



ConservationNews

Harrison County Soil and Water Conservation District

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Winter 2015

District Provides Schools and Non-Profits with Community Garden Grants



Dr. Christine Coker, MSU Extension Service and Tyree Harrington, NRCS District Conservationist, talk to Rose Johnson about the North Gulfport Community Land Trust garden, which received a garden grant from the District.

The District has continued providing grants to schools and non-profits to implement or enhance The People's Gardens, better known as community gardens. To date, the District has worked with nearly 30 gardens,

The District has had the pleasure of recently working with: North Gulfport Community Land Trust, North Woolmarket Elementary, North Gulfport 7th Grade School and North Gulfport 8th Grade School.

Earth Team Volunteer Dr. Christine Coker has been instrumental in touring and providing expert advice, along with Tyree Harrington, NRCS District Conservationist.

If you have a school or non-profit that would benefit with a community garden grant, please contact Beth D'Aquila, District Coordinator, at beth.daquilla@ms.nacdnet.net or 831-1647.

District Sponsors Agriculture Pathway for Pathways2Possibilities



Tyree Harrington, NRCS District Conservationist, discusses agriculture careers with Pathways2Possibilities participants.



Lance Middleton, MSWCC Field Representative, and Greg Haney, State Representative, discuss the success of the Pathways2Possibilities Agriculture Pathway.

The District was again a sponsor of the hugely successful Pathways2Possibilities career days, which was implemented to engage, educate, and empower the 7,000 eighth grade students who participated from the six coastal counties. The District coordinated with MSWCC, NRCS, and MSU to participate in the Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources pathway.



Lance Middleton, MSWCC Field Representative, lets a Pathways2Possibilities participant handle his snake in the Agriculture Pathway.



Arbor Day Tree Giveaway

Friday, February 13, 2015

7:30 a.m. - 2 p.m. (while supplies last)

Harrison County Soil & Water Conservation District Office

12238 Ashley Drive, Gulfport

(Hwy 49, two miles north of I-10; turn east onto Ashley)

Oaks in 3-gallon containers (1 per household)

Bare-root seedlings include: Sawtooth Oak, Nuttall Oak & Red Maple

***Southern Magnolia seedlings donated by GreenForest Nursery in Perkinston.**

We will not reserve trees; first come, first served.

Mulching Provides Environmental Benefits

Many people use mulch because it enhances the appearance of the landscape at their home or business. But mulch is more than a tool for beautification.

A layer of mulch provides erosion control, improves soil moisture content, reduces surface compaction, suppresses weeds, enhances vegetation establishment and improves soil condition.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service promotes mulching because of its abilities in stabilizing soils, which keep them from washing into streams and rivers and causing ill effects in our water.

Although mulch is not as good as live cover (like grass), it still is an effective way to retain soil and make a good temporary cover.

Organic mulches include hay, straw, wood chips and bark. They improve the condition of the soil. As the mulch slowly decomposes, it provides organic matter that helps keep the soil loose. This process improves root growth and increases the infiltration of water. Organic

matter is also a source for plant nutrients. They also provide an ideal environment for worms and other soil critters.

You do not have to go to the store to find mulches. You may have many of them around the house. Lawn clippings are the perfect mulch, and their fine texture makes them easy to spread around plants. Leaves and compost also make great mulches, and both improve soils structure and enhance plant growth.

It's good to consider various mulches when designing your yard. Whether you choose pine bark or grass clippings, mulch can help the soil and plants and add beauty and a finished look to your yard.

For more information on mulching and other Backyard Conservation practices, visit the Natural Resources Conservation Service online at www.nrcs.usda.gov or call 1-888-LANDCARE (toll free) for a free colorful Backyard Conservation booklet and tip sheets.

State Representatives Tour District Projects



State Representatives Greg Haney, Richard Bennett, and Carolyn Crawford join NRCS Area Conservationist Wesley Kerr (center), Commissioner Buck Johnson, and MSWCC Field Rep Lance Middleton as they listen to Lori West, CEO of Climb Community Development Corp., talk about the success of the Café Climb garden.

On a freezing day in November, the District invited Harrison County State Representatives and Senators to join us in learning about conservation projects the District is involved in.

After a demonstration of the District's grain drill by Commissioner Robert Johnson, Commissioner Greg Crochet gave a power-point presentation to cover some

of our educational outreach programs, such as our Conservation Education Field Day, Pathways2Possibilities, Stewardship Week, and Arbor Day, before heading out on a tour of projects such as Emergency Watershed Protection, cogongrass control, and community gardens.

Thank you to Sheriff Melvin Brisolaro for use of the Harrison County Farm.

Websites Useful to Landowners

Harrison County Soil & Water Conservation District
Natural Resources Conservation Service
MS State University Extension Service
MS Soil & Water Conservation Commission
MS Coastal Plains RC&D
Land Trust for the MS Coastal Plain
Farm Service Agency
MS Forestry Commission
MS Dept. of Environmental Quality
Harrison County
MS Dept. of Marine Resources
MS Dept. of Transportation
MS Dept. of Agriculture and Commerce

<http://www.hcswcd.co.harrison.ms.us>
www.ms.nrcs.usda.gov
www.msucare.com
<http://www.mswcc.state.ms.us>
<http://www.mcprcd.org>
<http://www.ltmcp.org>
www.fsa.usda.gov
<http://www.mfc.ms.gov>
<http://www.deq.state.ms.us>
<http://www.co.harrison.ms.us>
www.dmr.state.ms.us
www.gomdot.com
www.mdac.state.ms.us

Cogongrass In Harrison County - The Battle Is On



Contract sprayer working on a large patch of cogongrass in Harrison County. Cogongrass is one of the worst weeds in the world.

The Harrison County Soil and Water Conservation District spent \$20,000 on cogongrass control in Harrison County in 2014. The District determined that contract spraying is the most effective way to control cogongrass, and started in the west end of the county, servicing landowners who had signed up for cogongrass control in the last couple of years.

Cogongrass is extremely difficult to control due to its growth habits and spreading rhizomes. It has no natural enemies in the U.S. and has no nutritional value to livestock. In the south, cogongrass has spread, with each seed head producing as many as 3,000 seeds.

Prevent mowing while seed heads are producing in the Spring, multiple tillage is a means of control, applying a high percentage (41%-47%) of Glyphosate during the Spring to prevent seed production and dispersal and another application in the Fall for more control. Read all labels and follow instructions when using any pesticides.

The Harrison County SWCD office has forms for cogongrass control from Coastal Plains RC&D and MS Department of Agriculture, contact us at 831-1647 or stop by our office at 12238 Ashley Drive in Gulfport.



Seed Grain Drill

The District recently purchased a 7-foot Sunflower Seed Grain Drill through the Mississippi Soil & Water Conservation Commission's Education Enhancement program. This grain drill is available to Harrison County landowners.

To lease the grain drill, a lease agreement and refundable equipment deposit must be in the District office prior to use. Rental fee is \$5 per acre based on acre meter reading plus \$10 per day. Please contact the District office at 831-1647 for further details and to schedule use.

Water Conservation

Early Experiments at Mississippi A&M

by Joseph Buckley, Deputy Commissioner

There is a little pond on the outskirts of the MSU campus in Starkville. Students have enjoyed it for years as a spot to picnic, read, take a January swim during initiations, and just enjoy a quiet moment in the spring sun surrounded by a little green space. It is called Eckie's Pond. Most everyone who attended Mississippi State remembers this little pond fondly. "I don't know how it came to be but it has been here as long as I remember," is a common phrase heard concerning it.

The story of Eckie's Pond is indeed interesting. This little pond has been on the campus longer than anyone remembers because no living human was around when it was built. In fact, it is the oldest man made structure on campus. Yes, no building, not even the Textile Building, now home to the Industrial Education Department, is as old as Eckie's Pond.

The first president of Mississippi A&M College was General Steven Dill Lee. He moved to Mississippi after the Civil War to Neshoba County to operate his wife's farm. The farm proved to be a financial failure due in large part to a series of droughts. During that time the small farmers were dependent on rain as their main source of irrigation. One of the first things that he did when he was chosen for the presidency of the college was to implement a study on how small acreage farmers could efficiently catch and retain rainwater before it ran off the topsoil. Charged with this task was Professor A. B. McKay.

McKay did research on soil types and surveys of the campus farm. He concluded that small ponds, dug with simple hand tools could do the job of collecting rainwater for both row crops and livestock. The pond

was planned and the experiment began. Students began digging the pond. You see, back in the early days of the College, students were offered a "free" education. This did not mean that they could just come and take classes. It meant that it would not cost them money to do so. For this to be economically feasible for the College though, they all were required to work. And work they all did. From rich delta planter's sons to sharecropper's sons, they all worked shoulder to shoulder to clear land and build the campus farms. This work was indeed "old school." The pond was soon finished and the students were elated that they had a source of pleasure during the precious free time of college life. Fishing, swimming, and picnicking were some of the fun activities that went on at Eckie's Pond.

So how did the pond get the name of Eckie's Pond? Well, it seems that Professor McKay was deaf. As was the common practice back then, students gave him a nickname. It was "Echo." According to Dr. John K. Betterworth in his notes on early Mississippi A&M College, this nickname later became "Eckie."

So because the crops failed due to lack of rain, a civil war general became a college president and was instrumental in the formation of a major university. Because of the president's failure in farming, he took an interest in helping farmers secure a good water supply for their farms. This experiment was the first of its kind at any land grant college in the country.

The small pond remains at Mississippi State. There is a picturesque silo in the background. The little pond has been there for over one hundred and twenty years. It is Eckie's pond.

Quick & Easy Chicken Salad

- 1 Rotisserie chicken
- 8 oz. Cream cheese, softened
- 1 cup Mayonnaise
- 1 cup Sour cream
- 1 cup Celery, diced
- 1 cup Onion, diced
- 1 cup Almonds, sliced
- 1 cup Pineapple in chunk pieces

Debone chicken and cut into bite-size pieces.

Combine all ingredients with chicken and mix completely.

Serve over salad greens, make sandwiches with French bread, or mix with 1 lb. cold cooked pasta for a great pasta salad meal.

**Farm Families of Mississippi*

Conservation Education Field Days

About 600 fourth grade students and teachers from Harrison County took part in the District's annual Conservation Education Field Days to learn the importance of our natural resources. Students had hands-on presentations to learn about: Longleaf & Me, This Land is Your Land, Forestry, Wildlife Biology, Soils, Boat Safety, Recycling, Non-Point Source Pollution, Snake Safety, Sheriff's Dept. BRAVE, and Water Conservation.

The District is grateful to Sheriff Melvin Brisolara for use of the Harrison County Farm. The beautiful acreage and ponds make it an ideal site. The District was honored to have Seabees volunteer as tour guides each day; thank you BU1 Shawn Monkress for coordinating efforts with us.

The District would like to recognize Natural Resources Conservation Service, who provided expert staff to carry

out the Conservation Education Field Days. We also commend the experienced staff from the Jackson, Hancock, and Stone County Conservation Districts, and local Earth Team Volunteers. This was a huge 2-day field day, and we appreciate your efforts.

The District was fortunate to have MS Museum of Natural Science, MSU Cooperative Extension Service, Master Gardeners and MS Soil & Water Conservation Commission. Special thanks to Kathryn Lewis and Althea Jerome for their presentation on Longleaf & Me.

The District is fortunate to have such a dedicated team to work with on educational endeavors. We are grateful to all who came out to make learning about our natural resources a priority for the students in Harrison County.



NRCS Soil Conservationist Wayne Ornsbey and NRCS Area Forester Jim Barnes talk to students at the Conservation Education Field Day about forestry at the Harrison County Farm.



BU1 Shawn Monkress, front row-left, coordinated with the District to have 15 Seabees volunteer each day of the District's Conservation Education Field Days at the Harrison County Farm.

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Harrison County Soil & Water Conservation District

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Beth D'Aquila, *Editor & District Coordinator*

Tyree Harrington, *District Conservationist*

Dan T. Longino, *Field Technician*

The Harrison County Soil and Water Conservation District holds a regular monthly board meeting on the first Thursday of each month. This meeting is open to the public and held at the District Office, 12238 Ashley Dr., Gulfport, at 11:30 a.m. This board meets to administer the program of soil and water conservation in Harrison County. An equal opportunity employer.

Conservation Districts

Conservation Districts have been involved in delivering locally driven conservation across America for more than 70 years. Among other things, Districts help: implement farm, ranch, and forestland conservation practices to protect soil productivity, water quality, air quality and wildlife habitat; conserve and restore wetlands; protect groundwater resources; assist communities and homeowners to plant trees and other vegetation; guide developers in controlling soil erosion; and provide technical expertise to landowners to identify, apply for, and participate in conservation programs.

For more information about the Harrison County Soil and Water Conservation District, or any District projects and services, please call us at 831-1647 or visit our website at <http://hcsxcd.co.harrison.ms.us>.

Provide Pollinators Habitat

Three-fourths of the world's flowering plants rely on the help of pollinators to reproduce. Some scientists say one out of three bites of food can be attributed to animal pollinators like bees, butterflies, moths, birds, bats, beetles and other insects.

Pollinators provide crucial assistance to fruit, vegetable and seed crops as well as other plants that produce fiber, medicine and fuel. But pollinators are in trouble world-wide. Habitat loss, disease, parasites and environmental contaminants have posed many challenges for pollinators. You can help – by providing pollinators with habitat.

Incorporate pollinator-friendly plants in your yard. Trees and shrubs like the dogwood, blueberry, cherry, plum, willow and poplar produce ample pollen or nectar in early spring when food is scarce. When the weather warms up, use a variety of flowers, mixing colors, shapes and scents. These different plants will attract a variety of pollinators.

Reduce or stop spraying pesticide in your landscape. You can use plants that attract insects to control pests. Butterfly and moth larvae do damage plants. Do not poison these hungry caterpillars because one day they will be beautiful butterflies and moths.

Provide a shallow water source for pollinators. This can be done by tossing a few rocks in a bird bath. Leave dead tree trunks in your landscape. Bees and beetles prefer wood nesting and these aging trunks make a perfect home.

Insects play an integral role in sustaining our Earth. The honey bee is single handedly responsible for billions of dollars' worth of American crops each year. Pollinators, like the honey bee, visit flowers in search for food (nectar or pollen). During the visit, a pollinator may accidentally brush against a flower's reproductive parts, depositing pollen from a different flower. The plant uses the pollen to produce a fruit or seed. For many plants, without the help of pollinators, they would be unable to reproduce.

Birds and bats also play an integral role in the pollination process. The most common avian pollinator is the hummingbird, which prefers brightly colored tubular flowers.

Thousands of beetles play an important role in the pollination process, and in fact, beetles compose 40 percent of the world's insect population. Other insects, like flies, also help pollinate plants. Actually, midges are the only known pollinators of cacao trees, which is what we use to produce chocolate.

For more information about pollinators, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/pollinators.