



dirty digs

A Publication of the Autauga County Master Gardeners Association

June 2008

Scenic River Trail Leads To Alabama's Diverse Fauna

The Alabama Scenic River Trail, a route that includes beautiful stretches of seven rivers, two creeks and one bay, launched its grand opening recently.

The trail, which extends from the Georgia state line to the Gulf of Mexico and is the longest river trail of any state, had its grand opening June 6 in Montgomery. It also included stops in Millbrook and Prattville along the Alabama River.

The route, suitable for every kind of craft from canoes and kayaks to powerboats, begins in the mountainous terrain of northeastern Alabama, flows through beautiful scenery in nine lakes, through the serenity of the second largest river delta in the United States, through Mobile Bay and terminates at



Cahaba Lily Not Limited To A Single Waterway

By Jim Plott

It may be called the Cahaba Lilly, but the once thought rare flower actually flourishes across a three-state area and is found in several Alabama waterways.

Larry Davenport, a biologist at Samford University in Birmingham and a specialist in the Cahaba

Lily, said while the lily isn't as plentiful as it was 100 or so years ago it is holding its own.

The plant can be found in a number of rock-laden creeks and rivers in Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina along the Piedmont Plateau.

The plant and flower may look dainty, but don't be fooled by looks. It still

withstands some of the roughest waters in the Southeast.

Yet it is the tough aquatic



These lilies grow on Hatchet Creek in Coosa County. The Creek is on the Scenic River Trail.



conditions that has led to the plant's demise. The construction of dams and the restriction of water flow has

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Fighting Fire With Fire

Many Plants Can Stand Up to Summer's Heat

The prospect that we may be facing another dry summer can certainly dampen the enthusiasm ordinarily associated with spring planting.

Last year's experience of watching lovingly planted summer annuals and perennials languish without water has caused many folks to be hesitant about planting impatiens, begonias, marigolds and caladiums — once the mainstays of a southern garden.

Luckily, there are steps gardeners can take to satisfy their need to draw beauty out of the soil throughout the summer without watching plants suffer.

We can build flowerbeds filled with moisture retaining soil and, most importantly, choose plants recognized for their ability to withstand extremes of heat and drought.

Begin, as always, with the soil. Dig flowerbeds at least 8- to 10-inches deep and add plenty of organic matter in the form of kitchen compost, composted leaves, manure, etc. The spongy quality of organic matter greatly improves the moisture holding capacity of soils.

Place plants in the ground as early in the season as is reasonable. This allows them to become established while nighttime temperatures are cool and spring rains frequent. It is difficult for plants to set down an adequate root system in summer when high temperatures evaporate water faster than the roots can take it up.

Mulch plants with two to three inches of straw, bark or shredded leaves. This extra layer of protection helps to smother weeds that compete with your plants for water and nutrients. It aids in retaining soil moisture and serves to moderate soil tempera-

tures.

The nursery industry is providing a considerable array of drought resistant plants for sun and shade gardens.

Look for the tried and true

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drought tolerant plants such as lantana, salvia guaranitica, Mexican bush sage, and black-eyed Susan. Drought tolerant shade plants include autumn fern, Lenten rose, sedum 'Autumn Joy' and roof iris

Among the new drought tolerant introductions are grasses that range in color from green to bright yellow to blue. There is even a reddish variety called 'red rooster.'

My favorites of the new introductions are the succulents. These are plants with thick, waxy leaves that store water for lean times. Southern gardeners have grown these in the form of purslane and portulaca for years but these new varieties are definitely not what your grandmother grew.

There are mat forming types with tiny, bluish leaves, stalked succulents in the genus Aeonium that resemble small trees with swirling rosettes of leaves. Several grow to eighteen inches tall and are available in deep burgundy, jade green and one particularly striking one is chartreuse with red edges named 'Kiwi'.

But you don't need a list of drought tolerant plants when you visit the nursery, just good observation skills.

Drought tolerant species have several common characteristics. They want to hold onto the water they absorb. They do this by using different strategies. In general, their leaves are small—the less surface

area, the less water loss. Some plants like loquat and lantana have leathery leaves with a dense covering of

hair — hairs reduce the moisture leaving the leaf surface. Others develop a thick, waxy covering called a cuticle.

Whatever your gardening style, be sure to include some of these new drought tolerant varieties — just in case.

Mary Jo Modica is horticulturist at the University of Alabama Arboretum. Her columns appear weekly in The Tuscaloosa News Reach her at arbor@bama.ua.edu.

Stories, Ideas, Etc.

Contributions to Dirty Digs is not only welcomed, they are needed. If you at a garden event or tour or anything garden related -particularly involving Master Gardeners - please write accounts and by all means take photos. Story ideas are also encouraged. Submissions can be emailed to me at jimp@msn.com. Thanks—Jim Plott

Earl's Pearls A Lot is at Stake This Year in Vegetable Garden

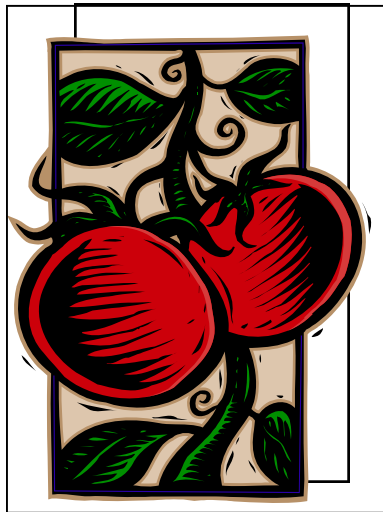
By Earl Fisher

I'm being tougher on my plants this year. So tough, I feel I'm being cruel to them. You decide. Last year my bell peppers and tomatoes performed poorly.

Most of my peppers, and many of the tomatoes, seemed stunted, and never grew as much as I expected. I grow most of my plants from seed, and I probably put them in the ground too early, before the ground was warm enough for maximum growth. It seems that once they stopped growing, they never picked up again.

This year, the same thing happened. About half my peppers and a

quarter of my tomatoes seemed stunted. Well—they are now gone—pulled up to make room for a new Better Boy, or some such. Every week I would uproot the three or four that weren't growing well and replace them with store bought plants. Even some of



the store bought plants didn't do well, and they got replaced, too.

Hey, I love peppers (especially, red bell and yellow banana) and tomatoes. I now have a ton of each. I just counted them – 42 tomato plants and 39 peppers. The only problem is that without rain, they'll all taste like city water.

But so far my plan seems to be working. I've still got a few which haven't grown, but, overall, I should be up to my neck in tomatoes and peppers in a few weeks. I'll let you (burp!) know when I begin eating them.

Garden Calendar

13- Sharp-witted Southern Living Garden Writer Steve Bender and Georgia-based landscape designer and hydrangea expert Sandra Jonas will be among the guest lecturers at this year's *Second Annual Hydrangea Symposium* sponsored by the Alabama Hydrangea Society. Also sessions on hydrangeas and compatible trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals will be Montgomery attorney Jim Scott. His five-acre Lake Martin estate has been featured on HGTV. A special selection of hydrangeas and companion plants will be available to purchase, and guided tours of the Aldridge Botanical Gardens hydrangea collection will be offered during breakout sessions. Tickets for the entire day are \$60 and include snacks and a gourmet boxed lunch. **Aldridge Gardens, 3530 Lorna Rd Hoover.**

14- Black and Blue Berry Festival- Join the fun as Petals from the Past celebrates the blackberry and blueberry harvest. There will be Blue Grass music, pony rides, face painting and lots of delicious blackberry and blueberry desserts. 9 a.m.- 5 p.m. Jemison.

14-/15 Hydrangea Fest- Taking up on its heritage at Lanark, the Alabama Wildlife Federation plans a two-day event involving hydrangeas. Tours, workshops and plant sale. 8-5 p.m. Saturday and 1-5 p.m. Sunday. Millbrook. Contact Kim Moon @ 334-220-8733.

18- The *Birmingham Fern Society* will hold a fern sale at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens from 2 – 6 p.m.

19- Thursday Hike with Wild South. This will be the fourth of a recurring monthly hike into the Bankhead National Forest/Sipsey Wilderness. Every third Thursday we will meet Janice Barrett at the Warrior Mountain Trading Company at 10:30 a.m. for a hike no longer than 3 miles. Bring a sack lunch and plenty of water. For your information check out this link:<http://members.aol.com/sipsewilderness/info.htm> for more information. Free.

Registration: events@freshairfamily.org or call (205) 401- 0245.

21- Seminar: Hardy Palms. Dr. David Francko Assistant VP for Academic Affairs at the University of Alabama and Dean of the Graduate School , will share his research, knowledge and talent as a botanical limnologist to explore the topic of growing hardy palms. Members \$10/Non-Members \$15 – Lunch. Aldridge Gardens, 3530 Lorna Rd Hoover.

28- Annual Greenhouse Sale- Everything in the greenhouse is sold at wholesale prices. **Petals from the Past, Jemison.**

Autauga County Master Gardener Minutes: May 2008

1. Vice-president Marianne Lovell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.
 2. Marianne introduced guest speaker Yvonne Thomas who spoke for 25 minutes on the various arms of ACES. It was a wonderfully enlightening program! Yvonne encourages us to take photos of all MG projects.
 3. Previous minutes were approved as corrected: Shirley Jensen and not Jean Hare worked on the MG project at the Alabama Boys Industrial School/Autauga Campus.
 4. **Treasurer** – no report
 5. **ACES** – no report
 6. **Project reports:**
 - A. Ongoing projects:
 - (1.) Demonstration Garden: C. Bonifay – Lettuce is ready and potatoes are coming in.
 - (2.) Prattvillage Gardens: S. Hodge. Thank you to everyone for all the help.
 - (3.) Autauga Co. Probate Office: Stephanie Holway – new rosemary planted.
 - (4.) Library: Jean Hare - Carol Risher and students planted bulbs and ajuga.
 - B. Proposed/completed/approved projects – no reports from any of these
 7. **Old Business**
 - A. Plant sale results/recap: We made over \$2,000 dollars. Kudos to Sherry Hodge for having the garden in such good shape. Sherry reported that shoppers wanted more flowering plants, ivy and ground cover. Shirely Jensen wisely pointed out that the public usually asks for what we don't have. We need to make note of these requests. It has been suggested that MG have a fall plant sale. Discussion will follow at a later meeting.
 - B. The lock box has been installed at Prattvillage Garden.
 - C. The compost bin-building party at the Risher Residence was very successful although supplies were a little more expensive than anticipated. Requests have been made to have another party in June.
 - D. The HelpLine schedule has been filled. Thanks to Jim Prince for getting this done.
 8. **New Business**
 - A. Shirley Jensen moved to have the June meeting at Jim Prince's residence for his program on drip irrigation. Mike Holway seconded. Motion passed.
 - B. Autauga County Master Gardeners have been offered a greenhouse heater. After much discussion (along with sage advice from Ray Jellison about the hard work required for this project), the membership voted to decline the offer.
 9. Meeting adjourned.
- Submitted By: Carol Wadsworth Jones, secretary**
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Congratulations!



A fresh batch of Autauga and Chilton folks (and one Coosa) recently completed the Master Gardener program. Classes were held in Autaugaville and Clanton. The group will have to complete the 40 hours each of volunteer work to be certified.

Extension System to Hold Blueberry Workshops

Blueberries are great backyard fruit and ornamental plants. In addition to their healthy berries they have attractive flowers and brilliant red fall foliage. Since the rabbiteye blueberry is native to the Southeastern United States it is an easy plant to grow. With a little care these plants can produce 12 to 25 pounds of berries per plant. They have few diseases and insect pests, need little fertilizer and are one of the easiest fruits to grow organically.

To learn more about Growing Blueberries

attend one of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System's Blueberry Workshops, including one July 24 in Autaugaville. Extension agents and state specialists will provide information on planting blueberries, pruning, variety selection, health benefits, use in fresh recipes and preservation methods.

The seven planned workshops and contacts are:

Tuesday, June 10, Headland – Henry County – Abbeville (334) 585-6416
Thursday, June 26,

Covington County – Andalusia (334) 222-1125

Tuesday, July 8,

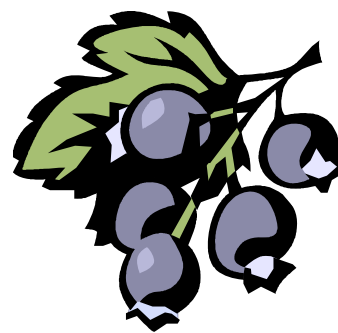
Randolph County – Wetlowee (256) 357-2841

Thursday, July 10, Chilton County – Clanton (205) 280-6268

Thursday, July 17, Etowah County – Gadsden (256) 547-7936

Tuesday, July 22, Lee County - Opelika (334) 749-3353

Thursday, July 24, Autauga – Autaugaville



(334) 361-7273

Workshops begin at 9 a.m. and conclude at 2 p.m. Work-

shop participants will receive blueberry publications, a blueberry recipe book, a T-shirt and lunch. The cost of the workshop is \$10. To register and for directions call the Extension Office number for the workshop you plan to attend. For more information contact Regional Extension Agent Stan Roark (256) 357-2841.

Trail, Continued from Page 1

historic Ft. Morgan.

The trail passes many points of historic interest, all of which are described in trail guides that will be available in the spring. These guides will include information on all aspects of the trail. It also passes several established birding trails, includes many of the country's best fishing grounds, and connects to the highly-regarded Bartram Canoe trail in the delta area.

"The Alabama Scenic River Trail can be to canoeing and kayaking

what the Appalachian Trail is to hiking and backpacking," said Tom Chesnutt, a tourism specialist with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

The trail is a lifelong dream of Fred Couch, who has spearheaded the project. Two key participants in the development of the trail are Alabama Power Co., which has identified portages around five of their six dams and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which has locks and portages at their three dams. For paddled craft, a shuttle is available at Mitchell Dam, where no portage could be developed. The lower half of the trail will be attractive for all

types of powerboats because the three locks on the lower half of the trail mean that a powerboat can make the trip from Montgomery in two days and even a slow powerboat can make it in three or four. Campgrounds are available all along the route.

Lily Continued from Page 1

reduced its habitat.

Locally, the lily can be found on Hatchet Creek in Coosa County, the Coosa River between Wetumpka and Jordan Dam and several streams in Elmore County.

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The June Gardener

Lawns

Cut lawns if possible during the early morning or late afternoon. It is better on you and the lawn which can get stressed with the heat from late morning to afternoon.

With the summer heat on and the rain already lacking it might be a good time to raise the level of your lawn mower blade by a notch.

Annual Perennials

Unsure about the insects bugging your petunias or begonias? It might be a good time to invest in a good insect and learn the difference between bad bugs and good bugs. Killing beneficial insects may likely increase the infestation of bad ones.

Keep those perennials deadheaded to ensure additional blooming.

Check hanging baskets regularly to ensure they have adequate water. Baskets can dry out quickly particularly when facing the west sun or plants are subject to winds, even gentle breezes.

Roses

Continue to monitor for black spot on roses. Remove infected leaves immediately and begin spray program with an appropriate fungicide. Most products must be reapplied following any rainfall.

Trees/Shrubs

Prune hedges after they put out their first intense growth

This is a good time to take shrub cuttings from semi-mature wood for rooting

Vegetables

There are two crucial times to water corn: When tassels begin to show and when silk begins to show. To encourage vegetable production, pick tomatoes, squash, okra, beans, and cucumbers regularly. Harvest every other day in early morning or late afternoon.

Pick eggplant after the fruit reaches 3-5 inches.

Other

Colors do matter in the flower garden. Red flowers make the flowerbed seem larger and closer.

White flowers make beds smaller and more distant.