

Laurel Letters- Fall 2026

Dear Laurel District,

Hello! Hello!! Our theme for Laurel is "Get out there and have fun!" Some really cool people have gotten the memo that The Garden Club of Georgia is awesome and we are able to welcome two new clubs- Rooted

Together led by Amanda Linder in Marietta and Laurel Leaf led by

Tanya Oliver in Homer and

surrounding areas. Thanks to Leanne Penman, Garden Club of Georgia's New Club Support Chairperson, and Laurel District Co-Director, Mikel Vann, for helping to form these clubs.



Our summer board meeting was hosted by Soque Garden Club at the Santee Nacoochee Cultural Center near Gainesville. We had a wonderful day and most people were able to tour the amazing arts museum. We have a write-up from

the club. Read on for the exclusive news.

The Laurel District annual fall meeting will be in Dalton hosted by the Garden Club of Ellijay. The theme is Rooted in the Mountains. Information and registration are included in this newsletter. I hope to see you there!



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Cheryl Briscoe has everyone fired up about the 100 years birthday of Garden Club of Georgia. We are commemorating this event with the planting of 100 Laurels in Laurel. Does your club have plans to plant one or more this fall? Pictures, please! Please send a picture, your club's name, date and location of the planting to laureldistrictdirector@gardenclubofgeorgia.org. We will be collecting documentation of 100 Laurels for our presentation to the Garden Club of Georgia.

Garden club presidents and Laurel District board members have been batting around ideas, questions and answers for each other at the Laurel Forums in September. If you haven't heard, Laurel Forum is the Zoom get together offered the first Tuesday of the month. FYI- we will meet again in November because our annual fall meeting is on the first Tuesday of October.

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, laureldistrictdirector@gardenclubofgeorgia.org, is on our webpage. Everything goes to me to be funneled out.

Sincerely, *Merrell Holden*

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Hello, Wonderful Clubs,

Two new garden clubs have been formed in Laurel District. They are Rooted Together Garden Club, Marietta GA- 23 members and Laurel Leaf Garden Club, Homer GA- 13 members.

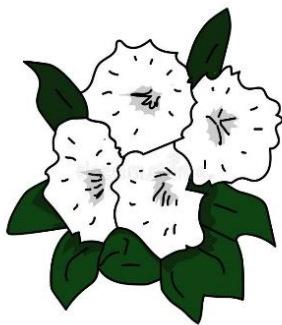
Members are encouraged to retain members and to start new clubs. Laurel District has 54 active clubs and 1,502 paid members. We have a total of 20 subscribing members.

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

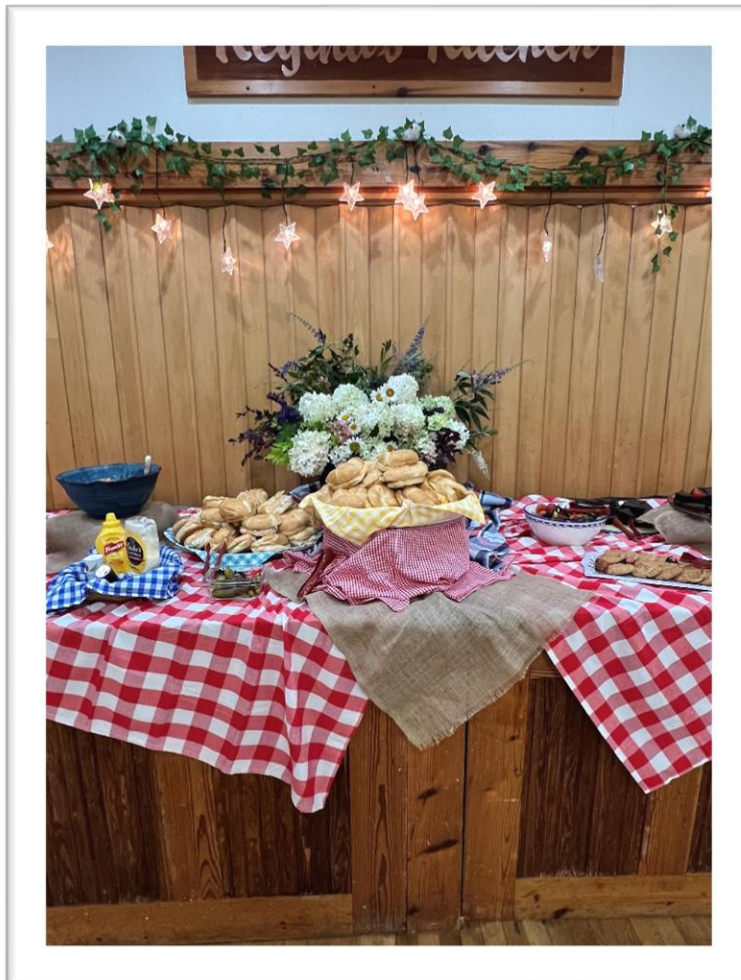
Condolence Procedure



Laurel District asks that you let us know at laureldistrictdirector@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 Summer Board Meeting hosted by Soque Garden Club



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The Soque Garden club hosted the Summer Laurel District Board meeting in Sautee Nacoochee on Friday, Aug 7, 2026. This is the first time the club can remember hosting a Laurel meeting and we enjoyed having the board visit. We choose a festive picnic theme and had a fun food table including ants (plastic) and cute little baskets of flowers from our gardens on the tables. The director of the Sautee Nacoochee Community Center welcomed everyone, told the ladies about the center and the garden and invited them to visit the folk poetry museum, art galleries and history museum.



Our team pictured left to right: Dawn Rinehart-Reumund, Elizabeth Ormsbee, Scotty Peppers, Madeline Chandler, Patty Bannon and Victoria Chandler, not pictured Molly Legg.

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Meeting Prep



Welcome!

What's Happening

The theme for ***Garden Gateways Winter 2026*** edition is
Membership.

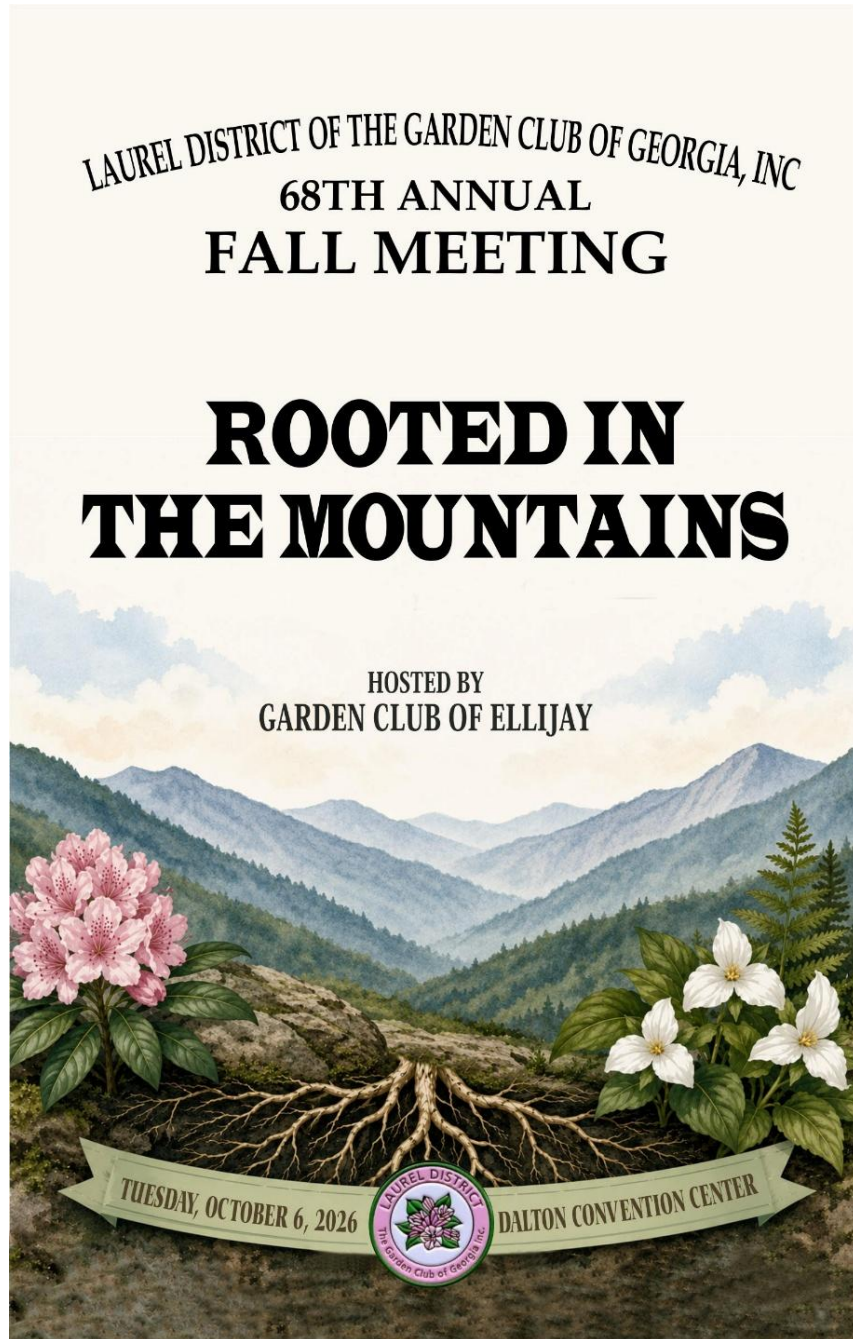
Articles for District Digs go to Merrell at
laureldistrictdirector@gardenclubofgeorgia.org.

The deadline for submissions October 10. We all
look forward to seeing your news!

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

*The registration for our Annual Fall Meeting on October
6 is at [Flowers | Laurel District Page](#) and also here:*

Garden Club of Ellijay co-presidents, Donna Houston and Joanne Waddey, cordially invite you to:



**Tuesday, October 6, 2026
9:30 AM to 3:30 PM at Dalton Convention Center
2211 Tony Ingle Parkway, Dalton GA 30720**

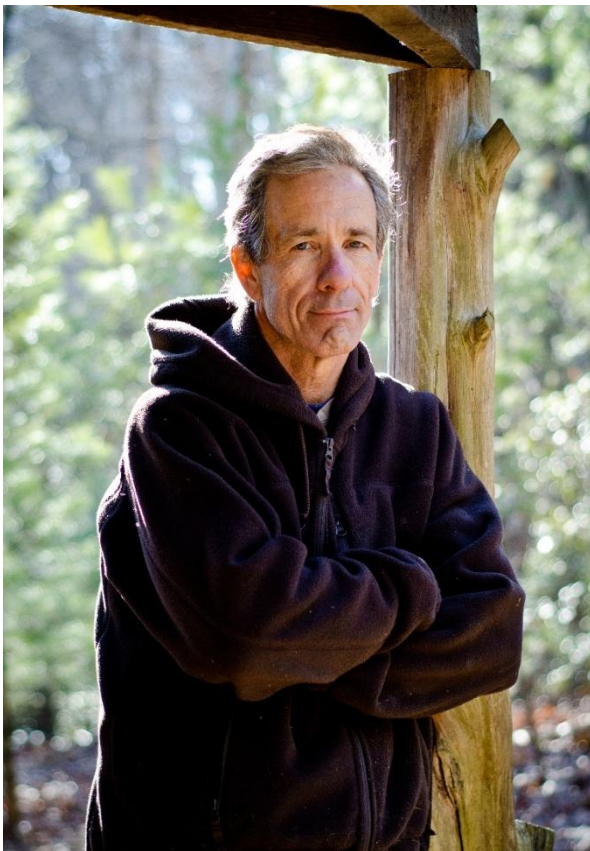
Featured Speaker: Mark Warren

naturalist, author, and director of
Medicine Bow Wilderness School

His presentation is

The Taming of the Few: Wild Plants in Your Garden

– a lecture and slide presentation



While most gardeners expend a lot of effort in keeping “outsider” plants on their side of the fence and the “garden” plants exclusively on the other, there are a number of native or naturalized “weeds” worthy of consideration to be full-fledged members of your personal “garden club.” Come learn about the wild plants that can add diversity to your plot. The rewards include new and interesting greens (both cooked and raw), tubers to dig up or pluck off a vine, roots to be roasted for coffee, and

berries so high in vitamin C that they have been known to kill flu viruses. You can also grow your own medicines that can resolve insect stings, inflammation, poison ivy rash, chigger itch, and excessive bruising.

Checklist for the Meeting

- Register by mail by September 17 or online by September 24
- Clubs donate a basket for raffle
- Bring pull tabs for Ronald McDonald House
- Notify laureldistrictdirector@gardenclubofgeorgia.org of club members to be honored in the memorial
- Make hotel reservations

Home2 Suites by Hilton Dalton
865 College Dr, Dalton, GA 30720
(706) 226-9500

\$169 USD plus taxes for Monday, October 5.
Reservations must be made by Saturday, September 5.

Make Reservations [Here](#)

**Remember to bring your pull tabs to the meeting on
October 6, 2026 at Dalton Convention Center.**

Thanks so much!

Virginia Hunter, Pull-a-Tab for Ronald McDonald

Laurel District asks that every club donate a raffle basket with a theme of your choosing. Please attach this information to the basket:

- **Club Name and City**
- **Basket Theme**
- **Basket Items and Values**
- **Total Basket Value**

If your club is unable to donate a raffle basket, please mail a check to Laurel District for \$50 for small clubs, \$100 for medium clubs and \$150 for large clubs to:

Claudia Bell
3759 Bear Den Creek Drive
Buford, GA, 30519

Does your club have someone we may honor in our memorial service for club members who have passed since our last annual meeting in 2025? Email Merrell at laureldistrictdirector@gardenclubofgeorgia.org by September 24 with their name, garden club with city, date of the passing, district or state offices held by this person and the mailing address of the family.



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Register Online by September 24th for Laurel District Annual Fall Meeting 2026

at [Laurel District Annual Fall Meeting 2026 Tickets, Tuesday, October 6 • 9:30](#)

[AM - 3:30 PM | Eventbrite](#)

for **\$59.06**

or complete, print and mail this form by September 17th

with check to Laurel District for **\$50** to:

Edna McClellan, 180 Pacer Ct., Unit 9044, Ellijay, GA 30540

Confirmation will be emailed to you.

NAME:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

PHONE NUMBER:

GARDEN CLUB AND CITY:

DISTRICT:

Please indicate all that apply to you:

- ☐ National Garden Clubs Board Member
- ☐ Deep South Board Member
- ☐ Garden Club of Georgia Board Member
- ☐ Laurel District Board Member
- ☐ Garden Club President
- ☐ Garden Club Member
- ☐ Garden Club Voting Delegate
- ☐ New Garden Club Member 2025
- ☐ First Time Attendee at District Meeting
- ☐ National Garden Clubs Life Member
- ☐ Deep South Life Member
- ☐ Garden Club of Georgia Life Member
- ☐ Emeritus
- ☐ Subscribing Garden Club Member
- ☐ Guest

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!



Laurel District Board Reports on August 7

Blue Star and Gold Star Markers: Victoria Chandler- no update at this time.

Chaplain: Rene Lanier - please remember to send notices of deaths to Merrell first. Laurel District page has instructions for condolences.

Cherokee Garden Library Chairperson: Deborah Paul- meeting next Tuesday.

Community Wildlife Chairperson: Inday Bauer- not present but Pollinator Count is next week.

Flower Show Coordinator: Judy Patterson- My report is very short since most things are "off" for the summer. However, I can tell you there are several upcoming flower shows which may be of interest to club members in our district.

August 15 and 16, Georgia Mountain Fair, Hiawassee. This will be an NGC Standard Flower Show in conjunction with the fair and recognizes the Hiawassee Clubs 75th birthday.

September 18, 19, 20, AND September 25, 26, 27 at Jim Miller Park, Marietta, GA. These are two SEPARATE Standard Flower shows, each held during the two weeks of the North Georgia Fair at the fairgrounds in Marietta.

October 2 the Dallas Garden Club will hold a standard flower show in Dallas, GA. This will be an exciting show after several years on hiatus.

Also, if anyone is interested, it is not too late to jump into Flower Show School which leads to accreditation as an NGC Flower Show Judge. The first school offering Course 1 is at Bellmere Garden House, Johns Creek, GA, starting August 16-19. The second Flower Show School continues with Course 2 and is offered at Central Georgia Technical College, Macon, GA. Course 1 is not prerequisite to

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Course 2 so it's not too late to consider this possibility. Flower Show Schools in Georgia don't come around very often so this may be a great opportunity to pursue learning to judge both horticulture and design. I'll be happy to provide more information regarding registration if anyone needs it.

Four and Five Star Members: Madeline Chandler- explained the recognition of garden club member who have completed National Garden Club schools.

what this is.

Garden Therapy: Joyce Laben- while at the National Garden Club convention in St.

Louis in May, I attended a presentation on therapeutic horticulture. The presenters were Liz Byrde, the coordinator of Therapeutic Horticulture at the Missouri Botanical Garden, and Jeanne Carbone, Therapeutic Horticulture Guru.

At first, I wondered what the difference between “garden therapy” and “therapeutic horticulture”? There is no difference!

Liz Byrde shared the following resources:

- Therapeutic Horticulture Activities Database
[Therapeutic Horticulture Activities Database - Therapeutic Horticulture Activities Database - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences – UF/IFAS](#)
- North Carolina State Extension Therapeutic Horticulture
[Therapeutic Horticulture Activities - Therapeutic Horticulture | NC State Extension](#)
- Missouri Botanical Garden Therapeutic Horticulture Page
[Therapeutic Horticulture](#)

If anyone is interested in the powerpoint, they may contact me and I will share it directly with them.

GCG Convention: Deanna Slone, Jill Denlea, Karen Hawkins, and Elaine Williams-

our goal stated in the title of this song- “Let’s Give Them Something to Talk About.” Dates are yet to be definitely determined, but right now dates are March 30-April 1st. Team was presented.

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Garden Clubs are asked to provide floral arrangements which will last for the entire convention. Raffle Baskets for the convention can be brought to the Annual Fall Meeting in October if no one from a club can attend the Convention.

Donations of \$25.00 for Door Prizes are asked from each club.

The emphasis will be on hospitality. Cheryl Briscoe emphasized that it has been 14 years since we were responsible for a convention due to the pandemic. This convention will be a non-stop garden party. Be looking for attire!

Grants: Maye Suddeth- via message encouraged all to apply for these good grants.

Historic Landscape Preservation: Cheryl Briscoe- reported that a record number of three grants received this year.

1. Marietta Council Garden Center- 100 plant signs for trees on property
2. William Ruth Museum- outside signage
3. Rome Federation - \$3,000 for the Meditation Garden.

Legislation: Mickey Carlton- Merrell shared her report- Mickey attended the community wide rededication service of our nation on the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States of America. The event was hosted by Cartersville First Baptist Church on July 19th at 6:00 PM.

Mickey will be attending the prayer walk for a local Bartow County or Cartersville City school on the 2nd Sunday in August from 4 to 6:00 PM. This year will be her fourth year to participate.

Marshall Forest Land Trust: Caroline Alford- no report

Merchandise: Lynn Fronk- Claudia Bell requested help for the Fall Meeting as she is unable to attend.

Pull-A-Tab for Ronald McDonald Chairperson: Virginia Hunter-reported that our district was next to the bottom in collection of tabs. A sheet was handed out with suggestions for securing more tabs from the community.

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Scholarship: Open

Social Media: Open

Youth Program: Open

Garden Council of Cherokee County President: Jean Ray- the County Fair, in September, will have participation from the Garden Clubs.

Marietta Council of Garden Clubs, Inc.: Kathryn Coffee- the council is working on securing a Blue Star Marker for their property.

Rome Federation Garden Clubs Co-Presidents: Kathy Cooper and Liz Tierney- clubs will be participating in the upcoming Flower Show at County Fair in October.



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 laureldistrictdirector@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's 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!**

Celebrate GCG 100th with 100 Laurels!

We Laurels have a great opportunity to honor Garden Club of Georgia's 100 year past with a gift to our district that will last well into the next century!

Let's plant 100 native Laurel plants all over Laurel District by June 1st, 2028.

Several types of laurel plants grow in Georgia, including Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), Carolina Cherry Laurel (*Prunus caroliniana*), and Great Laurel (*Rhododendron maximum*). (Below is a good description of each.)

These native plants are readily available at nurseries throughout our area. They cost a minimum of around \$25 each.

The other six districts are planning their celebrations, also, including, for example, 100 azaleas in Azalea District.

We want each club and council to plant at least two laurel plants so we can record at least 100 for Laurel's gift to Georgia in our district. Take pictures, documenting the location, date, volunteers and number of plants. Send your pictures (see attached form) to Merrell Holden at Laureldistrictdirector@gardenclubofgeorgia.org and Cheryl Briscoe at Ctgb15@gmail.com.

We will number each submission and keep you up-to-date on the total as we make our way to 100! Let's go, Laurels!

Laurel District 100

Club/Council Name _____

Date _____

Location _____

County _____

& Type of Laurels _____

Submitted by _____

Common Laurel Varieties in Georgia

- **Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*):** A native evergreen shrub with glossy leaves and delicate white-to-pink cup-shaped spring flowers, common in rocky woods, mountain slopes, and near streams. [1, 2, 3]
- **Carolina Cherry Laurel (*Prunus caroliniana*):** A native upright evergreen shrub or small tree featuring shiny dark green leaves and fragrant white spring flower clusters, frequently used for privacy hedges in the Piedmont and Coastal Plain regions.
- **Great Laurel (*Rhododendron maximum*):** A large native shrub found mostly in cool, damp mountain coves and forests, producing massive clusters of white or pale pink bell-shaped flowers in early summer.

Growing and Safety Facts

- **Toxic Properties:** All parts of native mountain laurels and cherry laurels contain toxic compounds (such as grayanotoxins in *Kalmia* and cyanogenic glycosides in *Prunus*) and are poisonous if eaten by humans or pets.
- **Care Needs:** They generally prefer acidic, well-draining soil and partial shade, though Carolina cherry laurel tolerates full sun and standard urban yard conditions very well.

Club News



AMICALOLA GARDEN CLUB

The Club's activities for this year have been positive and enjoyable. We had a milestone "Celebration of 91 Years" in March. Garden Week in Georgia was celebrated by the placement of flowers and a proclamation in the Tate Post Office, the Pickens County Library and the Chairman's Office of the Pickens County Board of Commissioners. An article promoting beautification, conservation and education was also placed online and in our local paper, the PICKENS COUNTY PROGRESS. A donation was made to each of our elementary schools, Harmony, Hill City and Tate for their spring gardening projects. Home Depot gift cards were provided to our local nursing homes, Jasper Point, Pruitt Health of Jasper and Wildwood Health Care, Inc. to assist with their spring planting needs. We have enjoyed some great speakers this year. Most recently, Susan Vaughn, a member of the American Daylily Society, gave a very informative talk about her collection of 400 varieties of daylilies. After our annual flower show in May, we headed out to enjoy the days of summer.

Anita Poole- Amicalola Garden Club

Anetsa-Ga-Da (Ball Ground) Garden Club

The Ball Ground Garden Club is commonly recognized by the local community as caretakers of the Ball Ground Botanical Garden. The garden is well known inside and outside of Cherokee County for its beautiful and serene green space. This year two club members completed the National Garden Club's Environmental School provided and hosted by the Garden Club of Georgia. Due to knowledge acquired, these members identified a



large area along the creek bed within the garden where the ecosystem was being very negatively impacted by a

large overgrowth of two invasive plants. Yellow Flag Irises and Japanese Stiltgrass had taken over both sides of the bank. The water flow was drastically impeded and there



was very little sign of aquatic life. A neighbor of the garden was recruited and graciously lent a hand to a few members to eliminate the invasives. The creek banks are now being replanted with native and non-aggressive plants to stabilize the banks and to restore the ecosystem to friendly territory for pollinators and aquatic life. Signs of life have returned to the creek!

Mary Hrovatic- Anetsa-Ga-Da Garden Club

Chattooga Garden Club

Members of Chattooga Garden Club assisted in landscape maintenance at Summerville Post Office this summer. Youth and adult volunteers of Three Circles Foundation joined in the work to place mulch, trim shrubs, remove debris, and clear the view of the historic 1937 cornerstone. The club provided materials for the project and made a donation to support the youth group.



Chattooga Garden Club members at Summerville Post Office Deborah Moore, Gail Adams, Nell Farrar, Sylvia Cordle, Andrea Norton. (L to R)

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View of 1937 cornerstone at Summerville Post Office



Loropetalum and Natchez Crepe Myrtle at Summerville Post Office

Nell W. Farrar- Chattooga Garden Club

Chattooga Garden Club adds Décor to Local Fundraiser

Supporting a local food bank and resource center, members of Chattooga Garden Club provided forty-five floral centerpieces for the annual “Dancing With Our Stars” fundraiser held at Chattooga High School on July 25th. White blooms from Limelight hydrangeas and greenery from Golden Mop juniper cut from the gardens of club members were used to create the arrangements. Tall Eiffel Tower style vases as well as shorter gold foil wrapped containers were used to coordinate with the table settings provided by the Community Resource Center of Chattooga County. The garden club also made a monetary donation to the CRCC which has the mission “to acquire and distribute resources and bring relief to those in financial need in Chattooga County.”



Nell W. Farrar- Chattooga Garden Club

Jonquil Garden Club of Smyrna Honored for Historic Preservation

The Jonquil Garden Club was honored in May 2026 by the Cobb County Landmarks and Historical Society for its ongoing work at Matilda's Garden. The club received an award recognizing its "outstanding contribution to the preservation of our heritage" during a special presentation at the historic Root House in Marietta. Awards were presented to the Jonquil Garden Club, and to the Friends of the Concord Covered Bridge, who partner together in the Matilda's Garden project.



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Club President Michele Cox, accepted the award on behalf of the Jonquil Garden Club. Dave Mahloy, who does “double duty” as a member of both the Friends of the Concord Covered Bridge and the Jonquil Garden Club, accepted the award that was presented to the Friends of the Concord Covered Bridge.

This recognition adds to a list of honors for the club’s work on Matilda’s Garden. In 2025, the Jonquil Garden Club received First Place in the State of Georgia for Historic Preservation among small garden clubs, as well as Honorable Mention from Deep South Garden Clubs and National Garden Clubs, Inc.

The club continues to improve and maintain Matilda’s Garden, a special place where gardening and local history come together. The garden surrounds a bench and historic plaque placed by the Toni Morrison Society to honor Black Americans who lived in the area, including those who were formerly enslaved and continued to live in the community following emancipation. It also extends along Concord Road with plenty of shade-loving perennials adding to the landscape.

Located at the Concord Road trailhead of the of the Silver Comet Trail, Matilda’s Garden has become a welcoming place of rest and contemplation for those enjoying the trail, as well as for visitors interested in the area’s history. The native perennials and annuals planted there are a haven to the area’s pollinators.

Through its dedication to Matilda’s Garden, the Jonquil Garden Club is helping preserve an important part of Cobb County’s heritage while creating a beautiful and meaningful space for the community to enjoy.

Michele Cox- Jonquil Garden Club

Mountain Ivy Garden Club

Rabun County High School held its annual Senior Scholarship Assembly on May 12. Mountain Ivy Garden Club is pleased to announce that the club awarded four scholarships to four seniors, Daniel Alexander, Ladonna Houston, Jayla Boyd and Lilly Speed, totaling, \$5,000. In addition, they awarded a special one-time scholarship in memory of the late Lucy Ezzard Bartlett to Peyton Hicks, in the amount of \$4,000. A native of Tiger, Lucy was a long-time member of Mountain Ivy Garden Club and a life-long educator. She was passionate about education and the club's mission to provide an opportunity for Rabun County students to seek post-secondary education in the agriculture sciences. To that end she worked tirelessly during her tenure with the club, baking cakes and



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cinnamon rolls to sell at countless plant sales, which was the club's main fundraising event over the years. The club also renewed two scholarships awarded last year, totaling \$5,000.

Three years ago, in 2024, the club hosted its first annual Celebrate Spring Garden Symposium as a fundraising event for our scholarship fund,



which we hoped would replace the annual plant sales. Thanks to the overwhelming success of this first symposium, we staged additional events in 2025 and 2026, adding more than \$20,000 to our scholarship fund. In addition to granting scholarships, the club provides funds to Rabun County High School's FFA and to assist with camp tuition for 4-H camp attendees. The club's next Celebrate Spring Symposium is scheduled for March 25, 2027.

Sherry LeTellier, Mountain Ivy Garden Club

What's new for the Soque Garden Club?

QR Code Plant Stakes!



Our club has wanted to replace the old bent, rusty plant identifiers in the gardens we maintain at the Sautee Nacoochee Center for several years. Initial replacement searches were found to be quite pricey because we want to include an individual QR code on each stake to give the curious viewer more information. The QR code information helps encourage

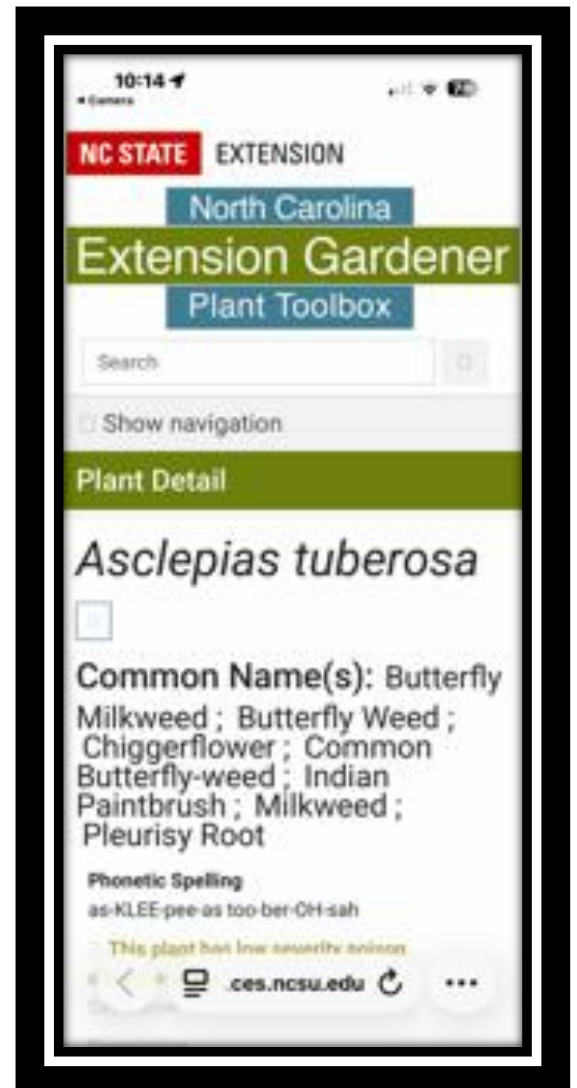
inter active interest in the variety of plant species in the garden.

So, our amazing Tea Party Committee



was determined to raise the money needed for this endeavor. After the last 3 annual events the money was achieved!

During the search for the perfect plant stake we were lucky enough to



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find a wonderful source through an individual on Etsy! George Roark from the PollinatorWeb could not have made it easier or more affordable for us. He was very respectful for, in his words “the meaningful project — the Sautee Nacoochee Center gardens sound like exactly the kind of place these markers were made for.” It was his way of honoring the work our club does.



Not only was George very kind and patient with us but also went out of his way to make sure the information was exactly what we needed.

We now have the first initial stakes which placed in our Rosalyn Carter Butterfly garden. The next step will be determining the rest of the numerous information stakes needed for the bigger garden sections in front of the Sautee Nacoochee Center.



LeeAnn Childress- Soque Garden Club



A Call for Response and Action

By now we are all aware of the development of Data Centers in our beautiful state of Georgia. Every county commission has had to answer to constituents about votes taken with packed meetings. I don't think anyone is at fault. This industry came quietly without our understanding of how it will affect our natural resources that Georgia is so fortunate to possess. Below is a letter I previously submitted to various environmental organizations.

It is sad to hear about the widespread use of eminent domain by Georgia Power to serve the buildout of AI Data Centers. Plants, wildlife, wetlands, water resources and farm lands are being sacrificed for the unknown. Landowners are being forced to give up their homes to their detriment.

On a personal level, a portion of our protected property which is in a Conservation Easement granted to the Georgia Alabama Land Trust is being threatened by a taking through eminent domain for an expansion of a Georgia Power electrical substation. Notably there is an approved Data Center about one mile away from this Georgia Power substation. This threat to take 19 acres of our protected property will not only cause the loss of the property but will harm the rest of our protected property on which we have springs, creeks, forests, lakes, wetlands, and rare botanical specimens.

I hope that the environmental organizations receiving this message will speak out through their newsletters, meetings, and elected officials about the threats to the resources of our beautiful state of Georgia. The fight by our environmental organizations to preserve the Okefenokee has been useful but now is the time to extend the fight to save our land, water and forests throughout the state. Please use your influence to help preserve our environment.

***Sincerely,
Jennifer Kearns
Seven Hills Garden Club, Rome***

*Club Presidents, please distribute to your members.
This is a testament to their hard work.*



Okefenokee Gains UNESCO World Heritage Site Status

Fantastic News!!!! – After more than 4 decades in the making, and after 2 years since being officially nominated, the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site on Saturday, July 25, 2026 by the World Heritage Committee at its 48th annual session in Busan, South Korea.

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- This is the FIRST World Heritage Site in Georgia
- This is the 27th site in the United States (other natural sites include: Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Yosemite National Parks)
- This is the 1st site to be managed by the National Wildlife Refuge System

This newly achieved status is well-deserved and serves as an acknowledgment of the swamp's world-class ecosystems- the Okefenokee is North America's largest blackwater swamp. It provides habitat to more than 1,270 species of plants and animals. Most of the swamp's wilderness is the same as it was 6000 years ago, making it one of largest intact wetland complexes left on Earth.

Many people hope that this designation will increase the OKE's profile as a travel destination, bringing new visitors and tourist dollars to an economically challenged part of our state.

The OKE has long faced dangers from mining threats along Trail Ridge – the eastern border of the swamp. Thanks to our garden club members and so many other concerned Georgians who mounted opposition to mining, the permitting process kept being delayed for the most recent proposed mine allowing time for negotiations between Twin Pines Minerals and the Conservation Fund to come to an agreement. In June 2025, Twin Pines Minerals agreed to sell their land and mineral rights to the Conservation Fund for \$60 million. Hence, the immediate threat from this one mine disappeared.

Then in March 2026, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources announced that it would buy about 4,000 acres of that land to create a new wildlife management area, slated to be open to the public in 2027.

However, we need to remember that there are another 25,000 acres of Trail Ridge that are still vulnerable. Therefore, in the 2027 Legislative session, we will continue to 'strongly encourage' our Georgia legislators to enact laws to permanently protect all of Trail Ridge from the dangers of mining.

Thank you for keeping this issue a priority.

Barbara Bourque
GCG Legislative Chairman