

The Magnolia Chronicle

Pulaski County Master Gardener Newsletter

President's Report

March 2021

By the time you read this, the snow will be a distant memory. We have been home for a week, not being able to leave our neighborhood. There has been a lot of time to worry over the garden and wonder if my plants will survive the extreme cold and snow. The best thing is to heed the advice of experts and take the wait and see approach. Snow can be an insulator and my fountain iced over, a blessing in disguise. I was hoping the ice would help protect the pump, but even though there is a heater in it, I felt that it couldn't survive the below zero weather. I was so excited to hear the water gurgling. Well, as I often say the Lord takes care of fools and babies and I know which one I'm not!

Spring is just around the corner and we will soon be out there digging, working on our projects and in August wishing for cooler weather. When that happens, think back to this snowy, cold week and remember this quote from an unknown author "***When it snows you have two choices: shovel or make snow angels.***" Then get hold of your inner child and lie down on the grass and make an angel.

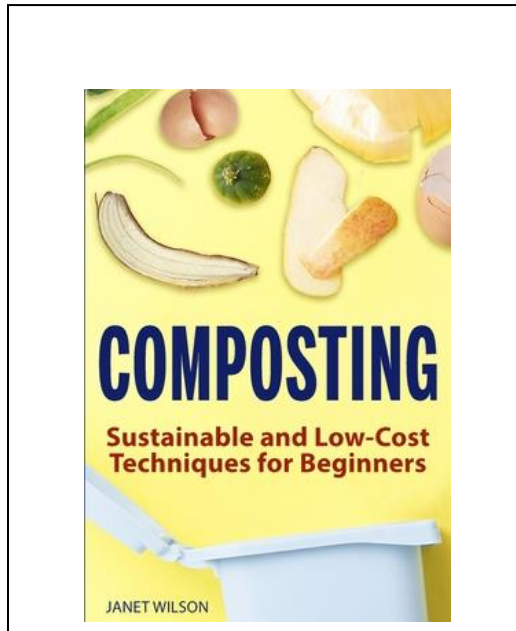
Stay well and Happy Gardening!

Sharon Priest,
PCMG President

In this issue:

President's Report.....	1
Book review.....	2
Gardening Calendar.....	3-4
Food for thought.....	5
Beth Phelps.....	6-7
Blast from the Past.....	8-9





**Book: Composting---Sustainable and Low-Cost Techniques for
Beginners
Author: Janet Wilson**

Book Review: Debra Redding

Here is a complete guide that walks you through the 3 main ways to make compost.

Section 1 covers microbial compost. Included is a lot of information on what to do and not to do, as well as what is optional. Thorough explanations help the reader understand what compost is, how to start, maintain and store it. Clear guidance is offered on how to create compost, and what you can do to speed up the process. Excellent pointers are offered on what makes for healthy compost, and what to avoid so you can have healthy compost. The author walks the reader through the entire process, and helps you understand the difference between cold, warm and hot compost. Guidance regarding equipment and bins is also included.

Section 2 covers worm composting and of all the necessary information is just as thoroughly discussed.

Section 3 has to do with humanure compost – something we don't hear about or think much about these days. To that end, some background and history is offered, along with what you would need to know if this would be appropriate for your situation. This is particularly helpful for those in remote areas or where “modern” facilities are not available.

The author concludes with a comprehensive list of references, some of which are also discussed, which adds additional information to what the book offers. Here is what you will need to know for basic composting, as well as for more complex situations. I was impressed with the author's thorough explanations.

GARDENING CHECKLIST FOR MARCH

Carol Randle

I think everyone is ready for spring, sunshine and warm weather.

VEGETABLES

March is a prime planting season. Vegetable gardens are up and running. It is a great time to plant cool season crops such as lettuce, broccoli, potatoes, onions, radishes, turnips, kale, cabbage and spinach. Cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower are planted as transplants, rarely as seeds. Most feed stores sell them in bundles of small plants which are then set out in the garden. Janet Carson usually plants them two inches apart and, as they grow, she uses every other plant for green onions, giving the other onions plenty of room to grow. Remember to fertilize at planting and then side dress six weeks later. Cool season vegetables have less disease and insect issues and give you a great start to the gardening season. We tend to have more energy now and sometimes we have ample moisture. Diseases and insects have not become firmly entrenched yet, so grab your shovel and start planting. If you don't have space for a large garden, plant some vegetables in pots or among your flowers. A minimum of six hours of sunlight is all you need. If you want to grow your own tomato transplants, they should be started now. You can't get quality transplants in an ordinary home window. You need either a greenhouse or a supplemental light source. The light source needs to be on for up to 12 hours a day. It typically takes 8 to 10 weeks before a transplant can safely be planted outdoors. Tomato planting time shouldn't happen before mid-April.

If you didn't prepare your beds in January, do it as soon as possible. Cool season crops, from carrots to turnips, can be planted until mid-April. Sweet corn can be planted about the middle of the month. Seeds for warm weather crops, such as peppers, can be started in the greenhouse or your windowsills. It takes six to eight weeks to get good size transplants. Our last frost date is March 20 to April 1, depending on what part of the county you live in. Potatoes should be planted from certified seed potatoes. Fertilize, water and mulch after planting.

ANNUALS

Fertilizing and dead-heading all these winter annuals will give them a boost and help them to rebound. If you lost your winter color, or you never got around to planting any, buy some geraniums, English primroses and ranunculus now. They make great transitional color for the garden and can tolerate light freezes with ease. Start planning your summer color, but don't actually buy any until mid-April. (This is hard to do when you see some plants you really like, but you have to keep them alive indoors until it is safe to plant them outside!)

BULBS

Bulbs are blooming now and extra care is needed to replenish them for another season. Fertilize your bulbs with a complete fertilizer and let the foliage remain healthy and growing for at least six weeks after bloom. Summer bulbs are popping up at nurseries and garden centers all over the state. You can buy these bulbs, but don't plant them. They like warm soils, and if planted in such cool soils, they could rot or deteriorate. I would not plant caladiums until at least May. Remember, the important time for bulb growth is right after bloom. If bulbs are over crowded, thin them and replant with the foliage intact. The same applies to overly shaded bulbs, move them to a sunny spot now, with their leaves growing. Let the foliage die down naturally to give them as much time as possible to replenish themselves. If you cut the leaves off too soon, you won't have great flowering next year. They need at least six to eight weeks of green foliage **AFTER** flowering to set flowers for the following year. Once the foliage begins to die, their season is over. They will be dormant until the following season.

PERENNIALS

As summer and fall blooming perennials begin to grow, assess whether or not they need dividing. Crowded plants don't bloom as well. If they do need dividing, now is the time to do so. Dig up the plant and divide, leaving two or three crowns per division. When choosing new plants, you don't have to plant exactly the same thing that died. If we have a season with little rain, you may want to opt for more drought tolerant plants. Even the most drought tolerant plants need water during establishment and would benefit from supplemental irrigations when we have miserable seasons. Soil preparation can go a long way in building a stronger root system which will, in the long term, give you a stronger plant. Many perennials are up and growing. Hellebores are in full bloom, along with bleeding heart, columbine and foxglove. Peonies are up and growing and you may even see the beginning of flower buds. Now is a great time to put some perennial stakes around your peonies. These wire rings need to be in place before the plant gets much size. That way, the foliage grows up into the rings and is supported when heavy rains try to topple the blooms. Spring ephemerals like bloodroot, trilliums and trout lilies are a great addition to the early spring garden. They are called ephemerals because they are here today and gone tomorrow. They often complete their life cycle before the trees have fully leafed out. If you have many early season perennials in your garden that do go, plant and move on. As you are gardening throughout the spring and summer and you come across a golf tee, just move over a foot or so. Summer and fall blooming perennials can be divided now, if needed. Divide established perennials and replant at their depth in an enlarged area with organic matter and fertilizer. Keep mulch handy for a late freeze.

HOUSEPLANTS

Houseplants don't look all that perky indoors, so many gardeners think they would benefit from some sunshine on a mild March day. While it is a nice thought, it isn't a good idea. Plants should stay put where they are now and make their move outside in late April. Now that the days are getting longer and temperatures are warming up, you will see some new growth appearing. If you have tropical flowering plants inside, you can give them a haircut now, but hold off on repotting until you move them outdoors.

TREES AND SHRIBS

Most plants that bloom in the summer set their flowers on new growth, with the exception of big leaf hydrangeas, oakleaf hydrangeas and gardenias. Leave these three alone, since their flower buds are already set. If you have Peegee hydrangeas, or smooth hydrangeas, butterfly bush, crapemyrtles, althea or rose of Sharon, clethra, roses and abelia and you haven't pruned them yet, grab your pruning shears and get going. While new growth is beginning, it isn't too late to prune. **CAUTION: PLEASE DO NOT COMMIT CRAPE MYRTLE MURDER!! They don't need severe pruning every year.**

All roses need annual pruning, including Knock Out Roses. Hold off on pruning climbing roses until after their first bloom. Some antique shrub roses only bloom once a year, so let them flower and then prune. For all-season-blooming shrubs, prune them back to 18 inches above the ground. Pruning encourages continued blooming and removes the mites, which overwinter in the upper portions of the bush and spread Rose Rosette Virus.

LAWNS

Winter weeds were growing long before winter weather arrived this year. The weeds are blooming their hearts out and many have set seeds and are ending their season. It is too late to worry with herbicides. In lawns, try to mow the weeds to prevent seed set. If your lawn is showing signs of green, it is from winter weeds. Spray with a broad leaf killer, if you have an abundance of them, or spot spray or pull them. A few clumps of wild onions (or garlic) can easily be dug. Applying fertilizer now before the grass is fully awake is a waste. You will actually end up fertilizing all those winter weeds that are in your lawn now. There is still time to use a pre-emergent herbicide, but do so very soon. Try to find a stand alone product without fertilizer. Your fertilizer application should be no sooner than mid-April, when the lawn is totally green. Waiting until May is not a bad idea, either.

Food for thought:

Who wouldn't want to welcome Spring with this Coneflower Bird Feeder????

Cute Idea.....Debra Redding



Another Legend Retires: Beth Phelps

By Mary Evans

Seems like I was just writing a similar piece on behalf of Janet Carson's retirement.... Darn! Here goes another Arkansas garden legend! Even though I knew it was coming... I gotta say, Beth is the kindest, most considerate person I ever met. Patience! Heck, she put up with me for a long time! (And the rest of you as well!) Respectful. I never (maybe once) heard her say anything remotely unflattering. She always knows what to say- no matter what catastrophe happens. Calm! I never met anyone as organized as her- she never forgets anything! She is my etiquette counselor "if" I have an etiquette dilemma.

She is the best roommate ever! I've had the privilege to have been to a lot of conferences around the country with Beth. No matter if it was a state meeting or an International Master Gardener Conference- we stayed up ALL night! One of my favorite IMGCS was at Disney in 2001. The first night Beth and I stayed with some former florist bosses in a camper in Orlando. She endured florist stories all night. Love to see her laugh! They opened the gates super early for the MG convention- The MGs had exclusive access to the entire Disney/ Epcot. We even stayed for closing fireworks. Quite the wild bunch. We had a great time with Janet Carson, Cecelia Buck, Pat Green and lots more from Arkansas. It was on this trip that Beth taught me not to sit on the bedspreads in hotels. I had a great time meeting her former Escambia County Master Gardeners- who all openly adored her. I had to rub it in that "we have her now."

Another IMGCS in Cincinnati, Ohio (2003) was a great trip. They had a lot of walking tours, we walked and walked. On one tour the entire group had to make a pitstop to buy Power Ball tickets. Dorothy Veirs, a former resident of Cincinnati, was our tour guide of the old German area. My favorite part was the Purple People Bridge, crossing the Ohio River, connecting Ohio to Kentucky. It had recently been converted to a pedestrian bridge and the local MGS were in charge of planting the entrances and large pots on top of the bridge. Smart bunch, we (MGS) did all the work for them. We planted a bunch of them.

Beth came to one of our sales at the MG Greenhouse. We were packed. I picked up an 1801 flat to toss... nothing germinated but weeds. I decided to have a little fun.... I commenced to passing them out like they were something special. People were snapping them up. Beth just happened to pop in the door when I had one left and I plopped it in her flat. I told her she got the last one! She smiled and thanked me. I finally owned up to it all... Beth- though, always a good sport-may have chased me out of the greenhouse.

Beth still answers my questions- prompt and professional, we did TV spots together, she always came to my garden tours. She was always looking for materials for her morning TV spot. She took good care of her MGs. I am proud to call her my friend! I have old friends that I know where the bodies are buried (that's a joke) As for Beth, I'm sure she has no bodies, she's too nice!

I worked with Beth for over 20 years at the Arkansas Flower and Garden Show. Many long hours, again-up all nights. She will no doubt want to kill me when she sees this picture (of course I have more) of her in the ticket office- at the Statehouse Convention Center, one late night. I am just sad for all these newbies that didn't get to work with her. Ha!

**Congratulations Beth! All the best because you are the
BEST!**



L-Mary Evans and Beth Phelps at Epcot, 2001
R-Beth Phelps at the Convention center after a long night in 2004



L- Cecelia Buck and Beth at Fairfield Bay, 1999
R-Beth with Nancy McGowan and a woman from Ohio on the Purple People Bridge, Cincinnati, Ohio, 2003

Blast from the Past

By Jane Gulley

I was pleased when Susan Rose, Magnolia Chronicle editor, asked me to contribute information about the history of the PCMGs for our newsletter. I have enjoyed presenting a short history presentation for our monthly meetings. It is exciting to go through the PCMG meeting minutes and the Master Minutes, the early newsletter of our organization. The PCMGs have always been busy!

The PCMGs started in 1989 after a pilot program the year before. The 1988 pilot program was not just for Pulaski County, it included four counties, but Pulaski was the first to form its own group. An exciting milestone happened in 1988. The familiar tree logo that you see on all our PC Master Gardener official documents, signs, and clothes was designed by Kathleen Ragsdale, "The tree grows strong branching into many areas of Pulaski County." In 2002 Kathleen's design was officially registered as the trademark for the Arkansas Master Gardeners. Now our logo symbolizes the statewide reach of Arkansas Master Gardeners. We didn't have PCMG officers until 1992, but we did have a newsletter. As I said before, our first newsletter was called the **Master Minutes** and most people thought it was the minutes from the meetings. Fortunately, in 2015 the name was changed to the **Magnolia Chronicle**. I enjoyed getting information from Jeffery McKinley about the renaming process. She had been named newsletter editor in 2014 and got her committee to do research to find out if the PCMGs needed a newsletter and what our members wanted. She discovered the newsletter needed rebranding -new name, new look, and a new delivery process. The new name came after studying other newsletters to get ideas and to make sure our name was an original. The committee studied the Victorian Flower Sources and magnolia seemed to be the perfect fit for the PCMG. The magnolia symbolizes dignity and strength. The new look meant adding color to the newsletter, and the new presentation was putting the newsletter online. All three ideas were successes. Susan Rose became the editor in 2017. Carol Randall has been a committee member for many years and Susan and Jeffery both sang her praises. The newsletter committee is a small group and if you have memories or interesting news you would like to submit they would appreciate your contribution.

You can read all the PCMG history at the armgs.org site, Arkansas Master Gardeners.org, use the same sign in information you use to record your hours. The past meeting minutes, newsletters, and summaries of the history are located at the site.

I guess because of my love of history, I used to teach American History, and because I was in the first PCMG class in 1989, I was curious about our I started checking where the history of the PCMG was kept and how it was organized. The history was being kept at the PC Extension Office in various file cabinets and file drawers. It was not organized. Dana Boyster and I started copying the papers and getting them organized. As we copied papers we sent the copies to Randy Forst's computer. That was not a good solution for preservation because while the information was saved, it was not accessible to our members. By putting the information on the armgs.org site any PCMG can access the history. The PCMG Board was concerned and realized a designated person was needed to keep the history updated and preserved. Nancy Kirsch, President of the PCMG in 2003-2004, has taken that responsibility. After all the history is finally copied and added to Randy's computer, the computer in the horticulture/phone room at the PC Extension Office, and the armgs.org site, the originals will be taken to the Butler Center so they can be archived and protected.

It has been an exciting journey and we all owe thanks to Sally Garrison, the first President of the PCMGs, and Vicky Kessel, a PCMG volunteer, for summarizing and recording the year by year events of our group. Each project has a project notebook and I hope the projects have worked to record their history. I was on the first PEST Committee, a committee that tries to be sure each project has the information they need to function and all their “paperwork” in order with their sponsoring host. When the members of PEST met with the project chairs we reminded each group about their project notebook. I think after reading the summaries of the start dates for different projects you can see why having the history of the project is important. With this history project we need all the help we can get!

These won't be test questions but did you know:

The PCMG started in 1989, we met every other month, we met at the PC Extension Office, Janet Carson was our Extension agent, we did not have dues we had sponsors, and we elected our first officers in 1992. We were busy because in Feb 1992 we hosted the first Arkansas Flower and Garden Show at the Robinson Center. We became a registered non-profit corporation in 1993, but in April 2003, on the advice of legal counsel, we gave up our nonprofit status and went under the “Umbrella of the University of Arkansas.” In 1993 we also started paying dues, \$10.00, and we started meeting monthly. One major change was Janet Carson left for a job at the State Extension Office and Beth Phelps became our PC Extension Agent. We have had three Extension sponsors, Janet Carson, Beth Phelps, and Randy Forst. We started meeting at the PC Extension Office, and in 1992 moved to the Blue Flame Room at the Arkla Building. Janet got that meeting place free of charge. In 1996 when the new Arkansas State Extension Office on University was completed we moved to it but soon outgrew the facility. When I was doing the research for this article I realized I was PCMG President when we moved to the State Extension Office and presided over our first meeting there! I had forgotten; it has been well over 25 years ago! We moved to our present venue, St. James United Methodist Church on Pleasant Valley Drive in Little Rock in January of 2004.

One very interesting fact about our organization is our commitment to our community. Many of our earliest projects are still active after 30 years! Any group can plant and move on after several years, but to commit long term takes true gardening expertise and lots of creativity. We can all be proud of our organization that gave 21,542.5 volunteer hours to our community in 2019 and even with COVID in 2020 gave 15,192 work hours. We are productively busy!

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