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Pulaski County Master Gardeners honored for volunteerism, beautification work

If you've ever visited some of central Arkansas' historic landmarks, parks and tourist sites, you may have admired the handiwork of the Pulaski County Master Gardeners who maintain nearly three dozen beautiful garden sites throughout the county.

One of the more visible sites is the garden at the historic 1889 Pulaski County Courthouse, where volunteers gathered June 20, 2024, to celebrate Pulaski County Master Gardeners Day. Pulaski County Judge Barry Hyde read a proclamation, designating the third Thursday in June as Master Gardeners Day.

"The Master Gardeners have been dedicated to promoting sustainable gardening, environmental stewardship and providing free community education for many years," Hyde said. "Master Gardeners are highly trained and work diligently to maintain their certification, and their efforts not only beautify Pulaski County but also foster a sense of community and promote healthy living."

Last year, Pulaski County Master Gardeners volunteered more than 17,000 hours, maintaining 32 projects around the county, Pulaski County Master Gardener president Sara Jordan said.

"Master Gardeners work year-round in Pulaski County and in nearly every county in the state, creating beautiful spaces for Arkansans to enjoy," said Randy Forst, who coordinates the statewide Master Gardener program. "We are grateful to Judge Hyde for recognizing our Pulaski County Master Gardeners for their volunteer work. The third Thursday in June will be a day we look forward to for years to come."

Master Gardeners have cared for the courthouse gardens at Broadway and Second Street in Little Rock since 2016.

"We've taken out some roses to make the garden more pollinator-friendly and gain designation as a Monarch Waystation," said Master Gardener Dana Boyster, who co-chairs the project with Melody Parsley.

The gardens feature milkweed, butterfly bushes, lantana,

rudbeckias, coneflowers, St. John's Wort and many other plants friendly to monarchs and other pollinators, she said.

Aside from the courthouse garden, Master Gardeners maintain several prominent gardens in Little Rock, including at the Arkansas Governor's Mansion, the Old State House, Historic Arkansas Museum, Pinnacle Mountain, Arkansas Children's Hospital, the C.A. Vines Arkansas 4-H Center and the Pulaski County Juvenile Detention Center. In North Little Rock, volunteers maintain gardens along Main Street in downtown Argenta, at the Patrick H. Hays Senior Citizens Center and at the Old Mill, a favorite spot for photo shoots. They also tend gardens at the Maumelle Community Center and Jacksonville City Hall.

"Our Master Gardeners are busy, busy people," said Derek Reed, the Pulaski County extension agent for agriculture and horticulture. "They also have two greenhouse projects – one in Little Rock and one in Jacksonville – where they grow plants for the annual plants sales."

Last year, those plant sales raised about \$15,000, which Master Gardeners use to maintain projects and create new ones.

Master Gardeners is a statewide program of the Cooperative Extension Service, part of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture. It started with 40 members in four counties — Garland, Jefferson, Pulaski and Saline. Today, Masters Gardener programs has more than 3,400 members volunteering in 67 of the state's counties. ■



Pulaski County Judge Barry Hyde talks with Pulaski County Master Gardeners president Sara Jordan after proclaiming June 20, 2024, as Master Gardener Day.

THE INSIDE STORIES

USDA grant helps AR researchers track invasive tick
AR 4-H offers axe throwing at Outdoor Skills Challenge
Retirees visit with Extension interns

Message from the director
August birthdays

USDA grant helps Arkansas researchers track invasive tick

Researchers with the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture have landed a \$270,000 grant to map the spread of an invasive tick species in Arkansas.

The Asian longhorned tick, *Haemaphysalis longicornis*, was first identified in Arkansas in 2018, a year after it was confirmed in the United States. Scientists are unsure how the tick first entered the U.S., but the risk posed to producers is clear, says Emily McDermott, assistant professor of entomology with the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station.

The tick, often the size of a sesame seed, can pose devastating risks for cattle. With the ability to reproduce without a male, a single tick can lay up to 2,000 eggs, and hundreds of ticks can infest a single animal, leading to its death.

McDermott said it's important to define exactly where this tick lives, as it's been confirmed in the state but has likely not spread across Arkansas. She is hopeful that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's financial support will aid in the team's ability to do just that.

The team will enlist citizens throughout the state for help with this mapping. Researchers will start by surveying a 1.5-kilometer radius in Benton, Independence and Washington counties, three of the Arkansas counties where the tick has been identified. Within these boundaries, they will sample at least 20 percent of a herd of cattle. If no longhorned tick is found, researchers will expand their surveillance to an 8-kilometer radius, repeating their methods until they identify the presence of the tick or reach the state line. If a surveillance site does test positive for tick presence, secondary surveillance will begin expanding in rings from the

area, drawing a more definite boundary for where the tick is distributed throughout the state.

All ticks collected from cattle, and those collected from the trapping that researchers will also conduct at each site, will then be tested for *Theileria orientalis* Ikeda genotype, a deadly parasite transmitted by the longhorned tick that was discovered for the first time in Arkansas just weeks ago, to assess the current risk of this threat.

Along with McDermott, the research team includes Jeremy Powell, veterinarian and animal science professor, and Kelly Loftin, extension entomologist and professor of medical and veterinary entomology, who serves as the principal investigator for the grant.

The team first received a \$15,000 internal animal health grant from the division before procuring the \$270,000 USDA grant, which runs from July 2024 to June 2026.

The internal grant allowed preliminary data collection that confirmed a presence of the longhorned tick at the division's Savoy and Batesville research locations. Testing at the research station near Hope was negative.

Loftin said the presence of the tick in Batesville has increased considerably, illustrating its growing threat to the state's cattle populations.

With these findings, the team went after further funding to address the fundamental question of their current work: how widespread is this tick?

Once the longhorned tick attacks an animal, it can transmit *Theileria orientalis* Ikeda, which can kill up to one in 20 infected cattle, according to the USDA.

The team's research proves to be timely, with *Theileria orientalis* Ikeda being identified in Boone County, its first case and death in the state, within the last two months, as reported by the Arkansas Cattlemen's Association.

Powell said that while there is no drug approved by the Food and Drug Administration to treat *Theileria*, the team hopes to use its findings to enhance producers' prevention efforts.

"If we're able to get a better handle on the prevalence and incidence of the tick, and then also test those ticks for *Theileria*, we would have a better idea to pass information along to the producers," Powell said.

Read more [here](#). ■



Research technician Renee Kong breaks cell samples in order to extract DNA that may identify pathogens carried by ticks.

Arkansas 4-H offers axe throwing at 4-H Outdoor Skills Challenge

Successfully throwing an axe is tougher than it looks, but Arkansas 4-H members had a unique opportunity to give it their best shot at the 4-H Outdoor Skills Challenge, held June 10 at the C.A. Vines Arkansas 4-H Center.

Arkansas 4-H is the only 4-H program in the nation to offer axe throwing as part of a contest. In addition to axe throwing, youth tested their skills in knot tying, fire building, canoeing, kayaking and atlatl, an ancient device used to throw spears. Forty-five members from 11 Arkansas counties attended the competition, first held in 2023.

Jesse Bocksnick, extension 4-H outdoor skills coordinator for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, said Arkansas 4-H decided to include axe throwing in the contest to help draw interest. Only senior level 4-H members, aged 14-19, can participate in the axe throwing.

“Axe throwing was kind of a throwback,” Bocksnick said. “We wanted to do something that was kind of cool, that nobody else did and was kind of edgy. We also noticed it was huge out in the public, with all those axe-throwing facilities.”

Participants each got two practice throws and five scoring throws. Points were given if participants successfully lodged their axes in tree cookies — cross-sections cut from a fallen pine tree at the 4-H Center. The tree cookies were soaked underwater for more than a year to soften them for the competition.



Three 4-H members prepare to take two practice throws and five scoring throws at the axe throwing contest.

Bocksnick said axe throwing teaches concentration and other important skills.

“It’s all about life skill development,” he said. “Anything to get kids to pay attention, concentrate, and help their self-confidence, that’s what it’s all about, and doing it in a fun way. We have to have a fun hook. Anything we can do to keep their interest and keep them hooked into the 4-H program, that’s what we do.” ■



Retirees lend words of wisdom to Extension interns

Extension Cord editorial board members Darlene Baker, Ella Geisler, Stan Chapman and Tom Leslie visited with students from multiple extension summer internship programs on July 3 at the Little Rock State Office. The student shared about their experiences so far, and in return, the retirees imparted wisdom and shared some extension lore. ■

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

Caroll 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



A few nights ago, I was puttering around the house with one of the local television stations on in the background. I wasn't really paying attention to it until I heard the screeching of a weather alert. I went into the bedroom where the tv was to better hear the alert. It was a flash

flood warning for several counties in the north central part of the state. I called my mom the next afternoon to see how she had made out through the storm. She reckoned that it had rained eight or nine inches there in Timbo, but she wasn't sure because her rain gauge had overflowed. Looks like Mom will get an unusual mid-summer respite from watering her garden, which is nice. The rain wasn't quite as nice up the road in Marion County. They had an honest-to-goodness flood that forced an evacuation of a nursing home and a temporary closure of our Extension office there. Would you have ever imagined flash floods and overflowing rain gauges in the middle of July in Arkansas? I certainly wouldn't. July is when you pray for rain, not when you pray for it to stop. Sometimes we get more than we bargain for, for better or worse.

I had a nice opportunity this month to visit with another group that I think probably got more than they bargained for this summer – in the best possible way, I hope. Our summer interns came to the state office in early July and

had lunch with several Extension retirees. It was a rare treat to get to see these young people in the middle of their first professional experience with CES engage with retirees having the perspective of decades-long careers with the organization. What was probably most impressive to me is that the common denominator on both sides of that significant generational divide was tremendous enthusiasm. Young interns and not-quite-as-young retirees alike had found plenty to sink their teeth into in Extension work.

A common theme from the interns was their surprise at the scope of our organization's mission. The varied nature of the work and the breadth of issues and problems that we are called on to address was a revelation to them all. In most cases, it sounded like they had gotten more from the summer than they had bargained for. The various internship opportunities that are available in Arkansas CES represent exciting, maybe even life-changing, experiences for these students. A lot of hard work goes into these programs. County agents, district directors, specialists, and support staff are all involved in making sure that interns have an exceptional education experience during their time with us. This effort pays off, though. Several of our past interns have already come back to us as full-time employees. I fully expect to see at least a couple of Extension careers launched out of this year's cohort, and that is definitely something to look forward to. ■