

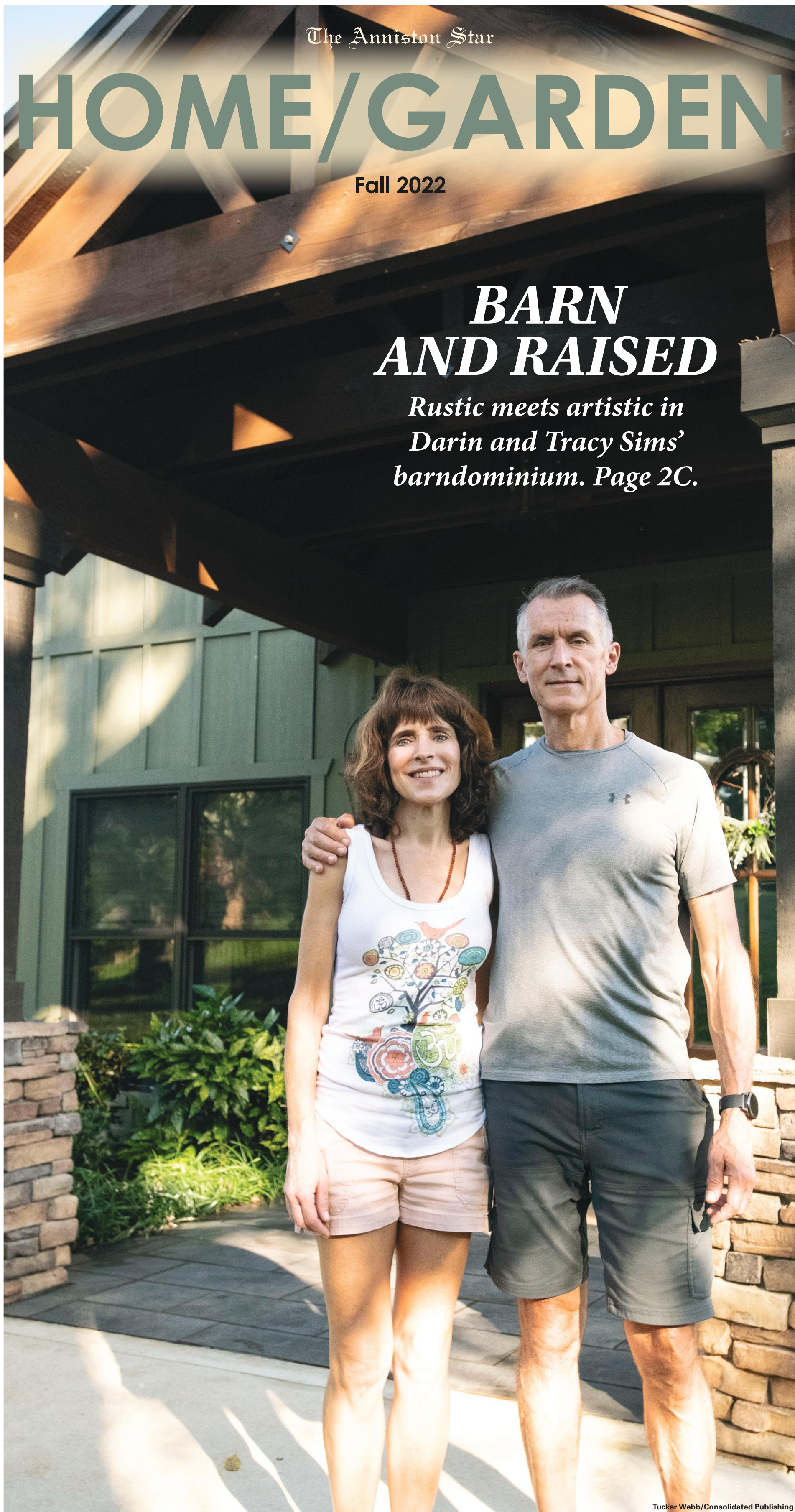
The Anniston Star

# HOME/GARDEN

Fall 2022

## BARN AND RAISED

*Rustic meets artistic in  
Darin and Tracy Sims'  
barndominium. Page 2C.*



Tucker Webb/Consolidated Publishing

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The two-floor barndominium features two bedrooms, two baths, a full kitchen, an outdoor grilling area and a patio.

# BARN AND RAISED

## *Rustic meets artistic in Darin and Tracy Sims’ barndominium*

**BY DANIELLE STALLWORTH**  
dstallworth@annistonstar.com

“Well,” Darin Sims said, “it all started as a barn workshop. But...”

“... It kind of got out of control,” Tracy Sims finished.

Darin and Tracy reside in Anniston’s Choccolocco Valley area. Follow the winding roads through peaceful neighborhoods and past open fields, and you’ll eventually arrive at their seven-acre property, where the latest addition to the picturesque land is a stunning barndominium (that’s barn + condominium, “barndo” for short).

What began as a future workshop for Darin soon evolved into a full-fledged living space. With the help of local interior designer Scott Skinner, the couple ended up creating a space that combines the traditional charm of a barndo (think sturdy wooden accents and warm earthy tones) with the whimsy of a colorful apartment (think vibrant painted ceilings and dazzling koi fish wallpaper).

“My son and daughter-in-law were getting married,” Darin said. “My daughter-in-law says, ‘You know, I’ve always wanted a barn wedding.’ And I’m like, ‘Well, you know, we’re building one.’ Then Scott got involved and it became an upstairs apartment. And since you’ve got an apartment upstairs, you’ve gotta have a kitchen. The more they talked, the smaller my workshop got,” he joked.

Located just off to the side of their main house, the barndo is a two-floor structure that features two bedrooms, two baths, a full kitchen, an outdoor grilling area and a patio. Construction took place around the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the goal was to have everything finished in time for their son Garrett’s wedding, set for April 2021.

“We were lucky,” Tracy said. “We got this in right before prices went through the roof. It would probably cost 20 or 30 per-

cent more now. Toward the tail end of it, it was taking a long time to get the furniture that we ordered. But we got everything done just in the nick of time.”

The barn’s decor and furniture is a mix of pieces the couple already had, pieces they picked out themselves and pieces Skinner picked out according to what he thought they might like — some of which were inspired by the couple’s travels.

“That’s what’s so great about him,” Tracy said. “He does it according to your taste.”

The Simses, who both work for Pinnacle Research Group conducting clinical drug studies, bought their home in 2017 after seeing it while on a bike ride. In addition to the new barndo, the property boasts a vegetable garden, a greenhouse, a beekeeping area where Darin makes his own honey, and a breathtaking view of the Appalachian foothills. There’s plenty of room for their two dogs — Lucy and Mollie — to run around, play and rendezvous with other neighborhood pups on the property.

While it has served them for personal usage and for their own guests, the Simses recently decided to list the barndo on Airbnb for travelers to rent out. The day after the listing went up, they got their first booking.

“We’re like, ‘Wait, we still have our stuff in there!’” Tracy said. “It’s been busy nonstop. You wouldn’t think Anniston is a destination, but apparently it is.”

“We thought we’d put it out there and someone would eventually find it, but they found it within a couple minutes,” Darin said. “We got a couple attorneys coming to stay for like nine days because of the new federal courthouse. It’s interesting because we learn a lot about the people who come stay here.”

Contact Features Editor Danielle Stallworth at [dstallworth@annistonstar.com](mailto:dstallworth@annistonstar.com).



Photos by Tucker Webb/Consolidated Publishing



The front door of the barndominium opens right into the living room area.



A bathroom off the living room. The walk-in shower was originally meant to be a dog washing station in Darin’s workshop. The sink counter is pecan wood.





The patio features plenty of seating for entertaining guests.



Darin custom-built the massive kitchen table with pecan wood. The ceiling beams were done by an acquaintance of his who has a sawmill. ‘These were about \$110 a piece, so that’s only \$600 worth of material up there,’ Darin said. ‘Buying retail, you’d pay that much for just one of them.’



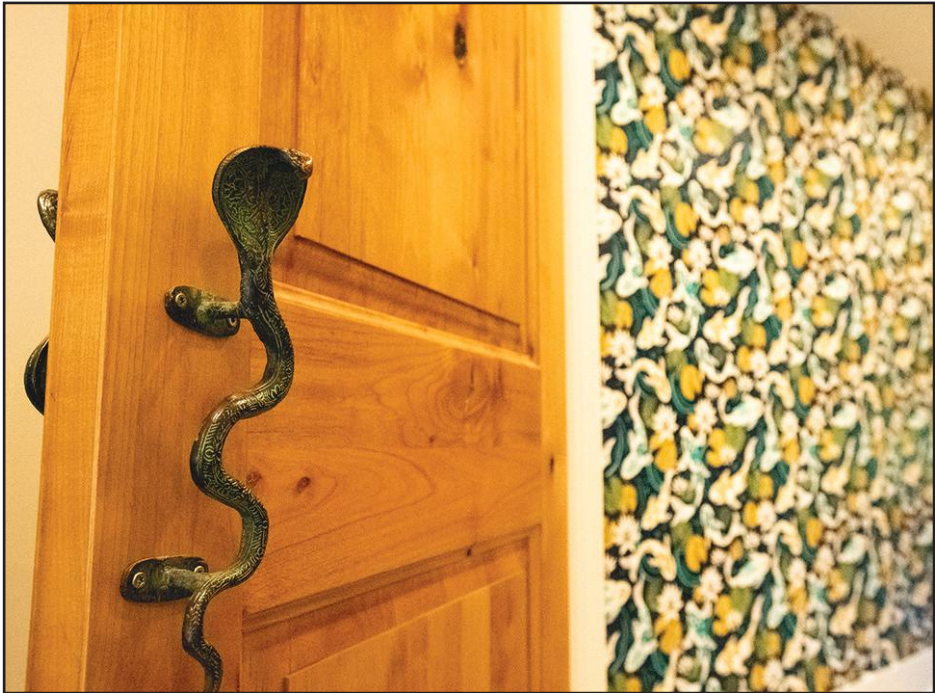
Sliding barn doors lead to the pantry, where canned vegetables from the garden and honey from Darin’s bees are stored. Darin built the shelving here as well.



A sliding barn door leads to the shower in the upstairs bathroom.



The double bedroom overlooks the back of the property. Colorful insect-themed artwork lines the walls and matches the bedspreads.



Scott Skinner was able to find cobra door handles at Tracy’s request.



An accent wall in the upstairs hallway features stunning koi fish print wallpaper. ‘That was totally Scott’s idea,’ Tracy said. ‘We love Japan, so he incorporated that.’



What used to be a yoga and meditation room for Tracy is now an extra bedroom for Airbnb renters. But the atmosphere is still plenty zen with its soft lighting and happy pops of color, including green armchairs and the saffron yellow ceiling.

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Rustic on Main Market in Piedmont partners with Nances Creek Farms to sell pumpkins.

Submitted photos

# PRACTICAL PUMPKINS

## How to get the most out of your pumpkins this season

BY WHITNEY ERVIN  
Special to The Star

Fall is finally upon us once more. The air is getting cooler and the days are getting short. That also means pumpkins will become a fixture in everything from food to decor. Pumpkins are incredibly versatile. They come in many sizes, shapes and colors. Whether you're growing your own or looking to add some autumnal whimsy to your home, how do you get the most out of your pumpkins?

Rustic on Main Market, a boutique and home decor shop in Piedmont owned by Ali Dugan, partners with Nances Creek Farms to have pumpkins and fresh flowers available at the shop. Dugan says pumpkins are good for indoor and outdoor decor.

"One thing I love to do is put the pumpkins in a big planting urn on the porch," she said.

She also recommends adding wild

flowers or greenery for a little extra color. It's a quick and easy project, but the result is a very pretty seasonal decoration. For inside the house, she likes to use small pumpkins to stack on top of each other, or place them on a candlestick. Dugan also recommends fake pumpkins if you want to make sure they last all season long and can be reused.

"The fresh pumpkins are dipped in Clorox before we get them," she says. "I've had people tell me they've had their pumpkins until February dipping them in Clorox."

Hayes Jackson, the urban regional extension agent with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and liaison of Longleaf Botanical Gardens, agrees that a Clorox dip can help with the longevity of pumpkins. Especially if you're using them to make a jack o'lantern.

"They have bacteria on their skin, so when you cut into them to make a lantern all that bacteria can get inside and cause

the pumpkin to rot faster."

If you're worried about using bleach products, Hayes also recommends using Dawn dish soap. Anything that can help kill the bacteria or potential diseases living on the skin will help with the longevity of your pumpkin.

The gardeners among us will be harvesting their pumpkins, assuming they've had much luck. Pumpkins are finicky. Ideally, according to Jackson, you should plant your pumpkins around the first week of July in order to harvest in the fall.

"The key to growing good pumpkins is vigilance," he says. "Especially in our climate."

Pumpkins aren't fond of humidity, but diseases are. You have to make sure to treat them regularly.

Jim Bennett, owner of Bennett Farms in Heflin, uses neem oil to treat the pumpkins they grow. Neem oil helps fight off fungal diseases like powdery mildew that are common in pumpkins. Even still, it

can be difficult to get a good harvest.

"I could grow only pumpkins on the whole farm and still probably not have enough to sell throughout the season," Bennett said. "Pumpkins just require a lot of attention."

If you forgo growing your own pumpkins for the fun of visiting a pumpkin patch, there are two main things to look for when picking the perfect pumpkin. The first is bruising, and the second is soft spots, which requires a little more studying. If the pumpkin already has bruising or soft spots, that means rotting is already starting to take place.

And at the end of the season, when your pumpkin starts to rot or you're ready to get rid of them, what's the best way to do so?

"Pumpkins make excellent compost," Jackson said.

Jackson adds that if you haven't treated the pumpkins with anything toxic to animals, they make a good snack for wildlife.



Photos by Whitney Ervin/Special to The Anniston Star  
Bennett Farms in Heflin has pumpkins of various colors, shapes and sizes for sale.

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Bennett Farms in Heflin has pumpkins of various colors, shapes and sizes for sale.

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THE SOUTHERN GARDENER



# BEE ACCOUNTABLE

## Tips for cultivating a bee-friendly garden

BY SHERRY BLANTON  
Special to The Star

Endangered bees and other invertebrates (those lacking a spinal column) celebrated on May 31, 2022, as California's Third District Court of Appeals ruled that the California Endangered Species Act protected them. This act includes four endangered bumblebees as well as other endangered insects. The Act further provided protection for some endangered plants and animals, as well as the means to make sure these species will not become extinct.

Over eighty percent of all plants require an animal pollinator, usually an insect, to reproduce. One third of food production depends on pollinators and seventy-five percent of all fruits and vegetables produce more products when visited by pollinators. In California's case, protecting the bee helps protect the state's farming industry.

Vegetable crops and ornamental plants all over this county depend on pollinators. Pollinators seek nectar and pollen in each plant they visit and carry the products to the next plant allowing that plant to reproduce.

Much has been written lately about the importance of bees to our lives and the food chain. It is commonly known that one out of every three bites of food we eat comes from a crop pollinated by bees. Bees are critical to our world.

Domesticated honey bees and many native bee species are declining. They are under threat from habitat loss, pests, pesticides and climate change. As gardeners, we can make choices to help our bees flourish. We choose the plants, how to handle pests and the chemicals we use. We must make the right decisions for the sake of these wonderful insects. With the help of the following tips from the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, we can all become bee-friendly. It is easy — just think like a bee.

- Choose flowers not only beautiful to

you but also to the bee

- Include flowers with attractive color patterns and fragrances that are also easy to maintain.
- Bright colors are important: think blue, yellow, purple, pink, violet and white. Some research says bees cannot see red and it looks black; however, I have seen bees gathered on my red flowers.
- Choose blooms where pollen is easily released from anthers (the part of the flower that holds the pollen).
- Seek plants with simple single flowers preferred by the bees, who may also visit tubular flowers.
- Select plants with high protein content in the nectar.
- Offer a year-round source of food: spring for hungry bees coming out from winter, mid-summer when many flowers begin to fade, late summer and fall flowers with food for the pollinators as they transition to cold weather and winter flowers for bees who continue to look for food in cold weather. Although bees may be less active, warm spells will bring them out to look for food; they are partial to my Japanese fatsia, camellias, mahonias and lenten roses.
- Remember the more the merrier; include a minimum of three different kinds of flowers for diversity. Plant a large variety of flowering plants as bees (and other pollinators) are drawn to gardens with lots of blossoms.
- Use masses of color; clumps at least three feet in size are more attractive to pollinators than plants placed here and there.
- Plant one type of flower close together in a small area to help the bees locate them and increase their ability to access pollen and nectar (a small patch is better than no patch; even containers can become bee magnets).
- Use a variety of flower shapes for different pollinators (i.e. butterflies) to increase accessibility to pollen and nectar; include various heights and growth habits.
- Create corridors of plants attractive to pollinators to provide a safe travel route

from one place to another, making a snack available on their travels.

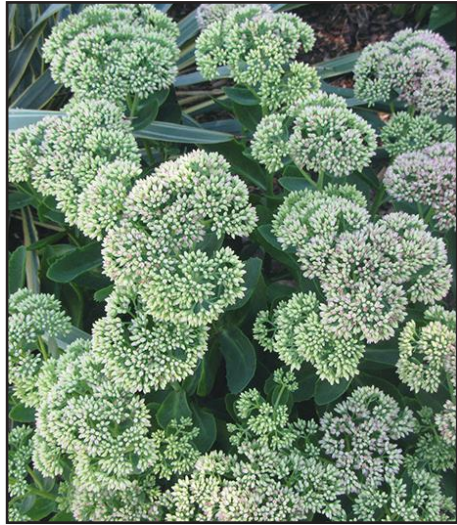
- Create bee welcome areas close to crops and gardens; small bees can only fly five hundred feet while bumblebees can fly one mile.
- Use native plants, as our native insects prefer them over non-native ones.
- Plant nectar bearing plants close to non-nectar bearing plants.
- Watch for the plants that bees seem to prefer; in my garden, sedums, gauras, pentas and dahlias are a big summer draw
- Concentrate on plants that provide a reward to the pollinators — some plants do not have either pollen or nectar (old-fashioned plants often are more appealing than many new hybrids who lack fragrance).
- Avoid pesticide use in the garden. It can kill bees directly, as well as damage

their ability to reproduce.

- Beware of plants that have been treated with pesticides during their growth; seek pollinator-friendly ones (many plants are now labeled as pollinator-friendly).
- Tolerate a less-than-perfect plant before using a pesticide.
- Learn to live with some weeds before using a herbicide.
- Welcome beneficial insects to handle pest problems.

Our bees are in our hands; bee-friendly decisions can make an enormous difference in the lives of the bees and the humans. It takes both for both to survive.

Sherry Blanton, "The Southern Gardener," writes about gardening for The Anniston Star. Contact her at [sblanton@annistonstar.com](mailto:sblanton@annistonstar.com). Follow her on Facebook at Southern Gardener-Anniston Star.



Photos by Sherry Blanton/Special to The Anniston Star

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# SHUTTER WONDERS

*Dress up your windows with Exclusively Shutters in Chelsea*

**BY FAITH DORN**  
Special to The Star

Debra and George Linton own Exclusively Shutters based in Chelsea, Ala.

Debra Linton started working with a fabrication company when she was 19 years old, and the couple opened their business in 2006.

"I have been in the shutter industry for over 40 years. I sold them to put myself through college," said Debra. "I enjoy people, I have always enjoyed sales, and I know the shutter industry. A small business advisor doesn't want you to start a business you don't have experience in, so we took their advice and started Exclusively Shutters."

George works as the installer for Exclusively Shutters. Formerly, the Lintons had a factory in Loxley, but when they moved back to Birmingham to take care of George's mother, they decided to work with a friend in Georgia who now handles the manufacturing.

Debra estimates that 80 percent of their customers are repeat customers.

"Our customers always refer people to us. One customer just referred me to somebody, and they have referred nine people to us in two years," she said. "All of our customers are so kind. I go to another small business, Magnolias, and get them a small thank you gift for referral."

Debra explains that plantation shutters were considered a "rich man's" product in the '80s. They were associated with the "upper crust" and were for aesthetics only in a library or sitting room. Now, people enjoy having them throughout their house.

"People have realized that these shutters can do four times what blinds or drapes can do. For the last 15 years, everyone has been getting them — even in garages. So many people have allergies and can't do drapes," Debra said.

Exclusively Shutters sells shutters that can have 2 ½-4 ½ inch louvers (the horizontal slats of the shutters). In order to decide which size to order, consider the way you decorate and the style of your home. Modern shutters have 3 ½-4 ½ inch louvers, shutters for a modern

coastal look have 4-4 ½ inch louvers and shutters at lake houses typically feature 4 ½ inch louvers. The shutters are heat treated and painted with a waterborne paint.

"When I come out for free consultation, I show hundreds of photos, so that we are making the product the way they want it. If they have a specialty color they want the shutters to match, we have a scanner and will match the color," Debra explained. "Once the shutters come in, I call the customers, and we set up the installation."

Usually, it takes about four to six weeks for orders to come in, but currently, the wait time is about five to six weeks.

"A typical job is a two to three-hour installation for 10-25 windows, including taking down what they currently have. If the homeowner is getting shutters for the whole house, and a typical house has probably 15 windows, you're looking at spending about \$5,800-\$6,500, depending on size and materials," Debra said.

Customers can choose between a solid cellular poly or hardwood. Debra says most decorators want hardwood, and most customers are now choosing hardwood because it is less expensive than the solid cellular poly for the first time ever. To care for this investment, she advises clients to dust regularly and not leave the windows open all the time.

"It is a large investment, so you want it to be something you are happy with. If you are looking for shutters, get online and look at reviews," Debra said. "Ours are all made in America — all made in the South, even."

She says that what sets Exclusively Shutters apart from other companies is that they call people back and do what they say they will do.

"The comment we get the most is that people will say, 'That was the thing that went the smoothest that we did to this house,'" Debra said, "We don't leave a mess. When we go into a home, we want people to feel comfortable and like they're working with friends. If something goes wrong, tell us, and we will fix it."

To contact Debra or George Linton at Exclusively Shutters, call 205-949-7231, visit [exclusivelyshutters.com](http://exclusivelyshutters.com) or reach out to Exclusively Shutters on Facebook.

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# SEEDS OF CHANGE

*Downing and Sons gets productive with produce in expanded seed store*

**BY FAITH DORN**  
Special to The Star

Downing and Sons in Anniston has been a family-run fabric, home and garden store since 1963. Earlier this year, they opened their new expanded seed store around the corner from the fabric store.

“We’ve had this space since my mom and dad bought it in the late ’80s,” said Lewis Downing, manager of the store and son of owner Robert “R.D.” Downing. “We always talked about what we wanted to do with it, and we decided it was time to do something productive.”

The new location for the seed store allows Downing and Sons a bigger space to be able to offer more items. Downing

explains that the seed store and fabric store are still part of the same company, but they are just different departments. The fabric store is still located at 1030 Gurnee Avenue, and the seed store is now located at 108 West 11th Street.

“Last year, we cleaned it out and refinished the floors and ran new electricity down there,” Downing said. “We call it the seed store as a label for us to differentiate from the fabric store.”

Downing’s grandparents opened Downing and Sons to sell True Value paint, and that led to selling hardware and paint supplies, and that’s when they began selling Bonnie Plants.

“All my cousins still call it the paint store, and we haven’t sold paint for almost 30 years,” Downing said, laughing.

Downing and Sons sells seeds by volume and weight rather than prepackaged seeds. They also sell canning supplies.

“People are wanting to grow their own food and preserve it, and we think that’s cool. We’re also going to offer homesteading supplies and beekeeping supplies. We don’t know what else we’re going to add, but we are figuring that out,” Downing said.

According to Downing, all kinds of lettuce, root crops and leafy greens are popular right now, including turnips, collards, cabbage, kale, mustard, radish

and carrot.

“We have tons of potting soils, and we also sell convenience hardware. You can come here and get a tape measure or screwdriver in much less time than you would spend going to a big box store,” said Downing.

Deciding to move a department to a new location, even one right around the corner, could be a difficult decision, but Downing believes it was the right one.

“We are having fun, which is one of the main things for us. It is a good indicator to us that we’re doing something right,” Downing said.



Photos by Aaron Coston/Special to The Anniston Star

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