

The Secret Lives of Master Gardeners:

Bittersweetness

By Cindy Coker

Gardening is indeed a bittersweet experience with the hours of toil expended in order to reap the best rewards. Master Gardener Eddie Rhoades knows and appreciates the concept so well that in 1998 he named his website Bittersweet Gardens. A tour of the website gives one plenty of Eddie's sage advice and a well rounded selection of links to other sites of interest to any gardener; one link even offering information in Chinese! As easy as it is to acquaint yourself with Eddie Rhoades via the website, you are missing out on a real treat if you haven't met him personally.



Eddie grew up in various rural areas during a time when dirt roads and an abundance of natural areas still existed. He and his brother delighted in “running off just as far as you could get to and come back from before sundown” and exploring all the things that fascinate a boy in the countryside; long strings of toad frog eggs vs. the jelly-clusters of bullfrog eggs in

ponds, for example. It was only natural that Eddie continued to feed his interest in nature by looking into a newspaper ad in 1980 calling for persons interested in gardening to attend courses for becoming a Cobb Master Gardener.

He entered the Master Gardener course in 1980 and recalls that it was a 19-hour course taught at the rate of two classes a night. Being that it was taught in the evenings, younger gardeners covering a wider demographic sector made up the class. Compared to the technical depth of today's MG courses, those early classes were fairly simple and to the point. Eddie took the initiative to start a demonstration garden at the fairgrounds. From his lead, other master gardeners joined in to suggest that a demo garden be maintained by all the Master Gardeners, resulting in an agreement with the Parks and Recreation Department and the creation of our Backacher Garden

of today. It is obvious that Eddie has had the dissemination of gardening knowledge at heart from the time he entered the program. However, it is his twist on educational methodology that separates Eddie Rhoades from the ordinary gardener.

Eddie has expressed that many Master Gardeners put too much concern on making everything purely educational. He feels that in the learning process, there is a place for entertainment; presenting information in whimsical ways as well as doing projects for fun and creative expression. It is no wonder that he has developed a knack for fanciful yard art and



has even been asked to present a lecture on his creations at the 2006 Southeastern Master Gardener Conference in Tennessee. While Eddie's yard art is well known, it is not his only creative outlet.

From his notable bright green shoes, to his popular color-changing-flexible shirt, it is easy to imagine that Eddie lives by the beat of a different drum – or perhaps that should be *strum*. He has been playing the guitar since age 15 and honed his skills as a singer/songwriter enough to garner engagements at a venue or two around Marietta. His musical style is as eclectic as his gardening skills with genre running the range from Country to R&B to Pop to Ballads to Boogie to Rock and, well, to even those yet uncategorized! Look for a CD of his original works to be forthcoming. Aside from his musical talents, Eddie has written and illustrated a children's book and has a book on gardening in the works with hopes of publication within a year or so.

As for his current gardening focus, Eddie is hard at work on grafting fruit trees; a rapidly dying gardening art. Something he would like to be able to develop is a fruit tree for the modern urbanite – a tree that would be small enough to fit within the space constraints of today's housing lots and still bear good fruit. He is also deep into extensive renovation of his yard after the removal of several trees and opening up enough space to start a stand of small fruit trees.

All our Cobb Master Gardeners make significant contributions to the betterment of gardening and no one can deny that our seasoned veterans

possess knowledge to be treasured. Eddie Rhoades, with 25 years and counting of active involvement as a Cobb Master Gardener, is one of our brilliant jewels... maybe that is why his mailbox glitters the way it does! (check the photo on the website!) Thanks for all the years of FUN you have provided us, Eddie. We can't wait to see what 'bittersweetness' you will delight us with in the future.

Additional photos:

