



South Central Region

(Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, & Texas)

The Communicator

UPCOMING EVENTS

National

May 13 – 17, 2027

NGC Convention
Madison, WI

South Central Region

April 21–22, 2027

Hotel Indigo
Tulsa, Oklahoma



SCR Representing at the NGC Convention.

Arkansas

February 23–26,

Flower Show School
Course 4
Jan Griffin & Claudia Bates
Wyndham Grand Little
Rock

April 12–14, 2027

AFGC State Convention
Wyndham Grand Little Rock

May 25–27, 2027

State Flower Show
"Metamorphosis: Spreading
Our Wings"
Wyndham Grand Little Rock

June 24–26, 2027

AFGC Symposium
Jan Griffin & Claudia Bates
Wyndham Grand Little Rock

Oklahoma

October 27–28, 2026

Conservation Pilgrimage
Ouachita National Forest
Broken Bow Public Library

April 19–20, 2027

OKC State Convention
Hotel Indigo
Tulsa, OK

New Mexico

October 13, 2026

District I Blue Star
Marker Dedication
2701 Mulberry Street SE
Albuquerque, NM

April 1–5, 2027

NMGC State Convention
"I Went to a Garden Party"
Rosewell, NM

Texas

Nov. 20–22, 2026

Environmental School
Course 2
Palestine, TX

February 8–9, 2027

Flower Show
Symposium – Dallas

April 6–8, 2027

TGC Spring Convention
Farmer's Branch, TX

April 6–7, 2027

State Flower Show "Wild
Flowers & Wonders
Across Texas"
Farmer's Branch, TX



Greetings to South Central Region Members

Greetings South Central Region Members,

The rains have finally blessed New Mexico after a brutally hot and dry summer and you can hear our gardens sighing! The cottonwoods along the Rio Grande are bare so there will be no fall glory this year.

I imagine most of you are involved in County and State fairs at this time which is a major outreach for garden clubs and a great way to attract new members. Be friendly and share your passion with other gardeners and spread the word about a National treasure which is garden clubs.

Our revamped website is ready to view and eager for articles of interest from clubs. Please give our webmaster something more to do and send me news and photos to post. The bylaws and awards booklet is posted for you all to reference so please before we get into the holidays get your entries ready to apply for SCR awards. Sharing your summer shows with the region would be great so please zip me some fun and informative articles.

The OGC and SCR Convention committee have been hard at work choosing a hotel and are about to announce details. We are so looking forward to Oklahoma hosting the South Central Region convention next year and the dates are April 21st through 22nd 2027 to be held in Tulsa. More will be on the website and I will forward details to your State Presidents as soon as I receive it. The theme is the roaring 20's. So, start thinking about getting into the spirit and choosing a costume and let's celebrate Gatsby style in the spring.

At this time in our world I have been reminded of a visit I made with 32 garden club members to the Lake District in Northwest England which was the home of William Wordsworth, the poet. He and his sister were orphaned at a young age and found comfort and healing in nature by bringing back to their home from woodland walks, wild flower and marsh plants plus lots of different mosses. The Wordsworth cottage garden was a sensory treat reflecting their walks across the Dales and since nature never disappoints it was a constant in their lives.

When I took the ladies to his cottage, we climbed the stairs to his attic room and sat at his desk to see daffodils as far as the eye could see and know where the poet got his inspiration for "Daffodils" one of his most popular poems. I have committed the poem to memory and it never ceases to take me back to the Lake District where the vision always proves the healing power of nature.

I am planning to attend all four State Conventions next spring and so look forward to meeting new friends and old. South Central Region is the best and I am here to help each club in any way I can.

Christine Longthorp
South Central Region Director (2025-2027)

CHRISTINE LONGTHORP, DIRECTOR 2025-2027

[HTTPS://WWW.SCRGARDENCLUBS.ORG](https://www.scrGardenClubs.org)



It is with a heavy heart
that we are sharing the
passing of our "Five Star
Crown Jewel" member of
our community.
Dottie Sivess

Dorothy Sue Sivess, 98, lived a remarkable life filled with love, family, adventure, service, faith, and an enduring commitment to her church and community.

Born to former and carpenter Bryant Barrett and his wife, Pauline, Dorothy was raised with being an Army wife, with Harry, perseverance, and service. Those values remained at the heart of who she was throughout her long and beautiful life.

Dorothy married Harry Sivess, Jr., a military man, and embraced the unique life that came with being an Army wife. During his military career, Dorothy and Harry traveled the world, experiencing places and cultures far beyond the life she had known growing up. Through all of those adventures, however, family remained at the center of her life. Together, Dorothy and Harry raised four children: Harry, Sivess, III, William Sivess, Sue Anne Sivess, and Wesley Sivess, who preceded her in death. Dorothy is survived by numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Dorothy believed in being part of something larger than herself. She was a loyal, devoted, and community leader. She was a generously giving her time, energy, and talents to others. She was the driving force behind the First Presbyterian Church Memorial Garden, a project fondly remembered as "Dott's dream".

She also coached soccer, encouraging young people and becoming a positive influence in her lives. Her love of gardening and nature became another important part of her life. That passion eventually led her to serve numerous times as Director of District III of the Texas State Garden Clubs, as well as a trustee and trustee-chairman, her knowledge and expertise even took her to Peru, where she judged a flower show. Yet her accomplishments tell only part of her story. Dorothy was much more than an accomplished woman, mother, wife, gardener, coach, and community leader. She was a woman of remarkable strength, generosity, faith, and warmth whose presence enriched the lives of everyone fortunate enough to know her. Her 98 years were filled with experiences that could fill many lifetimes: growing up on a farm, becoming an Army wife, traveling the world, raising a family, serving her church and community, coaching children, cultivating gardens, and touching countless lives along the way. The family was a legacy of love and service that both has the greatest legacy is found in the people who loved her and in the lives she helped. For her, she was fond of saying, "Give to others and always be kind." and she lived those words every day. She will be deeply missed, lovingly remembered, and forever held in our hearts.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to First Presbyterian Church of Mount Pleasant.

Building fund or memorial garden at Texas Garden Club Dottie Sives scholarship fund.

The family also thanks the staff at Azalea Trail Nursing & Rehab along with Dawn RN & Dwayne of Alinea Hospice for their care and compassion.

A funeral service will be held on Friday, October 2, 2026, at 12:00 Noon at the Bates-Copperman Funeral Home Chapel with visit to the cemetery.





CULTIVATING FLOWERS AND FRIENDSHIPS

Greetings!

There is something special about fall. It is a season of change, reflection, and new beginnings. As the leaves begin to turn and our gardens prepare for another season, I am reminded that we, too, have an abundance of new opportunities.

Our theme for this year's AFGC Mid-Year Board Meeting, "Renew – Refresh – Rejuvenate," could not have been more fitting. The meeting was a tremendous success, filled with learning, laughter, creativity, friendship, and inspiration. Most importantly, it reminded me of what makes our federation so special—the people who give their time, talents, and hearts to make AFGC thrive. Our breakout sessions were a wonderful opportunity to rejuvenate our senses. We learned how to plan a Sensory Garden, discovered helpful ways to ease gardening aches and relax our muscles, and were even treated to making our own lavender bath salts. Beautiful music filled the air and added such a special touch. The amazing "Blooms & Bubbles" reception set the tone for our evening dinner where we were amazed by the unique centerpieces using kokedama balls and the very informative program "The Magic of Moss".

Our luncheon guest speaker, Dr. Todd Lasseigne, Director of Bellingrath Gardens in Theodore, Alabama, presented "Rejuvenating a Legacy Garden". His fascinating presentation demonstrated how a treasured garden can continue to evolve while honoring the legacy of those who came before us. His wonderful sense of humor made the afternoon both educational and entertaining! And isn't that what gardening, and garden clubs, are all about? Honoring the past, nurturing the present, and growing the future.

Our district meeting season is quickly approaching! These meetings are wonderful opportunities for our members to get to know others from their district and meet the state officers in a more relaxed environment. They are places where ideas are exchanged, friendships are strengthened, accomplishments are celebrated, and new possibilities begin. Fall also brings flower shows and multiple opportunities for members to exhibit, volunteer, attend with a friend, or simply come to admire the beautiful work! Currently, we have 4 flower shows scheduled in October and November and we are already preparing for our state flower show in May, 2027.

Our commitment to education continues to be one of the great strengths of AFGC. Flower Show School Course 3 was well attended, with 15 students tested for credit. We were especially pleased to welcome students from Missouri and New Mexico. Our instructors, Jan Griffin and Claudia Bates, were outstanding, and I know everyone who attended came away with something new to learn and enjoy.

Course 4 will be held February 23–26, 2027. We are deeply grateful to our Flower Show School Chairman, Rose Knight, for her dedication to making these educational opportunities possible. Symposium Chairman, Terri Waterman has announced the dates for our Symposium. The course will be held at the Wyndham Executive Grand Hotel, conveniently located near the airport, on June 24–26, 2027. Terri always plans an extremely informative event packed with fun and we invite everyone to join us!

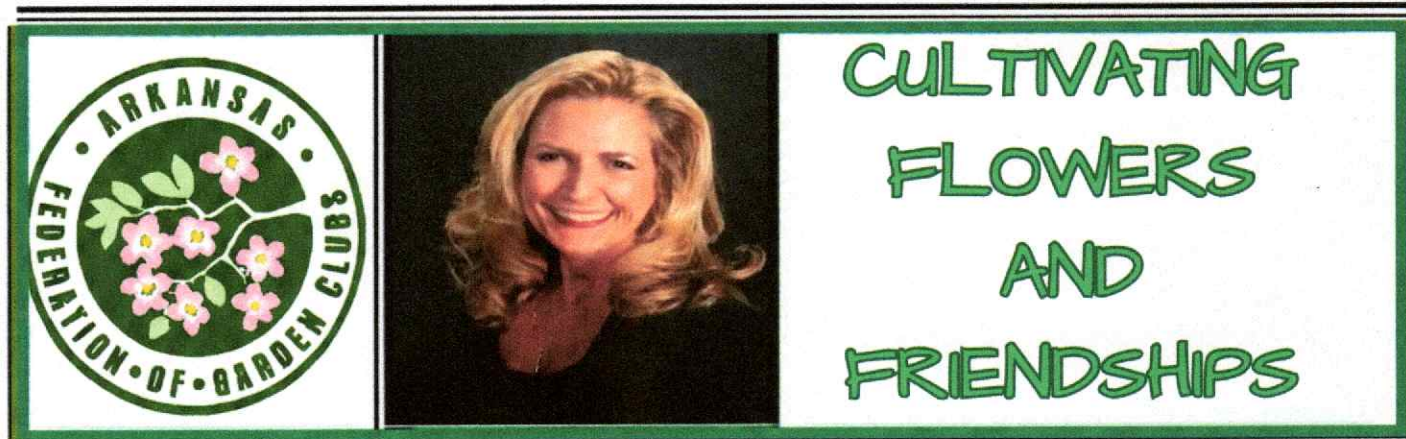
Perhaps the most thrilling news is that AFGC is growing again! We currently have 41 clubs including our virtual/hybrid club, Zoom N Bloom Arkansas. This club is designed to reach areas of our state where traditional clubs have not yet been established and now even beyond our state borders. Meeting on the third Thursday of each month this is a wonderful way to connect with other gardeners, learn something new, and become involved, regardless of where you live.

As we look ahead to the months to come, let us carry with us the spirit of renewal, friendship, and inspiration that makes garden club membership so meaningful. Whether we are gathering at a district meeting, creating beauty for a flower show, learning something new, welcoming a new member, or simply sharing our love of gardening with a friend, each of us has an opportunity to help our organization grow and flourish. Across our region and beyond, may we continue to honor the traditions that have shaped us, embrace new ideas and opportunities, and nurture the friendships that make this organization truly special. The future is full of possibilities, and I look forward to seeing all that we will accomplish together. Until then, keep growing, keep sharing, and keep blooming!



Arkansas is proud to welcome its newest club, Zoom N Bloom, a virtual club. Members meet at 7:30 p.m. CST on the third Thursday of each month, from August through June. Dues are \$15 per month for NGC members and \$20 per month for non-members. Use the QR code for more information.





Arkansas is announcing our State Flower Show, May 25-27 at the Wyndham Grand Executive Center- Little Rock, Arkansas. All AFGC and SCR members are encouraged to enter and help with the show. If you are interested in participating, please contact Terri Waterman terriafgc@gmail.com





PLANT AMERICA
*"Growing Together,
 Blooming Forever"*

Greetings from Oklahoma

Greetings to our garden club friends throughout the South Central Region! There is a lot blooming in Oklahoma, and Oklahoma Garden Clubs, Inc. is excited about the year ahead! From our beautiful prairies and wildflowers to Route 66, historic downtowns, gardens, and the wonderful people who call our state home, we are looking forward to sharing a little Oklahoma hospitality with all of you.

Most importantly—mark your calendars for Tulsa in April 2027!

97th Oklahoma Garden Clubs, Inc. Convention April 19–20, 2027

NGC South Central Region Convention April 21–22, 2027

Hotel Indigo – Downtown Tulsa, Oklahoma

We are planning four days of gardening, education, fellowship, tours, workshops, music, entertainment, and plenty of fun—all in the heart of historic downtown Tulsa.

Our OGC Convention will showcase the spirit and history of Oklahoma, while our South Central Region Convention, **"Let the Good Times Grow... A Gatsby Garden Affair,"** will take us back to the excitement and elegance of the 1920s as we celebrate 1927–2027: A Century of Style.

SCR members can look forward to floral design, workshops, downtown Tulsa tours and shopping, special entertainment, and our **"A Century in Bloom: The 1927 Fashion Promenade."** We may even have a few State Presidents showing us their best Charleston moves!

But beyond the programs and entertainment, conventions are about something even more important—friendship. They give us an opportunity to learn from one another, renew old friendships, make new ones, and celebrate the work our garden clubs are accomplishing throughout Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Oklahoma is ready to welcome you!

Come early, stay late, bring your garden club friends, and get ready to

Let the Good Times Grow in Tulsa!

See you in Oklahoma in 2027!



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PLANT AMERICA
*"Growing Together,
 Blooming Forever"*



Save our forests!

**Conservation Pilgrimage to
 USA's oldest, largest national
 forest in the south:
 Ouachita National Forest
 October 27-28 2026!**



**Scan to
 Plant-A-Tree!**



**October 13 \$30
 Registration Deadline via Questions?
 Eventbrite or check to OGC 918.625.1161**

OGC Conservation Pilgrimage to Ouachita National Forest

October 27-28, 2026 | Broken Bow, Oklahoma | \$30 per person

Come see where your trees are growing! Oklahoma Garden Clubs invites members and friends from Oklahoma and Arkansas to explore the Ouachita National Forest with forestry staff, learn about conservation and native plants, and enjoy fellowship across our states. Our Tuesday tour includes an area where pine seedlings were planted in early 2026 – a chance to see the forest supported through our former Penny Pines program, now NGC Plant-A-Tree.

The invitation will go to State Presidents and as an ALL HANDS announcement to Oklahoma Garden Clubs and the Arkansas Federation of Garden Clubs. Plant-A-Tree Chairman Brenda Michael Haggard has organized this gathering for the clubs that helped sponsor our forest. Please join us!

The itinerary

Tuesday, October 27: Meet at noon at Broken Bow Public Library, 404 N. Broadway St. Registration includes lunch with the Oklahoma Ranger District Forestry Team and a special treat. After a forestry program, travel near Hochatown for a forest tour, seedling visit, and native plant walk. Enjoy a Dutch-treat dinner and stay overnight at Choctaw Landing.

Wednesday, October 28: Explore Beavers Bend Nature Center, the Forest Heritage Center and Museum, trails, and local shops at your own pace. Gather for a Dutch-treat lunch before heading home. Carpool if possible and bring walking shoes, weather layers, rain gear, sunscreen, and binoculars.

Registration and lodging

Register and book lodging by October 13, 2026. The \$30 fee covers the pilgrimage lunch and special treat. Register on Eventbrite or mail a check payable to OGC to OGC Registrar, P.O. Box 521003, Tulsa, OK 74152-1003.

Reserve Choctaw Landing lodging • OGC website • Watch Oklahoma Garden Clubs on Facebook for the Eventbrite announcement.

PLANT AMERICA – Growing Together, Blooming Forever

CHRISTINE LONGTHORP, DIRECTOR 2025-2027

[HTTPS://WWW.SCRGARDENCLUBS.ORG](https://www.scrGardenClubs.org)



PLANT AMERICA

"Growing Together, Blooming Forever"

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION CONVENTION 2027

Let the Good Times Grow... A Gatsby Garden Affair

APRIL 21-22, 2027 • TULSA, OKLAHOMA

Save the Date!

Join garden club members from across the South Central Region in Tulsa, Oklahoma, for two days of fellowship, education, gardening, and celebration with a touch of Gatsby glamour.

On the final evening of the convention, Thursday, April 22, we will celebrate a century of style with

A CENTURY IN BLOOM: THE 1927 FASHION PROMENADE

Celebrating 1927-2027: A Century of Style

Regional and State Presidents and Officers, District and Club Presidents, Chairmen, and all garden club members are encouraged to participate!

1927 GARDEN GLAMOUR

Step back into the elegance and excitement of 1927! Participants may choose daytime garden-party elegance or glamorous evening attire. Exact historical reproductions are not necessary—vintage, reproduction, modern 1920s-inspired, and creatively assembled outfits are all welcome.

LADIES:

Think drop-shoulder dresses, fringe, beading, sequins, pearls, cloche hats, jeweled headbands, gloves, shawls, T-strap shoes, and Art Deco accessories.

GENTLEMEN:

Consider three-piece suits, vests, suspenders, bow ties, high-waisted trousers, tuxedo-inspired attire, straw boater hats, newsboy caps, and boutonnieres.



DON'T FORGET THE GARDEN!

Give your 1927 ensemble a garden-inspired touch with flowers, a corsage or boutonniere, floral jewelry, a botanical print, greenery, a flowered hat, or an Art Deco floral accessory.

WANT TO WALK THE PROMENADE?

If you plan to participate, please submit your information ASAP, but no later than October 31, 2026.

Please include:

1. Description of the outfit/items you will model
2. Your fun 1927-inspired stage name
3. Anything special you would like announced—your position, state, district, club, recognition, story behind your attire, or other interesting details.

Your information will be used to prepare the Fashion Promenade booklet and your introduction during the show.

Send participant information to:
Linda Jean Brown
Texas Garden Clubs President
ljbrown3264@windstream.net

Courtesy copy:
Melanie Mason-Spence
Oklahoma Garden Clubs President
mmasonce@gmail.com

Come promenade with us as we celebrate 100 years of fashion, fellowship, and gardens—from 1927 to 2027!

Let the Good Times Grow!

1927
2027
A CENTURY
OF STYLE

FASHION
FRIENDSHIP
FLOWERS
A BRIGHTER
TOMORROW



Planting Seeds Of Joy



New Mexico Garden Clubs was honored to be represented at the dedication of a Gold Star Families Memorial Marker at Fort Stanton State Veterans Cemetery on June 29. The ceremony brought together the New Mexico Department of Veterans' Services, New Mexico Garden Clubs, Lincoln County Garden Club, Gold Star Families, veterans, local officials, and community members to honor the families of those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. Shirley Tetreault, our wonderful Blue Star and Gold Star Memorial Chair, has done an exceptional job for our state. Her dedication to these very special programs and her commitment to honoring our veterans, service members, and Gold Star Families are truly appreciated. We are proud that New Mexico now has nine Gold Star Families Memorial Markers located throughout our state, including the marker at the Angel Fire Vietnam Veterans Memorial. These memorials are a wonderful example of the meaningful civic work our Garden Clubs can accomplish through partnerships with our communities and veterans' organizations.

On a personal note, I really enjoyed attending the South Central Region Convention. It was wonderful to meet so many members from Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. I came home with new friendships, new ideas, and an even greater appreciation for the wonderful work being done throughout our South Central Region. It is always inspiring to gather together, share what our clubs are accomplishing, learn from one another, and enjoy the friendship that makes Garden Club so special.



SCR is gearing up for its 96th Spring Convention to be held in the Tulsa, Oklahoma area. It will be fast, furious, fun and fashionable to say the least. So mark your calendar April 21-22, 2027 for a time to remember!

If I told you everything that goes on at our conventions it would take all the excitement and mystery of your coming. So, I will just leave it at that! You must consider attending an SCR Convention near you. So, won't y'all make your reservation and come see for yourself? Did I happen to whisper.....fashion show? 1920's? Just sayin! It will be a very happening event.

My two year Project "Spreading Wildflower Seeds all across Texas" was put into action as I traveled to District Conventions during my first year. Clubs were given large bags of wildflower seeds, instructions and guidelines. Daddyo, my wonderful husband, wanted to help with my project. He decided on awarding \$200.00 to each 1st place winner in each of our Districts that participated. So, 1st place winner from each District will receive a nice check in the amount of \$200.00 at the TGC, Inc. 99th Spring Convention in Farmers Branch, TX on April 6-8, 2027.

We are a relatively quiet group down here in Texas. But as a Texan myself, we are known to get a little bit rowdy when provoked. I can now let my sister presidents and clubs of South Central Region know what we have been up against for about the past ten years. Our attorneys have been with the City of Ft. Worth over a lawsuit they filed against TGC, Inc. Bottom line. BRIT wanted our property for development purposes. Without telling a drawn out story I will simply say the results are.....The City of Ft. Worth has dismissed their lawsuit. The Texas Garden Clubs, Inc. Headquarters and 10 acres are and have always been ours with a clear title dating back to 1959.

We thank God for answered prayers. God is so good all the time. He takes care of his own.

The National Schools are still going on in Texas. Environmental School #1 Landscape Design will be held at Lakeview Methodist Conference Center in Palestine, TX on November 20-22, 2026. More information will follow.

I am thrilled to announce as of this report, Texas garden clubs have purchased six Blue Star and/or Gold Star Markers this year. Bobbie Mason our BSGCMM chairman has been a busy, busy lady. As the saying goes...We've only just begun! Texas Garden Clubs, Inc., District III will be hosting a Standard Flower Show in the Palestine area on March 17, 2027. We are attempting to get clubs involved once again in displaying their fabulous designs and horticulture. We know once they participate they will be hooked as most of us are.

Linda Jean Brown
TGC, Inc. President
2025-27



Spread Wildflower Seeds All Across Texas

The Nationally Accredited
Flower Show Judges of TGC, Inc.
present an

NGC Standard Flower Show

“Wild Flowers & Wonders Across Texas”

★

April 6, 2027
at the TGC Spring Convention 2027

Doubletree by Hilton Dallas
4099 Valley View Drive
Dallas, TX 75244

*We need all TGC and SCR members
to enter and assist with this show!*

Schedule Chair - Heather White, 979-220-7545
Design Chair* - Heather White, 979-220-7545
Horticulture Chairman - Alexandra Taylor Cowart, 682-386-7399
Artistic Crafts Chair* - Cheryl Lenert, 281-255-9004
Educational Exhibits Chair* - Tracy Brown, 530-788-6367
Photography Chair* - Shannon Bouffard, 281-660-0827

**Advance entry required*



Paula Coptý Duplant Chaplain

Bird Feeder Cookie Cutter Ornaments

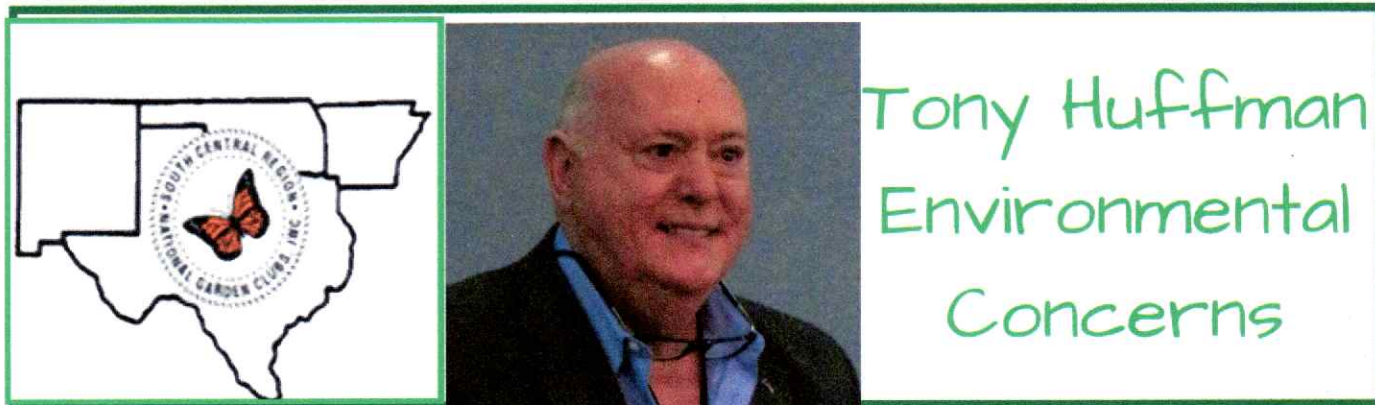


Ingredients

- 2 cups birdseed mixture
- 2 packets gelatin powder
- ½ cup of water
- Some metal or plastic cookie cutters in various shapes
-
- To Hang the Ornaments:
- A few plastic straws cut into pieces (to form the holes for the ribbon)
- Some ribbon or twine (ribbon works best for hanging on an outdoor tree as twine is a more natural material that breaks down in the weather)

Instructions

1. Bring ½ cup of water to a slow boil on the stove. Add in 2 packets of gelatin and stir well to combine. Stir until gelatin mixture is dissolved and then remove from heat. Let cool for a minute or two.
2. Add in 2 cups of birdseed mixture and stir to mix well and coat all of the birdseed.
3. Place cookie cutter shapes on a small piece of parchment paper and scoop birdseed mixture into the cookie cutters, pressing down firmly with the back of the spoon all the way to the edge of the shape. Fill the cookie cutter shapes all the way to the top and then some, pressing firmly to pack tightly and remove any air pockets.
4. Insert a straw wherever you'd like the hole for the ribbon to be. Then pack birdseed mixture around the straw as well as you can. Use another small piece of parchment paper to press birdseed mixture into cookie cutter shapes with your hands.
5. Let moulds set for a couple of hours while they harden. You can put trays of them in the freezer to speed up this process. Then when they're ready, gently push them out of the cookie cutters and take the straws out. Make sure that the straws have punched a hole all the way through.
6. Tie the ribbon or twine through the hole and then allow ornaments to cure in the open air for at least 24 hours before packaging them up in breathable packaging



GREEN BURIAL

An Eco-Friendly Trend

A green burial, also known as a natural burial, is an eco-friendly alternative to traditional burial practices. It involves burying the body in a biodegradable container without using embalming fluids or concrete vaults. This method aims to minimize environmental impact and promote the conservation of natural resources. Biodegradable containers are made from cardboard, wicker, wood and mycelium, and are now available in most states in America.

MYCELIUM CASKETS

Mycelium, the root-like structure of fungi, is a natural material that has been used to create sustainable products from packaging to construction materials. Now mycelium is being used to create biodegradable caskets that break down quickly and naturally in the earth. Another benefit of mycelium caskets is that they have a positive environmental impact. Mycelium absorbs carbon dioxide as it grows, and the decomposition process releases nutrients back into the soil, enriching the environment instead of contributing to pollution. These caskets can be customized with seeds and spores that help facilitate the growth of plants after burial, fostering new life in a space where the loved one is laid to rest.

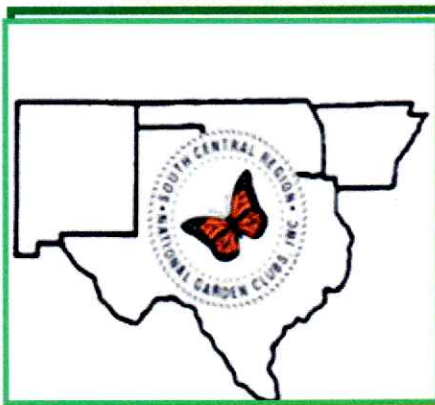
COMPOSTABLE CASKETS

Constructed of cardboard, bamboo, willow, or rattan, these caskets are designed to break down naturally over time. Unlike traditional caskets, they contain no toxic varnishes or preservatives, making them an environmentally friendly option for burial. These caskets are typically lightweight and more affordable than traditional burial options, making them accessible to a broader range of people. They also allow families to select a natural burial site, such as a conservation site or dedicated green cemetery, where the impact on the land is minimized and the focus is on preserving the environment.

BURIAL PODS

Perhaps one of the most creative and symbolic green burial options is a biodegradable cocoon that encases the body or ashes. The burial pod is made of a combination of algae or coconut fibers. Once the body is placed in the pod, it is buried in the ground where the materials break down and decompose, allowing the body to return naturally to the earth. Some burial pods include seeds or a tree sapling, which will grow from the nutrients provided by the body. The tree or plant represents a symbolic connection between the deceased and the natural world, creating a lasting legacy that contributes positively to the environment. Burial Pods are often a part of larger movement of "Tree Planting Memorials" or "Forest Burials", where loved ones can visit a living tribute to the person they have lost. These memorial forests also help combat deforestation and provide valuable green spaces for communities to enjoy.

By choosing options like mycelium caskets, compostable caskets, and burial pods, individuals can ensure that their final resting place contributes to the health of the earth rather than harming it. A green burial allows people to experience a meaningful, circular relationship with the earth, where death is not the end but an ongoing cycle of life.



Pam Grotts
Horticulture
Chairman

From Plot to Vase: The Architectural Elegance of Okra

When we think of okra (*Abelmoschus esculentus*), our minds naturally drift to the kitchen—to the comforting sizzle of a cast-iron skillet or the rich texture it brings to a simmering winter soup. Yet, for the floral designer and creative horticulturist, this robust member of the Malvaceae family holds a fascinating secret identity. Long after the peak of the summer harvest has faded, okra transforms into one of the most compelling, structural, and dramatic components available for autumn floral arrangements. For those who exhibit and judge, this humble garden staple offers an extraordinary opportunity to experiment in line, texture, and creative spatial manipulation.

The Botanical Foundation and Lifecycle

Understanding the visual power of okra begins with its lineage. As a proud relative of hibiscus and cotton, the plant boasts striking, creamy-yellow blossoms with deep burgundy throats that are an aesthetic joy in any summer landscape. However, its true design value emerges as the seasons turn. When left past their tender, edible stage, the seed pods grow into heavily ribbed, elongated capsules that eventually harden and dry on the stalk.

As they cure under the late-summer sun, these pods transition into a magnificent spectrum of organic tones, ranging from a pale, weathered silvery tan to a deep, woody charcoal brown. This natural drying process accentuates the deep ridges of the capsule, carving out high-contrast shadow lines that catch competitive overhead staging lights beautifully. It is a striking reminder of our core philosophy: beauty and utility are never separated in a well-managed garden, and the completion of a plant's lifecycle is simply the beginning of its artistic potential.

Navigating NGC Design Rules and Classification

Within the parameters of the NGC Handbook for Flower Shows, dried okra stalks and pods are unsung heroes. All plant material used in the Design Division must be carefully chosen to fulfill specific structural roles. Okra fulfills the "Line" requirement with unparalleled precision. Its clean, uncompromising vertical axis and distinct, pointed tips serve as a visual arrow, guiding the viewer's eye upward through a design, creating height, and establishing clear architectural boundaries in large-scale focal arrangements.

Furthermore, okra offers wonderful opportunities for innovative texturing while staying fully compliant with show rules. For an unexpected twist, designers can gently score or split the dried pods along their natural seams. This open-frame modification reveals the neat, geometric rows of spherical seeds neatly tucked inside the chambers. This internal geometry adds an intricate layer of pattern that acts as a strong contrast when placed against broader focal forms. Whether used as a pristine, unaltered specimen or thoughtfully opened to showcase its seed-bearing anatomy, okra provides the precise structural clarity required to secure top honors on a panel's score sheet.



From Plot to Vase: The Architectural Elegance of Okra

Engineering, Mechanics, and Manipulating Plant Movement

One of the most common challenges when working with dried agricultural stalks is managing their physical mechanics. As okra stems mature and dry, they become highly fibrous and rigid. Traditional mechanics like standard lightweight floral foam can easily crumble or shift under the weight of a top-heavy, statuesque stem. Heavy vine wire, nested wire armatures, or sturdy pin frogs secured to the base of low, heavy ceramic containers provide the necessary counterbalance for tall installations.

However, the modern floral designer does not have to be limited by the straight, unyielding nature of a standard stalk. While okra naturally dries into a rigid, linear form, it is incredibly responsive to mechanical manipulation. If you want to introduce dynamic rhythm, sweeping curves, or dramatic angles to your design, you can easily reshape the wood-locked fibers of the plant using a simple hydration technique.

By submerging fully mature, dried okra stalks in a warm water soak for a few hours, the rigid fibers soften and become remarkably pliable. Once the stems are flexible, you can manipulate them into custom shapes using everyday household items as your forming tools. You can wrap the softened stalks around cups, bowls, or rubber balls to create elegant, smooth curves. For sharp, modern, geometric angles, you can secure the stems across wooden dowels. Fasten the manipulated plant material tightly in place using simple rubber bands, and allow it to dry completely out in a well-ventilated space. Once the moisture evaporates, the fibers lock back into place, permanently retaining the new, custom movement you have introduced to the design. This simple technique transforms a rigid line element into an expressive, rhythmic sculpture that breaks the visual monotony of straight lines on the exhibition floor.

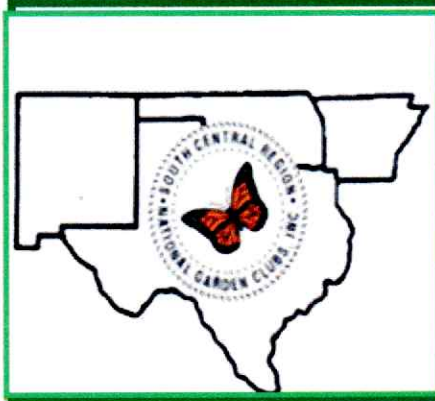
Color Harmonies and Avant-Garde Applications

The natural, muted palette of cured okra makes it an effortless companion for traditional autumn color harmonies. Its silvery-tan surfaces blend seamlessly with the warm, golden-yellow tones of dried grains, the rustic oranges of late-season seed heads, and the rich bronze hues of autumn foliage. The matte texture of the pod absorbs light rather than reflecting it, creating a quiet, sophisticated backdrop that allows fresh companion flowers—such as vibrant jewel-toned mums or rich burgundy dahlias—to pop with intense visual clarity.

For designers competing in more progressive or Abstract classes, the rigid anatomy of the okra pod serves as an ideal canvas for artistic surface treatments. While its natural state is undeniable, a light, disciplined application of creative color can completely redefine the material's expression. Tinting the exterior ridges with a rich plum hue while highlighting the interior seed chambers with an unexpected metallic or neon accent can shock the eye and spark immense interest. This juxtaposition of a rustic, familiar backyard crop styled into an ultra-modern, high-fashion sculptural design is exactly the kind of creative risk that captivates viewers and elevates a standard show entry into a memorable work of art.

A Closing Call to Artistry

This season, as you prepare your plots for the changing weather, look past the kitchen counter and challenge yourself to see your crops through the eyes of a sculptor. Allow a portion of your okra crop to bolt, harden, and reach its full, statuesque potential in the autumn wind. By harvesting, soaking, and shaping these structural wonders to bring to the design table, you honor the full, magnificent lifecycle of your garden while discovering the exact architectural element your next grand arrangement has been waiting for.



Gwen Dewitt

Down the Garden Path

After going out to eat, the husband and I like to explore our community to see what is going on. Of late, we have been interested in the progress of the new school. Imagine my dismay when I saw what was happening with the landscape! I was horrified by the planting conditions for expensive trees and shrubs and brought it to the attention of a member of the school board. I sent photos as evidence of this atrocity. I continue to watch as trees turn brown, drop their leaves and will need to be replaced. Our tax dollars at work.

When a new building is going up, they scrape away the topsoil in the interest of forming a good foundation. The new school is built on property adjacent to an abandoned caliche pit further complicating things. If they don't return the topsoil after construction, the landscape will suffer. Our soils are thin and care must be taken.

At the back of the school along the fence line is a huge mound of caliche where they dug holes for some of the trees. Each hole was caliche all the way down, no soil. The trees were taken out of the containers and plopped down in the hole. After my call and photos, a little topsoil was spread on top of the ground around the trees. Care should have been taken with that area, as any rain will wash the caliche onto the roadway and getting grass to grow on a caliche mound will be difficult.

The care of pallets of grass, shrubs, and trees waiting to be planted was lacking. It will be interesting to see what survives. They did use boulders and crushed granite along with cactus and red yuccas which can take abuse. All I can say, is this is the perfect example of what not to do when planting a tree. It can best be described as—how to kill a tree!

The dog days of August, when heat is unrelenting and no rain is in sight, it is the worst time to be putting in a new landscape. But if you must put the landscape in, care must be taken. Proper preparation, will give the landscape a chance. Trees need more than a hole in caliche to succeed if you want them to survive. Planting in August requires water, lots of water for the landscape to survive, much less thrive.

With that in mind, it is important to consider the four 'rights' of tree planting. Plant the right tree, in the right place, in the right way, at the right time of the year. Planting in the fall will give the tree a chance to establish a good root system before the heat of summer.

Homeowners, commercial businesses, schools and governments need to protect their trees by providing proper care and water. The loss of trees will result in higher heating and cooling bills for years to come. And then there is the water - more will be needed to maintain landscapes. The loss of trees in the landscape can impact property values. It is impossible to quantify the esthetic value of lost trees.

While we love our live oak trees, don't just plant oaks - diversity makes for a healthier urban forest. Diversity provides some protection to our landscape from diseases and insects - oak wilt will eventually arrive here. The school landscape does have diversity of trees chosen for the grounds. It will be interesting to see which types will survive.

When selecting a tree for the landscape it is important to consider many different characteristics. Among the many characteristics to consider is the tree's potential for disease or insect problems. It is also important to know if the tree has fruit or nuts, flowers, or excessive leaf drop. Be sure to consider its mature height and spread.

When planting a tree be aware of its location to power lines, buildings, and other trees. Consider the mature size of a tree when planting near a house - fifteen feet from the side or ten feet from a corner. Planting trees too close together stops them from reaching their natural shape and size. Unless it's your burning desire to continuously deal with pruning, be careful locating the tree. Don't plant a \$100 tree in a \$10 hole! The hole is critical for establishing good root growth. Trees still need some soil, not straight caliche! Dig the hole two to three times larger in diameter than the current root ball - make sure it isn't perfectly round—to keep the roots from circling. If you have clay soil and only dig a hole a little bigger than the root ball you will doom the tree to a slow death. This has the same effect as planting the tree in a giant cement pot - the roots will circle and eventually strangle the tree. Plant the tree at the same depth as the root ball or an inch or two above to allow for settling.

Keep the soil you remove and break it up. Use it to backfill around the new tree with the native soil, without amendments. Research has shown that trees grow better if you only use the native soil that has been broken up instead of adding soil amendments. Be sure to pack soil in good around the roots to eliminate air pockets.

Make a temporary soil wall around the edge of your hole to allow water to remain near the root ball. Remove this wall after a year to encourage root growth beyond the original hole.

Apply 3 to 4 inches of native hardwood mulch to help regulate the soil moisture and temperature. Mulch will keep the soil warmer in winter and cooler in summer. Mulch will help keep grass and weeds away that compete for water.

One thing for sure, the school landscape is a lesson on what not to do!
Happy Gardening!



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Did you know that South Central Region has a website with lots of information, upcoming convention information and archived copies of "The Communicator" (The Official tri-annual publication of South Central Region).

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