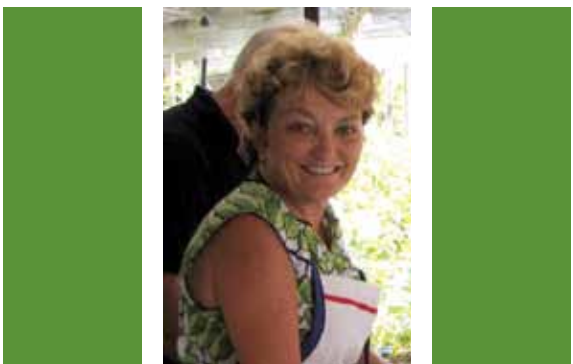




Habersham Gardens' Kitchen Flair

By Pete Mihalek



The last time *Lawn & Garden Retailer* had Habersham Gardens' Deb Harrison on the phone, it was to talk to her about the new food truck scene in Atlanta and how her garden center was benefitting from it.

This time around we placed another call into Habersham Gardens to hear more from Harrison about the role cooking plays in her garden center events.

We caught up with her the Monday after Habersham's spring open house — an event that featured Harrison's chef-like skill set.

"I fixed a fairly ambitious menu — Hawaiian pork sliders with a Hawaiian coleslaw topping, Italian white bean salad, crab quiche and all kinds of hors d'oeuvres," Harrison says.

You'll come to learn that when she says, "We're known for our connection with cooking," she means it.

Dining with the Doctor

A look at Habersham Gardens' relationship with Dr. Allan Armitage — an internationally known professor of horticulture at the University of Georgia — would be a good starting point to understand this special "connection."

"Allan is a dear friend of ours, frequent visitor and local celebrity to us," Harrison explains. Armitage has made well-attended speaking appearances at Habersham Gardens multiple times — each time culminating with a formal lunch Harrison caters.

"Now we've enlarged these lunches to include five lucky guests who attended his seminar," she says. "We have a raffle and they are selected at random and get to have lunch with him and his family in our lovely garden setting. That's really something you can do with almost any popular speaker you have."

After these formal lunches, Harrison would receive a surge of recipe requests from those at the lunch and their friends who happened to hear about it.

"People filled our Facebook page wanting to know the recipes for what I had served," she says. "That's really how I came to host my own cooking demos a couple times a year at the garden center."

The French Pot demonstration is one popular example. "I talk about the herbs that go in this

kind of container and then share some plates they might prepare," she says. Whether they attend to "make and take" or simply listen, Harrison says this type of talk gives her a chance to educate customers on herbs, especially those that are popular in the kitchen.

She also uses Habersham's Facebook page to promote cooking through edible gardening. "After we get in a new batch of heirloom tomatoes, I'll share a recipe and say, 'Here's what I would do with them this weekend,'" she says. "That has worked well for us."

Playing Host

Habersham Gardens has also made its location available to host local organizations.

"The American Society of Landscape Architects had their annual meeting here at the garden center," she says. Harrison whipped up a menu and catered the event. "Many of the landscape architects in Metro Atlanta were there to see the garden center and be reminded how wonderful this little jewel is," she adds.

Habersham's also serves as a community supported agriculture (CSA) pick-up site. Farmers Fresh CSA — a local cooperative group of small sustainable farmers — reached out to Harrison looking for support.

"With five locations, Whole Foods has a big CSA presence here in Atlanta, but their pick-up days were on Saturday, which is always busy and just a big hassle to deal with," she says. "We do it here on a Wednesday and CSA members come to us to get their weekly produce shares."

"This brings in 40 or 50 people that we may not have had otherwise and that the farmer may not have had access to without us."

Farmers Fresh CSA has also held events at Habersham Gardens — bringing in a trained chef for additional cooking demonstrations.

Interested in getting involved with your community's CSA program? Just turn to Google, Harrison suggests, and "all sorts of opportunities should arise. It's a growing movement." **LGR**

Deb Harrison is the owner and general manager of Habersham Gardens in Atlanta, Ga. You can reach her at dharrison@habershamgardens.com.