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# A BIT OF DIRT

Spring 2019

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



*Drying Tears* by Tixie Fowler - 2018 1st Place Close-up Category

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## From the Editor ...

The totals aren't in for February yet, but we have had quite a rainy season. The average 30-year rainfall for January (1981-2010) is 4.2". This January we had 6.23" in the Atlanta area, coming in third behind the Januarys of 1996 and 2017. February's rainfall may not be record-breaking, but it will be up there. Two ditties keep running through my mind, "Rain, rain, go away." and "April showers bring ...." but, wait it's not April!

As always, we have some great articles to share with you. Tulips, plantain, landscape do-overs, a field trip report and a recipe for dandelion wine amongst others. Just enough articles to enjoy while waiting for everything to dry out.

This issue we introduce a new regular feature - Committee Spotlight. There are 12 committee chairs that serve on GCMGA's Board of Directors. This is a rather large board for an organization our size, but I am convinced this component is what makes the GCMGA run so smoothly as each Board member has an assignment. We probably won't feature all 12 this year, but hopefully, you will get to better know some MGEVs, what each committee does and maybe be encouraged to get involved.

So until things dry out, happy reading about gardening!  
Ann Langley

January	Rain in inches
1996	8.26
1997	5.65
1998	5.83
1999	5.34
2000	4.89
2001	2.77
2002	5.35
2003	2.00
2004	2.84
2005	2.57
2006	5.10
2007	3.95
2008	2.85
2009	2.88
2010	5.38
2011	2.63
2012	5.14
2013	4.90
2014	3.35
2015	4.36
2016	5.14
2017	8.18
2018	3.26
2019	6.23

## **Committee Spotlight:** **Weed 'n' Feed and Seed Saver Shutters**

OK. So maybe our first Committee Spotlight is not really a Committee but just one person. Becky Panetta. In fact, Becky chairs two committees - Weed 'n' Feed and Seed Saver Shutters.

So, what is a Weed 'n' Feed? Sometimes a Master Gardener has a hiccup in life such as surgery or a stay in the hospital. We send out a call for Master Gardeners with a date and time. We do what is needed and the recipient provides a small lunch. We only work 2-3 hours depending on how many people volunteer. It's good to get together and helps the recipient get her or his garden up to snuff until he/she can get better. If you find yourself in need of help (or know of someone who does), let Becky know.

Seed Saver Shutters is the free seed library for Gwinnett's MGEVs. You know how it goes. Whether you buy them or harvest seeds from your garden, you wind up with more than you really want. Don't throw them away. Bring the extras to the Gwinnett Extension Office and share them with other MGEVs.

The shutters are kept at the Gwinnett Extension Office. There are plenty of paper envelopes available for your use. Please be sure to carefully mark each packet with the plant name and include as much information as you can such as light and water requirements, spacing, etc. Also, look for the Seed Saver list in this newsletter for what's currently available. Spring planting time is coming up soon and we are in need of more seeds. Please consider donating. You can bring your seeds to Becky at the meetings or come by the Extension office.

For more information on either committee, contact Becky at [rpanetta@gmail.com](mailto:rpanetta@gmail.com) or leave a message on her mobile, 770-757-6881.



**Becky shows off a Seed Saver Shutter. Window shutters are perfect for displaying seed packets.**

**Project Spotlight:**  
**The Walled Garden at Pinckneyville Middle School**



The Walled Garden at Pinckneyville Middle School has been a project for me for the last 8 years. It started in the summer with 10 students and several adult volunteers. Within a few weeks we had removed over 100 carts of holly bushes and crape myrtles. We started our first garden club that fall. About 10 students came to the garden instead of study hall. Our only success that season was peas, but to see the look on the students faces tasting a fresh pea for the first time is not easy to forget. The shock and then joy of tasting something so sweet that they thought they hated got me hooked. Since that first season, we have installed 18 raised beds, a perennial garden, herb garden, blueberry bushes, raspberries and a fig tree. Just as the garden has grown so has the number of students that enjoy the garden. We meet at 8 am on Monday mornings and have over 35 students registered in grades 6<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup>.

Each year the interest in the garden grows. Students come every week to learn about propagation, seed saving, soil health and the plain joy of planting seeds. Exposing them to the variety of fresh vegetables and herbs and how they taste is something they take with them for years to come. At first I thought keeping a group of middle schoolers interested was going to be hard, but the anticipation of the harvest seems to be a great draw.

We use the cold months to do upcycle projects to sell at our annual plant sale. We have a sale every Earth Day. The students show off the garden and sell some of the plants we have propagated as well as our upcycled products. The students have made bags from old t-shirts, saved seeds, and made baked goods, can tab bracelets, magnets and dog toys to name a few. We are always keeping them busy with new projects. This year they will make plant markers from old wood blinds.

The one main rule is they must taste everything we grow. You would think this would be no problem but middle schoolers can be picky! After the first few tastes they are usually ready to try everything. Fresh asparagus particularly is in high demand. They are shocked at how different it tastes from what they buy at the store. I have to agree with them on that.

This year we did a pesto tasting with 4 different types of basil. The food critic in each child was on full display as they debated the pros and cons of each one. I think they were surprised that the same herb can actually taste very different, something the adults enjoyed as well!

We have been blessed with the support and help from many different Master Gardeners over the years and thankful for the grants we have received as well. With the grant money and our Earth Day sales, we have purchased many great items. Our favorite is the door mat that leads to our courtyard. It says "Garden Club". This year we will use the GCMGA grant for soil testing to discover why several of the raised beds are no longer producing well. We will amend beds if the test results show any lack of nutrients or a pH

problem and use soil tests in students' science lessons.

Although I never expected this project to grow as it has, it has been wonderful to watch not only the garden grow but the students as well. When a student who was in my first garden group came to me as a Senior in High School and told me that his favorite memory from Middle School were the mornings in the garden with me, well ... let's just say I was encouraged to continue and I may have gotten a little teary eyed.

I recommend finding the right spot in your community to share the joy of gardening as it always seems to give back more than we put in.

- Mim Harris, MGEV

## Tulips are Better Than One

*I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.  
As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.  
Song of Solomon 2:1-2*

### Tulips and the Bible

Flowers...singing...doves...fig tree...vines. Spring arouses the senses of smell, hearing, sight, and taste. In this issue I will be looking at flowers of the Bible. The floral world of the ancient Middle East was rich but mainly in springtime. The long, hot, dry summers withered almost everything, leaving only a few autumn bloomers.



Flowers were not extensively used in religious rites of ancient Israel. The chief use of flowers was for decoration and to provide a pleasant aroma. The "flowers of the field" mentioned in Isaiah 40:6-8 consist of a number of plants commonly identified by biblical scholars and botanists specializing in flora of the Bible as Grape Hyacinth, Tulip, Daffodil, Crown Anemone, Poppy, Chamomile, Crown Daisy, Ranunculus, Crocus, Cyclamen, and the Star of Bethlehem.

The "Rose of Sharon" is likely not to be a rose but actually a bulbous plant. In fact, the Hebrew terms perah, tzitz, and nitzah were used for all flowers; nitzah was most used to describe the bulbous, red, spring flowers. I have chosen to focus on one of these nitzah for the Liliaceae family; the Tulip (*Tulipa montana* or *scharonensis*).

*"I am the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys." – Song of Solomon 2:1*

Ancient records of other civilizations tell us that tulips were cultivated ages ago. In fact, the name "tulip," some linguists believe, comes from an ancient Persian (Iran) word meaning "turban", as a tulip flower pointed downward looks like one of the headgear worn by ancient Persians.



### Tulips and Georgia

Tulip is the common name for a genus of spring blooming, bulbous flowers of the lily family. About 100 species exist and are native to the Mediterranean region. Typically, tulips are erect plants with long, broad leaves and cup-shaped, solitary flowers at the tip of the stem. Dozens of firms offer a wide range of all types of tulips to delight every Georgia gardener. Majestic deep red-flowered, low growing, simple types of tulips look most like those that still grace the wild areas of the Holy Land.

### Growing Tips

Tulip bulbs should be in the ground well before it normally freezes. It is a good bet that setting the bulbs in the autumn will work the best. Tulips need several months of chill time. Your best advice for planting time is your county agricultural agent. Another reliable resource is your local nursery or garden center. Tulips do best in a light, well-drained loam. One note of caution which I learned the hard way ... never use fresh manure on tulip beds because tulip bulbs are sensitive. Well composted materials is a good way to improve soil fertility. Plant bulbs to a depth of 6-8 inches, 8 inches apart, and in a spot where they will get at least half day of sun. During the growing and flowering period, they require ample watering. If you are new to tulips, which does not seem likely, please realize most tulips produce their best blooms the spring following their planting. So be patient, you'll be glad you were. Tulips are usually great perennials but can over the years show decline. Fertilizer can be added in the spring or after blooming. I have found using granular slow-release pellets the best but not the only type of fertilizer, including liquid spray-on. Narcissi, hyacinths and tulips foliage is part of the food-building part of the plants. After tulips bloom, leave them alone as the leaves must make and store food within the bulb for next year's growth.

### Tulip as a Garnish

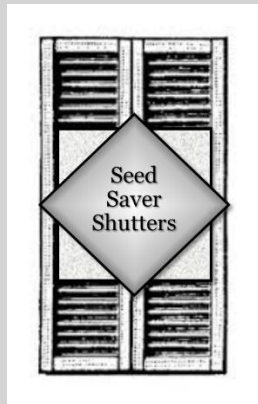
The next time you harvest these delightful species, if no chemicals are added, try adding edible beauty of the petals to garnish your salad. Don't eat the bulbs for they can be poisonous. Researchers have identified several nutrients in the petals including vitamins A and C, riboflavin and niacin and minerals such as calcium, phosphorous, iron and potassium.

By Dr. Ed Bez  
President of the Biblical Botanical Gardens and  
Pastor of Christ the Messiah Church  
Jacksonville, Florida

# GCMGA Seed Saver Shutters

Free Seed Exchange for GCMGA Members

Need some seeds or have some seeds to share?



*You can find the  
Seed Saver Shutters at  
Gwinnett County Extension Office  
750 S. Perry St., Ste.400  
Lawrenceville, GA 30046*

*All seeds are free as such there are no  
guarantees.*

## Annuals

Castor Bean Vine - 2  
Lantana, Lavender Popcorn - 1  
Money Plant, Lavender flowers - 3  
Orange Cosmos - 2  
Sweet Pea - 1

## Herbs

Wild Quinine - 1

## Perennials

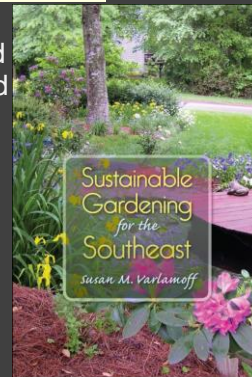
Blackberry Lily - 1  
Butterfly Weed - 1  
Gray-headed Coneflower - 6  
Hellebore - 2  
Jewels of Opar - 2

## Vegetables

Butternut Squash - 1  
Coco Peas - 2  
Dwarf Blue Kale - 1  
Honeydew Melon - 5  
Luffa Gourd Seeds - 3  
Paste Tomatoes - 3

## Sustainable Gardening Practices for Winter

Winter is a time of rest for the gardener and a time to dream and imagine the spring landscape. Besides sitting next to the fire and thumbing through seed and plant catalogues and gardening books, there are a few winter chores that can be accomplished during the dormant season.



- Compost. Toss leaves and branches that litter the landscape onto the compost heap. If possible, chip the limbs into smaller pieces to reduce their size. Turn the pile with a pitch fork to enhance decomposition.
- Prune trees and shrubs. Time to call in the tree service to cut down dead trees and limbs and trim the canopy away from the house. Squirrels have a knack for jumping from the canopy onto the house then into the attic to wreak havoc.
- Plant trees. Now is the best time to plant trees when the earth is dormant. Planting trees in winter allows the roots to become established before the onset of spring and rapid growth. Plant native trees that are adapted to the region. For a good list of Georgia Native Trees, visit UGA Extension publications and search Georgia Native Trees. As the “lungs of the earth” trees absorb CO2 and mitigate climate change. Trees also secure the soil and prevent erosion, filter stormwater, cool the air, improve air quality and bring wildlife to your doorstep.
- Grow seeds indoors. Get a start on spring by planting seeds indoors. Avoid using outdoor garden soil which has fungus and bacteria. You can make your own sterile potting medium by mixing one part peat moss, one part vermiculite and some water to moisten it (Penn State Extension). Sow seeds in a shallow tray of this potting mixture and put them in a sunny window to germinate.
- Improve the landscape. Winter is a great time to scout out the landscape to see where improvement is needed for your eco-friendly landscape. Is the lawn marginal under the trees canopy? If so, reduce its size. Are there bare areas that need to be planted? Put in plants to prevent soil erosion. Are there shrubs and perennials in areas where they are not thriving. This is a good time to transplant them. Are some plants overgrown and need to be separated? Go to it.
- Scout out plants for the plant sale. In a thriving garden, plants are reproducing happily. These babies can be transplanted into pots for the Gwinnett County Master Gardeners spring plant sale April 27 at the Gwinnett County Library. Be on the lookout for possibilities and stake them out so on a warm day you can pot them.

By Susan Varlamoff, MGEV

Adapted from [Sustainable Gardening for the Southeast](#)



## Maybe It's Time for a Do-over

Recently I was asked to do a 'walk through' at a friend's house to give my thoughts as to what could be done to improve the landscape. To set the stage, this was a very nice house in a very nice neighborhood and it made me feel like I should have worn a tie just to walk around the place. I could tell that the landscape had been carefully designed and professionally installed when it was created about twenty-five to thirty years ago. It was also irrigated and professionally maintained but I had to agree with the owners that it just didn't look attractive anymore.

So what was the problem. The landscape had matured and then matured some more and finally reached the stage where everything just looked kind of tired and worn out. We agreed that the solution was to redesign or renovate the landscape and make it look fresh and crisp and new again.

In order to not be overwhelmed by a major renovation, a good place to start is to divide and conquer. It's much easier to visualize if you can break it all into many manageable parts such as the area around the entrance to your home, the overgrown bed of foundation shrubs, the area of good turfgrass, the area of wimpy turfgrass, the prickly thicket of knockout roses, and my favorite, the lovely shrine around the mailbox to the U. S. Postal Service. Think of how areas are being used. You also have the relax and chill area, the tomato and veggie area, the bird café and vacation resort, the kiddie play and destroy zone, and the flower bed with all of the odd things you brought home from the MG plant sale.

And here's the good part. You don't have to do it all this week. Pick a couple of areas for this spring, a couple more for the fall and winter, and repeat as needed over the next few years. You can enjoy the creativity of the renovation process. Gardening is supposed to be fun.

Evaluate each of your identified areas individually. What is worth keeping and what should go away. In my friend's example, he had a big area of nice azaleas but there were about thirty in a space where there was room for twelve. Snatching out every other plant and pruning up the rest made a great improvement. Look at hardscape features, fences, hedges, walkways, and the things that affect that areas overall appearance.

Now evaluate the individual plants in the area. As Master Gardeners you know the criteria for evaluating plants. Decide which ones are healthy and should be kept and which ones should be kicked to the curb. You also will find that many of the plants can be moved to a better place in the landscape where they will thrive with more light or less moisture.

As a landscape matures it can lose its original proportion. Has your house become a hardscape feature because it is now the smallest thing in the landscape? Greatly overgrown plants can be thinned out, removed, or pruned back to a functional size. Think of yourself as a lion tamer and go in there with the determination to conquer the beast without being eaten. Once I pruned my Mother-in-law's 20 feet tall camellias with a chain saw. Fortunately, they sprouted and grew back and bloomed beautifully so I am still allowed at most family functions.

Overgrown trees can also be thinned or pruned. Where that is not possible, bed lines can be extended where grass will no longer grow and semi-shade plants can be replaced with true shade loving plants. Often the removal of a few trees can have a huge impact on the variety of plants that you have to choose from and it can greatly enhance your ability to have more color in the landscape.

You will find that removing some of the crowded plants or reducing the size of overgrown plants

will already make a significant impact on the appearance of a mature landscape. At this point it wouldn't hurt to sketch out a new simple landscape plan. It's easier to visualize and create on paper than it is with a shovel. Some of this newly available space can be an opportunity to incorporate plants with additional colors or shapes or textures into the existing landscape. Just remember to avoid the Master Gardener curse of falling in love with too many plants and filling all of the space up again to the original jungle style that you had to begin with.

By Robert Brannen  
Retired Gwinnett County Extension Agent

## Plant Sale Musings *We're at it again – those crazy plant sale ladies!*

The Gwinnett County Master Gardener Association Annual Plant Sale is scheduled for April 27, 2019. Yeah – got my first 2019 in correctly! Set up for the sale will be Friday, April 26, 3-5 PM and plant drop off from 5-7PM. SAVE THE DATES!!!

Susan Kosenka and I are excited to have already started potting up plants. Most of our committee chairs have returned plus a few new folks. Notably Margaret Molyson has taken up the reins of the Plant Dig Committee and has already scheduled two digs. She's ready to sign up folks to host plant digs. We're bursting with plenty of pots so let us know when you want a crew to come and collect plants from your garden. Or maybe you need a potting up team – if you prefer to dig your own plants. One of our goals this year is to offer more native plants and pollinators and avoid known invasive plants. We're excited to have had some wonderful natives donated by GA Native Plant Society members Sandy and Rick Krause.

We'd also like to offer more flowering annuals – this will require some folks volunteering to purchase young plants in March and growing them out for the April sale. These went over very well last year. If you're into growing from seed and can start some annuals or vegetables early for the sale, please let us know. We have seedling flats and will purchase seed starting soil as needed. Contact Lynda or Susan.

If you plan to pot up your own plants but need pots and soil, let one of us know. Lynda has a veritable mountain of pots of many sizes thanks to several member's contributions. She'll gladly deliver.

Martha Whitman is our contact person again for donations so let her know if you have potting soil, perlite, or soil conditioner to contribute, or have a good source. Keep an eye out at the big box stores for pallets of damaged bags – we can often get these for a minimal price and do have a small budget for these items.

If you love to dig and visit other folks' gardens, please sign up for the dig committee. If digging isn't your best thing, Margaret also needs people to pot up the plants and others to create labels and keep a list of the contributed plants. We'd like to have our contributions closed out by the end of March so potted plants have time to settle into their pots and look their best for sale day. We'll also need plant sitters.

Linda Bolton is heading up the Garden Art committee again this year and is busy making plans for artistic get togethers. Please let her know if you can help. This committee did a fantastic job last year and contributed some amazing items for the sale. Linda is trying to

come up with a catchy new name for the garden art booth since it is more than art items- bird houses, books, etc. Something like "The Garden Shed" might work but we're open to other ideas. Let us know what your creative brain cells come up with please!

Our indomitable Sonia Freidus is organizing our volunteers for set up and sale day again. Please let her know when you want to volunteer. And our big news is we have our own project line on MG Log this year! Please use **GCMGA Plant Sale** to record your hours. If you are a new MGEV this is a great way to way to earn volunteer hours.

Keep an eye out for messages through Virginia's President's emails for Plant Sale Committee meetings. Everyone is welcome.

Happy New Year to all!

Lynda Pollock 404-944-7345 [robert9811@att.net](mailto:robert9811@att.net)

Susan Kosenka 678-852-9109 [slk120@aol.com](mailto:slk120@aol.com)

Margaret Molyson 770-807-0122 [mmolyson@hotmail.com](mailto:mmolyson@hotmail.com)

Linda Bolton 770-855-7580 [lynrn47@gmail.com](mailto:lynrn47@gmail.com)

## Edible Weeds: Plantain

Plantain? "What is that?" you ask. It is one of those wonderful weeds that hides in your grass. This homely little plant has everything in it you need to make your outdoor living more pleasant this summer.

There are two types of plantains that are common around this area, the ones with broad leaves called *Plantago major* and the narrow-leaved type *P. lanceolata*. Either one can be used for healing purposes, but most seem to prefer the broadleaf plantain with larger, but softer, edible leaves.



Native Americans called this plant White Man's Footprint, as it was said to grow wherever their feet touched the ground. *Plantago* is also commonly referred to as plantain leaf but is in not related to the fruit similar to a banana.



Broadleaf plantain has 3 – 5 parallel veins that diverge in the wider part of the leaves. The leaves form a low-growing basal rosette with stems growing from the center. These stems are spikes of seeds which can easily be strewn over the soil to increase your harvest of the plant or they can be dried and used for constipation and other ailments. You have probably walked past it, trampled over it, pulled it up or mowed it down without realizing how beneficial this plant can be for your health. The leaves are highly nutritious. Plantago contain iron, calcium, potassium, vitamins A, K, C, and B. It is a good source of fiber and also contains various important minerals like zinc, copper, calcium, potassium and magnesium. Add a few young tender leaves to a fresh salad or cook them like you would a leafy green to benefit from this nourishing plant.

I prefer to consume young leaves raw or cooked. Older leaves are fibrous and are best cooked with the fiber removed. Steamed, young Plantain leaves can be used as a spinach substitute although they are slightly bitter.

*Here is a recipe for a tasty ...*

#### **PLANTAIN SALAD**

Ingredients:

2 cups Plantain leaves, cleaned, tough fibers removed if necessary

Seasoning:

- 1 Tbsp sesame oil
- 2 tsp white sesame seeds (optional)
- 1 Tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 2 tsp white sesame seeds (optional)
- 1/2 tsp Japanese pepper powder (optional)

Instructions:

1. Bring a pot of salted water to a boil.
2. Prepare a large bowl of ice water.
3. Cook the plantain leaves in boiling water for 4 minutes.
4. Remove the leaves from the boiling water and immerse them in the ice water to stop the cooking process.
5. Drain the leaves.
6. Mix the seasoning ingredients together in a separate bowl.
7. Drizzle the seasoning over the plantain to taste.
8. Toss to mix.
9. Serve cold as a side or as an appetizer.

Due to its astringent, anti-inflammatory and antibacterial effects, the plant is best known for its wound healing properties. It is very useful in treating minor wounds, scrapes, and cuts. It can be applied directly to the skin to stop bleeding or help speed up healing. It can take the pain out of bee and wasp stings, the itch out of mosquito bites and the burn and itch out of fire ant bites. It's a good idea to carry a small pot of plantain salve and a small spray bottle of plantain tea with you in the first aid kit that you keep in your purse or backpack. Plantain tea can also be sprayed or swabbed onto nettle rash, and the rashes caused by poison ivy or poison oak. I dehydrate the leaves and make small gauze-filled compresses that are ready to use (just add

water). Although Plantain is used most widely for external problems, it is also considered useful in the treatment of respiratory infections, relief from coughs and colds, digestion, constipation, mouth ulcers and many other ailments. Those ailments include asthma, emphysema, bronchitis, fevers, hypertension, rheumatism, ulcers, cystitis, hay fever, bladder problems, irritable bowel and goiter.

During the 1500s and 1600s, it was used by Europeans for everything from boils to fevers and the flu to bites of mad dogs, epilepsy, and leprosy. Plantain roots can be powdered and used on toothaches, or using fresh root by chewing it can bring relief as well.

You can make a plantain cough syrup by simmering 2 ounces of fresh leaves in 2 cups of water for around 10 minutes. Keep the pan covered. Strain and add 3 cups of brown sugar to the liquid or 1 cup of honey. Bring to a boil and as soon as the sugar dissolves, turn off the heat. Allow it to cool. This cough syrup can be stored for up to 6 months.

Growing this plant is much like growing dandelions. Once started in your garden, it will be self-sustaining. It may be considered a weed by many, but next time you look down at the ground, try looking for it and remember what a wonderful gift from nature it is. You never know when you may need it.

By Ann Thompson, MGEV

Here is another "weed" recipe to try ...

## DANDELION WINE RECIPE

Makes one gallon

1. Early in the morning when the dew is on the flowers, pick one gallon jug of perfect, open dandelion (just the) blossoms.
2. Place the flower heads in a two gallon or larger open crock and pour boiling water over them. Cover the mix with cheesecloth and let it sit at room temperature to marinate for three days.
3. Squeeze all the liquid out of the flowers and save. Throw away the spent blossoms.
4. Into a big cooking pot add 3 lbs. of brown raw sugar. White sugar works and also honey.
5. 3 or four lemons: juice, peel, skin – all chopped up.
6. 3 or four oranges: as above – all chopped up.
7. With the lid on the cooking pot, boil mixture for 30 minutes.
8. Cool mixture to lukewarm.
9. Add 2 packages of yeast\*. Cover with cheesecloth and let it sit/brew for three weeks until the yeast bubbling stops.
10. Filter mixture one last time through cheesecloth to catch any chunks.
11. Bottle your Dandelion Wine. 180 calories a glass. Great for the digestive system. High in vitamin A, B, C & D.

\*Red Star Bread or Champagne brand yeast.

From MOTHER EARTH NEWS on Wild Edible Plants by James E. Churchill in the May/June 1970 issue.



## *North Carolina, An Overnight Field Trip!*

Plant Delights Nursery (PDN) and Juniper Level Botanic Garden outside Raleigh, is quite a long car ride from Atlanta to North Carolina, but add a couple of gardening buddies to share the driving and the time passes quickly.

Dot Martin, Margaret Bergeron and I registered for a Saturday morning, "Talk Autumn Garden Plants and Walk" led by well-respected plant explorer, author, horticulturist and public speaker Tony Avent. In 1988 Tony, along with his partner Anita Avent, began sharing their plant passion and built an amazing mail-order business offering unique, rare and well-grown plants. To make plant shopping even more fun, they produced a quirky catalog and website. PDN offers a free newsletter subscription, workshops and classes and limited Open Nursery and Garden Days. Tony's 2019 Speaking Schedule (<https://www.plantdelights.com/pages/tonys-current-speaking-schedule>) is not complete at this time but if you have an opportunity to attend one of his presentations in Atlanta, you will enjoy the professional knowledge of a true plantsman delivered with a heavy dose of humor.



October is a transitional month in the garden and as PDN shares the same USDA Plant Hardiness Zone as the Atlanta area so many of our autumn stars were at their magnificent best. With over 28-acres of educational, research and display gardens, the inventory, diversity and humongous size of what we saw was truly inspirational. Everything looked so healthy and weeds were barely in residence. It is not a 100% organic operation, but darn close to one. Healthy soil and microbe cultivation with mulching, timely pruning and good hygiene practices makes for happy, happy plant specimens. As Tony walked our group through his gardens, he delved into the cultivation peculiarities of highlighted plants, where they originated, what makes them healthy, their flowering, seed and propagation habits. Have you ever seen the ground level flowering of an Aspidistra? The property has areas of dense shade and then a transitional walk out into full sun loving area. Gravel outcrops and boggy areas completed the plant diaspora.



Why do we enjoy visiting other people's gardens? So often it is not only the plants that enthrall us, but we are either reminded or introduced to new gardening practices, new ideas on plant grouping, or perhaps identify a pass-along that came *sans label*! One technique that particularly fascinated me was building berms with recycled footpath concrete. Google "*crevice gardening*" for more pictures and articles. I hope that the photographs do this explanation justice. If you have available smashed up footpath slabs, stack the pieces on end vertically and fill in space

between with fine gravel and minimal soil mix. The thickness of each slab is about 3 inches. The pored original cement mix often contains small aggregate that adds to the esthetic interest. These raised berms offer drainage perfect for arid region, full sun plantings.

Of course, all good tours end by walking through the gift shop. Here we had full access to numerous greenhouses loaded with healthy plants just begging to be adopted and taken home. I had to remind my fellow travelers that our car space was not unlimited.

But our day was hardly over. Our GPS took us to the J C Raulston Arboretum – a diverse ten-acre display garden attached to North Carolina State University and one of the most comprehensive plant collections in the Southeast. The garden beds were well labeled and full of color, the borders spilled over in all the specialty areas. Particularly impressive everywhere we visited this week-end was the Firecracker Vine (*Ipomoea lobata*). With a few hours of daylight still available, we drove into downtown Raleigh to an amazing garden center named *Logan's Trading Co.* located in a former railway station yard, the old platform canopies were perfect for the display of plants and containers. The station building itself held the garden store merchandise and café. All very impressive.

It's enjoyable to travel with companions who talk gardening. We've proven that we can share a hotel room and we are already planning our next overnight field trip to the Philadelphia area gardens this summer and the Georgia Master Gardener Association Conference in Macon this October.

*For more information visit these websites ...*

Tony Avent and Plant Delights Nursery, Inc. at Juniper Level Botanic Garden

[www.plantdelights.com](http://www.plantdelights.com) <https://www.youtube.com/user/PlantDelights>

Logan's Trading Company [www.logantrd.com](http://www.logantrd.com)

J C Raulston Arboretum, NC <https://jcra.ncsu.edu>

South Carolina Botanical Garden <https://clemson.edu/scbg>

Note: If adding a couple of extra hotel nights is an option for you, there are several gardens to add to your gardening sojourn. Along the route you could visit the South Carolina Botanical Garden at Clemson University and the iconic Biltmore House gardens in Asheville.

Carole Teja, MGEV

## Deadlines for A Bit of Dirt

Spring 2019 - March 20 (spring equinox)  
Summer 2019 - June 21 (summer solstice)  
Fall 2019 - September 23 (fall equinox)  
Winter 2020 - January 10

## Upcoming Meetings

*GCMGA meets on the third Monday of each month at Bethesda Senior Center, 225 Bethesda Church Road, Lawrenceville, GA 30044. The event is free and open to the public. Everyone is welcome to bring a covered dish to share for a potluck dinner at 6:30, or just arrive in time for the program which begins promptly at 7 p.m.*

### **March 18 Michael Dirr - "Abelia to Ziziphus ...**

#### **Mining the Alphabet for the Next Great Garden Plant"**

Gardening enthusiasts are invited to meet a living legend. On March 18, Dr. Michael A. Dirr, a renowned Professor of Horticulture now retired from UGA, will literally explore the ABC's of plants in a free presentation titled "Abelia to Ziziphus...Mining the Alphabet for the Next Great Garden Plant".

Throughout his career, Dr. Dirr has published more than 300 scientific and popular papers and articles. His teaching, lectures, seminars, garden study tours and plant introduction programs have contributed enormously to greater horticultural awareness not only in Georgia, but across the nation. He has received numerous awards and honors, most recently the Liberty Hyde Bailey Medal from the American Horticulture Society.

Dirr's "Manual of Woody Landscape Plants" is the field's leading horticultural text and reference work, and along with his "Reference Manual of Woody Plant Propagation" has become the bible for the landscape and nursery industry. In addition, Dr. Dirr's photo library of woody landscape plants (on CD-ROM) is recognized as the field's premier collection of plant images.

In his presentation on March 18, 2019, Dr. Dirr will share what he considers some of the best plant selections for Georgia gardens. The Gwinnett County Master Gardeners' Association is hosting this exciting opportunity at the Bethesda Senior Center, 225 Bethesda Church Road, Lawrenceville, GA 30044. The public is welcome at no charge – bring a covered dish to share and join us for dinner at 6:30, or just come for the program beginning promptly at 7 p.m.

### **April 15 Barbara Dorfman - Designing a Garden with Native Plants**

After taking the Master Gardener course in 1985, Barbara studied horticulture at Gwinnett Technical School. She worked in sales and design at retail and wholesale nurseries until 2004, then as an independent landscape consultant. Her specialties are teaching homeowners and garden clubs how to handle their overgrown landscapes and how to eliminate exotic invasive plants. She is an active member of the Georgia Native Plant Society and is passionate about promoting the use of native plants in the home landscape.



Many of our members and the public we serve are ready to incorporate more native plants into their home gardens but may not know where to start. Barbara has been helping homeowners create inviting yards for native flora and fauna for many years. Come see what she has created in her own beautiful yard and learn ways to incorporate native plants into your overall design whether it is a few plants or a complete makeover. Learn how to support our native pollinators and birds just by choosing to add native plants to your garden design.

### **Upcoming Field Trips**

*To register for a field trip send an email to Carole Teja at [gardening4u@gmail.com](mailto:gardening4u@gmail.com) or text her at 404-643-2354. Follow up with Carole if you have not received your confirmation within 24 hours. More detailed field trip information will be sent at confirmation time. First come – first served. Priority given to GCMGA Members. Deadline is one week prior to the event. A waiting list will be kept as often space is limited. The only charge will be entrance fees where/if they are applicable. Carpools are encouraged.*

### **Saturday, March 23 Deborah Duchon Foraging Walk and Talk**

11:00 AM

Location to be determined

Many plants we consider "weeds" are actually tasty and nutritious foods that have been forgotten over time. English colonists brought dandelions, plantains and many others to the New World because the plants were indispensable in the traditional kitchen garden. Deb Duchon, who spoke at our October 2018 meeting, covered a few of the most common and easily identified forgotten foods that are readily available to gardeners and homeowners here in the Atlanta area. Deb is a nutritional anthropologist and ethnobotanist who is a volunteer in the Master Gardening Program in DeKalb County. She is retired from Georgia State University's Dept. of Anthropology and has appeared on the Food Network's popular show "Good Eats". She also speaks and teaches nationally about plants, people and food history.

Join us for a Saturday walk and talk as Deb teaches us how to forage these forgotten foods.

### **Monday, April 22 Tony Harris Walk and Talk of the Native Cherokee Plant Collection**

11:00 AM

The Green Meadows Preserve, 3780 Dallas Hwy, Marietta, 30064

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.

For more information visit <http://www.greenmeadowspreserve.org/>  
<https://www.cobbmastergardeners.com/project/period-chokeee-garden-at-green-meadows-preserve/>

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