

The Dirt

President's Message by Penny Claiborne

As I look out on my freeze burned garden it is hard to hold back on getting out there with my pruners and a shovel to tidy things up a bit, especially since my house is for sale. One thing it definitely lacks right now is curb appeal. But with a few more nights predicted to be below freezing I think I can restrain myself and find other things to spend my time on instead. One of those things is working on the landscape plan for our new home. And since I am in the mindset of what I don't want my new garden to look like in the dead of winter I can plan to plant a four season garden with some winter interest. Camellias and blueberries are first on my list to accomplish that.

My biggest challenge is there are so many beautiful plants I would love to put in my new gardens but there are also so many variables to think about. Remember, "Right plant in the right place"? Well, some areas on the property will be in deep shade so I am glad I attended Joanne Ortmann's presentation on shade gardening at the Lunch and Learn last September. The handout from that class has been very helpful in planning this garden.

Another area of our property stays pretty wet so I think I will create a rain garden in that space. Or maybe a bog garden will be better suited to that spot. I am sure it will become a great habitat for a few of the frogs we hear in the marsh area just across the canal. It is so much fun to listen to them begin to croak. I can hear them get louder and louder until they crescendo and all of a sudden it's quiet again. Did you know that frogs have a fluid in their bodies similar to antifreeze that keeps them from freezing in the winter?

Then there is the beautiful large oak tree that definitely needs some under plantings. Surprisingly this area gets a fair amount of sun. One of my favorite groundcovers is the periwinkle (vinca minor). I just love the sweet blue flowers that appear in the spring and early summer. And if it gets a little out of control Tim can just mow it. That will make him happy. But first I have to get rid of the torpedo grass that is growing in that area. Yeah, I know; good luck with that!

And of course I will be putting vegetables and fruits in my garden. I just love the thought of an edible garden. Hopefully the Satsuma tree I planted last summer will survive the cold this winter. My thornless blackberry bushes will be beautiful growing on the fence Tim will be putting in at the front of the property. And I pray that the rest of the vegetables I plan to grow will not get eaten by the squirrels since I plan to plant them in galvanized water troughs on the large deck that was on the property when we bought it.

Needless to say I have my work cut out for me. Thankfully I have the Master Gardeners and the Extension office to go to for information and guidance. Now if I could only find someone to organize the new house so I can get busy in the garden as soon as possible.....

Happy Valentine's Day,

Penny



Inside this issue:

Chronicles	2
February Meeting	
MGOM	3
Scholarship Winners	4
Harvest for Health	
Feb. Lunch and Learn	5
DREAM garden totals	
Tips for Buying Seeds	6
Potting Soil Recipe	
Cheap Plant Markers	
Educational Seminar	7
Officers and Mission Statement	8

Dates to Remember:

- Feb. 3 -Lunch and Learn
- Feb. 4 -Board Meeting
- Feb. 6 -Member Meeting
- Feb 10 -Helpline Opens



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@MoCoGardeners

Web:

www.aces.edu/Mobile/mg

(mg is lower case)



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Our DREAM Garden – Demonstration, Research, Education, Activity, and Memory - is the new name, suggested anonymously and chosen at the Awards Banquet, for the DEMO Garden.. The by-line is “Where ideas are planted and dreams grow.” Also at the banquet, four of our 2013 Interns received MG certification. Congratulations to Gerry Persons, Barbara McMullen, Paulette Wilson, and Catherine McLeod. And, in addition to being chosen as Master Gardener of the Year, our outgoing President, Connie Barron, was given a small birdbath for “Lilly’s Garden,” about which we enjoyed reading in The Dirt last year.

Mobile County Master Gardeners have had a great start for 2014. Regina Gunn led us back into reality after the holidays with an interesting Lunch & Learn demonstration on making bird seed wreaths. Using a Bundt cake pan for the mold, she used flour, water, corn syrup, unflavored gelatin and bird food to make a large wreath, then smaller ones with Bundt muffin pans. Regina cautioned the group that drying time varies by depth, texture, temperature, etc., so let them dry for several days. Then they can be decorated with greenery, yarn, ribbon, raffia, jute...your choice. The birds will love you for it!!

If you especially enjoyed the coffee at the Christmas Greenery Sale and at the January general meeting, you might be happy to know that the Master Gardener Blend (Serda 's Coffee) will be available for purchase by special order – to be picked up at the general meetings beginning in February. Contact Joe Pippin to place an order.

The Master Gardener Booth at The Home and Garden Show on January 9-12 had lots of visitors interested in improving their landscapes and learning more about gardening. Connie Barron did a great job of lining up interesting speakers and workers for the booth. Thanks to all who participated.

Harvest for Health, the gardening mentor program through the Cancer Institute at UAB, is underway. The Mobile group needs 30 mentors to be paired with cancer survivors who want to learn more about vegetable gardening. This is a one-year project during which mentors meet with patients at least monthly. Matching will begin in February, and mentors will be paired with patients who live within 20 minutes of their homes. Contact Ellen Huckabay for more information.

For our January program, Cindy Brown and Tom Nix, professional designer consultants at Green Gates Market in Fairhope, demonstrated how mixing natural elements with favorite pieces create beautiful centerpieces. One example was a terrarium they decorated with cleaned moss, a piece of tree limb, a daffodil, and a bird nest. Cindy said the key is to mix a variety of textures in the grouping. Tom also suggested that we water Christmas trees with boiling water as well

**Master Gardener Member Meeting
February 6, 2014 —9:30 Social—10:00 Meeting**

**Speakers: Sherry Melton and Molly Dickson of
Zimlich's Patio and Garden Center**

Topic: Vertical Gardening

Join Sherry and Molly, Garden Consultants and Designers for Zimlich's Patio and Garden Center as they demonstrate the ancient art of Vertical Gardening. Vertical gardening is a great way to utilize space and still have beauty in the garden as well as food for your table. Sun or shade, indoors or out, vertical gardening is a work of art. Join us for hands on fun on Thursday, February 6, 2014 at 9:30 am at the Jon Archer Center located at 1070 Schillinger Road North in Mobile. The public is welcome to attend.





Martha Rauch

Recently, the Greenery Chair, Nan Costello characterized **Martha Rauch** when she said of her, “Martha is so enthusiastic!” Yes, meet native Mobilian and Class of 2012 Master Gardener Martha Rauch, who wades into any task with an indomitable enthusiasm that defies any obstacle in her path. Nowhere was that spirit more apparent than this winter when Martha made it her personal goal to seek out the best possible variety of greenery for The Greenery Sale. Clippers in hand, Martha set off on her venture, bringing in carload after carload of bounty to the market during greenery work days, having knocked on doors and traipsed through woodlands across the area in her quest. If you need someone to get a job done, call Martha.

At the Greenery after-sale, I leaned over and asked Martha if she had ever made a pine cone wreath. Now, the average person would have probably said “Yes” or “No” and then followed up with a curious, “Why?” But what Martha said was, “No, but that doesn’t mean I can’t. I’ll give it a try.” If you want a job done, just ask Martha.

“I have had a passion for plants since a child,” Martha says, and credits her mother who was an avid gardener and her father who enjoyed a successful family vegetable garden. True to her nature, Martha likes the challenge of trying to make a survivor of a plant that others can’t get to grow here. Martha Rauch is not just an intrepid cut greenery collector, she is also an intrepid plant collector, and her own yard boasts over 300 of the plants she has collected. Not bad for an engineering mathematics major! Yes, this gardener with the infectious laugh sports an MS degree in Engineering Mathematics from Auburn University, where she continued her education after graduating from Theodore.

She has worked in both research and business, managing a commercial refrigeration business before starting her own service business, Specialty Couriers, and later the business she would own and manage for 25 years, Mobile Answering Service, Inc. In the year since Martha became a Master Gardener, she has supported a wide range of the projects MMG sponsors, from the Greater Gulf State fair booth committee, to the Festival of Flowers (where Martha the Intrepid Snipper cut down and brought in actual trees!), and of course The Greenery Sale, and lots of work in between. And she has made all of these contributions while working full time, managing her own business. Congratulations to Class of 2012 Master Gardener Martha Rauch, January Master Gardener of the Month!



Regina Gunn
January Lunch and Learn



Luan Akridge presentation
Semme’s Senior Center



Tom Nix
January Member Meeting



Scholarship Winners Named by Dianne Sellers 4

Angela Dobson Speetjens and Dillon Turk, both of Mobile, have been named recipients of the JoAnne Ortman Scholarship Award for the 2013-2014 term at Auburn University.

The scholarship, sponsored by the Mobile County Master Gardener Association, is awarded annually to a horticulture student from Mobile County who attends Auburn and maintains a 3.0 grade-point average. It is maintained by funds raised at the association's annual Christmas greenery sale.

Speetjens' appreciation for horticulture was nurtured by a summer job at Cottage Farms in Mobile and also working as a floral designer for two local florists. Her first degree was in dental assisting and after four years in that field, she decided to go to Auburn and major in biomedical science. As a self-described nature lover, her fascination with plants and the environment grew and led her to horticulture instead.

The Auburn senior currently maintains a 4.0 GPA and will graduate after the spring semester. She proudly says that she will be the first member of her family to obtain a degree from a major university.

Turk's association with horticulture came at an early age. He grew up on his family's nursery in Semmes and spent many summers working there. He says his grandfather, Buddy Martin, started the nursery in 1973 and his father began working there after he completed college. Before enrolling at Auburn, Turk graduated from UMS-Wright where he played football and baseball.

At Auburn, he is a member of the Hort Club and participates in PLANET (Professional Landscape Network). He loves being outdoors and is planning to do an internship with a large landscape company within the year.

Harvest For Health by Ellen Huckabay

Harvest for Health is a unique MG project in which Mobile has the honor of being selected to participate. The original pilot study started in 2010-2011 and involved 10 patients and 10 MGs in Birmingham. Dr. Wendy Demark-Wahnefried from the UAB-Cancer Center had an idea to pair MG volunteers with cancer survivors who were non-gardeners. Does this fit with the goal of the MG program? Oh, does it ever!

As MGs we should try to avoid projects that just want free labor and to focus on projects that are primarily educational in nature. The one-on-one mentoring that this project requires meets this goal and philosophy which is closely tied to the proverbial, "teach a man to fish" idea.

The first year of the study was a documented success, and every mentor from that charter year signed on for another year of the project. As a mentor, you will meet with your cancer survivor monthly. Mentors and mentees will be paired based on geographical distance, with no mentors living more than 20 minutes away from their mentee.

If you do not feel confident in your veggie growing skills, have no fear; James and I will be offering training courses to get you started. And we're always available for assistance and support every step of the way.

I encourage you to participate in this program, the first of its kind in the nation. The task may seem daunting, but I promise the rewards will be worth the effort.



Lunch and Learn

A “First Mondays” program presented by Mobile County Master Gardeners, a program of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System

Monday, February 3, 2014

Noon to 1 pm

Where: Jon Archer Center, 1070 Schillinger Road N., Mobile, AL 36608
Bring a friend and a lunch. Free. Drinks are provided.

For more information: 251-574-8445 or www.aces.edu/Mobile/mg

Presenter: James Miles, Commercial Horticulture Regional Extension Agent for 11 counties in Southwest Alabama, Alabama Cooperative Extension System

Topic: “Pruning Workshop”



James Miles

James Miles will demonstrate to home gardeners the fundamentals of pruning. Bring your pruners and gloves. Valentine’s Day is the time to start pruning in Coastal Alabama for most of our woody plants (fruit and ornamental) though there are some exceptions. This demonstration will prepare you to prune your woody plants in mid-February for best results.

DREAM Garden Food Totals 2013

Food	Pounds	Food	Pounds	Food	Pounds
Arugula	16.00	Figs, Purple	3.25	Potatoes	39.75
Green Beans	0.75	Grapes, Concord	20.25	Sweet Potatoes	24.00
Pole Beans	5.75	Herbs, mixed	14.75	Radishes	25.75
Beets	3.75	Kale	22.50	Rutabagas	11.50
Blackberries	3.00	Kohlrabi	8.25	Satsumas (to H of H)	18.50
Blueberries	41.50	Kumquats (to H of H)	20.75	Spinach	1.75
Broccoli	10.00	Green Lettuce	4.75	Summer Squash	47.25
Brussels Sprouts	8.50	Red Lettuce	7.25	Winter Squash	6.00
Green Cabbage	64.50	Loose-leaf Lettuce	6.50	Strawberries	24.25
Red Cabbage	15.25	Mustard Greens	22.25	Swiss Chard	22.25
Savoy Cabbage	29.25	Mustard Rape	5.00	Tomatoes	16.25
Carrots	4.00	Okra	75.00	Turnip Greens	15.50
Cauliflower	12.50	White Onions	22.00	Turnip Roots	20.25
Celery	4.00	Red Onions	12.25	Tat Soi	7.75
Collard Greens	21.50	Green Peas	0.25	Mixed Asian Greens	6.25
Corn	20.50	Green Peppers	25.00	Loquats	31.75
Cucumbers	16.00	Hot Peppers	33.50	Watermelons	45.75
Eggplant	64.50	Persimmons	38.00	*Combined Sour Kumquats	468.00
Figs, Green	17.50	Pomegranates	0.50	and Satsumas delivered	
				to Bay Area Food Bank	

Are heirloom seeds and organic seeds the same thing? How about genetically engineered and GMO? If you're confused about what all those words mean on your seed packet, you're not alone. Here's what you need to know when buying seeds this year.

1. **Genetically Engineered (GE)** -Although GE and GMO are frequently confused, they are distinctly different. GE refers to the use of biotechnological techniques (typically recombinant DNA) to genetically manipulate organisms. In other words, these organisms, in this case plants, do not exist in nature--and never will without human intervention. GE seeds are used by agribusiness (think "Bt-corn" or "Roundup Ready") and are not available to home gardeners.

2. **Genetically Modified Organism (GMO)** -GMO plants are those that have been bred through any type of genetic modification (biotech or human), including selection of fruits and vegetables for certain traits such as disease resistance, fewer seeds, thinner skins, redder color and so on. All plant hybrids, whether organically or conventionally grown are the result of GMO by plant breeders.

3. **Treated and Untreated**-These two terms refer to whether a fungicide has been applied to the seeds. As you might guess, treated means that a fungicide has been applied. The package labeling should specify what it is. In general however, treated seeds are for commercial crops and not home use. Seeds with a USDA Organic Certification must be untreated.

4. **Heirloom** -Heirloom seeds are those hybridized through natural selection, that is, open-pollinated by insects, wind, or self-pollination. Generally, heirloom varieties are defined as those that are over 50 years old in age or were developed in the 1940s and 1950s, prior to the "modern" hybrids available today. Seeds saved from heirloom plants have the same characteristics as the parent plant.

5. **Certified Organic** -Certified Organic on a seed packet means that you are buying seeds from plants that have been grown in compliance with the USDA's National Organic Program. Growing requirements are very specific. For example, applications of pesticides, herbicides, and synthetic fertilizers are disallowed for the three years prior to harvest and there must be an approved Organic System Plan in place. Irradiation, the use of sewage sludge, and genetic engineering are also not allowed.

Recipe for Potting Soil

1 -2 cubic ft. bag of finely ground pine bark

1 -40 pound bag of cow manure

1 1/2 cups Osmokote

1 -#1 pot (trade gallon) of perlite

Mix well. Makes a wheelbarrow full.

Store in a clean garbage can

from *Garden Gate Nursery*

Cheap and Easy Plant Markers
Won't fade in the sun or become brittle!

Use pencil (marker fades and runs) then erase to use again next year .



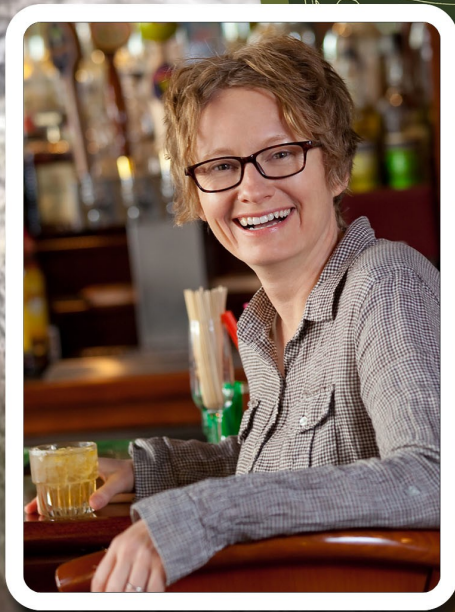
Vinyl Mini-blinds



AMY STEWART

Author of *The Drunken Botanist*

Book Signing to follow lecture. Books are available for purchase at the event. Registration required.



photos courtesy of Amy Stewart



APRIL 12 • 2:30-3:30 p.m.

Herbal Infusions served from 1:30-2:30 p.m. • \$20 per person

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The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M University and Auburn University) is an equal opportunity educator and employer.

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Newsletter Editor	Alice Marty '07
Volunteer Activity Coordinator	Elisa Baldwin '06
Volunteer Hours Coordinator	Jo Hayes '99, Genie Schneider '12
2013 Class Representatives	Kathy Sanders and Jan Tanner
ACES Advisor	Ellen Huckabay

Term Expires

Mission Statement:

The Alabama Master Gardener Volunteer Program is an educational outreach program provided and administered by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

Alice Marty will publish the Dirt on the 25th of each month. Articles for inclusion must be received by the 15th of the month and may be submitted to Alice Marty MCdirt@comcast.net or the Extension Office.

Issued by

Ellen Huckabay

Regional Extension Agent



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