

# Using the Community to Teach Plant Materials

– a real world study in plant identification,  
University of Georgia, Hort 3510 –

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# Perennial Plant Identification

Hor 3510 – 2 credit hours -

- No pre-requisite required, 2 lectures and 1 lab/week. Eight week (half semester) class in spring semester. In concert with Hor 3500 (Annuals, fall semester)
- Very popular among students in Horticulture and Landscape Architecture. Fills rapidly.
- Limited to approximately 30 students, each lab broken into 2 sessions.

# Objectives of Perennial Plant Identification – Hort 3510 -

Learn to identify plants but also:

- Understand the growing habit, eg. tolerance to sun and shade, drought tolerance, nativity.
- Recognize familial relationships, eg. Boraginaceae, Lamiaceae, Asteraceae

# Plant Identification Is Difficult

- This is often the first time students are exposed to herbaceous plants
- This may be the first time students are exposed to familial relationships
- The number of taxa can become daunting in such a short period of time - ~20 taxa per lab

# Plant Identification Becomes Easier If

- Plants can be studied “up close”, to be able to touch, smell and feel them.
- Plants can be seen in a realistic setting, rather than on slides or in a greenhouse
- Plants can be seen in a realistic setting more than once – “The Rule of 7”

# In A Nutshell, Plant Identification Becomes Easier If

- students can study  
the real thing, ie

**LIVE PLANT MATERIAL  
GROWING IN THE  
GROUND!**



# It Is Hard To Find Live Materials For Class Study

- Campus: May not exactly be a Garden of Eden. Herbaceous plants are used much less around campus due to higher maintenance. And not everyone has a Botanical Garden next door.
- Greenhouse: Impossible to grow, maintain and flower a diverse collection.
- Study Garden: Building a study garden is an enormous amount of work.



# Perennial Plant Identification

Hor 3510

- The Horticulture Trial Gardens are used for teaching, but not enough material is available for the entire semester





# Where Can Live Materials Be Found?

- If not the campus, the botanical garden, a study garden, nor the greenhouse, then where?



# Where Can Live Materials Be Found?

- Use natural resources in the community: Use **Gardeners!**
  - they are everywhere, full of enthusiasm and they love to talk about plants -



# Perennial Plant Identification

## Hor 3510

- A plant ID quiz every two weeks based on two gardens. Students must get back to gardens. Specimens brought to lecture class.
- Therefore, good gardeners must be selected.

# Selecting Gardeners For The Class

- Most are flattered to be asked, but are also often intimidated.
- Need gardens with a diversity of plants (perennials).
- Need to be relatively close (within 15 mins by car).

# Selecting Gardeners For The Class

- It helps to be a gardener yourself, and use your own garden. Other gardeners are then more willing to help.
- Must be able to visit garden 2 days beforehand to select plants to be studied, we then place them on Web CT

# Benefits Of Involving Gardeners

-direct -

- Seeing plant material in situ; greenhouse or screen does not come close to that reality.
- Seeing the same plant material in different settings during the entire course semester.
- Students don't get bored, as there is a new venue every week.



# Benefits Of Involving Gardeners

- indirect -

- Students become involved in the community and vice versa. Very imp. in a college town.
- Students see the enthusiasm of the gardeners, it is catching!.
- Equally important, I don't get bored, and am a far better teacher because of it.

# Potential Problems of Involving Gardeners - for students -

- Time: Students must go back to gardens to study, this takes time. However, they have to study somewhere. I have never had complaints about this.
- Travel: Students need a vehicle or car pool. I offer a van for those who need it, I have used it twice in the 15 years I have taught the course. Kids have cars or friends with cars!

# Potential Problems of Involving Gardeners - from gardeners -

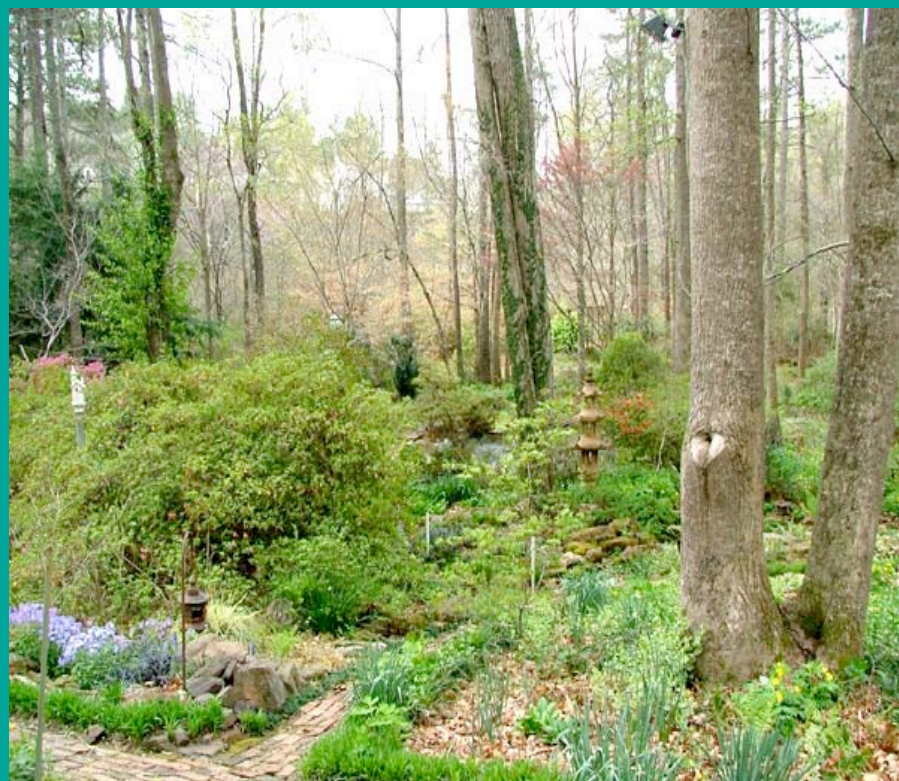
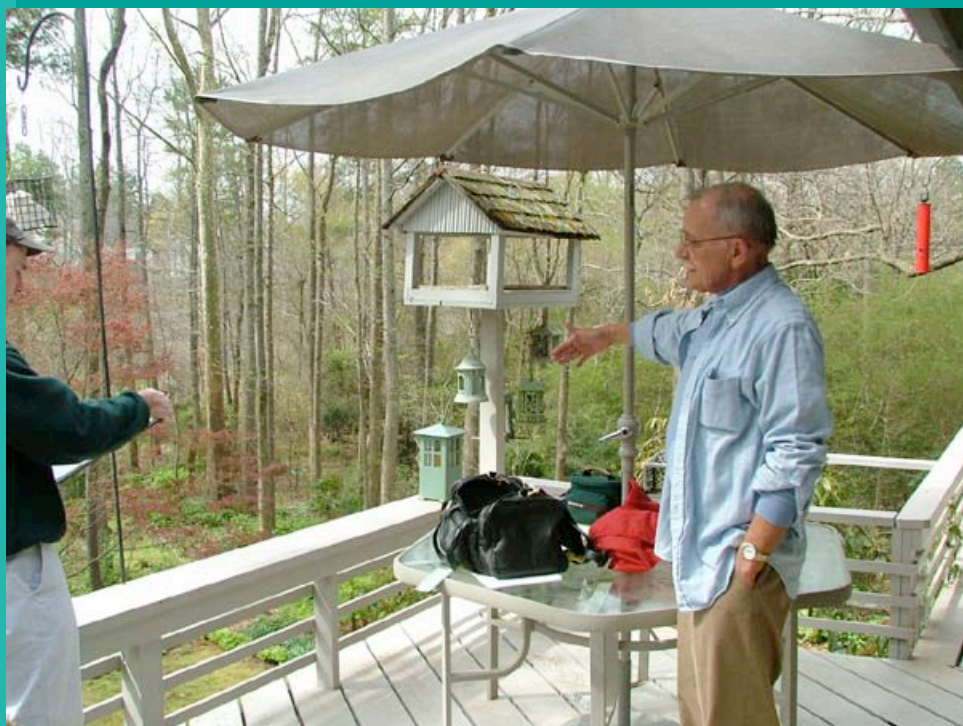
- So many students will hurt garden: Never happened, walkways are used, and when they return, they respect the garden.
- Gardeners don't want students in the garden at certain times: Students are given email and phone numbers, never been a serious problem.

# A Few Examples of Gardens We Use

- Over the years I have taken students to approximately 10 private gardens in Athens.
- All gardeners have told students to return for studying, providing phone and email information.
- All gardeners have asked us back.

# Gardens Used in Class

## 1. Lambert's Garden





# Gardens Used in Class

## 1. Lambert's Garden





# Gardens Used in Class

## 2. Gibberson's Garden





# Gardens Used in Class

## 2. Gibberson's Garden





# Gardens Used in Class

## 3. Armitage's Garden





# Gardens Used in Class

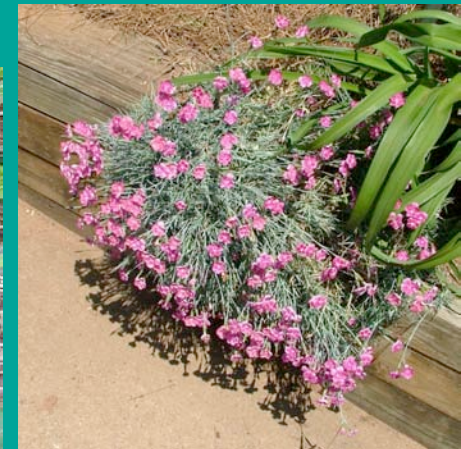
## 3. Armitage's Garden



# Perennial Plant Identification

## The Final Exam

- The final exam consists of all plants and is conducted in one of the gardens. Students must get back to all gardens to study.





# The Final Exam





# The Final Exam



# Does Involving the Community Make This A Better Course?

I do not know:

- if grades would be different without the gardens. Likely the good students would still excel, the poor ones would still struggle.
- if more or fewer students would take the course without the gardens.

# Does Involving the Community Make This A Better Course?

I do know:

- that the community and the students are enriched. Each appreciates the other more than before.
- that the enthusiasm from gardeners rubs off, and stays with many students for their lives.
- my course evaluations are always excellent, which I credit largely to the garden experience.



# The End – Questions?

