

Urban Dirt

Lawns and
Alternatives

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

Smart Landscaping

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

Be aware- this article comes with a caveat. If you live in a neighborhood with a Home Owners Association (HOA), proceed carefully before making changes to your lawn. It is estimated that one fourth of the population lives in an area monitored by an HOA. Before implementing changes, have a plan. I encourage you to make a map of your new desired lawn. Include all proposed changes. Research all of the plants you will use. It is a waste of time to include plants on your diagram if they are not suitable for your lawn. Know the plant's light requirements, growing zone, water requirements, special soil requirements, etc. Avoid the use of invasive plants. You do not want to obtain approval for plants that won't last. List the plants, walkways, beds, any lawn ornaments such as fountains, statues, rocks or boulders, etc. Be as detailed as possible. Obtain and follow your HOAs instructions and guidelines before starting any renovations. You do not want to be fined or, even worse, end up in court for not following clearly outlined rules. If you are given permission to implement your new landscape, obtain it in writing. Make sure your diagram has approval from the HOA and you should be able to avoid future headaches. There may be conflicts even though Senate Bill 198 was passed in 2013. The bill states that HOAs in Texas can practice xeriscaping. Xeriscaping is the use of gardening with low amounts of water. It encourages the use of native plants. Don't forget that the city



Mondo grass landscaping - a lawn alternative

Photo courtesy pinterest.com

may have ordinances you need to follow as well. Below are three examples of families who had problems with their HOAs. Eventually the problems were resolved, but it did take time, education and effort. One couple had to obtain a lawyer.

Early in 2019, the Forest at Stone Oak HOA in San Antonio sent a letter to Don Kirchhoff. He was told the "weeds" in his yard needed to be mowed. He and his wife were told they had breached

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Have Garden Questions? Email your questions and photos to: phonehcmga@gmail.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

Happy June to Harris County Residents and Master Gardeners,

The time has come to start reopening. We are closer to hosting in-person events, but not without an extreme amount of caution. This experience has been an unprecedented test of flexibility and we all deserve a hand for getting through it. Even though this pandemic has forced us to suspend all programming for months, it has done something else that was a pleasant surprise... it pushed our limited use of technology into overdrive and now allows for more effective online education. This has allowed us to reach more residents than previously before. Nothing compares to in-person events, but the traffic and distance getting around this county are factors that anyone attending an event must consider. It is a win-win situation to incorporate online education into our programming from now on.

Harris County's stay-at-home order will expire June 10th. All of our Master Gardener in-person events will still be suspended for June, but some will resume in July. The events that may resume would include a few Ask a Master Gardener events, Genoa Friendship Garden Open Garden Days, and McGovern Centennial Garden Education Days.

Green Thumb Gardening Lecture Series

We are happy to announce that we will be presenting our Green Thumb Series online through a collaboration with the Harris County Public Library System. You can sign up for those events on Facebook, or through the Harris County Master Gardener, Harris County AgriLife Extension, or the Harris County Library System websites.

Growing with Plants & Nature – Youth Activities

One of the first programs that went online when the pandemic hit was youth activities. A public facebook group was created for families with kids. We will continue to provide online activities here until further notice, but we do plan to resume in-person events later this summer. The link to the group is: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/GPNVG/>

Home Grown Lecture Series

We are pleased to continue this Lecture Series that completed its first month in May. The Harris County Ag/Natural Resources Department hosts a webinar on each Thursday during the month of June. Please note that we moved the time to 6 p.m. To register for these free events, please visit: <https://homegrown2020june.eventbrite.com>

If you have horticulture questions, email our Master Gardener Hotline at phonehcmga@gmail.com.

Please visit us at the social media pages below:

- [Harris County Extension Horticulture Facebook Page](#)
- [Harris County Master Gardeners Facebook Page](#)
- [Harris County Family and Community Health Facebook Page](#)

For more information on COVID-19, please visit the following websites:



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PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Beth at a women's cooperative in India last year. Most of her travel photos are of wildflowers and landscapes.

Four people came to mind when *Urban Dirt* editor Carolyn Boyd sent out a call for the June edition: Jaime Gonzalez, Brie Arthur, Lauren Simpson and my friend Patti.

Did you know that each edition of *Urban Dirt* is aligned, as much as possible, with the Green Thumb Lecture Series subject for the month? For June, the subject is *Lawns and Alternatives*. These four people have embraced *Alternatives* while not totally abandoning lawns.

Let's start with local **Jaime Gonzalez**, formerly with the Katy Prairie Conservancy and now the Houston Urban Conservation Programs Manager for The Nature Conservancy in Texas. He speaks on building healthy cities that support biodiversity. "We cannot have lazy landscapes" is one of his memorable quotes. In a presentation called *Hatton Spring Prairie: A Neighborhood Experiment*, which you can view on YouTube¹, he chronicles what happened when he planted a front yard prairie garden in his lawn-dominated neighborhood near the Astrodome. The neighbors' reaction was positively positive.

Brie Arthur is the author of *The Foodscape Revolution* and a leader in the national suburban foodscape movement. When she spoke at Peckerwood Garden, now The John Fairey Garden, a few years ago, she said her leap into foodscape was out of necessity. After studying Landscape Design and Horticulture at Purdue University, she wanted to eat fresh, organically-grown food but couldn't afford to buy it. She started tucking edibles into the landscape beds that came with the modest house she bought. Worried about the HOA's reaction in a neighborhood dominated by lawns and clipped hedges, she was surprised to be awarded Yard of the Year one year into her experiment. Her mixed beds of edibles and ornamentals (sometimes one and the same) expanded, and with it came the neighborhood kids, pollinators, and all manner of life above and below ground. You can check out her YouTube channel for inspiration.²

If you're a fan of pollinator gardening, you may already know about local **Lauren Simpson** and her garden called St. Julian's Crossing (SJC). She has a Facebook page and a website³ to share

her adventures and delight in growing, observing and recording her pollinator-friendly front yard garden. She is Clinical Associate Professor of Lawyering Skills and Strategies at the University of Houston Law Center, and an energetic and inspiring speaker when it comes to her passion. SJC was carved out of the front lawn of her home in a lawn-dominated neighborhood, and has fans from across the country and abroad through social media.

Quoting from her website, "SJC is a pollinator-friendly, organic set of gardens that are a Certified Wildlife Habitat (National Wildlife Federation), a Monarch Waystation (Monarch Watch, Waystation No. 10925), and a Certified Butterfly Garden (North American Butterfly Association). The gardens are named for St. Julian the Hospitaller, the patron saint of travelers and innkeepers, because Monarch Butterflies travel through the gardens on their annual migration. These are urban gardens, located in a residential neighborhood in one of the largest cities in the United States: Houston, Texas. The SJC community is dedicated to education about pollinators, their conservation, and the gardens that support them."

And then there's my friend **Patti**, who turned her front yard into a pollinator friendly oasis with mostly native plants. When she ran out of space, she moved onto the esplanade in front of her home in a historic Houston neighborhood. Her garden was dominated by orange cosmos when I first saw it, but earlier this spring, a wide variety of bloomers were showing off their colors as the butterflies and bees dropped in for feedings. As with the other gardens I've mentioned, these gardens aren't static. Rather than yards that look pretty much the same every season, their gardens vary by the season and year, move in the breeze, and attract wildlife. Even though social distancing was in place, I could walk through Patti's garden and visit with her while she sat on her shaded front porch.

What do these four people have in common? Many things, including their willingness to create beautiful foodscares and

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HERB OF THE MONTH

Arugula - (*Eruca vesicaria sativa*)

by Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

A February conversation at the gym with a health-minded fellow member inspired this month's featured herb, arugula. During our visit she described in detail a 2019-purchased tower garden system, which subsequently began providing the bulk of vegetables and herbs for their family of seven. The conversation included a turn to the then-rising national awareness of COVID-19, and her desire to supply her family with vegetables and herbs directly from her backyard, harvested by her own family. Incidentally, for those not familiar, tower gardens are an attractive alternative for those with limited space, by virtue of sunlight exposure and/or square footage. This month's herb plugs into the tower garden and other limited growing environments really nicely! Personally, I have found that arugula transforms everything from pedestrian garden salads to pizzas with a peppery kick and an interesting architectural flourish.

Arugula, also called roquette, salad rocket, or garden rocket, is an annual herb belonging to the mustard family. Native to the Mediterranean, it is grown for its pungent edible leaves, which are often eaten raw and are a good source of calcium, iron, and vitamins A, C, and K; just one cup of arugula provides nearly thirty percent of the daily recommended allowance of vitamin K. Ancient Egyptians and Romans considered arugula leaves and seed oil to be an aphrodisiac. In India, arugula seed oil is known as taramira and is used for medicinal and cosmetic purposes. There are several varieties of arugula, including:

'Runway' – Very fast growing with large-lobed leaves.

'Garden' – Fast growing with production of leaves with a mild, radish-like flavor.

'Italian Rocket' – Also known as 'Wild Italian Rocket'. Finely cut leaves with sharp flavor.

'Sylvetica' – Small-lobed leaves. Slow growing and slow to bolt.

'Astro' – Fast growing with a mild flavor.



Temperatures need to be below 75 degrees to grow arugula, making it exclusively a late fall/winter choice for local garden growing. Pest issues include flea beetles, cabbage worms, and downy mildew. Arugula prefers humus-rich, well-drained soil, but will tolerate a variety of soil conditions. Checklists for local growing success seems to vary somewhat, but one general consensus is that partial shade is an absolute must. Planted from seed, arugula's first harvest is usually available in about four weeks. While the gardener can wait to harvest leaves when they get larger, harvesting the young leaves encourages the plant to continue producing new leaves for several months. Pinch or cut the outer leaves with scissors

just above the soil. You can cut up to one-third of the outer leaves at once or harvest a few leaves at a time. An added plus to harvesting young leaves includes that, for many varieties of arugula, the younger leaves offer better flavor.

In the kitchen, arugula pairs particularly well with parmesan cheese and balsamic vinegar, either alone as a salad, or accompanied by other greens. Arugula also



seems to welcome the acidity of sliced tomatoes, resisting wilt even after several minutes' time, unlike spinach or some other greens

that are naturally higher in water content. While awaiting the season to grow our own arugula, several retailers, including HEB and Trader Joe's, readily offer arugula (my family's Trader Joe's run always includes at least one bag of arugula). If you haven't test-driven this particular herb in your kitchen, give it a try this summer and decide if arugula wins a spot in your winter garden.

Citations:

https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/organic/files/2011/03/E-561_growing_herbs_texas.pdf
<https://www.britannica.com/plant/arugula>

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Lawns and Alternatives

by Don Tyler, Master Gardener

Photos by Don Tyler

Can I be honest? I hate grass! So, if we take that statement to its logical conclusion, I really do not like lawns. No offense intended to my turfgrass friends. I believe my negative feelings towards grass stems from my early childhood days of hay fever, i.e., allergies. If I was within a country mile of someone mowing grass, it was close enough to trigger my allergies! In fact my allergies were so bad, I was well into my 20s before I ever mowed a lawn. So, as far as Plant of the Month, I will not be writing about lawns or anything closely associated with them in fear that I may have an allergic reaction. Instead, I am going to take this opportunity to write about “and alternatives” which has nothing to do with lawns—one of my prize possessions, a cinnamon tree. As with so many plants, the elderberry grows best in well-draining soil. That is our challenge in the Houston area as so many of our yards are primarily a clay base. I am fortunate as I seem to have a large area that is primarily clay and another is significantly sandier. If you find yourself with primarily clay, takes steps to maybe dig a bigger hole than you normally would and amend the soil you backfill with.

There are two main varieties, *Cinnamomum zeylanicum* (CZ) and *Cinnamomum cassia* (CC), which is also known as *Cinnamomum aromaticum*/Chinese cinnamon. My particular tree is the *Cinnamomum zeylanicum* which is also known as Ceylon cinnamon or ‘true cinnamon’.¹

Obviously, the cinnamon tree is not native to Houston and so it is one of “fun” things to try and grow. I purchased mine from an online nursery and I have had the tree since April of 2018.

I use the term “tree” a bit loosely. In its native setting, Sri Lanka, no doubt the tree can reach heights of 30 feet, but I tend to believe mine will be more of a bush than a tree. In fact, Mother Earth Living indicates the size and form will be “3 to 8 feet depending on pruning and container size; shrub”². Growing the tree in a container, as I have done, will limit its height.

As I have mentioned in other articles, I am of the opinion container plants offer much needed flexibility to deal with the varying weather we experience in the Houston area. I would also add I believe it is especially true for non-native species.

The following are various growing recommendations I gleaned from various online resources:



Cinnamomum zeylanicum - Ceylon Cinnamon tree

- Soil – well-drained but moist, rich organic mix; somewhat acidic potting soil such as used for African violets
- Nutrition – fertilize sparingly, biannually with slow release 15-5-10; moderate feeder; fertilize weekly or biweekly, but only during active growth; balanced fertilizer, every two weeks from spring to fall
- Zone – Outdoor Zone 10a-11, Patio Zone 4b-11; Zone 10.
- Light – 85-100% sunlight, full sun is best; full to partial sun.
- Cold hardiness – Avoid frost.

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Lawn and Alternatives, *cont'd from pg. 5*

There is some commonality but also some variation in the above recommendations.

My experience is there will always be a range of recommendations when dealing with non-natives. However, that should not be a deterrent. Growing a non-native can be fun and rewarding. For general discussion, I have mine located outdoors, partial sun, organic soil mix, fertilize with a modified compost tea 2 or 3 times a year, water sparingly to avoid root rot and add a layer of compost in each year. The tree is quite healthy and has recently experienced a great deal of new growth. The following pictures from March of this year shows about 6" to 8" growth. (UPDATE: The initial 6" to 8" of growth shown in the picture ended up being well over 18" of length at press time.)

These pictures also accentuate one of the nice features of the tree and that is the beautiful colors of the new leaves.

One thing all the sources agreed on was to avoid frost. We had a serious cold snap back in 2019, and to be on the safe side, I moved the tree into my garage for a few days. I recently purchased some frost bags and so this year (very mild winter), I "bagged" it. Other than that, I have found the tree to be quite hardy.

The cinnamon tree is unique and a beautiful addition to the landscape and relatively low maintenance. I have sprayed the tree only a couple of times with a neem oil solution to get rid of some mealybugs. The leaves are a deep green and as seen in the pictures, new foliage bursts with reddish colored leaves. I have yet to harvest bark as most suggest you need at least two-year-old growth for good cinnamon.

A cinnamon tree is most certainly not an "alternative" to a great looking lawn, but it is a pretty cool addition to your landscape.



Cinnamon tree displaying striking "cinnamon" colored foliage



¹ "Medicinal properties of 'true' cinnamon (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*): as systematic review." NCBI. Published October 22, 2013. Accessed 01/29/20, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3854496>.

² Marting, Laurelynn G. and Martin, Bryon E. "Growing Tasty Tropical Cinnamon." Mother Earth Living. Published January 24, 2011. Accessed 2/20/20. <https://www.motherearthliving.com/gardening/growing-tropical-cinnamon-ze0z1101zdeb>.

Smart Landscaping, *cont'd from pg. 1*

the HOA requirements. The weeds were six inch bluebonnets, the state flower of Texas. Kirchoff obtained literature from the San Antonio River Authority to share with the HOA. He had also requested WaterSaver coupons from San Antonio's water utility. The bluebonnets were drought-tolerant plants. Eventually the HOA backed off, but it did take time and education.

Anne Lawrence, who lived in San Antonio, wanted to eliminate turf grass that was in her front yard because of a high water bill. Her HOA denied her first request because she wanted to use mulch. She had to resubmit her plan and included her argument that the use of mulch saved water.

For 17 years Hermine Ricketts and her husband, Tom Carroll, grew vegetables in their front yard. Then a zoning ordinance banned growing vegetables in front yards. The fine was \$50 a day. Ricketts ripped out her garden and got a lawyer. After six years she won her case. The Florida Legislature enacted a bill that allowed vegetable gardens.

There are many reasons people may want to replace the grass growing in their yard. Lawns require extensive maintenance. Watering, mowers, fertilizers and pesticides all take money. Then there is the problem of runoff. Most lawns require an average of 1.5 inches of water a week. Eventually our water shortage here in the U.S. will become more severe. NASA satellites illustrate that our lawns take up about 50,000 square miles. That's the size of New York state. The percentage of our water that goes toward landscaping? One-third. No, that's not a typo. During the summer, we can use up to half of our water supply for our landscapes. Make sure to read the July issue of the *Urban Dirt* where we will discuss virtual water. That's another eye opener.

So what are some ways to reduce your water usage for that front lawn once you have permission? Here are some suggestions.

- Reduce the size of your lawn. Include some beds with plants that have low water requirements. Native plants can fill the bill.
- Add walkways, or widen the walkways. Use hardscape such as pavers, crushed stone, flagstone, etc.
- Use ornamental grasses with low water requirements that are suitable for your growing zone.
- Consider using alternative ground covers other than grass that use less water. Mondo grass (*Ophiopogon japonicas*) likes filtered light and makes great borders around beds. It also stays green year round. There is also a dwarf mondo grass.



Ornamental grass beds are drought tolerant and can add height and textural qualities to a lawn.

Photo courtesy elemental.green

I use it in my fairy gardens. It does well here in the south, but you may need to keep it in check. There are also other ground covers you can use. Know the growth habit of ground covers you decide on. Some grow slowly, some are aggressive.

- Consider a WaterSmart¹ landscape. There are three main tenets: plants should be native or adapted, require less water and maintenance, and finally, shelter wildlife.
- Harvest rainwater if possible.

Visit some of the places listed below to get an idea of WaterSmart landscapes in our area:

- University of Houston-Clear Lake, 2700 Bay Area Blvd, Houston, 77058, near Entrance 3 at the Environmental Institute of Houston.
- Butler Longhorn Museum and Heritage Park, 1220 Coryell, League City, 77573
- Armand Bayou Nature Center, 8500 Bay Area Blvd, Pasadena, 77507
- Ghirardi Water Smart Park, 1910 Louisiana Ave, League City, 77573
- Claude Burgess Center, 4200 Kalwick, Deer Park, 77536

For comprehensive information on landscape plants, a *Table of Landscape Plants* from Dr. William Welch's *The Southern Garden* is available at this link: <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/southerngarden/landtable.html>

¹ <https://watersmart.tamu.edu/>

President's Perspective, *cont'd from pg. 3*

wildscapes where neighbors can see them. All of them have maintained some lawn as a component of their intentional-looking designs, so that others can imagine doing something like that in their own yards. Neighbors drop by to see and observe, take selfies and photos of plants and insects to post online, and engage in conversations with the homeowners. Kids are especially fascinated by these patches of lively nature in the city. Figuratively and literally, it's an organic way of educating and connecting.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVBPpZykyco&feature=youtu.be>

² <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJjehwRXiIa25aV7kLHLZoQ>

³ <http://www.stjulianscrossing.com/our-story/>

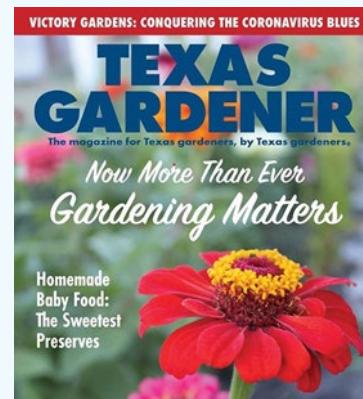
Whether we do it in our official capacities as Master Gardeners, or as homeowners or volunteers, this sort of inclusive education is what we are about.

Beth Braun

HCMGA Board President, 2020

Master Gardeners in the City

If you are a subscriber to Texas Gardener magazine, there is an article for the May/June 2020 issue on the Harris County Master Gardeners. This article highlights one of our programs in Hermann Park Conservancy's McGovern Centennial Gardens. You can find out more about the Texas Gardener at <https://texascardener.com/>



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

Bea Bomba, Les Bujko, Suzanne Cobarruvias, Regina Flaherty, Cheryl Gans, Sue Gortemiller, Judith Jackson, Ann Kong, Guy Lazarus, Chris Liles, Kathryn McLeod, Douglas Paluska, Bettye Schwartz, and Jarvis Taylor

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).

Texas Super Star Releases for 2020

by Carolyn Boyd, Master Gardener

Three new Super Star plants have been released this year. To discover more about each selection, visit the AgriLife Today weblinks.

Tidal Wave Red Velour Spreading Petunia

<https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2020/03/17/looking-for-a-texas-tough-petunia-tidal-wave-series-has-you-covered/>



The Tidal Wave Red Velour was grown at Genoa Friendship Gardens (GFG) in the 2019 Perennial/Annual Trials.

Photo by Carolyn Boyd

Purslane

<https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2020/04/08/purslane-adds-color-that-can-take-the-texas-heat/>



Cupcake Yellow Chrome

Photo courtesy Texas A&M AgriLife Research

Pentas

<https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2020/04/23/pentas-past-and-present-are-texas-superstars/>



Lucky Star Deep Pink

Texas A&M AgriLife Research photo by Brent Pemberton

HOME GROWN LECTURE SERIES

Hosted by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension—Harris County

6:00 p.m. Thursdays in June 2020

Join us for 30 minutes from the comfort of your home!
All you need is a computer, laptop or mobile device with
internet capabilities.

June 4th

Landscape Plants for the Shade

Paul Winski, Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Horticulture

June 11th

Backyard Poultry - Part 2

Shannon Dietz, Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-
Agriculture & Natural Resources

June 18th

Growing 10 Outstanding Herbs

Kim Perry, Cooperative Extension Program-Agriculture & Natural Resources
Prairie View A&M

June 25th

Youth Gardening - Getting Started!

Brandi Keller, Harris County Master Gardener Program Coordinator



Cooperative Extension Program

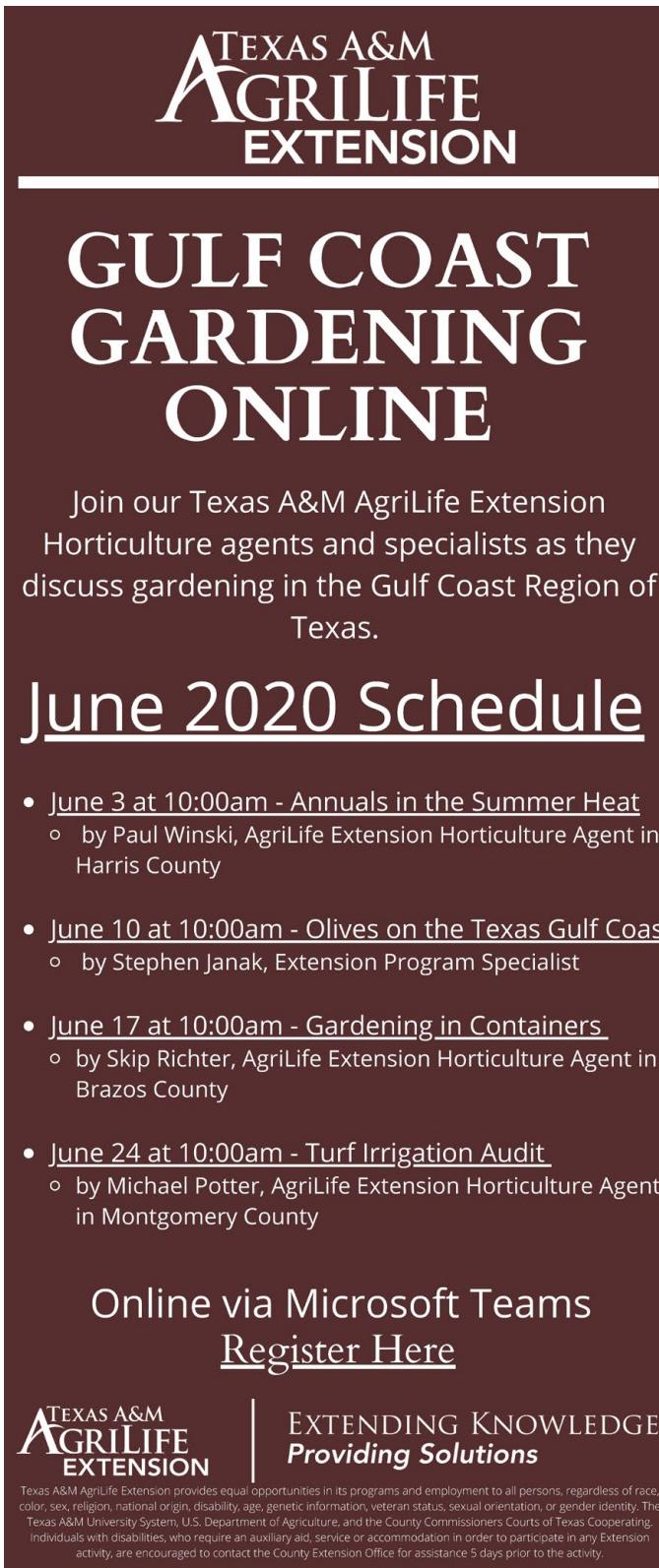
To register for this free event, please visit
<https://homegrown2020june.eventbrite.com/>

A link to the program will be emailed before the webinar.



The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife. Individuals with disabilities who require an auxiliary aid, service or accommodation in order to participate in this meeting are encouraged to contact the County Extension Office prior to the meeting to determine how reasonable accommodations can be made.

Need more horticulture information? Tune in on Wednesdays for the Gulf Coast Gardening Series and hear from AgriLife Extension horticulture agents and specialists from 9 different counties on gardening topics for the Gulf Coast.



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.

**As a public health precaution to help prevent the spread of COVID-19,
the Harris County Master Gardener Association is suspending events
for the month of June.**

**Our top priority is the health and safety of our staff, guests and volunteers.
We thank you for your understanding.**

Look for an *Ask a Master Gardener* table at the following locations when events resume.

Urban Harvest - *1st Saturday*, 7:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m., at 3401 Westheimer Rd. (corner of Buffalo Spwy. & Westheimer), Houston

Garden Oaks/Heights - *1st Saturday*, 8:30 a.m. - 11 a.m. at The Farmstand, 938 Wakefield, Houston

Tomball - *2nd Saturday*, 8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. at 205 W. Main Street, Tomball

Westchase - *3rd Thursday*, 3 - 7 p.m. at 10503 Westheimer Rd., Houston

Memorial Villages - *4th Saturday*, 8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. at 10840 Beinhorn Rd., Houston

Towne Lake - *4th Saturday*, 2:30 - 7 p.m. at 9955 Barker Cypress Rd., Cypress

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

www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners



MASTER GARDENERS in the city

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

in partnership with

Hermann Park Conservancy

are pleased to present

Master Gardeners in the City at McGovern Centennial Gardens

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the Harris County Master Gardener Association is suspending events
for the month of June.**

**Our top priority is the health and safety of our staff, guests and volunteers.
We thank you for your understanding.**

**McGovern Centennial Gardens at Hermann Park
1500 Hermann Drive
Houston, Texas 77004**

When events resume: free tours and children's activity. Adult workshop at 10:30 a.m.
No registration required.

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.

Growing with Plants & Nature

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Harris County Master Gardeners invite you to join us one day each month, January through November, 10:00 –11:15 a.m. Free for children ages three to twelve. REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED. To register or for more information: ogd.harrishort@gmail.com

**Growing with Plants & Nature has moved all in-person events online until further notice. Please visit us on our Growing with Plants and Nature Virtual Group found at the following link:
[https://www.facebook.com/groups/GPNVG/.](https://www.facebook.com/groups/GPNVG/)**

We hope this helps educate more families and children on gardening during this stressful time.

(The Open Garden Day children's activities program name has changed to be more reflective of its mission.)

Children and their parents looking for hands-on ways to learn, create, and have fun inspire our Growing with Plants & Nature 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

For information about upcoming topics, dates and registration, please email us at ogd.harrishort@gmail.com. Registration is required before each program.

Finding Blue

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

Evidence shows that many thousands of years ago humans gathered materials to express themselves artistically. The pigments they gathered and used included berry juice, sap, charcoal and even blood. To make a durable paint, they combined these pigments with bases such as animal fats, water, urine or saliva. An ochre paint and a stone toolkit dating back 100,000 years and 70,000 years, respectively, were discovered in a cave called the Blombos Cave located in South Africa. Cave paintings 40,000 years old have been found in Australia, Indonesia and Europe. Egyptian tombs featured six main colors: charcoal black, brown and red ochre, yellow orpiment, green malachite and blue azurite. Throughout history, mankind had used many types of materials to capture images.

Later, plant dyes were used to create art in the Mediterranean area. Red came from madder roots (*Rubia tinctorum*), a member of the coffee family. Turmeric, saffron, onion skins and pomegranate rind yielded yellow and, from indigo came a dark blue. These primary colors could be combined to make a variety of other colors. The search for new bases and dye sources continued in order to increase the durability of the paint in addition to improving the depth of color.

Now fast forward to current times. CNN reported on a recently published study from *Science Advances*. An interdisciplinary team of researchers have tracked down the source of an elusive blue and purple dye used for artwork in medieval manuscripts. The dye color called folium was popular at least a thousand years ago, particularly in Arthurian artwork (yes, the legendary King Arthur). The dye is believed to have been used on parchment, paper and tapestries. By the 19th century, the dye was no longer being used, and the group of scientists in this study began the search for the illusive dye to help preserve precious medieval illuminated manuscripts.

The study's author, professor Maria João Melo, gathered a crew that included a biologist, conservation experts and chemists. They knew the plant *Chrozophora tinctoria* was

Herb Chrozophora tinctoria
Photo by Maria Joao
Nova University



mentioned in tomes from the 12th, 14th and 15th centuries. The references listed a description, collection methods, and specific processing methods for the herb. Cloths were saturated with the dye and dried. When it was needed, a snippet was cut from the cloth and soaked with water or another type of base so it would adhere to the manuscript page. Folium had medicinal uses as well.

The herb prefers arid conditions and originates in the Mediterranean and surrounding areas. The search was on, and the team settled down in a small area of Portugal near a town called Monsaraz. The place was called Granja. Apparently, herb collection needed to take place during a specific time of year. Samples were collected over a period of three years during July, August and September.

The plant itself is gray green with small hairs. According to directions in the ancient recipes, the seeds containing the fruit were to be used intact. The researchers collected ripe and un-ripened fruit and

were able to process the compound to obtain the folium color. They isolated its chemical structure and discovered



Fabric impregnated with folium colors

Photo by Paula Nabais, Nova University



Chrozophora tinctoria fruit

Photo by Paula Nabais, Nova University

that folium is not a typical dye. It is in a unique new dye classification of its own. The new molecule is called chrozophoridin.

The recent recovery of the dye will keep researchers busy. The dye was capable of lasting a thousand years, and now, they will determine how long a synthetic dye derived from the plant can last.

Open Garden Days at Genoa Friendship Gardens



The Perennial/Annual Trial Garden



The Water Garden



The Greenhouse

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

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. 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

To schedule a special event for your garden club, school or professional organization please email brandi.keller@ag.tamu.edu 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.

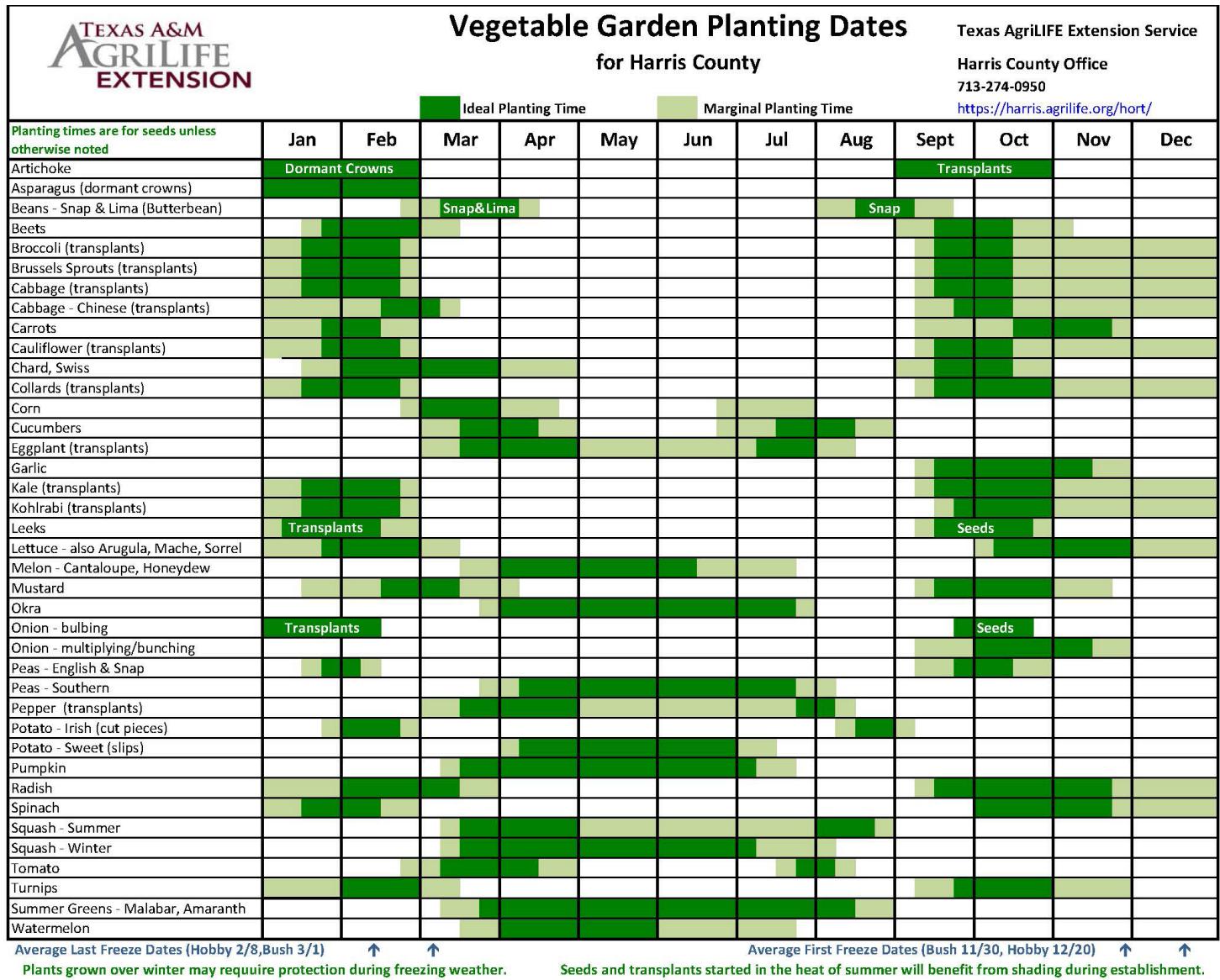
2020 Monthly Open Garden Days & Special Events

**As a public health precaution to help prevent the spread of COVID-19,
the Harris County Master Gardener Association is suspending events
for the month of June.**

**Our top priority is the health and safety of our staff, guests and volunteers.
We thank you for your understanding.**

Gardening Tools

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



Download the
Vegetable Garden
Planting Guide here!



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EXTENSION SERVICE
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harris.agrilife.org/program-areas/hort/
hcmga.tamu.edu

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The Harris County Master Gardeners as well as Texas A&M AgriLife Extension - Harris County Horticulture are actively participating on Facebook, 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



www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyHorticulture



<https://twitter.com/pharrishhort>



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



Green Thumb Gardening Series

Lawns and Alternatives

Join us **ONLINE** June 16th, 6 PM – 7:30 PM for our Green Thumb Gardening Series lecture. You can sign up for the event on the *Harris County Facebook Page* and will be notified of the link to attend the webinar. If you are not on Facebook, the webinar link will also be available on the following websites under the *Green Thumb Lecture Series*:

Harris County Master Gardener website

Harris County AgriLife Extension Service website

Would you like to contribute to the Urban Dirt?
Send all questions and/or submissions to: UrbanDirt.harrishort@gmail.com