



# Dirty Digs

December



**ACMGA President  
Rose McCauley**

As ACMGA members welcome in the New Year of 2026, we should take time to reflect on all the projects and activities we accomplished/worked on in 2025!

In addition to the routine tasks of holding our monthly meetings, hosting our monthly Lunch & Learn programs, answering the AMGA Helpline weekly, keeping the flower beds beautiful at Prattville and donating produce from the Demonstration Garden to AICC; we accomplished so much more.

In 2025, we hosted the annual AMGA State Conference, assisted with the Water Festival, worked Arbor Day, Friends of the Forest and Farm City Week. We joined with the Autauga County 4-H and taught a ten-week class to certify 21 third grade students with Learn, Grow, Eat & Go under the Jr. Master Gardener program.

We also participated in 4-H Competition Day by judging the entries and assisted with an after-school program at Pine

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### Special points of interest:

- *Junior Master Gardeners*
- *Christmas Tree Trail*
- *Prattville Garden*



AMGA Website  
[Alabamamg.org](http://Alabamamg.org)



Autauga MG Website  
[autaugamastergardeners.org](http://autaugamastergardeners.org)



Extension Website  
[mg.aces.edu](http://mg.aces.edu)



Level School.

The overgrown garden beds at Prattville Elementary and Billingsley School were cleared. ACMGA held a tomato workshop that was well attended. We manned information tables at Home Depot (Ask A Master Gardener) and Prattville's Farmers Market.

We celebrated the graduation of 15 interns from Autauga, Elmore, and Montgomery Counties with a spectacular ceremony and delicious luncheon. We have 9 interns enrolled in the current MG class.

We have established a Long Range Planning Committee to evaluate our future needs and projects. I am sure there are other projects that I have failed to mention.

I want to thank the Executive Board for their hard work and support to keep our association running smoothly. I especially want to thank Amy Richardson for all the work she has done as secretary. And I look forward to working with Nancy Strong our new secretary.

Your participation in our association keeps us strong. If you are not currently involved with any of our projects, I ask that you select one or two to join.

Rose

## Lunch and Learn Vicki Williamson



Lunch and Learn programs hosted by ACMGA have ended for 2025. The last program - "Plants off the Beaten Path" was presented by Robin Synder from Central Alabama Master Gardeners Association on December 17, 2025.

A special thank you to all the speakers throughout 2025. We look forward to seeing everyone in 2026.

Lunch and Learn presentations are held every 3rd Wednesday of the month, from 12-1pm. And are located at the Trinity Prattville Church, 610 Fairview Ave. Prattville, AL 33066.

Our 2026 program agenda (see page 7), has some interesting topics that will provide 1 CEU for each program.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!!

Vicki



2025 year end total  
for the Demo Garden  
**1,030 pounds**

## Demonstration Garden Glenn Huovinen



In the 2025 Demonstration Garden 4th quarter, we harvested the last of the Summer produce. We planted Fall and Winter veggies, and planted White Clover as a cover crop to save and build the soil.

As of December 1, we have planted 27 different varieties of Fruits and Vegetables, and **donated 1,030 pounds of fresh produce to AICC.**

We conducted Soil Tests on all 9 Raised Beds and will add needed nutrients before we start planting the Spring Garden.

Each Raised Bed will be numbered and a record will be maintained as to what is planted and where it is planted to help in rotation of the various vegetable families.

The “Autauga Master Gardeners Demo Garden” is now tagged for location on Google Maps.

## 2025 GOALS

- Increase production pounds for donation to AICC.
- Increase the types of vegetables planted.
- Start more seeds at home rather than buying transplants.
- Increase Interplanting.

- Invite groups to tour the Garden.
- Learn more and have a good time!

We have a great Demo Garden Crew and I would like to invite all members to join us on each Tuesday morning year around, weather permitting.

Glenn

## Awards & Honors Adrienne Yarbrough



### ACMGA Hummingbird Award

The ACMGA Hummingbird Award was created in 2012 to highlight the exceptional efforts of our certified members based on the hummingbird’s characteristics: fast, industrious, and beautiful.

**2025 Recipients** – Jane Boysen, Michael Camire, Elijah Pugh, Kathy Chapman, Bionca Lindsey, Darlene Blumentritt, Shannon Mayes, and Samantha Bowen

### ACMGA Longevity Pin

The ACMGA Longevity Service Pin was approved in 2019. The pins are only for ACMGA members who have held memberships for 10, 15, 20, 25 or 30 years.

**2025 Recipients – 15 Year** Recipients: Glenda Armstrong, Carolyn Gray, Marjorie Hannah, Paula Seamon, and Margaret Smitherman; **20 Year** Recipient: Pam Hattemer; and **30 Year** Recipient: Debbie Boutelier.

### AMGA Reach for the Stars Awards

This program is a volunteer service recognition program approved by the Alabama Master Gardener Association (AMGA) for members in good standing of AMGA.

#### Recipients :

**Bronze Star** (100+ cumulative hours) Kimberly Huggins

**Silver Star** (300+ cumulative hours) Valera Brown, Cindy Deane, Glenda Harris, James Hussey, and Diane Wonderly

**Gold Star** (500+ cumulative hours) Linda Barry, Jane Boysen, Katherin Chapman, Susan Clapp, Shannon Mayes, Jackie Raines, Amy Richardson, and Dawn Whitehead.

**AMGA Advanced Awards – Gold Name Badge** (1,000+ cumulative hours) Glenn Nichols, Judy Scholfield, and Lanell Tatum

**Platinum Name Badge** (2,000+ cumulative hours) Cynthia Salyer

**Champagne Advanced Award Star** (20,000+ cumulative hours) Debbie Boutelier

Adrienne

Congratulations!



## WANT TO GROW YOUR OWN SWEET POTATOES?

Glenn Huovinen



It is easy and fun. Purchase Organic Sweet Potatoes. Non-Organic Sweet Potatoes are sprayed with a chemical (Sprout Nip) that inhibits the growth of potato sprouts. You can find organic potatoes at a Publix Super Market next to the Banana display.



Place the Sweet Potatoes in a tray with soil that buries half of the Potato. Keep the soil moist. Sweet Potato slips will grow.



When the slips are 6 to 8 inches long, snap them off, place in water. In 2 weeks roots will grow.



Plant the slips according to the Alabama Extension Planting Calendar

## Robert Glenn Nichols

May 14, 1947 - December 5, 2025



Glenn Nichols, a native of Perry County, passed away Friday, December 5, 2025

He was preceded in death by his parents, Ralph and Grace Nichols.

He is survived by his loving wife of 56 years, Rita Nichols; three sons, Gregory Nichols (Carla), Mark Nichols (Richard) and Jeffrey Nichols (Rebecca); five grandchildren, Hayden Shoults (Frazier), Matthew Nichols (Rose), Ava Nichols, Kaleb and Olivia Nichols; great-granddaughter, Riley Shoults; sister, Ralphine Oakes (Mason); extended family and friends.

Full obituary page:

<https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/wcov/name/robert-nichols-obituary?id=60257580>

**Autauga County  
Master Gardeners Association**  
**Lunch & Learn 2026**

3rd WEDNESDAY of EVERY Month  
12:00-1:00 P.M.

Trinity Prattville Church, 610 Fairview Ave., Prattville 36066



**BRING A SACK LUNCH    FREE PROGRAM    WATER PROVIDED**

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>21 January</b>   | <b>Bluebirds and Their Habitat</b><br>Janell Diggs, Advanced Master Gardener                           |
| <b>18 February</b>  | <b>Container Gardening in Grow Bags &amp; Small Spaces</b><br>Glenn Huovinen, Advanced Master Gardener |
| <b>18 March</b>     | <b>Seedy Exchange ~ Bring your Seeds</b><br>Caylor Rolling, Horticulturist, Eat South Montgomery       |
| <b>15 April</b>     | <b>Hydrangeas</b><br>Maria Pacheco, Advanced Master Gardener   |
| <b>20 May</b>       | <b>Statewide Pollinator Census ~ Help us Count</b><br>Bethany O'Rear, Horticulturist, ACES             |
| <b>17 June</b>      | <b>Rain Barrels &amp; Irrigation</b><br>Bronson Lubresky, Natural Resources, ACES                      |
| <b>15 July</b>      | <b>Gifts Your Garden Gives</b><br>Linda Jarzniecki, Master Gardener                                    |
| <b>19 August</b>    | <b>Planting &amp; Growing a Smoothie Bar</b><br>Mallory Kelley, Horticulturist, ACES & Deb Kelso, MG   |
| <b>16 September</b> | <b>All About Pumpkins</b><br>Hayes Jackson, Horticulturist, ACES                                       |
| <b>21 October</b>   | <b>10 Best Bugs in the Garden</b><br>Dr. Meredith Shrader, Entomologist, ACES                          |
| <b>18 November</b>  | <b>Fall Blooming Camellias</b><br>Dr. Charles Mitchell, Retired Auburn Professor                       |
| <b>16 December</b>  | <b>Water Features in the Landscape</b><br>Mary McCroan, Advanced Master Gardener                       |



*Auburn University is an equal opportunity educator, employer, and provider. If you need a reasonable accommodation or language access services, contact the Autauga County Extension Office (334) 361-7273 at least two weeks prior to the event date.*

Central Alabama  
Master Gardeners Association  
**Lunch & Learn 2026**

2nd TUESDAY of EVERY Month

12:00-1:00 pm



First Presbyterian Church (Fellowship Hall)  
100 West Bridge Street, Wetumpka 36092



**BRING A SACK LUNCH**

**FREE PROGRAM**

**WATER PROVIDED**

- 13 January** Growing and Caring for Houseplants  
*Emily Stamm, Horticulturist, AU Graduate Student*
- 10 February** Sowing Winter Seeds in Milk Jugs and Containers  
*Elizabeth York, Shelby County Master Gardener*
- 10 March** Japanese Maples  
*Nicole Hart, Crooked Oaks Farm*
- 14 April** Bees of Alabama  
*Dr. Selina Bruckner, Bee Specialist, ACES*
- 12 May** Floral Arranging Techniques and Tips  
*Dr. Carolyn Robinson, AU Horticulture Professor*
- 9 June** Add Hostas to Your Garden  
*Bionca Lindsey, Advanced Master Gardener*
- 14 July** Teas, Tinctures and Salves  
*Debbie Kelso, Central Alabama Master Gardener*
- 11 August** Growing and Cooking with Herbs  
*Janell Diggs, Advanced Master Gardener*
- 8 September** Composting 101  
*Kelly LaFreniere, Elmore County Master Gardener*
- 13 October** Fall Blooming Roses - Planting and Care  
*Jason Powell, Petals From the Past*  
*\*Roses will be for sale following the program*
- 10 November** Citrus in the Backyard  
*Dr. Chip East, Commercial Extension Horticulturist, ACES*
- 8 December** Alabama Soils & Garden Fertilizers  
*Dr. Charles Mitchell, Soil Scientist, Retired Auburn Professor*



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**Montgomery County  
Master Gardeners Association**

**Lunch & Learn 2026**

**1<sup>st</sup> WEDNESDAY of EVERY Month  
12:00-1:00 P.M.**



Montgomery Cultural Arts Center  
1018 Madison Avenue, Montgomery 36104



**BRING A SACK LUNCH    FREE PROGRAM    WATER PROVIDED**

- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>7 January</b>   | Growing and Caring for Roses<br>Mallory Kelley, Horticulturist, ACES  |
| <b>4 February</b>  | Houseplants for Indoor Gardens<br>Anita Reeves, Advanced Master Gardener  |
| <b>4 March</b>     | Landscaping with Herbs<br>Debbie Boutelier, Advanced Master Gardener  |
| <b>1 April</b>     | Growing a Greener Grass<br>David Lawrence, Commercial Horticulturist, ACES  |
| <b>6 May</b>       | Cut Flower Variety Trials & Tips<br>Lucy Ellington, Horticulturist, ACES  |
| <b>3 June</b>      | Sustainable Landscape Design<br>Amanda Borden, Advanced Master Gardener   |
| <b>1 July</b>      | What's "Sweet Grown in Alabama?"<br>Ellie Watson, Sweet Grown Alabama, ALFA   |
| <b>5 August</b>    | Native Pollinators & Plants<br>"Their Intriguing Relationship"<br>Janice Jackson, Master Gardener                               |
| <b>2 September</b> | Floral Arranging Techniques & Tricks<br>Mallory Kelley, Horticulturist, ACES  |
| <b>7 October</b>   | Update on Cannabis in Alabama<br>Mary McCroan, Advanced Master Gardener   |
| <b>4 November</b>  | The Life of the Honeybee<br>Jason Borders, Professor, Huntingdon College  |
| <b>2 December</b>  | Christmas Plant Care~ Amaryllis, Cactus, Poinsettia<br>Paperwhites and More!<br>Karen Weber, Horticulturist and Master Gardener |



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# Autauga County Master Gardener Association and 4H

## 1st Junior Master Gardener Graduation

Bionca Lindsey

On November 21, 2025, we had the pleasure of graduating 21 third graders under the Texas A&M Junior Master Gardeners program. The host school was Prattville Elementary, and their teacher is Mrs. Amber Williamson. The students earned a certification in the Learn, Grow, Eat & Go curriculum. The 10 week/20 lesson program taught children about plant science, ecological principles, nutrition, and encouraged them to select healthy food options and to lastly, try new foods. Each session contained hands-on activities which aided in reinforcing the lesson's objectives. The instructors were five Master Gardeners from Autauga County: Bionca Lindsey, Michael Camire, Rose McCauley, Soyna Moore, and Jackie Raines.

Each week we, the instructors, were very excited to spend time with the students; we received hugs and lots of love. Most importantly, the children showed us how much they retained each week when they were able to recite what they had learned the previous week Mrs. Williamson, their teacher, was pivotal to the success of each session by reiterating the information as the students completed their gardening journal each week after our sessions.

Mrs. Williamson said, "I've had a whole week to reflect on my students' graduation from the Learn Grow Eat Go program with the Autauga County Master Gardeners. To say I'm thankful and honored for this opportunity to have worked with such passionate experts in their field is an understatement! The skills and knowledge gained this last semester will undoubtedly stick with the kids (and me) for a lifetime. Not to mention, every lesson correlated with at least one (usually more) state standard and gave many opportunities for hands on experiences, teamwork, and FUN! Thank you for the best experience. I can't wait for the next session!"

When we first started this journey, we were nervous and concerned that we could teach the lessons in the given time, because some lesson stated more time was required. I'm happy to say, we did that and so much more. We planted an entire garden consisting of two types of lettuce, Swiss chard, collard greens, broccoli, and cabbage donated by our 4H advisor, Kacey Powell.

Kacey supported us from day one. The Junior Master Gardener program falls under 4H because it deals with youths. She wrote a grant and obtained funds for us to add even more beds to the schools outside classroom and garden.



Proud Junior Master Gardener Graduates, with teacher Mrs. Williamson, and ACMGA members Rose McCauley, Jackie Raines, Bionca Lindsey, Michael Camire, and Soyna Moore.

Photo: Rose McCauley

We are so grateful to Mrs. Williamson, the students, their parents, Prattville Elementary, and all who supported this endeavor. The graduation celebration was filled with recognition, pizza, vegetables, fruit, and so much more.

# Junior Master Gardener Program

## Photo Gallery

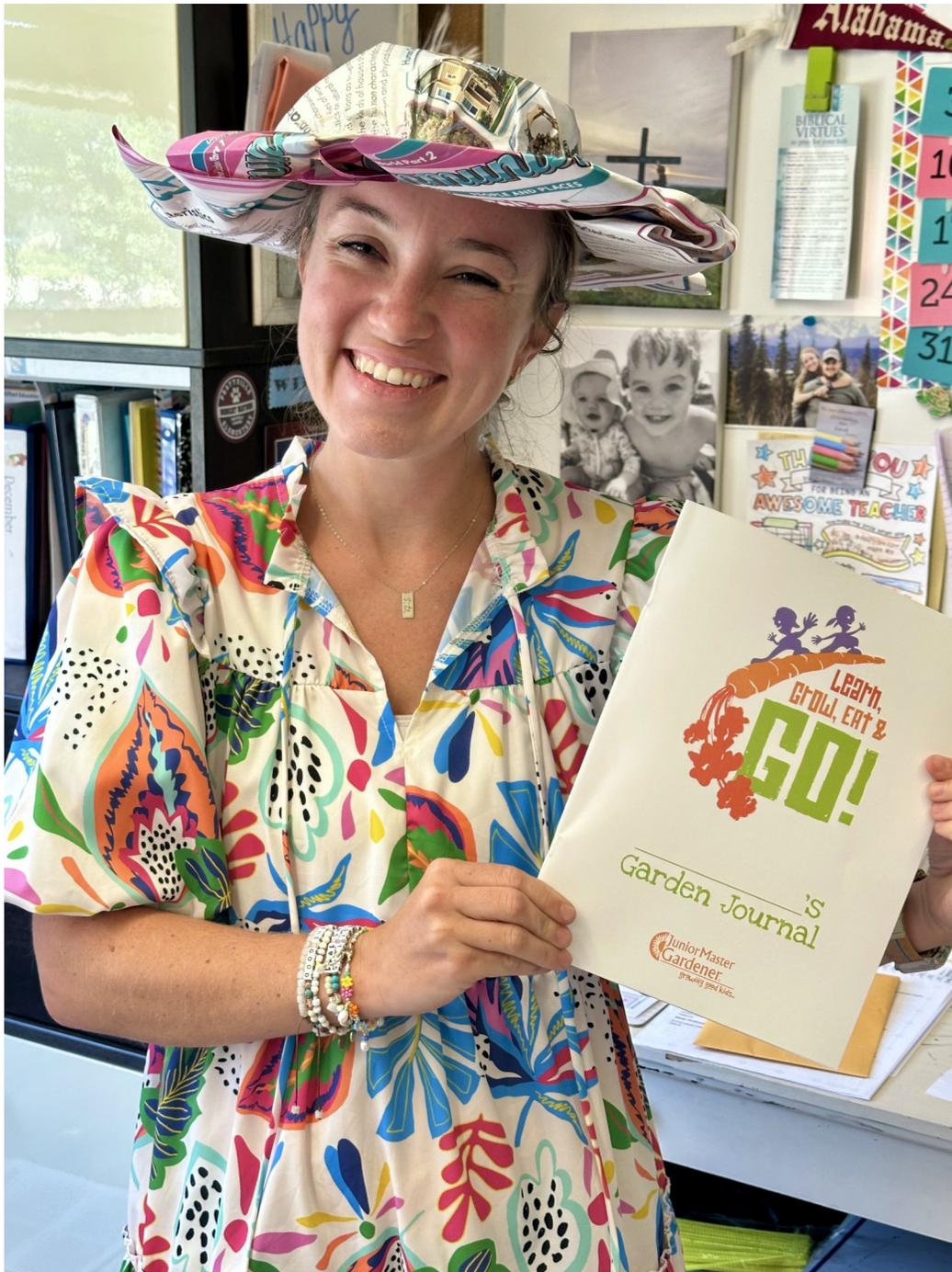
Photographs—Soyna Moore



Autauga County Master Gardeners—Michael Camire, Bionca Lindsey, Rose McCauley, Soyna Moore, and Jackie Raines



“Farmer Michael” and Bionca teaching plant parts and nutrients



Amber Williamson, Third Grade Teacher with the “Learn, Grow, Eat, and Go” Journal

Someone said the four-letter word ... DIRT!  
And Rose explained the difference between  
dirt and soil.



Yes, the children planted a garden. Some commented it was their first time.



You are what you eat! Go... Slow... Whoa!!



Sometimes you need to stop, listen, and be a friend



Yes, you can grow broccoli in a bathtub



Jackie Raines discusses MyPlate... protein, vegetables, fruits, grains, and dairy

## Helen Hardwick Allen

December 8, 1933 - November 22, 2025



Helen Allen, 91, passed away November 22, 2025.

Helen was the youngest and last surviving of seven children. Her oldest brothers and sisters were J.E. Hardwick, Wiley Hardwick, Mary Kerr, Ruth Perry, Alice Gregg and Bettie Morris. She graduated from Falkville High School in 1951 and the University of Montevallo in 1955.

She was a Registered Dietician and enjoyed a successful career at the V.A. Hospital in Birmingham and became Dr. Buris Boshell's first chief diabetes dietician as he emphasized diet in the treatment of diabetes.

In 1959 she married James Bentley Allen, Jr. (Jimmy), who survives her along with their three children, Alice Louise Allen Webb (David), Martha Rose Allen Olsen (Chris) and Elbert Smith Allen (Judy). She has eight grandchildren Bentley, Paul, Morgan (fiancé, Tiffany), Catherine, Brandi (Anthony), Chris (Courtney), Emily (Michael) Parker and Henry. A grandson Daniel predeceased her. She also has four great-grandchildren, Anatasia, Sagan, Dante and Scarlett.

Helen was active in garden projects in Homewood and Prattville. She became a Master Gardener in Prattville and won various awards.

Full Obituary page: <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/wcov/name/helen-allen-obituary?id=60131075>

# Prattville Christmas Tree Trail

Sondra Henley

This year's ACMGA Christmas card featured Holiday Cacti.

Christmas trees have a way of putting a smile on our faces. No matter how they are decked out...Bright lights, colorful ornaments, memories from childhood, and even home-made treasures.

The Autauga County Master Gardeners Association has participated in The Family Support Center's Christmas Tree Trail in Prattville, AL, for several years, with a garden related ornament. This year our theme ornament was the "holiday" cactus. I bet you've heard of a Christmas cactus, and maybe even a Thanksgiving cactus...but did you know the Easter cactus is part of this family. And they all three are different because of the leaves. Maintenance and care of these cactus' can be found at:

[ACMGA Christmas Cacti - Autauga County Master Gardeners](#)

Our Creek Walk tree was adorned with these ornament cards for folks to take with them. So if your cactus is flowering and you're not sure which holiday it might be, well check out our website. Merry Christmas from the Autauga County MG!



ACMGA Christmas Card—Front

# Get Ready for Spring Plantings – Part I

Marcus Garner  
Original Article

<https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/lawn-garden-urban/get-ready-for-spring-plantings-2/>



As the days grow longer and the sky less dreary, spring is the ideal time to prepare home landscapes for planting. Most trees, shrubs, and warm-season grasses are awakening from winter rest. As the weather heats up, focus your attention on container plants, in-ground flower beds, and replacing trees and shrubs that did not survive the winter.

## Container Plants

Pots and containers make ideal focal points for homes with minimal yard space. Therefore, placing a variety of colorful plants in pots with a good growing medium and suitable drainage can create a nice floral display. In addition, meeting specific growing requirements can be the difference between healthy and unhealthy plant growth. Be sure to read the labels.

If there is no label on the plant container that you are purchasing, research the plant before you purchase it to ensure you can provide all the necessary growing requirements in their environment.

Pansies, snapdragons, petunias, tulips, coleus, and variegated hostas are ideal plants that can be found locally. These plants will look exceptionally well in traditional concrete, wood, clay, and plastic pots.

## Flower Beds

Most in-ground flower beds can be challenging at times. Identifying the best planting areas in your yard is critical to getting the maximum amount of sunshine and adequate drainage for plants. Plants surrounding the house, blended in between trees and shrubs, or planted in shaded areas may get little sun needed for plants to grow. Nonetheless, some plants need open spaces, exposure to full sun, and occasionally hot or dry heat to grow well. Try to provide a water source for the bed to keep plant roots nice and moist.

When establishing a fertile flower bed, soil type and mixture are vital factors. Believe it or not, the soil's level of alkalinity or acidity will decide what will grow and thrive. The correct balance between sun and soil can be achieved with basic gardening knowledge. Contact your [county Extension office](#) to get a soil testing kit for a soil analysis. Lastly, remember that color-coordinated flowers are one of the most pleasing aspects of any container or in-ground garden.

## Replacing Trees and Shrubs

Most in-ground flower beds can be challenging at times. Identifying the best planting areas in your yard is critical to getting enough sunshine and adequate drainage for plants. Plants surrounding the house, blended in between trees and shrubs, or planted in shaded areas may get insufficient sun needed for plants to grow. Nonetheless, some plants need open spaces, exposure to full sun, and occasional hot or dry heat to grow well. Also, be sure to provide a water source for each bed to keep plant roots nice and moist.

Establishing a fertile flower bed, soil type and mixture is also vital. Believe it or not, the soil's level of alkalinity or acidity will decide what plants will grow and thrive. The correct balance between sun and soil can be achieved with basic gardening knowledge.

Contact your [county Extension office](#) to get a soil testing kit for a soil analysis.

Lastly, remember that color-coordinated flowers are one of the most pleasing aspects of any container or in-ground garden. When deciding how to plant or place your plants to achieve that optimal color coordination, there is no right or wrong answer for adding color to your garden. Color choices are a matter of personal taste. Less can be more when it comes to choosing colors for a particular garden spot. Focusing on a smaller area using just one color can be more impressive and pleasing to the eye than a larger area planted with a variety of spotted colors, also less expensive. Grouping one kind of flower together with the same growing requirements can be easier to work with to gain maximum impact.

## Other Tips

- Use a quality potting mix that adds fertilizers and moisture controls needed for good plant growth.
- Use a container that is deep enough for the plant to grow (check the label).
- Frequent watering will wash plant nutrients out of the soil, so always consider a routine feeding program.
- Water plants in the morning. To confirm sufficient moisture levels, Conduct the finger test to see just how much moisture is in the soil. The finger test is basically sticking your finger in the container, to see how moist or dry the soil is around the plant roots in the container. This will keep the plant from drying out when inconsistent water schedules are an issue.
- Provide routine maintenance flower beds to keep weeds from competing with the plant nutrients, minerals, space, and aesthetics.
- Avoid using unhealthy plants. Use only healthy plants and shrubs from the same plant group to fill in gaps between existing shrubs to complement other similar plants. This will also change the focal point in that area.
- Flowers enjoy good drainage. If your soil is more clay in texture or inclined to be water-logged, then incorporate plenty of horticultural potting mix or sand in the planting compost area. In some cases, it may be a good idea not to plant too deep in the soil but have a good cover of mulch to provide moisture.
- If the tree or shrub is not well suited to its planting site or location, it will perform poorly and will be more susceptible to disease and insect infestations or die.
- Plant trees in holes that are wider, not deep. Holes should be at least two to three times wider than the tree root system.

Check the label for growing requirements on all trees, flowers, and shrubs to ensure proper light, soil moisture, and hardiness zone.

## Get Ready for Spring Plantings – Part II

Rudy Pacumbaba

Original Article

<https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/lawn-garden-urban/get-ready-for-spring-plantings/>



Spring is the perfect time to plan your garden and landscape.

In Northern Alabama, this period begins in January and continues to the first week of April. As a person's location shifts to the southern part of the state, the period is earlier by two to three weeks.

Northern Alabama is considered a transition zone and usually experiences a late frost that may come as late as the first week of April. For this reason, Extension professionals always caution against planting tender plants before the late frost. However, as more consistent warmer weather approaches here is a checklist of things you can do to make seasonal planting a success.

## Soil Test

If you haven't conducted a soil test in two to three years, consider doing so. Contact your local county Extension office for details, instructions, and free tests kits.

## Lawn Care

Clear leaves and debris that may have accumulated over the fall and winter months. Use the debris as a foundation for a compost pile.

The application of a lawn preemergent will greatly reduce weed problems during the growing season. Don't waste an application of any fertilizer on your lawn until temperatures start warming up and green growth is observed.

Survey and address any troubled or damaged areas of grass. Consider reseeding or resodding and prepare the area accordingly.

## Trees and Shrubs

- Prune dead, diseased, or damaged branches.
- Remove crossing branches and structurally weak branches (narrow crotch angles).
- Remove any suckers and water sprouts.
- Cut back branches that are encroaching on walkways.
- If it blooms before May 1, prune after flowering but no later than early July for blooms on 'old' wood.
- If it blooms after May 1, prune before new growth begins in the spring (blooms on 'new' wood).
- Trim overgrown evergreens back to a branch whose direction you wish to encourage.
- Trim shrubs to maintain preferred size.
- Replenish and redistribute mulch around trees and shrubs. Do not mound mulch directly around the base of trees.

## Perennials & Ornamental Grasses

- Divide and replant any perennials that show slow or stunted growth.
- When replanting perennials inspect for healthy roots and crowns. Place them in a hole at least two times larger than the plant root ball. Backfill with native soil. Soil can be amended with organic material and slow-release fertilizer

- Clear any extra mulch and debris covering perennials to allow for increased exposure to sunlight and increasing temperatures.
- Cut back ornamental grasses to six to twelve inches from the ground.

## Beds & Border

- Clear out any remaining plant debris in the beds.
- Remove old mulch and inspect the fabric barrier. If you have not used a weed barrier or an irrigation system under the mulch, now is the time to install a fabric weed barrier or landscape fabric and irrigation lines and emitters. This will help deter weeds and help with moisture management.
- Inspect and repair any hardscape borders and redefine bed edges if necessary.
- Inspect and replace any irrigation lines and emitters.
- Replace old mulch. At least three inches in depth is recommended to be effective for weed and moisture management.
- Prepare annual beds, revitalize area and soil by breaking up large clods, adding additional organic material and slow-release fertilizer, and tilling to a depth of six to eight inches.

## Garden Beds

- Clear out any plant debris from fall/winter crops. Use the disease-free debris to replenish your compost pile.
- If used, remove, and inspect the plastic culture barrier. Replace if necessary, usually every two to three years.
- Inspect and replace drip lines, irrigation lines, and emitters.
- Inspect and repair raised bed structures and trellises.
- Plan garden layout to determine if the irrigation system requires redistribution.
- Replenish raised bed garden soil, preferably every two years. This can be done by adding additional organic amendments with new garden soil.
- In-ground garden soils, amend based upon soil test recommendations. Conduct a soil test every two to three years.

## Composting

- Use the disease-free debris and leaves from beds, and gardens to replenish your compost pile. Do not use grass clippings from treated lawns. Instead, consider using a mulching lawnmower to replenish your lawn during the growing season.
- Try and maintain an internal pile temperature of 135-145° F. This will ensure beneficial microbes will thrive and decompose the composted materials.
- Turning the compost pile every two to three days will also help with the decomposition process.

# Smell the Roses Next Spring by Planting This Fall and Winter

Lexie Hare

Original Article

<https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/lawn-garden/smell-the-roses-next-spring-by-planting-this-fall-and-winter/>



AUBURN UNIVERSITY, Ala. — Roses often carry a reputation for being difficult or high maintenance. However, with proper planning and ongoing maintenance, they can thrive.

Bethany O’Rear, a home horticulture agent with Alabama Extension at Auburn University, said there are simple care tips that can keep rose gardens blooming beautifully. The first step is to take advantage of favorable conditions and plant new rose bushes now.

“While many trees and shrubs can be planted throughout the year, mid-November to mid-February is the ideal planting time,” O’Rear said. “This allows them to establish a good root system before they start pushing out new growth in spring. Typically, we also get more rainfall during this time of year, so that creates a perfect scenario for establishment.”

## Purchasing and Planting Roses

Before purchasing roses to plant, O'Rear stresses the importance of buying roses from a reputable source. This can include national chains, local garden centers and online retailers. She also suggests using fall as a time to research varieties and create a planting plan.

“With all of the options available at your local plant supplier, it is easy to become overwhelmed,” she said. “Before loading up your shopping cart, you can research varieties online to know more about what you may want. Also, take your time at the garden center and talk with a reliable expert.”



Additionally, fall is a good time to soil test to ensure soil pH is favorable for roses.

“If you’re planting in a new area or you haven’t soil tested in a while, I’d recommend it,” O'Rear said. “Many shrubs, including roses, typically do best in soils with pH between 6.0 and 6.5.”

Roses prefer direct sunlight. When selecting a planting site, ensure that the location receives about six hours of sunlight daily. Planting in areas with too much shade can lead to weak stems, reduced blooming and overall poor performance.

## Mulch and Watering

After planting, mulch the area around the roses. O'Rear said the mulch works as an insulator.

“In winter, mulch keeps the ground warmer, and in summer, it keeps the ground cooler,” O'Rear said. “Don’t mulch directly at the base of the plant, because that mimics being planted too deep. The goal is to cover the root system. Mulch depth should be about 2 inches but no more than 3 inches.”

Additional benefits of mulch include controlling weed growth, retaining soil moisture and maintaining fertility. Common mulch options include pine straw and pine bark.

A consistent water supply is also needed to keep roses healthy. The plants require at least 1 inch of water per week, either from rainfall or morning watering. Newly planted roses will need additional watering as they establish roots. When watering, avoid wetting the foliage because that increases the risk of disease. Instead, focus the water directly at the base of the plant. Aim to soak the soil to a depth of 8 to 10 inches to ensure the roots receive adequate moisture.

## Additional Rose Care

In spring and summer, fertilizing will help roses. Depending on variety, roses may also benefit from preventative treatments to control pests and disease.

Roses are heavy feeders and require a steady supply of nutrients to thrive. Nitrogen and potassium are the nutrients most commonly lacking in soils where roses are grown. O'Rear suggested referring to the soil test to determine whether the soil needs improvement from specific fertilizers.

Remember to incorporate organic matter into the soil. Materials like decayed leaves or peat moss help improve soil structure and maintain essential nutrients, giving roses a strong foundation for healthy growth.

It is also important to stay vigilant for pests and diseases that can harm roses. Common pests include nematodes, aphids, caterpillars, spider mites and thrips. Common diseases are black spot, crown gall, powdery mildew, rose rosette disease, stem canker and cane blight.

“If your rose varieties are susceptible to fungal disease, it is necessary to start spraying on a preventative schedule when the weather starts warming up, around March,” O'Rear said. “That schedule will vary based on the active ingredient as well as the formulation of the chosen fungicide.”

## More Information

Discover more about growing beautiful roses by reading the Extension publication, “[Growing Roses](#),” available at [www.aces.edu](http://www.aces.edu)



# Upcoming Birthdays

## JANUARY

Rita Nichols 01/06  
Deborah Brooks 01/07  
Glenn Huovinen 01/09  
Marjorie Hannah 01/26  
Kim Wood 01/31



## FEBRUARY

Lisa Carrick 02/02  
Cheryl Ayala Winter 02/08  
Janice Jackson 02/11  
Samantha Bowen 02/25  
Gladys Elliott 02/28

## MARCH

Amy Richardson 03/07  
Darlene Blumentritt 03/13  
Pam Olson 03/15  
Billie Willis 03/16  
Rose McCauley 03/27



Please let us know if we missed your birthday 😞

# Fall into Spring by Planting Bulbs

Jayne Luetzow

Original Article

<https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/lawn-garden/fall-into-spring-by-planting-bulbs/>



Gardeners are always planning for the next growing season. With the arrival of colder temperatures and shorter days, it can be hard to think about the warmer months of spring. But take heart fellow gardeners—a crisp fall day in November is the perfect time to get out in the garden. Between November and early December is an excellent time to plant and prepare your garden for spring bulbs.

## What are bulbs?

Bulbs are a rounded underground storage organ present in some plants, notably those of the lily family. Bulbs consist of a short stem surrounded by fleshy scale leaves or leaf bases, lying dormant over winter. The term bulb can refer to true bulbs, tubers, tuberous roots, corms, or rhizomes.

When planting take care to distinguish between the three because planting depth, positioning, and growth habit vary.

### **How should you plant bulbs?**

Bulbs prefer growing in acidic, nutrient-rich and well-draining soils with full to partial sun. Wet, soggy soils can cause bulbs to rot. Therefore, it is recommended to till in organic matter such as compost, blood/bone meal, or worm castings to heavy clay soils. Even if your garden has a well-draining sandy soil, adding additional organic material will increase the soil's ability to hold water and nutrients.

When planting bulbs, a good rule of thumb is to plant in a hole three times as deep as the size of the bulb. Plant the bulb with the narrow end, or nose, pointing up. If you are unsure of which is the top or bottom, plant the bulb on its side and it will move itself in the right direction once the bulb starts to grow in the spring. Cover planted bulbs with 2 to 3 inches of backfill soil. Then, add a mulch. Adding a pine bark mulch will help reduce soil compaction, regulate soil temperature, limit moisture loss, and prevent weeds. A good watering at planting will help settle the soil. It will also be conducive for improved root development.

### **Buying and Storing Bulbs**

When purchasing bulbs feel for firmness and don't remove the papery skin surrounding the bulb. Bulbs with cuts or bruises can be a sign of damage. Soft bulbs tend to indicate rot. The larger the bulb, the larger the plant. Smaller bulbs can still be purchased but may take longer to bloom and mature. If you have bulbs from a previous season, be sure to cure them prior to planting by brushing off any soil and placing in a dry, cool, dark environment away from fruits and vegetables. Bulbs can be stored several weeks prior to planting.

## Prattvillage Garden

### Lori Terrell, Co-Chair



A highlight of fourth quarter at Prattvillage Garden (PVG) was the educational visit of the interns at the completion of their eleven-week classroom training. Several hardworking interns became weekly volunteers with our Crew. We also had delightful visitors who spent extra time learning about the garden. We do share plants with visitors and interns as we tidy the beds.

We planted some nice oakleaf hydrangeas behind the recently constructed stone pathway in our largest bed. They were air layered from shrubs at PVG and the Governor's Mansion. They displayed brilliant Fall colors, and we anticipate lush growth in Spring.

The remaining potted oakleaf hydrangeas were donated to our ACMGA Fall Plant Sale along with crinum, ginger lilies, daylilies, blue salvia, phlox, passion vines, turmeric, and our popular Ryan's Pink chrysanthemums. The volunteers also donated propagated plants from their home gardens. These donated plants contributed to a successful event and supported all ACMGA's ongoing projects.

PVG's Crew worked diligently through multiple deep freezes to maintain and enhance the garden's beauty. Despite the challenging weather, we cleaned and cut back perennials in the garden to ensure its beauty for visitors and the multiple scheduled events in the garden.

We displayed our ACMGA Members' Christmas Tree, adorned with wood-burned ornaments bearing ACMGA members' names, for the fourth consecutive year. We acknowledge that newest members' ornaments were not ready in time for this season. We will ensure those ornaments will be included next year.

The PVG volunteers gathered greenery and designed wreaths and window swags for the chapel and garden entrance. The fresh juniper berries attracted a mischievous mockingbird. We hope he does not destroy our decorations!

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and Happy Gardening!

Lori



Jane McCarthy instructs interns on propagating 'red zinger'.



Sheila Pearson & Kelly LaFreniere.



Sheila Pearson instructs four sisters visiting from 4 states (AL, FL, NC, & TX) on uses of medicinal herbs.



Coffee County MG Fran (center) with Sheila Pearson and Dian Owens.  
(This photo was taken by one of Fran's sisters.)



Intern Katherine Reed and MGs Lori Terrell and Linda Hicks potting salvia for the Fall plant sale.



MGs Linda Blackwell, Lori Terrell, Linda Hicks, Jane McCarthy, Sheila Pearson, Interns Tim Adams, Katherine Reed, and Cheyenne Taylor potting turmeric plants for ACMGA's Fall Plant Sale.



PVG is decorated with natural materials gathered and designed by our Crew.



This ACMGA Members' Tree has honored its members in Prattville Garden each December since 2022. (Creation of Jane McCarthy.)



Prattville Garden Chapel – Christmas 2025



Prattville Garden Chapel interior.

(All but one photo taken by PVG Co-Chair Dian Owens)



## Editors Corner

John Carrick



Wishing everyone a Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and a Blessed 2026.



Wiki Commons

[File:Oregon Junco in Kelowna, BC.jpg - Wikimedia Commons](#)

Please notify the web site team of any suggestions or issues at :

**[web@autaugamastergardeners.org](mailto:web@autaugamastergardeners.org)**

Finally, if you have any articles, pictures, etc., to be included in the Dirty Digs newsletter, please email them to: **[dd@autaugamastergardeners.com](mailto:dd@autaugamastergardeners.com)**

Newsletter feedback and suggestions are always welcome.

May God continue to Bless each and every one of you.

Johnny

*Merry Christmas  
and a  
Happy New Year*



Picture: Dian Owens

## Autauga County Master Gardeners Association

Autauga County Extension Office

2226 AL-14 W, Suite E  
Autaugaville, AL 36003

Phone: 334-361-7273



### *Autauga County Master Gardener Volunteers are...*

**Motivated** – to share their knowledge and expertise.

**Accessible** – to other Master Gardeners, horticulture and Extension professionals, and the public.

**Service-oriented** – to enhance their communities and the environment.

**Trained** – by Cooperative Extension in current horticultural practices.

**Excited** – about meeting other people who enjoy gardening.

**Research ambassadors** – who provide cutting-edge horticultural information to consumers.

**Next Issue March 31st**  
Please submit articles, no later than March 15

Prattville Garden  
139 1st Street, Prattville, AL 36067

Images courtesy of Wikimedia Commons  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/>

You can reserve the garden for an event—contact Party in the District

Honor Bricks:  
<https://donationbricks.com/acmga>



AMGA Event Page:  
<https://mg.aces.edu/autauga/events-calendar>

