

January 2025

Gardening & Beautification

A Publication of the Spartanburg Men's Garden Club



Welcoming Men & Women

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is the newsletter of the Spartanburg Men's Garden Club. It is published monthly except in December, and is available to the public free of charge. Sign up for the emailed newsletter by sending your request to:

Webmaster@DirtDaubers.org

President's Corner

We are already starting the new year with the garden chores that will make our gardens beautiful this year. Although the preparation can be a drudgery for some people, it is the foundation for a garden bountiful in plants, flowers and produce. Gardening is good for your health, soul and mind. It also seems that gardeners are some of the nicest people on earth.

One of the very nice people was Charlie Crescenzi, who passed away in December. Charlie had been a club member since 2007 and was a significant contributor to our success. Charlie held the officer positions of VP (2012), President (2013-2014) and Secretary (2016-2017). He had a good sense of humor and a great disposition. Charlie is emblematic of the typical gardener who is happy at their work. Who would not be happy when working with their hands and creating so much beauty in the landscape? Let's be thankful for our wonderful gardening hobby and spread the word so that others can have as much fun as we, and Charlie, have had.

Dan Whitten SMGC Speaker January 21, 2024



"A Plant Survey of Glassy Mountain"

Our January program will feature Dan Whitten, a naturalist living in Spartanburg, as our guest speaker. Dan retired from Michelin, North America after thirty years, and now he has time to renew his love and fascination of nature. Dan serves on the boards of the SC Native Plant Society, Friends of Jocassee, The Tyger River Foundation and The Foothills Conservancy. His program will feature the highlights of his 2023 plant survey of Glassy Mountain. Come prepared to learn more about our beautiful earth!



Post Office Box 1502
Spartanburg, SC 29304
DirtDaubers.org

Founded in 1948 as the "Dirt Daubers" the Spartanburg Men's Garden Club welcomes men, women and corporate members with an interest in nature.

As well as sharing gardening interests, the club has planted over 5,000 trees in Spartanburg, assists with many area beautification projects, and conducts a twice-yearly Tree & Shrub sale.



2025 Litter pickup schedule

March 8	rain dates	Mar 15
June 14	" "	Jun 21
September 13	" "	Sep 20
December 13	" "	Dec 20

Our area for litter control is Pine St. from Palmetto St. to McCravey Dr.

We meet at 8 AM in parking area behind Chamber of Commerce (off Oakland Av.)

Renew Now

2025 Membership

Single \$20 Family \$28 Student \$5
Corporate \$100

Forms are located at
DirtDaubers.org/Membership
and will be available at the next general meeting.

Bring check or cash & completed form to Shelia Middlebrooks.



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Upcoming Events

Presentations for 2025

February 17 Deb Vararo - "The Importance of Bees"

March 17 The Happy Berry Farm - "Growing berries and pussy willows"

Spring Plant Sale: April 4 & 5

April 21 Linda McHam - "The Chelsea Flower Show"

June 16 Nicole Goodman, Clemson Extension Agent

Nov. 17 Joyce Harrison - "Conservation/Litter/Microplastics"

Our Corporate Members are listed below. Please support them.

Creekside Garden & Nursery
Hatcher Garden & Woodland Preserve
Piedmont Farm & Garden
Peggy Wilson, Realtor
Wofford College



<https://www.instagram.com/spartanburgmensgardenclub/>



<https://facebook.com/groups/smgc1948>



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Member Musing

By Mary Ann Hipp

Conifers

One of my goals for my garden is to have something in bloom every time I walk outside. Since we live in the South, most of the time, that is a very achievable goal. In early January however, the blooms are few and far between. Sure, there are a couple of camellias that bravely open their buds, only to have them turn into brown mush overnight. And the forsythia has a few blossoms. But most of the blooming plants are taking a well-deserved rest. Fortunately, this is the time of year when the conifers get to be the stars.

Conifers are plants that reproduce via cones, and the vast majority of them are evergreen. Conifers come in a variety of sizes from 'Blue Rug' junipers that only reach 4-6" tall, to the Giant Sequoias, the largest trees in the world. They are available in a varied palette of forms, colors, and textures, and they provide year-round color and interest.



Although most of us are familiar with pines, spruces, and firs, they may not be the easiest plants to incorporate into your garden due to their size or growing condition requirements. Look instead to the arborvitae, the yews, the cryptomerias, the junipers, and my all-time favorite, the chamaecyparis, also known as falsecypress.



I first fell in love with the falsecypresses when a Southern Living Dream home was built and landscaped on the campus of Clemson University. A very large Hinoki falsecypress was the focal point of the garden and it was a beauty. I have since acquired several varieties and have never been disappointed in any of them. There are dwarf ones in my rock garden, small ones as foundation plantings, and medium sized ones in a conifer bed. Their foliage is scaly and grows in flat sprays. Their cones look like exploding soccer balls. They are a favorite of Bonsai enthusiasts and are good choices for containers. The new growth is often a different color which makes for a nice contrast. I also have a variety of arborvitae including Clemson Select, a good screening plant, and De Groot's Spire, a narrow tightly branched upright form. Prostrate plum yews make great foundation plants and can take more shade than most conifers.

If you are looking to add some winter interest to your garden, investigate the conifers. As with all plants, do your research. Conifers generally don't like to be pruned, so try to make sure the plant you want will fit in the space you have. Visit Hatcher Garden to see mature plants in a garden setting. Many of our local garden centers have a nice selection of conifers that will grow well in our area. Conifer Kingdom is also a great online resource.

History of the club continues on the following pages.

Tree Planting Tri-Fold. During 2000, another Club “tree enhancement” was accomplished. Pittman created the Club’s “Tree Planting Procedure” tri-fold. He sent a draft copy to five of the leading local nurserymen with the request, “... you would be a great help to this project if you would review the attached draft procedure and drawing, mark errors or modifications clearly and fax it back to me in a few days. Among the problems we have documented at some 18 rather recent tree planting sites are Planting too deep (root flare many inches below soil and/or below existing grade), Excess mulch over root ball area and around trunk, Circling roots, Improper removal of burlap/jute, and No removal of non-Biodegradable wrap, cord, tape, etc.”

All responses to the above were positive. The Club first distributed the tri-fold broadly at the fall plant sale 2000, and it continues to be widely used. The brochure is currently available on the Club’s website.

Crape Myrtle Maintenance and Brochure. In addition to planting trees, the Club has been diligent in educating not only members, but **also** the public about proper planting, pruning, and maintenance of trees. And for many years, pruning of Crape Myrtle trees has been a particularly active topic with the Club. It is unfortunate, but true, that severe cutting back of these great and important small-growing trees of the southern landscape has been an “old southern custom.” But it is wrong and a bad thing to do for both the aesthetics of these trees and their health. A number of years ago, Southern Living magazine created the descriptive name “CREPE MURDER” (yes, they spell it with an ‘e’) for the multiple forms of bad pruning—flat topping, hat racking, and other forms of large limb and trunk severing. This is often done to enhance flowering (or to force it to become a shrub or small tree), but it has limited success in that, and it ruins the form and shape of the tree forever. The appearance might not be so objectionable during the summer when foliage hides the grotesque form and masks the “pom-pom effect” from the multitude of suckers which grow around the large cut limbs or trunks, but the “murdered” tree is ugly for the remaining seven months of the year.

In spite of the many letters-to-the-editor, Master Gardener courses, and MGC promotions, it appeared the Club was losing the battle, so in March 2004, the club embarked on a rather massive “Save the Crape Myrtle” program. This involved a media education program with the Spartanburg *Herald-Journal*, WSPA-TV Channel 7, and more letters-to-the-editor.

A special highlight of the program was a Life Section front page story in the April 21 *Herald-Journal* with a strong write-up containing many local examples of bad pruning (called “Crape Murder”) and strong advice on good maintenance practices. Another highlight was a noon special on WSPA-TV on March 31 of that year.

But the main feature of the 2004 “Save the Crape Myrtle” program was the community crape myrtle maintenance clinic held in October at Spartanburg Technical College (now named Spartanburg Community College). This seminar or clinic was developed in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce and Milliken’s Noble Tree Foundation. The Chamber promoted the seminar and encouraged its members to insist that their landscape maintenance people attend. Most of the approximately 50 persons in attendance were landscapers (professional or home) along with Spartanburg Community College students and faculty. Milliken’s primary contribution was to encourage Dr. Bruce Fraedrich, noted horticulturist/arborist with Bartlett Tree Experts in Charlotte as the key speaker, a strong proponent of proper maintenance.

Appendix

Lyn Murajda with help from Milliken's Stewart Winslow and Henry Pittman created "Crape Myrtles: Four Seasons of Beauty," a six-page color brochure on selection and maintenance for this 2004 clinic. Seventeen of the community's leading landscape designers, maintenance companies, horticulture educators, garden writers, retail and wholesale outlets officially endorsed the contents and advice in the brochure. A thousand copies were printed pro-bono by Keys Printing Company as a courtesy to the SMGC. It was a key hand-out at the clinic and continues to be distributed broadly by the Club, in print form and electronically from the Club's website www.dirtclubbers.org.

The Crape Myrtle Brochure was so popular and the SMGC's program so impressive that Steve Bender, Senior Garden Editor of *Southern Living* magazine featured it in a three-page article entitled "Stop! Don't Chop!" in the February 2005 issue. The article's theme was a picture story of Winslow giving new life to a previously mutilated Spartanburg Crape Myrtle by careful pruning to remove the unattractive multiple suckers and encouraging more natural future growth. The magazine installed the Club's brochure on its website for download by readers. Club members have received many dozens of telephone calls and Emails from readers across the south seeking copies of the brochure and advice on Crape Myrtle selection and maintenance.

Noted Spartanburg garden columnist, Linda Cobb, discussed the article in her bi-weekly column, a part of which is shown below.

For many years, people have spent time each spring sawing off all of the limbs of the crape myrtle flowering tree leaving a single stump about 3- to 4-feet tall. The goal was to have a tight, almost topiary shape to the tree.

In retrospect, we know that using this severe pruning method has several flaws. First and foremost, this tree is meant to be a tree, not a shrub. If you want a shrub, then plant one of the Petite Series that grows to only 12 feet or less. Secondly, it makes the branches weak and breakable. The beautiful mottled bark of the crape myrtle will never emerge. The bark of the crape myrtle is one of its best features, next to the superb flowers.

Local horticulturalist Stewart Winslow is shown in the article pruning the crape myrtle properly. Stewart advises pruning in late winter, such as February; to remove suckers at the base of the tree, and as the tree grows, gradually removing all side branches from the main trunk up to about 5 feet. He advises removing unwanted branches before they get thicker than a pencil. And the old seed heads can be cut off, but it is not necessary.

Winslow, head horticulturalist for the Milliken Arboretum, thinks it is great that the magazine has noticed something that has bothered a lot of tree people for many years.

"The crape myrtle is such a stable tree that we use a lot in the South," Winslow said, because it offers such a wide range of bloom colors and sizes.

He said the first crape myrtle was planted in Charleston at Middleton Place in the 1700s and is still alive, making it hundreds of years old.

The Southern Living article said it is not too late to start pruning the right way. If you have already "crape murdered" your trees for the coming season, you still have time to rectify the situation. You can cut the plant to the ground.

Next winter, select three to five trunks and cut off any others at the ground. If you nurse those trunks through the next growing season, you will be on your way to recovery. The crape myrtle is meant to be a tree, so let it do its thing.

Linda Tiller McHam, president of the Men's Garden Club, said the article is great publicity for the club and, most importantly, for the trees.

"Henry Pittman has been involved for years in caring for trees," she said. "This is a continuation of his interest in using trees and shrubs to enhance the quality of life in our community."

Linda Cobb is a master gardener who lectures, teaches and designs garden in South Carolina

Appendix

Letters-to-the-editor of the Spartanburg *Herald-Journal* by Club members discouraging “Crape Murder” have been published many times. The most recent was one by Club President Ed Wilde published in early 2009. Educational activity to “Save the Crape Myrtle” continues, even though sometime it appears to be a losing battle.