

PATHWAYS

WINTER 2025-2026

What's Inside?

P2: AMGA Vice President Dates to Remember

P3-4: AMGA Nominations Committee Report

P4: AMGA Awards

P5: AMGA Endowment AMGA Membership AMGA Newsletter

P6: AMGA Project Funding AMGA Speakers Bureau AMGA Treasurer

P7-16: AMGA 2026 Conference in Huntsville

P17: Extension Update

P18: Winter Interest

AMGA Website

alabamamga.org

ALABAMA MASTER GARDENERS
ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM

AMGA PRESIDENT
DEBORAH BOUTELIER



Happy New Year! I hope everyone had a blessed holiday season filled with family, friends and food. AMGA had many accomplishments in 2025 and we are looking forward to having another full year in 2026.

My garden is primarily resting during this season, but there is still much to enjoy. This is the time when the evergreens and hardscaping get to shine. The native hollies are full of beautiful red berries, the camellias are starting their show, and the daffodil and narcissus greenery is popping up all over. The pathways curving throughout my garden have a soft covering of pine straw which makes for a peaceful and quiet winter stroll. There is always something to appreciate in every season.

I had the honor this week of speaking at the Master Gardener Intern graduation in Auburn. Seventy-two interns from across the state participated, receiving their certifications and name badges. What a nice way to celebrate their accomplishments. All told, we have 328 new Master Gardeners from the classes this past year! I know they are all excited to be working in their local associations supporting Extension Master Gardener projects.

Information for the 2026 Conference in Huntsville will soon be on the AMGA website and registration opens on January 15. This is going to be a really great conference with wonderful speakers, tours, and workshops. Their three-county team is putting the finishing touches on everything anticipating our arrival.

Also in this newsletter is the information on the slate of candidates being presented for AMGA Board of Directors positions. These positions will be voted upon at the Annual Meeting portion of the conference. I want to thank these candidates for their willingness to serve at the state level and encourage others to step forward for future positions. This is what keeps our Master Gardener program moving forward and thriving in Alabama.

Always remember, time began in a garden,

Debbie

December comes
And December goes.
With the last red berries
And the first white snows.

With night coming early,
And dawn coming late,
And ice in the bucket
And frost by the gate.

The fires burn
And the kettle sing
And earth sinks to rest
Until next spring.

adapted from Clyde Watson

AMGA VICE PRESIDENT

Julie Conrey

Azalea City has officially declared the end of the 2025 convertible season. We have rolled up our car windows, cranked up our furnaces and pulled out heavier clothing from the depths of our closets. Welcome to puffer jacket season along the Gulf Coast. Weather will never deter a group of determined gardeners.

The final big push for the 2026 conference committees is here. Early bird registration for the 2026 AMGA Conference in Huntsville at the Westin Hotel on Bridge Street is January 15 through February 14. Please check out all conference information and registration links on the AMGA website, https://alabamamga.org/. A block of 75 rooms has been reserved for Extension Master Gardeners at the Westin Hotel. The $179 price per night is valid Tuesday, May 5 through Thursday, May 7. Follow the link on the AMGA website to make room reservations. I look forward to seeing you in May!

Don't forget to send monetary donations for the conference silent auction by April 1 to AMGA Treasurer Susan Steele, PO Box 3031, Decatur, Alabama 35602 or get the item(s) your association is donating to one of the hosting associations no later than April 1.

We are pleased to announce Wiregrass Master Gardeners Association has committed to hosting the 2028 AMGA Conference in Dothan, Alabama. The AMGA Board of Directors approved the group's commitment at its December Board meeting. Welcome aboard Wiregrass EMG Volunteers. We're looking forward to working with your association.

Thank you all for working with me in 2025. Happy New Year! May light and love fill all holiday celebrations this season.



ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
February 3, 2026 10:00 – 12:00
Petals From the Past Jemison, AL
Come participate in the exchange of information, ideas, concerns and solutions from Local MGAs across the state.

AMGA BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
March 3, 2026 10:00 – 12:00
Clanton Recreation Center
305 1st Street North Clanton, AL
All are welcome to attend and hear about the business of Alabama Master Gardeners Association

AMGA 2026 CONFERENCE
May 6-8 in Huntsville
Registration opens January 15, 2026

AMGA 2027 CONFERENCE
April 7-9, Jefferson County MGA hosting

AMGA 2028 CONFERENCE
Wiregrass MGA
Dothan

March 8 – Time change to DST
Spring Forward!

MARCH 15 Spring *Pathways* and *Happenings* articles are due.

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT

Amy Weis, Chair; Don Richerson, Janell Diggs

Present Nominees For:

BOARD MEMBERS AT LARGE

Edwin "Skeeter" Sims, Cynthia Kershaw

NOMINATING COMMITTEE MEMBER

Betsy Smith



Board Member at Large: Edwin "Skeeter" Sims
Term: 2026-2029

Edwin hails from Calhoun County Master Gardeners, where he certified in 2015, after which he was quickly recruited to serve as Advisory Council Rep, then Vice President, and naturally President. Fondly known as Skeeter in the Master Gardener Family, Edwin was recruited to serve as Vice Chair and Chairman of AMGA Advisory Council. When not working on his farm with Kiko goats, chickens, ducks, and extensive forested areas, he enjoys volunteering at Cane Creek Gardens, where he serves as Ground Crew Chief, supervising all volunteers and developing operational plans for grounds maintenance. He has also been instrumental in the development and planning of the Hobson City Community Gardens.

Prior to his Master Gardener calling, Skeeter served for 28 years in the US Navy, initially as a nuclear power submarine machinist, where he won a meritorious scholarship to Auburn University, earning a degree in Mechanical Engineering, and subsequently commissioned to serve as a Naval Flight Officer in the E2C Hawkeye, accumulating over 4,000 hours and over 400 carrier arrested landings. He then attended the Naval War College, earning a Master's degree in National Security and Strategic Studies. His final years in the Navy were with a unique command involved in advanced technologies and operational planning for information operations.

Ed has been married to his high school sweetheart, Madge Sims, for over 40 years; Madge became a Master Gardener in 2022. They have two married adult children living in South Carolina with five granddaughters aged 2-9 years old.



Board Member at Large: Cynthia Kershaw
Term: 2026-2029

Cynthia is a member of Shoals Master Gardeners, where she was certified in 2014, after retiring from 38 years of teaching Secondary English and Drama in Tennessee. During her professional career, she has held many leadership roles, including serving as a Contract Negotiator for the local education association, Senior Play Director, and coordinating graduation activities. As a newly fledged Master Gardener, it wasn't long before Cynthia answered the call to serve in a higher capacity as chairman of her local Awards Committee, and then in rapid succession as Secretary of Shoals Master Gardeners Board of Directors, and subsequently as president. She has also served on her local scholarship committee and as the Shoals representative on the AMGA Advisory Council, which enabled her to seamlessly transition to her latest Advisory Council roles as secretary and Nominating Committee chairman. She has served on AMGA's Project Funding Committee and, most recently, as a member of the Statewide Helpline Working Group.

Cynthia enjoys propagating vegetables and herbs for The Shoals annual plant sale, where she has become famous for her cherry tomatoes. Her love for teaching and 4-H has led her to a plethora of volunteer opportunities with the Calvary Learning Center Garden Project, Rogersville Library Children's Reading program, 4-H summer garden program in Lauderdale County, Florence-Lauderdale Public Library, and as a teaching assistant with her local Regional Extension Agent. As an At-Large Board Member, Cynthia would like to serve on the Project Funding and Continuing Education Committee.

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT

Amy Weis, Chair; Don Richerson, Janell Diggs

Present Nominees For:

BOARD MEMBERS AT LARGE

Edwin "Skeeter" Sims, Cynthia Kershaw

NOMINATING COMMITTEE MEMBER

Betsy Smith



Nominating Committee Member: Betsy Smith
Term: 2026-2029

Betsy hails from Chilton County Master Gardeners, where she was certified in 2018 after retiring from 32 years in public education. Her professional and volunteer background is framed in a strong sense of leadership, from her Doctorate in Public Education Leadership, to serving as an assistant principal, to vice president of Chilton County Master Gardeners Association. She attended the Leadership Training offered to Master Gardeners in 2023 and assists the intern class each year. Betsy achieved an Advanced Master Gardener certification in herbs and is currently serving as President of The Herb Society of America. It is no wonder Betsy's motto is "Growing Learners, Growing Leaders". Betsy actively promotes the knowledge, use and delight of plants through education and believes kids can be learners and leaders in the garden. She recently expanded her Master Gardener repertoire to include the Chilton County MG Conservation Group that works to promote education and awareness of rare native plant species growing in and around Chilton County, propagates plant material, and works on plant site identification and community education.

In addition to being a Master Gardener, Betsy teaches English as a second language online to students in other countries and is a yoga instructor. She loves to take fresh herbs from her garden to her yoga classes for an enhanced mind-body experience. In her spare time, she enjoys quilting. Betsy and her husband, Darin, live on ten acres in Clanton with five dogs and one cat. They have five children and eight grandchildren.

AMGA AWARDS

Jim Harris, Chair

Some reminders from the Awards Committee:

- Please be working on your local association's nominees for the Gary Murray and Mary Lou McNabb awards. These are awards to recognize exceptional volunteer service in support of the Master Gardener goals. These are awards for non-Master Gardeners and Master Gardeners, respectively.
- If your association has a newsletter, please begin working on your submission for Newsletter of the Year award.
- The forms for all these nominations and awards are available on the AMGA website at https://alabamamga.org/amga-awards/.
- All nominations and applications for awards must be received by January 31, 2026.

If you lost or broke your badge and need to order a replacement badge, the cost will be $15. There is a form for this on the website.

Please bear with us as we make needed changes in the Awards Committee process and with some of our vendors.

ADVISORY COUNCIL

Ed "Skeeter" Sims, Outgoing Chair

It has been my distinct pleasure to have served with all y'all over the past four + years. From just being a representative to Vice Chair then early Chair, I just want to say Thanks to all who have been a part of this journey.

I will continue to promote Advisory Council as one of the best parts of being a Master Gardener! I have said it many times and still fully believe it to be an accurate statement – All that are involved in Advisory Council are the heart and soul of Alabama Master Gardeners – you all, from across the State, bring great ideas, community service, and local issues to the group in an open and honest format which in turn allows others to be encouraged, learn, and know that folks are nearby to help in any way that they can.

We have brought great ideas to the AMGA and had many great discussions that led to changes (long overdue) and increased interests and investments in the Master Gardener programs across all of Alabama. If I tried to list all that AC has been instrumental in accomplishing over the past four years, this article would be way too long for Pathways!!

I will still be around and look forward to the next few years to see where AC motivates, invigorates, and drives the future for Alabama Master Gardeners. Thank you all for your immense support, encouragement, and dedication you have shown during my time on Advisory Council.

AMGA ENDOWMENT

Kim Johnson, Chair

An endowment is a fund belonging to a public charity, the proceeds of which are dedicated to a particular purpose. The Alabama Master Gardeners Association established two endowments at the Auburn University Foundation. The two endowments provide scholarships to undergraduate and graduate students who major in horticulture at Auburn University. The annual Impact Reports for these endowments have just been released.

This year, six undergraduate students were awarded $1,000 each to help fund their education. The graduate student horticulture scholarship has yet to be awarded.

AMGA MEMBERSHIP

Rose McCauley, Chair

We continue to make changes on Dues Tracker. We hope everyone has found these improvements to be user friendly. We are not finished yet but plan to have all the updates completed early in 2026.

Please ask your members to review their contact information in the Service Report to verify it is correct. AMGA must send postcards to each member in January with information on the annual State Conference. Many cards are returned every year due to incorrect addresses.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at jrmprat@charter.net.

AMGA NEWSLETTER

Sheila Bolen, Editor

One year ago, I took over as Editor of Pathways and Happenings. What an eye opener it has been – talk about OJT! While Debbie and Julie have been very patient with me, they're always after me to look for a co-editor. I've always told them I need to do one complete year, Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall, as the sole editor, so I have the background to take on a co-editor. I understand their concern, what if I quit or some such nonsense, what would happen to the newsletter? Well, my one year is up with the Winter issues of *Pathways* and *Happenings*. So, on that premise I am open to a co-editor. If you are interested in becoming a co-editor, please contact me at mgbolshe13@gmail.com and we'll chat. The criteria for a newsletter editor can be found at https://alabamamga.org/amga-board-manual/ pages 12-13. Not listed are, in my humble opinion, the two most important points: proficiency in PowerPoint and MS Word formats. If you have any interest in this position, please contact me.

Bone picking time. There are several associations that do not send in articles and never reply to email requests. If your organization does not intend to send an article, please let me know so I won't continue to badger you! If your association does not have a *Happenings* reporter, urge them to get one. Just as your association members read about the projects, tours, and gardens in other associations around the state, we would like to read about yours.

The AMGA conference in Huntsville is coming up quickly. After Autauga's conference I did a spread of conference pictures and want to do this again. Please send me pictures after the conference. Email them to me at mgbolshe13@gmail.com. The pictures will come out in the summer *Pathways*.

AMGA PROJECT FUNDING

Kate Vogel, Chair

The purpose of the Project Funding Committee is to develop and administer a program that annually provides AMGA financial assistance, up to $2000, to outstanding Master Gardener projects throughout the State of Alabama.

At the 2025 AMGA Conference Cherokee County was awarded funds to double the footprint of the 21st Century program serving "at-risk" students at Cherokee Middle School. Chilton County received funds for tools to continue maintenance of the Chilton County MGA Demonstration Garden. 2024 Project Funding recipients were Wiregrass, Limestone, Master Gardeners of North Alabama, Lawrence, Blount, and Calhoun.

If your association did not receive a grant in 2025, please consider submitting a request by January 31, 2026, for next year. All requirements are listed at https://alabamamga.org/amga-project-funding-program/

AMGA SPEAKERS BUREAU

Susan K. Hagen, Chair

We have just a brief update this quarter on the Speakers Bureau's expansion of topics to include assistance for local association officers in conducting meetings and in writing internal communications. The endeavor moves forward slowly but steadily and has been endorsed by the AMGA Board of Directors. Of course, the Bureau continues to welcome speakers offering programs serving our original purpose of supporting local associations with program options and providing public outreach. See https://alabamamga.org/amga-speakers-bureau-2/ for more information.

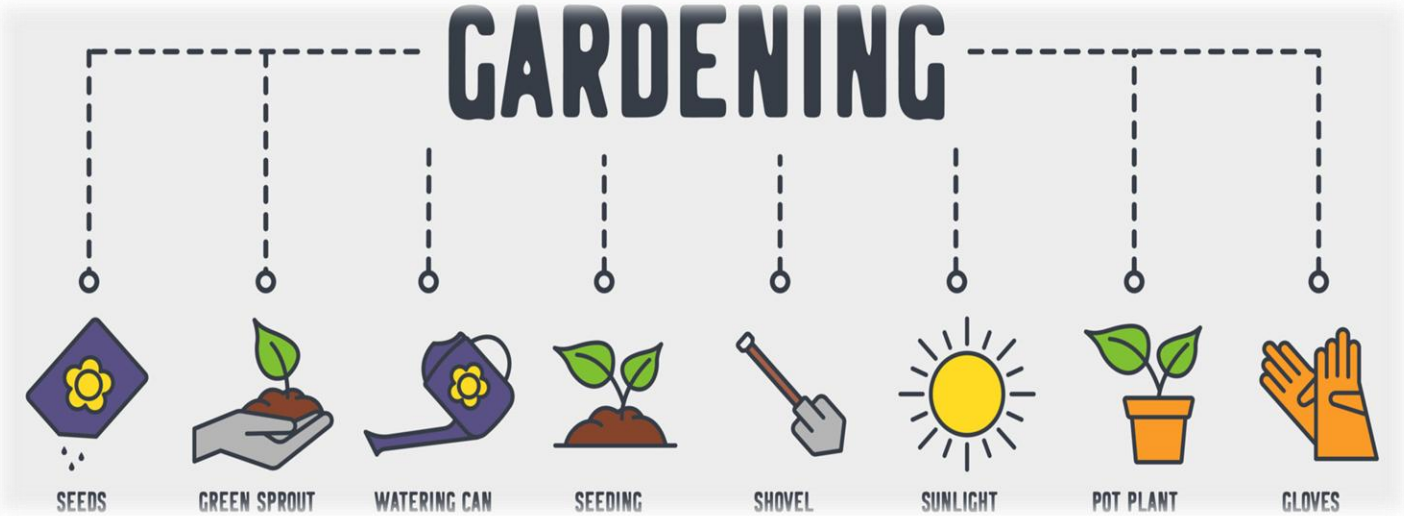
AMGA TREASURER

Susan Steele

Happy New Year! As we enter the time of planning our spring gardens, know that our association continues to hold a strong financial position, with $116,470 in the bank as of November 31, 2025. A more detailed Statement of Financial Position as of December 31, 2025, and a Statement of Revenues and Expenses for the year ended will be presented at the 2026 State Conference.

Please forward any outstanding bills to be paid by AMGA for 2025 as soon as possible to the address below.

AMGA
c/o Susan Steele, AMGA Treasurer
PO Box 3031
Decatur, AL 35602



AMGA 2026 CONFERENCE ★ The Rocket City

GARDENING TO THE MOON AND BACK

Limestone • Madison • Morgan

2026 AMGA State Conference & Business Meeting

May 6-8, 2026

Huntsville



ALABAMA MASTER GARDENERS

ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM



Hosted by the Extension Master Gardener Associations of Limestone, Madison & Morgan Counties

2026 AMGA
State Conference and Business Meeting
"Gardening to the Moon and Back"

REGISTRATION OPENS JANUARY 15, 2026

May 6 – 8, 2026
The Westin at Bridge Street
6800 Governors West
Huntsville, Alabama 35806

1. Online Registration is preferred.
   Registering via mail using this form will result in the inability to sign up for Wednesday's workshops, tours, and demonstrations. Registration required on or before April 15, 2026.

   To register and pay online by credit card: *Link to Online Registration.*
   Note: A personal PayPal account is NOT necessary to register online. PayPal is our credit card processing service and will accept VISA and MasterCard.

- Please complete a separate form for each person attending the conference.

- Guests are required to register for the conference if they wish to attend the meal events. A separate registration form for each guest is necessary. Registered guests will have access to all activities associated with the Conference.

2. Registrant Information:

   First Name_____ Last Name_____

   Street Address_____

   City_____ State_____ Zip_____

   Email_____ Cell (___)_____

   Local MG Association (if applicable) _____

   Please circle one: MG MG Intern ACES Speaker Vendor Guest Other

   Preferred Name on Badge (please print) _____

- The registration fee includes a Wednesday evening welcome reception, Thursday lunch, Thursday dinner, and break refreshments. Breakfasts are NOT included.

_____	EARLY Registration January 15 – February 14	$185	$ _____
_____	LATE Registration February 15 – April 15	$200	$ _____

3. Registrant Meal Information and Selection (Please check one)

Wednesday Meet and Greet Reception:
Heavy Hors d'oeuvres and Beverages, including a cash bar.

I will____ I will not ____ be attending the Wednesday Meet and Greet Reception.

Thursday lunch:
Bridge Street BBQ _____
Vegetarian: Grilled Vegetable Strudel with smoked red peppers _____
Not Attending_____

Thursday Dinner
Italian_____
Vegetarian: Eggplant Parmesan_____
Not Attending_____

Total Conference Fees

4. **Conference T-Shirt Order: Circle your** choice.

None Small Medium Large XL 2XL 3XL $35 each

Total T-Shirt Fees $_____

Registration $_____

T-Shirt $_____

Total Fees Due **$_____**

Please make checks payable to AMGA and mail along with this completed form to:

AMGA Conference Registration
c/o Norris Johnston
2110 Queenston Loop SW
Decatur, AL 35603

If questions, please email h2odocnnj@gmail.com.



2026 AMGA State Conference Agenda

Westin at Bridge Street Town Centre

Gardening to the Moon and Back

May 6 – 8, 2026

Huntsville, Alabama

Wednesday Workshops and Demonstrations, May 6, 2026

9:00 AM Registration Check-in Opens at the Westin Hotel
9:00 AM – 6:00 PM Free Access to Huntsville Botanical Garden (HBG) register at Murray Hall

Wednesday Workshops

Workshop space is limited. There is a charge for workshops #1 & #2. The workshops are held at Huntsville Botanical Garden, Murray Hall.

9:00 AM-10:30 AM: WS #1, Hydroponics, Murray Hall, $35, 35 people
Discover how to take your gardening skills to the next level with hydroponics! This hands-on workshop will introduce the fundamentals of soilless growing systems. Learn how hydroponics can be adapted for both small-scale home use and educational or community garden projects. Participants will also build and take home their own mini deep water culture hydroponic system to continue exploring at home. Whether you're a seasoned Master Gardener or just curious about innovative growing methods, this session will equip you with practical knowledge and inspiration to bring hydroponics to life in your own home or garden. Taught by Regional Extension Agent Brian Brown.

11:30 AM – 1:00 PM: WS #2, Floral Arrangement, Murray Hall, $35, 30 people
Join us for a fun, flower-filled workshop of creativity! You'll learn the essentials of floral design from Home Horticulture Agent Lilly Oaks. Experiment with color and texture and build your own beautiful arrangement to bring home and enjoy.

2:00 PM-2:45 PM: WS#3, Social Media Guidelines for MG, Free, 45 people
How can you get out to your community about what Extension Master Gardeners do, who we are, and how they can become involved? Social Media! This workshop will cover purpose, tips for effective posting, samples and Q&A time. While the workshop will focus primarily on the use of Facebook, the information can be applied to a variety of social media platforms. Taught by Master Gardener of North Alabama member Anita Reeves.

Wednesday Demonstrations
Demonstrations are no-charge, at HBG, and all are 30 minutes in length and limited to 30 people each. Start times for each are 9:30 AM, 10:30 AM, 11:30 AM, and 12:30 PM.

Demonstration #1: Vegetable Garden, check-in Murray Hall
The Demonstration Vegetable Garden, maintained by the Master Gardeners of North Alabama, showcases various gardening styles like traditional rows, wide row, raised bed, and square-foot gardening. It features a collection of All America Selections and heirloom vegetables suitable for the region. The garden not only produces a bounty of vegetables donated to local organizations, but also demonstrates composting techniques, offering valuable insights for home gardeners.

Demonstration #2: Fern Glade, check-in Murray Hall
The Fern Glade is a serene area showcasing nearly 150 species of ferns along winding paths. This shady oasis, located at the Nature Trail's northern end, features both deciduous and evergreen ferns that thrive in the region. Notable species include the Christmas Fern and the Cinnamon Fern. The glade also features a waterfall, and, belvedere, enhancing the tranquil atmosphere.

Demonstration #3: Herb Garden, check-in Murray Hall
The Herb Garden spans a quarter-acre and features 13 themed gardens alongside a charming herb cottage. Central to the garden is a Knot Garden, with beds designed for accessibility. Themes range from Culinary to Fragrance, with a special Tussie Mussie bed conveying messages through the language of flowers. Maintained by the Huntsville Herb Society, the garden is a living showcase of herbs' rich history and utility.

Demonstration #4: Daylily Garden, check-in Murray Hall
The Van Valkenburgh Daylily Garden is a display recognized by the American Hemerocallis Society. It boasts more than 700 cultivars, offering a rich tapestry of colors, sizes, and forms. Each plant is labeled with its cultivar name and hybridizer, and the collection is continually updated with new cultivars. The peak bloom season starts in late May, reaching its zenith in mid-June, and continues with reblooms until frost.

Demonstration #5: Grubbers, check-in Murray Hall
The Mathews Nature Trail takes visitors through a southeastern lowland forest, showcasing a variety of trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants. It's known for its seasonal beauty, with spring wildflowers, summer blooms, and vibrant fall foliage. The trail is maintained by the "Grubbers."

Wednesday Tours, May 6, 2026
Tours are at various locations and times. Please note that some tours have a cost associated with the activity.

Tour#1: Walk HBG with Harvey Cotten, 1:00 PM to 2:30 PM, check-in Murray Hall, limited to 35 people. 4747 Bob Wallace Avenue Huntsville, 35805
Meet Harvey at the Cherry Circle, a short walk from the Propst Guest Center, for an informative and historical walk through the Gardens. Mr. Cotten was the Chief Horticulturist at the Garden from its inception and was featured in the Huntsville Times' Living section called Dear Harvey, where he answered gardening questions weekly, for many years. He also had a weekly TV spot full of gardening tips and pertinent information. Come with questions, because he's sure to have an answer!

Tour#2: HudsonAlpha Greenhouse, 10:00 AM & 1:00 PM, check-in at HudsonAlpha GH, limited to 25 people for each tour session. 601 Genome Way Huntsville, 35806
Get a behind the scenes guided tour of HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology's 14,000-square-foot glass greenhouse. The highly sophisticated facility is equipped with two lab spaces, seven grow rooms with fifteen-foot ceilings, and several technologically advanced features rarely found in other greenhouses. The facility will help researchers in the HudsonAlpha Center for Plant Science and Sustainable Agriculture (Plant Center) advance their mission to use genomics to help sustainably feed and fuel our planet.

Tour#3: US Space & Rocket Center, 1:00 PM-3:30 PM, $20, check-in at USSRC, limited to 45 people. 1 Tranquility Base Huntsville, 35805
Take a self-guided tour of the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama, a museum operated by the state of Alabama, showcasing rockets, achievements and artifacts of the U.S. space program.

Tour#4: Bonnie Plants, 10:00 AM & 1:00 PM, check-in at Bonnie Plants, limited to 25 people for each tour session. 1601 South Monroe Street Athens 35611
Take a guided tour of the Bonnie Plant Farm Greenhouse range in Athens, Alabama, a short drive from Huntsville. Today, Bonnie Plants are available in all 50 states (plus Canada) and come in nearly 300 varieties (including Organics!), many of which have been test-grown in their own garden in Union Springs, Alabama. Bonnie Plants don't travel far to make it to you, either, as they now have over 70 growing stations across the country.

Tour#5: Harvest Square Nature Preserve, 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM, $50, limited to 15 people. 111 Allyson Sadie Boulevard Harvest 35749
Go on a guided foraging walk with conference speaker Jesse Akozbek, founder of Feral Foraging, an organization dedicated to educating others about safely foraging for wild edibles. Jesse's website states the purpose of his company is: "To create a world with more foragers who are deeply connected with their land and inspired to defend it, thus carving a path to reverse the loss of natural habitat".

Tour#6: Herb & Terry Lewis' Garden, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM, check-in at their address, limited to 25 people. 1709 Montdale Road Huntsville 35801
Herb and Terry Lewis, honorary Master Gardeners, have turned their backyard into a birding oasis complete with water features, time tested feeders, and walking paths all within a carefully curated habitat of ornamental and native plants. Together the Lewis' have spread their love of gardening and their bird watching enthusiasm to HBG where you can stroll the Lewis Birding Trail and explore Tweetsville, to HudsonAlpha's Terry and Herb Lewis Demonstration Garden, and bird blinds built for the Land Trust of North Alabama. While this is a self-guided experience the Lewis' will be on hand to answer questions.

Tour#7: Tram tour of HBG for AMGA Board of Directors, 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM, limited to 24 people.
Huntsville Botanical Garden staff will drive the AMGA Board members through the Garden on a narrated tram tour lasting one hour. This will be both informative and visually special as you travel to the best of the Garden's Naturally Delightful environment. Meet your driver in the Atrium of the Prost Guest Center.

Wednesday Program, May 6, 2026 (At the Westin Marriott Bridge Street)

3:00 PM – 4:30 PM Master Gardener Presidents Roundtable Discussion

4:00 PM – 5:30 PM Vendors and Silent Auction Open

5:30 PM – 6:30 PM Reception and Harvey Cotten Book Signing

6:30 PM – 7:00 PM Welcome and Speaker Introduction

7:00 PM – 8:00 PM Keynote Speaker, Harvey Cotten



Harvey Cotten is a garden writer, designer, and consultant. After 22 years with the Huntsville Botanical Garden, most recently, as vice president and chief horticulturist, he retired in 2014. He continues present workshops for the botanical garden, Master Gardener associations, garden clubs and other botanical gardens and arboreta while lecturing across the southeast on various garden topics. Harvey is very active in the industry. He currently serves as president of the Alabama Nurserymen's Association and is past president of the Horticultural Research Institute (HRI) and the Alabama Invasive Plant Council. Harvey co-authored a popular book *Easy Gardens for the South* published in 2009. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Ornamental Horticulture from Mississippi State University. Prior to joining the Huntsville Botanical Garden staff, he was general manager of Monmouth Plantation in Natchez, Mississippi and co-owner of Chase Nursery in Huntsville.

Thursday Program, May 7, 2026

7:30 AM – 9:00 AM Breakfast on your own

8:30 AM - 9:30 AM Vendors and Silent Auction Open

8:30 AM – 9:00 AM Welcome, Speaker TBD

9:00 AM – 10:00 AM Guest Speaker, Edward Pate



After retiring from public education, where he taught writing and literature to grade six through law school seniors, Dr. Edward Pate became an Alabama Master Gardener. Since 2022, through the Master Gardener program, Pate, known as "Garden Man," to students, has applied his love for learning, people and nature to the development of school gardens at Conecuh County Junior High School and Repton Junior High school in partnership with the Conecuh County Extension Service. Through regular Garden Days in the gardens, students (PreK to sixth grade) learn diverse lessons about growing plants, beneficial and harmful insects, nutrition, and effects of weather among other topics. Through Grow More Give More students help their communities by donating fresh produce from the gardens to those in need. Donations now total almost 400 pounds! The main ingredient of a successful garden? Says Pate, "Everything grows better with love."

10:00 AM – 10:30 AM Break and Door Prizes

10:30 AM – 11:30 AM Guest Speaker, Patrick Thompson



Patrick Thompson grew up on Shades Mountain near Birmingham, Alabama. He graduated with a Master of Science degree from Auburn University Horticulture Department in 2018. He has been employed by Auburn Department of Biological Sciences; Davis Arboretum since 2000. Patrick has curated the arboretum's oak collection and deciduous azalea collection since 2008, and both are now certified by the Association of the Public Gardens of America's Plant Collection Network. He is an honorary Lee County Master Gardener, a climbing arborist and the coordinator of the Alabama Plant Conservation Alliance.

11:30 AM – 12:30 PM Lunch – BBQ or Vegetarian

Bridge Street Barbecue: White Chicken Chili, Loaded Potato Salad, Smokehouse Slaw, Smoked Barbeque Breast of Chicken, Barbecue Pulled Pork, Brown Sugar & Bacon Baked Beans, Macaroni & Cheese Gratin, Green Bean Casserole, Biscuits & Cheddar Cheese, Green Chili with Corn Bread, Grilled Vegetable Strudel with Smoked Red Pepper Coulis, Berry Cobbler, Red Velvet Cake.

12:30 PM – 2:00 PM **AMGA BUSINESS MEETING**

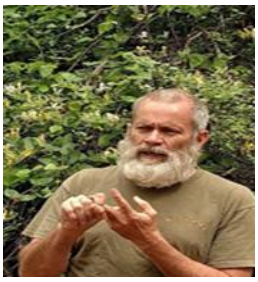
2:00 PM – 3:00 PM **Guest Speaker, Jessie Akozbek**



Foraging Is the act of gathering wild food for free. Jesse is the creator and hike leader of "Ferral Foraging" in Huntsville. Although it gained far greater popularity in recent years, for our distant ancestors foraging would simply have been a way of life – a necessity in fact. Come learn the difference between foraging and scavenging and Jesse's "golden rule" for foraging! He is a dynamic speaker who will entertain and enlighten you with amazing stories from the forest. His mission is to create a world with more foragers who are deeply connected with their land and inspired to defend it, thus carving a path to reverse the loss of natural habitat. You will be amazed by Jesse's work and passion!

3:00 PM – 3:30 PM Break and Door Prizes

3:30 PM – 4:30 PM **Guest Speaker, Darryl** Patton



Darryl Patton has been hunting, gathering and working with medicinal plants on Lookout Mountain in the Southern Appalachians for the past 25 years. He is a Master Herbalist and brings many years of experience to the field of alternative medicines. Darryl is the author of *Mountain Medicine, the Herbal Remedies of Tommie Bass*, published by Natural Reader Press and has appeared on Alabama Public Television and the Comedy Channel. Darryl has been featured in many newspaper and magazine articles relating to the use of medicinal plants and is in demand nationally as a speaker on alternative medicine. Darryl operates a wilderness survival training school in the mountains of North Alabama where he teaches a wide range of subjects including medicinal plant walks and one-on-one apprenticeships for those seeking to further their knowledge in the world of herbs and alternative medicines.

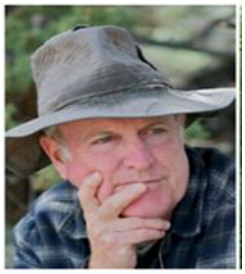
4:30 PM – 5:00 PM Awards

5:00 PM – 6:00 PM Vendors and Silent Auction Open

5:00 PM – 6:00 PM Book Signing: Doug Tallamy

6:00 PM – 7:00 PM Dinner – Italian or Vegetarian
Toasted Homemade Focaccia, Rolls & Garlic Butter; Minestrone; Ceasar Salad Station; Insalata Caprese with Vine Ripened Tomatoes, Fresh Mozzarella & Home-Grown Basil; Antipasto with Grilled Vegetables with Asparagus, Zucchini, Eggplant, Squash, Mushrooms, Assorted Olives, Capicola, Genoa Salami, Prosciutto & Provolone; Chicken Parmesan Spaghetti; Italian Style Green Beans; Eggplant Parmesan; Chocolate Chip Cannoli; Tiramisu.

7:00 PM – 8:00 PM Keynote Speaker, Doug Tallamy



Doug Tallamy is the TA Baker Professor of Agriculture in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, where he has authored 114 research publications and has taught insect related courses for 45 years. Chief among his research goals is to better understand the many ways insects interact with plants and how such interactions determine the diversity of animal communities. His books include *Bringing Home Nature, The Living Landscape* co-authored with Rick Darke, *Nature's Best Hope,* New York Times best seller, *The Nature of Oaks,* winner of the American Horticultural Society's 2022 book award. In 2021 he co-founded Homegrown National Park with Michelle Alfandari, https://homegrownnationalpark.org/. His awards include recognition from The Garden Writer's Association, Audubon, The National Wildlife Federation, Allegheny College, Ecoforesters, The Garden Club of America, The Herb Society and the American Horticultural Association.

Friday, May 8, 2026

7:30 AM – 9:00 AM Breakfast on your own

9:00 AM – 10:00 AM Guest Speaker, Cindy Upton



Cindy Upton was born in Decatur, Alabama. where she still lives and has been an Alabama Master Gardener since 2001. She loves reading gardening books like some people read novels. Cindy's relatives were mostly farmers on Sand Mountain and growing up with garden chores made her hate everything about it! It wasn't until much later when she got her own house and planted her first thing: a hydrangea shrub, that she realized she loves gardening after all! She dug a hole big enough to cram it in, and her dad discovered her poor attempt and showed her the right way while laughing at her! She sill has that hydrangea but not her dad…except that she can visit that sweet memory anytime she feels like it by looking at that shrub. Plants and gardens have such a wonderful place in our lives, and she was just hooked after her hydrangea experience. She guesses that gardening was in her blood after all. Cindy has worked for NASA for 36 years and loves it. She manages the National Space Science & Technology Center, where fascinating research is done in many areas of earth and space science.

10:00 AM – 10:30 AM Closing Remarks, Adjournment

10:30 AM – 12:00 N Pay and Pickup Silent Auction Items

Cheerful Holly Berries



Another year has started! I hope you've all had an inspiring December making decorations for our eyes, ears, noses and hearts to enjoy. Did anyone collect some of Mother Nature's gifts to share with family and friends? Or maybe you requested or gave special plants as holiday gifts.

One of my winter delights is holly. My favorites are the deciduous hollies, *Ilex decidua* and *Ilex verticillata*. Whether I'm mixing them in an arrangement or admiring them in the landscape, I think the bright colored berries (botanically, they're "drupes"), held on grey stems, light up any other evergreen plant.

The genus *Ilex* is a very diverse group. With such an array, every gardener can find at least one holly that's just right. They range in height from three feet to sixty feet. Some have tiny leaves, some large leaves – some have spines and others do not – some are evergreen and others are deciduous. Holly fruit has different colors too – red, orange, yellow, black or white.

Whether choosing a holly for decorations or birdwatching, fruit production is likely a top priority. As you know fruits develop after pollination. Remember that all hollies are dioecious. Each plant has either male or female flowers and cannot produce fruit standing alone. Male flowers only contain pollen, and only the female flowers can produce fruit.

The fruit crop is affected by three factors; bloom time, species compatibility, and weather. Hollies blooming in March cannot pollinate those blooming in May. Some species are extremely particular. A female Yaupon holly requires a male Yaupon for fruiting. However, English and Chinese hollies blooming at similar times will cross-pollinate effortlessly. Weather is the one factor we cannot control. Late frosts can decrease fruit-set for early spring bloomers, while droughts shrink fruit crops for any plant. The strongest weather effect is actually an indirect one. Insects, mostly flies and bees, are essential for holly pollination. Cool, cloudy, and especially rainy weather reduces or prevents insect activity and pollination.

Learn more about this amazing plant group – hollies – and add one to your landscape this year!

Kerry

ALABAMA MASTER GARDENERS
ALABAMA EXTENSION

Alabama Extension Master Gardener Program State Coordinator
Auburn University

I have no interest in 'Winter Interest'

By Marianne Wilburn

I have developed a strong antipathy for the term 'winter interest' in garden writing. Do we truly have nothing better to say about winter gardens or the plants growing in them than to damn them with faint praise? I have been guilty myself but now repent wholeheartedly.

To term something 'winter interest' is to reject the capacity of the winter garden to charm on its own terms. It is to begin in the premise that the winter garden is markedly inferior to the summer garden; and as such, cannot hope to inspire, energize, or uplift the gardener, but only clinically interest him. As in, "It's a pity everything looks like hell out there. But I did notice a gumball-pruned holly while making a beeline for the front door."

By that definition, an abandoned wheelbarrow is winter interest, as is that pile of black pots you meant to stash away but never did. They drew the eye for a moment, disappointed it, then released it in a wash of guilt and/or regret. It is at core a statement of absence and comparison. We do not use or need its equivalent in spring and summer – no one in their right mind terms a tulip "spring interest."

Judge them differently

Yes, there is less to admire. Less in-your-face frippery – less of the cheap and easy thrill. But there is a deeper, more resonant quality to the winter landscape. The superficiality of one's summer play is laid bare, and we are forced to contemplate the underlying, structure – or lack thereof – and fix it if we dare. We are faced with our weaknesses as gardeners – the bones that were never planted, the structures unpainted, the winding paths never laid. That pile of pots.

Enough winter interest! Expect more of your garden. Expect more of your plants. How much better to create a scene and name the attributes of a plant or structure in the winter garden for what *they are adding to the overall effect*, in the same way we effortlessly discuss those characteristics during the growing season?

In summer, grasses soften hard lines and provide movement. In winter, that sexy sway stiffens and morphs into fountains of tawny beige. In summer, an uber-thin 'Taylor's' juniper is a vertical statement, in winter, it becomes a launching point, drawing your gaze upwards to an icy blue sky. The pinkish cast on a 'Silver Lining' pyracantha is something unachievable in the summer garden – revel in that blush! Do not hand it second place in a beauty contest with the too-easy condescension of 'winter interest.'

Big Picture Thinking Is Required

Do we dare move beyond winter interest and claim our gardens in winter? To build a winter garden, or at least, a garden that continues to enchant and surprise us with strong colors, textures, shapes and views, a layering, patient approach is necessary – especially in smaller gardens where players must assume many parts. That requires more than a quick and casual approach to planting. For instance, a red or yellow twigged *Cornus* (or a bit of both in the cultivars 'Midwinter Fire' or 'Arctic Fire') is a striking beacon in the winter months, but the shrub is dull during the growing season. It must be tucked in where it can bide its time least offensively as a green backdrop in order that it may stun the pants off you the minute it loses its leaves and the temperatures drop. But that's not enough. It must echo elsewhere – even if it's simply a bunch of pruned whips from the original shrub poked into potting soil in a pot or pots on the porch. One shrub on an arctic tundra qualifies under the insipidity of 'winter interest,' two or more bright fiery displays make it look like you planned it.

Because you did.

One Thing Leads to Another

And from there perhaps you build on a good thing, underplanting your deciduous shrubs with some resilient hellebores, cheerful snowdrops and winter aconite, *Chinodoxa*, *Puschkinia*, etc. – plants and bulbs that will play a huge part at soil level and then either disappear or happily enjoy a summer shading.

Layer follows layer – it takes time to build a garden that holds its own in winter. We commit to that endeavor when we stop talking in terms of 'interest' and start talking in terms of colors, shapes, textures and views.

I have no interest in 'Winter Interest - GardenRant

Pathways
Winter
2025-2026



ALABAMA MASTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION

alabamamga.org

Editor: Sheila Bolen
East Central AL MGA
mgbolshe13@gmail.com

Copy Editor:
Martha Burnett
East Central AL MGA

Proofreader:
Susan Clapp
Autauga MGA

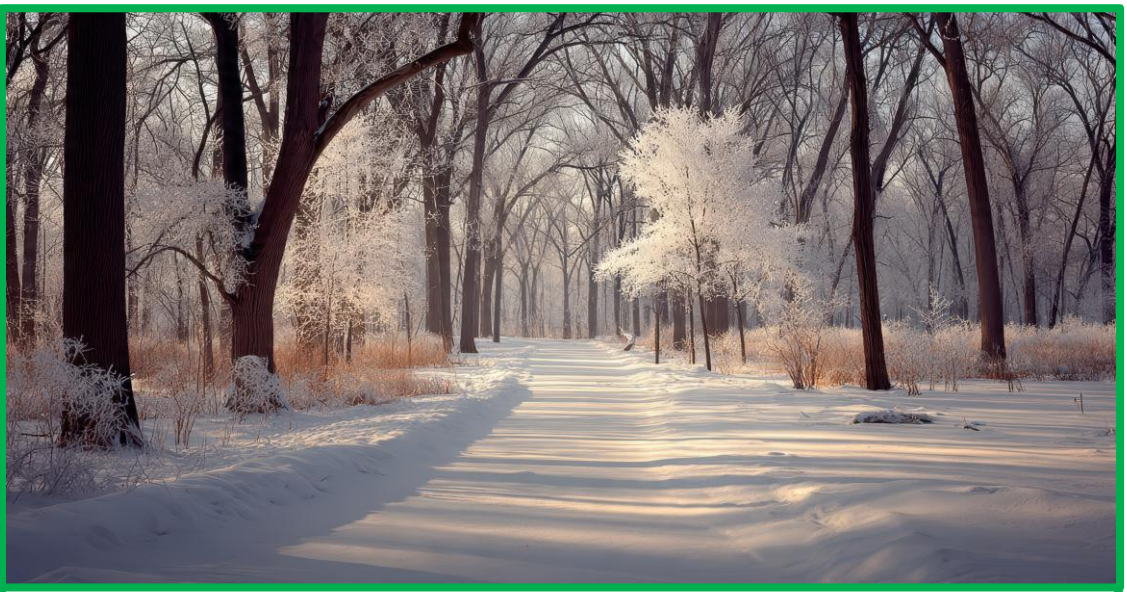
State Advisor
Kerry Smith
State Master Gardeners Program Coordinator
334-844-3036
Cell 334-329-1051
smithkp@auburn.edu

Got Questions?

?

We've Got Answers

alabamamga.org



NEXT ARTICLE FOR PATHWAYS DUE MARCH 15, 2026

2025 - 2027 AMGA BOD OFFICERS

President: Deborah Boutelier, Autauga
Vice-President: Julie Conrey, Mobile
Secretary: Amanda Redman, Blount
Treasurer: Susan Steele, Lawrence
Asst. Treasurer: Wanda Smith Tuscaloosa

BOARD MEMBERS AT LARGE

TERM 2023 – 2026
Kate Vogel, Shelby
Jan Shirley, Wiregrass
Term 2024 – 2027
Janell Diggs, Capital City
Kim Johnson, Jackson
Angela Whorton, Etowah County
Term 2025 – 2028
Harriet Jackson, Chilton
Soozi Pline, Limestone

AMGA COMMITTEES

AMGA AWARDS
Jim Harris, Chair, Lee

AMGA COMMUNICATIONS
Angela Whorton, Chair, Etowah
Newsletter Editor: Sheila Bolen, East Central
Webmaster: Caroline Etheriedge, Blount

AMGA ENDOWMENT
Kim Johnson, Chair, Jackson

AMGA MEMBERSHIP
Rose McCauley, Chair, Autauga

AMGA NOMINATING
Amy Weis, Chair, Jefferson

AMGA PROJECT FUNDING
Kate Vogel, Chair, Shelby

AMGA RECORDS & RETENTION
Michael Thomason, Chair, Shoals

AMGA SPEAKERS BUREAU
Susan Hagen, Chair, Blount

AMGA STATE CONFERENCES
Julie Conrey, Chair, Mobile

CONFERENCE COMMITTEES
2026 MGNA/LIMESTONE/MORGAN MGAs
Jennifer Johnson (MGNA), Soozi Pline (Limestone), Doty Henry (Morgan)
2027 JEFFERSON COUNTY MGA
Katherine Ennis

ACES VOLUNTEER TRAINING
Coordinator TBA

AMGA ADVISORY COUNCIL
Tony Wallace, Chair, Etowah
Anne Ness, Secretary, Morgan

AMGA WEBSITE
Caroline Etheriedge, Webmaster, Blount
Deborah Boutelier, Autauga
Julie Conrey, Mobile

AMGA WEBSITE INFO APPROVAL
Caroline Etheriedge, Blount
Deborah Boutelier, Autauga
Julie Conrey, Mobile