

Garden Dirt

December 2024

AAMGA Monthly Newsletter

Hello Gardeners,

I hope your Thanksgiving was a wonderful experience and you were surrounded by Family and Friends. In our last meeting (November) Victoria Clendenening gave a great presentation on "Winterizing your Garden". It was quite impressive and full of insights and useful knowledge for any gardener.

With Thanksgiving behind us, time to focus on the rest of the holiday season. Remember, being a Gardener is about peace and the joy the earth gives you. Thank you for all you do.

The AAMGA Christmas party is scheduled for Dec 17th at the Oconee State Bank, 6pm. Please RSVP to marthablokzyl@gmail.com so the Hospitality Committee knows how many Gardeners are attending. Pre-party libations at 5:30pm. The white elephant gift limit is \$25.

Have a safe and joyous Christmas as well as a bright New Year.

Jim Weck, MGEV - AAMGA President



ATHENS AREA MASTER GARDENERS

Please refer to the information in the President's message regarding the upcoming December Christmas Party.

AAMGA Meeting Minutes

November 19, 2024

Athens-Clarke County Agricultural Extension Office

The meeting opened at 6:00 p.m. with a delicious potluck dinner followed by a wonderful presentation titled “Winterizing Your Garden” by Victoria Clendenning, Athens-Clarke County Agriculture and Natural Resource Educator. There were 31 people in attendance.

President Jim Weck opened the business portion of the meeting with requests for approval of the Business Meeting notes. A motion was made by Frank Johnson and was seconded by Cheryl Johnson. The motion passed unanimously. Frank Johnson also made a motion for approval of the Treasurer’s Report. Andrea Woodall seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Committee Reports as follows:

J.J. Harris After-School Garden Club: Debora Ondracek reported that the club continues to thrive, with an average attendance of 25 students. Projects last month included bean dissection, crayon art projects with leaf rubbings, celery dissection, and pinecone turkey table decorations. Weeding, harvesting and watering the garden also continued. Turnips and kale were harvested and taken home by our gardeners with recipes for trying at home.

Oconee Plant-A-Row: Gary Wade reported that our last workday was rained out. Our next workday will be December 3, 2024. 3004 lbs. have been harvested this year to date.

Jim Weck led a discussion on the need for continued leadership for OPAR with the resignation of the current team. Special thanks were given to Gary Wade, Bob Quinn, and Dave Giordano for their wonderful leadership in recent years. We will continue to rethink our options as we transition resources into the new garden at Clarke Middle School.

Clarke Middle School Garden: Gary Wade, Merry Anderson, and Pam Bracken met with the agricultural teacher to discuss plans for developing the garden space. Currently it is completely fenced with access to water and use of the greenhouse for storage space. The agricultural teacher is excited to collaborate with us. More information will be forthcoming as we develop plans for building raised beds and irrigation installation.

Demonstration Garden: John Aitkens and Kristi Seago both reported that they are now battling armadillos in the garden. They have sprayed a mixture of castor oil and liquid soap to deter them. This seems to be “working like a charm”. Reseeding will be held off until the problem is “definitely taken care of”. On Saturday, the first seeds for spring flowers were spread. The entire back will be planted in clover.

Pollinator Garden: Frank and Cheryl Johnson announced another workday on December 11th. We will meet at 1:30 p.m. to give the workday time to warm up. The Pollinator Garden is located behind the Loran Smith Center for Cancer Support, 240 Talmadge Drive, Athens, GA. The garden faces Sylvan Road.

Additional Business:

The next meeting will be our annual Christmas Party at Oconee State Bank, 35 North Main Street, Watkinsville, GA 30677 on December 17th. Pre-party libations begin at 5:30 p.m. with dinner to follow at 6:00 p.m. Please RSVP to Martha Blokzyl marthablokzyl@gmail.com or Donna Cates at dcates02@gmail.com. We will have our white elephant exchange again this year. Gift limit is \$25.00. Merry Anderson also asked that we bring a contribution for the Athens Area Food Bank. Snack items such as cereals, snack crackers, chips, and candy are the most needed donations at this time.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting, was seconded and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debora Ondracek, Secretary

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TREASURER'S REPORT

November 2024

Total Beginning

Bank Balances **\$23,226.87**

Deposits:

Dues 10.00

Donation 10.00

Honoraria 90.00

Interest 0.10

Total Deposits **110.10**

Expenses:

Pollinator Garden 52.81

Hospitality 138.14

Total Expenses **\$ 190.95**

Total Ending

Bank Balances **\$23,146.02**

Ending Balance

Checking Acct \$ 3,637.68

Ending Balance CD \$ 10,000.00

Ending Balance

Savings Acct \$ 9,508.34

\$23,146.02

Respectfully Submitted by: -

Sky Campbell, Treasurer

Any questions, contact me at

agrimony@bellsouth.net



December Gardening Chores

Lawns: Take some time to admire all the hard work you did all year long.

Trees/Shrubs: Enjoy what color is left in the leaves!

Annuals/Perennials: Bake some cookies and/or have some eggnog!

Fruits, Veggies and Herbs: Enjoy the “fruits” of your labors!

General: Go look at some Christmas lights in your neighborhood (if that’s still a thing...) Sing some carols, enjoy this beautiful season and prop your feet up! You deserve it!

Extension Office Demonstration & Teaching Garden

The Ornamentals

We have been waiting to see a reduction of armadillo activity before seeding the Garden for spring wildflowers. Now we have freezing weather to work around! This is the 3rd year in a row that early December has had hard freezing weather. Seeds planted in late Novembers past have started sprouting, thanks to Georgia's fluctuating temps. The 2nd week of December sounds like a good start date for seeding spring wildflowers to me.

Late November had several outstanding plants blooming; Belinda Rose, Climbing Pinkie with faces in the sun, Dutchman's pipevines blooming in shady corners. I was surprised at the size of the manettia cordifolia Brazilian firecracker vine plant. I guess our summer was Brazilian!!

The Veggie Garden

This weekend's freeze finally did in our tomato plants. They just wouldn't quit! Here Pete picks the last of them to ripen at home. We're seeding these former tomato beds with Collards, which love the cold weather.

The freeze also means it's time to pick cotton and harvest our peanuts in our "Top Georgia Crops" area where we also feature soybeans and a pine tree representing forest products.

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PROTECTING YOURSELF

Drug-Resistant Fungus Found in Garden Items

► That pile of soil you bought at the home improvement store may contain more than just dirt, according to new research from the University of Georgia.

A UGA study found high levels of multidrug-resistant fungi in commercially available compost, soil, and flower bulbs.

Aspergillus fumigatus is a widespread fungus that thrives in soil. But it also poses a serious risk to human health if inhaled, particularly for people with compromised immune systems.

The researchers sampled products, including compost, soil, flower bulbs, and a variety of food products sold at big box retail stores from 2019 through 2021.

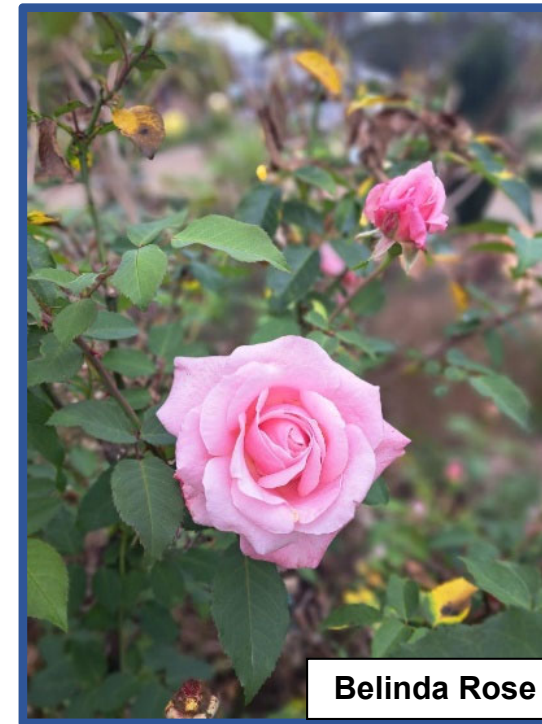
The study found more than 500 strains of *Aspergillus fumigatus* in the products, which included an assortment of different brands. Of the 525 samples, most of the drug-resistant strains of fungi were found in soil, compost made from manure, and flower bulbs, including daffodils, dahlias, gladioli, and tulips.

The researchers highly recommend individuals with compromised immune systems take precautions when gardening and discuss the potential risks with their physicians. Devoted gardeners can also wear N-95 masks to provide some protection.

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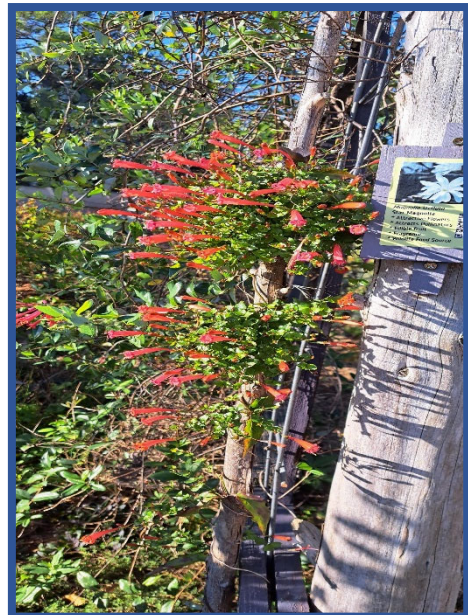
Demonstration & Teaching Garden
At the Extension Office



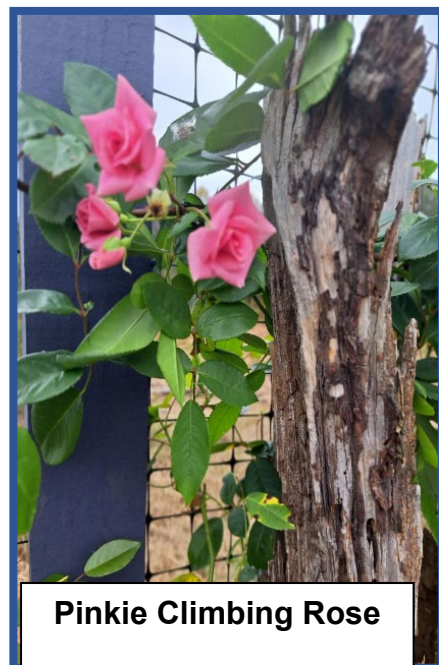
Belinda Rose



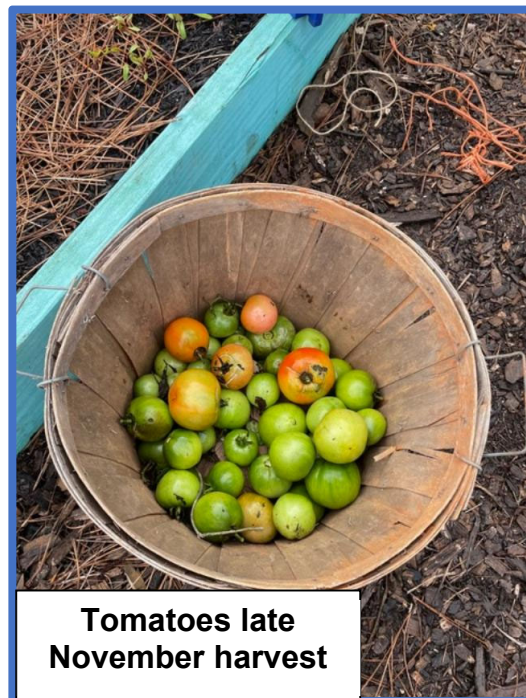
Dutchman's Pipevine



Manettia cordifolia Brazilian
Firecracker Vine



Pinkie Climbing Rose



Tomatoes late
November harvest



Pete and his tomatoes



Peanuts



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Update on the Oconee *Plant-a-Row for the Hungry* Garden at Farm 441

Gary Wade, Dave Giordano and Bob Quinn, Project Coordinators

Our last workday for the year at Farm 441 will be on December 3. We will harvest the remaining fall crops (turnips, lettuce, collards and spinach), clean up the beds, pull up stakes, take down the sign, turn off the drip irrigation system, remove the timer, filter and pressure regulator from system and put them in the storage shed for winter.

A summary report on the 2024 garden will be published in the January AAMGA newsletter.

Special thanks to all the faithful Master Gardener volunteers who prepared, planted and tended the garden through the heat and humidity of summer and the bone-chilling cold of late fall. Without their dedication and support our garden would not be possible.

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OPAR Garden



Garden Debris filled up
Five Wire Bins!



Okra Laid out and Ready for Compost



Admiring the Clean and Organized Shed.
Left to Right: Bob Quinn, Deb Place, Deb Ondracek, Merry Anderson, Debbie Tuten,
Phyllis Rother, Cathy Roth



Cleaning out the
Storage Shed

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Interesting Plants and Some Backstory



POINSETTIA (or the Mexican Flame Flower)

Happy Holidays to you all! And, in honor of this beautiful season, I thought it fitting to talk about the Poinsettia. Did you know that December 12th is National Poinsettia Day??

This plant symbolizes many different things across many cultures. The ancient Aztecs considered it to represent purity. Currently, the more modern connotations represent good cheer and success. It's native to Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador and was originally called the Mexican Flame Flower or Painted Flower plant. (In some locations, you can find it named as such). The US botanist, Joel Roberts Poinsett was the first Minister to Mexico and while down there, he noticed them blooming all over. He sent some back to the US in 1826 where he was able to later successfully cultivate them in his South Carolina greenhouse.

As mentioned above, these plants are native to Mexico, where the Aztecs and Mayans used the plants for many medicinal reasons. The Aztecs used the sap to remove hair and to aid in reducing bleeding. The Mayans boiled the small yellow flowers and red bracts to form a decoction to give to post-partum women to staunch bleeding.

There are many varieties of poinsettia – red, white, pink, and varying degrees of marbled. Given where they originate from, you should protect them from cold. (If you're purchasing one from a store that has kept them outdoors, just remember that fact. They might look nice at the store now...) They prefer a more humid climate and if your home is dry from the heat, you might want to mist them every few days or so. They prefer bright, indirect light so if you are thinking about brightening up a dark corner, they may not flourish as nicely as you'd want.

A quick note about your fur babies: Poinsettias aren't harmful to pets unless the leaves and bracts are eaten in large quantities. Some kitties might like to chew on the leaves. The sap can irritate the mouth so it might be best to keep the plant out of reach!

Other holiday plants – Mistletoe is VERY toxic to pets and immediate veterinary attention is necessary if consumed by a pet.

Holly berries and leaves can be a problem to pets causing upset tummies, vomiting, and diarrhea.

Christmas Cactus is not toxic to pets (except if eaten in large quantities).

Amaryllis can cause increased salivation, gastrointestinal abnormalities (vomiting, diarrhea, decreased appetite, abdominal pain), lethargy, and tremors in both cats and dogs.

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Volunteer Opportunities at The State Botanical Garden of Georgia

OK...so it's not a volunteer activity for getting MG hours.....
BUT think of how many new folks you can talk to about becoming a MG!

We also have another incentive!

Volunteers who cover 4 of the late shifts (7:30p-10:30p) will have their choice of 2 tickets to Disco Nights in Jan or 1 ticket to attend a FRIENDS First Friday (between February & September 2025)

- *Photo stops
- *S'mores stations
- *Wayfinding

Below is the link for the Winter Wonderlights volunteer page!

<https://www.givepulse.com/group/1000666-Winter-WonderLights>

