

**2025 State Master Gardener Conference**

**Speakers (listed alphabetically)**

**Brumfield, Anna: "Styled Wild - Floral Design Inspired by Nature"**

Anna Brumfield will demonstrate how to create an asymmetrical design with a whimsical elegance inspired by nature. She loves that “just picked’ from the garden aesthetic and tries to capture that in her design style. Flowers in the arrangement will all be locally grown from their flower farm.

Anna and her husband, Jonathan, own Flower and Fiddle near Searcy, Arkansas, and are going into their 5th flower season.

Anna has always had a passion for flowers, from admiring her grandma's peonies as a child to designing flowers for events, which all led to starting her own flower farm. When not in the flowers, Anna is a patient experienced professional in healthcare, and Jonathan is a professional counselor specializing in marriage and family therapy.

Flower & Fiddle bloomed from their desire to create and inspire joy. The farm name comes from their own creative outlets that bring happiness. They encourage others to slow down in life and find joy in the bloom, whatever that may be for you.

When I started growing flowers from seed to vase, I instantly became hooked, and this is where my flower farming journey.  Join me for a flower design demonstration and leave inspired to create beauty from your own garden or from locally grown.

**Cooper, Chris: “Sustainable Landscape Principles”**

Chris is a University of Tennessee Extension County Director and Coordinator for the Extension Master Gardener Program in Shelby County.  Chris can be found throughout Shelby County conducting educational programs addressing issues that affect urban and home horticulture. He has a B.S. degree in Soil Science from Southern University, Baton Rouge, LA., and a M.S. and Ph.D. in Plant Physiology from Alabama A&M University, Huntsville, AL. Chris is the host of the series “The Family Plot: Gardening in the Mid-South” which can be found on WKNO/Channel 10 (PBS) on Saturdays at 3:00 pm and Sundays at 12:30 pm.

How smart is your yard? Come learn nine sustainable principles that will help you achieve your landscaping dream!

**Babb, Cory: “Year-Round Gardening”**

Cory Babb and his wife Lee Waters started Firelight Farm in March of 2021, and have been growing year-round ever since. Firelight Farm is a one-acre market garden, focusing on high value crops such as lettuce mix, carrots, tomatoes, peppers and kale. Utilizing high tunnels, interplanting, shade cloth, row covers and more; Firelight Farm produces high quality lettuce and other crops through the hot summer, and the winter- using all organic growing practices.

Cory studied Sustainable Food Systems at Montana State University and worked as a chef for more than a decade. This culinary background was invaluable for growing crops for some of Central Arkansas’s best restaurants such as the Root Cafe and Sterling Market. Beyond restaurants, you can find Firelight Farm at the Hillcrest Farmers Market year-round.

Find out more about Cory and Lee and Firelight Farm at www.thefirelightfarm.com

Follow us on Instagram and Facebook! @thefirelightfarm, Facebook.com/thefirelightfarm

Using organic practices, like interplanting, shade cloth, row covers and more, learn how to grow high value crops year-round.

**Coykendall, John: “Preserving our Roots – Seed Saving”** (Keynote Speaker)

John Coykendall is the master gardener at Blackberry Farm where he has worked for 23 years. He is a seed saver, artist, and author. John has been saving seeds for over 40 years and is one of the nation’s biggest preservationists of heirloom seeds. Each year John grows different heirloom varieties for seed to ensure their survival for generations to come. And each year his goal and motto is “saving diversity one seed at a time”.

His passion for gardening and seed saving are accompanied by what he calls memory banking. It isn’t just the seed that grabs his attention, but also the story that accompanies it as well; where did it come from, what family or region is it passed down from, what family traditions and stories does this one seed hold.

His love and intense desire to see that these precious seeds and stories do not die out but continue to thrive today as they once did in the past is evident in his voice as he tells the tales that these seeds hold in such a small yet captivating package.

Come and learn how to preserve our roots, saving one seed at a time! John will be one of our keynote speakers.

**Farris, Greyson: “Native Plants from Seed”**

Learn to identify native plants, seed collection of native plants and propagation and horticulture skills. Get inspired by native plants biodiversity and understand more about habitat restoration and conservation.

**Pittcock, Kim: “Propagation Techniques”**

Dr. Kim Pittcock is a retired Horticulture Professor from Arkansas State University. She taught all the horticulture courses, organic agricultural production, genetic improvement, plant breeding, and seed production. She managed the Horticulture greenhouses, plant production and sales, and the Horticulture display garden at the farm. She currently serves as the Program Manager for the nonprofit entity, East Arkansas Resource Conservation and Development, which oversees the Judd Hill Farmers' Market. She continues to garden at her home grow and propagate many unique succulents and tropicals in her 2 greenhouses.

Asexual Propagation Techniques:

We will review various propagation techniques such as cuttings on softwood and hardwood cuttings. Demonstrations of hormone use, cutting techniques, heating mats, and propagation of easy to more difficult plants will be discussed.

**Wilbanks, Mike: “Houseplants and Their Health Benefits”**

Mike Wilbanks is a third-generation commercial printer and publisher whose career started in 1968. In 1993 Mike was first named as one of the Who’s Who of Global Business Leaders. This trend continued for the next three years. Mike is an appointed member to the Printing Industries of America Presidents Council.

Mike retired in 2014 and has devoted much of his retirement time to the Craighead County Master Gardener program. And a year later became a member of County 76 Master Gardener annual calendar project.

Mike is a speaker in high demand over three states. Some of his presentations include Curb Appeal for Homeowners, Health Benefits of Houseplants, Beginning and Advanced Plant Photography, Landscaping in a Small Area, and Daylily Health.

Grow indoor plants to improve your own health!

**Shelton-James, Sarah: “Herbal Teas”**

Sarah Shelton- James is an herb enthusiast and the founder of BWG Herbal Tea. On her farm in Casscoe, Arkansas, she grows a variety of herbs, handcrafting unique and flavorful tea blends. Sarah is passionate about creating teas that are both delicious and beneficial, providing a natural way to enhance wellness. Her blends are e enjoyed across Arkansas , and she’s always exploring new herb combinations to bring seasonal and specialty teas to life.

“If you have a problem, I have a tea for that!”

**Moffett, Taylor: “Fun with Bees and Honey – Basic Beekeeping”**

Taylor Moffett grew up in White County and graduated from White County Central in 2023. While there she became heavily involved in FFA and learned about beekeeping. During her sophomore year, she bought two hives that she took care of until she started college at Arkansas Tech University. She learned a great deal about beekeeping and is excited to have the opportunity to share with you during the state conference.

Learn the beautiful things about honeybees, their routines and all the joys in the little details!

**Wilcox, Tina Marie:** “**Ozark Tales of Courtin’and Spoonin’”** (Keynote Speaker)

The Widow Wilcox likes to go on about how folks used yarbs to get along way back at the

turn of the century. The Widder moved to Rattlesnake Ridge with her family when she

was just a little ‘un. They came with everything to start a new homestead packed on a wooden wagon drawn by two gray mules. The Widow Wilcox travels around on foot now, gathering plants from forest, field, and garden. She visits neighbors with the rheumatiz, ringworm and the seven-year itch, and performs the granny woman chores, delivering babies and making the dead ready for buryin’. She is prone to reminiscing, especially about how it was meetin’ her feller and how they got sweet on each other. Her sorghum spoon is

always with her and in her apron, pocket is the very same vanilla bean her old pa gave her when she came of courtin’ age. Folks don’t have to work as hard to get together these days. Reckon it is good to hear an old woman rememberin’ how it used to be. The Widow Wilcox has always got a basket full of good

smellin’ yarbs and each one spins a yarn.

**Miller, Tom and Debbie: “Raising Butterflies”**

We moved to White County in May 2004 from Saline County mainly to be closer to our first grandchild. I had already received the gardening bug in Bryant but was thrilled to move into rural White County near Floyd. We had 15 acres of property, and we added 27 flower beds to play with. I noticed that we had a few butterflies around, but I received the butterfly "bug" when we visited the Butterfly "bug" when we visited the Butterfly House in Dallas, Texas. We kept records of every variety that ventured into our yard. I was determined to expand my garden to bring in as many varieties as possible. We were thrilled that we had registered the first Dianna Fritillary (our State butterfly) in White County. We will share some tips in our presentation to help you enjoy our butterflies/pollinators that grace our 3/4 acre.

Come hear some tips on raising backyard butterflies and how to enjoy them!

**Meyer, Uta: “Birds and Native Plants”**

Uta Meyer joined Audubon at the Little Rock Audubon Center in 2013. As Center Manager, Uta develops and implements environmental education programs and manages the Center's facility, native plant gardens, and 450-acres of diverse habitat. She received her B.S. in Environmental Science from the University of Central Arkansas in 2011 and her M.A. from New York University in Environmental Conservation Education in January 2013.

Over the past century urbanization has changed once ecologically productive land into sterile lawns with exotic ornamental plants. The human dominated landscape typically does not support functioning ecosystems or provide healthy places for birds. As a result, many bird species are in decline. Your yard - and the kinds of plants in it - matters more than you may know. Native plants play an important role in providing the food and cover birds need to survive and thrive in a way that non-native plants cannot. By increasing the number of native plants, decreasing non-native invasive plants, and making other changes, you can greatly improve the value of your yard to birds.

Human dominated landscapes (non-native plants) vs Native plants. Which will it be for your birds to survive and thrive?

**Johnson, Norris: “Water You Thinkin”**

Morgan County Alabama Master Gardener

The presenter was raised on a farm in Northeast Arkansas. A large family garden and several hundred acres of cotton and soybeans occupied much of his time when not in school. He graduated from the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville with a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering in 1972. He spent his entire working career focused on Industrial Water Management before retiring and pursuing a Master Gardener Certification in 2017.

Water remains one of our most precious resources. It is an absolute necessity for life here on earth. This presentation focuses on water quality and quantity when it comes to caring for ourselves and our plants. So, “water you thinkin” to keep your plants’ thirst quenched?

**Polcar, Diana: “Seed Saving 101: Growing a Seed Saving Community”**

Diana’s love for gardening started with a few flowers and cacti in a shady garden bed of her first home on an Air Force Base in Del Rio, Texas. Since 2004, Diana and her family have moved 7 times – leaving behind a garden at every house they’ve lived in, even in Canada! Diana and her family have called Vilonia home since 2018. That same year, she established a backyard kitchen garden, affectionately known as Misty Ridge Gardens. Diana’a dedication to gardening led her to become a Faulkner County Master Gardener and she earned the honor of Faulkner County Master Gardener of the Year in 2022. Everything she has learned about gardening has come from trial and error, tons of research, and a large community of gardening friends. Beyond the garden, Diana is an inspiring special education teacher at Vilonia High School. When not teaching or gardening, she enjoys pouring over seed catalogs, volunteering with the Faulkner County Master Gardeners, and spending quality time outdoors with her beautiful family.

See Saving 101: Growing a Seed Saving Community

Join us for a Seed Saving Workshop where we will explore the foundations of building a community through the practice of saving seeds. This workshop will provide an in-depth look at selecting the right seeds for saving and mastering the techniques for processing and storing them effectively. Whether you’re a seasoned gardener or new to seed saving, this workshop offers a supportive environment for learning and sharing knowledge. Come together with fellow gardening enthusiasts to foster a sense of community while preserving the diversity and vitality of our local plant varieties. Let’s grow together by saving seeds and cultivating connections that will blossom for generations to come.