



Over The Garden Gate

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Our Seed Lady Experiments with Vegetables

By Pat Bishop



Anita Sparks presents a pumpkin grown in the lasagna garden.

After you spend a few hours talking about gardens with Anita Sparks, you will have a new appreciation of vegetables and their growing conditions.

Anita started gardening after she retired, and she has spent these years researching, developing, propagating, and harvesting a variety of vegetables and perennials. She says that her experiments are “not for show; they are there for production. This isn’t Pinterest.”

As a child, she enjoyed gardening with her grandparents. She tried flower gardening in her thirties, admitted that she “failed at that,” and left gardening in her adult years. That is, until she retired in 2019 as an IT trainer of technological concepts and “needed something to do.” That’s when she returned to the soil.

Fencing off a square area in the corner of her backyard, she began experi-

menting with three types of vegetable growing: lasagna, inground, and raised beds.

The lasagna garden started as “crappy soil” that was compacted, hard dirt of a former alpaca farm on the property. She began with the cardboard trick, laying the cardboard directly over the poor soil, watering it in, layering it with mulch, and waiting six months or longer for the good soil to develop. Here, she grows broccoli, cabbage, onions, squash and flowering annuals for pollination. Separate rows of sweet and hot peppers produce the sources for her candied peppers. Italian basil adds a fresh fragrance to the whole garden. From these vegetables, in addition to enjoying them as food, she harvests the seeds for the following year’s crop. Starting the seeds in a grow room of her basement, she sells her vegetable starts in the spring to neighbors and Facebook customers.

Several varieties of tomatoes such as Amish, Roma, Marzano, Opaka, Rutgers pop up along the way. Not to be daunted by these indeterminate giants, Anita is using a new type of support called the “Florida weave.” With this method, she builds a wall of twine in front and in back of the plants as they grow.



The Florida weave supports luscious tomatoes in Anita’s garden.

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Hall County Master Gardeners Initiate Turning Leaf Book Club by Karin Hicks

Members of Turning Leaf Book Club held their first meeting in June with the discussion of *Founding Gardeners* by Andrea Wulf. The group plans to meet again September 7, 11:30 am., at the Linwood Nature Center to discuss *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. The public is also invited to attend. Bring your own lunch and a friend to enjoy the discussion.

Future reads include *A Walk in the Woods*, Bill Bryson (October 5); *The Hidden Life of Trees*, Peter Wohlleben (November 2); and *The Over Story*, Richard Powers (January 4).



Attending the first Turning Leaf meeting are Karin Hicks, Kathy Johnson, Nedra Byers, Margaret Rasmussen, Kayla Brown, Brenda Letteer, Julie Auten, Mary Griffin, Dotty Gabrels, Suzanne Zimmerman, Natalie Watts, and Ann Fair.

SEED LADY

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Another experiment for this year's garden is the "basket in the ground." She buried a small basket within the row of vegetables and fills it with food scraps. In a few weeks, she discovered earthworms enjoying their dinner and knew that she had created an outlet for vermicomposting, producing organic nutrients for soil amendment. Nearby, bush beans thrive in this newly discovered process.

Martha Washington asparagus, Egyptian walking onion, and echinacea sprout from the inground bed. Anita explains that asparagus takes up to three years for its first harvest: For its first year, let it grow; the second year, trim it back by one-third; the third year, get ready to harvest. I asked her why the onion is referred to as a "walking onion." She gave a simple explanation: "As the stalks get heavy, they will fall over, root, and create new bulbs. If you let them, they will walk all over your garden."

The third experiment is the raised bed. Built up with timbers and filled with enhanced garden soil, the beds burst with more vegetables. Anita explains that the 42-day tomato grows

on compact plants and produces small, sweet tomatoes, but are short-lived. Not to be outdone, the sweet 100 cherry tomatoes, smaller than the 42-day tomato, produces drooping stems of tiny, super-sweet goodness.

A most amazing fourth experiment is the hügelkultur, German for "mound bed." Here, she has formed dirt mounds atop recycled mulch and logs from fallen trees. This method is highly effective in the hot Georgia summers, as it holds moisture and releases nutrients to the planted seedlings. From these mounds, Anita has planted winter wheat from which she has made bread. She has also found that sweet potatoes and white potatoes thrive in this medium.

For one who only has begun serious gardening in the last three years, Anita has become known as the "seed lady here in Hall County. She actively volunteers with Hall County Extension Office planning the seed sharing project and conducts in-person classes on vegetable growing. The next time you have an opportunity to attend one of her vegetable classes, sign up quickly. You won't regret walking away with a vegetable basket of information.



Sun flowers, echinaceas, and zinnias provide pollination for Anita's vegetable gardens.

For more information, visit these websites:

FLORIDA WEAVE:

extension.uga.edu › publications › detail › title=Staking and Pruning Toma...

KUGELKULTURE:

extension.uga.edu › master-gardeners › newsletters › Apr_MayNews19

Now's the Time to Plant Your Fall Containers

By Laura Keathley

Outdoor container gardening has many advantages. You can place them wherever you want: on your open or covered patio, on the front steps, by your garage or in your garden.

Planning is important. You need to choose the size of the pot and make sure there is a drainage hole. You can cover the drainage hole with a coffee filter or landscape fabric to keep the soil from washing out of the pot. Drainage matters!

If the pot is lightweight, you can add gravel to weigh it down so that it will not tip over from the wind. If you have a large pot that you may want to later move, you can fill the lower one-third of the pot with empty plastic flower containers or empty plastic water bottles. Then fill it two-thirds full of potting mix for flowers. You may buy potting mix that already has moisture control and slow-release fertilizer, or you can add water-absorbing crystals and fertilizer.

The amount of sunlight the pot gets will help you determine which plants to use. Besides the same water and fertilizer needs, similar light requirements are important to consider. Since the sun is not as strong in the fall, you may be able to plant flowers that typically need more shade into a spot with filtered sun.

Now that we are in the middle of summer, it's time to plan your fall containers, and fall containers can be anything, even a pumpkin! When you think of fall, you think of color



A black diamond crape myrtle thrills this fall container.

changes. Colors of red, yellow, orange and brown. But we are not limited to these! And while you may be changing your flowers in your garden, it's also time to change the flowers in your containers. Now it's time to plant!

A popular way to choose plants is to choose thrillers, fillers and spillers. For thrillers, you can place a taller plant in the center of a pot or the back of a pot if it's up against a wall. Fillers will fill in the diameter of the pot, and spillers will drape over the pot. Some fall thrillers include ornamental grass, corn husk, cordyline, ornamental millet. If you want a tree, a black diamond crape myrtle adds visual interest year around; branches from trees (natural or painted) and branches with seed pods also add interest and texture. Fall fillers offer an array of color: mum, marigold, heuchera, oxalis triangularis, dusty miller, lamb's ear, silver sage, ornamental cabbage and kale, pansy, viola, snapdragon, cole-

us, small fern, cyclamen, ornamental pepper, asters and celosia. Fall spillers such as sweet potato vine, creeping Jenny, petunia, calibrachoa, ivy, verbena, or dead nettle will complete your picture.

Water the plants and loosen the roots before putting them into the pot. Add additional potting mix on the top two inches below the rim, water gently until the water runs out of the drainage hole, and repeat when it feels dry on top. Add fertilizer as directed on the label. Remember, you can't set it and forget it! You can add pumpkins, gourds or lotus seed pods to maximize your fall look.

Once the temperatures drop at night, it will be time to plant your winter container. Your plants will let you know. Yes, you can keep your containers full and beautiful year around in Northern Georgia.

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Pat Bishop, Editor

Garden for the Marvels of the Night

By Karin Hicks

Have you ever considered plants specifically for moths when planning your garden? Butterflies receive a lot of attention in the news and across social media platforms and have brought the subject of pollinator decline to the forefront; however, butterflies only count for a small percentage of the Lepidoptera family; 96% are moths.

Moths are hugely important in the garden. Not only are they critical pollinators, but also they are important in a balanced ecosystem, providing food for lots of birds and mammals in the food chain.

Since most moths are nocturnal, they are rarely abundant unless we see them by artificial light or conspicuously resting during daylight hours. Luna moths are probably the most endearing moths; I suspect since they are so large and look very much like a butterfly. They are also strongly attracted to UV wavelengths and, therefore, are often seen at house and street lights.

Their silk moth family name, Saturniidae, is based on the eyespots that contain concentric rings reminiscent of the planet Saturn. Members of this family are large and some of the showiest moths around with striking colors and shapes. Moths included in the group are the Cecropia, Polyphemus, Prometheus, Luna, Io and Imperial moths.

The regal moth (*Citheronia regalis*) is another very large moth with a wingspan of 5.5 to 5.9 cm, and the

caterpillar (larvae stage) is equally as large, growing to almost 14 cm. Their orange and gray strip pattern on the wings is stunning. It hosts on a variety of trees, including walnut, hickory, pecan, persimmon, sweetgum, and sumac. All of the trees grow easily in our area, and, therefore, these moths should be abundant.



The regal moth displays its stunning orange and gray strips on its wings.

Another intriguing moth is the imperial moth (*Eacles imperialis*). This moth has just one brood a year and hosts on several conifer and deciduous trees, including pine, oak, box-elder, maple, sweetgum, honey locust, red cedar, sycamore, basswood, bald cypress, and sassafras. Adults emerge before sunrise and mate after midnight the following day. The female then lays her eggs at dusk, and the caterpillars hatch in about two weeks. Pupation takes place underground over winter.



The rosy maple moth is the smallest of the silkworm moths.

The forest dwelling rosy maple moth (*Dryocampa rubicunda*) is one of the smallest of the silkworm moths. The caterpillar, often called green-striped maple worm, eats the foliage of maple and oak trees. Young caterpillars feed in groups and then become solitary as they mature. They are fierce feeders in their larval stage and sometimes defoliate trees. As adults, however, they do not eat at all, relying on their fat storage to survive. Three generations are produced in the South, and the last generation will overwinter in its pupa stage underground, emerging the following spring.



The imperial moth has just one brood a year and hosts on a number of local trees.

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MOTHS

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With its metallic accents, the giant leopard moth is among the most beautiful of moths.

The unmistakable giant leopard moth (*Hypercompe scribonia*) is another example of the gorgeousness of moths. Just look at those metallic accents.

Moths in their adult form are essential pollinators. They are the night shift, if you will, taking over pollination services from butterflies that fly during daylight hours. It is easy to create a habitat that supports moths, as the concept is the same for creating a butterfly habitat. Here are a few essential elements to keep in mind:

Plant a variety of trees.

Most moths in their adult form need nectar for energy. Certain blooms have nectar that is more available, so by choosing these plants for your garden, you create a better feeding station for moths. Native plants are more nectar rich than foreign orna-

mentals. In general, moths are attracted to cluster blooms and flat, open flowers that provide for easy landing, preferably to white or dull colors. Note that double blooms may be pretty for the gardener, but they have little-to-no nectar availability for pollinators. Blooms that service moths typically open in late afternoon to early evening specifically for these nocturnal flyers and are often highly fragrant.

Some plants are solely dependent on moths for pollination. For example, the yucca moth is the sole pollinator of the yucca plant. It is a good idea to have blooms available from early spring through late fall. *Datura*, four o'clock, flowering tobacco, honeysuckle, evening primrose, gentian, monarda, salvia, and foxglove are a few examples.

Provide host plants.

For months that do not feed as adults, it is critical to provide larval host plants. These plants provide the necessary food for the caterpillars. Some species will forage on a wide variety of plants while others are restricted to a few plants and some only to one specific plant. Many trees such as oak, maple, hickory, sweetgum, cherry, pine, sassafras, persimmon, and willow are hosts for moths. Moths in their larvae form can be as spectacular as adults.

Stop being so tidy!

As a rule, you cannot keep an immaculate garden and expect to support wildlife. Keeping some areas of your land 'wild' will help protect these insects. Moths in the adult and larval stage need leaf litter, old stems, logs and plant debris to hide predators. Wait until spring to cut back your expired plants. Many moths overwinter in the ground in their pupa stage and need undisturbed places to do so.

Dare to go organic.

Herbicides and pesticides are harmful to moths in all stages. Spraying for mosquitoes often kills many other pollinators. Organic gardening is beneficial to all wildlife, and eliminating chemicals will increase the number of beneficial insects in your garden.

National Moth Week is June 23—30 and is dedicated to the awareness of this magnificent member of the Lepidoptera family. This summer, challenge your preconceptions about moths and get to know these marvelous insects. You may even be inspired to create a welcoming habitat in your garden by including some nectar and host plants specifically to attract moths.

Photos by Karin Hicks

Resource Library Opens at Extension Office



Thanks to those who have donated numerous gardening books, Stormy Costas and the late Ron Brechter for ordering and assembling book shelves, and Julie Auten for donating furniture, we have established a resource library at Hall County Extension Office.

Books are available for check out. Please

be sure to sign out any books you borrow and place them in the return rack when you bring them back. If you would like to add to our collection, we gladly accept anything "gardening" related.

This horticultural resource is available to all Master Gardeners.

Friends Offer Tributes to a Fellow Master Gardener Ron Brechter, “Tomato Ron”

January 31, 1948—May 24, 2022



Photo by Don Linke

Ron was bigger than life. You don't meet many like him in your lifetime.

He was the master gardener extraordinaire, always working for the benefit of the HCMG. He helped so much with the 2021 Fall Expo, finding vendors every place he went. He worked so many hours at the office, at the Farmer's markets, teaching intern classes, in the hospital even! He will be missed by many.

—Mary Griffin

Here are some memories of Ron from our extension office:

**Ron would often answer the phone when he stopped by the office whether he was working the front desk or not.*

**He always rang the bell three to four times every time he came in the office.*

**Several times a year, Ron would make a big crockpot of his delicious chicken 'n dumplings or vegetable soup for us and to share with everyone in the building.*

**Last Christmas, Ron decided that we needed decorations. He brought in a large Christmas tree that played music along with decorations and a snowman topper. Sandra & Leddy made ornaments with pictures of the staff and one with Ron's picture to hang on the tree. He also decorated the counter with wooden decorations that he had made.*

**While working in the office, Ron would answer the client's questions and then always promote any HCMG activities that were upcoming (classes, expo, etc.).*

**Ron was always willing to help us in the office - he helped hang the quilt and pictures on the wall. He also planted many flowers/bulbs and worked in the extension garden.*

**Ron enjoyed talking with us about tomatoes, football, & music. We enjoyed having him around and will miss him greatly.*

—Karen Davis

A Photo Tribute...

By Don Linke



Ron teaches how to pollinate a squash blossom.



Ron sports his Longhorn "tattoo."



Brenau students listen as Ron demonstrates the planting of tomatoes.



Jeannie Zibrida, Ron, and Mary Ann Mall at Fall Expo.



Mindy Wade with Ron as he is named 2019 Hall County Master Gardener of the Year.



Stormy Costas, Ron, and Don Linke at 2012 Butterfly Release. "Ron will always be in our hearts."