

NORTH MISSISSIPPI GARDEN EXPO

R. C. Sloan¹, S. S. Harkness¹, and L.S. Kelly²

¹ Horticulture Research & Education Unit, North Mississippi Research & Extension Center, Mississippi State University, Verona, MS 38879

² Mississippi State University Extension Service, North Mississippi Research & Extension Center, Mississippi State University, Verona MS 38879

ABSTRACT: Mississippi State University has an opportunity to reach a non-traditional agricultural audience, the home gardener. These new clients are the driving force behind the fastest growing segment of agriculture today: The Green Industry. They are involved in the entire range of gardening which includes ornamentals, vegetables, and turf. They are by far the largest client group that MSU agriculture could hope to reach. MSU-ES county agents report that the majority of the calls that they receive are related to garden and landscape questions. This event is an attempt to bring together Mississippi gardeners that have questions and interests with the MSU professionals that have comprehensive expertise in the many subjects that are related to gardening. Approximately 1000 people attended the 2004 Expo.

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KEY WORDS: Gardening information, Mississippi gardens, MSU horticulture, North Mississippi Garden Expo

MATERIALS AND METHODS: The North Mississippi Research & Extension Center hosts the North Mississippi Garden Expo as a way of achieving the goal of providing horticulture programs and information for northeastern Mississippi residents. The Garden Expo was patterned after the highly successful Fall Garden Day held at the Crystal Springs Truck Crop Branch Experiment Station. The Crystal Springs Garden Day attracts large crowds and has been a much anticipated annual event for central Mississippi gardeners for more than twenty years. Unfortunately, Crystal Springs is located below Jackson and is too far for most north Mississippi gardeners to travel for the event. The first Garden Expo event for gardeners in northern Mississippi was staged in Verona in 1997. The Expo has been undertaken in both the spring and in the fall to try to determine the 'best' time to reach gardeners. It was determined in 2000 that the Garden Expo would be more effective for gardeners if the event were held in the autumn. In the fall, plants from the summer cultivar evaluations are still living in the beds, while there would be little plant material in the field for gardeners to observe in the spring. There is generally an autumn flush of bloom in the Rose Garden, a popular attraction for Expo attendees. Additionally, herb, vegetable, and ornamental beds have mature plants for viewing.

Mississippi State University Extension Service personnel guided walking tours of research and demonstration gardens. Included in the walking tour were stops at the vegetable and herb beds, Rose Garden, Native Plant Garden, Water Garden, and the Annual Garden within the Magnolia Botanical Gardens. Members from the Northeast Mississippi Rose Society shared their interest and expertise in roses with gardeners. Tour participants were transported by hay wagons to the

Shade Garden, a project of the Monroe County Master Gardeners. Mississippi Medallion plant trials in the beds near the Exhibit Tent attracted flower gardeners.

The 'Plant Doctor', from the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology, diagnosed insect and disease problems and dispensed strategies to prevent future problems. Plant material specialists from the Department of Plant & Soil Science identified mystery plants brought by gardeners. The state turf specialist answered questions concerning homeowner turf problems. Patti Drapala, representative from the Mississippi Department of Agriculture & Commerce Bureau of Plant Industry, addressed the growing problems presented by cogongrass. The Mississippi Master Gardeners maintained an information booth and also had a large plant sale under a separate tent adjacent to the Exhibit Tent.

The featured speakers in the auditorium were Plato Touliatos, owner of Trees by Touliatos, Memphis, Tennessee, and Kristin Lamberson from the Strawberry Plains Audubon Center in Holly Springs, Mississippi. Mr. Touliatos' seminar topic was "How to Succeed at Gardening by Paying Attention to Mother Nature" and Ms Lamberson's topic was "Hummingbird Gardening".

The featured speakers in the MBG Pavilion were Gail Barton, Coordinator of Horticulture Technology programs at Meridian Community College and Jeff Wilson, Mississippi State University Extension Service. Ms. Barton's seminar topic was "Making New Plants – Backyard Nursery Propagation", and Mr. Wilson's topic was "Pruning Crape Myrtles".