Mississippi University for Women Edible Plant Trail

Michael Dodson,
Assistant Professor of Biology
Mississippi University for Women

Beginnings...

- 5 different disciplines/majors
 - Biology
 - Culinary Arts
 - ► Graphic Design
 - Spanish
 - History



Students learning cross-disciplinary and multidisciplinary skills (aligned with the QEP)



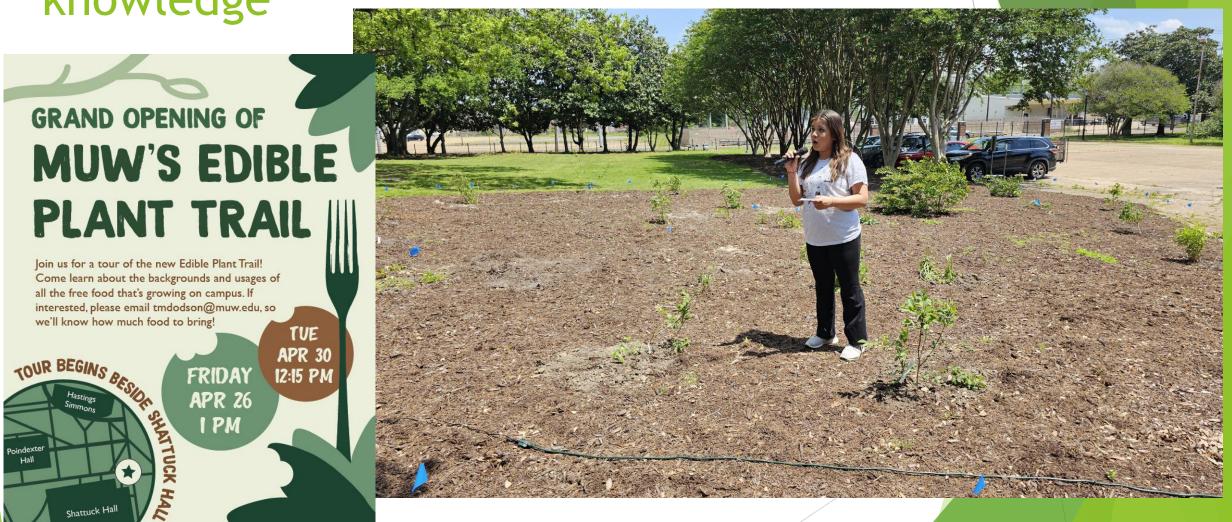


We also collaborated with MSMS



Photo Credit: Chris Jenkins.

Students presenting their work and new knowledge



Edible Plant Tasting

- Smilax
- Violet
- Yaupon
- Pecan
- Oxalis
- Mulberry
- Spiderwort
- Berries
- Wild onion and garlic



Greenbriars (Smilax spp.)

- Good for deer
- Create very good barriers
- Nice climbing evergreen with
 - interesting berries (black, blue or red)
- Can be spread easily
- Native



Greenbriars (Smilax spp.)

Smilax bona-nox





Smilax glauca

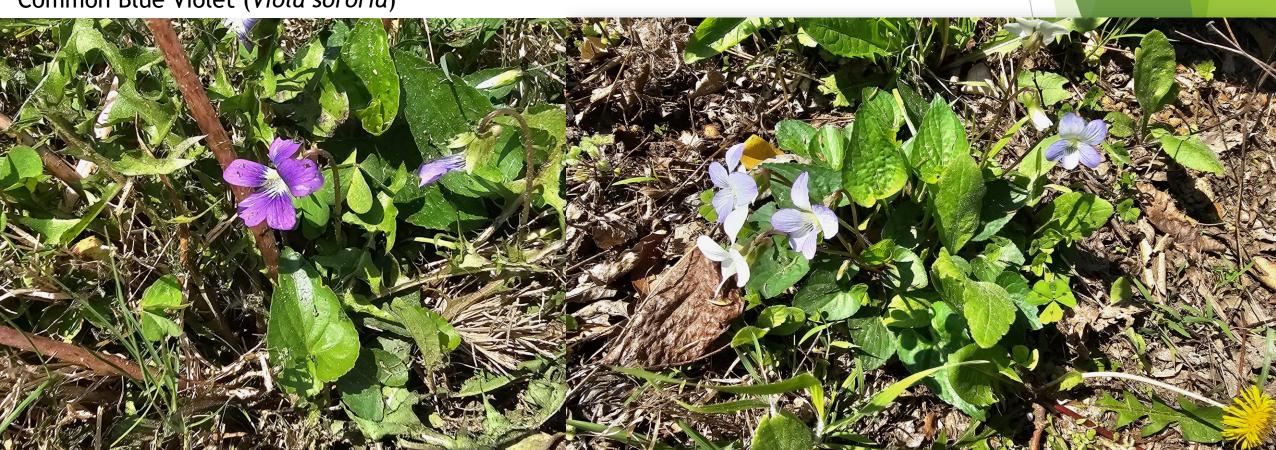
Smilax walteri

Photo by: John Seiler, Edward Jensen, Alex Niemiera, and John Peterson (2021)

Violets (Viola spp.)

Common Blue Violet (Viola sororia)

- Edible
- Makes a nice lawn cover to replace grass
 - Handles being mowed
 - Doesn't grow fast or tall
- Native



The Experience

- I have had a transformative experience working with the native and edible plants...This very hands-on experience has equipped me with new skills and more awareness of just how much food is around me. The informational aspects of this project have been as engaging as the tactile parts. Gardening after class provided a level of enrichment that I found myself regularly looking forward to."
- "My parent's yard looks a lot different now! I am recognizing the plants we have on the trail and am trying to get friends to eat them..."
- :My experience with native and edible plants has been eye-opening. I had the opportunity to engage with a part of nature that was unknown to me, yet so close. Now, I know that these are alternative food sources which taste great. They are also sources of remedies for several common ailments."

What the students learned

- They learned from each other
- They learned skills outside their disciplines
- They learned soft skills that are transferable



Branching out!

- "My interpersonal skills are stronger due to working with people outside of my discipline."
- "By identifying and relocating the native plants, I was exposed to a level of tactile learning that was refreshing yet educational for me."
- "I considered foraging a hobby for years, but I never gave any thought to the implication of it being a hobby. For generations, "gathering" was key to human survival, and the agricultural revolution shifted how humans get food, what we eat, and who eats what. "

Being Together

- "Collaborating with people from different academic backgrounds was useful because together, we added a significant amount of depth to the project. I enjoyed seeing how we were all able to learn from one another. Each discipline helped broaden my perspective in a different way."
- "Seeing what my fellow volunteers found important during their presentations on their plants was eye opening. Many people included the medicinal and historical uses by indigenous peoples of the plants. Compared to my focus on native ranges and speciation, which would make sense with my biology education. My fellow students had a more human focused approach. That difference feels important to recognize."
- If found that learning how other disciplines work opened my mind and skill set to new possibilities. In my daily academic life, I usually keep my mind brewing analysis pertaining to historical topics. I'd like to believe that my writing reflects this. So, this project allowed me to expand my writing skills into creating work less for academia and more for the public. I also learned to implement different aspects of the disciplines into my research."



Signage





Future Directions

- Creating a more complete self-guided trail for visitors to come to.
- This would include a website and QR codes





Is this a weed or a plant?

Common question with an underlying misconception



Violet Woodsorrel (*Oxalis violacea*) Native



Broadleaf Plantain (*Plantago major*) Non-native

Food Deserts and Food Justice

Food is a right and should be accessible to everyone.

An area is defined as a Food Desert if it meets the following criteria:

- -For urban areas, residents live more than 1 mile from a grocery store
- -For rural areas, residents live more than 10 miles from a grocery store
- -There are increased numbers of convenience stores and gas stations
- -20% or more of an area's residents live at or below the federal poverty line

https://www.umc.edu/Research/Centers-and-Institutes/Centers/Center-for-Bioethics-and-Medical-Humanities/CBMH%20Education/Food-for-Thought/Food-Deserts.html

Where are Food Deserts in Mississippi? * Food Access Research Atlas www.ers.usda.gov

- Working with local groups outside of MUW to spread awareness
- Continued Collaboration with MSMS
- Incorporating Plymouth Bluff

Columbus used to be a 'Tree City.' It's working to regain title.

Drake Elm planted in Arbor Day ceremony near pedestrian bridge

BY EMMA MCRAE

The Columbus Tree Board reignited its mission Friday by partnering with Keep Columbus Beautiful and Pick It Up Possum Town to plant a Drake Elm in front of the pedestrian bridge at The Riverwalk in celebration of Arbor Day.

Chairman Gary Dantico said the new board, established six months ago, is hoping to ramp up its activity in the community, starting with the newly planted tree.

"Ever since the new iteration of the board, (we've) been coming back together and refocusing, coordinating closely with the forestry commission and other resources throughout the state to really come up with a program to move forward,"

Part of that program is regaining the city's Tree City USA certification, a title awarded to communities that have shown a demonstrated commitment to urban forestry. Celebrating Arbor Day, Dantico said, was the first step toward reclaiming the Tree City certification.

Arbor Day is a day set aside for schools, civic organizations and individuals to reflect on the importance of trees. Observing Arbor Day is also one of four requirements cities must fulfill to earn a Tree City USA designation, along with having a community tree ordinance, maintaining a tree board and spending at least \$2 per capita on



mind McRay, Dispatch Staff

Mayor Kerth Gaskin watches Alex Balland with the Mississippi Forestry Commission prepare a Drake Elm for planting at the pedestrian bridge on The Riverwalk Friday afternoon. The Columbus Tree Board partnered with Keep Columbus Beautiful and Pick it Up Possurn Town to plant the tree in celebration of Arbor Day.

urban forestry.

Columbus maintained a Tree City certification for more than 15 years before losing it due to inactivity on the board. Dantico said the board will be reapplying for the designation along with similar awards called Tree Line and Tree Campus, which respectively recognize utility companies and college campuses.

He said recertifying will put the board in a better position to receive grants for urban forestry, beautification and other tree-related projects.

"These recognitions are fairly simple, but we just have to go through the steps to do it," he said. "When we want to apply for grants, they see our commitment and dedication, and (that) helps guide their decision making."

Mississippi Forestry Commission Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator Alex Ballard has been working with the board to help reclaim the Tree City certification.

"We're doing all we can to work with Columbus," he said. "The Tree City USA program is an award for (cities and communities) doing the right thing. They're taking care of their trees the right way, and Columbus is one little step over the hill from getting that." Mayor Keith Gaskin and Ward 4 Councilman Pierre Beard joined the group Friday to issue an official proclamation recognizing the Arbor Day celebration.

"The more trees we have, the healthier our community is in many ways," Gaskin said. "So it's great to see so many here today wanting to be a part of this historical day planting our first tree."

Dantico said the event was a great opportunity for the board to engage the community while honoring its mission of promoting the benefits of trees.

"This demonstrates how active we are and engaged not only with the things we have to do, but also the education of the community," he said. "This tree is the first of many awesome things we are going to do."

Plymouth Bluff

- ► Future Tours at Plymouth Bluff on Foraging
- Sundays (Saturdays) at the Bluff





Berries and Briars

- Amazing berries in late spring/early summer
- Can be used as a vine to drape over a ledge/wall as cover
- Many are native

Dewberry (*Rubus trivialis*) Native



Spiderwort (*Tradescantia ohioensis*)

- Edible
- Causes no harm to your lawn
- Can flower if not mowed
- Can spread easily
- Native



