

# The Dirt | June, 2025

Mobile County Master Gardeners



Master Gardeners,

## It is Fun to be a Marketeer

Our association has a regular calendar of events – In the Spring, we put most of our energy toward the Spring Festival, and for each of the first three years of this one-day event we have been successful. At the end of the Fall, we put an amazing amount of energy into one week for the Greenery Sale, and we are usually well rewarded for our efforts. In between, these two significant programs, during the Mobile Summer before the heat of July drives us indoors, we have the Market Season – Market in the Park.

Actually, the Market program is more accurately the Season of the ***Ask a Master Gardener Tent***. For the months of May and June, and then again for six weeks in October and November, we don't sell anything. We do, however, give away a lot of information. This program is really the essence of what Master Gardeners do – we study hard, and we share scientifically based gardening information with others. In the Mobile County Master Gardener Association, Inc Operations Manual, you will find the statement of our objectives on page 5:

The objectives of the Association are to:

- (a) *Enhance and supplement the Alabama Cooperative Extension System Home Horticulture programs in outreach, teaching, and research.*
- (b) *Enhance Master Gardeners' knowledge of, and interests in horticulture and related activities.*
- (c) *Provide community service to residents of Mobile County, Alabama, by way of horticultural projects and dissemination of information about horticultural practices and techniques as approved by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.*
- (d) *Cooperate and affiliate with other public and private organizations whose purposes are consistent with the purposes of this Association.*
- (e) *Provide opportunities for Master Gardeners to associate with others who have an interest in horticulture.*

Recruit and train individuals with similar interests to those stated herein.

The Market does that last item as well -- we recruited Bill Fink!

We offer the Market experience to the Interns every year. It is a good chance to hone what we have learned in class or in our own gardens and then use that learning to answer gardening questions on the fly, addressing the interests or

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concerns of the customer. It is a great way to expand what you know about gardening and horticulture by listening to what your fellow Master Gardeners say, or by suddenly realizing what the instructor meant that day in class when you did not really understand what, or why, a topic was being taught. It is a wonderful way, during the down time between customers, to talk with your fellow Master Gardeners and become friends.

The Market program offers its participants a way to earn volunteer hours – a lot of hours depending on how much you want to do. During the Summer Market in the Cathedral Square, one might earn 60 hours – over 10 weeks. We also have another Summertime market in Semmes where you can earn as much as 25 volunteer hours on Thursday afternoons. Then there is the fall Market back at Cathedral Square where a Master Gardener can pick up another 35 to 40 hours – and the weather in October is Mobile's finest time. One hundred and twenty-five hours in one year! Reach for the Stars, earn that next badge.

There is another stat that you can add to your Time Report – Contacts! Over the entire market experience, we had over 1,000 contacts in 2024, and we have never had less than 900. The Market program registers more contacts each year than the Festival or the Greenery Sale – combined!

The Ask a Master Gardener tent at the Market in the Park is a great way to be a Master Gardener, and it is really a lot of fun to be a Marketeer. If you would like to get in on the Ask a Master Gardener Program, contact me, Bob Howard, at our next meeting or by email at [rwhoward51@gmail.com](mailto:rwhoward51@gmail.com). It is fun to be a Marketeer!

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## Chronicles

by Cindy Findlay

Summer is here! Almost, temperature wise, with a few more weeks until the "official" summer date. We Master Gardeners have been at our best! Tending to our gardens and reaping the benefits. We are all hands in the dirt or volunteering to help with our community's garden. This is a happy time for us Master Gardeners.

Earth Day Celebration was held at the re-opening of Chickasabogue Park on April 28th. As with past years we teamed up with Mobile Urban Growers to share space to teach the public on how to grow food and answered questions. Seed packs were given out with an interactive seed planting station for the kids. A success story indeed!

The Community Garden at Wilmer Hall looks wonderful! Thanks to the group of volunteers who will be watering, scrutinizing, and harvesting almost daily. MCMG, **Jan Wood**, is heading up this project. She is doing a good job with the help of **Jack LeCroy** in helping lead them into success.

Market in the Park is going strong every Saturday until June 28th. I understand that the weather has been kind so people are out and about. Bob and Catherine would love your help!

Mobile Botanical Gardens held their last two Market Place sales on May 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. Thanks to all MCMGs who suit up and show up. It's fun work!

Our May general meeting, held at the West Regional Branch of the Mobile Public Library, was a great success. Approximately 44 members attended.

We sent 9 Birthday cards this month and a Get-Well card.

**Stay hydrated as you garden and if you can be anything, be kind.**



## Mark Your Calendar

It's never too early to think about attendance at the AMGA conference in early May 2026. Saddle up and wagons ho, MGs, Huntsville here we come!

**May 16-18, 2026**, for Master Gardener Garden Tour. Details TBD. This gives you plenty of time to gussy up your garden.



## Master Gardener of the Month

by Emily Arellano

There is something about playing in the dirt that MGs love! This month's Master Gardener of the Month is no exception. She likes to get her hands dirty. Pulling weeds, planting flowers, and spreading pine straw are some of her activities.

When not playing in the dirt, she serves as a docent at MBG. Oh, she also plays in the dirt at MBG too. Planting, pulling weeds, (there is a pattern here) are also what she does as MBG as well as working MBG plant sales. She must like kids

because she works with school children at MBG and even goes to schools to teach kids about the wonder of gardening.

It is a pleasure to award MGOM to **Karen Ruckart** for May 2025. Thank you, Karen, for your hard work.

## Confessions of a Former 4-Her

Walking into the Jon Archer Building and observing ongoing 4-H Club meetings led by **Adeline Quintana**, I reminisce about my 4-H days quite a few decades ago. Even after all this time I am still mindful of the 4-H motto "Head, Heart, Hands, and Health."

My membership in 4-H was driven by my Grandma Abbie, the grandmother I wrote about last month. She was a community leader in Baldwin County and knew several extension agents of the day. Any organization Grandma Abbie was involved in she wound up in a leadership position. When I joined 4-H I became president which I guess made Grandma proud. Because of my leadership role I felt like I needed to participate in every 4-H event which I did with the exception of raising livestock. No more mucking around in cow manure for me at that age.

What I did participate in first was the annual biscuit baking event. Every Southerner needs biscuits in their menu rotation, so that was a useful recipe to have in my back pocket. Everyone in my club was given the rules: only regular AP flour, leavening, etc. I practiced baking biscuits from scratch daily until the day of biscuit judging. In my opinion those biscuits were so light and fluffy, they practically floated off the plate. I was so proud! I took my biscuit entry to be judged, hoping to be a winner. But, alas, my biscuits did not win. Instead, another biscuit entry won by a baker whose name I will not disclose, but I have NOT forgotten, F.E! I found out after the fact that F.E. used self-rising flour instead of regular AP flour, a definite rule violation. I was disappointed, but I guess F. E. needed the approval the blue ribbon offered more than me, so I moved forward without making a ruckus.

The next 4-H event was apron sewing. I was determined to score a win on the apron, so off to the local dime store for fabric. Truth be told, the dime store did not stock the prettiest cloth, so I chose the least ugly fabric available. Then Grandma Abbie hovered over me as I struggled with her sewing machine and stitched the ugliest apron on the planet. Nevertheless, my "creation" won first place and gave me the opportunity to go to the county level for judging. The judging took place on Highway 104, the location of Baldwin County extension activities even today. This building had a stage which I pranced on to show off my apron. I guess that was to be my 15 minutes of fame and my red-carpet moment. Sadly, I did not win at the county level, but that was OK because just my stage presence filled my esteem bucket.

The 4-H organization founded in 1902 was and is beneficial for a variety of reasons. 4-H pushes members forward in a wide range of hands-on experiences and life skills. 4-H agents and volunteers offer opportunities in science, health, agriculture, and civic leadership. My 4-H experiences led to increased confidence and a love of science which remains with me today. For me "Head, Heart, Hands, and Health" is as relevant today as it was decades ago during my 4-H tenure.

by Barbara Boone



## Poop From the Coop

"Gardening is awesome because it is one of the only ways we can be led to buy poop!"- Anonymous

So many homeowners have added chickens in their backyards for the purpose of egg laying. However, there is more to obtain from chickens besides eggs. Chicken manure is also a valuable byproduct as a soil amendment, especially for home gardeners. Chicken manure can be bought in a bag, but if possible, get it straight from the source.

Chicken manure is an excellent source of nitrogen as part of the N-P-K plant growth requirement. What one has to be cognizant of is that the percentage of N-P-K is dependent on the bird's diet. Not only does chicken manure serve as fertilizer, it also can improve soil structure by aiding in drainage in situations where the soil is largely clay. In addition, microorganisms in the manure adds to the soil web complex.

When using chicken manure, one has to be mindful of not incorporating the byproduct too fresh. Using manure too "hot" from the source can lead to fertilizer burn from too much nitrogen. (It is recommended to age manure about 3 months.) Letting the manure "cure" by composting is a must. Layer the composted material as a single layer in a no dig situation. Another application method is making a compost tea.

Manure could be the source of pathogens (think Salmonella) so wearing gloves is a must. Be sure to vigorously wash hands!

Knowing which plants benefiting from cured manure or teas are leafy plants such as brassicas. Do not apply to lower pH-loving plants such as azaleas, hydrangeas, or blueberries.

Either residing in a coop or foraging as a free-range bird. composted manure from chickens is a valuable amendment for plants and ultimately the soil. So, scoop the poop and cluck on!

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source: Elizabeth Waddington, Rural Sprout, May 2021.







Roses at MCI



More Roses at MCI



Roses at MCI



Crew hard work at MCI



More roses at MCI



Carolyn Rooks,  
Mary Ann Tomblin



The Crew!



Earl Gochey



## Extension Leaders and Volunteers Enhancing the Community

Wilmer Hall update: Pictured directly above (bottom) are the Wilmer Hall team members. **Alice Marty, Mary Townsley, John Mitchell, Jack LeCroy, Cindy Findlay, Bob Howard, and Jan wood.** The team will be responsible for periodic checking and recording growth, watering needs, and presence of pests. This attention to detail should yield a bountiful harvest of nutritious veggies for Wilmer Hall residents.

Pictured above, **Dr. Dana Nettles** continues to speak along with other MGs like **Pat Hall** to participants at the Connie Hudson Senior Center. Pictured above 2nd from top are Pat Hall, **John Mitchell**, and a host of helpers at the center.

Crew 22 continues to beautify Mitchell Cancer Institute (MCI). The rose garden has more blooming roses seen in the photo above. Crew members working at MCI: **Patti Hicks, Carolyn Rooks, Paul Ezell, Carol Mackay, Lisa Davis, Mary Ann Tomblin, Earl Gochey, Kathy Deckbar, and Paul Barnes.** Passersby continue to comment on a job well done. This committed team still works at Mulherin as well spreading nature's beauty all over town.



### Dirt Under Your Nails

#### Lantanas

Lantanas, *Lantana camara*, are a real workhorse in the garden. Grown as an annual in most gardens, in warm climates lantanas can be treated as perennials.

Originating in tropical climates, lantanas became popular in North America due to its showy flowers in yellows, pinks, and reds in clusters and ease of growth requirements. These plants typically grow 3-4 ft in height and spread 1-2 ft. They love full sun and well-drained soil with moderate watering and minimal fertilization.

Probably due to the bright flowers, lantanas are major attracters of pollinators. It is not uncommon to observe butterflies and bees hovering around flower clusters. On the other hand, lantanas repel mosquitoes.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source: Mary Ellis, Backyard Garden Lover, Feb 2024.



AeroGarden system



Olivia Reinhaus  
checking hydroponic  
setup



Hydroponic system

## Gardenology

### Hydroponics

The photo above middle shows **Olivia Reinhaus**, (2021) who for several months has "dipped her toe" into a liquid hydroponic system. A visit to her hydroponics setup indicates how far she has come in this growing technology she first started the end of 2024 after attending a how-to session held on Hwy 104 across the bay.

Hydroponics is defined as growing plants in nutrient-rich water without soil, although hydroponic systems can be either liquid or aggregate. Liquid systems have no supporting medium for the plant roots, whereas aggregate systems have a solid medium of support. Olivia uses a liquid system. Systems utilize nutrients listed below. \*

There are a number of benefits to growing in either environment as opposed to soil:

- requires less water
- requires less space
- use of fertilizer efficiently
- faster growth cycle
- avoids soil pathogens
- no herbicides or pesticides
- no weeds
- no good soil required

Having listed the many benefits of growing via hydroponics, note that several cons exist:

- cost of equipment
- requires power
- requires some maintenance

\*Macro: N, P, K, Ca, Mg, S

\*Micro: B, Cl, Cu, Fe, Mo, Zn

All of the pros and cons need to be considered before moving forward with a hydroponic system. So far Olivia has had positive results growing lettuces and herbs and states that grow seasons are not really a consideration any longer since she grows indoors in front of a sunny window.

Compiled by Terra Firma

Source: Hydroponics for Homeowners and Schools, multiple REAs, Nov 2024  
Extension, Okstate.edu. Arjina Shrestha, Apr 2017

### What's in a word: Mulch

Sometimes we see or hear a word so many times we forget it may have an origin in another language and another time. An example is a term we use frequently, mulch.



The word "mulch" originates from Old French "Muche" meaning " soft, rotten wood". In the 16th century it referred to decaying wood as a protective layer around plants. Over time the word expanded to include straw, leaves, and bark. Now we refer mulch to mean any covering on the soil surface for protection and enrichment.

Compiled by Terra Firma

Source: The History of Mulch, Wholesale Wood Products



## Earth Day 2025

Pictured above Chickasabogue Park on April 26 was the venue designated to celebrate Earth Day in the Mobile area. The park, having undergone a recent renovation and update, was a perfect location for the event. The overall theme of the day was sustainability and keeping our part of the globe clean. 110 contacts tallied, approx. 50 seed packets distributed, and about 25 herbs handed out to visitors to the MG/MUG tent. Mobile Master Gardeners and Mobile Urban Growers were represented by **Carol Dorsey, Pat Hall, Cindy Findlay, Marion Platt, Theresa Davidson, Barbara Peters, Karen Ruckert, and Barbara Boone.**

A little history on Earth Day: 1969 was the scene of oil spills and concern over the environment in general leading to rallies and marches. This concern led Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin to sponsor legislation that led to the Environmental Protection Agency, the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act. From there came Earth Day first celebrated in 1970.

By Barbara Boone

Source: earthday.org  
Photo courtesy of Pat Hall

## Speaker's Bureau Update

May 17 **Jane Finley** spoke to Arlington Oaks HOA on home turf. Jane's topic presented to 30 members was "Seeking a Beautiful Lawn" which covered types of turf best planted in our area and management of the turf.

Christ Methodist Church next speaker event will be September 13. Probable topic will be growing fruit in Mobile. More details to follow.

If you would like to be involved with the Speaker's Bureau educating and reaching out to our community with gardening and sustainability topics, please contact **Barbara Boone** (251-680-8263) or **Alice Marty** (251-709-1125).

## Bugs and Hisses

Fusarium Wilt

*Fusarium oxysporon f. sp. cubense* is not a bug nor does it hiss. Also known as Panama disease, Tropical Race 4 (TR4), and Fusarium wilt, this is a fungus which has been decimating Cavendish bananas, the most common commercial banana cultivar. This disease was previously reported in this newsletter, but that was before scientists reported tackling this problem and reporting a solution so that bananas continue to be in our supermarkets.

A major purveyor of bananas (you know, bananas with that recognizable blue sticker) teamed up with genetics labs and universities to create a new banana hybrid known as Yelloway One. Yelloway One bananas have the same taste, texture, and look like the common Cavendish. The difference is this hybrid has developed resistance to TR4. DNA sequencing and genetic analysis studies brought about the banana hybrid.

Yelloway Ones are currently going through field trials and should be available in 2028. This is one time that GMO is a welcome addition!

Compiled by Terra Firma

Source: U of Maryland extension



## From the Green House

### Useful Garden Hacks

Unless you wear good quality gloves, you will likely accumulate dirt under your nails when digging or transplanting in your landscape. A quick way to prevent dirt under your nails is to scrape nails across a bar of soap prior to working in the garden so that soap is there instead of dirt. That means making easy work of scrubbing with a brush when gardening is done.

Another hack to keep in mind is to place stones or pottery shards around the trunk base of a shrub to prevent "weed eater" disease from trimming too closely around the trunk causing damage to the shrub cambium. Exposed cambium can lead to pest and disease as well as the shrub's inability to transport water and nutrients. Either situation can lead to death of the shrub.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source: 10 Gardening Hacks, HGTV April 2025.

**Going out to the garden is to go on holiday; when you travel amongst flowers, your body touches heaven and your mind tastes tranquility and freedom. -Anonymous**



**Remember, see separate In the Loop for all MCMG date, time and location. Plus, how to capture MG volunteer hours, especially important for new interns wishing Master Gardener certification ASAP!**

### **Mission Statement**

The Alabama Master Gardener Volunteer Program is an educational outreach program provided and administered by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

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