



THYMES

CUMBERLAND COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

MARCH, 2024

Spring Beauty by Kristi DuBois

President: Mike Barron

FIRE! Not something to shout in a crowd, but it does have some advantages. I recently had TWRA come out and do a prescribed burn in some of my fields. A prescribed burn is well planned before lighting the match, and TWRA even requires the landowner to light the match. They look at the wind, soil moisture, fire breaks and several other factors before burning. Burning increases plant diversity, removes thatch and underbrush that inhibits wildlife and increases plant production. I am told that I will see increases of pollinators, see more wildlife and help native plants to thrive by burning. My plan is to experiment, by burning some fields next to mowed fields, and checking weekly for changes in growing patterns. I'll keep you posted. I have also, through this process, gained a *gray hound* which used to be my white dog, until she rolled in the ashes.



MEETING NOTE: On April 2nd, we will go back to our evening schedule and hold our MG membership meeting in the Country Store beginning at 5:30 pm. We will begin with a potluck dinner. Our speaker will be Jennifer from Dirty Girls.

After our speaker, we will hold our monthly business meeting. This meeting, our final general meeting before the big Show, would be the time to bring items for the Silent Auction and/or Yard Sale to be part of the Flower, Lawn & Garden Show. We also have a couple of ongoing fundraisers for bulbs and rain barrels, so tell your friends.

Vice President: Katie DePoortere

Jennifer Garate from Dirty Girls Nursery will be speaking at our April Master Gardeners meeting on Tuesday, April 2nd, at 6pm. She will be talking about the history of Dirty Girls: how it all started and what the nursery has to offer to the community. Dirty Girls is located at 697 Dunbar Rd. in Cumberland County. They are a small nursery that is situated in a quaint 1936 historic Homestead Barn with lots of acreage and greenhouses. They offer classes to the community and help teach the successful growing of plants through their classes. They are very knowledgeable about plants and planting and want to help the community become successful at what they grow.

I have taken classes on making *fairy gardens* with my daughters, learning about air plants and making a terrarium for the air plants, and making a Christmas wreath with evergreens. They have a unique do-it-yourself planting station where you are able to pick a plant, repot it and make it personal by adding colorful rocks or fairy garden type figurines. Throughout the year, they have live music and offer coffee, teas and a variety of food options, including fresh muffins and pastries daily. My family enjoys going to the nursery, and it is a great place to visit. If you haven't done so, I would highly recommend it. I am looking forward to Jennifer sharing much more about Dirty Girls and I'm excited to hear about the history of it all.

We look forward to hearing about the other local nurseries, since master gardeners support all privately-owned such businesses.

IN THE NEWS: FROM MASTER GARDENERS

Sue Partch: Eastern Cottontail

With Easter at the end of the month, I thought it appropriate to choose an animal associated with the holiday. As I haven't seen any lambs, baby chicks or ducklings at PDG, I am left with the bunny. I have seen a few of those, though not very many. I've startled a couple into scampering off in their classic



zig zag and observed another couple hopping casually as they looked for lunch. All encounters were between the path and the road in the main garden area.

Since rabbits, Eastern cottontails in our case, spend most daylight hours resting in sheltered shallow depressions, called a form, it's not unusual to only catch a glimpse of them now and then. They are active mostly from dusk to daybreak and during other low visibility times, such as rainy or foggy days. In addition to trying to keep a low profile by hiding during the day and motionless freezing, their other methods of self-preservation depend on their eyes, ears and nose. Their big eyes give them almost 360 degrees of vision; the only blind spot is directly in front of their nose. The oversized ears detect the softest of sounds; so they rarely are out on windy days, because the wind interferes with that hearing. A nose with 100 million scent receptors that can twitch up to 120 times a minute makes them excellent at sniffing out danger.

There's truth in the saying *multiply like rabbits*, and there's a reason for it, too. Female rabbits average 3 to 4 litters a year, 5 kits per litter. The kits are independent, out of the nest and reproductively mature by 3 months. That's lots of rabbits. But rabbits are the main food source for many predators, especially raptors, foxes, coyotes, weasels and ferrets--even raccoons and snakes. Additionally, many are killed by domestic and feral dogs and cats and humans in vehicles. If they didn't reproduce like, well, rabbits, they'd be extinct.

Rabbits are herbivores, particularly fond of young tender greens, though they do eat some fruits and flowers and in snow cover, survive on buds, twigs and bark. They seem to think our gardens are buffets. Garden director, Shalena Durkot, says, *unlike the groundhogs and deer, rabbits do cause noticeable damage to PDG plants, particularly the vegetable and herb areas.* She's found form depressions under shrubs and ground covers and nests in the kindergarten labyrinth and by the new rest rooms. The damage is enough to require caging some plants and the use of liquid fence and similar repellents.

If you are celebrate the date, **Happy Easter**. May there be no rabbits in your gardens this spring, only chocolate ones in a basket.

Kristi DuBois: Spring Wildflower Ephemerals: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow

*Blossoms rupture and rapture the air,
All hover and hammer,
Time intensified and time intolerable, sweetness raveling rot.
It is now. It is not.*

Osip Mandelstam

Oh, the wildflower ephemerals of early spring! Be in the right place at the right time, and you will be rewarded with intricate and delicate splashes of pastel flowers under the mottled shade of the forest canopy. Be at the right place at the wrong time, and you will have to wait another year to discover the wonders of spring ephemerals. But that's what makes the discovery so thrilling--like finding the perfectly preserved seashell on a wind and wave swept beach.

Spring ephemerals are woodland herbs in the deciduous forest that emerge, flower, and fruit before the canopy of leaves closes in. They are called ephemeral, or fleeting, because they bloom, lose all their

ground vegetation and retreat back underground into their roots and bulbs within a period of about 2-3 months. Here on the Cumberland Plateau that period is usually March through mid-May. Local hikers and native plant enthusiasts eagerly scout the trails for these first, cheerful harbingers of spring--one of the first being bloodroot. A showy, pure-white flower with bright yellow stamens sitting atop elaborately scalloped leaves, the bloodroot is one of the first flowers to bloom in deciduous woodlands, attracting hungry pollinating insects. Bloodroot can be found throughout the Cumberland Plateau.

On the southern Cumberland Plateau along the rugged Collins Gulf Trail in the Savage Gulf Natural Area, you can view an array of spring ephemerals--wild geraniums, spring beauties, hepatica, purple phacelia, rue anemone, and wild blue phlox among many other wildflowers. One of our favorites on this trail is the comically named Dutchman's breeches, so named because the white flowers above the intricate fern-like leaves look like Dutchmen's white baggy pants, hanging upside down on a drooping clothesline.

Closer to home at the new state park site at the Head of Sequatchie, the Sequatchie River bubbles out of the ground after its long journey underground from Grassy Cove. Along the river, you may discover colonies of Virginia bluebells with pink buds like shriveled grapes and nodding pale blue *bells* hanging in bunches on shrubby leaves. After flowering profusely, the vegetation withers, and all the energy goes under ground for the next year. Walking along the newly constructed section of the Cumberland Trail, south from the Head of Sequatchie, you will encounter a blanket of blue-violet larkspur in the woodlands. The flowers appear to be tiny dunce caps connected to the main stem with curved *spurs*. The racemes of flowers are at the top of long stalks with deeply divided, sharply lobed leaves at ground level.

The elusive Jack in the Pulpit can also be found at the Head of Sequatchie along the Shelby Loop trail. The flower itself hides under broad leaves and looks like a little preacher man (Jack) standing inside a purple striped and hooded *pulpit*. The Cumberland Trail passes through another wildflower Shangri-La close to Crossville--Soap Creek. From the Stinging Fork trailhead near Spring City, you can take a steep trail down to the picturesque Stinging Fork Falls and, then, turn right on the Cumberland Trail above the creek. If you arrive at the right time in March, your jaw will drop at the carpet of wildflowers under your feet, including the trout lily--an early nodding yellow lily so named for its mottled leaves that resemble the markings of a trout.

A bit later in the spring season, the flowers at the higher elevations of Black and Brady Mountain, near Highway 68, burst into bloom. A steep hike up the Cumberland Trail to the spectacular Brady Mountain overlook of Grassy Cove takes you past a stunning blanket of trilliums and mayapples. Nothing announces spring more than trilliums with their distinctive trio of large toadstool leaves, topped with white, yellow, or maroon 3-petaled flowers. The trilliums stand side-by-side with the tall, duck foot-shaped leaves of the mayapples with their cute, nodding umbrella flowers hiding underneath. A steep hike or windy drive up to Black Mountain will also reward you with an array of spring wildflowers and fun exploration through and on top of impressive rock outcroppings. One of our favorite spring ephemerals there is the spiderwort. Showy, bluish-purple, 3-petaled posies sit atop tall grass-like leaves, resembling the long legs of spiders.

The queen of spring ephemerals on the Cumberland Plateau, however, is the pink lady's slipper orchid, so precious that its location is carefully protected by native plant enthusiasts. The lady's slipper has 2 basal leaves with a large pink pouch like a fluffy slipper, sitting conspicuously atop a long leafless stalk. The flowers are so intriguing that ill-informed gardeners may dig them up and attempt to plant them in their gardens. This is a bad idea! Lady's slipper orchids need a very specific ecosystem, including a certain fungus, to grow, and chances are they will die if you try to transplant them. They can also take a decade to bloom!

If you want spring wildflower ephemerals in your yard (and who wouldn't?), PLEASE DO NOT DIG THEM UP FROM THE WILD! It is illegal to collect plants from private, state, or federal property says the Tennessee Native Plant Society. Many plant species are endangered, and you don't want to contribute to the problem. Instead, buy your wildflowers from a reputable nursery selling native plants (See the Tennessee Native Plant Society website for a listing.) Leave the wildflowers wild for others to discover and enjoy.

Kristi's ephemeral article, along with many photos courtesy of David Clark, has enjoyed widespread recognition among local newspapers. We are fortunate to benefit from her encompassing talent.

Erin Fletcher Conley: Garden Membership Opportunity

There will be a UT garden membership table in the PDG booth at the Flower, Lawn and Garden Show. We will be available for you to renew your membership BEFORE the May 4th plant sale at the Plateau Discovery Garden, so that you can receive a 10% discount on your total plant costs that day. If you are new to master gardeners and don't know what a UT garden membership is; stop by, and I will tell you about all of the great benefits (besides the 10% discount on plants).

In addition, I will need someone to help me at the membership table. I leave from time to time throughout the Show to take photos of exhibits and speakers. On Saturday, I will need someone who can stay and assist with clean up. I need to leave at 3 pm to go home and change before setting up the altar for the 5 p.m. Mass.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO RECYCLE AND REUSE

The Maryville Chapter of Kiwanis is collecting plastic bottle caps. The bottle caps will be manufactured into park benches and tables. I am assuming a lot of us recycle plastics already. Would you please save your plastic caps and collect them for me? The caps need to be separate from the bottles.

I plan to place a collection bin at the ASK THE MASTER GARDENER desk in the Extension office. Another bin will be located downstairs in the PDG classroom. Please look for them and deposit your caps (only) in the bins.

I will take the collected bottle caps to Maryville.

See the picture below to note all the caps which can be saved!

Gallivanter -

Remember that we've started trying to be Zero Waste at our meetings and also on our Gallivants? One of our Gallivanter, Maria Gall, is very conscious of our environment and the Zero Waste initiative.

Read about a project below that you can participate in -

It's being spearheaded by the Maryville Chapter of the Kiwanis, (they are just one of several organizations involved) in which they are collecting plastic caps and lids for the manufacture of park benches and tables. By doing this, they are keeping these items out of the landfills, therefore,

Here's a list of the acceptable items, note they need to be CLEAN.

- Drink and Water bottle caps
- Medicine bottle caps
- Flip-top caps
- Spray paint caps
- Deodorant caps
- Detergent caps
- Toothpaste tube caps
- Milk Jug caps
- Hair spray caps
- Ointment tube caps
- Ice Cream bucket caps
- Peanut butter jar lids
- Cottage cheese lids
- Cool whip lids
- Cream cheese lids
- Coffee can lids
- Nestea lids
- Plastic Easter eggs



P.S. For more information check the link [Maryville Kiwanis Cap & Lid collection webpage](#).

Jewell Wilhoite: Growing Things

So, since I seem to be the only one willing to reveal my current seed efforts, here goes. I might have mentioned that we added heat to our sunroom last year. Guess what loves the new premises?

My dahlia and dianthus seeds emerged in one week! Plus, those sweet peas are now ready to climb out the windows. Little too zealous in preparing those seeds. Hopefully, like me, all the new interns have snapdragons up, since we sowed those on March 27. Let's remember that those plantable fiber pots need to be soaked before finding a permanent garden spot, with the soil pulled up to cover the top edges of the seed pot. It's a little early to be permanently outside, but transplants in pots can be moved or covered when necessary. That's my plan.

I have never been successful getting Alpine strawberry seeds to germinate, but I am more hopeful this year with the new surroundings. Didn't I read that plants can communicate? Surely, all the others will cheer on those reluctant strawberries. I'll keep you posted and expect to hear of your progress. Grow on!