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A BIT OF DIRT

Summer 2018

A Newsletter of the
Gwinnett County Master Gardeners Association
Promoting Gardening Through Education & Volunteering



2017 GCMGA Photo Contest Winner - 1st Place Still Life "Beautiful Blue" by Becky Wolary

In This Issue ...

- [From the Editor](#)

- [Project Spotlight: McDaniel Farm Park](#)
- [Biblical Botanical Gardens Society \(BBGS\): Go FIG-ure!](#)
- [Wandering Around the Landscape](#)
- [What's Going On Down There?](#)
- [GCMGA Plant Sale: Here Comes 2019!](#)
- [Eat Your Weeds](#)
- [Dandelion - The Pin-Up Girl for Edible Weeds](#)
- [Basil Boom Vinaigrette](#)
- [Seed Savers Shuttles \(Seed Exchange\)](#)
- [Of Naked Ladies and Forget-Me-Nots: The Peeling Crape Myrtle](#)
- [Making An Old Idea New Again](#)
- [Kathy Parent Receives 30 Year MGEV Award](#)
- [Kathy Parent Retirement Party](#)
- [Annual President's Lifetime Achievement Awards](#)
- [Community Garden @ Snellville Awards and Recognition](#)
- [2018 GCMGA Photo Contest Award Winners](#)
- [Deadlines for Future Issues of *A Bit of Dirt*](#)
- [Upcoming Meetings](#)
- [Upcoming Field Trips](#)

From the Editor ...

As you know, each project we work on has its rewards and its frustrations. I love being the editor of the GCMGA newsletter. Just take a look at all the great articles we have this summer!

- Ed Bez, president of the Biblical Botanical Gardens Society, has a great article on figs. This is the first of four articles he has agreed to write for us.
- Our own Robert Brannen has also agreed to be a regular contributor on landscaping ideas.
- I hope you enjoy Linda Rivers' fun article on soil microbes. (Makes Chapter 1 of the MG Handbook a lot less scary!)
- Ann Thompson's "Eat Your Weeds" is another four-part series that starts this issue.

- AND ... we have three recipes to share with you.

Not to mention all the great reports on MG community projects, the vision for the 2019 Plant Sale, Lifetime Achievement Awards, our Seed Exchange, and 2018 Photo Contest Winners. I love the excitement and energy of our MG club. It's contagious.

TWC predicts a lot of rain over the next two weeks. So, we've provided you with a lot of great reading material to enjoy if you can't get outside to play in the dirt.

So the downside of being the editor of this newsletter is technology. Sigh. I could use some help. If you are well-versed in Mail Chimp and would like to earn volunteer hours sitting in the comfort of your air-conditioned home, then let me know!

Until the fall issue, happy gardening!
- Ann Langley

Project Spotlight ... McDaniel Farm Park



McDaniel Farm Park is a 134-acre passive park situated on a 1930's (depression) era cotton farm with historic buildings and equipment, trails, dog park, farm-themed playground, interpretative signage and pavilions. The Park remained a working family farm until 1999 when its namesake, Archie McDaniel, died.

Gwinnett County Parks & Recreation along with the Environmental Heritage Center (EHC) preserve and manage the park.

Since 2006, Gwinnett County Master Gardeners Extension Volunteers (MGEV) have maintained a demonstration garden, Archie's Garden, at the heritage site with support from Gwinnett Parks & Recreation and the EHC. MGEVs plant a combination of fruits, vegetables, flowers, berries and herbs. Vegetables and ornamentals are showcased growing in raised beds, in-ground beds and containers. The garden serves as an open forum for the public to observe and ask questions about growing fresh fruits and vegetables.

Master gardeners teach and demonstrate:

- Organic and sustainable methods of gardening
- No dig, low till soil cultivation
- Water-wise irrigation techniques
- Crop protection from critters
- Cover crops for soil enrichment
- Growing communities through gardening



MGs routinely stress the importance of soil preparation, proper siting, water conservation and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as being keys to a successful planting.

The gardens at McDaniel Farm Park provide a visual and hands-on educational opportunity, promote gardening as a healthy outdoor activity, serve as an outdoor classroom, expose park enthusiasts to the Master Gardeners association, beautify the landscape and provide a source of fresh, local produce. All produce is donated to Plant-A-Row for the Hungry.

Additionally, visitors to the garden are encouraged to use the county's Agriculture & Natural Resources (ANR) Extension services as a homeowner resource for research-based answers to gardening questions, classes and information on proper environmental and horticultural practices.

McDaniel Farm Park Demonstration Gardens is the perfect place to promote environmental awareness and gardening as a healthy outdoor activity. Come visit the farm and enjoy its beauty, peace and serenity.

*Joyce Melvin Teel, Project Coordinator
McDaniel Farm Park, Duluth*



[Go FIG-ure!](#)

Ficus carica (Common Fig)

Ficus carica is one of mankind's oldest fruits. Although considered a fruit, the fig is actually a flower inverted into itself. It belongs in the mulberry family (Moraceae) and is known as the common fig. They thrive best in hot, dry climates and are ubiquitous in the entire Mediterranean basin. They are native to the Middle East and Western Asia.

Yet, with some care figs can grow in some regions of Georgia; more on growing figs in Georgia in a moment. Most people, this author included, have a hankering for figs. They are quite tasty and have been eaten fresh, preserved, baked and stewed for millennia



Figs and the Bible

The word fruit is mentioned 54 times in the Bible with fig being mentioned in more than 70 references; it is the most often mentioned fruit.

Figs appear in the Bible very early. In fact, the fig is the third plant mentioned after the mysterious Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve are said to have clothed themselves with 'aprons of fig leaves'

after eating the forbidden fruit. Most Rabbinical scholars and sages contend the fig is the forbidden fruit, outweighing the apple. Why? Adam and Eve covered their nakedness. What was close by? The fig tree. From then until modern times fig leaves - or their stylized depictions - have been used to cover the 'nakedness' of human private parts by sculptors, painters and artisans. And has come to mean figuratively the covering up of an act that is embarrassing or distasteful.

Incidentally, the use of Bible plants to manufacture textiles is well established from aprons of fig leaves, to flax linen garments (*Linum usitatissimum*), to regal curtains of cotton (*Gossypium herbaceum*) mentioned only in the book of Esther.

The common fig was the most widely planted fruit tree in Bible Lands. It could live up to 200 years and was often planted alongside olive trees, which are also long lived. The fig was the last tree to produce leaves in the spring yet the almond (first to leaf) and the other deciduous trees were fully developed as the fig was just budding. Jesus mentions this fig factor in Mark 13:28-29. This verse about figs and the beginning of summer is often used eschatologically.

The fig is included in a special list of blessed crops in the Torah (Deuteronomy 8). These Seven Species, as they are called, became the basis of ancient Israelite economy and sustenance.

Figs are used figuratively and symbolically throughout the Bible. An example would be the oft quoted passage from 1 Kings 5:5, "each man under his own vine and fig tree," which depicts a state of peace and prosperity.

Jesus was familiar with fig trees and their sweet fruit. In one of the more difficult stories in the gospels Jesus curses a fig tree; the only thing he ever cursed (Mark 11). Without attempting to interpret the 'whys and wherefores' of this mysterious passage, one thing can be assumed with some degree of certainty, figs would have been eaten by Jesus and he would have enjoyed them.

Curiously, Jesus is often identified with two communities near Jerusalem that grow figs, Bethpage (lit. meaning 'house of unripe figs') and Bethany (lit. meaning 'house of ripe figs').

Ficus sycomorus (Sycamore fig)

Another species of fig referred to in the Old and New Testaments is the Sycamore (1 Kings 10; Amos 7). This fruit bearing fig tree was the one which Zacchaeus climbed to see Jesus (Luke 19:4) and the Prophet Amos cultivated.

This was one of the most important fruit trees in ancient Egypt, especially appreciated for its shade. This species had inferior fruits but still sweet and edible. It could live 1000 years. The notable difference between it and the *Ficus caria* was that it bore fruit in clusters on fruiting

branchlets on the trunk and main branches.

Also, known as the mulberry fig, the sycamore is often confused with the Platanis here in the USA, or the Acer in the UK.

Beneficial Uses of Figs in Biblical Times

Figs were used medicinally too. King Hezekiah's malignant, swelling, flesh sore was treated using a special fig poultice salve, used in the ancient middle east to also cure warts and a variety of skin ulcers. Its fruit was known to be a laxative. The leaves were used in a decoction to address diabetes, calcification in liver and kidneys. The Assyrians used it as a sweetener.

Yet, one of the coveted and practical uses of the fig tree in biblical times was for its shade. Fig trees could grow to 30 feet and temperatures beneath its leafy branches might be 10-15 degrees cooler. This author found this still to be true while living in Israel (Yad HaShmonah) and cultivating their biblical gardens.

Today, the fig leaf is still medicinally used to treat high cholesterol, skin conditions, such as eczema, psoriasis, and vitiligo.

The fig is high-fibered, rich in essential minerals and vitamins, especially K and B6.

Growing Ficus carica

A fig tree needs a sunny site with good drainage and is not particular about soil. Once established, it tends to become drought resistant.

Expect two crops per year from most varieties; the sweetest figs coming in the second harvest (August-September). Pruning should be done in the spring.

Unlike native figs you will not need to worry about a supply of Blastophaga fig wasps to pollinate your figs in Georgia; varieties that grow well here are self-pollinating.

For complete details about growing figs in Georgia, [click here](#).

Oh Taste and See Abigail's Fig Cake (1 Samuel 25:18)

1 cup butter

½ cup honey

3 cups figs (or fig preserve)

5 egg yolks, beaten (save whites)

3 cups whole wheat flour

1 cup plain yogurt

1 cup walnuts

1 cup raisins

1 ½ tbsp. cinnamon

5 egg whites, beaten

Cream butter and honey together before adding the figs and the beaten egg yolks. Stir until smooth. Add flour and yogurt, alternating. Add nuts, raisins and cinnamon. Fold in egg whites. Pour into greased cake pan and bake at 350° F for 90 minutes. Serve with honey drizzle.

*Dr. Ed Bez, President, Biblical Botanical Gardens Society
Master Gardener and Naturalist*

Resources:

Healing Foods from the Bible. Bernard Ward.

The Jewish Gardening Cookbook. Michael Brown.

Baker's Encyclopedia of Bible Plants and Planting a Bible Garden. F. Nigel Hepper.

Gardening with Biblical Plants. Wilma James.

Plants of the Bible and Their Uses. Irene Jacob.

Figs, Dates, and Myrrh, Plants of the Bible and the Quran. Lytton John Musselman.

[Wandering Around the Landscape](#)

After many years of obsessing over the minutest of details, I have lately been working in the opposite direction and concentrating on the 'big picture' before I jump into any new project or endeavor. I call this 'thinking it through' before I act. Kathy Parent says that I am just procrastinating.



I think the same is true when we develop our gardens and landscapes. We often agonize over decisions based on plant varieties, colors, shapes, and textures and we seem to forget that the whole idea is just to have a garden or landscape that is simply pleasing to look at.

When making decisions about additions or changes to the landscape I always start with asking a few simple questions. Does the plant sun or shade? How big is this going to be? How much maintenance will be involved? These simple queries have served me well over the years. I have lately added a new fourth question. Due to escalating utility bills and also the gentle nagging of my environmentalist friends (including you Susan), I have now added this question, How much water will it need? As this is summer which tends to be a dry season for Georgia, I think this is a good time to toss out some ways to cut back on the excessive use water in our landscapes. Do we need to keep our plants hydrated and healthy? Yes. Can we cut back on the amount of water we use? You bet'cha.

During the 'think-it-through' stage you should plan your landscape, or any changes to it, with water use in mind. Long narrow strips of turfgrass, blobs of flowering annuals scattered everywhere, and shrines to the U.S. Postal Service around the mailbox are usually going to be water wasters. Try to group together those things that will require more consistent watering into high water use zones. Even newly planted shrubs and trees probably won't need additional water but once every five to seven days. Older established woody ornamentals will only need water if we experience an extended drought. The original woody ornamentals in my landscape were planted about thirty years ago. In the ten or so years that I have lived there, at least half of those plants have never been watered.



Test your soil and fertilize and lime as needed. (After all of those years as an Extension Agent I still say that in my sleep.) Plants that have adequate nutrient levels are healthier and can get by with less water. Most do well when fertilized once or twice a year in some combination of the fall, winter, or spring. In the summer months when plants are stressed from the heat either don't fertilize or only use small doses of a slow release product.

Choose plants that are appropriate for the site. Keep sun loving plants in the sun, shade plants in the shade, and low growing plants where you need a low-growing plant, so you won't have to constantly butcher it to keep it from covering your windows.

Turfgrass is an attractive part of the landscape but you don't need to look like a sod farm. For me, turfgrass is a maintenance and a water use issue. While I personally enjoy mowing my grass, I have never had to do it for more than 20 minutes each time. I figure any lawn bigger than that is cutting into my personal after mowing re-hydration time. A well-established hybrid Bermuda lawn doesn't require much water. Pretty much all other grass needs water to remain healthy and attractive.

Be efficient with your watering. Check and monitor your irrigation system to see how much it is really using. Scratch around your plants after watering to confirm that you watered enough but not excessively. Eat more tuna fish so you will have plenty of the little tuna cans to scatter around to measure how much water you are actually applying. An inch of water in the can is plenty for almost everything in the landscape. (OK, so when have you ever read a gardening article that said you will be a more successful gardener if you eat more tuna fish.)

Use mulches when possible. We all know that a well applied mulch will keep weeds down, hold moisture around our plants roots, and even reduce plant pathogens from splashing up from the soil onto our plants. It's relatively cheap and comes in a variety of colors and textures. Free mulch is also available every Wednesday in Lawrenceville. It's not pretty, but hey, it's free.

Two things will force a plant to use more water. Blasts of fertilizer make it want to grow bigger and faster, so it sucks up all the water it can get to meet the radical grow demand. Shearing plants will also force a plant to try to quickly replace all the leaves that were cut away. A thinning prune job is OK, but sculpting plants into those meatballs is tough to recover from. Guys, walk away from the power tools.

The ideal landscape is going to be attractive, interesting, low maintenance, and water wise. Also, don't forget to use some of this water you are saving to water yourself. Yep, it's part of the big picture too.

Another recent example where I stopped to think about the 'big picture' occurred when I

went with a couple of buddies to an antique car show. One of the show's sponsors was showcasing (and selling) beautiful new Corvettes for only \$95,000 each and the very skilled salesman shook my hand vigorously and said, "Robert, you really need to drive one of these cars home today." Fortunately, I was thinking of the big picture and my potential future health and said, "But what will I tell my wife?" He was thinking of the big picture too and calmly said, "It's easy, just say, Honey you're so special, I bought this car for you."

Robert Brannen

[What's Going on Down There?](#)

Filmed on location in the Rhizosphere

Directed by Sunny Photosynthesis

Cast of characters in order of appearance

Root Exudates

Bacteria

Fungi

Protozoa

Nematodes

Can you feel the rhythm of the rhizosphere beneath your feet? Or chuckle as busy bacteria and fungi feast at the root exudates buffet until their tummies are plump with nitrogen fertilizer? Or stand horrified as large hungry protozoa, and even larger nematodes, ambush these over-stuffed microbes, eat them by the thousands, and excrete the excess carbon and other nutrients into the rhizosphere?

Don't worry if you missed the gory story! The setting and cast of characters are microscopic.

So, grab your electron microscope. Let's dive into the top six-inches of soil. Here you will meet a few microbe characters who live in this mysterious dark kingdom known as the rhizosphere.

The Rhizosphere

Welcome to this narrow and very sticky region. It is home to many different soil organisms. Its borders extend about one tenth of an inch from the plant's roots. Within this rhizosphere, there is a constant mix of microbe characters, each of whom plays a unique role: bacteria, fungi, protozoa, nematodes, and even larger organisms.

Root Exudates

The director of 'What's Going on Down There' has just walked on the set. So, pop your head through the soil again, and let's go meet him.

Sunny Photosynthesis, an intensely focused director, sits among the leaves. He senses that his cast of microbes is hungry. Sunny wipes the perspiration from his brow, and directs the roots to feed the hungry microbes. At his command, a chemical secretion of root exudates, rich in carbohydrates and protein, starts to ooze out of the roots into the rhizosphere. Lunch has arrived!

Bacteria and Fungi

The tiniest members of the cast are bacteria and fungi. They are the first to arrive at the root exudates buffet table despite being on the lowest level of the food chain. They stuff their small bodies with nitrogen and other nutrients from the exudates. They are like little bags of fertilizer eager to provide the plant with its seasonal nutrient needs. Bacteria are so small that they produce a slime that sticks to things, otherwise they would wash away. This slime is useful because it traps pathogens before they reach the root, and it helps soil particles to stick together. Bacteria produce streptomycin which helps the plant maintain good health.

Fungi, sometimes introduced as mycorrhizal fungi, are skilled protectors of the roots. If foraging root-eating nematodes try to penetrate a root, then their access is instantly barred by the swashbuckling flamboyance of a fungal hypha strand. These courageous fungi provide water, phosphorous, and other necessary nutrients to the roots. Sometimes they deliver vitamins and antibiotics to the roots in the form of penicillin.

Protozoa

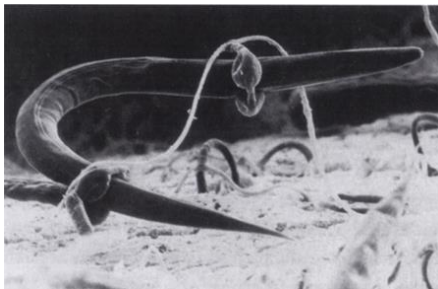
A story isn't complete without the all-important protozoa villains – all 60,000 species--the majority of which live in the soil. Their main role is population-control police. They make sure that bacteria don't get out of hand so, they eat them—about 10,000 per day, each.

Their secondary role is 'transformer'. Protozoa need moisture to live, travel, and reproduce. If there's a dry spell, then the protozoa stop feeding, go dormant, and encase themselves in a cyst – sometimes for several years.

The good news is that protozoa's waste contains carbon and nitrogen compounds including ammonium which the plants need. Nearly 80% of the nitrogen a plant needs comes from the wastes produced by bacteria-eating and fungi-eating protozoa.

Nematodes

This long, thread-like microbe varies in length from 2 millimeters to a whopping 30 feet! Complete books could be written about this member of the cast. No worries soil diggers! Your electron microscope will be focused on the 2 millimeter variety found in soil. To ease your curiosity, the 30-foot nematode is found in the placenta of sperm whales. We'll save that information for another time. These blind roundworms also mineralize nutrients by ingesting bacteria and fungi—just like protozoa. There are 20,000 known species. Scientists estimate that there could be as many as 1 million species.



This cast member is unfairly criticized by gardeners as a predator of plant roots. This is somewhat true when soil is unhealthy. However, when the rhizosphere is intact and the microbial cast members work well together, then the predator root-eating nematodes are kept under control.

Actually, the majority of nematodes are high-maintenance and very picky. A teaspoon of healthy soil usually contains 20 bacteria-eating nematodes, 20 fungus-eating nematodes, and very few predators. They require porous soil in which to travel. If the soil is too dense and their search for food is hindered, then they will die. Consequently, the nitrogen in the soil will be greatly reduced, too. So, it is in the best interest of the cast of characters to cater to the needs of picky nematodes as they search for food. They must be given space to blindly 'feel' any minute change in temperature to locate their preferred food source – bacteria and fungi.

We hope you enjoyed your visit to the land of rhizosphere, where the rhythm below your feet is alive. There are many more actors in this soil story, but we'll save them for another time.

Linda Rivers

*For information on Linda's alpaca soil amendment
(which keeps our cast of soil microbes very happy),
visit her at www.lionscreekfarm.com*

Photo: A nematode trapped by the mycelium of a mushroom. This image taken with an electronic microscope by Pr H.H. Triantaphyllou for the American Phytopathological Society, in St Paul, MN

GCMGA Plant Sale Update: Here Comes 2019

Thank you again to all the fabulous volunteers who made our 2018 GCMGA Plant Sale a wonderful success. We raised over \$7,000.00 for the association and donated many plants to our MG projects around the county and to Creative Enterprises. Thank you to all who contributed plants. We are already planning for next year's plant sale.

As you evaluate your own garden, divide perennials, and think about space for new plants you want, we hope you'll consider collecting plants for our 2019 sale. By potting plants in the fall, plants will have a chance to establish a strong root system and hopefully be ready to bloom in time for the spring sale. We encourage donors to label fully (name of plant, color of blooms, sun, part sun, shade, water needs, pollinator friendly, bird friendly, etc.). We loved all the donated plants, but some weren't buyer friendly - particularly flowering plants where the color was not clearly indicated. We want our buyers to be sure of what they are planting and be confident the plant is what they wanted and not an invasive or problem plant.

One thing we want to focus on for the 2019 sale is pollinator and wildlife friendly plants. Since our sale is close on the heels of Earth Day, many buyers look for plants to encourage wildlife in their gardens, especially pollinators. Below are links to several sites that have lists of these types of plants and are approved for growing in Georgia. This is a great time to reconsider your own yard and plant for wildlife be it pollinators, native amphibians, or birds.

- [Georgia Native Plant Society](#)
- [Native Plants for Georgia](#) - pollinator support
- [Xerces Society](#) - gardening for native pollinators
- [Beyond Butterflies](#)
- [Atlanta Audubon Society](#) - gardening for birds
- [Cornell Lab for Ornithology](#)
- [National Wildlife Federation](#) – attracting amphibians to your garden



We are also considering having fall plant digs. If you are interested in having a plant dig this fall, let us know. We'll hope to hold these toward the end of September and beginning of October. Plans are still being made at this point, so we'd like to get an idea of how many members might be interested.

We're also hoping to work on some Garden Art this summer and fall – maybe making hyper tufa pots or bird house /feeder construction. Let us know if you are interested. Linda Bolton did a great job for 2018 and has agreed to continue for the 2019 sale.

We had a great feedback session after the plant sale and have lots of ideas for making next year's sale even better. If you are interested in helping by being a committee chair or contributing your volunteer hours, please let us know. If you were a committee chair this year and want to continue, let us know. If you want to chair a different committee, let us know. Not sure but want to help, let us know.

We look forward to hearing from many more members as we gear up for the 2019 sale.

Happy Summer, Everyone!

Lynda Pollock robert9811@att.net

Susan Kosenka slk120@aol.com

Linda Bolton lynrm47@gmail.com

Eat Your Weeds

Yes, it is that time of year again. That time when you stroll through your garden and see those dreaded “weeds” popping up everywhere. Did you know that many plants we now consider invasive started their careers in kitchen gardens and were brought here with settlers?

What is a weed? It is plant growing where we don't want it.

How many species of edible plants are there? There are over 20,000 species of edible plants. How many do we usually eat today? We eat about 20 species. How did we lose so much knowledge for the food and medicine these plants provide? Sadly, our taste in foods reflect the limited varieties of veggies and greens that can survive shipping from agricultural centers.

Everywhere you walk you are probably surrounded by wild edible weeds. These weeds are close relatives of the vegetables and herbs we all grow in our cultivated garden. Many wild edibles contain higher levels of nutrients than their cultivated counterparts.

Working with these plants can help change your perspective on such notoriously misunderstood plants as dandelion, chickweed, stinging nettle, plantain, white clover and many others. Besides providing many necessary biological functions in the environment, these plants can also be a source of great enjoyment in the kitchen.

Just a few tips for using your weeds in your kitchen:

- Pick them when they are young as they are less bitter.
- Many edible weeds are tastier when cooked.
- Small portions can add interesting flavors to salads.
- They can always be used in soups.
- You can substitute these plants in almost any recipe that calls for spinach or swiss chard.
- Add a handful to your smoothie for added vitamin and mineral boost.

Before you eat:

- Make a positive ID as some plants can have a poisonous look-alike. Don't just try things.
- Just because an animal or bird eats it doesn't mean its edible for humans
- Not all the parts of the plant are edible. Know which is and which isn't.

Harvesting tips:

- Start slowly. Consider the nutritional and fiber content and the possibility of allergies.
- Some things are edible but not practical.
- Harvest from areas free from chemicals and pesticides only.
- Never harvest where there is a lot of vehicle traffic.

- Wash you harvest thoroughly.
- Some plants need to be cooked to be edible.

Edible weeds are not just edible. They also can:

- Have medical and healing properties
- Be used as dyes
- Be companion plants
- Be soil breakers
- Be soil indicators of water and nutrients
- Provide stock fodder
- Be good ground covers
- Be green mulches
- Be nitrogen fixers
- Attract beneficial insects
- Repel bad bugs

I encourage you to stop thinking of weeds as pests, and start viewing them as valuable plants, welcome additions to your yard, and good food.

Ann Thompson

[Eat Your Weeds: Dandelion](#)

The pin-up girl of edible weeds is the dandelion.

Dandelion was once so highly treasured that it was carried on the Mayflower to the new world for its medicinal properties. One of the top six herbs in the Chinese herbal medicine chest, it is considered by most herbalists to be a great blood purifier and liver

detoxifier. It also serves as an excellent diuretic and boosts the immune system.

Dandelion blossoms and leaves are high in vitamins A, B1, B2, B3, C and E as well as calcium, iron, magnesium, potassium, and zinc. Dandelion is generally considered



safe with no known side effects, however, people who take diuretics, or drugs to lower blood sugar level should use dandelion under a doctor's supervision.

Every part of the dandelion is usable and edible. The flowers can be battered and fried or put fresh into your salad bowl. They make a beautiful honey colored jelly or wine. The leaves can be put fresh in a salad, cooked as a pot herb or made into a medical tea. The root can be made into medical tea or roasted, ground and used as a coffee substitute. Even the sap in the stem is used by some for wart removal, and is being researched by Germany, Japan and U.S for an alternative to rubber.

Because dandelions develop deep tap roots, the best way to grow them is in a pot with loose potting soil. If you prefer not to grow them, you can wild craft them, but they should never be gathered from along a road or from an area which may have been sprayed with any type of poison. There are several look-alikes when it comes to dandelions, but none of these are poisonous.

Once harvested, wash all parts thoroughly. (I use old tooth brush for cleaning the roots). Use fresh or dry plant completely for use later. You can dry them in a dehydrator or simply hang the plant upside down until it is dry. Store in air tight glass jars.

Eating dandelion is a pleasant addition to the family menu. Cook the leaves or add them directly into your salad to give variety to your everyday menu. Perhaps try your hand at crème de pissenlits (French for Cream of Dandelion soup). In the meantime, here is a simple recipe for Dandelion Tea.

DANDELION TEA

1 teaspoon dried dandelion leaves or 1 tablespoon fresh chopped leaves
8 oz water

Pour boiling water over leaves and let steep for 10 minutes. Strain and drink.

Last, but not least, for those who are looking for new plants for their pollinator garden, why not try the lowly dandelion? Bees love it and the bloom is one of the first in the spring.

Ann Thompson

BASIL BOOM

A few years ago, I experienced a boom harvest of my basil. I really like basil, but I can eat only so many Caprese Salads. I dried basil and preserved it for my spice rack. I was sprinkled it fresh on everything until I was in basil overload! Then one day I came across this great recipe in *Southern Living Magazine* and voila' it saved the day.

If you find yourself in that same situation, you might like to rescue yourself with this light, refreshing, flavorful, salad dressing. I also use it as a dip for raw veggies and sometimes as a sauce for cooked veggies. Serendipitously, after you make this, your kitchen smells wonderful!

Sweet Basil Vinaigrette

½ cup red wine vinegar
2 shallots chopped
3 Tablespoons sugar
3 Tablespoons chopped fresh basil
1 Tablespoon fresh lemon juice
2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
¾ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
½ teaspoon salt
¾ cup Canola oil



Process the first 8 ingredients in a blender until smooth. With the blender running, add canola oil in a slow steady stream, processing until smooth. Store in refrigerator for up to

2 weeks.

Linda Bolton

Photo courtesy of Carol Hassell

GCMGA Seed Saver Shutters

Free Seed Exchange for Gwinnett's Master Gardeners

<i>Common Name</i>	<i># of Packets</i>
<u>Vegetables</u>	
B	1
B	2
C	2
C	1
L	8
N	1
P	1
P	1
T	3
<u>P</u>	
B	2
C	1
Gray-head Coneflower	9
Jewels of Opar, <i>Talinum paniculatum</i>	4
Lenten Rose/Hellbores	6
Purple Coneflower	1
Wild Quinine, <i>Perthenium integrisfolium</i>	1
<u>Annuals</u>	
Castor Bean	1
Cleome	1
Cosmos, Orange	2
Cosmos, Sulfur	1
Lantana 'Lavender Popcorn', <i>Lantana Trifolia</i>	1

Sunflower, Dwarf Sungold	1
Sunflower, Velvet Queen	1
Sweet Peas, Mixed Colors	2
Sweet Pease, White	1
Wild Flower Mix	1

Of Naked Ladies and Forget-Me-Nots

The Peeling Crape Myrtle

Every now and then I wonder what in the world I did uprooting my family from Montreal and ending up in the South, the land of kudzu, pokeweed, and boiled peanuts. While I have yet to emphatically embrace any of these uniquely Southern charms, I have come to love the crape myrtle. From June to August, the land is alive with the blossoms of this extraordinary Chinese expatriate. The common name causes a bit of head scratching though. The leaves may be mistaken for those of myrtle but the “crape” part is a little puzzling.

This plant was introduced to England from China in 1759, but it did not impress many people there. The problem was that few regions in England were warm enough to support the vigorous growth for which crape myrtle is now known.

However, around 1786, the French botanist, Andre Michaux (1746-1802) brought plants to Charleston, SC. They flourished. They have become the summer-flowering tree of the South and extend well up into the Mid-Atlantic states.

The common name probably arose not for the constitution of the flowers but for the bark, which peels off in thin sheets over the season, and was often compared to crepe paper. In fact, the bark is probably the most ornamental part of the tree because it is as handsome in winter as it is in summer.

A continuing argument concerns the spelling of “crape”. After all, the term comes from the Old French word crepe, changed to “crêpe” in the eighteenth century. So why is the name not spelled crepe myrtle? Dozens of names have been translated to other languages, resulting in slightly different spellings, so this would not be puzzling. However, there was no love lost between the English and French in those times, and it was just as likely that the English wouldn’t accept “crêpe” simply because it was French.

Lagerstroemia indica

Today, one can find plants in a wide spectrum of heights ranging from 3-foot shrubs to 25-foot trees. Flower colors are available in almost any hue.



Place plants in full sun and water in well. If growing as a tree, remove bottom branches as the plant matures. This will make the handsome peeling bark more obvious.

- 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%.

Making an Old Idea New Again

Last fall, the Gwinnett County Parks & Recreation Department put a new policy in place: a section of each of our county parks was designated as a “mow free zone,” allowing native grasses and vegetation to grow. What a great idea! I personally was glad to see this new approach.



The member team that volunteers at Bethesda Senior Center took the no-mow area at Bethesda Park under our purview to monitor and determine how we could augment it. The area will only be mowed once a year – in November/December.

In early May we were delighted to see how well the native grasses and plantain had filled in. We saw dandelions blooming – among the earliest sources of pollen of the spring season when pollinators urgently need nourishment. We watched sparrows and other small birds flitting around in the grass. We hope ground nesting species will select the

area. We have plans to add native wildflowers and crimson clover in the next few months to enhance the area. The wildflowers will add some color and provide pollinator food. Clover, a legume, will stabilize and hold the soil on the steep slope near the lake, and will sport a carpet of gorgeous purple blooms in season.

There is an informational sign about why this natural area is important. We want to address the impression some passersby may have that the area is ugly, and the County needs to cut it back. As MGs, we know that it has the prospect of providing key nutrition and safe habitat for pollinators, birds and other small critters, but it's beautiful, as well! More to come.

Author, Becky Wolary

Photographer, Celeste Wallace

Kathy Parent Receives 30 Year MGEV Award

Kathy began her life as a Master Gardener in 1985 when she first applied to the Master Gardener Extension Volunteer (MGEV) training in DeKalb County. But Kathy couldn't attend the training at that time as she and her husband moved to Canada for their fulltime jobs. Later, they transferred back to the states to live in Gwinnett County. Once again Kathy applied for the MGEV training and was accepted into the class of 1988. She attended evening classes at Berkmar High School in Lilburn allowing her to work full time. Glenda Patterson, another long-time Gwinnett MGEV, was in the same class as Kathy.



To accrue the 50 hours of MGEV volunteer service required after completing the training and passing the exam, Kathy volunteered in the Gwinnett County Extension office during her lunch hour and gave numerous presentations in the evenings on a variety of gardening topics. Working full time never kept Kathy from achieving her goal of becoming a master gardener. Kathy also served as a board member of the Georgia Master Gardener Association when it was first being formed back in the early 1990's.



Throughout Kathy's 30 years of service, she has helped maintain "Archie's Garden", an MGEV project at the McDaniel Farm Park in Duluth. McDaniel Farm teaches the public about early 20th century farm life. She also volunteered at the Lanier Community Gardens, the annual Extension Home Show at the Infinite Energy Center, numerous large community events and has given presentations on gardening to garden clubs and other interested groups.

Kathy will retire as the coordinator of the Gwinnett MGEV program after 20 years of working as a Gwinnett County employee at the UGA Extension Gwinnett County office. Kathy's incredible patience, loyalty and her enormous heart has caused her to be loved so much by so many – the Master Gardeners, Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation, Department of Water Resources, Health and Human Services Senior Centers and many other county divisions and departments, including the staff at UGA Extension. We thank her for her 30 years of service as a master gardener and her 20 years of service as an Extension employee. We wish her all the best!!!

Thankfully, Kathy will continue to volunteer as a Master Gardener when she isn't busy with her husband, Michael, her children, Angela, Shylie and Maureen, and her six grandchildren (5 boys and 1 girl).

Mary Black, Gwinnett County Extension Agent

Retirement Party for Kathy Parent

UGA Gwinnett County Extension invites you to attend

Kathy Parent's Retirement Party

Monday, August 20, 1:30pm – 3:30pm

2nd Floor Conference room

Gwinnett County Gov't Annex Building (aka the Tag office)

750 South Perry Street

Lawrenceville, GA 30046

Please RSVP to Rachel Warner at rachel.warner@gwinnettcountry.com or 678.377.4010.

Gwinnett County Community Services Department
Annual President's Lifetime Achievement Awards

On April 19, 2018 at the Old County Courthouse, Lawrenceville, Gwinnett County Community Services Department held their first Annual President's Lifetime Achievement Awards. Five of our Master Gardener Extension Volunteers and the Gwinnett Master Gardeners as a whole were honored that evening.

The President's Lifetime Achievement Award honors those Gwinnett County Volunteers who have given over 4,000 volunteer hours of their time to the community. Please congratulate our recipients for their excellent volunteer work.

Shirley Bohm – Class of 2011, Vines Park coordinator and go-getter. Never says “No” volunteer, past Member of the GCMGA Executive Board, past Master Gardener Plant Sale coordinator and champion plant sale “Dig” Coordinator where over 2,000 plants were collected. Has helped with teaching Extensions “Food Safety” programs.

Shannon Pable – Class of 2001, has achieved over 8,600 Volunteer Hours, past GCMGA President and Master Gardener Plant Sale Co-coordinator, garden designer, mural painter. Has developed flower garden areas in many Gwinnett County Schools and at the Gwinnett County Environmental and Heritage Center using volunteer workers to complete the projects.

Glenda Patterson – Class of 1988, 30-year Master Gardener Extension Volunteer, has volunteered at many schools teaching environmental and gardening programs as well as doing garden talks. Glenda and her husband, Richard also work with

immigrant families through her church.

Jane Montgomery – Class of 2001, originally transferred from Virginia in the early 2000's, began the Hudgen's Art Center MG Project in Duluth, landscaping project and helping out with programs. She's been part of Lanier Community Garden, Buford since its start-up in 2009. She also volunteers at George Pierce Park in Suwanee with the Senior's programs.

Kathy Parent – Class of 1988, 30-year Master Gardener Extension Volunteer, one of the first GMGA Board Director's and newsletter author. Coordinates and works many community events and is the Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator for our Gwinnett County Master Gardener Extension Volunteers.

[The Community Garden @ Snellville](#) continues to grow ... not just the veggies ... but in awards and recognition. Here's an article literally torn from the pages of a magazine.

Well done, guys!

COMMUNITY GARDEN @ SNELLVILLE

Awards and recognition continue to grow



From left: Lucy Nettleton, Greenhouse Team member; Wes Nettleton, Master Gardener and Greenhouse Team member; South Gibbons, Gardener; Gretchen Schulz, co-chair Community Garden @ Snellville Committee; Susan Langley, Greenhouse Team member; Kurt Schulz, co-chair Community Garden @ Snellville; Committee and Martha Whitman, Master Gardener and Greenhouse Team member.

By Gretchen Schulz,
Councilwoman

Veggies and flowers are not the only thing flourishing in the Community Garden @ Snellville. The list of the garden's awards and recognitions also continues to grow.

In April, the garden was one of 34 community gardens across the Atlanta metro area that was awarded a \$1,500 grant to complete infrastructure or improvement projects on their gardens. The funding organization, Food Well Alliance, promotes community gardening to build community vitality, promote good health, and provide access to healthy, locally grown food.

"These gardens and communities are really helping to craft the landscape of the city," said Bobby Farmer, grant coordinator for Food Well Alliance. "They need our support to keep trying innovative approaches to maintain and expand their growing spaces, to have the tools necessary to make growing inclusive and accessible, and to continue engaging their communities around the garden."

The grant funds awarded to Snellville's Community Garden

will be used largely for infrastructure needs, particularly items for the garden's greenhouse. The 20-foot by 40-foot greenhouse is unheated, which has made it difficult for the garden's Greenhouse Team to start seedlings in the cold winter months. The funding will enable the procurement of thermostat-controlled propagation mats and a portable greenhouse. This small greenhouse can be heated with an electric heater and placed inside the large greenhouse to provide a warm environment for seedlings.

"Trying to heat the entire greenhouse would be prohibitively expensive," said Master Gardener Wes Nettleton who led the effort to write the grant proposal.

Other planned purchases include an upgrade to the greenhouse's ventilation system to help reduce temperatures in the summer and the construction of additional raised beds to demonstrate gardening techniques and provide for more donations to the Southeast Gwinnett Co-op.

Rob Stewart and Master Gardeners Martha Whitman and Ileen Meggison provided input for the grant proposal.

The Community Garden @ Snellville is also now featured on the Georgia Municipal Association's website. The article can be found at <https://www.gmanet.com/Advice-Knowledge/Innovation-Made-in-Georgia.aspx> as part of the organization's Innovation Made in Georgia feature. Innovation Made in Georgia is a periodic feature of innovative programs in Georgia's cities. Each case study presents a creative solution to a problem in municipal government, describes how the program works, and discusses its costs and benefits.





1st Place Birds Category and Best of Show

Feed Me by Lori Prosser

GCMGA 2018 Photo Contest Winners

Fifteen GCMGA members submitted 76 photos to the July 2018 Photo Contest. Our judge, Eric Bowles, did a wonderful job culling through the submissions and picking the top three in each of ten categories. And here are our winners!

BIRDS

1st *"Feed Me"* Lori Prosser

2nd *"Arrival"* Tixie Fowler

3rd *"Hangin' On"* Becky Panetta

1ST TIME SUBMISSION

1st *"Smokin' Hot Gladiolus"* Celeste Wallace

2nd *"Old Flowering Vine"* William Smith

3rd *"Orchid Cactus in Bloom"* Bob Wilgus

GARDENS

1st *"Goddess of the Lake"* Linda Bolton

2nd *"Children at Play"* Barbara Geier

3rd *"Pink & Green"* Jane Burke

HARVEST

1st *"Cold Slaw"* Jane Burke

2nd *"Green Bean Bounty"* Barbara Geier

3rd *"Round 'n' Round 'n' Round"* Tixie Fowler

LANDSCAPE

1st *"Angels Sing Down the Day"* Tixie Fowler

2nd *"Around the Bend"* Linda Bolton

3rd *"Fall Harvest at the Farm"* Susan Smith

Honorable Mention *"Harvesting Lavender"* Becky Panetta

MACROS & CLOSE-UPS

1st *"Drying Tears"* Tixie Fowler

2nd *"Pollinator on Purple"* Linda Bolton

3rd *"I'll Be 'Zinnia'"* Celeste Wallace

DIGITAL ART

1st *"Where Have the Colors Gone?"* William Smith

2nd *"Prettier in Pink"* Becky Panetta

3rd *"Eclipse Effect"* Debbie DuPont

PLANTS

1st *"Sunshine on a Cloudy Day"* Linda Bolton

2nd *"Clematis"* William Smith

3rd *"Rosa Rugosa"* Barbara Geier

STILL LIFE

1st *"The Secret Garden"* Lori Prosser

2nd *"Orange You Surprised?"* Celeste Wallace

3rd *"Blessings"* Becky Panetta

WILDLIFE

1st *"Ready for the World"* Lori Prosser

2nd *"Protecting the Mint"* Tixie Fowler

3rd *"Bee Bomb Photo"* Becky Panetta

Best of Show - *"Feed Me"* Lori Prosser

Deadlines for A Bit of Dirt

Fall 2018 - September 22 (fall equinox)

Winter 2019 - January 11

Spring 2019 - March 20 (spring equinox)

Summer 2019 - June 21 (summer solstice)

Upcoming Meetings

August 20 Tony Harris

"If Plants Could Talk – A Cherokee Relationship"

Whether you actively garden for medicinal purposes or just enjoy a good plant story, an hour with Mr. Harris is a delightful and informative exploration of both nature and history about the Cherokee Indians. A citizen of the Cherokee Nation, Mr. Harris is passionate about preserving his heritage and as a result, offers a vast knowledge of native plants and how they were appreciated by his ancestors. Thanks to his work, the Cherokee Garden at Green Meadows Preserve in Cobb County contains many of the plants used by these native people for food, medicine, weapons, tools and ceremonies. The garden offers such a compelling story of the relationship the Cherokee had with plants that it has been designated as an Interpretive Site on The Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. Tony is active with the Cobb County Master Gardeners, Georgia Native Plant Society, and he's also President of the Georgia Trail of Tears Association.

September 17 Picnic at McDaniel Farm Park

Each September GCMGA hosts a thank-you picnic for their members and guests in

recognition of their volunteer service to the community over the past year. This year it will take place at the pavilion in McDaniel Farm Park in Duluth. More details to follow.

October 15 Deb Douchon "Forgotten Foods in your Yard"

Many plants we consider "weeds" are actually tasty and nutritious foods that have been forgotten over time. An MGEV from DeKalb County, Deb is a nutritional anthropologist and ethnobotanist, recently retired from Georgia State, who speaks and lectures nationally and has appeared on Food Network's "Good Eats".

Upcoming Field Trips

October 3 Fern Ridge Farms Field Trip

We will meet at the farm at 11 AM Eastern Time. Eleanor Craig was our speaker at the May GCMGA meeting. Fern Ridge Farms is a small specialty nursery located in northeast Alabama, between Cedar Bluff and Centre, Alabama. It is primarily a retail operation, but does sell wholesale on a limited basis. Eleanor's 20 years of experience in landscaping, lawn maintenance and the nursery industry has evolved into a greenhouse business specializing in hardy garden ferns. Although she grows other plant materials (select annuals, tropical ferns, perennials, natives, and many fern companion plants) her passion and continuing area of expansion is the perennial fern program. She is currently growing over 75 varieties of hardy garden ferns in quart, gallon, and 3 gallon sizes. Please visit the website www.fernridgefarms.com for more information and directions.

