

THYMES  
CUMBERLAND COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS  
FEBRUARY, 2023



President: Mike Barron

Welcome Spring...except, it's not! My forsythias are blossoming; my willows are starting to leaf out; and I was able to pick a bouquet of daffodils for my wife on Valentine's Day, but it is not spring. When I walk with my dogs and look at the plants, I feel like it is spring, but then reality slaps me when I realize it is too early.

Spring is officially five weeks away, at least by the calendar, and we will almost certainly have one or more cold snaps before the May 10 average last frost date. I know there will be damage to some of my plants when they all start growing, but hopefully it will be limited. I am told to *be patient, wait and see, and this has happened before*. I do know that patience is a virtue, but I don't always feel virtuous. Maybe patience should be prominent in our Mission, or at least listed in the qualifications to be a Master Gardener.

I am going to continue to enjoy this spring while we have it and not worry about the cold coming back until it does.

What's your project?

It is that time of year when gardeners are thinking about the project(s) that they want to do this year. It could be something they wanted to do for a while, saw in a magazine or something to replace an earlier project that did not turn out well. It could be a shade garden, raised bed vegetables or maybe a screening landscape.

Could you use some help or suggestions from Master Gardeners in planning and/or executing your plans? (I know I can.) Helping you could also be an excellent opportunity for others to learn or get new ideas? I would like to hear about some projects during future meetings and then hear MG comments and advice to help you be successful. If you are willing, maybe we can even make a field visit to your place for some on-site learning. Be thinking, because at the next meeting you might be asked to describe your project for this year.

Vice President: Rhoda Hiller

I know we are all biting at the bit and wanting to get out into our gardens. Have you all been looking through the new seed catalogues? My head is usually spinning after looking at all the new plants. Don't forget about our plant sale this spring; and if you are a *Friend of the Garden*, you can order early and be assured of getting the new plants.

The color of the year is magenta; and when we were deciding on the plants for this year's sale, we took that into consideration. For my own annuals this year, I think I will go with magenta and white with splashes of yellow and blue.

Remember the advice for our landscape plants, don't prune yet. You can do the scratch test on the bark to make sure it is still green under that dark color. I have high hopes that this will only be a small set back and our yards will be beautiful again.

I hope to see all of you at our next meeting on March 7 when our experienced speaker will be Bill Morgan. Bill will talk about native plants for the home landscape.

## Master Gardener Feature Articles

Sue Partch: Tree Closets



I mentioned tree skeletons last month. Over the last few years I've become more aware of them, really looked at them--their shapes, what their leaflessness reveals.

Tree skeleton crowns come in a variety of shapes: rounded corner triangles, tall narrow ovals, shorter fatter ovals, umbrellas, mushrooms, almost square.... I know I could use those shapes to help identify the kind of tree, but mostly I just enjoy looking at them. I've noticed, too, how *Nature* and her fractals shape them to look neatly trimmed. Except for damaged trees or trees trimmed like for power lines, very few have random branches poking out at odd angles. Not only is each tree neatly shaped but along ridge lines the silhouettes flow mostly in undulating lines, rather than ragged broken peaks and dips.

Traveling highways I get to see what leaves hide. Leafless bushes among tree trunks reveal the earth's ribs. Tiers of rock ledges are stacked to make up the hills. You can see the rocky road edges, scattered boulders and fallen trees, fire damage, hidden brooks and tiny waterfalls, along with the trash. I notice houses, outbuildings, fences, vehicles, fields, and roads hidden during the rest of the year.

On my way into town I get to see not just a glimpse of the ridge line to the east, but miles of it. Close ups offer opportunities, too. I can locate the singing bird on his branch and follow the chattering squirrel as he jumps from tree to tree. I actually identified a nest in a tree while a passenger in a moving car. Dead limbs can no longer hide.

If any of these sights appeal to you, and you want to check out tree skeletons, too, you better do it soon. I saw reddish tinges on some tree branches. We'll have concealing leaves soon.

## Linda Ferris: The Color Yellow, plus

I notice a lot of daffodils are in full bloom across the street from me, as well as along fence lines down the street. Mine are not yet in full bloom, but they are about 6-8" tall with buds ready to bloom. My Forsythia is also putting out flowers, a little at a time. The sedum are pushing up, as well as tulips and Swedish bluebells. Everything else, at least right now, looks like it is still asleep (brown and bedraggled). March will soon be here, and I'm sure a lot more will be making a show. I have faith that not all was lost over Christmas!

I have seen lots of blue jays, cardinals and some bluebirds flitting around searching for food.



Patricia Briney: This guy tried for days to come in and visit. Drove my dog crazy.

## Alan Baker: The Big Freeze

The arctic blast of 2022 hit here on December 22nd with a low temperature at the airport of 14 degrees, accompanied by wind. It remained below freezing for the next 100 hours or so, rising above 32 degrees on December 27<sup>th</sup>. The period of cold was the really unusual part of this event and was made worse with a wind chill of down to -23 degrees on the 23rd. Also, the rapid warm-up caused other problems with our plants. Here is a chart of the highs/lows during this event, courtesy of Mark Baldwin:

December, 2022, Highs and Lows

- 12/22---42...13
- 12/23---13...minus 4
- 12/24---16...minus 2
- 12/25---23...5
- 12/26---25...11
- 12/27---41...24

The coldest Christmas time of recent years was a similar *Artic Blast* in 1983 with a temperature of -7. 1962 saw the coldest since the airport records started in 1955 with -17.

## Continued Cold Subject: via Gregg Upchurch

I think it was a combination that contributed to the freeze damage. First, it had not really been that cold most of winter leading up to that point. In fact, as Mark's chart shows, the temperatures were in the 40's leading up to that arctic blast. When the very fast, really hard drop in temperatures came, it was a real shock to the plants. As was mentioned during our master gardener's meeting, this was followed by a fairly quick warm-up that may have further stressed plants.

While certainly problematic, these events are not that uncommon around here. First, it had not really been that cold most of winter leading up to that point. In fact, as Mark's chart show, the temperatures

Probably, one of the most dramatic weather events I remember as a kid was a storm that came late winter/early spring. I remember the sound of a terrible thunderstorm and pouring rain one evening as I was going to bed. To my surprise, my father woke me the next morning to go to the farm because school was canceled because of weather. Now the fact that school was canceled because of weather in Cumberland County was no surprise; however, the fact that temps were in the single digits, wind chills below zero, and a foot of snow on the ground after a night of thunder, lightning, and rain was a surprise.

Other weather events that I remember in recent times would include the Easter freeze of 2007. We went from above average temps in March to a drastic change the third week of April. Many things had bloomed out, and for two days temperature lows hit 20 degrees with wind chills in the single digits. To me, that was a far more devastating weather event! It wiped out nearly all fruit production in the southeast that year.

As for really cold duration, I think it was in 2018 that we had a 2-week period that the temperature never rose above freezing. The temperatures got super cold, staying in the single digits to the mid 20's. For a historical perspective, I've included 3 pictures. The first one is of newly-planted evergreens that were absolutely burnt up from a cold snap in April. The last two were taken at the end of the 2-week cold snap that, I believe, occurred in 2018. These are Piney Falls, at the edge of the Plateau in Grandview, and the other is Stinging Fork Falls on the edge of Rhea County, essentially below Piney Falls.

## Jewell Wilhoite: New Interns

Yea for us! We have a large class of new interns—27 and holding. The current method of zoom presenters, followed by an interactive session, seems to be appealing to interns and presenters, alike. Here in our county, we owe some thanks to Rita Reali and other master gardeners who continue to provide home-made goodies and snacks for our program. There'll be no sugar lows among our group.

Also, many thanks to all who attend to give support and welcome to the new class. Right on! (That's 60s talk for you youngsters.)

THANKS TO ALL CONTRIBUTORS FOR FEBRUARY