

Well friends, I come to you with a sad heart. Lee May __ the award-winning journalist who gained acclaim as a writer for the Los Angeles Times and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution __ passed away peacefully this week at his home in Marietta. Lee was 72.

I remember back in the 90's he called me and asked what in the world was wrong with his beloved azaleas: they were wilting even though he watered each day. I suspected root rot and told him so..... but his symptoms didn't quite match what I described. So I drove out to his house one summer day to where he lived in West End and took a look.

Yep - his azaleas were wilting....but when we pulled back the mulch, we saw a white plastic-looking layer of something under each one. We poked holes in it with a stick and Lee confessed that he had applied a thick layer of horse manure under each plant in the spring. And what had happened was that decomposing fungi had covered the manure with their white roots, making a surface that was impermeable to water. So as much water as he applied, it all ran off to the side and his plants dried up as a result.

It was a learning experience for both of us.

He was born "Eddie Lee May" in Cuba, Alabama in 1942. He sometimes spoke of being from LA....meaning Lower Alabama. He had a hardscrabble upbringing, but he graduated from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. He earned numerous awards, including the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award for outstanding contributions to human relations. He wrote two novels: "In My Father's Garden" and "Gardening Life". "In My Father's Garden" is an account of his re-acquaintance with his estranged father....discovering that both of them held a mutual love of gardening. It's well worth reading...available at Amazon.

Lee joined the AJC staff in 1992. He was a news writer and editor before he became a gardening columnist for the AJC. He was the newspaper's first Black Editorial Page writer.

"All life's lessons grow in the garden: Birth, nurturing, love, heartbreak, success, joy and so many more," May wrote in his book "Gardening Life".

To get a better picture of the man, go to leemaysgardeninglife.com, and read some of his blog posts. They are a joy...even the last two, written right after his diagnosis this fall.

Lee is survived by: his wife, Lyn May; their daughters and sons-in-law; and 12 grandchildren.

Lee May will be laid to rest privately by his family. Memorial services in his honor are being planned for January or February in Marietta. In lieu of sending flowers, the family requests that Lee's friends and admirers plant a tree in his honor.

You can do just that online by going to treesatlanta.org and buying a holiday tree greeting, which will result in a tree being planted in his memory and honor. Go do it right after the broadcast today.