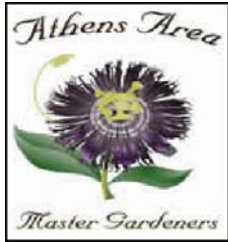


# The Garden Dirt

February 2011

**FROM THE GROUND UP**



Many thanks to all of you who came to welcome the new class of Master Gardeners at our January 18 meeting - and a special thanks to those who brought refreshments. What a wonderful crowd! And wasn't it nice that Dr. Nicholls dropped by to congratulate the graduates as well?

To our newcomers: WELCOME!

We can't wait to get to know you better, dig in the dirt with you, and hear all of your new ideas. We hope that you will join our group and attend all of the meetings as well as join in our projects. We are always open to new ideas for projects and look forward to hearing from you.

Speaking of joining in our projects, there is a perfect opportunity for you to join in with the "veterans" at the Athens Home and Garden Show running from Friday, February 25 through Sunday, February 27 at the Classic Center. We are going to try to pair up the new graduates with some of our regulars to work the different shifts. Please check the Weekly Announcements and volunteer for this fun event.

Judy



Master Gardener  
Graduates 2010 Class

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## **Executive Board**

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It is exciting to write my first blurb for the AAMGA newsletter. Most of you know that I have been working on my graduate degree for the past couple years. I am happy to announce that I graduated in December with a Master in Plant Protection and Pest Management. While it is quite a mouthful to say this degree basically helps me identify and control pest and diseases in the landscape. You might have guessed it but this specific degree is pretty perfect for an Extension agent. I learned so much during my time in graduate school but graduating was one of the best Christmas presents I have ever received!

On the first day back after holiday break the new Master Gardener program began. We have a great group of interested students with lots of good questions. The new students are from many parts of the country and have quite a variety of gardening experience. Their interests range from vegetables, to deer control, to roses, to how to do anything with Georgia clay. Does any of that sound familiar? We did miss a week of classes due to the snow but we are still chugging along with the schedule, learning a lot along the way. Don't forget that as a veteran Master Gardener you are welcome to attend any of the classes as a refresher. It is very possible we are covering topics now that were not covered when you took the class or maybe you missed a class due to a meeting. Regardless, you are welcome to sit in, enjoy, and get to know the new class.

January of 2011 has been unusually busy. I already mentioned that we have started the new Master Gardener class but we also had 31 graduates from the 2010 program. We are also planning the Master Naturalist program for April and May of 2011. The Athens Farmers market is starting early this season on April 2<sup>nd</sup> and one of your fellow Master Gardeners is starting a new Farmers market in Statham this June. Another thing to mention is that we have received more questions than usual for the winter season. Questions have ranged from how to get rid of squash vine borers to diseases of pecan trees to how to graft fruit trees and where to purchase the rootstock and scion wood for those fruit trees. Even with over a week of snow, it really has been a great but very busy month!

Amanda Tedrow



#### THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

Please don't forget the annual bird count February 18 through 21. This is a four-day joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Audubon Society, and Bird Studies of Canada. The data they receive from individuals or groups identifying and counting birds over this weekend helps them pin-point which birds are where across the continent. Of course, there are many variables, such as weather, but this does not affect your count. You count in whatever weather you have.

If you have as little as 15 minutes to spend counting birds in your yard or feeders, please logon to:

<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/howto/html>

or just Google: Great Backyard Bird Count. It's easy and fun. There is a way to download a bird list to assist you in your count and you submit your count on-line. You can count for as little as 15 minutes on one of the days all the way up to several counts or longer duration for all four days. Give it a try. The instructions are clear and easy to follow. There's even a way to download pictures if you'd like. I do this every year and I love it. After the count, you can logon again and see results from all over the continent.

## FLOWER OF THE MONTH: Violet

The flower for February is the violet. There are many myths and legends about the violet. This flower, which grows low to the ground and has small purple or white flowers, probably first appeared in an Ancient Near Eastern myth. The great mother goddess, Cybele, was in love with Attis who was killed while hunting wild boar. Where his blood fell to the ground sprouted violets.

The ancient Greeks named the violet "Iona". The story goes that Zeus became enamored with the lovely nymph, Io. He changed her into a heifer to protect her from his jealous wife. Zeus gave Io pastures in which to graze and in these pastures were violets. Hera found her anyway and sent a gadfly to torment her so much that she jumped into the Ionian Sea, also named for her. The Athenians decorated their houses with violets and wove them in crowns for festive occasions.

To the ancient Romans, violets were the symbol of mourning and affection for the dead. Tombs were decorated with wreaths of violets on the Festival of the Dead, or "Feralia" in February and at the "Violaria" or the Festival of Violets, at the end of March. These ceremonies guaranteed peace to the departed.

In the Middle Ages, violets were the symbol of faithfulness in love. The tiny flowers were made into crowns for the winners of poetry contests. (This was, after all, the age of courtly love). The fairy, Puck, used their juice to make "man or woman madly dote/Upon the next live creature that it sees." (A Midsummer's Dream, Shakespeare).

Ancient Christians used the violet as the symbol of Mary's humility. It was believed that all violets were white until Mary suffered at the time of the death of her son. At that moment, all violets turned from white to purple in mourning.

In the 17th century, violets were sold in Paris streets by vendors who dug them up in the forests outside the city. It was not long before horticulturists, who noticed how much beloved the flower was to the people, wanted to cultivate these flowers inside the city limits. They became very popular in private gardens and new varieties were quickly introduced.

When Napoleon was banished to Elba, he said he would "return with the violets". When he did return, Josephine was dead, and he picked violets from her grave before he was again exiled to St. Helena.

Viola odorata, the only scented violet, was thought to be the flower of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. Its oil were made - and are still made to this day - into scents and flavorings. These violets were strewn on floors to cover smells. Although the scent doesn't linger very long, other smells dissipate with it. That is because it produced the chemical, ionine, which dulls the sense of smell.

For such a small flower, it has quite a large following. Violets now come in several colors: purple, white, cream, yellow and blue. There are more than 400 species of violets through the world today.

[www.suite101.com](http://www.suite101.com); [www.birthstones.org](http://www.birthstones.org); <http://livingartsoriginals.com>;

Diana Wells, 100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names,

Algonquin Press, Chapel Hill, 1997.



## FEBRUARY GARDEN CHORES

- \* Prune apple and pear trees now - but postpone peach pruning until mid-March.
- \* Redesign your lawn for easier mowing. Eliminate sharp angles and narrow turf areas. Use mulch, new flower beds or a groundcover like mondo grass there instead.
- \* Water poinsettia, Christmas cactus and amaryllis plants with houseplant fertilizer diluted to one-half strength.
- \* Prune one-fourth of the branches from your overgrown fig bush. Concentrate on saving the horizontal branches.
- \* Bring branches of spirea, forsythia and flowering quince indoors. Place in a vase with warm water and they should bloom in just a few days.
- \* Remember to turn houseplants 180 degrees every two weeks to prevent uneven growth.
- \* The brown foliage on pampas grass and maiden grass can be pruned away now. Scratch out the middle of the clump to make room for new growth and leave only a "crew cut" of brown stems twelve inches high.
- \* Plant sweet peas now for fragrant flowers later. You can also plant English peas, onions, asparagus or elephant garlic for your spring vegetable garden.
- \* Build a raised bed (or two) for roses, vegetables and ornamentals. It's easy to do with four pieces of 2 x 8 wood planks. Choose lengths that fit your space and bolt them together at the corners.
- \* Clean out bird boxes so they will be ready to welcome new residents in a few weeks.
- \* Consider putting up a bat house in your woods. Bats are actually better at consuming insects that trouble gardens than purple martins.
- \* Fill and hang hummingbird feeders before the arrival of the hummers. You might catch a rufus hummingbird or an early scout of the ruby-throated hummer family.
- \* Feed pecan trees now and spread lime to counteract acidity. Spread fertilizer in a wide band outside of the drip line where feeder roots are located.
- \* Mid-February is a good time to divide perennials in our area.
- \* Plant tree peonies - they have enormous blossoms. They need afternoon shade and adequate moisture to ensure a good set of buds.
- \* Plant a daphne near your front door and you will be welcomed by the lovely scent as you go in and out of your house.
- \* Reduce the size of your butterfly bush by two-thirds to one-half to encourage new growth and bigger blooms this summer.
- \* Set your mower to its highest setting and cut off the leaves of liriopse. They will quickly regrow in March.
- \* You may cut Burford holly shrubs severely now (renewal pruning). Even if you cut it down to about a foot, new buds will be stimulated to grow and the plant will be full again by the end of summer.
- \* Remove guy wires, stakes and trunk wraps from small trees that you planted last fall.

**Time to get moving!**

## CORNUS KOUSA: A Lovely Tree - And You Can Eat the Berries

With all of the problems associated with dogwoods and spot anthracnose (dogwood blight), many new cultivars have been introduced that are resistant to this scourge. Cornus kousa is one of these.

Native to Korea and Japan, this deciduous tree has a broad conical shape with a distinct horizontal branching habit. It is a small tree, growing to a height of 22 feet and with a spread of about 15 feet. It is cold hardy and resists a multitude of pests and diseases. Freely-flowering and nearly carefree, this is a tree with year-round appeal.

In May in our area, small green flowers are produced surrounded by 4 ovate white bracts of about 1-2 inches across. These flowers are followed by raspberry-like large fleshy red fruits which last for months.

The fruits are edible, if you get to them before the critters. Kousa berries are said to be irresistible to squirrels. The fruit from mature trees is larger and sweeter than that from younger trees. The larger and darker the fruit is, the riper it is, and the sweeter it is. The taste has been described as a strawberry or paw paw taste; it's creamy and delicate. If it is picked too soon, it has a sour-persimmon tang. There is even a recipe for Kousa Dogwood Parfait in The Wild Vegan Cookbook.



Fall draws attention to the mottled bark and the red to crimson-purple leaves.

Grown for its showy white bracts, its elegant horizontal branching habit, its colorful autumn leaves and its unusual fruit, Cornus kousa is great as a border plant, a foundation plant, or as a beautiful specimen tree. It gives wildlife berries to eat, provides a safe haven for birds in the winter, and is resistant to the pests and diseases that plague our native dogwood.

A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants, The American Horticultural Society, 2004 edition

John Quackenbush, Judy Hawks and Joey Bristol admire the completed Butterfly Dreams Project in Oconee County



## NOMINATING COMMITTEE BEGINS WORK

The Nominating Committee is busy putting together a slate of officers to be voted on at the March meeting. According to our By-Laws, the existing officers are able to stay on for another term if they so desire. The Committee's job is to fill in the blanks for those who do not wish to extend their service. This is a good time for all members to consider stepping forward and offering your services. It is a great way to get to know other members of our club and to be involved with all of our great projects. Give it some thought: you might just be the person they are looking for!

AAMGA provided a grant of \$200 to sponsor the 2011 N.E. Georgia Regional Science & Engineering Fair which will be held February 25 at Athens Tech. We also set up a special prize award of \$100 in the plant sciences category to be given in the name of AAMGA. This is a special annual event for middle school and high school students in 21 counties in Northeast Georgia.

**NEXT MEETING:** February 15th at 5:30 P.M. in the Adult Classroom of the Conservatory at the Botanical Garden. Our speaker will be Kate Austin with the Community Garden project of Athens/Clarke County.

PLEASE JOIN US

### IMPORTANT - Master Gardener Hours

Quite a few MGs have not turned their hours in yet and they are way past due

**If you have any Master Gardener announcements, please send them to:**

**[AAMGAlistserv@gmail.com](mailto:AAMGAlistserv@gmail.com) by 7:00 pm on Tuesday evenings.**

**Our newsletter deadline is 7:00 pm on the 27th of the month.**

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