

# The Dirt | January, 2025

Mobile County Master Gardeners



Master Gardeners,

As I write this it is Christmas Eve. This is one of the most special days of the year for many people, but for some, it is a day marred with sadness. Juxtaposed against the general gaiety and cheer it seems odd and out of place, but it really is not. The biblical message that resounds on this evening is "Fear Not!"

As gardeners we know that life can linger under great stress – drought, freezing temperatures, lack of attention – and yet the plant survives, greens up, and produces a new flower.

Christmas Eve is the beginning of a new start. The days will soon start getting a little longer, and they will get a little warmer. We will venture out into our gardens more and get excited about what we can plan – and plant.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas – or a quiet Christmas. Just remember, Spring will be here before you know it.  
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## Chronicles

by Cindy Findlay

Do Mobile County Master Gardeners (MCMGs) know how to bring in the holiday season or what? Under the direction and hard work of both **Paula Reeves**, MCMG and **Emily Arellano**, MCMG, all of us MCMG "elves" went hard to work to make the 2024 Greenery Sale the success that it was! The Pine Cone and Okra Party was just the beginning of our holiday festivities.

Intern **Steve Sisk** has stepped up to be our new leader for the Greenery Collection

phase (thank you Steve). Steve and his crew were out at the Auburn Research Center bright and early the Saturday morning after Thanksgiving to cut and pick all of the greenery needed for all of our creations.

Then, on Sunday, there was Paula again, with her crew (thank each one of you) washing all of the greenery gathered and soaking the oasis for the creations we make. The very talented decorators arrived bright and early Monday morning and worked tirelessly for the rest of the week.

Last year we moved our pick-up location to the Jon Archer Center. That went so well and so many wanted to buy extra, we added a "Holiday Shop" in the small auditorium space. Thanks to **Donna Kelley**, MCMG and her crew for decorating and making our Holiday Shop so successful that I heard whispers of bigger and better! Cuppa Cheer, Okra Angels, Okra Grinches, Christmas decorations and cookies, we had it all.

I know all MCMGs, those who helped this year and those who have helped in past years, know how much work, how many moving parts, people and time it takes to pull this event together. Thank you, thank you, thank you! And we all had fun, worked hard and were exhausted when it was over!

The Board of Directors met on December 4<sup>th</sup> to wrap up the year. The details of our Annual Awards and Christmas Dinner were planned. On Sunday, December 15. Thanks to **Cindy Knowles**, **Jack LeCroy** and **Diane Anthony** for their help with our awards banquet. Jackie Jenkins, MCMG, as always, had the place all dolled up! Which meant the event turned out fabulous! Good food, some Intern certifications and our other awards presented.

11 birthday cards were sent for our MCMG's with December birthdays  
A 'Get Well' card was sent to to **Nancy Seibt**, MCMG.

I want to "Point of Light" on a few of our members that work in the shadows! **Earl McLaughlin**, MCMG, **Marianna Parker**, MCMG. Thanks for what you do for "US."

Lastly, many, many, thanks to our President **Carol Williams**, MCMG whose guidance in 2024 has been very appreciated. She worked so hard with every single project that the MCMG's undertook in 2024. Always ready to answer a question, find the answer, and take your hand and show you how! We appreciate and value your leadership.



## Mark Your Calendar

Save the Date: April 3-5, 2025, to attend 2025 AMGA Conference & Business Meeting located in Prattville, AL  
Hosted by Autauga County Master Gardeners Association.  
Theme at the conference is "Fountains of Knowledge." Details will follow.

### We Have a Wish List:

For future Greenery Sale items, please check your craft stash for supplies like acrylic paints, an extra glue gun, and glue sticks. These donations will be much appreciated for Master Gardener crafters.



## What's Your Sign: Houseplants by the Zodiac

Houseplants get minimal coverage in this newsletter, so it's time that plants grown inside get more love and attention. In 2025 a houseplant will be featured every month based on the stars. Hopefully the plants featured each month will highlight insights into your personality based on your astrological sign.

Aquarius-January 20-February 8 ZZ plant, *Zamioculcas zamifolia*, is perfect for an Aquarius-born grower. They are drought resistant and dramatic.



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## Master Gardener 2024 Awards of the Year

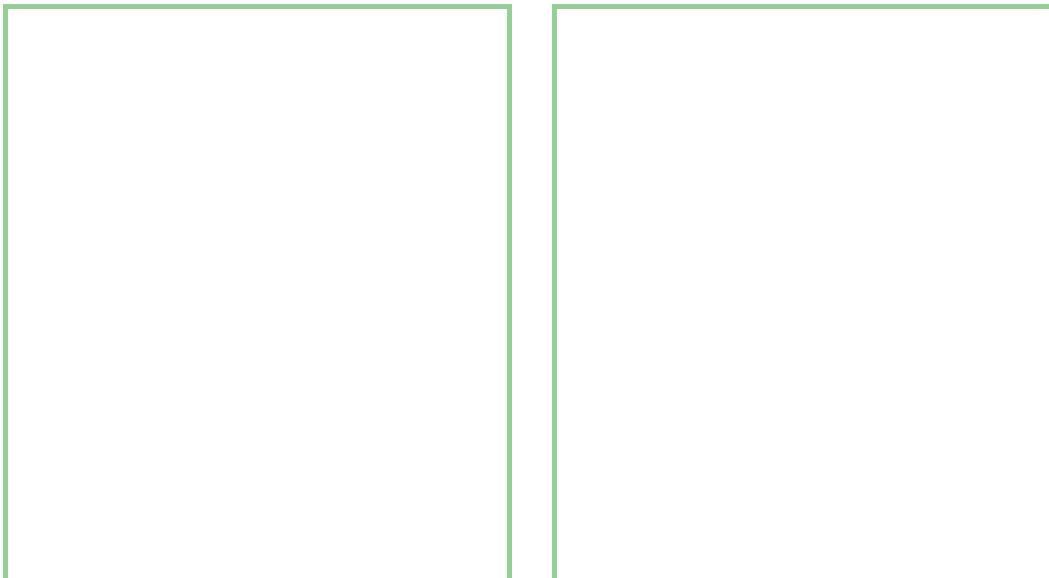
Jon Archer Center was the site on January 15 for the 2024 Mobile County Master Gardener Banquet. Plenty of social time and good food was enjoyed by all. The highlight of the evening was the announcement of awards by **Jack LeCroy**.

- Master Gardener of the Year- **Theresa Davidson**
- Rookie of the Year- **Paul Barnes**
- Holly Jolly Award- **Paula Reeves**
- Golden Trowel Legacy Award- **Dorothy White\*\***
- Above and Beyond Award- **Marion Platt**
- Visibility Award- **Carolyn Rooks**
- Behind the Scenes Award-**Jackie Jenkins**

New 2024 certified Interns as of Dec 15, 2024: **Margie Wilcox, John Mitchell, Kelsey Flach, Steve Sisk, Melissa Curtis, Pat Hall, and Dana Nettles.**

In addition, all 2024 Master Gardeners of the Month were recognized: **Paul Barnes, Gudrun Russell, Catherine Moates, Donna Kelley, Paula Reeves, Lydia Criswell, Theresa Davidson, and Marion Platt.**

\*\* Award accepted on behalf of Dorothy White by **Diane Sellers.**





Theresa Davidson Master Gardener of the Year



Paul Barnes Rookie Master Gardener of the Year



Paula Reeves-Holly Jolly Award



Jackie Jenkins-Behind the Scenes Award



Carolyn Rooks-Visibility Award



Marion Platt-Above and Beyond Award



Dorothy White-Golden Trowel Legacy Award\*\*



2024 Certified Master Gardeners + Dana Nettles



All 2024 Master Gardeners of the Month



## Extension Volunteers Enhancing the Community

### Wilmer Hall Vegetable Garden Project

The workday at Wilmer Hall was held December 19 1:00 to 4:00. Irrigation was laid and soil put in the beds. Wilmer Hall serves young adults and families, mothers and babies, especially people who might otherwise endure food insecurity and homelessness.

### Making Connections

Seen below in the top photo, **Alice Marty** visited with Colorado Master Gardeners. Alice has a son who lives in the Denver area who she told she wanted to check out local Master Gardeners. The visit was arranged at the local extension, and while there, she saw familiar plants as well as an unfamiliar chocolate plant. Yes, it smells like chocolate. Alice acted like the Southern Bell she is, charming all in the photo. This proves that no matter the geographic location, we all have common interests.

**Pat Hall**, MUG liaison, sent 4 photos below taken at a recent Taylor Park outing. Who is having a better time? It is hard to tell. One thing for sure is what these kids take away from engaging with them is yet to be determined. More connections made!





John Mitchell at Taylor Park



Sonny Hughey at Taylor Park



Ed Deas at Taylor Park



All Taylor Park helpers



## Dirt Under Your Nails

### Overwintering Ferns

During warmer months many front porches have ferns hanging from them. With moist soil, correct sunlight, and an occasional dose of fertilizer, ferns do well. But now that cooler weather and occasional freezing temperatures occur, how can we keep ferns ready to enhance a front porch again next year?

Some of us transport ferns to a garage, but ferns can also be treated as a houseplant until next spring. Bringing ferns indoors to overwinter is a good way to add greenery interest indoors and is beneficial for next year's gardening budget.

The following are a couple of tips to keep your ferns brought inside in good shape.

- Prune and shape the fern, especially long straggler fronds.
- Give the fern a good wash.
- Inspect for any insects before bringing the fern inside.
- Some large ferns will need to be repotted to prevent becoming root bound. Avoid dividing ferns now. Wait until warmer weather to divide.
- Place ferns in indirect light.
- Water after soil is dry to the touch.

Following the above tips should ensure ferns ready to place back outdoors next year.



### What to do with Waxed Amaryllis After Blooming

Amaryllis with waxed bulbs are a popular holiday gift this year. If you are fortunate enough to receive a gifted waxed amaryllis, your first question is what to do with the bulb after the bloom is spent. After all preserving the bulb means adding to your amaryllis collection.

With a little effort the bulb can be saved. To remove the waxy coating, soak the entire bulb in warm water 10-15 minutes. After the wax is removed, the bulb may look a little shriveled because the bulb uses moisture and nutrients to fuel its blooms. As long as the bulb has some remaining firmness and doesn't feel mushy, it should recover with a little time and water.

Next inspect for any mold which may have developed underneath the wax, scraping any infected areas. Cut off the flower stalks about 2 inches above the bulb so that no energy is applied to making seeds. Place the amaryllis in potting soil so that the top third of the bulb sticks up. Water well and place in well-lit location. Roots and leaves will begin to grow.

Now, with a little patience, you have another amaryllis, and every time you see a beautiful bloom, you remember the person who presented such a wonderful gift.

By Dirt Diva

Source: National Gardening Association, Dec 2024.

### Diatomaceous Earth-Dinosaurs in Your Garden?

Have you thought you would ever be hosting a substance that is actually a dino fossil in your garden? Not a T. rex, but diatomaceous earth (DE), which resembles talcum powder, is composed of fossilized diatoms. DE works by drying out oils and fats of the offending pest. Diatoms are one-celled microalgae, and they have been collected and dried for the following uses:

- Pest barrier-apply DE around plants or along garden bed perimeters to deter pests, especially slugs and snails and ants.
- Application to active infections-of thrips and spider mites.
- Application of wet DE to hard-to-reach areas-such as leaf undersides. DE in a wet application is made with 1/2 gallon water + 1 cup DE.
- Rodent deterrent-a mixture of a few drops of essential oils + 1 cup DE will rid an area of rodents. **NOT TO BE USED IN PET AREAS.**

Tips for using DE:

- Do not use DE on plants that attract pollinators.
- Only use food-grade DE.
- Wear mask and gloves PPE when applying DE.
- Reapply after rain.

Diatomaceous earth is available locally and by mail order.

Compiled by Terra Firma

Sources: BH&G, Laurel Lander, Aug 2024.

## The Greenery Sale 2024: Veni, Vidi, Vici which in Master Gardener Speak is We Came, We Worked, We Got It Done!

The Greenery Sale held every year as the major Mobile County Master Gardener fund raiser takes much planning and many hands. Design training, marketing, design, setup and take down all came together proving this sum was greater than its parts. Here are a few of the helping hands which made the 2024 Greenery Sale a success.



Karen Ruckert and Addie Smith with Swag



Sonny Hughey Okra Designer



Marion Platt Okra Designer



Lorene Lami Designer



Completed Designs

## Bravo Susan Hilton!

Yes, that is **Susan Hilton** crossing the pink carpet. We are so proud of her for traveling to California and participating in this event. Master Gardener, artist, runner. What can't this lady do? Why does she do this? Read on...





According to Susan, there were about 1900 walkers including 400 cancer survivors aged 18-65.

Susan completed 60 miles including hills in 20 hours and 36 minutes. Raising \$2500, she completed this event to help inspire and encourage others AND it is therapeutic. She is a WARRIOR!

Congratulations, Susan! You are a true inspiration to us all.

By Barbara Boone

## Speaker's Bureau Update

Libraries often provide opportunities to reach out to people for more than book lending. They also provide the setting for informational programs such as horticulture and gardening. AND besides lending books, some libraries also have initiated seed lending. The Moorer Branch on McGregor Ave. currently has a program in place. Library hours are M, W, F, S 9:00-6:00 pm, and T, Th 9:00-8:00 pm.

**DO YOU HAVE A PET TOPIC YOU ENJOY? WE NEED SPEAKERS! WE CAN HELP YOU GET STARTED! Stay tuned for a meeting to get better organized in January 2025. A Speaker Bureau meeting is planned for after the General MG meeting.**

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).

## What Super Food Is Still in Season?

That would be cranberries! This berry is not just a condiment for the annual Thanksgiving food fest. Early on Native Americans incorporated cranberries in their diet even though the concept of a superfood was unknown. Algonquin and other indigenous Americans combined the berries with other foods as part of their diet.

Cranberries are known for their nutritional value since they are high in antioxidants such as flavonoids and polyphenols.

Cranberries are not grown in our region; instead, the leading cranberry growing states are Wisconsin, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Oregon. Glacial bogs with an acidic pH are the site where cranberries grow as shrubs or vines. The bog growers then employ scoops to harvest the berries from the shrubs or vines.

From point of harvest in Fall, cranberries are processed by that company we all know which makes cranberry sauce. Even though these berries are not grown in our climate, it's nice to know where our food comes from.

Source: [www.cranberries.com](http://www.cranberries.com), Sarah Salkin, Nov 2013.

## Hortimetrics

### The Rule of Three

Known in the design world of decor and landscaping, the "rule of three" refers to planting in repetition in odd numbers. Even odd numbers like five, seven, or nine qualify. Why do odd numbers work in landscaping?

- Odd numbers look more natural; the eye can't easily divide the group in half.
- Groups of plants in odd numbers seem to flow from one to the next.
- Odd-numbered groupings have a more established feel.
- Odd-numbered groupings keep the eyes moving around the space because they are more interesting.

Where the rule might not work as well is where plants are not similar. Too many differences in plants create a scattered, confused appearance. However, an exception to this caveat is a wildflower meadow where it is expected to see many indigenous plants, flowers, and grasses.

By Dirt Diva

Source: Gardening Know How, Mary Ellen Ellis, Aug 2024

## Sci-Fi in the Garden

### To boldly grow where no gardener has grown before!

**Editor's Note:** I admit it...I am a science nerd in case you haven't realized that by now. When I take a deep writing dive, my mantra is science, human interest, and a dash of humor. Read on....

Literature, television, and motion pictures have long delved into science or pseudoscience as story lines. Hollywood captured a few noteworthy examples as seen below. Renowned authors such as Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clark, and Frank Herbert are but a few notable writers in this genre.

In the late 1950s viewers were captivated and horrified in the film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* where seeds sent by extraterrestrials to Earth grew into pods. Anyone sleeping in the vicinity of the pods became "pod people" devoid of all human emotion. **Bob Howard**, have you verified and vetted Spring Festival seeds are legit and did not originate in a galaxy far, far away?

In the late 60s, *Star Trek*, produced by Gene Roddenberry, gave us many scripts dealing with extraterrestrials, usually Klingons. In the episode entitled "This Side of Paradise", the Enterprise was sent to a planet whose inhabitants were suspected of being in some sort of trouble and lack of communication. When Captain Kirk, Spock, and medical officer McCoy beamed down, they found that all seemed well. But was it? Of course it wasn't. Plants releasing spores caused inhabitants to appear well. Only mental concentration not in the vicinity of the spore-releasing plants overcame the effect made by the spores. So, **Jack LeCroy**, please reiterate Right plant, Right Place!

The Chris Carter *X-Files* series ran from the early 90s to the early 2000s. This series was based on FBI Fox Mulder's and Dana Sculley's quest for the extraterrestrials responsible for the disappearance of Mulder's sister. During this search in an episode entitled "Firewalker" both Scully and Mulder encountered a volcano which harbored a silicon-based *Ophiocoedyceps* fungal-like organism. Again, fiction harking back to fungi was the script's concept. Let's send in **Crew 22** to repopulate the volcano's landscape from invasives to native plants.

Fast forward to a more recent cinematic example in "*The Martian*" based on the book of the same name by Andy Weir. In this tale an astronaut crew evacuated from Mars back to Earth, but due to a sudden, fierce storm, astronaut botanist and engineer Mark Watley (Matt Damon) is left behind. Resources remaining were meager with few supplies and little food. But Mark was resourceful and found a way to survive with only potatoes as a

food source. Planting and harvesting potatoes to sustain himself for over 500 days, he was eventually rescued by NASA and an international crew. Potatoes are a nutritious vegetable, but how many ways can potatoes be prepped for consumption for over 500 days? Maybe **Marsha Stolz** and our favorite fast-food outlet can collaborate on this conundrum.

Mark Twain wrote that "truth is stranger than fiction" and in certain situations it is. Today scientists grow plants in space to test the ability to grow in a sub-gravity environment. Seeds sent aboard a Soviet space craft were purported to grow the first flowering plant. Zinnias have been grown on the International Space Station. Today most horticultural experiments aboard the ISS are dedicated to growing food to supplement astronaut diets, support the oxygen level, and enhance mental health.

In the state of Virginia, the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden is a little closer to home. Housed in this garden are Sci-Fi spaces populated with alien resembling plants. Think pitcher plants, *Sarracenia spp.*, and certain orchids, *Orchidaceae spp.* Visiting this garden proves we don't need to undergo astronaut training and wait for the opportunity to board a Space-X fueled rocket to garden in outer space. **Emily Arellano**, arrange a 2025 road trip to Virginia?

**10, 9, 8.....1 Gardeners, man your trowels and lift off!**

By Terra Firma

Source: Science Fiction in the Garden, June, 2015.



## From the Greenhouse



### Reuse, Recycle, Repurpose-Sweet Gum Pods

Sweet gum trees, *Liquidambar styraciflua*, produce seed pods that are a boon to a crafter or a gardener. However, it takes 20 years before the seed pods are produced! What can be done with the prickly seed

Pods? These spikey pods can be used as follows:

- Lay around young plants to deter snails and slugs.
- Use the pods as mulch.
- Grind them and add to a compost pile as brown material.
- Use as a drainage filter in the bottom of pots.
- Add to wreaths or ornaments as natural components.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Source: littlebigharvest.com, Jan 2014  
NC State Extension, Oct 2016



**Remember, see separate In the Loop for all MCMG date, time and location activities. 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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