



2017 MGNA Membership Due

Many of you have been great renewing your membership early for 2017. As of late November, we already had about 80 renewing including new members joining us since their graduation as interns. Pat yourselves on the back. **HOWEVER**, that means about 130 of you still need to renew by 2017. The Membership Form is on line for your convenience. You can pay with Paypal at mginfo.org. If you must mail it to me, my address is 2415 Glenn Street, Huntsville, AL 35801. If you want your membership cards, enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope and I will send them to you. You can also pick them up any time at a meeting. The cost of Active Membership this year is \$30. If you wish to be an Associate Member, the dues are \$40. Let's exceed our 209 membership of 2016. After all, we have a conference to come to right here in our own backyard!! I'm looking forward to seeing all of you soon.

Elouisa Stokes ('81)
Membership Chair

2016 MGNA Annual Awards

By Suzanne Kirkhuff (W'07)

Congratulations to the winners of the 2016 annual Master Gardener awards!

Carolyn Wade (W'12) is Master Gardener of the Year. She

will be our nominee for the Mary Lou McNabb State Master Gardener of the Year Award which will be presented at the 2017 Alabama Master Gardener Association State Conference. Carolyn graduated from our Master Gardener Program in the winter of 2012. Her passion as a new member

was the Demonstration Vegetable Garden. She joined the Communications

Committee in November 2012 and became an invaluable part of our email distribution to MGNA and TriCounty. She won Intern of the Year in 2013-sharing this honor with Tom Simpson (W'12). She has helped with the Huntsville Botanical Garden spring plant sale since 2013 and with our own MGNA plant sales in 2015 and 2016. In 2013, she began chairing the Morris Greenhouse Project. She has helped with soil testing and with past AMGA conferences and is on the committee for our 2017 conference. She is currently our Secretary and member of our MGNA board.



Awards Committee Chair Suzanne Kirkhuff (left) and MG of the Year Carolyn Wade (right) at the 2016 Christmas Social. Photo by Jessica Wood.

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Meet Our New Extension Agent, Rhonda Britton

Hello MGNA! I am so excited to be working with you! For those who do not know me, my name is Rhonda Britton. I know several of you because I have been with the Alabama Coopera-

tive (ACES) for several years. Those who might know me would recognize me driving a big truck and trailer called Water Wheels or would have participated in rain barrel or shiitake mushroom workshops.

RHONDA BRITTON Continued on Page 11

From The President

The year 2016 is coming to a close, time has flown this year. MGNA has made progress in a number of areas this year but it seems as if there is never enough time to accomplish all that we would like to see done.

Our various projects have exceeded themselves again this year and have proven to be extraordinary in so many ways. Our award winning children's programs are extremely successful and proving to the community that Master Gardeners are a viable part of our communities. The Workshops and Programs have broadened the community outreach. Our members, as always, are proactive and willing to help whenever needed throughout the state.

MGNA has a very active year planned for 2017, including hosting the State MG Conference

on May 1, 2, and 3. You will begin to see emails and requests for volunteers in a variety of areas over the three day schedule. Please sign up early – and often – to help. We cannot do this without your help. Even the smallest of jobs is of great importance.



We have a new Extension Agent, Rhonda Britton, and we are excited to have Rhonda to guide our program into 2017.

On a final note I would like to express my sincere thanks to everyone for supporting me over the past few years. This organization has my heart and will always have my support in whatever capacity I can lend. I will still be around for a few more years but may not be as active as I have been in the past. Just know if I can help in some small way I will be there.

Kathie Bass (F'02)
Outgoing MGNA President

VOL. XXVI, ISSUE 1
Editor in Chief
Jessica Wood (F'14)

Regular Contributing Editors
Bill Fuller (W'97)
Jean Lee (W'95)
Brenda Tapp (W'98),
Carolyn Wade (W'12)
Lynn Overman (F'15)

The Garden Thymes newsletter is published quarterly: January/February/March, April/May/June, July/August/September, and October/November/December. Editorial deadline is the 20th of the month prior to publication.

Master Gardeners of North Alabama was incorporated in 1988 and is now a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation.

The Alabama Master Gardener program is conducted at the county level by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

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Diane Campen (W'09) and Tish Hall Host Fall Orchid Seminar

Article and Photo By Nareatha Studdard (W'15)

Imagine the beauty of having orchids in every room of the home or at least the rooms where the orchids may thrive. Of course, for a novice orchid grower who has never seen a bloom it can be a frustrating experience. On Tuesday, November 15, 2016, a seminar on growing orchids in the home was held at the Madison County Extension Office on Cook Avenue. Diane Campen (W'09) introduced speaker Tish Hall from the Heart of Dixie Orchid Society. Tish, who has been growing orchids for more than 25 years, discussed understanding the light needs of growing orchids successfully in the home. Patience is a virtue practice when growing orchids due to their slow growth and short bloom times. However, the splendor of their flowers can sometimes soften the most hardened heart. The last part of the seminar featured Diane, also an avid orchid grower,

demonstrating how to transplant an orchid. If you are interested in learning more about orchids the Heart of Dixie Orchid Society meets the third Monday of the month at 6:30 p.m.

at the Huntsville Botanical Garden's Anderson Education Center next to the Purdy Butterfly House. They can also be found on the Internet at www.h-o-d-o-s.org. 🌿



Tish Hall (left) and Diane Campen (right) at the workshop. Photo credit: Nareatha Studdard

Compost Demonstration Project Update

By Bill Fuller (W'97)

This project has been in operation at the Huntsville Botanical Garden (HBG) since 2008. The Master Gardeners of North Alabama (MGNA) received a request from the HBG to construct a three bin welded wire composting system and operate and maintain the system so visitors to the gardens could see what was recommended for the backyard small gardener.

All MGNA members and interns are encouraged to contact project leader Bill Fuller at auburn64@comcast.net if interested in volunteering on this project or who might just want to come out and learn how to construct and/or operate a composting system, especially if they are having problems with their own composting system. 🌿

Carolyn Wade is 2016 MG of the Year

Original Article By Andrea Cummings (F'07)

Additions Made By Jessica Wood (F'14)

Shut out once from an already full vegetable workshop, Carolyn Wade was going to waste no time signing up for the next one. When she saw the notice in the paper on a Saturday morning in 2011, she called the phone number thinking she was going to get a recording to leave her name. What she heard was a groggy Diane Campen (W'09) who took that 7 am call, and Carolyn was on her way to becoming one of our most active Master Gardeners.

Carolyn learned about the Master Gardener Program during a 2011 vegetable workshop. In her Winter 2012 class was Tom Simpson, and both became MGNA Interns of the Year for 2013. Carolyn had top hours of the year for MGNA the past two years, volunteering 1,008 hours in 2014 and 1,078 hours in 2015.

She has lived in Huntsville since 2005. She is from Virginia and has traveled the world. She and British-born husband John met while both worked at a Burger King during college. Married in 1982, their adventures began when he joined the U.S. Army. They have lived in Germany, Bahrain, Maryland, Tennessee, and several cities in Alabama.

As a registered nurse, she has



Carolyn Wade (W'12)

- 2016 MGNA Master Gardener of the Year
- 2013 MGNA MG Intern of the Year
- 2015-present: MGNA Secretary
- 2014-present: Chair, Morris Elementary Project
- 2014-present: Co-Chair, Demonstration Vegetable Garden
- 2013-present: AMGA State Fundraising Committee
- 2013-present: HBG Spring Plant Sale Committee
- 2012-present: Garden Thymes contributing editor
- 2013-2015: MGNA email administrator

worked for heart surgeons, in schools, in home health, in a senior day care center, as colonoscopy nurse for two years, and as the U.S. Embassy nurse in Bahrain. She traveled to Cairo, Saudi and Oman, and was required to wear a burka in Saudi when training there.

“Army life was hard. John was gone a lot,” she said. “He was in for 23 years. We moved a lot, more than 20 times. He was home maybe 10 years of that time. It was hard, but it was interesting. There was always something new. We still have good friends in all the places we lived.”

In 32 years of marriage, the longest she and John lived in one city is two and a half years. Until now. He retired from the Army in 2005, and they moved to Huntsville for his job with Dynetics. Carolyn has always been active, winning her high school district championship in tennis, and then playing through

college. They still go for short get-aways, but Carolyn has to keep an eye on how active she is.

“My brain says go, and my body says no,” she said. “Once diagnosed with dysautonomia, I had to give up nursing and find other pursuits, which is what really led me to master gardening because I had the time to do the class.”

“I think it is so cool you can plant a seed, watch it grow, and then eat what you grow. It turned me into a vegetable lover. I was not before. I would eat tomatoes and corn and potatoes. Now I try just about everything we grow. I would grow vegetables at home for my husband but would not eat many of them. The DVG people shamed me into trying a snow pea. John Givan (F'05) picked it and asked me if I had ever eaten one, and he said I had to try it even though I told him I don't eat vegetables. He said I had to, and I've

WADE Continued on Page 5

been trying vegetables ever since.

“I try to find the best in everything because it is what it is,” she said. “That’s become my motto since I became sick because I will not let this beat me down. I may have to sit a while and not do a lot of what I want to do, but I can do things!”

Her first volunteer opportunity was creating the booklet of recipes provided by her class. She then worked the pH testing booth at the Spring Plant sale and that’s where Joe White (W’09) invited her to help with the DVG. “Joe asked me each time I went what I learned, and I would tell him,” she said. “Joe planted me at the DVG, and I grew from there. Master Gardeners are so willing to teach what they know, and help you out.”

Carolyn also notes that Joe sets an example that many other Master Gardeners should follow in communicating with new participants. “Just having the personal invitation that Joe extended made a huge difference to me. He made me feel welcome and called me by name. The relationships that you make are what keep you involved,” Carolyn observes.

In recent years, Carolyn has become deeply involved with the Morris Elementary School Outdoor Classroom. Her favorite aspect of this project is interacting with the kids. “If we can reach one child a year, I feel like we’ve done something. The last couple years, it’s been really interesting because you can see a few of the children have grown so much in their gardening

knowledge. We’ll start out with basic plant-growing information. By the end of the school year, we have children working by themselves in the greenhouse dividing and caring for plants independently.”

The Morris work extends beyond horticulture instruction. Carolyn incorporates photography and public speaking into greenhouse and plant work as well as larger life lessons. The program places a strong emphasis on the importance of giving to others through donating to the food bank. The children are also exposed to related subjects throughout the year through work at the DVG and presentations on honeybees and recycling.

Carolyn’s advice to newcomers to MGNA is to get involved, be open to something new, and be willing to meet

people. “If there’s something that people are interested in, ask! There’s nothing wrong with asking. Don’t be afraid to suggest something new that we haven’t done before.” 🌱

Morris Elementary Project won 2015 Project of the Year. Photo credit: Jessica Wood (F’14).



Carolyn was recently honored with a Liberty Legacy Award. Photo credit: John Wade.

MGNA Christmas Party Winners

The Awards Committee had 75 members return their volunteer forms telling us where they had volunteered – with a total number of 278 chances to win. The winners are listed below:

For the \$25 gift certificates from Bennett's:

Debi Bonkoski
Suzanne Beckinger
Gigi Bullman
Owen Hofer

For the complimentary 2017 memberships:

Debbie Severn
Diane Campen
Patty Cowart
Carol Milton

For the two tickets to a concert in Huntsville in February (donated anonymously):

Barbara Locke

Thanks to all our 2016 volunteers!

Carolyn Wade (W'12)
MGNA Secretary

Communications Update

By Meredith Kilby (F'11)

Starting in 2017 the Garden Thymes will move to being a quarterly publication. The quarterly publication will focus on the terrific work being done by MGNA and its many committees. It will continue to have Master Gardener Profiles and many of the same features. The new website at www.mginfo.org will be the go-to place for up-to-date event announcements, workshop notices, our MGNA calendar and things we want both our members and the public to be up to date with. The decision to move to a quarterly publication was approved by the board at the November meeting following a recommendation of Sue Khoury and I (we Co-Chair the Communications Team) with the support of editor Jessica Wood. Additional details on its release schedule are still being worked out.

The website has been up and running since mid-October. I hope you have been able to visit it and familiarize yourself with where things are located. A few things to remember:

1. MGNA's website at www.mginfo.org is a public website and is not connected in any way to the Auburn database website where you record your hours. You do not need a user-name and password to access www.mginfo.org
2. All of our MGNA official emails are now managed differently. They are now managed in the G-Suite we have (this was formerly Google Apps Non-Profit). G-Suite is a cloud-based, business class tool that allows MGNA leadership (officers, chairs, directors, etc) the ability to create, save, store and share their MGNA relevant work in one easy to access location. All existing and new MGNA officers and committee chairs for 2017 must log into their MGNA G-Suite accounts and set up e-mail forwarding to their personal accounts. If for some reason you do not get a response from someone with an «mginfo.org» email address, that does not mean it is broken, or not working; it simply means they have not accessed their account and set up forwarding.
3. The mastergardenersofnorthalabama@gmail.com email is still in place until such time that we can also move it over to the G-Suite email application if that makes sense.
4. I am here to help! Please reach out to me if you need help accessing your account. It takes only a few focused minutes to get you started.

Want to get involved? There is a great deal of work taking place behind the scenes on the Communication team. There is an urgent need for a lead Historian or Archivist to help manage our historical and photo records in G-Suite. The lead Photographer post remains open. If you and a friend enjoy scrapbooking or photography and want to tackle either of these posts together, please let me know at comcoordinator@mginfo.org and I'll be happy to fill you in. Have a wonderful 2017! 🌱

Ongoing Project: Demonstration Vegetable Garden

Article By Tom Simpson (W'12) and Picture By Carolyn Wade (W'12)

We had a great year at the Demonstration Vegetable Garden (DVG) with 1,900 pounds of produce taken to the Madison County Food Bank! The DVG shed has a new coat of paint, there are doors on the tiller shed, and the

rotten rails on the porch have been replaced with an L-shaped built-in bench for on-porch seating. The walking paths are covered in pea gravel (well, most of them anyway!), and we have a good winter crop growing. One more thing: the NEW

FENCE and compost beds work much better than before! It takes a team, and I have the best people helping every week; you can really count on them. 🌱

Tom Simpson
DVG Chair



DVG Shed with new on-porch seating. Photo by Carolyn Wade (W'12).



Alice
Lawler
(F'98)



Intern Class Graduation Fall 2016



First row, left to right: John Whitt, Gloria Couch, Machel Ogletree (Limestone Co.), Lynn Alexander, Zelpha Balch (Morgan Co.); Second row, left to right: Edward Heyse (Limestone Co.), Mary Lynn Wright, Claire Abernathy, Sabrina Green (Morgan Co.). Photos By Alice Brigman

MGNA Decorates Huntsville Main Public Library Christmas Tree



Kathie Gillies (W'10) led the effort to set up and trim the MG tree at the Main Branch of the Huntsville Public Library on Wednesday, November 30 at 1:30 pm. She was joined by Diane Campen (W'09), Gloria Uhl (W'12), Elouisa Stokes ('81), and Beverly Kappenman. Katie Donnell attended to document the event. The tree was taken down by MG volunteers on Friday, December 30. 🌿

Photos by Katie Donnell.

Seasonal Recipes

Creamy Tomato Basil Soup

By Barbara McFarlen (W'08)

This is the best tomato soup recipe.

Ingredients:

3 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 medium onion, diced
2 celery ribs, finely chopped
3 cloves garlic, minced
3 tablespoons plain flour
4 cups chicken broth
2, 14.5 oz cans of tomatoes
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1 teaspoon sugar
2 bay leaves
2 teaspoons basil
½ cup cream
salt and pepper to taste
croutons and fresh Parmesan for topping

Directions:

1. Melt butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Add onion, celery and garlic. Cook for 4 minutes or until onions are translucent.
2. Stir in flour over low heat and cook for 5 minutes, stirring constantly.
3. Add broth, tomatoes, tomato paste, sugar, bay leaves and basil; bring to a slow boil. Turn heat to medium and simmer for 10 minutes.
4. Remove bay leaves. In a blender, carefully puree half the soup. Return to saucepan, or blend all the soup with a hand held blender. Stir in cream and season with salt and pepper. Top with croutons or freshly grated Parmesan cheese.

Hamburger Vegetable Soup (Slow Cooker)

By Barbara McFarlen (W'08)

1 cup okra, sliced
2 cups water
1 cup carrots, grated
1 cup onions, sautéed
1 cup colored butter beans
1 cup field peas
1 cup cooked dried small red beans
1 cup shredded cabbage
1 cup cooked rutabaga
2 cups potatoes
1, 16 oz can of whole kernel corn
1 quart chopped tomatoes
1 lb lean ground beef
1 teaspoon seasoning salt
1 teaspoon black pepper
¼ to ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper

Place okra and water in slow cooker crock and cook until okra is tender. Stir okra into pieces.

Add carrots, onions colored butterbeans, field peas, shredded cabbage, and potatoes. Cook until all vegetables are tender.

Add tomatoes and corn.

Add beef in pinched pieces and cook until beef is done. Add seasonings.

Serve with cornbread.

Note: adjust seasonings to taste.

Our Intern of the Year is Susan Meyer (W'15). She is the volunteer coordinator and she volunteers with the Horticulture Therapy program.

The Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes a Master Gardener who has been an active member of the organization for a minimum of 20 year. This year's winner is given to Dottie Pierce (W'95). She was MGNA Master Gardener of the year in 2008 and AMGA Master Gardener of the Year in 2009. Dottie was MGNA president in 2010 and 2011.

The Project of the Year

Award goes to the Education Workshops chaired by Janet Boothe (W'06). This committee consistently provides informative and educational workshops to the public. Sometimes the workshops are instructional and other times they are hands-on learning classes.

The Friend of Master Gardeners of North Alabama is awarded to Allyson Shabel who is an Extension Agent from Lawrence County but also helps in Morgan County. Allyson was instrumental in helping MGNA set up the Advanced Master Gardener in Landscape Design course. Not only did Allyson give us suggestions

on what we should cover and who we should get to teach those sessions, but she also taught several of the sessions herself.

The New Initiative Award was won by the Communication Team chaired by Meredith Kilby (F'11). Under Meredith's leadership, the Communications Team developed our new website this year.

There were several candidate nominations for each of our awards because we have many outstanding members. MGNA works in many ways to make our community a better place. Congratulations to all our winners and nominees. 🌱

RHONDA BRITTON Continued from page 1

I was born in Huntsville, Alabama, and was raised in Meridianville. I am a 24-year resident of Hazel Green. I received my B.S. degree in Horticulture from Alabama A&M University in 1990. My first job after college was selling sod for a living as a Marketing Representative for Nutri-Turf, Inc. One of the projects I worked on in this position was the conversion of the University of Tennessee game field from artificial turf to natural grass. I also collaborated with the University of Kentucky, Vanderbilt University, and the University of Arkansas on other projects. I worked in the sod industry until 2002, when I took a job at Alabama A&M working with Dr. Caula Beyl and Dr. Cathy Sabota.

While at A&M, I worked

with small fruit production, shiitake mushrooms, and water conservation practices. In 2006, I received a M.S. degree in Plant Science and continued working with A&M and ACES. I'm currently working on my Ph.D. at Auburn University in Agronomy and Soils.

I am married to Daryl Britton, of Hazel Green, and we have two boys. Bradley is 20 and a student at Calhoun, and Landon is 17 and a senior at Hazel Green High School.

I am excited and look forward to be working with all of you!

***Rhonda Britton
Regional Extension
Agent***



Rhonda Britton, image courtesy of ACES website.

2016 MGNA Christmas Party



Alice Brigman, Max Campbell, and Nancy Billings



Herschel McFarlan and Ken Tippie

2016 MGNA Christmas Party



Julie Wood and Diana Nalley



Al and Elouisa Stokes



Tom Simpson and Alice Lawler





Harvey Cotten and Kathie Bass



Suzanne Kirkhuff and Carol Milton



Jane R. Parks Grant Winners



2017 MGNA Leadership and Board of Directors.



Jane R. Parks Grant Winners



Suzanne Kirkhuff and Meredith Kilby



Pam Price and Rhonda Britton



Tom Simpson



Allyson Shabel





GARDEN THYMES

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