

The Thymes

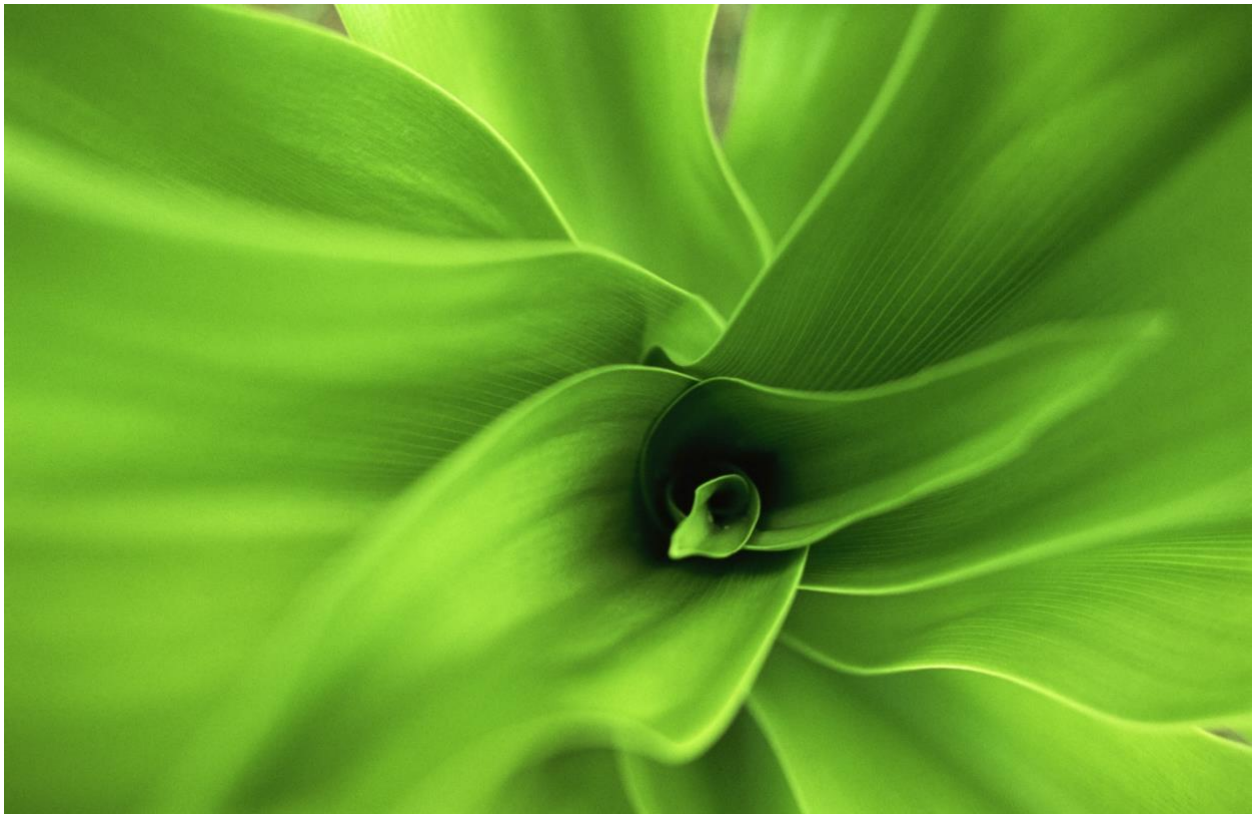
The Cumberland County Master Gardener's Monthly Newsletter

MAY 2026

“O the month of May, the merry month of May,

So frolic, so gay, and so green, so green, so green!”

Excerpted from “The Merry Month of May,” a poem by Thomas Dekker (c. 1572-1632), an English Elizabethan dramatist and pamphleteer. “The Merry Month of May” is a part of Dekker’s play, *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, first performed in 1599. Credit: Wikipedia



Stock image

A Message from the President, Margo Carroll

May is a time when everything is growing -and it's a good reminder to think about sustainability, not just in our gardens, but in our organization.

Sustainability means building something that lasts. In CCMG, that happens when members step up, take on roles, and help carry things forward. We are at a point where it's time to pass the torch and welcome new voices into board and leadership positions.

If there's something you feel drawn to I encourage you to follow that. You don't need to have all the answers-just a willingness to learn and be involved. When you step in, you not only grow yourself, you help keep this organization strong for the future.

Thank you for all you do. This group works because of you.

Margo - 931-202-4438 Cell/Text

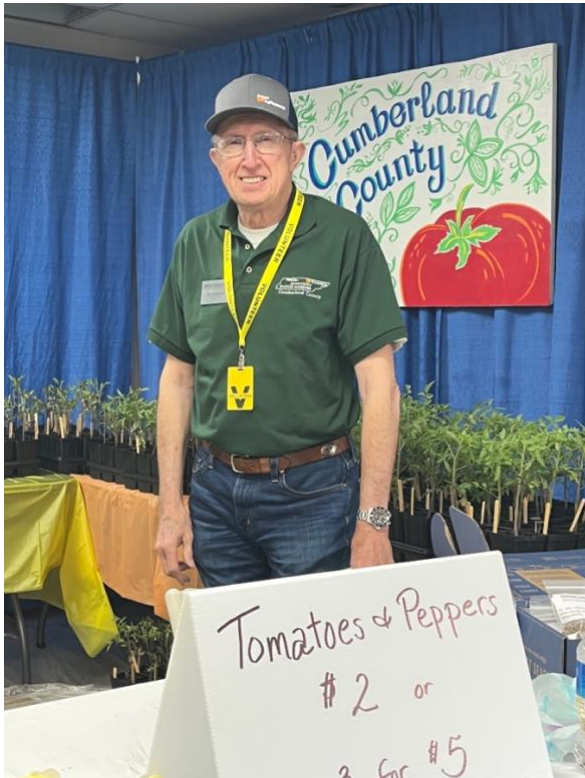


Figure 1 Flower Lawn and Garden Festival Chairperson, Leslie Mullican with 2026 President, Margo Carroll

Photo Credit: Vickie May

Another great FLAG on the books! Enjoy the following pictures...







FLAG event photo credit Laura Riester/Jan Pitzer, unless otherwise noted

Bear Corn

By Barbara Moore

We have lived at our house since 2005, when it and the mother-in-law house were completed. During this time we have landscaped the property, addressed drainage issues, built a deck, paved a driveway etc. I guess what I am saying is, we've been all over our property in detail. So, a few weeks ago, our daughter is in the yard and says, "Mom, what is this?" I had never seen "this" before, here or ever. So, with a little help from Google, we learned it is Bear Corn (*Conopholis Americana*) also known as American Cancer Root. I had to do some research and thought this might be a good opportunity to share with others in case it is new to you as well.

Bear Corn is a parasitic plant that grows on the roots of oak trees. As it does not have any chlorophyll, it has no green color. Its color ranges from a cream to a yellow/brown when it emerges from the ground, becoming a darker brown as it dries out. Bear Corn lives 9-10 years, reaching maturity at approximately 4



Figure 1 Photo from writer.

years. Found in the eastern half of the US and Canada, it grows to be 2-8 inches tall and ½-1 inch wide. The scale-like flowers resemble a pinecone. Cancer Root only comes to the surface after the parasite root system attaches to the oak root and forms a large woody gall. The growth sends out stems for several years and will then die out. Stems usually appear in late spring with flowers opening a few weeks later. The flower is replaced by a seed capsule containing many small seeds which then spread to potentially grow elsewhere.

Bears and deer consume the bear corn fruit, stem and all. The fruit and seed will pass through these animals without harm and is deposited near an oak tree, then will begin the growth process again. Bees and flies contribute to the pollination process. Bear Corn is edible and can be eaten raw or cooked, however, according to my sources, it is very bitter. (no, I did not try it myself). Sources said it can be used as an astringent for treating wounds and has been used by native Americans as a treatment for menopause, hemorrhaging in the bowels or uterus and a cure for headache.

Other sources stated uses included treating rheumatism, bronchitis, diuresis, as a sedative, laxative and as a

vermifuge (which means it is good for expelling intestinal worms...ewww!) It also has nutritional value including beta carotene, B vitamins, potassium, magnesium and vitamin C. It has no known cancer-causing agents nor is it used as a cancer treatment. Materials did suggest consulting a medical professional or herbalist before using the plant medically. (personally, I will stick to Tylenol arthritis strength, Dulcolax and One a Day before trying this) Well, this information might already be known to some of you, or you might have learned something like me. I have no idea how it got to this oak tree this close to my house and I guess I will never know. It will be one of nature's mysteries.

Bird Count

By Sue Partch

An email about participating in the annual bird count caught my eye last fall. I responded as possibly interested in the backyard version. Emails of encouragement and directions followed but reality set in as I realized I was not a good candidate. I don't like online tutorials, I don't "do" mornings, and it was set at a busy family time for me. I didn't participate.

Which doesn't mean I didn't do a bird count. Every winter I record the different birds we see at our feeders and, as spring arrives, in the yard. Occasionally we see something unusual but until mid-April this year we just had our regulars. Today an indigo bunting showed up, yea!

Everyday and most often we see tufted titmice and chickadees. Regular visitors are the white-breasted nuthatch, little Carolina wrens, mourning doves and at least one of the small woodpeckers, downy or hairy. With the snow come the juncos and at the first hint of winter's end we get a flock of goldfinches and a few purple finches. We get cardinals but not as many and not as often as they used to come. Special treat is the red-bellied woodpecker that comes for the suet. And there are some sparrows that I sometimes try to sort out. Oddly blue jay visits are only occasional.

Advancing spring brings robins into the yard. Because I'm out more I see the crows and our pair of pileated woodpeckers. Bluebirds come every year and often nest in one of our boxes. Yearly a phoebe spends the summer near our bedroom window. Because we feed year round, we keep our all-year regulars. My husband notes the hummingbird arrival each year so we know when to put out the sugar water. On several occasions turkeys have wandered thru the yard. Sometimes we hear or spot Canada geese flying overhead or turkey vultures.

Past years we've had some rare (for us) visitors. In a least 3 winters we've had a brown creeper, a red breasted nuthatch or a pair of rosebreasted grosbeaks. The indigo bunting comes every once in a while. Several times we've seen a yellow warbler...once close up and personal as it flew into the house. Once each a dickcissel, a mockingbird, a hawk of some kind, a heron, cowbirds (Boooo!), an American redstart, a gold crowned kinglet, and a black & white warbler.

And then there are the furry "birds" that come to the feeders, or rather the deck under the feeders. Squirrels are regulars, raccoons are night visitors and opossums occasionally. Squirrels that learn to jump from the railing to a feeder are permanently discouraged. The raccoon family we had last summer was really cute but the coon that learned to climb the support pole and crawl along the wire to the feeders taught us to take the feeders in at night. My cat tries to catch the squirrels, mutually ignores the raccoons and growls at the opossum. Fortunately he's too fat and slow to have much success at catching the birds.



Figure 1 Photo from writer.



Figure 2 Milkweed from the Flower Lawn and Garden Festival – success!

Photo Credit: Barbara Moore

Editor's Note

from

Jan Pitzer & Laura Riester

This publication is not responsible for errors and omissions.

Please send newsletter additions before the end of the month to:

jprp1990@gmail.com



Figure 1 Photo Credit: Laura Riester