



GARDEN THYMES

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Master Gardeners of North Alabama, Inc.



Déjà vu is the feeling that one has experienced something before. This was the feeling I had when asked to be president in October. It was an honor to be MGNA President 2012 – 2013 and to be President again, in 2021, is simply a double honor.

What a year 2020 was. MGNA Board along with Committee and Project Chairs and Co-chairs are optimistic that this year will be different, and we're planning with that thought in mind. There are several places where you can pick up volunteer hours:

Become a MG Buddy/Mentor – new MG class starts in February. Contact Rhonda Britton (rcb0003@auburn.edu)

Greenhouse – should be up and going soon and lots and lots of helping hands are needed. We are hoping to have a MGNA Plant Sale with most of the plants coming from our greenhouse. Contact Carolyn Wade (cbwade9@gmail.com)

MGNA Plant Sale – April/May - a great place to pick up some volunteer hours. Contact Sue Khoury (suekhoury@knology.net)

Adopt-a-Spot – help us take care of the median near Lewter's, downtown. Contact Dave Grey (dagrey3593@gmail.com)

Demonstration Vegetable Garden (DVG) – do you enjoy growing vegetables, then this is for you. The DVG is located at the Botanical Garden. Contact Susan Parker (susan.par96@gmail.com)

There are many more areas where you can pick up volunteer hours, and they will be showcased throughout the year.

Wishing you a blessed and healthy New Year

Janet Boothe (W06)

MGNA President

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MGNA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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January 2021—December 2021

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President @mginfo.org

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January 2021-December 2023

Connie Carr (F16)

January 2019—December 2021

Liz Gould (F18)

January 2020—December 2022

Eugene Roberts (F14)

January 2021-December 2023

Barbara Stansky (W17)

January 2020-December 2022

Carolyn Wade (W12)

January 2019 -December 2021

All directors can be reached at: Director@mginfo.org.



MASTER GARDENER PROFILE

Mary Ann Stasiak (W18)

“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in Heaven”
Matthew 5:15-16

Ann Tippie (W12)

Mary Ann was born and raised in suburban Philadelphia, PA, where her father still resides. She has one sister. Mary Ann met her husband, Ed, at work in the Washington DC area. Ed had grown children when they met, so she jumped right to grandchildren, who are now out of college with their own families.

Mary Ann received a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Massachusetts/Amherst. She has two masters degrees: Masters of Business Administration from Marymount University in Arlington, VA and Masters of Science in National Security Strategy from the National War College in Washington DC. She worked as a program manager and engineer for the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) for the last twenty years of her career. Prior to that, she worked for the Navy – Naval Air Systems Command as an engineer and program manager, and as a private contractor for the Naval Sea Systems Command. Mary Ann is retired now and loving it! She has more time for gardening and yardwork!

Mary Ann jumped right into volunteering with MGNA, as soon as she became a master gardener. She has helped with Ask A Master Gardener and the Morris School project and is the chairperson for Habitat for Humanity Landscape, to name a few areas.

Mary Ann and Ed love dogs. She calls Ed a “dog whisperer”. They have always had a dog. Right now they have a cutie pie Schnauzer named Lilly, whom they adopted from a Schnauzer rescue league.

Mary Ann is very involved with volunteer activities at Messiah Lutheran Church, Maple Hill Chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution, Huntsville Assistance Program, and LEAP Academy. She also plays piano/keyboards in several swing bands (Sentimental Journey, Twickenham Jazz & Swing, Big German Band, Little German Band, Tea Time Band) as well as an instrumental group at church. She started a group from her church, Messiah Minstrels, that sings swing music—and hymns—at retirement communities. Now that they are both retired, Mary Ann and Ed love to travel. They are missing travel during the COVID sequestration! Waiting for vaccines so they can get back to it. She has given several presentations to Armchair Travelers group in Learning Quest on trips they have taken.

Mary Ann plays golf in an LPGA women’s golf league and with friends she found at the golf league. She has gotten to play lots of golf during the COVID sequestration. Mary Ann also cares for all the landscaped grounds at Messiah Lutheran Church in Madison. Messiah just finished a lovely patio in a courtyard which is surrounded by a garden she is turning into a butterfly and pollinator garden.

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MARY ANN STASIAK PROFILE (Continued)

Mary Ann says almost anyplace is a great place to visit at least once. It is always interesting at least the first time. She and Ed tend to like Hilton Head to play golf once a year. Their last trip, before COVID, was a train trip across Canada from Vancouver to Niagara Falls, which included a stop at Butchart Gardens, while they were in Vancouver—a beautiful destination. A must see for every gardener.

They moved here in 2008 from the DC area, with the MDA's BRAC move. Their plan, at the time, was to move to South Carolina, when she retired, to be near Ed's family. When they neared her retirement, they decided to stay for a while because they were enjoying what Huntsville has to offer. They are still enjoying the Huntsville life!

Mary Ann has another favorite quote: "Be yourself, everyone else is already taken".—Oscar Wilde



Penny Chilton (volunteer from Maple Hill Chapter DAR), Mary Ann and Geanine Lehmann at a Habitat build.



Lilly



Mary Ann's favorite flower is the peony. She says her mom would send them to school, with her, for her teachers.



Mary Ann and Ed
Butchart Gardens
Sunken Garden

CITY OF MADISON'S ROTARY CLUB CREATES MONARCH HABITAT

Kathy Gardner (F16)

If one of your many gardening passions is planting for pollinators, then you already know that milkweed is a host plant for the Monarch butterfly, a pollinator. In fact, milkweed is the only plant where a Monarch butterfly will lay her eggs. But did you know that the population of Monarch butterflies is at a dangerously low level? According to the non-profit Pollinator Partnership, there's been a 90% decline in the Monarch population in recent years largely due to habitat loss as a result of urban sprawl.

Since Northern Alabama experiences both the Spring and Fall migrations of the Monarch butterfly, we have a wonderful opportunity to support the Monarch's life cycle. And the Rotary Club for the City of Madison is fully embracing this opportunity.

Since I have been raising Monarchs for years, one of my dearest friends, Bailey Erickson, recently asked me to speak to the Madison Rotary in response to a challenge issued to Rotary Clubs all across America by Rotarian Frank Bures to restore Monarch habitat. (Link to the article by Frank Bures, "Butterfly Effect" that appeared in the October 2020 issue of Rotary magazine:

https://magazine.rotary.org/rotary/october_2020/MobilePagedArticle.action?articleId=1623652&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=TXTHE6200929002&utm_content=gtxcel#articleId1623652)

My message was simple: plant native milkweed. Plant a lot of it, and plant nectar sources. The nectar sources, also known as pollinator plants, will attract butterflies and will provide food when the butterflies emerge from chrysalis at the tail end of each migration period.

In late November, Erickson received the green light from the City of Madison to identify sites for consideration. We visited city parks and identified five potential sites. Our first choice, a spot that receives full sun near the soccer fields at Dublin Park, was approved. Because the area couldn't be tilled, Madison City Parks and Recreation Director Kory Alfred and his crew provided generous amounts of topsoil to the site – 160 feet wide by 10 feet deep - and then graded the topsoil in preparation for planting.

On December 5, 2020, approximately 25 volunteers created Madison's first Monarch habitat. The initial plan was to dig two trenches two feet apart, but a few days of rain required some flexibility. Volunteers John Rice and Rick Gardner slogged through the mud and dug holes a few inches deep approximately every two feet, with yellow rope as their guide. The holes were filled with a handful of purchased top soil. Master gardeners Donna Phillips, Mayra Pangborn, and volunteer Alexis Nichols deposited three to five seeds in each hole at approximately 1/2" deep and added a handful of fresh topsoil on top of the seeds. Several volunteers, including Rotarians Marc Jacobson, Kris McBride, and Mark McBride, then spread eight bales of straw across the expanse of the milkweed bed to protect the seed until Spring germination.

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MADISON MONARCH PROJECT (Continued)

This late Fall planting will ensure the cold stratification that milkweed seed requires. With Phase 1 complete, plans are under way for Phase 2. Rotarian Erickson continues to lead this effort on behalf of the Madison Rotary Club. Nectar source plants will be added to the Monarch habitat in April of 2021. Signage and certification of the Monarch habitat will follow.

To ensure we restricted our plantings to native milkweed, I reached out to Monarch Watch, to Pollinator Partnership, and to the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. Stephanie Frischie, Ph.D., Agronomist and Native Plant Materials Specialist for the Xerces Society, provided a county-by-county listing of milkweed native to Alabama. There are around nine species of milkweed that are native to Northern Alabama, which make them ideal for both Madison and Huntsville. Four of these are easy to grow and well suited for Monarchs and gardens: whorled milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*), common milkweed (*A. syriaca*) butterfly milkweed (*A. tuberosa*) and rose milkweed. Common milkweed was chosen for the Dublin Park project because the seed was readily available for purchase in bulk. This variety reproduces clonally, which can be considered an aggressive trait.

“Some milkweed species grow in a clump form (they stay as one stem or stems from the same root base) and other milkweed species grow clonally with underground rhizomes that spread horizontally and send up new stems over a wider area. Common milkweed is one of the species that spreads clonally. It is a wonderful food source (leaves) for monarch caterpillars and many other insects feed on the nectar in the flowers” advised Frischie. She added that when planting common milkweed, regular weekly upkeep during peak growth in summer limits the plant’s spread. Frischie’s guidance was valuable in assessing potential sites. The land bordering the site at Dublin Park in Madison has a pavement border running the length of the habitat, and the grounds on either side will be mowed regularly which will keep the clonal spread of common milkweed in check.

“Under consideration for future butterfly conservation projects are the retention pond on Shorter Street in Madison, the new city park on Mill Road as well as several hundred acres offered by a private corporation in Madison County. To quote Bailey Erickson, “Any and all participation by the Master Gardeners of North Alabama would be greatly appreciated”!

Rotary Clubs throughout Alabama should consult a master gardener if they accept the Rotary’s challenge to restore Monarch habitat in their communities. Frischie provided the following resources to identify milkweed and nectar plants native to your county. County distribution maps of milkweed species from the North American Plant Atlas:

<http://bonap.net/NAPA/TaxonMaps/Genus/County/Asclepias>

Xerces’ Monarch Nectar Plant List for the Southeast:

<https://xerces.org/publications/plant-lists/monarch-nectar-plants-southeast>

If you would like to volunteer for Phase 2 of the Monarch habitat or future Monarch habitat projects within the City of Madison, please contact Kathy Gardner at kgardner0321@gmail.com to be added to the volunteer distribution list for MGNA’s volunteers.



Kathy Gardner and
Bailey Erickson



Getting started



Phase 1 complete



L to R: Alexis Nichols, Cheryl Byers,
Bailey’s daughter, Bailey Erickson,
Lisa Hendrix, Tracy Hackler, Mayra
Pangborn, Donna Phillips and Kathy
Gardener

MONTHLY MEETING PRESENTATIONS YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS!

Soozi Pline (F19)

In 2020 when our in-person community outreach was put on hold, and meetings became virtual events, you stepped up to expand your horticulture knowledge by learning the art of Zoom! You have shown your strong commitment to garden education rooted in science and in 2021 we'll continue to offer an array of presentations that will delight and educate us all! Due to the uncertainty brought on by the pandemic we will continue to hold our monthly meetings online through Zoom and if or when the situation changes you will be notified of our new face to face, live in person location! In the meantime below are the confirmed talks we all have to look forward to.

January 14	Pruning Fruit Trees-Doug Chapman, ACES
February 11	MGNA Communications - M. Kilby and S. Khoury, MGNA
March 11	Basics of Beekeeping- Allyson Shabel, ACES
April 8	Attracting Butterflies to Your Garden- Jennifer Johnson, MGNA
May 13	TBD
June 10	What's a Herbarium?-Lynne Weniniger, AL A&M
July 8	Certified Outdoor Classrooms & a BioBlitz-April Waltz, AWF
August 12	Rare Plants of Alabama- Patrick Thompson, APCA/Auburn
September 9	Fall Vegetable Gardening-Nikki Sothers, HBG
October 14	Pumpkin Variety ID- Carol Lambdin, Landscape Architect
November 11	iNaturalist- Misty Hertzig, HBG
December 9	TBD



DEMONSTRATION VEGETABLE GARDEN (DVG) REPORT

Susan Parker (F17)

This fall the focus of education and demonstration continued at the Demonstration Vegetable Garden. Ongoing demonstrations included expanding the keyhole garden to accommodate and space vegetables to maximize the harvest rather than crowding.

The Hügelskultur (Hoo-gul-culture) garden behind the garden shed was reworked. Connie Carr and Carolyn Wade found a rotting log as the garden base. Then layers of sticks, wood, old hay bales (recycled) and compacted soil from another bed was added. Cardboard and pine bark mulch was layered circling the pile to prevent weed germination. Over the winter the contents of the garden will decompose ready to be planted in the spring.

The nitrogen fixing Cowpeas were harvested. Jim Mullen cut the foliage and stems and tilled the mulched stems into the ground. The next step to improving the soil by breaking the hard pan was to plant Daikon radishes as a cover crop. The long white tap rooted radish will pull nutrients within the soil. These will not be harvested but rather allowed to rot leaving a hole aerating the soil and leaving pockets for nutrients and moisture to collect.

While removing crops, as in this case the okra (highly susceptible), always examine the roots for nodules. We discovered one bed contained nematodes. So far, no other contaminated beds have been discovered. This leads into another demonstration to control the pest. Currently planted in the bed are resistant plants. Next spring the bed will be solarized with the hot weather then planted in late summer with marigolds. After that a rotation of resistant crops. We will let you know the outcome in a year.

For the past few years, activities at the DVG slowed down at the end of October but this year the September October weather encouraged us to plant fall crops which have grown beautifully keeping the team active through December. Planted in October were baby bok choy, Chinese kale, Brussel sprouts, lacinato kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, cabbage, onion, and collards. The prize planting was French breakfast radishes characterized with a long red and white mild flavored root that grows on top of the soil.

Individuals within the DVG are learning the characteristics and cultural requirements of unfamiliar vegetables. The DVG has a successful fall garden but not without pest and weather damage. The first fall pest was crop damage from four legged critters, thus replanting. Then there was the abundance of imported cabbage worms, yellow striped cabbage worms, aphids and green stink bugs. We learned to recognize the pest presence by droppings, the damage such as swiss cheese holes in foliage and life cycles eggs, larvae, pupae and adult moth.

Harvesting continues even into December. There has been some cold damage but yet to be harvested are the mustard greens, kale, cabbage, collards and Brussel sprouts. The produce is taken to the Rose of Sharon Soup Kitchen. Despite getting a late start in the garden, beginning May 28, the DVG has harvested over 600 pounds of produce.

The DVG team welcomes garden visitors and answers questions. Visitors are from all over the U.S. and the world. They may recognize a vegetable and ask cultural questions, or we may introduce them to our southern favorites. If you are interested in touring the DVG or would like to volunteer this spring with the group send an email to Susan Parker at susanp.grdn19@gmail.com. Currently through the winter months workdays depend on the weather.



Jim & Marge Mullin harvesting lettuce from the smaller keyhole garden.

MGNA GREENHOUSE

Carolyn Wade (W12)

We did it!! We have raised enough money to purchase MGNA's very own greenhouse. The greenhouse, to be built behind the Extension office on Cook Ave, will be just the beginning. The area will also encompass a vegetable garden and compost area.

We have also received permission to place MGNA's demonstration beds in front of the Extension office near the flag pole. There will be three 3 x 6' beds – a perennial, pollinator and a herb bed. We received a grant from AMGA in 2020 to build these beds and hope to have them built soon. In addition, we will have a 'MGNA' sign and a rain barrel demonstration area.

BUT – we need volunteers to plant and maintain the beds. If you would be interested in being on a bed team (pollinator, herb or perennial), please let me know. What would be involved? You and a few others would be responsible for planting and maintaining 'your' bed.

Interested in helping - send me an email and be sure to let me know which raised bed you are interested in. cbwade9@gmail.com

MEMBERSHIP

Elouisa Stokes (81)

Membership is due. After this incredible year, believe it or not it is time to join the other 92 members and pay your membership dues for 2021. To do so, go to the bottom of our web page (mginfo.org) and check "Forms and Applications." Then check "Membership." Choose whether you want to pay by PayPal or send a check. Copy the form if you send it to me, include a check, and a self-addressed stamped envelope if you want your membership cards. You can pay by PayPal on line and I will receive notice from PayPal. The cost for the year is \$30 for membership or \$40 for Associate Membership. Donations are also appropriate. I cannot accept credit cards. My address, which is on the form, is 2415 Glenn Street, Huntsville, AL 35801. Please call if you have questions 256-539-2058, or 256-604-8669.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR OUTGOING PRESIDENT

Cyndi Lindblom (F13)

Wow, what can I say? I have had a wonderful 2 years with all of you. I have made many new friends and gotten to know a lot of you that I previously only knew casually. I want to thank you for your words of encouragement and keeping me on track... in a kind way.

Some accomplishments:

- We actually sold all of Mary Lou McNabb's books.
- We raised enough money for our greenhouse.
- We had a successful time at the Farmers Market.
- We didn't change our name; be proud of our heritage!
- We had 2 successful plant sales.

Then we had COVID! COVID-19 really did impact our lives and try as hard as we could we had to delay Spring Plant sale to Fall Plant Sale which brought in almost as much money. We did have to cancel the Christmas Social, but we did get new officers.

We had a great picnic and everyone enjoyed being outdoors and with other people even as we physically distanced.

Thank you all for a wonderful two years. May God bless you as we move into a new year.

Cyndi

INTERN GRADUATION

Carolyn Wade (W12)

The latest group of interns to graduate are Lisa Crump (transfer), Paul Zachary, Megan Chivers, Shirley Leonard, Tina Cechovic, Diane Rodgers and Geanine Lehmann. Graduation was held on December 7 at the Madison County Farmers Market in Huntsville. Three interns were able to attend the ceremony.



REA Rhonda Britton giving certificates to L-R: Tina Cechovic, Diane Rodgers and Geanine Lehmann



GARDEN THYMES

Master Gardeners of North Alabama
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