

Master Gardener Extension Volunteers of Union and Towns Counties

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Meetings: Unless announced otherwise, Master Gardener Extension Volunteers of Union and Towns Counties meet on the second Thursday of every month in the Haralson Memorial Civic Center in Blairsville, 4:00 p.m. socializing, 4:30 p.m. meeting. We do not meet if inclement weather closes Union County or Towns County schools.

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View of Brasstown Bald on February 7th from Bunker Hill Farm and Gardens



Editor's Words

It is almost spring! According to our groundhog, General Beauregard Lee, we are to experience an early spring. I do have daffodils in bloom but one day I am in short sleeves and the next, it is cold and rainy. I guess that is how spring is supposed to be.

Master Gardener Extension Volunteers have been busy with a successful Kris Kringle sale and are gearing up for work in the Gold Medal Garden and Hamilton Gardens. Work is also underway preparing for our upcoming Master Gardener Extension Volunteer class.

Our featured Master Gardener Extension Volunteer for this quarter is Marcia Little. I enjoyed getting to know more about Marcia and hope you will too, please see page 3. Gayle Kusak, Elaine Bliss and Tommy Westbrook shared pictures of their gardens on pages 10-12, read about Jared Ogden's hot new tool on page 13 and some of Barb Baumgardner's favorite tools on page 14. Grace Howard has provided us with an update on what's new at Hamilton Gardens on page 15.

For me, spring is an awakening, a stirring and optimistic time. I look forward to warmer weather and the golden glow of daffodils and getting outside and gardening.

Happy gardening,

Jo Anne

Spring begins on March 20, 2021 at 5:37 a.m.



Daffodil 'Early Sensation'

Blooming in the Garden of Tom and Jo Anne Allen

Meet Marcia Little

Our featured Master Gardener Extension Volunteer for this quarter is Marcia Little. Marcia and her husband Paul have lived in Union County since 1999. They have two children, a son and a daughter, and three grandsons. She completed her Master Gardener Extension Volunteer training in 2009 and was certified in 2010. Marcia is one of the founding members of the Towns-Union Master Gardener Association and has worked on many projects throughout the years including but not limited to the Gold Medal Garden and the By-Law Committee.

Marcia was born and grew up in Miami, Florida. She earned an Associate Degree in Business at Miami Dade Junior College.

Marcia, now retired, worked for a number of different attorneys in Miami, Florida and also Xerox Corporation in both Miami, Florida and Atlanta, Georgia. She also worked for Wang Laboratories, Spruill Products (a steel fabricating company) and Brickman Group (a national landscaping company) in Atlanta. Her current work is volunteering.

Her hobbies and passions include gardening, traveling to historic sites and junking (searching for old discarded things that are regarded as worthless and converting, repurposing or altering them to make them more suited for possibly a different purpose).

Currently, Marcia is hardscaping new areas of her garden where trees have matured and shade has taken over. Her biggest task is drainage allowance.

Past community work consisted of volunteering and working with youth and church activities. She was a member of the Blairsville Garden Club for several years and was the Chairperson of the Blairsville Junior Garden Club.

Marcia's favorite plants to grow are any and all landscape plants and flowers and her favorite gardening activity is landscape and garden design and hardscape.

Favorite foods include coffee and cookies, but not always together though, and she has taken cruises to Europe, Alaska and Canada. Something that many of her friends do not know about her is that she has a passion for gardening and an addiction to plants and flowers.

I enjoyed getting to know Marcia better and hope you will too.

Jo Anne Allen

Master Gardener Extension Volunteer

I've started to plant my herbs in alphabetical order. People ask me how I find the time. I tell them "It's next to the sage".

March Garden Chores

Have your garden soil tested. Your County Extension Agent has soil test bags and instructions.

If your soil test indicates that you need to add lime, it needs to be added two to three months prior to planting your garden.

Complete all major pruning by mid-March. Maple trees bleed sap when pruned now, it's better to wait until late April. Do not prune spring flowering shrubs like forsythia and quince until after they have bloomed or you will not get any blooms this year.

Only prune crape myrtles if needed, removing any suckers, cross branches and dead branches.

Prune roses back to about half their present size before buds break and began fertilizing as buds break.

Divide overgrown hostas, daylilies and other perennials and ground covers as needed when you see the leaves unfurling above ground.

Start planting cool season vegetables in late March – carrots, radishes, lettuce, collards, English peas, spinach, and beets. Warm season vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, corn and okra should be planted after the soil temperature warms up and the danger of frost has passed.

Dig up the new flowerbeds you plan to plant this spring when the soil is not soggy and mix in plenty of organic matter.

Start vegetable and summer annual seeds indoors. Your seedlings will be ready to transplant into your garden after the soil temperature warms up in six to eight weeks.

Planting the same vegetables in the same spot in your garden year after year can lead to an accumulation of insects and or diseases in your soil. To avoid this problem, rotate your crops.

Fertilize trees and shrubs following label instructions in March and follow with an application in early May and early June.

Repot root bound houseplants before moving them outdoors in warm weather and begin fertilizing them at half the recommended strength.

Rejuvenate the pansies you planted last fall by fertilizing them with a water- soluble fertilizer as the temperature warms up.

English ivy can be very invasive. Good ground-cover substitutes include ajuga, mondo grass and creeping raspberry.

Set your lawnmower blade on its highest setting and cut back lirioppe before new growth begins, being careful not to damage the crown of the plant.

Avoid mixing freshly cut daffodils with other flowers in arrangements because they produce a chemical that injures blooms. Place daffodils in another container for a day after cutting, then rinse the stems before arranging.

Cut back your butterfly bush to half the size you want it to become this summer.

Sharpen or replace lawn mower blades if you have not already done so.

Plant bare-root roses in soil that contains organic matter that has been thoroughly tilled.



Sharpen or replace lawn mower blades if you have not already done so.

Spring bulbs should be fertilized as flowers fade. Remove foliage only after it begins to fade.

Fertilize spring bulbs with a 10-10-10 fertilizer (one pound of fertilizer per 100 square feet of flowerbed).

To help control weeds in your garden, apply a two to three-inch layer of mulch.

Pull mulch at least six inches away from tree trunks to prevent soggy conditions and possible disease or insect damage.

Sprinkle crushed eggshells around plants susceptible to slugs and snails, especially hostas.

Lift stepping stones that have sunk below grass level, spread sand in the low area and replace the stepping stone.

Be on the lookout for summer bulbs at your favorite garden center. For better selection, buy them when they become available but do not plant them until late April or early May.

Clean leaves and other debris from ponds and water features.

Plant clematis and other vines and put out hummingbird feeders.



Plant broadleaf evergreens and prune evergreen shrubs back to a manageable size before new growth starts.

If you want flowers on your cactus, plant it in a small pot. Most cactuses bloom sooner if rootbound.

Purchase azaleas when they are in bloom so you will be sure of the color you are buying.

April Garden Chores

You may kill pollinating bees if you spray your fruit trees with pesticides while they are blooming. Wait until most of the blooms have dropped before spraying.

When planting a new tree, keep weeds and grasses out of a 3 foot by 3-foot area around the tree to reduce competition for nutrients and moisture. Cover the ground around the tree with mulch.

Plant tomato seedlings in your garden as the weather warms up, after the danger of frost has passed. To reduce the likelihood of blossom end rot on your tomatoes, work one-half handful of dolomitic lime into the soil around each plant, mulch and provide a uniform amount of moisture during the growing season.

Leaf lettuce can be grown in containers or in your vegetable garden from spring until summer. Choose a site with four to six hours of direct sunlight and expect to harvest in about 45 days.

Do not work in your garden when the foliage is wet to avoid spreading diseases from one plant to another.



Don't rush to plant corn. Wait until the soil has warmed up, or the seeds may rot.

Don't be too quick to remove perennials and shrubs that have been damaged by cold. Cut back the dead branches above ground but leave the roots in place until June to see if new shoots appear.

Eliminate weeds before they set seed and you will also be reducing future weed problems.

Repot root bound houseplants before moving them outdoors in warm weather and begin fertilizing them at half the recommended strength. Protect them from direct sun.

Set out herb transplants after the danger of frost has passed.

Fertilize emerging perennials with bone meal, following label directions.

Fertilize daylilies in April, June and September.

Fertilize fruit trees just before or during bloom period, always following label directions.

Fertilize summer bulbs now. Always follow label directions.

Fertilize azaleas after blooming is complete.

Fertilize cool and warm season grasses.

After spring-flowering bulbs are finished blooming, feed them a 5-10-15 or similar ratio fertilizer following label directions.

Prune spring-flowering trees and shrubs AFTER they bloom.

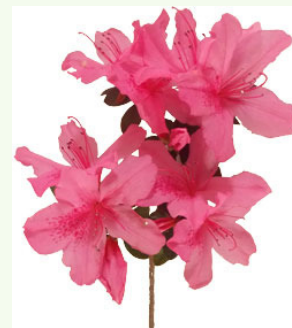
Remove faded flowers from daffodils and hyacinths but let the foliage remain and die back naturally.

Divide and transplant perennials and ground covers this month. Water them well until they are established if rain is sparse.

Protect hydrangeas and roses if a late frost threatens.

As the soil temperature warms up, begin planting summer flowering bulbs – dahlias, gladiolus, caladiums, cannas.

Mid to late April is a good time to plant annuals and perennials. Fertilize with a starter fertilizer that



contains lots of phosphorus (the middle fertilizer number).

Dig in 2 cubic feet of soil conditioner for every 10 square feet of bed area when preparing new flower beds.

Twist off faded flowers of rhododendron after they bloom to double the number of flowers next year.

Replace the pansies in container planters with summer annuals.

For a different look on a sunny fence, trellis or mailbox, plant hyacinth bean – a fast growing ornamental bean (annual). Pink flowers give way to shiny, purple pods that are as attractive as the flowers. Wait until after the danger of frost to plant.

Buy azaleas when in bloom so you can select colors compatible with your existing landscape.

Pull up invasive plants such as Chinese privet, honeysuckle and English ivy.

As you see new growth on your roses, begin fertilizing (following label directions) every four to six weeks.

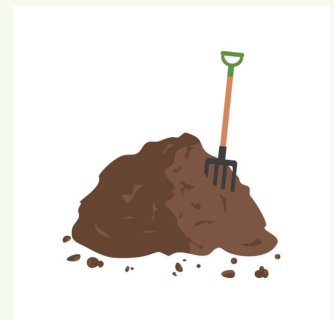
Container grown trees can be planted now.

Remove the thin sprouts (suckers) that grow from the base of Dogwood, Cherry and Crabapple trees and crape myrtles.

If you do not have a compost pile, start one.

Sod or sprig new lawn areas to fill in bare spots in existing lawns.

Regularly water bare-root roses and trees planted this spring.



May Garden Chores

Plant rosemary, basil, thyme and other herbs to enhance summer meals. Herbs are a good choice for a flower-box for your patio. Most herbs grow best in full sun, but mint, cilantro, parsley and thyme tolerate moderate shade.



Tomatoes can be grown in containers on a sunny deck or patio. Bush-type tomatoes do better in containers; plant in a large pot at least 24 inches across filled with a good quality planting soil. Fertilize and water tomatoes regularly.

Do not pile mulch against the trunks of trees. This can encourage possible insect and water problems. Mulch should be approximately 6 to 8 inches away on all sides.



Plant peppers by the first part of June for summer harvest.

Strong sun and wind are hard on new transplants. Set them out in the late afternoon so the plants have overnight to acclimate.

Seeds of annual flowers like zinnias, cosmos, salvia, marigolds, and nasturtiums can be seeded directly into prepared flowerbeds.

Fertilize your vegetable garden every four to six weeks during the summer, always following label directions.

Replace pansies with summer annuals and plant ornamental grasses now.

As your spring flowering bulbs die back, plant bulb beds with annuals for summer color, being careful not to disturb your bulbs.

Remove invasive plants like Chinese privet, poison ivy and English ivy from your landscape.

Do not remove daffodil foliage after they have bloomed until it turns yellow. The leaves absorb sunshine for energy and nutrition for the bulbs so they can bloom again next year.

Look for Lenten rose seedlings underneath your mature plants and transplant them to other shady spots in your garden.

Pinch out terminal growth (the tip) of annuals to make bushy plants and encourage growth.

Lichens growing on your tree trunk may be an indication that your tree is stressed from soil compaction, poor drainage or insufficient fertilizer.

Use rubber soaker hoses among shrubs and flowers in beds and mulch with pine straw to put the water where the plants need it and to conserve water this summer.

Water roses with a soaker hose to keep water off the foliage and possibly prevent blackspot.

Fertilize azaleas, rhododendrons, and roses now.



Fertilize flowerbeds with a slow-release fertilizer.

Mulch newly planted blueberry plants to insulate shallow roots from heat and drought.

Move or replant irises if they did not bloom very well last season.

Prune climbing roses after they finish flowering.

Variegated hosta may turn green when grown in lots of sun. It's best to grow hosta where it does not get hot afternoon sun.

Plant annual vines like moon flower vine and purple hyacinth bean to disguise ugly walls and enliven fences.

Plant sunflowers for a sunny summer flower arrangement.



Weed flowerbeds and borders regularly.

Caladiums need generous amounts of water and fertilizer to continually produce new leaves during the summer.

Look for fire ant mounds and treat with appropriate insecticides, always following label directions.

Prune off sprouts from the base of crape myrtles that are being trained to an upright tree form.

Wait until after your azaleas have bloomed to prune them (if pruning is needed). This is also an ideal time to fertilize them.

Remove faded blooms from rhododendrons to increase the buds that make the blooms for next year.

Remove low-hanging and dead limbs from shade trees.

It is still not too late to set out roses.



Rejuvenate houseplants by lightly pruning them and moving them outdoors to a partly sunny/partly shady area for the summer. Start fertilizing at half the recommended strength.

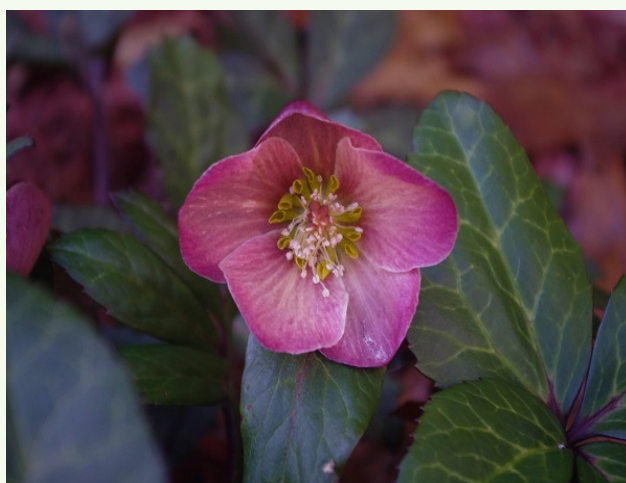
What's Blooming Now
(or what has just finished blooming or being beautiful)



Helleborus orientalis—Lenton Rose
and Edgeworthia chrysantha
From the Garden of Tommy Westbrook



Helleborus orientalis—Lenton Rose
From the Garden of Gayle Kusak



What's Blooming Now Continued

Nandina domestica

Beautiful, red berries in the garden of Gayle Kusak's neighbor. Berries supply winter food for birds and clusters can be cut for holiday decorations.



Zenobia

From the Garden of Elaine Bliss in December

Native from North Carolina to Florida. Slow growth to 2-4 feet or possibly 6 feet tall with open, loose, arching habit. Pale green leaves are 1-2 inches long. Fall foliage is yellowish with a red tinge. White bell-shaped, anise scented flowers late spring-early summer. Needs well-drained, acid soil.



Left: This plant changes color depending on which side faces the sun, this is north-facing.



South-facing



Left: South-facing. A closer-in picture in the morning's frost. This plant has an amazing palette of color. Especially welcome in December.

Why Play the Devil's Advocate When You Can Play the Devil?

In your garden, it is ironic that by playing The Devil, you actually improve the garden's looks without toxic chemicals. Although you probably kill millions of good bacteria and fungi and contribute CO₂ to the atmosphere. However, playing The Devil is rewarded by enhanced beauty, instant gratification, and most of all, it's fun, and the bacteria and fungi will return.

I play The Devil with my new 500,000 BTU propane torch. It weighs six pounds, attaches to a standard 20-lb propane barbeque tank, and shoots out a nearly invisible flame. The ten-foot hose attached to the torch allows me to burn weeds within a wide area before lugging the tank to another location. Fortunately for me, I have so many weeds that it takes a long time to burn every weed in a ten-foot circumference, so I have time to rest before lugging the tank around.

The burner is hot enough to melt and patch asphalt. It is also an excellent fire starter. Just the other day, I cleaned my office and discovered a large drawer full of long-forgotten bank statements. I took them to the fire pit, fired up my devil toy, and within minutes, the remains of the bank statements were smokelessly ascending toward heaven.

I must caution that if not careful, the heat will kill the plants you want to keep. My other caution is for you to read the instructions before using. I have a tendency not to read instructions, preferring to figure how to operate on the job. The flame is powerful and nearly invisible. It is hot and if pointed carelessly, can-do irreparable harm to human skin. Luckily, I read the instructions, and I am glad I did. When I first fired the torch up, I had a "Boy! Now I understand what they were explaining" moment. Improper use can be dangerous.

Dangerous but fun. Fry weed, fry!

Jared Ogden
Master Gardener Extension Volunteer



Favorite Gardening Tools

My daughter and her family live in Virginia and I don't get to see her nearly as often as I would like but she shares my passion for gardening. Here are just a few of the wonderful gifts which arrive to help me work around the arthritis I have developed in my knees and let me keep putting in my garden:

A Fiskars standup claw-weeder so I do not have to bend down to extract the weeds. You place it's "teeth" over the center of the plant where you assume the main root/roots are located and press it down with your foot and rock it back on its leg and out comes most all of the weed/weeds I have attempted to remove.



This is copied from the Fiskars info: "Fiskars 4-Claw Weeder 39 Inch, Black/Orange (339950-1001) **Wipe out weeds without using chemicals or straining your back!** Our UpRoot® Weed and Root Remover makes it easy to remove invasive plants from your lawn without kneeling, bending over or using harsh, costly herbicide. It features four serrated, stainless-steel claws that grab weeds by the root for clean removal, plus an easy-eject mechanism on the handle that clears the head between uses. The durable aluminum handle is extra-long to help you reach every weed without kneeling or straining your back by bending."

This is my gardener's bench. It folds up. It is sturdy but light weight. I can sit on it and weed or turn it over and kneel on it and weed and I then have the two legs to help me get back up! I have even used this in the house when I had to get to something my knees didn't want to cooperate about!



I really like my Fiskars ricketing lopping shears but when I get into a branch over about 1-1/2", I have to fight to get it cut through. I now have a hand held battery powered chain saw capable of taking care of branches 2" – 3" in diameter.



My next project is to put together the little indoor greenhouse my daughters just sent me. It is a very light weight shelved unit with a plastic cover. Also received the garden heating pads for each shelf, grow lights for each shelf, a mat to put under it and smaller seed starting trays with slightly taller lids than others I have used in the past. I will have to report on my growing successes in the next newsletter.



Barb Baumgardner
Master Gardener Extension Volunteer

What's New At Hamilton Gardens?

1. The Spiral Herb Bed (pictured) to be planted with medicinal and culinary herbs.



2. The American Azaleas Society Legacy Garden, planted this past fall with 45 native azaleas. 200 more coming in the fall of 2021.
3. The West Lawn and Pavilion renovation, in process, named for our own Peggy West.
4. Firefly Habitat
5. New 'Art' sculptures, 'Oscar ' the Octopus, in the Demo Garden
6. The New Majestic Wilderness Trail showcasing wildflowers galore
7. "A Blooming Affair at Hamilton Gardens", April 16—May 23, 2021 (peak bloom season)

Submitted by Grace Howard, Executive Director Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge, Inc.

What runs around a garden but never moves? A fence.

Spring is almost here! I am so excited I wet my plants.

Why do gardeners plant bulbs? So the worms can see where they are going.

What's In Your Soil?

Beautiful, productive gardens start with good soil. Soil is the basis for everything that grows. If your vegetable garden is not producing, your flowers aren't flourishing or your lawn isn't thriving, you need a soil test. Novice or seasoned gardener, the results of this test will help you give your plants what they need to succeed.



Soil testing measures your pH level, the potential of hydrogen. It is a measurement of your soil's acid-forming activity. It also tells the availability of major nutrients and can let you know if you have any deficiencies that may hurt plant growth.



You can visit your County Extension office – 165 Wellborn Street, Blairsville, for Union County and 67 Lakeview Circle, Suite B, Hiawassee for Towns County, to pick up soil testing bags. Collect your soil samples and submit separate samples from different spots in your garden, depending on what and where you want to grow. Collect soil samples from your vegetable garden, lawn, areas around trees and shrubs and flower beds. Charge is \$10.00 for each sample. Return your samples to your County Extension office and they will send them to the soil laboratory at the University of Georgia. Within a few weeks you will get your results and recommendations.

Jo Anne Allen
Master Gardener Extension Volunteer

Weeds I Love To Hate

Swinecress

Coronopus didymus

Swinecress is a freely-branched, prostrate winter annual. In my picture here, it is growing quiet well in my gravel walkway. Leaves are alternate and divided into numerous, very small segments and strongly pungent (skunk odor) when crushed. Tiny, four-petaled, white flowers form in clusters at the end of stems and leaf axils. Swinecress reproduces by seed, quickly spreads and is found throughout the eastern half of the United States as far west as Texas and California. It is also found in southern Canada, the West Indies, South America, Europe and North Africa.



Swinecress is common in worked or tilled soils where other plants are trying to grow, like gardens and orchards. It also can be a nuisance in pastures, and milk from cows that eat it has been known to take on an unpleasant taste.

In my internet research of swinecress, I did read where it is classified as one of the micro-mustards and some people (not me) have cooked and eaten it. I also read where the roots of swinecress can be ground and mixed with vinegar for a type of horseradish. Personally, I will just continue to purchase my horseradish from Ingles.

If you desire to be rid of swinecress, herbicide application is the most effective way to do it. Hand digging, much more labor intensive, can be effective if the entire root is removed. If you apply an herbicide, always follow label directions and make sure the herbicide you are using lists the weed or weeds that you are trying to eradicate.

Jo Anne Allen

Master Gardener Extension Volunteer

Georgia Pollinator Plants

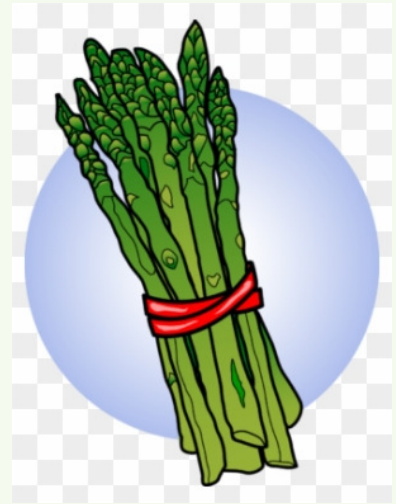
Georgia Pollinator Plants of the Year, led by the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, recognize four top-performing landscape plants that support pollinators:

Spring bloomer	Conradina (<i>Conradina canescens</i>)
Summer bloomer	Sweet Pepperbush (<i>Clethra alnifolia</i>)
Fall bloomer	Downy Goldenrod (<i>Solidago petiolaris</i>)
Georgia native	Butterfly Weed (<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>)

Sesame-Soy Asparagus

Serves 6

- 2 T toasted sesame oil
- 2 T minced fresh ginger
- 2 T minced garlic
- 6 1/2 C cut (1 1/2 inch pieces) fresh asparagus
- 2 C cut (1 1/2 inch) scallion pieces
- 2 T mirin (Japanese sweet rice wine)
- 2 T soy sauce
- 1 T toasted sesame seeds



Heat oil in skillet over medium heat. Add ginger and garlic and cook about 1 minute. Add asparagus and scallion pieces; increase heat to medium-high. Cook, stirring occasionally, until asparagus is tender-crisp, about 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in soy sauce and mirin. Cook until pan sauce thickens and coats vegetables, 30 seconds to 1 minute. Sprinkle with sesame seeds before serving. Enjoy!

Book Corner

Title: Nature's Best Hope

Author: Douglas W. Tallamy

From the library of Jo Anne Allen and she gives this book 5 green thumbs out of 5.

I am in the process of reading this book now and it is totally changing the way I garden! Contents include: Introduction, The Dreamers, A New Approach to Conservation, The Importance of Connectivity, Shrinking the Lawn, Homegrown National Park, Rebuilding Carrying Capacity, Are Alien Plants Bad?, Restoring Insects, the Little Things That Run the World, What Have Weeds Done for Us Lately?, Will It Work?, What Each of Us Can Do and Concluding Remarks. This book provides practical, effective and easy to understand and accomplish information you can incorporate into your own garden. There is even a section in the back with frequently asked questions. A must read!