

# Urban Dirt

Gardening for  
Beginners

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

## Beginner's Gardening Tips

Article and photos by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

If you are new to gardening, welcome! Finding your niche in gardening may take time or you may already know what you want to grow. Recognize that your plant affinity may evolve over time. Originally, I bought any plant that appealed to me. Over time I have become more selective in my purchases. My primary interest is herbs with some rare plants tossed in. Perennials are my favorite but I make an exception for my basil since I have a basil addiction. I do not have many plants that remain green. I do have a few ferns, but I prefer perennial flowers.

If you are new to gardening or gardening in this area, we can offer a few tips.

Decide if you want to put plants in the ground or in pots, or a combination. One of the first things you may want to do is have a soil test performed in your gardening area. Go to the website <http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/> for instructions regarding how to collect a soil sample and send it off for testing. If you do want to place your plants in the ground, then "8-12" raised beds are recommended. Do not use dyed mulches in your beds.

If you want to grow your plants in pots, choose carefully. Some thin ceramic pots will not survive the winter and will crack. If the planter is thin ceramic, it will last longer indoors. Thick pottery containers will usually last longer outdoors, but some may crack.



Gardening in containers

One more hint: use caution when it comes to pots that have a narrow opening. If a pot has an opening with a smaller diameter than the widest diameter on the pot, you may have problems transplanting a plant that is bottom heavy. If you like the pot, then

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

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## AUGUST 2021

### Green Thumb Gardening Series

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

#### Gardening for Beginners

**Aug. 9,** 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. For the HCC program, register in advance to receive the link:

[hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops](https://hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops)

**Aug. 17,** 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](https://facebook.com/harriscountyp/live)

### Educational Programs

**Aug 3, First Tuesday** 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Program: *Master Gardener Committee Reports* presented by Committee Chairs.

**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: [homegrown2021Q3.eventbrite.com/](https://homegrown2021Q3.eventbrite.com/)

**Aug. 5,** 10:00 a.m. - *Cooking Safely Outdoors* by Shannon Dietz, Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent - Agriculture and Natural Resources

**Aug 19,** 10:00 a.m. - *Fall Vegetable Gardening* by Paul Winski, Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent - Horticulture

### 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/>.

### Open Garden Day

**August 16,** 8:30 - 11:00 a.m., Genoa Friendship Garden, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston, TX 77034. *Plants for sale in the Greenhouse.*



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:



**Texas AgriLife Extension Service  
Horticulture Program in Harris County**  
13105 Northwest Freeway, Suite 1000  
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## HERB OF THE MONTH

# Patchouli (*Pogostemon cablin*)

by Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

It isn't often that an herb's essence is under my very own nose as a newfound beloved perfume—for several months, mind you—packaged and sold by its very own name, and I didn't even realize that it is an herb. Herein is the crossroads; my research for unusual and/or little known herbs for this article, and an exclusive perfumery in Montrose known as “Le Labo,” local outlet for a company born in New York City in 2006. Because Le Labo deserves a little highlighting itself, more about it later in the article.

Native to the exotic tropics, including India, Malaysia, and the Philippines, Patchouli is a member of the Lamiaceae family, which includes mints, lavenders, and oreganos. Aromatic Patchouli emits a fragrance that is a derivative of the Orient, perhaps India in particular. Widely used in perfumes, oils and soaps, its leaves make an excellent potpourri. Patchouli was in fact used for ages by ancient Chinese silk traders who would pack Patchouli leaves within the folds of their silk cargoes to prevent damage from moths. As you might imagine, Patchouli can be used in drawers and attics instead of toxic mothballs! The herb's anti-fungal properties render it a natural insecticide, and make it a great choice for your garden. Additionally, Patchouli possesses antibacterial properties, and has been used for hundreds of years to treat nausea, headaches, colds, and even venomous snake bites. Patchouli made a brief popular resurgence in the 1960's as a popular oil used by Hippies to condition their skin and hair (some also suggest to successfully cloak by way of Patchouli's pungency the smell of marijuana and alcohol).

An excellent herb choice for the garden in zones 9-11, Patchouli may also be kept as an indoor plant in filtered light. Situated in the garden with its preferred conditions of filtered light and moist soil, Patchouli will expand as a shrubby perennial to heights of about three feet; however, it is quite sensitive to cold.



Patchouli

Most efficient propagation is achieved via cuttings, and Patchouli thrives in a warm, damp climate in fertile, well-drained soil, placed in a spot where it will receive partial sun exposure. Patchouli can be started from seed by planting the tiny seeds in a seed-starting tray or container filled with warm soil, then positioned in a bright, warm spot to encourage germination.. Use a grow-light if needed. Provide additional heat by placing the tray on a heating mat. Patchouli typically germinates within three weeks. Water Patchouli regularly after plants germinate because it is exceptionally sensitive to dry soil. Keep the young

plants in a growing environment that includes moderate-to-warm temperatures, moist—but not soggy—soil, and indirect light. Thin the seedlings until only the strongest one is left in each pot. Move plants outside when temps are regularly above 60°F at night.

Blooming in the summer with light purple to white flowers, Patchouli's large fragrant leaves are roughly oval in shape and irregularly toothed. The

flowers themselves possess little fragrance.

Although there is lack of scientific evidence to support the use of Patchouli oil for medical conditions such as stress, depression and anxiety, many proponents adhere to its use and effectiveness in addressing these. The oil produced by Patchouli is used by practitioners of alternative medicine including Ayurveda and aromatherapy for mental health management.

Now a little bit about Le Labo, where I first heard the word “Patchouli,” as it is used in one of Le Labo's eighteen signature fragrances, “Patchouli 24.” Le Labo uses a standard naming convention for each of their scents, as each one is named after the primary scent note and given a number, indicating the composition's total ingredient count. Patchouli 24 was created by Annick Ménardo; she has a background in biochemistry and medicine, studied perfumery, and is a graduate of the French

*cont'd on pg. 4*

### Citations:

Petruzzello, Melissa. "Patchouli". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 3 Dec. 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/plant/patchouli>. Accessed 13 July 2021

## Beginner's Gardening Tips, *cont'd from pg. 1*

use it but remember it will be difficult to remove a root bound plant from it.

Don't forget your weight limitations for plants. Just because you can carry a forty pound bag of soil does not mean you can carry that entire bag of soil after it's dumped in a large planter with rocks in the bottom and the plant itself.

Don't throw in the trowel if one plant dies. Ask me about hibiscus. I had five hibiscus plants die on me before I found my Texas star native hibiscus. Good enough.

Invest in good tools and keep several pairs of gloves on hand. During Texas summers a hat and sunscreen are recommended. Take frequent breaks and stay hydrated. Drinking water is not enough. Keep some electrolyte drinks handy.

Know the first and last freeze dates for your area. This will help you know when to plant your seedlings and when to transfer any plants you protected indoors to their outdoor setting.

Know your growing zone.

Locate a good plant provider- larger chains may carry plants not intended for our area! Ex: last winter I saw a livestock supply store offering cherry trees for sale. Generally, cherry trees do not produce in our area.

Several local associations or nurseries only carry plants intended for our area. Plants specific for our area are available at Master Gardener sales. If you are not familiar with a plant, Google it to learn about it. Will it grow in our zone? Does it require shade, full sun or something in between? Will you keep the plant outdoors or indoors? Will it be in a pot or in the ground? Does it have specific soil requirements or water requirements?

## Herb of the Month, Patchouli, *cont'd from pg. 3*

perfume academy ISIPCA. Annick is responsible for creating a plethora of world-famous perfumes, including Christian Dior's Hypnotic Poison, Black by Bvlgari, and Xeryus Rouge Givenchy. Le Labo's formulations do not include animal products, paraben, preservatives or coloration, and are not tested on animals. Fragrances are compounded at the time of purchase with the client's name printed on the labels of the boxes and the perfume bottles (you can customize your label to include a short, fun phrase, or perhaps a celebratory remembrance, which is particularly nice when done as a gift).

Some plants may prefer acidic soil and some cannot tolerate city water. Will the plant require protection during the winter?

One lesson I learned that I cannot stress enough: the term "full sun." Full sun does not necessarily mean Texas full sun on the south side of the house with blistering sunlight from 2:00 p.m. until nightfall (usually 9:00 p.m.). Sometimes protection from afternoon sun is required.

When problems arise, what level of intervention or precautions will you implement for your plants? Will you prefer organic products and solutions?

When it is time to transplant or "bump up" your plant, choose the next size pot if possible. Do not put it in a planter that is too large. If you are transferring a plant from a 10" diameter pot, then move it into a 12" diameter pot if it is available.

Share and exchange gardening info with others. Join a gardening group or plant swap group. Attend gardening lectures, befriend other gardeners who have and are willing to share their wealth of gardening information. There are third generation gardeners out there. Make them your friends. Groups are on the internet in social media. Your neighborhood may have a page on social media that discusses gardening.

The *Green Thumb Lecture Series* will feature lectures for beginning gardeners online in August. Visit <https://hcmga.tamu.edu/2021-green-thumb-gardening-series/> for information.

Patchouli, the herb, is equally fascinating as its Le Labo perfume namesake, and since we conveniently live in a subtropical to tropical climate here in south Texas, it definitely merits consideration for your garden or home. Whether or not you choose to pursue gardening with Patchouli, do consider a field trip to fascinating Le Labo, and ask for my good friend there, Brooks.

Happy end of summer 2021 to all!

# PLANT OF THE MONTH

## Hatch Chile

by Don Tyler, Master Gardener

I must admit it is hard sometimes to think of something to think about. I was out in my garden this past weekend in the sweltering Houston heat and thought why not write about something hot, and I thought about my Hatch chiles. Granted they are only 2,000 to 8,000 Scoville units, but I figured that was hot enough for this article. I am not sure if chiles are a staple in your garden but if you are looking to spice it up a bit, I would suggest giving Hatch chiles a try. I have had decent success.



Hatch pepper

I realize things can get really confusing when you start talking about peppers in general. For the sake of this article, I am going to focus on those specifically referred to as those you buy roasted at your local HEB from time to time, i.e. Hatch green chiles, i.e. *Capsicum annuum*.

The name, Hatch, is a designation for a specific chile grown in the Hatch Valley of New Mexico. Hatch, New Mexico is the self-designated “Chile Capital of the World”. The website, [www.chilipeppermadness.com](http://www.chilipeppermadness.com), provides a brief history of the Hatch, or New Mexican, chile pepper. Based on this source, all the chile peppers “owe their genetic base” to Fabian Garcia who developed a variety called New Mexico No. 9 in 1913. The article continues, “Today, chili pepper studies continue at the Chile Pepper Institute in New Mexico, founded by Paul Bosland, in order to study New Mexican peppers and others from around the world.

Although I am getting more and more into seed collecting, I currently purchase some of my seeds from Tyler Farms ([www.tyler-farms.com](http://www.tyler-farms.com)). I do try to remain neutral in my recommendations as there are probably many other

sources of Hatch chile seeds, but I have had great success with Tyler Farms.

With Hatch or virtually all other peppers, you will want to either purchase seedlings or start your seeds indoors like you would tomatoes. Typically, you would start your plants 6 to 8 weeks prior to the last frost date and then harden the seedlings off prior to planting in early spring.

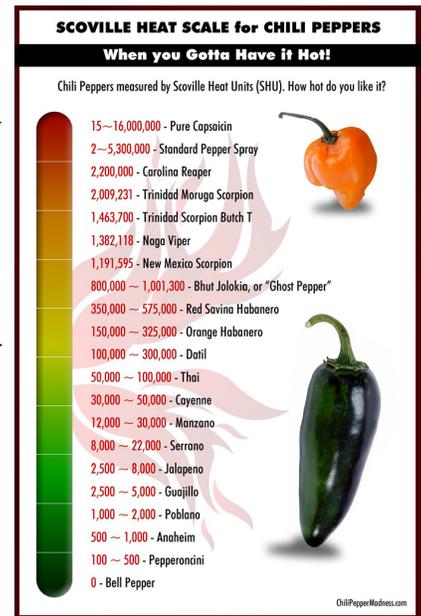
Hatch peppers prefer a sunny location, but you will have a decent amount of success if you grow them in partial shade. I find that to be true of quite a few plants I grow in Houston. They may not produce as vigorously but they are shielded a bit from our blazing summer sun. Oh, did I mention you should plant them in good draining soil? Have you noticed how good draining soil seems to be a constant. BTW...the following picture is my first attempt at a garden when we moved to Houston several years ago. That is not “good draining soil”!

Even though I have not experienced significant insect problems, the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension *Easy Gardening* series on peppers does list the flea beetle, leaf miners and aphids as your most challenging pests. Other than that, Hatch chile peppers, or really any pepper, is fairly simple to grow.

If you do decide to grow Hatch chiles in your garden, I guess the six-million-dollar question is, “Are they still Hatch?” The official answer is no, but I won’t tell if you don’t!



Don's burgeoning garden



# Invasion of the Flatworms

Article by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

Remember an old movie called “Attack of the Killer Tomatoes?” A recent article in the Houston Chronicle triggered that old movie memory. The Texas Invasive Species Institute has issued warnings that the hammerhead flatworm (*Bipalium kewense*) has been seen in Texas. The worm can grow up to one foot long and unlike most of us, it likes Texas' heat and humidity. The worm is narrow, light colored and has stripes.



Hammerhead flatworm

Photo courtesy Education Images/Education Images/Universal Image

The worm has several bad attributes.

- It eats the earthworms that are *good* for our gardens
- It exudes a toxic substance. This noxious irritant can affect humans if handled with bare skin. If eaten, the toxicity of the worm can also bother your pets and other domestic animals.
- The worms can carry other parasitic nematodes.
- The creepiest bit of trivia (in my opinion)? These worms are asexual. They can reproduce by fragmentation. A piece near the tail breaks off and can produce another worm!
- Do NOT chop this worm into pieces. Use gloves, carefully pick it up in one piece, dispose of it in a plastic baggie that you can add salt to, then seal the baggie and dispose of it. Orange oil and vinegar can also kill the worm, although vinegar alone will do the job.

Originally from Vietnam the worm likes greenhouses and can also be found in mulch. If seen in your garden, carefully dispose of it and report it. Take a picture and the coordinates and email the info to [invasives@shsu.edu](mailto:invasives@shsu.edu). You can also find more info on this invasive worm at the website <http://www.tsusinvasives.org/home/database/bipalium-kewense>.

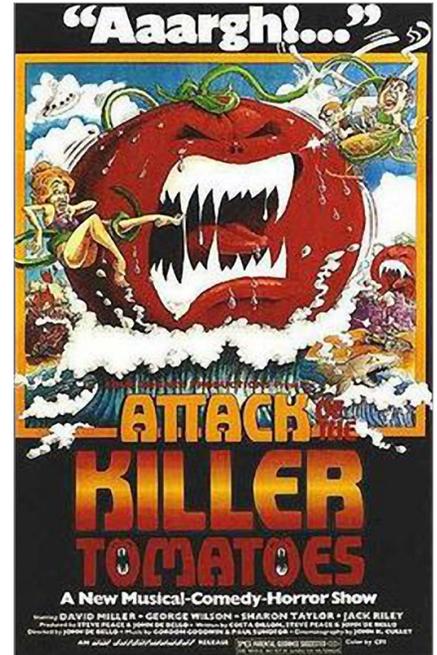


Illustration by David Weisman for 1978 NAI Entertainment theatrical release



Flatworm

Photo courtesy Jason Ondreicka at Getty Images

Citation:

<https://www.chron.com/life/wildlife/article/hammerhead-flatworm-houston-invasive-species-16281684.php>

# CONGRATULATIONS to our Harris County Master Gardeners!

Article and photos by Brandi Keller, County Extension Agent - Horticulture

The Harris County Master Gardeners continue to earn recognition for their contribution to our local communities. In May, these volunteers won two awards during the TMGA (Texas Master Gardener Association) Search for Excellence Awards for 2020. Awards are given in each category according to county size.

**Green Thumb Gardening Lecture Series** won 2nd place for *Educational Program*.

The free program is a monthly online lecture series through the Harris County Public Library System (HCPL). Pre-Covid, this talk was held in-person at four libraries, but it quickly transitioned to a virtual platform presented by HCPL with the capability of streaming to all 26 county libraries. The Facebook Live attendance during the program has ranged from 50-240, but the beauty is the ability for the public to watch it as a recorded post, reaching thousands each month. Houston Community College then adopted this online



A few members of the Green Thumb team  
Chevy Tang, Teresa See, Jo Ann Stevenson, Becky Larkin, Jean Fefer

talk later in the year and was presented with their Community Learning program.

Local collaborations have made our programs more accessible throughout the county. Many thanks to these organizations that help us educate.

**Urban Dirt Monthly Online Newsletter** won 3rd place for *Written Program*.

The *Urban Dirt* is a monthly newsletter written and published by Harris County Master Gardeners. Their information and articles bring research-based horticulture information to Texans interested in urban gardening. The team consists of up to twenty volunteers as they contribute to articles, editing, and proofreading. The 20+ page newsletter is posted monthly on the HCMG website and Facebook page.



A few members of the Urban Dirt newsletter team  
Top row: George Kabacinski, Karen Kabacinski, Carolyn Boyd, Karen McGowan, Pam Longley.  
Bottom row: Christa Kaiser, Alan Fisherman, Jo Ann Stevenson, Becky Larkin





# HOME GROWN LECTURE SERIES

## JULY - AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2021

### THE LATEST & GREATEST IN BEDDING PLANTS FOR 2022

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

July 1, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

### GARDEN HUMMINGBIRD SAFETY

Brandi Keller - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Horticulture

July 15, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

### COOKING SAFELY OUTDOORS

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

August 5, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

### FALL VEGETABLE GARDENING

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

August 19, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

### ENHANCING YOUR DISHES WITH FLAVORED BUTTERS

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

**CHANGED to September 17, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.**

### GROWING MICROGREENS AT THE WINDOWSILL

Brandi Keller - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Horticulture

September 16, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

**TEXAS A&M  
AGRILIFE  
EXTENSION**

TO REGISTER FOR THIS FREE ONLINE SERIES,  
PLEASE VISIT  
[HTTPS://HOMEGROWN2021Q3.EVENTBRITE.COM](https://homegrown2021q3.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 and Nature*

Growing with Plants and Nature offers children and their families opportunities for learning about gardening and nature. We are eager to return to our in-person programs and to expand our services while maintaining our virtual presence.

We also are excited about our outreach to more children and their families through a collaboration with our AgriLife Extension agents.

Check out our Facebook Group at [www.facebook.com/groups/GPNVG](http://www.facebook.com/groups/GPNVG) where you will find videos of all of our Family Zoom presentations as well as many crafts and activities related to those presentations. Email [ogd.harrishort@gmail.com](mailto:ogd.harrishort@gmail.com) for any questions, information or comments about all of our Growing with Plants and Nature activities.

Our July Family Zoom Event was "From Seed to Seeds", presented by Master Gardeners, Susan Visinsky-Bracken and Linda Perse.

Linda and Susan covered the growth of a plant that begins when an incredible seed first absorbs the moisture that signals its enzymes to begin to grow a new plant.



Their presentation talked about roots, stems, leaves, blossoms and fruit with the final step being the production of more seeds that makes possible the repetition of the plants' life cycle.



## **Our plans for Growing With Plants and Nature going forward include:**

- Returning to our in-person programs at community centers and to expand our services
- Maintaining our virtual presence while making our virtual programs available to a broader audience
- Collaborating with Extension Agents on outreach programs to children and their families

## **Our activities throughout the spring and summer have included the following:**

- Planting activities with large numbers of children from the Boys and Girls Club at several different Elementary schools and other locations in July as well as providing planting supplies for 3 different crafts for 275 Boys and Girls Club children in June
- Providing talks to 4-H High School students to give them ideas about different professions in the horticultural field, including a field trip to GFG where we toured the gardens, talked about horticulture and provided a planting activity for them
- Providing monthly Virtual presentations, along with craft presentations, for children and their families

**On August 7th**, we'll host an Open House at the new Steve Radack Community Center for children and families

# MGs Assist with Installation of Arbor Structures at Spring Branch Elementary

Article and photos by Deb Stutsman, Master Gardener

Special thanks to our master gardener volunteers for the installation of new arbor structures at Spring Branch Elementary.

Teresa Wilson, master gardener, built both arbors. We can't thank her enough for all of her time and talents to help us have two new beautiful and functional arbors in the garden.

Volunteers from Spring Branch Independent School District facilities dug the holes and cemented in the arbors. Additional volunteers, a mixture from the Spring Branch community, Harris County Master Gardeners and regular Spring Branch Elementary garden volunteers helped lift and place the arbor structures.

We will soon be planting blooming vines on the arbors to attract hummingbirds, butterflies and other pollinators. One arbor

will be covered with tangerine crossvine and yellow butterfly vine. The students love the butterfly seed pods it produces. And, we will also experiment with growing and drying different types of gourds for fun and nature crafts.

This is part of the goals of our grant, and I am so excited that we finally have some heavy duty arbors in the garden for our big vines!



Teresa Wilson



The completed arbor.



Volunteers raising the arbor into place

# 4-H Students Visit Genoa Friendship Gardens with Growing with Plants and Nature

by Linda Persse, Master Gardener

Growing with Plants and Nature (GPN) hosted Northwest Houston 4-H students and Misha Chakraborty, Harris County 4-H & Youth Program Assistant, at the Genoa Friendship Gardens. Master gardeners, Carolyn Boyd, Dianne Lawrence and Linda Pearson toured the students through the various gardens and the greenhouse. Linda Pearson gave a primer on butterfly behaviors in relation to the Butterfly Garden. After the tour, GPN coordinator Linda Persse, and

GPN team member Dianne Walker demonstrated how to repurpose 2-liter soda bottles as hanging planters using organic oregano. In Linda's introduction and instructions for the planting activity she encouraged the kids to think about this as a way to recycle. The students were then supplied with materials to create their very own hanging planters! These types of field trips provide students with ideas about different professions in the horticultural field.



4-H students and master gardeners ready for the tour!

Photo by Brandi Keller, CEA-Horticulture



Linda Persse and Misha Chakraborty

Photos by Linda Persse



Dianne Lawrence explains the origins of GFG.

Photo by Misha Chakraborty



Carolyn Boyd discusses GFG plant trials.

Photo by Misha Chakraborty



Hardy Hibiscus Summer Spice®  
Crème de la Cocoa™ in GFG's  
Earth-Kind garden

Photo by Brandi Keller, CEA-Horticulture



Photo by Misha Chakraborty

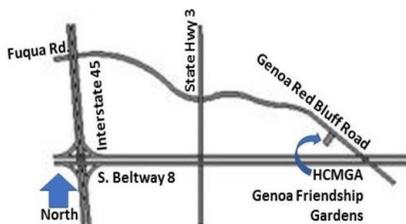
Students build hanging planters with organic oregano.

# Genoa Friendship Gardens Open Garden Days

Open the 3rd Monday of every month,  
8:30 a.m. until 11:00 a.m., March thru October.

Admission to the Exhibit Gardens is Free.

- Tour the variety of exhibits including vegetable, perennial, rose, tropical, desert/xeriscape, native, EarthKind and plant trial gardens.
- Meet and talk with a Master Gardener about our plantings, and they are happy to answer questions you may have.
- Contemplate the serenity of our gardens and catch a view of the water garden.
- Don't leave GFG until you have shopped the Greenhouse where a variety of plants are available for bargain prices until September.



**HCMGA**  
1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road  
Houston, TX 77034



# Getting Down to Earth

Article and photos by Pam Longley, Master Gardener

## News from Genoa Friendship Gardens

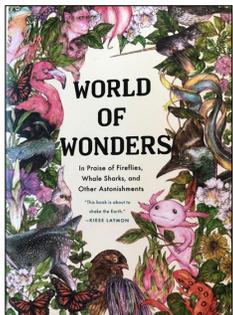
I would like to introduce our newest GFG team member, **Sanjeevi Gunarathna** who is helping **Christa Kaiser** in the rose garden. Originally from Sri Lanka, Sanjeevi was in the 2018 Master Gardener class, and is a part-time ESL instructor and a translator. She moved to Houston from Iowa in 2001 and then soon met MG Marsha Long, who was her neighbor, and helped her tweak her gardening skills from Midwest to Southwest. Marsha encouraged Sanjeevi to take the MG training and it worked! We are delighted to have her.



Sanjeevi Gunarathna

**Book review** - *World of Wonders: in Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks and Other Astonishments* by **Aimee Nezhukumatathil** was voted one of the best books of 2020 by Barnes and Noble.

I loved it so much that I wanted to share it with you. I was entranced by the lush imagery of the author's childhood memories of what she calls nature's astonishments woven together with her hopes, dreams and fears. It is 184 pages of 5-6 page essays on her encounters with monsoons, a corpse flower, vampire squid, dancing frog, fireflies, peacocks and touch-me-nots, to name a few. No matter how forbidding the landscape of the many places she lived as a child, she found herself seeking guidance and clarity from a wild array of fierce and funny creatures.



It is truly a delight! A quote from her essay of The National Bird of India, the peacock: "What the peacock can do is remind you of a home you will run away from and run back to all your life". Aimee is a celebrated poet and professor of English and creative writing in the University of Mississippi's MFA program. Illustrations are by Fumi Nakamura.

Monday, July 19 was our first Open Garden Day at GFG since autumn of 2019. We had over 50 visitors and many stopped by the greenhouse where Janice Muhm and helpers, Bridget Richnow and Bobbie Wiese had pentas, day lilies, butterfly and other pollinator plants, peppers, crape myrtles and many others for sale. The total sales came in at \$333.00 in three hours!



Linda Pearson, Butterfly Garden Lead, with guest, Nancy, on Open Garden Day



After the February freeze, GFG's Tea Tree appeared to be dead, and was destined for removal. But, during the removal process, under a crown of dead limbs and leaves, new growth was discovered. The GFG Tea Tree survives!



Pat Daniel's lovely painted bench with stained glass

cont'd on pg. 14

*Getting Down to Earth, cont'd from pg. 13*

**Christ the Good Shepherd Garden**

Article and photos by Dale Hudson, Master Gardener

Every gardener understands that growing conditions are constantly changing and almost never achieve optimal alignment of moisture and temperature, but to experience too much rain on too many days in July is rare indeed. That's not all bad, of course. The cooler cloudy days have probably extended the harvest window for veggies at CGS Garden by a couple of weeks this year, so we pull on our boots and continue picking.

The Green Light cucumber trial was a great success. During the seven weeks of production we produced 267 pounds of cukes on 60 square feet of bed area. Turns out that this broke the all-time record production for weight per square foot of growing area that was set by our turnip beds last year.

The nine varieties of peppers in the trial beds continue to do well. Over the two months of production. So far, we have harvested 265 pounds of peppers with no evidence of slowing down. Most folks haven't weighed their pepper pods, but it takes nearly 7000 pepper pods, all picked by the hands of garden volunteers, to achieve this total.



*Contrasting smooth skinned Green Light with typical cukes grown in the CGS Garden*



*Closeup view of trial peppers loaded with 25 or more pods per plant*

Our summer trial on Candle Fire okra is looking good in spite of too much rain. The plants have just started producing those bright red pods at press time. The garden is growing three

other okra varieties this summer, so Candle Fire will have some real competition if it expects to earn bragging rights these next few weeks.

*cont'd on pg. 15*

## Getting Down to Earth, *cont'd from pg. 14*

### Centennial Gardens

Article and photos by Becky Larkin and Nancy Graml, Master Gardeners

**We are celebrating and learning from a bountiful summer garden.**

Our early summer harvests have already yielded 250 pounds of vegetables. Master Gardener Lisa Lawrence regularly delivers to the Humble Area Assistance Ministries (HAAM) food pantry and Master Gardeners Patricio and Marisol Arteaga deliver to the Mission of

Yahweh Shelter for Women and Children. Included were eggplant, cucumber, Swiss chard, tomatoes, onions (purple, green, and yellow onions), peppers, and yellow squash.



Vegetables donated to food pantries

We regularly donate our harvests to area food pantries.

Since it was too hot for our tomatoes to set more fruit, we finished harvesting what was left, making way for more of our heat-loving harvest in the Family Garden. In the summer we celebrate the many plants we can have. We had to mention the pineapple plants that amazed our visitors! They took four years to set fruit, so we do not recommend trying them for the Houston garden.



Pineapple

Our sugar baby watermelon is a great summer plant and has done very well this year! From only two plants, the bounty filled a large raised planter. For our second watermelon bed, we are trying a seedless variety for the first time, which will need to be pollinated using a seeded variety planted along with the seedless variety so it has a pollination source. Stay tuned for our later report on the results of our seedless watermelon experiment.



Sugar baby watermelon

Other fabulous hot weather plants are peppers, okra, black-eyed peas, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, and eggplant. We have planted the beds in succession so we'll continue to have produce through August. Now that we do not have tomatoes to snack on, we turned to raw okra. They were delicious. The sweet potatoes are also doing great, even though we've had trouble with pests in the garden, but our most troublesome pests are rabbits.



Okra loves hot weather!

### Keeping Thumper at bay requires constant vigilance.

We don't care what you believe a rabbit won't eat. It will try any new leaf--every one of them until it nibbles it down to the nub. So whenever we put in anything at anytime in this garden, we have to fence it to keep out the rabbits. Tall beds, short beds, it doesn't matter. Believing rabbits do not like eggplant, we neglected to fence some new plants. Strangely, the rabbits chewed off only the connection point where leaves meet the stems. The leaves were all left intact on the ground. When we added the fence, the plants made a quick recovery.



A fence was erected around the beds to keep out the pesky rabbits. Meanwhile, Thumper ponders his next move!



# The Rose Corner

Article and photos by Christa Kaiser, Master Gardener

## Classification of Roses

There are many questions about the classifications of roses. No other flowers have a wider range of size, color, shape and flower form than the rose. Roses are among the most versatile of plants, coming in every shape, size and color imaginable with architectural dimensions, both in bloom and plant size. Each year the American Rose Society publishes a helpful guide on how to select roses. Another helpful guide for me is *Taylor's Guide to Roses*. The knowledge of the Classes of Roses is a good tool for your selection of roses in your garden. Here is a short list.

**Species roses** are the naturally occurring roses found in the wild. There are about 200 species of roses altogether.

**Climbing roses** are cultivars that can be trained to grow up a trellis, arbor or buildings.

**Shrub roses** is a catch-all class of cultivars that do not belong with either the old garden roses or any of the more modern classes.

**Old garden roses** have been in cultivation since 1867.

**Floribundas** are a modern group of roses, the result of crossing hybrid teas with polyanthas. They typically have many blooms per stem.

**Grandifloras** are another modern group, the grandiflora class only came into being in the mid-1950s.

**Hybrid teas** is the most popular class of roses of all. Many familiar long-stemmed varieties are included and come in a very wide range of colors.

## Ratings of Roses

Each rose is rated on variety's vigor, bloom production, plant habit, disease resistance and hardiness.

The American Rose Society compiles official ratings for every commercially available rose and publishes them in its



Judges evaluated entries at the American/Houston Rose Society show in 2017.



*Handbook for Selecting Roses*, a booklet sent free to members.

Once a year all rose growers are invited to participate in the annual evaluation of new introductions. The scoring system is as follows:

9.3-10: One of the best roses ever; 8.8-9.2: An outstanding rose; 8.3-8.7: A very good to excellent rose; 7.8-8.2: A solid to very good rose; 7.3-7.7: A good rose; 6.8-7.2: An average rose; 6.1-6.7: A below average rose; 0.0-6.0: Not recommended.

The typical entry has a number of important information features to guide the buyer in choosing the right variety. The information guides are structured the following way:

Name of the Rose, Classification or Type, Color, Petal Count, Date of registry or introductory date.

These are the colors named by the American Rose Society: white, near white, white blend, light yellow, medium yellow, deep yellow, yellow blend, apricot & apricot blend, orange and orange blend, orange-pink & orange-pink blend, orange-red and orange red blend, light pink, medium pink, deep pink, pink blend, medium red, dark red, red blend, mauve and mauve blend.

Of course, your choice might be determined by color, scent and growing habit. A less thorny rose is often preferred. Sometimes a new variety or unknown color shade might catch your eyes.

You can rate a rose you planted yourself and fell in love with. It might be a rose your grandmother had in her yard and you took a cutting of. The love for roses will live on forever.



# 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/](http://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](http://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](https://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*



Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service 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 activities, are encouraged to contact the Harris County Extension Office at 713-274-0950 for assistance five working days prior to the activity.



# Ask a Master Gardener – Resuming Select In-Person Activities!

by Valerie Depew, Master Gardener

After a hiatus of over sixteen months due to the COVID pandemic, the Ask a Master Gardener program is back! We have resumed our Farmer’s Market table hosting activities. These events are in compliance with COVID protocols, such as wearing masks and social distancing. However, with most of our volunteers now vaccinated, and with these

activities occurring outside, we are ready to take those first steps to get back out there and educate the public.

For Harris County MGs that are interested in volunteering for these events, the SignUp is available at: <https://signup.com/go/wBSYeQe>

## The full AAMG schedule for August

- Sat., Aug. 7**      **Urban Harvest**, 3401 Westheimer, Houston, Texas – 7:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.  
                          **Mercer Botanic Gardens**, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble, Texas 77338 – 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
- Sat., Aug. 14**    **Tomball Farmer’s Market**, 205 West Main St., Tomball, Texas – 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Thurs., Aug. 19** **Westchase Farmer’s Market**, 10503 Westheimer Rd., Houston, Texas – 3 to 7 p.m.
- Sat., Aug. 21**    **Towne Lake Farmer’s Market**, 9955 Barker Cypress Rd., Cypress, Texas 77433 – 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.  
                          **Mercer Botanic Gardens**, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble, Texas 77338 – 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Sat., Aug. 28**    **Memorial Villages Farmer’s Market**, 10840 Beinhorn Rd., Houston, Texas – 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

# Home Grown Program Expands to a Podcast

<https://bit.ly/3w4cUAR>



*The Home Grown podcast is presented by the Agriculture & Natural Resources (ANR) Unit of the Harris County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office. The series provides information on urban agriculture / horticulture / gardening and ag literacy. The program focuses on topics that are relevant to the urban gardener.*

*The podcast can also be found at the following site: [www.listennotes.com/podcasts/home-grown-podcast-paul-OM7PKqityX/](http://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/home-grown-podcast-paul-OM7PKqityX/)*

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

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



**Texas A&M AgriLife Extension**

in partnership with

**Hermann Park Conservancy**

are pleased to present

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

**The Harris County Master Gardeners maintain the vegetable, herb, berry, and citrus beds in the Family Garden on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, so if you see one of us working there, feel free to say hi. We will resume educational activities in September.**

**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 - *Dale Hudson*

by Karen Breneman, Master Gardener

### Congratulations to **Dale Hudson!**

Dale Hudson, a 2014 graduate, is the Master Gardener of the month for July. He retired from Shell in 2000, then worked as a consultant to the petrochemical industry for another 12 years. He is married to Miriam. They have two kids and three grandkids. Prior to MG, Dale's main volunteer activity was soccer, refereeing for 17 years in Houston and surrounding area. His current hobbies are running, biking, skiing, and traveling. His MG-ing these days involves five mornings a week split between two donation gardens up in the NW area of the county where they are doing various veggie trials at Paul's request.



*Dale Hudson at Christ the Good Shepherd gardens in Spring, TX*

## 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](mailto: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!*

# August 14th & 28th 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 *August* include the following. Wish them a **HAPPY BIRTHDAY** when you see them!

Carolyn Boyd, Brad Coburn, Don Couch, Ceil Dow, Eng Keeng, Sally Goss, Nelson Harbison, James Holmes, Julee Jackson, Brandi Keller, Jana Lee, Sunya Lewis, Margaret Pierce, Dale Reid, Teresa See, Kelly Shannon, Jo Ann Stevenson, Noe Tristan, Heman Wai

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



## It's that time of year!

As you all know, we are in hurricane season until November 30th. Hopefully, storms will bypass our area this year. But, to make sure you and your families are prepared for an event, check out <https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/prepare/ready.php> .

# Gardening Tools

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

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

Average Last Freeze Dates (Hobby 2/8, Bush 3/1)      Average First Freeze Dates (Bush 11/30, Hobby 12/20)

Plants grown over winter may require protection during freezing weather.      Seeds and transplants started in the heat of summer will benefit from shading during establishment.

Download the Vegetable Garden Planting Guide here!

# TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE

EXTENSION SERVICE

13105 NORTHWEST FREEWAY, SUITE 1000

HOUSTON, TX 77040

713-274-0950

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

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

## Follow Us On Facebook, Twitter & Instagram

The Harris County Master Gardeners as well as Texas A&M AgriLife Extension - Harris County Horticulture are actively participating on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram offering tips, lists, news and plant advice almost daily. The best part, instead of locating planting guides or insect documents, and sale dates for individuals, you can add the HCMG site to your account and easily share information with others. This is a definitely a timesaver for these busy garden days and helps promote our organization. Reach us via these links:



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

[www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyHorticulture](https://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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:UrbanDirt.harrishort@gmail.com)