

PATHWAYS

SUMMER 2026

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AMGA Website
alabamamga.org/



AMGA PRESIDENT

Deborah Boutelier



Welcome to summer! The southern heat and humidity have arrived in full force! Even so, there is much to do in the garden with the arrival of summertime weeds that accompanied the late spring rains. As gardeners, we adapt, now enjoying our work in the early morning hours and the late afternoon hours.

I would like to take a moment to again thank our three host counties of the 2026 State Conference in Huntsville – Master Gardeners of North Alabama, Limestone County Master Gardeners and Morgan County Master Gardeners. They worked really hard to put together a wonderful conference. There was so much to enjoy from beginning to end! Now we set our sights on Jefferson County for the 2027 State Conference.

Since we are starting a new AMGA year, I'd like to give you a synopsis of the activities of the AMGA Board of Directors over the past year. We have spent a lot of time reviewing and updating the AMGA's governing documents and policies, procedures and guidelines. Starting at the top are our Articles of Incorporation. These Articles are filed with the Alabama Secretary of State and govern what we can do as an association.

AMGA Bylaws are subordinate to the Articles of Incorporation and shall not be in direct conflict to the Articles of Incorporation. The last time the Articles were amended was in 2006. Because this is such an important document, we decided it was time to have them reviewed, along with our bylaws by legal counsel. What we discovered was twofold: the Articles of Incorporation meet or exceed requirements set forth by the Alabama Secretary of State, so these Articles are still a viable governing document. The second discovery was that our bylaws conformed with the Articles with two discrepancies of note. Both had to do with dates of notification to the membership in regard to called meetings and voting on bylaws amendments. Both were addressed in the proposed changes to the bylaws that were ratified at the annual business meeting.

The other documents which have undergone extensive updates are the AMGA Board Manual, the Conference Guidelines, and the Local Master Gardeners Association Handbook. In keeping with the best practices of a non-profit organization, we developed a financial policy for AMGA. All of these updated or new documents are posted on the AMGA website.

AMGA provided a grant in the amount of \$2,500 to Bethany O'Rear, Regional Extension Agent, for her project entitled "Combatting Food Insecurity in Alabama Food Deserts Through Home Gardening Intervention." The urban component of this project covers five families with school-age children in Mobile, Montgomery, Birmingham, Huntsville & Tuscaloosa for a total of twenty-five families. Extension Master Gardeners in these communities will partner with the families teaching them how to grow their own food, thus ensuring a more secure food source for those families.

In addition, we appointed an ad hoc committee made up of board members and representatives from both small and large MG associations to develop ideas on how AMGA can best serve our associations. Several of these ideas have already been implemented. Local associations no longer have to pay for the bronze, silver and gold stars awarded to members for reaching milestones in the Reach for the Stars program.

Project funding grants were increased from \$10,000 per year to \$16,000 per year. This means we were able to award more grants this year. We also decreased the waiting time for applying again. The board also approved providing two free conference registrations: one was awarded at the AMGA Fall Seminar and the second was awarded at the end of the business meeting for the 2027 conference. And last for this year, every conference participant took home a native plant to incorporate into their personal garden compliments of AMGA.

If you have any ideas on how AMGA can help support the local associations, please share your idea with me or another board member. We are here to serve our local associations and members.

Always remember, time began in a garden.

Until next time,

Debbie



ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

August 4, 2026 10:00 – 12:00

Come participate in the exchange of information, ideas, concerns and solutions from Local MGAs across the state

SAVE THE DATE!

AMGA 2027 CONFERENCE

April 7-9, 2027

Jefferson County MGA
Rosewood Hall in Homewood, AL

AMGA BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

September 1, 2026 10:00 – 12:00

Petals From the Past

Jemison, AL

All are welcome to attend and hear about the business of Alabama Master Gardeners Association

AMGA 2028 CONFERENCE

May 4-6, 2028

Wiregrass MGA
Dothan, AL

SEPTEMBER 15, 2026

Fall *Pathways* and
Happenings articles are due

AMGA VICE PRESIDENT

Julie Conrey

Congratulations to Extension Master Gardener volunteers from MGNA, Morgan and Limestone counties for the amazing job you did with the 2026 AMGA Conference. Attendees were starstruck at the greeting from two astronauts who work on the International Space Station, and great speakers such as Harvey Cotten and Doug Tallamy, who provided us with new perspectives in gardening. Special thanks to Conference Chair Soozi Pline, co-chairs Doty Henry and Carlita Edwards, plus volunteer coordinator Jennifer Johnson, and many others who went above and beyond to showcase the best of Huntsville and gardening in three days.

The 2027 AMGA Conference will take place April 7-9 in Rosewood Hall in Homewood. The Jefferson County conference team is led by Chair Katherine Ennis. The group has been hard at work planning a memorable learning experience for all of us. Pre-booking hotel rooms will begin in October. It's best to book a hotel room when they become available. Please monitor your email and the AMGA website, <https://alabamamga.org/> for the most current 2027 conference information. In a typical year, conference information is placed on our website in mid-December and in the winter issue of *Pathways*. Registration for the event begins in mid-January. Please consider registering as soon as you can to avoid being left out of a sold-out gardening adventure.

It never ceases to amaze me how hard-working, friendly and caring our Extension Master Gardeners are. Please keep up the good work you do. It is deeply impactful and very much appreciated.

Happy Summer!



AMGA Endowed Fund for Excellence in the Alabama Cooperative Extension System

Debbie Boutelier

AMGA has an exciting new giving opportunity to support the future of the Extension Master Gardener program. We finished our commitment to the Transformation Garden in record time, and a number of associations have been asking what is next. This endowment allows us to support the program statewide. The minimum needed to establish a permanent endowment is \$25,000. AMGA has made the initial gift of \$12,500. We need the help of all the local associations and members to meet the \$25,000 goal. Until this goal is met, we cannot draw from the endowment.

After the goal is met, then the interest can be used to support the Extension Master Gardener program throughout the state. Small support projects can be covered in the beginning but as the endowment grows future projects can be larger in scope.

Together, we can do amazing things to secure the funds needed to have an excellent program as we move into the future. For example, if every local association pledged just ten percent of their plant sale proceeds to the endowment annually, we could have the minimum goal met in less than two years! It is my hope we can get this funded quickly to enable us to begin supporting the Extension Master Gardener program in a tangible way.

In addition to local association support, this is also an opportunity to make donations in memory of or in honor of someone special. What a lasting and beneficial tribute that could be!

To make a donation, complete the form: <https://alabamamga.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Gift-Commitment->, write a check to AMGA and mail to our treasurer. Mark your donation for the Fund for Excellence. Every dollar sent will be forwarded to the Auburn Foundation. This way AMGA gets the credit for the donation.

The address for the AMGA Treasurer is:

Susan Steele, AMGA Treasurer

PO Box 3031

Decatur, AL 35603

Phone: 678-446-2692

Email: ssteele1954@yahoo.com

AMGA AWARDS

Sondra Henley, Chair

It's never too early to think about 2027 awards! Criteria for all awards can be found at <https://alabamamga.org/amga-awards/>. Start now by:

- Identifying nominees for the Gary Murray award (non-extension Master Gardener) and the Mary Lou McNabb award (Master Gardener of the Year)
- Considering the criteria for newsletter awards and making sure they are followed throughout the year.
- MGA Volunteer Hours Coordinator - review hours quarterly and encourage members who are getting close to the next level for badges and stars.

All nominations and applications for awards must be received by January 31, 2027. 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. I can be reached at awardsamga@gmail.com. or text me at 205-567-3333



CONGRATULATIONS 2026 AWARD WINNERS

Mary Lou McNabb recipient – Edwin “Skeeter” Sims – Calhoun
Gary Murray recipient – Carmen Flammini – Baldwin County Regional Extension Agent
Jean Lee Lifetime Hours Award – Helen Carr, MGNA, 10,408 lifetime hours
2025 Top Hours of the Year – Annette Walker – Central Alabama -1,000 hours
Fred Evans Intern of the Year – Sonja Johnson – Chilton County

Navy Blue Star (12,000-14,999 hours) – 1
Emerald Star (6,000-7,999 hours) – 2
Platinum Badge (2,000-3,999 hours) – 31
Gold Star (500-999 hours) – 31

Diamond Star (8,000-9,999 hours) – 1
Ruby Star (4,000-5,999 hours) – 6
Gold Badge (1,000-1,99+ hours) – 35
Silver Star (300-499 hours) – 68

Bronze Star (100-299 hours) – 135

Lots of dedicated Alabama Extension Master Gardeners!



AMGA 2027 CONFERENCE

Jefferson County MGA, Inc. Hosting
Katherine Ennis, Chair

JCMGA, Inc. Can't Wait to Welcome You to Birmingham!



"Forging a Garden Oasis" is the theme of the 2027 AMGA Conference hosted by Jefferson County Master Gardener Association, Inc. and we're working hard to give you an educational and fun-filled conference experience. Rosewood Hall in Homewood is the venue and it's a good one! Our speakers are lined up and we're working on all the little details that hosting a conference brings with it. We will have guided tours, self-guided tours, a curated tour, workshops and demonstrations that will grab your attention. The speakers will cover topics ranging from research to storytelling and more. Conference dates are April 7-9, 2027. Save the dates and join us in "Forging a Garden Oasis". Watch for more details in the fall edition of Pathways.

Welcome Aboard to our new AMGA Board of Directors and Nominating Committee Members



Edwin "Skeeter" Sims
At-Large Board of Directors
2026-2029



Cynthia Kershaw
At-Large Board of Directors
2026-2029



Betsy Smith
Nominating Committee
2026-2028

AMGA NOMINATIONS

Janell Diggs, Chair

It is an honor to serve you for the upcoming year, not only as an at-large member of the AMGA Board of Directors, but also as the Nominating Committee Chairperson. Don Richerson, Baldwin MGA, and Betsy Smith, Chilton MGA, will serve alongside me for the upcoming year. This year will bring many changes for AMGA Leadership with eight upcoming vacant positions. We have a big job ahead of us and commit to search throughout the state for nominees who are passionate about the Alabama Master Gardeners Association and are willing to prioritize and serve the organization.

The following positions will be open:

- President
- Vice President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Three At-large Positions on the Board of Directors
- One Nominating Committee Position

If you are interested in serving in one of these positions, or if you know someone you feel would be a good fit for one of these positions, please contact me at: thyme2growherbs@gmail.com. Text or call 334-425-9069.

May all Your Weeds be Wildflowers.



AMGA NEWSLETTER

Sheila Bolen, Editor

Wowzer! What a conference that was! Many thanks to all the hardworking folks from Limestone, Madison and Morgan County MGAs for a job very well done.

Now it's time to get down to the nitty gritty. The newsletter staff is losing a member. Martha Burnett, Copy Editor, is moving to Georgia, likely before the end of the year. That leaves me, Editor and Susan Clapp, Proofreader. We're looking for a co-Editor and Copy Editor. If you, or anyone you know, has any interest in working on the newsletter now would be a fabulous time to step up. It's not hard work but does take a time commitment. It doesn't take publishing experience, but a working knowledge of MS Word and PowerPoint is required. If you have any interest at all in working on *Pathways* and *Happenings*, please reach out to me at mgbolshe13@gmail.com and we'll chat. The duties of a co-editor and copy editor can be found at <https://alabamamga.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/AMGA-Board-Manual-June-2025.pdf>.

Now I have a challenge for all AMGA Extension Master Gardener Associations. The article in this issue of *Pathways* on useless plant information makes me wonder just how much useless plant information there is in the brains of EMGs across the state. Get your members to put together a list of what they believe is "Useless Plant Information." It doesn't matter how big or little they think it is, put it all in a list and this fall I'll put together an article on "Why is this in my brain taking up space?"



AMGA PROJECT FUNDING

Kate Vogel, Chair, Outgoing

The purpose of the Project Funding Committee is to develop and administer a program that annually provides AMGA financial assistance, up to \$2,000.00, to outstanding Master Gardener projects throughout the State of Alabama. This year, ten associations received AMGA grants through the Project Funding Program. This year the full amount available was awarded to the following EMGs:

- BUTLER COUNTY – Connecting Youth and Community. The association formed January 1, 2026.
- CALHOUN COUNTY – Renovations to the Cane Creek Community Gardens greenhouse.
- CAPITAL CITY – Replacement of obsolete technology for educational purposes.
- COFFEE COUNTY – Establishment of a Pollinator Garden at the Enterprise State Community College apiary.
- EAST CENTRAL – Upgrades to the Wedowee Elementary School of Blooms, serving grades K-3.
- ETOWAH COUNTY – Installation of a Living Hedge at the Gadsden Family Success Center.
- LAWRENCE COUNTY – Upgrades to donated greenhouse used for educational purposes.
- MARSHALL COUNTY – Upgrades to CASA garden.
- MORGAN COUNTY – Restoration of the WaterWorks Pollinator bed.
- WALKER COUNTY – Completion of the Walker County Pollinator Teaching and Demonstration Garden.

AMGA Speakers Bureau

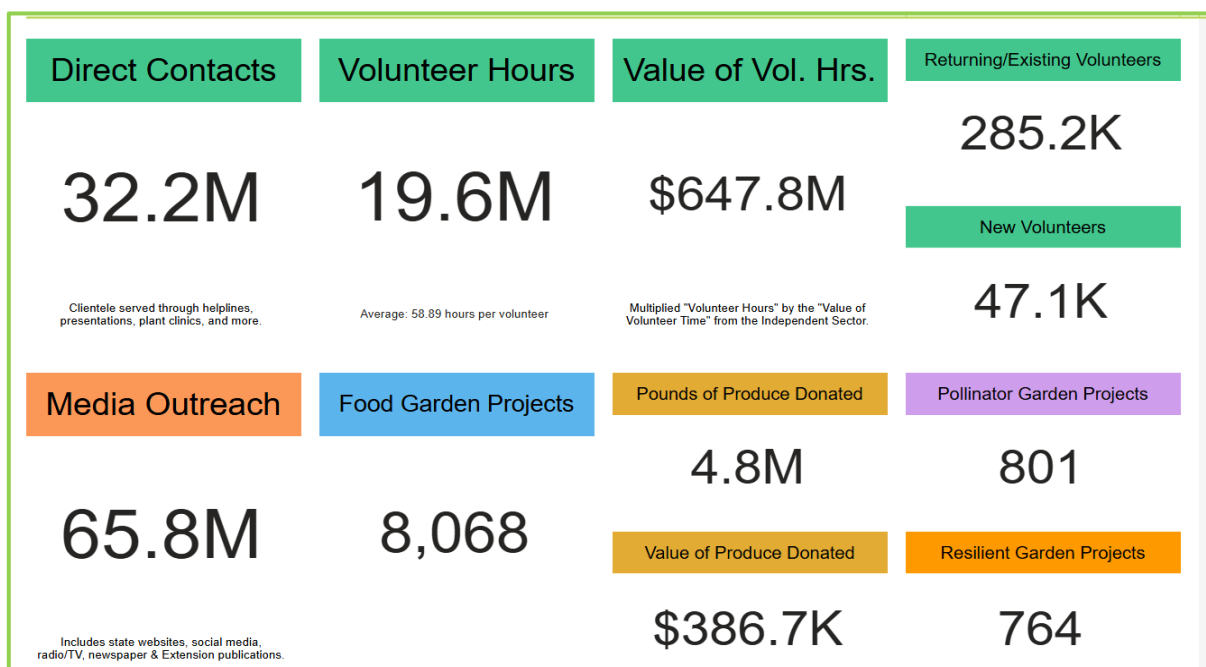
Susan K. Hagen, Chair

In the spring edition of *Pathways*, the Speakers Bureau promised an expansion of topics to include assistance for local association officers in conducting meetings and in writing internal communications. That promise has been fulfilled. In time for the Speakers Bureau report at AMGA's annual business meeting during the conference in Huntsville, three downloadable files were posted on the AMGA website. Those "tutorials" are based on *The Rules of Order* governing motions and minutes, and on best practices for clear and effective emails. Since our report, by mid-June there had been 46 downloads of the file on motions, 38 of the selection on minutes, and 45 on the guidelines for emails. In addition, the Speakers Bureau page has counted 121 views, and the Speakers List has been downloaded 45 times, with 46 downloads of the submission form to join the list.

Encouraged by this response, the Bureau looks forward to adding additional resources useful to our local association, such as guidelines on agendas and on public presentations. Moreover, in support of the Advanced Certification program, the Speakers Bureau continues to encourage new speakers to volunteer. See <https://alabamamga.org/amga-speakers-bureau-2/>.



I'm always looking for interesting trivia for East Central's newsletter. I came across this really long website address but thought the information worth sharing. Kerry gives us Alabama's Extension Report, these numbers are for all Extension in the United States. <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiaNzVmYjFmM2ltZDcwYy00YWJkLTk1YzUtMmVhMmZlZGY4ZjcwliwidCI6ImFmYjU4ODAyLWZmN2EtNGJiMS1hYjlxLTM2N2ZmMmVjZmM4YiIsImMiOjZ9>



Who are Extension Master Gardeners?

- We improve the lives of Alabamians.
- We use research-based horticulture to educate people.
- We are a dedicated, trained, and involved Extension volunteer TEAM.

Every EMG Volunteer program strives to address community needs, emphasizes knowledge gained from research, and exists because people believe in volunteerism. From the first word, “We” are a statewide collective effort.

Help promote and sustain Alabama’s EMG Volunteer Program by showing your statewide team spirit.

1. Wear and display the statewide logo with pride. This image shows everyone that we’re all connected to this statewide program – and we love it!

[Shop the EMG Volunteer Program Store](#)



2. Support the future of the EMG Volunteer Program with your financial donation.

[Alabama Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program Endowed Fund](#)



Thank you for everything you do to support our program and its mission!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kerry".



Alabama Extension Master Gardener Program Coordinator
Alabama Cooperative Extension System
Auburn University Department of Horticulture

AMGA Fall Seminar

UPDATED 6/3/2026



**AT AUBURN UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF NURSING
OCTOBER 8TH-9TH**

REGISTRATION OPENS

AUGUST 1ST*

\$45

**JOIN US ON OCTOBER 8TH FROM 2:00-3:00PM AT THE
AUBURN UNIVERSITY RAPTOR CENTER TO MEET SOME
GAMEDAY SUPERSTARS!**

**OUR MAIN EVENT IS OCTOBER 9TH. YOU'LL GET A SNEAK PEEK
AT NEW TRANSFORMATION GARDEN PROJECTS, LIKE THE
CHILDREN'S GARDEN AND VINEYARDS—PLUS A CHANCE TO
WIN EXCITING PRIZES!**

***NO REFUNDS**





Happiness is the Garden!

**Blount County Master Gardeners'
Fall Conference, Thursday, October 1, 2026**

4 CEUs

**Blount County Multipurpose Center,
6700 County Road 1. Cleveland, AL 35049**

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M University and Auburn University) is an equal opportunity educator, employer, and provider. If you need a reasonable accommodation or language access services, contact Bethany O'Rear, Regional Extension Agent at bao0004@auburn.edu by two weeks prior to the program.

8:30 a.m. Registration

9:00 a.m. Susan Hagen, "There's More in the Garden than Plants!"

10:00 a.m. Bethany O'Rear, "Fun in the Garden"

11:00 a.m. Lunch by Lulu's BBQ and shopping with Jason Powell

**12:30 p.m. Hayes Jackson, "The Weather is Awful and I Have Lost My Clippers Again:
An Avid Plantsman's Tales of Triumph in the Garden"**

1:30 p.m. Felder Rushing, "Garden Whimsies!"



Registration form, please print and clip ----- ✂ -----

Name _____

Address _____

City / State / Zip code _____

Email / Phone # _____

Make \$40 non-refundable registration fee check payable to Blount County Master Gardener Association and mail to Sherilyn Osborne, P.O. Box 13, Locust Fork, Alabama, 35097.

Phone: 205-382-0791 (Leave a message)

Plant Facts: From the Fountain of Useless Information

by Cindy Murphy

Throughout years of gardening, I have gathered a lot of information about plants. Much of it is stored in my head, gathering dust because it has no practical application. Though I think it's interesting information, it doesn't help me in my job at the nursery or make me a better gardener. It's, quite frankly, useless information.

I am convinced that this useless information is hogging valuable brain space that could better be used for important things like phone numbers or where I left my car keys. All I need to do is set it loose, and instantly my mind will be uncluttered, thus making me a less chaotic and more organized person. So let me free up some space in my head by passing along to you a small sampling of what's stuck up there. You, in turn, can use it to amaze your family, friends, and neighbors....or in the least make them wonder if you've stayed out in the sun too long. Here we go with eleven things you may not know about plants....

1. The white or pink flowers of dogwood aren't really flowers at all; they're called "bracts," which are modified leaves. The actual dogwood flower is the knobby green ball in the center.

2. The silk from milkweed pods has had many uses over the years. It's been spun into candle wicks, netting, and fringes, and used as stuffing for pillows and mattresses. The silk is warmer than wool and 6 times lighter, along with being 5 times more buoyant than cork. During World War II, people collected milkweed pods from the wild and shipped the dried pods to collection stations all over the country. Large operation milkweed farms sprung up across the nation, as the weed suddenly became valuable. The reason? It was discovered just a few pounds of the fluff stuffed into life jackets could support a 150-pound man, and aviator suits lined with the floss were warm and buoyant, keeping downed pilots afloat until they could be rescued.

3. Another common plant with a multitude of uses is one naturalist and stalker of the wild asparagus, Euell Gibbons, called the "supermarket of the swamp": cattails. Cattail leaves have been woven into mats and baskets. The woolly inflorescences were once used as fillings for quilts, pillows, mattresses, upholstery, baseballs, and lifejackets. And if that's not enough, all parts of the plant are edible. Young sprouts are used as salad or cooked greens; the green, unripe bloom is cooked and eaten like corn on the cob; root stocks are ground into flour, and cattail pollen is a nutritious additive to meals, but reported to be especially tasty in pancake batter. Good to know if you visit your local box store and find the shelves empty. Just head on down to your local swamp instead.

4. Fresh pine needles are rich in vitamins A and C; particularly medicinal are Scotch and white pine. A cup of strong pine-needle tea has approximately 5 times more vitamin C than a lemon. Native Americans and early settlers knew of pine needles' benefits long before scientific research confirmed it. They drank the tea several times a day to remedy coughs, colds, and to prevent scurvy.

5. As much as we take pleasure from it, the fragrance of flowers only has one purpose: to attract insects needed for pollination. Flowers pollinated by wind don't need to attract insects, and therefore, have no scent.

6. The amount of oxygen released by the trees and grass planted along all the U.S. Interstate highways is enough to support 22 million people.

7. The national flower of Scotland is the thistle. According to Scottish legend, in the 900s, the Guardian Thistle as it came to be known, alerted the Scots to a night invasion of Norsemen when one of the invaders stepped on its prickles. Take a look at those stickers! "Ouch!!!!" Another version of the tale tells us the entire garrison of Norsemen took off their boots to wade through a castle moat, but instead of water, they found themselves in a dry bed filled with thistles. In either case, the result was the same; the yells of pain roused the Scots, who then defeated the Norsemen.

8. Slow and steady wins the race, even in the plant kingdom. Generally, the slower growing a tree is, the longer it lives. Fast growing trees expend their energy on quick growth and reproduction, while the slow growing ones use their energy for structural support, and to develop defenses against disease and insects. The slow growing oak tree, for example, can live for centuries. In contrast, the quick growing willow has an average lifespan of 30 to 50 years.

9. Say to someone, "I've got to clean the helicopters from the gutters", and most everyone will know exactly what you're talking about. Tell someone you're going to clean the samaras from the gutters, and you'll leave many people scratching their heads. Samaras are winged seeds such as ash or elm keys, and of course, maple helicopters.

10. Crabgrass is a thorn in many lawn enthusiasts' sides. The good news is the grass is an annual; it dies after one growing season. The bad news is each crabgrass plant produces 60,000 seeds in a single season.

11. Ferns were a mystery to ancient cultures. Without visible flowers or seeds, it was not understood how ferns could reproduce. Therefore, the ancients believed the flowers and seeds of ferns must be invisible. And of course, invisible seeds must have the power to make those lucky enough to gather them invisible too. This mysterious plant reportedly flowered on St. John's Eve, and golden seed fell to the ground, ripening in the moonlight. Cloths or pewter plates were placed beneath the plants to collect the seed. So, polish your pewter, and mark your calendars for next year; St. John's Eve is June 24th. But lest you think I am endorsing this practice as a means to obtain actual invisibility, it must be noted that there are no eye-witness accounts of invisible persons roaming the land due to the magical fern seeds ... but then again, there wouldn't be, would there?

There. I feel better now that I've cleared some space in my head; a bit freer perhaps. Give it a try and unclog your brain too. What useless information do you have up there?

Now, I've got to go find those car keys. I bet someone dusted them with fern seed in an attempt to make me think I'm losing my mind. It might be working.

[Plant Facts: From the Fountain of Useless Information - Grit](#)





AMGA 2026 CONFERENCE ★ The Rocket City
**GARDENING
TO
THE
MOON
AND BACK**
Limestone • Madison • Morgan



Every conference starts with set up







AUTAUGA MGA



BUTLER MGA



BALDWIN MGA



BLOUNT MGA



CALHOUN MGA



CULLMAN MGA



CHEROKEE MGA



EAST CENTRAL MGA



JACKSON MGA



JEFFERSON MGA





LAWRENCE MGA



MARSHALL MGA



MASTER GARDENERS of NORTH ALABAMA



MOBILE MGA



MORGAN MGA



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SHELBY MGA



SHOALS MGA



TUSCALOOSA MGA



WIREGRASS MGA





**ALABAMA
MASTER
GARDENERS
ASSOCIATION**

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Got Questions?



We've Got Answers

alabamamga.org



NEXT ARTICLE FOR PATHWAYS DUE SEPTEMBER 15, 2026

2025 - 2027 AMGA BOD OFFICERS

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Vice President: Julie Conrey, Mobile
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Term 2024 – 2027

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Kim Johnson, Jackson
Angela Whorton, Etowah

Term 2025 – 2028

Harriet Jackson, Chilton
Soozi Pline, Limestone

TERM 2026 – 2029

Edwin "Skeeter" Sims – Calhoun
Cynthia Kershaw - Shoals

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Katherine Ennis

2028 Wiregrass MGA

Devonne Ellis

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Angie Kelsoe, Coordinator

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Anne Ness, Secretary, Morgan

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Deborah Boutelier, Autauga
Julie Conrey, Mobile

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Julie Conrey, Mobile