

◆ A Bit of Dirt ◆

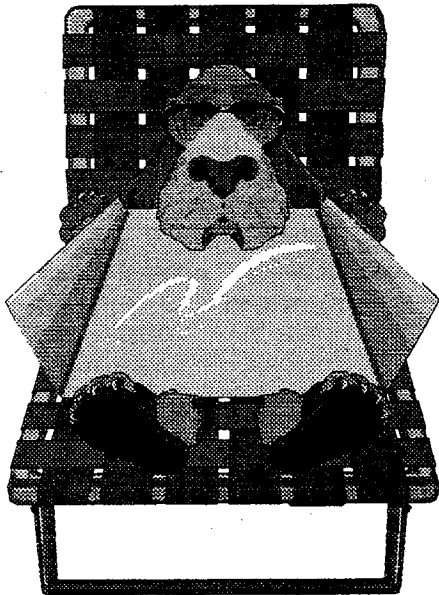
Volume 6 Issue 2

Summer 1998

The Newsletter of the
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, or email me at
103657.1211@compuserve.com



*Tell you what I like the best -
'Long about knee-deep in June,
'Bout the time strawberries melts
On the vine - some afternoon
Like to jes' get out and rest,
And not work at nothin' else.*

James Whitcomb Riley



SUMMER

Future Meetings

Please watch your mailbox for
postcards announcing future
meetings. At press time
speakers were not confirmed.

Advanced MG Training

June 18, 1998 UGA Athens
Preregister through County Agent

GMGA Summer Conference

June 19-20, 1998 UGA Athens
Registration \$60.00, to George
Wellington, 150 Ruby Forest
Pkwy, Suwanee 30024

GPPA

June 18, 1998, 7:30pm
Atlanta History Center
Robin Parer, owner of
Geraniaceae Nursery, Marin Co.
California
"Hardy Geraniums"

It is difficult to think anything but
pleasant thoughts while eating a
homegrown tomato.

Lewis Grizzard



*Message from our
President*

Planting Good Values In Our Youth

Gwinnett Master Gardeners have
been asked to join with Harry
Blazer, founder and CEO of Harry's
Farmers Markets in a mentoring
project. Beaver Ridge and Sum-
merour schools would participate in
the program entitled **Planting
Good Values in Our Youth.**

Harry's Farmers Market will provide
land adjacent to the Gwinnett
megastore on Satellite Drive. On
this site an organic vegetable gar-
den would be planted. Mr. Blazer
will provide everything needed for
raised bed gardening, including a
water source. The garden area will
be approximately 1000 sq. ft.

Gwinnett Master Gardeners have
been asked to be a major contribu-
tor in this project. We would provide
our gardening expertise in planning
the design, picking the plants,
planting them, developing a com-
post area and mentoring the chil-
dren as they come to the garden.
They will learn how to plant and
grow the food they eat. The chil-
dren would gain an understanding
as to what it takes to produce food
while they learn planning, nurtur-
ing, patience and responsibility.
We may be training future Master
Gardeners!

(Continued on Page 2)



From the President, continued

Project Open Hand will be the recipient of the organic produce that is grown. Project Open Hand will prepare and deliver 2 freshly cooked meals each day to the children living with Aids. Project Open Hand is the only organization in Atlanta providing home delivery of food to people with Aids.

This is a wonderful opportunity for our group to be involved with a multifaceted community project in its infancy. We will have real input in the planning and follow-thru of this garden. As the project progresses we can introduce herbs, bird houses, bird baths and flowering perennials for color.

A plaque giving recognition to Gwinnett Master Gardeners will be placed in the garden and press releases to the media will be made introducing this project to the Gwinnett community. What a bonus for the UGA Cooperative Extension Service Gwinnett Master Gardeners!

The project will offer a wide variety of opportunity for all of us to participate according to our interest and talents. We will need an active core group to take on this project; a small handful of people cannot carry this alone. Please respond as quickly as possible if you would like to be involved in this, and at what level. A response form is on the back of this newsletter. We must respond to Harry Blazer soon if we plan to be involved in this worthwhile project. I will be happy to answer any questions you have. This project is in its infancy so many of the details will be worked out as we go along. Please give me a call at my home, 770-921-9246 with your questions or comments or mail me the form on the back of the newsletter.

Happy Gardening,

Sheila Wilbur

Notes from the Extension Office

What Will All This Rain Do?

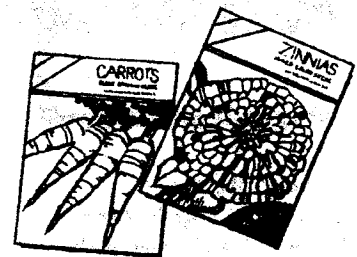
I'm sure many of you are in the same boat (and we did need one sometimes) as me. All the garden was not planted on time and now what do you do? It is still wiser to wait to work the soil until it has dried out adequately. You always run the risk of ending up with dirt clods instead of nicely worked garden soil if you are too ambitious. Now I know there are some of you who have this problem licked because you have built raised beds or have added so much organic matter over the years that the soil drains well and can be worked sooner. The rest of you can only be patient (and yes, envious) but do make plans to use that compost you have been making (remember from the MG class on "Composting"). If you don't have enough compost there is always something like ground pine bark humus (ie Nature's Helper) to make real improvements to our heavy clay soil. Remember there is another benefit to ground pine bark humus and that is disease suppression. Wow!...not only do you get looser, better draining soil but reduce disease at the same time.

Another reason to not be in a hurry to plant is soil temperature. The last time I looked about May 9 the four inch depth temperature was only 60 to 65 degrees F. Even under the IRT (infrared trapping) plastic it has just now gotten warm enough for my tomatoes to look happy. But here

again those of you that built raised beds probably have robust tomatoes and peppers. Raised beds warm up faster.

Enough about garden soil; now for some bad news. Some of the plants in your landscape may have a very tough time this summer if the usual dry spell and high temps strike again. Just think...some of the roots of these plants have declined (not yet showing any signs) because of excessive rain. With a reduced root system the plants are going to have a harder time supporting the top growth of trees and shrubs. In other words look out for some dieback this summer. For those of you so inclined, please save this article. Hopefully you can call me this fall and say...Well, Steve, you missed on this one. I will save the weed story for another time. Happy Gardening!!!

Steve Brady
Gwinnett Extension Service



1998 Gold Medal Winners

Plectranthus 'Athens Gem'
Asteromoea (Kalimeris) mongolica
Bottlebrush Buckeye
Trident Maple

PLANT CD's

The Allan M. Armitage Photo-Library of Herbaceous Plants on CD-ROM is now available through Plantamerica (www.plantamerica.com) or through Stipes Publishing, 217-356-8391. They are also appearing in some retail garden centers.

There are thousands of images of annuals, perennials, grasses and ferns arranged alphabetically on the four CDs. The photographs are for the most part excellent. Many genera contain species and cultivars; for instance, there are 54 species of iris, many with cultivars, and then another 55 varieties of hybrid bearded iris.

Plants can be chosen by common name, botanical name or family. You can pick and choose, or simply click to move to the next picture, right click to move back.

Dr. Armitage is also working on interactive software that, he says "will allow you to make a recipe of needs (eg, yellow flowers, 3' tall, zone 7, good for cut flower, etc.) and dozens of choices will come up. The interactive is essentially my perennial book. The keys will be active and about 1500 photos will accompany it. As a bonus, it will also be linked to the photo library. Available in July??"

This is another great resource for any serious gardener.



Project FeederWatch



Last February 20, 21 and 22 many of you participated in Project FeederWatch, counting the birds that appeared at feeders in your own backyards. The results are in, and verified using criteria developed by Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

In Georgia alone there were hundreds of participants, with 51 different species being observed in the 3 day count.

There were 355 observations of the Tufted Titmouse, with a total count of 965 birds. Listed below are some species and the total number of each bird observed in Georgia.

Robin	2826 birds
Grackle	2194
Goldfinch	1850
Dove	1467
Cardinal	1248
Carolina Chickadee	884
Crow	850
Blue Jay	832
House Finch	815
Chipping Sparrow	773
Starling	582
Junco	542
Yellow-rumped Warbler	465
White-throated Sparrow	458
Carolina Wren	407
Red-bellied Woodpecker	400
Rufous-sided Towhee	374
Purple Finch	305
Cedar Waxwing	241
E. Bluebird	216
Downy Woodpecker	211
Mockingbird	207
Brown Thrasher	166

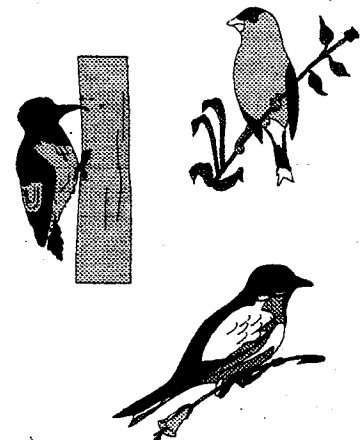
Birds whose count was quite low were generally still in their winter quarters during this period, or are not winter residents of Georgia.

Northern Flicker	68
Red-headed Woodpecker	65
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	48
Pileated Woodpecker	43
White-crowned Sparrow	41
Hairy Woodpecker	20
Fox Sparrow	18
Cooper's Hawk	8
Brown Creeper	6
Hermit Thrush	4

It is easy to see from these reports which birds are resident in the colder months, and plan what type of food to place in your own feeders for maximum attraction.

The time to hear bird music is between four and six in the morning. Seven o'clock is not too late, but by eight the fine rapture is over, due, I suspect, to the contentment of the inner man that comes with breakfast.

Donald Culross Peattie



Gardening on the Web

A web site of special interest and pertinence to all gardeners in Georgia is the Betty Johnson Horticulture Garden at the University of Georgia. The web address is www.uga.edu/~ugatrial/.

Remember, you do not need your own computer to view these pages. A simple trip to the library, and you can use the library computers to log on to the internet. The library staff is very helpful, and can assist you in learning how to use the computers.

Here Dr. Allan Armitage trials annuals and perennials for their suitability to Georgia's hot and humid climate. The plants are rated on a scale of 1 to 5 for floriferousness, foliage color and vigor, fullness, and insect and disease damage. Plants receiving a rating of 3.5 or above were deemed top performers and recommended without reservation. On these pages you can easily see which plants are the best for our gardens, and why.

The cool-season trials were mainly pansies and violas. The highest rated single cultivar was Universal Plus White, which received a 3.9. Rally Pure White and Ultima Lavender Shades rated 3.8 each, the Atlas mixture 3.6, Imperial Purple and Yellow 3.5 and Maxim Marina 3.4. Pansies were also listed by color, so that if you wanted a yellow pansy, you could see which one did the best. In violas, the Jewel Mix rated 3.9, and the Sorbet Mix 3.6. Among other winter annuals trialed were primulas, bellis and dianthus.

In the warm season annual trials, he rates the "Best of the Best" each year and gives details of culture. Geraniums, which tend to not like our muggy summers, did have a winner in Designer Lilac Chiffon, the Designer series receiving 4.0. For dianthus, the Ideal series received an overall rating of 3.6, and the Dazzler series of impatiens rated 3.9.

The perennial trials page lists plants receiving ratings of 4.6 to 5.0. These include Artemesia 'Powis Castle', Salvia guaranitica 'Argentine Skies' and Salvia 'Indigo Spires'. Among those with ratings of 4.0 to 4.5 were Amsonia hubrectii, Dianthus 'Bath's Pink' and 'Mountain Mist', Dicentra scandens 'Athens Yellow' and Lantana 'Miss Huff'. Ratings of 3.5 to 3.9 were given to, among others, Achillea 'Anthea', Lychnis coronaria and Phlox x 'Chattahoochee'. Plants with ratings lower than 3.0 had significant flower or foliage problems or showed early decline.



Individual analyses for each plant, giving rating, common name, weeks in flower, flower color, height and flowering time were also listed. For example:

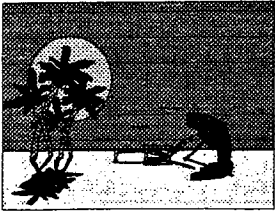
"Dianthus 'Mountain Mist'
Cheddar Pink
Rating 5.0
Pale Pink 9" tall
Flowering for 7 weeks
Flowered 4-29 to 6-17

Very attractive evergreen plant with fragrant double pink flowers and green-gray-blue foliage. Outstanding. Scattered flowers early summer. Two flowers per stem."

Dr. Armitage also trialed specialty annuals, new and different things that might be excellent garden subjects. Some of these were angelonia brachycome, gingers (curcuma and kaempheria), diascia and bacopa.

This is a tremendous resource when planning your garden. If you are looking for something that will be a sure success, this is where you can find out what to buy. Not all of the 1997 trials were up on the page at press time, but may be ready when you look at the site.

The Hort Garden is open to the public all the time, but there will be a special Public Open House on July 9, 1998. To get to the garden take GA 316 or US 78 to the Athens 10 Loop. Follow the Loop south and take the College Station exit. At the end of the ramp, take a left. At the third red light (across the RR tracks) take a right onto East Campus Rd. At the first red light, turn left onto Carlton Street. At the first red light, take a right onto D.W. Brooks Drive. Take the first left into the parking lot. The greenhouses are directly ahead. The gardens are to your right.



A TRIP TO PENSACOLA

THE 2ND ANNUAL SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE OF MASTER GARDENERS

It was a dreary rainy day as Fran Robbins and I started our journey to the SE MG Conference at Pensacola Beach, Florida. We were hoping the rain would run out and give us nice weather for the next few days and that is exactly what happened.

We arrived in Pensacola at about 3:30 and checked into our room which was similar to a condo and very nice. After packing out the beach and clearing up, we watched the sun set while driving to Peg Leg Pete's for some wonderful blackened grouper and Cajun food.

There were some folks from Ga. there including speakers Walter Reeves and Paul Thomas and approx. 8 MG's that we knew. Also, Bob Westerfield, MG Volunteer Coordinator.

The next morning some of us took off for the Gulf Breeze National Seashore and the others for a Butterfly House tour and perennial demonstrations. Dr. and Mrs. Ben Ford led the tour of the seashore which included a slide show and talk about the ecosystems of the area. Mother Nature constantly is working on the islands and changing the geography a little every year. I think I feel more secure living inland.

That afternoon, we were able to visit the garden of a friend on Gulf Breeze. Then, we checked out Fort Pickens which was a rather elaborate setup. I think they said it saw action during the

Civil War. It is home to a menagerie of Swallows now. The fort dates from the 1800's.

Dr. and Mrs. Ford, who led the seashore tour, also gave an excellent presentation on the Monarch butterfly. We could tell they know their subject intimately. Pensacola is a stopping off point for the Monarch. He informed us that the clear-cutting of trees in Mexico is robbing the Monarch's winter home.

Felder Rushing gave an informative, humorous presentation on Vermicomposting. Worms in the house, in a sweater box, making compost. We were told to use red wigglers and DON'T use citrus peels in your box. Also, Felder says that fungicides kill earthworms.

Dr. Ken Langeland of the Univ. of Fla. gave a presentation on noxious weeds. He specialized in aquatic weeds found in Florida.

Dr. Hugh Conlon, of the Univ. of Tenn. talked about LTD shrubs. Fran laughingly thought that might mean Love to Die but instead it was on shrubs with Little to Do to care for.

The one hour program on ornamental grasses was as excellent as the health of the grasses that were displayed. Dr. Mack Thetford, Univ. of Fla. gave the talk. We were all rushing to write down the names of our favorites. Mine were Muhlenbergia species and Sheep Fescue, Blue Fescue and Feather Reed Grass.

Imagine this: Master Gardeners dressed up! Yes, folks, it really happened—at the banquet that night. I took pictures to prove it! The food was delicious; battered fried shrimp, roast beef custom-sliced, new potatoes, etc., with delicious cheesecake to top it off.

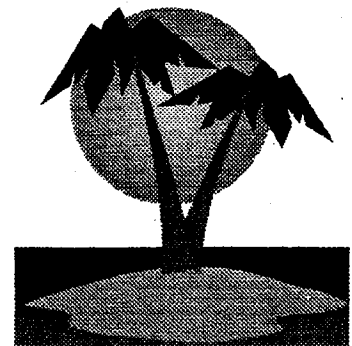
Dr. Paul Thomas, an Extension Ornamentals Horticulturist with UGA, explained Georgia's Gold Medal Plant Award system for the benefit of other states that might be interested in

implementing this system. He told us of the latest perennials and annuals. Sorry, folks, I can't find my notes on that! Ask about the latest at your favorite nursery.

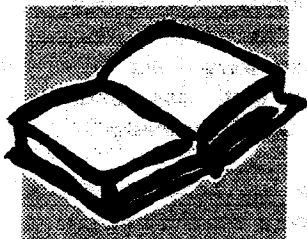
Let me say here that the folks in Pensacola did a great job, in every respect, at pulling this conference off in an efficient, but friendly way. Everyone was very nice; I thought. If there were any big problems, we didn't notice. Three cheers for the area's Master Gardeners, Beth Bolles, their Extension Agent and all the great speakers.

By the way, there was talk about where to have the next SE conference and Atlanta seemed to be on a lot of lips. Also, Asheville, Charleston or Savannah. Sounds like I might need to attend next year too!

Brenda Adams



For those of you interested in wildflowers, in addition to the annual meet in Cullowhee, NC., there is a yearly Wildflower Pilgrimage to Gatlinburg, Tennessee (on the other side of Smoky Mtn. National Park) the last weekend of April. In addition to a flower show and sales in the Civic Center, the main drive of this gathering is field trips led by local horticulture experts, to more remote parts of the park in search of rare wildflowers. Contact Great Smoky Mtn. Nat. Park 423-436-1290.



A GARDENER'S BOOKSHELF

Passport to Gardening

Published by Gardener's Supply

This book gives you all the tools and information you need to chart your gardening journey. Contains the most up-to-date gardening information on over 33 gardening topics, from composting to heirloom roses. Each chapter gives you an overview of the subject, tells how to get started, and connects you to the best plants, products, and information. You also get the latest tips and techniques, recommended plants and products, commentaries and reviews, and links to other resources. Eclectic and opinionated.

Dirr's Hardy Trees and Shrubs: An Illustrated Encyclopedia

by Michael A. Dirr

A main selection of the Garden Book Club, this is unquestionably one of the most beautiful and significant books ever published by Timber Press. This lavishly illustrated book describes the best woody plants, from *Abeliophyllum* to *Zenobia*, showing flower, fruit, bark or fall color of more than 500 species, and including some 700 additional cultivars and varieties.

*I think that I shall never see
A billboard lovely as a tree.
Indeed, unless the billboards
fall
I'll never see a tree at all.*

Ogden Nash

Compost, Compost Compost

If you haven't yet started your compost pile, this is a perfect time to begin making black gold for your garden. Our summer heat and humidity eats up organic matter in the soil quickly, so it is important to have a ready source of organic additives at hand.

Composting is easy. You don't need a special high-cost "compost in 4 weeks" bin. You can build a compost bin from wood pallets picked up from a store, from chicken wire or inexpensive woven fencing. You can even use black plastic garbage bags, but this will make the finished product cook more slowly due to lack of oxygen. Ideally, the compost bin should be 4-5' by 4-5'. Perhaps the easiest way to compost is simply pile up the ingredients against the back fence.

Many articles and books have been written on the subject, and many of them seem to infer that this is a difficult scientific operation, needing exactly the right C:N ratio, constant turning, proper watering, etc. etc. **WRONG!** Making compost is as simple as leaves falling from a tree and being raked in a pile, then left alone.

People get really hung up on this C:N ratio, but don't worry about it. Just think brown things and green things, brown things being the carbon and green things being the nitrogen part of the ratio. You need more brown than green. Simple. To that pile of fallen leaves (brown) add vegetable/fruit scraps from the kitchen (green), grass clippings (green), dead flower stalks (brown)

and you get the idea. Any vegetable matter is grist for the compost mill. There are a few don'ts to keep in mind, however. Don't put any fats, meats, animal products into your compost pile.

Except - manure from herbivores is good - this means don't use your dog or cat manure as they are carnivores and could carry bacteria you don't want in your garden. Horse, cow, sheep, chicken, and Zoo doo are wonderful additives to compost piles.

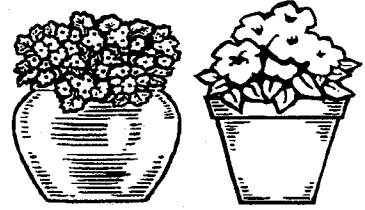
Generally, a mixture of kitchen and yard waste gives you close to the ideal C:N ratio.

What about this weekly turning and lifting and stirring? Not really necessary, if you can wait till next year to use your compost. The compost will decompose all by itself. We get enough rain to make monitoring of water unimportant, except maybe in droughty August. If we have an exceptionally wet year, you might want to cover the pile with a tarp to limit the amount of water it contains. By the same token, if we get too much rain our hot sun soon takes care of the excess.

I keep two piles, this year and next year. This year's pile was built from last year's leaves, kitchen refuse and dead flowers. Next year's pile is being built now. I do nothing but add material to a height of about 5 ft., then watch it all sink down and decompose with no further work from me.

As I said, composting is easy.

Our Trip to Birmingham



PUZZLE

The following flowers are embedded in this puzzle. See how many you can find.

- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| Aloe | Hosta |
| Alyssum | Iris |
| Azalea | Ixia |
| Bellis | Lunaria |
| Campanula | Lycoris |
| Canna | Malva |
| Cosmos | Mimulus |
| Dahlia | Nepeta |
| Daylily | Peony |
| Dogwood | Rose |
| Erodium | Rudbeckia |
| Galax | Ruta |
| Gaura | Salvia |
| Gentian | Sedum |
| | Vinca |

What a fun day! We met our bus at 8:30, Shelia and others loaded on the food goodies and we took off right on time. That little mad-cap, Maria Turk, brought along four houseguests and made it a "mystery" trip for them. She didn't tell them ahead of time where they were going.

One of Maria's guests, Joann Moss, owns a bed and breakfast home in Moreland so we were busy planning our next trip to Joann's lovely gardens. We had a preview of her gardens from Better Homes and Gardens Special Edition magazines which were passed around.

We were met by Larry and Gary at the entrance to Birmingham Botanical Gardens and started our tour. Parts of the gardens are quite formal with beautiful sculpture at the entrance to 'Hill Garden'. This garden features a lawn and reflecting pool at the end of which is a wall of water and a piece of sculpture in this large "room" with walls of vitex.

Next we went through the rose garden which is also formal - the raised beds are in related geometric shapes. A metal gazebo is in the center of this garden of hybrid teas with shrub roses at the edges. Through arches we pass to a less formal garden of old roses - also in raised beds but in softer kidney and oval shapes with "walls" of oakleaf hydrangeas and hollies. Parts of this garden also have small rooms, semi-partitioned with short white-aired fences. Larry, our guide, pointed out the design elements all through the tour.

We were all hungry by this time so we speeded up a bit through the Southern Living garden featuring lots of hellebores along with horse chestnut and smoke trees, peonies, astilbe, hostas, grasses, salvias, etc. Then the Iris Garden (also other perennials), the Rhododendron Garden, Camellia Garden, Herb and Vegetable Garden. The Herb Garden features a lovely tapestry of many-colored creeping thymes. Then a quick dash through the conservatory and Desert Garden. We thought it had been hot outdoors! At the entrance to the conservatory is a beautiful large, metal sculpture of a clock with a backdrop of a slanted sheet of water. Each number of the clock is a plant or flower sculpture with a woodland animal. Way cool!

After a delicious lunch in the French restaurant we were on our own so we spent a lot of time in the Japanese Garden, coveting the beautiful boulders, admiring the irises, Japanese maples of many varieties, and trying to implant into the brain the design elements of this most impressive garden.

Before heading home we made a quick tour of the Southern Living building test kitchens and photo studios. It is a beautiful building which straddles a stream, has walls of stacked stone or wood panelling and huge windows facing the woody landscapes. Altogether a beautiful workplace.

Well, back on the bus the refreshments were polished off, some dozed, some chatted. Brenda would have driven the bus for a while if given the chance, but that's another story.

Fran Robbins

N	E	P	E	T	A	O	A	N	N	A	C
R	A	R	A	S	O	M	S	O	C	L	Z
T	I	N	R	U	T	A	E	N	H	Y	M
X	L	A	O	S	N	D	I	B	O	S	P
A	H	I	S	A	L	V	I	A	S	S	E
L	A	T	E	S	U	Y	R	P	T	U	O
A	D	N	P	E	N	S	C	G	A	M	N
G	O	E	O	D	A	N	B	O	N	N	Y
D	G	G	A	U	R	A	Y	I	R	I	S
A	W	Y	D	M	I	H	G	U	R	I	P
Y	O	S	H	T	A	S	D	Y	X	O	S
L	O	U	A	N	X	B	E	L	L	I	S
I	D	L	P	E	E	R	O	D	I	U	M
L	O	U	L	C	L	T	A	E	X	C	A
Y	M	M	K	W	O	A	L	O	I	E	L
A	L	I	A	S	C	M	Z	L	A	R	V
C	A	M	P	A	N	U	L	A	T	E	A