

The Thymes

The Cumberland County Master Gardener's Monthly Newsletter

September 2026

SEPTEMBER

Lo! a ripe sheaf of many golden days
Gleaned by the year in autumn's harvest ways,
With here and there, blood-tinted as an ember,
Some crimson poppy of a late delight
Atoning in its splendor for the flight
Of summer blooms and joys
This is September.

- Hilaire Belloc - 1870 – 1953



Figure 1 Creative Commons

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT, Margo Carroll

What another wonderful year it has been with the Cumberland County Master Gardeners!

This year has certainly had its challenges, and for me personally, some difficult and sad times. Through it all, I continue to be amazed by this group and everything we accomplish together.

Just think about the programs, classes, gardens, festivals, and events our members have made happen. Someone has an idea, others jump in to help, and together we create something wonderful for our community.

Now we are heading into autumn—harvesting, planting our fall and winter gardens, enjoying cooler days, reflecting on what worked, and already thinking about what comes next.

Take some time during these beautiful days to slow down and enjoy it. Notice the views, the smells of the garden, the changing season, the late flowers, birds and butterflies.

And while you're enjoying it, remember this: We do wonderful things for other people.

Every person in this group is part of making educational horticulture and nature programs happen in our community. Whether you teach, organize, work in the gardens, answer questions, pull weeds, haul things around, or simply show up when help is needed—you make a difference.

That's a pretty huge positive contribution.

Enjoy September. Harvest something, plant something, share something, and take a moment to appreciate what we've accomplished together.

Then, as gardeners always do, let's look forward to what's growing next.

Margo Carroll

Margo
[931-202-4438](tel:931-202-4438) Cell/Text



“And all at once, summer collapsed into fall.” - Oscar Wilde

Window Open

By Sue Partch

Prompted by my peepers experience the spring of 2025 I have been driving with my window(s) open more often. I discovered that traveling in a closed climate controlled vehicle has isolated me from many sensory experiences and some memories. Not that I don't fully appreciate that closed climate controlled environment when it's brutally hot or raining or in cold weather.

First noticed was the feel of the breeze. It ruffled my hair and brushed my skin. I remembered why ponytails and head scarves were popular in the 50's and 60's... open windows and convertibles were the only air conditioning. I became aware of the feeling of dampness after a rain, heavy warmth on a hot summer day, the blessed coolness at dusk on my way home from a long afternoon in the daylilies. In the spring the air is light and fresh, in summer it's heavy and still, in fall it feels tired and dusty.

Then came the sounds. The peepers of course, but also other frogs and a variety of insect noises as the seasons changed, occasionally a bird call. I became more aware of machine sounds: my own car engine, lawnmowers, motorcycles got louder as did trucks, car radios on high volume, chainsaws. I heard dogs barking, kids at play, a raised adult voice calling.



Figure 2Creative Commons

Next the smells. I love the damp earthy smell that comes after a rain. In spring you can smell honeysuckle; in fall, burning leaves. Passing someone cutting down trees there's the unique fragrance of fresh cut wood. A newly mown hayfield or lawn is a favorite scent (as a teen I bought a cologne called "Fresh Mown Hay"). There are car odors: exhaust, diesel and the farm smell of recently spread manure. Interesting how the intensity changes within the day: lighter in the morning, strong and vibrant midday, heavy at night.

There are drawbacks of course. That earsplitting revved motorcycle, the stench of a skunk or the manure, that smell of diesel, getting wet in a sudden storm, the oppressive heat of a summer day. But even as the window goes up on those the experience is a reminder of the world outside the car window. I've enjoyed it all. I recommend it.



Wildflowers on Lantana

By Mike Barron

Early this year, I was in Walmart and saw \$10 bags of Burpee's Wildflower seeds, so I picked one up thinking that I would find somewhere to add some color. As the weather stayed cold, every week when I went to Walmart, I would grab another bag and when I got to ten bags, I decided that I would have to begin planning this planting out. I have acres of sedge grass and other types of field grass and weeds to play with, so I decided to go big.

Fortunately, I have a tractor with a seven-foot-wide rototiller. I read an article that said for opening a new plot, you should make one pass as deep as possible (about 7"), then wait a week and till it again, at half the depth (about 3-4") which should kill the grass seed that was raised with the first tilling; and then come back a week later and till again at half depth, before planting. It really did make for a nice seed bed.

I started spreading the seed in late April, which turned out to be a real pain as the Burpee seeds were very small and light, and mixed with some filler making it difficult to spread. My seed spreader would not work, so I ended up sowing by hand and not very well. After that I ordered some Buzzy Wildflower Pollinators, which were a more granulized seed and easier to spread, still by hand. After the seeding, I then lightly raked the soil to cover the seeds. Overall, I spread enough seed (using the label's estimate) to cover 15,000 sq. ft. but I only covered about 8,750'. (Seven-foot-wide tiller x 1250 feet of seed bed) All I could do then was wait for Mother Nature to provide some water, which she did sporadically. Growth started in a couple of weeks and looked good in the beginning. But later on...

Results: Some of the wildflowers came up beautifully, about 200' out of 1,250'. The rest of the planting was mixed, some with a few flowers and some areas where the grass just came back with no flowers. The successful parts were the ones using the Buzzy seeds, with very sparse success in the areas where I used the Burpee seeds.

All of the seeds were supposed to be perennial, so I do not know what to expect next year. This was an experiment, and I have learned a few things like having the tools and seeds, does not always make a successful garden. You still need Mother Nature's support. Maybe next year???



Fall Festival 2026



Fall Festival photos sent by Margo Carroll



Fall Festival Photos sent by Margo Carroll

Fried Green Tomatoes

By Laura Riester

Thanks to some Master Gardeners, I recently became the beneficiary of a green tomato after mentioning that I had never made Fried Green Tomatoes. In fact, I had never even heard of Fried Green Tomatoes until I moved to Tennessee in 1977. These days, I usually enjoy them when eating out, and I especially like the ones prepared at Crawdaddy's in Cookeville.

But now, with a green tomato in hand, I had no excuse—I had to try preparing my own version. I didn't have cornmeal, so I substituted Panko crumbs and Bang Bang for seasoning. They turned out pretty well! I also had some breading and egg left over, so rather than waste them, I fried them up into little Panko Hushpuppies.



What makes this especially amusing to me is that where I grew up, tomato-killing temperatures usually arrived around Labor Day. We always had plenty of green tomatoes. Yet we never prepared Fried Green Tomatoes.

My mother did make Green Tomato Jam, though. I am sharing a recipe published in a Betti Bossi (traditional Swiss) cookbook. It probably is most like the recipe my mother used:

Ingredients:

Tomatoes: 600 g (halved, seeded, and sliced fine)

Juice: 2 tbsp lemon juice and 2 tbsp orange juice

Sugar: 400 g total (split into 200 g for caramel and 200 g for simmering)

Water: 2 tbsp

Finish: 2 tbsp white balsamic vinegar (Aceto balsamico bianco) (optional)

Instructions

Prep fruit: Slice prepared tomatoes and mix with citrus juices. Let rest covered for 2 hours.

Make caramel: Boil 200 g sugar and 2 tbsp water without stirring until light brown.

Simmer: Add tomato mix and juices to the caramel, stir in the remaining 200 g sugar, and cook 10 minutes on medium heat.

Thicken: Purée the mixture smooth, return to the pan, and simmer for 15 more minutes until it sets.

Store: Stir in white balsamic vinegar, skim foam, and pour boiling hot into clean jars.



I'll be visiting my brother and some friends in Switzerland next month, and I suspect they may not be familiar with Fried Green Tomatoes. I'd love to introduce them to a good, traditional version while I'm there. If you have a favorite recipe for Fried Green Tomatoes—especially one you've made and enjoyed—I'd be grateful if you would send it my way. (riesterL@me.com)

I'm hoping to recreate a little taste of the South for my Swiss friends!



Congratulations! to MG Rita Reali for placing First and Third in two Cumberland County Fair baking categories. Rita freely shares her culinary time and talent with our membership and for that we are most appreciative! Photos from Rita Reali.



Also from Rita – an interesting U-Tube link for Sunflower aficionados:

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/TwGdaxRJB5M>



Photo Credit: Jan Pitzer

Two of ten Monarch Caterpillars munching on Swamp Milkweed

Thank you to ALL content contributors. We always enjoy and appreciate your efforts in creating the *Thymes*. Please send your stories, news, observations and information for the next edition before the end of the month. Thanks again!

Jan Pitzer – Jprp1990@gmail.com and Laura Riester – riesterl@me.com

This publication is not responsible for errors or omissions.