

THE DIRT

President's Message by Penny Claiborne

For many of us May is a very busy month. With first holy communions, graduations and end of the school year festivities there are plenty of things to do that keep us out of the garden. By now the azaleas have long been faded and hopefully the pollen is almost finished coating everything in a nice shade of yellow. The days are warmer and longer so even though our calendars are filled with events it is possible we might be able to sneak in a few hours in the garden in the late afternoons.



As for me, most of the boxes are unpacked and I am in desperate need of some gardening therapy. That is exactly what gardening is for me – therapy. While our house was being built I sketched out an entire landscape plan for the property but as Mother Nature would have it I have had to make some drastic changes to my plan. Due to all the fill that was brought in, every garden area needs to be amended with plenty of compost. I knew I would need a lot of composted material so I began saving bags of leaves and grass clippings this past fall and throughout the winter. Several of my friends contributed their yard waste as well. (Thanks Alice for the truckload.) Under the deck is filled with black bags of soon to be much needed nutrients for my future gardens. Funny thing is..... I do not think I have enough.

Living on the water has been very exciting. Each morning I am in awe of the view from the upper deck. Some mornings are so crisp and clear and other mornings the fog has been so heavy it even engulfs the porch. We have had so many different birds fluttering about. Eventually I hope to be able to identify them all. There is even a pair of bald eagles in the area. Observing them soar overhead is quite a sight. I have witnessed a bluebird work very hard to feed his young after my cat killed his mate. Evening boat rides have been most enjoyable. And oh the sunsets!!!! It is truly a wonder that I have been able to get anything done with so much serenity surrounding me here at "the swamp house". I just pray that I never take it for granted or get so used to it that I no longer appreciate the beauty it offers.

One thing I was not prepared for is the wind. During the three years we have owned the property we would spend time on weekends here cutting the grass, going for boat rides and just hanging out on the deck next to the boathouse. Normally there was a breeze, but being 13 feet high offers not only a completely different view of the marsh but also much more windy conditions. Paper plates are rarely used and nothing can be left on the porch that might blow away. The patio chairs have to be bungeed together to keep them from sliding across the porch. Even my plants get wind whipped if I don't pull them close to the house.

I pray, that as spring continues to amaze us with bursts of color, each of you make a few appointments to get some gardening therapy. One sure way to do that is to attend the Gallery of Gardens on May 2 & 3. Hope to see you there.

Blessings,

Penny

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Dates to remember:

- April 26—Market in Cathedral Square
- May 1— Member Meeting
- May 2-3—Gallery of Gardens
- May 5—Lunch and Learn
- May 17—MG Picnic
- May 27—Board Meeting
- June 6—Farm To Table

Chronicles by Nancy Adams



DREAM Garden

Congratulations to Kathy Degnan and Sandy Jacobs, Interns who received Master Gardener certification in April.

Thanks a million to Connie Barron and John Olive, who came together to plan and implement the perfect plant swap for the April 2014 general meeting. It was well organized, entertaining, and educational. John's enviable plant knowledge and easy sense of humor added much to the program.



John Olive

Mobile Botanical Gardens' annual Gallery of Gardens is scheduled for May 2-3 and includes eight gardens with a broad range of styles. The gardens are open from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. and they need two docents for each of three shifts. Two of the homes are scheduled to have a dance crew perform lyrical interpretive dances as part of the tour. Also, there will be a landscape architect's before-and-after drawing at one of the homes. Discounts for volunteers are available for tickets purchased at MBG.

Our sincere condolences go to our friend and faithful Master Gardener, Sybil Burnett, and her family following the loss of her son, Wyley, on April 5, 2014.

Last fall, the MG Class of 2013 began a program called Horticulture Therapy with L'Arche Mobile (a community in which people with intellectual disabilities and those who help them can live, work and share their lives). They meet for six weeks in the fall and six weeks in the spring. So far, they have built raised beds



Newly certified Master Gardeners
Sandy Jacobs and Kathy Degnan

and planted vegetables and brightly colored flowers. All MGs are welcome to participate. Contact Jan Tanner for more information.

Dianne Sellers added yet another great Lunch & Learn program with her presentation about Old Fashioned (Antique) Roses. Many of you probably already knew that antique roses generally have much more fragrance than hybrids. These roses - when planted in good soil in a good area - usually do well with very little attention. One of her favorites is the Yellow Lady Banks, a thornless rose which only blooms once a year but is "well worth growing." Dianne shared handouts with pictures and information on ten of her favorite roses. One of her favorite sources for antique roses is Mike Shoup of The Antique Rose Emporium in Brennan, Texas.

Many Master Gardeners worked hard to make the Learning Seminar on April 12, with Amy Stewart,

Author of The Drunken Botanist and several other publications, a great success. The garden reception prior to the program was beautifully planned. The weather was perfect, the silent auction had great items, the food was outstanding, there were delightful drinks, and all seemed to enjoy the time. Amy's program and outside-the-box ideas had many of us spellbound. How many of you have visions of turning your potting bench into a refreshment table for your next garden party?

The Jim Scott Gardens trip was something to be remembered. The weather was perfect for exploring the seemingly never ending landscape vignettes carved into the hillside. Photos at: <https://mobilecountymastergardeners.shutterfly.com/pictures> password-Gardener (capital G)

2 CEU hrs. for tour with guide

Brenda Bolton— Master Gardener of the Month For March by Penny Claiborne

If you have not had the chance to attend an event that Brenda Bolton had her hands on you have really been missing one of the most talented Master Gardeners in this organization. Some of us have visions of what we want to see in our gardens but that is as far as it goes. Brenda has a gift of implementing her visions and it seems to come so easily to her.

She credits her mother and father for instilling a love of the earth in her. As a child she visited farmlands and nurseries with her family and watched them nurture their home garden. Brenda grew up in Mobile in a home on Moffat Road in Forest Hill which was “country” back in the 40’s and early 50’s. There was a large vegetable garden and the kitchen window sill was always lined with tomatoes. They also had chickens and pigs. Some of her fondest memories were of visiting her grandfather’s farm in Baldwin County or her uncle’s farm in Wilmer.

Brenda graduated Magna Cum Laude from the University of South Alabama with a major in English. She also received her Master’s Degree and completed an administration certification program there. During her career she worked as an English teacher and then as an administrator at Davidson High School, ending as assistant principal for curriculum. One of her most impressive achievements is leading the development team for Davidson’s Engineering Curriculum and International Baccalaureate programs. She also was first to pilot in-house computer support for recordkeeping functions in schools.

In 1977 she married Harold. Their children consist of a 14 year old cat and a 13 year old Pekingese, along with their 100 year old house which they have lovingly “raised” in midtown. Both Brenda and Harold enjoy traveling and have been to some of the world’s great gardens. Viewing these gardens awakened her interest in gardening and home landscaping. Like most of us Brenda collected pictures from magazines to help inspire her with ideas to use in the garden and in her home. But it was a lifelong interest in old historic districts and the homes within these districts that has been so influential in creating her home garden as it exists today. There is no limit to what she puts in her garden rooms. Moving the inside out does not hinder her when it comes to what elements she might put in the garden – as long as it is weatherproof.

After retiring she began to look for activities to participate in and was drawn to Master Gardeners after seeing them working at the Mobile Botanical Gardens plant sale, which she always attended. She was especially interested in learning in a more formal way about gardening. The program offered both knowledge and plenty of activities along with enjoyable people. For her it was the perfect trinity: people, knowledge and engagement. And of course, the community education component is a nice fit with her background in education.

Along with everything she has going on in her life, Brenda and Harold recently revamped the garden in front of their home. (If you attended the Gallery of Gardens last year you will recall how beautiful the entire property was.) Their motivation came from desiring a maintenance free garden along with a more natural look that would tie in with the style of the home. They used native plants with an abundance of ferns, grasses, native hollies, giant liriopse and agarista. Although she had a hard time removing the loropetalum, which took away some of the privacy in the side garden, she is very pleased with the outcome. (As I am sure we all will be when we do a drive by!)

Congratulations Brenda! And thank you for sharing your many talents with us. You truly are an inspiration to the entire organization!



President Penny Claiborne with Brenda Bolton

Barbie Whitaker— Master Gardener of the Month For April

by Brenda Bolton

Long before I knew Barbie Whitaker by name, I knew the “lady in the visor” at Mobile Botanical Gardens spring and fall plant sales who seemed to have all the answers to all the questions people asked. She was the one anyone would send you to if you asked about getting in a particular plant. Long before I knew that this plant sale owes much of its success to Barbie Whitaker, the MBG plant sales had become embedded in my personal spring and fall calendars and my garden planning and garden planting cycles, events not to be missed under any circumstances.

So I was more than pleased to hear that our selection committee had tapped Barbie Whitaker to be our Master Gardener of the Month this month in recognition of this year’s successful spring plant sale and all the successes that preceded it over the years under her management. Discovering that Barbie retired from a career in Washington in construction management goes a long way toward revealing why she is such a good project manager.

Born in Charleston, West Virginia, Barbie moved to Mobile from Washington D.C. in 1993 when her husband retired and announced he wanted to move to the south and play golf. And so began the odyssey that brought Barbie back to her southern roots. She became a master gardener in 1997 to find out why she could not get her D.C. geraniums to bloom all summer on the Gulf Coast.

The Mobile Botanical Gardens and Mobile gardeners owe a great debt to those wilting and spindly August geraniums.

One of the benefits of the master gardener program is the creation of an ever-growing network of knowledgeable and trained local gardeners to support home and community gardening efforts. In Barbie Whitaker’s case, that benefit has been fully realized. Here is a master gardener, trained in our own program, who networked her interests and skills with another special community nonprofit organization, the Mobile Botanical Gardens, and applied those to the support and further development of the single greatest fund raising event at the Gardens, and the event that introduces many Mobilians to the master gardener program as we work the field in our signature green aprons. And that is how gardening communities are built and strengthened. Barbie Whitaker is a key contributor to that process in Mobile.

Because I didn’t know Barbie well, I asked others who did to tell me a bit about her.

I was told she is hard working, driven even, in regard to the MBG plant sales. I was told that the amazing and dependable inventory as well as the variety of stock and even the trial plants are largely because of her skill in selecting plants that the customers want, and she is quick to add that her own skills are complemented by the plant knowledge that others bring to the sale team. I was told she has incredible business acumen. And I was told that she has developed over the years the key to success: her relationship to the area growers supplying the plant stock and connecting that to what the customers want. She even has suppliers growing plants at her request specifically for the sales.

When I asked Barbie what her own evaluation of her skill set was, she modestly said “Organization,” and credits others who “know the plant material,” but those who have worked with her have a much longer list of her talents.

When I asked Barbie what goals for the Gardens or the plant sales she has for the future, she quickly said, “More people involved.” As with most volunteer efforts, those who *will* do must do, and so she spends six months preparing for the sale, first ordering the citrus in November, contacting nurseries in December, and in full swing on all the remaining tasks by the end of January. That sounds a lot like an open invitation to someone with enthusiasm, energy, organizational skills, and time who would like to join her team for the next spring plant sale and learn from a master.



Barbie Whitaker
Master Gardener of the Month
April 2014

Mobile County Master Gardener Public Education Event

Presenters: Barbara and Fred Muenzmay,
Eagles Roost Herb Farm

When: Thursday, May 1, 2014 9:30 – 11:00 am

Where: Jon Archer Center,
1070 Schillinger Road, N., Mobile

Admission: Free

Topic: **Growing and Cooking with Herbs**



Barbara and Fred Muenzmay

Barbara and Fred Muenzmay make their home in Rockford, Alabama where they grow more than 40 different culinary herbs. Barbara and Fred will teach you how to grow and care for your herbs as well as how to use them in cooking. Both common and hard to find potted herbs will be available for sale so come learn the secret of Barbara's geranium pound cake and pick out a few herbs to purchase for your own garden.

Lunch & Learn

A "FIRST MONDAYS" PROGRAM PRESENTED BY MOBILE COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, A PROGRAM OF THE ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM

MONDAY, MAY 5, 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.

**TOPIC: INTRO INTO HOME BREWING,
HOP CITY, BIRMINGHAM AL**

REACH FOR THE STARS – 2013 And Advanced Hours Recognition Program

Reach for the Stars is the volunteer service recognition program honoring Master Gardeners who have assisted Extension in educating and improving our communities and to encourage Master Gardeners to keep records and report volunteer hours as requested by ACES. Recorded hours are utilized in justifying the Master Gardener program.

These hours are lifetime (cumulative) hours since Mobile County Master Gardeners began in 1992 through the end of 2013. The hours are updated at the end of each year. The following Mobile County Master Gardeners are receiving these awards this year.

9 **Bronze Stars** for 100-299 recorded volunteer hours will be awarded to Judy Adams (2012), Barbara Bingham (2012), Harold Bolton (2012), Martha Harris (2012), Danna Howe (2012), D. J. Johnson (2012), Catherine McLeod (2013), Tom Rigdon (2009), Peggy Wright (2012).

10 **Silver Star** for 300-499 hours goes to Nancy Adams (2008), Brenda Bolton (2012), Mary Ann Days (2011), Carol Eskeridge (2012), Angela Mooring (2009), Martha Rauch (2012), Ellaina Semifero (2012), Jane Spicciati (2009), Beth Walmsley (2011), Diann Weeks (1997).

8 **Gold Stars** for 500-999 service hours were earned by Josie Carter (2004), Penny Claiborne (2010), Nan Costello (2010), Jackie Jenkins (2011), Susan Meztista (2009), Genie Schneider (2012), Ann Singleton (2007), Judy Weaver (2011).

2 **Gold Badges** for service hours of 1,000-1,999 will be presented to Carolyn Eichold (1997), Regina Gunn (2011).

2 **Platinum Badges** for 2,000-3,999 service hours will be awarded to Elisa Baldwin (2006), Connie Barron (2008).

The Advanced Hours Recognition Program is a Silver Star with a "gem stone" which may be attached to the Platinum Badges.

1 **Ruby Stone** for 4000-5999 hours will be awarded to Jane Trawick (2003).

1 **Emerald Stone** is for 6000-7999 hours will be awarded to Luann Akridge (2001).

1 **Diamond** is for 8000-9999 hours will be awarded to Sybil Burnett (1992).

The Stars were announced at the April Master Gardener meeting and the Gold and Platinum Badges and Advanced Award Stones were presented at the Alabama Master Gardeners Annual Conference, which was held in Daphne.

Congratulations to each of you for your dedication to the Master Gardener program.

**Mobile County Master Gardeners Picnic at Kukkuta Farm
May 17, 2014, 4 pm - for Master Gardeners
and their families
Hosted by Libba and Glen Vanderbeek**

My husband Glen grew up on a family farm in southeast Nebraska in the 1950's and '60's. Although he chose not to make farming his life's work, he always held onto his love for the land and gardened wherever he lived. When we moved to Midtown Mobile in 2006 after Hurricane Katrina, Glen built a raised bed garden at our home. We grew a lot of different vegetables and loved the results we got. Also during this time we became interested in organic gardening and did not use any pesticides or herbicides. We loved the taste of fresh vegetables and herbs from our garden. I became a Master Gardener in 2010 and started on our quest to learn as much as possible about growing our own food. In 2013, we decided that we wanted to do this on a much larger scale than a raised bed and invested in an acreage in Loxley.

We have become spoiled by the taste of our own vegetables. Lettuce from the grocery store is so disappointing! We have had a few failures as well but have learned from each failure. Our most spectacular failure was the loss of all of the citrus trees we planted last year. I had read that the first two years were the most crucial to their survival. The winter that we just experienced did them in. However, the blueberries and blackberries seem to be thriving.

We are honored to have the Mobile County Master Gardeners visit our farm. Our address is 29600 Loper Road, 36551 and my phone no is 251-243-4539. Below are the directions to the property:

I-10 east to exit 44.

Go south on Hwy 59 1.3 miles.

Turn left on County Road 68.

Go 2.8 miles.

Turn left on County Road 65.

Go 1.2 miles. At the top of the hill, turn left on Loper Road. Go 1.3 miles. Our farm is on the left and there is a big rooster sculpture on the left side of the driveway.

Meat will be provided. Everyone is asked to bring a dish to share. Soft drinks will be provided. Adult beverages are welcome but will not be provided (BYOB).



Libba Vanderbeek

**MOBILE COUNTY
MASTER GARDENERS**

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	Term Expires
Glenda Eady '09	2014
Greer Wilhelm '10	2014
Jackie Jenkins '11	2015
Joe Pippin '11	2015
Mary Ann Days '11	2016
Carol Eskridge '12	2016
Past President - Connie Barron	'08

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Volunteer Activity Coordinator	Elisa Baldwin '06
Volunteer Hours Coordinator	Genie Schneider '12
2013 Class Representatives	Kathy Sanders and Jan Tanner
ACES Advisor	Ellen Huckabay

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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