

GRASS ROOTS

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALDWIN COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS, INC.

DECEMBER 2025

www.baldwinmastergardeners.com

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PRESIDENT'S NOTE

By Don Richerson

As I look back over the past two years of my time as your President, I am reminded of the adage, don't poke a skunk. I have religiously avoided the poking, having had plenty of issues arise without said poking.

It has been a whirlwind of activity and change from hosting the 2024 AMGA Conference in Daphne to the hugely successful Spring Plant sale in April 2025. In between sprinkled with a new system of hours reporting, a new Policy and Procedures manual with new Membership categories and two enthusiastic Intern Classes. Ex officio Board membership for one intern, elected by their class, has helped bring forward new leaders to our organization.

The BCMG is in a time of transition from the organization that secured our 501 (c) (3) status years ago to the current internet savvy research based classes that we have come to welcome. Gone are the days of Covid restrictions and Zoom meetings that have given way to "the sky's the limit" in furthering our mission:



PRESIDENT'S NOTE

By Don Richerson

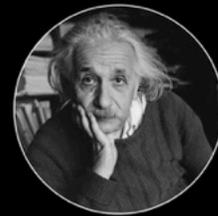
The mission of the Baldwin County Master Gardeners (BCMG) Corporation is to provide horticultural education, community service and environmental stewardship for our community in affiliation with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) program.

To that end, the BCMG will:

- Enhance and supplement the consumer horticulture programs in teaching and research of the ACES universities: Auburn University and Alabama A&M University.*
- Train for certification as master gardeners individuals who, in turn, volunteer their expertise and services in support of the Cooperative Extension effort in the horticultural sciences. Enhance master gardeners' knowledge of and interest in horticulture and related activities.*
- Provide opportunities for master gardeners to associate with others who have interests in horticulture.*
- Provide community service to residents of Baldwin County, Alabama, by way of horticultural projects and dissemination of information on horticultural practices and techniques as approved by ACES.*
- Protect and conserve the natural resources of the state by teaching safe, effective and sustainable horticultural practices that promote the development of healthy gardens, landscapes and communities.*

Recent events have further forced us to face the reality of having insufficient facilities to germinate and propagate for our Spring and Fall Plant sales. We are actively seeking a partner where our mission can be enhanced and perhaps redirected to other areas of horticultural education. It's an exciting time to be a part of BCMG.

Change will be the keyword moving forward, and your new Officers and Board members are eager for the challenges ahead. Precise definitive decisions are mandatory as our organization continues to grow just like our Baldwin County does. A bright future with opportunities for all member categories is a wonderful place to contemplate. I am profoundly grateful for the support you have extended to the Board and I this past year and I look forward to the future. The sky is the limit! There, I poked that skunk!



Not everything that can be
counted counts and not
everything that counts can
be counted

ALBERT EINSTEIN



DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Cassandra Rabren 12-3
Lynn Andrews 12-5
Alice Kohler 12-6
Beverly White 12-7
Reba Cunningham 12-11
Maura Daniell 12-11
Michelle Patton 12-12
Elsie Reed 12-12

Mike McQueen 12-18
Ann Shirley 12-18
Terri Withee 12-22
Steve Urbanek 12-27
Lydia Chan 12-28
Patrick Waldrop 12-31
Teena Reed 12-31

Happy Birthday



MONTHLY PROGRAM NOTES



*December Meeting
December 10th, 2025
Foley Civic Center
407 East Laurel Avenue
Social Begins at 10:00 am.
Meeting begins at 10:30 am.
Meal Begins at 11:00 am*

*Please bring a festive food item
or your favorite banquet dish.
There will be a special cake to honor
BCMG's 35th anniversary.
WDLR Recipient Announced
There will also be door prizes.*

December Award Luncheon

Fresh Air, Sunshine and Friends!

by Lynn Barnes

On Thursday, November 13, 2025, Carmen Flammini, our Extension agent, conducted a tour of some of our Demonstration Gardens where we are involved with the community. Wow! You should be so proud of your title of "Baldwin County Master Gardener". This tour, the first of many, made it clear that we are supporting children's hands-on learning. Let me share with you what we saw.

At Point Clear Youth Rotary Club on Young Street in Fairhope, we saw the raised beds that will soon be planted with winter vegetables. When they are harvested, they will cook and serve the kale chips, brussels sprouts and carrots. Many of the children have never eaten these vegetables.

Next, we visited the Pelican Nest Science Lab and Garden in Fairhope. Very impressive! In addition to pollinator and bird gardens, we saw a frog and turtle pond. All Baldwin County school children get to come here for a science field trip. Our MG's help maintain it and answer children's questions.

Fairhope West Elementary was our third stop on the tour. Even in mid-November the flowers and shrubs in the pollinator garden were blooming their hearts out! Master Gardeners helped design and plant these gardens. Their next project is a shade garden beside the classroom wall. The students each painted a rock and personalized it. These were used to define the borders of the pollinator gardens. The teachers at this school use this outdoor classroom whenever possible.



Fresh Air, Sunshine and Friends!

by Lynn Barnes

Nature Connect Outdoor School was a hidden gem in Montrose. The children here participate in outdoor classrooms. They installed a rain barrel (with Carmen's help) to collect rainwater and use it for irrigation. They also built a moss and lichen garden and a frog pond using local clay soil as the liner on the bottom (with the help of Master Gardeners). We took a short hike to a beautiful and very clear stream where early potters in the area used the water and the clay. We even found some broken pottery shards.

Lastly, we visited the Ruff Wilson After School Center which had raised beds that are tended by the children who participate in the program. It was neat as a pin and had flowers and vegetables growing. Master Gardeners helped design and plant these gardens. The actual boards used in the raised beds were preserved through a burning process using a torch that was done in the hot sun of July by Karon Pennington and Shannon Russell. The children get hands-on experience in how to plant and maintain a garden.

I urge you to join us on future garden tours where Master Gardeners have donated their time and talent. Please help us to continue leading the way by sharing your knowledge, expertise and time with our fellow Baldwin County citizens.



MEETING MINUTES



By Gilda Underwood

Baldwin County Master Gardeners

General Meeting 11/12/2025

Don Richerson, President, called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM at the Gulf Coast Research & Extension Center, located at 8300 SR-104, Fairhope, Alabama. Don requested everyone stand for the Pledge of Allegiance, then asked if any visitors were present; none responded. Don invited everyone with a November birthday to please stand, as well as all past Presidents and Wayne de la Rua Award recipients. All of those individuals were acknowledged with applause from the group. A total of 84 people attended.

Charlotte Hamm introduced today's guest speaker, Vaughn Drinkard, who created a wonderful garden on Government Street in Mobile. He has practiced law there for 48 years and comes from a family with a long legacy of camellias. He has designed and developed a small botanical garden called Cornerstone Gardens, that is comprised of 8000 plants made up of 125 different species, including 300 camellias. He is a Mobile Master Gardener and serves as a trustee for the Gulf Coast Region of the American Camellia Society. He is the founder and an active member of the Sawada Camellia Club in Mobile. A warm round of applause welcomed Vaughn Drinkard.

Vaughn Drinkard opened his talk as a Regional Director of the American Camellia Society, a member-based non-profit dedicated to advancing camellia knowledge through education and research. The Society certifies judges, registers new cultivars, and offers resources such as publications and workshops for growers. He encouraged everyone to join as a member.

He introduced his topic, "The Gulf Coast's Royal Connection," by noting that his interest originated in childhood when Queen Elizabeth ascended to the throne of England.

It all began when Robert O. Rubel, Jr., widely recognized around the world as an expert on camellias, founded The Longview Nursery in 1915. Mr. Rubel traveled, collected, and documented old and new camellias by drawings of the blooms, buds, and leaves. A good camellia man knows you have to be able to identify camellias. Some of the famous camellias he introduced were 'Blood of China', 'La Peppermint', and 'Roosevelt Blues'. Every named camellia has a history behind it. Robert Rubel cultivated the 'Queen' variety from seeds sowed in 1932, with its first bloom occurring in 1943.

In 1950, Cliff Harris, the grandfather of Vaughn Drinkard, acquired Longview Nursery in Mobile, where his son-in-law Blanding Drinkard had previously been appointed by Robert Rubel as a nursery supervisor. Cliff Harris subsequently advanced Longview Nursery's legacy, focusing on the propagation and grafting of camellias.

MEETING MINUTES



By Gilda Underwood

Queen Elizabeth II became Queen in 1952. Camellia growers entered into a competition for a flowering camellia plant to be chosen for the young Queen. In 1954, a camellia from Longview Nursery was selected from over 200 camellia blooms to be presented to the new Queen. The camellia was named, 'Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II'. The camellia flower was described as a rich brilliant salmon pink of incomplete double form. Later the camellia nomenclature book would describe the bloom as a japonica salmon rose pink, medium to large, semi-double to a loose peony form with wavy ruffle petals.

Vaughn Drinkard's grandfather, Cliff Harris, was planning to send the queen's plants to Windsor Castle's Royal Gardens in England. On March 22, 1954, a large number of folks gathered at the Mobile airport to see the camellia plants off to London. Cliff Harris had created a gold-plated crate with a glass window so people could see the healthy plants being sent to London. The two plants were planted in the Royal Garden at Windsor Castle.

Describing what happened to the plant since 1954, Drinkard said the 'Queen' is in many gardens in Mobile, but the cultivar did not have widespread distribution. In 2017, Vaughn Drinkard corresponded with John Anderson, her Majesty's keeper of the gardens. Mr. Anderson said the progeny of the original plant was in Savill Garden at Windsor Great Park. It was learned that 'Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II' is still in the Queen's Garden.

In November of 2022, Mr. Drinkard had the honor of donating a mature 'Queen' to Masee Lane Gardens, Fort Valley, Georgia, home of the American Camellia Society.

When exploring the history of local camellia enthusiasts, the story of Cliff Harris (Vaughan Drinkard's grandfather) and Blanding Drinkard (his father) is highlighted alongside notable figures such as Kosaku Sawada, Bobby Green, and others.

Mr. Drinkard invited everyone to come to Cornerstone Gardens to see one of the oldest 'Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II' camellias. On the last Saturday of January and each Saturday in February, he conducts a camellia demonstration at Cornerstone Gardens.

During this period all camellias are in bloom. Participants in his class have the opportunity to select cultivars for cuttings or scions. He provides instruction on grafting techniques. The demonstration lasts approximately two and a half hours.

Cornerstone Gardens and Arboretum is located at 1066 Government Street in Mobile. It was developed as a private botanical garden as a place of meditation, prayer, and rest. A Carriage House near the Gardens has been available for ministers' rest and rejuvenation since 2016.

MEETING MINUTES



By Gilda Underwood

Now the Garden is open on Saturday from 8:00AM to dark and on Sunday afternoon. It is made up of two large gardens, an English garden, which is all white blooming and a Japanese woodlands garden. Smaller gardens complement the larger gardens. They are the Blanding Drinkard Camellia Garden, comprised of about 300 cultivars, a herb garden, the Cliff B. Harris Shade Garden, and Nelson T. Harris Rose Garden. Also, there is a succulent garden and will soon be a medicinal garden. Recently, Southern Living featured the Cornerstone Garden in their magazine.

Vaughn Drinkard invited questions from the audience. The attendees expressed their appreciation with applause.

The audience had an interest in the soil needed for camellias placed in pots:

- Pine bark & sand (2-part sand to 1 part bark)
- Peat moss (one to four)
- One bag of potting soil
- Large glass of perlite
- Fertilizer 12-6-6 or 13-6-6 (3 times from March - August)

Don call for a 15 to 20-minute break.

After the break, Don resumed the meeting and asked if there were any corrections or additions to the minutes of the General Meeting held on October 8th, as published in the November Grass Roots Newsletter. As there were no corrections or additions, Tom Fortner moved to approve the General Meeting minutes of October 8th. Sara Semmes seconded the motion, and it was approved by all present.

RESOLVED, Approval of the October 8, 2025, General Meeting minutes as published in the November Grass Roots Newsletter.

Don announced to all Master Gardeners the deadline for recording volunteer hours in the ACES EMG Service Report is November 15th for inclusion at the December Awards Luncheon. It's very important to ACES that all hours are recorded by December 31st.

Mickey Ezell announced that BCMG received a donation from the Schmieding Foundation for \$10,000.00. He further added the budget for 2026 has been prepared. When working on this budget Mickey said he realizes just how much Baldwin County Master Gardeners relies on successfully growing and selling plants for their major income. Mickey encouraged everyone to support and be involved with the organization and the great projects being done.

MEETING MINUTES



By Gilda Underwood

President's Report: Don reported that there have been negotiations with the City of Loxley regarding a place to build a greenhouse and being a partner in the greenhouse. The Greenhouse committee met on Monday with the City of Loxley Mayor, Richard Teal, and their new Public Works director, Greg Smith. Currently, they are looking into leasing land to BCMG. Securing a ground lease is essential for applying for grant funding to construct a greenhouse, since BCMG does not own land. The matter is currently being reviewed by Loxley's attorney and the mayor. Don anticipates receiving a response from them within a few weeks. The Greenhouse Committee has been invited to participate in the beautification meeting scheduled for January.

Don said he has shared information about what BCMG can contribute to constructing the greenhouse. Next, we'll find out what they will offer. This is our current state in negotiations. The City of Loxley is conveniently located and open to partnering with BCMG. They suggested the Loxley Municipal Park's new Pavillion as a possible place for our plant sale.

Vice-President's Report: Lynn thanked members for attending the meeting after the speaking event. She announced our December 10th meeting will be held at the Foley Civic Center. There is additional parking behind the building. Social time begins at 10:00. The meeting will start at 10:30AM with the meal beginning at 11:00AM. Please bring a festive food item or your favorite banquet recipe. There will be a special cake to honor BCMG's 35th anniversary. There will also be door prizes.

Lynn shared that Loree Hadley has put in a lot of effort to create a prototype book celebrating the 35th anniversary of Baldwin County Master Gardeners. If you would like to receive this book, please sign the order list. The book features stunning pictures and is priced at \$46.00.

Lynn asked members to bring a dish for the General Meeting's refreshment table when they can. She reminded attendees that providing refreshments qualifies as one hour of volunteer service.

A door prize drawing was held, and three plants donated by Dolores Hammack were awarded to three lucky members.

ACES Report: Carmen Flammini, Regional Extension Agent, will have a Master Gardeners tour on Thursday, November 13th, of five Demonstration Gardens. If you're interested in volunteer sites, meet at 104 building for carpooling at 8:30AM tomorrow.

- Fairhope Rotary Youth Club gardens - 9:00AM to 9:30AM
- Pelican Nest Science Lab - 9:40AM to 10:10AM
- Fairhope West Elementary - 10:20AM to 11:00AM
- Nature Connect Outdoor School - 11:15AM to 11:45AM
- Ruff Wilson gardens - 11:55AM to 12:20PM

MEETING MINUTES



By Gilda Underwood

In the spring there will be a tour of projects located in the South district. She stated there are currently 14 projects in the county, with more to be announced.

Carmen asks everyone involved with or interested in the Speakers Bureau to meet for about 20 minutes after today's General Meeting.

Treasurer's Report: Cassandra Rabren reported the checking account to be \$62,997.79, a CD of \$5,122.27, and a new \$50,000.00 CD, totaling \$118,120.06. Cassandra announced that each project budget request was approved. The budget passed and will be distributed to members. Cassandra thanked everyone for paying their 2026 Master Gardener dues early.

Don Richerson formally presented the slate of candidates without opposition for the 2026 BCMG Board:

- President – Lynn Barnes
- Vice-President – Tom Fortner
- Treasurer – Nancy Schlack
- Recording Secretary – Gilda Underwood
- Corresponding Secretary – Kim Scasny
- Members at Large – Barry Gilliland and Mary Meyer

Elmer Vick made a motion to accept the 2026 slate of officers as presented. Cassandra Rabren seconded the motion with all in favor.

RESOLVED the slate of officers presented are hereby voted upon and approved to serve as Board members of the Baldwin County Master Gardeners in 2026.

Don stated, we have a Board for 2026. The Appointed Board of Directors will be revealed at our next meeting.

WDLR Award: Mary Calvin requested that anyone that did not vote online for the Wayne de la Rua Award winner, please vote today. Charlotte Roberts, Extension Agent Assistant, has paper ballots at the front table. Voting will be closed at noon today. This is the highest honor bestowed upon a Baldwin County Master Gardener. Please vote. The recipient of the WDLR Award will be formally recognized at the December luncheon meeting.

MEETING MINUTES



By Gilda Underwood

Old/New Business: Mickey Ezell announced there will be a financial audit of the BCMG books in December. Gail Hand has volunteered but there is a need for several more to assist. Mickey asked anyone interested in helping to please give him a call or text. His number (251) 978-0993 is listed in the BCMG Pictorial Directory.

There being no further business, Connie Gillespie made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:35AM. Lynn Barnes seconded the motion with all in favor.

The next General Meeting will be held at the Foley Civic Center, 407 East Laurel Avenue, Foley, Alabama on Wednesday, December 10th. Social time is scheduled for 10:00AM, followed by the meeting at 10:30AM.

MEMBERSHIP DUES REMINDER

By Cassandra Rabren

As a friendly reminder, 2026 membership dues are \$25.00 if paid by January 31, 2026. After that date, dues will increase to \$30.00 for the year.

To remain an Active Member, everyone—unless you hold a Lifetime Membership—must have their dues paid by the deadline.

I'll be accepting cash or check payments at the December Meeting, or you can conveniently pay online using the secure link below or QR code. :

<https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/baldwin-county-master-gardeners-annual-membership>



2026

If you have any questions about your dues or payment options, please email me at Treasurer@baldwinmastergardeners.com.

Thank you for keeping your membership active and supporting all that we do together as Master Gardeners!

MARK YOUR CALENDAR



CEU Opportunities - Access more information at aces.edu/calendar

Onsite Classes

Forest Health Workshop
Dec. 12, 2025 9am - 3pm

Ben May Library Training Room, 701
Government Street, Mobile, AL
36602

Online Classes

Back 2 Basics Gardening Series

Dec 10, 2025 at 10:00am

Growing Plumeria in Alabama, with Urban
Extension Agent Hayes Jackson

Interactive workshop for landowners
and managers on the identification and
management of pests, diseases, and
invasive plants.



To all outgoing board and
committee members, we extend
our heartfelt gratitude for your
time and dedication in serving the
BCMG organization.



By Andreu Riebe

Volunteer Hours Deadline

- December 31st: Final deadline for all 2025 volunteer hours.

New Login Process

You may have noticed a change to the Service Hour Report login. Previously, both your email and password were entered on the same page. Now, the process is split into two screens:

- Page One: enter your email address
- Page Two: enter your password

This “split login” improves security by reducing automated login attempts and sets the stage for stronger features such as multi-factor authentication.

You can log your hours anytime at  <https://www.acesagmg.site/>

Got Tech Questions?

Send them to: Grassroots@baldwinmastergardeners.com. Your question might be featured in the next Tech Corner!

How do I submit something to Grass Roots?

Send your article or photo to:

 grassroots@baldwinmastergardeners.com

Deadline: 20th of each month

- Articles: Google Docs, Word, PDF, or Rich Text
- Photos: JPG or PNG (minimum 1MB). Attach files or share via Google Drive.

Articles- Due to limited space, we appreciate short well-written paragraphs.

Photos- Please provide group, action photographs along with a brief description of the event and names of subjects in the photo.

Newsletter Committee:
Andreu Riebe, Kim Musson, Linda Crowell, Larry Musson



Baldwin County Master
Gardeners, Inc.
8300 State Hwy. 104
Fairhope, AL 36532



CALENDAR

- DEC. 03, 2025 BCMG Board Meeting, Research Station, Hwy 104, 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
DEC. 04, 2025 Mobile County MG, Holiday Greenery Sale. See website mobilecountymastergardeners.org
DEC. 10, 2025 Awards Christmas Luncheon. Foley Civic Center, 407 East Laurel Avenue, Foley, Alabama
DEC. 31, 2025 Final deadline for all 2025 volunteer hours.
JAN. 31, 2026 Dues will increase to \$30.
MAR. 19, 2026 Home & Garden Show Mar. 19 - 22, 2026, by Providence Foundation @ Mobile Civic Center
MAY 06, 2026 AMGA 2026 Annual State Conference, Gardening to the Moon and Back, Huntsville AL.



Loree Hadley has put in a lot of effort to create a book celebrating the 35th anniversary of Baldwin County Master Gardeners. If you would like to receive this book, please sign the order list. The book features stunning pictures and is priced at \$46.00.

2025 BCMG Elected Board

President: Don Richerson
Vice-President: Lynn Barnes
Treasurer: Cassandra Rabren
Recording Secretary: Gilda Underwood
Corresponding Secretary: Kim Scasny
Members at Large: Barry Gilliland, Tom Fortner
Past President: Mary Calvin

2025 Appointed Board

Monthly Program Chair: Charlotte Hamm
Intern Class Coordinator: Anita O'Connor
Outreach Coordinator: Sara Semmes
Finance Committee Chair: Mickey Ezell
Projects Chair: Elmer Vick

Awards Luncheon:

Wednesday December 10, 2025
10:00 am - Social
10:30 am - Meeting
11:00 am - Meal

Merry Christmas

