MEPKIN ABBEY

Mepkin Abbey Garden Newsletter

August 2026

It has been a typical July here in the Lowcountry with temperatures ranging from the low to upper 90s. Fortunately, there has been a little more rain, but still not enough. Even in the shadiest spots on the grounds of the Abbey, garden hoses, buckets, and watering cans have been hauled out to provide relief to flowers and shrubs in stress due to the shortfall of precipitation.

The pace necessarily slows down a little in summer, but our garden volunteers do the best they can to keep the gardens well maintained. Sporting sunglasses, hats, and cooling towels, they grab bottles of water for their own hydration and head out to work. But only after a good spritzing of bug spray. They do it because they love Mepkin and its people and the satisfaction the work gives them.

Thanks so much to those who contributed photos for this edition. Gail, your photos are stunning and so welcome and refreshing for those of us here at home who look forward to your return. Ursula, your photos of Fr. Guerric's arrangements have spread a beautiful light over the pages of this month's edition. Jill, we are glad that you and Keith have not moved so far away that you can't come back and work with us from time to time. And, Georgiann, your photos always help to inspire the contents of the newsletters they appear in.

MCST Sisters Visit Mepkin Abbey

On Tuesday, July 7th, garden volunteers working around the visitors' center had the privilege of meeting the **Missionary Catechists of Saint Therese Sisters** out on a morning stroll**.** The Sisters told us that they are part of a congregation that began in the Philippines but has now spread to other parts of the world. The Sisters seen here are addressing the needs of a community in Maryland.

Greetings from Gail and Guy

Those of you who have the pleasure of knowing long-time Mepkin Abbey volunteers, Guy and Gail, are probably aware they have a little cabin in Alaska where they spend their summers doing what they love – *fishing*! Gail sent along some awesome photos to illustrate what they see and experience when they are there.

Guy pulled this halibut out of Cook Inlet. Gail says boats get launched from the beach by huge tractors and when the boats return, the tractor pushes a trailer into the water for them and hauls the boat and trailer out.

Greetings (cont'd)

Guy took this photo of a mother bear and two cubs while fishing on the Russian River. Gail added that these are brown grizzly bears.

Greetings (cont'd)

There is "breathtaking scenery everywhere we look," noted Gail. Above are photos she shared of the mountains surrounding Cook Inlet. That's Mt. Iliamna in the top photo and Mt. Redoubt in the photo below.

By Special Arrangement: Summer Blossoms Grace the Church

The best sampling of plants in bloom around the Abbey is always to be found in the wonderful arrangements that Fr. Guerric creates. On July 5th he brought a feeling of summer in the South to the Church in this gorgeous display of crape myrtle.

<u>Arrangement (cont'd)</u>

In the arrangement for July 12th, Fr. Guerric combined larkspur, white carnations, and yellow mums in a harmonious trio.

Arrangement (cont'd)

In this smaller arrangement for Sunday, July 12th, larkspur was combined with beautiful yellow roses and white carnations.

Arrangement (cont'd)

Zinnias got their chance to be part of an arrangement for the church on July 19th. Fr. Guerric has brought together an assortment of pink blossoms with white carnations in this beautiful display.

<u>Arrangement (cont'd)</u>

In another arrangement for the July 19th service, pure white lilies and attractive green foliage were combined in a sky blue vase.

<u>Arrangement (cont'd)</u>

When Ursula shared this photo she took on the morning of July 26th she added the comment, "The sun is shining this morning." Indeed! Nothing brightens an indoor setting better than a pot of sunflowers.

Arrangement (cont'd)

That same sense of joy was created in this equally sunny arrangement for that same Sunday morning.

Summertime in St. Clare

For what St. Clare lacks in colorful blooms in midsummer, it more than makes up for in lushness. Plants that are completely out of sight during the winter spring to life in the heat and humidity of summer.

St. Clare (cont'd)

The large open spaces of the garden that greet visitors during the Crèche Festival become filled with a variety of subtropical plants and an array of native ferns during summer.

St. Clare (cont'd)

In some corners of the garden at this time of year, it can feel as if you are deep in a forest. Not a real stretch for the imagination considering that all that keeps the surrounding forest from overrunning this site is a determined group of Mepkin volunteers and staff.

St. Clare (cont'd)

The deeply shaded areas of the garden are well suited to an assortment of plants that love to grow on and under trees.

St. Clare (cont'd)

St. Clare's Walk, like all the gardens at Mepkin, changes from month to month, season to season, and year to year. But in St. Clare's it all takes place in the constant presence and watchful eye of The Good Shepard.

Spotlight on Plumbago

Thanks, Georgiann, for providing this photo of Plumbago auriculata in bloom in Memorial Arbor. This low-growing evergreen shrub has been planted by Lowcountry gardeners for its beauty and versatility for at least two centuries now. Once thought to be an antidote for lead poisoning, it earned the rather unappealing common name, leadwort.

Plumbago (cont'd)

Plumbago is attractive to butterflies, but not to deer. It's quite drought-tolerant and works well for container gardening. But be sure to wear gloves when handling it. The leaves can be mildly irritating to skin.

Its clusters of phlox-like flowers can range from sky blue to indigo, and while it can hold its own alone in any garden setting, it becomes even more striking when paired with bright yellows, oranges, and reds.

Nature's Little Helpers

Georgiann was pleased to have a little help with her tasks recently .

Jill D. was given some assistance by a dragonfly, too.

Helpers (cont'd)

A dragonfly's favorite food is mosquitoes, but perhaps they like a little rosemary occasionally. Or maybe this one was looking for a sturdy perch that it could use to observe Jill going about her work.

Helpers (cont'd)

It's apparent these caterpillars have found something to their liking to dine on. Thanks, Jill, for sharing this wonderful photo of the soon-to-be black swallowtail butterflies.

More Portraits of the Flora and Fauna of Mepkin Abbey

An interesting white fungus has taken up residence on a gnarly old vine under the trellis next to the store.

More (cont'd)

Here's another delightful photo from Georgiann. Anoles -- nicknamed Chameleons -- change colors in response to their surroundings, but their emotional state can determine their color, too. So, try not to hurt their feelings when you encounter these sensitive little creatures.

More (cont'd)

While most of us will only be able to see an unattractive growth on this tree in St. Clare -- an indication of injury or stress -- a skilled crafter might see a nice bowl or two he can carve out of the inside. A talented sculptor might find a magnificent work of art waiting to be revealed.

More (cont'd)

Sometime after the photo of the proud and erect pineapple lily shown on page 13 was taken, some force or creature of nature knocked it over. May we all be inspired by this plant's will to fulfill its purpose. Bent and a little worse for wear, it continues to bloom where it was planted.

Contemplating the Month Ahead

August 2nd is Friendship Day. The idea goes back to 1919 and started with the founder of Hallmark Cards. It celebrates the bonds formed by friends and is a reminder for us to tell them how much we appreciate them. The idea has spread throughout the world and is celebrated to promote peace and kindness. So, if you are blessed with good friends be very, very glad. Give yourself and them a big hug. If they aren't nearby, reach out and hug them with a text or phone call. Don't hesitate to let them know how much they matter to you.

An event at the Abbey that is coming up soon that folks always look forward to is the Annual Volunteer and Staff Luncheon. It will be held at 12 noon on Saturday, August 22nd in the Monastic Refectory. If you haven't done so already, be sure to RSVP. Garden volunteers will find the invitation and the information they need to respond in Sylvia's email dated July 17th.

And now that Ed has rejoined the Tuesday crew, that group has something extra to look forward to -- his awesome cookies.

Please take care of yourselves out in this heat. I hope to see you all at the luncheon.

-- LuAnne