

# The Dirt | April, 2024

Mobile County Master Gardeners



## The President's Message

by Carol Williams

Mobile County Master Gardeners may have created a new definition for "March Madness." Our "brackets" were our camellia display at the Festival of Flowers second weekend, volunteering for the Mobile Botanical Garden's Plantasia sale with record results third weekend, and our own Spring Festival, offering for sale 2,900 vegetable plants including 12 varieties, fourth weekend. Read further in *The Dirt* for details and pictures. I hope that all of you had a chance to participate in at least one, or all, of these annual events. Special thanks to all who volunteered to meet both important MCMG goals: Share gardening education in our community and have fun!

Also, a special "Thank you!" to the Baldwin County Master Gardeners who cordially greeted the public at our Festival of Flowers display in Cathedral Square on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, March 8-10. They handed out information about camellia development in our area, how to become a Master Gardener, and our invitational flyers for Spring Festival.

We may be able to return that favor at the Alabama Master Gardeners Annual Convention, hosted by Baldwin County Master Gardeners, beginning Monday, April 22 at the Daphne Civic Center, continuing all day Tuesday, and Wednesday morning. If you haven't registered for the conference, BCMG needs some extra help so check **Theresa Davidson's** Vol Opps lists at our April 10 General Meeting to sign up.

The speaker for our April general meeting is **Jett Loewen**, a schoolteacher who retired with her husband, Arthur, to their farm in south Mobile County where she has learned much about growing their own organic food. Part of that learning and experimenting for the most nutritious and practical farming outcomes includes farming earthworms. They use earthworm castings for natural fertilizer and have developed a very effective liquid fertilizer with them. Jett will present a PowerPoint of their operation and hopefully be able to offer some of their liquid fertilizer for sale.

Also included in our April 10 general meeting, Alice Marty will be leading our spring plant swap. Bring healthy plants you have grown or multiplied, but don't plan to use in your garden, to trade for plants which may be more useful or enjoyable to you. We will have an area designated to park the plants you bring and will draw numbers for turns to pick new plants.

It looks like April offers more fun for MCMG volunteers. Our new leaders of the Speakers Bureau, **Barbara Boone** and **Alice Marty**,

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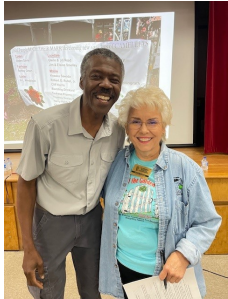


have lined up several of our gardeners to present at the West Mobile Regional Library. April 12, **Leslie Maycock** and **Alice Marty** will present Winter Sowing, a Seed Germination Technique, including a PowerPoint as well as a demonstration. On April 27, **Karen Ruckart** will be sharing "Grocery Store Botany," a class spent defining "vegetables, fruits, and roots" with food from the grocery store. All MCMG Speakers Bureau presentations are open to the public and our speakers will appreciate your attending to support them. If you have a gardening topic that you love to talk about or if you would be willing to share pre-made gardening talks from Auburn and other sources, contact Barbara or Alice to join the Speakers Bureau.



We are making plans to have a joint meeting with Baldwin County Master Gardeners on Wednesday, May 8. Tentatively, we will meet at Spanish Fort Presbyterian Church, 6620 Spanish Fort Boulevard (about 35 minutes from our Jon Archer ACES Center) and our speaker will be Jared Jones from the Gulf Coast Research & Extension Center in Fairhope. Check out the May edition of *The Dirt* for final details.

**Carol Williams**, President  
251-367-0473



~~~~~Carol's Corner~~~~~

**March Garden Riddle:**

I wear a crown of petals, in colors bold and fine,  
In gardens of the royals, majestically I shine.  
My scent is quite enchanting, a fragrance that's divine,  
In bouquets and in paintings, elegantly I entwine.

(Answer: **Cherry blossoms!** No one suggested the correct answer for March.)

**April Garden Riddle:**

With tendrils reaching upwards, I climb towards the sun,  
Around fences and trellises, my green journey is never done.  
My flowers may be small, but they're pretty and they're bright,  
In gardens, I bring beauty, from morning until night.

**April Chuckles:**

I put up an electric fence around my field last weekend. My neighbor is dead against it.  
I got arrested at the Farmers Market. I was disturbing the peas.

See you soon!  
Carol

*Please send your answer to [readingweeder72@hotmail.com](mailto:readingweeder72@hotmail.com)*  
All Photo sources: Mobile County Master Gardeners.



by Nina Ward

Oh, happy day! Spring has sprung in Mobile and Master Gardeners have been leading a very busy month! Spring means it's time for our annual Caladium Sale available at the MG general meeting and the Spring Festival. This year we sold six varieties based on sun or shade tolerance. For any bulbs yet to be sold contact **Marion Platt** (251-610-9748) or **Nina Ward** (251-251-447-7683)

The March general meeting hosted Alan Sealls, retired consummate weatherman, as speaker. A crowd favorite, Alan generated many questions from his audience.

The Festival of Flowers benefiting the USA Providence Foundation was held March 8-10 in the downtown Cathedral Square offering many stunning displays, especially the camellias by Master Gardeners, "Make Their Mark." Kudos to Master Gardeners who helped construct the camellia display, a very labor-intensive part of the construction project.

Thank you to **Robin Krchak** for her appreciatory letter to MCMG for assisting in Plantasia March 14-16. Many MGs volunteered at this event for labeling, checking, and transporting to bins for customer pickup.

Our latest successful endeavor was the 2nd annual Spring Festival at Jon Archer March 23. Plants that back yard gardeners arrived to buy were tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, eggplant, and squash. You know, the veggies being the ones we all want in our garden and on our plate.

A variety of garden-related vendors were on site to sell their wares. And you know Mobilians march on by their stomachs, so the Shux Y'all food truck provided tasty snacks for the energy to keep on shopping.

Lucky early arrivals at the Spring Festival scarfed up free bare root Red Bud and Tulip Poplars provided by the Arbor Day Foundation. This organization's goal is to inspire people to plant, nurture, and celebrate trees. Based on the number of tree seedlings taken home, this goal was met here in Mobile.

**THANK YOU TO ALL Master Gardeners** who participated in any way to make the Spring Festival successful this year. You know who you are: planners, up-potters, transporters, labelers, security on site, advisors to customers, presenters, coordinators of presentations, table/chair arrangers, snack providers, Dream Garden cleaners/straighten uppers/planters. An infinity of hands=>success!

Now, let's put our feet up for a little R&R-at least until the next big thing!

Live like someone left the gate open!

## Dream Garden Updates

The Demonstration Garden is always a work in progress. The vegetable section under **Marsha Stolz** always needs an extra hand, so stay alert for any additional planting date(s). Grandma's Passalong Garden has undergone a general Spring cleanup, adding a few colorful annuals and trimming where needed. See below for MGs who participated: **Carolyn Rooks, Karen Ruckert, Barbara Boone, Shirley Reynolds, Leslie Maycock, Marion Platt, and Boudreaux**, the official JAC wonder dog. **Lisa Davis** updated hanging baskets throughout the gardens. Her hanging baskets are like adding jewelry to the garden!

The Native plant section was also cleaned up recently per Marsha. If you would like to step up to oversee the Native plant section, please contact Marsha Stolz: [marshastolz@msn.com](mailto:marshastolz@msn.com) 251-689-5993.



Cleanup in Grandma's Garden



Karen and Carolyn adding trellis



Dream Garden



Dream Garden and Marcia Stolz

## "I'm Lookin' Over a 4-Leaf Clover..."

Remember this ditty from years ago? It's a little late for harking back to St. Patrick's Day, but maybe future wise you will be able to distinguish between shamrocks (*Trifolium repens*) and four-leaf clover.

All shamrocks are three-leaved and observed frequently in our landscapes. Because four-leaved clover is so rare, the plant is related to the "luck of the Irish" based on Celtic folklore. Four-leaf clover is a genetic anomaly and only occur 1 in 5,000 to 1 in 10,000 clovers. Five-leaf clover also exists and only occur 1 in 100,000 plants.

Actually, there are other clover varieties to include the *Oxalis* genus which is sold as shamrocks for St. Patrick's Day. Some consider this genus a lawn nuisance (especially HOAs), while others consider this greenery beneficial because it fixes nitrogen in the soil. It also draws pollinators, needs little maintenance, is pet and budget friendly. Many homeowners encourage white clover by letting nature take its course or literally sowing white clover seeds.

No matter the leaf number observed in your lawn, "Irish eyes are smiling" and they are always on the lookout for four leaves.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Inside the Garden podcast, David Beaulieu, 3/2023.  
UGA Extension Bulletin 1251

## Mark Your Calendars

State AMGA meeting April 22-24

| January |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|---------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
|         |    |    | 1  | 2  | 3  |    |
| 4       | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 |
| 11      | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
| 18      | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| 25      | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 |

## Common Household Items Useful for Plants

So, there is the Farm to Table movement, but how about turning this around for a Pantry to Produce movement. Here are a few items in your pantry that can be used to feed your plants.

1. Coffee Grounds-rich in nitrogen and aerates the soil, helping with water retention. Use already brewed grounds.
2. Eggshells-packed with calcium, especially needed by tomatoes. Pulverize in a food processor and sprinkle powder onto the plant's soil and then water the powder into the soil.
3. Banana Peels-contain potassium primarily and also calcium and magnesium. Water plants with banana peels which have been soaking for a few hours.

Try this plant food formula:

1 T coffee grounds

1 t Epsom salts

Handful of pulverized eggshells

Pitcher of H<sub>2</sub>O (dechlorinate by letting H<sub>2</sub>O sit at room temp for 24 hours)

Let stand for about 6 hours and water plants. **(If you try this, please report your findings for a later newsletter update.)**

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Armen Adamjan 2/2023



## MBG Plantasia Sale

The photo to the left shows **Kathy Deckbar** and **Carolyn Rooks**, two of many Master Gardeners assisting customers at the Spring Plantasia plant sale held at Mobile Botanical Gardens March 14-16. This year's event proved extremely popular with plant buyers seeking just the right plant or tree. Thursday evening the Gardens hosted a Preview Party with food, beverages, live music, and the opportunity for first choice shopping. Fortunately, the weather cooperated on Friday and Saturday for additional plant selections.



Plantasia Preview Party 2024-- More than 450 guests attended!



Master Gardeners man the checkouts.



How many MGs does it take to erect a tent??! --We do better in dirt!

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*A special thank you (below) from the Director of the Mobile Botanical Gardens, Robin Krchak, to MCMG's. And, thank you, Robin. We are pleased to support the Gardens we love.*

# Spring Plant Sale and Festival of Flowers: Successful!

Spring Plant Sale was a great success -- thanks to the hard work by many volunteers (mostly Master Gardeners) along with our small staff. We extend special thanks to Volunteer Coordinator, Theresa Davidson, for her excellent organization of the teams. Well done, all!

Preview Party evening we had over 450 folks in attendance and the predicted rain never came! Friday and Saturday were also very well attended sale days -- and to give perspective, Buddy McLaughlin reported that only 16 camellia plants remained at the close of the sale on Saturday...there were over 350 camellia plants in the sale!

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## Seed Starting Tips con't

Many gardeners are engaged in seed starting by now. Having said that, what are common mistakes observed in seed starting leading to low or no germination? The following bullets may prevent germination issues:

- Place seed starting setups where they can't be overlooked.
- Start seeds in the right soil mixture.
- Keep soil moist but not too soggy.
- Establish a watering schedule until germination is observed.
- Observe for damping off which is caused by fungus; air circulation may prevent damping off.
- Growing under lights indoors regulates growth for sturdy stems.
- Utilize scarification or stratification techniques for large seeds.

Compiled by Dirt Dive

Gardening Know How, Becca Badgett, updated 20



### Dirt Under Our Nails

**Editor's Note:** The following few newsletters will have a focus on common vegetables and flowers...another memory jogger for planting and maintaining.

#### Growing Peppers

One of the most popular warmer weather vegetables to grow is any one of a number of pepper varieties. Sweet peppers, jalapenos, or superhot peppers all have a place in our gardens. They can be grown in ground, in raised beds, or in containers such as the pepper varieties sold at the Spring Festival plant sale.

The good news is that these peppers do not need to be grown in a pricey container. In fact, 5 gallon buckets are perfect for growing peppers because they offer space for root structure and they can be moved to sunny and warm locations as needed which promotes fruit production.

While 5 gallon buckets are easily attainable containers, note that there are certain caveats when choosing a bucket:

- Make sure adequate drainage holes are present.
- Choose BPA free or food grade.

Growth media for peppers should be a good quality, well-draining soil. Adding compost or worm castings enhances growth.

Plant seedlings deep, about 1/3 of the pepper in the soil mixture. Support the plant soon after planting.

An adequate container and good soil should promote a good pepper harvest.

*Fine Gardening, Tanya Barnett, 2/2023*



## Master Gardener of the Month

by Bob Howard

Our Master Gardener of the Month, Carol Mackey, retired in January, 2020 from a career in healthcare management -- Perfect timing for gardening since the Covid pandemic was getting ready to shut down everything else! She is married with 2 grown children -- one daughter who lives in Mobile and a son who resides in San Francisco. In addition to gardening, our Master Gardener of the Month loves playing pickleball. She is an avid walker and works out at a gym in her Oakleigh neighborhood.

Our Master Gardener has been busy. In February, Carol trimmed ornamentals at the Mulherin Home, worked many hours at the Mobile Botanical Gardens getting ready for the Plant Sale and working as a docent for MBG programs. Even with all of that, she attended our regular meetings and picked up 6 ½ hours of CEUs since the beginning of the year! In March, she continued her active ways by getting involved with our Spring Festival activities.

Carol Mackey is a member of the 2022 Master Gardener class and our Master Gardener of the Month! Congratulations, Carol!

## Advanced MG Certificate

The announcement that **Carol Dorsey** received the Master Gardener Advanced Certificate was made at the March general meeting. According to ACES, this certificate indicates that a recipient is a subject matter expert and serves as an advanced resource for ACES and the community served.

Congratulations Carol!



**MCMG Festival of Flower Display 2024**

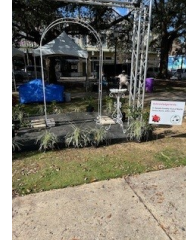




Lydia Criswell, Carolyn Davidson Leaf skirt



Lynne Davis Camellia waxing



Basic Camellia structure



Gudrun Russell glued the first and longest row of leaves on the tablecloth.



Display in progress



Cindy Findlay, Donna Kelly, Marianna Parker, Jane Finley, Cathedral Square teamwork



Carol Mackey, Theresa Davidson, Donna Kelly, Marianna Parker, Carol Williams, Paula Reeves, Jane Finley MCMG FoF completed



Camellia guru Harry Surline collecting camellias



Theresa Davidson, Kathy Deckbar, Harry Surline collecting camellias



Theresa Davidson,  
Becky Root, Marion  
Platt, Boudreaux



Donna Kelly, Carol  
Mackey, Dennis Harris  
Work in progress



Donna Kelly, Paula  
Reeves, Marianna  
Parker



See the Easter Bunny?



Cathedral Square view



Azalea Trail Maid



Made Their Mark handout



Made Their Mark handout con't

## Festival of Flowers

Cathedral Square was the venue for the 2024 Festival of Flowers which benefited USA Providence Foundation. As seen in the photos above, many MGs participated in hours of planning and putting together the theme of "Make Your Mark" honoring promoters of camellia propagation in Mobile, namely K. Sawada and many other propagators from the 1800s and on. Many visitors of the event commented very positively on the visually stunning setup. Kudos to MG volunteers who participated in some way: **Marianna Parker, Paula Reeves, Jane Finley, Donna Kelly, Lisa Davis, Carol Mackey, Marion Platt, Theresa Davidson, Lydia Criswell, Carolyn Rooks, Carolyn Davidson, Joy Earp, Cindy Findlay, Gudrun Russell, Barbara Boone, Carol Williams, Kenny Helton, Patti Hicks, Harry Surline, Kathy Deckbar, and Lynne Davis.** Special thanks to floral designer **Dennis Harris** for setup guidance.

## Spring Festival 2024

The second Spring Festival held at the Jon Archer Center Saturday, March 23,

despite an ominous slightly damp and definitely windy start with a late sun appearance, was a successful sale with approximately 375 visitors tallied as foot traffic. Happy customers left with fresh varieties of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, squash, and cucumbers. In between shopping, customers had the opportunity to listen to speakers: **Alice Marty and Leslie Maycock, Harry Surine, Bill Fink, and Jack Rowe.**

Such a project requires many participants, a synergistic one in which the sum is greater than its parts. Thanks to all Master Gardeners who assisted in this project. Special thanks to **Bob Howard and Earl Gochey** for their leadership.



Up-potting Vegetables



Circling the Wagons!



Stocking the Wagons



Wagons Ho!



Veggies to Jon Archer



What's wrong with this picture??! --Our leader, Bob, transported only 3 plants from Jon Archer!?!



Donna Kelly lookin' good with Spring Festival finery



Crowd-favorite speaker Bill Fink



Ready-for-sale veggies-Mary Townsley and Karen Ruckert waiting for arriving shoppers



More ready-for-sale veggies-Donna Kelly, Catherine Moates, Mary Townsley, Bob Howard



The Three Musketeers waiting for customers-Alice Marty, Judy Stout, Mary Townsley



Manning the MG table-Carol Williams, Carol Dorsey, Carol Mackey



## How to Grow an Easter Cactus

The Easter cactus, also known as the holiday cactus, is a cactus hailing from tropical locales. This cactus, scientifically known as *Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri*, blooms near the Easter holiday with star-shaped blooms in various shades of pink, coral, purple, and white. Easter cactus is an epiphyte, which means it doesn't actually require soil, but nevertheless grows well in soil as long as it is well-drained and there is a filtered light source.

Easter cactus is distinguished from other holiday cacti by bloom time, growth bloom shape, and most of all, by leaf shape.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

BH&G, Cori Spears, 2/2024.



Last year, for about three days, I watched two female birds hang out in the crape myrtle and live oak. They looked like giant sparrows. They watched the goldfinches, Carolina chickadees, titmice, wrens, cardinals, and house finches devour sunflower kernels as well as sunflower and safflower seeds. The garden was a hub of flights among the trays, tubes, and ground. These giant-sparrow look-alikes remained in the trees, but not for long. Their constant head tilting had worked out the best

clearances to partake of the goodies.

Not sparrows, of course. Female grosbeaks!? Maybe. They came everyday and stayed awhile. Then three or four more joined in the myrtle and oak. They ate like the cardinals, preferring the ground rather than the wooden trays or tubes without the trays. Very pretty females: earthy, heavily streaked breasts. Neat edges, layers, and folds - lots of edges, layers, and folds: an organic origami of ebony, cinnamon, beige, and coffee bean. Beige brow feathers just above the eyes, extending to the neck feathers. Ohhhh! The beak - not gros. Then I see the bronze, applied like a watercolorist would: Smudges of it on their throats and washings of bronze among the edges, layers, and folds. Female red-winged blackbirds! I thought that they hung out only on the wires and grasses on the Causeway. I did not know that they would visit my backyard buffets.

The first couple must have been scouts. Tweet-of-beak must have spread fast. ... seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one. Ruffling. Twenty-one: no fussing or ruffled feathers. They nourished in unison. A sisterhood. Girls' day out.

This year the same: two females for about a week. Then more showed. They waited auspiciously in the crape myrtle, live oak, Japanese magnolia, and camellias. They discovered the leavings on the ground from the feeders thanks to the chickadees, finches, and the occasional red-bellied woodpecker. ...Eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve...

Female twelve was two or so yards beyond the female feathership. She was neither foraging nor feeding. And...she would not anymore. Nor preen. Nor chirp. Her bronze smudges and ebony, cinnamon, beige, and coffee bean edges, layers, folds, and tucks were in repose just to the left of a gold and bronze coreopsis. A befitting spot that she chose. A quiet place in my garden with. . . another friend.

By Debra Morrow



## A History of Chocolate

Taking a walk down the candy aisle in any supermarket probably seeking Easter basket treats, one sees a plethora of confections, many containing chocolate. With all that goodness in front of you, it is hard to visualize how long the journey is from a cacao pod to the grocery or confectioner's shelf.

*Theobroma cacao* is the Latin name of one of the world's most special plants. Cacao isn't the most attractive plant nor the most abundant, but it provides the pod which is the precursor to ultimately make chocolate.

Cacao, native to the Amazon region, eventually spread to the Central America area before Christopher Columbus arrived. The Mayans and Aztecs, inhabitants of

Mexico, made use of the precursors of what we know as chocolate hundreds of years ago. Even though cacao was first seen in the Southern Hemisphere, today most cacao is grown in West Africa where trees grow to about 25 feet tall. The cacao tree is pollinated by one species of insect, *Forcipomyia*, a small biting midge.

Technically cacao fruit are not pods, but a berry, however the term "pod" is generally accepted in the chocolate industry. After harvest of the pods, the beans inside are removed. The beans are then fermented for up to 6 days which gives the fruit its distinctive color and flavor. After drying and grading, the beans are shipped to a chocolate factory where the beans are roasted, crushed, and ground to produce what is called cocoa mass, cocoa powder, and cocoa butter. Sugar and milk are then added to become a certain percentage of chocolate.

Chocolate arrived in the American colonies in Florida in the mid 1600s. By the late 1700s cacao beans were a major import enjoyed by all classes of people. Europeans in the upper class were the only ones who could afford this luxury until a Dutch chemist discovered a way to treat cacao beans with alkaline salts to make a powdered chocolate known as Dutch processed chocolate.

In the latter 1800s, 2 chocolatiers, Nestle and Lindt, invented a process that mixed and aerated chocolate, giving it a smooth texture that blended well with other add-ins. Later other companies such as Cadbury, Mars, and Hershey began mass-producing confections matching the growing demand for this treat.

As your children or grandchildren participate in an egg hunt and overindulge Easter treats this year, remember the long journey made by a pod from a tropical cacao tree to their Easter basket.

Compiled by Dirt Diva

Sources:

*Smithsonian Magazine*, "A Brief History of Chocolate" 2018

*Eating to Extinction*, Dan Saladino, 2023

## Bugs and Hisses

### Fire Ants

**Editor's Note:** I am an Ant Whisperer. That means that if there is an ant (a.k.a. Spawn of Satan) within a ten-mile radius, it will find its way to me. Since I abhor their stingers so much, research into their life cycle was important to me to determine if they have an actual place of importance in our ecosystems. Read on...

Exhorts her Royal Highness, "March on, Worker Ant Army!" Seek our favorite Ant Whisperer, don shields and your stingers and doeth your best to protect our nest! Our future doth depend on keeping this intruder at bay!" Imagine these orders proclaimed by the Ant Queen to her minions in a Disney movie. Oh, I forgot...already done in "A Bug's Life."

Now is the season where ant mounds appear along sidewalks, lawns, pristine gardens, and even otherwise thought to be containers only inhabited by potted plants. Fourth grade science modules speak to social insects like ants, so as Master Gardeners, let's refresh our minds of the ant life cycle which is observed in these locations.

Fire ants are social creatures, meaning that many thousands of ants inhabit a mature colony headed by the aforementioned queen, which is the only ant capable of reproducing progeny. Thousands of workers carry on designated duties to sustain the colony.

The ant's life cycle begins when the queen lays eggs which hatch into legless larvae and are constantly tended by the workers. After 4 molts and a pupal stage, the adult finally emerges. One would think that the larvae just consume food, which

they do, but the older larvae digest the food and produce a liquid which is used to sustain the entire colony. Unlike bees which utilize honeycombs, there are no storage units for this liquid; it is stored in the ants themselves. Think of this as an on-board storage unit.

In an ant colony, size does matter, especially for designated duties. Larger ants forage and store food, while runt-sized ants tend the larvae brood. The queen is larger than any other ant in the colony. The males which assist in reproduction, have large bodies but small heads.

Mounds are built by workers by tunneling through soil in a honeycombed maze. (No wonder ants travel to the neighbor's yard, but still know their route back to yours.) Size and mound height is dependent upon weather and temperature. Tunneled and excavated soil becomes a mound which promotes warmth above ground and cooler conditions below ground. The real determinant of mound size is based on the ultimate goal of keeping the brood safe.

Fire ants usually ONLY travel above ground except when foraging (remember potato chips to determine active foraging) or when a queen attempts to start a new colony. She flies to a new location, sheds her wings, feeds on those wings, and starts reproducing with male ants.

Is there any positive impact on the ecosystem? Actually, there are some positive aspects to fire ants. They prey upon other arthropod pests, aerate soil, and consume decomposed vertebrates. Nevertheless, fire ants are considered to have more negative than positive attributes. The positives are hard to remember when your appendage is being attacked!

Having discussed a fire ant's life cycle, how can they be controlled? There are control products available. Broadcast baits are useful for lawns and individual mounds. Always read the bait label to determine when and how much of the active ingredient to apply. Baits do not have a long shelf life, so only purchase the necessary amount based on the area to be covered. Additional applications will probably be needed after the initial agent is added. **DON'T WAIT, USE THE BAIT!** **Your neighbor's lawn is standing by!**

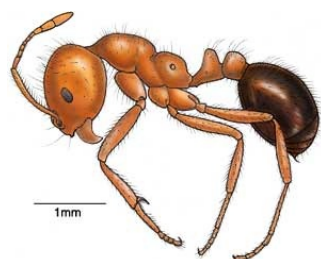
#### Fire Ant Facts:

- Fire ants first entered the U.S. via Mobile, Alabama about 1918.
- Fire ants spread throughout the Southern states which is probably related to warmer temperatures.
- Two species of fire ants dominate in Alabama, red and black, although some are a hybrid of both.

Compiled by Dirt Diva/reluctant Ant Whisperer

#### Sources:

MS extension, Blake Layton  
USDA, Department of Food and Agriculture



Fire Ant



Fire Ant Mound

### How to Read a Plant Tag

As a reader, you think to yourself that this is an already known topic. However, it may have been some time since attending MG class, or you just

forgot. When choosing a plant, the following may jog your memory.

Tag front includes:

- Name, usually common name
- Photo
- QR code occasionally

Tag Back includes:

- Patent/Propagation
- Trademark occasionally
- Habit of growth
- Height
- Grow zone(s)
- Water requirements
- Light requirements
- Blooming time
- Spacing
- Fertilization
- Where plant grows best

Hopefully the above memory joggers will help in selecting the right plant for the right place.

Source: Review of plant tag



The Lonely Bloom



The Lonely Bloom + Friends



### From the Greenhouse:

The 3Rs: Reuse, Repurpose, Recycle

**Editor's Note:** This month "From the Greenhouse" features a functional garden piece made from materials that would otherwise be discarded. Recycle on...

No longer used lamp shades were stripped of the shade fabric portion, leaving the metal backbone structure. Next the metal was spray painted. An appropriately sized planter was chosen and now we have a plant stand ready for a pot or a birdbath.

Courtesy of Barbara Boone





Check out these Easter kids, Jack, Diane, Jacob, and Joel, who wish everyone a Happy Easter!



## In The Loop

by Theresa Davidson

### Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities:



#### April Board of Directors Meeting

Jon Archer Center

Wednesday, April 3, 10:00 am

Carol Williams, 251.367.0473

readingweeder72@hotmail.com

*EMG Program Support/Local MGA or AMGA Admin*



#### April General Meeting

Jett Loewen, Farmer of Organic Foods and *Earthworms*

April 10 - 9:30 am Social time, 10:00 am Meeting

Carol Williams, 251.367.0473

readingweeder72@hotmail.com

*EMG Program Support/Local MGA or AMGA Meeting*

Discover Alabama Extension

Government Plaza Atrium

Extension  
**APRIL 8TH & 9TH**  
*discover*  
**ALABAMA**  
**EXTENSION**

The Mobile County Extension office is here to answer your questions with the latest research-based information to improve lives, and offer practical solutions.

Topics of interest:

- Gardening
- Food Preservation
- Healthy Lifestyle Changes
- 4-H Youth Programs
- Environmental Education
- Agriculture
- Family and Wildlife Management

Learn more at [www.aces.edu](http://www.aces.edu)

Government Plaza Atrium  
 Monday, April 8 10:00-4:30  
 Tuesday, April 9 9:00-2:00  
 Free papers and giveaways!

*Discover Alabama Extension's Impact on Alabama!*

Monday, April 8, 11:00-4:30  
 Tuesday, April 9, 9:00-2:00  
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 251.574.8445  
**Other Extension Activities/Support Other Extension Activity**



**Plant Late Spring Vegetables**  
 Dream Garden  
 Friday and Saturday, April 12 and 13, 9:00 am  
**Bring Gloves**  
 Marsha Stoltz, 251.689.5993, [marshastolz@msn.com](mailto:marshastolz@msn.com)  
**Growing Food Plants/Garden**



**First Friday at the Gardens**  
 Mary Helen Harper  
 Enjoy a delightful musical experience at MBG  
 April 5, 12:30 pm  
 Free for MBG members, otherwise daily admission  
**No CEU's this time**



**Market in the Park**  
 Cathedral Square, Downtown Mobile, 300 Conti St.  
 Man the Master Gardener Tent  
 Saturdays: 5/4, 5/11, 5/18, 5/25, 6/1, 6/8, 6/15, 6/22, 6/29, 7/6  
**Needed! Coordinators to share responsibilities for Set Up**  
**Community Event/Market in the Park**



**Marketplace at Mobile Botanical Gardens**  
 Mobile Botanical Gardens,  
 Marketplace  
 Saturday, April 6, 9:00-noon  
 Theresa Davidson, 251-510-4961,  
[theresadavidson80@gmail.com](mailto:theresadavidson80@gmail.com)  
**Community Partner Event/MBG**

## Ongoing Volunteer Opportunities:

**Monthly Garden Zoom Class**



Jack LeCroy

3rd Thursday of the month, 6-7 pm

Diane Anthony, jda0002@aces.edu, 251.574.8445 or  
www.aces.edu/go/gardenzoom to register

**CEU**



**Master Gardener Helpline Tuesday - Friday.**

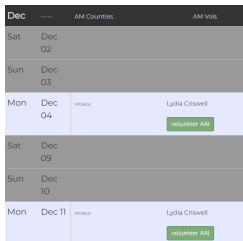
Please call Diane Anthony to schedule these shifts.

Morning shift 8:30 - 12:00

Afternoon shift 12:00 - 3:30

Cindy Findlay, 251.786.4245, cndyfindly@att.net

*Create & Share Info w/Public/Helpline*



**Master Gardener Statewide Helpline Mondays**

Please commit to Mondays on the Statewide Helpline.

Sign up online under '**Helpline Calendar**'.

Morning Shift: 8:30 -12:00

Afternoon Shift - 12:00- 3:30.

Cindy Findlay, 251.786.4245, cndyfindly@att.net

*Create &Share Info w/ Public/Helpline*



**Prepare Snacks for MG General Meetings:**

Jon Archer Center

Lydia Criswell, 251.610.5543, criswells2@mchsi.com

**EMG Program Support/Local MGA or AMGA Meeting**

*(Add your round trip drive time to the meeting time.)*



**Mobile Japanese Garden**

700 Forest Hill Drive

Volunteer your MG skills any morning/afternoon.

Text Don to coordinate!

Don Fry, 251.422.8466, don.fry@comcast.net,

mobilejapanesegarden.com

**Growing Ornamental Plants/Garden**



**Community Gardens:**

Grow More Give More with Mobile Urban Growers:

mobileurbangrowers.org

Community gardens in Midtown, Downtown, + other neighborhoods, school sites. Search FB "Mobile Urban Growers" and Community Gardens

Carol Dorsey, 251.209.3483, bcdorsey63@gmail.com

mobileurbangrowers@gmail.com

**Growing Food Plants/Garden**

**Mobile Medical Museum**

Robert Thrower Medicinal Garden

Curating and maintaining everchanging collection +



gardening with Full Life Ahead, serving adults with intellectual disabilities, usually on Wednesdays  
 1664 Springhill Avenue  
 Carol Dorsey, 251.209.3483, bcdorsey63@gmail.com  
**Growing Food Plants/Therapeutic Horticulture**



**Grow More Give More**  
 Statewide Master Gardeners initiative to encourage food gardening and sharing produce  
 2 Ambassadors needed: attend meetings, target areas for grant development/grant funds fulfillment  
 Carol Dorsey, 251.209.3483, bcdorsey63@gmail.com  
**Growing Food Plants/Garden**



**Speakers Bureau**  
 \*Alice Marty, 251-709-1125, amarty@comcast.net  
 \*Barbara Boone, 251-680-8263, boonebama@live.com  
**Create & Share Info w/ Public/ Creating Educ. Materials**  
 (See the table below for a list of upcoming Bureau opportunities and the speaker for each. **Speakers are needed!** If no speaker is listed, please contact Alice or Barbara, if you'd like to volunteer.)

| Date    | Location                   | Time        | Topic                       | Speaker                     |
|---------|----------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 4-9-24  | Belle Fountain Garden Club |             | Ornamental Grasses          | Barbara Boone               |
| 4-12-24 | MPL West                   | 10:30-12:30 | Winter Sowing               | Alice Marty, Leslie Maycock |
| 4-27-24 | MPL West                   | 10:30-12:30 | Grocery Store Botany (Kids) | Karen Ruckart               |
| 5-10-24 | MPL West                   | 10:30-12:30 | Container Gardens           | Emily Arellano              |
| 5-14-24 | MPL West                   | 10:30-12:30 | Ask a Master Gardener       | ??                          |



**Office Manager/Phone Lines/MG Helpline**  
 Cindy Findlay, 251.786.4245, cndyfindly@att.net



**DREAM GARDEN:** Join a Garden Room (**See below**)  
 Jon Archer Center  
 Marsha Stolz, 251.689.5993, marshastolz@msn.com  
 Contact Marsha **or** a Garden Leader to volunteer and work as needed.  
**Growing Ornamental Plants/Garden OR Growing Food Plants/Garden**

**The Gardens:**

### **Grandma's Pass Along Garden**

Catherine Moates, 251.366.6163, memo366@att.net  
Olivia Reinhaus, 251.458.7383, omcvea@gmail.com

### **Native Garden**

**Open**

### **Shade Garden**

Bob Howard, 251.423.3108, rhoward51@gmail.com

### **Vegetable Garden**

Marsha Stolz, 251.689.5993, marshastolz@msn.com  
Mary Ann Days, 251.391.5806, masdays@comcast.net

### **Herb Garden**

Mary Ann Days, 251.391.5806, masdays@comcast.net

### **Cottage Garden & Formal Garden**

Glenda Eady, 251.342.4248, jerryeady2@comcast.net

### **Building Garden**

Marsha Stolz, 251.689.5993, marshastolz@msn.com

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## **You may like these organizations:**



### **Orchid Society Meeting**

Mobile Japanese Garden meeting room, 700 Forest Hill  
4th Sunday of the month (except June & Dec), 2:00

**NEXT MEETING: April 22**

Lynn Coleman, 251.622.3939, lynncolman411@gmail

***CEU for the presentation***



### **Gulf Coast Herb Society**

Mobile Botanical Gardens 4th Tues. of the month,  
(except July and Nov.), 5:30 pm

**NEXT MEETING: April 23**

Beth Poates, 251.342.6508, poates57@hotmail.com

***CEU for presentation***



### **K Sawada Camellia Club**

Most meetings at Mobile Botanical Gardens

1st Sunday of month: Nov-March, 2:00 pm

Kenny Helton, 251.459.5555, kehelton@comcast.net

***CEU for presentation***

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### **Camellia Club of Mobile**

Jon Archer Center

2nd Sun of the month: Sept. 2023- April 2024, 2:00 pm



mobilecamellia.org, Camellia Club of Mobile FB Group  
**CEU for presentation**

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*Clarke Root Gardens*  
~2,000 Waterfront Camellias in Mobile, AL~



Becky Root  
Owner/Camellia Enthusiast

251.753.0348  
byroot@yahoo.com

RSVP for free tours on most Sundays  
in January, February & March at 2pm



**Azalea City Bonsai Society in Mobile,  
AL**



**Ikebana Mobile, Al - Friendship  
through Flowers**

1.2K likes • 1.3K followers

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**MOBILE BOTANICAL GARDENS**  
*Come Here To Grow!*



Theresa's top reasons to join the Gardens:

1. **DISCOUNTS** on events, classes, plants, and the Artful Gift Shop!
2. First Friday Lectures--**free** (Senior rate is \$45 per year. Senior nonmembers pay the daily admission rate of \$6 to attend the First Friday lectures. Join and save \$27 a year! And, get all the benefits of membership!)
3. The **BEST** weekly newsletter-know **EVERYTHING** that's happening at the Gardens
4. Access to the Gate Code to visit the Gardens *before* and *after* regular hours
5. Reciprocal special admission at 360+ gardens in the US- I've used it in Atlanta and New York City.

## Mark your calendars for these SPECIAL EVENTS:



**Annual Mobile SPCA  
Plant and Bake Sale**  
Saturday, April 6  
8 to noon • Rain or shine  
MSPCA Office - 620 Zeigler Cir W

We'll have plants, all kinds of garden tools and patio decor including flags, flower pots and tons of great-garden stuff! Plus delicious homemade baked items!  
For more information or to donate plants or baked goods — [MobileSPCA.org](http://MobileSPCA.org) or [spca@mobilespca.org](mailto:spca@mobilespca.org)



### ODWA Plant Swap

Saturday, April 6, 10:00 am  
Central Presbyterian Community  
Garden (parking lot)  
Corner of Dauphin St & Ann St  
Please bring plants potted and  
labeled.

A special thanks to Old Dauphin Way Association & Central Presbyterian Community Garden for making this event possible. Remember it is not only about plants but connecting with gardeners from all gardening interest and knowledge.



## MCMG Plant Swap

April 10 general meeting

Alice Marty will be leading our spring plant swap. Bring healthy plants you have grown or multiplied, but don't plan to use in your garden, to trade for plants which may be more useful or enjoyable to you. We will have an area designated to park the plants you bring and will draw numbers for turns to pick new plants.



We are making plans to have a joint meeting with Baldwin County Master Gardeners on Wednesday, May 8. Tentatively, we will meet at Spanish Fort Presbyterian Church, 6620 Spanish Fort Boulevard (about 35 minutes from our Jon Archer ACES Center) and our speaker will be Jared Jones from the Gulf Coast Research & Extension Center in Fairhope. Check out the May edition of *The Dirt* for final details.



Thursday, April 11th, 6pm - 9pm  
Food by Georgia Roussos  
Music by The Jimmy Roebuck Jazz Trio  
Signature cocktail by Woodford Reserve  
Signature craft beer by Braided River Brewing Company  
Celebratory cake by Lacy Lane Designs  
\$106 per person for the 106 acres worth celebrating



Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs

# LONG-SLEEVE SHIRT DRIVE

**MARCH 24-31**

PLEASE DONATE a new or slightly used long-sleeve shirt to help farmworkers mitigate exposure to pesticide residues and reduce direct exposure to the heat.

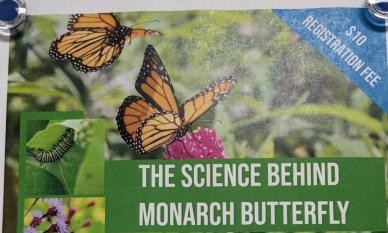
For more information contact:  
Mobile County Extension Office  
251-574-8445

www.afop.org/nfaw

Find the **DROP OFF LOCATION** nearest to you



Follow us @afophealth



**THE SCIENCE BEHIND MONARCH BUTTERFLY**

**The Science of Migration and Migratory Garden.**  
May 31, 9:00am - 11:00am  
Jon Archer Agricultural Center  
1070 Schillinger Road North, Mobile, 36608

This workshop participants will learn the different research involving Monarch migration, the influence of milkweed in their development and how to build migratory gardens.

**REGISTER ONLINE**

<https://aub.ie/Monarch>  
Cost: \$10

For more information, please contact 251-574-8445.

**extension**  
ACES.EDU

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M University and Auburn University) is an equal opportunity educator, employer, and provider. If you need a reasonable accommodation or language access services, contact Carmen Fleming at 251-395-0249 by May 10, 2024.

## 2024 Alabama Master Gardeners Association State Conference



Welcome to the **2024 Alabama Master Gardeners Association State Conference**, hosted by the **Baldwin County Master Gardeners**. We are thrilled to invite you to join us for our annual gathering of gardeners, educators, and enthusiasts from across the state. This year's conference theme is "Paradise Found," We can't wait to explore the many ways we can cultivate our own little corners of paradise.

The conference will be held on **April 22nd – 24th, 2024**, at the **Daphne Civic Center** located in beautiful **Daphne, Alabama**. Over the course of

three days, attendees will have the opportunity to participate in a variety of workshops, lectures, and networking events, all focused on gardening, sustainability, and environmental stewardship.

We believe that gardening is more than just a hobby – it's a way of life. By bringing together the brightest minds in gardening and horticulture, we hope to inspire and empower our attendees to create their own little pieces of paradise- a community garden, a backyard oasis, or a thriving urban farm.

So join us in Daphne, Alabama, as we explore the many ways we can cultivate paradise in our lives and communities. We can't wait to see you there!

To Register: On-line registration is preferred. To register and pay on-line by credit card, click on link:

<http://c.planetreg.com/AMGA2024CONF>

NOTE: A personal PayPal account is NOT required to register on-line. PayPal is the credit card processing service and will accept VISA and MasterCard.

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## Marion Drummond Lecture Series at MBG

**What:** A lecture series honoring Marion Drummond (former Director of MBG) and Celebrating the 50th Anniversary year of Mobile Botanical Gardens

**Cost:** \$35 per event (MBG Members receive discount) or

**Season Tickets:** \$150 for the series include preferred seating and invitation to Coffee & Pastries with the Presenter.

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**Carol Reese**, Horticulturist and nationally-known speaker ***Native Plants: Facts, Fabrications and Foibles***

**Saturday, May 4, 2024**

9:00am – 3:00pm

Carol's program celebrates the many native and non-native plants that provide great beauty, durability and excellent nutrition for our beloved wildlife. The day includes the morning seminar, lunch, and an after-lunch interactive session: Why Did My Plant Die??

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**Marianne Willburn**, opinion columnist for the American Horticultural Society's The American Gardener

***Keep Calm and Garden On: Gardening in the Midst of Climate Change***

**Saturday, June 22, 2024**

9:00am – 2:00pm

How can we best adapt to what is, right now, and make our gardens more resilient throughout the seasons? The day includes seminar and lunch.

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A special thank you to Mr. Jim Chamers who came to Jon Archer hoping to find someone with whom he could share some of his bromeliad collection. He happened upon Master Gardeners in the auditorium who gladly accepted his offer. He returned a week later on our meeting day and delivered lots of bromeliads. FYI. He may bring more to our next meeting!



## Did You Know?

When you shop The Artful Gift Shop at Mobile Botanical Gardens, look for the work of two of our Master Gardeners: Susan Hilton, Potter, and Sharon Claseman, Jewelry Designer.



## Mission Statement

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

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A & M University and Auburn University) is an equal opportunity and employer. [www.aces.edu](http://www.aces.edu)



Mobile County Master Gardeners | 1070 Schillinger Rd. N., Mobile, AL 36608 251.574.8445

[Unsubscribe mobilemastergardeners@gmail.com](mailto:unsubscribe@mobilemastergardeners@gmail.com)

[Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by [info@mobilecountymastergardeners.org](mailto:info@mobilecountymastergardeners.org)