

Roger & Laurie Vines: Leading by Example

By Elishia Ballentine, Editor

When Roger and Laurie Vines purchased their first 40 acres in Coosa County back in 1986, they considered themselves lucky to have found it. Recently married and ready to begin a family, they moved to Alabama where he took the job of Coosa County Extension coordinator, just down the road in Rockford. They had met while he was completing graduate school in Louisiana. Roger admits that it took some persuading . . . she was a city girl from New Orleans, and a little bit reluctant to move to a rural area.

Now some 20 or so years later, they have a total of 110 acres in this rolling terrain, and Laurie loves the “country.” She has become an avid outdoor woman with a passion for fishing and deer hunting. Roger confessed that she actually has the bigger trophy buck on the wall!

Looking out across the beautiful landscape today, one would never guess that this property was completely cut over and virtually “treeless” when they bought it. They worked hard to make improvements, carefully site prepping and planting the first pines; then gradually adding more and more. As the years have gone by, Roger and Laurie have enjoyed watching the trees grow on this hilly Coosa County countryside – right along with their two daughters.

In fact, that’s how Roger and Laurie remember the exact age of their first two pine plantations, because they were planted the same years the girls were born. The oldest pines are 21 years old – the same age as Emily – and were thinned at 16 years. The second plantation of pines is ready to thin now at 17 years old – the same age as Anna. The youngest loblolly pines are approximately 7 years old.

Given his educational background and experience, Roger is not afraid when it comes to trying new things and experimenting with different trees and crops. In addition to all the loblollies, he has also planted some white pines which normally only grow well in climates north of here. Roger has been fascinated to find rather large deer rubs on the young saplings. He doesn’t know exactly why, but these signs seem to indicate that deer prefer this particular species of pine.

Down in the hardwood bottoms, which he had thinned to encourage vegetation, Roger experimented with rye grass. In yet another experiment, he grafted a Japanese persimmon tree with a wild persimmon tree. The resulting fruits are apple-sized persimmons.

As hunting and wildlife-watching are favorite pastimes, the family has created several greenfields. They call the largest one the “wildlife cafeteria” where Roger plants corn, soybeans, and sunflowers in

the summer and wheat and oats in the winter. He keeps it in native grasses for wild turkey, and the plot is surrounded by fruit-bearing trees that attract all sorts of wildlife: sawtooth oaks, persimmon, pecan, and plums. Early this spring, Roger was looking forward to his best acorn crop ever from the 10-year-old sawtooth, when the late frost killed all the young acorns.

Other interesting features include a natural spring on the back side of the farm, and Mill Creek which

runs the length of the property. The Vines built two nice fishponds for bass and bream, but both are extremely low this year with the continued drought. They also built a crawfish pond where they raised Louisiana Red Swamp crawfish in years past, but it is completely dry now.

Roger has planted several long-leaf pines, short leaf pines, bald cypress, and river birch all around the property. However, one of the most interesting trees is one that he did *not* plant . . . a huge, beautiful



Top: While away at college, the Vines’ oldest daughter, Emily, enjoys skeet shooting whenever she comes home.

Middle: Roger, daughter Anna, and Laurie Vines.

Bottom: Anna and Roger demonstrate that they cannot quite reach around the big yellow-poplar that towers over Miller Creek (also shown on opposite page).



Photo by Elishia Ballentine



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Roger displays one of the large fruits that resulted from grafting a Japanese persimmon with a wild persimmon.

old yellow-poplar, growing right along the bank of the creek. It measures approximately 13 feet in circumference and 60 feet tall.

Still working with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System as Coosa County Extension coordinator, Roger says he's really a "jack of all trades." He educates landowners and citizens about all sorts of things, from soils to fishponds, from vegetable gardens to forests. Having the strong belief that it is important to help people and make a difference in others' lives, one of the significant facets of his job is time spent with 4-H students. This educational program of the Cooperative Extension System teaches youth about the value and principles involved in managing wildlife resources.

Although Laurie is a registered nurse, she too has worked in various forms of education for the last several years. After getting a second degree in elementary

education, she taught school for a while. She currently works with the 4-H program in Chilton County and is the state coordinator for the Junior Master Gardener program.

Both daughters quite naturally inherited a love of nature and the land. The oldest, Emily, is a Fine Arts major at Shorter College in Georgia. She first became interested in wildlife

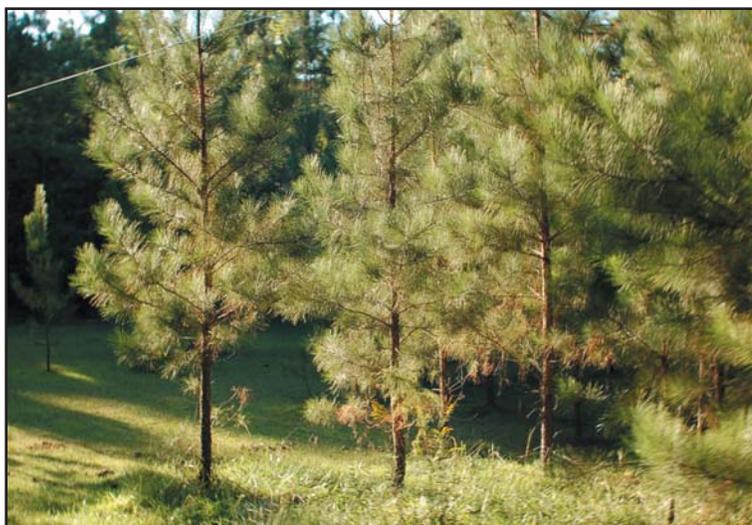
art as a 4-H student. Although not a big hunter, she enjoys shooting skeet. The youngest daughter, Anna, enjoys both deer and turkey hunting. She's already bagged one of each, an accomplishment that she laughingly said was more than some of the guys at her school could say. She also loves taking care of her five goats and horse, Jackson. A senior at Sylacauga High School, she plans to study veterinary medicine at Auburn following graduation.

With dad and mom so actively involved in the 4-H program, they are quite proud of their daughters' accomplishments, and rightfully so. Both girls have been members of National Champion 4-H teams,

collectively winning four championships in wildlife and forestry. They both also ranked highest in individual competition at the nationals. (See accompanying story.)

Over the past few years, the Vines' place has often been the site where the Coosa County 4-H team practiced their forestry and wildlife skills prior to competitions. The family has used the property to entertain and educate different Girl Scout troops, as well as host the Coosa County TREASURE Forest landowner tour. They have also hosted several of their own family reunions on the 4th of July each year, with fishing, four-wheeling, and walks in the woods.

The Vines' say that their original TREASURE Forest objectives were timber and wildlife. However, as time goes by, wildlife and recreation now seem to be more important. Enjoying the land with family is obviously a priority for Roger, Laurie, and the girls, worth much more than the monetary value of trees. It is heartwarming to see two educators who not only clearly love what they teach, they live it. 🌲



Above: The youngest of three pine plantations. Right: One of several greenfields on the Vines property.

