

diggin' it!



All the Dirt from the Memphis Area Master Gardeners

Vol. 13, Number 2

Memphis Area Master Gardeners

November, December 2009

Fall Weekend Gardening Seminar: Going Native!

"Gardening is like poker: you play your hand or you bluff." (Jim Crowder) And in Shelby County, we were dealt quite a hand: properties that vary from rock-hard clay to sandy soil; micro-climates that exist side by side in two (or three?) different heat-tolerance zones; winters that drop to 15-below and climb to 75... all within a week! So how do we tame such a varied eco-system? Do we want to tame it at all? Or, is there something in-between?

A panel of MidSouth gardening experts – Lorie Emens (Dixon Gardens), Jim Volgas (MAMG), Chris Cosby (Memphis Botanic Gardens), Diane Meucci (Gardens Oy Vey), and Jim Crowder (Dan West Nurseries) – created lively debate regarding these questions and more at the Fall Weekend Gardening Seminar on October 31, held at the Memphis Botanic Garden.

The morning began with this question: "What is the definition of a native plant?"

It existed "in place" prior to European settlement

It is best adapted to conditions where you live

What difference does it make?

It is a plant that survives in and contributes to the ecosystem

It's the right plant for the right place

Confusing? You betcha. We can 'play our hand,' using the soil we have, or we can 'bluff,' attempting to get a plant to grow where it really isn't supposed to grow (which can be a very expensive enterprise indeed!). But, there are some ground rules we all can agree upon and follow when it comes to gardening with native plants in the Mid-South.

First, each yard is its own micro-eco-system. We can't generalize. Urban soil – soil surrounding building tracts and 60-year old Midtown mansions – is most likely builders' soil, not 'native Memphian' soil. We can amend our soils to provide a better foundation and we may even be able to grow something that isn't "supposed" to grow in our zone, evidenced by the old Mountain Laurels and Rhododendrons at Dixon Gardens.

Secondly, we can amend our soil, but we can't amend the environment. As Diane Meucci noted, garden design starts with science – we must determine what will grow where. And, importantly, we must be 'responsible' gardeners. What impact will a plant have on the ecosystem not just of our own yard, but on Shelby County? (Witness that lovely hedge, privet (*Ligustrum*) and the old

standby, Bartlett Pear, both of which have become invasive in our natural Tennessee landscape.)

The answer may come with "go native." Here are some personal favorites of the panel:

Jim Volgas: Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) and Pond Cypress (*Taxodium ascendens*).

Chris Cosby:
Carolina Moonseed (*Cocculus caroliniana*) and Hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*).

Diane Meucci: American Fringe Tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*), Dogwoods and Big Leaf Magnolias.

Jim Crowder:
Sweetbay Magnolia (*Magnolia Virginiana*), "Chitalpa" (catalpa+ desert willow), and *Itea*.

Lorie Emens: American Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) and the many spring ephemerals available for our ecosystem (such as Trillium, Virginia Bluebells, and Jack-in-the-pulpit).

Our conclusion? It seems as if, regardless of the hand we were dealt in Shelby County, we are all winners when it comes to native plants.



Hophornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*).

Books of interest:

- **Wildflower Watch** by Margaret Gratz
- **Wildflowers of Tennessee, the Ohio Valley and the Southern Appalachians** by Dennis Horn and Tavia Cathcart
- **The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World** by Michael Pollan
- **Gardening with Native Plants of the South** by Sally Wasowski
- **MidSouth Gardening Guide** from the Midsouth Gardening Club

—Anne Krekelberg—MG, 2009

Facebook? I Just Don't Get It.



A Message from
Our President
—Carol Watkins—'06

I am probably more technical than some, but as years go by, new technologies are leaving me stuck in the mud. Facebook is one of those. I just don't get it. Since our association is embracing some of the technologies I *do* get, I thought about the constant struggle we all have to adapt to change and invention.

Social networks, video-sharing sites, and Pods—technologies barely around 10 years ago—are now in the mainstream. A study on digital learning says kids spend time texting, chatting, blogging, gaming, and Facebook-ing, and that's a good thing. These activities provide avenues for extending social worlds, self-directed learning, and independence as well as information and contacts not available in their local community. By using these new forms of media, young people learn basic social and technical skills.

*Culled from Landscape Juice,
a gardener's blog*

Who would have thought?

Those who stay abreast of change and remain open to new ideas are better able to adapt to diversity and conflict. Gardeners are ahead of the curve in that regard. Gardeners are adaptive and resourceful. Think of our resilience when storms and winds plummet our newly

cared for yards or pests and disease destroy anticipated produce. We persevere in spite of and in harmony with nature. Gardeners find pleasure in small things...watching seedlings grow and enjoying seasonal wonders.

Garden bloggers are embracing technology to relate with other gardeners. Websites abound with informative gardening advice; nurseries can market rare plants. *Weeding the Web* by Helen Gazeley, is dedicated to gardening from a British point of view. *Life of a Garden* blog has an interesting story on Survival Gardening. Our own UT Extension Service participates in a cooperative extension website for research-based information at extension.org.

MAMG is taking steps to allow members to record recertification hours on the UT Master Gardener website. Over the past two years, MAMG website visits have continued to increase. Now, we have improved the site to hold member information. This will reduce multiple lists, keying errors, and make administrative tasks much easier. MAMG is an organization ahead of the curve. Good for us.

Incidentally, USNews.com reports that older people who are willing to use technical devices—like those that regulate lights, temperature, or monitor blood pressure—may be able to maintain their independence for a longer period of time. Okay, that might be something worth thinking about. But, Facebook? I still don't get it.



Carol Watkins—'06



The Minutes of the Regular Meeting of Memphis Area Master Gardeners

OCTOBER 1, 2009

President Carol Watkins called the business meeting to order at 6:30 P.M.

Chris Cooper gave a presentation on CoRe Projects.

CoRe Project representatives gave project descriptions.

Announcements were made.

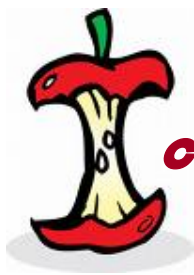
Chris Cooper was presented a wedding gift certificate on behalf of the membership.

The proposed 2009-2010 MAMG budget was presented to the membership.

A quorum being present, a motion to approve the operating budget for 2009-2010 was submitted by the Executive Board, seconded and approved by a majority vote of the membership.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 P.M.

159 attendees



CoRe Corner

Habitat For Humanity is a challenge! There are not only an extraordinary number of six homes scheduled for planting this fall, but we are contending with all of this rain! A dedicated group of eight volunteers was able to get the two homes on Haas Avenue tilled, edged and planted on October 21. The October 24 Pershing project was cancelled due to rain, as were the November 5 and 6 dates. Currently, planting is planned on November 7 and 9. **HELP IS NEEDED** for this very visible and important project. If willing to help, please contact Barbara Pierce, Jeff Golladay or Jimmy Gafford so they can keep you informed of the rapidly evolving schedule.

Speakers Bureau. Presentations were given by Donna McComas ("Winterizing Your Garden") at the Green Lawn Garden Club; Karen Houdek ("Flower Arranging") at Parksdale Garden Club; and Al Cook ("Mulch") at the Farmer's Market.

Plant-a-Row is nearly finished for the season. We continue to dig up the sweet potatoes and harvest the greens as long as is necessary. In spite of the rain, Plant-a-Row provided over 4,600 pounds of fresh produce to the Food Bank.

The **Ask a Master Gardener Plant Clinics** are now an extension of the **Hotline Committee**. Due to the success of the clinics this past year, we are in the process of procuring material for a 2nd kit. Also, please see the new guidelines for answering Hotline Calls on the Notes board below. With more Clinic opportunities on the horizon, we will be working on guidelines for scheduling and signing out materials. As a side note, if anyone has a spare folding table they could donate to the new kit we would greatly appreciate it. And, thank you to Donna Olsing for her donation of folding chairs.

It's never too early! **Spring Fling, Plant Camp** and the **Garden Jumble** are just around the corner. An additional tent will be added to Spring Fling; and we are lining up speakers and vendors already. Each member will be expected to donate five plants for sale at Spring Fling next year. Since now is the perfect time to divide perennials, why not prepare at least five for next year's Spring Fling. It's important to label with plant name (both common and scientific) and with color. It's never too early to begin collecting items for Garden Jumble. Set aside a corner in your garage or potting shed and let your neighbors and friends know you have a great way to recycle their unwanted items and divided plants.

Dr. Chris Cooper continues to evaluate **Special Projects** in which Master Gardeners can be involved. These projects must meet the mission statement of MAMG and the Extension Office in order that we can best serve our community. The Special Projects Committee helps to assess the feasibility of suggested projects. If you are interested in being on this committee, please contact Zoe Marshall.

CoRe (County Required) Projects

For recertification a minimum of 8 service hours must be devoted to one or more of the following projects:

- Ask A Master Gardener
- Garden Jumble
- Habitat for Humanity (Education & Landscaping)
- Horticulture Hotline
- Plant A-Row
- Speakers' Bureau
- Spring Fling
- Weekend Gardening Seminars
- Youth Plant Camp

MAMG is having a Potluck Social at December's Meeting

Each member attending is asked to bring some sort of dish of food--(main dish, sides, salad or dessert).

At October's meeting, the majority of those who planned on attending wanted to be able to bring a guest, as well as, BYOB--soft drinks and coffee will be provided. So bring a guest and you B of choice. A sign-up sheet will be available at the November meeting for members who plan on attending so we can have sufficient table seating.

NOTES

From the desk of Dr. Cooper:

I thank you all for your gifts and well wishes! You have truly blessed Hope and me with your thoughtfulness and generosity. Thank you so much for sharing in this precious moment with us, it means a lot! Again, I am so honored and proud to be a part of this wonderful association. Consider yourselves loved and hugged!

You are invited to see Cornelia Swain's Nativity Collection (over 1,200, 71 countries) on November 6-8. Friday and Saturday hours are 1-5:00 and Sunday is 1-4:00. For questions/directions, call Cornelia.

Guidelines for Answering Hotline Calls

Chris has requested that hotline volunteers record the caller's zip code in the log book. This helps him in keeping track of which calls come from what areas of Shelby Co. We will be getting out new log sheets that reflect this change in the near future, but until then please write the zip code in the name column. Chris also suggested we have a Diagnostic Question Guide by our hotline phone. The committee felt this would greatly help all hotline volunteers in accurately determining plant problems. Until the committee has the list posted in the office, please use the following questions to gather information:

- *What is the plant?
- *What is the problem?
- *What is a healthy version of the plant suppose to look like?
- *What type of growing conditions is the plant subjected to and are they what the plant likes, i.e. sun/shade, dry/moist, soil type and ph, planting conditions, etc.
- *Does the plant have any mechanical injuries?
- *Have any herbicides been recently applied near the plant?
- *What type of recent and past weather conditions could have affected the plant?

Get a Jump on Spring

by Ken Mulholland—MG '04

If you are anything like Betty and me, reading an article in the November issue of DIGGIN' IT about spring gardening is not really exciting.

After a long, hot and sloppy eight (8) months of vegetable and rose gardening, I have been praying for an early hard frost to put all of our gardens to sleep for several months. But, we all know that we must give some thought the next year's gardening during the dormant winter months. This involves more than just reading seed catalogues.

Two years ago, Betty was intent on starting some of our vegetable plants from seed in February and March. Not only would growing a lot of our own vegetable plants from seed save us some money, but Betty could get her hands back in the dirt during the winter doldrums. Betty's initial efforts to grow vegetable plants from seed started with tomatoes. Our home and lot are not well suited to having an outside green house to grow plants in. We have way too much shade for ideal conditions for green house growing. So, as an alternative, Betty tried to grow tomato plants in our home with grow lights and seed trays on top of our utility room freezer and refrigerator. Her resultant seed plants were less than blue ribbon winners. The seed did come up, but the tomato plants were anemic and leggie. These plants were not acceptable from transplantation to our vegetable garden plots at Shelby Farms, so we ended up purchasing all our vegetable plants as usual.

I spent most of my childhood growing up in the cold north country - South Bend, IN. We had lots of snow, ice and freezing temperatures in the winter. My Dad was the gardener in our family. I distinctly remember my Dad building a "cold frame" and placing it on the south side our home. With this cold frame he was able to grow some early spring vegetables while there was still snow on the ground and while the night time temperatures still got below freezing.

Last December, I suggested to Betty that we build a cold frame and try our hand again at raising some of our vegetable plants from seed in

the cold frame. Betty and I have a "side garden" in addition to our large garden plots at Shelby Farms. We decided to build a cold frame and place it in our side garden out there.

I went on the internet and did some research on cold frames. I found several sets of free construction plans for cold frames during my search. We built the cold frame, placed it out at Shelby Farms, did good soil prep in the cold frame, and planted tomato, lettuce, radish, and pepper seeds in early March 2009. We did plant too many seeds for the amount of space we had to work with. Almost all of the seeds came up. We had a hard time separating the plants for transplantation. Our cold frame worked like a charm for growing vegetable plants from seed. Eating fresh leaf lettuce and radishes in early April was a real treat. Our tomato plants grew very large and healthy, and we transplanted the plants easily into our large garden plots in late April. We had many old time gardeners out at Shelby Farms come by to view our cold frame garden and comment on the success of our early plant growth. We definitely will continue to use our cold frame for starting vegetable plants from seed, and we recommend that our fellow gardeners might want to give this growing technique a try.

The cold frame supports the basic environmental growing conditions to germinate seed - sunlight, warmth, moisture and protection - before Mother Nature provides these conditions in the spring. Hence, a gardener can "get a jump on spring" to begin gardening earlier in the growing season. The construction of a cold frame can be as elaborate as one with built-in heating elements, automatic watering systems and electronic, thermostatically controlled opening devices. Or, the cold frame can be as simple and economical as a wooden box covered by an old window frame on hinges. Obviously, one can construct a cold frame anywhere between these two extremes. The cold frame must be placed outside where it is exposed to the maximum amount of direct sun light, for it is the sunlight that

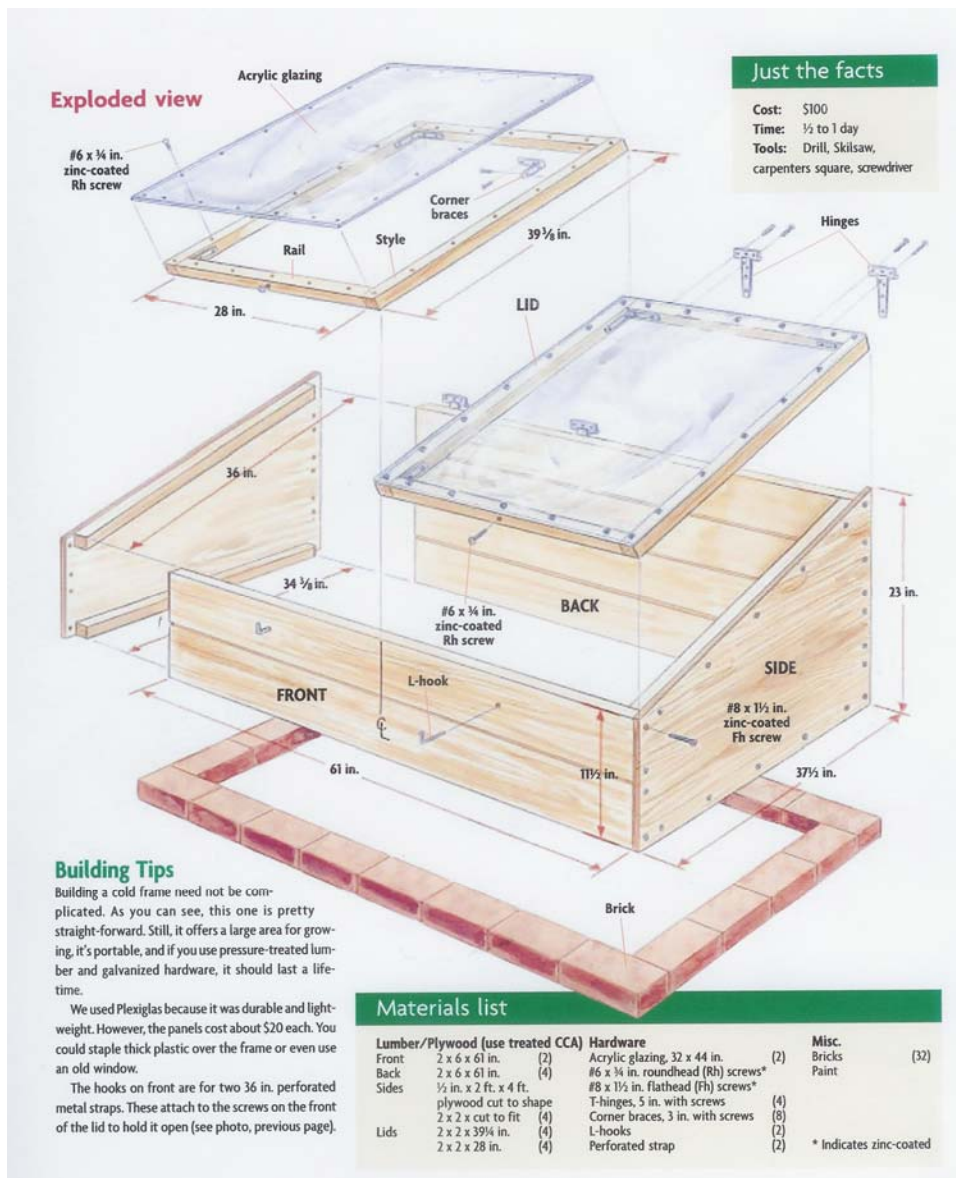
produces the light and warmth conditions to germinate the seed. Cold frame gardening can be used to germinate any type of seed.

Once the cold frame is placed into its location, be sure to load it with very well prepared soil medium. We tilled the ground where we placed our cold frame to soften the soil and get rid of as much weed seed as we could. Next we placed the cold frame over the prepared ground and loaded it with a rich growing medium of potting soil, mulch, and compost. We mixed these products thoroughly together and then "boiled" the growing medium. You "boil" the growing medium by placing black plastic on top of the soil and closing the lid of the cold frame. Let this "boiling" process continue over several weeks before you plant your seed. "Boiling" the soil kills all remaining weed seed in

the soil and accelerates the break down of the organic compost materials in the soil medium.

Once you have "boiled" the growing medium, remove the black plastic from the cold frame. It is now time to plant your seed. Make sure you do not construct your cold frame too largely, as it will be hard to work in the frame from the front and sides.

Remember, the cold frame is a closed growing environment that needs regular attention. You cannot just plant your seeds and walk away from the frame for a long time. The sun shining through the glass/plastic window top(s) of the frame produces very warm and dry conditions in the frame. You must keep the growing medium moist with water. Neither should you allow the temperature inside the frame to exceed 80 degrees for a prolonged period of time. To lower the temperature inside the frame, you raise the hinged glass top(s) just enough to ventilate ex-



Just the facts
 Cost: \$100
 Time: 1/2 to 1 day
 Tools: Drill, Skilsaw, carpenter's square, screwdriver

Building Tips
 Building a cold frame need not be complicated. As you can see, this one is pretty straight-forward. Still, it offers a large area for growing, it's portable, and if you use pressure-treated lumber and galvanized hardware, it should last a lifetime.
 We used Plexiglas because it was durable and lightweight. However, the panels cost about \$20 each. You could staple thick plastic over the frame or even use an old window.
 The hooks on front are for two 36 in. perforated metal straps. These attach to the screws on the front of the lid to hold it open (see photo, previous page).

Materials list

Lumber/Plywood (use treated CCA)	Hardware	Misc.
Front 2 x 6 x 61 in. (2)	Acrylic glazing, 32 x 44 in. (2)	Bricks (32)
Back 2 x 6 x 61 in. (4)	#6 x 3/4 in. roundhead (Rh) screws* (2)	Paint
Sides 1/2 in. x 2 ft. x 4 ft. plywood cut to shape (4)	#8 x 1 1/2 in. flathead (Fh) screws* (8)	
Lids 2 x 2 cut to fit (4)	T-hinges, 5 in. with screws (4)	
2 x 2 x 39 1/8 in. (4)	Corner braces, 3 in. with screws (3)	
2 x 2 x 28 in. (4)	L-hooks (2)	
	Perforated strap (2)	* Indicates zinc-coated

cess heat during the day. Remember to lower the hinged glass top at night to keep the early spring, cold night air out of the frame. For best growing results, you want to keep the inside moisture and temperature as constant as you can both day and night. If you continue to use the cold frame to grow your plants into late spring and early summer, keep the glass top propped open at all times, day and night.

Betty now can tolerate the "winter doldrums" with more patience knowing that she can get her hands back in the soil (her dirt therapy) in our cold frame by late February or early March. Ideally, we would place the cold frame in our yard, but we do not have a good spot for it there. Consequently, we have to make several trip each week out to Shelby Farms to tend to the temperature and moisture in our cold frame. So if you want to "get a jump on spring" try some cold frame gardening.

MASTER GARDENERS' CEU CALENDAR

Thursday, November 5, 10:30 am; **Amaryllis & Paper white Bulb Workshop**, **Manjula Carter**, Dixon Gallery & Gardens, Catmur Horticulture Building; \$35 (members \$25) Limit 20; fee includes an Amaryllis bulb, 4 paper white bulbs, containers, & planting mix. Learn the proper way to plant and grow these bulbs.

Thursday, November 5, 10:30 am; **Japanese Flower arranging Class**, **MBG Horticulture Center**. Sponsored by the Memphis Bamboo Chapter of Ikebana International. Cost \$15. Call 683-1163 for details and reservations.

Wednesday, November 11, 12 noon; **Brown Bag Lunch and Learn**. Bog and Marginal Plants, Cason Calloway with Spectacular Plants Inc. MBG. Members free/non members \$5.00, 636-4128

Thursday, November 12, 5:00 p.m. **MAMG Share and Learn**, **Pat Patterson and Jana Pulley**, **Christmas Flowers; Poinsettias, Paper Whites, and Christmas Cactus**, Extension Office Conference Room on the 2nd floor of the B-Wing. 6:30 pm **MAMG meeting** (refreshments begin at 6:00) **Jason Powell** from *Petals of the Past*, **Jemison**, Alabama

Saturday, November 14, 10:30 am; **Hands on Leaf Casting Workshop**, **Dale Skaggs**, Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Catmur Horticulture building. \$20 members/\$30 non-members. Limit 20. Reservations required. 761-5250. Make a leaf casting that can be used as a bird bath or attractive garden ornament. Fee includes all materials and instructions. Bring your own leaf or Dixon will provide one.

Tuesday, November 17, 5:30 - 7:30 pm **Holiday Wine Party**. **MBG 3rd Annual Holiday Design Extravaganza** with wines & hors d' oeuvres. **Greg Campbell** of The Garden District creates holiday floral arrangements from 6-7pm. Wine Party tickets: MBG members \$20/non members \$25. 636-4128 to register. Full Extravaganza ticket package MBG members \$100/non-members \$130.

Tuesday, November 17, 7:00 pm The Memphis Bonsai Society meeting at the MBG. **Darryl Baily presents another facet of Bonsai**. The collection and presentation of Suiseki. Visitors welcome.

Wednesday, November 18, 9:30 am-4pm **MBG Holiday Design Extravaganza**. **Morning Showcase 9:30- 11:30am** features three designers talking you through a number of arrangements to be auctioned after the session. **Morning Design Showcase**: MBG members \$30/ non-members \$45. Box lunch available for preorder, \$12. After lunch, **Hands-on Workshop, 2:00-4pm**. featured designer, **Kevin Coble**, guides you to create your own take home holiday designs. **Hands-on Workshop**: MBG members \$40/ non- members \$50. 636-4128 to register.

Thursday, November 19, 11:00 am, **Phoebe Cook Lecture: From the Met to Memphis**; **Remco van Viet**, Floral and event designer for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Dixon Gallery and Gardens Winegarden Auditorium. A slide presentation of floral arrangements from The Metropolitan Museum of Art and other venues and a variety of vase arrangements and cen-

terpieces, all of which will be raffled off at the conclusion. Free with Dixon admission.

Thursday, November 19, Noon, **Floral Arrangement Workshop and Lunch**. **Remco van Viet**, Dixon Gallery and Gardens Hughes Pavilion. A workshop in which guests will make one of the arrangements created during the preceding lecture to take home.

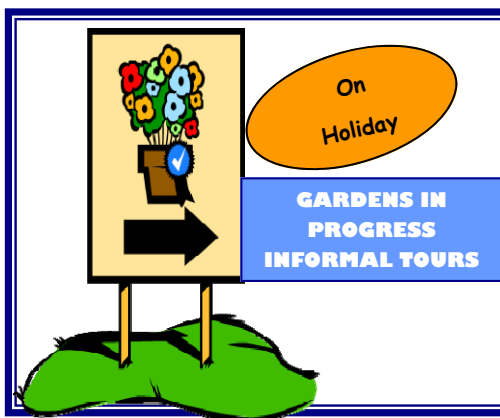
Fee includes a box lunch, a container, and flowers Remco selected specifically for this workshop. \$75 members/non-members \$85. Reservations required, 761-5250

Thursday, November 19, 10:30am, **Japanese Flower Arranging Class**. MBG Horticultural Center sponsored by the Memphis Bamboo Chapter of Ikebana International. Cost \$15. Call 683-1163 for details and reservations.

Wednesday, December 9, 12 noon. MBG, **Brown Bag Lunch and Learn**. **Evergreens**; **Len Lawhon**. MBG members Free/non-members \$5. 636-4128 for information.

Wednesday, December 16, Noon - 1 PM, **Creating a Holiday Floral Arrangement**, **Dixon floriculturist, Gregg Francis**. Dixon Gallery and Gardens Winegarden Auditorium. Learn how to make an attractive holiday arrangement for your home using seasonally available materials such as holly, boxwood, magnolia, hemlock, pine, red holly berries and dried flower heads. Bring

If you are aware of an educational event that should be included in the newsletter, please contact mamg.newsletter@gmail.com.



Thank you to all of October's hosts, who had to battle cold and wet weather in order to showcase their lovely gardens.

There will be no Gardens in Progress for the November and December months. Gardens in Progress begins anew in January 2010.

If you are interested in sharing your garden, please contact Jean Ward-Jones. Garden hosts will receive three Education Given hours for sharing their gardens.

Shelby County Extension Office
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Executive Committee
2009/2010

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Carol Watkins, 2006

Vice - President
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Patsy Courtright, 2008

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THE UNIVERSITY of TENNESSEE

The purpose of The Association shall be to support and engage in projects and activities of the Extension Service of The University of Tennessee, to enhance the quality of life for the residents of the Greater Memphis Area through horticulture, and to increase the availability of horticulture information and service to the members and the community. - MAMG Bylaws

MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

The November meeting will be:
Thursday, November 12, 6:30 p.m.
Refreshments begin at 6:00

Topic: Antique Roses, Heirlooms
Speaker: Jason Powell, Petals from the Past
Location: Agricenter, Banquet Room, Wing C

The December 10th speaker will be from Crown Vineyards. There will also be a potluck social!

SHARE & LEARN



will meet before the membership meeting at 5:00 p.m. in the Extension Office Conference Room. Thank you to Barbara Pierce for her presentation on Lasagna Gardening last month.

Pat Patterson and Jana Pulley will be presenting November's topic, Christmas Flowers; Poinsettias, Paper Whites, and Christmas Cactus.

There will be no December Share & Learn

If you're interested in presenting a topic please contact Jean Ward-Jones. Session leaders will receive two Education Given hours. Attendees will receive one Education Received.

Diggin' It is the official newsletter of the Memphis, Tennessee, Area Master Gardeners.

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Master Gardener Website:
<http://memphisareamastergardeners.org>

Articles, ideas and comments may be submitted to the newsletter committee at:

By Email: MAMG_newsletter@gmail.com
(Preferred)
Or by fax: (901) 328-5670
Or by phone (901) 336-7309

Email recipients of **Diggin' It** receive their newsletters in COLOR.

Deadline for submissions to the newsletter is the **3rd Monday** of the month prior to the month of publication.

There is no December newsletter. Please check the website for updated information.

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