

Urban Dirt

Butterfly Gardens

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

Successful Butterfly Gardening

Article and photos by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

Right now this is a popular topic. People are still home due to the pandemic and many are taking up new tasks or hobbies around the house. Sewing, canning, and gardening are a few hobbies that those who remain home are involved with. Spring is here and one thing the kids can enjoy is planting for butterflies. If you keep track of the Monarch butterflies, they begin migrating back to the U.S. from their winter home in Mexico around the end of March.

Some experts prefer that only native plants should be used, but others may not. The one thing that some experts are still debating is whether to include a butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*) in that butterfly garden. Several varieties are invasive and have been banned in some areas. Western Europe considers it a weed. New Zealand has banned it and the state of Oregon only allows sterile cultivars. One major problem is that while there are beautiful varieties available, the bush is not a food plant for caterpillars. When planting your butterfly garden, include plants that will provide nectar and food for all stages of butterflies, from caterpillar to adult. Personally, I do not have good luck with *Buddleia davidii*. I have killed at least five.

Another reminder is to become familiar with the different varieties of caterpillars. Do not kill caterpillars that may become butterflies. You will defeat the purpose of having a butterfly garden.

Orange dog caterpillars are incredibly ugly and somewhat scary. They resemble poop and can be found on citrus trees. It is hard to believe something that ugly becomes a beautiful swallowtail.

Do not use pesticides in your butterfly garden. They can wipe out all life stages of the butterflies you are trying to attract. This includes mosquito sprays. Organic pesticides can have the same effect.

Guess what? Your garden needs to be maintained. Weeding, some trimming and mulching needs to be done on a regular basis.

Plants you buy probably have pesticide residue because many come from wholesale providers. Don't plant them right away in your butterfly garden until the pesticide has had time to dissipate.

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Monarch enjoying crushed berries and beer at the Cockrell Butterfly Center



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Have Garden Questions? Submit your questions to: <https://hcmga.tamu.edu/ask-a-question/>

UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL 2021

Green Thumb Gardening Series

We have collaborated with the Harris County Public Library and Houston Community College. Join us for one or both!

Butterfly Gardens

Apr. 12, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. For HCC program, register in advance to receive the link:

hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops

Apr. 20, 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Simply visit the Harris County Public Library System

No reservation required. Watch on Facebook – facebook.com/harriscountyp/live

Educational Programs

Home Grown Lecture Series - This webinar is provided by our Harris County Ag/Natural Resources Department. Registration is required for these free events. Please visit: please visit: homegrown2021Q2.eventbrite.com/

Apr. 1, 10:00 a.m. - *Southern Bulbs* by Paul Winski, Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent - Horticulture

Apr. 15, 10:00 a.m. - *Sausage Making 101* by Shannon Dietz, Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent - Agriculture & Natural Resources

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/>.

Apr. 13, 10:00 a.m. - *Flight of the Monarch* by Regina Gardner and *Kingdom of the Monarch* by Blanca Elder. For information about upcoming topics, dates, and registration, please email us at ogd.harrishort@gmail.com. Registration is required before each Family Zoom Event.

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 website:



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HERB OF THE MONTH

Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*)

by Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

This month's featured herb, brahmi, bears partial binomial nomenclature with and close resemblance to one of my favorite trailing plants to use as a filler in large urn pots, white bacopa. While brahmi can certainly function aesthetically in a similar fashion to the ornamental version of bacopa, the two should not be confused. Let's take a look at brahmi, April's featured Herb of the Month.

Used frequently in Ayurvedic Medicine, brahmi is not, however, FDA approved for the touted benefits within that ancient East Indian medicinal practice. According to Internet sources, in 2019, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warned manufacturers of dietary supplement products containing *bacopa monnieri* against making illegal and unproven claims that the herb can treat various diseases. Nonetheless, there are a growing number of proponents of the herb's effectiveness, and some scientific studies that appear to support their suppositions.

Native to the wetlands of southern and eastern India, Australia, Europe, Africa, Asia, and North and South America, *bacopa monnieri* is a perennial, creeping herb with small oblong leaves and white or purple flowers, known by the common names brahmi, water hyssop, herb of grace, and Indian pennywort. Generally, brahmi can be found throughout warmer, humid parts of the world in damp and marshy areas, growing in sunny altitudes ranging from sea level up to 4400 feet. Brahmi roots at the nodes, and can be easily propagated from cuttings.

To the subject of brahmi's medicinal usage, according to an article published in 2013 in The National Library of Medicine,



Brahmi

“numerous animal and in vitro studies have been conducted, with many evidencing potential medicinal properties. Several randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trials have substantiated *bacopa monnieri*'s nootropic utility in humans. There is also evidence for potential attenuation of dementia, Parkinson's disease, and epilepsy. Current evidence suggests BM acts via the following mechanisms—anti-oxidant neuroprotection (via redox and enzyme

induction), acetylcholinesterase inhibition and/or choline acetyltransferase activation, β -amyloid reduction, increased cerebral blood flow, and neurotransmitter modulation (acetylcholine [ACh], 5-hydroxytryptamine [5-HT], dopamine [DA]). BM appears to exhibit low toxicity in model organisms and humans; however, long-term studies of toxicity in humans have yet to be conducted.”

With the alarmingly widespread scourge of dementia,

much scientific research, including the aforementioned study, has been dedicated to discovery of safe methods to successfully combat the disease. Possible side effects of emerging treatments are a constant concern. The 2013 study cited here observed, “unlike the potentially addictive and forceful action of widely used psychostimulants, chronic and moderate administration of *bacopa monnieri* appears to nourish rather than deplete neurons, an action compatible with 1400 years of Ayurvedic study.” Pretty interesting, and a finding not to be dismissed out of hand.

In traditional Ayurvedic Medicine, the entire brahmi plant is further used as a nerve tonic and for epilepsy. It is also used as a diuretic and for treating arthritis, asthma and hoarseness. Users of the herb assert that brahmi also has good potency in controlling cough, fever, and diabetes.

cont'd on pg. 4

Citations:

https://agritech.tnau.ac.in/horticulture/horti_medicinal%20crops_brahmi.html

<https://food.ndtv.com/health/8-impressive-benefits-of-brahmi-the-medicinal-ayurvedic-herb-1682250>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3746283/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bacopa_monnieri#:~:text=Bacopa%20monnieri%20is%20a%20perennial,of%20grace%2C%20and%20Indian%20pennywort

Successful Butterfly Gardening, cont'd from pg. 1

This may take several weeks. It is okay to use a mixture of native and non-native plants if you wish.

Patience. You may have to wait a while before the butterflies show up. Don't give up.

On April 10th, the Cockrell Butterfly Center is having a virtual spring plant sale and their horticulturalists have selected several butterfly host plants. For attracting Monarch butterflies, remember they prefer to lay their eggs on milkweed. This is the only host plant for this iconic species, as Monarch caterpillars feed exclusively on milkweed leaves. For more information, check out this link: <https://www.hmns.org/cockrell-butterfly-center/virtual-plant-sale/>.



At the Cockrell Butterfly Center Monarchs can sip from sponges soaked in sugar water.



Enchanted Gardens has a beautiful Monarch chair and backdrop next to their milkweed selections.

Brahmi (Bacopa monnieri), cont'd from pg. 3

Because of the claimed potential of enhancing memory and vitality, this “miracle plant” is gaining attention for its commercial cultivation globally. With an estimated 3.4 million people affected by dementia in the United States, prevalently the elderly, and with

the elderly population (aged over 65) expected to double by 2030, reaching 72 million, or 20% of the total U.S. population, the search for safe treatments of dementia will surely continue to be trialed and in great demand. Brahmi is an herb to watch.



A carpet of Brahmi

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Gardenia

Article and photos by Don Tyler, Master Gardener

Even though this will publish in April, I am sitting at my house writing today having just come through one of the worst winter storms in Houston. Yesterday morning it was 9°F outside and a whopping 48°F inside with no power and no water! Today, we are blessed to have power and water and yet there are so many still struggling. It is hard to think of gardening in a time like this, but I needed a diversion. I wonder what April will be like!

Right before the winter storm, our neighbor had sold their house and was moving. As a parting gift, they gave my wife several cuttings from their gardenia bush. We had a gardenia at our house several years ago but lost it due to neglect. My wife is from Alabama and she always remembered growing up with gardenias in her yard, so I am hopeful we can get these cuttings to root. She has had them sitting in water hoping for them to root but things are not looking so good. I took a few of the cuttings, placed them in rooting hormone, and planted them in a pot. By publication time, we will know if we were successful.



- Demand high humidity.
- Fertilize every 2-4 weeks during their growing season (March to October).

Maybe we neglected the first one but then again... maybe it was a bit too demanding, a bit too fussy. I was encouraged to read we seem to be on the right path to propagating the cuttings using the rooting hormone.

I had to chuckle to myself when I visited the website, gardeningknowhow.com. They described the gardenia as “finicky” but also stated gardenias are “cold sensitive and may die during severe winters”. No doubt a gardenia, if left outside, would not have survived the last couple of days! I am still wondering what shape so many of my plants are in right now covered with every imaginable protection I could throw on them.

Alas, back to the gardenia. Of course, we all know how flaky our weather can be here in Houston and if planted outside, you must stay on guard and provide adequate protection for extreme weather conditions. Gardenias can be grown in pots allowing it to weather extreme conditions in a controlled environment.

As to diseases, most information available indicates the plant is susceptible to “root rot, powdery mildew, stem canker, and bud drop”. There is useful information from a variety of resources to deal with these rather common challenges. These should not be a deterrent to adding a gardenia in your landscape either in-ground or in a planter.

Having learned of the finicky behavior of a gardenia, I am well-informed of the challenges ahead. Even if my cuttings do not root, I believe the plant will make a wonderful addition to my landscape this year. We may all be re-planting a great deal of our landscape, so why not throw a gardenia in the mix!

I thought it would be interesting to make this article about the gardenia. The website, gardenia.net, provides a good description, “Beloved for their intoxicating fragrance and attractive, waxy, creamy-white flowers contrasting beautifully with their shiney, leathery, dark green leaves (...)”. Definitely makes me wish we hadn’t neglected our first plant, while hoping this cutting takes root!

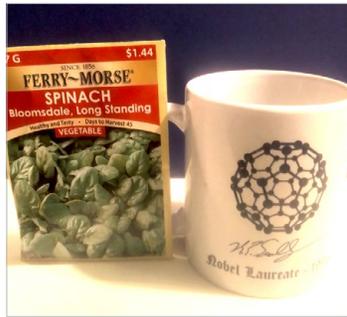
Even though I will visit other websites for information, gardenia.net designates the plant as “fussy and quite temperamental” and offers the following key points to consider when growing gardenias:

- Select a site with full sun to light shade.
- Make sure the soil is moist and well-drained (need at least one inch of rain or equivalent watering per week).
- Acidic soil with a pH between 5.0 and 6.0.
- Soil that is rich in nutrients....add plenty of organic matter.
- Perform best in day temperatures of 65-70°F and night temperatures of 60-65°F.

Spinach Emails

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

It almost sounds too bizarre to be true. A vegetable sending emails? Spinach can communicate. What would Popeye think? I was doubtful at first but the research on the topic comes from a reputable source. Dr. Michael Strano is a chemical engineer who once worked with Dr. Richard E. Smalley at Rice University. You remember Rick Smalley? He's the Nobel Laureate who discovered buckminsterfullerene (C60), a new form of carbon commonly referred to as "buckyballs." He was also able to isolate carbon nanotubes. Would you call me a name dropper if I mentioned that I met Dr. Smalley years ago and got a tour of his lab? I still have the coffee mug I got from that tour. Dr. Smalley was successful in encouraging agencies to fund nanotechnology projects and the nanotechnology field with numerous applications has been off and running since then. Dr. Strano is now with the Strano Research Group at MIT. His research focuses on developing new techniques in a variety of areas using chemistry and math.



What do spinach and this coffee mug have in common? Read the article at the following link: *Future Flora: Spinach Emails, MIT and the Birth of Plant Nanobionics*.
Photo by Terri Simon

Peter Martin, Harris County Master Gardener, posted the article link on the HCMGA Facebook page and I was fascinated. Using nanosensors in the leaves of the spinach, Dr. Michael Strano's research group at MIT has enabled the spinach to perform different functions. Functions that seem so advanced it's hard to imagine. This new area of research is called Plant Nanobionics. This past December his group used spinach and rice, as well as other plants to perceive arsenic in groundwater. Tapping into plants' hidden abilities and giving them different jobs is one of his lab's goals. These plants cannot reproduce. His plant nanobiology research dates back to 2016 but has recently become a favorite topic on the internet. On Twitter the phrase "you've got kale" popped up. Dr. Strano's group intends to pursue more avenues in this new research field. Is this the new wave of "Frankenveggies"? Who knows? To stay tuned to the Strano Research Group, check out this link <https://srg.mit.edu/news/>.

By the way, just in time for this article, the Agrilife extension office sent out a recipe for spinach (see pg. 7). Perfect timing!

FOOD SCIENCE

Future Flora: Spinach Emails, MIT and the Birth of Plant Nanobionics

BY HUGO MCCAFFERTY, JOURNALIST
09 February, 2021



Graphic courtesy <https://srg.mit.edu/news/>

Spinach Emails, cont'd from pg. 6



What's Cooking

Spinach Quiche

8 servings

Ingredients:

- 2tablespoons canola oil
- 1 tablespoon garlic clove, minced
- 1cup onion, chopped
- 1 (8 ounce) package mushrooms, sliced
- 1 (6 ounce) package spinach, fresh
- ¼ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- 1cup reduced fat cheddar cheese, shredded
- 5 eggs, medium to large

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Spray a 9-inch pie pan with cooking spray.
3. Heat oil and garlic in a large skillet over medium-high heat until garlic is soft, and oil is infused.
4. Add onions and mushrooms to the skillet. Cook until veggies are soft.
5. Add Spinach to the skillet until lightly wilted.
6. In a bowl, combine eggs, cheese, salt, and pepper.
7. Add Spinach mixture and stir to blend.
8. Pour into prepared pan.
9. Bake until eggs have set, about 30 minutes or until knife inserted in center comes clean.
10. Allow it to set up and cool for 10 minutes before serving.

Nutrition Facts: Amount Per Serving – ¼ cup

| | |
|------------------------|------------------|
| Calories: 110 | Total Sugar: 2g |
| Total Fat: 7g | Protein: 9g |
| Saturated Fat: 2.5g | Vitamin D: 1mcg |
| Cholesterol: 110mg | Calcium 172mg |
| Sodium: 230mg | Iron: 1mg |
| Total Carbohydrate: 4g | Potassium: 272mg |
| Dietary Fiber: 1g | |

Nutrition Information

Spinach is low in calories yet extremely high in vitamins, minerals, and other phytonutrients (natural plant chemicals with human nutritional value). It contains large amounts of vitamin A and other carotenoids, phosphorus, and potassium.

Source: Adapted from <https://dinnertonight.tamu.edu>

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

APRIL
MAY
JUNE **2021**



HOME GROWN LECTURE SERIES

- 04/01 **Southern Bulbs**
Paul Winski - Texas A&M AgriLife County
Extension Agent-Horticulture
- 04/15 **Sausage Making 101**
Shannon Dietz - Texas A&M AgriLife County
Extension Agent-Agriculture & Natural Resources
- 05/06 **Benefits of Bats**
Brandi Keller - Harris County Master Gardener
Program Coordinator
- 05/20 **Growing Fabulous Houseplants**
Paul Winski - Texas A&M AgriLife County
Extension Agent-Horticulture
- 06/03 **A Legen-Dairy Lecture**
Shannon Dietz - Texas A&M AgriLife County
Extension Agent-Agriculture & Natural Resources
- 06/17 **Art from the Garden**
Brandi Keller - Harris County Master Gardener
Program Coordinator

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EVENTBRITE.COM/](https://homegrown2021q2.eventbrite.com/)

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.

Growing with Plants & Nature

Growing with Plants and Nature offers children and their families opportunities for learning about gardening and nature. To support social distancing we have focused on creating virtual programs.

Our Facebook Group is found at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/GPNVG> It is filled with educational and fun information, games, puzzles, and crafts.

We also present a monthly Family Zoom Event each month. For more information about upcoming topics and dates, check out our Facebook Group. Please register for Family Zoom Events at ogd.harrishort@gmail.com. Use this email for questions, information or comments about all of our Growing with Plants and Nature activities.



For our March Family Zoom Event Master Gardener Julee Jackson's presentation reminded us about the importance of "Reduce, Reuse and Recycle."



- Choose and purchase items that include minimum packaging with the potential for reusing or recycling
- Avoid throwing away or recycling items that can be "repurposed" or reused
- Use and promote recycling resources in your neighborhood and community

Our craft demonstration was presented by Master Gardener Susan Whitacre and Intern Tony Masraff. They showed us ways to "upcycle" or repurpose our old CDs and DVDs by painting creative and colorful designs onto them.



On April 13th, Master Gardener, Regina Gardner, will present "Flight of the Monarch". Her presentation will cover the life cycle of the Monarch as well as their amazing migration to Mexico. Master Gardener, Blanca Elder, will follow with the "Kingdom of the Monarch" and will share with us an amazing account of her trip to the sanctuaries of Mexico where the Monarchs overwinter.



Did you know:

- The Monarch is the only butterfly known to make a two-way migration like birds do
- That the orange of the Monarch butterfly's wings is a warning color telling predators that the butterfly could taste bad or could be toxic
- The Mexican holiday, "The Day of the Dead" coincides with the Monarch's return to Mexico

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

Getting Down to Earth

by Pam Longley, Master Gardener

News from Genoa Friendship Gardens

For this issue, I turn the spotlight on **Sandy Stephens**, who has been the Cylinder Garden Manager for 5 years. Sandy joined the cylinder team in 2014 as a new MG intern, recruited by her friend **Bev DeMoss**. Although she had a fair amount of knowledge about vegetable gardening, she says her knowledge has grown exponentially about what it takes to make a garden successful. She credits not only Bev, but also MG, **Judy Thomas**, who managed the Bear Creek Cylinder Garden until 2 floods forced the entire Harris County Extension campus to close, for all the tips and advice towards that success.



Sandy Stephens, GFG cylinder garden manager

The Cylinder Garden is a team effort with a long history in Harris County. MG, **Glen Graves**, started the program in 1986 and it has been a robust outreach to as many as 64 schools (8000 students!) in one year all over the county ranging from preschool to 12th grade. Because of the pandemic, last year's school total was 13 with 500 students participating. Currently, MG **Marisol Arteaga** is the chair of the Cylinder Garden Committee and coordinates with **Fatma Ozel** to order seeds and package them for the schools. Blue Bell Creamery furnishes the white plastic buckets (cylinders) for the schools to plant their seeds in. Teachers sign up on our website to receive the empty cylinders, seeds and fertilizers. They pick up the supplies in February and September from either Plants for All Seasons in north Harris County or at GFG on the southeast side. Both Sandy, at GFG, and the schools are simultaneously planting old favorites like bush beans,

Cherry Belle radishes, White Icicle radishes and Buttercrunch lettuce, as well as a newcomer, Tasto cabbage. In all, 14 vegetable



Students setting up a cylinder garden

varieties are going into both GFG and the school gardens, as well as Juliet tomato plants grown from seed and donated by MG **Peter Martin**.

The plant Trial Team at GFG recently participated in a webinar on ginger propagation and production hosted by **Joe Masabni**, assistant professor, Texas A&M University at the AgriLife Extension Service. We will start the propagation for early summer planting from pieces of ginger bought from the grocery store. This will be a first for our team. We learned that fresh ginger has an almost white papery covering unlike the tan color we usually see that results from long storage.

In other news, **Rick Castagno**, Vegetable Production Manager, reports that from November, 2020 until March, 2021 over 273 pounds of citrus and 339 pounds of vegetables were harvested by MGs. Most of the harvests were donated to local food banks. "Rick's Rows" fared pretty well after Winter Storm, Uri, thanks to row cover, but the snap peas went to Veggie Heaven. The late Winter/early Spring perennial trial is petunias and they are all tucked into their beds with many already blooming. The kale varieties in the trial garden came through like champs and we harvested again the 2nd week in March.



Kathryn McLeod watering newly planted trial petunias at GFG

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Getting Down to Earth, cont'd from pg. 10

Christ the Good Shepherd Garden

by Dale Hudson, Master Gardener

Wow! Can everyone agree March was an interesting month? As many of us sat at home in the dark and cold, and maybe also thirsty, am I the only one whose thoughts turned to the ancient Chinese curse which says *May You Live in Interesting Times?* For Gulf Coast gardeners things became even more interesting when experts advised us to stand down and do much of nothing in our lawn and gardens for a couple of weeks following the freeze-up. Well, time is up. We at CGS Garden have taken stock (not too bad actually), opened up the play book to remind ourselves what needed to happen in a vegetable garden in March and got back to work. Here's what we're doing.

The kale and swiss chard trial is going fine. We covered the beds with heavy gauge plastic film and sealed in really well around the edges and we didn't lose a single plant. Last week we took more than 30 lbs of greens to the food pantry.



Kale in the CGS trial survived the freeze just fine.

Everything in our greenhouse survived. This included over 200 tomato plants, an equal number of pepper plants, and a wide assortment of other veggies, herbs and marigolds. Full disclosure, gardener volunteers luckily took everything from the greenhouse home with them during the hard freeze. We did have a power outage and likely would have lost everything had this not happened.



Cheryl Gans and Sheila Haskins deal with transplants bursting out of the greenhouse.



Wes Carr plants those tomatoes deep.

The 2nd week of March we crossed our fingers and transplanted 125 tomatoes. The long range weather forecast was favorable, and we figured we were overdue for some good luck for a change. Right behind the tomatoes comes the yellow squash, the zucchini, the pole beans and the cucumbers. The beans and cucumbers will include some trials proposed by Harris County Extension Agent Paul Winski.

The stage is being set for our biggest trial of the summer. Paul has provided us with 9 varieties of peppers that we have not seen before. Everything was seeded around February 1st and transplants have just been bumped up into silo cups. We will have a lot more to say about this project next month.



Maria Cargile takes good care of the seedlings for the pepper trial.

cont'd on pg. 12

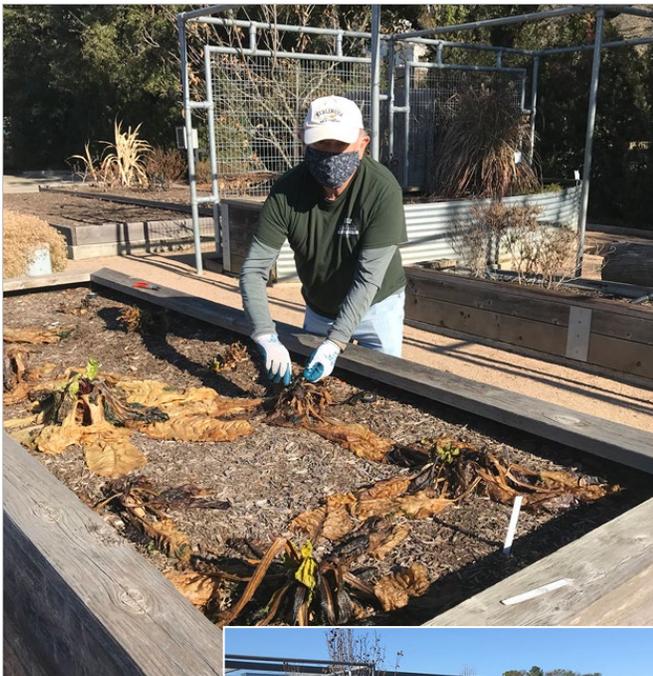
Getting Down to Earth, cont'd from pg. 11

Centennial Gardens

by Becky Larkin, Master Gardener

We have had lots of visitors in the Family Garden the past couple of weeks and the most frequent question has been “Did anything survive?” Well, the answer is yes! We lost a lot, but a lot survived. We are still holding out hope the citrus trees will make a comeback. They were covered with heavy freeze cloth as were the pergola beds, although, they are both looking very sad. As for the vegetables, all our root crops (onions, potatoes, and carrots) did very well, as did the cactus, Brussel sprouts, blackberries, and

bok choy. However, we did lose several beds of more tender crops: chard, lettuce, arugula, mustard, and broccoli. We were expecting temperatures down to 20 degrees and felt the brassica could make it with only a little freeze burn. However, the temperatures got well below that at Centennial. Fortunately, we have been able to fill in with some short-term crops, lettuce, spinach, radishes, etc., so the garden looks great again, and we have already started putting in spring/summer crops.



Patricio Arreaga cleaning up the chard



Dead sugar snap peas



Dan Shannon cleaning up the arugula



New planting of spinach

Green Thumb 2021 Gardening Series

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Harris County Master Gardeners are pleased to offer the FREE *Green Thumb Gardening Series of Lectures* now provided virtually twice a month. We have collaborated with the Harris County Public Library and Houston Community College. Join us for one or both!

Got questions? Go to hcmga.tamu.edu/ask-a-question/

Second Monday, 10:00 A.M. – 11:30 A.M. Houston Community College

Register in advance to receive the link: hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops
Second Monday of each month

January 11 – *Pruning Basics*

February 8 – *Spring Vegetable Gardening*

March 8 – *Composting*

April 12 – *Butterfly Gardens*

May 10 – *Integrated Pest Management*

June 14 – *Intro to Plumeria*

July 12 – *Fall Vegetable Gardening*

August 9 – *Gardening for Beginners*

September 13 – *Permaculture*

October 11 – *Plant Propagation*

Third Tuesday, 11:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M. Harris County Public Library Facebook Live

No reservation required. Watch on Facebook – facebook.com/harriscountyppl/live
Third Tuesday of each month

January 19 – *Pruning Basics*

February 16 – *Spring Vegetable Gardening*

March 16 – *Composting*

April 20 – *Butterfly Gardens*

May 18 – *Integrated Pest Management*

June 15 – *Intro to Plumeria*

July 20 – *Fall Vegetable Gardening*

August 17 – *Gardening for Beginners*

September 21 – *Permaculture*

October 19 – *Plant Propagation*



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Planting Veggies at Spring Branch Elementary

Article and photos by Deb Stutsman, Master Gardener

This winter, Spring Branch Elementary first graders planted carrots and second graders planted sweet onions. All survived the recent freeze without a problem. Below are a few photos of enthusiastic students planting Spring crops!



Kindergarteners planting green beans



2nd grade onion bed



Tomato bed



4th graders planting peppers (sweet and hot)



5th graders planting cherry tomatoes

*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,
Harris County Master Gardeners have suspended in-person
educational events until further notice.**

**However, this garden is a public space, so you are still welcome to visit
according to the guidelines set forth by Hermann Park Conservancy. The Harris
County Master Gardeners maintain the vegetable, herb, berry, and citrus beds in
the Family Garden, so if you see one of us working there, feel free to say hi.**

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.

MG of the Month - *Jonathan Correia*

by Karen Breneman, Master Gardener

Congratulations to **Jonathan Correia!**

A 2014 graduate, Jonathan is our latest MG of the Month. Last year, in the face of the pandemic, he re-vamped our in-person plant sales into an online process through the MG website. He located and installed new sales software and trained others how to use it. The program generates reports, sends information to repeat customers, makes it easier to contact buyers of plants and remind them of pick-up times. The program keeps track of all sales, how many items purchased and other useful information. He is working with new ways to use this program which has allowed the Harris County Master Gardeners to remain in the public eye and enabled us to raise funds for our other programs. Many volunteers have stepped up to put the sales into place with Jonathan. The online store will improve our ability to do what we have done in the past and will hopefully increase in the future even when we return to in-person sales.

As many may or may not know Jonathan was born and raised in New England, where he learned about gardening from his grandparents and their neighbors. The son of a New England Fisherman and a multi-generation Salemite his family is deeply rooted in New England history. In 1990, he moved to Texas and carried his gardening skills to his home in the Heights. He quickly adapted to the weather and began to grow his garden. In the winter, Correia's garden is filled with an assortment of greens, lettuces, onions, and several new cool weather crops. Under his new grow lights are bumped up flowers, early spring vegetables and several edible flowers. When warmer weather hits the area, Jonathan's garden includes squash, eggplant, tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, herbs, melons, berries and fruiting trees. After this year's freeze, most plants took a beating but look good as he learned to grow what can be handled in Texas.



Jonathan Correia and his fish!

Jonathan and his lifelong zeal for growing anything allows him to teach his friends, family and clients about the advantage of long-term gardening. A garden that is well maintained can bring curb appeal and an abundance of produce all year round. He likes to suggest making use of all outdoor space. When space is limited, containers are a great way to enjoy fresh herbs, vegetables and fruits, for those who like a challenge and do not mind getting a little dirty. You will hear Jonathan say to many "Let it Grow Don't Mow" and "If you can't Grow it Out, Grow it Up."

Thank you, Jonathan, for all your hard work!

Nominate a Master Gardener of the Month

We want to recognize the people who are working hard to keep our organization functioning.

To let the Membership committee know about the volunteers deserving of the award, contact

Karen Breneman at kbreneman2017@gmail.com or phone at 281-463-2110 or 832-923-1712.

Thank you in advance for your nomination.

For Harris County Master Gardeners Only!

April 10th & 24th 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 on hand to guide you through the tasks.



For some of you that have considered this a distance you couldn't commit to on a regular basis, it is *always* available if you want to be surrounded by old or new friends.

GFG also offers Mon./Wed. workdays (8:45 a.m. – Noon) for MGs who can attend during the week.

Please join us at our GFG Garden Workdays!

Evan J. Hopkins,
Master Gardener



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.



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

Thank you for your support.

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



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

Angela Byargeon, Vivian Cromwell, Valerie Depew, John Philip, Karastin Katusin, Gabby Matringe, Cindy Moore, Marleine Oren, Diane Perez, Mary Stokman and Cig Vergason

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

Gardening Tools

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

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

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

Download the
 Vegetable Garden
 Planting Guide here!

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE

EXTENSION SERVICE

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>

MG In-person Volunteer Gardening Opportunities

Learning Tuesdays at Centennial Gardens

As a reminder, every Tuesday, we will have a 30-minute lesson on a component of the garden for MGs and Interns. So you can get in an hour and a half of volunteer work and 30 minutes (sometimes more!) of continuing education. The workday begins at 9 a.m. We'll take a break mid-morning for a rest and the 30 minute class, then should finish up by 11 a.m. Email Becky Larkin directly, if you are interested in attending at rebeccalarkin117@gmail.com

Genoa Friendship Garden

1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Houston 77034

Weekday Workdays 8:30am - 12pm

Every Monday and Wednesday we are working in the gardens. Feel free to drop in to get service hours!

Weekend Workdays 8:00am - 12:00pm

Please join us every 2nd and 4th Saturday at our Weekend Workdays. These are opportunities for Interns and MGs to meet with other gardeners to learn and work in a variety of gardens while observing safe physical distancing.

Gardening on the North side at Christ the Good Shepherd Church (CGS)

Monday, Thursday and Saturday - 8:00 - 10:00 a.m.
CGS garden is located between TX 249 and I-45 just north of FM 1960 at 18511 Klein Church Rd, Spring, TX 77379.

All work tools and equipment are provided, including gloves, water, sunscreen, and bug spray. We welcome new faces to join our group. Contact **Dale Hudson** by phone or text at 832-659-7799, or email at UTVOL66@gmail.com.

The garden has 28 raised beds for vegetables and two uniquely designed raised beds for herbs. There is a heated greenhouse where veggies and herbs are started from seed. And, there is a specifically designed composting area where all of the compost and mulch requirements for the garden are met on site. Gardeners with special skills or interests can focus on a particular area and lead or learn in the setting they enjoy.

CGS garden is approved as a Texas AgriLife research site, and as such we conduct plant trials throughout the year.

Would you like to contribute to the Urban Dirt?

Send all questions and/or submissions to: UrbanDirt.harrishort@gmail.com