

Master Gardener Extension Volunteers of Union and Towns Counties

NEWSLETTER

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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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Maple at Cupid Falls Park in Young Harris, photograph submitted by Tommy Westbrook. Thank you Tommy!

Editor's Words

Winter has the potential for many different kinds of weather which affect gardening here in the North Georgia mountains. Happy is the gardener who accepts what the weather brings and does his or her gardening whenever the weather cooperates.

Master Gardener Extension Volunteers have been busy getting gardens, like the Gold Medal Garden, ready for the winter months ahead and crafting treasures for the Kris Kringle Market that is scheduled for December 4th. Charles and Elizabeth Claypool chaired a new Master Gardener Extension Volunteer project, Forestry Garden Project, pictures found on pages 15 and 16.

Our featured Master Gardener Extension Volunteer for this quarter is Toni Smith. I truly enjoyed getting to know more about Toni, please see pages 3-4. Tommy Westbrook shared many pictures of his garden, please see pages 10-13 and Grace Howard shared her Final Reflections on Hamilton Gardens on page 14. I love sweet potatoes and try to grow them every year in our garden. This year we harvested about 15 pounds of sweet potatoes and I share with you a Martha Stewart sweet potato recipe on page 18.

Happy gardening,

Jo Anne

Winter begins on December 21, 2021 at 10:59 am.



Gentian growing near Cupid Falls in Young Harris, photograph submitted by Elaine Bliss. Thank you Elaine!

Meet Toni Smith

Our featured Master Gardener Extension Volunteer for this quarter is Toni Smith. She completed her Master Gardener Extension Volunteer training on May 4, 2021 and is currently working on completion of her 50 volunteer hours for certification.

Toni grew up in Atlanta, Georgia and lived there until 2016 when her family moved to Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, where they still have a home. She has a BBA in Accounting from the University of Georgia - Go Dogs - and loves football.

Toni is married to James Smith who is also an accountant with Voya Financial, he is planning to retire in 2022. She has one stepson, Pierce, who will be graduating from Kennesaw State University in December.

Toni worked in international finance and accounting with the Coca Cola Company in Atlanta for 15 years. During this time, she worked in 25 countries and spent six months each on assignment in Puerto Rico and Russia. She also worked for Hewlett Packard, AT&T and other major corporations as a financial consultant and fraud investigator based in Atlanta. She unintentionally retired in 2016 when they moved from Atlanta to Hilton Head. After about a year of living in Hilton Head, she realized she enjoyed not working and decided to make it permanent.

Currently, Toni and James reside in Young Harris, Georgia. Their property connects to Young Harris College and the National Forest. When they purchased their home in January of 2020, it basically did not have any plants, shrubbery or a yard to speak of. She had three crape myrtles and two hydrangeas that were planted next to the sidewalk in an area completely covered with gravel. For the past two years she has been moving the gravel to the driveway and hopefully next spring will bring in soil to create flowerbeds and a small area for a lawn. She and James did manage to build three raised beds where she grew tomatoes, peppers, English peas and okra this past summer. She grew most of her flowers in containers and hanging baskets.

Hobbies include gardening and travel. Once her husband retires, they plan to travel more and visit many of the national parks and take a transatlantic cruise.

She has been growing lime trees for about 15 years in containers. She can usually keep a tree for about five years before it gets too big for her husband and son to move inside, so at this point she starts over with a new plant. Toni is also a big fan of herbs, especially basil, and she is in the process of learning how to dry herbs, now that she has some space to work. Her favorite gardening activity is landscape design and her barren landscape is presenting her with numerous opportunities to learn. They lost 2.5 of their 7 acres to a wildfire started by their neighbor last April. This has presented a lot of challenges and opportunities to create something new.

Before moving to Towns County, Toni was involved in her Property Owners Association in Atlanta and Hilton Head. She is currently working on the Master Gardener Extension Volunteer project at the Young Harris Library and the restart of the project at the Hiawassee Town Square Park. The Hiawassee Town Square Park Project will be developing over the next few months as the group working on it prepares for a spring make-over and new plantings.

Favorite foods include seafood, any type except oysters and her favorite place to visit, so far, is Zion National Park. She said she could sit and watch the sunrise and set every day. She loves all of the parks in Utah and has been back three or four times. They are planning trips to other parks each year and next years trip is planned for Big Bend in Texas. Next week they plan on going to the St. John Virgin Islands National Park.

Something that many of Toni's friends don't know about her is that she is addicted to watching the "Farm Monitor" on Georgia Public Broadcasting each Saturday.

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

Jo Anne Allen
Master Gardener Extension Volunteer

Toni Smith's Garden Areas



Toni's house and only (but not for long) flower bed

The hill and all of the gravel area that Toni is slowly turning into a flower bed and lawn area



December Garden Chores

Trees and Shrubs - Trees, shrubs, and perennials can still be planted or transplanted to a new location this month if the ground is not too frozen to work properly. Some trees and shrubs that will provide food for birds are dogwood, crabapple, holly, hawthorn, and pyracantha.

Continue raking leaves from your lawn and apply lime if your soil test indicates that it is needed. A hand-held shredder that acts like a vacuum is an alternative to raking. The shredded, bagged leaves can then be deposited in your garden.

If you have not already done so, mulch all trees, shrubs, perennials, and bulbs. A four to six-inch layer of mulch is good, placing the mulch close but not touching the stem or trunk of the plant.

Deciduous trees and shrubs can be pruned as needed when they are fully dormant.

Rake and dispose of fruit and leaves around fruit trees to help minimize over-wintering insects and diseases.

If rain and snowfall are inadequate, water all new plantings and bulb beds.

Flower Beds - Cut chrysanthemums back to about two to three inches once blooming is complete.

To keep your pansies healthy and blooming, deadhead (remove faded blooms) and fertilize, following label directions.

Spring flowering bulbs can still be planted this month.

Clean up flowerbeds and remove annuals killed by frost. Work old mulch and organic matter into beds before the soil freezes.

Apply pre-emergent herbicides to control winter weeds.

Vegetables - Plan ahead. Order gardening catalogs and start planning your spring vegetable and flower gardens.

Prepare next year's garden soil by turning it over and incorporating organic materials such as pine bark, compost, or shredded leaves.

Pull any weeds that remain in your garden.

Cut any remaining tops off of asparagus plants and add a winter dressing of aged manure to the bed.

Houseplants - Do not over water houseplants during the winter months as this could lead to root rot.

Miscellaneous - As winter approaches, take time to review your past gardening year. Look at your successes and failures and make your next year's plans and goals accordingly.

If you decorate for the holidays with a cut Christmas tree, recycle the tree by pruning off boughs for use as frost and wind protection for tender and newly planted perennials and shrubs.

Prepare your garden tools for winter storage. Clean, sharpen, and store them in a bucket filled with oiled, coarse sand. They will be ready for you when spring arrives.

If you have not already done so, shut down outdoor irrigation systems to prevent freezing and drain garden hoses and store indoors.

Don't forget to feed the birds because as winter approaches, they may not be able to find an adequate supply of food. Keep fresh water out for the birds as well.

Lightly trim evergreens in your garden to use for holiday decorations. Magnolia, euonymus, boxwood, laurel, holly, cypress, and juniper all make long-lasting cut stems indoors.

Look for after Christmas sales on garden tools and equipment.

Make a wreath of dried herbs and flowers from your garden.

If you do not have a garden journal, get one and start keeping records of your garden. Record information such as future plans for design, plant and seed orders, planting schedules, insect appearances, garden highlights (like the date when you first see blooms on your spring bulbs), and more.

Celebrate the winter solstice (the arrival of winter) December 21st.

January Garden Chores

Trees and Shrubs - For winter interest in your landscape, birch trees, crape myrtle, deciduous magnolia, coral bark maple, kousa and red-twig dogwood, stewartia, and trident maple all have interesting bark.

For winter blooms, plant flowering quince, witch hazel, and leatherleaf mahonia.

Prune trees and shrubs while they are dormant with the exception of those that bloom in the spring. They should be pruned just after they bloom. Evergreen shrubs can also be pruned late this month.

Be sure to water evergreens before the soil freezes if severe weather is forecast, because the roots are not able to take up water when the soil is frozen.

When pruning, make sure that your tools are sharp. For large branches, first cut through the bark on the underside of the limb to be pruned to keep it from tearing the bark. Next, cut from the top, close but not flush with the trunk. The swelling at the base of each branch is the branch collar and this should not be cut.

Plant ornamental trees and shrubs this month if the soil is not frozen.

Watch for borers, over-wintering insects, and scale on broadleaf evergreen trees, fruit trees, shrubs, roses, and perennials. Apply dormant oil spray when these pests are detected, always following label directions.

Water trees and shrubs during dry periods.

Prune nandinas any time between now and early spring by cutting out one third of the oldest canes.

Shrubs such as forsythia, spirea, and kerria can be divided now.

Flowerbeds - Watch for poison ivy when working outdoors. Even though the vine is leafless this time of the year, the branches can still cause a powerful reaction if accidentally touched.

If you have *Helleborus orientalis* (Lenten rose) planted in your garden – look for blooms beginning now to mid-spring.

To encourage new blooms, deadhead pansies (remove spent blossoms) and fertilize monthly with fertilizer that contains nitrate nitrogen (best for plants growing in cold soils).

Water outside containers planted with pansies and evergreens regularly.

Vegetables - If you have not already done so, prepare your vegetable garden area for spring planting when the ground is frost free and not soggy. Apply lime if your soil test indicates that you should. Contact your County Extension office for soil test directions.

The New Year is an exciting time to reevaluate your life and your garden. Cold days are great for sitting by a fire and planning your spring landscape changes and vegetable garden.

Request mail-order seed and plant catalogs and order seeds for starting indoors.

If the ground is dry, till soil in your vegetable garden to help eliminate insects and weeds and incorporate manure or compost to get the soil in good shape for spring plantings.

Houseplants - Remove amaryllis stems with the faded blooms. Keep it indoors with your houseplants then plant it outdoors in May.

Use water at room temperature when watering houseplants. Spray houseplants with insecticidal soap if you detect spider mites, mealy bugs, or scale on the leaves, always following label directions.

Give houseplants a half turn every month so they do not become misshapen.

Repot houseplants as needed and fertilize using a water-soluble fertilizer at eight-week intervals at half the recommended strength.

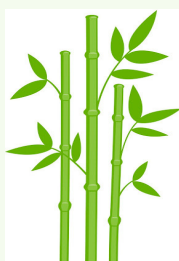
Miscellaneous - Now is a good time to install edgings around flowerbeds and construct walls, terraces, and walkways, when weather permits.

Instead of salt, use sand on icy walks and driveways. Salt can damage plants and lawns.

Have your lawnmower serviced so it will be ready when you are for spring grass cutting.

Inventory your garden tools and replace or repair as necessary. Sharpen your tools and clean rust from them with steel wool. Coat blades with a light oil and rub linseed oil on wooden handles to help preserve them.

Chop unwanted bamboo and English ivy to the ground. Follow up with weed killer on the leaves in April. More than one application of weed killer may be necessary, always follow label directions.



February Garden Chores

Trees and Shrubs - Forsythia and quince are easy to force into bloom indoors. Cut branches when the buds show a touch of color and place them in a vase of water. They should bloom within a week or so.

February is a good month to plant and transplant trees and shrubs.

Prune flowering shrubs that flower before May just after they bloom; prune those that bloom after May prior to spring growth.

Prune apple and pear trees.

Continue dormant pruning; prune out any tree branches that are crossed, broken, or diseased.

Observe Arbor Day by planting a tree on February 18th. In Georgia, Arbor Day is celebrated the third Friday in February.

Fertilize established ornamental trees and shrubs always following label directions.

Cut back butterfly bush to 12-18 inches to promote thicker growth and more blooms.

Check the mulch around your landscape plants and add some if necessary. Trees and shrubs should have about a six-inch-thick covering layer of mulch.

Prune overgrown broadleaf shrubs late this month.

Prune evergreens. Do not severely prune pines, spruce, or junipers as they are unable to generate new growth from old wood.

If necessary, prune crepe myrtle by selecting 3, 5, or 7 main stems. Prune old seed heads and twiggy growth that grows from the base of the plant.

Prune Clematis armandii immediately after it blooms.

Flowerbeds - Fertilize spring bulbs as they emerge with 10-10-10, following label directions. Note gaps in plantings and plan fall bulb order.

Prune ornamental grasses down to 12-18 inches to expose base of clump to sunshine.

Prune climbing roses after the first flush of blooms. Now is a good time to tie main canes to a support before they leaf out and remove any stray canes.

Divide ground covers that have become too thick and prune back liriopse before new spring growth begins by setting your lawn mower to its highest setting and cut.

Look for blooms on your Lenten rose (*Hellebores orientalis*).

Keep faded flowers and weak growth removed from pansies and keep them well watered and fertilized.

Soil Test - Take soil samples from your garden area in order to plan your fertilizer program. Contact your County Extension Agent for instructions on having your soil tested.

Prepare vegetable garden area for planting. Add fertilizer and lime if indicated by your soil test.

Houseplants - An occasional lukewarm bath in the sink or shower is a tonic for houseplants that overwinter

in hot, dry rooms.

When the weather is extremely cold, close the window shades or place protective cardboard between houseplants and window glass to protect houseplants.

Compost - Add any remaining leaves and garden debris to your compost pile if you have one. If you do not have a compost pile, start one.

Miscellaneous - Clean out the old nesting materials in your bluebird boxes early in the month and they will be ready when the bluebirds are ready to nest.

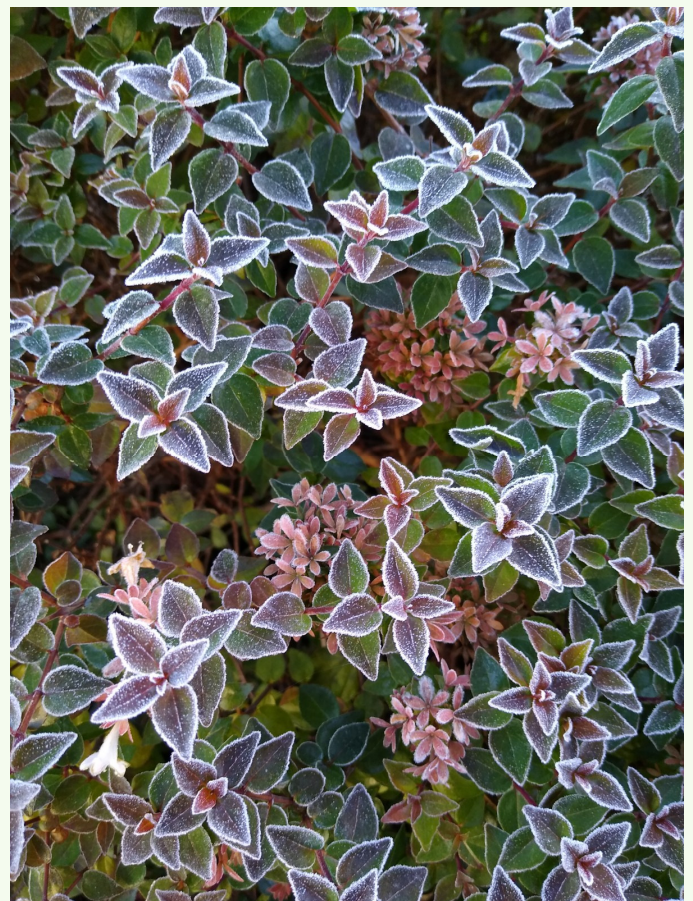
Feed birds and provide them with a fresh supply of water.

Use cat litter or sand on icy sidewalks instead of salt. Too much salt can burn nearby plant roots.

Service your lawn mower so it will be ready when you are for spring grass cutting.

Morning Frost on Abelia

Morning frost on Abelia leaves greeted Roy Benjamin on a recent morning while walking their puppy. Thank you for sharing Roy!



What's Blooming Now

(or what has just finished blooming or being beautiful)

Pages 10-13 from the gardens of Henry and Tommy Westbrook



Ageratum



Aster



Beautyberry

What's Blooming Now
continued



Bigleaf Magnolia



Burning Bush



Cinnamon Fern

What's Blooming Now
continued



Fatsia japonica



Hearts-A-Bustin

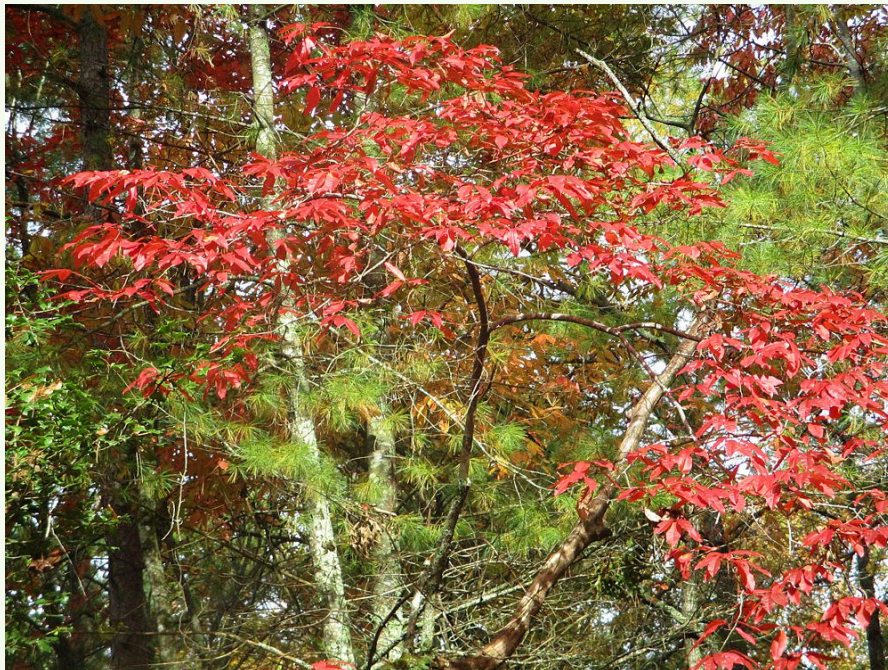


Hydrangea

What's Blooming Now
continued



Pineapple Sage



Sourwood

Final Reflections from Hamilton Gardens

During the 2020 pandemic lock down we took the time to reflect on the work and challenges at Hamilton Gardens, beginning with our start in 2016. There were six “Reflection’ articles published. It seems appropriate to publish the final reflection as we prepare to close this chapter of an incredible garden journey of joy and achievement.

From the beginning five years ago, we have worked to bring a sad and neglected garden back from the edge of utter devastation to a place of beauty and significance in the northeast Georgia mountains.

It has been an amazing run and we are proud of our many accomplishments and most importantly, of being true to our mission ‘to restore, preserve, and enhance this botanical legacy garden for the education and enjoyment of all who visit’. A big part of our strategy has been to build community for the Gardens, not just on the local level, but nationally as well. The statistics we collected in 2021 show that we have been very successful, as we recorded visitors from 37 states and nine countries. Our five separate groups of volunteers have supported the Gardens from day one and continued to do so until our last work day in October. We operated our organization as a business, complete with a vision, mission and five-year strategic plan, which drove our efforts. It was not enough. The nonprofit corporation, Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge Inc. was unable to secure a sustainable leasehold agreement; a path to a future which would have allowed us to remain as stewards of the property. Our efforts were always focused on the Gardens, not building political capitol, and so our story is over and we are dissolving the corporation. A lack of vision and leadership were the determining factors in decisions made regarding the fate of the Gardens.

What will the Gardens look like in a year? They will still be there, but they face an uncertain future as to how will they be managed, and will our work be continued? Promises made are not always promises kept.

Ansel Adams said it best: ***Let us leave a splendid legacy for our children, let us turn to them and say “this you inherit: guard it well, for it is far more precious than money; and once destroyed, nature’s beauty cannot be repurchased at any price.”***

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

First Phase Pictures of the Forestry Garden Project



Left: Doublefile Viburnum



Work on this project “was a testament to the Master Gardener program’s dedication to nature, it’s natural beauty, and education to and beautification of our community. I can hardly wait to visit the garden in the spring!”

Elizabeth and Charles Claypool

Weeds I Love To Hate

Viola sororia

Missouri Violet or Common Blue Violet or Wild Violet

Wild violet is a low growing perennial with leaves and flowers that emerge from underground rhizomes. Six to 10-inch leaves are heart-shaped and glossy with teeth on the edges. In the spring, the plant is topped by purple or white flowers with white throats; the three lower petals are hairy.

It prefers moist, shady soil and grows wild in swamps, thickets, woodland edges, wooded slopes along rivers or lakes and damp woodlands. In developed areas, it can be found in lawns, city parks, moist waste areas, and along hedges or buildings. Sometimes the Common Blue Violet is grown in flower gardens. It can grow in clay but thrives in moist, loamy soil and can become invasive.

The flowers and leaves are edible and some sources state that even the roots can be eaten. I have not eaten any part of this plant. The Cherokee used it to treat colds and headaches.



The plant may look cute and dainty but it is an aggressive weed that grows into thick mats of leaves that can choke out your lawn or garden plants. To control wild violets in beds and borders, you can spray with Roundup, or another brand of non-selective herbicide, if the violets are in a spot set apart from perennials and other garden plants. Or the best way to control wild violets is hand pulling or hand weeding. To help deter the wild violets from growing back, mulch the area after you have cleared the wild violets out.

Jo Anne Allen

Master Gardener Extension Volunteer

Red-Leaf Salad with Roasted Sweet Potatoes
(Martha Stewart Recipe)

2 sweet potatoes, peeled & cut into 1-inch chunks
1 red onion, quartered
2 T olive oil
Coarse salt and pepper
1 pkg (10 oz) frozen cut green beans, thawed
1/3 c walnuts
1 C plain low-fat yogurt
2 T white-wine vinegar
1 garlic clove, crushed through a garlic press
1 head (10 oz) red-leaf lettuce, torn into bite-size pieces



Preheat oven to 450 degrees. On baking sheet, toss together sweet potatoes, onion and oil: season with salt and pepper. Roast until sweet potatoes are tender, about 20 minutes. Add green beans and walnuts to sheet; toss. Roast until green beans are tender, about 5 minutes. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, whisk together yogurt, vinegar, and garlic; season dressing with salt and pepper. Top lettuce with roasted vegetable mixture; drizzle with dressing. Enjoy!

Book Corner

Title: A Field Guide to the Trees and Shrubs of the Southern Appalachians

Author: Robert E. Swanson, Illustrations by Frances R. Swanson

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

This book is for everybody who wants to learn to recognize the trees, shrubs and woody vines that grow in the mountains and the adjoining higher foothills of the southern Appalachians. It covers common native species, and many rare ones, that grow in the forests and in high mountain meadows, on heath balds, in long-abandoned fields, and along fencerows and roadsides. Chapters include: Introduction and Terminology, The Keys, Shortcuts to Identifying Some Woody Plants, Illustrated Descriptions of Genera and Species and List of Trees and Shrubs Arranged according to Family.