



GARDEN THYMES

Master Gardeners of North Alabama, Inc.

First Quarter 2025

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- MGNA Awards
- MGNA's New Board

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Happy New Year MGNA Family!

I pray each of you had a safe and adventure-filled holiday season. It is an honor and a pleasure to serve as your MGNA President this year. I am filled with profound gratitude for the incredible work we have accomplished together and the commitment you have shown over the years. I am a firm believer that “many hands make light work”.

As members, there are ways to stay involved – e.g., volunteer, donate, attend events, etc. As mentioned at the December holiday party, we have an urgent need for an MGNA Newsletter Editor. I want

A WORD FROM OUR NEW PRESIDENT

By MGNA President, Acacia Moore (F12)

to thank Suzanne Kirkhuff for her tremendous efforts to keep us informed with the well-developed quarterly newsletters. Also, I want to thank two MGNA members, Robert McClintock as our new Special Events Chair and Marge Mullen as our new Fundraising Chair for 2025.

We have great speakers planned for 2025.

Please make every effort to attend our monthly meetings. These meetings are not only informative but also inspiring. As the saying goes, “When you miss a meeting, you miss a lot”. In addition to our monthly meetings, please mark your calendar for the following events:

- Design Your Home Landscape Course – (Wednesdays, 10 A.M. - 12 P.M.) **January 22 - February 26**

- AMGA Conference & Business Meeting (First Baptist Church, Prattville, AL) **April 3-5**
- MGNA Spring Plant Sale (Alabama A&M Agribition Center) **April 11-12**
- MGNA Picnic (Monte Sano State Park Pavilion) **June 21**

Your involvement is crucial to our ability to make a positive impact. Together we can create a brighter future for our community. I am confident that with your unwavering support, we will achieve great things in the year ahead.

In closing, may your 2025 be productive and safe. Each one, reach one!

You may reach me at president@mgna.org

From Our 2024 President By Carlita Edwards (W21)

Thank you for allowing me to serve as 2024 MGNA president. MGNA has a great diversity of members with varying educational backgrounds, interests and knowledge. It is rewarding to be part of a group willing to share their knowledge with the community. Our educational resources and information sharing are appreciated by fellow citizens.

This year has been filled with exciting changes. Our membership has grown substantially as many interested people have completed MG certification. These new MGs are volunteering with a local Extension Master Gardener Association.

The MGNA Huntsville greenhouse was constructed and is filling up with plants and volunteers to make things run smoothly to prepare for our largest fundraiser — the Annual Spring Plant Sale on April 11 & 12, 2025. Marie's Garden, the Pollinator Garden at Blevins Gap Nature Preserve, with MGNA maintaining two of the beds, was officially opened this past year and is being enjoyed by people and wildlife as well as the pollinators who visit. The Clock Tower in downtown Madison is maintained by MGNA volunteers, and MGNA volunteers also guided the installation of the Madison Rotary Monarch Butterfly Project.



The Demonstration Vegetable Garden (DVG) has actively participated in education of the Huntsville Botanical Garden guests who tour the DVG. Hundreds of pounds of produce were donated to local food banks and soup kitchens. The DVG also participated in the Grow More, Give More program

The Morris Elementary School program was expanded in the fall to include two 4th Grade classes. The students enjoy getting out of the classroom and being involved in gardening activities.

MGNA members participated in a variety of field trips. Our Educational Workshops with a diversity of topics were heavily attended. The Tinsel Trail Tree was beautifully decorated!

Thank you MGNA for an outstanding 2024!



HAPPY 2025!



2024 MGNA AWARDS By Helen Carr (W98)

Jim Mullen is our **Master Gardener of the Year** and will be our nominee for the Mary Lou McNabb State Master Gardener of the Year Award. Jim became a Master Gardener in 2019 and spends half a day each week in the Demonstration Vegetable Garden and half a day each week maintaining his church's gardens. He teaches interns and the public about composting. He constantly researches and posts gardening articles on our website and private Facebook page and helps Kerry Smith with the state Steering Committee and Program Guidelines. He is our photographer and is involved with numerous other programs and activities.

Bonnie Gardner received the **Lifetime Achievement Award**. She graduated in 2002 and continues to make significant contributions. She gives lectures, has worked on the workshop committee for many years, and grows plants for the plant sales.

Walt and Cyndi Lindblom and the new greenhouse volunteers won recognition for the **Group Project of the Year**. Many hours have gone and need to go into this long-range effort to assure a viable place to grow our plants to support our organization's projects.

The **Intern of the Year** is **Elise Fulda**. Lily Oakes, our Madison County Extension Agent, said Elise showed exemplary commitment and dedication to the Extension Office and Master Gardener Program.

The **New Initiative Award** went to **Karen Kirk-Williams** for her development and successful achievement in implementing the Design Your Home Landscape classes.

The **Agribition Center's three volunteers** -- **Donna Gilbert, Eric Nobles, and Tim Smith** -- won **Friend of Master Gardeners** for their support of our yearly plant sales and accommodation of our landscape course.

Helen Carr and Debi Bonkoski are co-chairs of the Awards Committee.



Debi Bonkoski presents awards to Elise Fulda, Cyndi and Walt Lindblom, Jim Mullen, and Karen-Kirk Williams



Intern of the Year Award presented by Lilly Oaks to Elise Fulda



Our Master Gardener Christmas Tree at the Huntsville downtown Tinsel Trail

Jane R. Parks Memorial Grant By Janet Boothe (W06)

The Jane R. Parks Memorial Grant was established in 2012 as a memorial to an MGNA member. This grant supports educational horticultural projects in Madison County.

The 2024 recipients of this grant were:

Madison Public Library: Will continue the Seed Library stocked with seeds of vegetables and flowers that are easy to grow in Alabama. Educate the public through gardening and nature programs on how to grow fresh food, help with food insecurity, support out pollinators and create community through sharing the joy of gardening.

Horizon Elementary School PTA: Will have a Plant Night where students will learn about the life cycle of a seed and learn different plant names. Families will paint a pot, plant a seed and monitor the seed's growth. The students will be learning about the environment and plants that hopefully will lead to an appreciation and love for nature

Donations to the Jane R. Parks Memorial Grant are deeply appreciated and are tax deductible. Grant committee members are Janet Boothe and Suzanne Kirkhuff.



Janet Boothe, Jen Clark and husband of Horizon Elementary, Carolyn Reagle of Madison Library, and Suzanne Kirkhuff

Greenhouse (December 2024)

By Cyndi Lindblom (F13)

WOW!!!! What a close to 2024. I know 2025 has to be better. While we got a lot of work done at our Bob Wallace location we had some major snags.

Both fans quit working. We thought it was something minor but it was major. The motors were corroded inside and the electrical wires fell out. After many talks with the company Walt Lindblom was able to fix both. Thank you Walt!

THEN...the heater broke and we had no heat. I prayed for no freezing weather and thankfully the weather cooperated. The heater guy came and that was a simple fix! We had a bad thermostat.

Now that everything is in working order, we have potted geraniums and planted some seeds. We are "all hands on deck" right now until the plant sale. If you have plants to donate please let us know.



Paula Wheeler, Dawn Nelson, Anita Reeves, Carol Umstaedter, and Paul Wieland potting Geraniums

If you want to have some fun earning your hours, we can certainly use you. Contact me at cyndi.lindblom@gmail.com.



YOUR 2025 MGNA MEMBERSHIP DUES WERE DUE DECEMBER 31

By Elouisa Stokes (1981)

**IF YOU HAVE NOT PAID YOUR 2025 MGNA MEMBERSHIP DUES,
YOU ARE IN JEOPARDY OF LOSING YOUR MEMBERSHIP!**

Thanks to everyone who paid their MGNA dues for 2025. As of Dec. 15, only 102 out of our 185 members have paid for 2025. Your dues were due on December 31. If the dues remain unpaid by January 30, you will be dropped from the email list. Active members owe \$30 and Associate members owe \$40. Please print the Membership Form from the Forms and Registrations section of our web page. Fill it out and send it to Elouisa Stokes. If you want your membership cards, send a self-addressed stamped envelope with your check. Thanks for all your help with membership.

OUR TATE FARM FIELD TRIP

By Ameree Young (F12)



Master Gardeners arrived at Tate Farm on Sept 30th for a prepaid luncheon and presentation by Mike Tate on the history of the historic Tate Farm which is one of the oldest in the North Alabama region.

We enjoyed a delicious meal of pulled pork barbecue, chicken casserole, roasted broccoli, pumpkin soufflé, and stewed apples. Dessert was a selection of banana pudding, chess pie and bread pudding. The highlight of the meal was the fresh sourdough bread made from a bread starter.

After our meal was served, Mike Tate gave a talk on the history and operations of the family farm.

The main crop is cotton, but other crops are grown there too, such as corn, soybeans, and pumpkins. We learned about the use of the no till method of farming to prevent soil erosion, and how terracing is done to prevent floods in the field.

The farm is open to the public in the fall starting in September through November for pumpkin picking, and kids recreational activities.



Sangeetha Bathala (W22) Our New Vice President

I was raised in Anchorage, Alaska, and have been in Huntsville for the past 10 years. I have always had a passion for gardening and nature. I love seeing plants grow and thrive and as well as birds residing in nearby nests. I also enjoy baking, cooking, photography, playing the violin and piano, and world traveling. I always have time to make new friends so let's chat over chai (tea).

Design Your Home Landscaping Course begins January 22

Email sign ups will begin early January





Jean Lake's Legacy (W06)

By Ameree Young (F12)

Master Gardeners and other friends have mourned the recent passing of Master Gardener Jean Lake who was known for her beautiful garden and her involvement in Horticulture Therapy.

Jean loved sharing her garden with others, and there were many who visited over the years including our MGs, OLLIE, Learning Quest and garden clubs.

Within the bigger garden, visitors to her garden would see a variety of delightful small gardens including a memorial garden, gnome garden, Elvis garden, Americana garden, frog garden, secret garden and

beach garden. There were a variety of water features including a bubbly rock, and a crows fountain for the birds. There was a swing with lots of hanging baskets of annuals. There were also many potted perennials throughout the garden. Along the fence line was a stand of trees to keep the plants cool during the summer and to provide privacy.

Jean also directed the Master Gardener Horticulture Therapy program at the Adult Day Care at the Huntsville Senior Center. She did a masterful job of planning many activities that the residents could complete. As a group of volunteers along with Jean would enter the building, the residents would beam with joy and excitement to see what activity they would be doing with the volunteers. They loved to take their projects home to show their families.

There were raised garden beds in which the residents planted vegetables such as carrots, peas and potatoes along with ornamental plants. When it was time to harvest the vegetables, they helped with the task. The highlight of the summer season was the July watermelon seed spitting contest, and there was also an annual Halloween carnival. Unfortunately, when the Covid-19 pandemic came in 2020, that ended our time at the Senior Center.



Advisory Council Meeting By Carol Weand (F18)

November 5, 2024

Specially called business meeting

A vote was held for the changes to the Bylaws of AMGA.

- Under Article III, a sentence was added. A member that does not have an active association to join will be considered a Member at Large.
- Under Article III, Membership the 10,000 plus lifetime hours badge for lifetime membership is eliminated and the star pins have been extended.
- Under Article X, Parliamentary Authority there were corrections for typos.

These changes were unanimously accepted.

At the regular meeting several topics were discussed

1. Yearly conference information
 - 2025 State Conference will be held in Prattville, AL April 3-5. Registration will begin in January.
 - 2026 conference will held in Huntsville, Al and is a Tri-county event (Madison, Limestone and Morgan) May 6-8 at the Westin in Bridge street.
 - 2027 conference will be hosted by Jefferson County
2. Because there were changes to the MOU all members will sign it again in January 2025.
3. In 2025 a focus will be on Grow More/Give More. Watch for more information.

CHRISTMAS SOCIAL AND SILENT AUCTION By Cyndi Lindblom (F13)



This year's Christmas Social was fun as usual. Everyone looked amazing in their Christmas outfits and the food was delicious! We were missing a few of our members due to illnesses.

The Silent Auction was much smaller but successful. Everything was bid on and went home with the bidders.

The program went smoothly as we inducted the officers for next year and the awards were given out. We will have a great board next year!

Thank you 2024 Board for all you did last year. You deserve a rest. Have a Happy New Year!!!!

INSTALLATION OF BOARD MEMBERS

Pictures by Carol Umstaedter (W05) and Jim Mullen (W19)



Directors: Desiree Umstaedter, Marcia Oberman, Marsha Levy,
Treasurer: Barbara Stansky Secretary: Valeeta Wheeler Vice President: Sangeetha Bathala
President: Acacia Moore Cyndi Lindblom inducted the new board
Directors not present: Cathy Hales, Dean Rice, Gina Gonzalez

(See page 16 for contact information for our new board)



A thank you gift being presented to our outgoing president, Carlita Edwards, by our 2025 new president, Acacia Moore, and new vice president, Sangeetha Bathala

MGNA FLORAL ARRANGEMENT WORKSHOP

By Suzanne Kirkhuff (W07)

You have heard it said a picture is worth a thousand words. These pictures say it all. We made a couple floral arrangements each at the November 24 workshop. One was more for Christmas and one for our Thanksgiving table. This was for Master Gardeners only. Thanks to Huntsville Florist once again for working with us on this fun event.



October 14 Fall Gardening with extension agent Marcus Garner



THE DEMONSTRATION VEGETABLE GARDEN (DVG) IN PICTURES

Article and Pictures by Susan Parker (F17)



Tina Cechovic MGNA and Bob Houseman from Limestone Master Gardeners harvested sweet potatoes which were planted on June 3, 2024. Between this inground bed and a raised bed, over 61 pounds were donated. The sweet potato vines were composted. October 4, 2024

Julie Anderson hosted the Kid campers at the DVG over fall break. The first group's topic was Farm to Table and the second group's topic was identifying the Plant Parts and Functions. Activities included eating vegetables, harvesting green beans, eggplant and digging sweet potatoes.



Susan Beam and Diane Rodgers dug the peanuts before the sneaky squirrels finished harvesting them. Growing peanuts is an excellent demonstration to engage and educate the guest to a regional crop of economic significance grown in Alabama.



Marge Mullen methodically cut the okra stalks at the ground row by row. The large roots will rot breaking up and aerating the soil. Since the soil was wet, the cardboard was utilized to minimize stepping in the mud and compacting the soil. On June 17 four varieties of okra were planted-Heavy Lifter, Clemson Spineless, Emerald and Dwarf Perkins Long Green Pod. The last harvest was November 20th and yielded over 198 pounds of donated okra.

MORRIS ELEMENTARY HAPPENINGS

Article by Julie Anderson (W23)

The MGNA volunteer team at Morris elementary greenhouse and learning garden's goal this year was to instruct the children on plant propagation and utilizing plants for medicinal properties. To understand plant propagation the students propagated many houseplant and succulent cuttings to develop roots on the plants for subsequent planting when they return to class in January.

The students also studied the restorative value of different plants and how each could be utilized to improve health and wellbeing.

As part of the experiment on the health benefits of plants the students conducted experiments in a smell station lab on the effect of plant smells on human's mental and physical well-being. They discussed how different smells can encourage feelings of excitement, calmness, relaxation, and motivation.

The MGNA instructors also taught the students that herbs and plants can be applied medicinally to treat different ailments. The students learned that common herbs and spices can be used to heal and help our bodies, such as using ginger for stomach issues and mint and eucalyptus for colds.

The students then expanded their knowledge on using herbs for health by learning about how to use plants to make infusions, decoctions, and tinctures.

The culmination of all this knowledge occurred during the last class before the holiday break when the students made calendula oil salve to take home.

When classes resume in January the instruction curriculum will include helping the students to start planning and growing items for spring gardens.



Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Garden at Dublin Park, Madison

Article and Pictures By Kathy Gardner (F16)

On October 19th, several MGNA members embraced the proverb “Many hands make light work.” Working alongside members of the Madison Rotary Club, the Sierra Club, and other volunteers, the Master Gardeners demonstrated the smothering technique for weed suppression at the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Garden at Dublin Park in Madison, Alabama. Volunteers donated pine straw, topsoil, and cardboard. They weeded, spread the cardboard over the newly weeded areas, then spread mulch on top of the cardboard to anchor it ahead of the winter’s decomposition process.

The dedicated group stepped carefully among the plants because the native passion vines, a host plant for Gulf fritillary butterflies, were full of fritillary caterpillars. MG Donna Phillips, brought her 3-year-old grandson along, and he helped spread mulch, water plants, find butterflies and was especially fascinated with the caterpillars. What a wonderful way to teach him about nature.

The Garden has native milkweeds, the host plant for the Monarch butterfly, as well as nectar-rich perennials and shrubs with staggered bloom times. These blooms support butterfly migration and a variety of pollinators. This past summer, volunteers added plant signage and planted lantana, black-eyed Susan, yarrow, and Joe Pye weed. One of the best things about volunteering at the garden is the positive feedback from local residents who use the park’s walking paths. Every time we’re there, someone thanks us for the work that we do. Gayle Stinnett, a one-woman volunteer recruitment team, has encouraged several individuals to volunteer – and they do! “When they tell us how much they like the garden, I just tell them that it’s a lot of work, but it’s worthwhile, and I ask if they’d like to help,” said Gayle. One of her recruits, Javonda Blake, volunteered several times this fall. The community’s appreciation of the Garden is gratifying, and the signage may encourage others to plant nectar-rich pollinator plants in their home landscapes.

“I hope this pollinator garden can do two things: 1) help local insects and 2) bring awareness to the public of the importance of pollinators and nature. “ It’s thrilling to see all the butterflies and bees happily going about their business.

The Madison Rotary and several MGs are already working to purchase or grow plants from our wish list for Spring 2025 planting. Anyone interested in volunteering at the Garden should contact Kathy Gardner at kgardner0321@gmail.com.

MGNA members: Gayle Stinnett, Donna Phillips, Kathy Gardner, Mayra Panghorn, Marilyn Porter, and Laurie Horrocks.



Smothering at Habitat: Tommy Overcash, Debbie Overcash, Marc Jacobson, Gayle Stinnett, and Javonda Blake. Tommy, Debbie and Marc are members of the Madison Rotary and contributed substantially to the success of the clean-up day.



THYME TO GO

By Suzanne Kirkhuff (W07)

It has been my privilege and an honor to be the editor of the Master Gardeners of North Alabama's newsletter, *Garden Thymes*, for the past few years. I am stepping down from this position, and this is my last newsletter. I will continue as co-chairman of the Workshop Committee, on the Jane R. Parks Grant Committee, and as a team member on the Design Your Home Landscape course. So I will still be busy.

Thank you so much for all the articles and pictures you have submitted for our newsletters. As I said in the past, "we would have no newsletter without all of your contributions".

Our proofreaders are invaluable in the appearance and correctness of each article. A huge thanks to Brenda Tapp, Cathy Hales, and Maria Cayse for their hard work as our proofreaders. Last but certainly not least is Carolyn Wade. Carolyn always does the final proofing of the whole newsletter before it is sent out for distribution to our membership. What a great team!

Excuse the pun above in the title. Cathy Hales suggested it and I thought it would be fun to go out with a little levity.

I know you all will support our new editor the same way you did me and look forward to whoever will take over this endeavor.

Suzanne Kirkhuff, Editor

If you are interested in becoming our newsletter editor, contact our MGNA President, Acacia Moore.

OUR 2025 MGNA BOARD

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DATES TO REMEMBER

Board Meetings: The Monday before the General Meeting, 10:00 am at the Madison County Extension Office

MGNA General Meetings: The second Thursday of each month at location and time announced

Education Workshops:

(The following first three workshops are at the Madison Library, start at 10:30 am and free to public)

February 4-*Growing Organically*,
by extension agent Holt Akers

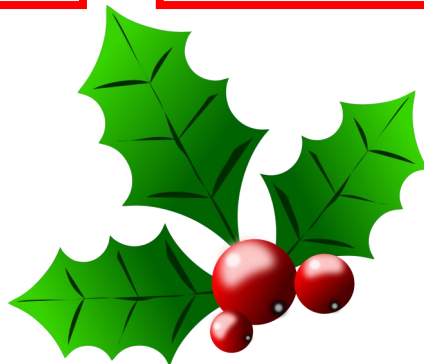
February 11-*No Dig Garden Beds*
by extension agent Lilly Oaks

February 18-*Gardening without Pesticides*
by extension agent Brian Brown

February 22 (Saturday)-*Make Your Own Bonsai*, by Bonsai Society members, 9 am, Cook Avenue extension office, \$75, Master Gardeners ONLY

March 18-*Totally Tomatoes*, several extension agent speakers, 9:30-noon, Madison Library, free to public

March 22 (Saturday), *Small Space Gardening*, by extension agent Lilly Oaks, 10:30 am, Huntsville Main Library, free to public





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Cathy Hales (W05)
Brenda Tapp (W98)
Carolyn Wade (W12)

Thank you to our 185 Extension Master Gardeners who submitted articles and pictures and special thanks to our proofreaders. We would have no newsletter without all of your contributions.

. . . Editor

Facebook page: www.facebook.com/MGofNA
MGNA website: www.mginfo.org

The Alabama Master Gardener Program is conducted at the county level by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

