

Laurel Letters- Summer 2026

Dear Laurel District,

I saw many Laurel District friends at the Garden Club of Georgia convention this spring. Seeing familiar and smiling faces and visiting with people from my world was a delight. I am thoroughly enthused for us to



be hosting the 2027 convention. We are going to hit it out of the park!



Laurel Forums? Yes! Mikel and I will be back in September, October, November, January, February and March meeting with club presidents and Laurel District board members in the Fall using our Zoom account. We meet on the first Tuesday of the month at 10:00 AM and 7:00 PM. Let me know if you have any suggestions for topics of discussion.

Remember that <https://gardenclubofgeorgia.org/laurel-district-page/> at <https://gardenclubofgeorgia.org/> is the first place to go for information about many things. Our webpage lists deadlines for Laurel Letters and Garden Gateways along with events and a listing of our clubs by city. **If you are not receiving emails from me or GCG, you can press the Sign up to be on Our Mailing List for Laurel District News button. You may have been removed for some reason.** My email address is on our webpage. Everything goes to me to be funneled out.

Sincerely, *Merrell Holden*

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Hello, Wonderful Clubs,

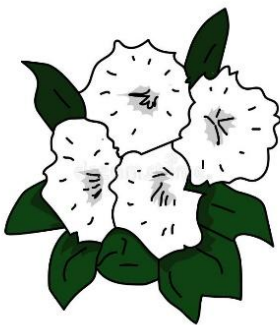
As of May, the GCG has 9105 members, 257 Subscribing Members and 275 clubs!

Our membership success story is credited to our NEW CLUB SUPPORT CHAIRMAN, Leanne Penman. Leanne has been the driving force for new clubs in our state. We encourage member clubs to start new clubs in your community and Leanne is there to help. Leannepenman2@gmail.com

There are also new club incentives. GCG offers grants to defray the cost of providing programs, including speaker fees and materials needed for the programs.

Co-Director, Mikel Vann

Condolence Procedure



Laurel District asks that you let us know at lauredistrictdirector@gardenclubofgeorgia.org if a garden club member has passed so we may reach out to the family with a card and honor them at our memorial service. We would like to know the name, garden club with city, date of the passing, garden club, district or state offices held by this person and the mailing address of the family.

— What — Happened

***Laurel District Fun* at The Garden Club of Georgia's 2026 Convention**



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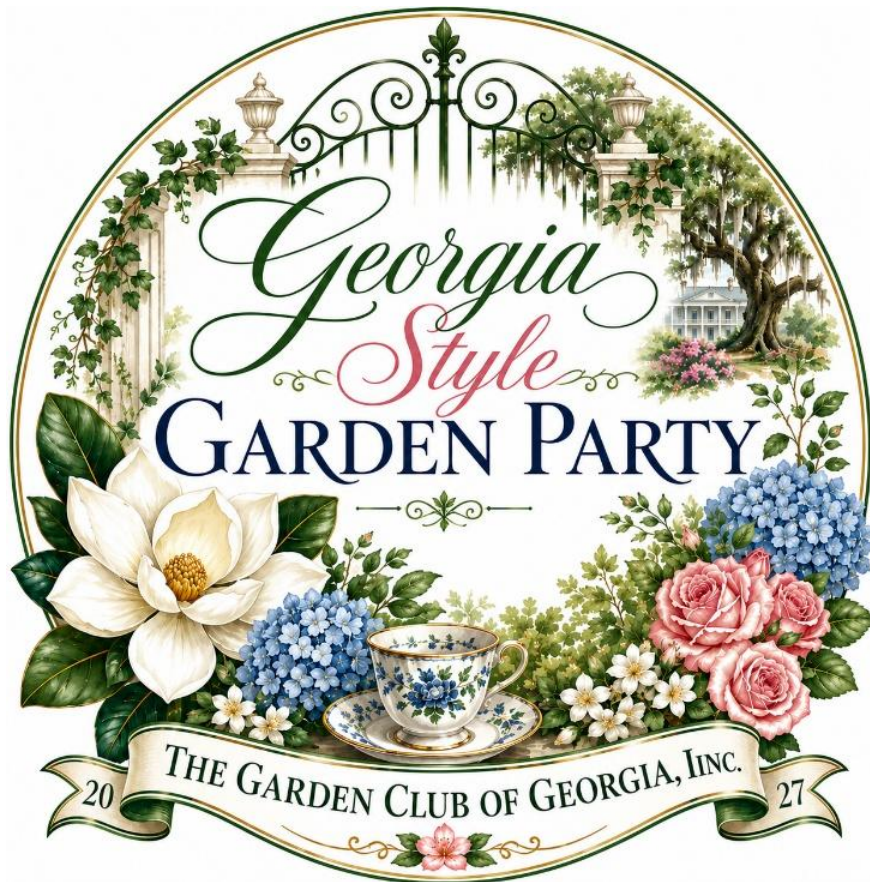
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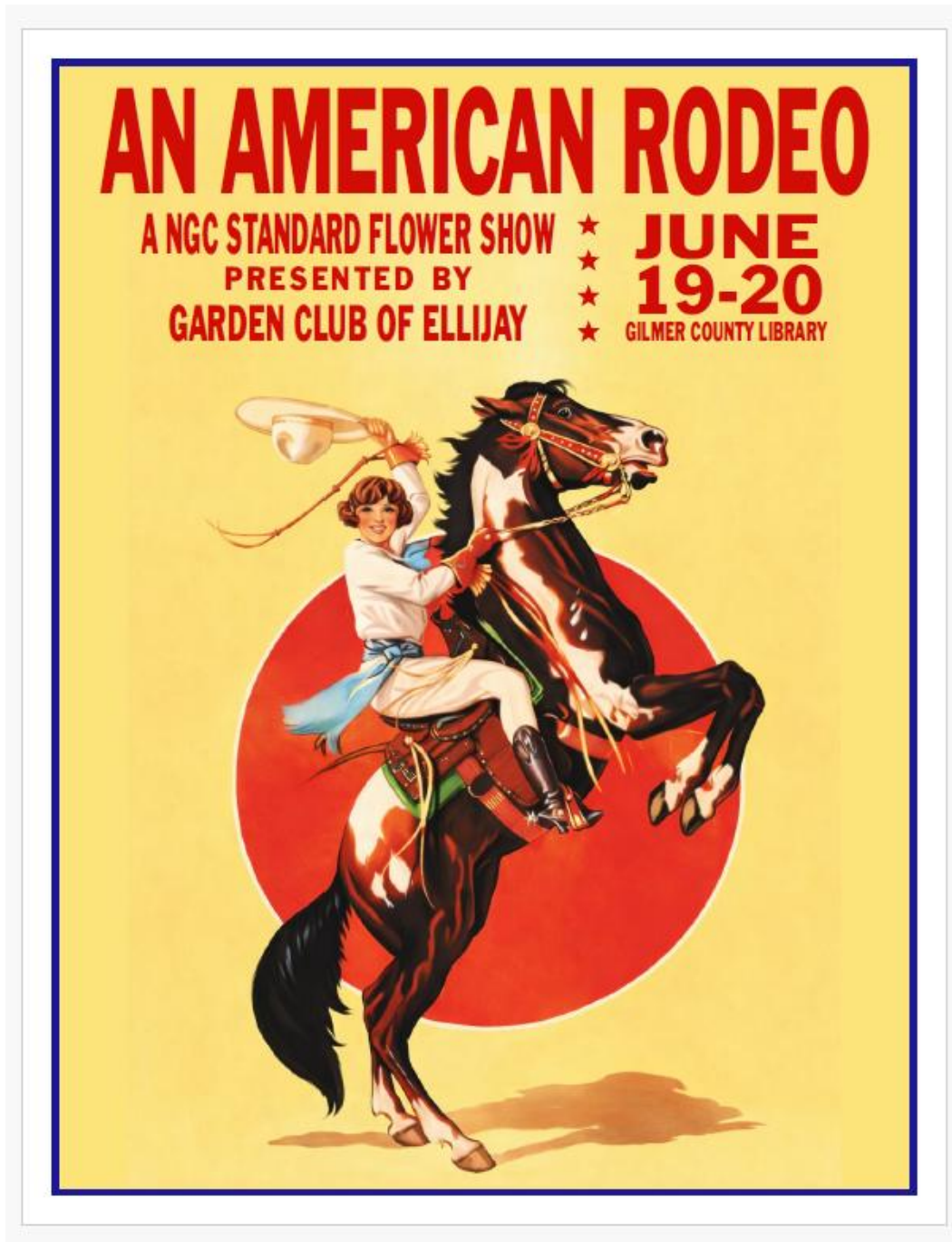
What's Happening

Laurel District is hosting The Garden Club of Georgia's 2027 Convention at Brasstown Valley Resort in Hiawassee. Deanna Slone is our convention chairperson. The landing page for the conventions is <https://gardenclubofgeorgia.org/gcg-state-convention-2027/>.

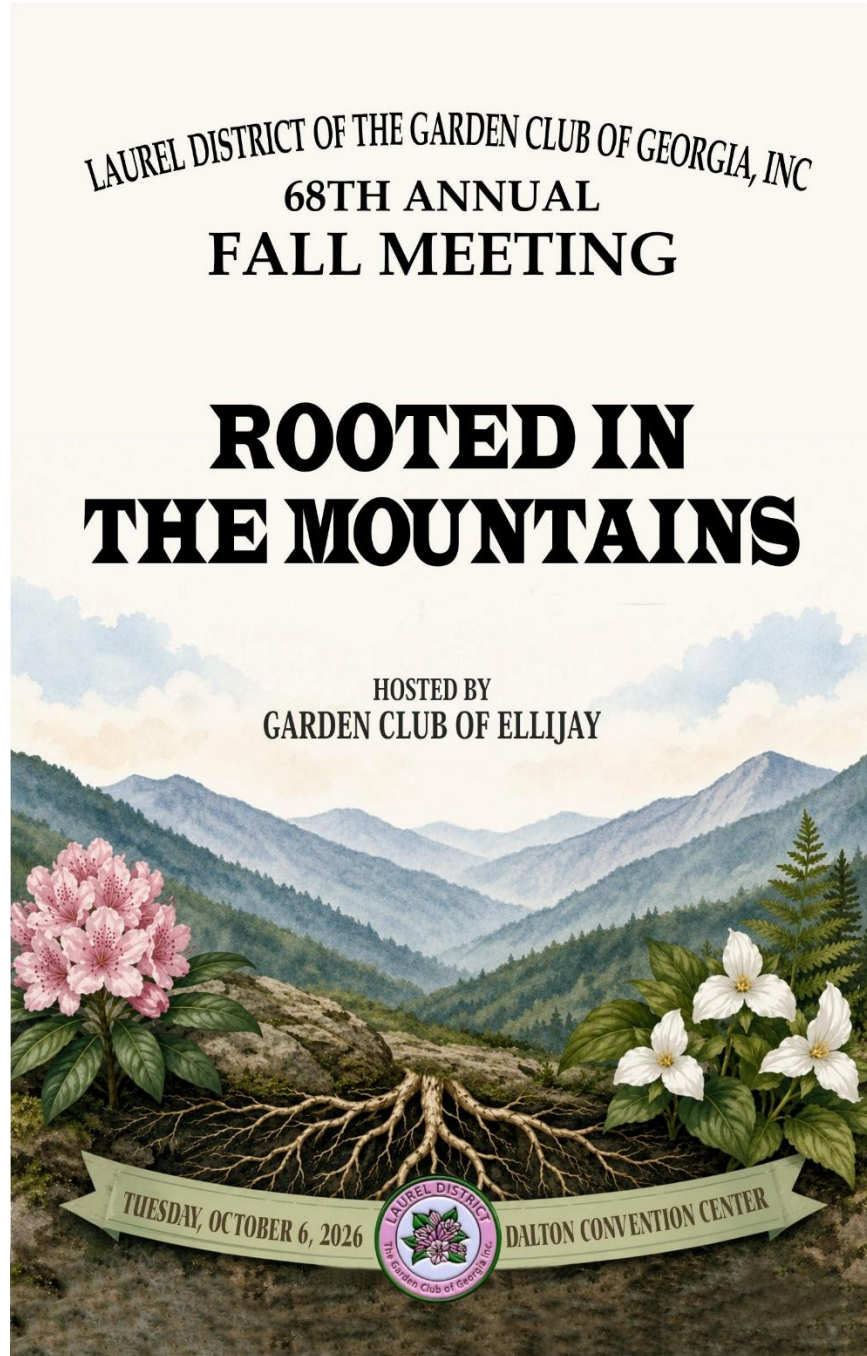
It is going to be amazing!



The Garden Club of Ellijay is presenting
an **NGC Standard Flower Show**, *An American Rodeo*,
on June 19 and 20. Show hours are Friday, June 19 from 2:00-6:00
p.m. and Saturday, May 20 from 10 a.m.-4:00 p.m. The show will be
held at the Gilmer County Library, 268 Calvin Jackson Drive, Ellijay,
GA 30540.



The Garden Club of Ellijay is hosting our *2026 Annual Fall Meeting*. Ask your garden club friends if they would like to go with you to Dalton, Georgia in on Tuesday, October 6th. We will have a grand time!



The theme for ***Garden Gateways Fall 2026*** edition is **Education**. Articles for District Digs go to me at laureldistrictdirector@gardenclubofgeorgia.org. The deadline for submissions is July 10. I look forward to seeing your news!

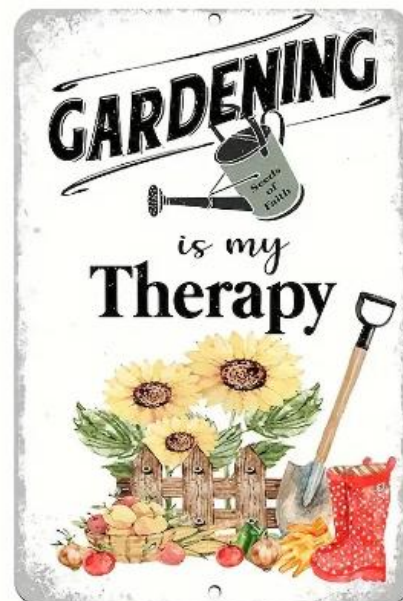
Speaking of publications submissions, all information is listed at [Flowers | Laurel District Page](#).

Laurel District Board Reports

Garden Therapy

“Gardening is not exercise.” The words out of my cardiologist mouth at a recent visit. When he asked me if I exercised, I responded proudly that I was a gardener. I couldn’t believe it! He went on to say I needed to exercise 30 minutes a day and “gardening is not exercise”. Well, I decided this man had never dug in Georgia clay or hauled bags of soil and mulch.

So, what does a gardener do when someone makes an idiotic suggestion: go to the research. In my Google search which only took



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minutes, found 3 scientific research articles indicating GARDENING IS EXERCISE. I won't go into the data collection, research techniques but will share the titles (I have the APA citations if you want them):

“Gardening Tasks Performed by Adults Are Moderate-to High Physical Activities”; “Physical and Psychological Health Conditions of Older Adults Classified as Gardeners or Non-gardeners (the gardeners were healthier); “Can Older Gardeners Meet Physical Recommendations Through Gardening”(the answer found was YES).

Now to be fair, research has indicated physical activity can improve cognitive functioning. So, I decided that I will follow my cardiologist advice and take a 30-minute walk before playing duplicate bridge. This will be for my brain not my heart. Taking a walk is less messy than digging in the dirt. So, when a medical professional asked “Do you exercise?”, proudly say you are a gardener and the research supports it!

Joyce Laben- Laurel District Garden Therapy Chairperson



**Who
is
on
our
board?**

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First Name	Last Name	Board Position
Merrell	Holden	Director
Mikel	Vann	Co-Director
Anita	Bridges	Recording Secretary
Claudia	Bell	Treasurer
Jean	Ray	Corresponding Secretary
Cheryl	Briscoe	Parliamentarian and Advisor
Caroline	Alford	Advisor
Victoria	Chandler	Advisor
Edna	McClellan	Advisor
Marie	Purser	Advisor
Victoria	Chandler	Blue Star and Gold Star Markers Chairperson
Rene	Lanier	Chaplain
Deborah	Paul	Cherokee Garden Library Chairperson
Inday	Bauer	Community Wildlife Project Chairperson
Judy	Patterson	Flower Show Coordinator
Madeline	Chandler	Four and Five Star Members Chairperson
Joyce	Laben	Garden Therapy Chairperson
Deanna	Slone	GCG 2027 Convention Chairperson
Karen	Hawkins	GCG 2027 Convention Co-Chairperson
Jill	Denlea	GCG 2027 Convention Co-Chairperson
Elaine	Williams	GCG 2027 Convention Co-Chairperson
Cheryl	Briscoe	GCG State Botanical Gardens District Rep
Maye	Suddeth	Grants Chairperson
Cheryl	Briscoe	Historic Landscape Preservation
Mickey	Carlton	Legislation Chairperson
Caroline	Alford	Marshall Forest Land Trust Chairperson
Lynn	Fronk	Merchandise Chairperson
Joyce	Crider	Merchandise Co-Chairperson
Virginia	Hunter	Pull-A-Tab for Ronald McDonald Chairperson
		Scholarships Chairperson
		Social Media Chairperson
Kathy	Donahue	Youth Contest Coordinator for Poetry & Posters
		Youth Programs Chairperson
Jean	Ray	Garden Council of Cherokee County President
Kathryn	Coffee	Marietta Council of Garden Clubs, Inc. President
Kathy	Cooper	Rome Federated Garden Clubs Co-President
Linda	Easterwood	Rome Federated Garden Clubs Co-President

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We have open board positions.

Please let me know at lauredistrictdirector@gardenclubofgeorgia.org if you know someone interested in these initiatives.

Scholarships Chairperson

Promotes and recognizes donations to The Garden Club of Georgia scholarships.

Social Media Chairperson

This chairman serves as photographer and promoter of Laurel District using social media outlets in conjunction with GCG.

Youth Programs Chairperson

Facilitates GCG youth programs and awards in the district.



Looking for a program?

The 2024 and 2025 lists are on The Garden Club of Georgia website on the password-protected GCG Personnel Guide page:

<https://gardenclubofgeorgia.org/membership-gcg-personnel-guide/>

They are also available on the member portal dashboard:

<https://gcg.member365.org/>

Let Merrell know at lauredistrictdirector@gardenclubofgeorgia.org if you need a password.

100 Laurels in Laurel



The Garden Club of Georgia is celebrating 100 years in 2028. **How is Laurel District commemorating this event?**

100 Laurels in Laurel! We are asking clubs to plant Mountain Laurel in your gardens and communities. Please send a picture, your club name and location of the planting. We will be collecting documentation of 100 Laurels for our presentation to the Garden Club of Georgia. **Let's go, Laurels!**

New directive for Raffle Baskets donated by clubs at the Laurel District Annual Fall Meeting

Most people agree that the display of baskets and raffle drawing are among the most fun and exciting parts of the meeting! The raffle is also the bread and butter for every Garden Club of Georgia district as it funds operations throughout the year. We are encouraging all our clubs to participate in the joy of supporting Laurel District through club creativity and collaboration.



Please begin planning your club's raffle basket. Our Annual Fall meeting is Tuesday, October 6, and we look forward to the show!

If it is not possible for your club to enter a basket, we ask for a donation to Laurel District of \$50 for small clubs (1-20 members), \$100 for medium clubs (21-50 members) and \$150 for large clubs (51+ members).

Club News



Conservation Tip:

Here is a list of items that should **NOT** be placed in a recycling bin:



- Bubble Wrap
- Dry cleaning bags
- Ice bags
- Ziploc food bags
- Shrink wrap
- Bread bags

Try to recycle these items so they do not end up in landfills. Let's do our best to make a difference. So where can you take these items? Look for designated retail drop off locations, specialized recycling centers, or specific municipal drop off sites in Georgia. Items designated number 3-7 will have to go to special drop-off sites, but most major grocery stores except items number 2 and 4 plastics. Check with Keep Georgia Beautiful or Keep Cherokee Beautiful for locations.

Mary Hrovatic- President- Ball Ground Garden Club (Anetsa- Ga-Da)

Dallas Garden Club Celebrates 90 Years in Bloom! 1936 -2026

The Dallas Garden Club was formed in April, 1936 by a group of ladies sharing a common love for flowers and gardening. Here we are, 90 years later, celebrating that beginning and the rich history of our club. Some of our current members' mothers were part of the club in the early days and a few members have been part of DGC for 40+ years. The club is now a thriving group of legacy members with an infusion of new and younger members. The club enjoys planning and hosting activities including community work, scholarship donations, flower shows and of course, our fun and informative monthly meetings. Spring activities have included a Lunch & Learn with NGC Master Judges, Fran Myers and Becky Groce. Our club attended the Dallas Women's Club Spring Tea and was recognized for celebrating 90 years. We celebrated with a 90th birthday party during our April meeting. We are most proud of our scholarship donation of \$1,000 to the Paulding County UGA Extension Office to support the continued education of an outstanding agricultural student.

Linda Williamson - Dallas Garden Club



Dallas Garden Club attends Dallas Women's Club Spring Tea! L-R, Linda Williamson, Cathy Amos, Susan Brock, Lisa Butler and Rhonda Worley

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Dallas Garden Club Celebrating 90 Years in Bloom!



Mary Carol Sheffield, Paulding County Extension Coordinator, accepts scholarship donation from Susan Brock, Dallas Garden Club President

Magnolia Garden Club Hosts Basic Design Course I in Cartersville



The Magnolia Garden Club in Cartersville, Georgia, is currently sponsoring Basic Design Course I through June 2026. Janet Martin, Magnolia Garden Club Member and NGC Accredited Flower Show Judge, saw the need for a Basic Design Course I in Cartersville. She has noticed floral design insecurity in Magnolia Garden Club members each February, when Magnolia Garden Club members create mass floral designs for nursing homes and assisted living facilities in Cartersville.

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Janet contacted Edna McClellan, Basic Design Schools Chairman, who formed a plan to make the Basic Design Course I a reality. The class consists of 21 paid participants from Cartersville and Rome, Georgia and Fort Payne, Alabama. There are five units in this Basic Design Course I: Line Design and Line Mass Design, Mass Design, Wreath Floral Designs, Place Setting Floral Designs and Creative and Petite Floral Designs. The Accredited Instructors for the five Basic Design Course I units are Madeline Chandler, Becky Groce, Edna McClellan and Fran Myers.



Instructors- Madeline and Becky

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Instructors- Edna and Fran

Professional photographer and videographer, Charlotte Acker, has been taking pictures during each class and after all designs are completed!

Charlotte can be reached at char.acker.81@gmail.com.



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**Janet Martin- National Garden Club Accredited Flower Show Judge
The Magnolia Garden Club- Cartersville**

MEMBER CELEBRATIONS

Congratulations to Sarah
Margaret for graduating
with a Doctorate in Physical
Therapy from Brenau
University!



Reilley Hutto- Marietta Azaleas Garden Club

The Marietta Magnolia Garden Club Boards the Floating Classroom of the Chattahoochee River Keepers



On April 16th, the Marietta Magnolia Garden Club had the opportunity to board the 40-foot floating classroom operated by the Chattahoochee River Keepers. CRK's purpose is to educate, advocate, and secure the protection of the Chattahoochee River including its lakes and tributaries. The classroom instructors teach the importance of water conservation in a changing climate and the importance of ecological health for the people and the wildlife that depend on the river.



They also participate in water monitoring in places that regulatory government groups cannot reach and will hold groups that are responsible for the pollution accountable by taking legal action against them.

The Chattahoochee River is the most heavily used water resource in Georgia.

For more information:
www.chattahoochee.org



Mikel Vann- Marietta
Magnolia Garden Club



Celebration of Spring Garden Symposium

Mountain Ivy Garden Club in Rabun County, Georgia, held its third annual *Celebration of Spring Garden Symposium* on March 26. More than 150 garden enthusiasts were treated to a day of fellowship that included shopping, expert speakers, raffles and lunch from Henri's. This small group of 21 garden club members organized and hosted the event completely over more than six months, including creation and staging



of all room decor, curating and crafting all floral arrangements for in the garden market, acquisition and staging of more than 10 raffle baskets, execution of ticket sales and marketing. All proceeds from this labor of love go to the club's scholarship

fund, which provides scholarships for Rabun County High School students pursuing higher education in the agriculture sciences. Money is also donated to the Rabun County FFA and 4-H campers. We are proud to say that this year's event netted more than \$10,000. Our scholarship committee is in process of reviewing applications and identify scholarship recipients for 2026.

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This year's speakers included three very entertaining garden professionals. South Carolinian Jenks Farmer entertained us with his unconventional views on gardening. He and his so-called garden disruptors designed and created the renowned Riverbanks Botanical Garden in Columbia, S.C., which they built from what was literally an overgrown island. He shared the successes and peccadilloes of their journey in building the gardens as well as other amazing projects they've undertaken through his humorous and enlightening stories.



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The incomparable Alvin Moore's career encompasses floral design clients from iconic venues in Las Vegas to All Saints Episcopal Church in Atlanta and everything in between. In addition to directing the Southeastern Flower Show for 10 years, he's been a featured speaker at dozens of garden clubs and events. His demonstration not only kept the audience entertained but also inspired with his advice and tricks of the trade.

Local flower farmer and popular gardener Tori Carver shared her passion for growing dahlias, giving advice for cultivation and answering questions from attendees. A well-known purveyor of dahlias in the Clayton, she offers an impressive variety of bulbs through her online market.

Addressing the science of plants and importance of sustainability, Dr. Bodie Pennisi shared her considerable knowledge of native plants and the vital importance of sustainable landscape practices. Dr. Pennisi, whose extensive credentials include holding the Vince Dooley Chair of Ornamental Horticulture, fascinated attendees by describing the intricate interconnection of plants, beneficial insects and the impact of humans on the ecosystem in an entertaining and inspiring layman's terms.



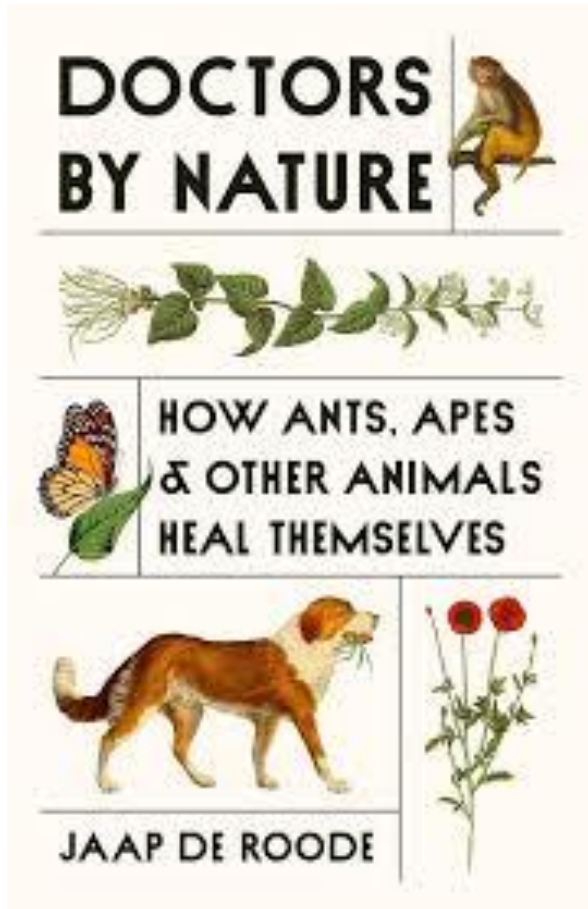
Next year's symposium will be held March 25. Details for the event will be posted on Mountain Ivy Garden Club's Facebook page as it becomes available.

Sherry LeTellier- President- Mountain Ivy Garden Club- Clayton

How Ants, Apes, and Other Animals Heal Themselves

By: Cindy Smith, Editor, The Mountain View Review

Mountain View Garden Club- Rome



I was intrigued by D'Ann Downey's comment about the speaker, Dr. Jaap De Roode, she heard at the State Conference who spoke on Doctors by Nature: How Ants, Apes and Other Animals Heal Themselves, so I had to look this up to find out more. Here is what I found out.

*Animals exhibit a wide range of self-healing behaviors, often referred to as **zoopharmacognosy**, which involves using natural substances to prevent or treat illness. According to biologist Jaap de Roode in his book [Doctors by Nature](#), these behaviors range from simple ingestion to complex "surgical"*

interventions.

Healing Behaviors by Species

Ants: Some species, like the *Matabele ant*, can **diagnose and treat** infected wounds of their peers by applying antimicrobial substances produced in specialized glands on their backs. Researchers have even observed ants performing life-saving **amputations** on injured nestmates to prevent fatal infections. Additionally, wood ants collect antibacterial **resin** to protect their nests.





Apes & Primates:

- **Internal Medicine:** Chimpanzees and bonobos swallow specific rough-textured or bitter leaves whole to physically dislodge and expel intestinal worms.
- **Topical Treatments:** Some chimpanzees have been observed crushing insects and applying them directly to their own wounds or the wounds of others to speed up healing.
- **Parasite Repellent:** Apes and lemurs rub their fur with millipedes or toxic plants to repel biting insects.

Other Animals:

- **Elephants:** African elephants have been known to chew the bark of fever trees to ease joint pain and arthritis.
- **Birds:** Some birds practice "anting," rubbing ants on their feathers to use the ants' formic acid as a natural pesticide.
- **Monarch Butterflies:** Sick monarchs lay their eggs on specific types of milkweed that contain chemicals to help their offspring fight off parasites.
- **Dolphins:** They possess remarkable healing speeds and can survive severe wounds by restricting blood flow to non-essential body parts while diving.

Types of Self-Medication

Scientific observations classify these behaviors into several strategies:

1. **Prophylaxis:** Using substances preventatively before getting sick (e.g., Japanese monkeys eating more antiparasitic plants in high-risk areas).
2. **Therapeutic:** Taking action after an infection has already occurred, such as caterpillars eating toxic alkaloids to kill parasitic larvae.
3. **Body Ointment:** Rubbing antiparasitic substances into fur or skin to repel pests.
4. **Social Medication:** Treating others within the same group, as seen in ants and chimpanzees.

Information taken from: www.researchgate.net

The book suggests that understanding animal medicine can lead to new pharmaceutical drugs, healthier livestock, and better conservation strategies for pollinators. The author, Jaap de Roode is a biology professor at Emory University, specializing in infectious diseases. Here is a link to a video that you can watch to hear Dr. Jaap de Roode talk about his research: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0u8A8sD5L4&t=191s>

◆ Youth Garden Therapy



Didi Vreatt and Sara Barton worked with “young gardeners” in April to paint terra cotta pots in preparation to make fairy gardens in them in May. Teal was a very popular color!



Didi and Sara do a great job of coming up with fun projects for children to complete each month.

Cindy Smith- Mountain View Garden Club- Rome

◆ Meditation Garden Update



Mountain View Garden Club in Rome had an excellent workday on Saturday April 25 with 10 people from various clubs and Master Gardeners. We planted pulled weeds and fertilized things. The cost for all the remaining plants from Watters will be \$3,400. We have received a generous gift of \$1,000 from a private donor and will get another \$500 from a Master Gardener Grant but still need any additional donations. Another workday to plant the remaining plants will be scheduled soon. A big thank you to Stephanie Shorey for all her donated time to landscape this area and make it a beautiful place for the public to enjoy. It is starting to look really nice. Go take a look if you have not been by in a while.

Cindy Smith- Mountain View Garden Club- Rome

Hats off to Spring

Soque Garden Club's annual tea party at the Valhalla Resort in Helen on March 13th was a big success. The 100 tickets for this event sold out quickly with people on a waiting list in hopes of attending. It was later decided to add another table to accommodate the 8 people waiting.



Brenda Holly and Maggie

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Centerpiece Winner by the Sunshine Girls

The event included a “Hat Parade” giving information and history about hats throughout the last 75+ years, a centerpieces competition and raffle baskets filled with goodies for pampering dogs, bird lovers, bees & pollinators, kitchen gadgets and more.



Tea Party Hat Contest Winners

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Also included were items from the Garden Gift Shop, which is set up every year for the Garden Extravaganza event, the first Saturday of every May. Offering The Garden Gift Shop was a good way to help determine interest for purchases and get feedback from guests.

Members and visitors are already talking about and making plans for our next tea party in 2027.

LeeAnn Childress- Soque Garden Club- Cleveland

Garden Extravaganza

With the support of 30 local sponsors, the Soque Garden Club's 9th annual Garden Extravaganza (GE) event was a huge success. There was a wide variety of vendors including native plants, trees, herbs, annuals, perennials and garden tools. Our local Veterans Art Group brought a diverse assortment of garden art that's always a big hit.



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With its diverse range of offerings, the GE had something for every gardener. From beginner gardeners to seasoned experts, attendees were able to find inspiration by attending 3 different demos, including information about annuals, bees and how to design flower arrangements.



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Now the club is already making plans for their 10th annual Garden Extravaganza!



LeeAnn Childress- Soque Garden Club- Cleveland

Council News



Rome Federated Garden Clubs (RFGC) and two special members were recognized for 50 years of community beautification, environmental protection and volunteerism at the 50th Anniversary Celebration of Keep Rome Floyd Beautiful in April.



Pictured are Pam Roberts, Townview Garden Club, Georgia Burns, Three Rivers Garden Club, and Joy Puckett, on behalf of Rome Federated Garden Clubs

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Rome Federated Garden Clubs Co-President, Kathy Cooper, presented a print of a Rome landmark to Linda Easterwood for serving with her as Rome Federated Garden Clubs Co-president 2025-2026. Linda is moving out of state and will be greatly missed.



Kathy Cooper and Linda Easterwood

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On April 23, 2026, Rome Federated Garden Clubs sponsored a community educational program on the history of the Labyrinth. The program was presented by Selena Tilly, Director of the Rome History Museum. Laurel District Director, Merrell Holden, attended.



Three Rivers Garden Club Event Hosts and Attendees

**Donna Knighten, Co-President, Three Rivers Garden Club,
and 2nd Vice President, Rome Federated Garden Clubs, Inc.**