

A BIT OF DIRT

Winter 2018

A Newsletter of the
Gwinnett County Master Gardeners Association

Promoting Gardening Through Education & Volunteering



2017 GCMGA Photo Contest Winner - 1st Place Birds - "Brrrrr" by Becky Panetta

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From the Editor ...

Well! I am truly excited about this Winter's newsletter. It is packed with all kinds of interesting articles. There's one from Tixie Fowler about her non-profit which helps school children connect with nature. Then there are two great articles from Jessica Miller: one on camellias and another on waxing camellia blooms. Tim Daly, one of our Gwinnett Extension Agents, provides insight on how to control kudzu which seems to be thriving in Gwinnett. Jane Burke has a great piece on the best fruit trees for Georgia. Alan Armitage has given his permission to reprint an article from his latest book, *Of Naked Ladies and Forget-Me-Nots*. Don't overlook his generous offer for our readers to get a discount on his books ordered through his website. Then Wes and Lucy Nettleton, Ileen Meggison and Jackie Daniel give us an update on their UGA project: growing cool-season vegetables in a Bermuda lawn. Lynda Pollack and Susan Kosenka, our Plant Sale co-chairs, have tips on potting up now for our plant sale later in the spring, not to be confused with the UGA Extension Gwinnett 2018 Plant Sale. And finally, a small piece from me on pruning mature muscadine vines.

There is also a short bio on Sharon Cassidy. As many of you know, Sharon, the receptionist/support person, at the Gwinnett County Extension Office retired in December. We wish Sharon the best in her retirement. It certainly has gotten off to a cold start!

Yes, there's a lot of information here, but it's much too cold to garden today. A great time to enjoy a second cup and read up.

- Ann Langley

Project Spotlight ... Gardens for Growing Community, Inc.

"The Gardening Path"

There was a time when I didn't know how to grow a carrot or explain the sex life of ladybugs to seventh graders. It certainly wasn't my plan to stray from a comfortable career negotiating advertising contracts into one defined by Mother Nature's un-negotiable deadlines; however, I recently spent a freezing afternoon trying to cover collards before an incoming "bomb cyclone". Although I can't recall one single moment that decided this was the direction my life would take, I can recount many instances in which I have found myself amazed by this journey.

In a nutshell, four years ago I founded a nonprofit called Gardens for Growing Community (G4GC). The program connects people and nature, fostering pathways that lead to a mutually healthy and often-healing relationship. We see nature as one of life's greatest teachers and support school gardens as a way to bring the natural world into schools. We work with kids, coach teachers, and organize opportunities for diverse community members to support and engage with each other. The effort stems from awareness that our youth and our natural environment are facing significant challenges – the hope is that by partnering with Mother Nature, we can arm this next generation with the skills and tools they'll need to thrive.



So what's the cause for alarm? Generally speaking, kids don't spend enough unstructured time outside. Studies indicate a list of related issues from skyrocketing childhood obesity to an array of psychological problems bundled under a modern condition dubbed "nature deficit disorder". As the world's human population continues to escalate, the health of our natural environment continues to decline, with resources like water and natural fuel becoming more precious and costly. And although aware of intensifying weather patterns and dramatic temperature swings, most of us only understand climate change to the extent of what happens when the household thermostat is adjusted. Forget politics; consider history and science. Basic, research-based, evidence-supported, historically-proven data repeatedly indicates an alarming disconnect between humans and nature, with a subsequent "ripple effect" that is changing the way our children will, as adults, be able to eat, breathe and live on this planet.

There's also my memory of failing Algebra in high school. Twice. Algebra just wasn't interesting and I didn't think its mastery would ever be worth the effort (my mother eventually convinced me otherwise). I've asked groups of middle school students if they think *any* subject they're studying in school actually connects to real life, and not one student has ever made a connection between academics and what they have to deal with outside of school. For many students in Title 1 schools, "real life" includes dealing with social prejudice, cultural isolation, limited opportunities and even discouraging role models. Getting a good education is often the only way under-privileged youth will be able to escape the patterns that threaten them, and educators work diligently every day to empower their students. It's an enormous challenge, and with approximately 180,000 students in the Gwinnett school system alone, teachers need all the support and tools a community can provide.

So here's where Gardens for Growing Community takes everyone outside for a deep healing breath

of air, reminding us to eat the proverbial elephant “one bite at a time” and preferably with a side dish of garden-grown greens.

To date, G4GC supports nature-based programming in nine public schools across Gwinnett County, with three new ones to be added to the roster this Spring. Our pilot site is the Environmental Education Center (EEC) on the campus of Norcross' Summerour Middle School, where we designed and manage an outdoor classroom with over 10,000 square feet of growing space. The EEC includes a community mini-farm, a small fruit orchard, a large learning garden, a labyrinth and about ¼ mile of forest trail. Each week, we work with homeschoolers, and also conduct an after school program called “Earth Team”. In addition, I help teachers create standards-based activities that use the garden and community green spaces to engage students more fully in all the academics, not just the sciences.



This work supports all learning levels and capabilities, and G4GC provides students with opportunities to gain valuable real-world experience by participating in community service projects. For example, water quality tests for the Department of Natural Resources are conducted during local stream clean ups, giving meaning to lessons learned in Chemistry class. G4GC recently encouraged a local 10th grader to explore her dream of becoming an engineer by helping her design a dramatic arbor entrance for the Summerour garden. Thanks to the owner of a local engineering firm, this young student tried her hand at AutoCad and learned about college choices and career opportunities. She even got to help build her arbor, learning to handle power tools under the careful guidance

of volunteers from Mitsubishi Electric USA headquarters.

In addition, G4GC connected students with a local filmmaker who is helping them develop technology and Language Arts skills by producing an educational video about recycling. Thanks to a recent grant from the Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta, another group of students will soon design and build a tool shed for their school garden, decorating it with art panels depicting their family cultural connections to food and nature. And this spring, a group of students will go on a canoeing adventure which will casually connect to what they're studying in Language Arts, History and Social Studies, as well as Science.

To expand the program's outreach, G4GC is partnering with the University of Georgia's JW Fanning Institute of Leadership to organize a 12-week job skill development apprenticeship. The pilot program is designed for military personnel who are transitioning into civilian careers; eventually, we envision a program that also supports high functioning special needs adults. Participants will have the opportunity to explore career paths in urban agriculture, while gaining skills required for successful business management and entrepreneurial ventures. In exchange, G4GC will provide school programs with a pool of garden-savvy workers who can keep things growing during the summer as well when school is in session. We are currently securing funding and plan to unroll the program this summer.

Gardens for Growing Community has cultivated many exciting relationships since its inception 4 years ago, including the GA State Botanical Garden, the Atlanta Audubon Society, Gwinnett Technical College, the Georgia School Garden Network and Vetlanta. But when it comes to mentors, the agents at UGA's Gwinnett County Extension office are at the top of the list. Last year at this time, I was training to become a Gwinnett Master Gardener, and this past December, the much-coveted name badge finally came in the mail. While the info I learned during the “turf management” portion of the course may get filed with my earlier opinion of Algebra, the resources, friendships and opportunities for continued education have proven priceless. Much of what we studied also comes in handy when trying to pull a 7th grader away from earplugs or from texting a

BFF; learning about the sex life of a ladybug is an instant winner, every time.



Admittedly, I'm still struggling to grow the perfect carrot and sadly, I didn't win the race against the 2017 "bomb cyclone". But Mother Nature is an incredible business partner. She teaches me every day, as do the students, parents, educators and other Master Gardeners with whom I am privileged to share this path. There are many challenges, and an almost overwhelming amount at stake. However, Nature offers cycles, not just a beginning or end....and each sunrise reminds me there is hope for all of us.

- Tixie Fowler, Executive Director, Gardens for Growing Community, Inc.

For more information about the program, please visit www.GardensforGrowingCommunity.com or contact Tixie at 770.842.2551. G4GC's project sites are approved for earning MG volunteer credit hours, and there are opportunities for gardens-related grant writing, marketing and teaching as well as garden maintenance support.

Gwinnett County Master Gardener's Association Plant Sale

Don't get confused the Gwinnett County Master Gardener's Association Plant Sale is NOT the same as the UGA Extension Gwinnett 2018 Plant Sale. (See below.)

Its time to plan for spring. As you dream over those seed catalogs and think about being back out in the garden, the Plant Sale Committee hope that you will give some thought to plants you could donate to the plant sale this spring. We're already eyeing several things in our gardens that need to be divided this spring and plan to pot several up. Just be sure to divide and plant in pots sooner than later as we want well rooted and happy plants to sell. Also – if you are starting vegetables, think about a few extra to grow on and have ready for the sale. We hope to have specific dates soon. We'll see you at the next meeting with sign up sheets in hand. Lots of hands make light work so we're hoping for lots of volunteers. A fun way to get in those hours. Think spring!

Cheers, Lynda Pollock and Susan Kosenka, Plant Sale Co-Chairs

Some reminders about potting up plants ...

- Use a good quality potting soil mixed with compost.
- Make sure to label the pot.
- Keep plants healthy by placing pots in a protected area.
- As we have no idea what the next weather event will be, monitor pots carefully to be sure they don't dry out or freeze. Settling pots in the soil and covering with pine straw helps mitigate freeze/thaw cycles.
- If you need pots let us know and we'll get them to you as soon as we can.
- If you are not able to dig plants yourself there will be a sign-up opportunity soon for a team to come to your house and dig what you want to share!



Stay tuned!

[UGA Extension Gwinnett 2018 Plant Sale](#)

Don't get confused! This plant sale is not the same as the Gwinnett County Master Gardener's Association plant sale to be held later in the spring. (See above.)

The Extension office is offering a variety of blueberries, raspberries, figs, apples, pomegranates, Goji berries, Native Azaleas, Pecan trees and other landscape plants as part of their annual plant sale. All proceeds from this fundraising event will be used for Extension educational projects.

Prepaid plant orders are being accepted now but must be received by March 21, 2018. Prepaid orders must be paid by cash or check (payable to Gwinnett County Extension/4-H). Credit cards (Visa, MasterCard, and Discover) can only be taken with

walk-in orders at the Gwinnett Extension office, 750 South Perry St., Lawrenceville.

[Click here to download the order form and details of the plants for sale](#) or you can call 678.377.4010 to request an order form be mailed to you.

Mark your calendar or Thursday, March 29, between 9am and 6pm is the one and only day scheduled to pick up your prepaid order at the Gwinnett County Fairgrounds, 2406 Sugarloaf Parkway, Lawrenceville. No orders will be shipped.

Thank you for your support!

Community Garden @ Snellville Teams Up with UGA on Project

The Community Garden @ Snellville is starting to make a name for itself in the area of research. The garden has been selected as a site for a University of Georgia study.

An area of the garden is currently being used for a UGA Center for Urban Agriculture study looking at the possibility of growing edible cool-season vegetable crops in the same space as dormant warm-season turfgrass, such as Bermuda. UGA is looking for a way to successfully grow vegetables without destroying turfgrass when installing a garden or raised bed may not be desirable. Vegetable gardens don't have a "conventional look" that many homeowners desire in their landscape plan and is often expected by neighbors and homeowners associations.



The project has involved digging 24 4-inch holes in a grassy area of the garden and then planting cool-season vegetables. The growth and yield of those plants is compared to 12 similar plants planted in one of the raised beds in the garden. The produce will be harvested, weighed, and then the results will be sent to UGA. The Bermuda grass will be allowed to grow back over the area where the vegetables were planted. The study will also document how the turfgrass recovers and performs in the spring and summer.

Initial results of the study "indicate that it is possible to grow a harvestable yield of edible cool-season crops, such as broccoli, Swiss chard and lettuce" said Wes Nettleton, a master gardener who plays a very active role as a volunteer at the Community Garden. Ileen Meggison and Jackie Daniell, also master gardeners who work with the garden, as well as Wes' wife Lucy Nettleton, are assisting with the project.

We'll see if their study shows you can have your grass and eat it too!

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An brief update from Wes Nettleton on the UGA study ...

Although the official report is not in yet, it is apparent that you can grow and harvest cool-season vegetables grown in Bermuda grass. The yield, however, is not as great as the plants grown in the raised beds.

Kudzu, Though Aggressive, Can Be Controlled

Kudzu aggressively grows and covers just about everything in its path including large trees and abandoned structures. The vine crowds out native vegetation and can disrupt wildlife habitats. Kudzu kills other plants by smothering them, by girdling tree trunks, and by breaking off or uprooting entire trees and shrubs because of its weight. The individual kudzu vines are capable of reaching lengths of over 100 ft and can grow as much as one foot per day under optimal conditions. It can grow in almost any type of soil, but it prefers moist soils of nearly any kind. Its extensive root system allows it to survive prolonged drought conditions.



Kudzu was imported from Asia in the early 1900s and was planted throughout the southeast along the sides of roads, railroads, and farmland for erosion control as well as source of forage for livestock. The government encouraged farmers in the south to plant kudzu to reduce soil erosion, and Franklin Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps planted it widely for many years. It was also a favorite ornamental vine due to its beautiful leaves and purple flowers which resemble wisteria.

Controlling kudzu can be a real challenge since it is a perennial weed. It has a large underground root with the ability to store food reserves. Continued pruning it back to the ground, or in some cases, mowing will eventually deplete the vine of its stored energy in its roots.

August and September are an excellent time to control kudzu with a chemical herbicide. The leaves are taking food material and transporting it deep into the vine's root system for the winter. The best herbicides for controlling kudzu are Round-Up and any herbicide with the active ingredient triclopyr. It is sold under names like Bayer Advanced Brush Killer Plus, Ortho MAX Poison Ivy and Tough Brush Killer, and others. Spray the leaves with these chemicals until thoroughly wet. You can also cut the individual plants back to the ground and coat the cut stump with undiluted triclopyr. There are formulations sold just for this purpose.

This particular method works exceptionally well in controlling kudzu that is growing beds of shrubs and flowers since the herbicide will also kill desired plant material as well. Poison ivy, greenbriers, privet, and other woody plants can be similarly treated in this manner. Both methods may require more than one application.

Another way to control the vines is during the winter months, while the vine is dormant, cut back the individual kudzu vines. In May, spray the kudzu shoots when the leaves have fully opened up and is about the size of your hand. Then repeat the treatment in late summer to control the re-growth. Please make sure you follow all label directions and safety precautions when using chemical pesticides.

If you have extensive areas of kudzu, you may need to hire a landscape contractor that has the expertise and resources to control and remove it from your property. Despite the rapid, aggressive growth of kudzu, it can be brought under control and prevented from overtaking your property. Constant vigilance is a must since even after the vine has been eradicated it has the potential to return from old root growth and vegetative growth. For more information on kudzu, please contact the Gwinnett County Extension Office.

- Tim Daly, Gwinnett County Extension Agent

Of Naked Ladies and Forget-Me-Nots

The Fable of Johnny Jump Up

Johnny Jump Up is but one of many names for the three-colored wild violet. The name refers to the habit of the seeds exploding from the flower, resulting in "plants jumping up" everywhere. Many species of violets do this (which is why so many are obnoxious weeds) but only this particular one earned the nickname. Why the name Johnny, I am not sure.

Heartsease is another name often seen for this plant. Two reasons for the name are provided. The first from its use as an herbal supplement as a palliative for many maladies. Using it puts one's heart at ease. The second is that it may have acquired this name because it was used in love potions and charms. I like this reason best.

By the way, 'Johnny Jump Up' is also an Irish drinking song from County Cork and refers to a strong cider, made more potent by being stored in whisky barrels. Who knew?

- Dr. Allan Armitage, Professor Emeritus of Horticulture, University of Georgia



Newsletter readers can receive a 10% discount on any of Dr. Armitage's books on his website (www.allanarmitage.net). Just type GCMG in the space for discount code and the price will automatically be reduced by 10%.

Good Fruit Trees for a Georgia Yard

Georgia might be known as the Peach State, but peaches are actually very challenging to grow here. The same goes for apples, pears and plums. Without constant spraying of harmful chemicals these fruit trees just don't produce well. Cherries need more cold days than we get here so they are also not a good choice for the Southeast. Here are a few fruit trees which are better suited to our climate and take little or no input from us other than to head out into the yard to pick their tasty offerings.

Persimmon

The Japanese varieties, which reach only 12' to 15' tall, produce abundant, honey-sweet, fruit in late fall. Two particularly good varieties, Fuyu (and any of its crosses) and Matsumoto, are non-astringent so they can be eaten when still firm and crunchy or left to ripen until they are completely soft. If picked while still

firm they will last many weeks on the kitchen counter. The trees require full sun, but need no care other than a bit of water if we have a particularly dry summer. These are attractive trees that have lovely fall color so they can be planted as a small specimen



Persimmon Tree

tree in the front yard. They are self-fruitful so only one is needed to get a tree laden with fruit, which will start in 2 to 3 years of planting.

Russian Pomegranate

A variety to try is Nikitsuki Ranni (Crimson Sky) as it is well adapted to the humid south and is very cold hardy. The large, bright red fruits have light pink, soft, chewable seeds that ripen in early October. These trees grow to only 10' tall, start bearing fruit in just 2 years and are self-fruitful, so you only need a single tree. They require some pruning when the trees are young to establish a good, bushy shape, but once mature they need little pruning and no spraying at all. They are attractive, shrubby trees which can be used as a specimen.

Fig

If you have not eaten ripe figs directly from the tree you are missing out on a mouth-watering delicacy. Figs do not keep well, which is why they are seldom seen on supermarket shelves, and when they are available, their flavor and texture is severely lacking. Fig trees require no spraying and can take some shade, but fruit better in full sun. These really are trees and not shrubs, requiring a good deal of space for lateral growth. If pruned when young to branch very low to the ground it makes picking easier. A good variety to try is 'Brown Turkey'. Yes, the birds will feast on your figs, but one mature tree is enough to feed you and the bird population, so be prepared to share the bounty with them.



Pawpaw Fruit

PawPaw - *Asimina triloba*

Another fruit that does not keep well, the pawpaw (not to be confused with the tropical papaya) is a Southeast native. It has delicious tasting fruit, is easy to grow and does well in partial shade. The fruits are best eaten when they are close to falling off the tree, which is why they are not sold in stores. The flesh, which tastes like

mango/banana custard, can also be pureed and frozen to enjoy later in smoothies, as sorbet or baked in pies.

The trees sucker so they should be planted in an area where this habit can be accommodated to form a thicket. You will need two varieties for cross pollination, but these can be planted within a foot or two of each other to save on space. Different varieties have subtly different flavors, so you may consider getting 3 or 4 different ones to enjoy their differences. They are pest-resistant, require no pruning, but will require 5 to 7 years before setting fruit. However, they are well worth the wait.

Asian Pear

European pear trees require more cold days than we get to fruit well and tend to succumb to fire blight and other ailments, but some Asian pears are resistant to fire blight and require less cold days. As these trees are not self-fruitful you will have to get two varieties for good fruit set. Shinko and Shinseiki work well together and have excellent disease resistance. Other Asian pear varieties are susceptible to fire blight and should be avoided. The fruits are crispy (not soft like European pears), very juicy and sweet when ripe. Grafted trees will grow to a height of 12' to 15'. They require full sun and will need some pruning in early spring, but will need no spraying of pesticides or fungicides.

Buying Fruit Trees

Do your homework before selecting fruit trees to grow in your yard. Just because a fruit tree is for sale at your local Home Depot or nursery does not mean it is a good variety for your yard. Pick varieties carefully as some are quite susceptible to disease whereas others are disease resistant. It is a matter of picking well, and that can only be done by doing the research before heading out to the nursery. A better option is ordering bare root trees online. There are many suppliers and winter is the best time to order them as they are shipped in late winter, early spring.

- Jane Burke

Camellias

The camellia is a genus of flowering plants in the family Theaceae. They are found in eastern and southern Asia from the Himalaya east to Korea and Indonesia. There are 100–250 described species with some controversy over the exact number. Camellias are large, attractive, broad-leaved, evergreen shrubs that are highly prized for their flowers, which bloom from winter to spring.

Camellias are named after the Jesuit botanist Georg Joseph Kamel (1690).

Camellias leaves are alternately arranged, simple, thick, serrated, and usually glossy. Their flowers are usually large and conspicuous, with five to nine petals in naturally occurring species of camellias. The colors of the flowers vary from white through pink to red; truly yellow flowers are found only in South China and North Vietnam. Camellia flowers throughout the genus are characterized by a dense bouquet of conspicuous yellow stamens, often contrasting with the petal colors. The so-called "fruit" of camellia plants is a dry capsule, sometimes subdivided in up to five compartments, each compartment containing up to eight seeds.



Common Japanese Camellia (*Camellia japonica*) is a broadleaved, evergreen shrub, which may grow to a height of 25 feet. It has a spread of 6 to 10 feet. The dark-green leathery leaves are 4 inches long. The flowers, which range in color from white to pink and red, are 3 to 5 inches in diameter. They flower on different varieties from September until April. The flowers may be single, semi-double, or double.

Camellia sasanqua is a broad-leaved evergreen shrub, varying in form from upright and densely bushy to low and spreading. Heights range from 1½ to 12 feet tall. The leaves are very dark green, shiny and about 2 inches long. The flowers are mostly white and single, 2 to 3 inches in diameter, and very fragrant.

Camellia oleifera is a large shrub to 20 feet tall with glossy, dark green leaves and fragrant, 2-inch-wide flowers in fall.

Camellia reticulata has some of the biggest and most spectacular flowers, but is a rather gaunt scrub about 10 feet tall and 8 feet wide. This species is very susceptible to cold and mild frost will kill the plant.

Most camellias grown for their flowers are cultivars or hybrids. There are more than 2,300 named cultivars registered with the American Camellia Society.

Growth Rate

Camellias grow very slowly and can grow to be quite old. Hundred-year-old plants may reach 25 feet high, but most gardeners can consider camellias to be 10 to 12 foot-tall shrubs. Some Japanese camellias, around the emperor's palace in Japan, are known to be more than 500 years old.

Landscape Use

Camellias are used as evergreen specimen large shrubs, shrub borders and screens. The Camellia can be trained to a wall, trellis, or grown in containers. The main ornamental feature is their showy flowers.

Cultivation

Select full, well-branched camellias for your landscape. Look for uniformly shaped plants with vigorous foliage. Avoid plants with heavy infestations of scale insects on stems or on the leaf undersurfaces. Avoid plants with cankers on the stems. See our UGA handout for selecting better varieties for Georgia. Varieties are categorized according to color and hardiness.

Camellias can be planted any time of the year provided they are properly planted, mulched and checked for water frequently. Planting dormant plants reduces the attention required. Balled-and-burlapped plants transplant best during the dormant season, which is fall through spring. Soil moisture is adequate during the winter and the root system readily grows. When spring arrives, the plant has a well-established root system able to support new growth.

Camellias thrive and bloom when sheltered from full sun and drying winds, in year-round semi-shade areas. Those planted in full sun are less dormant during winter warm periods. Sudden temperature drops can cause severe flower bud and leaf injury. Older camellia plants can thrive in full sun when they are mature enough to have their roots shaded by a heavy canopy of leaves.

Camellias are shallow-rooted plants, and they do not tolerate poorly drained soils. Camellias must be planted shallowly in a well drained, even slightly raised area. It is recommended to dig a large planting hole two times wider and no deeper than the root ball. (Check container plants and find where the roots start, they are often planted too deep in the container thus compounding the problem of planting too deep). It is a good idea to cut the roots of neighboring trees, which will otherwise compete for water with the newly planted camellia. Partially fill the hole with loose soil before planting the camellia shallowly. Remove stones and break up heavy clay soils when backfilling around the root ball and water to eliminate air pockets. Use organic amendments on top of the soil surface. A good 3-inch layer of organic mulch maintains soil moisture and reduces weeds.

Camellias prefer a slightly acid soil and light applications of acid plant food may be used to maintain dark-green, attractive foliage.

Camellias do not require heavy applications of fertilizer, burned leaf edges and excessive leaf drop usually indicate over fertilizing. One level tablespoon of slow release fertilizer per foot of plant height, applied in March and July is usually sufficient. A general analysis such as 10-10-10 gives satisfactory results. Extend applications several inches beyond the drip line to encourage root growth.

Maintain vigorous camellias through proper watering. Because they have shallow root systems, camellias are susceptible to drought damage. Apply water slowly to get maximum soil penetration. Wet the soil to a depth of 15-18 inches. Rewater when the soil in the root zone begins to dry. Water adequately the first summer after planting, but be careful not to over water camellias. Watering once a week when rain is inadequate should be plenty.

Some flower bud dropping may be a natural phenomenon; many camellias set more buds than they can open. However, bud drop can be caused by under watering in the summer.

Camellias require very little pruning except for the removal of damaged branches and long shoots that detract from the attractive form of the shrub. Cutting back severely (no leaves left) can be done safely from Valentine's Day to around May 1. Cutting out the dead and weak stems can be done anytime. See the UGA handout for more pruning detail.

The major pests to Camellias are scale insects, aphids, and spider mites. Systemic insecticides work well for scale insects and aphids, oil emulsions work well to control spider mites. Only apply oil emulsions in the spring and fall. Application can injure plants in exceedingly high temperatures, or temperatures below freezing.

Fungal problems are controlled well with good garden sanitation (pick up dropped blooms and leaves, sterilize pruning tools). Use fungicides when necessary. Again, see the UGA handout for more disease information.

Garden History

Camellias were cultivated in the gardens of China and Japan for centuries before they were seen in Europe. The German botanist Engelbert Kaempfer reported that the "Japan Rose", as he called it, grew wild in woodland and hedgerow, but that many superior varieties had been selected for gardens. He was told that the plant had 900 names in Japanese. Europeans' earliest views of camellias must have been their representations in Chinese painted wallpapers, where they were often represented growing in porcelain pots.

The first living camellias seen in England were a single red and a single white, grown and flowered in his garden at Thorndon Hall, Essex, by Robert James, Lord Petre, among the keenest gardeners of his generation, in 1739. His gardener James Gordon was the first to introduce camellias to commerce, from the nurseries he established after Lord Petre's untimely death in 1743, at Mile End, Essex, near London.

With the expansion of the tea trade in the later 18th century, new varieties began to be seen in England, imported through the British East India Company. The Company's John Slater was responsible for the first of the new camellias, double ones, in white and a striped red, imported in 1792. Further camellias imported were associated with the patrons whose gardeners grew them: a double red for Sir Robert Preston in 1794 and the pale pink named "Lady Hume's Blush" for Amelia, the lady of Sir Abraham Hume in 1806. By 1819, twenty-five camellias had bloomed in England; that

year the first monograph appeared, Samuel Curtis's, *A Monograph on the Genus Camellia*. Camellias that set seed, though they did not flower for more than a decade, rewarded their growers with a wealth of new varieties. By the 1840s, the camellia was at the height of its fashion as the luxury flower. The fashionable formality of prized camellias was an element in their decline, replaced by the new hothouse orchid.

Use by Humans

Camellia sinensis, the tea plant, is of major commercial importance because tea is made from its leaves. While the finest teas are produced by *C. sinensis* (meaning from china) courtesy of selective breeding of this species, many other camellias can be used to produce a similar beverage.

Tea oil is a sweet seasoning and cooking oil made by pressing the seeds of the Oil-seed Camellia (*C. oleifera*), the Japanese Camellia (*C. japonica*), and to a lesser extent other species. Relatively little-known outside East Asia, it is the most important cooking oil for hundreds of millions of people, particularly in southern China.

Ecology

Mainly due to habitat destruction, several camellias have become quite rare in their natural range. One of these is the aforementioned *C. reticulata*, grown commercially in thousands for horticulture and oil production, but rare enough in its natural range to be considered a threatened species.

- Jessica Miller



Waxing Camellias for Porcelain-Like Bloom Preservation

We adore camellias for the lovely flowers that grace our gardens in the dreary winter months when the landscape is cloaked in shades of brown and gray. Many of our mothers and grandmothers knew how to extend the pleasure of these colorful flowers by waxing, a technique nearly lost in modern times.

Creating the porcelain-like bloom of a waxed flower is relatively simple, but instructions must be followed carefully to ensure success. Note that pink, white, and variegated

blooms are usually more successful than red, as darker colors look less true-to-life with a wax coating. Better results are also achieved with single and semi-double forms, rather than double flowers with closed centers.

Always collect flowers early in the morning when they are at their peak. If necessary, clean them with a dry, soft brush or gently blow away dirt and debris. Trim stems to 3-inches long and remove all but a few leaves. Keep stems in water.

To begin the waxing process, heat five pounds of paraffin wax with one and a half pints of mineral oil in a double boiler or a heavy, four-quart saucepan. Once melted, cool or heat the wax to exactly 138 degrees F. Temperature is critical. If too hot, the wax will scorch the bloom; if too cool, it will coat the flower in thick blobs.

When the temperature of the wax is exactly right, dip a camellia bloom, holding leaves away from the flower, into the wax with a sweeping motion. Quickly twirl the flower through the mix, being careful not to touch the hot pan, and lift it sideways from the wax. Give the bloom a gentle shake or two, removing any excess wax.

Set the wax mix by immediately dipping the bloom into a bowl of ice-cold water. Again, plunge the flower with a sweeping sideways motion to preserve the natural shape of the flower. Hold the bloom in the cold water for several seconds, then place it aside to dry.

Waxing a camellia bloom will preserve its beauty for weeks, or perhaps even longer. Handle flowers gently, however as the petals will turn brown if the wax seal is broken. Other blooms can be preserved in a similar manner. As the weather warms and more plants begin to flower, experiment with branches of quince and forsythia, and even stems of narcissus.



- Jessica Miller (from a workshop led by Clemson Master Gardener Marion St. Clair)

Pruning Mature Muscadine Vines

I am a relatively new Master Gardener. In fact, I just received my permanent name badge! I'm so pleased.

I admit that my gardening experience is very limited and I naively thought that going through the Master Gardener training would somehow magically help me avoid most if not all of the pitfalls of gardening. But as there is so much information, I have decided that I will probably have to learn my lessons the hard way.

My latest lesson is how to prune mature muscadine vines. My father planted a fair number of them many, many years ago and due to one thing or another, they had not been pruned for several years. YouTube has become a great mentor and with regards to muscadine vines, Ison's Nursery has uploaded a number of great videos on the proper care and maintenance of them. So 2 years ago I took hedge trimmers to get the vines manageable enough to properly prune them. Sadly, 2016 was the year of the drought and I had no fruit. Sadly again, in 2017, I had very little fruit. Just this week I called Ison's to ask a few clarifying questions on their video for drip irrigation thinking that it might be the solution to a better crop this year. June bugs were also a big problem as they completely denuded one of the vines and munched happily on the rest. Greg Ison was very kind to take time out of his busy day to answer my many questions. However, during the course of my conversation with him, it became apparent that the lack of fruit was not due to lack of water or an abundance of June bugs; it was user - should I say pruner - error. The pruning video I watched was how to prune first year vines. Pruning mature vines is a bit different.

Last winter I pruned the vines back too hard. I cut back the vines leaving 2-3 buds on old growth when I should have left 2-3 buds on new growth. So how to differentiate between old and new growth? I was afraid I would have to do some calculations ($\# \text{ years since 2016} \times 2 \text{ buds per year} = \# \text{ of total buds}$) and count the number of buds on each vine. Thankfully, it's quite obvious and much easier once you know. The old growth vines are dark and gray. The new growth is lighter and brown. (See picture.) And thankfully, I found out today as this is a great week weather-wise to prune, cold but sunny.

Gardening is a humbling experience. My only solace is to think that I'm not the only one.



Sharon Cassidy Retires

Sharon Cassidy retired in December from the Extension Office. She was more than a receptionist/support person who did all kinds of other tasks for us when needed. And, since I didn't know Sharon very well until I was actually a full time employee of Extension, even though I had been a Master Gardener volunteer here for 10 years in and out of the office like everyone else whenever to get my hours in, I went ahead and asked her to do a bio on herself to capture the details with working at Extension. Since we became good friends when working together all of these years, I hope to keep that relationship going after her retirement. It's a good story. - Kathy Parent, ANR Program Assistant



I began working with Extension in 1984 while my 3 children were very small. Mr. Bill Baughman called me at home and asked if I would like to come up and work with the Extension office. It was the perfect job being all my kids were under the age of 9. The job began as a part time position which led to 60 hours a week instead of 25. I began as a 4-H program assistant and worked that position until becoming the Ag program assistant. Mr. Baughman sent me to the MG training in I think 1986 (Kathy and I can't find exactly). After a few years I transferred to being the 4-H Secretary. I have been in all aspects of assisting in the Extension office. I moved to Missouri for 2 years and Robert Brannen called me and told me that he was holding a position for me back at the Extension office if I would move back home. I returned and was placed in the position of Assistant Support Staff. My position was different than just being a plain old receptionist. Knowing the areas of our office so well, it has been a true asset to use my knowledge of over 23 years. Robert always told me, you know the areas of the office, so handle it when the phone rings and answer the questions if no one is available. Funny how I suckered right into that one!

Extension has been my rock for over 23 years as a single mom raising 3 kids. My children had opportunities through the 4-H program that I could not have offered them without it. It has been an honor when handed the Extension Plant Sale and starting the middle of the ring sale. We have benefited nicely with the help of great MG's that volunteer. My greatest gift to the Extension office has been the starting of the Gwinnett 4-H Farm Friends. I started the "petting zoo" back in 1995 with a small budget and Mr. Baughman only told me, "don't call me when you get put in jail." I laughed and the rest is history. It has been the best fund raiser for the 4-H program. I will take a big "high five" for that one because I poured my heart and soul into making it a success and hope that it continues for many more years.

Leaving Extension is easy at this point. They say you know when you are ready for



retirement and I have reached that point in life where I want to do some things for ME. I have made lifelong friends, helped with projects and youth, and now it is time for me. Thank you to all of you that crossed my path and shared a good laugh or cry. It's been fun but turn me loose in the pasture now. Hope to see you down the road.

- Sharon Cassidy

Deadlines for A Bit of Dirt

Spring 2018 - March 20 (spring equinox)

Summer 2018 - June 21 (summer solstice)

Fall 2018 - September 22 (fall equinox)

Winter 2019 - January 11

Upcoming Meeting

Monday, February 19, 2018 - African-American Gardening

Fulton County Extension Agent, Abra Lee, and Fulton County MGEV Tommy Butler will cover the history of African American garden design including its arrival to the United States via West Africa; the link between African American gardens and those found in other Afro communities throughout the African Diaspora; key features of African American Garden design and its influence on Southern Garden design; and pictures of African American Gardens.

NOTE, THIS IS A LUNCHTIME MEETING! Our meeting will begin with lunch at 11:30 a.m., at Bethesda Senior Center, [225 Bethesda Church Road, Lawrenceville, 30044](#) followed by the presentation at noon.

Once again we will do a Soup and Salad Luncheon. Please bring a dish to share!

- A-F Salad

- G-L Soup or chili (or Entrée)
- M-R Dessert
- S-Z Bread, Cornbread, biscuits, or rolls



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