

Urban Dirt

Summer Survival & Preparing for Fall issue!

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

Preparing for the Fall vegetable garden

By Christine Hammen, Master Gardner

Vegetables growing in the summer production garden at Precinct 2 Genoa Friendship Garden include cucumbers, melons, okra, peppers, Southern peas, squash and sweet potatoes. Additional crops that will handle our summer heat and humidity are Malabar spinach, Roselle, and Asian beans (Yard long). If you have never grown Yard long beans, they are magnets for aphids. Keep a bucket of soapy water handy when harvesting to wash the aphids off the beans before you bring the beans in the house! If you have spring planted arugula and/or swiss chard growing in full sun, and it is looking wilted by lunch time, consider covering these with shade cloth to prolong production and prevent scorching. Keep the shade cloth handy in late August when you begin setting out tomato and pepper transplants. Covering the transplants with the shade cloth will help the plants adjust to field conditions. All of the vegetables listed above will carry over to the fall garden producing until the first frost. If their production slows, or they become diseased, remove them immediately. There are plenty of cool season vegetables to take their place. You may decide at some point to rip everything out and start fresh.

The fall vegetable seeds that may be direct sown are green or wax beans, beets, carrots, collards, coriander, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuces, mustards, onions, parsnips, peas, radishes, spinach, and turnips. Broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, and parsley will be seeded in the greenhouse in early to mid-August for transplanting to the garden in September & October. We start seeds in the greenhouse in the summer because, for many fall vegetables, the garden soil temperature is too hot for optimum seed

germination. Seeding indoors and setting out transplants in 6-8 weeks gives us a jump start on the growing



season. Thus, we are able to get a harvest before a severe frost occurs. December 3rd is the average first frost date for SE Harris County. Also seeded in the greenhouse, in early July, are tomatoes and peppers for transplanting in mid-August. Small, whole potatoes are planted out in the garden in late August. Garlic cloves and multiplier onions are set out in October.

Now is the time to get your list going of what you want to plant in the Fall. Purchase seeds. Sketch a diagram of where these seeds or transplants will be planted in the garden. Compare this to your Spring 2017 plot plan (or photos if you photo-documented your Spring garden). It is important to plant vegetables of the same species in different locations from season to season to avoid the build-up of soil pathogens and pest insect populations. This concept is known as crop rotation, and is the primary tenet of an integrated pest management program. Make the necessary changes to your diagram. Save it and refer to it when planting out your seeds and transplants in the Fall.

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Upcoming Events

August 2017

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

Fall Vegetables

Aug. 10, Barbara Bush Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Aug. 15, Spring Branch Memorial Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Aug. 17, Freeman Branch Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Aug. 19, Maude Smith Marks Library, 10:00 - noon.

Educational Program

Aug. 10, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m., *Attracting Blue Birds* by Linda Crum, Montgomery County Master Gardener, Master Naturalist and board member of the Texas Blue Bird Society. Genoa Friendship Garden Education Building, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston, 77034

Open Garden Day: *Meet the Master Gardeners!*

Aug. 7, 21, 8:30 -11a.m., Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston, 77034

Aug. 27, Workshops & children's activities, *Fall Vegetables*, 10:00 - 10:45 a.m. Bear Creek Gardens/Extension, 3033 Bear Creek Drive, Houston, 77084

September 2017

Green Thumb Gardening Series

Gardening with Children & Grandchildren

Sept. 14, Barbara Bush Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Sept. 16, Maude Smith Marks Library, 10:00 - noon

Sept. 19, Spring Branch Memorial Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Sept. 21, Freeman Branch Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Educational Program

Sept. 4, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m., *Fall Gardening*, Guy Lazrus, Harris County Master Gardener. Genoa Friendship Garden Education Building, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd

Open Garden Day: *Meet the Master Gardeners!*

Sept. 18, 8:30-11:00 a.m., Genoa Friendship Garden, Plants for sale in the Greenhouse. 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. 77034

Sept. 26, Workshops & children's activities, *Gardening with Children & Grandchildren*, Bear Creek Gardens/Extension, 3033 Bear Creek Drive, Houston, 77084

October 2017

Plant Sale!

October 7, Fall Sale & Symposia - Plant overview, 8:00 - 9:00 a.m. Plant sale, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Landscape plants, perennials, herbs and even some fall vegetables. Bear Creek Gardens/Extension, 3033 Bear Creek Drive, Houston, 77084

Have Garden Questions?

Master Gardener Help Line - 713.274.0950

9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m., Mon.-Fri.

Email your questions to: phonehcmga@gmail.com

You can also drop in, or mail us at 3033 Bear Creek Dr., Houston, TX 77084

Visit txmg.org or contact the Harris County Extension Office, 713-274-0950, coordinator.harrishort@gmail.com for information.

Preparing for the Fall vegetable garden, cont'd from pg. 1

How do we prepare the garden for Fall transplants and seeds? We will start by tilling under compost and fertilizer to amend the soil. Check the soil pH to make sure the pH is in the ideal 6-6.5 range. Soil pH is an important and easy parameter to measure using litmus paper. Soils in southeast Harris County are usually slightly alkaline; they have a pH higher than 7. To acidify the soil to bring it back into the ideal pH range, till in some sphagnum peat moss. It is important to have your soil slightly acidic (pH 6-7 range) so that essential minerals like phosphorous, iron, copper, zinc, boron and manganese are in a form that is readily available for plant uptake. If your soil is acidic, add ground agricultural limestone to raise the pH to the 6-7 range.

Work smarter, water smarter! In the summer time along the gulf coast early morning and late evening are the best times of day to work in the garden, to water the garden, and to set out transplants in the garden. Be sure you stay hydrated. Keep the electrolytes (Gatorade) handy, too! They help the body recover quickly from heat stress. This is a good time to check your garden's irrigation system for leaks. While the garden waits for Fall planting, consider upgrading from traditional sprinklers to soaker hoses or drip irrigation. You might consider harvesting your rainwater, or using ollas to water large containers. Whatever your irrigation method, it is important that you irrigate your garden consistently, and frequently, especially if you are growing vegetables from seed. Once your garden is ready, you may want to cover the soil with mulch so weeds don't take up residence before planting time. Reapply mulch to other gardens as well to conserve soil moisture, lower soil temperature, and keep weeds from taking root.

Let's discuss tomatoes briefly, as they are the vegetable of most interest to gardeners, in general. Do you still have healthy tomato plants growing from your spring planting? I have removed the diseased and stressed tomato plants from my home garden, three healthy plants remain which I will try to coddle through the summer. When the last tomatoes have been harvested from these plants, they will be cut to 18" in height and watered only enough to keep them alive. In late August, any surviving plants will be fertilized and resume normal watering. Hopefully, they will all survive. Do you intend to plant tomatoes in your fall garden? If so, you need to select your varieties and start seeds now. In the greenhouse at Precinct 2 we seed tomatoes for fall planting about July 4th. Seeds of Creole, Juliet, and Large Red Cherry have germinated and as of July 10th they had their first set of leaves. Other varieties you

might consider for your fall tomato garden are Better Boy, Early Girl, Jet Star, Jubilee (yellow), Super Boy, Sweetie, and Tycoon. Randy Lemmon fans might expand this list to include Amelia, Dona, Heatwave, Sunmaster, Surefire, Tomato 444, Sungold, and Sweet 100's.

Whatever the variety you choose (all short season tomatoes, of course), you will transplant the tomato plants to the garden in late August.



Also, I want to share with you one question that is asked repeatedly from our garden visitors. "What can I plant before leaving for a month, two, or three during the summer so my garden isn't overgrown with weeds when I return?" Here are two options. One, consider planting your garden with squash or sweet potatoes. Both are large leaved, vining plants that will quickly cover the soil keeping it cool and blocking out weeds. Both require 3-4 months before they reach maturity. Two, consider sowing a cover crop. Cover crops are also known as green manures and are considered the easiest and most economical way to improve soil health. When the cover crop blooms, it can be mown and turned under thereby cycling organic matter and nutrients back into the soil. Leguminous cover crops (peas, beans, clovers, fava beans and vetch) also fix nitrogen into the soil. Whether you choose a legume, grain, grass or brassica cover crop, the end result is improved soil aeration, fertility, tilth (ability to till or work the soil) and water holding capacity. Why not give the garden a vacation and let the cover crop do the work for you?

To summarize, select appropriate vegetable varieties, purchase seed, and sketch your garden plan to ensure seasonal crop rotation. Maintain soil health by amending your garden soil with compost, fertilizer and peat moss as required. Check your irrigation system for leaks and upgrade to a more water conserving system as your budget allows. Enjoy your garden!

Herb of the Month - Micro Herbs

By Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

If you have visited a fine dining restaurant within the past twenty or so years, you've probably witnessed on your table or the next a delicate greens compilation looking to have been grown by a secret society of miniatures-masters, then artfully arranged utilizing tweezers and shallow breaths. Although there is no absolute USDA definition of "micro greens" nor "micro herbs," they are nonetheless the darling of great chefs throughout the United States and beyond, and "micro herbs," specifically, are our focus for August.



With a non-existent official definition of "micro greens," we turn instead to the Institute of Culinary Education (ICE) for this explanation: "Plants with two cotyledons are called "dicots." Inside the cotyledons is a "food reserve" for the plant, to be used until it can extract enough energy and nutrition from the sun and the soil (i.e., begin photosynthesizing). After that stage the cotyledons either start photosynthesizing or drop away. In some types of plant, the cotyledons last only a few days; within others they can exist for a year or more. These minute cotyledons on a fine stem are what people normally think of when talking about microgreens."

Expanding upon this, according to the University of Illinois, "(m)icrogreens (micro-vegetables or micro-herbs or tiny greens) refers to the stage of growth between baby greens and sprouts. These tiny greens are normally harvested 10-14 days after planting

Citations:

<http://blog.ice.edu/2016/09/23/tiny-delicate-flavorful-microgreens/>

<http://web.extension.illinois.edu/state/newsdetail.cfm?NewsID=31552>

<http://www.johnnyseeds.com/herbs/herbs-for-micro-greens/>

<http://www.epicurious.com/recipes/food/views/microgreens-with-curry-vinaigrette-237663>

and have fully spread leaves ready to add color, crunch and nutrients to your winter meals." It's also interesting to note that micros don't bear the same now-infamous reputation of sprouts as posing a risk of becoming a source of food-borne illnesses like salmonella or E. coli, as they are harvested when these risks are not present.

The range of micro herbs available is impressive and more extensive than you might have guessed, including parsley, Italian large leaf, dark opal and lemon basil; red-veined sorrel, dill, chervil, salad burnet, fennel, cutting celery, shiso, lemon balm, and more.

Micro greens and, likewise, micro herbs, are to be plated judiciously. Think of these greens and herbs as artful dashes of vivid yet subtle, sophisticated color, taste, and texture pops on an overall dining palette. Too many may spoil the entire effect, but a carefully executed balance creates an exciting experience that is savored like a cool breeze on a sultry southern evening. If you don't mind a little spice with your sultry, here is a great Indian recipe from Epicurious utilizing micro greens.

Micro Greens with curry vinaigrette

Ingredients

4 teaspoons curry powder (preferably Madras)

2 teaspoons water

1/2 cup canola oil

2 tablespoons cider vinegar

1/2 teaspoon minced garlic

Scant 1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

6 cups microgreens (1/4 pound)

Preparation

Stir together curry powder and water in a small bowl to make a paste. Let stand 5 minutes, then stir in oil and let stand, stirring occasionally, 1 hour.

Pour curry oil through a paper-towel-lined sieve into a small cup, discarding any solids.

Whisk together vinegar, garlic, salt, and pepper, then add curry oil, whisking until combined.

Divide greens among plates (with pork and potatoes, if serving) and drizzle with some dressing.

Plant of the Month - Cacti (*Cactaceae*) & Succulents (*many botanical families*)

By Beth Braun, Master Gardener

I had forgotten about my first foray into gardening back in elementary school. With a modest allowance I bought a small potted cactus, then a few more. None bloomed that I recall, but their shapes and colors and spines fascinated me.

This memory surfaced after I moved to a metal-clad townhouse with a small yard that gets full afternoon sun. The heat reflected off the siding called for really hardy plants suitable for container



gardening. What better than weird and wonderful cacti and succulents?

What's the difference between a cactus and a succulent, you ask? The better question is "Is this succulent a cactus?" Simply stated, all cacti are succulents but not all succulents are cacti. Cacti are in the botanical family Cactaceae, but succulents are represented in over 40 botanical families that are spread around the world.¹

Beyond that, it can be really confusing because not all plants that look like a cactus are a cactus, and some that don't look like a typical cactus really are. Common names are not much help either. True cacti are distinguished from the succulent members of other plant families such as Euphorbiaceae by the structure of the flower and the presence of the areoles on cacti.² Areole are the small light- to dark-colored bumps out of which grow spines. Spines serve as a defense mechanism to keep foraging animals from chomping into the soft-fleshed cacti and their fruit for fluids and nutrients. In some species, hairy tangles of spines provide shade and climate control to the cactus. Cactus flowers are usually flamboyant, and emerge from the areoles as well.

If you want to get really wonky, you can read articles on cactus spines, epidermis, cortex, apical meristems, cephalia, flowers etc. at <http://www.sbs.utexas.edu/mauseth/ResearchOnCacti/Spines.htm>. Also, take a look at our own <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/search/> and you'll see over 400 results for the word cactus.

The one that caught my eye begins with "In fact, one of the first pets that I had in earliest childhood was a thornless cactus . . .".

This garden sits in full sun, surrounded by pavement and gets no irrigation beyond rainfall. This is a great example of a low-maintenance xeriscape that's not likely to be trampled. The plants were eventually



stolen, however. An important thing to keep in mind when planting a spiny/thorny succulent is its full size. This is true of all plants, but let's face it: digging up such a succulent that's

outgrown its space is more challenging than moving a perennial. They tend to be slow growing and may not pose a problem any time soon, but you may end up like my friend who sold her house to get away from a woody vine that got out of hand.

The cactus garden at P2's Genoa Friendship Garden showcases large and small specimen, with expanses of crushed granite used as well-draining and attractive mulch. The specimens are far enough apart to move around safely to weed and occasionally tend the cacti.

This close-up photo shows part of an inspired garden in a neighbor's small front yard. Next to an area of brick pavers, the garden is packed with succulents of various shapes, sizes and colors in raised, well-draining beds with a ribbon of polished black rocks



meandering through it. The owner bought most of the plants at big box stores. Supposing this short column piques your interest. Mark your calendar now for The Houston Cactus and Succulent Society's

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Some Like It Hot!

By Becky Lowicki, Master Gardener

Finding drought-tolerant plants to survive the dog days of August in Houston seems as if it would be simple, right? Well, yes and no.

Survival of the fittest in Zone 9 takes a sort of plant finesse, so to speak, a will to live in our sub-tropical climate under monsoon circumstances that come on a whim producing upwards of 2-6 inches of rain and buckets of standing water in the aftermath, as well as an affinity for soil that becomes dry as the Mojave desert with often sauna-like conditions permeating the atmosphere.

Whew, even we as humans have a tendency to droop, wilt and become brittle and downright oversaturated this time of year.

Bring on the fall respite! Well, not so fast—the cooler temps are but a promise of hope to come on the horizon. But until then, here are a few tips to consider until relief arrives:

1. Mulch, mulch, mulch. As always, a nice 1 to 2-inch blanket of pine bark or cedar mulch provides a protective cooling cover and moisture among your beds and around your trees—but remember to avoid “mounding” the mulch or creating the pyramid look around tree trunks, which is prone to disease and fungus over time.
2. Compost is your friend! Adding organic matter not only provides moisture, it’s also worth its weight in gold for all the beneficial nutrients it provides for new and existing plants in your landscape.
3. Water intensely but less frequently. *The Drought Survivability Study* (DSS), initiated by the Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources (IRNR) and Texas Water Resources Institute (TWRI), found most of the study’s 97 plant species common to the Central Texas region remained lush and healthy when watered in smaller amounts, and some remained healthy with zero irrigation.
4. Hold off on heavy fertilizing or pruning during intense heat periods as each will encourage new growth, adding stress on a plant that’s truly just trying to stay the course and make it through the summer.
5. Think color and texture! There’s no reason you can’t have color in the garden as well as interesting focal points of greenery for the eye, even during tepid times.

Heat-loving perennials include the hardy hibiscus with showy blooms in almost every color imaginable, as well as the sunny yellow of daisy-like annual *melampodium paludosum*, profuse rainbow of colors of lantana, attractive silver texture foliage of dusty miller (*Senecio cineraria*) and the spike-leaved agave succulent renowned in xeriscaping, a landscaping style requiring minimal irrigation.



Hibiscus Rosa-Sinensis (Cairo Pink)

Planning for the future, be sure to check out the *Earth Kind Plant Selector* hosted by Texas A&M Extension, a ready resource database of annuals, perennials and more listed by zip code or hardi-



Bowles Vinca Minor (Periwinkle)

ness zone based on parameters you select. From the pop of “periwinkle” vinca to vibrant purple verbena, or the “yellow bells” of esperanza to vibrant red Turk’s cap, there are oodles of options depending on your planting specifics. With a bit of pre-planning, you can help your plants survive the Texas heat and maintain an attractive landscape as we look to welcome “cooler” temps ahead.

Tomato Culture 101

By Charlotte Gogola, Master Gardener Intern

Our July **Second Thursday Lecture Series** topic at the Genoa Friendship Gardens was **Tomato Culture**, presented by Lawrence Gibson, one of the first Master Gardener graduates in Liberty County. We want to share his extensive knowledge and insights on growing tomatoes. Information for the August and September lectures are listed in the **Upcoming Events** on page 2 of this newsletter. Enjoy!

Tomatoes originated in western South America and eight species still grow wild there. The plant was brought to Europe by Spanish soldiers in 1521, where it was adopted as Europe's *pomme d'amour* (fruit of love!) The English apparently saw the tomato as strictly an ornamental; British colonists brought it back to the Americas as such. (The tomato is in the nightshade family and is related to poisonous plants, so it may have been assumed that tomatoes were poisonous.) When the Tariff Act of 1883 levied a 10% tax on imported vegetables, the tomato was argued to be a fruit, but the Supreme Court decided otherwise because tomatoes generally are served during the main part of a meal as vegetables are.

Growing tomatoes can be a challenge as there are several diseases that afflict tomatoes. Fungal diseases include Early Blight, Late Blight, Gray Leaf Spot, and most recently Southern Blight. A Daconil product that's registered for use on tomatoes will attack the first three. With Southern Blight, it is necessary to discard the plant and preferably the clothes you're wearing when you uproot it as it's highly contagious. Wilt diseases include Fusarium Wilt, Verticillium Wilt, and Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus. The tag on the hybridized tomato plant will indicate its resistance to these diseases (e.g., F for Fusarium Wilt, V for Verticillium Wilt, and TSWV for Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus.) Resistance to harmful nematodes is indicated by N. (Some nematodes are helpful, others are harmful.) The number one tomato nemesis is *Alternaria solani*, a fungus for which no resistance or treatment has been developed.

Pests that affect tomatoes include tomato hornworms, which are voracious. They can be removed by hand. Spider mites, stink bugs, leaf-footed bugs and tomato worms can be deterred by frequent application of 5% Sevin dust. They can also be combatted by frequent high-pressure watering, optionally with a few drops of soap added as a surfactant. Squirrels attack both green and red



tomatoes; birds (especially mockingbirds) attack pink-to-red tomatoes. Netting can keep them out, but it may be simpler just to plant additional plants – some for them, some for you!

Blossom End Rot is a disease caused by a shortage of Calcium, which is necessary for the tomato fruit's structure. It can be caused by either too little or too much watering, so watering should be adjusted depending on whichever is the likely culprit. Once the leathery, pale, sunken spot appears, you've lost that tomato. Calcium is particularly challenging because, unlike Nitrogen, Calcium isn't mobile within the tomato plant.

Success or failure depends in part on site selection. A tomato needs 6-8 hours (no more) of preferably morning sun. The soil should

have good internal and external drainage – ideally it should be porous like a sponge. The plant should be free from competition, near water, and visible if possible. (“Your presence is the best insect control you have.” You should visit your plants once or even twice a day.)

Bed preparation is another determinant of success. In the fall, start a new bed or refurbish an old one. It should be raised eight or more

inches, and it should be sized so that you can reach the center from the sides. It's best to have it oriented East-to-West for better wind pollination, and the branches should touch when the plants are mature. About 3" of compost (which should smell fresh and clean) should be added on top. There are many potential sources of soil enrichment, including cottonseed meal, composted animal manure, rabbit feed (which is almost all alfalfa), Epsom salts (magnesium sulfate), and one cup per cubic foot of 13-13-13 fertilizer. Even better than using balanced fertilizer, send your soil off to be tested to determine what it really needs. (Don't trust the store-bought kits.) Tomatoes prefer a slightly acidic pH of ~6.5-6.7.

Pine straw makes a good mulch. Hardwood mulch can also be used. Do not use prairie hay for mulch; it's usually treated with herbicide for weeds, and that will kill your tomato plant. Alfalfa isn't treated for weeds so it's okay to use. Drip irrigation, if used, can go on top of the mulch or under it.

Plant selection also affects success. There are Determinate plants, which stop at a certain height; Indeterminate plants, which grow to

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Tomato Culture 101, *cont'd from pg. 7*

8-9 feet, and Semi-Determinate. “Bush” is basically Determinate. Mr. Gibson buys bush **Celebrity**, which does well in Liberty County and grows to a height of over 6 feet. He also recommends **Champion**. For Harris or Galveston county, the plants with the fewest days to maturity will do best. Mr. Gibson buys his seedlings in late January/early February. For our area, calculate backward from the last frost date to know when to buy seeds or seedlings. Cold weather protection may be necessary. When buying seedlings, check that the roots are white; if they’re brown or black, the plant is ill.

Another factor in tomato success is how they’re planted. Mr. Gibson plants his in a zigzag pattern such that the plants are about 24 inches apart. Over each baby plant he slips a bottomless Styrofoam coffee cup to deter cutworms. (This is left in place at least until the tomato stalk is about a finger’s width, too large for the cutworm to cut.) Between the two rows of tomato plants he plants a row of empty one-gallon plastic pots so that they’re 24 inches from the plants. Watering and fertilization are done through those pots, which come with holes in the bottom to let the water and fertilizer seep out. This prevents getting water and fertilizer on the tomato plant leaves, which can cause disease and injury. A mature tomato plant may have 25-inch roots extending in all directions just below the surface of the soil; there is no tap root.

Immediately after buying tomato seedlings, you should “bump them up” to 4-inch pots because tomatoes don’t like being root-bound. Hold each plant by the leaves so that the stem isn’t crushed, and use a pencil to dig the hole and tamp in the soil. About three weeks after transplanting the plants into the ground, install metal support posts and tomato cages. The posts go in two lines along the long edges of the bed. The cages go in between the rows of posts. Use cable ties or 14-gauge electrical wire to tie the cages to each other and to the support posts.

Plant of the Month, *cont'd from pg. 5*

show and sale on September 9 and 10 from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. at the Metropolitan Multi-Service Center, 1475 W Gray St. in Houston. This is a fun event in that you’ll see plants not typically sold in nurseries. Member experts are happy to answer questions, as we

As the plants grow, keep the foliage trimmed up from the bed to prevent the introduction of diseases and pests. You may also want to trim suckers since they can push the original plant leaves onto the ground. They can also result in smaller tomatoes (same overall yield, more fruits.)

Don’t wait until the tomatoes are pink or red to pick them because pests could get them first. When they’re beginning to pink, pick them and lay them on paper to ripen (no sunshine needed.)

If you find yellowing/bleaching of bottom leaves, cut them off but remember to sterilize your cutting tool after each cut. Clorox wipes are a convenient way to sterilize tools.

Watering and fertilizing also affect plant success. Watering is done in the morning. A basic watering schedule is to water daily the first week, every other day the second week, and by the fourth week cut watering to twice a week. If yellowing or chlorosis appears, this schedule may need adjusting. (If tomatoes start splitting, they’ve gotten more water than they can handle.) Add a water-soluble fertilizer about every 3 weeks after tomatoes start to appear.

“The book says don’t ever plant tomatoes twice in the same place,” says Mr. Gibson. He excavates and refills his beds once every three years and hasn’t had a problem.

Growing tomatoes in pots is challenging because tomatoes are so picky about their water requirement. Mr. Gibson doesn’t recommend it. He also warns that growing heirloom tomatoes is extra challenging because there is no resistance bred in.

Our tomatoes are about done for this season, and Mr. Gibson says he hasn’t tried trimming back and trying for a fall crop, but that is an option according to several attendees. Good luck out there with your tomato plants!

do at our Master Gardener plant sales. The Society’s website lists growing tips, events, newsletters, membership information and more. Happy gardening!

¹ Susan Croissant writing for the Master Gardener newsletter Under the Solano Sun, a publication of the University of California Division of Agricultural and Natural Resources.

² Ted Fisher, retired Texas Extension Horticulturist, in the May 2002 web issue of Horticulture Update, edited by Dr. William C. Welch, and produced by Extension Horticulture, Texas Cooperative Extension, The Texas A&M University System, College Station, Texas.

Laying a groundwork for a fall garden

By Terri Simon, Master Gardener

This is the time those of us along the Gulf Coast start prepping our fall gardens. I know it's hard to believe, but if you are drenched with sweat after 30 minutes of working outside, that's when you need to start planning for fall. In July and August, there's not a lot happening in your vegetable garden. Be harsh. Those plants you coddled and loved throughout the spring are done with their bumper crops. Grab your babies by the throat and rip them out. If they are not diseased, toss them in the compost pile. Pull up any supports or wire cages you used and clean them thoroughly.



Plan your fall vegetable garden. Decide if you want to start from seeds or transplants or both. Depending on the crop, seeds should be started now. Select seeds with a short maturity date if that is the route you choose. If you want to grow tomatoes and peppers,



I recommend transplants.

For bed preparation, weed the bed. You can do it by hand or you can cover the area with ½" of compost followed by five newspaper layers. Wet that and then cover with 2-4" of

shredded mulch. If you choose the latter method, allow time for newspapers to break down.

Most vegetables require eight hours of sun. If you do grow shade-tolerant plants, plant them between rows of larger plants which will provide some cover for them. Don't forget to fertilize your plot. You can use one pound of ammonium sulfate per one hundred square feet. Follow that with one tablespoon of ammonium sulfate every three weeks around each plant. Water in thoroughly. Some of you may prefer a different fertilizer, so use what works for you.



Once you have your bed properly prepped and your veggies and other plants in, it should be

smooth sailing. With love and attention your plants should flourish. One advantage of a fall garden is less heat and fewer insects.

If you decide to use transplants, great news! Harris County Master Gardeners, at the Bear Creek extension, is having their fall sale on Saturday, October 7th. They will have herbs and some fall vegetables. The address is 3033 Bear Creek Drive, Houston, Texas, 77084. Click on the plant sales section at <https://hcmga.tamu.edu/Public/> for details.

The extension has a wealth of online information for fall gardening. Below are some of the many I found.

Direct seeding guide (Houston is zone III):

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/archives/parsons/fallgarden/falldirect.html>

Herbs for Harris County (Parsley and cilantro are two cool weather crops that come to mind):

<http://counties.agrilife.org/harris/files/2011/05/herbs.pdf>

A guide of vegetable varieties suitable for Harris County:

http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/publications/veg_variety/

A comprehensive list of summer and fall vegetable varieties:

<https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/solutions/easy-vegetables-to-grow/>

And finally, a **guide for summer and winter vegetables that are easy to grow**, and it is in English and Spanish:

<https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/garden-how-to/projects/fall-garden-clean-up.htm>



Galveston County's fall garden from 2016 featured broccoli, Dwarf Blue Curled Vales Kale (center), and Lacinato Kale.

Photo by Gene Speller, Galveston Master Gardener

Gardening Tools

This chart is a handy guide for knowing the best times to plant in Harris County.

Vegetable Garden Planting Dates for Harris County	FACT SHEET											
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
ASPARAGUS, Crowns												
BEANS, Lima & Snap Bush												
BEANS, Lima & Snap Pole												
BEETS												
BROCCOLI, Plants												
CABBAGE, Plants												
CAULIFLOWER, Plants												
CARROTS												
CHARD, Swiss												
CHINESE CABBAGE												
COLLARDS												
CORN												
CUCUMBER												
EGGPLANTS, Plants												
KOHLRABI, Plants												
LETTUCE												
MUSKMELON, Cantalope												
MUSTARD												
OKRA												
ONION, Bulb-type setes												
ONION, Transplant for scallions												
ONION, Multipliers												
PARSLEY												
PEAS, English & Snap												
PEAS, Southern												
PEPPER, Plants												
POTATO, Irish												
POTATO, Sweet												
PUMPKIN												
RADISH												
SPINACH												
SQUASH, Summer												
SQUASH, Winter												
TOMATO, Plants												
TURNIP												
WATERMELON												



Not a Master Gardener?

Get Master Gardener Event Notifications
 Sign up for email alerts for upcoming
 Master Gardener events open to the public.



August Gardening Tips: You and Your Garden

By Betty Bailey, Master Gardener

As August begins in Texas it's important to think about what your garden needs and what you need when you are gardening.



August heat puts stress on both the gardener and your garden which means job one is staying hydrated while you work in your yard. Drink lots of water and schedule your garden work during less intense times of heat: early or later in the day.

Wearing a hat, sunscreen and taking breaks while you work are absolute musts. Listening to music can also take your mind off the heat and give you extra energy.

The phrases *hotter than blazes* and *bursting into flames*, when outdoors, come to mind quickly when you move from air conditioning to the outdoors. But then, the garden and its needs kick in to supply motivation. I find that working at least 15-20 minutes every day helps to keep up with the weeds and needs of the yard.

Gardening Tips

Watering is important and a rule of thumb is to water deeply, encouraging vigorous roots. Water early morning or late evening. Test your soil to understand your irrigation needs. Choosing plants and grass suited to your yard can help ensure a beautiful landscape.



Pots require more frequent watering. Check them daily. They will quickly lose moisture and watch for wilting as a call for water from your plants.



Mulch is necessary for trees and plants. Mulch three to four inches deep, to keep plants cooler, less stressed and weeds at bay.



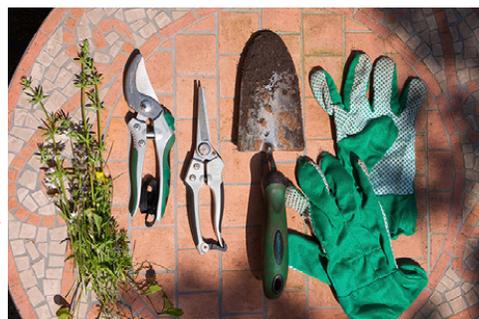
Photo courtesy of YourLeaf.org

Mulch applied in a “V” shape building in thickness away from the bark of the trees allows for moisture while ensuring air for the root system. Organic mulches are ideal and enrich the soil as an added benefit.

It's a good time to plan and prepare for fall plants in your garden. Cool season vegetables and herbs such as cabbage, kale, broccoli, potatoes, carrots are just a few to seed or transplant when the weather moderates.

Perennials, annuals, roses and fall blooming shrubs enjoy a light feeding.

Pruning and a light “haircut” encourages fall blooms for roses.



Prune deadwood from trees and weak tree branches.

Remove old plants that have stopped producing to eliminate insect shelters and clutter your landscape.

Watch for aphids or other insects and spray them away with a hard blast of water with an eye for both sides of the leaves.

In general, plan for the fall and spring. Work on garden maintenance such as deadheading plants and those annoying weeds. Be aware of the heat and how it affects you, and your landscape.

Open Garden Days at Genoa Friendship Gardens



The Orchard



The Water Garden



The Greenhouse

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Harris County Master Gardeners invite you to join us

Open Garden Days

on the 3rd Monday of every month, 8:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m., January through December, and the 1st Monday of every month, June through August.

Admission to the Exhibit Gardens is free, and register at the Welcome Table to receive additional monthly notices for children and family events.

The Genoa Friendship Gardens

is located at

1202 Genoa Red Bluff Road

Houston, Texas 77034

Email: phoneHCMGA@gmail.com **Phone:** 713.274.0950

To schedule a special event for your garden club, school or professional organization please contact us to make your arrangements.

- Tour the variety of exhibits to inspire you with vegetable, perennial, rose, tropical and native gardens.
- Meet and talk with a Master Gardener about planting citrus, fruit or berries for your home orchard.
- Contemplate the joy in the Serenity Garden and catch a view of the Water Garden.
- Don't leave the GFG until you have shopped the Greenhouse where seasonal herbs, vegetables and perennials are available for bargain prices until September.

2017 Monthly Open Garden Days & Special Events

January 16	Open Garden Day	June 5 & 19	Open Garden Day
February 18	Fruit Tree & Tomato Sale	July 3 & 17	Open Garden Day
February 20	Open Garden Day	August 7 & 21	Open Garden Day
March 18	Perennial, Herb & Pepper Sale	September 18	Open Garden Day
March 20	Open Garden Day	October 16	Open Garden Day
April 17	Open Garden Day	October TBD	Family Fun Day
May 15	Open Garden Day	November 20	Open Garden Day



The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Harris County Master Gardeners invite you to join us for fun and learning at
Open Garden Days,
on the 4th Tuesday of every month from January, 2017 through October, 2017.

The event is FREE. However, please register in the lobby when you arrive.

We are located at: 3033 Bear Creek Drive, Houston, TX 77084

Email: ogd.harrishort@gmail.com

From 9:00 to 11:30 you are welcome to wander around the grounds and to visit with the Master Gardeners as they work in the gardens .

From 10:00 to 11:00 workshops and activities adapted for all ages are held.

Workshop for adults and older teens will include a hands-on gardening experience related to the Green Thumb Lecture topics listed below.

Activities for 7 year olds to younger teens will include hands-on gardening and/or a project with a nature theme. A parent or responsible adult must be on the premises, and is welcome to attend the adult workshop.

Pre-school to 6 year olds and their parents can share a hands-on gardening and / or a nature theme craft activity.

If you wish to participate in the workshop / activity session from 10:00 to 11:00 AM, please RSVP to the email above by the Sunday before the event, and include the ages of children attending with you.

We want to have enough supplies for everyone.

Monthly 2017 Green Thumb topics and the Open Garden Day dates:

January 24 – Soils and Compost
February 28 – Spring Vegetable Gardening
March 28 – Roses: Planting, Growing & Upkeep
April 25 – Herbs
May 23 – Insects in the Garden

June 27 – Propagation and Seed Saving
July 25 – Raised Beds, Drip Irrigation & Rain Barrels
August 22 – Fall Vegetables
Sept. 26 – Gardening with Children and Grandchildren
Oct. 24 – Trees: Planting and Care (includes fruit trees)

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

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

713.274.0950

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

hcmga.tamu.edu

Like Us On Facebook

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 • AUGUST 2017



August Green Thumb Gardening Series *Fall Vegetables*

August 10
Barbara Bush Library
6:30-8:30 p.m.

August 17
Freeman Branch Library
6:30-8:30 p.m.

August 15
Spring Branch Memorial Library
10 a.m. - Noon

August 19
Maude Smith Marks Library
6:30-8:30 p.m.