

A Bit of Dirt

Volume 7 Issue 1

Spring 1999

The Newsletter of the
Gwinnett Master Gardeners

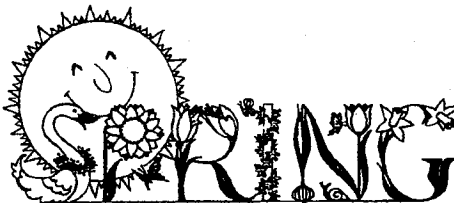


A Bit of Dirt is published quarterly. Editor is Gail Martin. If you have news, or an article you would like to have published, please call me at 770-381-2513 GailTMartin@compuserve.com



*If there comes a little thaw,
Still the air is chill and raw,
Here and there a patch of
snow,
Dirtier than the ground below
Dribbles down a marshy
flood;
Ankle-deep you stick in mud
In the meadows while you
sing,
"This is Spring".*

C. P. Cranch



FUTURE MEETINGS

March 8

This will be a covered dish dinner meeting, so bring your favorite dish to share. We will discuss the recent survey and see what we can change to better our membership and our programs.

April 12

May 10

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to our own Dolores Wyland who won a Roots of the Garden award for donating more than three years and 500 hours of service to the Atlanta Botanical Garden.

Good Job, Dolores!!

*A Message From Our
President*

Spring just can't be far away! As I look out this morning at another cloudy, rainy day it seems the garden will stay asleep forever.

But on the other hand, next week is the Southeastern Flower Show. That must mean spring is close at hand. This week in my travels I've seen many forsythia bushes in bloom. It is February and the temperature is high 60's or low 70's, what are the plants to think? But we all know the cold weather will return. March can be a brutal month.

The most we gardeners can do is keep reading our catalogues and start our seedlings. Be optimistic and hope spring is just around the corner. Like you, I can't wait to get my hands in the dirt.

Soon we will be going to Garden Tours, plant sales and all our favorite nurseries.

We are planning a field trip to Jim Gibbs personal gardens on May 12, 1999. This is a Wednesday, so mark your calendars now. More details later.

Sheila

A New Master Gardener Project

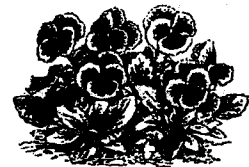
The Gwinnett Master Gardeners are very excited about their new project!

They are working with Gwinnett Habitat for Humanities. Every new Habitat homeowner is currently required to attend classes to improve their knowledge of home ownership and upkeep, personal health and OUR FAVORITE: Yard and Garden development. We will teach classes in every area of gardening, approximately every other month. If you can help in any way please call Sharon Matthews at (770) 736-3928 or email her at RJConsulting@MindSpring.com.



"The way it works is this: summer is hot and winter is cold and the other seasons fall in between. Gardeners who every year fall off the deep end at the first slight variation in mean temperature should try to get that sentence fixed in their heads."

Henry Mitchell



"Firmness in all aspects is a most important quality when gardening, not only in planting but in pruning, dividing and tying up. Plants are like babies, they know when an amateur is handling them."

Margery Fish

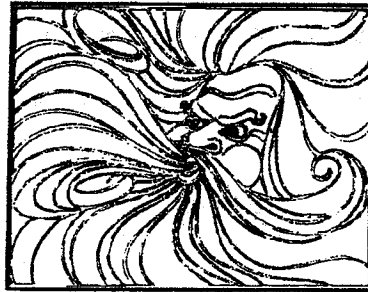
Notes from the Extension Office

What Happened to My Lawn and Other Things in the Landscape??

The so far mild winter weather (as of this writing) would seem to most to pose no problem in the landscape. The truth be know, however, this can turn out to be very hard on many of your plants.

Let's explore the things that may have or are about to occur in your lawn. Many people think that just because the lawn (bermuda, zoysia and centipede) looks brown on top it is dormant. Many times it is still active, just out of sight and out of mind. What may make this worse is the fact that with the mild temperatures the lawn is using stored carbohydrates to start its spring growth. Then along comes a cool spell that stops the green-up. If this cycle repeats too many times this puts the turf in the position of running on empty. Another way of saying this is, the turf may have used its last drop of gas. Where this does occur in your lawn, you will notice it remains brown while the rest of your lawn or neighbor's lawn greens up successfully. I bring this out as an explanation for some of what occurs. If this was not enough, the next thing that usually occurs at this time is, many people spray for weeds. Again, it appears that the turf is dormant, but, there is life

down below. Some people think that they can KILL a weed deader than dead (hence the term overkill)...so they spray...spray...spray. All that really happens is they wet the weed with the herbicide and the rest rolls off into the turf and down to the active stolons (runners). What would normally not injure the lawn is applied at a time when injury can and frequently does occur. This simply means spray if you need to but not to excess, rather just to moisten the weed.



Many of your landscape plants have used a lot of stored carbohydrates to this point. Some have started expanding their bloom and/or leaf buds to the point of being vulnerable to the next potential cold snap. This will help you to explain the lack of flowers or lack of vigor in the landscape.

Steve Brady



Get Ready for the Birds



Once March arrives in Atlanta we begin to think about the birds we want to invite into our gardens this season. If we haven't put up our nesting boxes in February, it is important to do so as soon as we can. Carolina wrens, bluebirds, tufted titmice, nuthatches and Carolina chickadees are all cavity nesters and make use of those boxes we provide. The birdhouse should be nailed securely to its support, about 5 feet above the ground. These small songbirds prefer a perchless box, so they can land directly onto the edge of the entrance hole. House sparrows and starlings may take over the box if you add perches.



Once the birds' housing needs are taken care of, take a long look at your garden and yard, and assess it's attractiveness to a variety of birds. In order to have a hospitable environment for them, your garden must provide food, shelter, water and nesting sites.

Groundcovers such as vinca minor and pachysandra give the birds protection from predators. Brown

thrashers, rufous-sided towhees and sparrows rummage around in leaves and groundcovers for food while remaining hidden and safe. Ferns offer soft material hummingbirds use to line their nests. Placing lint from your dryer outside also provides soft nesting material for birds.

Vines such as honeysuckle and ivy provide nesting spots for many birds. Trumpet vine and crossvine will also attract hummingbirds to their trumpet shaped flowers. Berry thickets, while not popular with gardeners, nevertheless provide ample food for many birds.

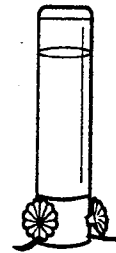
Any perennials that seed are ready-made cafeterias for seed-eating birds like goldfinches, cardinals and titmice. Leave seedheads on echinacea and rudbeckia and watch the little goldfinches perch on top enjoying a meal. Titmice and cardinals enjoy crape myrtle seeds during the winter.

An assortment of shrubs provide fruit in various seasons of the year. Many fall migrants eat their fill of berries to prepare for their long migrations, while winter residents like to munch them throughout the season. Pyracantha and clerodendron berries are loved by robins, cedar waxwings and bluebirds.

Hummingbirds show up in very late March to mid-April here in Atlanta. Cross vine blooms early, and

azaleas and columbines are visited by these tiny birds. For a summer's worth of hummingbirds plant abelia, weigela and flowering quince, and add several different salvias and monardas to your perennial beds.

Keep your hummingbird feeder filled with fresh solution, and your flower beds filled with flowers and you should have a steady stream of hummers until the last ones leave in early October.



The Meaning of Flowers

- Aster - Talisman of love*
- Begonia - A fanciful nature*
- Red Carnation - Admiration*
- Daffodil - Regard*
- Daisy - Innocence, gentleness*
- Forget-me-not - True love*
- Hibiscus - Delicate beauty*
- Jasmine - Amiability*
- Pansy - Thoughtful recollection*
- Rosebud - Beauty and youth*
- Pink Rose - Perfect happiness*
- White Rose - Charm, innocence*
- Tulip - Perfect love*
- Violet - Modesty, simplicity*

Make a Copper Arch

Making a copper arch for your garden is a nice afternoon project that shouldn't cost more than \$75-80. All materials are readily available at your local home fix-it store.

I used heavy gauge 3/4" copper pipe for the upright parts and 3/4" flexible copper tubing for the arch part. I did the uprights in three 2' sections, which gave me 6' (plus a couple of inches when you count the extra bit that copper tee connectors add). I used 18" pieces horizontally to connect the two verticals that make up each side. Each side looks something like this (sort of like a ladder).

At this point I used the hammer/nail punch method (you can solder if you prefer) and connected two of the three vertical sections together on each of the sides, just so they wouldn't keep falling apart while I fitted the curved section on top.

Since my path is 4' wide, I took a guess that 12' of the tubing (divided by 2, i.e. two 6' lengths) would be enough to make the right amount of curvature. Turned out to be a pretty good guess. I initially cut it in two pieces, fitted each piece into the top connector on the vertical parts and carried the whole thing out to the garden to see how it looked. In the beginning it was much too narrow and tall so I kept gently straightening the tubing until I had the right amount of curvature to make a 4' wide arch.

A helpful hint here: at this point

I was only using two of the three 2' vertical sections on each side so that I had a 4' tall arch. This is much easier to maneuver around the garden and do the unbending trial and error-ing with than the full 6' arch would be. I stuck the final 2' sections on the bottom of each side when I was finished.



When I had it reasonably close to the right width, I cut each piece of tubing into three equal pieces and inserted two of the 18" horizontal pieces, still using the copper tees as connectors and continuing the ladder effect. I used the hammer/nail punch method to connect all the rigid pipe sections at their tee intersections and then had my sol solder all the joints on the curved part. The hammer/nail punch method doesn't work on the soft tubing - it smashed too easily. And you could certainly solder all the joints if you wanted to.

Then we carried it out to the garden. At this point it's a two-person job, at least in the 4' width - pretty unwieldy for one person to handle. We used four

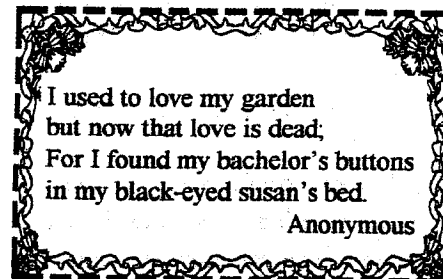
4' sections of 1/2" rebar pounded not quite halfway into the ground to set the feet of the arch on. It comes up inside the vertical pipes just past the first joint and makes the whole thing feel pretty solid.

At the store keep a close eye on the guy who cuts the copper tubing for you and don't let him straighten it out to measure it. It's much easier to work with if it still has the original curve in it. Also, be careful cutting the tubing as it crimps easily if you tighten the pipe cutter too much at once. Another also: make sure when you pound the rebar into the ground that you're not going to puncture sewer lines or sprinkler systems or sever underground wiring.

Only thing I might/will do differently on the next one I make would be to use 14' (7' of arch) instead of 12' (6' of arch) of tubing. The width of mine is actually 52" instead of 48" (it has to span not only the path but the 2" brick edging on either side) and the curved part is a little "flatter" than I would have preferred.

Go for it.

Written by
Jane Donahue, who gardens in
Eugene, Oregon





Master Gardener January '99 Conference



The weather could have been a little better but that didn't keep undaunted gardeners from attending this conference in full force (over 300). The meeting was on January 9 at the Atlanta Botanical Gardens. Gwinnett County's representation numbered 12, including Steve Brady, Gwinnett's Extension Service Agent.

After Becky Blades' welcoming, Bob Westerfield, the state coordinator, talked briefly about plans for advanced training. One credit will be earned for each unit of study - study time may be for one hour or one day, depending upon the subject and five credits will qualify a person to be an Advanced Master Gardener. Rockdale County is hosting a seminar on landscape management March 4 and Bibb County will have a seminar April 29, the day before the State Master Gardener Conference, April 29-May 1 in Macon. Check with your extension office for these and upcoming advanced training conferences.

Jim Wilson (we all know him from TV's Victory Garden), also a Master Gardener, said he couldn't decide if he was a garden writer, a writer who gardens, or a cheerleader for Master Gardeners. He spoke about planting a "row for the hungry", which might be something to think about for a project for our club.

Then we had break-out sessions and I've seen more successful ones but the main problem was the inclement weather. The new Children's Garden was sup-

posed to have had the hard-scaping installed, but it wasn't, so it was a sea of mud. The Winter Interest session with Tom Harvey was too cold to stay outside to attend, though he did have some beautiful slides when we were all back indoors.



Ann Shenk of the State Botanical Garden (Athens) gave a very enthusiastic presentation of diverse ways of interesting young children in gardening. She had some great ideas: square-foot gardening; seeds and bulbs in cups for little fingers; gardening in barrels, tires; a pizza garden; a child-size arbor; plant teepees; a bat cave; a plant bog. Our Glenda Patterson said she got more from this speaker than any she had heard at these conferences.

I hadn't signed up for "Propagating Plants" by Jennifer Ceska but our Barbara Troso (now living in Venezuela) said she enjoyed it.

During the business meeting Becky had people vote by show-of-hands about how they would feel about having future MG meetings in Gwinnett County. We really have outgrown the auditorium at ABG.

Kathy Henderson, of radio

fame, spoke in the afternoon, "What's Old is New Again" and had sprigs of plants from grandmother's time which are making a comeback. She wanted everyone to identify themselves as a Master Gardener when they call her show at 770-491-7748. She gave away plants, too.

It was a fine time. Jim Wilson's parting shot was that he had been "Intoxicated with the exuberance of his verbosity". Am I sliding into that mode?

Fran Robbins



There is something very fine about a poppy, in the extraordinary combination of boldness of color and great size with its slender delicacy of stem, the grace of the set of the beautiful buds, the fine turn of the flower as it opens, and the wonderful airiness of poise of so heavy a flower...And when the flowers have shed, oh, so lightly! their silken petals, there is still another beauty, a seed vessel of such classic shape that it wears a crown.

Elizabeth Lawrence

1999 All-America Selections Winners

This year there is an unprecedented number of AAS winners for us to try in our gardens with 12 new plants judged to be superior to those that have gone before. Eight are flowers, seven annuals and one perennial. The other four are edible, a squash, a pumpkin, a tomato and a watermelon.

Zinnia 'Profusion Orange' and 'Profusion Cherry' have received the AAS Gold Medal, and are considered to set a new standard for garden zinnias. They are resistant to powdery mildew and bacterial leaf spot, are mid-sized (12 to 18 in. high), flower all summer and don't require deadheading. It has been 10 years since a plant received a Gold Medal.

Marigold 'Bonanza Bolero' is a dwarf French marigold with gold flowers flecked with red. It grows 8 to 12 inches high with the double flowers measuring 2 1/4 inches.

Verbena 'Quartz Burgundy' has large flower clusters in a deep wine red color with white eyes, and is resistant to powdery mildew. It spreads to about 15 inches.

Portulaca F1 'Sundial Peach' has large peach flowers, 2 inches, and more petals in each bloom. It is supposed to stay open for a longer period of time each day.

Begonia F1 'Pin-Up Flame' is a yellow tuberous-type begonia with the yellow flowers edged in red/orange. Flowers are single and are 2 to 4 inches while the

plant grows only 10 to 12 inches high. Try this one in shade, and hope for a cooler summer.

Osteospermum 'Passion Mix' comes in colors of pink, rose, purple and white, but while it may do splendidly farther north, it probably will be best here in the spring and fall.

The one perennial that made the AAS grade is Tritoma (aka Kniphofia) 'Flamenco'. It has the ability to bloom first year from seed with thirty inch spikes of orange, yellow or red flowers. It can attract hummingbirds.

Squash F1 'Eight Ball' is a little round summer squash the color of zucchini, growing on compact 3 ft. plants. They can be harvested as babies in about five or six weeks. Supposed to taste great.

Pumpkin 'Wee-B-Little' is an eight to sixteen ounce pumpkin with a bush habit. It requires nevertheless 6 to 8 ft. of space. Count back 120 days from Halloween to know when to plant.

Tomato F1 hybrid 'Juliet' is an elongated cherry tomato that will withstand cracking while on the vine, has a sweet taste and grows in clusters like grapes.

Watermelon F1 'New Queen' has bright orange, sweet flesh in a 5 to 6 lb melon on a vine that can spread as far as 9 ft.



State Botanical Garden

2450 Milledge Ave., Athens
313 acres with various features,
5 miles of nature trails

Taylor-Grady House & Garden

634 Prince Ave., Athens
Historic home with 19th C box-
wood garden

Massee Lane Gardens

10 Massee Lane, Ft. Valley
Home of American Camellia So-
ciety, with ten acres of Camel-
lias

Lockerly Arboretum

1534 Irwinton Rd., Milledgeville
Arboretum, special collections
on 47 acres

Callaway Gardens

Highway 27, Pine Mountain
2,500 acres; collections, aza-
leas, Butterfly Center, bike and
nature trails

Bonaventura Cemetery

330 Bonaventura Rd., Savannah

Davenport Home & Garden

119 Habersham St., Savannah
Historic building and gardens

Owens-Thomas House

124 Abercorn, Savannah
Traditional Regency style house
museum, formal gardens

Rose Test Gardens of the Amer- ican Rose Society

Thomasville, GA

Pope Home

West Robert Thomas Avenue
Washington, GA

Web Gardening

Web sites with unusual and useful pages are sometimes bewilderingly difficult to find in the huge cybergarden on the World Wide Web.

National Gardening Association at www.garden.org has among its many pages an online horticultural course offering. The next course, **Exploring the World of Plants: A Botany Course for Gardeners**, begins in March. This course deals with important concepts in botany, such as plant growth and functions, diversity, plant interactions and becoming comfortable with horticulture terminology. You will be able to read plant symptoms, identify problems and know what action to take to correct the problems. Cost of the course is \$35.00.

Garden.com offers a **Garden Planner** that will help you design the garden of your dreams. There are over 900 plants to choose from. First you choose plants for your garden in 2 ways: using their **Plant Finder** which takes into account your zone, sun exposure, pH, soil composition, color choices and season of bloom, among still more criteria such as the amount of work you want to spend in your garden; or you may select plants by name, i.e. select **Rose** and you will see an extensive list of roses. Next you design your garden using a plan grid to create a new garden or draw a garden you already have. After you've done all this, you can buy all or some of the plants you use in your design. The Garden Planner then

totals the cost of all the plants and allows you to purchase them online, by fax, or by calling their 800 number.

Also on Garden.com Felder Rushing writes a monthly column for the Southeast. The current one is titled **Our Two Months of Winter**.

Perhaps the most fun of all is ebay.com which can also be reached through a link from PlantAmerica.com. This is an online auction of all things garden related and can be every bit as addictive as a real-live auction. Each item is given a set number of days to be auctioned, and keeps track of the bidding as it goes. Minimum bids are posted and bid increments are indicated. Items range from a set of autographed Martha Stewart garden tools used on the Rosie show (price when I last looked was \$1575.00 and going up) to a packet of flower seeds for \$1.00. There are welcome plaques, placemats, flower pots, books, garden CDs, plants, seeds, birdhouses, garden related Christmas tree ornaments, porcelains - you name it. Anything garden related goes here. Prior to bidding you must register, and usually the buyer pays shipping costs. As in all auctions, sometimes things are way overpriced and sometimes things go for a song.



GardenTrends Showcase

The Georgia Green Industry Association presented the first GardenTrends Showcase on January 21. This was an effort on the part of the GGIA to let gardeners know more about the organization.

Walter Reeves introduced a number of new plants developed by GGIA nursery members, as well as introducing all the speakers. Walter did an excellent job of keeping things moving along right on time.

Lee May, the ever popular garden writer, told stories of his own early gardening years. Michael Dirr and Allan Armitage, the Frick and Frack of Georgia gardening, were their usual ebullient selves. Dr. Dirr spoke on Myths and Realities of Native Plants while Dr. Armitage discussed Crazy Plants for Crazy Gardeners. The fourth speaker(s) of the evening were George Sanko and Thelma Glover talking about Nature's Garden of Eden....the Smoky Mountains to the Florida Panhandle.

The 1999 Georgia Gold Medal Plants were presented. Some of the other new plants were an upright ivy, *Hedera helix* 'Arborescens Glacier', a gorgeous bright purple *Stokesia* appropriately named 'Purple Parasols', more fall blooming Encore azaleas and the lovely yellow *Buddleia* hybrid B. 'Honeycomb'.

TRY SOME SUMMER BULBS

This year pep up your garden by trying some new-to-you summer bulbs. The time to order them is now, to plant when the soil warms up.

Acidanthera is a gladiolus relative. They have the same culture as typical glads, but there the similarity ends. They flower in late summer, with large white flowers with chocolate blotches at the petal bases. There are up to eight flowers per stem atop 24 to 36 inch foliage. They are wonderfully fragrant.

Brodiaea is a West Coast native with grasslike foliage and beautiful blue flowers. They flower in summer with a height of 24 inches.

Chlidanthus is an amaryllis cousin that flowers with fragrant yellow blooms in midsummer. These are small plants for the front of the border and aren't particularly hardy. They are worth growing anyway.



Crinodonna (aka *Amarcrinum*) is a bi-generic hybrid between *Crinum* and *Amaryllis belladonna*. The soft pink flowers are carried on 30 inch stems above strappy green foliage.

Gloriosa superba is indeed glorious, with its twisted and re-curved petals of red and gold. Not at all hardy, it is worth potting up inside for winter protection.

Ixia, the corn lilies, are tender little corms native to South Africa. The plants have grassy leaves and a 12" spike of cup shaped flowers in pink, white, yellow or soft orange.



Polianthes, or tuberose, is one of the most fragrant of flowers. It's waxy white flowers bloom on 24 to 36 stems in mid to late summer and perfume the garden.

Sparaxis, wandflower, is another South African native, not hardy but worth growing as an annual. Lance shaped leaves and 12" stems of 3 to 6 flowers are produced in late spring.



Sprekelia is a vibrant red flower that rises to a height of 18 inches. It is native to Mexico and sometimes hardy for us but worth planting for the beauty of it.



Tigridia comes to us from Mexico and South America, and is not consistently winter hardy. Plants are 24" tall with 4-6" wide flowers in varied bright colors in early July.

1999 Georgia Gold Medal Winners

Nova Pentas (*Pentas lanceolata* 'Nova')

This pentas is a summer annual with magenta buds opening to rose-colored flowers in clusters. Attracts butterflies and hummingbirds.

Lenten Rose (*Helleborus orientalis*)

Pass-along perennial that has proven its value. Now available in distinct colors. Evergreen, blooms in February through May.

Mohawk Viburnum (*Viburnum x burkwoodii* 'Mohawk')

A deciduous shrub growing 7 to 8 ft. high with incredibly fragrant flowers in March/April. Highly pest-resistant foliage.

American Yellowwood (*Cladrastis kentukea*)

A native tree with spectacular, fragrant blooms, yellow fall color and pale gray bark. Grows 30 to 50 ft. tall, high tolerance to insects and diseases.

SPRING BULB (SUMMER FLOWERING) PLANTING CHART

HEIGHT
(inches)

HEIGHT
(centimeters)

48

44

40

36

32

28

24

20

16

12

8

4

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

10

12

15

20

30

40

50

60

70

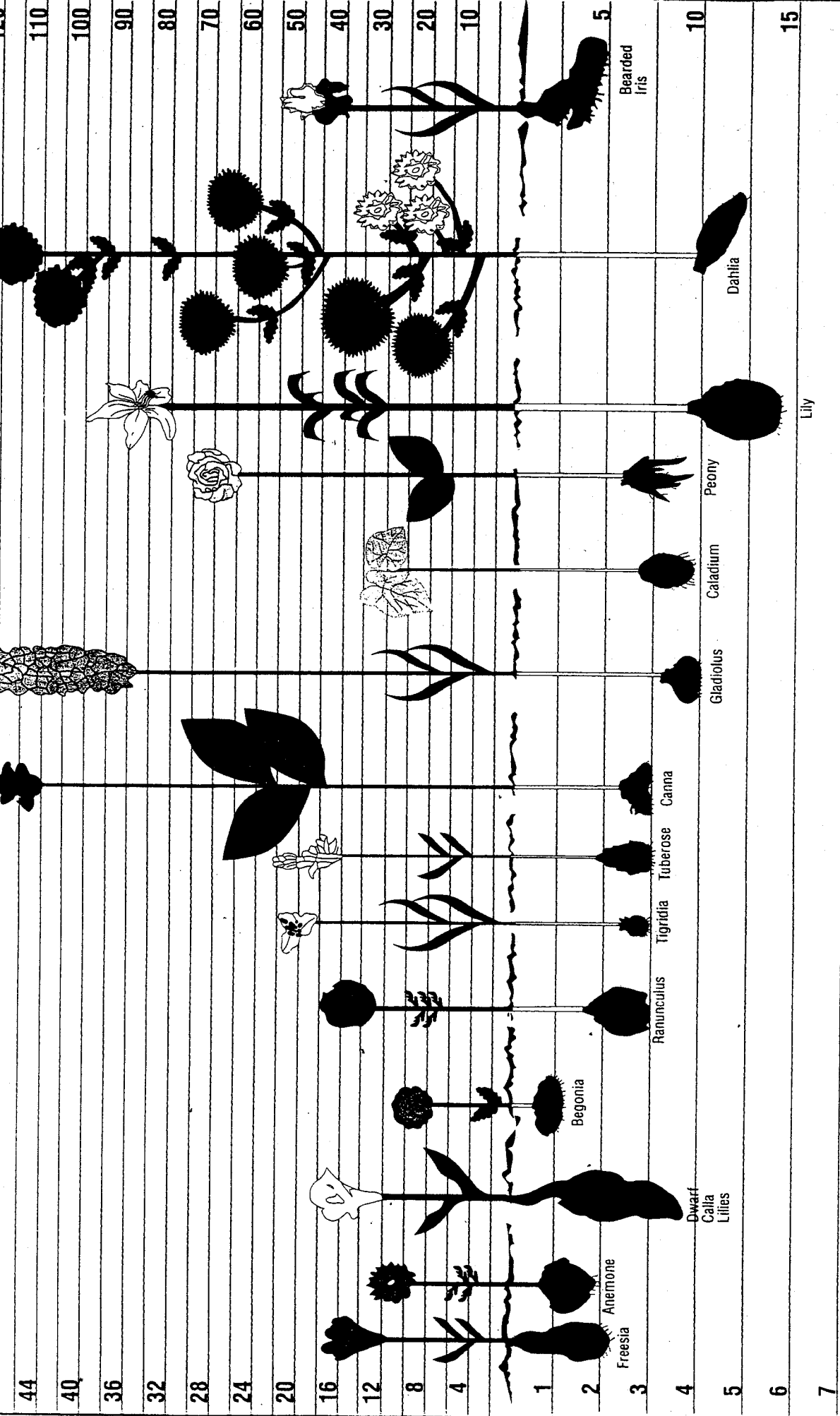
80

90

100

110

120



8
Depth
(inches)

20
DEPTH
(centimeters)

A Winter Hummingbird



What a treat we have had this year with our "winter" hummingbird! I first noticed her in late October or early November around a hummingbird feeder I had not yet taken down. I was so excited I immediately filled 4 feeders with sugar water and waited and watched for her. She came on a regular basis then. When I saw the article in the Constitution asking people to notify Bob Sargent of the Hummer/Bird Study Group in Alabama if we saw any hummingbirds, I immediately e-mailed him at rubythroat.com. He replied that someone would come to check it out. Karen of the Birdwatchers Supply in Duluth came later that week and she heard the hummer before she saw it. She thought it was a

rufous but couldn't get a good look at its back. Buddy Rowe of the Georgia Hummers came on New Year's Eve and videotaped the hummer. It was so cold around that time that I had to thaw the sugar water each morning. Even when a little sleet was falling and temperatures at night were in the 20's the hummer still came. Then on January 9 Duane and Donna Berger came over from Alabama and caught and banded the hummer. I was so surprised they were able to capture her because she was the most skittish hummer I had seen at the feeders. They sat at the kitchen table and measured and weighed her (less than 4 grams), plucked 3 feathers for dna studies, and photographed

her. It was definitely an adult female rufous. She had tiny dots of ruby/brown color on her throat. They used their global satellite positioning instrument to pinpoint exactly where she was found. Our hummer was the 15th one in Georgia they had banded. Then they let me hold her to release her. It was such an exciting experience.

I did notice that I saw her first at the feeder directly above the pineapple sage. It was blooming on into December this year. Donna did comment that several of the hummers in Georgia were found in yards that had pineapple sage blooming. I don't know if there is a direct connection. But we have really enjoyed her presence in our yard.

Barbara Fisher

A Bit of Dirt

Gail Martin

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