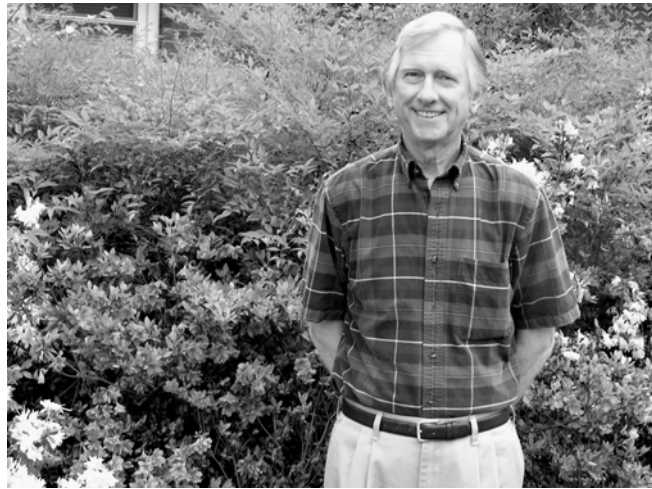


Friendly Exchanges: an interview with Ivan Tatum
by Cindy Coker

Ten years of service in the Master Gardener Program earns one the title of Lifetime MG, a thirst for knowledge earns one the label of Lifetime Learner. Ivan Tatum, with 20 years of active involvement as a Master Gardener and an ongoing quest for knowledge is indeed an outstanding representative of both.



Growing up on a farm in Dawson County made horticulture a natural part of Ivan's life. Wanting to learn was likely instilled into Ivan's psyche from a young age by way of his father, a high school principal who went on to be superintendent of schools in Dawson County. Later, the family moved to Atlanta and brought along countryside traditions; including gardening. As an adult, Ivan spent 20 years working at Lockheed and gardened as a pastime.

A neighbor invited him to join the Marietta Men's Garden Club, the enticement being that Ivan could ask questions and learn from other gardeners. One of those members turned out to be Eddie Rhoades who told Ivan about the Master Gardeners of Cobb County and how much information could be picked up by going through the training class. With that, Ivan knew that was just what he wanted to do.



In 1985, Ivan attended the weekly morning course held in Dunwoody. Later, he was involved in the planning and creation of the Backacher demonstration gardens and says that the project grew out of frustration felt by several of the Master Gardeners. The MGs would go to Pikes, or Town Center, or the Square and hang out to answer questions, but "We thought we should have a little place to grow some things," Ivan said. Over the years, he has continued to be active in the organization and has served three times as treasurer for Cobb MGs.

As a dedicated MG, Ivan continues to pass along information by working with Eddie Rhoades in teaching a gardening class at ELM, a Cobb Co. school for senior citizens. Last year, he conducted the gardening class which meant that he took charge of lining up guest speakers for the eight classes including MGs Michele Brown, Louise Weyer, and Bruce Gillett. Ivan emphasizes that the class wouldn't be as successful without the help of our Cobb MGs.

Ivan Tatum looks at his garden as a healing place; a place for personal meditation and forgetting about the rest of the world. In his garden he wants to see all his friends and old timey favorites. In planning this sort of garden, he has included nandina (easy to care for, vigorous), an abundance of rosemary (for fragrance), and a wide plot of golden daylilies (for the gorgeous, glowing color !). He says that a gardener should not be a slave to the garden, but simply enjoy it. Enjoy your favorite plants as you would friends – caring for them as well as taking from them all they have to give you. Perhaps it is his relaxed approach to gardening that has even helped him to produce a lovely lilac bush!



Through his experimentation, Ivan has a few fuss free favorites and tips for successful gardening. His favorites include: Rutgers tomatoes (disease resistance), any vigorous green pepper, and Clemson Spineless okra. In landscaping, plant a large grouping of only one thing and let it make a bold impression for the eyes – thus explaining the more than a hundred peony buds ready to burst into bloom in one area of his yard!

To Ivan, it is great to be a Master Gardener because it's a chance to “get really close to some really nice people – gardeners are just very nice people to know”. The information exchange and the wonderful camaraderie is what it is all about to Ivan. “Talking and sharing – that's the best part!” Take the time to ‘talk and share’/learn with this soft-spoken veteran gardener and you'll certainly come away with a refreshed outlook on how you relate to the ‘friends’ in your yard.