HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER NEWSLETTER • DECEMBER 2020

Urban Dirt

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

Gifts for Gardening

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

The holidays will be here before you know it so now it the time to begin shopping. Several of the gifts suggested here can be purchased online so you can limit your exposure to the inevitable holiday crowds. Whether you're gifting yourself or your favorite gardener, get a jump start on your purchases. Remember that Covid has put a cramp on our lifestyle. More people are staying home so some items are in short supply. Deliveries may take longer and items may be back ordered since many people staying at home are returning to basics. Baking, sewing, canning supplies and garden plants/tools are at a premium. If you grow tomatoes and peppers from seeds now is the time to plan for next year's garden and order your seeds. In our area tomato and pepper seeds may be sown indoors in December or January so order now before the stocks run out and to allow adequate delivery times. Not sure what to get for that special gardener? Consider gift certificates. One of many suppliers out there that I frequently order from is gardeners.com. Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds has gift certificates at rareseeds.com. Other growers like burpee.com and johnnyseeds.com have certificates. Your favorite supplier may offer gift certificates as well. For pepper seeds, some pepper powders, and starter plants try Jim Duffy's website at superhotchiles.com. He's a reputable gardener that many pepper loves order from. Don't let the title fool you. His site has a unique variety of peppers ranging from sweet peppers to the super hot peppers. Of course, don't limit yourself to these sites alone. There are plenty of others out there.

There are other gifts I have that I could recommend if you're interested. Naturally, I gifted them to myself.

A Japanese hori hori knife is a nifty but lethal looking knife to use in the garden. Sort of like the kind Crocodile Dundee would use. Both edges are sharp and the knife comes to a point. If you have one with a straight edge and a serrated edge you can saw, cut, and dig with it. It's ideal for cutting through the roots of plants that are root bound. Some tips for choosing a good hori hori knife include: select a knife made of stainless steel and it needs a sheath with a belt loop, make sure it has measuring lines for planting bulbs at the correct depth. An ergonomic handle and three rivets in the handle are ideal, but some plastic models will not have three rivets. If you have large hands you may prefer a wooden handle. A wide

Japanese hori hori knife

Photo by Terri Simon

cont'd on pg. 7

Upcoming Events 2
President's Perspective.....3
Herb of the Month 4
Plant of the Month 5
Easy Peasy Christmas Gift 6
Plant Sales Team & Sale Dates.....9
Home Grown Gardening Series..10
Gardening on the Gulf Coast.....11
Getting in the Dirt.....12
Hildegard of Bingen 14
GFG Master Gardener Workdays..16
Ask A Master Gardener 17
Master Gardeners in the City 18
Centennial Garden Opportunities..19
Master Gardener Birthdays 19
Growing with Plants & Nature.....20
Open Garden Days at GFG.....21
Gardening Tools 22

Have Garden Questions? Submit your questions and photos at ***https://hcmga.tamu.edu/ask-a-question/***

Upcoming Events

December 2020

Educational Programs

Home Grown Lecture Series - *Webinar* To register for these free events, please visit: *homegrown2020november.eventbrite.com*

Dec. 3, 10:00 a.m. - *Food Preservation* by Amanda Krippel, Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent - Family & Community Health
Dec. 10, 10:00 a.m. - *Ask the Agent* / Open Forum

Gardening on the Gulf Coast - *Webinar* To register for these free events, please visit: *gardeningonthegulf.eventbrite.com*

Dec. 2, 10:00 a.m. - *Cool Season Annual Color* by Paul Winski, AgriLife Extension Horticulture Agent in Harris County
Dec. 9, 10:00 a.m. - *Winter Bulb Care & Division* by Boone Holladay, AgriLife Extension Horticulture Agent in Fort Bend County
Dec. 16, 10:00 a.m. - *Horticulture Myths* by Stephen Brueggerhoff, AgriLife Extension Horticulture Agent in Brazoria County
Dec. 23 & 30, NO PROGRAM (Happy Holidays)

Youth Activities - Growing with Plants & Nature

Please visit us on our Growing with Plants and Nature Virtual Group found at the following link: *https://www.facebook.com/groups/GPNVG/.*

No Family Zoom event for December

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

For Harris County Master Gardeners Only!
Master Gardener Garden Work Days at GFG!

An opportunity for Interns and Master Gardeners to meet with other gardeners, and to learn by working in a variety of gardens. Work tasks will be outlined and garden leads will be available to guide you through the task.

Mondays & Wednesdays - 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. at Genoa Friendship Gardens, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Houston, Texas 77034

Saturday Workdays

Dec. 12, 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. at Genoa Friendship Gardens, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Houston, Texas 77034

If you have horticulture questions, visit our Master Gardener Hotline at *https://hcmga.tamu.edu/ask-a-question/*

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*

COVID-19 AgriLife Extension Web Hub

Texas AgriLife Extension Service
Horticulture Program in Harris County
13105 Northwest Freeway, Suite 1000
Houston, TX 77040
713.274.0950

Master Gardener Program Coordinator
Brandi Keller - 713-274-0956
CEA – Horticulture
Paul Winski - 713-274-0981

2020 Board of Directors

President
Beth Braun
hcmgapresident@gmail.com
First Vice President
Alan Fisherman
hcmga1vp@gmail.com
Second Vice President
Jonathan Correia
hcmga2vp@gmail.com
Past President
Evan Hopkins
hcmgapastpres@gmail.com
Secretary
Aida Pita
hcmgasecretary@gmail.com
Treasurer
Dianne Lawrence
hcmgatreasurer@gmail.com
Directors
Douglas McLeod
Danny Dunn
Janice Muhm
Linda Saxman
Alexa Haass
Marsha VanHorn

Genoa Friendship Gardens
Steering Committee Coordinators
Advisors
Evan Hopkins
Georgia Lau

•

Urban Dirt Editor
Carolyn Boyd
UrbanDirt.harrishort@gmail.com
Assistant Urban Dirt Editor
Terri Simon

President's Perspective

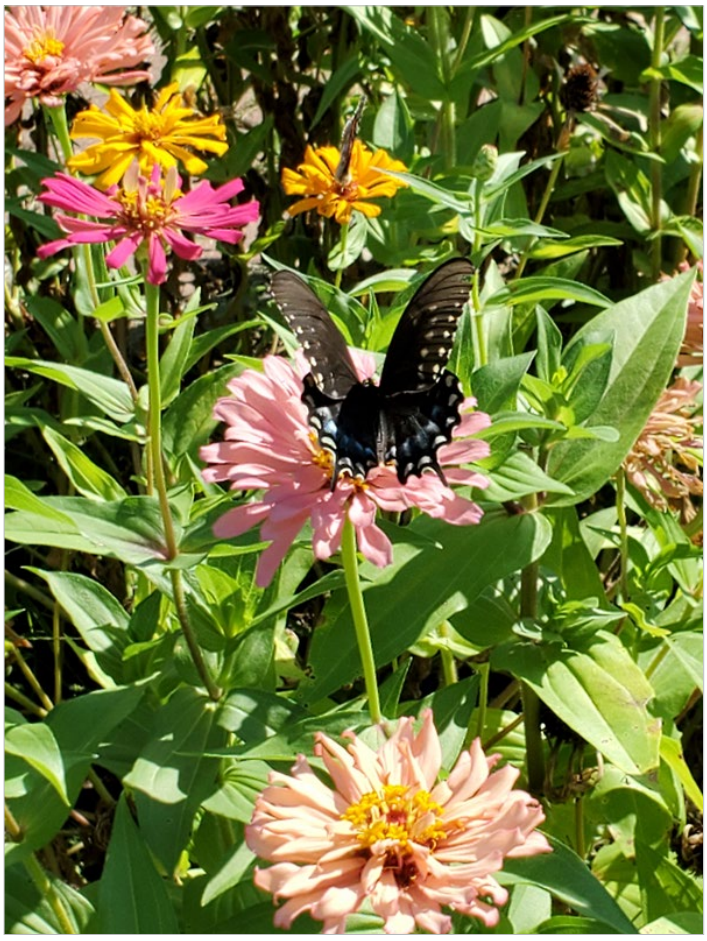
I'm experiencing the paradox of time, where this grueling and historic year seemed to drag on and yet speed by. Here we are, facing the arrival of 2021, weary of--but better adapted to--living our lives during a pandemic.

Congratulations to our AgriLife staff for *finally* being able to move into spacious offices, and for introducing ways for Master Gardeners and the public to connect online. Educational events are reaching a far wider audience than we could with in-person events. No longer do people need to live near the venue to attend classes; these events can be viewed from anywhere in the world! The staff also successfully pivoted to an all-virtual class for interns this year. Welcome, interns!

Congratulations also to the various committees who are using online tools to connect and offer public education and activities while meeting in person is out of the question. Among the major changes is that all 2021 plant sales will be online. The store started accepting fruit tree orders on November 1, and will later add perennials, herbs, tomatoes and peppers to the inventory. Plant sales will be pickup only, and all payments will be online for low-contact transactions. Check out the fruit tree selection at *https://hcmga.tamu.edu/shop/*

My thanks go to Master Gardeners who've served diligently on the Master Gardener Association Board (HCMGA) in 2020 and previous years and are rotating off: **Danny Dunn**, **Evan Hopkins**, **Aida Pita**, and **Marsha VanHorn**. 2021 President **Alan Fisherman** and First Vice President **Jonathan Correia** have already hosted a membership-wide online gathering, and are planning to take that into 2021 in lieu of our monthly in-person gatherings for as long as needed.

My thanks also go to Master Gardeners who contribute to this outstanding publication, to the teams who answer gardening questions from the public, speak on various topics, work behind the scenes on the plant sales, recognize Master Gardener(s) of the Month, run the perennials and vegetable trials, create children's activities, distribute container gardening supplies to area schools, maintain the demonstration garden at Genoa Friendship Garden, and so much more.



Swallowtail butterfly on a zinniz planted by Christa Kaiser at GFG

A shared mission and connection with our fellow Master Gardeners keeps the program afloat. Keep up the good work, **Recertify**, and be a part of our future.

Beth Braun
HCMGA Board President, 2020

Herb of the Month

Toothache plant *(Acmella oleracea)*

by Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

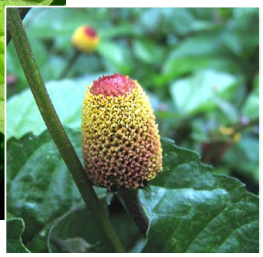
Admittedly this may be a stretch, but this month's featured herb, toothache plant, ties (albeit loosely) to the theme of Christmas through the famous words of Clement Clark Moore "While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads…" Sugar…toothache…OK, I think we all get it.

As it is with most plants, the toothache plant sounds far more interesting and catchy by its nicknames, which include eyeball plant, toothache plant and electric daisy, than by its Latin moniker. The toothache plant is one of approximately 30 species of annual and tender-perennial herbs of the daisy family native to South America, with the toothache plant itself thought to be native to specifically Brazil. Commonly grown everywhere in the tropics of the Southern Hemisphere, along with warmer parts of Asia, the toothache plant is thought to have been introduced to the Indian Ocean islands by Portuguese seamen in earlier times.

Given its preferred temperate garden conditions, the toothache plant is a rapidly growing, warm-weather annual that can be grown easily from both seeds and cuttings. With a mature height of 12-18 inches tall and wide, the commonly grown, rayless flower form of the toothache plant is not known in the wild. While it does not appear in the wild, the toothache plant is actually widely naturalized and considered a weed throughout most of the tropics, used as a medicinal herb and a spicy food additive throughout its range. The toothache plant was virtually unknown in the United States nursery market until just the last 20 years. There was considerable buzz about the plant at first within the herbal remedy community, but the toothache plant's very unique appearance and its subsequent potential as an ornamental seems to be what really catches most people's attention. And if you really sort of love globe shaped plants like I do, such as gomphrena (also known as purple globe amaranth), you might want to consider introducing the toothache plant into your garden design. After the danger of frost passes, the seeds or cuttings of the toothache plant can be accommodated in a sunny garden spot in average soil, where it will easily establish with little care. Once established, care should be taken not to overwater.

To the point of its medicinal usage, the toothache plant's flower heads can contain as much as 1.25 percent spilanthol, a fatty acid amide, which is also present in the foliage. This compound produces a pronounced localized buzzing sensation and heavy salivation because it is readily absorbed through the soft tissue of the mouth. There it provides a numbing and cooling effect and as such, it is used as an herbal remedy for dealing with the pain of toothaches and other oral ailments. Toothache plant is also used in regional foods to flavor salads, soups and mixed with chilies in hot sauces.

Toothache plant branch



Acmelia oleracea flowerhead

Photos courtesy commonswikimeda.org

Plant happy for 2021 everyone, and please allow me to close 2020's final herb article by wishing you and your family the warmest and most peaceful of holiday seasons in the words of someone else:

A Visit from St. Nicholas

By Clement Clark Moore

Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;
The children were nestled all snug in their beds;
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;
And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap,
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.

Citations:

https://www.uaex.edu/yard-garden/resource-library/plant-week/Acmella-oleracea-Eyeball-Plant-Toothache-Plant-07-28-2017.aspx
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43171/a-visit-from-st-nicholas

cont'd on pg. 8

Plant of the Month

Pomegranates

by Don Tyler, Master Gardener

Not too sure why I picked this particular plant especially seeing I have such a hard time spelling it! That aside, as I have mentioned before, I like to write about things I have firsthand experience with, and I have five pomegranate trees growing in my yard. One tree was here when we bought our house six years ago and I have since purchased two and propagated two others. However, I have not yet harvested any fruit.

The original pomegranate tree unfortunately is planted on the side of my house and tends to be out of sight out of mind. It does produce fruit but by the time I remember to check on it, the fruit is starting to decay. The tree is much too large to relocate which led me to try my hand at propagating so I could find a more suitable location.

I cannot state with certainty the exact year I took cuttings and rooted them but for argument sake it probably has not been more than four years and those two-inch cuttings are now four-foot-tall trees, i.e. bushes. Thinking I had become a master propagationist, I soon learned pomegranates are easy to root from hardwood cuttings. I guess sometimes it is better to be lucky than good.

Uncertain of the ultimate outcome of my two-inch cuttings, I purchased the other two trees in October of 2018 and two years later those three-foot trees are just over eight feet tall! I know it is hard to tell in the picture but take my word for it, pomegranates grow quite well in our environment. I used the terminology of tree above, however as suggested in the *Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Texas Fruit and Nut Production Fact Sheet on Pomegranates*, fruit specialist, Mr. Larry Stein, Mr. Jim Kamas and Mr. Monte Nesbitt state, "Although the plant can be trained as a small tree, it is more commonly grown as a bushy shrub." As you can in the pictures, I am training the nursery bought one as a small tree having pruned many of the lower bushy limbs, i.e. suckers, whereas with the propagated pomegranate, I have left more as a bush or shrub.

I mentioned the existing tree planted on the side of my house. One reason I wanted to plant new pomegranates is this tree is really in the shade most of the day. As mentioned on the website, *growinginthegarden.com*, "Pomegranates need plenty of sun to thrive and produce fruit. Look for an area that gets at least 6 hours of direct sun." (*https://growinginthegarden.com/how-to-grow-pomegranates*) There is no way that tree gets sufficient sunlight and the limited fruit production I have seen bears witness to this recommendation.

Nursery bought

Propagated

Another aspect of growing pomegranates I like best of all is *"they tolerate almost any soil, even poor or alkaline ones"* (www.growinginthegarden.com). The AgriLife Fact Sheet supports this claim, *"Pomegranates can grow in almost any soil that has good drainage. They grow very well on the moderately alkaline soils of South Texas and northern Mexico, as well as the slightly acidic soils in East Texas."* Of course, we cannot overlook the need for "good

cont'*d on pg. 6*

Pomegranates, *cont'd from pg. 5*

drainage" in the Houston area but the plant does seem to be adaptable to our soil conditions.

As I did not purchase my pomegranates locally, I am not sure what kind of selection exists at local nurseries but the AgriLife Fact Sheet does list *Al-sirin-nar*, *Russian 18*, *Salvatski*, *Spanish Sweet*, *Sumbar*, *Surh Anor* and *Wonderful*, as varieties suitable for growing in Texas. The two trees I purchased are the Wonderful variety.

In addition to the fact the plant is adaptable to our soil conditions, the website, thespruce.com, states, *"Pomegranate shrubs are one of the easier fruits to work with since they are not usually affected by many pests or diseases."* (*https://www.thespruce.com/pomegranate-growing-tips-3269232*) All the resources mentioned state leaves can be damaged by whiteflies, thrips, mealybugs, stink bugs, and scale insects. So far, I have yet to see any significant damage due to pest infestations.

All in all, the pomegranate seems to be a great, low maintenance, addition to my garden landscape. Even though I have yet to harvest fruit, I am convinced it is a great addition to our landscape.

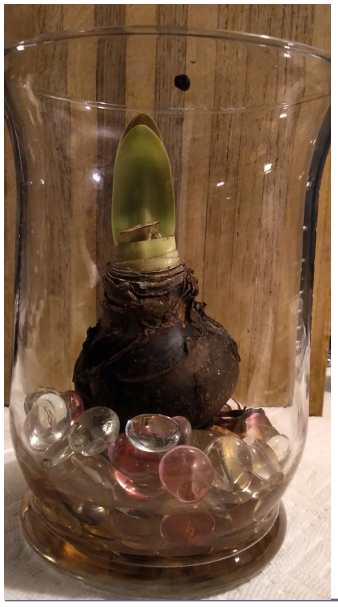
Easy Peasy Christmas Gift

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

You will need:

1 amaryllis bulb
1 wide mouth, deep vase (mine is 8 ¼ x 5 ¼)
Colorful or clear glass marbles (enough to fill bottom of vase approx 3")
Marker to write on glass (optional)
Blank stickers (optional)

I make some of these every year to give as presents. I usually try and start them by the last week of November. They are beautiful gifts that keep on giving after the holidays are over. With luck they will bloom by the holidays. Occasionally, though, I have had one or two bloom before Christmas so I usually make 1-2 extra. Empty the marbles/stones into the vase. Three inches is about enough. Then add about 1"- 1 ½" of water in the vase. You want the amaryllis roots to be slightly above the water. Don't worry, they will find it soon enough. I place a sticker on the bottom of the vase that identifies the amaryllis variety. Using a marker that writes on glass, I make a small dot near the top of the vase. The vase needs a quarter turn daily so the amaryllis will grow straight and the dot helps me keep track of the turns. If you look closely at my photo you can see the dot. Check the water level daily and add more if necessary to keep the level at 1"-1 ½". That's all you need to do. When it is through blooming and the leaves turn brown, snip them off so you can transplant it in the ground outside or in a pot outside. Leave the neck exposed in the dirt. Since you forced the bulb this year you may not get a flower next spring but you can expect a bloom in spring of the following year. I usually buy the vase and marbles from a dollar store. This is an easy way to bring a smile to someone's face.



Gifts for Gardening, *cont'd from pg. 1*

hilt is preferred so your hand doesn't slip down on the blade. Some will come with a sharpening tool. You are not allowed to re-enact the shower scene from Psycho with it. It's a splendid present for a gardener.

Degrees Brix (symbol °Bx) is a measurement for the sugar content in an aqueous suspension. A Brix refractometer is a nice gift for the fruit and vegetable gardener. Refractometers are used in the agricultural, food, chemical and manufacturing industries. The refractometer is an instrument that needs only a few drops of liquid to measure the sugar content. Tomatoes, corn, grapes, oranges, (even wine) -you name it. As long as you can squeeze some juice from it and slide a drop or two under the glass/plastic cover on top of the prism face you can determine the sugar content. A clean garlic press can be used to extract liquids. Cloudy fluids should be filtered first. A coffee filter works fine. Remember, you only need a drop or two. One example: maturity requirements for oranges in Florida are a minimum Brix of 8.0. There are analog and digital models available. Analog refractometers are less expensive at around $25. Resist the urge to say "ahoy Matey!" when looking through your refractometer. The following chart shows the Brix percentage of some different fluids.

Brix refractometer *Photo by Terri Simon*

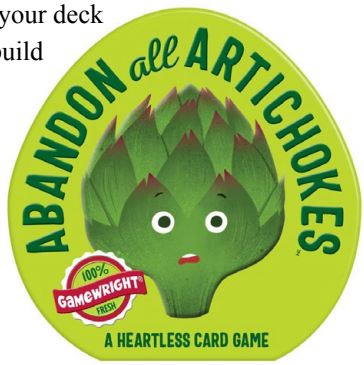
Brix Chart

Sample fluid	Brix %
Cutting oils	0 to 8
Oranges	4 to 13
Carbonated beverages	5 to 15
Apples	11 to 18
Grapes and wines	14 to 19
Concentrated juices	42 to 68
Condensed milk	52 to 68
Jams and jellies	60 to 70

Chart courtesy of coleparmer.com.

To see an explanation of how a refractometer works, visit *www.coleparmer.com/tech-article/refractometers*

Finally if you are interested in a novelty card game about vegetables then try *Abandon all Artichokes* by gamewright.com It's a card game for 2-4 players, ages 10 and up. Your ultimate goal is to become "heartless" by getting rid of all your artichoke cards. You gather vegetables such as beets, broccoli, eggplant, and corn among others to build your deck and gain powers. You can also build a community compost pile. It's listed as a strategy game and priced under $25.00. No batteries required.



Graphic courtesy mbeans.com

To wrap things up, I hope you enjoy some of the suggestions in this article and have wonderful holidays. Stay safe and happy gardening!

A Visit from St. Nicholas, *cont'd from pg. 4*

Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow,
Gave a lustre of midday to objects below,
When what to my wondering eyes did appear,
But a miniature sleigh and eight tiny rein-deer,
With a little old driver so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment he must be St. Nick.
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name:
"Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now Prancer and Vixen!
On, Comet! on, Cupid! on, Donner and Blitzen!
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"
As leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky;
So up to the housetop the coursers they flew
With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too—
And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.
As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.
He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a pedler just opening his pack.
His eyes—how they twinkled! his dimples, how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard on his chin was as white as the snow;
The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke, it encircled his head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a little round belly
That shook when he laughed, like a bowl full of jelly.
He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;
He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight—
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night!"

Nominate a Master Gardener of the Month

There is no MG of the month since no nominations were received. The membership committee knows there are MG volunteers doing great work during this trying time. Without your help, we just do not know who they are.

Please submit nominations to:
Karen Breneman
kbreneman2018@gmail.com

We know there is a deserving member out there.

Thank you in advance for your nomination.

Please subscribe to our Harris County Horticulture YouTube page for access to recorded videos.

Thank you for your support.

https://www.youtube.com/channel

Have Garden Questions?

We have developed a new form located at ***https://hcmga.tamu.edu/ask-a-question/***

You can submit your question and up to three photos. Be sure your photos are focused and clear.

Claim Your Spot on the Plant Sales Teams!

by Jonathan Correia, Master Gardener

There's nothing quite like the buzz at Master Gardener plant sales. These fundraising events make our mission of public education and outreach possible. Miss the camaraderie of working with fellow MG's? Here's your chance to engage. Whether you're new to the program or a veteran volunteer, there is a place for you. Work has already started on the four 2021 plant sales:

January 23 – **West Side Fruit Tree Sale Pickup in Cypress**
February 20 – **Genoa Friendship Garden's Fruit Tree & Tomato Sale Pickup in Pasadena**
March 13 – **West Side Spring Vegetable & Perennial Sale Pickup in Cypress**
March 20 – **Genoa Friendship Garden's Pepper, Perennial & Herb Sale Pickup at Genoa Friendship Gardens**

THE TOP PRIORITY NOW is to add volunteers to the **catalog team**. Click **HERE** to see open positions, and **HERE** for detailed descriptions of each position. Claim your spot and get started by emailing PlantSales.HarrisHort@gmail.com. We are counting on you!

TEXAS MASTER GARDENER
TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION
Harris County

Harris County Master Gardeners

Online Plant Sales Dates for 2021

Store location

HCMGA-online.company.site

WEST SIDE
Online Sale November 1 – December 31
Order at HCMGA-online.company.site

GENOA FRIENDSHIP GARDENS
Online Sale November 1 – January 31
Order at HCMGA-online.company.site

Pickup only locations (***No in person shopping***)

West Side

Fruit Tree Sale Pickup Date – January 23

RICHARD & MEG WEEKLEY PARK
19110 LONGENBAUGH ROAD
CYPRESS, TX 77433

Vegetable & Perennials Sale Pickup Date – March 13th

RICHARD & MEG WEEKLEY PARK
19110 LONGENBAUGH ROAD
CYPRESS, TX 77433

Genoa Friendship Gardens

Fruit Tree and Tomato Sale Pickup Date – February 20

CAMPBELL HALL, PASADENA FAIRGROUNDS
7601 RED BLUFF ROAD,
PASADENA, TX 77505

Peppers, Perennials and Herb Sale Pickup Date – March 20

GENOA FRIENDSHIP GARDEN
1210 GENOA RED BLUFF ROAD
HOUSTON, TX 77043

In response to the needs of the public we will have contactless sale events for 2021.
All sales will be 100% online/pickup only.

Ask A Master Gardener - hcmga.tamu.edu/ask-a-question/ OR 713-274-0950

HOME GROWN LECTURE SERIES

November/December 2020

Join us on Thursdays at 10:00 a.m. CST

November 5th
Plant Disease Identification
Paul Winski, Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Horticulture

November 12th
Fall Gardening Chores
Shannon Dietz, Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Agriculture & Natural Resources

November 19th
Holiday Plant Care
Brandi Keller, Harris County Master Gardener Program Coordinator

December 3rd
Food Preservation
Amanda Krippel, Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Family & Community Health

December 10th
Ask the Agent/Open Forum

To register for this free event, please visit
https://homegrown2020november.eventbrite.com/

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

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

HARRIS COUNTY TEXAS

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..

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

GARDENING ON THE GULF COAST

Join our Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Horticulture agents and specialists online as they discuss gardening in the Gulf Coast Region of Texas.

December 2020 Schedule

- December 2 at 10:00am -Cool Season Annual Color
  - by Paul Winski, AgriLife Extension Horticulture Agent in Harris County
- December 9 at 10:00am -Winter Bulb Care & Division
  - by Boone Holladay, AgriLife Extension Horticulture Agent in Fort Bend County
- December 16 at 10:00am - Horticulture Myths
  - by Stephen Brueggerhoff, AgriLife Extension Horticulture Agent in Brazoria County
- December 23 & 30 - NO PROGRAM (Happy Holidays)

Online via Microsoft Teams

Register Here

Registration Questions? Please email Lindsey Munyon at lindsey.munyon@ag.tamu.edu

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION | EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE *Providing Solutions*

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 Cooperating. Individuals with disabilities, who require an auxiliary aid, service or accommodation in order to participate in any Extension activity, are encouraged to contact the County Extension Office for assistance 5 days prior to the activity.

Getting in the Dirt

by Pam Longley, Master Gardener

News from Genoa Friendship Gardens

In mid-October, the plant trial team, under the guidance of Paul Winski, our Extension agent, started a vegetable trial of six varieties of kale and seven varieties of swiss chard. Christ the Good Shepherd's gardening team is mirroring the trial. It's not a competition, but could it be? A few days after planting, we suspected a raccoon dug up parts of the two beds. We think it was after the Microlife we fertilized with at the initial planting. MicroLife is 100% organic and, per the MicroLife website, a favorite foodstuff of random garden critters and dogs. One of our master gardeners, Dianne Lawrence, said her dogs had dug up plants in her yard searching for and eating the MicroLife. Fortunately, we still had the plant cells and replaced the damaged seedlings. The next week we again found one or two seedlings in each bed displaced but were able to replant them. Despite the rough start, the plants have thrived and quadrupled in size in the last few weeks. The watering schedule is five minutes Tuesday, Friday and Sunday.

Kale bed

Swiss chard bed

On November 11, GFG hosted members of the 2020 Fall Master Gardeners class. It gave us an opportunity to show potential graduates what is available to them for volunteer hours. Following appropriate COVID restrictions, Evan Hopkins, 2020 HCMGA Board Past President and Beth Braun, 2020 HCMGA President led a tour of the greenhouse, orchard, trial beds, vegetable gardens, rose garden, desert garden and berry garden. Silo Managers **Linda Person**, **Carolyn Boyd**, **Rick Castagno**, **Janice Muhm, David Butler** and **Pat Danie**l were on hand to answer questions about their areas and activities. **Bev DeMoss** had a pop up MG store and **Jonathan Correia**, Plant Sale Coordinator, talked about our upcoming virtual plant sales.

On, November 16, the plant trial crew and two interns decided it was time to dig up the sweet potatoes. Guy Lazarus, a long-time GFG vegetable gardener passed away in mid-October. Guy's last instruction about his sweet potato beds, God rest his soul, was to not dig them up until the week before Thanksgiving. Close enough.

Digging to China is what is seemed like! There were plenty of potatoes a few inches down. But, to make sure the bed was completely harvested, the MGs kept digging more and more red tubers until there were four+ fully loaded red wagons from the 3' x 33' garden bed. After weighing and logging data for the extension office, the total came in at over 169 lbs!

Becki Guillory, Intern, digging for sweet potatoes

Sweet potato harvest

Oranges, tangerines and grapefruit from the orchard were harvested during the November 14th MG Saturday work day. The harvests were donated to several local food pantries.

All of us at GFG invite 2020 interns and Master Gardeners alike to join our group of dedicated volunteers. We have a lot of fun propagating seeds, planting, tending and documenting data for the Harris County Extension office as well as sharing our gardening trials and errors. We have become invested in this little "farm" that is like a learning laboratory. There is always something new to tuck into our brains that we learn from the Earth. We look forward to seeing you there!

Christ the Good Shepherd Garden

November is transition month at Christ the Good Shepherd (CGS) garden. The summer crops are finished and harvested and the winter crops are going in the ground. Plus we MGs just kicked off a kale and swiss chard trial.

Most readers are aware that CGS is almost exclusively a veggie garden. Our primary mission is to produce a variety of fresh

***cont**'d on pg. 13*

Getting in the Dirt, *cont'd from pg. 12*

veggies year-round for the food pantries in the NW part of Houston. We are giving ourselves a pat on the back this month because after totaling up our harvest over the past few weeks we are setting records. It couldn't have come at a better time. This "year of the virus", when the pantries in our area have been stretched to the limit, we, together with a benevolent mother nature, have produced and delivered more than 9200 pounds of fresh vegetables; an increase of 26% over the same period last year. Thanks to relatively friendly summer weather and no major attacks by pests or fungi, we have set records for tomatoes (2268 lbs), cucumbers (1728 lbs), and okra (347 lbs). Onions and sweet potatoes weighed in near 800 lbs each, as well.

CGS volunteers planting Swiss chard and kale seedlings for the plant trials

Now it's time to focus on cool weather and cold crops. Typically this will be the third crop grown in each of our beds during the year. We have an early Spring planting, followed by a Summer (heat tolerant) crop, followed by our Fall/Winter selections. We aim to get these cool weather varieties all in the ground before Thanksgiving, and we're on track to do that. This Fall the MGs are excited to be invited by Paul Winski to mirror the kale and swiss chard trials going on at the GFG location as part of our Fall/Winter program. On October 29th we transplanted six varieties of kale and seven varieties of Swiss chard using seedlings started in the GFG greenhouse and shared between the two locations. Every variety is off to a good start and growing. We'll keep you updated on how things turn out.

Centennial Gardens

Every week is different at the Family Garden in McGovern Centennial Gardens. With 28 beds for vegetables and 18 for herbs, new vegetables and herbs are going in or being harvested constantly. Master Gardeners are in the Family Garden every Tuesday and Thursday morning to tend those 40+ beds. Additionally, they take time to interact with garden guests to answer questions and help them learn about what can be planted in Harris County and how to get started.

Our biggest surprise this past month was not one but two real pineapples blooming and setting fruit. Each fall, we have carefully repotted the pineapple plants, moved them into the greenhouse, and in the spring, replanted them back outside. We have two additional pineapple plants we are watching hopefully.

George Kabacinski and Adrian Ruiz, MG interns working the beds

The Master Gardener volunteers have been enjoying the cooler weather. They already have 11 of our 28 vegetable beds converted to fall crops: broccoli, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, mustards, lettuce, cabbage, tomatoes, peas, kohlrabi, and beets, and chard. Sweet potatoes will be coming out next week and more Fall vegetables going in.

Learning Tuesdays have been a great success with new hands-on lessons each week. Some of the highlights include the life cycle and care of monarch butterflies presented by Kyle Wolfe of the Hermann Park Conservancy staff, transplanting and seeding in the garden with Will Isbell, a tour of native species in Centennial by Judy Thomas, and a tour of the rose garden with Jennifer Marino, staff gardener for the rose beds. We'll have two more lessons this year and will restart Learning Tuesdays in January.

Hildegard of Bingen, *1098-September 1179*

by Christa Kaiser, Master Gardener

In summer 2019, my husband and I visited our friends and family in Cologne (Köln) Germany. Cologne is located along the "Rhein" River. One of my vacation plans was to visit the area where Hildegard of Bingen lived and worked. Hildegard is also known as Saint Hildegard and the Sibyl of the Rhine. She was a German Benedictine abbess, writer, composer, philosopher, Christian mystic visionary and polymath of the High Middle Ages. Hildegard founded the monasteries of Rupertsberg in 1150 and Eibingen in 1165. She has been considered by many in Europe to be the founder of scientific natural history in Germany.

To have some better understanding of her healing methods, we have to consider the major illnesses in her time: Dysentery, malaria, diphtheria, flu, typhoid, smallpox and leprosy.

With her knowledge of healing plants, many pilgrims came to her monasteries to seek her advice and healing methods.

A translation of her "Plant" section of *Physica*, Hildegard's classic twelfth-century work on health and healing is still available. We can read about her relevant understanding of natural health. Hildegard's *Healing Plants* is a treasure for gardeners, natural healing enthusiasts and Hildegard fans everywhere.

For us Gardeners, here is her plant list, published in her plant section. It has an extensive description of the applications of the plants listed below. Many of those plants are not well known anymore, I had to look up many of them.

From the index of plant names:

- Agrimony, Aloe, Althea, Arnica, Arum, Asafoetida, Asarum
- Balsam, Barley, Basil, Beans, Belladonna, Bennet, Betony, Bilberry, Bindweed, Birthwort, Bitter vetch, Black dock, Black hellebore, Black nightshade, Blind nettle, Bloodwort, Borage, Bramble, Brookline, Bryony, Burdock, Butter, Butterbur
- Cabbage, Calendula, Camphor, Catnip, Cattail, Celandine, Celery ,Charlock, Chervil, Chick-peas, Chickweed, Cinnamon, Cinquefoil, Clary Sage, Clover, Cloves, Cockscomb, Colchicum, Columbine, Comfrey, Common house leek, Cornflower, Costmary, Cranesbill, Cress, Cumin
- Danewort, Dauwurtz, Dill, Dittany, Dorth, Duckweed, Dwarf elder
- Eggs, Elecampane

Image from Hildegard of Bingen's *Medicine*

- Female fern, Fennel, Fenugreek, Fern, Feverfew, Ficaria, Field mint, Flax, Flaxseed, Forget-me-not, Frankincense
- Galingale, Garden spurge, Garlic, German chamomile, Germander, Ginger, Gladiolus, Goatsbeard, Goutweed, Grass, Ground ivy
- Hart's-tongue fern, Hazelwort, Hemlock, Hemp, Henbane, Hog's-fennel, Honey, Hops, Horehound, Horsemint, Horseradish, Houseleek, Humela, Hyssop
- Indian chickweed, Ivy
- Java pepper or cureb
- Lady's thistle, Lavender, Leek, Lentils, Lettuce, Licorice, Lilim, Lily, Lovage, Lungwort, Lupine,
- Madder, Mallow, Mandrake, Marse's-tail, Masterwort, Meadow grasses, Menna, Meranda, Meygelana, Milk, Millet, Mountain parsley, Mouse-ear, Mugwort, Mullein, Musetha, Mushrooms, Mustard, Myrrh

cont'd on pg. 15

Hildegard of Bingen, *cont'd from pg. 14*

- Nettle, Nigella, Nutmeg
- Oats, Onion, Orach ,Oregano
- Panic grass, Parsley, Parsnip, Peas, Pennyroyal, Peony, Pepper, Pimpernel, Pine resin, plant on which blueberries grow, Plantain, Plionia, Poppy, Prickly lettuce, Primrose, Psaffo, Psyllium, Purslane,
- Radish, Rose, Rue, Rush, Rye
- Sage, Salt, Sanicle, Savory, Saxifrage, Scammony, Shallot, Silverweed, Skirret, Smartweed, Sorrel, Southernwood, Spearmint, Spelt, Spike lavender, Spruce pitch, Spurge, Squash, St. John's wort, Storax, Storkbill, Stutgrass, Sugar, Sulfur, Summer savory, Sunnewirbel, Sysemera
- Tansy, Thistle, Thyme, Tithymal, Tormentil, Turnip
- Ugera
- Valerian, Vervain, Vetch, Vichbona, Vinegar, Violet
- Water Lily, Water mint, Water Parsnip, Watercress, Welsh onion, Wheat, White dock, Wild lettuce, Wild strawberries, Wild thyme, Winter cherry, Woad, Wormwood, Woundwort
- Yarrow, Yellow gentian
- Zedoary, Zugelnich

I recommend the following books: Hildegard's *Healing Plants* – from her Medieval Classic *Physica* (Becon Press) and Hildegard's of Bingen's *Medicine*-Dr. Strehlow&Gottfried Hertzka, M.D., Folk Wisdom Series (Bear&Company, Rochester, Vermont}

Image from Hildegard of Bingen's *Medicine*

For Harris County Master Gardeners Only!

December 12th
GFG Garden Workday!

8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Houston TX

Appropriate Covid-19 protocols will be observed. As a reminder, please remain socially distanced at least six feet apart, wash your hands and use hand sanitizer. If working closer than six feet, a mask is required.

Genoa Friendship Garden Workdays are an opportunity for Interns and Master Gardeners to meet with other gardeners, and to learn by working in a variety of gardens. Test your practical gardening skills and learn from other gardeners' knowledge. Explore the various options of working in a collection of gardens with perennials, proven Earth-Kind winners, the fruit tree orchard, native plants, composting, and greenhouse activities.

Come and enjoy a few hours working in the garden with fellow Gardeners while gaining your required membership service hours.

Work tasks will be outlined, and available to gardeners to seek their interest. Garden leads will be available to guide you through the tasks.

The GFG is located 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Houston, Texas 77034. For some of you that may have considered this a distance you could not commit to on a regular basis, it is *always* available if you have a need to be surrounded by old or new friends.

Please join us at our Open Garden Workdays!

Evan J. Hopkins
HCMGA Past President

Ask a Master Gardener - Where we are now

by Valerie Depew, Master Gardener

Think back to February…

We are all at First Tuesday, picking up our crate resources and getting ready for a very busy March! The schedule is full of activities for AAMG, including all library Green Thumb talks, Farmer's Markets, plant sales, and several special events. In a few short weeks this all came to a grinding halt due to the COVID 19 pandemic, and we were left wondering how all of this would impact our organization.

For AAMG, the effect has been to shut down nearly all activities. Given the imposed restrictions and our concern for at-risk members, this has really been the right call. Although it is difficult for us, we understand the seriousness of this situation and do not want any volunteers to feel pressured to participate.

The toughest call has been whether to resume our farmer's markets, as they are outdoors. Some markets are still not allowing volunteer groups, while others are now open to volunteers. There have been known COVID clusters that developed from farmer's markets, though. The theory has been that people gathering around tables creates an environment more conducive to spread, even though people are masked. So, for the time being we are still holding off on them, which is probably the single most frustrating thing for our AAMG volunteers.

I think we can all see the light at the end of this COVID tunnel, what with the progress of several vaccines and some more promising therapies. To that end, I am hopeful that we can resume a normal schedule at some point next spring (or perhaps earlier).

However, we have been able to resume a couple of activities. The criteria for any activity has been for it to have a modest attendance, be outside, and provide the ability to maintain social distancing. Of course, masks are always required. We are currently participating with the Mercer Ambassadors program on the first and third Saturdays of the month. This is a host table program at Mercer Arboretum that allows us to interact with the public, provide resources, and answer gardening questions. This program has now expanded to include two MG volunteers per shift. The SignUp for this is available at: **https://signup.com/go/gMxSVPE**

Bruce Heiberg, MG, manning an AAMG booth

With the Ask A Master Gardener program, we have the most wonderful and loyal volunteers! Throughout this year everyone has been patient and understanding of these unique circumstances and challenges. I know that we are all looking forward to the day when we can resume our core function of providing relevant, research-based horticultural information to the wider public!

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

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

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 December.

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.

Looking for a way to serve your hours and earn continuing education at the same time?

Becky Larkin has three words: McGovern Centennial Gardens

by Vivian Gallant

If you find yourself in the heart of Hermann park, be sure to visit the restorative Centennial Gardens. And if you show up on a Tuesday or Thursday morning, you can enjoy the gardens while earning Master Gardener credits. Now that the weather is starting to cool, it is a perfect time to join in tending the beautiful gardens with the socially distanced camaraderie of fellow Master Gardeners. Whatever your skill level, you will feel valued and welcome. Be it weeding, removing plants, or replacing seasonal vegetables, we share our techniques/preferences for getting the job done.

Additional learning takes the form of 30 minute informal mini-lectures. Recent topics have ranged from a hands-on tour of different basils (given by Becky), a monarch butterfly presentation by entomologist Kyle Wolfe from the Hermann Park Conservancy, and a discussion of native plants by Judy Thomas. This is a great in-person way to earn your CU's.

Want to give it a try? Contact Becky at rebeccalarkin117@gmail.com

Entomologist Kyle Wolfe, Herman Park Conservancy staff, giving a presentation on Monarch butterflies assisted by Vivian Gallant, Master Gardener.

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

Marisol Arteaga, Nancy Cansler, Carol Curtiss, Eileen Donovan, Gwen Fritz, Alison Ivins, George Kabacinski, Edie Le Bourgeois, Becky Lowicki, Bennie Matusek, Karen McGowan, Janis Muhm, Kim Perry, Bridget Richnow, Linda Saxman, Nina Turner and Kim Wallace

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

Growing with Plants & Nature

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 Facebook Group found at the following link: https://www.facebook.com/groups/GPNVG/

We hope this helps educate families and children on gardening and nature. Programs are tailored to children and their families and include lessons, and crafts combining the Facebook presence and a monthly live Family Zoom Event.

There is a program / topic per month so if you are new or just getting started with the GPN Facebook group, or may have missed a post during a month, just find the popular topics section and click on a subject that interests you. All posts and discussions for that program are included inside the topic, allowing you to view all subject matter at one time.

The November Family Zoom Event, **Holiday Foods from the Garden**, was presented by **Linda Persse** and **Jo Ann Stevenson**. Fun facts shared during the meeting include:

- Many holiday foods we enjoy today are versions of foods shared at the first Celebration of Harvest in 1621.
- Cranberries are native to North America, and are grown in bogs, not underwater. The bogs are flooded at the time of harvest and the berries float to the surface.
- The heaviest pumpkin ever grown weighed in at 2,624.6 pounds. It was grown in 2016 in Belgium.
- "The Three Sisters" garden comes from Native American legend. Growing corn, squash and beans together was an early version of "companion planting." Each plant supports the growth and nutrition, and reduces the disease and insect infestation of the others.
- Children were shown how to make a cornucopia craft for their Thanksgiving table.

There will not be a Family Zoom Event for December. Topics for 2021 will include cold weather and indoor gardening projects, recycling, Monarch butterflies, wildflowers, and other monthly topics. More information on these will appear in upcoming Urban Dirt issues.

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

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
1210 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.

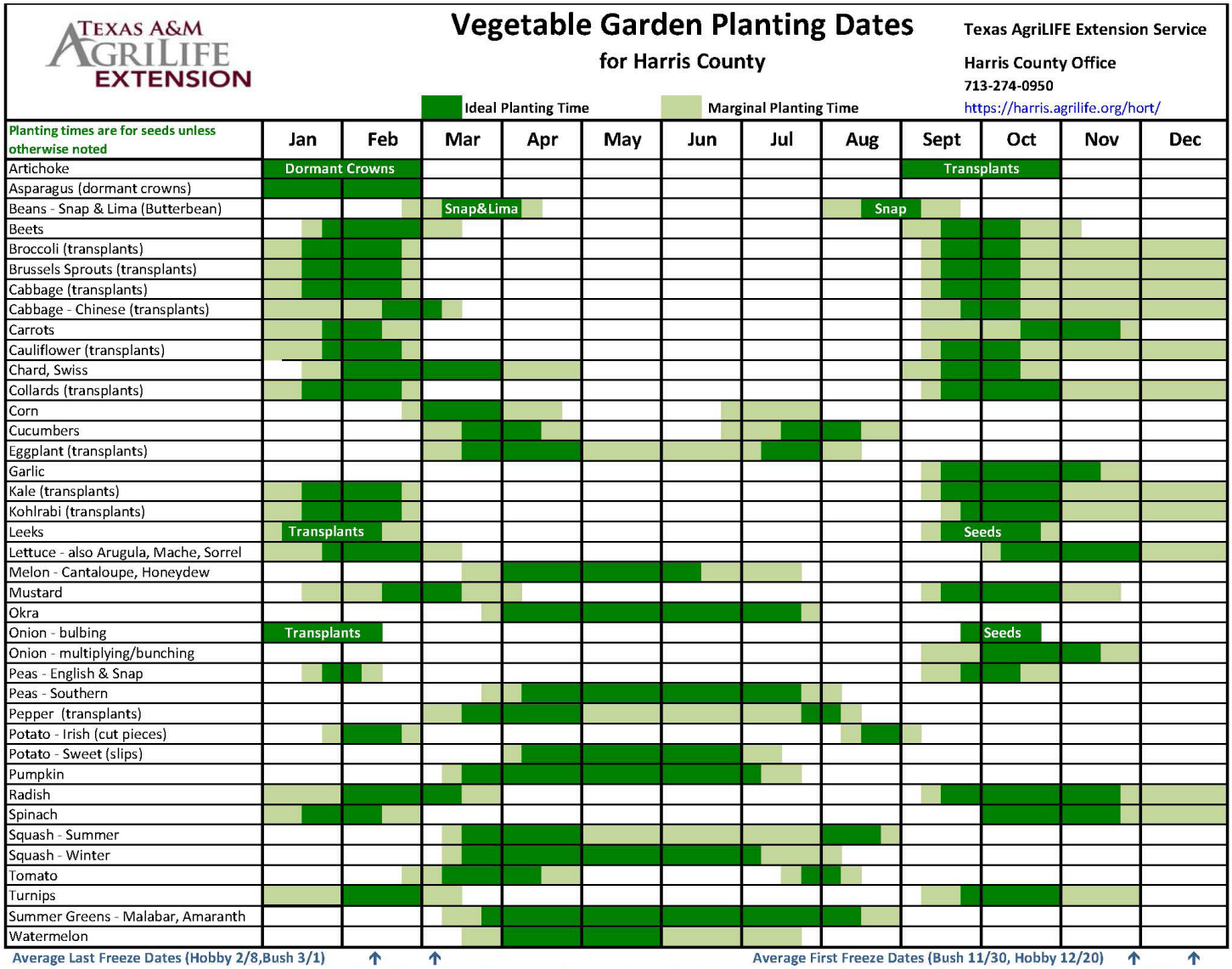
2020 Monthly Open Garden Days & Special Events

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 December.

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!

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE
EXTENSION SERVICE
13105 NORTHWEST FREEWAY, SUITE 1000
HOUSTON, TX 77040
713-274-0950

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

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. Reach us via these links:

www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners
www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyHorticulture

https://twitter.com/pharrishort

https://www.youtube.com/channel

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