

# GEORGIA MOUNTAIN RESEARCH & EDUCATION CENTER

The Georgia Mountain Research and Education Center is located in Union County, Georgia, three miles south of Blairsville on Hwy 19/129. The Center is used by University of Georgia faculty to conduct ongoing research and education projects and locally by the Community Council of the GMRE Center for monthly adult education programs and seasonal field experiences for kindergarten through high school students.



**In 1930** the Georgia Mountain Branch Experiment Station was established as a branch of the Georgia Experiment Station in Griffin, Ga. The initial 210-acre tract of mostly wooded land (only 35 acres were cultivated) was originally leased from Bob Christopher and purchased a few years later by the University System of Georgia. Early research projects at the station focused on the potential for vegetables and fruits in an effort to upgrade the economy of the area. The station was expanded in the late 1930s to include field research on feed grains, forages, soil fertility, dairying and sheep. During this time a soil test laboratory, fruit stand and community cannery were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps and Federal Emergency Relief Administration.

**In 1938**, the station entered into a cooperative agreement with the Tennessee Valley Authority known as the GA-TVA. This partnership promoted economic usage of TVA fertilizers in the valley counties of Georgia. Station personnel produced results to illustrate that yields of feed grains and forages could be greatly increased with good fertilizer and proper variety selections. Consequently, a farmer in Union County was the first in Georgia to produce 100 bushels of corn per acre. Research conducted from 1950 through 1990 produced gains in apple production, forage evaluations for sheep production, soil-test-crop-yield correlations, variety-testing of horticultural crops, beef cattle stocker feeding and swine production.



**In 2000**, the station was renamed the Georgia Mountain Research and Education Center. Currently, more than 40 research or extension projects are on-going involving: apples, beef cattle, blueberries, collards, field corn, forages, greenhouse pests, peaches, pumpkins, soybeans, turfgrass, woody ornamentals and wheat. In 2004, aided by funds raised by the Community Council, the Center began to offer a series of adult outreach seminars and hands-on field experiences for area school children. Several gardens, now completed, were also begun to expand preservation efforts at the Center. Currently, the GMRE Center grounds cover 415 acres of orchards, test plots, pasture land, gardens, historic sites, and forests.

## Community Council of the GMRE Center

The Community Council was formed in 2003 to expand the outreach and service of the GMRE Center to the mountain region. To fulfill this purpose, volunteers work through three program committees – Preservation, Education, and Outreach. Since its inception, several thousand north Georgia and western North Carolina students and adults have benefited from the Council's programs. The operating budget of the Community Council is funded by gifts from friends through an annual campaign. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation today!

# PRESERVATION

The preservation committee informs the public about the importance of preserving the diversity of native plant species unique to the Southern Appalachian Mountain region through programs, hands-on activities, and displays at the GMRE Center.

## Appalachian Ethnobotanical Garden & Woodland Medicine Trail

The Ethnobotanical Garden at the GMRE Center serves as a living display of plants that the Cherokee and early settlers of the area used for food, fiber, and medicine. Visitors to the garden can begin at the covered bridge, cross the creek, and continue on the boardwalks to the planting areas and viewing platforms. Hand stamped, clay signs have been created, identifying the plants and a self-guided tour brochure is also available.



## Native Plant Rescue Project

Pink lady's slippers... trillium... cardinal flower... ginseng... bloodroot... goldenseal... these are just a few of the incredible wildflowers and special plants native to the Southern Appalachian Mountain region. Very often they go unnoticed and end up in harm's way at new building sites. The Plant Rescue Team provides trained volunteers to identify native plants at building/development sites. The plants can then be preserved at the site or moved to a safe location. The Team also provides informative programs and literature on native plant identification and preservation to interested groups. Preserving native plants enhances the value of property, benefits wildlife, particularly birds and butterflies, and helps maintain the scenic quality and natural balance in the mountains.

## Educational Seminars

The Preservation Committee works in cooperation with the Outreach Committee to sponsor seminars such as "Plants of the Cherokee" and "Seed-Saving Gardening with Heirloom Vegetables and Flowers" and hands-on workshops such as "Making Plant Medicines" (pictured left) and "Cooking on the Wild Side" (salad pictured below).



## Heirloom & Bog Gardens

An Heirloom Garden and a Bog Garden are currently being established at the GMRE Center. The Heirloom Garden is near the Jarrett House and will display heirloom vegetables, flowers, and herbs. The goal of the Bog Garden project is to preserve plant species typically associated with these once common mountain wetland areas.



# EDUCATION

The education committee of the Community Council provides free educational programs to students of area public, private and home schools.



## Johnny Appleseed

In the fall, a program for kindergarten students is offered at the GMRE Center. A team of 40 volunteers conducts a 3-stage rotational program on three days. The objectives of the Johnny Appleseed program are to:

- explain how apples grow
- teach the importance of the apple industry to the mountain region
- provide an opportunity for students to travel through an apple orchard and learn about Johnny Appleseed

## Birds Program

Birds is a program for first graders presented in the local schools and sponsored by the Birdyard Seed Company. This program features three 20-minute rotating study sessions: hummingbirds, bird identification, and how to make a bird feeder.

## Cabbage Patch Project

An early spring giant cabbage contest for third graders uses plants to teach gardening skills. Committee educators visit 3rd grade classrooms to distribute plants and present a mini-gardening lesson. Students receive one plant to grow at home and plant care instructions. At the end of the project, students take a picture of themselves with their cabbage and send the photograph with an entry form to program sponsor, Bonnie Farms to be eligible for a \$1,000 state prize.

## All About Trees

This full day program allows students to rotate through seven 20-minute classes. Session topics include: native tree identification, parts of a tree, uses of the forest, and forest ecology. This field experience is unique in that it meets many of the state performance standards for Grade 4. As a special feature of the day, “Paul Bunyan” tells tales of his experiences as a lumberjack.



## Environmental Education Field Day

This event, which takes place at the GMRE Center in May, provides fifth grade students with a hands-on learning experience about environmental topics. Eight 20-minute sessions are taught by various agencies including the US Forest Service, Georgia Forestry Commission, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition, and the Dept. of Natural Resources. Subjects include:

- forest management and fire prevention
- aquatic food chains, water quality and watersheds
- recycling and “Leave No Trace” skills



## Arbor Day Program

The Arbor Day Program is an ongoing project of collecting and planting 90 species of native trees on the grounds of the GMRE Center. On Arbor Day, high school students have the opportunity to plant trees in a demonstration forest at the Center. This demonstration forest is used to educate children and adults on the value of trees and to serve as an area for tree identification and forest succession after a natural or manmade disturbance. Arbor Day videos are also provided for use at all local schools.

# OUTREACH

The outreach committee provides monthly educational seminars and hands-on workshops for adults. Since the Committee began offering free seminars in 2004, more than several thousand participants have benefited. Topics are based on requests from the community. Please visit the GMRE Center website for registration information and a list of current offerings: <http://www.gmrec.uga.edu>



Seminar speakers are experts in their field, and have included University of Georgia researchers, extension and faculty members.

Educational seminars and workshops are on a variety of horticultural, agricultural, and environmental topics including:

- organic vegetable gardening;
- edible native plants;
- fruit tree care & pruning;
- the science of making chocolate;
- herb gardening;
- growing pumpkins in the Blue Ridge;
- trees & shrubs for the home landscape;
- soil enrichment & composting; and
- food preservation.



Seminars are typically held in the GMRE Center auditorium on Friday mornings; however, many seminars include hands-on activities and short “field trips” out to other parts of the Center property. Some seminars have also been scheduled on Saturday mornings or weekday evenings.

## Contact Information

The Georgia Mountain Research & Education Center is located three miles south of Blairsville, GA on the east side of US Highway 19/129 South.

**Address:** 2564 GA Mountain Experiment Station Rd.  
Blairsville, GA 30512

**Phone:** 706/745-2655

**Email:** [gmrec@uga.edu](mailto:gmrec@uga.edu)

**Website:** <http://www.gmrec.uga.edu/>

The University of Georgia, Georgia Mountain Research & Education Center (GMRE Center) offers educational programs, assistance and materials to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability. An equal opportunity/affirmative action organization committed to a diverse work force.

