

◆ A Bit of Dirt ◆

Volume 8 Issue 1

Spring 2000

The Newsletter of the Gwinnett Master Gardeners



A Bit of Dirt is published quarterly. The 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 GailTMartin@compuserve.com



'Tis spring-time on the
eastern hills!
Like torrents gush the
summer rills;
Through winter's moss
and dry dead leaves
The bladed grass re-
vives and lives,
Pushes the mouldering
waste away,
And glimpses to the
April day.

John Greenleaf Whittier



Future Meetings

March 20

April 17

May 15

Programs to be announced

MARCH 14

Georgia Native Plant Society
Lecture: "Plants of Granite
Outcrops"

Speaker: Dr. Eloise Carter,
Professor of Biology, Oxford Col-
lege of Emory University

MARCH 16

Georgia Perennial Plant Associa-
tion

Speaker: Brooks Garcia

MARCH 17

Gardening Symposium
Dunwoody Nature Center on Fri-
day,

March 17 from 10am-2:30pm and
at Dunwoody Library on Saturday,
March 18 from 10am to 2:30pm

A Message from our President

As I look out my window on this cold January morning, I watch the birds and squirrels scamper to get something to eat before the next round of freezing rain.

My thoughts go back to January 1997 as I began my Master Gardener training. I was so thrilled to have been picked to attend the classes! It was everything I hoped it would be, and more. I loved the training itself but really enjoyed all the wonderful people I met during that time. Joining the Master Gardener group after graduation has continued to provide an opportunity to learn more and more every year and to share with other garden enthusiasts. The more involved I have become, the more I have come away with in personal growth.

Speaking of enthusiasm, I have been blessed to have such wonderful people volunteer to serve with me. They are: Karen Brandon, Vice President; Pat Longo, Secretary; Susan Hanson, Treasurer.

I have to add that the Gwinnett Master Gardeners wouldn't be where they are today without the support of Steve Brady and the leadership of past Master Gardener presidents: Don Freidus, 1994; Beverly Howerton 1995; Gail Holliman 1996-7; Shelia Wilbur 1998-99.

Please attend the meetings and give your support to our wonderful organization! Don't forget your name tags.

Judy

Notes from the Extension Office

(This report will be more rambling than focused)

Spring can't be far off because the lady bugs are coming out of the walls and ceiling here at the extension office. If you are so inclined just stop in and collect a jar full. In addition to your butterfly garden, you may want to plant refugia to encourage beneficial insects to hang out around your garden. Some examples of refugia are yarrow, Queen Anne's Lace, buckwheat, clover and alfalfa.

Some of us will get more sunlight in our landscapes this year. Late January weather thinned some branches and in some cases entire trees. If you have trees that need removing but are not an immediate threat, consider waiting. Prices for tree removal are often market driven. I have some examples of vertical firewood, too.

Some of us will be radically pruning and/or renovation pruning plants. Mid-March is great for cutting back those shrubs that failed to read the book and overgrown the area intended. This is also another example of late January's influence in the landscape. I have had to radically prune some of my blueberries that were broken by falling

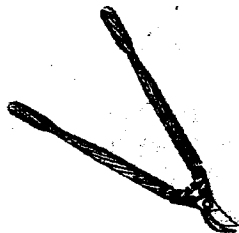
branches.

If you use pre-emergent herbicides in your lawn and/or garden, early March is the time for the first application. Most pre-emergents need a second application two to three months later. Warm season grasses are sensitive to post emergent herbicides during spring greenup.

Remember to plow or turn under cover crops in your vegetable garden two to four weeks before you plant in that section. This allows the green manure time to decay. Also you may want to cover some rows with plastic as you get them ready. I like to do this (early) where I will plant potatoes since the ground is almost always too wet when the seed potatoes are available to plant.

If you have fruit trees you should have finished your pruning and dormant oil or lime sulfur applications. Look over your spray guide and stay ahead of pest problems.

Steve Brady



Wildflowers

Springtime is the time for walks in the woods and mountains, looking for wildflowers. Listed below are some you can find in the southeast, and the months they generally bloom.

Skunk cabbage	Feb-Mar
Dwarf Iris	Mar-Apr
Spring Beauty	Mar-Apr
Mayapple	Mar-Apr
Serviceberry	Mar-May
Silver-bell tree	Mar-May
Birdfoot violet	Mar-May
Buttercups	Mar-June
Crested Iris	Apr-May
Squirrel Corn	Apr-May
Indian Paintbrush	Apr-May
Solomon's Seal	Apr-May
Fringed Phacelia	Apr-May
Bloodroot	Apr-May

50th Annual Wildflower Pilgrimage

The Spring Wildflower Pilgrimage is a three-day program of conducted nature walks, motorcades and photographic tours in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It is sponsored by the Botany Department of The University of Tennessee, the Gatlinburg Garden Club, the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society, the Great Smoky Mountains Natural History Association and Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

For further information contact:
Web Page URL:
<http://www.goldsword.com/wildflower/pilgrimage.html>

Or, the Great Smoky Mountain National Park in Gatlinburg, Tennessee 37738.

Phone: (865)436-1290

aired for Life? (Or not)

Have you ever wondered if birds really do mate for life? By this I mean birds that bond until one of the pair dies, at which time the surviving bird will probably take up with another. Or not.

Because the male bird puts more effort into raising its young than most mammals, the pair bond is probably stronger than, say, dogs or cats. A bird pair may stay together for life, for several years, for one year, for a brood, or not. It all depends on the species, and the length of the "engagement" period. Some species like albatrosses and geese are betrothed months before they are sexually mature and are probably mated for life.

So why do some do it? One possibility is that they simply arrive at the same time in a favorable territory. But some birds, like chickadees and goldfinches, pair up before the territories are even set up. Some say that some pairs even have some sort of affectionate bond with each other. And then some birds decide solely on the basis of looks.



Although 90 percent of the world's birds are monogamous (somewhat), they don't always stay together in marital bliss. "Divorce" rates vary from 0 percent in the Australian raven to almost 100 percent in the house martin and the flamingo.

A study of kittiwakes and red-billed gulls showed that pairs who had maintained their bonds from the pre-breeding season bred earlier (a good thing), laid more eggs, and had

greater reproductive success than new pairs.

Every spring, our birds are faced with the decision of whether to re-mate with their old partner, or to find a newer model. There are pros and cons involved here. If the cons outweigh the pros, it's bye-bye birdie. Since birds are driven to pass on their genes, they need to bond with a partner of the best available quality. By trial and error they may be able to improve on their reproductive output.

However, experience and familiarity with the same mate may improve breeding performance, as less time is wasted hanging out for a newbie, and thus the experienced pair may get a jump on their competitors by nesting earlier.

If the sexes migrate to different regions in the winter, it may be hard to reunite with their old partners. Even if they do winter together, they have to spend a lot of time and energy to stay in contact. This is not always easy in large flocks.

There are a number of reasons for divorce in birds. If a pair aren't doing well together, each one may be better off with a new mate. Or, one member of the pair could improve it's success if it found a better mate. In species where territory is more important than mate quality, any bird will do. In the case of an accidental loss, the surviving partner looks for a replacement. And then some birds mate, divorce, find another, and repeat the cycle. Naturally, mostly male birds employ (and enjoy) this strategy. And then there's the other man or other woman, initiated by the intrusion of a third bird who displaces one member of the pair.

State Trees

Alabama	Southern Pine
Alaska	Sitka Spruce
Arizona	Pala Verde
Arkansas	Pine
California	Ca. Redwood
Colorado	Col. Blue Spruce
Connecticut	White Oak
Delaware	American Holly
Florida	Sabal Palm
Georgia	Live Oak
Hawaii	Kukui-Candlenut
Idaho	White Pine
Illinois	White Oak
Indiana	Tulip Poplar
Iowa	Oak
Kansas	Cottonwood
Kentucky	Ken. Coffee Tree
Louisiana	Bald Cypress
Maine	East. White Pine
Maryland	White Oak
Massachusetts	American Elm
Michigan	White Pine
Minnesota	Red Pine
Mississippi	Southern Magnolia
Missouri	Dogwood
Montana	Ponderosa Pine
Nebraska	Cottonwood
Nevada	Bristlecone Pine
New Hampshire	White Birch
New Jersey	Red Oak
New Mexico	Pinon
New York	Sugar Maple
No. Carolina	Longleaf Pine
No. Dakota	American Elm
Ohio	Buckeye
Oklahoma	Redbud
Oregon	Douglas Fir
Pennsylvania	Eastern Hemlock
Rhode Island	Red Maple
So. Carolina	Palmetto Palm
So. Dakota	Black Hills Spruce
Tennessee	Tulip Poplar
Texas	Pecan
Utah	Blue Spruce
Vermont	Sugar Maple
Virginia	Dogwood
Washington	Western Hemlock
West Virginia	Sugar Maple
Wisconsin	Sugar Maple
Wyoming	Cottonwood

Meet Your New Officers

Judy Hoffman President

Judy qualified as a Master Gardener in 1998. Her interest in gardening really began in 1978, when she became interested in landscaping her new home. Her curiosity grew over the years as she wanted to learn more and more about gardens and landscapes.

She likes to grow unusual things, along with easy, hardy shrubs, annuals, and perennials. One favorite thing is making baskets from cuttings. Judy has also planted the front entrance of her subdivision.

Judy planted a garden for her mother just outside her mother's kitchen window, and added a bird feeder, which her mother enjoys every day.

She loves setcreasea and cannas, but after several years in the garden she's discovering just how invasive they are. Two of her favorite shrubs are nandina, for its winter color, and oak leaf hydrangea.

As a Master Gardener Judy has manned the phones at the extension office, worked at the Southeastern Flower Show, and helped with the blueberry sale at the Fair Grounds. Judy was our Vice President in 1999.

Judy trained as a nurse, but spends time now making gift baskets for children at Easter and Christmas. She is also a Hospice volunteer.

Judy has one husband, one dog (a pound puppy) and 10 neighbor cats who visit her garden.

Karen Brandon Vice President

Karen certified as a Master Gardener in 1999. She became interested in the MG program because of her love of plants, and the recommendations of a garden club friend.

She gardens in the shade, in a hardwood forest environment. Her favorite plants are hostas, but she is becoming very interested in hydrangeas. Karen loves hellebores and Japanese maples. She has rescued about 300 old fashioned jonquils from her grandfather's farm in Tennessee, and in total has about 1500 narcissus of various kinds and varieties planted in her garden.

Karen has been an active volunteer, handling the phones at the Extension office, working at the Georgia Perimeter College native plant sales, the Dogwood Garden Club plant sale, and clerking for the judges at the Southeastern Flower Show. She is a member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and is treasurer of her garden club.

Cooking is one of Karen's favorite non-gardening pastimes, and she is helping to compile a cookbook by the Gwinnett Council of Garden Clubs.

Lucy and Liz are Karen's two cats, who are very well behaved in the garden, and bring her gifts of chipmunk heads and tails as a token of their love.



Pat Longo Secretary

Pat has been a Master Gardener since 1994. He was encouraged to enroll in the program by his son, who said that because Pat liked to play in the dirt he would enjoy becoming a Master Gardener. He enjoyed the classes. Pat and his wife have 6 children.

At his home Pat does mainly ornamental gardening, with an emphasis on Old Garden Roses. He currently has 18 growing in his garden. Pat is particularly interested in woodies, and has a number of scented shrubs in his woodland garden. He has many favorite plants, including a ginko tree, Yoshino cherries, a fourteen foot Japanese maple 'Bloodgood', and a pink dogwood that he has moved three times.

Pat is involved with the Collins Hill Library landscape project, and works with the Telephone Pioneers fund raisers.

He loves to read, and is a self-professed "health nut", very interested in herbal remedies for conditions such as arthritis.

Pat and his wife generally take two vacations a year, going north to Philadelphia in May for school reunions, and south to Florida or Mississippi in the winter. He likes to visit gardens here and when he travels, but prefers personal gardens to those professionally done. Pat is not afraid to knock on a stranger's door if he likes their garden, and to talk about what they are growing.

New Officers, cont'd.

Susan Hanson
Treasurer

Susan attend the Master Gardener classes and qualified in 1993. She has always enjoyed gardening, and a friend told her about the program. She wanted to learn more, and particularly specific information.

Susan has 3 children, all married, one husband, and one husband's cat.

She, too, gardens in the shade. Susan grows shrubs and flowers suited to shady conditions, and is particularly interested in shade-loving natives. She grows native azaleas, sweet shrub, and many wildflowers such as lobelia.

Susan has coordinated the plantings at the Berkeley Lake City Park, starting in 1995, but is an ongoing commitment. This too is a shade garden, full of native plants. Other volunteer activities include teaching Sunday school to 5 year olds.

Susan plays a lot of tennis, and enjoys cooking and sewing. Her degree is in Home Economics.

She has two grandchildren close by in Georgia, and visits them frequently. Susan enjoys garden tours, particularly the Gardens for Connoisseurs on Mother's Day, and tours such as the Master Gardener tour of Athens a few years ago.

Susan travels to Hilton Head 3 or 4 times a year, and enjoys gardening in the much different climate and sandy soil of the island.

Planting Tomatoes?

Planting your own tomato plants from seeds allows you to choose from a wide range of varieties. If you have had problems with diseases in the past, try growing disease resistant varieties. VNF varieties carry resistance to verticillium wilt, fusarium wilt, and root-knot nematodes, and include Better Boy, Celebrity and Whopper. Check the labels.

Begin no earlier than 6 or 7 weeks before planting out in the garden. The seedlings need to be kept moist, but not soaked, and given lots of sunlight.

Choose a location in your garden that receives full sun. Good drainage and wind protection is a must. Tomatoes grow best in a slightly acid soil with a pH between 6.2 and 6.8, amended with organic matter.

If you purchase transplants, choose those with straight stems about the size of a pencil. They should have 4 to 6 true leaves and no flowers. Be sure to harden off the plants before transplanting. Each plant will need about 3 sq ft of space if they are to be staked.

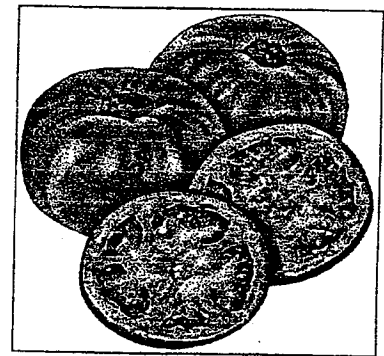
Water well, and place them in the ground about 2 inches deeper than they are in the pot. After planting remove 2 or 3 bottom leaves and water again. As they grow, water deeply to prevent them from developing shallow roots.

Tomatoes can be grown in large tubs or containers, and some small fruiting varieties can even be grown in hanging baskets. Use a sterile planting mix and choose a container

with good drainage. Special attention needs to be paid to the water and fertilizer needs of container grown plants.

Dark green, vigorous plants don't need additional nitrogen. If your plants start yellowing, though, addition of nitrogen will probably solve the problem. Some lower leaves will inevitably yellow and drop off.

Too much nitrogen will result in lots of dark green leaves and no fruit. Try using a quart of manure tea for each plant - one third manure and two thirds water, stirring daily for two weeks. Be careful not to get it on the leaves, as they burn easily.



Mixing lime in with the soil will help reduce mineral imbalances that cause fruit deformities. The calcium in lime helps prevent blossom end rot.

Good companions for tomatoes include cabbage, carrots, celery, onion, calendula and borage. Borage actually improves the flavor of tomatoes, and young borage leaves are a great addition to a salad. Calendula and borage help deter tomato worms. Don't plant tomatoes near fennel or corn.

Integrated Pest Management

Until recently, the very idea that pests in the garden could be kept at acceptable levels without the use of large amounts of pesticides ran counter to everything we had been taught. Now, however, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is the watchword of nearly everyone in the world of gardening.

Chemical pesticides were first introduced in large quantities in the 1940s, and they seemed to answer the problems of farmers and gardeners alike. As the years passed, the damage these pesticides were causing slowly became apparent. Even 25 years after DDT was banned in the U.S., this poison can still be found in the tissue of animals.

Environmental concerns were only part of the problem. It was found that when populations of specific pests were destroyed, their natural predators were destroyed as well. This sometimes caused an upswing in the pest population, as new, resistant insects developed. Also, when one pest was killed off, another who was less apparent made their appearance. The use of more and better chemicals did not seem to be the way to go.



The first tenet of IPM is simply to avoid the problem, and make sure your plants are healthy. A stressed plant is more likely to have problems than a strong, well-maintained plant. Make sure the plants are watered sufficiently (and in the morning), mulched, planted in the proper location, and have

plenty of air circulation.

Many insects feed primarily on just one genus or species of plant. Take for instance the rhododendron lace bug or its cousin, the azalea lace bug. Planting a large grouping of these plants is a sure way to create a problem.

To totally do away with chemicals in your garden, one thing you simply can't grow well are hybrid tea roses. But some of the old fashioned roses, particularly those with strong origins in the China rose, can withstand black spot and even Japanese beetles fairly well.

IPM involves using many methods to control pests. It also involves deciding when to use these methods, and only dealing with the pest when the plant is in danger. Aphids are always present, but do they always do great harm? Not necessarily. If they are sprayed, even with insecticidal soap, it may do away not only with the aphids, but also the local preying mantises, who love to eat aphids. The best way to get rid of aphids is with a strong spray of water from your hose, which not only benefits the plant, but saves the good guys.

Lawns are recipients of far too many chemicals. If your lawn is a place for children and pets to play, does it really matter if a clover leaf or two spoils the putting green look? Just think about the bare feet running across the chemicals.

There are many natural controls that will help to control pests in your garden if you just give them a chance. Lady beetles, mantises and spiders are all busily eating insects; parasitic wasps lay their eggs in the larvae of other insects,

then hatch and devour them from within. You can purchase lady beetles, mantis egg casings and parasitic wasps if your garden seems to need more of these beneficials than you have. The best way, however, to maintain a healthy population of predators is simply to avoid using insecticides at all.

There are times, however, when it seems that you must use pesticides or lose a valuable plant. But remember that when you go to your local garden center to buy it, that the most popular reference book used is supplied by a large chemical manufacturer. You need to learn for yourself what is best to use. Determine the pest, then find the treatment that poses the least risk.



It is important to understand the meaning of the different terms on pesticide labels. The EPA determines the toxicity of pesticides based on how much would be required to kill off 50% of an animal population. Highly toxic chemicals must have the word "Danger" on their labels. Moderately toxic ones must carry the word "Warning". The least toxic contain the word "Caution". Usually there is a less toxic substitute for those labeled Danger or Warning. Benomyi, for instance, is less toxic than many household cleaners, and insecticidal soap poses almost no threat to plants, humans or other animals. It is a good idea to limit yourself to those pesticides marked Caution. And always, always, read the label

Georgia Green Industry Association

Stillness, tinkling, crashing ice covered pine branches and the giant thud of trees falling across things in their path are what we all woke up to Sunday, January 22. As I put my head out the upstairs window to see what had happened over night, the air was filled with the aroma of pine sap. And what did I see! Limbs and tops of pine trees had landed on and destroyed my ten foot berry covered Savannah holly that the elusive and evasive wood thrush eats from each day of winter right outside my kitchen window. Also twelve years growth of rhododendrons had been snapped off at the ground by the top of a pine tree - along with other devastation.

We are without electricity and telephone so this is being written by the light coming in the window - which isn't anything new, but being a person who does almost everything the old fashioned way I'm making do. I hope you all fared well.

What this is all leading up to is a report. The Georgia Green Industry Association had their meeting at 6:30 pm, Thursday, January 20 in the Cobb Galleria. Brenda Adams and I attended.

We arrived early and looked at the latest plants, soil amendments and yard art booths. The special guest and keynote speaker was Jim Wilson of Victory Garden, showing slides and giving the particulars of 80 "Bullet-proof Plants". I'll have the list at our next meeting, along with other handouts.

Did you know Jim lives east of Due West and south of North, North Carolina? Because there is a 20" lack of soil moisture he stressed a product called Permatill (one of the handouts), a gritty material good

for aeration, drainage and amending.

Next came the "Daring Divas of Garden Design", Ms. Jane Bath of Land Arts Nursery on Highway 11, Ms. Nancy Beckemeyer, Landscape Architect and Ms. Dottie Myers, Landscape Architect.

They were introduced by Walter Reeves who is a product of gardening. His mom fertilized with chicken manure and his dad had 1000 chickens; they met, got married and he is the result.

Walter fired quick questions at the three divas and they all came back with excellent, concise answers.

Jane, as with Jim Wilson, stressed and put as number one the importance of good soil. She also recommended Permatill. Jane said to cover the mud in new developments with organic matter, not sod, for drainage. She advised the planting of eye level flowering shrubs and trees, oak, maple and conifers. Jane said February is the month to feed your garden. Consider it breakfast for the plants; they are waking up and are starving. A 10' x 10' area gets 3 handfuls of organic fertilizer.

Nancy urged us strongly to minimize the use of chemicals and pesticides. She said "What's wrong with clover and other so-called "weeds" in the grass - loosen up?" She also said to read Silent Spring to change your thinking about herbicides and pesticides.

Dottie's advice was to mix edible plants in with flowers for diversity. Her favorite yard art is self expression.

They all agreed on soil amending, shrubs, trees, no sod, minimizing pesticides and herbicides, composting is a must and none of them use air-conditioning because they planted trees around their homes.

Their enthusiasm for conservation and working with nature and not against it was enthusiastically received and appreciated by all attending. (If only we could get this information out to the developers and the people buying development homes!)

Last were the Heroes of Horticulture, Drs. Dirr and Armitage of the University of Georgia, showing slides of natives vs. non-natives.

There were three ticket stubs drawn for prizes and Brenda's daughter Kim Smith won Michael Dirr's Woody Landscape Book.

Dolores Wyland



Spring is nature's way of saying, "Let's Party!"

Robin Williams



Among famous traitors of history one might mention the weather.

Ilka Chase



Timely Topics

University of Georgia Cooperative
Extension Service

March is the month to clean up the perennial beds. Cut back old foliage on herbaceous perennials, ornamental grasses, daylilies and irises.

Fertilize spring-flowering bulbs when the foliage is three to four inches. Use a balanced fertilizer such as 10-10-10.

Prune crape myrtle during March. Please don't butcher crape myrtles by cutting them back to stubs - this results in a poodle-like appearance and unnatural-looking growth.

Mow off liriope and mondo grass early in March. When new growth emerges, it's too late to mow because the tender new shoots will be injured.

This is the perfect time to prune roses. Make sure you have good, sharp pruning shears. Remove all dead and diseased wood. If the rose blooms only one time a year, such as the Lady Banks rose, do not prune until after the rose blooms.

Pruning is not an exact science. The key point is to remove all dead and diseased wood and reduce the remaining canes by at least 1/3.

As you cut take note of the appearance of the center (pith) of each cane. If the pith is brown or black, continue to cut the cane until green or white pith is found. This may mean a drastic reduction of the

cane.

Occasionally, the pith will become darker and darker with each successive cut and the cane will have to be removed at the bud union.

People who are interested in garden display will usually prune to about 3 feet, leaving more bud eyes to produce bloom. People who prefer to exhibit their roses will prune much lower, to about 1 1/2 feet, gaining fewer but larger flowers.

Wherever you do prune make sure that each cut is about 1/4 inch above an outside-facing bud.

It is not necessary to seal the cut ends of the canes. If you wish to apply a sealant, a general purpose glue such as Elmer's will do the job just fine.

A Bit of Dirt

Gwinnett Master Gardeners
Gail Martin
160 Beaverwood Lane
Lawrenceville, GA 30044

