

◆ A BIT OF DIRT ◆

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WINTER, 1996

Issue 9

The Newsletter of Gwinnett Master Gardeners



A BIT OF DIRT is published quarterly. Editors are Brenda Adams and Gail Martin. If you wish something published, please contact us at 466-4665 and 381-2513.

FUTURE MEETINGS

GWINNETT MASTER GARDENERS do not meet in December and January of each year. The first monthly meeting in 1997 will be the 2nd.. Monday of February, at 7:00 PM in the GJAC building, 2nd. floor.

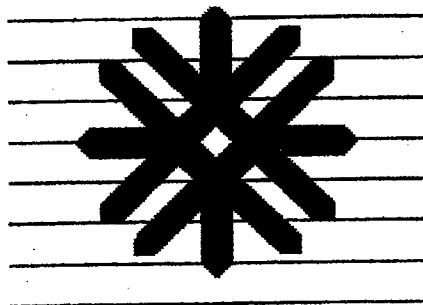
Meanwhile, Georgia Master Gardeners meet at the Atlanta Botanical Garden every January for their yearly conference. SEE YOU THERE!!

We wish to take this opportunity to wish one and all a very merry Holiday Season. Don't forget your Master Gardener friends and also, don't forget your garden. There are probably some cleanup tasks out there. Also, this is a good time to put slow release goodies around your ornamentals, such as well-rotted manure, cottonseed meal, lime, compost, shredded, rotted leaves and finish with a mulch for winter protection.



Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike.

—John Muir



WINTER



OFFICERS FOR 1997

President: Beverly Howerton
Vice President: Barbara Fisher
Treasurer: Jan Hansen
Secretary: Pam Folks

Congratulations, ladies.
Members, Please support these new officers.



UPCOMING ATTRACTIONS

Dec. 6 and 7 - The annual Southern Gardening Symposium sponsored by Gwinnett Tech will be at the Gwinnett Justice and Administration Center this year.

Wildflower Symposium at the State Bot. Garden, Wed. Jan. 29. Cost \$12-14. To carpool, call Brenda Adams 466-4665.

Georgia Native Plant Society: See Article on Native Plants for information.

Georgia Master Gardeners January Conference: January 11 at ABG. Bring yearly dues of \$10.

The training of a new group of Master Gardeners will begin in January. Don't forget that veteran MG's may sit in on some of the classes to refresh your memory. Also, we will be asked to provide refreshments for several of the meetings. Be ready to volunteer if you are called on to help.

4-H Blueberry Sale is in February. MG's help to hand out plants. This benefits the 4-H Club.

GPPA Symposium: Saturday, Feb. 8 at ABG.

Southern Gardening Symposium at Callaway Gardens: Jan. 24-26. Call 1-800-225-5292 to register.

Minutes of Meetings - FALL 1996

September 9, 1996
7:00 p.m. at G.J.A.C.

Gail Hollimon called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. and introduced tonight's speaker, Arty Schronce, Horticulturist from Hastings Nursery.

Program:

Arty Schronce presented the "Characteristics of White Trash Landscaping Style". His humorous slide show demonstrated these characteristics. He also provided a handout that listed signature plants that are indicative of White Trash Gardening.

New Business:

There will be a Hypertufa party at Brenda Adam's house on October 5th. A sign-up sheet was passed around.

Shelia Wilbur passed around a sign-up sheet for refreshments for the October and November meetings.

Jan Hansen announced that the annual Plant Sale will be held at GIAC on October 11th. A sign-up sheet was passed around for volunteers to work the sale.

Brenda Adams announced that a plant rescue was tentatively scheduled for September 25th.

Beverly Howerton announced that Dean Pailler of Flowery Branch Seed Company will be our speaker at the October meeting.

Steve Brady needs volunteers for the Southern Gardening Symposium on December 6 and 7.

The meeting was adjourned for refreshments at 8:10 p.m.

October 14, 1996
7:00 p.m. at G.J.A.C.

Gail Hollimon called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

New Business:

Gail Hollimon announced that the election of new officers for 1997 would be held tonight. She turned the floor over to Gail Martin, Nominating Committee Chairman. Gail explained that the Nominating Committee was made up of herself, Shelia Wilbur, Jenni Wilson, and Ginny Douglas. Their recommendation for 1997 officers were: Beverly Howerton, President; Barbara Fisher, Vice President; Jan Hansen, Treasurer, and Pam Folks, Secretary. Gail asked for additional nominations from the floor. There were none. She asked that a motion be made to accept the slate of officers. Glenda Patterson made the motion and Gail Hollimon seconded it.

Jan Hansen presented the steps that had been made by members of the Executive Board in order to open a checking account for our group, as well as register with the IRS. Jan has spoken with members of the Master Gardener Volunteers of Cobb County, the Secretary of the State Master Gardeners, and the Executive Board has met with a CPA. All of the paperwork has been filed with the IRS and we expect our Federal Identification Number very soon. As soon as we receive that number, we can open a checking account.

Gail Hollimon explained that the GMG's had decided not to merge funds with the Extension Office.

Beverly announced that the November meeting will be held on the 18th in Conf. Room B.

Glenda announced that she could use volunteers for Habitat Activities at Cedar Hill Elem. School on Tuesdays and Thursdays through Nov. 7th.

Program:

Dean Pailler of Flowery Branch Seed Co. presented a slide show on new plants from Europe. Dean makes an annual trip to Holland to see the latest plant introductions. Some of the plants in his slide presentation are available this year in his catalog. Others will be available in future years. For a copy of his catalog, send \$4 to: Flowery Branch Seed Co. P.O.Box 1330, Flowery Branch, GA 30542.

The meeting was adjourned for refreshments at 8:45 p.m.



For minutes of the November meeting when we had Penny McHenry join us, see page 5.

YOUR NEW OFFICERS

Beverly Howerton is our new President. Beverly grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, where her parents were avid gardeners. Her mother loved and grew many flowers, while her father concentrated on trees, lawn and azaleas. Beverly remembers one time when her father brought home 65 azaleas at once. Her parents were fishermen, and would bury the fish remains in the rose beds for added fertility to the sandy soil.

Beverly has 4 daughters, all named after plants, and one grandson. She enjoys sewing and loves to cook with herbs. She has been a Master Gardener since 1989. Beverly grows indoor plants, but her main interest is growing herbs, mostly culinary, and has dabbled in medicinal herbs as well. Beverly is learning more about perennial flowers, but herb gardening remains her great love.

Vice President for 1997 is **Barbara Fisher**, who graduated in the 1995 Master Gardener class. Barbara grew up in Chattanooga, and has been in Suwanee about four

years. She spent many years teaching earth science in middle school, and her love of gardening grew naturally from this discipline.

Barbara has one son, George, who lives in Tampa, and a daughter, Cindy, who lives in North Carolina. She has one 4 year old grandson and one 9 months old granddaughter. Since Barbara's yard is shady, she concentrates on a shade garden, with over 20 varieties of hydrangeas. Her garden includes hostas, ferns, wildflowers and shade loving perennials. Other leisure time pursuits Barbara enjoys are reading and listening to books on tape.

Our new secretary is **Pam Folks**. Pam lives on several acres in Annistown. She grew up in Dallas, Texas and has been in Georgia for a number of years. She first became interested in gardening in Maryland, where one of her jobs in an office was to take care of the indoor plants. When they all died, she realized she'd better figure out why, and her love of gardening began.

Pam lives with her husband and one son, presently in college studying film and marketing. She is also raising an 8 month old black lab puppy named Lexus. Pam also paints and sketches, mainly abstract figures of people. Pam has been a Master Gardener since 1993, concentrating her first enthusiasm on shrubs and trees. Currently Pam maintains a vegetable garden and perennial garden.

Our money will be handled in 1997 by our new treasurer, **Jan Hansen**. Jan grew up in St. Louis, MO, and now lives in Lilburn with her husband and two cats, Boogie and Buttercup. As a child Jan was in awe of her aunt's garden.

She became interested in gardening in 1993 when they bought their first home in Lilburn. Jan attended Gwinnet Tech and received an Associate degree in Environmental Horticulture. She became a Master Gardener in 1995. She now has a shrub border, perennial beds and both sun and shade gardens. Her favorite plant is blue baptisia.



THE RAGE FOR COLEUS

Java, the fourth largest island in Indonesia, is considered the ancestral home of today's garden coleuses. Some plants were taken to Europe in the mid-1700's as garden worthy foliage plants. They crossed the Atlantic and entered America early in the 1800's.

During the Victorian age these plants had their hey-day. Hybridizers crossed and re-crossed the different strains, and gardeners bought them by the thousands. They passed winters in homes and greenhouses, and in summer were bedded out in elaborate displays of Victorian excess. By the early decades of this century its popularity had waned, and what was once hot was not.

During the rest of the century coleus was considered a seed-raised annual that became a wimpy eyesore before the summer was halfway over. Those that did grow it were advised to plant it in a half-day of filtered sunlight, along with the caladiums.

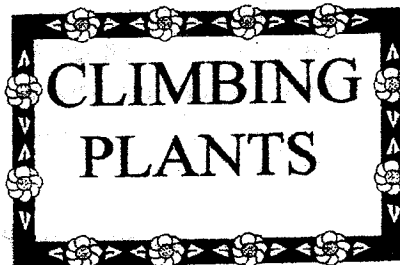
Out there in nursery-land, a few growers continued to breed coleus, looking for more sun-worthy and longer lived plants that would not come into flower for many months. One of the first of these sun-loving coleus, a pass-along plant for decades, was known as 'Alabama Bellingrath' in that state, but was known as 'Texas Parking Lot' in Texas and 'Coppertone' in the Carolinas. Here it is most often sold as 'Alabama Sunset'. In 1993, a whole new lot of cuttings were brought back from Indonesia. Grown for a year in Florida, a batch of them moved to UGA's trial gardens in Athens and got a lot of people excited about growing them in our Southern sun.

These sun-loving coleus, many raised in hot and humid Florida, are slowly

making their way into the marketplace as nurserymen and landscapers discover the colors and sun-worthiness of these plants. This coming spring the numbers of available sun coleuses should be larger and more colorful than ever. The sun-lovers have become the newest fashion in plants. There are several named strains; the Sun Lovers and the Solar coleus being the most prevalent.

The colors are bright, sometimes gaudy, sometimes restrained. There are solid dark purple leaves, a pure yellow named 'Primrose', and multi-colors in any combination you could wish for. This coming summer, try to find a place or two for these sun-lovers. No need to plant in the shade - put them in your sunny spots for a season of brilliance.

Gail Martin



Do you have an empty fence that needs covering, or a wall that would be improved with a trellis and something growing? If so, think about planting a vine or two this coming gardening season. Vines will soften outlines, provide privacy and add a vertical dimension to your garden.

The queen of all vines is clematis, in all its many forms. Clemes come in all

sizes and colors, from dainty little viticella to monsters like *C. montana*, who can easily climb the largest oak. The many large flowered hybrids make mailbox magic, but they can be used equally well on trellises, arbors, and growing through shrubs and small trees. A blue clematis twining around a pink or white rose is a breathtaking sight. Colors in these large-flowered hybrids range from pure white through pinks, red, blues and purples. Sweet autumn clematis, *C. terniflora*, is a large rambunctious vine that can easily reach up and around a second story deck or cover yards of fence.

Climbing hydrangea, *H. petiolaris*, is an aristocrat of great beauty. This is a clinging vine that can attain great heights, but can be maintained at a lower level. Carolina jessamine, *Gelsemium sempervirens*, is an evergreen twining vine with bright yellow very fragrant flowers in the spring. Confederate jasm *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, another evergreen twiner with fragrant, white, star-shaped flowers, but is somewhat tender.

There are many annual vines which will give good growth and bloom all summer. *Mina lobata* grows to great heights and blooms in late summer and fall with spikes of flowers ranging from cream to red. The purple lab-lab bean, *Dolichos lablab*, is another large annual vine that provides lavender/purple pea-like blooms all summer long and rewards us after the blooms with shiny purple pods. *Asarina* is another fairly delicate vine with a long flowering season of purple trumpets. *Ipomoea quamoclit*, Cypress vine, has ferny foliage and scarlet trumpets.

This winter plan an arbor, a trellis, a viney fence. Check out your books and the new catalogs for vines you might like to try. No matter if you get a plant, or plant seeds, you will enjoy the results of adding vines.

Gail Martin

PARTY!

Christmas Decor Party
 at Gail Hollimon's
 home. Saturday,
 Dec. 14 at 10 A.M.

Bring a sandwich for
 lunch. The rest will be
 furnished.

Bring goodies like
 magnolia leaves,
 nandina berries and a
 base for your
 masterpiece.

Call Gail R.S.V.P. and
 with questions at 945-
 4252.

Gwinnett Master Gardeners Meeting
 (continued)
 Nov. 18, 1996
 7:00 p.m. at G.J.A.C.

Gail Hollimon called the meeting to
 order at 7:00 p.m. She thanked all of
 the officers and committee chairmen
 for their hard work in 1996. It has
 been a great year of activities and
 fellowship. We look forward to new
 programs in 1997.

New Business:

Jenni Wilson said that she thought the
 postcards seem to bring members in
 for the monthly meetings. Everyone

agreed that they were effective and
 should be used whenever possible as
 reminders for upcoming events and
 meetings.

Gail Hollimon announced that the
 Executive Board had recommended
 that membership dues for 1997 be
 raised to \$10. Jan Hansen explained
 that we now have additional expenses
 including checking account fees, P.O.
 box rental, postage for postcards, and
 higher speaker fees. After discussing
 the issue, Susan Hanson made a
 motion that the increase be approved.
 It was seconded by Brenda Adams,
 and the vote passed.

There will be a wreath-making party
 at Gail Hollimon's house on Dec. 14.

Program:

Penny McHenry, founder of the
 American Hydrangea Society,
 presented a slide show on her favorite
 topic: hydrangeas. She discussed her
 favorite varieties, their cultural
 requirements and propagation. She
 brought three hydrangea plants to be
 given away as door prizes. They went
 to Anne Wellington, Judy Garner
 (both visitors), and Beverly
 Howerton. A 'Penny Mac' hydrangea
 was presented to Gail Hollimon for
 serving as President this past year.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00.

Submitted by Jan Hansen, Secretary

*"The cold Winter lays bare over
 the land, with a smile on his face
 and a dream of Spring."*

TREES IN THE GARDEN

There seems to be a growing interest in
 native plants these days. Unless you
 grow all sunny types, there will
 probably be trees involved in your
 landscape; hopefully native ones. Over
 the years, I have observed certain traits
 of some trees which I wish to share.
 These are my opinions only. Excuse
 me when it is something you know
 already.

Maples: Most are very adaptable,
 reasonably fast growing and offer good
 shade. However, to plant underneath of
 maples you should be aware they have
 very greedy roots and will require more
 watering and feeding in the area. This
 will prove to be a disadvantage;
 especially since water rates keep going
 up and good water will be more scarce
 in the future.

Their canopy is medium to dense
 which doesn't always provide the
 correct amount of light for plants.
 Limbing up and thinning out of limbs
 are two solutions for this.

This information does not apply to
 Japanese maples.

Oaks: Some people have heard that it
 is good to plant under oaks as they
 don't have such greedy roots. That
 isn't necessarily true. Some, such as
 Water Oak, Pin Oak and Willow Oak
 have a fibrous root system and are
 moisture lovers. Besides, it is an
 accepted fact now that all tree roots
 have their feeding roots in the upper
 12" of soil area just where you want
 your ornamentals to grow.

Also, the oak tree exudes tannin which
 explains the inability of some plants to
 grow well under oak trees. A mature
 tree will cast a lot of shade also.

(Continued on next page)

TREES IN THE GARDEN (continued)

Sweetgum: This is a sore subject to some as this tree does have disadvantages. The sweetgum balls they happily spill beneath their feet each fall is enough to be a problem, but these trees sucker all around themselves producing sprouts which appear to be new trees. I find the roots to be of medium greediness.

Two redeeming qualities are the beautiful fall color and the stateliness of a well grown specimen.

Locust: Having owned a locust only in the past few years, I can speak only of the thornless honey locust in my back yard which has a *Lonicera heckrotti* growing up through it. It has an open habit of growth which allows plenty of light to get to the vine. This would seem to be a good tree to grow wildflowers under, as the grass grows almost up to the base of the tree. It is definitely a good tree as host for vines. However, I believe the locusts are disease and insect prone. Mine lost its leaves early this fall.

Dogwood: I realize this is sacred ground. Who would dare talk against the beloved dogwood that has meant so much to all Southerners since childhood? After all, Atlanta is the Dogwood City. However, this tree is much maligned by those who mean no harm but plant it in full sun and expect it to behave like a good specimen. Sometimes they do; but too often, they have a hard time surviving in this manner. They are naturally understory trees and desire a woodland soil with adequate moisture retention to carry them through some of Atlanta's droughty times. So, please, some afternoon shade for these trees. The past few years have been hard on Dogwoods. They have shallow roots,

which leaves them vulnerable to drought. Then they develop deeper roots which can be damaged by a period of too much water. This past year, there seemed to be a lot of mildew; perhaps caused by a cool spring. Also, a lot of buds were lost this spring due to the late freeze.

The best specimens seem to be closer to Atlanta, where the grown ones have seen a lot of seasons come and go but have endured. It seems to me, the closer to Atlanta you go, the better the soil. Sour grapes, maybe.

Yellow Poplar: A tall stately tree which can be quite lovely—until it develops its end-of-the-summer leaf problems. There are really majestic specimens of this tree at Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest in North Carolina. Not a tree for small yards. The poplar has an extensive system of very fleshy roots which can eventually mean death

"Who would dare to talk against the beloved dogwood that has meant so much to all Southerners since childhood?"

for sensitive wildflowers trying to grow underneath. The leaves are very hard to handle as they drop for months. From personal experience, don't put a water garden under them. They love moisture and the roots will seek your pond. The leaves will have to be collected quite often too.



Loblolly Pine: This is the most often found pine growing in our area. We sometimes bemoan the presence of pines in our yard because they fall prey to various storms, such as wind and ice storms. Their branches can become quite heavy with the weight of ice or snow and since they are so tall and brittle, break easily in these conditions.

HOWEVER, I have gone through that stage and come out the other side, feeling wiser when it comes to knowing the merits of pines. Have you ever noticed how well the often-planted azaleas grow under pines? I believe there are several reasons for this. Yes, the pines are somewhat acidic but I don't think they are as bad as some think. Otherwise, why would pine straw be just about the best mulch you can get for your ornamental beds? Also, pines lose their lower limbs, providing that valuable "limbing-up" technique I mentioned and casting a good mix of shade and sun.

Their roots are not as greedy as some deciduous trees I have mentioned; although they do spread out laterally. When you cut off a deciduous tree, it will sprout all around. When unwanted, pines can be cut, young or old, and they will go away and leave you alone.

Other trees that I love and can find no fault with are the Sassafras and the Sourwood.

On the following page is a recent article that appeared in the Atlanta Journal/Constitution about native plants becoming popular in the southeast. It features George Sanko, who has done so much at Dekalb College South. I agree completely with him that you DO need both natives and exotics. No need to restrict your enjoyment of plants. But do remember your natives which I find to be more undemanding than exotics IF planted in the right PLACE. Brenda Adams

Southeastern natives nudging to the forefront

By Jill Sabulis
STAFF WRITER

If George Sanko got his way, a whole new palette of plants would grace Atlanta front yards.

Scarlet rose mallow might replace roses. Ocmulgee skullcap could bump begonias. And Florida wood fern would edge out hosta.

The new kids on the block, though, aren't really new, says Sanko, a retired botany professor. They're Southeastern native plants that modern gardeners have overlooked in favor of the imports and man-manipulated cultivars that typically dominate nursery shelves.

The battle between the tough native plants that grow in the wild and the so-called exotics is escalating. More natives are making their way into the nursery trade, and gardeners are slowly learning their attributes.

That's not necessarily a good thing, says Warren Quinn, director of landscape services for the American Association of Nurserymen in Washington. A slavish devotion to natives, to the exclusion of cultivars with superior traits, is not practical, he says. "It's throwing out 100 years of horticultural research."

Quinn urges common sense in plant selection, allowing the landscape environment to determine the best plant for the site — regardless of whether the plant is a native or an import.

Nonetheless, Sanko says, natives that are carefully chosen have a big plus in their corner: "Anybody can grow them. I challenge you to kill some of these things."

And Sanko can prove it. Five years



RENEE HANNIANS / Staff

Retired botany professor George Sanko hopes more gardeners will give native plants a try and not depend solely on the usual exotics.

what's possible with natives," he says. They won't see it at the average garden center, which will typically stock only a few natives.

"There are purists who won't plant anything but natives," says Mark Griffith of Watkinsville, owner of Griffith Propagation Nursery, which wholesales some native plants. "But the average homeowner is still motivated by what looks good, and it doesn't matter if it's native or not. They're learning, though. I think natives definitely have become

ago, he founded the largest garden of native plants in the Southeast. It's on the western edge of DeKalb College's South Campus on Panthersville Road and is open to the public for free daily during daylight hours.

There, in raised beds that get full sun and along meandering woodland trails, Sanko has collected an astounding array of plants native to the United States. Most of the 5,000 plants are even more specific to Georgia.

"I want people to see this, to see

more popular in the last few years."

Herb Romig, Home Depot's live-goods merchant, agrees. "There are all levels of education about the native plant movement," he says. Metro Home Depots are selling more native fothergilla, oakleaf hydrangea and Hummingbird clethra, he says.

University of Georgia horticulture professor Mike Dirr, a major influence in reintroducing fothergilla to Georgia gardens, says there should be room for both schools. "Those of us who are truly plant lovers can see through the thin veneer of this issue of native vs. introduced," he says. "The bottom line is there are good and bad among both. All I can say is, if you've got a good plant, use it. Does it really matter where it's from?"

Even the president of the Georgia Native Plant Society can agree with that. "You don't have to live in the woods. You don't have to live in a shack in the middle of nowhere to have native plants," says Jackie Fitts, who has seen her group grow to 310 members in just two years. "You can incorporate natives in the regular landscape, and they'll make your life easier."

George Sanko won't argue, either. "When I first got started in native plants, I'd bought a house," he says. "Well, I had all the shrubs and other [introduced plants] taken out and replaced them with all natives. That was a mistake.

"The truth is, you do need both natives and exotics. My message is, don't forget the natives."