

# Urban Dirt

Soils and Composting

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

## Getting Down and Dirty

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

Yes, it's true. This month I'm giving you the dirt on the dirt in the *Urban Dirt*. On Thursday, March 14, the *Second Thursday Lecture* given by John Ferguson from Nature's Way Resources was extremely informative. John spoke about *Small Scale Backyard Composting* at the Genoa Friendship Garden. For those of us who try to garden organically it was an eye opener.

other gardening products are all sold at Nature's Way Resources. Some are available by the yard and by the bag. In 2014 they added a plant nursery.



Loam soil

Photo courtesy wiltshiregabbire.co.uk

Believe it or not, not all garden- ing products are created equally. According to John, no sewage sludge, dyes or ashes are added to any of their products. His company even carries vinegar in the higher concentrations (10% and 20%) that I use to make my own organic weed killer.

Sewage sludge, or biosolids, is made from human stools that have been processed into organic fertilizer. Consider this before using it in your garden. Think of all the "additives" that are in municipal sewage. Pathogens, pharmaceuticals (yes, people flush old prescription drugs down their toilets) and perhaps heavy metals are in that product. The old term for this sludge was "night soil." Before commercial fertilizers were available, farmers used human waste for thousands of years. Today that sludge can have many contaminants in it. It is accumulating in landfills so there is ongoing research to determine its effect on agriculture. It does have nitrogen and phosphorus but it has contaminants as well.

cont'd on pg. 6



John Ferguson

Photo by Terri Simon

After a severe allergic reaction to a fungicide, John began researching the use of organic methods and products for gardening and this eventually led to his founding Nature's Way Resources. His company has received several recognition awards over the years and his private garden has also been featured in *Better Homes and Gardens*. Mulches, soil blends, compost and

## Upcoming Events

### April 2019

#### Green Thumb Gardening Series

##### **Soils and Composting**

**Apr. 11**, Barbara Bush Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

**Apr. 13**, Maude Smith Marks Library, 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

**Apr. 16**, Spring Branch Memorial Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

**Apr. 25**, Freeman Branch Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

#### Open Garden Day

**Apr. 15**, 8:30 - 11:00 a.m., Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. *Plants for sale in the Greenhouse.*

**Apr. 16**, 10:00 - 11:15 a.m., Weekley Community Center **Registration required by Saturday, Apr. 13th to: [ogd.harrishort@gmail.com](mailto:ogd.harrishort@gmail.com).** Weekley Community Center, 8440 Greenhouse Rd., Cypress, TX **[ogd.harrishort@gmail.com](mailto:ogd.harrishort@gmail.com).** Weekley Community Center, 8440 Greenhouse Rd., Cypress, TX

#### Master Gardener Lecture Series

**Apr. 11, GFG Second Thursday** 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. *Cucurbit Culture - Squash & Melons* by Herman Auer, Master Gardener. Genoa Friendship Gardens Education Center building, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd.

### May 2019

#### Green Thumb Gardening Series

##### **Water Conservation**

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

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

**May 18**, Maude Smith Marks Library, 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

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

#### Open Garden Day

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

**May 28**, 10:00 - 11:15 a.m., Weekley Community Center - **Registration required by Sunday, May 26th to: [ogd.harrishort@gmail.com](mailto:ogd.harrishort@gmail.com).** Weekley Community Center, 8440 Greenhouse Rd., Cypress, TX

#### Master Gardener Lecture Series

**May 9, GFG Second Thursday** 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. *Organics A to Z, The Healthiest Lawns and Gardens Ever!* by Mike Searmt. Genoa Friendship Gardens Education Center building, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd.

## Have Garden Questions?

Email your questions and photos to: [phone hcmga@gmail.com](mailto:hcmga@gmail.com) or  
Call us Monday – Friday 9:00 am to Noon at 713-274-0950

Visit [txmg.org](http://txmg.org) or contact the Harris County Extension Office, 713-274-0950, [coordinator.harrishort@gmail.com](mailto:coordinator.harrishort@gmail.com) for information.

# Herb of the Month - Purple Passionflower

*(Passiflora incarnata)*

by Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

Known also by various monikers such as purple passion vine, maypop, and apricot vine, purple passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*) is the highlighted herb for April.

Popular during Victorian times, purple passionflower fell out of favor with gardeners in the early twentieth century; however, according to several online sources, the plant is gaining worldwide renewed interest as a commercial crop and as an exotic decorative addition to gardens, conservatories & greenhouses.

An herbaceous vine that climbs up to twenty-five feet long, this unusual plant is widely distributed throughout the southeast



United States, from Texas to Florida. The plant was given the name Passionflower or Passion vine because the floral parts were once said to represent aspects of the Christian crucifixion story, also referred to as The Passion. The 10 petal-like parts represent

the disciples of Jesus, excluding Peter and Judas; the 5 stamens the wounds Jesus received; the knob-like stigmas the nails; the fringe the crown of thorns. Purple Passionflower's alternate name "maypop" comes from the hollow, yellow fruits that pop loudly when crushed. Yellow Passion Flower (*P. lutea*), a small yellow-flowered species, occurs from southeast Pennsylvania to Florida, west to Texas and Oklahoma, and north to Missouri, Illinois, and West Virginia.

#### Citations:

<https://www.passionflow.co.uk/passion-flower-history/>

[https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id\\_plant=pain6](https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=pain6)

<https://universityhealthnews.com/daily/stress-anxiety/passionflower-benefits-anti-anxiety-and-insomnia-without-the-side-effects/>



Most often in pink, purple, and blue, the perennial vine blooms in a wide range of months, from April to September, and thrives in nearly any environment: Roadsides, prairies, plains, meadows, pastures, savannas, woodland edges and openings, streams, and riverbanks. It will tolerate virtually any type of soil and adapt to either moist or dry conditions; sun or partial shade. Passionflower may be propagated with success either by cuttings or seed and requires virtually no maintenance. Pinching back during the first growing season to encourage bushiness is recommended, and little other care is needed.

Aside from its amazingly adaptable properties, *P. incarnata* is used by herbalists as a mild sedative and, in emerging news, there may be further medicinal uses which are currently being explored, including extensive research tests on treating anxiety and stress. Results thus far are impressive. Aside from utilitarian usage, this likewise attractive and vigorous plant also plays host to several butterflies, including Gulf Fritillary, Zebra Longwing, Crimson-patch longwing, Red-banded hairstreak, the Julia butterfly, and the Mexican butterfly.

If your garden calls for a flexible, hardy vine that offers interesting, long-lasting color, purple passionflower is an excellent option that presents multiple-duty attributes to boot! Happy spring, all!

# “Resilience” Proven Recipe “Forecast” for Garden Success

by Becky Lowicki, Master Gardener

With temps ranging from below frigid freezing one night to balmy tropical humidity the next morning, all to reoccur with cyclical intensity within a span of 48 hours, it’s no wonder our plants across the Houston landscape, much like us, are often dazed and confused!

Should we hunker down for winter or cast off layers and prepare for spring? Who knows--no one can quite prepare for the tropical nature of Houston mixed with the spikes of quick freezes to rapid warm-ups—there’s just no telling what the next roller coaster forecast will bring—ice and sleet or a picture-perfect sunny day.

For the backyard gardener (and front yards, too), it’s often proven in the plant world that the best defense is truly a great offense—and that means utilizing tried and true contenders from a diverse array of “hardy stock” candidates. And what better place to find them but your own backyard!

Based on where you reside within Harris County, as well as whether your location faces east, west, north or south, among a variety of other soil and or site challenges, your “proven winners” list will likely look different than mine—and that’s to be expected as it lends more opportunity to share potential candidates and try, try again!



*Long-lived Spirea loves a sunny corner of a house and is the first mass bloomer of spring.*

On the short-list this winter for me are the following standouts: duranta, lantana and spirea, now amass in white bloom, are likely not surprising finalists. But much like a beauty contest of the horticultural kind, there are surprises in a showy, flowery way

from the subtropical angel’s trumpet to heavenly aromatic almond bush, to the first blush of my improved Meyer lemon and multi-graft apple trees---notably repeat producers acquired from our infamous plant sales. Even Mexican sage, originally planted as a lark from seed, has adapted very well to all temps and adds the cheerful burst of red to gloomy drizzle days with no end.



*Multi-graft apple tree in bloom*

Regardless of any plant’s success, or lack thereof, each attempt is an opportunity to start anew, experiment and literally, bounce back from the dead of winter through miraculous minute green



*Vivid Mexican sage is a profuse and hardy top performer.*

growth just like that I captured on crinums and hibiscus, long-thought to be on the way out and now emerging daily. Consider the unexpected in resilience gardening and here’s hoping your landscape “springs eternal” with new green-ing potential!

*Visit the Harris County Master Gardeners  
Facebook page for event details!*

*[www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners](http://www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners)*



**Texas A&M AgriLife Extension**

in partnership with

**Hermann Park Conservancy**

are pleased to present

## **Master Gardeners in the City at McGovern Centennial Gardens**

**Saturday, April, 13th & 27th**

**McGovern Centennial Gardens at Hermann Park**

**1500 Hermann Drive**

**Houston, Texas 77004**

Events include garden tours and children activities.

**These educational programs are FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.**

Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin.  
The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating.

## Ask a Master Gardener

Ask a Master Gardener is a volunteer program offered by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Volunteers staff booths and tables to provide free, research-based horticulture education to the public throughout Harris County.

In March we are going to be in the following locations!

- Apr. 6**      **Urban Harvest** - *1st Saturday*, 7:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.  
3401 Westheimer Rd. (corner of Buffalo Spdwy. & Westheimer), Houston
- Garden Oaks/Heights** - *1st Saturday*, 8:30 a.m. - 11 a.m. at The Farmstand,  
938 Wakefield, Houston
- Apr. 13**     **Tomball** - *2nd Saturday*, 8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. at 205 W. Main Street, Tomball, TX
- Apr. 18**     **Westchase** - *3rd Thursday*, 3-7 p.m. at 10503 Westheimer Rd., Houston
- Apr. 21**     **Town Lake** - *3rd Sunday*, 9:30 a.m. - 3 p.m. at 9955 Barker Cypress Rd.  
Cypress, TX
- Apr. 27**     **Memorial Villages** - *4th Saturday*, 8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. at 10840 Beinhorn Rd.,  
Houston

## Getting Down and Dirty, *cont'd from pg. 1*

The EPA has created two levels for biosolids. Class A biosolids available to gardeners and farmers should not contain pathogens or heavy metals in the final product. The USDA specifically prohibits the use of sludge in any product labeled as organic. For a list of USDA regulations for organic labeling of products you can refer to the website <https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Organic%20Production-Handling%20Standards.pdf>. Another reference I found regarding the use of biosolid compost is at the website <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2013/05/07/182010827/is-it-safe-to-use-compost-made-from-treated-human-waste>. Keep in mind that it can also be difficult to track the original source of the biosolids as well.

He also mentioned that some composts being used today can have a high percentage of salt. From now on I intend to be more selective in regards to what I dump in my garden beds and pots. I admit I have not been a proactive gardener in this aspect. I intend to start. Spring is here and I am anxious to apply what I have learned from his lecture. Please remember that the first thing you should do before randomly dumping amendments in your soil is to have it tested. The Texas A&M extension offices have a link for you to download a form and submit your soil for testing. The cost is nominal and it's a good place for you to start when planning your garden. The website is <http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/>. Happy and safe gardening to all of you.

# 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 the month, March through October, 8:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.  
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 sale until September.

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### ***2019 Monthly Open Garden Days & Special Events***

<b>February 23</b>	<b>Fruit Tree Sale</b>	June 17	Open Garden Day
March 18	Open Garden Day	July 15	Open Garden Day
<b>March 30</b>	<b>Spring Plant Sale</b>	August 19	Open Garden Day
April 15	Open Garden Day	September 16	Open Garden Day
May 20	Open Garden Day	October 21	Open Garden Day

***Second Chance Sale** bargains can be found in the Greenhouse after our February and March plant sales.*

# Open Garden Days at The Weekley Community Center

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

## Open Garden Days

one Tuesday each month, January through November, 10:00 –11:00 a.m.

### Open Garden Day Activities

is located at 8440 Greenhouse Road, Houston, Texas 77433

*For information about upcoming topics, dates and registration, please email us at [ogd.harrishort@gmail.com](mailto:ogd.harrishort@gmail.com). Registration is required before each program.*

Children and their parents looking for hands-on ways to learn, create, and have fun inspire our Open Garden Day volunteers to offer programs that do just that.

This FREE monthly children’s event includes a variety of activities:

- Planting seeds, veggies or ornamentals into pots so children can continue to grow them at home.
- Creating a “nature theme” craft project with materials that are provided.
- 30-40 minute hands-on lesson that focuses on a single topic each month.

Previous lessons have included making a worm farm, putting together a compost bin, learning about the importance of butterflies, and making a feeder to attract pollinators.

#### Past projects



Seed Pod mobile



Fantasy Garden



Recycled soda bottle

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### 2019 Monthly Open Garden Days

**February 26** Registration required by Sun. Feb. 24  
**March 26** Registration required by Sun. Mar. 24.  
**April 16** Registration required by Sat. Apr. 13  
**May 28** Registration required by Sun. May. 26  
**June 25** Registration required by Sun. June. 23

**July 23** Registration required by Sun. July. 21  
**August 27** Registration required by Sun. Aug. 25.  
**Sept. 24** Registration required by Sun. Sept. 22  
**October, November and December** dates are TBA  
at this time.

# Gardening Tools

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

		<b>Vegetable Garden Planting Dates</b> for Harris County											Texas AgriLIFE Extension Service Harris County Office 713-274-0950 <a href="https://harris.agrilife.org/hort/">https://harris.agrilife.org/hort/</a>		
Planting times are for seeds unless otherwise noted		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec		
		<span style="color: green;">■</span> Ideal Planting Time <span style="color: lightgreen;">■</span> Marginal Planting Time													
Artichoke	Dormant Crowns													Transplants	
Asparagus (dormant crowns)															
Beans - Snap & Lima (Butterbean)														Snap	
Beets															
Broccoli (transplants)															
Brussels Sprouts (transplants)															
Cabbage (transplants)															
Cabbage - Chinese (transplants)															
Carrots															
Cauliflower (transplants)															
Chard, Swiss															
Collards (transplants)															
Corn															
Cucumbers															
Eggplant (transplants)															
Garlic															
Kale (transplants)															
Kohlrabi (transplants)															
Leeks	Transplants													Seeds	
Lettuce - also Arugula, Mache, Sorrel															
Melon - Cantaloupe, Honeydew															
Mustard															
Okra															
Onion - bulbing	Transplants													Seeds	
Onion - multiplying/bunching															
Peas - English & Snap															
Peas - Southern															
Pepper (transplants)															
Potato - Irish (cut pieces)															
Potato - Sweet (slips)															
Pumpkin															
Radish															
Spinach															
Squash - Summer															
Squash - Winter															
Tomato															
Turnips															
Summer Greens - Malabar, Amaranth															
Watermelon															

Average Last Freeze Dates (Hobby 2/8, Bush 3/1)    ↑    ↑    Average First Freeze Dates (Bush 11/30, Hobby 12/20)    ↑    ↑  
 Plants grown over winter may require protection during freezing weather.    Seeds and transplants started in the heat of summer will benefit from shading during establishment.

Download the  
 Vegetable Garden  
 Planting Guide here!

# TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION SERVICE  
3033 BEAR CREEK DR.  
HOUSTON, TX 77084  
713-274-0950

[harris.agrilife.org/program-areas/hort/](http://harris.agrilife.org/program-areas/hort/)

[hcmga.tamu.edu](http://hcmga.tamu.edu)

## Follow Us On Facebook, Twitter & Instagram

The Harris County Master Gardeners as well as Texas A&M AgriLife Extension - Harris County Horticulture are actively participating on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram 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 to your account and easily share information with others. This is a definitely a timesaver for these busy garden days and helps promote our organization.



[www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners](http://www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners)

[www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyHorticulture](http://www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyHorticulture)



<https://twitter.com/pharrishort>



<https://www.instagram.com/harriscountymastergardeners>



## Green Thumb Gardening Series *Soils and Composting*

**April 11**

Barbara Bush Library

6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

**April 16**

Spring Branch Memorial Library

6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

**April 13**

Maude Smith Marks Library

10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

**April 25**

Freeman Branch Library

6:30 – 8:30 p.m.