



Over the Garden Gate

PUBLISHED BY THE HALL COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

Inside this issue:

<i>Featured Creature</i>	2
<i>Extension Office News</i>	2
<i>Growing Native</i>	3
<i>Books Make Great Gifts</i>	3
<i>Photographing Your Winter Garden</i>	4

HCMG Officers

President Sharon Van de Water
Vice President Chris Michael
Secretary Sharon Marler
Treasurer Beverly Brinson
President Elect Don Linke
Past President Sarah Galshack
Members at Large Ken Slater,
Bill McMahan

Newsletter Editor:

Karin Hicks

Please submit your ideas, news,
comments and questions to
kbh267@gmail.com

Newsletter contributors:

Sharon Van de Water
Janelle Whalen
Karin Hicks

Over the Garden Gate is published
quarterly by the Hall County
Master Gardeners.

Copyright 2015 by Hall County Master
Gardeners. All rights reserved. Articles
may not be reprinted without
permission of the author.

President's Corner

by Sharon Van de Water

Dear Master Gardeners,
2015 was a fruitful year for us. We had great success at our Garden Expos, the biannual Garden Walk and in projects we sponsor throughout the community.

At the outset of the year we set some ambitious goals to grow interest and involvement.

Increase member participation: We discussed a survey to learn more from our membership so Don Linke volunteered to conduct a telephone survey of members to solicit ideas and preferences. We adjusted meeting timetables and added new content. When our meeting room grew cramped, members of the Executive Committee

searched for alternative venues. Don again came to the forefront with an arrangement with Brenau University for use of its commodious Downtown Center.

Provide varied continuing education opportunities: Monthly meeting topics added new perspectives, thanks to our talent agent Chris Michaels e.g. a veterinarian advising on plant toxicity for animals, a bonsai cultivator on pruning and care of various species, and Southern Living on the newest cultivars of plants that thrive in the South. Nearly Native, in a two-hour seminar, explored how to make the most out of a wide range of native plants, trees and shrubs.

Recognize member contributions: This year we continued to name a "Gardener of the Month" to recognize contributions by individual Master Gardeners. Members attending monthly awards by biographer/photographer Don Linke gained a keener understanding of individual successes and a range of volunteer opportunities. At year's end we had an all time high number of nominations for Gardener of the Year, which was won by consensus nominee Margaret Rasmussen.

We have a superb volunteer organization that grows stronger every year. It has been a pleasuring serving as your president.

Germinating Milkweed Seeds

by Karin Hicks

Planting native seeds is one small but important step in preserving the web of life. Adding milkweed plants to home gardens is all the rage now in the gardening world. Whether you purchase seeds from a reputable seed company or get some from a friend, you can begin your germination process so that you have plants ready for the monarch butterfly's spring migration.

The seeds are covered with a chemical which prevents them from sprouting prematurely during extreme conditions such as prolonged drought or extreme cold. Slow soaking and rinsing milkweed will remove this chemical and allow for faster germination.

1. Pre-chill 1 gallon of distilled water. If you are working with

more than one species and you want to do site specific planting be sure to keep them in separate jars (and label). Mix each species of seeds with one cup of pre-chilled, distilled water. Soak for 24 hours in the refrigerator.

2. After 24 hours, pour seeds into a clean strainer. Rinse with distilled water. Drain excess water
(continued on pg. 4)

Featured Creature: Wheel Bugs

by Karin Hicks

Have you seen this weird creature in your garden?



Wheel Bugs (*Arilus cristatus*) are most commonly spotted in late summer in meadows and around trees and shrubs. They are slow moving, despite their long legs, and the cog-like structure on the top of their thorax resembles some sort of mechanical device. It's not clear what the function of this strange structure is but, both males and females adorn them.

Wheel bugs prey on many unwanted insects. According to the University of Florida's Entomology Department "they are considered especially valuable in forests and shade trees because they prey on the well-protected hairy caterpillars that are defoliators". Wheel

bugs are predatory their entire lives and feed on many garden pests including fall web worms, imported cabbage worms, locust borers, Japanese beetles, eleven-spotted cucumber beetles, leaf miner beetles, saw flies and aphids. It's no wonder they are classified as beneficial. However, these bugs are indiscriminate and will also feed on caterpillars, moths, lady beetles, honey bees and other soft bodied insects you may want in your garden.



When prey is scarce they will even feed on other wheel bugs, and like praying mantids, females are known to feed on males after mating. They use their stout

beak to inject saliva, which contains a toxic paralytic substance, that immobilizes and kills their prey in seconds, after which, this predator will suck out the victim's fluids.



Wheel bugs create just one generation each year, mating in autumn. The female lays her tiny brownish, bottle shaped eggs on twigs (another reason not to cut back your plants in the fall) and then dies (sometimes after one last meal, her mate). The red, wingless nymphs hatch out in spring. They feed on aphids and caterpillars while they go through 5 molts before becoming adults by summer's end.

Wheel bugs are not often abundant so if you discover one in your garden take some time to observe these strange creature. They are not aggressive, but if handled, they will deliver a painful bite to humans.

Extension Office News

by Robin Friedman

As 2015 draws to a close I want to thank HCMG for their expertise and dedication this past year. You are an amazing team of fun and caring garden experts. In the short time I have been at the extension I have had the privilege of observing and learning from you. I have witnessed sharing of knowledge and expertise, teamwork, friendships, a can do positive spirit, kindness, and a diversity of projects. I am thankful for each of you for all you do, not only to support Hall County residents and their environment but extending me such a warm welcome to Gainesville. I enjoy getting to know each and every one of

you and if you haven't had the chance to meet with me, I hope you will do so in 2016. I look forward to it!

My focus for 2016 is to both balance and publicize the projects currently supported by Cooperative Extension HCMG. I look forward to expanding ways that we can increase the Master Gardener knowledge (continuing education) and overall volunteerism (project hours) of our membership. With an abundance of talent and wisdom, I welcome your participation, thoughts, and ideas in this planning. This year we have been involved with several community and pollinator gardens, 11 youth programs, the opening of Linwood Nature Preserve, ABG-Gainesville would

not exist without all your expertise and people power, a stupendous Garden Walk, Fall and Spring Expo to name a few. I would be amiss to not mention the many HCMG who support extension at our office, particularly Dr. Sam Faulkner and Polly Reins who dedicate a day each week to support our residents. I welcome you to take a half or whole day shift this winter or spring.

Next year we have some exciting plans for increased publicity, a Community and Youth Garden Alliance, partnering with Gardens on Green to host a Nurturing the Natural Conference, Continuing Education, a May Plant Auction and more. As you reflect on your goals and plans for the (continued pg. 4)

Growing Natives: Evergreens

by Janelle Whalen

What's a good activity for holiday and winter visitors? A short drive takes you to three of Northeast Georgia's most beautiful waterfalls. Amical Falls is in Gilmer County near Ellijay. Anna Ruby Falls is in White County near Helen. Duke's Creek Falls is also in White County near Helen. The leaf color season is over but now is a great time to appreciate how many evergreen native plants we have. Most of us think of trees when we think of evergreens, but there's lots more to discover. Of course we have beautiful pines, hemlocks, hollies and red cedars. Then you'll see the dark green leaves of mountain laurels and rhododendrons. Look closer to the ground and you might find the shiny leaves of galaxy (*Galax aphylla*),



the tiny round succulent leaves of wild stoncrop (*Sedum turnatum*)



and the little blue green leaves of rattlesnake plantain (*Goodyera pubescens*) with its network of white veins.



Pipsissewa leaves (*Chimaphila maculate*) are dark green with white center strips. Red partridge berries (*Mitchella repens*) have mostly been eaten by the birds and small animals by now, but the dark green

Leaves of the vines cling close to the ground. You'll very likely see ground pine (*Lycopodium digitatum*), a relic plant from



the carboniferous period. If you see a fern, it's likely to be a Christmas fern because that is our only evergreen fern in this area.



Take photos with your phone, then ID them when you get back home. Enjoy the fresh air and exercise!

Books Make Great Gifts

by Karin Hicks

You've got your list, you've checked it twice and discovered there are more than a few people who are hard to buy for. Well, you may find that the perfect gift is a book. Here are a few of my favorites that should sit on any gardener's bookshelf.

The Natural Habitat Garden by Ken Druse. This book provides examples of nature's original communities—grasslands, drylands, wetlands and woodlands—and shows how to create beautiful native-plant gardens with over 500 color photos to drool over.

Pest Control for Organic Gardening by Amber Richards. This short book is

packed with practical and sometimes surprising ways to address pests and disease control in a biological method. It is a book I reference frequently. (Available on Kindle)

Winter World: the Ingenuity of Animal Survival by Bernd Heinrich. Unlike humans, who alter their environment to accommodate our physical limitations, animals adapt to an amazing range of conditions. Heinrich examines everything from food sources in barren winter landscapes to the chemical composition that allows certain creatures to survive. The companion book ***Summer World: a Season of Bounty*** is also a must read. Covering the complex interactions of animals and plants with nature and the

relationships between habitat and the warming of the earth.

Planting in a Post-Wild World: Designing Plant Communities for Resilient Landscapes by Thomas Rainer and Claudia West. Written by two leading voices in ecological landscape design, this book reveals how to create a landscape that is resilient, beautiful and diverse. This is a guide to help replace a lifeless landscape to something that will delight the eye at the same time as heal the land. It covers everything from water features to rooftop gardens to urban backyards. It is practical and inspiring.

Photographing your Garden in Winter

by Karin Hicks

The winter garden may seem uninspiring at first glance but there is much to be discovered. The bare bones of a garden are revealed in winter and offer many prospects. Look at the shape of your plants for inspiration or how the light plays off the trees. The architecture of branch structures such as Harry Lauder’s walking stick and the beautiful bark of river birch, paperbark maples and crape myrtles provides much interest.

There is an entire palette of colors to be found in the winter landscape, you just need to look a little closer. There are gray tones that teeter on the edge of blue, deep gray-greens and an entire range of browns from latte to chocolate. You only need to visit a paint store to see nature’s winter palette translate into a color scheme. Look for deep somber greens of mosses and heart-leaf ginger. Rich purples from the underside of the crane fly orchid

leaves. The muted yellows of witch hazel or Edgeworthia blooms in contrast to the deep yellow of the pine warblers that you may see in stark shrubs. Look for the pale green greys of lichen or the soothing browns of fungi that adorn the forest trees and decorate stumps and snags. A variety of reds enhance the landscape from red twig dogwoods to coral bark maples.

Trees take on a graphic beauty without their leaves but they also reveal many winter birds. Downey woodpeckers and yellow-bellied sapsuckers move along the tree trunks with ease. You may even be lucky enough to see a Pileated woodpecker working on a snag. Birds of prey perch on the branches to keep a keen eye on the leaf litter below. Hermit thrushes are abundant and cardinals pop against the bleak landscape.

Winter is the time to discover a new way of looking at things or trying out a new technique. Because of the harsh lighting winter is an ideal time to experiment with black and white or sepia. Sunrises and sunsets are most spectacular at this time of year especially against the silhouette of our towering trees. Bad weather can often lead to great photography. We don’t always get the snow to capture that quintessential winter scene but rain, fog and ice can be just as good. Grab a pair of flexible gloves and get outside and shoot. Just remember not to bring your cold camera directly indoors. Put inside your camera bag to warm up to avoid condensation and keep some extra batteries warm on hand.

Milkweed (continued from pg. 1)

Add a cup of vermiculite into the sterile containers with lids (canning jars work great for this). Slowly add approximately 1/3 C distilled water or just until vermiculite is moist but not dripping. Mix in your cleaned seeds and seal container (don’t forget to label it!). Store in the refrigerator for 30 days.

4(a). Plant entire mixture of seeds and vermiculite directly outdoors once soil temperatures are warm (70 degrees +) or

4(b) sow indoors by filling flats with soil mix for starting seedlings. Soak soil and let excess water drain. Add seeds to flats by scattering them on the surface of soil. Cover seeds with 1/4” soil mixture and gently mist with water to dampen the additional soil that is now covering the seeds. Cover with a plastic top or clear bag to keep from drying out. Place under artificial light, in a sunny window or greenhouse. Seeds will germinate within 7-10 days if temperature is kept at 75 degrees. Once seedlings have emerged keep soil moist by watering the flat from the bottom. This can be accomplished by placing flat in a sink, plastic bin or other such container filled with about 2” of water. soil surface. Once seedlings are about 6” high you can

begin to acclimate them outdoors for a few days (bringing them in at night), before transplanting them outdoors.

Watch your milkweed patch for monarchs, their eggs and caterpillars. Be sure to share a photo or two on the HCMG Facebook page of your success.

Garden Tip:

Water houseplants with ice cubes. The soil can absorb the water slowly and it won’t run out the bottom. Add some liquid fertilizer into homemade ice cubes and you have slow release fertilizer.

Extension (continued from pg. 2)

new year, I hope you will be inspired to consider a grassroots project or two. If you haven’t already, stretch your comfort zone a tad, or consider dabbling in a newer project that needs a mentor or a MG expert alongside. We have a number

of projects that truly need some MG expertise, just waiting for a few of you to say, “YES, I can do that!”

Congratulations to our 11 Class of 2015 Master Gardeners! Please welcome and mentor our new HCMGs when they are at meetings and onsite projects. On January 5th we will welcome 15 new students who will be the Class of 2016.

I wish everyone a very happy holiday, peace and prosperity to all. I’m excited for a new year and new beginnings, aren’t you? From all of us at Extension we appreciate your support and wish you the happiest of holidays and a joyous New Year! From our family to yours!

Upcoming Speakers

January 19th-Peter Gordon, Program Director, Elachee

February 16th-Mary Richards on garden design

March 15th-Professor Brad Davis, UGA presenting “healing gardens”