

Sprigs and Sprouts



Limestone County Master Gardener Association

Volume 4, Issue 1 Sprigs & Sprouts

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Pamela Gibbs, MG '03

Spring is in the air. The weather is warming up nicely. The daffodils, forsythia and creeping phlox are blooming. The trees are budding and, unfortunately, the weeds are growing. I know that we are all getting impatient to get outside and start gardening for another season.

We also have several of our M.G. projects that are gearing up for the year. I would like to encourage all of our members to really get involved in some projects this year. Don't think that you have to work on all of them. We are all too busy to do that. But we can pick two or three projects that we are interested in and really work hard on those. Want to learn more about vegetable gardening or composting? Volunteer at the community garden or our compost demonstration site at Athens High School.

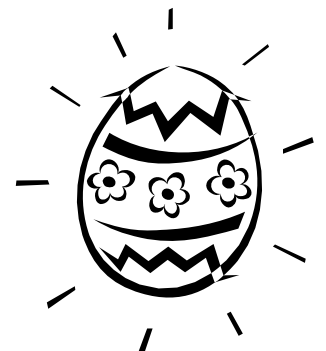
There are several projects that need someone to take charge and really get them off the ground. Want to work in a greenhouse? You can help with the greenhouse at the Birdie Thorton Center. And if you don't find an existing project that tickles your fancy, come up with an idea for a project that you are passionate about and recruit some volunteers to help.

I know that we all have lives that are full to bursting with family and personal responsibilities. But one of the joys of being a M.G. is to give back to the community. Our M.G. projects are just some of many ways we can do that. So let's get out there and have some fun. Ready, set, GARDEN!



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Last year was the year for record corn. Willing workers harvested some “second ears,” which meshed nicely with our slightly later than usual tomato crop. The five varieties of tomatoes we planted produced mixed results. A lesson learned was to keep better yield records if you are going to plant so many varieties.

We were glad to have some new faces in the garden this year, including those who said “It’s been a long time since I (pulled corn, picked peas, etc)!” The few Saturday work days we had seemed to be well received by those who are still working.

We added to our capital equipment by purchasing two backpack sprayers and a dozen orchard baskets. We closed the season by storing our tomato cages on tarps so we won’t have to wrestle them back from the grass in the spring (if you’ve ever been there on tomato planting day you know what I mean!). Speaking of Spring.

An initiative for 2006 is to have our members grow from seed our tomato plants. We have several home greenhouses among our members,

including a new one for Rodell Thacker. So far Rodell, Jerry Franks and Edd Hall have agreed to grow a few extra for the garden over their usual Plant Sale supply. We will also try a new variety (CRISTA) suggested by Doug Chapman. It is a 2005 N.C. State offering reported to be: wilt resistant, determinant, uniform shouldered, long shelf life and RED. Other varieties favored by our growers are still to be determined.

For our garden conversation piece this year (last year was the Black Krim), it is proposed that we demonstrate the corn, bean and squash on a single hill as reportedly practiced by Pilgrim era Indians. The squash plants are at the bottom to hold the mound intact, the cornstalk up the center produces the corn and the support for the climbing bean! Think it will work? Let’s give it a try.

Hybrid tomato - Fresh market - Determinate round - CRISTA F1 (HMX 4828)

- *High determinate variety with extensive disease resistances*
- *Perfect for slicing and food service*
- *Round fruit for single-fruit harvesting*
- *High yield*
- *Large to extra large fruit*
- *Uniform shoulders*



A GARDEN FOR ALL SEASONS

A garden that offered something of interest year 'round.

That was our goal 16 years ago when we moved into a house situated on a small city lot mostly shaded by pecan trees.

Several times a day my husband Bruce and I walk the circuit around the house, honing our powers of observation as we take note of seasonal changes in plant life – the deep purple of a spring crocus; the slow unfolding of heart-shaped leaves on the redbud; or on a summer's evening, the delicate smell of the Four O'Clocks.

As I write this in mid-February, icicles hang from the camellia bush where just last week our granddaughter and I picked deep pink blossoms, watching snow flakes accumulate on the lustrous green leaves. (Our camellias have been known to burst into bloom anywhere from November through February, depending upon the weather.) The honeysuckle bush outside our living room window displays the pale yellow blossoms that give off the barely detectible scent of spring. Daffodils dance in the north wind. And Lenten roses peek out from underneath an

azalea grown too large.

Soon fragrant narcissus will join the daffodils, and the vibrant hues of tulips will clamor for their share of the attention. And then the show really begins: azaleas and dogwoods followed by irises and then the tall old-fashioned orange daylilies that we love even after hearing another gardener disparage them as "ditch lilies." By that time, the Japanese maples will have unfurled their delicate, lacy leaves that cast dancing patterns of light on our den floor as they play peek-a-boo with the sun. The hostas will have re-emerged, amazing us with a seemingly infinite variety of hues and shapes and sizes. The evergreen ferns that had grown ragged in winter will look rejuvenated. The chocolate mint will have sprung up and resumed its quest to cover the world – or at least our little corner of it. The nandinas that in winter provided red berries for holiday arrangements will be putting out tender new limbs, growing a safe place for jays and towhees to scout for predators before swooping down to the birdbath for a quick drink or a freshening-up.

The flowering plants that popped out in spring with so

Charlotte Fulton, MG '05

much enthusiasm will have flagged by the dog days, literally lying down in exhaustion. That's when we'll rely on stalwart annuals like zinnias, marigolds and cosmos and one of our more recent discoveries, creeping lantana, to take us through the balance of the hot, humid summer – at least, we'll rely on them to color our few sunny spots. As for the shade, we'll depend on an old favorite – impatiens – which we plant in masses in shady nooks, knowing they'll thrive until cold weather kills even the autumn-loving chrysanthemums.

When the last blossom has faded, we'll look to the brilliant scarlet that comes from the Japanese maples' last gasp before leaf-fall. And then when winter arrives, we'll admire the graceful shapes of the bare-limbed crape myrtle, and how the ice delicately encases its seed pods, shimmering in the winter sun. We'll be thankful for evergreens such as the too-fragrant eleagnus and the yaupon holly with its tiny red berries – and we'll go on watch for the first crocus that signals the beginning of a new cycle.

SHAKE HANDS WITH PAMELA GIBBS

Nancy Robinette, MG '93

Pamela Gibbs, Master Gardener class of 2003, says that although her mother was a gardener, she never became interested in gardening until after she was married and had a place of her own. That's the way with many of us. Your own home is what inspires you, even if it is rental property with only a small strip of ground. In Pam's case, her first main home was on an acre of land in East Limestone with 90 large mature pine trees. She and her family lived there for 15 years, during which time she faced the challenge of gardening in the shade amidst 90 trees. She did what she now knows not to do. She brought in dirt and built up berms around groups of trees so her husband would not have to mow around each individual tree. The trees survived.

Then they moved to where they live now on Cambridge Lane, on two acres almost completely sunny. So the learning process had to begin anew. She thinks the most important step at the new home was preparing the hard-packed clay soil by pulling out all existing foundation plants and bringing

in truckloads of composted horse manure, composted gin trash, and some sand. She has been working for 6 years now on a long-range plan that keeps getting longer. She is working in stages, adding new gardens every year. Landscape design is her first love, but that wouldn't amount to much without the energy and tenacity for implementation and maintenance, which she has.

Pamela and her husband Chuck, who did some fine picking for the musical portion of our 2004 Christmas party, have two college-age daughters. No, they are not interested in gardening - no homes of their own yet. The family has attended the First Baptist Church for 20 years. Pamela presently serves on the Property Committee and teaches Bible study. (She modestly refers to herself as a facilitator.)

Since becoming a Master Gardener, Pam has been very helpful with the Triangles project. When a juniper needs to come out of the ground, you can count on Pam to make it happen. She has headed up our committee for the Donnell House

Festival of Trees for 3 years, works in the Donnell House herb garden, and helps with the MGA classes. She hosted our 2005 Christmas party. She also maintains her membership in the Athens Garden Club.

Her hobbies other than gardening include acrylic painting, crocheting, basket weaving, antique auctions, and crafts of many kinds. She is an energetic, busy lady.

We appreciate her agreeing to be our President and feel fortunate to have her as a participating and contributing member.



LCMGA MEETINGS

Nancy Robinette, MG '93

The New Year began with our new officers exercising flawless responsibility at the January meeting. The meeting was held at the Limestone County Extension office at noon. The minutes of December's meeting were approved and our budget is healthy. Doug Chapman delivered a superb presentation on holiday flowers and how to care for them. If you want great-looking poinsettias, you're going to have to put them in the dark every night. Martha McCracken has a 50-year-old Christmas cactus that she is ready to relinquish if anyone is interested in a stubborn cactus. With spring just around the corner, most project leaders are excited to get back to work. Some were even working diligently in the off-season as evidenced by Jim Ladner's community garden budget request. As usual, Jim is well ahead of the game.

The February meeting found us back at the Limestone County Extension office at noon again. Limestone County District 4 Commissioner, Bill Daws, was present to discuss a permanent MG office at the new Senior Center near Elm & Market. This was a very exciting offer. Many questions were asked about the new center and the overall consensus seemed to support the project, although it is not known in what capacity we can assist at this time. New meeting times to encourage and allow more participation from

the employed members were discussed. No action was taken but everyone was asked to give it diligent thought. Please contact Pam Gibbs and submit your proxy vote on the proposed meeting times if you have not done so yet.

The main topic discussed at the March 13th meeting was the plant sale coming up April 29, 7 AM – 11 AM, at the Farmers Market. Everyone was reminded to come early and to label their plants as to what they are and how to care for them. Pricing will be done after the plants are off-loaded on the morning before the sale. In his absence, Mark Morgan was elected Publicity Chair for the event, as he has been for the last two years. Remember, this is our only moneymaker. Bring your plants. Tell your friends and neighbors. Our 2006 budget is \$2445. That's the goal we are shooting for.

The attending members voted to have a six-month trial period, beginning in April, during which time every other meeting will be at noon and every other meeting will be at night (6 PM). At the end of the trial period we will look at attendance records.

Instead of a program, after the meeting a group of Master Gardeners visited the Limestone Manor to deliver houseplants to residents. Lowe's donated the plants. They were well received by the residents who enjoy house-

plants and by one resident in particular. Her name is Lillian Schrimsher, and she recently turned 102 years old. She walked out of her room (yes, she is still mobile!) to select the plant of her choice: the one with the purple fuzzy leaves. Thank you very much. For those of you who weren't there, you missed a warm fuzzy feeling.

Our April meeting will be at the Limestone County Water Authority for a briefing about the many things that are going on at the Huntsville Botanical Gardens. It will be a 6 PM meeting. If you have not been to the HBG lately, it is time you plan a trip.

Everyone will be all abuzz about our May meeting as we have Maynard Dalton, a beekeeper from Madison County, scheduled to discuss the world of bees. Maynard is also a Master Gardener and his presentation is sure to be sweet and sticky!

In June we will visit again Pettie Aquatic Garden Supply for a 6 PM meeting/cookout. This is a wonderful setting for a meeting so plan for a great meeting.

See you there.



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Visit us on the web:

<http://www.aces.edu/counties/Limestone/MastGard>

Email us any comments or suggestions:

limestonemg@yahoo.com

knowing to grow is going to grow....



LCMGA OFFICERS

President:

Pam Gibbs

Vice President:

Melanie Williams

Secretary: *Janice Hutton*

Treasurer: *John O'Neill*

NEW INTERNS: SPRING 2006

From Limestone County:

- David Mobley
- Linda Ray
- Wayne Smith
- Robert Trent

We certainly look forward to them joining us in our meetings and projects. Welcome them and help them as they seek out opportunities to log their service hours.