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

knowing to grow is going to grow...



Obituaries

John J. O'Neill Jr.

Mr. John J. O'Neill, Jr., 75, of Eagleville Rd. Jefferson, OH, died at his home Thursday, Oct. 6th. John was born Dec. 21, 1936, in Cleveland, OH. He retired from Federal Mogul, in Alabama, in 2000 and moved to Jefferson three years ago. He was a Master Gardener and enjoyed Bird watching and traveling.

John served as the treasurer for Limestone County Master Gardner's for many years and also coordinated the annual plant sales.

Internment was at All Souls Cemetery in Chardon, OH.



Rodell Thacker

Mr. Rodell Thacker, 81 of Athens, died at his home Wednesday, Oct. 19.

Rodell was born Aug. 28, 1930, in Lauderdale County, and was a member of First Baptist Church in Athens. He was retired from NASA, was a veteran of the Korean War, and was a member of Limestone Baptist Association Disaster Relief Team.

Since becoming a Master Gardner in 1996, Rodell was a valuable team member and his energy translated to many worthwhile projects.

Both of these Mater Gardeners are sorely missed.

Sprigs & Sprouts



Limestone County Master Gardener Association

Volume 8, Issue 2

From The President

Carole Barron MG '03

Wow! What a year we've had! From tornados in the spring that affected all of us to some degree, to the unbearable heat and drought of the summer, it has been a challenging year. Some of our members have spent most of this year in 'clean-up' mode and will use their knowledge gained from the Master Gardener Program to begin anew, while the summer heat has prompted others to 're-think' their gardens. Whatever our current situation may be, it is awesome that we have resources to aid us in our decisions and ideas. We went places this spring and summer. Cane Creek Canyon with Dr. Jim Lacefield as our guide was a learning experience in wildflowers and geology. The trip to Jerry Whitt's beautiful day-lily garden made us

all want more as we discovered so many different varieties. Melissa Kuykendall was a gracious hostess allowing us to enjoy nature's little jewels at her home to view hundreds of hummingbirds. While we had several good speakers this year, Harvey Cotton and Doug Chapman were fabulous speakers as they presented programs for two of our meetings that we invited the public to attend. Edd Hall hosted our annual picnic at his home as we all admired the community garden and the efforts of all the members who participate in this very worthy project. Joni Gruber opened her home and garden for a pot-luck evening meeting that was fun and relaxing. After looking back at all we did while working on continuing projects like the plant sale, community garden, tri-

You amaze me with your talents and different areas of expertise.

angles, newsletter, MG Classes and website, it just proves that LCMG's were up to a challenging year! We've enjoyed having some new interns becoming involved this year as well as our regular members helping each other and sharing information and ideas. You amaze me with your talents and different areas of expertise. This is what makes a great organization: sharing, caring and supporting. I sincerely appreciate the support you have all given me this year as I served as your President.

Respectfully,
Carole Barron

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Merry Christmas!



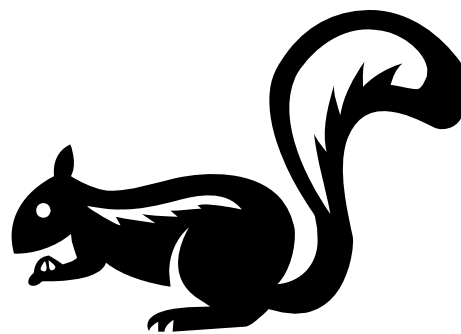
We love wildlife. So when we set about landscaping our backyard, one of our primary goals was to make it a haven for animals. We provided the four basics for wildlife: water, shelter, cover, and food. We added a small backyard pond for water, planted fruit-bearing and seed-bearing plants, added a woodpile for shelter, hung bird feeders and nesting boxes and planted shrubs for cover. Then we sat back and awaited the arrival of our wild guests. That's when the trouble started.

My first inkling that all would not be Disney-like occurred when I received a call from my lovely wife. I was driving back from Indiana on a Sunday afternoon, and my phone rang as I drove through Kentucky.



"Guess what! We have a Great Blue Heron in our pond. It's so pretty. I'll get some pictures in case it leaves before you get home."

This was great news for us. Such a majestic bird right in our own backyard! Our efforts were paying off. Animals had discovered our oasis. As I drove through Tennessee my phone rang again. "I think this stupid bird is eating our koi. He looks like he's stalking them around the pond edges." I approached Nashville and once again the phone rang. "I'm going to shoot this #@%* bird. He's eating all our fish!" Ah, how quickly the beauty of nature fades. Two hundred dollars worth of fish later we finally figured out that fishing line stretched over the pond kept him away. Maybe we'd have to do without herons.



But still, apart from one unintended consequence of our wildlife attracting endeavors, the rest would still be good. Right?

Then pecans began appearing everywhere in the garage and basement. We had stored a box full of pecans in the garage, and it seemed like the level kept going down in the

box. We started finding pecans everywhere we looked. We unfolded the sofa sleeper. Two dozen pecans fell out. I opened a drawer—a pile of pecans. I worked on the lawnmower and found five pecans stuffed behind the air cleaner. The sewing machine jammed, and I dislodged a handful of pecans stuffed into the works. I pulled a toolbox off the shelf and was pelted by a cascade of pecans. A squirrel had invaded the house and was stashing pecans in every nook and cranny. We're still finding them.

The thought started creeping into my head that maybe this wildlife thing wasn't such a good idea. That thought was reinforced a couple of evenings later when I was rooting around the pond and noticed something moving across the yard. It was a skunk. Nice looking fellow, minding his own business. I ran into the house and



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LATE START and LOW YIELD!

This year was definitely a slow start (May 5) and a low yield (60 dozen ears) year for the garden. Abundant rain in April followed by high heat and drought conditions played havoc with our "best laid plans." The last few years we have attempted to split the corn planting to give a longer season. The rain delayed the 1st planting until May 5. Having the abundant moisture (and our usual deep planting) resulted in an adequate stand of corn. Our 2nd stand however was not so fortunate. It was decided to shallow-plant the 2nd stand which was immediately followed with heat and drought resulting in 6 two hundred foot rows of rotted seed.

About the only thing which grew well this year was the



weeds between our narrow rows. The tractor didn't fit between them as neatly as in past years.



We were able to harvest only a modest amount of beans. Tomatoes were a big surprise. We had many more "Romas" than was thought at the original planting. Seems we had some label mix-ups. Most of



the plants were from our membership.

Finally, after many years, we were able to provide service hours for a Limestone County intern, Donna McMillan, who joined with long time workers to struggle through a tough garden year. Others working the garden in 2011: Edd Hall, Jim and Liz Ladner, Patricia Frey, Nancy Morton, Tommy and Janice Hutton, Bruce Fulton, Jerry Davis and Faye Hardiman.

Sorry to have left anyone out, but the record keeping was just as "low yield" as the crops.

ON TO NEXT YEAR! 

Meet Bruce Fulton

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year when he took over the maintenance of the triangle gardens near Athens High School on Highway 31. He and Charlotte live near the school, and he noticed that the triangles were “looking a little ragged,” so he took it upon himself to improve their appearance. He started with the north triangle, cleaning up the dead plants and planting flowers and repeating the beautification process on the south triangle. Take a drive past and view his handiwork, the difference is noticeable. I asked him if he had any good stories about his work on the



continued

triangles; he said the best story is that he hasn't been run over yet. A brave man, planting flowers in the middle of a street next to a school full of teenage drivers. I figured with those seven acres to keep up with, Bruce and Charlotte wouldn't have time to keep up with much around their house, but a tour of their yard reveals a varied and attractive mix of shade trees and a variety of plants and bushes including azaleas, crepe myrtles, and hollies. I followed a meandering path through gardenias and past a brilliant red Japanese maple to their latest effort: a butterfly garden. Even in late autumn I could tell the garden had been full of blooming plants. Bruce said the plants outnumbered the butterflies.



As far as future gardening projects, they plan to keep their place in the county and will go out there as often as they can, “as long as my health lasts” Bruce says. Or as long as there are trees to cut.



Recipe Corner

Nancy Robinette MG'93

My newest cookbook is “Depression Era Recipes.” Since I was born in 1932, it seemed like the perfect way to get back to food I remember cooking with ingredients in my pantry, and away from newfangled recipes listing ingredients I never heard of. Here is one of the ole-timey recipes I find charming:

Slumgullion

- 4 slices bacon, diced
- 2 c. meat, cooked
- ½ onion, diced
- 1 can tomatoes
- 1 ½ c. cheese, cubed

Brown bacon, drain, and set aside. Fry onion in bacon fat over low heat. Stir and cook until onion is transparent. Add tomatoes, beef, and bacon. Simmer 5 minutes. Stir in cheese. Pour into tureen and serve over fresh bread. If the family is getting anxious for supper to be ready, set the table. It will encourage them.



A Better Place

A chance to make the world (or at least the intersection of Hobbs and Hwy 31 in Athens) a better place.

I had been enjoying the varied colorful plantings at the Master Gardener planting triangles for many years, and had thought, since I live so close, that the care and planting of the triangles would be a perfect project for me. I asked Jerry Davis if I could ‘take on’ the care and planting of the north triangle this spring. He said yes. Later, I added the south triangle.

I had been working at Tanglewood Apartments as their groundskeeper, and had quit after achieving my objective of completing my 40 Social Security quarters. So taking on the care and planting of the triangles was just a continuation of what I had been doing.

The timing (early spring) allowed the planting of the north triangle with summer flowers. There are basically three bedding areas there: the ‘points’ on the triangle, the liriope-enclosed area, and the main bed facing Hobbs. After the weeding and bed preparations, and consultations with my M.G. advisor (Charlotte) for potential plant types and color combinations, I planted primarily lantana in the main bed, (yellow and a mounding

orange), and vinca/periwinkle, tall (red) in the enclosed area and as ‘backup’ for the creeping variety (purple) at the three corners.

Summer heat was already in full swing when I volunteered to take on the south triangle, so the decision was to skip the summer planting (too late/too hot) and concentrate on getting this area ready for fall planting.



I have now removed the summer flowers and have planted both the north and south triangles with fall flowers, and mulched. The flowers I used were pansies (a new ‘spreading’ variety), violas (supposed to bloom further into winter than the pansies), snapdragons, and dianthus. I cut the yellow lantana back close to the roots and covered it with mulch, to try and have it come back next spring.

My ‘advisor’ and I try to choose plants that ‘take care of themselves’, can survive being planted in the triangle areas,

Bruce Fulton MG '05

are colorful, and maybe even come back year after year. I like some colors to ‘pop’, a term my advisor says I over use. I want to note that I am very thankful that Tommy Hutton is keeping the watering sprinklers in the triangles working.

Trash pickup is one of my continuing duties, required to keep the planting areas looking their best. Weeds are an ongoing problem which will never fully go away. I am just hoping that they can be kept under control. There are about 5 or 6 different ones, which keeps me busy. I have already had some run-ins with the barberry (literally). It looks nice through the seasons, but its thorns are mean.

Another aspect of caring for the triangles I had not really considered was the stray car or truck that encroaches on the triangles. One decided, past the last minute, to turn from 31 to Hobbs, cutting across the north tip of the north triangle. A driver turning from 31 to Hobbs flattened a couple of orange lantana. A truck making a wide turn left a rut by the nandina in the south triangle. A truck or car took out 5 holly bushes on the 31 side of the south triangle, and another wiped out the yellow flowers at the Hobbs/31 corner of the

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Chaste Tree- A Most Valuable Plant (MVP)

Shari Duke, MG Intern

Blue for You

You know what one of the great things about gardening is? If you plant something with somebody or receive a plant from someone, every time you look at it, you remember the person and the time you planted it. My chaste tree will keep alive my memory of Sue Bish, hostess of my first Master Gardener Intern gathering this past summer. Sue's backyard chaste tree (Botanical name- *Vitex agnus-castus*, COMMON NAME--Vitex, Chaste Tree, chastetree) was quite the conversation starter! Bearing large, spectacular panicles of deep-blue flowers with butterflies swarming about so, many thought we were looking at a butterfly bush. Whatever it was, it was absolutely beautiful. I knew HAD to have one. When it was suggested I write an article as part of my MG Intern volunteer hours, I immediately recalled the impact of 'seeing is believing' that August afternoon. My MG friend's enthusiastic words "You can grow this!" ringing in my head inspired this research into the summer-blooming *Vitex*. *V.agnus-castus*: this deciduous shrub or small tree was found in most antebellum, southern landscapes, so it truly has a



Vitex agnus-castus

home in the south. A chaste tree "quickly grows into a multi-trunked tree about 10 to 20 feet tall and wide with a broad, spreading habit."¹ The Grumpy Gardener's blog tells us the chaste tree gets its name from the erroneous medieval belief that a potion made from it could curb the libido. In reality, wearing a



Chaste Tree - *Vitex agnus-castus*

house dress with orthopedic shoes and multiple nose piercings is much more effective!²

Digging into the Details

Few trees are as easy to grow and thrive in our Alabama heat. Here's the low-down: **Light:** Full sun. **Soil:** Tolerant of various soils, but prefers well-drained soil. **Water:** Regular moisture at first -- very drought tolerant once established **Pests:** None serious. **Pruning:** Not the tidiest plant in the world as *Vitex* does seed easily. Pulling strays is a pain, but worth it. The best time to prune is late winter to produce an attractive multi-trunked tree. Select 3-5 main trunks and prune off all the side shoots

Critter Capers

(Continued from page 2)

grabbed a camera to document the presence of another critter in our wildlife paradise. I slinked around the edge of the house, crept next to a line of bushes, near enough to get a good close-up shot of our visitor. I was down on one knee snapping away when he noticed me. He gave me a quizzical look—something along the lines of "Is this guy daft enough to actually come near me?" That's when I discovered that skunks aren't really scared of humans. His tail shot straight up. "Well that's odd," I thought as I peered over my camera. Then he fixed his beady little eyes on me and charged. OK, maybe charged is too strong a word. Ambled is more like it, but I swear I could read ill intent in his eyes. Let me tell

I made a sound similar to Tarzan missing a vine and hightailed it across the yard

you, I've run across grizzlies in Alaska and been charged by a bull elephant in Africa, but that skunk was the most menacing critter I've ever had the displeasure of encountering. I made a sound similar to Tarzan missing a vine and hightailed it across the yard with a tiny black and white terror shuffling along in pursuit. It was three days before I ventured back into the yard. Needless to say, our backyard wildlife adventures have not all been sitting by the pond and observing the calming beauty of wildlife at play, but it's been fun—and exciting. Uhhmm, ... I think I just saw a snake!



2012 Officers

The new officers for 2012 are:

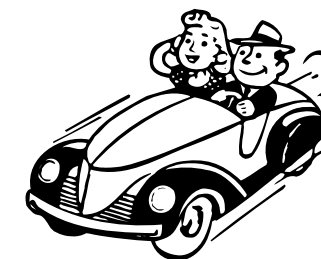
- ✓ President
Carole Barron MG'03
- ✓ Vice President
Joni Gruber MG '06
- ✓ Secretary
Carroll Adams MG'05
- ✓ Treasurer
Jerry Davis MG'94

We are grateful for the willingness of these individuals to serve.

Continued Better Place Continued

(Continued from page 3)

south triangle. I guess these kinds of incursions come with the territory. The work is rewarding as it keeps me active, and it satisfies my creative side. I am pleased with the resulting look, and by the occasional positive feedback when a driver shouts out his/her car window: 'thanks', 'good job', 'looking good' (I finally realized the last was not personal; they were just complimenting the plantings). I find this project to be a very good way to 'give back' to my community. I plan on continuing with it as long as my health (back) holds.



Upcoming events

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

- Southern Gardening Symposium, Callaway Gardens - Jan. 27 - 29, 2012
- Alabama Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference, The Hotel At Auburn University Conference Center - Feb. 10-11
- Garden Club of Alabama's Landscape Design Study Course, May 1-2, 2012
- Southern Region MG Conference, Natchez, Mississippi - May 1-4, 2012
- International MG Conference Alaska cruise, Sept. 7-14, 2013

For more info contact: Ken Creel—256-532-1578—kcreel@aces.edu

Meet Bruce Fulton?

If trees could scream, would we be so cavalier about cutting them down? We might, if they screamed all the time, for no good reason.

~Jack Handey



I thought about this quote when Bruce Fulton told me his hobby was “cutting down trees” and his wife Charlotte confirmed that “no tree is safe” from him. I don’t think they were exaggerating. When I visited their Athens home and toured their yard and gardens, Charlotte pointed out where two pecan trees once stood—victims of Bruce’s chainsaw. Then they took me to a pretty little seven acre spot that they own in rural Limestone County where I noticed that every other tree seemed to be sporting a necklace of bright pink marking tape. Trees marked for cutting and living on borrowed time, awaiting the ar-

rival of the next tree massacre. Bruce must hear screaming.

Perhaps surprisingly, their country acreage still hosts a large number of trees including huge hickory and oaks. Bruce said they don’t really use the land for anything other than just a place to go and relax, and they spend a lot of time there mowing, bush hogging and enjoying the escape from town that the land provides. It was easy to see why they love it. A pleasant mix of wooded groves and open fields, the land is a quiet refuge in the country.

Although they have owned the land and tended it for years, Bruce’s gardening career flowered late in life. Originally from the West Coast by way of Los Angeles and Oregon, he joined the Army and was eventually assigned to Redstone Arsenal. While he was stationed at the Arsenal he met Charlotte, a Madison native, and with their marriage he became a permanent Alabamian. The couple lived in Limestone County for a while but now live in Athens. They are both active members of First United Methodist Church where Bruce is a member of the church choir.

After he left the Army he worked on Redstone Arsenal as a civilian until his retirement from the Patriot Missile

Tom Ress MG ‘09

Program Management Office in 2005. With a little time on his hands after retirement, he and Charlotte took the Master Gardener course in 2006. He had been interested in taking the classes for a while, like many of us to “learn a lot of things he didn’t know” but—again like many of us with bad memories—he says that even after taking the course “if it’s not written down it’s gone”. He says his neighbor keeps reminding him that he’s a Master Gardener and should know all about her plants.



Since receiving his MG certification he has remained an active member of the Limestone County Master Gardeners Association, contributing in a variety of ways. In the past five years he has worked our vegetable garden, helped with the annual plant sale and assisted with Master Gardener classes. He upped his participation in the past

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Chaste Tree

A chaste tree “quickly grows into a multi-trunked tree about 10 to 20 feet tall

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up to about 4 feet -- kind of like pruning a crepe myrtle. It’s especially important to open up the middle and remove any branches growing through the center of the tree. Also remove messy, twiggy growth that tends to crowd the ends of the branches. As an option, cut entire plant to ground in winter. It will sprout in spring and bloom in summer, although later than those trees not pruned so severely. Chaste tree blooms on new growth. You can force a second bloom in summer by removing the first flush of blooms as soon as they fade. The best thing about chaste tree, in my uber-learned opinion, is the **flowers**. Small, fragrant panicles



*Monk's Pepper,
Vitex agnus - castus
Smell Great!*

Never Again

Never again will I plant anything with ‘loosestrife’ in its name. I believed the blurb that said only purple loosestrife is invasive, but I discovered that even a white variety is impossible to get rid of without resorting to major chemical weapons (and

of eye candy light blue flowers in 6-12-in. spikes at branch end and in leaf joints that bloom three to five months. This lovely tree attracts hummingbirds, and I have seen several interesting butterflies at my tree. Commitments can become a ball and chain, but *Vitex* easily wins a blue ribbon from Harvey Cotten “for its high performance with very little care.” **Bee alert:** Bumblebees love this plant above all others and will even spend the night on the flowers. Keep this in mind if bees freak you out. **Selections:** ‘Alba’ and

continued

‘Silver Spire’ are white selections; “Mississippi Blues” is an excellent deep blue selection, and ‘Abbeville Blue’ & ‘Shoal Creek’ are good blue selections. ‘Rosea’ has pink flowers.³ Whatever you choose, watch it take off, blooming profusely from a very young age. Being with other Master Gardeners is indeed like oft-quoted Helen Keller’s “Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light.” I will always remember Sue Bish walking me around her back yard and introducing me to her chaste tree every time I look at mine.

Note: Bennett’s Nursery (\$19.99).

1. Southern Living Garden Book 1998
2. The Grumpy Gardener Blog
3. Bob Polomski “Month-by-Month Gardening in Alabama and Mississippi

Kathryn Davis MG ‘98

I’m not sure the chemical weapons will be effective). I’ve had it for about 20 years now, and it is still coming up. **Never again** will I allow a neighbor to dig up anything in my yard without my being there. Some people don’t know when to quit, and some

people don’t listen when one tells them what is available for the taking.

Never again will I buy plants without having a plan for incorporating them into my garden - that is, never again until next spring!

