

THYMES

CUMBERLAND COUNTY
MASTER GARDENERS

FEBRUARY, 2024



Guess what's blooming right now.

President: Mike Barron

Spring is coming. Have you heard or seen the Sandhill Cranes circling the sky over your home? I have seen many, many flights of 25-50 birds (counting them is difficult, because they fly so high) heading north. Sandhill Cranes have a wing span of 5-6 feet and weigh up to 14 pounds. The birds frequently circle over head as they move to gain altitude until they find favorable winds. They can fly up to 400 miles per day. Their distinctive warbling sound catches your ear long before you can find them in the sky, and they have 18 different vocalizations depending on the social context. I just hope that a few warm days haven't fooled them into going north too soon; but, Sandhill Cranes have been around for at least 2 Million years, so I guess they know what they are doing.



I walk my property several times daily and am always looking at plants for buds, hoping to see them as a sign of spring, but worried that it may be too early. Spring officially begins on March 19. So, do your pre-spring preparations, because it is coming. Think about how you will experiment with your garden this year. (By the way, those are hellebores in the picture above.)

I like the idea of getting to know MGs from other counties. A group of MGs is coming from Scott County on April 22 to tour the PDG at 1 pm. It would be great to have some of our MGs come out to meet and participate in a garden tour. On May 20th, we will have a group from the Hamilton County Master Gardeners coming to the Plateau Discovery Garden (PDG). Shirley Stewart, President, has suggested a meeting to talk about what each of our MG groups does, and to take a tour of the PDG. I think this is a great opportunity for us to highlight some of our programs and the work we do and to learn from them about how Hamilton County MGs function. We will have more information closer to the date, and I hope we will get a good turnout from our group.

NOTE: On March 5th, we will hold our MG membership meeting at the PREC indoor classroom, beginning at 1 pm. The meeting cannot be held in the Country Store because it is used as an election site. Maggie Clark will be our Speaker for the meeting. She will discuss hydroponics/water towers. This will be a meeting without a meal.

If you haven't had a chance to pay your dues, now is the time. We will make our official count of MGs after this meeting, and those paying names will appear in the 2024 directory. Membership also means receiving group-wide emails, including the newsletter. See Alan Baker's reminder below.

Alan Baker: Master Gardener Dues

Dues: A reminder that \$15 CCMG Dues for 2024 are due by the March members' meeting. Checks can be mailed to CCMG PO Box 483 Crossville 38557 or you can pay at the March 5th meeting.

Gardener Observations

Sue Partch: Whitetail Deer

Because we often see deer on our own small acreage, it surprises me that I have only seen one deer at PDG in the 5 years that I've been weeding daylilies. I am frequently there at dusk, a prime time for them to graze. Perhaps they do come, but I just haven't happened to look up at quite the right times. The one I did see was distant, off to the northeast near where the apple orchard used to be. It seemed to be looking back at me, but then dropped its head to feed again.

Most of us are familiar with this animal, its looks and habits; so, from my research, I picked out some of the less well-known items. The whitetail covers a huge range that extends from the Arctic Circle in Canada to just south of the Equator in Peru and Bolivia. The body and antlers are larger in cold temperature climates; much smaller in the tropics, deserts and on islands. A Canadian male can weigh up to 400 lbs.; a Florida key deer only weighs 50 lb.

Whitetail deer predate the ice-age, and they make up the oldest, non-extinct deer species. Their high running speed, skill at hiding, and ability to move silently are the results of centuries of learning to evade predators. Adept at adjusting to disruptions to ecosystems, they, nevertheless, do not fare well against direct competition from other deer species. A mostly solitary animal during the summer, deer often group in herds in the fall and winter for warmth and predator protection.

We know the problems deer create for us. They eat our plants, crash into our cars and carry Lyme disease ticks. They also are a problem for other animals; they carry parasites that have depleted caribou, moose and elk populations and affect livestock. When asked about deer problems in the PDG gardens, Shalena, Garden coordinator, said, *Deer have, occasionally, been glimpsed near the tree line edges, and some hoof prints have been seen in or near the gardens. Some damage to roses and foodscaping might have been caused by deer; but amazingly, they have not touched the deer candy hostas, nor have I noticed munched daylilies.* She credits the frequent people activity as the reason, but it may also be that the extensive acreage of other food sources on the PDG property provides ample foraging for deer.

Whatever the deterrent, I wish I had some so I could take down all my ugly fencing. Deer and other wildlife continue to be a challenge for every gardener and require constant attention to protect our sources of beauty, plant diversity, and food production.

Most of the info for this article came from www.britannica.com.

Laura Riester : Arugula

Arugula is popular all over the world. I am learning that this vegetable is a member of the Brassica, or Cruciferous, family. Arugula is a cool weather green. The most popular variety is Rocket. When grown from seed on the Cumberland Plateau, it does not disappoint.

A good time to start arugula from seed is late August or early September. It germinates easily. Soon, tender greens will be ready to harvest. Arugula is a cool weather vegetable and very hardy.

When the weather warms in the spring, arugula bolts and produces lovely flowers. The flowers are small but very attractive. They are edible and taste the same as the young leaves. When arugula does flower, the leaves may turn slightly bitter. The greens will disappear during the summer.

If allowed to go to seed, arugula will start growing again when the temperatures cool, usually during September. January, 2024, was a survival test for winter vegetables. I am happy to report that arugula survived the hard freeze we had mid-January. Its growth habit is much like that of dandelion. It self-seeds just about anywhere. I have it growing not only where I placed the seeds but also in my lawn and in between stepping stones.

Many people enjoy Arugula's spicy kick and strong, distinct flavor. I put the greens in sandwiches and on pasta. Sometimes, I use arugula together with walnuts, salt and olive oil to make a pesto. There are many recipes on the web for arugula pesto. I also stumbled across a couple of publications which describe the genetics and the health benefits of arugula.

For more information:

<https://research.reading.ac.uk/research-blog/rocket-arugula-rucola-how-genetics-determines-the-health-benefits/>
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6690419/#:~:text=Taxonomic classification-,E.,vesicaria subsp.>



Photo left: Self-seeded greens, mostly arugula

Photo on right: arugula flowers



Bird Updates:

Unfortunately, the great backyard bird count happened on days when it was cold and overcast in my back yard. I saw one small bird fly over with no indication of stopping to be counted. Since that week, the juncos have visited, always in flocks, and the bluebirds have checked out the box which probably has been home to their families over the years. A few robins have been around, eating what's left of the holly berries, and titmice (which do not fly in flocks, but in families) have scavenged spiders from the gutters. Yea for all the bug eaters!

Since the small bird baths which attract all sizes to the yard, will now be, mostly, ice free, I expect to see growth in numbers and species. Bet you have some bird stories of your own. Let's hear them. Don't make me print the words to the *Tennessee Bird Walk* again. There could be singing involved.