

A Bit of Dirt

Volume 6 Issue 1

Spring 1998

The Newsletter of Gwinnett Master Gardeners

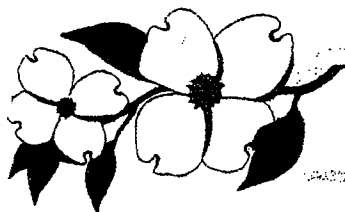


A Bit of Dirt is published quarterly. Editor is Gail Martin. If you have news, or an article you would like to have published, please call me at 770-381-2513.



*I wonder if the sap is stirring yet,
If wintry birds are dreaming of a mate,
If frozen snowdrops feel as yet
the sun
And crocus fires are kindling one
by one:
Sing robin, sing
I still am sore in doubt
concerning Spring.*

Christina Rossetti



SPRING

Future Meetings

March 9

A representative from Pike's Nurseries will discuss new introductions for 1998.

April 13 & May 11

To be Announced

GPPA, March 19, 7:30 p.m.
Atlanta History Center
Dr. Allan Armitage on Phlox,
Heucheras, Pulmonaria.

GA Native Plant Society
March 10, 7:30 p.m.
Patricia Howell, Medicinal
Herbs, Northwest Unitarian
Church

Field Trip - On Wednesday,
April 15th, we will go to
DeKalb College South
Campus for a tour of the
wildflower garden. Bring a
sack lunch.

Message from our President

Welcome to our 1998 Master Gardener Graduates. We want to get more acquainted with you and find the place in our group that meets your gardening interests.

As we begin our 5th year we want to continue our spirit of volunteerism while we continue to learn, but have fun while we do it.

I am excited about our slate of officers. It is my pleasure to serve as your President with Judy Pitts, Vice President, LaDonna Benedict, Secretary and Jan Hansen, Treasurer. Judy Pitts has some wonderful speakers lined up for us, as well as exciting field trips.

Nothing can take the place of your first spring day in the garden. Spring never comes too early for gardeners. We have waited all winter to get our hands and knees dirty. Have a great time, see you at the meetings.

Fondly,
Sheila Wilbur

EXPLORING NEW HORIZONS

The 1998 Annual Meeting of the Georgia Master Gardeners was held at the Atlanta Botanical Garden on January 10. Over 315 Master Gardeners attended, a terrific turnout indeed!

Our first speaker of the day was Bob Westerfield, who discussed advanced training for Master Gardeners. The first session is planned for June 11 in Athens just prior to our summer meeting. They are shooting for about 100 people, and plans now are for a diagnostic clinic and an entomology session.

Bob also announced the Southeast Regional MG meeting in Pensacola, Florida, to be held April 20-22.

Dr. Ed Brown, Extension Program Coordinator, Plant Pathology, UGA, explained the future of diagnosing plant problems throughout the state. 60 diagnostic sites will be set up in county extension offices, containing PCs, digital cameras, microscopes and other equipment. Plants will be brought into the extension offices, digital images will be taken, videos of microscopic slides will be taken if necessary, and all uploaded via the internet to the pathology labs at UGA. It will take 3 years to implement the total program, but the first 31 sites will be operational by April 1 of this year.

Eventually a diagnostic library will be available on the internet site for everyone to use. He had taken some images with the digital camera before the meeting, and he showed us exactly how the process would work. A fascinating use for new technology.

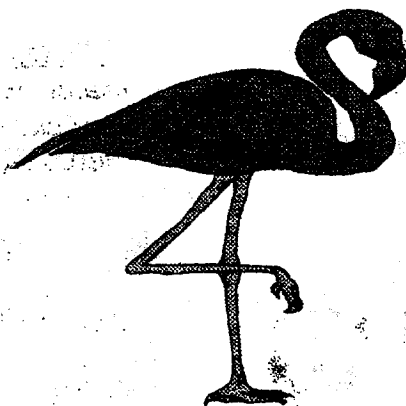
Mildred Pinnell, Horticulturist at the Atlanta Botanic Garden, then showed slides and discussed her recent collecting trip to China. The purpose of the trip was to find new

herbaceous perennials that would be appropriate for zones 6 through 8. She brought back seeds of many plants, among them a primula that may do well in the South, arisemas, peonies, buddleias and viburnums. From the pictures she took of the hotels, and some of the food they ate, I don't think I'll follow in her footsteps!

Following Mildred, George Schmid, author of *The Genus Hosta*, gave us an interesting overview of the late 18th century hosta introduction to Europe and subsequent breeding. He discussed good companions for hostas in the garden, mentioning especially ferns, grasses, azaleas and daylilies.

The GMGA business meeting came next, where we welcomed our new officers and bid goodbye to our past officers.

After a delightful lunch and a stroll through the gardens, we reassembled to hear Felder Rushing expound on water in the garden, folk art in general, and flamingos in particular. As always, Felder was a delight. Did you know he has carried a pearl, feather and glitter encrusted flamingo all over this country, and

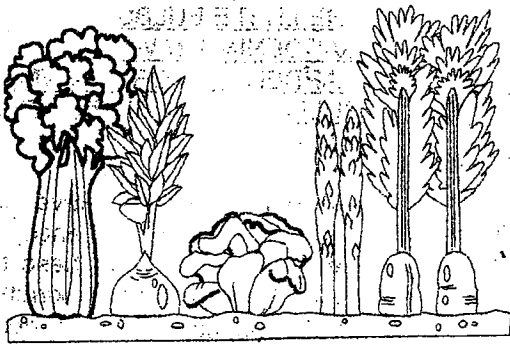


EXPLORING NEW HORIZONS, continued

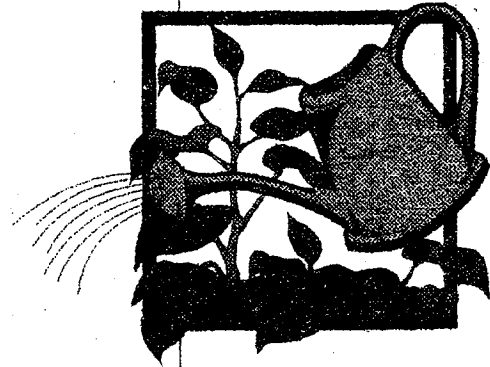
Europe. Who else but Felder! He also had a Christmas tree in his garden made of tires, and very nicely decorated.

Several Master Gardeners then told us of the projects they had been involved in. These ranged from taking over a derelict greenhouse in Savannah, decorating a Christmas tree with bamboo ornaments (and thus winning first prize for uniqueness in decorations), a trial garden at Wesleyan College in Macon. Other projects were an arbor built at the Oakhurst Community Garden, a butterfly garden at a Lumpkin County elementary school, Triangle Gardens and the Abernathy Beauty Border in Fulton County and a Rose Garden in East Point. Good work, all of them.

Denise Smith, of GardenSmith Nursery in Jefferson, Ga., was as charming as ever. She spoke on ornamental vegetables, and



showed slides of an amazing number of unusual and beautiful vegetables and herbs. Lots of lettuces, colorful chard, bright peppers, burgundy okra and purple broccoli. She also had slides of herbs, lemon verbena by a gate, rosemary, basil, sage and thyme. Denise handed out a plant list of this season's offerings at



GardenSmith, and many of us were busy highlighting the things we had to have.

Hal Massie, our own Master Gardener, finished up the day with a lecture on moss gardening. He explained that moss is a native plant underused in gardens, and perfect for that shady bed it seems so difficult to fill. Mosses are simple little plants that need little in the way of maintenance, and are easy to propagate. He explained the proper way to plant moss mats (really, step on it). Hal also said the best companions for mosses are small, evergreen, shade tolerant plants such as ferns, hostas and partridgeberry.

The meeting was a great success, and although we weren't able to have break-out sessions due to overbooking by the ABG, we all got to hear everyone, which was a blessing in disguise.

*First a howling blizzard woke us,
Then the rain came down to soak us
And now before the eye can focus -
Oweus.*

Lilja Rogers

RETURN OF THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT TREE

Or better said, the possible and hopeful return of the American Chestnut.

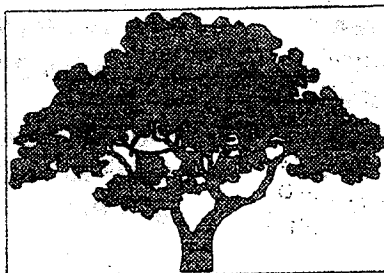
Our eastern hardwood forests, from Maine to Georgia, were once filled with pure chestnut stands. Mature trees could reach 80-100 ft tall, average 4-5 ft in diameter and live for 600 years. The trees were covered with creamy flowers in early summer, making the mountainsides appear to be covered with snow. The nuts were said to be the best flavored of all chestnuts, demand was high and became a major cash crop for many families in Appalachia. Bear, deer, wild turkeys and the now extinct Passenger Pigeons all survived winters by eating the nuts.

A fungus, probably imported from the Orient prior to the passage of plant quarantine laws, infected the trees in New York City in 1904. The blight tore through the forests, spreading 20-50 miles a year, and killing every chestnut in its path. By 1950 the American chestnut was eliminated as a forest tree. All that remains are isolated stump and root sprouts, as the roots were not killed by the disease.

Since the blight first made its presence known, plans and experiments have been underway to breed blight resistant trees. The longest-continuing breeding program is that in Connecticut, begun soon after the discovery of the blight. The early CT work focused on hybrids that were a combination of species, planted over 10,000 seedlings in Virginia which are still being evaluated. Two of the Connecticut's first-generation-backcrossed trees

[[ChineseXAmerican)XAmerican] are now 50 and 43 years old.

A group of scientists formed The American Chestnut Foundation in 1983. This is a non-profit organization whose mission is to restore the American chestnut as an integral part of the eastern forest ecosystem.



The Foundation's approach is to use backcrossing to transfer the blight resistance of the Chinese tree to the American tree. It entails crossing the two trees to obtain a tree that is 1/2 Chinese and 1/2 American, then backcrossed to an American chestnut to obtain a tree that is 3/4 American. Each further cycle reduces the Chinese fraction by a factor of 1/2, and they hope eventually to breed out all of the Chinese characteristics except for blight resistance. The goal of the Foundation is to produce trees which are 15/16ths American, and which will be indistinguishable from pure American chestnuts.

Chestnut tree hybrids are available for the home gardener from a number of nurseries. One in Georgia is Lawson's Nursery, Route 1, Box 472, Yellow Creek Road, Ball Ground, GA 30107.



A Gardener's Bookshelf

LANDSCAPE PLANTS OF THE SOUTH by R. Gordon Halfacre and Anne R. Shawcroft

This book focuses on shrubs and trees, including some vines and ground covers. Each plant is pictured and details of growth habits and requirements are listed.

SOUTHERN GARDENER'S BOOK OF LISTS by Lois Trigg Chaplin

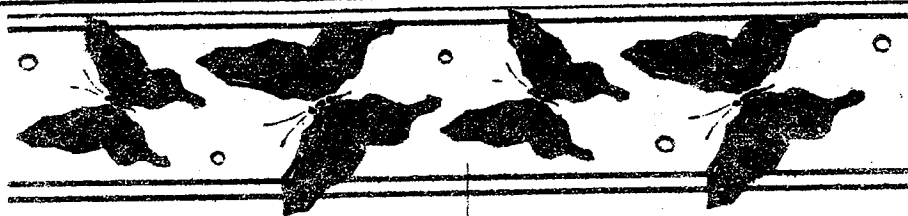
A book just for Southern gardeners it sorts plants by type and by requirements. Want a pink perennial that blooms in fall? You'll find it here, as well as a resource list for purchasing the plant you found.

A SOUTHERN GARDEN THE LITTLE BULBS GARDENING IN WINTER GARDENING FOR LOVE/MARKET BULLETINS all by Elizabeth Lawrence

For gardeners who have not yet discovered Miss Lawrence, a real treat is in store with these books. She wrote with great beauty, and her knowledge and love of her North Carolina gardens is evident in all her books.

THE GENUS HOSTA by George Schmid

The book covers hostas worldwide and discusses their selection, care and feeding. Mr. Schmid gardens in Tucker, growing many of the hostas he discusses in his book.



Butterfly Gardening

Butterfly gardening is the newest rage to hit gardeners nationwide. Gardens meant to attract these lovely winged insects are easy to plant, and lovely to look at even without the butterflies.

In order to be successful in your efforts to attract butterflies you must plant not only nectar flowers, but larval food as well. It is easy to include some of these in your garden, and the excitement of seeing a parsley plant covered with swallowtail caterpillars is worth a few chomped down leaves.

Following is a list of common butterflies and their larval food.

Pipevine Swallowtail

Pipevine (*Aristolochia tomentosa*)

Black Swallowtail

Carrots
Parsley
Dill

Tiger Swallowtail

Wild cherry
Birch
Ash
Tulip poplar
Apple

Gulf Fritillary

Passion vines

Monarch

Milkweeds

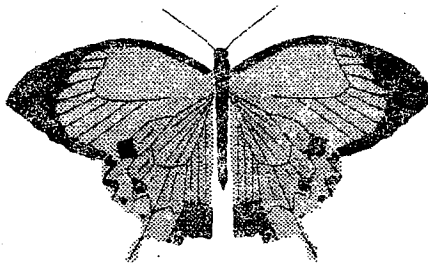
Painted Lady

Thistles
Bachelor's buttons

Other plants that attract butterfly larva include clover, hackberry, elm, snapdragon and willows.

Nectar sources are many and varied. Among the flowers in our borders are alyssum, daisies, lantana, marigolds, sedums, phlox, asters and zinnias. Additional flowers include liatris, rudbeckia, eupatorium, solidago, monarda, spearmint and verbena.

Shrubs and trees that flower are

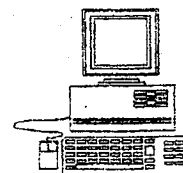


also excellent nectar sources. Some of them that attract many different butterflies are buddieias, blueberries, buckeyes, sumac, privet, redbud, lindera, and spirea.

Plant some of these trees, shrubs and flowers and you will be amply rewarded for the time spent by the number of lovely butterflies flitting around and through your garden.

*Gardens are not made,
By singing - "Oh, how beautiful!"
And sitting in the shade.*

Rudyard Kipling



GARDENING ON THE WEB

The World Wide Web contains a vast number of resources for gardeners. The Web can be a confusing place to find things if you don't know where to start. Listed below are some sites that will get you started.

Atlanta Garden Connection

www.atgarden.com

The Garden Gate

www.prairienet.org/garden-gate/

Green Thumb Corner

www.hht.com/Bus/horns/green.htm

National Gardening Association

www2.garden.org/nga/HOME.HTML

The Garden Web

www.gardenweb.com

The Garden Net

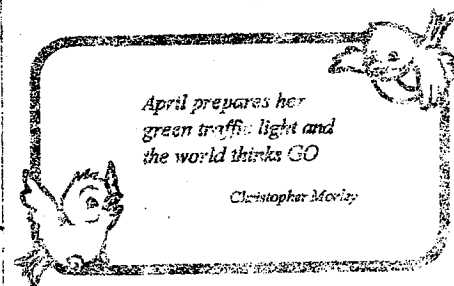
www.trine.com/GardenNet/

These are all sites that include links to specific plants, articles, book reviews, bulletin boards and more. Several of them have links to State Extension Offices, and to several plant encyclopedias.

PlantAmerica

www.plantamerica.com

Our own UGA/Michael Dirr site for professionals, but with an excellent plant search capability. The Dirr and Armitage CDs may be ordered here.



*April prepares her
green traffic light and
the world thinks GO*

Christopher Morley

A New Attitude

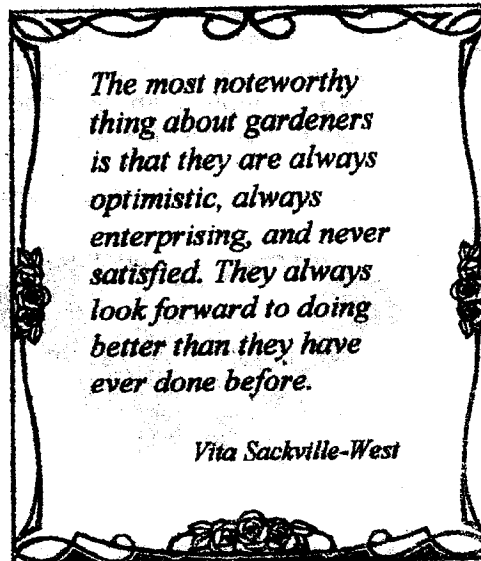
by Jan Hansen

It was a dream come true to go to England last September. It was an unfortunate time, however, as we arrived two days after Princess Diana's funeral. We saw a grieving nation demonstrate their love and respect for her and learn that life goes on. It was an amazing experience.

Yet, we had gone to visit the famed gardens of England. There are so many incredible gardens, both huge estates and small cottages. Many are owned and maintained by the National Trust, but there are privately owned gardens open to the public as well. As we had limited time, we had to prioritize which gardens to visit. I chose Hidcote Manor Garden, Stourhead, Christopher Lloyd's Great Dixter, and the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh. However, it was the Sissinghurst Castle Garden that changed my attitude about gardening.

Sissinghurst is one of the most famous gardens in the world. It is operated by the National Trust and has almost 200,000 visitors annually. An Elizabethan mansion was built in the mid 1500's, was used as a

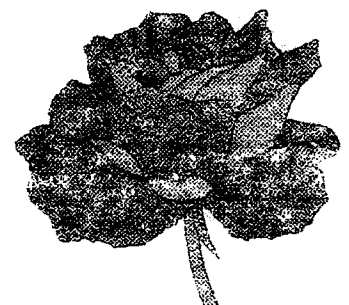
prison camp in 1756, and most of it was demolished by 1800. By 1930, when Vita Sackville-West purchased the property, the condition was deplorable. But Vita longed for an estate where she could build her own garden. So began the transformation.



Sissinghurst is magnificent. Vita and her husband, Harold Nicolson, designed a number of garden rooms. They are: the white garden, the top courtyard, the lower courtyard, the sunken garden, the rose garden, the cottage garden, the lime walk, the nuttury, the herb garden, the thyme lawn, the orchard, the azalea bank, and more. It became hard to appreciate my perennial

border back in Gwinnett! It just didn't measure up. Then I learned something: Sissinghurst (and Rome) wasn't built in a day. On a wall in one of the tower rooms, there was a chart of the chronological history of the garden. It was an ongoing process from 1930 and continued past the deaths of both Vita and Harold, and still continues today. In 1930, they cleared the nuttury and unearthed the moat wall. In 1931, they sowed the lawns in the courtyards and laid paths in the cottage garden. In 1932, they planted the yew walk, etc. Every year they added to the garden, even during World War II.

So, I've decided that my yard is "a work in progress". I've only been working on it for about three years. I have a long way to go, but I no longer pressure myself to get it done. It will never be a Sissinghurst. But, my house isn't a 16th century castle, either!



Spring Wildflowers

One of the delights of spring is a tramp through the woods looking for wildflowers. Perhaps you are lucky enough to have a woody corner in your own garden, and can grow many of our spring ephemerals. Nothing matches the delight of spying the first bloodroot, or trillium, of the season.

In a normal spring, March is the month for beginning bloom, and April is the main wildflower bloom time.

March will bring Bloodroot, *Sanguinaria canadensis*, Spring Beauty, *Claytonia caroliniana*, Birdfoot violet, *Viola pedata*, Toothwort, *Dentaria laciniata* and the rare and wonderful Oconee Bells, *Shortia galacifolia*.

Also in March we have the blooms of the Redbud, *Cercis canadensis*, Sweet Shrub, *calycanthus floridus*, and our beloved Dogwood, *Cornus florida*.



April then bursts forth with a rainbow of wildflowers and blooming shrubs and trees. All the Trilliums are here, and the Crested iris, *Iris cristata*, Foam Flower, *Tiarella cordifolia*, Shooting Star, *Dodecatheon meadia*, and both Ladyslippers, *Cypridemium acaule* and *C. calceolus*. The wild gingers, *Asarum* species, are hiding their little brown jugs, Bellwort, *Uvalaria grandiflora*, Solomon's Seal, *Polygonatum biflorum*, and Fire Pink, *Silene virginica*, add to the woodland scene.

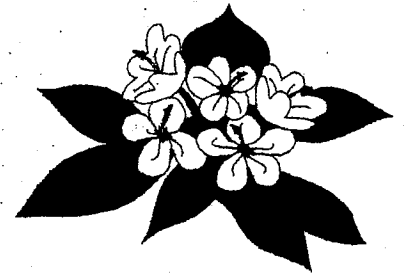
The wild azaleas, *Rhododendron* species, light up the woodland and scent the air with their sweet fragrance. Leucothue hangs its white bells over leafy Mayapple, *Podophyllum peltatum* and the mountain tops are white with Fringed phacelia, *Phacelia fimbriata*.

Horticulturally, the month of May is opening night, Homecoming, and Graduation Day all rolled into one.

Tam Mossman

May ushers in the Catawba Rhododendron, *Rhododendron catawbiense*, and Mountain Laurel, *Kalmia latifolia*. Phlox, *Phlox carolina*, Bluets, *Houstonia* species, and

Galax, *Galax aphylla* add their colors to the picture. Also beginning are the Butterfly weed, *Asclepius tuberosa*, Queen Anne's Lace, *Daucus carota*, Sundrops, *oenothera tetragoma*, and Meadow Rue, *Thalictrum revolutum*. Above



all these, the Flame Azalea, *Rhododendron calendulaceum* stands out as an exclamation point.

Many of us plant wildflowers in our gardens. The only time digging from the wild is acceptable is during a plant rescue operation. If you are buying plants, make sure that they are nursery propagated, not just nursery grown. This is the only way we can save the wildlings in their natural habitat.

■ Almost any farmer can describe
■ blackberry winter. It's that cold
■ spell that comes in May, about
■ three weeks after spring fever. It
■ comes when blackberries are in
■ bloom and does sometimes
■ actually drop a few real
■ snowflakes into the white flowers.
■ It doesn't bite through to the
■ hard, green incipient berries
■ nested behind the petals. It lasts
■ less than a week.

Rachel Peden