

# Urban Dirt

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

## The Mosquito Detectives

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

Bzzzzz. Splat! Those are common sounds heard here in our damp coastal environment. Mosquitoes can be a problem in our area. Prevalent after it rains, the swarming mosquitoes can cause havoc when we step outside our homes. Livestock, pets and humans- no one is immune from mosquito bites. When driving in from work I can spot children waiting for the school bus who are sheltered in their parents' cars while they wait for their bus. The cars line the end of the block. If mosquitoes are not around, the kids can wait out in the open. During mosquito season they sit safe and snug in SUVs and trucks until the bus arrives.

The Fall 2019 edition of Naturally Curious features an article that discusses the scientific measures that the Cockrell Butterfly Center (CBC) is using in conjunction with Harris County Precinct 4's scientists. Many of us associate the four precincts with flood prevention and road and park maintenance, but they perform other duties as well. One of these includes a Biological Control Initiative. Biocontrol is an approach to limit or eliminate pests by using parasites, predators and sometimes pathogens. According to Erin Mills, the director of the CBC, biological control methods are already used at the center. Among these are lacewings, beneficial nematodes and ladybugs. Currently the main focus is on controlling or eradicating the yellow fever mosquito (*Aedes aegypti*) and the Asian tiger mosquito (*Aedes albopictus*). One bit of trivia I learned- the mosquitoes were transported here several hundred years ago. They hitched a ride in drinking water carried



*Aedes aegypti*

Photo by James Gathany, CDC Public Health Image Library

by merchant marine ships. They also arrived tires brought here from Southeast Asia, recently. The mosquitoes carry the Zika virus, dengue fever, West Nile virus and Chikungunya fever.

The director and chief researcher of the Precinct 4 group is Anita Schiller. Her team members are referred to as "Schiller's Killers." Their main concentration is on the mosquito assassin (*Toxorhynchites rutilus*), also called the elephant mosquito. The mosquito assassins can be differentiated from *Aedes* mosquitoes by their large size and iridescent colors. They cannot bite humans but their larval stage feeding habits makes them valuable. The carnivorous larvae eat anything close to them in the water and

cont'd on pg. 14



Upcoming Events .....	2	Harris County Extension Appears	
Herb of the Month .....	3	on Great Day Houston .....	14
Plant of the Month .....	4	Open Garden Day at	
Night-Blooming Cereus...		The Weekley Center .....	15
Star of the Show .....	6	Ask a Master Gardener .....	16
2020 Plant Sale Dates! .....	8	Houston Urban Tree Conference	17
Teaming with Microbes .....	9	Master Gardener of the Month ...	18
Composting with Carlos .....	10	Master Gardener Birthdays .....	18
Gardening Fun in October .....	11	Gardening Tools .....	19
TMGA 2020 State Conference ...	13		



# Upcoming Events

## November 2019

### Master Gardener Lecture Series

**Nov. 5, First Tuesday** 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. Speaker - *All about Salvias* by Phoebe Lake. Pot Luck Lunch.  
Trini Mendenhall Community Center, 1414 Wirt Rd, Houston, 77055

### Open Garden Day

**Nov. 14,** 10:00 - 11:15 a.m., Weekley Community Center, **Registration required by Tuesday Nov. 12 to:**  
[ogd.harrishort@gmail.com](mailto:ogd.harrishort@gmail.com). Weekley Community Center, 8440 Greenhouse Rd., Cypress, TX 77433

### Houston Urban Tree Conference

**Nov. 15,** 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., \$45.00 Register: <https://hutc2019.eventbrite.com> Weekley Community Center,  
8440 Greenhouse Rd., Cypress, TX 77433

## December 2019

### Master Gardener Lecture Series

**Dec. 3, First Tuesday** 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. Program: **TBD**

Arrive as early as 10:30 a.m. and bring a sack lunch. Trini Mendenhall Community Center, 1414 Wirt Rd, Houston, 77055

## Have Garden Questions?

Email your questions and photos to: [phone hcmga@gmail.com](mailto:phone 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 - Cilantro (*Coriandrum sativum*)

by Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

If this month's herb, cilantro, is not the most polarizing among food epicureans, it is surely at minimum among the top three. A member of the Apiaceae family, the native range for cilantro is southern Europe and the western Mediterranean.

After the first one or two cold fronts here in Houston, it is officially local prime time for planting this annual that enjoys our version of cool weather and full sun to partial shade, preferring afternoon shade in the local environment.

The pronounced attribute of this herb, that seems to be one of the reasons for its polarizing effect: Flavor profile related to heat. Usage of the herb in cooking is easily steered by keeping in mind that cilantro's flavor increases and alters directly in proportion to heat and cooking time. It is generally best to add cilantro in the last 2-4 minutes of cooking or to simply stir in freshly chopped cilantro at the end of cooking; perhaps reserving some for garnish. Longer cooking times tend to create an unpleasant, pungent flavor some liken to the taste of soap. The seeds of cilantro, coriander, aren't subject to the about-face flavor profile due



Coriander seeds



to heat sensitivity, and mature seeds release a wonderful, floral aroma when ground and/or heated. Freshly roasted coriander, quickly accomplished in

a heated pan, is one of my favorite kitchen flavor enhancers of all. Coriander is a main component in curry powder, used frequently in Indian cuisine. Cilantro is a staple in Latin American and Vietnamese cuisines, while coriander has been somewhat more widely adopted and can be found in recipes spanning the globe; from sausages, curries, Scandinavian pastries, Middle Eastern skillet potatoes, and confectionery, such as English comfits.

According to Britannica, records of the use of coriander date as far back as 5000 BC. The Romans used it to flavor bread, and it was once used as an aromatic and carminative, but its only modern use in medicine is to mask unpleasant tastes and odors of drugs.

Cilantro is a relatively easy, well-mannered plant that simply requires moderate irrigation and well-drained soil. Like basil, cilantro can grow roots if the stems are placed in a glass of water. Once the roots are long enough, just plant them in a pot; however, once established, plants will thrive either in pots or directly planted into the ground. If the older, outside leaves are harvested, the plant will continue to produce new foliage until it goes to seed; however, keep in mind that cilantro does not re-grow as completely as parsley.

Plant this wonderful annual and enjoy both the flavor it lends to foods as well as its ability to attract swallowtail butterflies, who feed on its leaves!

As we embark on the holiday season, warmest wishes and happiest gardens to you all.

#### References:

<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?taxonid=275984>  
<https://worldcrops.org/crops/cilantro>  
<https://www.britannica.com/plant/coriander>

# Plant of the Month - Moringa Tree (*Moringa oleifera*)

by Don Tyler, Master Gardener

Photos by Don Tyler

“*Moringa oleifera* is a plant that has been praised for its health benefits for thousands of years. It is very rich in healthy antioxidants and bioactive plant compounds.”<sup>1</sup>

In this same online article, Dr. Arnarson goes on to tout the benefits of *Moringa oleifera* as “very nutritious”, “rich in antioxidants”,

“may lower blood sugar levels”, “may reduce inflammation”, “can lower cholesterol” and “may protect against arsenic toxicity”.

With these nutritional benefits, it is easy to see why Moringa is classified as a superfood. Moringa can be purchased in several forms, i.e., tea, capsules or as a powder which is often included in many vitamin supplements or mixed in smoothies. The best source of moringa could be harvested from your very own moringa tree!

“The name, moringa, is derived from *murungai*, the Tamil word for drumstick, and the plant is commonly referred to as the drumstick tree.”<sup>2</sup> Moringa is native to south Asia and therefore non-native to our area. Growing non-native plants can present unique challenges for the avid gardener but it can be done! You can typically find moringa trees at some of our local nurseries.

Being a non-native species, there is not a lot of formal “how-to” information regarding tree growth patterns, pruning (harvesting) and training, irrigation, fertilizing, diseases and most importantly harvesting. As such, there will be bumps along the way, but we gardeners tend to be a persistent bunch. For instance, I was able to harvest the leaves off my first moringa tree before I successfully killed it. Now I have planted two more trees which, fingers crossed, will be a more successful venture.

When growing moringa, it is important to remember we are not trying to grow the tree for its aesthetic value to our overall 2”



Graphic courtesy of fengshuilondon.net

landscape plan. We are growing the tree to harvest the nutritional benefits and, as long as we can keep that goal in mind, growing moringa can be a fun and worthwhile challenge.

The picture, at right, is the first of the three moringa trees I attempted to grow.

Do not let the size fool you (many local nurseries will have 1’ to 3’ tall trees). Within a matter of five months, this rather unassuming “bushy” looking tree will most likely be a 10’+ tall “drumstick”.

To say moringa grows like a weed in Houston would be an understatement, and that is one of the most unique challenges of growing this drumstick, I mean tree.

I planted the first tree in an area that receives full sun, typically defined as 6 hours. Generally speaking, the area was well-draining and the soil, as with most of Houston, was less than optimum, i.e., clayey. The tree took off! As eluded to earlier, before I knew, the tree was over 10’ tall. The trunk of the tree was over 2” in diameter and yes, it was a drumstick. The well-documented challenge with moringas is trying to get them to branch out and not grow spindly.

Being a novice, I decided it was time to harvest my first batch of leaves (more on that later). With tools in hand, I did what any Master Gardener would do, I whacked, I mean pruned, the tree to 5’ tall, literally cutting the tree in half. The tree did not seem phased by the whacking, i.e., pruning, and quickly put out new limbs. Unfortunately, I was unsuccessful in getting the tree to branch out and, ultimately, I whacked it to its ultimate demise.

Not to be deterred, I did some additional web searches on growing moringas and found some good material at

*cont'd on pg. 5*



Moringa tree

<sup>1</sup> Atli Arnarson, Ph.D., May 4, 2018, 6 Science-Based Health Benefits of *Moringa oleifera*, Healthline, <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/6-benefits-of-moringa-oleifera>.

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia contributors. “Moringa.” Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moringa>.

## Plant of the Month - Moringa Tree, *cont'd from pg. 4*

[www.moringaforlife.com](http://www.moringaforlife.com) and [www.moringamatters.com](http://www.moringamatters.com). Both websites have a wealth of information on growing moringas, although not specific to Houston, and offer recommendations on how to get the tree to branch out.

With my recent failure and armed with new information, I was determined more than ever to grow moringa and just this past May planted two new trees. These trees started off only about 1' tall and I planted both trees in the same general area as the first. In less than 5 months, at the time of this writing (mid-September), both trees had grown to over 8' + tall with a trunk that is approximately 1" in diameter. Again, the trees are "drumsticks".

Seeing that the trees were well-established, I decided this would be a good height and size to harvest the leaves and start trying to shape the tree. The following pictures shows the pruning and remaining individual branches below the cut.



*Moringa trees are pruned to about 4' tall.*

As you can see in the pictures, I have left both trees at about 4' tall; however, it is my intention in the November/December timeframe to cut at least one of the trees back to the ground and allow the tree to grow back from the root. This is one recommended approach to getting the moringa to branch out, as several shoots should grow back from the root. In any case, I hope to share my success in a future edition of this newsletter.

I mentioned earlier the new growth after pruning. The picture, at right, shows the new limbs forming within a couple of weeks of the initial pruning.

*Moringa tree trunk is sprouting new shoots after pruning.*



Now to the harvest....as previously mentioned, the leaves are loaded with nutrients! The following series of pictures shows some of the steps towards the final product, moringa "powder".



### **Harvested limbs**

*I found stripping the leaves to be a bit easier if you allow the limbs to dry a bit after cutting from the tree.*



### **Harvested leaves**

*There will be some very small stems but as long as you dry the leaves sufficiently, the small stems will grind up as well.*



### **Placement on a dehydrator rack**

*After the leaves were collected, I rinsed the leaves and let them air dry prior to placing them on the dehydrator rack. I suggest rinsing the leaves after stripping from the stems, as the wet leaves will cling to everything they touch. The drying time is obviously a function of the dehydrator and tray loading but most leafy material is dehydrated on a very low setting. In my case, the dehydrating temperature was set for 105°F and typically each batch was dehydrated for a minimum of 4 hours. To get a powdery product, you need to dry the leaves thoroughly. Remember, too, there may be a few small stems and so you want to ensure those are dry as well.*



### **3.2 oz. of finished product**

*Once dried, I processed the leaves in a Cuisinart food processor. Obviously, the final product is not a fine powder as you will find in store bought products, but this level of granularity is more than sufficient for adding to a smoothie.*

# Night-Blooming Cereus - Star of the Show!

## (*Selenicereus grandifloras*)

by Don Tyler, Master Gardener

Photos by Don Tyler

If you are familiar with the recent movie, *Crazy Rich Asians*, you may remember a party scene in which a certain plant was center stage. The plant was set to bloom that night at the party and to the untrained horticulturist, i.e., me, I would have immediately informed you the plant was the night-blooming cereus. It was not until I started research on this article that I learned even though



*Ephiphyllum oxypetalum*

Photo courtesy Connormill72,  
commons.wikimedia.org/

the plant in the movie exhibited some of the same characteristics of the night-blooming cereus, the plant is not related to the cereus at all. It was in fact the Dutchman's pipe cactus or queen of the night, *Ephiphyllum oxypetalum*.<sup>1</sup>

No doubt some day you may be on *Jeopardy* and that fact may be **Plants for \$400!** Now that we

have movie trivia out of the way, we can focus on the subject of this article, the night-blooming cereus.

DesertUSA.com, puts it best, "*One of the strangest plants of the desert, the night blooming cereus, is a member of the cactus family that resembles nothing more than a dead bush most of the year. It is rarely seen in the wild because of its inconspicuousness. But for one midsummer's night each year, its exquisitely scented flower opens as night falls, then closes forever with the first rays of the morning sun.*"<sup>2</sup>

My wife, also a Master Gardener, still remembers nights spent at her grandmother's house waiting for the chance to see the exquisite bloom.

As noted above, this unique plant is a member of the cactus family and so one would expect it to grow only in a desert environment. However, the yearly nighttime visits by my wife to view the blooming were not in the desert but in Alabama, and it just so happens ours bloomed last night here in Spring! It was this unique event that served as the catalyst for this article.



Don Tyler's Night Blooming Cereus (*Selenicereus grandifloras*)

Being a desert plant, one would tend to conclude this strange plant would not grow in our climate. However, we have obviously had good success with ours and, lest we forget, my wife's grandmother grew it in Alabama.

Generally speaking, the plant will do well in full sun to partial shade although there are concerns intense exposure to sunlight may indeed sunburn the plant.<sup>3</sup> DesertUSA notes the plant is "*often in the shade of desert shrubs like creosote.*"<sup>2</sup> Ours is located in partial shade. There are others that indicate the plant will do well indoors.

We planted our night-blooming cereus in a pot. I am of the opinion due to our climate being significantly different from the native desert environment, the plant is best suited for potting. By potting the plant, the critical growing conditions of soil type and sunlight can be better controlled not to mention placement of the plant to complement each individual landscape plan.

Further supporting the idea of potting the plant is the way it tends to grow. Being a type of cactus, the plant itself is rather unassuming. The stems are long flat leaves and the plant tends to

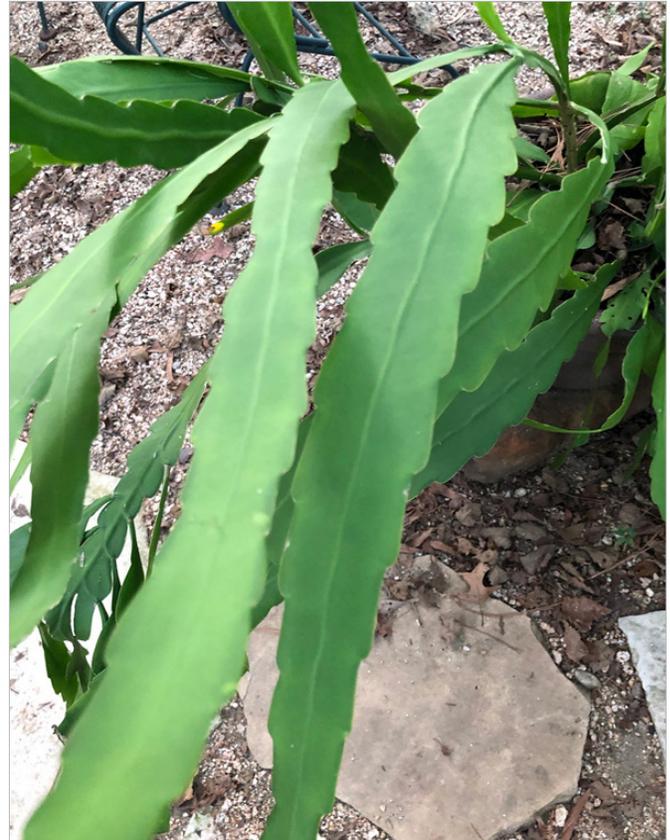
*cont'd on pg. 7*

## Night-Blooming Cereus, *cont'd from pg. 6*

grow in all different directions, what some may refer to as sprawling. We have owned our plant less than a year and already it has more than doubled in size. If the size gets to be too much, the plant can easily be pruned to control the size.



As to watering, the best advice is to leave it alone. “*Night-blooming cereus require minimal attention to grow.*”<sup>3</sup> We have never once hand watered our night-blooming cereus since we potted it. Does that mean you never have to water the plant here in Houston? No, but we do need to be a bit more leery of too much water when dealing with plants of the cactus family. It is also critical to make sure the soil as well as the location, whether in the ground or a pot, is well-draining. With this plant, it is better to let the plant tell you when it needs attention. Become a cereus-whisperer!



The night-blooming cereus is also fairly adaptable to propagation. Bonnie L. Grant, Certified Urban Agriculturist, states the plant “*is one of the easiest cactus from which to take cuttings*”<sup>4</sup>. Aside from the recommendations of Ms. Grant (see reference below), I have recently cut stems from the base of my plant and placed them in a milk carton filled with water. Within a few weeks, roots formed and now the stem is ready to transfer to a new pot.

I hope this is an encouragement to try the night-blooming cereus. It is truly a fascinating plant and as Ms. Grant states, it “*is a leggy plant with flat leaves and gangly stems, but when it is blooming it goes from wall flower to star of the show*”<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> “*Epiphyllum oxypetalum.*” Wikipedia, *The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epiphyllum\\_oxypetalum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epiphyllum_oxypetalum)

<sup>2</sup> DesertUSA, *Night Blooming Cereus cactus – Queen of the Night – DesertUSA*, <https://www.desertusa.com/cactus/night-blooming-cereus.html>

<sup>3</sup> SFGate, *How to Take Care of Night Blooming Cereus*, <https://homeguides.sfgate.com/care-night-blooming-cereus-45019.html>

<sup>4</sup> Gardening Know How, *Propagating Night Blooming Cereus: How To Take Night Blooming Cereus Cuttings*, <https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/ornamental/cacti-succulents/night-blooming-cereus/night-blooming-cereus-cuttings.htm>



## Save the Dates Harris County Plant Sales 2020

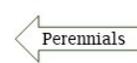
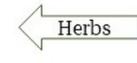
RICHARD & MEG WEEKLEY PARK (West Side)  
19110 LONGENBAUGH ROAD  
HOUSTON, TX 77090  
(Between Barker Cypress and Greenhouse Road)

GENOA FRIENDSHIP GARDENS  
CAMPBELL HALL, PASADENA FAIRGROUNDS  
7600 RED BLUFF ROAD, PASADENA, TX 77507

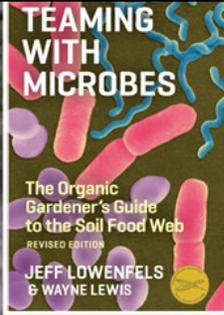
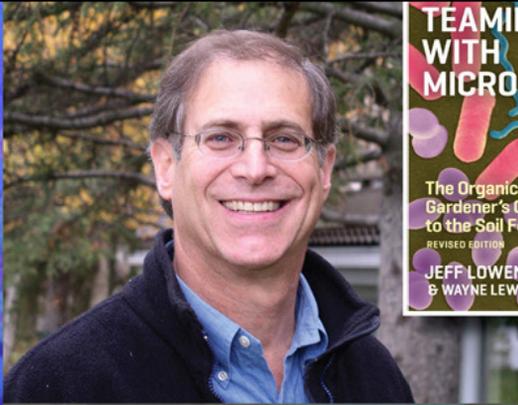
- Fruit Tree Sale January 25<sup>th</sup>
- Spring Tomato, Pepper, Vegetable & Perennial Sale March 7<sup>th</sup>
- Cy-Fair Home & Garden Show March 21<sup>st</sup>



- Fruit Tree and Tomato Sale, February 22<sup>nd</sup>
- Peppers, Perennials and Herbs, March 21<sup>st</sup>



Questions? Ask A Master Gardener 713-274-0950



**NOVEMBER 7TH**  
**2019**

# Jeff Lowenfels Teaming with Microbes

**United Way**  
**50 Waugh Drive Houston, TX 77007**

## SPONSORS



Come discover the fascinating world of soil microbiology with the most entertaining, Jeff Lowenfels. He is the author of the Teaming Series featuring the award-winning book 'Teaming with Microbes'. As a world renowned soil microbiology expert and leader in the Organic movement, Jeff will blow your mind with his findings from the soil food web.

Come join us as one of the most enlightening and captivating lecturers in the Organic Movement comes to Houston for this can't miss event.

### TICKETS

Register Online  
[ohbaonline.org/events](http://ohbaonline.org/events)

**OHBA Members \$25**  
**Non-Members \$50**

### ITINERARY

**5:00-6:00PM**  
**REGISTRATION,**  
**NETWORKING**  
**& LIGHT BITES**

**6:00-7:30PM**  
**JEFF LOWENFELS**

# Composting with Carlos at October's First Tuesday

by Carolyn Boyd, Master Gardener

Photos by Brandi Keller, Master Gardener

Genoa Friendship Gardens hosted HCMGA's First Tuesday meeting in October. Over 70 MG's plus a few members of the public attended. The speaker was Carlos Domenech, Harris County Master Gardener, and the topic was compost.

Carlos discussed how compost improves the structure and nutritional value of soil, brings soil closer to the ideal pH of 6.5-7 and replenishes and promotes microbes in soil. While demonstrating how to fill and layer a compost bin for best results, he fielded a variety of questions from the audience.

Assisting Carlos were two very able Master Gardeners to fill the compost bin – Mariana Pena and Aida Pita. Mariana

represented *Carbon* and Aida represented *Nitrogen*, the two requisite ingredients in making good compost. Under Carlos' direction, they filled a compost bin, appropriately layering nitrogen-rich green materials (kitchen scraps, egg shells and decaying fruit) and carbon-rich brown materials (dead leaves and grass and small branches).

Handouts were also provided with recipes to make compost, whether you have a lot of material or just a little. Carlos is so very passionate about compost that I've begun calling him the *Compost Whisperer*.



Master Gardeners Aida Pita, Carlos Domenech and Mariana Pena



# Gardening Fun in October

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

Photos by Terri Simon

October was an exciting month for me. Hectic, but fun and full of gardening events for plant lovers. It started with an excellent lecture given by Carlos Domenech at the Genoa Friendship Gardens (GFG). The First Tuesday Lecture, *Composting for Personal Gain*, was presented on October 1 at GFG. It was good to see West Master Gardeners (formerly Bear Creek) in attendance along with GFG Master Gardeners. The weather was perfect for an outdoor demonstration and Carlos did an outstanding job. It's obvious he is an enthusiastic advocate for composting.

On Friday, October 4th, I was off to attend the Bulb & Plant Mart sponsored by the Garden Club of Houston at the Church of St. John the Divine. Heidi Sheesley from Tresearch Farms lectured about the plants featured at the sale. Heidi's an excellent, gifted speaker. Her love of plants is contagious and I miss her lectures at the GFG plant sales. She has such a knack that I think she could convince shoppers to buy a broken down wagon full of weeds.

I went to the sale on Friday hoping it would not be crowded. Wrong. Traffic was heavy and it seemed other shoppers also hoped for smaller crowds. In the past I have bought bulbs from the sale, but now my focus in on the outside plant stands. I had studied the online plant catalog and I acquired several plants that piqued my interest. I had set a limit for myself, but I quickly tripled that limit and filled my wagon. There were plants literally

calling my name. I snatched up a Mexican beautyberry, a fuzzy leaved *Hamelia patens*, a giant milkweed (a present for my friend Jeanette), a few Mexican mint marigolds, a Himalayan buddleia and two pink variegated



Turk's Cap

Turk's cap. Now I just want to rest on my laurels and gloat about my wonderful finds.

Saturday, October 5th, came and I was off to the PlantMeet Houston Swap group's annual plant swap at Mercer Arboretum. Preparing for this swap has taken several months. I divided plants, grew plants from seed, rooted cuttings, and scoured the plant clearance section at a certain hardware chain for neglected,



Himalayan buddleia



My booth at PlantMeet Houston Swap

## Gardening Fun in October, *cont'd from pg. 11*

marked down babies I could save. My living room was taken over by fairies and accessories to make my beloved fairy gardens. Sculpey modeling clay is my new best friend. I used it to make bases for the fairy garden items that would not stand alone and also to make small items for props. Bird's nests, seagulls, dog food dishes, etc. – all of these I molded by hand. You can call me the Sculpey Michelangelo. Two of my favorite trades – a beach themed bird feeder and a Mrs. Jimmy Spangler hibiscus. The trade I didn't get was a variegated chile pequin. Missed it by that much. Maybe next year.



*Fairy Garden from PlantMeet Houston Swap*

Herman Auer, a Galveston Master Gardener, gave an informative talk on October 10th, for the Second Thursday lecture at GFG. His topic was *Planting Fruit Trees*. I love to hear him speak. He is a walking gardening book. It was great seeing my gardening friends. The camaraderie I have with them is wonderful. We laugh, get caught up on things and, finally, we discuss plants. The gardens look beautiful. GFG gives me the “garden fix” I need.

The Galveston County Master Gardeners held their plant sale on Saturday, October 12th. Again, I filled my trusty collapsible wagon. This time I snagged two bur oak trees (another present for my friend Jeanette). The bur oak tree can grow from 70-100 feet tall and can live up 400 years. It has the largest acorns of any native oak. The size of the acorns can reach 1¼ inches. They are huge. I use the acorn caps for my fairy gardens. Other treasures I snapped up included a plumeria cutting that could probably serve double duty as a club. Yes, it was that big. It just jumped in my wagon, I'm not sure how. I was the tenth person in line before the gates opened. I had already browsed their online catalog and the plant sale map so I was ready. I raced down the aisles with my trusty wagon and grabbed some evergreen amaryllis bulbs I had coveted along with some ox blood lilies. The only plant I didn't

get was a Holub's hamelia. It was listed in their catalog but was not available for the sale. Maybe next year.



*My Goodies Wagon from The Galveston MG sale had two bur oaks, three evergreen amaryllis bulbs, two packages of Ox blood lilies, and a plumeria cutting!*

Looking back at this article makes me tired. I didn't realize I had been that busy but my bank account says otherwise. Now I am busy repotting plants and I have also agreed to donate four fairy gardens and a collapsible wagon full of plants for a benefit on November 2nd. All will be auctioned off for a good cause.

Finally, on October 19, 2019, I visited San Antonio for a work related conference. Where did I head during a break? The Market Square, or El Mercado as it's sometimes called. What did I find there? The perfect Talavera pots for my plants of course.



*Talavera pots from San Antonio*

# TMGA 2020 State Conference



Proudly hosted by the McLennan County Master Gardener Association in Waco, TX.

**May 12-14, 2020** at the Waco Convention Center

Keep up to date on our conference [Facebook](#) page.

**LODGING:** We have contracted with two great hotels for you! The host hotel, and its partner hotel directly across the street, are now accepting reservations. Our agenda will have Leadership Training on the afternoon of May 11th, with conference registration opening at 7:00 a.m. on May 12th. The conference will close at 5:00 p.m. on the 14th. Our special hotel rates are valid for three days before, and three days post-conference. Come, enjoy all that Waco has to offer!



**Hilton Waco:** This riverside hotel is connected by a covered walkway to the Waco Convention Center - \$149  
Phone: 254-754-8484

<https://www.hilton.com/en/hi/groups/personalized/A/ACTWHHF-MGA20-20200510/index.jhtml>



**Courtyard Marriott:** This newly remodeled hotel is immediately adjacent to the Waco Convention Center - \$145  
Phone: 254-752-8686

<https://www.marriott.com/event-reservations/reservation-link.mi?id=1558020957260&key=GRP&app=resvlink>

**NOTE:** If you wish to stay longer, both hotels will honor the above rates three days BEFORE and three days AFTER our conference block, however, you must make these reservations by phoning the Reservations Desk directly at the hotel using the phone numbers provided above.

The presentation from the August 3rd Director's Meeting, with an overview of the Event site, Keynote Speakers, Tours, Workshops and Breakout Sessions, may be viewed [here](#).



County Horticulture Agent, Skip Richter, joined two other area horticulturists for the November 18th showing of KHOU 11's, Great Day Houston with Deborah Duncan. Skip answered community and audience questions and was supported by his Texas A&M AgriLife Extension – Harris County coworkers in studio.

The Mosquito Detectives, *cont'd from pg. 1*



Mosquito assassin

Photo by Salvador Vitanza, PhD, <https://elp.tamu.edu>

this includes other mosquito larvae and, on occasion, each other. Unlike other mosquito species who feast on blood to lay their eggs, adult mosquito assassins have a sweet tooth. Their diet is sugar – usually nectar but they will also eat plant sap, honeydew and juices from decomposing fruit. They are attracted to the color blue. Research goals for the study include eradication of the

Asian tiger mosquitoes in the CBC and the formation of a self-sustaining population of the mosquito assassins. Long term goals include raising large groups of the mosquitoes in the Spring area where another team is working on the biocontrol initiative. In November 2018, nearly 86,000 eggs were produced for the month. The goal is to eventually produce assassin release kits, called Aedes Predator Pods (APP) for home use. Studies in Louisiana indicate that releasing the mosquitoes after insecticide spraying can decrease the Aedes mosquito population by 98 percent. Currently the insecticide sprays have a 29 percent eradication rate.

As a child, I recall that mosquitoes were out during early morning and late evening hours. That is no longer the case in my area. I am attacked throughout the day and night. Mosquitoes seem to love me even though my blood type is A. They are especially attracted to people who have type O blood, but apparently the mosquitoes in my area haven't gotten the memo. I hope to purchase an Aedes Predator Pod if they ever become available for the general public. I can't wait.

# 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

are 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

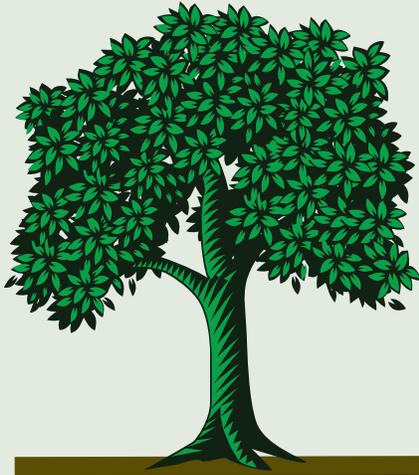
<b>February 26</b>	<i>Registration required by Sun. Feb. 24</i>	<b>July (TBD)</b>	<i>Registration required</i>
<b>March 26</b>	<i>Registration required by Sun. Mar. 24.</i>	<b>August 27</b>	<i>Registration required by Sun. Aug. 25</i>
<b>April 16</b>	<i>Registration required by Sat. Apr. 13</i>	<b>September 24</b>	<i>Registration required by Sun. Sept. 22</i>
<b>May 28</b>	<i>Registration required by Sun. May 26</i>	<b>October 15</b>	<i>Registration required by Sun. Oct. 13</i>
<b>June 25</b>	<i>Registration required by Sat. June 22</i>	<b>November 14</b>	<i>Registration required by Tues. Nov. 12</i>

## 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 November we are going to be in the following locations!

- Nov. 2**      **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
- Nov. 9**      **Tomball** - *2nd Saturday*, 8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. at 205 W. Main Street, Tomball
- Nov. 10**     **Bridgeland** - *2nd Sunday*, 12:30 - 3:30 p.m. at 16902 Bridgeland Lakes Pkwy,  
Cypress
- Nov. 21**     **Westchase** - *3rd Thursday*, 3 p.m. - 7 p.m. at 10503 Westheimer Rd.,  
Houston
- Nov. 23**     **Memorial Villages** - *4th Saturday*, 8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. at 10840 Beinhorn Rd.,  
Houston
- Nov. 23**     **Towne Lake** - *4th Saturday*, 2:30 p.m. - 7 p.m. at 9955 Barker Cypress Rd.,  
Cypress



# HOUSTON URBAN TREE CONFERENCE

Friday, November 15, 2019  
8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Weekley Community Center | 8440 Greenhouse Rd  
Cypress, TX 77433

## Agenda

Registration  
\$45.00

- *Emerald Ash Borer – Coming to a City Near You*  
**Matt Weaver**, Texas A&M Forest Service – Harris County, Urban & Community Forestry
- *Scanning the Horizon for the Future of Arboriculture*  
**Dr. Andy Hines**, University of Houston, Foresight Graduate Program Coordinator
- *Using Tree Growth Regulators to Reduce Pruning Costs*  
**Dr. Todd Watson**, ISA Board-Certified Master Arborist
- *Aquaholics Anonymous: How to Cope with Your Landscape's Drinking Problem*  
**Dr. Todd Watson**, ISA Board-Certified Master Arborist
- *Greening the Houston Region – Partnerships and Projects that Support the Urban Forest*  
**Ethan Beeson**, TXDOT, Transportation Landscape Architect  
**Justin Bower**, HGAC, Senior Planner-Community & Environmental Planning  
**Nic Griffin**, Harris County Flood Control District, Forester



Register at  
<https://hutc2019.eventbrite.com>

The Houston Urban Tree Conference is a partnership between Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Houston Area Urban Forestry Council (HAUFC) and ISA-TX.

ISA CEUs (Pending)  
TNLA CEUs (Pending)

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension provides equal opportunities in its programs and employment to all persons, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperation.

# MG of the Month - *Doug Paluska*

by Karen Breneman, Master Gardener

**Congratulations, Doug Paluska!** A 2011 graduate, Doug has worked in the vegetable gardens and with cylinder gardening. He started gardening when he was six-years old way back in 1956. His best memory was when he and his dad would go to the garden with a paring knife and a salt shaker and would pick turnips and radishes and eat them right there in the garden!! They always sprinkled some salt on both of

them. His mom would pickle or can everything they grew and they ate vegetables every night for dinner.

Doug grew up in Illinois and moved to Texas in 1978 working in the Oil & Gas industry until he retired in 2010. He says, "I love the Texas growing seasons - you can grow anything *and* just about everything. Radishes are still my favorite today but I love to walk to the garden on Thanksgiving morning and pick a head of broccoli. My wife Marcia then makes a Broccoli casserole for dinner. Yum!! Having learned to plant, grow and eat veggies at an early age is why I work in the Cylinder Gardening program.

Nothing better than teaching and watching young children to enjoy the 'Veggies of their labor'. Thanks to the Master Gardening program and ALL of the volunteers for all you do and everything you taught me."

Thank-you Doug for all you have taught the Master Gardeners and all your contagious positive attitude.



Doug and his dad in 1956 tilling the garden with pitchforks.



Master Gardeners and Interns who celebrate a birthday during November include the following. Wish them a **HAPPY BIRTHDAY** when you see them!

Wendy Barr, Gaynor Beesley, Sara Brana, Beth Braun, Fatma Dokumaci Ozgel, Debra Fernandez, Nancy Grami, Toni Lawrence, Bea Lindzon, Kim Messer, Patricia Metzinger, Judy Padar, Ruthann Pechulis, Aida Pita, Katrina Rochon, Betty Sigler, Jane Swanzy, Chevvy Tang, Patti Usnick and Susan White

*If your name is missing, please check that your online profile is complete.*

## Nominate a Master Gardener of the Month

Is there a fellow MG you think should be recognized for their hard work and commitment? If the answer is YES, you can submit their name for an MG of the Month nomination.

Submit your MG of the Month nominations to the Membership Committee by e-mailing the information to **kmbrene@att.net** (West) or **gclau@comcast.net** (Genoa Friendship Gardens).

# Gardening Tools

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

Planting times are for seeds unless otherwise noted	Vegetable Garden Planting Dates for Harris County											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Artichoke	Dormant Crowns								Transplants			
Asparagus (dormant crowns)									Transplants			
Beans - Snap & Lima (Butterbean)			Snap&Lima					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 AGRILIFE  
EXTENSION SERVICE  
HOUSTON, TX

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](https://www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners)

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



<https://twitter.com/pharrishort>



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

Would you like to contribute to the Urban Dirt?

Send all questions and/or submissions to: [UrbanDirt.harrishort@gmail.com](mailto:UrbanDirt.harrishort@gmail.com)