



Keeping you connected

extension cord

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A decade in, Arkansas Diamonds program continues to shine

Ten years later, the Arkansas Diamonds program is doubling down on its plant trials as it continues to parse the best plants for Natural State Gardens.

The program is a partnership between the Arkansas Green Industry Association, the Cooperative Extension Service, local growers and independent garden centers. The emphasis has generally been on plants with vibrant blooms and foliage that fare well in Arkansas' soils and climate.

Anthony Bowden, extension ornamental specialist for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, said that instead of a one-year trial period, new selections for the Arkansas Diamond program will have a two-year trial period.

The longer period allows "for a more comprehensive and reliable picture of the performance across variable environmental conditions," Bowden said. "A single growing season may not capture the full range of stressors that influence plant health and ornamental value, such as unusually mild or extreme weather, pest outbreaks, or inconsistent rainfall."

Reflecting the variety in Arkansas' soils and microclimates, Bowden has 37 trial plots in 32 counties including plots at and Hope and Little Rock.

"Plant selection for trial purposes is a strategic process that prioritizes species and cultivars with demonstrated regional adaptability, commercial availability, and potential horticultural value," Bowden said. "Preference is given to plants readily available from wholesale nurseries or breeding programs to ensure accessibility for growers and retailers if the trial results are favorable."

Candidate plants are evaluated for durability under such stressors as heat, drought, poor soil fertility and their ability to



Impatiens in the Arkansas Diamonds trial beds at the Little Rock State Office of the Cooperative Extension Service.

resist insects and disease. Of course, aesthetic appeal and overall landscape performance are big factors too, he said.

"Feedback from industry stakeholders, including growers, extension agents, and retail garden centers, also informs plant selection to ensure the trials remain relevant to market needs and consumer preferences," he said.

Bowden said Arkansas Diamonds are ones that can withstand the state's high summer temperatures, varied rainfall patterns and soil types ranging from sandy loams to heavy clay.

These are plants selected to be brown-thumb-proof.

"Because the trials are designed to reflect low-input residential and public landscapes, plants are evaluated for performance with minimal irrigation, fertilization, or pest control beyond standard cultural practices," he said. "Preference is given to plants that maintain ornamental value and vigor throughout the growing season under these conditions."

Read more [here](#).

THE INSIDE STORIES

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Arkansas 4-H Star Camp a summer tradition for more than 50 years

Nestled among towering pines and a glittering 40-acre lake, Arkansas 4-H members from five counties gathered at Timber Lodge Ranch for the 4-H Star Camp, building pool noodle boats, coming out of their shells and living the camping experience.

Seventy 4-H members from Howard, Miller, Montgomery, Pike and Sevier counties joined 20 adults, including extension county agents, summer interns and parent volunteers, for three days of outdoor recreation and team-building activities from June 18-20.

Campers faced off in a water balloon Battleship-style game, created abstract art using paint-filled water guns and built boats from cardboard, duct tape and pool noodles, which they put to the test on the lake.

“For years, this program actually involved camping in tents and cooking everything outside,” said Eva Langley, Pike



4-H'ers work together to stack cups in a team building exercise.

County extension staff chair. “They really got the true camping experience. We’ve been coming here for several years now, and even though the kids are staying in air-conditioned bunks, we still want it to feel authentic, because not every kid goes camping.”

The 4-H Star Camp, named after its five participating counties, has gone by a few different names since its inception more than 55 years ago. Originally called Quad County Camp for its partnership among Sevier, Howard, Miller and Little River counties, the program has welcomed generations of 4-H members and their families.

“We work very hard to keep this camp a tradition,” said Rex Herring, Sevier County extension staff chair, who has been involved with Star Camp for the past 21 years. “You’ve got kids coming here whose moms and dads and grandparents have come through this camp. Our theme every year incorporates educational elements, but we have a lot of fun — otherwise, they wouldn’t want to come back.”

The camp brings together extension family and consumer sciences, agricultural and 4-H agents, as well as extension summer interns, who lead the activity rotations for the 4-H members.

“One of my favorite parts of Star Camp is the way we get to collaborate on it as agents,” said Samantha Horn, Howard County extension staff chair. “We put a lot of time and effort into planning this and making sure our kids get the best experience out of it.”

Read more [here](#).

Extension Cord editorial board welcomes two new members

Extension retirees **Allan Beuerman**, former county extension agent-agriculture, and **Ursula Crow**, former warehouse supervisor, and have recently joined the Extension Cord editorial board.

Current members also include **Stan Chapman**, **Ella Geisler**, **Diane Jones**, **Tom Leslie**, **Darlene Millard** and **Don Plunkett**.



The Extension Cord editorial board visited with the 2025 UADA summer interns during their July meeting.

Arkansas Master Gardeners of the Year announced at 2025 state conference

Angelia Hudson and Joanne York were recently named the 2024 Arkansas Master Gardeners of the Year in honor of their contributions to the volunteer organization, which trains members to lead horticulture education and beautification projects throughout the state.

The Arkansas Master Gardeners held their annual state conference June 5-7 at Harding University in Searcy, hosted by the White County Master Gardeners. The conference included tours of local members' gardens, community gardens and commercial flower and berry farms. Members also attended educational seminars on floral design, sustainable landscape principles, seed saving techniques and more.

"Arkansas Master Gardeners are making huge impacts on their communities all over the state, and we are so proud of what our award recipients have achieved this year," said Randy Forst, extension consumer horticulture educator and Master Gardener coordinator for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture. "It is a joy to recognize and celebrate their work."

The organization's awards were divided into program size, with smaller programs having 50 or fewer members and large programs having 51 or more.

Read the full list of winners [here](#).



Angelia Hudson of Lonoke County was recognized as Master Gardener of the Year for small programs. Left to right: John Anderson, director of the Cooperative Extension Service, Angelia Hudson and Randy Forst, extension consumer horticulture educator and Master Gardener coordinator.

Division of Agriculture researchers track Asian longhorned tick, related pathogen in Arkansas

Researchers with the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture are tracking the spread of an invasive tick affecting cattle in Arkansas.

The Asian longhorned tick (*Hemaphysalis longicornis*) was first confirmed in the United States in 2017. Ticks collected in New Jersey and West Virginia in 2010, however, were initially identified as rabbit ticks but later identified and confirmed as Asian longhorned ticks. It carries the pathogen *Theileria orientalis*; two genotypes of the pathogen, Ikeda and Chitose, have been confirmed in Arkansas.



A fully-engorged Asian longhorned tick, measuring 12.5 mm by 10 mm, oviposits thousands of offspring inside a lab jar. Division of Agriculture researchers are tracking the spread of the invasive tick in Arkansas.

The study to determine the prevalence of both the tick and the pathogen in Arkansas cattle is funded by a U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture grant (USDA NIFA Award No. 2024-67016-42397).

The Asian longhorned tick has been confirmed in at least 20 states, most of which are in the eastern half of the country, and as far west as eastern Oklahoma.

Kirsten Midkiff, extension animal health and wellbeing specialist, said cattle infected with *Theileria* exhibit symptoms that mirror Anaplasmosis, a bacterial disease many Arkansas cattle producers will likely be more familiar with.

"We'll see weight loss in those cattle, suppression of milk production, loss of appetite, anemia, and reproductive problems like abortions," Midkiff said. "You'll also see some jaundice, weakness or reluctance to move, even death in some cases."

In early June, Kelly Loftin, extension entomologist, co-authored an update on the prevalence of both the tick and the pathogen with fellow Division of Agriculture researchers Emily McDermott, Elizabeth Smith and Jeremy Powell. The Asian longhorned tick has been confirmed in Benton, Boone, Independence, Newton, Searcy and Washington counties. The *Theileria* pathogen has been confirmed in cattle in Arkansas, Baxter, Boone, Carroll, Lonoke, Marion, Searcy and Washington counties.

Loftin said there is no evidence to suggest *Theileria* poses a health risk to humans. Read more [here](#).

August Birthdays

Raymond Duncan - Aug. 1
 Patricia Walters - Aug. 1
 Berline Wright - Aug. 1
 Linda Buckley-Chappell - Aug. 3
 Betty Holman - Aug. 4
 Louise Burns - Aug. 5
 June Moody - Aug. 5
 Carol Wallace Guffey Jr. - Aug. 8
 Paul Ballantyne - Aug. 9
 Ronald Beaty - Aug. 9
 Burl Scifres - Aug. 9
 Laura Goforth - Aug. 10
 Delbert Taylor - Aug. 11

Nancy Clark - Aug. 12
 Marion Terhune Jr. - Aug. 12
 Robert Goodson - Aug. 14
 Charles Wilson Jr. - Aug. 14
 Beverly Fountain - Aug. 15
 Janice Huddleston - Aug. 15
 Marian Snortland - Aug. 15
 Mark Everette Brawner - Aug. 17
 Barbara Holt - Aug. 17
 Gail Clark - Aug. 19
 Carolyn Grimes - Aug. 19
 Laura Luther - Aug. 19
 Gloria Pickett - Aug. 19

Wanda O'Neal - Aug. 20
 Jim Ragland - Aug. 20
 Jan Rogers - Aug. 20
 Rickey Wiedower - Aug. 20
 Claudia Corbin - Aug. 21
 Barbara Simmons - Aug. 21
 Steve Jones - Aug. 23
 Terry Davis - Aug. 25
 Carla Vaught - Aug. 25
 Martha Albright - Aug. 26
 Frank Plafcan - Aug. 28
 Lott Rolfe III - Aug. 29
 John Langston - Aug. 30

Message from the director



One of my favorite old television shows is *Cheers*. There is a well-known scene in one of the early episodes where Norm, Cliff, Coach, and the other bar patrons are debating which is the [sweatiest movie of all time](#). I thought of that scene last week as I was walking across the UA campus in the mid-afternoon July heat at state

O-Rama. It occurred to me that we could have a good debate about the sweatiest CES event. Between O-Rama, field days, outdoor trainings and competitions, and a host of other summer activities and events, the competition is stiff.

Despite the heat, state O-Rama was — as usual — a fantastic event. It is always gratifying to see our 4-Hers in action. The poise and confidence that 4-H experiences build into our young people is incredible to see. Most of them are miles ahead of where I was at that age (not that that's a very high bar). I know that doesn't happen by accident. It takes a lot of work from our dedicated 4-H staff, agents, and volunteers. I appreciate the hard work that goes into making 4-H the best youth development program in the country — especially during the long hot days of the July O-Rama season.

My trip to O-Rama was cut a bit short this year because we had a very special guest visiting an Extension project in

Save the Date!

Upcoming Fall Regional Retiree Meetings:

Oct. 7 – Arkadelphia | Youth Building, Clark Co. Fairgrounds

Oct. 10 – Stuttgart | Rice Research and Extension Center

Oct. 21 – Fort Smith | University of Arkansas at Fort Smith, Center for Economic Development

Nov. 5 – Little Rock | Little Rock State Office

Grant County on the last day of O-Rama. Gov. Sanders dropped by Sheridan Intermediate School (SIS) to visit the teaching garden there. I don't usually do individual shout-outs in this space, but Brad McGinley (with huge help from his wife, Serena) has done an excellent job with the teaching garden at SIS. Brad was part of the governor's roundtable discussion at this event, and he did a masterful job of explaining to the governor and her staff not only how Extension supports that project but also how that project weaves together all four of our CES program areas to maximize stakeholder benefits from what, on the surface, looks like a modest little middle school project. It was an excellent object lesson in why Extension remains not only relevant but also absolutely essential to agriculture, communities and families in this state. And, given the weather that afternoon, the governor's visit could be a real contender for the sweatiest event of the year.