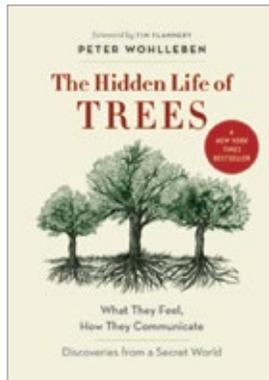


Urban Dirt

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

Books on my radar

Can trees communicate? Are they capable of learning and feeling? Do they have BFFs? A snippet of a television interview led me to buy Peter Wohlleben's *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate* (ISBN 978-1-77164-248-4). Wohlleben is a German forester in the Eifel mountains located in Germany whose outlook regarding the forest he protected evolved over time. As he became more aware of the forest he began to see it through different eyes and his knowledge of the arboreal relationships allowed him to fully appreciate the trees.

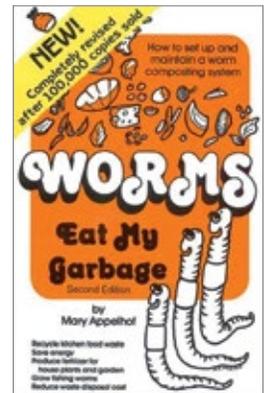


According to Wohlleben, cultivated plants cannot communicate above or below ground because of selective breeding. Trees in a forest, however, can communicate by electrical pulses, and visual and olfactory methods. In clear, concise language, Wohlleben weaves a tale about his beloved forest and other trees using examples from his own experience, other foresters' experiences and scientific arboreal studies. One example includes the story of when wolves disappeared from Yellowstone Park and the resulting snowball effect that followed. When the wolves vanished from Yellowstone in the 1920's, the elk population in the park grew and they devoured the cottonwoods, aspens and willows. The amount of vegetation dropped and animals that ate those trees left. Wolves were gone for 70 years but as they returned, they began to hunt the elk and the trees returned. The previous equilibrium slowly re-established itself. We learned a lesson about leaving forest lands alone.

When I spotted this news segment I was not sure I believed trees could communicate. Reading this book has convinced me that trees

are capable of much more than I believed possible. If you thought you knew about trees, this book will enlighten you.

The second book I picked up was because of a master gardening lecture on vermicomposting at the Genoa Friendship Garden—GFG, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Road. It was given by Charlene Perry of Dig It Organics. She is an excellent speaker who spoke about vermiculture, which means worm farming. Vermicompost is a plant additive which uses the manure left by worms. It is an excellent organic fertilizer which can also be cost effective. From Charlene I purchased the book *Worms Eat My Garbage*, second edition, by Mary Appelhof (ISBN 978-0-9972614-0-0). Now deceased, Appelhof had master's degrees in biology and education and her experience shows in the layout of the book. She was an avid environmentalist who educated many school children and gardeners as "Worm Woman" and believed worms should be used to recycle food waste. Using a pound of worms, she estimated she fed them 65 pounds of food garbage within 110 days.



Appelhof goes into detail about producing worm compost. She has diagrams with specific measurements if you want to build your own worm box or you can purchase one commercially. Either way, she guides you through the steps of selecting worms, setting up your bins, feeding and harvesting. She includes some worm biology, necessary calculations and record sheets. Valuable other information is included as well. I consider this a good resource for the beginning worm farmer.



Upcoming Events	2
Fruit Tree and Tomato Sale	3
Herb of the Month.....	4
Plant of the Month	6
Worms for Composting	7
Green Thumb Gardening Series	8



Upcoming Events

February 2017

Green Thumb Gardening Series: *Plant advice and tips from the Master Gardeners*

Spring Vegetable Gardening

Feb. 9, Barbara Bush Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Feb. 16, Freeman Branch Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Feb. 18, Maude Smith Marks Library, 10:00 - noon.

Feb. 21, Spring Branch Memorial Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Plant Sale

Feb. 18, Fruit tree & tomato sale: citrus, apple, peach, pear, avocado, berry, pecan and tomatoes suitable for our area. Precinct 2, Genoa Friendship Gardens, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd, Houston 77045

Open Garden Day: *Meet the Master Gardeners!*

Feb. 20, 8:30 -11a.m., Genoa Friendship Gardens, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd, Houston 77045

Feb. 28, Workshops & children's activities, *Spring Vegetable Gardening* 10:00 - 10:45 a.m.

March 2017

Green Thumb Gardening Series

Roses: Planting, Growing & Upkeep

Mar. 9, Barbara Bush Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Mar. 16, Freeman Branch Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Mar. 18, Maude Smith Marks Library, 10:00 - noon

Mar. 21, Spring Branch Memorial Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Plant Sale

Mar. 4, Tomato and Pepper Sale and Symposia

Tomato and pepper varieties as well as other vegetables and herbs suited to our summer growing season.

Bear Creek Gardens/Extension, 3303 Bear Creek Drive, Houston, 77084

Mar. 18, Spring Perennial and Peppers Sale: Perennials and peppers suitable for our area. 8 am-Plant Preview, Sale-9 am - 1 pm, Campbell Hall, Pasadena Fairgrounds, 7600 Red Bluff Rd., Pasadena, TX

Open Garden Day

Mar. 20, 8:30-11:00 a.m., Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. Plants for sale in the Greenhouse.

Mar. 28, Workshops & children's activities, *Roses: Planting, Growing & Upkeep*, 10:00-11:00 a.m. Bear Creek Extension

Master Gardener Help Line - (281) 855-5600

Visit txmg.org or contact the Harris County Extension Office, 281.855.5600, coordinator.harrishort@gmail.com for information.

8 AM Open
to the
Public
&
Speaker
Lecture

9 AM
Sale Gates
Open

For a complete list of all
fruit & berry varieties
available go to HCMGA
website for Precinct 2
2017 Fruit Tree Sale
Catalogue at
hcmga.tamu.edu

Harris County Master Gardeners Association

2017 Fruit Tree & Tomato Sale

Saturday, February 18th
9 AM to 1:00 PM



A p p l e s Anna Apple,, Dorsett Golden Apple, Fuji Apple

P e a r s Housi Pear, Pineapple Pear

P e a c h e s Eva's Pride, Mid Pride, May Pride, Tropic Snow, Red Barron, Bonanza, Bonfire, Dwarf Patio

P l u m s Beauty, Methley, Santa Rosa, Plum

G r a p e f r u i t Bloomsweet Hybrid, Cocktail, Rio Red, Ruby Red Grapefruit

O r a n g e s Vaniglia Sanaugno Blood, N-33 Navel, Republic of Texas, Valencia Rhode Red, Pineapple Oranges, Brown Select, Dobashi, Xie Shan Satsumas

L e m o n s New Zealand Lemonade, Variegated Pink Lemons

L i m e s Palestinian Sweet, Persian Limes

B e r r i e s Kiowa, Arapaho, Natchez & Quachita Blackberry, Emerald, Misty, Sunshine Blue Blueberries, Rabiteye Pink Lemonade, Climax, Preimere, Tifblue, Caroline Raspberry

F i g s Little Ruby, LSU Gold, LSU Purple, Native Black, O'Rourke (Improved Celeste), Petite Negra, Texas Everbearing



HCMGA Precinct 2
Satellite
Campbell Hall
Pasadena Fairgrounds
7600 Red Bluff Rd
Pasadena, TX 77507



Herb of the Month - Onion Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*)

Article by Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

Onion Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*) is our herb of the month for February.

A properly diverse garden calls for a little bit of this and a little bit of that...some purely ornamental beauties, your carefully chosen edibles; butterfly attractors along with plants producing in each season: winter, spring, summer, and fall...and then some things you can both munch on and use as a repellent for pests. Huh...? Yes, really! Onion chives are both delectable and provide a pungent deterrent to insect visitors who may not have your garden's best interests at heart.

Slower growing than their relative, garlic chives, onion chives are nonetheless considered easiest to grow of all the fresh herbs used for culinary purposes. This handy fact makes onion chives a great choice for the novice gardener as well as the wisest ones, who know that a hardy herb that does not need to be overly coddled is a very welcome addition to any edible landscape. Native to Britain, Northern Europe and North America, onion chives are favored

modernly in gardens throughout these regions and are the only species of *Allium* native to both the New and the Old Worlds.

A member of the Lily family, onion chives offer pretty purple A member of the Lily family, onion chives offer pretty purple petals during their early spring flowering period, and the color contrasts beautifully with the plant's deep green foliage. Reaching up to two feet in height, onion chives can make an attractive border plant, depending upon the scale of your garden. While onion chives do prefer full sun, considering other environmental factors such as temperature range and irrigation practices, they can also thrive in partial shade. Since south Texas is a warmer climate, you will probably find that onion chives actually do quite well in partial shade, locally. Onion chives "can be raised by seed, but (are) usually propagated by dividing the clumps in spring or autumn. In dividing the clumps, leave about six little bulbs together in a tiny clump, which will spread to a fine clump in the course of a year, and may then be divided. Set the clumps from 9 inches to a foot

cont'd on pg. 5



Herb of the Month - *cont'd from pg. 3*

apart each way. For a quick return, propagation by division of the bulb clumps is always to be preferred." If onion chives are being grown strictly for a culinary usage, three to four harvestings can be done per season. Cut a selected clump close to the ground and then snip as desired for use. The sheared chive section will then regrow, with the new shoots, in turn, often found to be more tender than the previous harvest's.

Onion chives are utilized in many dishes, including spreads, butters, baked potatoes, soups, stews and more. The lavender flowers make a bright, edible addition to salads. If a naturalist approach appeals to you, chives can be blended in water and used as an insect repellent, and, as previously mentioned, grown as a deterrent among plants that may harbor unpleasant insects.

Below is an original recipe highlighting onion chives that was selected from over 600 submitted recipes as the first place division category winner in Louisiana Cookin's 2014 national contest (recipe by Karen McGowan, Texas Master Gardener):

Piquant Sweet Potato Quiche

- 1 (15-ounce) bag frozen sweet potato fries, thawed
- ¼ cup unsalted butter, melted
- 1 ½ cups shredded Havarti or Monterey Jack cheese
- 1 fresh jalapeno pepper, seeded and diced
- 2 cups shredded Swiss cheese
- 2 cups chopped cooked ham
- ¼ cup finely chopped fresh onion chives
- 4 large eggs, lightly beaten
- ½ cup fat free half and half
- 1 ½ tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. smoked paprika
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ tsp. cayenne pepper

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Spray 10-inch pie dish with non-stick cooking spray.
2. In the work bowl of a food processor, add sweet potato and pulse until shredded. Transfer sweet potato to a sieve, and press



- with paper towels to remove excess moisture. Press sweet potatoes into bottom and up sides of prepared pie dish. Brush with melted butter, and cover with aluminum foil. Bake until edges of crust are golden brown, 20 to 25 minutes. Remove from oven, and let cool on a wire rack. Reduce oven to 350 degrees.
3. Add Havarti or Monterey Jack cheese, jalapeno, Swiss cheese, ham, and chives to crust in one layer. In a medium bowl, combine eggs, half and half, salt, paprika, pepper, and cayenne. Pour evenly over cheese mixture, and cover with aluminum foil. Bake until knife inserted into center comes out clean, 30 to 40 minutes. Let cool 5 minutes before serving. Enjoy!

Citations:

- <http://www.botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/c/chives65.html>
- <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/recipes/herbs/information.html>
- http://www.herbinfosite.com/?page_id=346

Plant of the Month - Winecup, Purple Poppy Mallow (*Callirhoe involucrata*)

Article by Beth Braun, Master Gardener

The description on the nursery tag for this plant begins with “Heat-loving”. Why then am I writing about the Winecup during the winter?

I don’t know how your garden fared during our recent freezes, but mine is pockmarked with drooping brown remains of basil, pentas, lysimachia, Mexican flame vine, several salvias, hibiscus and others tender plants. Some will come back, but some are slated for the compost bin. That’s not all bad. Who of us hasn’t celebrated the passing of a plant, which clears the way for trying something new?

A surprise survivor of the freezes, unprotected, in my garden is the Winecup, a spreading perennial with showy, 2-3” flowers that bloom spring into fall. Its stunning color is described as a clear magenta, fuchsia, violet, pink-purple, ruby, maroon, and of course, wine-red. The greenish white centers set off the vibrant petals, and the overall color scheme of the plant compliments cold-weather ornamental cabbages and kales.

Winecup’s stems form a thick mat up to 1 foot tall and sprawling along the ground up to 3 feet in diameter. The rounded and deeply lobed leaves provide visual interest in themselves. The Winecup has a native distribution from Iowa west to Wyoming, south to

New Mexico, and across to Texas and Louisiana, and it’s a beneficial nectar plant for bees and butterflies. The accompanying photo is from the collection of the Wildflower Center in Austin.

This beauty is suited for rock gardens, wildflower and prairie gardens, and as a trailer in planters. It requires well-draining soil and sun to part shade, and is drought hardy.



Callirhoe involucrata and its near relatives—Standing Winecup, Annual Winecup and others—are included in Texas native seed mixes including Lady Bird’s Legacy Wildflower Mix, developed in collaboration with UT Austin’s Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Its vivid color stands out in planned natural landscapes (not as much of an oxymoron as it sounds) at Memorial Park, MD Anderson, along Braes Bayou and other locations around town.

Worms for Composting

Article by Kelly Gibson, Master Gardener

The P2 Lecture Series for January was “Worms for Composting” by Charlene Perry, a delightful speaker, informative and loving what she does.

The term “Vermi” means ‘worms,’ and “Vermicomposting” is worms and their casting (poo) mixed with compost. Charlene talked about the benefits of worm composting, which include Eco Friendly advantages, recycling food waste, and cost effectiveness.

During the lecture we learned what is the most popular worm for this area. It’s the Red Wiggler (*Eisenia fetida*). They are high producers and adapt well in this climate. Not all worms are the same. There are surface worms and burrowing or yard worms (earthworms). Surface worms are used for composting and include Canadian Night Crawlers, African Night Crawlers, European Night Crawlers, Alabama Jumpers and the preferred Red Wigglers. If one produces a good environment for these Red Wigglers, they will double in numbers every three months.

Worms can be cultivated inside or outside, but one must be mindful of maintaining proper temperature, moisture and ventilation while protecting from pests. A group of worms is called a herd.

There are several different types of worm bins to use, including tubs, barrels and buckets. Do not use chlorinated water in your worm bin because the chlorine will kill the micro goodies your compost is making in the soil. Natural rainwater is the best for worms. If you don’t have access to this on a regular basis, let your

tap water sit for a while before you water your worms. Charlene also warned us to not use drainage from compost bins to water plants.

Charlene also discussed how to feed the worms. They like veggies, fruits (not citrus), coffee, egg shells, manure paper, peat moss, and egg cartons. She feeds hers lots of pumpkin and watermelon. They do not like meat, dairy, onions, garlic, cabbage, bones, broccoli and grease. Worms need to be fed in different areas of their bin so that they will crawl around the bin and spread their castings. Bulk or bedding needs to be added as well in order to increase the volume of the bin. This could be shredded paper and/or cardboard, peat moss, compost, shredded leaves and egg cartons.

There are three different ways to harvest worm castings: light separation, sideways separation and vertical separation. The use of a screen or trammel is recommended. Apply vermicompost to your plants by lining bottom and sides of pots, applying to seed furrows and side dressing during the growing season.

For more detailed information and instructions visit her website www.digitorganics.com or email her at digitorganics@yahoo.com. She did give us a sample of vermicomposting. Mine went home to a tired Begonia.

Good Job Charlene Perry! And Happy Worming!



TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE
3033 BEAR CREEK DR.
HOUSTON, TX 77084

281.855.5600 FAX 281.855.5638

harris.agrilife.org/program-areas/hort/

hcmga.tamu.edu

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The Harris County Master Gardeners as well as Texas A&M Agrilife Extension - Harris County Horticulture are actively participating on Facebook offering tips, lists, news and plant advice almost daily. The best part, instead of locating planting guides or insect documents, and sale dates for individuals, you can add the HCMG site



your account and easily share information with others. This is a definite timesaving device for these busy garden days and helps promote our organization.

www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners

www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyHorticulture

URBAN DIRT • FEBRUARY 2017



February Green Thumb Gardening Series *Spring Vegetable Gardening*

February 9
Barbara Bush Library
6:30-8:30 p.m.

February 16
Freeman Branch Library
6:30-8:30 p.m.

February 18
Maude Smith Marks Library
10 a.m. - Noon

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Spring Branch Memorial Library
6:30-8:30 p.m.