

The Thymes

The Cumberland County Master Gardener's Monthly Newsletter

DECEMBER 2025

Last of all, December,
The year's sands nearly run,
Speeds on the shortest day,
Curtails the sun;
With its bleak raw wind
Lays the last leaves low,
Brings back the nightly frosts,
Brings back the snow.

- Christina Georgina Rosetti, from "A Year's Windfalls" 1866 -



Photo credit/Creative Commons

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT, Margo Carroll

Dear Master Gardeners,

As the year comes to a close, I find myself most thankful for the people who make this organization so special. Each of you brings dedication, kindness, and a willingness to serve that truly strengthens our Master Gardener community. I am especially grateful to the PDG Committee for their vision and planning toward the future development of the Plateau Discovery Garden, and to the Tea Event Committee for creating such meaningful opportunities to connect and celebrate together.

I also want to thank everyone who worked so hard on the Spring Flower, Lawn and Garden Festival, the Fall Festival, and those who contributed their time and knowledge through Classes in the Garden. The countless volunteer hours spent at the Discovery Garden do not go unnoticed—your efforts have made it a place of learning, beauty, and inspiration for our entire community.

Most of all, I am thankful for the friendships within this group. The encouragement, cooperation, and shared love of gardening make this a truly special organization. I look forward to getting to know you even more and working alongside you in the coming year.

Happy Holidays,

Margo



Happy Holidays to all, and to all a green thumb! May your season be filled with joy and may the coming year bring your biggest and best harvest yet.



Figure 1: Clematis Skeleton, photo credit/Laura Reister

Laura with the Major Award presented at the November monthly meeting for her 2025 Thymes photography submissions.





Soybeans - Just Plain Soybeans

By Laura Riester

During the early 1970's, some popular non-fiction books made a deep impression on me. One such book really changed my vision for the future survival of humanity and our world: *Diet for a Small Planet* by Frances Moore Lappé, published in 1971. That book describes the „Food Pyramid“ which places foods which are easy to grow and harvest at the bottom of this pyramid and those which require energy, time, care and processing, for example beef, at the top of the pyramid. The book promotes the idea that, if our diet was rich in foods that were low on the food pyramid, more people could be fed. Lappé also estimated the energy required for meat production and named it a contributor to global food scarcity. The author mentions beans, especially soy, as a superior form of protein.

While in college, I learned that one of my professors and his students were studying soybeans. Some of my fellow students were enthusiastically growing soybeans on the college farm for their projects and others were spending nights in the lab, analyzing porphyrins, the building blocks for chlorophyll. We

students would have deep discussions (over beer) how soybeans would some day feed the world. Soybeans are not only a source of food high in protein; during their growth and reproductive period, they convert atmospheric nitrogen into a form that the plant can use, thereby reducing the need for nitrogen fertilizers. In other words, soybean culture prepares the soil for future crops. Thus, soybeans became known as the perfect food.

Soybeans (both yellow and black) have been cultivated in China for thousands of years. Soybeans were introduced into the United States in 1765 by Samuel Bowen. He planted seeds that he had brought to Georgia (still a colony) from China. This small crop marked the first known planting of soybeans in North America.

After college I did not pay much attention to the importance of soy. The recent temporary boycott of American soybeans by China brought back memories of those days of idealism. And it had me curious. I did not know before this game of politics just how much of the American soybean harvest is exported to China and how much farmers are financially dependent on the sale of soybeans. This is true even here in Tennessee. When it comes to soybean production, our state ranks 16th with Illinois being #1, In 2024, Tennessee farmers planted over 1.8 million acres and harvested 75.6 million bushels of soybeans.

(https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick_Stats/Ag_Overview/stateOverview.php?state=TENNESSEE). I also became aware that every hour, Tennessee loses about 10 acres of farmland. Every hour? <https://farmmanagement.tennessee.edu/land-loss/> Selling land to a developer might be tempting to a farmer who fears being stuck with a warehouse full of soybeans. In May of this year, Governor Bill Lee signed the Farmland Preservation Act into law in the hopes of creating permanent farm conservation easements and discouraging landowners from selling their land to developers. For more information: <https://www.landtrusttn.org/blog/the-farmland-preservation-act-what-it-means-for-tennessee-farmers/>

I am reading that around 70–80% of the world's soybeans are processed into soybean meal, which is fed to livestock — mostly chickens, pigs, and cows. The same is true in the United States, where over 70% of soybeans go to animal feed, 15% to human food products especially oil, and 5% to biodiesel. A large portion of the the crop grown in the United States is exported, especially to China, where it is also processed into animal feed and oils. What was postulated in the early 70's as a possibility, became indirectly true: American soybeans

feed the world even if it is by first feeding the animals we eat. After my contemplation on soybean farming/processing, I thought I could just head to a grocery store and pick up a package of dried soybeans to experiment with and satisfy my curiosity. Never having cooked or tasted plain soybeans, I wanted that opportunity, maybe also make a soybean hummus or a soybean soup. I searched several stores in Crossville but there were no dried or even canned soybeans to be found. I ordered a bag of yellow and a bag of black soybeans on-line to experiment with. Most of the soy available in stores are processed soy products, the exception being frozen, very young, tender soybean pods for snacking. During my years working, I learned about soy products when I had colleagues or housemates from Asia. Most would bring homemade lunches to work. Those lunches were usually reflective of their culture. Many insisted on warming up their meals in the microwave provided in the lunch room. The smells of those lunches were an education in themselves. Pheww!



Rotten fish? Sweaty socks? Often it was the smell of fermented soybeans (condiment) added to their rice which was responsible for the smells we folks were not used to. In my home I learned about Asian cooking from my housemates, but I never saw them cook plain dried soybeans. Even Lappe's book *Great Meatless Meals* - published in 1974 as a follow-up to *A Diet For a*

Small Planet, has only two recipes for soybeans in it. I feel compelled to continue my experimentation with soybeans. I first tried a soybean soup using yellow soybeans. The texture and taste of these soybeans are very different from the beans, peas or lentils we are used to. Then I made a soybean hummus. The beans become nice and creamy but the taste of an unseasoned cooked soybean is distinct and not easily disguised. I drifted from using traditional hummus seasonings to Asian ingredients such as dark mushroom soy to flavor the pureed soybeans. It is a work in progress. Black soybeans have an entirely different flavor. They are sweet yet have the same firm texture as yellow soybeans. In Asia black soybeans are a favorite for fermenting to create various condiments. During my experimentation I learned that soybeans sprout really easily. I planted a few soybeans in a container. Within a few days, the cotyledon broke through the soil surface. A week later, this little sprout has developed its first leaves. And has that peachy fuzz characteristic of soybean seedlings.





HELP WANTED

***The Thymes* is seeking an editor (or co-editor) for 2026.** In previous years, the newsletter was the responsibility of the President. This year, a volunteer managed the newsletter. Outsourcing the task to a volunteer gave the President freedom to focus on their many other CCMG responsibilities.

Building a newsletter is an easy project of primarily cutting and pasting items submitted via email by contributing members. A rudimentary publication only requires a couple of hours of time per month. Additional creativity (and time) is strictly optional.

Due to a new personal schedule, I can't commit to handling *The Thymes* solo in 2026 but will be happy to assist an incoming editing volunteer. Please consider this opportunity to help our president focus on myriad other organizational needs.



Thank you,

Jan

Jan Pitzer
Jrp1990@gmail.com
615.481.0871

Creative Commons Image

Please note Linda Ferris' new address: 25 Hyder Ridge Rd., Crossville, TN 38555

Reflections on a Season of Orchids

by Kristi DuBois, Master Gardener
Photos by David Clark, Tennessee Naturalist



Figure 1: Mountain Lady Slipper 1

When people think of orchids, they picture the tropical orchids that can be bought at supermarkets- showy moth orchids in vibrant shades of pink and purple. These tropical orchids are epiphytic, meaning they perch in the crook of trees, but there are also many species of terrestrial orchids, and 50 of these live in Tennessee.

My partner David Clark, a newer Tennessee Naturalist, has a fascination with orchids, some might say an obsession. He heard about the elusive mountain lady slipper while a member of the Native Plant Society in Oregon and spent the better part of 20 years searching for it. When he discovered a small population in a moist forest setting with dappled sunlight, he pinned the location and came back year after year to photograph them.

When I first met David in Oregon about 15 years ago after we had both gone through painful divorces, I bought him a uniquely colored moth orchid and facetiously quipped, “Keep this orchid alive. As long as it survives, so will our relationship.” David took this as a challenge, so much so that when we moved from Oregon to Tennessee 4 years ago to care for my parents, he set up a battery-generated light system in the back of our car to give the orchid enough light on its cross-country journey. Needless to say, the orchid is still alive today; so is our relationship and David’s quest for orchids, now in the wilds of Tennessee.

Many Tennesseans are familiar with and fond of pink lady slippers, but they may not realize that these forest flowers are orchids.

According to Bart Jones in *The Conservationist*, orchids are unique in the plant world because their male and female reproductive parts stand together in the column of one plant. Orchids have 3 petals and 3 outer sepals, and the middle petal is a labellum, or lip, that can be a tube or a pouch as in lady slippers. An orchid’s dust-like seeds must be fed with carbohydrates by mycorrhizal fungi to germinate. This symbiotic relationship with very specific soil fungi means that digging up a wild orchid to plant in your garden is usually a death sentence to the plant. This is the case for the showy and much beloved pink lady slipper, often found in clusters on the Cumberland Plateau in April and May, but increasingly less so because of ill informed or unethical plant collectors. Other lady slippers found on the Plateau in the spring but seldom seen are the large yellow lady slipper and the Kentucky lady slipper with its cream-colored pouch and maroon sepals.

Lady slippers are unusual orchids in that they provide no nectar for pollinators, says Jones, but they still lure bees into their slipper, or pouch, with deceptive landing strips of lines and spots. When a bee gets temporarily trapped in the pouch, it brushes against the orchid’s column and its sticky pollen, eventually escaping and carrying the pollen away to fertilize another flower. Whereas lady slippers stop hikers in their tracks with their large conspicuous pouches standing alone on a single stalk, fringed orchids create a splash with dozens of brightly colored flowers encircling a long spike. The showy inflorescences that come in vibrant shades of orange, yellow,

purple, or green live in moist meadows or bogs and are a favorite of butterflies. Jones says that butterflies poke their heads into the long spurs of the tiny flowers and emerge with sticky pads of pollen stuck to their heads like horns, which they then carry to the stigma of other flowers for pollination.

The most common fringed orchid on the Plateau is the yellow fringed orchid, a misnomer because it is in fact bright orange. Blooming from mid-July through September, yellow fringed orchids have multitudes of orchid-shaped flowers with whiskered labellum, or lips.



Figure 2: Yellow Fringed Orchid 1



Figure 3: Purple Fringeless Orchid 1

We occasionally see them along the road in sunny, drainage ditches.

A far less common fringed orchid on the Plateau is actually called the purple fringeless orchid because the lower lips of its small flowers are toothed, not fringed. You may be lucky to see these rare but beautiful orchids blooming in boggy areas in the summer.

Tennessee orchids that you might miss because of their tiny white flowers are ladies' tresses. Dainty tubular flowers spiral around a long stem like an elegantly braided lady's tress, making them a macro photographer's dream. Ladies' tresses are the largest genus of orchids in Tennessee because their habitat can range from



Figure 4: Ladies Tresses 1

swamps and bogs to dry disturbed lawns, explains Jones. Depending on the species, they bloom from spring to late fall.

There are several unique orchids in Tennessee. One particularly tropical looking orchid is the spreading pogonia. These singular pink or white flowers make a statement with wide open "mouths" and striped "tongues". Their long thin mahogany sepals thrust into the air, resembling helicopter propellers. Spreading pogonias stand proud in meadow bogs in the spring. With their flashy colors and unique anatomy, orchids are endlessly fascinating to professional and amateur botanists and photographers.

Tennessee is fortunate to have many native terrestrial orchids. The next time you are out in a wild area and catch sight of an orchid, get down on your hands and knees and really look at its intricate form. Orchids are best observed up close and personal.



Figure 5: Spreading Pogonia 1



Christmas Greenery

by Sue Partch

One of my favorite childhood Christmas memories is making a wreath with my dad. We would go out and get a variety of greens: long and short needled pines, fragrant balsam, bristly fir, soft cedar, delicate hemlock, bright green yew and two kinds of lycopodium or clubmoss we called ground pine and princess pine. We girls would cut up the greens into separate piles of small pieces while Dad bent the coat hanger into a circle and anchored the string on the hook part. Then each girl would make up bunches of one of each kind of the greens and hand them to Dad to tie on. Mom put on the red ribbon and tucked the leftover greens here and there around the house.

Over the years since then I've made wreaths the same way off and on; occasionally on my own but mostly when my kids were old enough to carry on the tradition of gathering greens and making the bunches. Other years I'd settle for a swag on the door and greens throughout the house. Fortunately, except for a few city and town years, I've lived where there were greens on the property that I could gather - even the especially treasured ground pine and princess pine.

Here in Tennessee I have a wreath because it's one of my husband's Christmas presents for me. He orders it from Vermont, a wonderfully fragrant all balsam one that I hang on the deck so we can see it from the living room. It's near the bird feeders so we get to also see Christmas card type views of cardinals and chickadees posed in and on it.

But I still go out and gather greens. My primary reason is to make a background for the wooden candles my dad made for all his daughters one Christmas. They were intended for a window but I put mine on my mantle and arrange the greens in behind. The leftovers make a swag for the front door and get tucked around here and there - just like Mom. Some of the greens are the same: long and short needled pines, cedar, hemlock, yew, but here instead of fir and balsam I have boxwood and holly...with berries tho some years that takes some searching. Best of all I found some small patches - at a nearby creekside - of the ground pine and princess pine. I only pick a few for memory sake, just enough to decorate the yulekaga I send to my sisters and a couple pieces for my kitchen windowsill.



Sue Partch at the November Monthly Meeting with her 2025 People's Choice Award, for writing.



Field Notes from the November Aurora Borealis

From Carol Lorenc and Bill Smith/Photo Credit: Bill Smith

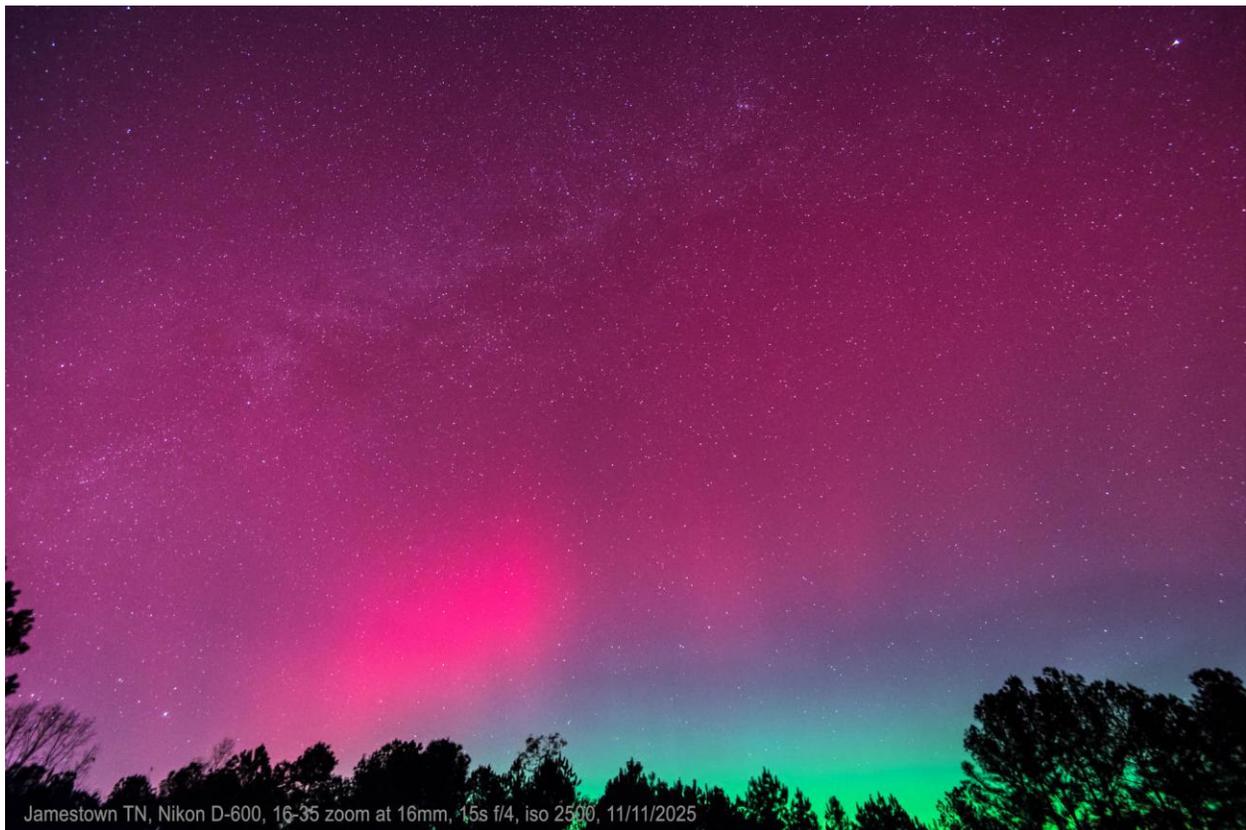
What a MONSTER aurora it was. We were driving back from Crossville and we could see the huge red mass thru the windshield even with the dashboard lights, headlights and oncoming cars!

Natch it was slowing down as we approached home and could only see the dullest of glows when we got home.

Yet the camera picked up the faint stuff. Still a touch of red to the eye. Shots are from 10:15 to 12:30am; went out at 1:30 ... gone.

I can only imagine what the camera would pick up when it was bright; probably only needed 1 sec exposure.

The field-of-view is 89 deg wide across the horizontal; this is the widest wide-angle lens I have.





CCMG Committees Teams Positions : 2025

Ask a Master Gardener Desk	Debbie Ward
Bulb Sales Spring & Fall	Linda Ferris, Carolyn Jozwiak
Classes at the Garden	Julia Wood
Community Outreach	Connie Farley
Crossville Planting Projects	Carolyn Jozwiak
Decorating	
E-Mail Coordinator	Alan Baker
Fall Gardeners Festival	Leslie Mullican
Flower, Lawn & Garden Festival	Leslie Mullican, Margo Carroll
Garden Teas	Sue Partch
Hospitality	Ron & Rosie Drechnik Andrea & Tony Capannola
Intern Class Hosting & Welcome Team	Rita Reali, Julie Lesko / Greg Recht, Barbara Blackford, Carla Lund
KinderGarden	Sue Maruska
Membership Contact list	Alan Baker
Merchandise / Publications, Membership clothing	SK Smallwood & Margo Carroll
Newsletter	Jan Pitzer
PDG Spring Plant Sale	Leslie Mullican
PDG Coordinator Director	Vicki May
PDG Umbrella Committee Representative	Mike Barron
Plant Growing & Propagation	
Plateau Discovery Garden UT Membership	Erin Fletcher
Publicity	Kristi Dubois, Erin Fletcher
Rain Barrel Program	
Facebook - Members Group	Alan Baker
Facebook - Public Page	Erin Fletcher
Instagram - Public Page	
YouTube - Public Page	
Search For Excellence	
Speakers Bureau	Carol Burdett
Website	Kelsey Whitefield, Alan Baker

corrections 1/5/2025

This publication is not responsible for errors and omissions.