



# dirty digs

*Entertain, Educate, Elevate*

A Publication of the Autauga County Master Gardeners Association April 2011

## ***MGs Assist In Student Training***

Several Autauga County Master Gardeners assisted the county Extension Office in providing local students instruction in a number of areas during a three-day Spring Break Camp.



**By Yvonne Thomas**  
County Extension Coordinator

MG President Anthony Yarbrough and Bob Scheffler taught gardening and plant basics to the students during the March camp. The gardening program included some hands-on activities.

Students participating in the program also were taught cake decorating, skeet shooting, career development, Alabama history, team building and economic development. They were also given guidance in making good decisions in life.

As part of the program students visited WVAS Radio on the campus of Alabama State University, cruised the Harriott II boat in Montgomery, toured LoneStar Plastics and the 4-H Center in Columbiana.

In addition to Master Gardeners, partners in the program were the Autauga County Board of Education, Autauga County Commission, Mid-South RC&D, Autauga Missionary Baptist District Association, U.S. Soil & Water Conservation District, Seat of Mercy and Winn-Dixie.



Bob and Anthony volunteered for the

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***Got a garden story, idea, photo? We want it, need it; got to have it. Submit it to [jmplott@msn.com](mailto:jmplott@msn.com) Deadline is Friday, May 13***

## **Don't forget the plant sale this week**

Do we have to say anything or has it already been drilled in your head?

At any rate, the Master Gardener annual plant sale will be Saturday from 8 a.m. until.

Plant check-in will begin Friday morning. If you can't stay, at least label your plants so everyone will know what they are. It also goes without say that plants should look

like you would want to buy them. Other garden-related items are acceptable to sell also.

We are also being urged not to prematurely purchase plants or set them aside so that the general public will have a better choice.

If you see a plant you like, hunt the owner and ask if they might be able to supply you one later.

## A guide to a lazy, but effective way to compost

One of my goals last year was to compost more. I have done so, but not as much as I originally planned. I have reached an impasse. I am pleased with my effort, however.

My preferred method, and one I used all winter long, was what I call hole-in-the-ground composting. I start at one corner of my vegetable garden, an area about 15 feet by 30 feet, and dig a hole. I dig it as deep as I can, well into the orange-clay sediment.

I'd guess each hole is about two feet, cubed. Then I add kitchen waste. Every time I dump a container of vegetable matter, I cover it with dirt and a little high-nitrogen fertilizer.

I have done this for two years now, and have composted about a third of my entire garden. I stop doing it in February, so that I don't plant over non-composted areas when I set out garden plants in the

spring. This is, I'll admit, the lazy-man's way to compost, except for the digging of the holes. Being a lazy man most of the time, I like it.

Every year I also try composting in my plastic 55-gallon barrel. This year I started composting in the barrel when I quit digging holes in the garden.

On April 9, I stopped. The flies I was raising in the barrel, which is not airtight or fly-tight, made the effort un-worthwhile. I must have added a thousand flies to the Prattville population. Ugh.

Sooo...I am no longer going to compost in the barrel. If you are lazy, like me, you might try my hole-in-the-ground method.

Now a few random notes: A lot

of you may not believe in global warming. I do. This is the first year I can remember when we didn't get a killing frost after March 1. My yard resembles a tropical garden thanks to no late frosts. I'm a believer.

When October came around in 2010, I could not toss my hanging baskets, like I usually do every winter. I decided to see if I could winter them over in my greenhouse.

I had three geraniums, two calibrachias, two impatiens, one creeping gloxinia, and one petunia. I wasn't sure if any of them would make it. They did. They all did.

Right now all of them are covered with more blooms than they ever had last year. They look wonderful. This October I will find room, somehow, in my greenhouse for all of these hanging baskets. They are well worth the effort.

### *Earl's Pearls*



By Earl Fisher

## *Let it rain*



Photos by Sherry Hodge



There was a lot of participation in a rain garden demonstration and workshop at the Autauga-Prattville Library on March 29. The event was hosted by city of Prattville, Autauga County Master Gardeners, the Alabama River Clean Water Partnership and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

# Tommy Pratt Shares Knowledge of Bluebird Trail, Habitats

**Jim Plott**

There may be a housing slump in the people market, but if you are bluebird housing starts never looked better.

That's all thanks to Tommy Pratt and others who have seen to it that bluebirds in Autauga, Dallas and Elmore counties don't have to search far for a home. Nearly 300 bluebird houses have been erected in the three-county area in recent years on what is called the Alabama Bluebird Trail, said Pratt who spoke to the Autauga County Master Gardener Association in March.

"Your trail is the largest trail I believe in the Southeast," Pratt said.

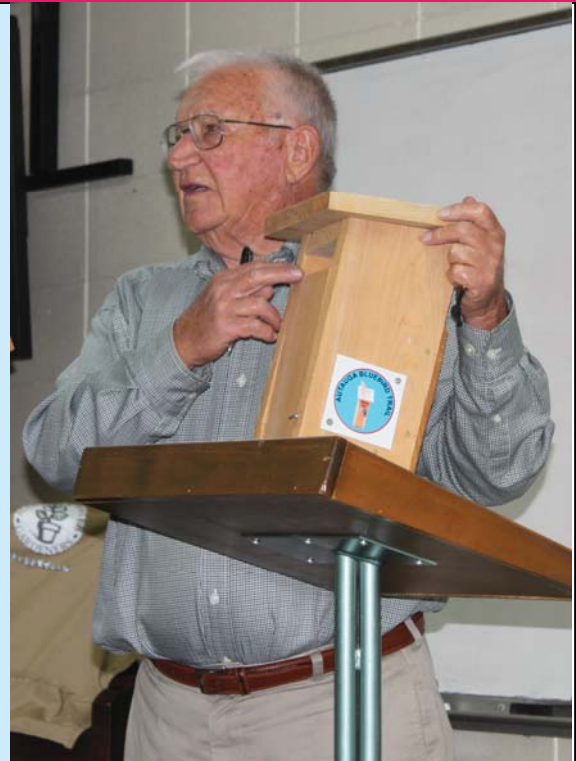
Pratt said Master Gardeners were among those who supplied

the seed money for the project and the Autauga Leadership class helped install some of the earlier bluebird houses many of which were built by students at Prattville High School in 2006. Many Master Gardeners are active in the project and can accumulate credit hours for their work.

Pratt said the houses are essential for the survival of bluebirds because much of their habitat like hollowed erect dead trees has been taken over by over types of birds that are not native to the area.

"They're depending on us to put them up a home," Pratt said.

The bluebird houses, which usually take only minutes to in-



stall, are monitored throughout the year to determine if they are occupied and if a family of bluebirds is raised. Some bluebird boxes have been in existence for 22 years.

Pratt said houses have also been built for owls and wood ducks.

## Prattville summer lawn maintenance schedule provided

Many Autauga Master Gardeners have signed up to keep the Prattville Gardens grounds maintained during the summer.

Sherry Hodge who oversees maintenance at Prattville recently released a schedule of mowing for the season.

Master Gardeners contribute their time and labor in a number of areas including the community gardens and the Helpline, and they are to be congratulated for their efforts which not only help people, but improve their communities.

May 1-7	John Newman	July 17 - 23	Anthony Yarbrough
May 8-14	Jim Plott	July 24 - 30	Bob Sheffler
May 15 - 21	Janet Lohman	July 31 - August 6	Tina Reed
May 22 - 28	Anthony Yarbrough	August 7 - 13	Sherry Hodge
May 29 - June 4	Bob Sheffler	August 14 - 20	Mark Carmichael
June 5 - 11	Tina Reed	August 21- 27	John Newman
June 12 - 18	Sherry Hodge	August 28 - September 3	Jim Plott
June 19 - 25	Mark Carmichael	September 4 - 10	Janet Lohman
June 26 - July 2	John Newman	September 11 - 17	Anthony Yarbrough
July 3 - 9	Jim Plott	September 18 - 24	Bob Sheffler
July 10 - 16	Janet Lohman	September 25 - October 1	Tina Reed

## Carpenter bees can cause significant damage to wood structures

In the spring and early summer, homeowners often notice large, black bees hovering around the outside of their homes. These are more than likely carpenter bees searching for mates and favorable sites to construct their nests. Male carpenter bees are quite aggressive, often hovering in front of people who are around the nests, but are harmless as they lack stingers. Female carpenter bees can inflict a painful sting but seldom will unless they are handled or pestered.

Carpenter bees look a lot like bumble bees, but the upper surface of their abdomen is bare and shiny black; bumble bees have a hairy abdomen with at least some yellow markings and are overall a little smaller than the carpenter bee.

Despite their similar appearance, the nesting habits of the two types of bees are quite different. Bumble bees usually nest in the ground whereas carpenter bees tunnel into wood to lay their eggs. Bare, unpainted or weathered softwoods are preferred, especially redwood, cedar, cypress and pine. Painted or pressure-treated wood is much less susceptible to attack. Common nesting sites include eaves, window trim, fascia boards, siding, wooden shakes, decks and outdoor furniture.

Carpenter bees overwinter as adults in wood within abandoned nest tunnels and emerge in the spring, usually in April or May, but this year as spring has come early they are already here. After

mating, this is where the trouble begins. The fertilized females then begin to excavate tunnels in wood and lay their eggs within a series of



**By Mallory Kelley  
Regional Extension Agent**

small cells. The female places a ball of pollen in each cell to feed the larvae which then emerge as adults in late summer.

The entrance hole and tunnels are perfectly round and about the diameter of your finger. Coarse sawdust the color of fresh cut wood will often be present beneath the entry hole. Female carpenter bees may excavate new tunnels for egg laying, or enlarge and reuse old ones and the extent of damage to wood which has been used for nesting year after year may be considerable.

### Control

Carpenter bees prefer to attack wood which is bare, weathered and unpainted. Therefore, the best way to deter the bees is to paint all exposed wood surfaces, especially those which have a history of being attacked. Wood stains and preservatives are less reliable than painting, but will provide some degree of repellancy versus bare wood.

Liquid sprays of carbaryl (Sevin), chlorpyrifos (Dursban), or a synthetic pyrethroid (e.g., permethrin or cyfluthrin) can be applied as a preventive to wood surfaces

which are attracting bees. The effectiveness of these insecticides are often only 1-2 weeks before they need to be reapplied. Tunnels which have already been excavated are best treated by puffing an insecticidal dust such as Sevin Dust into the nest opening. Aerosol sprays labeled for wasp or bee control also are effective. Leave the hole open for a few days after treatment to allow the bees to contact and distribute the insecticide throughout the nest galleries. Then plug the entrance hole with carpenter's glue, or wood putty. This will protect against future utilization of the old nesting tunnels and reduce

*Dirty Digs* is a monthly publication of the Autauga County Master Gardeners Association.

For information, story ideas and submittals, contact Editor Jim Plott at 334-361-9621 or [jmplott@msn.com](mailto:jmplott@msn.com).

The association meets each second Thursday of the month alternating day and evening meetings.

**President: Anthony Yarbrough**

**Vice President: Mark Carmichael**

**Secretary: Jean Hare**

**Treasurer: Michelle McGowan**

**Historian: Carroll Bonifay**

**Membership: Mark Carmichael**

**Hours Coordinator: Pam Olson**

**Newsletter Editor: Jim Plott**

**Helpline: Janet Lohman**

## A bag of sticks, transformed into a bag of tricks

It never fails. At least twice a year someone will come into the plant nursery where I occasionally help out on weekends and make this request: I want a shrub that blooms all year, never loses its leaves, doesn't have to be pruned and doesn't have to be watered.

I have developed a standard answer that I try to deliver with all the elegance and grace I can muster: (after I have a second to cringe)

"If that is the kind of plant you want, this is what I suggest you do," I say. "When you say your prayers tonight before you go to bed, be sure to ask God for that kind of plant, because as far as I know it doesn't exist right now."

And thank goodness there's no perfect plant. If you had a plant that bloomed all year, think what you would miss. There would be no thrill when it produced its first bloom of the year. Specific bloom times give us reason to continue going into our gardens. And can you imagine looking out the window at your yard throughout the seasons and seeing the same things?

There would be no satisfaction in seeing a plant you didn't expect to make it through that heavy cold snap to produce green shoots in early spring.

You get the point.

We would easily tire of a plant that constantly bloomed, and if you had a plant that required no pruning or watering there really wouldn't be any need to go into a garden any more.

Weigela is by no means a perfect plant. It's not even close. In fact it can at times be downright ugly. But for a period in spring or early summer it more than makes up for it.

Named after German physicist Christian Ehrenfried Weigel, who incidentally helped perfect the distilling

of alcohol, weigela is a fast growing shrub often with arching branches that can range in height from three to seven feet, depending on the variety.

A member of the honeysuckle family, weigela produces inch-long, funnel-shaped flowers in the spring. Flowers, again depending on the variety, can be red, pink or white. It can take the full blast of our hot summers and also tolerate shade.

Popular cultivars, which for some reasons are named after dances, include Minuet, Samba, Rumba and Tango. However, my favorite is

**Jim Plott**

variegated which in addition to its pale leaves has multiple pink to red flowers.

But I did say weigela can be ugly, particularly to people that watch too much Home and Garden TV and expect everything to be perfect all the time. After its leaves drop in the late fall; weigela can resemble a small pile of brush. The trick to that is using weigela as a background plant to evergreen shrubs. Keep in mind, however, that while weigela isn't fussy about many things and doesn't really have any major disease or insect problems, it doesn't like to be crowded. Give it room to grow.

### *New MG apparel fit to be tied*

Autauga County Master Gardeners have begun ordering aprons that will be used to help identify themselves as association members at functions- and maybe keep some dirt off that good shirt or pair of pants.

Green won hands down over khaki as the color for the aprons during a recent meeting and a polling of Master Gardeners.

The aprons come in two sizes;

One apron is 9 1/2 inches wide at the top of the bib and 22 inches wide across the bottom. The cost of this apron is \$16.97, including tax (9.5% effective May 1).

The other apron is 11 inches wide at the top of the bib and 25 inches



**Millie Ledford and Anthony Yarbrough demonstrate the two apron styles as Pam Olson explains**

wide across the bottom. The cost of this apron is \$18.07, including tax.

Aprons can be tried on during the May meeting and possibly at other functions. A mirror will be on hand. Purchasing an apron is optional, but there will be only a limited number of aprons

purchased and owned by our organization to be loaned out at functions like the plant sale and the county fair.

If you plan to purchase your own apron, please come to the meeting prepared to pay with cash or a check made out to Autauga Co. MGA.

**Autauga County Extension Office**  
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**Autaugaville, Al. 36003-2540**

## Master Gardener supporter George Bonifay dies

Autauga County Master Gardeners lost a trusted friend, a dedicated worker recently and an ardent supporter recently.

George Bonifay, the husband of Carroll Bonifay, died on April 25.

Although George was not an official Master Gardener, he was every bit the master gardener that any of us claim to be, and had been named an honorary Master Gardener for his contributions to the organizations.

Everyone who has been involved with Master Gardeners even for a short time realize the time and labor that George gave to the organization and the community. The plain fact is George's service hours would put most of our volunteer efforts to shame.

Our condolences are extended to Carroll Bonifay and her family.

It is times like this you search for the right words to provide comfort for someone so near and close to us. Still, even the most perfect words fall well short of our feelings and our ability to take away the hurt.



**George Bonifay spent numerous hours at the community gardens.**