

Spring 2021 "Bit of Dirt"



Native Azaleas by Lisa Klein

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From the Editor's Desk

Well, 2021 is definitely here and COVID still hasn't gone away. I hope everyone is staying healthy. Wear your masks and get your shots. I know I have. We all have our own ways of coping. Some of my favorites include writing old-fashioned letters. There's nothing sweeter than getting a letter from your 10 year old grandson. One person I know sets out lawn chairs at the end of her driveway and socializes with her neighbors during cocktail hour. What a friendly neighborhood! Then we have Zoom. It's not as much fun as visiting during a pot luck dinner but it's something. Stay connected.

I read a while ago that each person learns at least 6 new activities each year. It's like New Year's Resolutions, just a little later and trying something positive instead of getting rid of something negative. I think I'll try some of the gardening techniques that I haven't done before. Layering my rosemary so there will be lots of new rosemary bushes for the plant sale next year. Grafting tomatoes for sturdier stems and better production. Planting a fall garden and using a cold frame to extend the fall growing season and start of the spring growing season earlier. Do that hypertufa container that I've been putting off. Clean up and extend my moss garden. Every year, my yard becomes shadier and shadier so I might as well "go with the flow." What would you like to learn this year? I'd love to put your projects in the newsletter. Send me a description and pictures at shirley_bohm@hotmail.com.

Congratulations to the winners of the last two challenges in the "Bit of Sunshine." **Linda Bolton** won for the Fall 2020 issue and **Jane Trentin** won for the Winter 2021 issue of the "Bit of Dirt." From this issue on, the answers to the challenges will appear at the end of the newsletter.

Spring has sprung! Everything is green. I think it's time to get a little dirt under my fingernails. Let's enjoy this lovely weather before it gets Georgia hot.

Shirley Bohm

Editor, GCMGA "Bit of Dirt"

Message from the President - Welcome to 2021 and GCMGA.

I am so excited to serve as your President this year as we continue to try creative ways to share our love of gardens and gardening, I hope each of you will find a way to take photos and share your garden with our

members. **Freda Steward**, (fsteward1121@comcast.net) is posting virtual visits to our Pandemic Gardens on our website. Take two or three representative pictures (hopefully include yourself in one!) and add a paragraph about what you've been doing over the last 18 months. We need more pictures!!!! My husband **Bob** and I cleared our back yard of invasives and started a native garden last winter. This winter we're helping our neighbors clear their creek-side areas of invasives and encouraging them to replant with natives. I'm also working on starting natives from seed for this purpose as well as hopefully having some to sell for the plant sale this year. The best thing is these activities are outside so we get to visit with friends and garden. *Remember potting up plants and caring for plant sale plants counts as volunteer hours.*

Just a reminder that our monthly meeting will continue as a Zoom meeting for the near future. I hope everyone is working on getting their Covid-19 Vaccine so we can build our herd immunity and eventually get back to seeing each other face to face. You are welcome to share the Zoom link with friends. Please encourage them to join GCMGA. At \$15, it's a great deal.

Speaking of Members Area – **Its time to renew** if you haven't done so already this year. At \$15, it's a great deal and will get even better as we work on some new digital media areas to enhance our communication with each other and the community. We're hoping to post our speaker recordings and add even more useful content soon. The password changes March 31, so get that renewal mailed to **Jack Bolton**. Here is a quick link to the form. Microsoft Word - 2021 Membership Form.docx (gwinnettmastergardeners.com).

Ann Langley (ann.langley@comcast.net) is working on redoing our Facebook page with both a public and private version and eventually adding an Instagram account for garden photo sharing. This will be a great opportunity for outreach to the community. **Ann** is looking for about six or seven members to step up and help her with this project. Its also a great way to earn your volunteer hours at home! Please get in touch with **Ann**. She has a variety of ways you can help.

Our April 19th Speaker will be **Shirley Bohm**. Her topic will be "Vines Garden Park - A Learning Garden." Vines Park near Loganville is one of the three heritage parks in Gwinnett County. Previously a private botanical garden, it was donated to Gwinnett County by **Bo** and **Myrna Adams** in 1990. Master Gardener volunteers have done the majority of the maintenance in the nine individual garden settings for more than 10 years. This 90-acre park including a lake and 30 acres of established gardens is used by the Master Gardeners as a backdrop for many learning experiences. Come learn more about Vines and enjoy a tour of the grounds.

Finally a HUGE THANK YOU to our Executive Committee: **Margaret Molyson**, VP, Secretary, **Karen McGinty**, **Jack Bolton**, Treasurer, and **Virginia Schofield**, Past President and to our Board of Directors: **Gervasio Cubenas**, Field Trips, **Martha Whitman**, Grant Committee, **Freda Steward**, Historian, **Alice Verner**, Hospitality, **Lori Processer**, Photo Contest, **Susan Kosenka** and **Lynda Pollock**, Plant Sale, **Jessica Miller**, Publicity and Education/Workshops, **Robert Ayer**, Trainee Breakfast, **Aaron Tulin**, Webmaster, **Becky Wolary**, Assistant Webmaster, **Becky Panetta**, Seed Exchange, **Ann Langley**, Facebook/Digital Information, **Shirley Bohm**, "Bit of Dirt" Editor, **Kim Fritz**, **Tim Daley**, and **Lisa Klein** from the Extension Office. These people represent you and need your help on their committees. Please find an area to help and contact the committee chair – see Members Only area for contact information.

The work we do as Master Gardeners matters and as we support our neighbors with our garden knowledge, our association seeks to support our members in their outreach to the community. Please let us know how we can help you in your Master Gardener journey.

Respectfully,

Lynda Pollock

2021 President Gwinnett County Master Gardeners Association

gwinnettgardener@gmail.com

Report from GCMGA Historian.

I was born in Buffalo, NY and lived there and in other parts of New York State until my early 20s. When my Mother moved back home to Alabama in the late '70s, I followed her south and have lived here since then. My Mother greatly influenced my interest in gardening. We always had plants inside and outside the house. She would nurture beautiful flower and vegetable gardens outside, so growing and communing with plant life was simply natural to me. I often thank her for that gift among so many other things.

Though I do not clearly remember how I learned about the master gardener program, the idea of it immediately piqued my interest. I planned to retire soon, so I decided to become certified before retirement to see if that type of volunteerism was for me. I wanted to stay active doing something that added to my joy and it has! As the GCMGA Historian, I do not have a committee; however, I am fortunate to have backup support from **Becky Panetta** and **Becky Wolary**. I also work very closely with **Becky Wolary**, our webmaster, to post photos and articles on our GCMGA website. My goal is to cover and chronicle events that will illustrate just how our members make our association an invaluable part of our community.

GCMGA members are welcome to send me brief stories and companion photos for posting to our website as historical pieces. For example, some MGEVs shared their gardening experiences during the pandemic as a way to stay connected with colleagues. Please feel free to share your gardening adventures with me as a way to document the ever-evolving importance of gardening to our personal growth and environmental health.

Submitted by **Freda Steward**, GCMGA Historian

Report of Publicity Committee.

Jessica Miller became a Clemson Master Gardener in Greenville, SC in 2007. After relocating to Loganville in 2010, she joined GCMGA and became a UGA Master Gardener Extension Volunteer.

Jessica first served on the GCMGA Executive Board as Publicity Chair in 2012, and continued to serve as Education Chair (2015), Vice President (2016), President (2017) and Past President (2018). She comes back to chair Publicity again for 2021. She has also served on the Boards of the Greater Greenville Master Gardener Association and the Georgia Master Gardener Association.

Jessica enjoys speaking to groups about gardening, volunteering in community garden projects and writing garden articles. Other interests include travel, photography and reading. She has a B.S. in Environmental Science and Natural Resources from Purdue University Department of Agriculture (1976).

Submitted by **Jessica Miller**, Chair of Publicity Committee

Stay healthy, stay safe, stay home.

Social Media Committee Report - Accomplishing our Mission Virtually.

Although I had heard of Master Gardeners for years, it wasn't until 2017 that I decided to become one when I inherited 8.5 acres in Gwinnett Loganville. My parents bought the property in 1977. I'm sure you remember the difficult economy of the 1970's. During that time, Dad lost his job and we lost our home. Once my parents began to get back on their feet, my father, who was raised on a farm in Griffin, determined to buy some property outside Atlanta so he could always care for his family. Back then they were in the country. Stephens Road was a dirt road and they were surrounded by pastures. Now, Stephens Road is paved and we are surrounded by neighborhoods. Dad passed away in 2018 but I want to carry on his vision not just for myself, but for my sons, their families and my surrounding community. But what did I know about farming? All my working life I was a secretary. That's why I decided to become a Master Gardener. Naively, I thought the course would prevent me from making mistakes. Instead I gained an understanding of gardening basics and resources that help me succeed. After all, gardening is an art best learned through experience.

Since becoming a Master Gardener, I have enjoyed serving the Association in ways that are practical for me. After spending the day working on the "farm," I can earn MG hours at night in the comfort of my home in front of a computer.

Back in 2014, there was an attempt to create a Facebook page for the Association, but it quickly became apparent that maintaining an online presence is not a one-person job. Now we are giving it a second go and failure is not an option. The COVID pandemic has certainly forced our hand. Unable to meet with each other or the public in person, online meetings have provided us a way to communicate without compromising our health. The time you spend creating and moderating posts, or working on the Social Media Committee will count towards your MGEV hours. Plus, whatever we post online can be available for future reference.

While there is a wealth of gardening information on the internet, our specialty will be how to garden in Gwinnett County. What is our zone? When are our first and last frost dates? When do we sow seeds? What plants work best in our climate? Plus, we can provide real time help when nature throws us curve balls like an unexpected late frost, or a drought or too much rain.

Plans are underway to host a workshop teaching us all how to create compelling and eye-catching posts. I will let you know when those plans are firm and hope you will join us.

In the meantime, [click here](#) to review the events and classes that Gwinnett Extension will offer for 2021. What classes interested you? Vegetable gardening? Pollinator and landscape? Septic

tank maintenance? We will promote these events on our Facebook Page throughout the year. Choose which events you plan to attend and be prepared to make post-meeting comments on our Facebook Page. Or perhaps you have a passion for roses. Do you have family or friends who would like to learn this skill from you? You could be our Facebook rose guru posting your successes and tough lessons learned from failures.

We want to create eye-catching and compelling stories. It is a great opportunity to help reconnect us to each other, make new friends and move forward into our new normal as we come out of the pandemic era.

The Social Media Committee needs editors and moderators - three of each. The editors will meet on a regular basis to plan posts for the upcoming months. The moderators will help review posts and answer questions. Editors and moderators should have a Facebook account and be comfortable using it. If you would like to learn more, please contact me at ann.langley@comcast.net.

Submitted by **Ann Langley**, Social Media Committee Chair

What are you reading these days?

During the Pandemic Lock Down I've been able to indulge in one of my favorite activities – reading garden related books and finding garden themed podcasts to listen to while I garden. I would like to share a few titles I've found especially interesting. Most of the books I have been able to get at Gwinnett County Public Library and the pod casts are free through a variety of sites such as *Itunes*, *Stitcher*, *I Heart Radio* or by subscribing directly at the podcaster's website (which I've included below). Hope you find something you enjoy.

Andrea Wulf has written extensively about the history of gardens and gardening. She is an insightful and engaging writer. I felt amazingly connected to each of her subjects.

The Invention of Nature: Alexander Humbolt's New World. *SO, yes, I knew about the Humbolt Current and all the counties in the USA named Humbolt but the extent of Alexander Humboldt's influence on our understanding of nature is stunning. He met Thomas Jefferson and was the first to explain the connectedness of all things in nature.*

Founding Gardeners, The Revolutionary Generation, Nature, and the Shaping of the American Nation. *Maybe it was trying to ignore all the current political news but discovering how our founding fathers were not just busy creating a new nation but applying their connections with*

other enlightenment figures to create the American garden was stunning – and the politics were just as down and dirty sometimes!

The Brother Gardeners: Botany, Empire, and the Birth of an Obsession. *How Britain became the leading gardening country in the world had everything to do with exploration, colonization, and the enlightenment. Our own William Bartram was a part of this amazing group of mostly men who took gardening into a whole new realm.*

Sunday mornings have become my quiet time for watching the birds (Feeder Count day) and listening to garden podcasts. My two favorites right now are **Margaret Roache's** A Way to Garden podcast - [AWaytoGarden.com – is Margaret's homepage] and you can sign up to get her podcast weekly. Yes, I know she is in the northeast, but she talks to such amazing gardeners each week and it is fun and personal. I also have her book which I use as a reference adjusting for region. She has interviewed many of my favorite garden personalities like **Joe Lamp'I, Doug Tallamay, Ken Druse**, and many more. I've discovered some new authors to investigate as well. Then go to **Joe Lamp'I's** website at <http://joegardener.com> and click on the podcast link. He has extensive Show Notes and lots of other information on his site. His website is definitely a rabbit hole worth going down.

Hope you can find something here that piques your interest. My nature/ garden reading may have gotten a bit out of hand but feel free to contact me for more ideas. (robert9811@att.net) Oh yeah – and did I mention.....

Cheers,

Submitted by Lynda Pollock, Master Gardener Class of 2017

Don't toss that nursery pot!

Did you ever wonder what to do with all those plastic nursery pots that are piling up in your garage or shed? Here are some ways you can recycle them for a second useful life.

- **Plant barrier.** Cut the bottom out of a large 3 or 5-gallon pot, sink it in the ground and you can keep aggressive plants such as mint controlled. Leave an inch or so of the pot edge sticking above the soil so the plant can't send out runners.
 - **Protect plants.** When a late frost or storm comes up, it can damage newly planted annuals or perennials. Protect them by inverting large nursery pots over each plant and weighting them with rocks. Don't forget to remove them when the bad weather is past.
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- **Get more plants.** Layering is a lot easier when you use a nursery pot. Choose a plant for layering where you pull down a lower stem to pin down with landscape pins. To make moving easier on the plant, dig a hole and set in a soil-filled pot under the layered stem before you pin it. In 6 months or so, when the layered stem has rooted, cut the connection to the main plant and lift the container with the rooted plant out of the ground. This works well with clematis, forsythia, honeysuckle and rosemary.
- **Take up space in large pots.** Crush a number of smaller pots or invert a larger pot in the bottom of a very large container to save the amount of potting soil required to fill the container.
- **Spread fertilizer.** Slip one round 4-inch pot inside another for an instant pelletized fertilizer spreader. Line up all the drain holes for a quick flow. Twist the inner container so holes do not match to slow the flow down as you shake.
- **Make potato pots.** Get two identical 5-gallon plastic pots. Cut out four rectangles in one, leaving ribs between. Place the cut out pot inside the intact one and fill with 2-3 inches of potting soil. Plant 3-4 potatoes with several sprouting "eyes" and add several more inches of soil to cover. Continue to add soil as the sprouts grow. Plants can be harvested after they flower.
- **Pot up plants for the Plant Sale.** Divide your plants or plant seeds in your spare nursery pots for the next GCMGA Plant Sale.
- **Keep your sense of humor.** When all else fails at using up those pots, let your sense of humor take over. Make a "garden buddy" to keep you company.



Submitted by **Shirley Bohm**, MGEV

When your tree might be in trouble.

Recognize major tree problems, especially if you have large or old trees. Disease, wind, lightning, physical damage or age can cause problems that may take years to kill the tree. Consult a professional arborist if you recognize any of these problems in your trees. This is especially important if the tree could fall on your house, driveway, sidewalk or other outbuilding.

- If the trunk has a large hollow at least one-third the diameter of the trunk.
- If the tree has more than one trunk and the trunks have grown together, leaving a seam. They may split apart, especially as the weight of the branches increase.
- If a lightning strike is deeper than the bark.
- Large dead branches in the tree are a fall hazard and should be removed.
- If there is a cavity at the base of the tree which may be much larger inside the tree.
- Mushrooms or shelf fungi are growing on the root crown which may be a sign that wood-rotting fungi have invaded the tree.
- If the tree is leaning with a mound of soil next to the trunk opposite the lean.
- If the trunk or root system has been damaged by mowers, string trimmers, heavy equipment, removing too many roots. (Removing a root 1 inch in diameter effectively removes miles of root system from the tree. This puts the tree into a drought situation even if it is raining. Damaging the root or trunk also allows disease or decay organisms to enter.)





Submitted by Shirley Bohm, MGEV

: **Coming Events**

April 16 & 17 - Norcross Garden Club Plant Sale, 9 am - 5 pm, 33 College St.,
Norcross

April 19 - GCMGA "Vines Garden Park - A Learning Garden" by Shirley Bohm, 7
pm (Zoom)

April 23 - drop off plants at Lilburn Library for GCMGA Plant Sale, 10 am - 2 pm

April 24 - GCMGA Plant Sale at Lilburn Library, 4817 Church St, Lilburn, 9 am - 1
pm

May 17 - GCMGA Photo Contest Winners, 7 pm (Zoom)

June 21 - GCMGA "Container Gardening" by Dr. Julianna Razryadov, 7 pm,
(Zoom)

Sept. 12 - 17 - International Master Gardener Conference 2021 (Zoom)



Bit of Sunshine

Attracting Bluebirds.

Here's how to attract bluebirds to your backyard.

A meal of mealworms. Live mealworms, available at most pet stores, are one of bluebirds' favorite meals. If you offer a handful of mealworms in the morning or evening on a tray feeder out in the open where bluebirds can see them they should come for a meal.

The right housing. Bluebirds are cavity nesters and like their birdhouses on the edge of a field or yard. They prefer houses that are 5 ½" by 5 ½" by 10" high, colored in light, earthy tones. The entrance hole should be 1 ½" centered 6" above the floor and mounted on a post 5-10' above the ground facing an open area.

Competition control. House sparrows are likely to nest in bluebird houses, often by evicting bluebirds. A second house located nearby may satisfy everyone.

Winter roosting. As winters become warmer, bluebirds have been staying on their nesting grounds all year. The same houses that were used for nesting in summer are excellent roosting cavities in winter. Multiple birds may roost in one house.

Bird baths for bluebirds. Bluebirds regularly use bird baths to drink and bathe. If the water is moving and splashing you're even more likely to attract them.

Helpful Hints

- There's no law that says edibles can't be planted in your landscape. Creeping thyme is a beautiful ground cover. Parsley adds a lustrous green mound to the setting and pollinators love it. Hot red peppers add a splash of color. A rosemary bush provides an endless supply of this aromatic herb. Ginger root with numerous "eyes", straight from the
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grocery store, can be soaked in warm water overnight and planted the next day. Or it can be started in a large pot indoors in the fall and transplanted outside in the spring. It even does well in part shade. Red lettuce and 'Bright Lights' Swiss chard both add a lot of color to you landscape.

- Use a reciprocating saw to divide large clumps of hostas or ornamental grasses.
- All through the year, when you clean pumpkins, melons, squash, even cucumbers, save the seeds and dry them on a paper plate. Once dry, serve them up to your bird friends.
- Train an annual climber like morning glory or hyacinth beans to vine up a lamp post by wrapping the post with chicken wire first so it has something to grab to.
- Speed up your composting pile. Hot compost breaks down faster and kills weed seeds as well. Here are some tips to heat it up. Cover the top of the compost pile with a tarp. Add a layer of small tree branches at the bottom (1/2" diameter or less to aid aeration) and cut up composting materials to speed up breakdown. Also make sure your pile is large enough. The bigger the better, but it should be at least 3 feet square. Finally, don't forget to turn it once or twice a month and keep it moist.
- Take a large plastic tote with a snap on lid and screw scrap 2x4s to the bottom to create a frame. Then add casters. The container is perfect for potting soil storage and rolls around easily and stores easily under a potting bench.

Did you know?

Manure. If someone offers you free manure for your garden, there are a few precautions you should take first. If the manure has been piled and aged to kill weed seeds and pathogens, it might be ready for use "as is." Otherwise, pile it up and compost it for at least six to twelve months. Fresh manure may also contain residual herbicide if it's from treated pastures. Some herbicides can remain active for up to 5 years. Avoid it or test it by growing a couple of tomato seedlings in the manure first to see if there is any residual activity. Check with the farmer.

Garden yield estimates. Here are some yield estimates to use when planning your vegetable garden. These estimates are just for eating fresh, not canning.

<u>Crop</u>	<u>Planting</u>
Asparagus	5-10 plants /person
Beets	1 plant yields ¼ lb. root
Bush beans	10-12 plants /person
Corn	25 ft. row yields 25-50 ears
Cucumbers	1 vine or 2 bushes /person
Lettuce	8 plants yield 1 salad /person each week
Peas	15-20 plants /person

Peppers	3-5 plants /person
Potatoes	5 lb. seed potatoes yields 50 lbs. potatoes
Tomatoes	2-4 plants per person
Zucchini	1 plant yields 10 lbs.

Determinate versus indeterminate. What's the difference between determinate and indeterminate plants? Tomatoes are a good example. Determinate plants grow to their full size and set fruit all at once. This is useful for canning because all the tomatoes get ripe at the same time and makes collecting enough for canning easier. Indeterminate plants keep growing and producing fruits all season, giving you an eating supply over a long period of time.

Keep us laughing!

- Like plants too much? You may be a hoarder culturalist.
- Gardening is a matter of your enthusiasm holding up until your back gets used to it.
- If you are a gardener, you can always put "Plant Manager" on your resume.
- He who throws dirt, loses ground.
- Life's a garden. Dig it.
- Old gardeners never die. They just run out of thyme.
- Give a weed an inch and it will take a yard.
- What is green and a great trick shooter? Annie Okra.
- Compost is best aged a little like a fine wine. I mean, would you prefer to drink a fine, aged wine or something that was made last Thursday?
- If April showers bring May flowers, what do May flowers bring? Pilgrims.
- You know you're a gardener when everything you see becomes a planter.
- If nothing ever changed, there would be no butterflies.
- The hum of bees is the voice of the garden.
- The sign of a good gardener is not a green thumb but brown knees.
- I thought I was pretty cool until I realized that plants can eat the sun and poop out air.
- My garden is like my child: a little wild, hard to contain and makes me smile.

Test your horticultural knowledge

Match the definition in Column A with the term it defines in Column B.

Column A

1. A member of the cabbage family such as broccoli or collards.
 2. To scratch the hard seed coat of seeds so they germinate more easily.
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3. What an annual plant does when it sends up a flower stalk & sets seed.
4. A layer of cells at the base of a leaf stem where the leaf breaks away in fall.
5. A form of pruning fruit trees to produce lateral growth instead of height.
6. When a plant turns to follow the sun to increase sunlight it receives.
7. The wood of crops such as blackberries that grows the first year.
8. The part of the flower that receives the pollen which fertilizes the ovum.
9. A water conservation process for landscapes that uses minimal or no water.
10. *Bacillus thuringiensis*, a biological insecticide that destroys insects that eat it.

Column B

- A. Heliotropism
- B. Xeriscaping
- C. Stigma
- D. Espalier
- E. Scarify
- F. Bt
- G. Cole
- H. Primo cane
- I. Abscission layer
- J. Bolt

Answers: 1.-G, 2.-E, 3.-J, 4.-I, 5.-D, 6.-A, 7.-H, 8.-C, 9.-B, 10.-F

Deadlines for Future Articles in
A Bit of Dirt

Summer 2021 Issue - June 30th
Fall 2021 Issue - September 30th
Winter 2022 Issue - December 31st
Spring 2022 Issue - March 31st

Upcoming Meetings & More

GCMGA normally meets on the third Monday of each month at Bethesda Senior Center, 225 Bethesda Church Road, Lawrenceville, GA 30044. Until further notice, no face-to-face meetings will be held because of COVID-19. Once we resume, 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.

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Our mailing address is: c/o S. Bohm, 2735 Meadow Gate Way, Loganville, GA 30052

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