to help out. Nowadays there are only a few new interns each year, whereas in the past interns were the greatest source of labor for the garden. But the stalwart hard-core gardeners of past garden seasons kept the garden growing. Edd Hall, our tireless worker and garden host was our "Johnny on the spot" to advise when to plant, when to use pesticides, when to pull weeds, and when to pick. Doug Chapman still advised with the plant varieties for each season. Jim developed the Community Garden Handbook, with careful record keeping. In addition to sweat, muscle, and management of the gardening tasks, Jim added some personal touches that make for wonderful team spirit. When volunteers picked beans in the mud, they were given stickers for their lapels saying "Bean Team." There was also the "Corn Crew" and "Squash Squad." All the bags distributed with produce had stickers provided by Jim saying "Produced by Master Gardeners." Jim thought communication

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**"To my favorite honeydew, do you carrot all for me? My heart beets for you, with your turnip nose, radish face. You are a peach. If we cantaloupe, lettuce marry. Weed make a swell pear."
...Author Unknown**



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was key, working fast was important and flexible workers were a must.

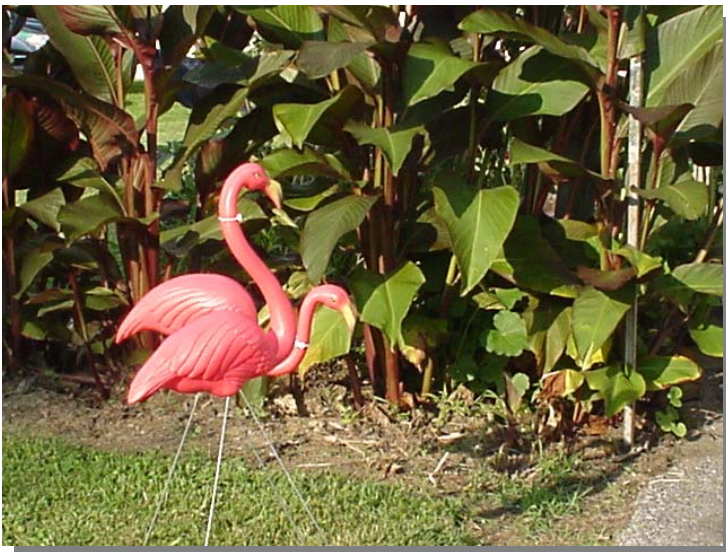
One of the great benefits of the community garden idea, of course, was the produce picked for the DHR and CASA needy individuals. "The elderly who received the fresh produce had wonderful appreciative comments regarding the produce and the fact that someone cared enough to do this for them. They realized all the hard work and time that went into the project." Many of the elderly had their own gardens in their early years. "They talked of how long it had been since they had tasted fresh green beans and okra and of how they cooked it and invited their families to eat with them." Faye Hardiman, who has helped in the later years with distribution, knows that most harvesting days

start very early in the morning with 6-10 people picking the vegetables. The produce is then put in bags and divided amongst the Hospice, DHR and Senior Center clients. Faye says some people call every time they receive a bag of produce to thank MG's for the food and mention, "The corn was so good!" and "The tomatoes were great!" Most of us have probably discerned the correlation between energy expended in the garden to the taste of the vegetables. The harder you work, the more delectable the vegetable seems. On this premise, Jennifer White and all the volunteers since that first year in 1993 can tell you that the vegetables coming from this garden are very good indeed.

Often less noticed, and perhaps nearly as important as the produce itself, is the benefit of the growing friendships of not only the individuals involved, but of the different groups and organizations in Athens. The Master Gardeners and DHR tend to help each other in their projects. Jennifer White, a DHR employee, became a Master Gardener in 1999, and Edd Hall, a long-time DHR volunteer, was made an honorary MG. Other DHR volunteers who became Master Gardeners are Jerry Davis (1994), Jerry Franks

((1996), Rodell Thacker (1996), David Linn (1996) along with many others. Some of the individuals who worked in the garden were from the local churches and who volunteered their time on behalf of a church group. And still others came from civic organizations such as Athens Garden Club, Americorps, and Boys & Girls Club.

Now it is Summer 2008, 15 years after the first seeds were planted. It has been a back-wrenching, but unifying, and productive 15 years. The Limestone County Community Garden has covered between 1/2 acre – 2 acres of ground. It has had several project leaders, been under control and shared control by two organizations, DHR and LCMGA, and has hosted countless volunteers at three separate locations. The garden has served hundreds of elderly Limestone County citizens. A great service has been given this community by the simple chore of gardening. All who managed, volunteered labor, donated money, tools and time have good reason to be proud of our community garden.



Early Volunteers at the Friendship United Methodist Church

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Kathryn Davis
 Jerry Franks
 Gina Garth
 Congo Grady
 Jerry Gray
 Josh Greene
 Herbie Greenhaw
 Edd Hall
 Flick Hargroder
 Lou Hargroder
 Jeanette Hargrove
 Elaine Harris
 Evelyn Harrison
 Jerry Honeycutt
 Jones Jacqueline
 Suzanne Johnson
 Mary Johnston
 Pat Johnston
 Jan Layton
 Herb Lenox
 Christy Leopard
 David Linn
 Susan Linn
 Lisa Marshall
 Karin McAndrew
 Jason McCracken
 Martha McCracken
 Sarah McElyea
 William Morris
 Brandon Nelson
 Jeff Pace
 Homer Pack
 Caroline Page
 Danielle Richardson

Nancy Robinette
 Arnissa Rowe
 Bo Russell
 Ralph Seigler
 Melissa Sides
 Dorothy Skrotzki
 Art Tarwater
 Houston Taylor
 Rodell Thacker
 Eligah Townsend
 Elaine Webster
 Jennifer White
 William Whitt
 Charles Workman



Limestone County Master Gardeners who volunteered at the Community Garden at Easter Ferry Road:

MaryLou Beck	Jim Ladner
Doug Chapman	Liz Ladner
Jerry Davis	Lawson Lee
Naomi Dubois	Jim Markestad
Mary Gayle Ermert	Martha McCracken
Gene Ermert	Nancy Morton
Dave Flanigan	Paul O'Neal
Jerry Franks	John O'Neill
Patricia Frey	Nancy Robinette
Bruce Fulton	Bhupendra Shah
Charlotte Fulton	Mary Simmons
Linda Gabe	Rodell Thacker
Joni Gruber	Bob Trent
Edd Hall	David Webster
Jeanette Hargrove	Jennifer White
Faye Hardiman	Melanie Williams
Delyn Helton	Carl Witty
Jerry Hooper	
Tommy Hutton	
Janice Hutton	



Contributors

Donations

4-H Clubs
 Adult Probation Office
 Americorps
 Athens Police Department
 Auburn Extension Service
 Beasley Produce
 Benevolent Fund
 Beta Club
 Bonnie Plant Farm
 Burgreen Contracting Co.
 Capshaw Homemakers Club
 CASA Huntsville
 CWF of the First Christian Church
 DHR
 Edd Hall, Landowner
 Faithful Followers – First Baptist Church
 First Christian Church, CWF
 First Presbyterian Retired Men
 First United Methodist Church
 Flanagan Lumber Company
 Friendship United Methodist Church
 Goldkist #411
 Gro South
 Group Dekko
 Isom’s Chapel UMW
 Juvenile Probation Office
 Keenagers – First Baptist Church

Kmart
 Limestone Correctional Facility
 Limestone County Extension Service
 Limestone County Farmers’ Cooperative
 Limestone County Jail
 Limestone County Sheriffs Office
 Master Gardeners
 Railroad Bazaar
 Trinity Congregational Church
 Wal-Mart

Bags
 Buckets
 Fence Posts
 Fertilizer
 Garden tools
 Hoses
 Money
 Seed Machine
 Seeds & Plants
 Shed
 Sprinkler
 Tiller
 Tomato cages
 Twine
 Use of tractor
 Wire



**LIMESTONE COUNTY MASTER
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Knowing to grow is going to grow

WE'RE ON THE WEB!

[http://www.aces.edu/counties/Limestone/
MastGard/index.html](http://www.aces.edu/counties/Limestone/MastGard/index.html)



Yields

1997 Yields

39 gal squash
96 dz corn
177 gal tomatoes
33.5 gal beans
119.5 gal peas
205 gal turnip greens

1998 Yields

97 gal squash
254 dz corn
3.5 gal green peppers
212 gal peas
158 gal beans
93 gal tomatoes
38 gal cucumbers
127 gal okra

2003 Yield

107 dz corn
71 gal pole beans
106 gal tomatoes

2004 Yield

143 gal beans
119 dz corn
153 gal tomatoes
12 gal squash
55 gal peas

2005 Yield

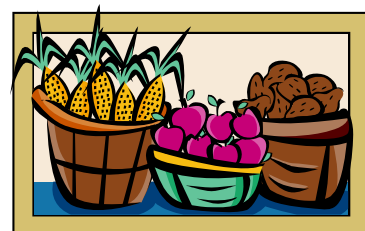
80 gal beans
203 dz corn
106 gal tomatoes
40 gal squash
32 gal peas

2006 Yield

95 gal beans
250 dz corn
155 gal tomatoes
7 gal squash

2007 Yields

152.5 gal beans
159 dz corn
155 gal tomatoes
10 gal squash



"In order to live off a garden,
you practically have to live in
it."

...Frank McKinney Hubbard

This special edition news-
letter for the Limestone
County Master Gardener
Association was developed
from meeting minutes,
interviews, past newslet-
ters, Internet informa-
tion, newspaper articles,
and garden documenta-
tion from the Project
Leaders reports.

Joni Gruber and
Jennifer White