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MOBILE BAY

Issue
#8



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ISSUE #8

FRONT MATTERS

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Want to submit something to the journal?
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Now Releasing Every Other Month
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The World of

SHORE



BIRD

CONSERVATION

On the Gulf Coast.



Article and Photos by K. B.

Summer is a popular season on the Gulf Coast— and not just for humans. For decades, a quiet struggle has continued to unfold between seasonal beachgoers and the many types of native wildlife that depend on our coastline. Between the loud boom of firework celebrations and the thousands (if not millions) of small scattered plastic fragments regularly littering the sand, shorebirds in particular have felt the effects of our dominance during their visit for the annual summer breeding season.

According to long-term population assessments, shorebird populations across North America have declined by roughly 70% since 1973, even with the added protections provided by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. And while species like Least Terns (*Sternula antillarum*) and Black Skimmers (*Rynchops niger*) continue to nest widely across our barrier islands and beaches, a century of coastal development has taken a toll on their already-limited habitat.



As we continue altering the landscape to fit our own needs, natural nesting spaces become scarcer. In search of alternatives, birds have turned to unusual places such as sewage lagoons and flat rooftops, both of which often contain materials that mimic the textures of their natural nesting spaces. Human intervention isn't usually recommended for wildlife in general, but these types of sites come with serious risks that require monitoring.

While urbanized environments already provide limited shelter (leaving birds fully exposed to predators and weather), flat roofs add their own hazards; Once the chicks are old enough to wander, there's been an issue of them falling off of the platform with no way back. Thankfully, local bird conservation groups have protocol in place for these types of situations. One way to minimize roof mortalities is by adding wire mesh fencing and chick "shelters"-- two basic, inexpensive additions that provide shade, barriers, and protection, dramatically reducing overall chick mortality.



Along with urbanization and habitat loss, individual human activity remains a large threat to young shorebird survival rates. Unsuspecting visitors entering roped-off sites for a peaceful walk down the shoreline will often find themselves getting divebombed, screeched at, and defecated on as parent birds attempt to protect their nests. Kites, drones, balloons, fireworks, and unleashed dogs are all disturbances that can stress a colony to the point of abandoning young flightless birds and eggs on an established site. These activities are fun, and can be safely done outside of colony boundaries—just remember to “share the shore.”

There are also the “natural” disturbances, which aren't nearly as natural as they once would have been.



In a balanced system, the animals that consume shorebird eggs would also have predators of their own to keep the population in check. With the removal of native apex predators and natural food options, we're seeing a situation arise where opportunistic animals such as raccoons, foxes, coyotes, and cats (mostly species that aren't native to an island ecosystem) are given an unfair advantage to scavenge the wide open spaces that bird colonies utilize. And depending on when a depredation or disturbance occurs in the season, the birds may not have enough time to re-lay before migration starts up again. Since the majority of what these shorebirds face is human-induced, the solution must also come from human hands. Trapping predators and installing symbolic fencing are two physical options that greatly help.



Conservation is an uphill battle, but getting the community on board creates generational results. Rebuilding a connection to nature starts with awareness. Many locals



and visitors don't realize that their simple decisions—where they walk, how they recreate, or whether they keep pets leashed—can determine if a colony successfully raises its young or fails for the season. Small behavioral changes, like giving space to posted nesting areas, packing out trash, correctly disposing of fishing line, avoiding feeding wildlife, and leaving behind natural debris like driftwood can make an outsized impact on the birds' ability to thrive.

Outreach efforts are already helping bridge this gap through interpretive signage, volunteer beach stewards, and community-led monitoring programs that allow citizens to participate directly in wildlife protection. Giving residents and tourists a chance to see the chicks they're helping allows a deeper understanding of how vulnerable these species are and how intertwined their survival is with the choices we make.



It's about fostering a sense of shared responsibility. When a community feels pride in its natural resources and wildlife, conservation stops being a niche effort and instead becomes part of the local identity. If we can commit to conserving the fragile habitats that define our coastline, we ensure that future generations will witness the annual return of shorebirds like least terns, skimmers, and plovers. Their presence is more than a marker of summer; it's a reminder that these islands are living, breathing ecosystems, and that we have the power to help them thrive.



For folks who wish to do more for our wildlife, local bird conservation groups like Audubon provide multiple opportunities to get involved across the coast. Volunteers can choose to take part in bird surveys, cleanup and outreach events, and even summer and winter beach stewarding. At the end of the day, you don't have to be an expert to find your place in conservation— everyone is encouraged to take a stand to protect what makes our coast such a unique and wonderful place.

Upcoming Events For Bird Protectors

Alabama Coastal Bird Fest

April 23-26

Registration closes on April 16, 2026

<https://alaudubon.org/alcoastalbirdfest>

Dauphin Island Spring Bird Banding

April 8-12th, 8am to 2pm

Address for banding: 700 Cadillac Avenue

Address for Parking: 661 Bienville Blvd,

Dauphin Island, AL 36528

<https://www.bandingcoalition.org/dauphin-island-bird-banding>

Accessibility needs? Contact kyle@bandingcoalition.org.



THERE IS NO MORE CAKE

By Gracchus

Art By HollyRose
Baker & Gracchus

As the new year began, the nation was bombarded with “breaking news” seemingly every week. From the illegal abduction of President Nicholas Maduro in Venezuela, to the Greenland debacle, to the ongoing tragedies and murders caused by ICE’s occupation of Minneapolis. The public’s response to this cavalcade of catastrophes has been nothing short of incredible, by American standards. Thousands of Minneapolis residents took to the streets, braving -20°F weather to stand up for their community, while thousands more across the country organized in sympathy and support. Locally, both the Party for Socialism and Liberation and Indivisible Mobile have organized vigils and demonstrations to voice local resistance, and student organizations at the University of South Alabama staged two walkouts in January with approximately two-hundred students participating. Even Murphy High School students staged a walkout-protest in response to a visit by Education Sec. Linda McMahon.

However, the attention placed on these events has obscured the slow progression of an insidious plot taking hold of both our state and the nation at large. Conservative politicians have long vilified social welfare programs, and their recipients, but this year may well determine the foreseeable future of such programs, especially in Alabama. The Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) is at risk of becoming too narrow in scope to adequately service our most disadvantaged community members. At the same time, changes to guidelines provided by the Dept. for Housing and Urban Development (HUD) threaten the Continuum of Care program and seek to effectively weaponize Public Housing Agencies in favor of the Trump administration’s inhumane immigration policies.

SNAP

According to the most recent data available, approximately 752,000 Alabamians receive SNAP benefits, 105,709 of those recipients live in Mobile and Baldwin counties. For many, these benefits are what enables them to afford groceries for themselves and their dependents, often children, while also keeping a roof over their heads. This figure does not even begin to touch on the many families experiencing food insecurity or other financial hardships, but it is difficult to imagine that some of our elected officials are comfortable forcing even that many of their constituents to choose which basic necessity they can afford to retain on a certain paycheck, or which they must do without. This, however, is the unfortunate truth of the day. Last year’s passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, as it is so erroneously termed, shifted much administrative costs of the SNAP program onto the individual states. The numbers for each state look different, but for Alabama this could mean that up to \$200 million must be found within the current state budget in order to maintain benefits at their current level for 2027. For a state that consistently appears in the bottom ten for most positive metrics, that is a lot of money.



The stated purpose of this measure is to combat waste and fraud while also increasing the accountability of state governments. Yet, the alleged fraud and waste is not as apparent as some conservative lawmakers seem to think. According to John Sharp's reporting for Al.com, the vast majority of payment errors in Alabama are simply administrative errors (change of address, change of status, etc.), not intentional fraud on the part of the beneficiaries. In fact, many would argue that this state's payment error rate of approx. 8%, one of the lowest in the country, is more the fault of politicians who continuously seek to vilify those who most benefit. The solution: a properly funded program which allows Dept. of Human Resources employees proper resources to lessen their case load, allowing them more time per beneficiary.

Despite this, Senator and gubernatorial hopeful Tommy Tuberville is unsure whether or not the state can find room in the budget for SNAP benefits to remain at their current level in the next year, or even if the program will survive beyond that. That kind of blasé attitude is not that of someone who wants to see the program continue to keep our most vulnerable community members fed. Rather, it is indicative of the disdain he has towards both social welfare programs and their recipients.

Continuum of Care

One of the most unnoticed aspects of the second Trump administration is the overhaul of the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This is mainly because unless you work directly with HUD or those experiencing housing instability, many policy changes and their ripple effects occur in the background. In general, public housing and associated programs are overlooked in favor of trends in the real estate market, which also impacts costs for renters. Public housing programs are, unfairly, viewed as secondary issues more to do with highly urbanized areas despite the fact that they are a vital safety net throughout the country.

According to HUD, the Continuum of Care Program is “designed to promote community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness by providing funding for efforts by nonprofit providers and State and local governments and promoting access to and effect utilization of mainstream programs by homeless individuals and families.” In other words, Continuum of Care provides federal funding for qualifying organizations that help those experiencing homelessness. In practice local organizations form a Continuum of Care committee, which formulates plans and projects tailored to their specific area and applies for funding through the program. This is a working understanding, not an in depth explanation. For more information and further reading please visit endhomelessness.org (Resources - Policy Info. - What is Continuum of Care), hudexchange.info (Programs - CoC), or reach out to a local organization that addresses homelessness in your community (These can give you more local information and are typically in need of volunteers).

Under the previous administration, the principle of “Housing First” became the primary outlook for homeless services. This principle simply states that housing is a human right, and that permanent housing solutions should be provided to individuals regardless of other circumstances they may be experiencing (substance abuse, mental health issues, budgeting issues, employment, etc.). This is a recognition that basic life necessities such as shelter, food, and clothing must be adequately met before an individual can focus on secondary needs, such as previously mentioned. When someone does not have their basic life necessities adequately met they are in a constant state of survival, which narrows focus. Their primary concern becomes meeting those basic necessities, which supersedes addressing physical or mental ailments, including substance abuse. Substance abuse in particular is a rather difficult topic to go in depth about and may seem imperative to those of us who are housed, but, in short, it should instead be seen as a form of self medication and/or an attempt to relieve

immediate stresses of day-to-day living for individuals experiencing homelessness. HUD Sec. Scott Turner, refers to this as “a failed ideology” and a “Biden-era slush fund” on the departmental website.

Last year, a combined effort by HUD, Dept. of Health and Human Services, and the White House Faith Office (farewell, separation of church and state), to “promote self-sufficiency among vulnerable Americans” sought to drastically reduce the amount of federal funds that organizations which utilize the Continuum of Care program could use for permanent housing solutions. In previous years the cap was 90%, but the cap proposed last November was only 30%. Any funds exceeding the 30% cap would instead be directed towards temporary housing measures, such as shelters. Additionally, HUD wants to be able to deny any sort of proposed Continuum of Care project that engages in racial preference, uses definitions of sex other than binary, or engages in any activities deemed to be harm reduction. Continuum of Care projects must also show compliance with local law enforcement, laws regarding public camping or illicit drug use, and involuntary commitment standards. The initiative also prioritizes treatment of mental health issues and substance abuse over providing housing with mandatory participation in programs. Any hint of noncompliance could result in immediate loss of funding.

As of Jan. 9, 2026 these standards have been temporarily halted by a judicial order. A final ruling on their eventual implementation has not been issued.

Public Housing Agencies

As of February 2025, HUD began increased data sharing with the Dept. of Homeland Security (DHS) regarding immigration status of beneficiaries in compliance with Executive Order 14218, “Ending Taxpayer Subsidization of Open Borders.” It has been a long standing policy that those receiving any form of benefits first prove their citizenship or eligible immigration status. Previously, if HUD or a public housing agency, an agency certified to provide public housing, was aware of undocumented individuals within a household, those individuals would not be counted when assessing applicable benefits. This means that benefits would be prorated and mixed status households would effectively pay higher rents. There have absolutely been instances of HUD and DHS cooperating before the 2025 data sharing, but, generally speaking, it was not departmental policy.

On January 23, 2026, HUD issued a directive mandating that all agencies receiving funding from the department immediately verify the citizenship status of all tenants. This is the direct result of an audit which was aided by DHS. While this may seem relatively benign on the surface, it is a part of a larger effort to make immigrant and mixed status families afraid. Those who may have undocumented family members in their home will now be afraid that simply applying for benefits from a public housing agency will alert DHS and cause the deportation of their undocumented family members. This is in spite of the fact that those family members are not considered in any way when benefits are calculated and distributed.

**HOUSING IS A RIGHT
NOT A PRIVILEGE**

The increased scrutiny on beneficiaries also stokes many preexisting fears held by legal residents and naturalized citizens. There have been numerous reports of individuals being detained by law enforcement while attending immigration hearings, and even some “wrongful” deportations of legal residents due to “administrative errors”, most notably Kilmar Abrego Garcia. Is it truly a stretch of the imagination to assume intentionality on the part of law enforcement? Is it unbelievable that the current administration has or will begin targeting legal residents? Here at home, Alabama Sec. of State Wes Allen has introduced SB 21, an amendment to the state constitution which would bar naturalized citizens from holding most offices in the state, including judgeships and sheriffs. While the bill is still working its way through the legislative process, the fact that such a high ranking state official would think it beneficial to so much as introduce such a bill is astoundingly frightening. Nobody is safe, regardless of what the law says. Everyone is a potential target.

What This Means

Altogether, the changes to SNAP and HUD should be seen as an attempt to make the social welfare system a hostile environment for beneficiaries. I cannot help but think of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 from the United Kingdom, also known as the New Poor Laws. This amendment set forth to curb the inefficiencies and abuses of the old poor laws by bringing in a new system in which the costs burdened by the state would be greatly reduced. It also mandated that aid to the poor was to be administered only through workhouses, whose conditions would be so deplorable that only the truly desperate would seek aid. If this system seems familiar, it is because it was the favored system of Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* and a recurring setting in the works of Charles Dickens more generally. The amendment was devised by Malthusian economists and evangelicals with the intent of encouraging the most vulnerable of society to simply do without and pull themselves up by their bootstraps, as well as the

Malthusian belief that overpopulation must be “curbed” by allowing nature to take its course on the disadvantaged.

The parallels here cannot go unnoticed. The Trump administration is doing what conservatives in this country have longed to do for so long, gut the social welfare system and then hang it out to dry. Shifting SNAP costs onto the states, a previously unheard of measure, simply opens the door for some states to drastically reduce the benefits distributed, and for others to end the program outright. The proposed HUD guidelines, if passed, will drive those in need away from the programs which might actually help them. Individuals or families who are camping in public spaces, which they should have every right to do if they are unhoused, will be afraid of repercussions from local law enforcement, so may not interact with those trying to help them. Individuals who are engaged in substance abuse will be afraid of both legal repercussions and the daunting task of confronting their substance abuse. The simple fact is that recovery is a long and personal process that takes time to muster the courage to engage in and commit to, not something that can be imposed onto someone without consequences.

Social welfare programs work better when they are made more accessible, not more hostile. Driving people away from programs may reduce costs, make some numbers look better, or make unknowledgeable, disinterested bureaucrats feel better, but none of these things actually help the people who are in need. Disputing the fact that poverty, and by extension homelessness and the need for social welfare programs, disproportionately affects particular racial or sexual groups is not a push for equality, but rather a dissociation from reality. These are not the “common sense reforms” that Sen. Katie Britt claims they are. These are blatant attempts to kneecap the social welfare system so that further down the line conservatives can point to the failing of these programs as further evidence to eradicate them.

Social welfare programs are not without their abuses, inefficiencies, or deficiencies, but they are nowhere near as rampant and all-encompassing as conservatives would have you believe.

The message is clear. For decades many politicians, especially conservatives, have been content with lackluster social programs which only act as bandages, temporary relief from the contradictions of capitalism. Now, not even those programs are acceptable to conservatives and the current administration. For decades they have told you to eat cake, and now there is no cake. There is no bread, there are no circuses. This all has been replaced by naked brutality and a climate of constant fear. Protecting social programs is important, as thousands of underserved people depend on them in order to meet their basic life needs, but in this time of great change we should not be content returning to the status quo. In addition to defending these programs, we should be advocating for their expansion and building mutual aid networks within our communities. The solution to the shortcomings of social programs as they stand is not to tear them down and leave those who utilize them out in the cold. We, as a society, must respond to suffering with compassion, not cruelty.



**THERE
IS NO
BREAD
THERE
IS NO
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THERE
IS ONLY
VIOLENCE**

MOBILE ART MEET

Article by LaToya McCoy AKA Lady T Musings.

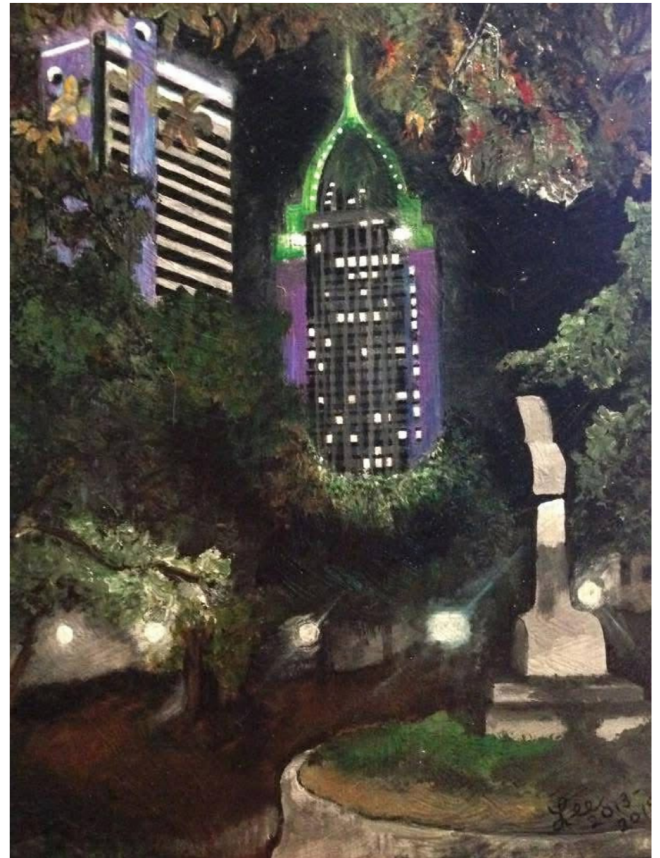
WHAT'S AN ARTIST ANYWAY?

When you think of an artist, what comes to mind? Maybe the “starving artist” selling paintings on a street corner. Or someone in a gallery surrounded by sculptures that look like horseshoes arranged at cryptic angles across a very large, very white room (I know, oddly specific—but stay with me). Maybe you think of renowned names like Artemisia Gentileschi, Toulouse-Lautrec, Jack Kirby, or Floyd Norman. Or maybe your mind jumps to your favorite musician, poet, fashion designer, or pop star.

Ask anyone what an artist is, and you’ll get a dozen different answers—and they’d all be valid. All those names and images have something in common, and I bet you can guess what that is. They’re artists.



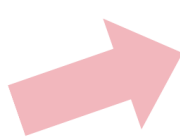
Black Fae Day by AsyaShareef.com



Acrylic on canvas by Lee McNab Callaghan

But what about the person sitting in a café doodling on a sticky note? The writer tapping away on their phone during the bus ride home, shaping a story on a tiny screen? The person turning a box of discarded clothes into new fits and upcycled accessories? Or the one humming a melody into their voicenotes app while cooking for their family?

What connects them all?



Creativity.

MOBILE ART MEET

Article by LaToya McCoy AKA Lady T Musings.

WHAT'S AN ARTIST ANYWAY?

If you create—whether with words, paint, fabric, voice, digital means, clay, or anything else—you're an artist. Making art is one of the most accessible things a person can do. You don't need special tools, training, or even hands. You just need the will to make and the fortitude to follow through with bringing what's in your head into the world.



Sweater by @KatchieCrochet on Insta



Kirby Erin Ngo



Dione Taylor of Dees Edible Elegance

The beautiful thing about art is that no one can tell you what you make isn't art—as long as it comes from you. That's what separates human creativity from AI generation. I won't go too deep into that today, but in short: one has soul; -the other is an algorithm built from stolen work. AI lacks that spark—that "oops," that organic flash of inspiration that makes human expression so powerful. AI can only mimic; it can't originate.

To my fellow artists: I know how discouraging it can feel in this age of AI-generated content flooding our feeds and markets. But creativity will always persist. Artists exist across countless mediums, styles, and genres—and that diversity ensures that art, our art, will continue to thrive.

With all that said, let me tell you about Mobile Art Meet.

MOBILE ART MEET

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Mobile Art Meet is a nonprofit arts group based in Mobile that focuses on creativity, community, collaboration, sustainability, and accessibility in the arts. We welcome artists of all backgrounds, mediums, experience levels, and budgets to come make with us and get involved in events that use creativity to meet real community needs.



Linocut Chrysanthemum by Sarah Brecher

We host bi-monthly meetups for adults (18+) where folks bring whatever they're working on—or start something new. We make art together, share knowledge, learn from one another, talk, relax, and create in community. Some come for feedback; others come to quietly work among people who get it. We're here to support that creative spark in everyone and help it grow.



Moonpie over Mobile in Mardi Gras beads by Lorelei Koory

Hand painted jacket by Amber Degerstrom



Dione Taylor of Dees Edible Elegance

From January through October, we meet in various spots around the city—coffee shops, parks, community rooms, galleries—anywhere with enough space, good energy, and decent lighting. We always share meetup and event dates on our socials and website, and we also host MAM at night meets through our Discord.

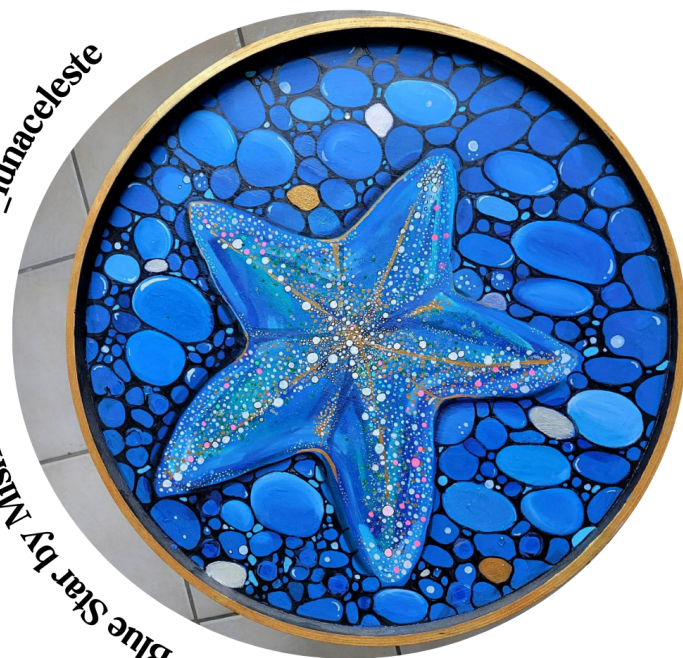
MOBILE ART MEET

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But MAM is more than meetups. We host events that creatively serve our community —like our upcoming Plus Size Clothing Swap and Sustainability Meet on March 7, 2026, at Great Day Latte. We also organize Black Fae Day Mobile, celebrating Black contributions to fantasy and fiction across media, held every second Saturday in May (This year its on May 9th, from 1-5pm, at the Charles Wood Japanese Botanic Gardens in Mobile, Volunteers Wanted!). We've hosted plein-air gatherings, free skill-share workshops led by local artists, and collaborations with the City of Mobile's Parks and Recreation Department for the annual Culture and Fashion Show.

We're always looking to connect with local creatives, support local art events, and build a network of people who believe in art's power to uplift and connect.

Blue Star by Misha Robinson aka _lunaceleste



Medusa in Citrus by LaToya McCoy



If you'd like to collaborate, pitch an event, or offer space for a meetup, reach out! We want to create with our community, not just for it

You're welcome here—whether you've made art your whole life, are returning to it after time away, or are just drawn to creative energy and looking for inspiration. Bring your project, your curiosity, or just yourself.

We look forward to makin' with y'all!

Contact and Connect With Us!

Mobileartmeet@gmail.com
mobileartmeet.carrd.co/

Join us on Facebook, Instagram, or
Discord (link on our site).

Learn More About Black Fae Day
blackfaeday.com

BULLDOZING OUR WETLANDS FOR SOLAR IN STOCKTON?

By Natasha Freeman

Three minutes in early December was all it took for the Alabama Public Service Commission to sell out to big tech and place one of the most biodiverse places in the world in danger. Approving two solar farms without public input or knowledge. It would take the Stockton area two months before they discovered the plans for their community. These solar fields are being built to offset energy use at Meta's new data center in Montgomery. These two fields will eat up 2900 acres in Tensaw and 4500 acres in Stockton. Both of these are historic unincorporated communities that are vital to our rare wetland ecosystem. We are so privileged to live in such a magical swampy area that I am terrified to see it be destroyed.



"Stop Solar In Stockton" - Art From The Public Meeting by Kristine Carson

So who is planning to clear cut, grade out and basically scorch this precious land for profit? None other than Alabama Power, Silicone Ranch, and Meta (The company that owns FaceBook, Instagram, Threads, and WhatsApp). These are all mega corporations with billion dollar profit margins.

Alabama Power is facing outcries from everyday citizens who are concerned with everything from bill prices to environmental atrocities. This is a monopolistic company that sadly many of us must contribute to daily when we turn on a light, open the fridge, and go about our daily routines. Ironically enough, Alabama Power isn't even an Alabama based company. Its headquarters are in Birmingham, but it is a subsidiary of The Southern Company, based in Atlanta, Georgia. Many in our community are battling record high bills. Power bills have more than doubled in a month's time with households maintaining the same lifestyle. This puts a monumental strain on our already pressed communities. Imagine opening a doubled power bill when you're already concerned about putting food on the table. And while Alabama does have limited resources for energy assistance; these can be hard to navigate. These resources oftentimes require trips into town, and documentation that can be a burden to attain. That's not even considering the stress of seeking out assistance.

Environmental concerns involving Alabama Power are serious for our area. Within the last two years fines have been issued by the state for contaminating ground water and waterways with arsenic and mercury. This is leaching from unlined coal ash pits; a by-product of years of producing energy with coal. Surely, one of the largest power companies in America can afford to properly dispose of this material. Consumption of this groundwater may contribute to cancers and heavy metal poisoning. These pits are often placed in low income areas. The cap-in-place method of dealing with these unlined pits is a rather questionable solution. It does not stop the leaching, and simply monitoring and paying out penalties is not the answer our future generations are going to thank us for.

Another concern with Alabama Power is lack of transparency. While this is an issue at all levels of big corporations, we have direct evidence in the form of a recorded and released phone call. This call between Alabama Power lobbyist R.B. Walker and Energy Alabama lobbyist John Dodd is interesting to say the least. Energy Alabama is a non-profit that states they are advocating for clean energy across Alabama. This January 27, 2026 call was discussing House Bill 392. This bill would change our Public Service Commission from elected to appointed officials. The recorded call was placed a week before the bill was introduced. In my opinion, Mr. Walker was attempting to persuade Energy Alabama to support this bill. While Alabama Power wishes to appear to remain neutral. This bill will strip Alabama residents of the right to vote in who we see fit for the important office of Public Service Commission. This commission oversees our utility systems. This three position panel regulates rates, safety and infrastructure. If this commission was appointed by the governor rather than through election it could open the door to further corruption. This bill has been floored at the moment, I believe due to so many people reaching out to their representatives. We must be diligent that it isn't reintroduced when we aren't paying attention. There are concerns with the current PSC as to why rates have been allowed to increase. And why and how was this solar field approved within three minutes. With that in mind, elections for Alabama Public Service Commission are approaching, primaries in May and elections in November. We need commissioners that are going to keep the everyday people in mind, not line Alabama Powers pockets further.

In another ironic twist, Alabama Power makes private use of solar panels extremely difficult if not impossible. It has some of the highest fees in the nation for private solar use and impacts heavy fees on large scale solar fields not owned by Alabama Power. The double standard here is evident and alarming. Solar energy executed correctly and in the proper ecosystems could offer everyone a reduction in power rates and reduce the environmental impacts of fossil fuels.

The next player in Stockton's proposed solar field is Silicon Ranch. Alabama Power would be purchasing the energy produced in Stockton from Silicon Ranch. They claim to be one of the largest independent power producers in the country. Founded in 2011, Silicon Ranch's website states that they are "The Solar Company that Keeps Its Promises". The company practices agrivoltaics, or agricultural production among solar fields. The website states that they produce two crops, solar energy and pasture raised lamb. One doesn't have to look far to see complaints from communities living near Silicon Ranch facilities. Documented cases of erosion and sediment runoff, general site upkeep, and community reports of frequent fires that require specific training and equipment to contain - training that many rural volunteer fire departments have not received.



The Alabama Public Service Commission allows Alabama Power to take money from residents and businesses who have their own solar panels, essentially adding a tax to private solar power. So why do big businesses get to do it without any push back, and on our delicate wetlands?



There is also the concern for the solar panels themselves and what type of impact they would have on the ecosystem when damaged. Solar panels typically last 20-35 years with environmental concerns surrounding their decommission. Concerned citizens that spoke with Silicon Ranch did not seem impressed with any information provided. All concerns were easily dismissed by Silicon Ranch with statements like, “opposition always happens”. Mobile Bay Keeper had a similar experience when they requested to view the completed wetland delineation, geotechnical report, and biological review. The only information provided was that they do not plan to fill any wetlands and that the biological assessment did not show any gopher tortoise in the area. Any Stockton area resident can tell you that an area of that size has many gopher tortoise burrows.

Many of us have asked, why Stockton, Alabama? Stockton is a community rich with history that would fill an article of its own, a community that hunts, fishes and relies on a clean ecosystem for its way of life. Many of us still collect mineral rich spring water from the tap at Red Hill Spring. The supposed site is mere miles from the Mobile Tensaw River Delta and Splinter Hill Bog Preserve. Silicon Ranch says the site was chosen due to its proximity to transmission lines and the topography of the site does not pose an issue. Many of us just don't see how that is possible. Of the 4500 acres, 800 of those acres are wetlands. Silicon Ranch executives claim they are “used to checkerboarding” panels around water. The site is full of hills and has many creeks that lead straight to the delicate Delta. They state the plan is to develop 2500 acres of the site and “preserve” the remaining 2000 acres. The environmental concerns surrounding this project are immense. Erosion and toxic runoff from panels and waste from grazing animals will flow right into our Delta. Imagine if a hurricane or hail damaged these panels, what type of chemicals would run right into the Delta? Habitat loss is another major concern. Native gopher tortoises that are a keystone species are known to live in the area. Their burrows house many native species that would be greatly impacted by their loss. Many migratory birds rely on this area for sanctuary. The proposed site takes up half of Stockton's Landmark district. Thankfully the people of Stockton and surrounding areas are making a stand.

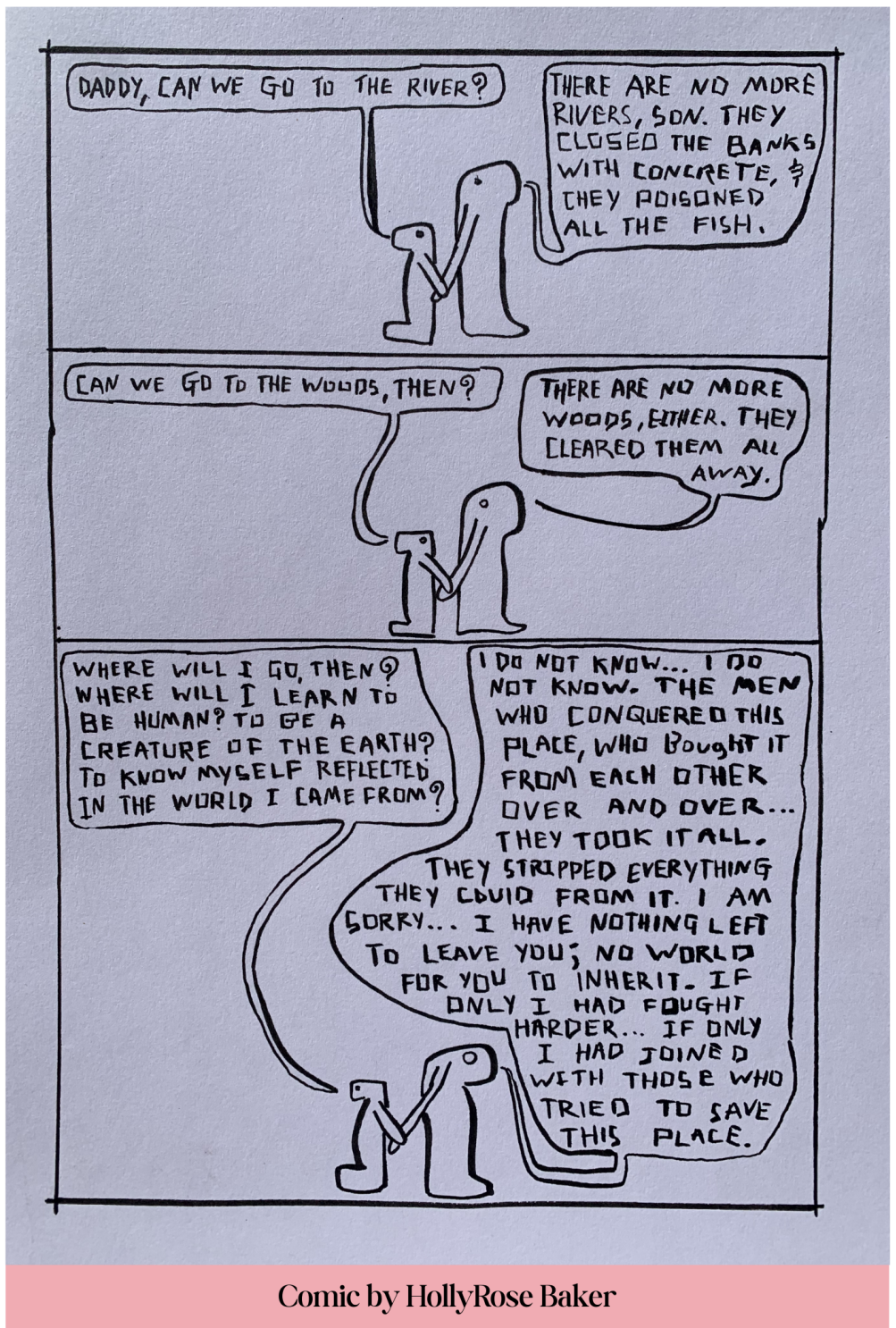


Red Hill Spring in Stockton. Land development often stops springs from flowing, and poisons the ones it doesn't stop.

The site became public knowledge on February 3, 2026 when local publication Lagniappe Daily published a Facebook post exposing the plans. By the end of the day the Facebook group Stop Solar in Stockton was alive and screaming in protest. Concerned citizens had a grassroots team together and a town hall style meeting set up quickly. I attended the meeting on February 9 along with more than 300 people. To see such an outcry of support for our ecosystem brought many of us to tears. We heard from many people that have spent their entire lives right in Stockton and were appalled at the news of the plans for their community. Speakers ranged from 16 year old voices full of fear and hope to elderly voices that long to preserve their way of life. Many spoke of two prior developments of the same property that were not allowed due to environmental concerns. Sadly, some of those regulations have since been dismantled.

Announcements of this magnitude create fear and a powerless feeling for those of us that rely on our natural world for food, medicine and overall mental health. We must keep in mind that we are animals that require natural spaces too. There are still many of us that hunt, fish, forage and worship in the few wild spaces we have remaining. This fear can be calmed when you seek out a community that agrees that these spaces are important. To see the public come together to fight these corporations that seem untouchable at times is balm to the soul. Joining the resistance by monitoring your social media time, minimizing AI usage, reaching out to your representatives and participating in community are tangible things we can do to make a difference.

Baldwin County Commission and the Army Corp of Engineers have yet to receive any formal permitting, applications, or plans for the Silicon Ranch site. This past week the commission approved spending of \$54,000 to Jacobs Engineering Group to evaluate engineering and environmental considerations at the site. This consulting group has ties to the solar industry. We can only hope they have the South Alabama population and environmental standards in mind. As a community it is imperative that we continue to hold our representatives accountable for environmental impacts brought on by unchecked growth, check in with ourselves and each other to be mindful of our impacts as well. If you are interested in getting out in our wild spaces and learning about the abundance they hold, join us for one of our community plant walks. I am a local born and raised bio regional herbalist that is passionate about preserving our wild spaces for our future generations. I have operated my business, Bee-Lightful Botanicals for 5 years teaching others to craft their own herbal preparations from the many options growing right at your doorstep. My dear friends Melissa with Cedar and Moon Apothecary and Tanner Hammond from Mushroom Man Tan host walks and events with ecosystem preservation at our core. Our next walk is March 8 at 10am at the Weeks Bay Pitcher Plant Bog in Fish River. Register at cedarandmoonapothecary.com Registration costs go toward our Free Herbal Clinics, herbal education and community care. We always offer a sliding scale option as well. It is extremely important to us that this knowledge ins accessible to all.



Comic by HollyRose Baker

Our next step in putting a stop to solar in Stockton is to keep it in the forefront of our minds. Be on the lookout for the next call to action and keep reaching out to your representatives. Let them know that we will hold them accountable for preserving America's Amazon.

Our next step in putting a stop to solar in Stockton is to keep it in the forefront of our minds. Be on the lookout for the next call to action and keep reaching out to your representatives. Let them know that we will hold them accountable for preserving America's Amazon.

A CASE FOR LEFTIST SELF DEFENCE

By the Alabama Socialist Rifle Association

As the facade of the state as a force of protection destroys itself, and reveals its stark truth as an occupying and oppressive force - a truth marginalized communities have known since the inception of the United States - many fear that it is now on them to defend themselves, both from the regular threats of life, and from the state itself.

This appears impossible. For generations, we have been falsely taught that only the state can protect us, that these are skills that only the special bodies of armed government institutions should know and practice. The ability, skill, and confidence necessary to successfully defend yourself and your community may seem daunting, anxiety-inducing, but it is one of the most important skills you can have, especially as a marginalized person. An understanding of these skills is best begun by understanding the requirements and theoretical, ideological, and material basis of the leftist defense movement. The Socialist Rifle Association, as a united, de-colonial, anti-capitalist and internationalist front, is dedicated towards expanding the understanding of these skills and their usefulness, in order to foster the ability of the people to defend themselves from and resist fascism.

The ability to defend oneself is easily within reach. An understanding of situational awareness, de-escalation strategies, and non-lethal self defense is sufficient for a majority of the scenarios in which you or your community may find yourselves in danger from non-state actors. Defense from state actors such as ICE is another matter entirely, requiring more training, coordination, and thought. These basic skills are a framework towards building the infrastructure and knowledge necessary for more advanced forms of defense.



Protect Your Community.

OR THE DEVIL,
WILL GET YOU!

While these three skills are the most important skills to begin with, self defense is a holistic and expansive effort. Your community cannot be kept truly safe unless strong networks of mutual aid, care, and communication are in place. You cannot defend yourself without a robust network of care supporting you. Any undertaking in defending oneself should involve and be organized with a network of friends, family, and other community members. An interconnected, expansive understanding and confidence in these skills reinforces and bolsters everyone's safety, and the unique life experiences and skills of an entire community will be able to deal with conflict in ways a singular person is unable to. Self defense must be understood as inseparable from community defense and mutual aid. The common perception of self-defense as a lone act, with the only way to defend yourself being a firearm, is both dangerous and false. Defense should be community-driven and supported by community infrastructure.

Finally, a leftist understanding and advancement of self/community defense also advances the ultimate cause of all leftists, the destruction of the capitalist state. Through freeing yourself and your community from relying on the state for protection - an ability required exponentially more in present times - the states' monopoly on violence weakens, advancing the possibility that it can be destroyed. Additionally, the ability to defend oneself and one's community allows the community as a whole to be emboldened. Small threats, such as violent counter-protestors, harassment, and other conflicts will have the potential to be resolved immediately and overwhelmingly through non-violent, or non-lethal means, allowing for actions that would otherwise be too risky due to threat of retaliation to be carried out. Thus, an understanding of leftist defensive theory and skills advances and safeguards all leftist causes.

Situational Awareness

- Understand what is normal in the space so you can identify anomalies.
- Understand what tools you have and how they can be used in an emergency.
- Identify exits, escapes, and safe areas in your area.
- Practice by running memory exercises. Memorize plates, cars and people routinely in your area, etc.

De-Escalation

Most important concept is the "6 D's"

- Direct Intervention: to the target or threat, explain what you have observed and your concerns.
- Distance: Maintain space between you/the target and the threat.
- Distract/divert the threat's aggression.
- Delay the conflict for as long as possible.
- Delegate: Ask friends to do certain tasks (such as bringing a car up for rapid egress)
- Document: Take notes/film the the incident

Nonlethal Self Defense

- Nonlethal Self Defense will likely be the best course of action in a self defense scenario.
- Use of force should always be proportional to the force, or threat of force that is targeting you.
- Application of lethal force without proper threat to your life is likely to cause significant legal issues.
- Of the various nonlethal self defense options, pepper spray is recommended.
- Stun guns, key chains, knuckle dusters, wasp spray, batons, all have various issues that make them less effective than pepper spray.
- Flip-top, aerosol spray models are recommended.
- Avoid using pepper spray at a distance at/less than 1 foot if possible, due to the possibility of permanent injury to the threat.
- Aim for eyes, nose, and mouth, in that order.

(The boxes are by no means a comprehensive and complete guide for the their topics! Taking classes for each topic is recommended.)

Poetry from the Protests

WHITE HORSE

Recited at the
Stop ICE Terror
Protest 1.20.26

By Ashton Baroni

White horse symbolization.
Purity, Power, Hope, Connection to The Divine.

A mother of three, caught in the road
Three minds, three hearts
Unknowing and blissful
Full of potential
"Show your credentials
That this is your home."

A stuffed animal, tucked in the glovebox
White horse, white men
Protect and serve, or Ku Klux Klan
When you go home, where do you stand
You're white washing the native's land.
Pawns of the fascist building blocks.

Put the car in reverse, and move forwards
Three point turns, three gunshots
Blood on the dashboard and steering wheel
Fight back and die, or lower and kneel
To the war pigs who lie and steal
"America needs you!" Those were your words.

After your shift, what do you do?
Happy house, happy family
Play with your daughter? Talk to your son?
Do their eyes ever catch sight of your gun?
Does **YOUR** mother know the things you have done?
What makes you think that they're safe too?

Do you ever think
What you've done unto others
Will be done to you?

Submit your protest speeches to
Mobilebaylaborjournal01@gmail.com

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Getting Started

With

Native Plants

A Lower Alabama Guide.



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2026 Edition

Getting Started With Native Plants.

A Lower Alabama Guide - 2026 Edition - Published in the Mobile Bay Labor Journal issue #08

Simple steps.

- Identify plants around you.
 - Verify, and Learn whether or not they are native.
 - Remove invasive species.
 - Revitalize native species.
 - Return historic patterns to the landscape.
 - Integrate the modern world and ecological relationships

Step 1.

Identifying Native Plants Around You.

Start where you are; your lawn, the grass around your apartment complex, anywhere close by. Many yards in Lower Alabama contain 50-90% native plants, even before any restoration activities have occurred.

Common native yard species to look for:

- St. Augustine Grass
- Lyre Leaf Sage
- Elephants Foot (Elephantopus)
- Turkey Tangle Frog Fruit

Tools for identifying plants:

- iNaturalist (best free photo-based ID app)
- FloraQuest (Region specific ID tool based on scientific identification techniques, \$30)
- Flora of Alabama Facebook Group (Real people help you ID plants.)

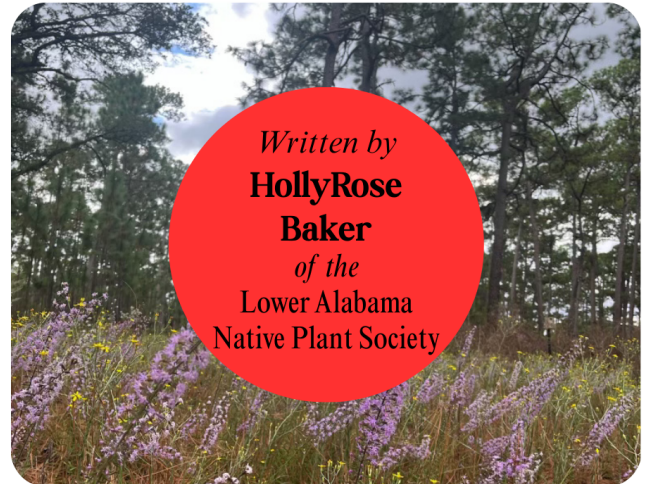
*Don't use Chat-GPT or another large language model AI. They aren't built for plant ID, and so they often get it wrong.

Some tips for using iNaturalist

- The app is easiest to use if you make an account, otherwise it might not save your uploads. It also needs photo and location permissions set to "on" for it to work properly.
- It has an easier time identifying unique looking species. Start with things that look different and unique, or are flowering.
- If you are struggling to get an ID, try:
 - moving the camera around slowly and steadily.
 - looking up whatever higher level classification the app tells you and reading about that.
- If you are documenting rare plants, or plants in a protected area, using iNaturalist's geoprivacy feature can help keep away poachers.

How does plant ID work, anyways?

1. Narrowing down what the plant is by starting with larger groups of possible plants, and eventually arriving at the right species or genus.
 - a. This is what the photo-based apps try to do for you.
2. Recognizing species you have seen before.
 - a. This improves as you learn to differentiate more plants from each other.



How Am I Supposed To Remember All Of That?

The key to memory is relationships and repetition. Pick one plant. Every time you see it, say its name out loud. Spend time with it. Learn its history. Over time, you will know it so well that you can spot it from a few hundred yards away in a moving vehicle. Pick another plant. Try it out in different places. Learn how that plant behaves in different ecosystems.

Going to well managed habitats can help us understand what our landscapes used to look like pre-colonization, and what they could look like again. Seeing plants in context helps us understand them better, remember them, and it informs our eventual restoration work.

Here is a list of particularly good places to go botanize.

- **City of Mobile:** The Long Leaf Pine Treasure Forest next to the Mobile Botanical Gardens
- **Dauphin Island:** Dauphin Island Bird Sanctuary
- **Foley Area:** Weeks Bay Pitcher Plant Bog
- **Gulf Shores:** Gulf State Park
- **North Baldwin County:** Splinter Hill Bog Preserve
- **Mobile County/Mississippi State line:** Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve
- **Coastal Mississippi:** Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge
- Outside of hunting season, many of the Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) are great for botanizing.

Just be sure not to harvest from these ecosystems, or dig up any native plants. Eventually, you will learn more about invasive species and might can help remove them.

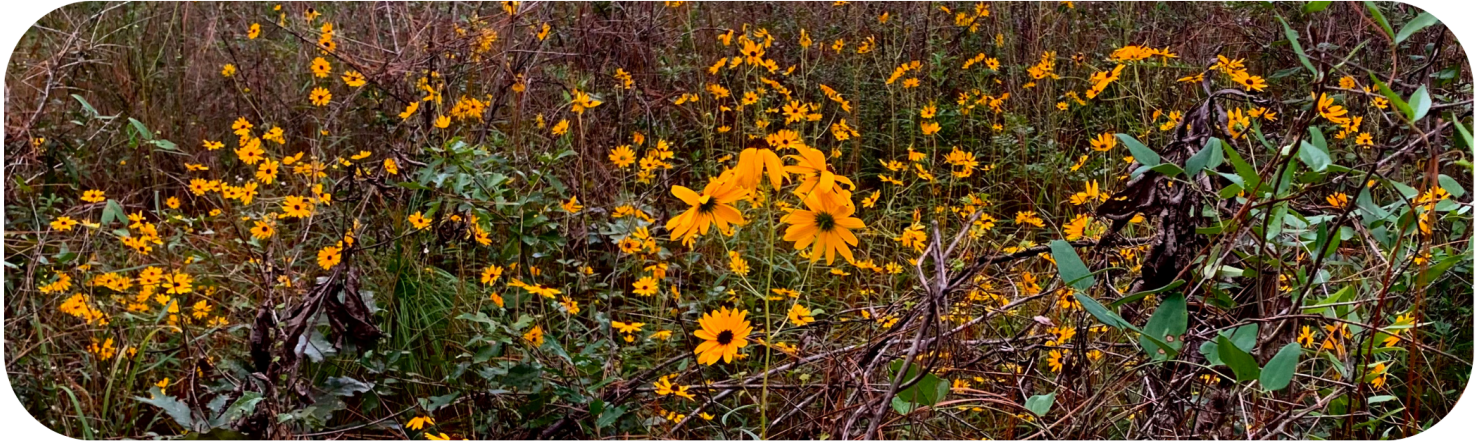
Plants look different throughout the year!

The Gulf Coast Phenology trail website can help us understand those changes, and what is blooming when. <https://fws.usanpn.org/gulfcoastphenologytrail>

The study of how living things are related is called Phylogenetics

Step 2. Verify the plant identification. Learn whether or not they are native.

After you get an initial ID, the next step is to cross reference to a more reliable source. **Practicing verification regularly is a necessary element of being a good plant person.** No one source of information is enough to ensure ID, especially when foraging (eating) plants you find, and when changing a landscape based on that ID (removing invasive species, planting native species).



Start with The Flora of the South Eastern United States

- <https://fsus.ncbg.unc.edu/>
 - Website curated by botanists and meant for public use. Contains pictures, bio-region range maps, native and invasive status, identification keys, and more. It is an ongoing project and not complete, but it is the best resource available for the plants it currently has categorized.
 - The range maps can be a little intimidating, but the gist is; triangles means it's present but not native, diamonds means we aren't sure, and squares mean it is native.
 - Searching plants by genus name (the first part in the two-part scientific name), will show you the close relatives of a plant, to help tell the difference. It is a good way to learn when you are having downtime. A few good genera to start with are Coreopsis, Asclepias, and Helianthus. Sometimes you can search by common name.

Then Verify County-by-County native status using the **Flora of Alabama / Alabama Plant Atlas**. I tend to view something as a native worth planting if it is within 2 counties. But use your judgement!

- <http://floraofalabama.org/>

Feel free to check resources from other nearby states for more information; just remember, what is native there may not be native to here.

- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center (Texas)
 - Wildflower.org
- North Carolina Extension Gardener Toolbox
 - <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/>
- Florida Native Plant Society Plant Database
 - <https://www.fnps.org/plant?county=Escambia>
- Louisiana Native Plant Society.
 - <https://www.lnps.org/>

Tip: On most phones, you can save website links to your home screen, and click them like an app. This can help you access these easier.

While you are doing this, it is important to engage with **Resources for increasing general ecological knowledge**. Some of the best content for our region is on TikTok.

- **@nativeplantforyou** is a plant identifier from Lower Alabama
- **@lillybyrd27** is a botanist in the Florida Panhandle
- **@nativeplanttok** is a conservationist in North Alabama

It is important to remember that **Sometimes, knowing if a plant is native can be very complicated**. Lets use Florida Betony (*Stachys floridana*) as an example.

- Florida Betony is definitely native to south and central Florida. Most botanists agree that it is native to north Florida and the Florida Panhandle. Botanists widely agree that it was not historically present further away, like in Tennessee, but it is there now. Whether or not it was historically present in Lower Alabama and South Georgia is debated. We know indigenous peoples in Lower Alabama used it, and spread its range prior to colonization. That said, most of the time we refer to a native plant, we mean something that was native to an area prior to colonization. So, is Florida Betony native to Lower Alabama? We don't know. It is complicated. We have to use our own judgement to decide if we should plant it. I choose to plant it.

Step 3. Remove Invasive Species

Why Remove Invasive Species?

- **Invasive species displace native species and lead to their extinction. This leads to collapse of entire ecosystems.**
- Read *Nature's Best Hope* by Douglas Tallamy to learn more about why it is important (free on the app Hoopla with a Mobile Public Library Card).
- You usually want to get rid of invasives from an area completely before planting natives, otherwise the invasives might completely displace the natives. **The Guide For Growing Your Prairie** by Prairie Moon Nursery is the most concise and detailed resource available for removal and for planting.
 - <https://www.prairiemoon.com/PDF/growing-your-prairie.pdf>

Removal Tactics Covered On Next Two Pages:

- Cover, Solarize, Pull, Cut, Girdle, Burn, Compress, Graze, Biologic Controls, Conventional Herbicide, Homemade Herbicides

Remove the invasives you can. What you can't remove, keep from reproducing. Two of the most invasive understory plants in Lower Alabama are *Nandina* and *Coral Ardisia*. Both are easy to pull, but reproduce en masse. You often can't remove a whole patch in just one day. We recommend bringing bags with you on walks, and bagging the berries of these species for later disposal.

Make invasive plant removal a resource that helps you in your daily life.

- **Make baskets out of invasives.**
 - You can use any invasive vine species, or the bark from an invasive trees.
- **Forage invasives.**
 - Many invasive plants are edible. Do your research, harvest them, and don't spread them.
- **Recycle dead invasives in the garden.**
 - You can clear large areas of bamboo just by making trellises. Just be sure to let the bamboo dry first so it can't root.
 - You can compost many invasives, but you need to ensure that there are no seeds, and that it isn't a species that can reroot easily.
 - You can soak invasive seeds (or whole plants) in water in a sealed container until partly decomposed (usually 6 weeks). This will deactivate the seeds, and make a soil amendment. Don't use poisonous species.
- **Let your pets help.**
 - I have trained my chickens to eat certain invasive species, mainly Chamber Bitter and *Bidens Alba*. I have trained my dog to startle the chickens if they are foraging the same area too long. Because of this, the chickens eat the invasive species, and are startled away before they can eat the native ones, this is called rotational grazing.



But keep the cats indoors.

- **Removing invasive animals from the garden is very important.** Allowing invasive animals to thrive in your area can undo all of your hard work. We tend to refuse to do native plant installations in yards where people have outdoor cats, or who intentionally feed feral cats. **We don't want to create a biological trap.** If you do native plant restoration in your yard but don't remove feral cats, you are essentially baiting wildlife to your yard just for it to be slaughtered. Cats kill.

Read free scientific articles from around the world, focused on invasive species
<https://neobiota.pensoft.net/about>

Step 3. Remove Invasive Species

Tactics for Removal

The best tactic is always going to depend on the species and the site context. **Research! Experiment!**

There is no best way. There are only options, and considerations.

Different tactics preserve different soil microbes and lead to different plants thriving.

Consider what is within your ability, learn what is suited to your specific species composition. Act based on that.



Pulling

This method can severely reduce the numbers of an invasive species. But, it can also increase the amount of seeds that sprout that were already in the soil, and this is usually invasive plant seeds that are suited to disturbance (because species that germinate when the ground is messed up tend to be more invasive). That said, this is the easiest thing you can do, and it is the most effective option for younger individuals of most invasive species. You can do it anywhere at any time. This is what you should spend most of your time and effort on.

Covering

This is when you place cardboard, wood chips, tarps, or other materials over invasive plants to starve them of light and eradicate them. This kills a lot of stuff, but some invasive root systems and many invasive seeds can just wait in the soil until after, or spring up through the layers given enough time. It preserves some aspects of the soil microbiome, but eradicates others. It usually activates less invasive seeds from the soil than pulling does. It can be hard to be selective about which species are removed.

Girdling

This is when you remove a section of bark completely around the trunk of a tree. This is not always effective on plants that will make a new trunk, like Tallow Tree. However, this is very effective for managing Mimosa trees. It will send shoots from below the girdle, but not usually the roots. Break the shoots off every few months until they cease (usually one year). This method is good because it leaves standing dead trees that are useful for habitat.

Cutting

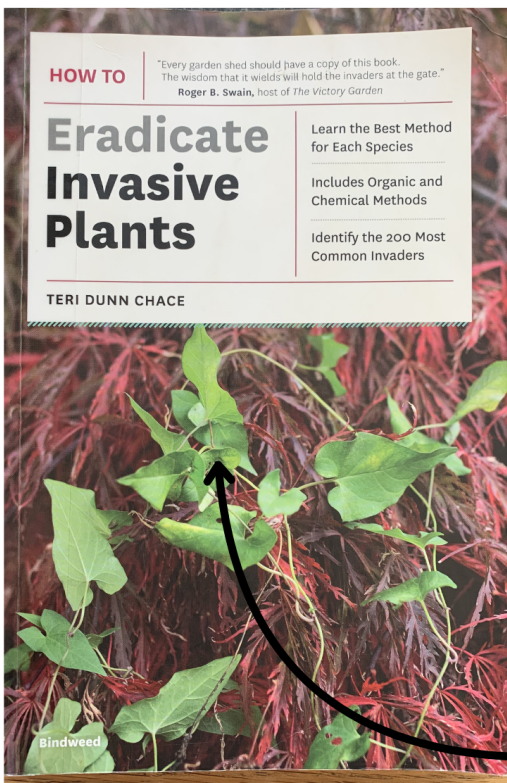
This gets rid of some invasive species, especially if you do it regularly. But a lot of the time, it makes plants harder to remove by other methods, especially pulling, because they tend to focus on spreading and growing their root systems after being cut. Persistence is key.

Solarizing

This is when you bake invasive plants by heating up the ground with glass or specialized plastics. It works well for killing plants, but it isn't easy to be selective when using it on large scale. It is hard on soil microbes. It is hard to safely use large enough glass pieces without them shattering and making the soil dangerous to work in, especially for food production. Using plastic tends to lead to the plastic degrading and entering the soil. That said, using this with small glass panels is incredibly effective at removing invasive species.

Boiling Water

- It can occasionally help to keep a stump from sprouting, and might kill some small seedlings and annuals. But it can also increase seed sprouting rates of some invasive species. Most of the time does nothing to hardy invasive plants. It can kill fragile natives near them. It kills beneficial soil microbes, but usually in a small enough area that they can return easily.



Want to learn more?

The book **How To Eradicate Invasive Plants** by Teri Chace is Available at Mobile Public Library

Just be careful, not every plant listed in the book is invasive

Step 3. Remove Invasive Species

Burning

This is the absolute best thing you can do for our local landscapes, provided you have removed ladder fuels (plants that will bring the fire to the canopy layer). Burning is not possible in some situations, especially close to buildings. It requires expertise. Also, some invasive species love fire and will spread after, especially Cogon Grass. Learn more about how to get licensed for controlled burns on page 12.

Compression

Most things die if you put enough weight on them. There are some native plants adapted to recover from this, especially plants that lived in areas where there were bison, and sometimes plants that live around gopher tortoise burrows or beaver and alligator slides. However, compression seriously limits what species can return to a landscape, and can damage ground long term, especially in its ability to host diverse species. Driving over Cogon Grass can be very effective. B

Grazing

Sometimes letting teams of livestock eat the plants in an area helps get rid of invasive species. But most grazing animals aren't native either, and the plants that respond well to this aren't always native, and sometimes reproduce heavily to fill an area that was recently grazed. Maintaining these flocks can often take so many resources that it causes more issues for native plants than are viable. But if done well, it works well.

Biologic controls

This is when a species (usually non-native) is introduced to limit the population of another (usually non-native) species. These can be incredibly useful, or they can just introduce new invasive species while not eradicating the one they were meant to. Never, ever do this without many years and many teams of dedicated researchers studying it and then finally saying it is useful. This is the most potentially harmful thing on this list.

Conventional Herbicide

This is the most effective way to remove invasives resistant to other methods, but it can cause some issues. This is often seen as a last resort. That said, not using it when it needs to be used often just leads to a situation where more of it has to be used at another time, causing even more harm. The other downside is that using herbicides means you can't forage, taking away another avenue for removal. There are many different herbicides, some affecting certain plants or groups of plants, others affecting different stages in a plant's life cycle, or being absorbed in different parts of the plant. Some herbicides are disastrous if used near bodies of water, others are designed to mitigate this issue. Some herbicides stay in the soil for just a few months, others last decades or longer. All herbicides have different impacts based on the dosage and formulation. Selective application is often possible. Research and training are the key here.

Homemade Herbicides

These are often unstudied, meaning we don't know what harms or uses they might have. That said, many of their component ingredients are well studied. For instance, most homemade herbicides call for pouring salt and soap into the soil. This might kill the invasives, but it usually also prevents you from planting anything else, because salt accumulates in the soil and breaks down cell walls of plants that try to grow there.

Tactics for Removal



Alabama Extension Guides for Invasive Species Removal and Herbicide Use

[https://www.aces.edu/
blog/tag/2026-year-of-
invasive-plants-
resources/](https://www.aces.edu/blog/tag/2026-year-of-invasive-plants-resources/)

Further information on Herbicide Training in Alabama

<https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/counties-statewide/alabama-private-applicator-permit-and-training-information/>

Direct link to online herbicide training program (costs \$60)

<https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/private-applicator/alabama-private-applicator-online-training-program/>

Invasive plants are harmful, and need to be removed. That said, it's important to remember that people did this too. It's not their fault that we brought them here. You don't need to hate them to remove them.

Step 4. Revitalize Native Species.

Here is a vague and imperfect timeline of **what native plant gardening looks like for the average person** (especially someone without much money to spend.) The rest of Step 4 will be elaboration on these concepts, links to resources, and elaborations on common questions that arise while doing it.

In your first year

- Start thinking of where you want to plant things.
- Remove as many invasive species as you can from the space. Ideally, you will remove high spreaders first, and then go section to section removing all of them.
- Acquire a few plants of several different species you want to grow. (Water all the time!)
- Then, when they go to seed, collect the seeds. (Label them!)
- During this time, collect seeds from as many native plants as you can. Label them! (And read the honorable harvest from Braiding Sweet Grass!
- Save containers for starting seeds. My favorite are large plastic catering trays. But you can use milk jugs, vinegar bottles, or whatever else.
- Start Composting!
- Either buy or make your own potting soil, or use another seed starting medium. Experiment with different options.

In your second year.

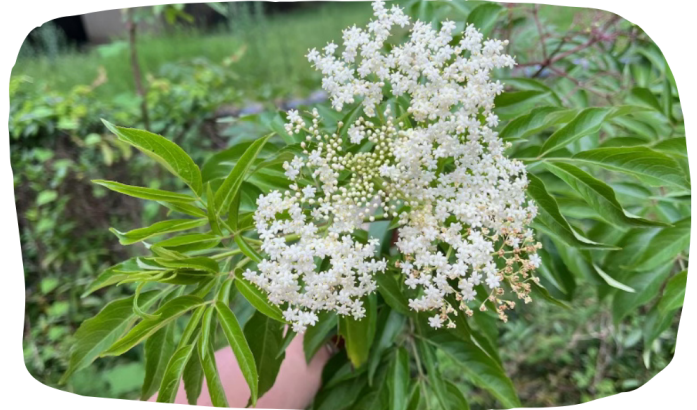
- Stratify seeds in the winter. (Winter sowing, plug trays, fridge bags, etc.) you can start in December or early January.
- When the seeds start germinating, you can move them to larger pots, or you can plant them in the ground.
- Watch out for any invasive that spring up in your bed. It will happen. You will not have gotten everything. And new seeds will blow in.
- Keep going.

Think about Maintenance

Nothing in life is free of maintenance, and native plant installations are no exception. That said, if done well, the maintenance can be relatively light and fun, and add benefit to your life. Well planned maintenance routines also lead into each other, and each project supplies materials for the next. Most of good maintenance comes from good planning. But just remember, maintenance is how you show something you love it, and how you spend time with it. If you plant a garden you like, pulling things out of it won't feel so much like a chore. Maintenance is also a series of trade offs. Clearing debris can keep a habitat healthy, but it can also take away key resources. However, there are a few things that are pretty much always good practice. I strongly recommend regularly edging around your native plant beds to help reduce invasive species intrusion.

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/garden-cleanup-for-pollinators-trim-perennial-stems-in-their-first-winter>

Start by grounding yourself in ecological principals. Read **Braiding Sweetgrass** by Robin Wall Kimmerer (free on the app Hoopla with a Mobile Public Library Card).



Choose a small area to plant. You don't need ton have your own space, **There are plenty of community gardens, public parks, and private projects accepting volunteers.** If you want help finding these places, contact the [Lower Alabama Native Plant Society](#) on Facebook or the [Mobile Urban Growers](#) at mobileurbangrowers@gmail.com. If you want to garden clandestinely on land that you don't have permission for, we recommend crimepaysbutbotanydoesnt.com. Often, you will start by planting the areas you removed invasives from.

Observe the space you will be working in.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself about it.

- **What would this space have looked like prior to colonization?**
 - Most of the non-wetlands in our area would have been a mosaic of grasslands, prairies, savannas, open forests, and thickets. Most of our wetlands would have been marshes, bogs, and swamps. Try to observe intact examples of these ecosystems within our region, and utilize that to imagine what your restoration space might have been before. You might not get it exactly the same, that's okay. Make informed decisions.
- **What actions would have kept this place looking that way prior to colonization?**
 - Examples; Fire keeping the landscape open to light. Grazing animals trampling the ground and selectively eating certain plants or other animals. Predators keeping animals from eating all of one species. Beavers flooding areas. Foraging creating selective pressure. etc
- **How much water does the space get? Where does the water go? Does any water flow into the space?**
 - <https://www.harvestingrainwater.com/>
- **What is the soil made of?**
 - <https://www.thrivelot.com/resources/ultimate-guide-to-native-plant-soil-compatibility>

Step 4. Revitalize Native Species.

What to Plant and How.



Starting Seeds? Most native plant seeds require a cold, wet period before they can sprout. Dry seeds don't sprout!

Two common options:

- Place seeds on a paper towel inside a not-quite-sealed bag in your fridge. Keep moist but not soaking. When sprouted, put in small pots called plug-trays. This requires diligence.
- Save old translucent & transparent containers (like hard plastic rotisserie chicken containers, catering trays, or bottles from milk, soda, or vinegar). Remove top half. Insert wet soil. Sprinkle seeds. Put top back on, leave outside over winter for 1 to 3 months. Plant or pot seedlings when 1-2 inches tall. Or, scatter rest of seeds and water once a few have germinated.

Need Wood Chips? Contact Mobile Urban Growers about the pile at the Taylor Park Community Garden.

Planting over lawn? Prairie Up has a good quick guide (free resource)

- <https://prairieup.com/the-many-methods-to-eradicate-lawn>

Want to learn general garden knowledge online for free?

- https://www.lsuagcenter.com/topics/lawn_garden/master%20gardener/home-gardening-certificate-course

Replacing Boxwoods? Yaupon Holly is a native species that can be used in the same manner. The leaves produce caffeine, and can be made into tea. So trimming your bushes will also be a harvest.

Interested in gardening with carnivorous plants?

- The Savage Garden Revised by Peter D'Amato is pretty good, (although mostly about container gardening) and is available at the Mobile Public Library.

Not sure what to plant?

Home Grown National Parks has a good guide. (free)

- homegrownnationalpark.org/keystone-plants/

So does the National Wildlife Federation. (free)

- <https://nativeplantfinder.nwf.org>

Study Other Gardens!

- Native plant garden at University of South Alabama's Archeology Museum.
- @FlockFingerLakes videos on YouTube for garden tours, many native (but sadly not local).
- Study wild areas (use list from first page).
- The Lower Alabama Native Plant Society sometimes hosts garden tours.



Garden Inspiration, Design, and Planning Guides?

- Native Plants of the Southeast: A Comprehensive Guide to the Best 460 Species for the Garden (book) by Larry Mellichamp - Available at Mobile Public Library (This book is amazing)
- Wild Ones Native Garden Design (free website). <https://nativegardendesigns.wildones.org/create-your-garden-plan/>
- Matrix Garden Design (free website with links to paid classes). <https://prairieup.com/matrix-design-101/>
- The Living Landscape (book) by Rick Darke and Doug Tallamy - Available at Mobile Public Library.
- Gardening with Native Plants of the South (book) by Sally Wasowski - Available at Mobile Public Library
- Best Native Plants For Southern Gardens (book) by Gil Nelson - Available at Mobile Public Library
- Planting in a Post-Wild World (book) by Thomas Rainer and Claudia West. <https://www.thomasrainer.com/book>

Learn about plant-pollinator relationships, bloom times, and more, tailored to the Coastal Plain. (free resource)

(Not everything in here is native, always verify) <https://pollinator.org/PDFs/Guides/OuterCoastal.May.2024.rx9.pdf>

More advanced research on this topic

<https://zookeys.pensoft.net/article/160796/list/1/>

Step 4. Revitalize Native Species.

Acquiring Plants and Seeds

Before you can plant you will need to **Find Native Seeds** You can often get local ecotype seeds through the Lower Alabama Native Plant Society for free. "Local ecotype" means that a plant comes from a specific area. Growing things local to you helps ensure biodiversity, and they may be better adapted.

Otherwise, **You can gather Seeds Yourself.**

- **Follow the Honorable Harvest** - Guidelines are on the Foraging page. When gathering seeds, add this further restriction, **Never Take More Than 10 Percent of Seeds.**
- **All actions are selections.** There is a lot of genetic difference between plants of the same species. When you grow or spread the seeds of a specific plant, you are making more plants with its specific genetic makeup. If you only gather seeds from one individual, this can lead to a lack of genetic diversity in your plantings (we call this a genetic bottleneck). This will make your plantings more subject to disease, and often less hardy. When gathering seeds, it is best to gather a few seeds from many different plants, from different locations, within the same locations, and at different times of the seed gathering season. Be thoughtful.
- Trespassing is usually illegal, but it is often ethical. When deciding whether to gather seeds, focus on how protected and likely to thrive the plants are, rather than who owns the land.
- When asking yourself if you should harvest seeds from a population, your greatest concern should be on how this will impact that population.

You can purchase seeds if you can't find them locally.

Roundstone Native Seed often has closer-to-local seed, but have less variety, and they sell nonnatives. Verify that you are buying natives when buying from them.

Prairie Moon Nursery mostly has midwestern ecotype seeds, but almost exclusively sell natives. They have lots of useful filters to help you search. They also show native ranges of plants and provide very helpful seed starting information. Only by plants native to our area.

You can also purchase potted plants. But you need to be careful. There is a lot of fraud in the nursery trade, and they often sell nonnative species and pretend they are native. This is especially true when buying milkweed, beautyberry, and passion flower. Always ask for the scientific name of a plant before buying, and verify range. Also, nursery stock is rarely local, and usually severely lacks in genetic diversity. That said;

Kim's Nursery in Wilmer, Alabama is a good nursery run by kind and knowledgeable people. About half of what they sell is native, and they are very helpful with plant selection. (251) 680-9426. 8160 Bluett Tanner Rd. Wilmer, Alabama. Way down a dirt road, don't be scared.

Recreative Natives in Cropwell, Alabama sells local ecotype natives from Central Alabama (Birmingham Area). (205) 966-7350 <https://recreativenatives.com/>

Rufner Mountain Native Plant Sale is a seasonal sale in Birmingham.

You can transplant existing plants. But there is often a lot to consider. Transplants have very high death rates. Taking plants from places they are thriving and not at risk is usually far more harmful than helpful, but some abundant species can be ethically sourced via transplant from abandoned areas. Use your best judgement, and really interrogate why you are transplanting these plants, and if it is something you are doing for them, or for you. That said;

- The best circumstance for transplanting is when removal of a native plant is part of a necessary maintenance task. For instance, we intentionally plant fast-spreading natives on the edge of our paths, and we transplant them out of the paths for distribution and path maintenance.
- When pulling invasives, you occasionally end up pulling natives with them, or needing to uproot natives to remove invasive plant roots. Plant these in place if on conservation land or land that is relatively safe from development. Otherwise, plant where desired.
- Never transplant from conservation lands unless you really talk it out with the people managing those places. This is not advisable for anyone without years of experience in ecological work.
- If you know land is going to be developed, feel free to gather many of the plants. Still, leave some, in case those development plans fall through, or in case you misjudged the situation.
 - If you suspect a site is going to get developed, you can look through city permitting websites to investigate.
 - <https://mobileal-energygovpub.tylerhost.net/apps/selfservice#/search>
 - This site takes some getting used to.
 - Sometimes you can get information through the city/county planning commissions, by going to their meetings or looking through their meeting notes.
 - You usually need the address and/or parcel number
 - Find it here if in Mobile County
 - <https://mobilecopropertytax.com>,
 - Worst case, you can often find it using the map on the home-buying app Zillow.

You can clone plants you already have.

- You can divide many native plants that spread by rhizome or root from cuttings. Divided plants are the same genetic individual as the one they came from, and can be more susceptible to disease and reduce biodiversity. Dividing from multiple source locations will ensure genetic diversity.
- You can use this same principle to make runner trays, which make it much easier to propagate and spread native ground covers. Place soil in a well draining shallow tray. Place cuttings of native plants that like to spread in it. Eventually, they will grow over the sides and root into the ground. Simply cut the tray out and move it to a new area, and it will continue to spread the plant.

Step 4. Revitalize Native Species.

Know when, where, and how to plant trees.

Trees are important features of many ecosystems, but open areas are important too, and often host more species diversity.

Before planting a tree, consider;

- Is this tree native to my area? If not, is it invasive?
- Will this tree shade out other desirable species when it reaches its adult height?
- When I look at landscapes around me and compare them to the historical record of my area pre-colonization, are trees over-represented now, or under-represented?
- Refining on that same question; is the specific species I want to plant over-represented now, or under-represented?
- Is this a tree species that would have been present in ecosystems like the one that was present on this specific site prior to colonization?

It is okay for us to have different priorities than perfect restoration. Sometimes we will plant for food, other times for beauty. These considerations are here to help us to understand the sorts of trade offs we might be making when planting a trees.

Free Guides for Trees and Woody Plants.

Starting Trees From Seed.

Woody plant Seed Manual by the United States Department of Agriculture.

- https://www.fs.usda.gov/rm/pubs_series/wo/wo_ah727.pdf

Planting and Establishing Woody Plants.

https://www.aces.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/ANR-0410_PlantingandEstablishingWoodyPlants_042523L-G.pdf

Woody Plant Maintenance.

https://www.aces.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ANR-0958_ManagingLandscapePlants_081222L-G.pdf

Pruning Guide.

<https://extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/fnr/fnr-506-w.pdf>

Training and Pruning Fruit Trees.

https://www.aces.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/ANR-0053-K_TrainingandPruningFruitTrees_093025L-G.pdf

Tree Identification Guide.

Native Trees of the Southeast: An Identification Guide.(Book) by L. Katherine Kirkman, Claud L. Brown, and Donald J. Leopold (available at the Mobile Public Library.)

Further Plans and Guides.

- International Society of Arborists Planting Guides
 - <https://www.isa-arbor.com/education/onlineresources/cadplanningspecifications/>

Information about trees.



Step 5. Return Historic Patterns to the Landscape.

Overview

Ecosystems are made of many component parts interacting with each other. These parts develop complex interactions over long periods of time. When some of the parts have been removed, the other parts have to adapt to that. Sometimes, they can't, and more parts disappear. This creates a compounding effect, and if enough parts are removed, the ecosystem can collapse. Species that relied upon that ecosystem start to go extinct, never to be seen again. This limits the amount of diversity available when new ecosystems start to form, which limits the complexity of the new ecosystem.

This is a process that happens on its own in nature; however, human activities have caused it to happen far faster and at a greater scale than it otherwise has, except during mass-extinction level events.

That said, humans are also capable of helping these ecosystems recover much faster than they otherwise would. The role of ecologically minded people is to learn about the component parts of healthy ecosystems that evolved in their area, and to help restore those component parts. This ensures the greatest likelihood that the most number of species possible will survive long term.

It is a constant battle against the forces that dominate our world. We must be strategic, informed, and persistent. Luckily, we are not starting from scratch. We still have intact, well managed local ecosystems to learn from. We have the groundwork of generations of botanists, ecologists, and naturalists. And, luckily, there are many indigenous communities who have spent 10+ thousand years learning to live with these landscapes without destroying them, and many of these communities are eager to continue this work, and often are willing to teach outsiders. The work of the world is endless, but it is also endlessly attainable.



Understanding Historic Patterns.

Native plants are the foundation that everything else is built upon. But other ecological features are important. Learning to incorporate these into our restoration projects, or to recognize when they are already there, is a key part of our work.

Over time, ecosystems that contain woody plants also accumulate **Deadwood**. This wood can help to maintain moisture in the soil, and it hosts a large variety of insect life. **Standing Deadwood**, known as Snags, provides a different role in the ecosystem than deadwood on the ground. Trees that rot while standing are necessary for some species to reproduce (like pileated woodpeckers). Large trees that rot from the inside out also provide key habitat. Old age, fire, disease, and animal activities can all lead to deadwood. Fallen trees create **Mounds and Pits**, forming unique habitat for ferns and mosses, and small bodies of water that host nesting amphibians.

Beavers add deadwood to an ecosystem by felling and girdling trees. They also expand wetland habitats, creating spaces for wet hardwood forests and swamps, while also creating open areas for more light-loving species. These wetlands can act as fire breaks, and are also important breeding habitat for many species.

Ephemeral wetlands can also exist in places without beavers. These are called **Vernal Pools**. In Alabama, these are important nesting habitat for our native amphibians. The temporary nature of these spaces keeps them from being overrun by predators like turtles and fish. Partially because of these vernal pools, Alabama has more salamander diversity than anywhere else in the world.

Beaver dams, vernal pools, and other landscape features help water to enter back into our **Aquifers** (large masses of underground water). In some places, this leads to **Seepage Ponds** and **Bogs** forming at the bases of hills, which can host rare aquatic plants and carnivorous plants due to their very clean water and low nutrient availability. Healthy and full aquifers also lead to the formation of **Springs**, which add clean water to a landscape, and help manage the water to sediment ratio in local waterways.

All that you touch,
You change.
All that you change,
Changes you.
The only lasting truth,
Is change.
-Octavia Butler

Step 5. Return Historic Patterns to the Landscape.

If **Disturbance** is prevented, many of our local ecosystems will end up being closed canopy forests, made up of just a few, tall species, and with very little life in the understory. However, historically, very few southeastern locations could go for very long without disturbance. Humans, lightning strikes, and other natural factors led to **Fire**. Fire kills many things, and burns away dead material that covers the soil. This creates more standing deadwood, and lets light reach the ground. Most trees become rarer on the landscape, but lower growing shrubs, grasses, and flowering plants are able to flourish in far greater diversity. This also allows for different animals to thrive, as there is more food available on the ground. In our area, one such animal is the **Gopher Tortoise**.



They dig giant burrows to live in, and often dig far more burrows than they use. This leads to an ecosystem of many holes, and many creatures use those holes for a variety of purposes; but especially to hide during fires.

Frequent fire leads to a unique makeup of **Soil Nutrients**, as dead material cannot rot in place for as long. This leads to more specialized plant species, some of whom even require fire for their seeds to sprout. Many of the plants that arise from these conditions are useful to humans, leading them to live in these areas. However, the soil is not always suited to agriculture unless amended. In an ideal situation, humans amend some of the soil to create high production food plots, and they also caretake non-amended areas to ensure high diversity, harvesting from that environment in ways that benefit it or do not harm it. Humans using native plants in cyclical and sustainable ways, while paying attention to how the ecosystem and those specific plants react, becomes part of the functioning of the ecosystem.

Humans and other predators **Hunt**. Native predator species and native prey species tend to have somewhat stable patterns of interacting, and native plant communities have often evolved to situate their lifecycles around those patterns. Humans have been a part of this for thousands of years in our area. That said, humans can also mimic certain patterns that extinct or extirpated predator species applied to the area. We can also reintroduce many of those species. In the meantime, at the very least, we can work to keep herbivore populations in proportion to the amount of habitat there is for them to occupy. Most of the time, this means killing deer.

Many native plants have adapted to longstanding human activities in ways that are now necessary for their survival, or otherwise increase their thriving. Some native plants reproduce better and spread further when foraged from. Often, the act of foraging itself allows for humans to spend time with native plants in ways that help those humans understand the plants better, and therefor increase their ability to utilize them in restoration projects. The appropriate usage of native plant material to meet human needs can reduce the amount of extractive, unsustainable land-use that is required to otherwise meet our needs. This reduction in landscape destruction also helps these ecosystems.



Step 5. Return Historic Patterns

How to Bring Fire Back To Your Landscape.

If you are a large private landowner, the South Alabama Land Trust (SALT) will sometimes agree to do controlled burns on your property. Some municipal fire departments may also help. But most of the time, you either need to hire someone, find a volunteer, or do it yourself. Regardless of which of these avenues you take, it is important to make sure that anyone working the burn is appropriately trained and has experience. The training to do controlled burns is the same training as doing wildland firefighting. If you have received this training, you can volunteer to be added to the lists of people who are called when a burn is needed on conservation lands, such as those listed on page 1. Once you have this experience, you may feel comfortable burning on your own. If you need an additional trained person to help with a prescribed burn, call Cosmos Radiance at 334-596-0638.

There are multiple routes for training.



National Wildfire Coordinating Group

- NWCG.gov

Coordinates wildland fire training, training is same for wildland firefighting and controlled burns. Offers virtual, self-directed online courses (prices vary). They also offer mixed inperson/online courses, but this is usually done for government agencies, government programs, nonprofits, and other larger groups. Their website has a publications section that is useful, and has resources for anyone who wants to do a burn.

Additional Resources from NWCG

Glossary of Terms for Wildland Fire

- <https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/pms205/nwcg-glossary-of-wildland-fire-pms-205>

Incident Response Pocket Guide(IPCG)

Hand booklet with all the information you need on a fire.

- <https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/pms461/2025-nwcg-incident-response-pocket-guide-irpg>

Alabama Forestry Commission Training Course

- <https://forestry.alabama.gov/Pages/Fire/BurnManager.aspx>
32 hour prescribed burn manager course. Teaches safety, planning, and legality. Available twice a year in Foley, Alabama. Cost is \$150 for initial class, \$50 for recertification after 5 years. Enables you to get insurance on your burns.



There are entry level programs if you want to work in conservation and learn about controlled burns.

Student Conservation Association

- theSCA.org

Has training programs available to applicants age 18 to early thirties. Get paid, get some student loan forgiveness. Gives following certifications:

- S130 (wildland firefighter training)
- S190 (introduction to wildland fire behavior)
- S212 (wildland fire chainsaw.)
- Wilderness First-Aid and CPR

Coastal Alabama Fire Cohort

Work directly under The Nature Conservancy and live on site at Splinter Hill Bog. Work from January to April. Travel to assist with other burns in Lower Alabama.

GulfCorps

Apply in June/July, work from September to February. Gives experience in carpentry, invasive plant management, trail maintenance, herbicide application, and career development skills.

Step 5. Return Historic Patterns to the Landscape.

Foraging.

Learn in Person Locally!

Cedar and Moon Apothecary

- Most plant walks are easier to find on the facebook page, but there is also a website
- <https://www.cedarandmoonapothecary.com/>

Bee-Lightful Botanicals

- <https://www.beelightfulbotanicals.com/>

Blue Boy Herbs

- <https://blueboyherbs.com/>

Mushroom Man Tan

- <https://www.mushroommantan.com/>

Learn Online and From Books!

Sam Thayer's Field Guide to Wild Edible Plants of Eastern & Central North America (Book, \$ 30)

- Single most comprehensive guide for foragers. Includes lots of information from someone who has eaten every plant he recommends. Not all recommendations are local to us, but enough are to make it highly useful.

Gather: The Foraging App by Feral Foraging (App, \$60 a year for most features)

- Alabama based creator focused on our area.

Both Sam Thayer and Feral Foraging have YouTube and TikTok videos you can watch and learn from for free.

@LegacyWildernessAcademy on YouTube

- Alabama forager who also discusses medicinal usage, very in-depth.

Alexis Nicole (The Black Forager) on YouTube and TikTok.

- Forager who travels the US and covers many topics.

Practical Self Reliance has good foraging articles.

- <https://practicalselfreliance.com/category/foraging/>

The Honorable Harvest

by Dr, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass

"Know the ways of the ones who take care of you, so that you may take care of them.

Introduce yourself. Be accountable as the one who comes asking for life.

Ask permission before taking. Abide by the answer.

Never take the first. Never take the last.

Take only what you need.

Take only that which is given.

Never take more than half. Leave some for others.

Harvest in a way that minimizes harm.

Use it respectfully. Never waste what you have taken.

Share.

Give thanks for what you have been given.

Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken.

Sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever."

**Foraging invasives is an effective removal tactic, and what an honorable harvest means for this is going to be different*

Just because something is edible doesn't mean it is safe for you to eat.

Allergies, intolerances, and skin reactions can happen with any food, including wild foods. The standard way to check if you will have a reaction to something is called the **Foragers Test**. You do this by increasingly interacting with the plant material you want to consume in ways that are progressively more likely ways to cause a reaction, with ample time in between to develop symptoms (a few hours to a full day). Start by simply touching the plant. Then, rub the piece you want to eat on your skin. Then, rub it on your lips. Then, rub it on your tongue. Then, eat a small amount. Then, eat progressively larger amounts. If you have access to an epi-pen, it is a good idea to keep it on hand. If you don't, this website has a guide for making epi-pens.

<https://fourthievesvinegar.org/epipencil-autoinjector>



**Do Not Use Chat GPT for Foraging. Using Chat GPT for Foraging Can Kill You.
Do Not Trust An AI Overview With Your Life. Use Resources Made By Humans.**

Step 6. Integrate the modern world and ecological relationships

Using intentionally constructed systems built around native plants to supply for our material needs is a key element by which we can sustainably live into the future. A better world seems impossible until we imagine it. But once you can picture it, can see it in your minds eye overlaid over the world in front of you, you will fight for it with every breath remaining. You will not be able to live without living to build it, with your own to hands. **Take a moment to imagine with me.**

Imagine that the year is 2035 (less than ten years from now), and you are going to a giant concert in Mobile, at a park called Brookley By The Bay. The massive field is usually packed full of blooming flowers; species from the pine savanna, the prairie, the native grasslands. But this concert has been planned for many months, and so city workers and volunteers came and did a prescribed burn on the field. There are already a few patches of seedlings spinging back, and people mostly don't set their blankets on those. Parts of the grasslands outside the concert area are still intact, and hundreds of butterflies can be seen at any given moment. You enjoy the concert, and you pack up. Throughout the year, parkgoers have been encouraged to gather seeds, and store them in a communal building on site. Now, as they wrap up their revelry and gather their garbage, they spread seeds back across the ground. The park doesn't have some of the more delicate species that cant take trampling, and experiments are ongoing for the best ways to time the burns. But still, the place is a place of beauty, and fun, and it fills you with love. (This is pretty much what the city has planned for this park.)

Imagine for a moment that an entire neighborhood was planted with hickory trees. During season, volunteers would drive around and gather all the hickory nuts. They would take them to someones house and process them together, making hickory nut milk, and then distributing it back to the neighborhood, or to the food bank. Over time, they design new vehicle trailers that make it easier to gather the nuts, and new machines that make it easier to process them. Over many generations, they selectively grow hickory trees that produce even more. Perhaps they begin to design their roads in ways that keep the nuts from being crushed, and make them easier to harvest, and now they can plant the trees along the roads, increasing growing area. The byproducts of this process become key resources. They use the shells of the nuts to make strong composite wood, which they use to make shoe soles, and roof decking, and furniture. They use the husks of the nuts to smoke other foods and add flavor, or they grind them down to make a potting soil. Every 50 years or so, a new set of hickories is planted between the old, and allowed to grow up. As the old trees start to lose production, another 50 years later, they are logged, and used to build houses. The younger generation are already fruiting, and the older can be replaced, keeping the cycle going forward.

(There are many high-production hickory trees on/around Dogwood Dr. in Mobile. The abandoned CVS on the corner could easily be used as a processing and distribution center).



Imagine for a moment that the landscaping around all of our parks, apartments, libraries, and any other buildings necessary to a city, are landscaped with native edible plants. Imagine going to do some electrical work down at a free public tool library, and outside are planted sunchokes. You pull up 5 of the tall, yellow flowered plants, and you put the delicious roots in your bag. On your bike ride home, you gather muscadine leaves, and you pick up your universal-free-hickory-nut-milk (from the previous example). You make a soup for your family, without even needing to go somewhere like a grocery store.



Step 6. Integrate the modern world and ecological relationships

Learning, Listening, and Talking to Others



It helps to talk to strangers in the woods!

Much of what I have learned about plants and ecology has come from talking to people I meet outside. It is best to assume that everyone knows one thing about plants that you don't. Try to find out what it is!

Even if you don't use Reddit, you might want to for this.

- One of the largest online communities dedicated to native plants is [r/NativePlantGardening](#) on Reddit. To post there, you need a Reddit account. You also need to include your area in the tags of your post. If using a phone app, you made need to make your post, and then click the three-dot menu and select "Change Post Flair." Scroll to the bottom, and type "Lower Alabama"

If You Use Facebook:

- **ReWild Alabama** is a page dedicated to learning about native plants and invasion ecology in Alabama.
- **Weekly's Flora Of the Southeastern United States** has a facebook page.

Broader Organizations can help host broader conversations.

Here is a list of some non-local groups that host helpful online events.

- Xerxes Society
- Institute for Social Ecology
- Wild Ones
- Homegrown National Parks

New To Podcasts? Don't start at the beginning, or with the most recent episode. Start with an episode that feels interesting to you. And don't be afraid to skip past advertisements.

Talk To Other Enthusiasts.

Finding Local Events.

- **Gulf Coast Nature Journal** on facebook posts a list of ecology events happening every month, mostly in Coastal Mississippi
- **Green Drinks** at Braided River Brewing in Mobile is a monthly ecology meetup with many experts and lay people.
- **The Lower Alabama Native Plant Society** on facebook hosts free plant events.
- The **County Extension Agents** host free events, and can be called or emailed at any time to ask for help with any gardening or ecology questions.
- The **Mobile Botanical Garden** has educational events on the first Friday of every month, sometimes relevant to native plants.
- The **Gulf Coast Zoo** has a seed swap every January, with many ecologically minded folks.
- More groups listed on page 13.

If you like podcasts, you can learn more about native plants and ecology by listening to the following:

- **Future Ecologies** is a high production quality listen that focuses on ecology. It is nuanced and informative, often featuring national experts and indigenous ecologists.
- **In Defense of Plants** is an interview based show focused on talking to botanists about their research, and it is surprisingly parsable to the lay person.
- **The Poor Proles Almanac** is mostly focused around agro-ecology, which is essentially the study of how we can build sustainable and scalable food systems using native plants, incorporating scientific approaches and indigenous stewardship principles. It also covers the history of different farming practices and related social movements.
- **Low Tech Institute Podcast** focuses on individual and community scale integration of technology, food production, and native plant ecosystems.
- **All My Relations** is a podcast focused on indigenous justice and land rights.
- **Native Plants Healthy Planet** is a podcast run by Pinelands Nursery, a north eastern native plant nursery, where they casually talk together (buzz episodes) or interview other native plant people.
- **Back Yard Ecology** Covers many of the topics in this guide, and other similar suggestions for the home gardener.
- **For The Wild** is an interview podcast focused on ecology, land defense, and decolonization.

Credit and caveat page

Thank you for the help!

The following people submitted information and/or edits for this guide.

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Photo Credits! (used with permission)

Cosmos Radiance - Controlled Burns
Mary Smith - Gopher Tortoises
Karrie Arnold - Woodchip mulching
Jess Hamlin - Wand Goldenrod
Tree Hugger
Fallen Tree
HollyRose Baker - Invasive species removal
Flower pictures
Seed Starting
Foraging pictures

Disclaimer: We are not paid by anyone mentioned, but have received free items from some of the services listed here, and we have done free work for them. I, HollyRose, am friends with a lot of the people working on the resources listed. That is how it works. Community builds connections and helps each other do the work. My friendship may have influenced my selection of these resources.

Now, a word on AI. At the beginning, we recommended iNaturalist. You might notice that the app describes itself as using AI to identify plants. Without getting too technical, I want to break down what that means, and how it is different from something like Chat GPT or Google Lens.

iNaturalist uses an algorithm that compares what is on your screen to a database of curated pictures. This model is small enough that it doesn't consume a great deal of energy. And, because it is curated, it doesn't get poisoned by fake images, misidentifications, or conflation very often. There are botanists and lay experts around the world who go through and help verify identifications. Also, the designers of the algorithm make a concerted effort to use images that are in the public domain or that they otherwise have permission for. Lets compare that to something like Chat GPT. Chat GPT isn't made for plant identification. Chat GPT isn't comparing to a curated list of identified and labeled plants, it is comparing to every picture it has access to, which is almost the entirety of the internet. This is not only inaccurate, it is ecologically devastating. Chat GPT and AI like it require so much water and electricity that states are damming more rivers, building more power plants, and destroying acres and acres of habitat for data centers.

With great hesitancy, I used Chat GPT for the very first time to make sure my comparison here was accurate. I uploaded a picture of the plant known as leafy elephant's foot (*Elephantopus carolinianus*), and asked "What plant is this?". Chat GPT told me it was a blue mistflower, and that it was safe to consume it. While it is true that both plants have medicinal uses, the medicinal uses listed by Chat GPT were not consistent with real uses of blue mistflower, and blue mistflower and leafy elephant's foot are not interchangeable. iNaturalist provided the correct identification, with a link to further information, comparison pictures, and suggestions for other plants it could be. It also showed a map of other observations of the same plant around the city. iNaturalist isn't perfect, and its creators admit that. But it is far better than using generative AI.

Chat GPT is the wrong tool for this job, and it is inevitably going to get people killed by telling them to eat something they shouldn't. If you use Chat GPT for plant identification, you should assume that everything it is telling you is a lie. Same with the Google AI Overview. If you see someone use these resources and regurgitate them back to you, try to educate them, and take any prior information they have given you with a huge grain of salt.

The algorithm used by iNaturalist is not really "AI", and in fact, many of the things we call AI are technologies that have almost nothing to do with each other. The main reasons I recommend iNaturalist is that it is free, somewhat reliable, has few negative impacts, and also is used by restoration workers and botanists to find plants for source and study. That said, there are other resources you can use if you can put a little bit of money towards this endeavor that are not algorithmically based. The app FloraQuest is available for different regions, and helps guide the user through plant keys to provide identification. Any sufficiently advanced botanical learner will likely need to learn keys eventually, and this is a wonderful place to start.