HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER NEWSLETTER • NOVEMBER 2021

Urban Dirt

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

Domestic Truffles

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

On occasion if I want to feel privileged and wealthy I will order the mac and cheese with truffle oil at a restaurant. I can't afford truffles but we all like to feel pampered now and then. The last time I priced truffles at Central Market they were $379 a pound. This is cheap. Some truffles can cost several thousand for a pound. Why are they so expensive? It's because they are rare. Even commercial farms have problems growing them in large volumes. The most popular varieties grow with oak trees and maintain a delicate balance. A few connoisseurs prefer truffles that have been foraged from nature instead of those commercially grown.

Pricey truffles!
Photo by Terri Simon

Truffles are not the same as mushrooms. They are a fungi, but they have selective growing requirements. Unlike mushrooms, truffles like different climates and they stay underground. The truffles develop a symbiotic relationship with the tree. More common varieties are usually white or black. White truffles are gathered in September but the growing season for black truffles differs between varieties.

There are towns in Europe that hold truffle fairs. Truffles grew wild until the early 1800s when a Provence farmer named Joseph Talon realized truffles often grew near oak trees. He gathered young oak sprouts growing near established oaks with truffles because they had the necessary truffle spores. Eventually he had the first truffle farm. In the 1970s, French researchers refined the growing methods for black truffles. Once the laboratory fungi are established, they will surround the tree's roots and stop other fungi from growing. It can take a few years for the truffles to flourish.

In the past, pigs were used to locate the truffles. Truffles have a pungent smell when ripe and pigs like truffles. Sometimes the pig would eat the truffles it found. This is one reason why some truffle farmers are missing a finger. Trying to grab a truffle away from a 300 pound pig is not that easy. Today, trained dogs are used. These truffle dogs are not cheap. One breed that is considered ideal for truffle hunting is the Italian Lagotto Romagnolo. These dogs cost from $3,000-$5,000. Truffle training can cost several more thousand. Other dog breeds can be trained and the Oregon Truffle Festival has a two day truffle dog training seminar in January of every year. Another harvesting method uses rakes.

Truffle hunting dog
Photo courtesy Smithsonianmag.com

cont'd on pg. 4

Upcoming Events 2
Herb of the Month 3
Plant of the Month 5
Home Grown Lecture Series 6
Growing With Plants and Nature. 7
MG of the Month 8
Master Gardeners in the City 9
Getting Down to Earth 10
Ask a Master Gardener 13
GFG Garden Workdays 14
Master Gardener Birthdays 15
Gardening Tools 16
MG In-Person Gardening Opportunities 17

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

Upcoming Events

November 2021

Educational Programs

Nov. 2, *First Tuesday* 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Arrive as early as 10:30 a.m. and bring a sack lunch. Trini Mendenhall Community Center, 1414 Wirt Rd, Houston, 77055

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: *homegrown2021Q4.eventbrite.com/*

Nov. 4, 10:00 a.m. - *Citrus Trees for Your Landscape* by Brandi Keller, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Harris County, Extension Agent – Horticulture

Nov. 18, 10:00 a.m. - *Rainwater Harvesting* by Teresa See, Harris County Master Gardener

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/.*

Nov. 16, 4:00 p.m. - Growing with Plants and Nature Family Zoom Event. Topics: *Holiday Foods from the Garden and instructions for making a cornucopia for your holiday table*. Please request your connection link from: *ogd.harrishort@gmail.com*.

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.

https://bit.ly/3w4cUAR

HOME GROWN PODCAST
TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION HARRIS COUNTY
GARDENING
HORTICULTURE
URBAN AGRICULTURE

The podcast can also be found at the following site: www.listennotes.com/podcasts/home-grown-podcast-paul-OM7PKqityX_/

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: COVID-19 AgriLife Extension Web Hub

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

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

CEA – Horticulture
Paul Winski - 713-274-0981
CEA – Horticulture
Brandi Keller - 713-274-0950

TEXAS MASTER GARDENER
TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION
Harris County

2021 Board of Directors
President
Alan Fisherman
Alan.Fisherman@hc-mga.org
First Vice President
Jonathan Correia
Jonathan.Correia@hc-mga.org
Second Vice President
Carolyn Boyd
Carolyn.Boyd@hc-mga.org
Past President
Beth Braun
Beth.Braun@hc-mga.org
Secretary
Mary Stokman
Mary.Stokman@hc-mga.org
Treasurer
Kathryn McCleod
Kathryn.McLeod@hc-mga.org
Directors
Douglas McLeod
Dianne Lawrence
Janice Muhm
Dale Hudson
Alexa Haass
Carlos Domenech

Genoa Friendship Gardens
Steering Committee Advisors
Evan Hopkins
Georgia Lau

•

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

Herb of the Month

Sweet Annie *(Artemisia annua)*

by Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

Even if you have never heard of the herb "sweet Annie," if you subscribe to Hungarian writer Frigyes Karinthy's theory described in his 1929 short story "Chains" of "six degrees of separation," chances are that you are connected through that to someone whose life has been dramatically improved or even saved by the life-saving compound "artemisinin," which is extracted from sweet Annie. Also known as "sweet wormwood," this little herb has quite the storied past, and present.

Native to China, sweet Annie can be grown with some success in a number of climates, but prefers sub-tropic and tropical environments, right in the backyards of where it is most needed. According to an online division of Novartis on record with sweet Annie's history, this herb's yield quite literally qualifies as a "miracle drug."

Sweet annie

Used for over two thousand years in China to alleviate fevers (without knowing what those fevers were caused by), often in combination with other herbs, sweet Annie has been stealthily serving those impacted by mosquito-borne illnesses with greater success for two millennia than some modern drugs possess for any number of health issues. Quietly, sweet Annie remained in relative obscurity until the Vietnam War.

In 1967, as the Vietnam War escalated, so did malaria parasites' resistance to the drug chloroquine, which up to that point had been widely used to treat malaria. As a result, the Vietnamese troops became ill at an unprecedented rate, and thousands of them died – more than were killed in combat. Desperate to find medical assistance, the Viet Cong's leader, Ho Chi Minh, turned to his Chinese neighbors for help.

While China was already a producer of antimalarial medicine, a program was instituted by Chinese leaders to support medical research on a new drug, thereby identifying and creating one to which malaria parasites would not possess resistance. The program was called Project 523, named for the program's starting date of May 23, 1967. More than 800 Chinese scientists from more than 60 institutes participated. A team from the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences identified the active ingredient artemisinin in the *Artemisia annua* plant in 1972, leading to the development of artemisinin-based combination therapies (ACTs), which revolutionized the treatment of malaria. The team's principle investigator, Dr. Youyou Tu was awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine or Physiology in 2015 for finding a way to extract artemisinin from the plant. Novartis does not elaborate in its history on sweet Annie regarding the rather belated nature of the Nobel award (better late than never?).

Today, sweet Annie's yielded compound "artemisinin" is the standard antimalarial treatment worldwide recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). For decades knowledge of this treatment remained sealed with China, where, it is said, research continued on the plant and its powerful ingredient.

Meanwhile, on the African continent, malaria infection and mortality rates remained (and continue today as) the highest in the world, accounting within its borders for nine of ten global malaria victims. In the 1980s and 1990s, an alarming number of malaria deaths on the continent increased sharply, from an estimated 493,000 to about 800,000 per year, finally garnering attention that demanded action. Again, *Artemisia annua* played the leading role. The development of the first fixed-dose artemisinin-based combination therapy began in the 1990s, when Novartis joined forces with Chinese researchers to transform the traditional herbal remedy into a modern antimalarial medicine.

Although verifiable information proves elusive on sweet Annie's local success, if you choose to grow the herb, begin from either seed or cuttings. Seeds should be set out in non-wet conditions after the last frost. Once established, Sweet Annie requires little care, save for occasional light pruning. With its resemblance to a fern, it makes a pretty plant in a sunny location with well-drained soil, maturing to a height and spread of about two feet. Beware that it reseeds readily and can become a nuisance plant.

Hope you enjoyed the history of this fascinating herb, which has provided a life-saving drug that we can count among our many modern blessings. Happy Thanksgiving!

Citations:
https://www.hobbyfarms.com/grow-use-sweet-annie/
https://www.sandoz.com/stories/access-healthcare/plant-medicine-how-ancient-plant-based-remedy-became-modern-malaria

Domestic Truffles, *cont'd from pg. 1*

Unfortunately, thieves using rakes, called "rakers" or "tweakers", can quickly damage your crop by turning over any piece of ground to search for the valuable truffles and the truffles may not even be fully ripened yet.

The June 2021 Smithsonian magazine [1] has an article featuring a company in North Carolina called Mycorrhiza Biotech which was started by Nancy Rosborough. Rosborough has struggled for 15 years to grow truffles. The truffle industry has not been very successful here in the U.S. Truffle farms are rare and they struggle with their profit margin. Europe, Australia, Chile and New Zealand have truffle farms. The U.S. lags behind them. The Perigord orchard in Sonoma county California has ten acres and harvests about 35 pounds annually. It is the biggest producer so far. One large producer was in Tennessee in the early 2000s. Tom Michaels harvested 200 pounds of truffles from ten acres in 2009 but his crop was wiped out by the Eastern Filbert Blight, another fungus that damaged truffle producers on the East Coast. The truffle market here may take off soon if Rosborough and her team are successful.

Rosborough knew a little about farming. Her previous career was as an information technology consultant. The triad she formed for her company included herself, Omoanghe Isikhuemhen, a Nigerian with a PhD in mycology and Richard Franks, chief scientific officer. Franks joined at a later time. Together they did their research to determine the variety they would grow and under what conditions. They determined that the bianchetto truffle (*Tuber borchii*) with a whitish color does well here in the Southeast. It wasn't as expensive to purchase, but it ripened in spring while other varieties ripened in the winter.

Richard Franks, chief scientific officer, smells a truffle.
Photo by Andrew Kornylak, Smithsonianmag.com

One important factor was that the bianchetto preferred loblolly pines. Loblolly pines can be found growing throughout the Southeast. Dr. Isikhuemhen developed a growth media used to inject truffle spores into pine seedlings. So far their approach seems to be working. The only thing missing was investors. The company was rapidly losing money. Finally, they received a call from an investor, Richard Franks who worked for Thomas Edward Powell III. Powell's three sons founded a company which eventually became LabCorp. It has an estimated value of $15 billion. Deep pockets. Powell also owned acreage with pine trees. Rosborough had been in touch with a liquidator but canceled the call.

Dr. Omoanghe Isikhuemhen
Photo by Andrew Kornylak, Smithsonianmag.com

The company wouldn't go under after all. In 2012, more than 1,000 seedlings were inoculated, and Burwell Farms used a bulldozer to clear two acres of ground. Lime was trucked in to change the soil's pH. In December 2016, Franks, Rosborough and Isikhuemhen headed to the farm to check on their project. They found truffles by following an animal trail. In 2019, the farm produced 30 pounds of truffles. Things were going well until COVID. The restaurant industry took a huge hit. Burwell Farm froze the truffles but they become mushy when thawed, though they can still be grated over food. Thomas Edward Powell III decided to go big. Burwell Farms planted ten acres of orchards with more than 5,000 trees. The farm predicts they will be able to harvest 1,000 pounds a year. With a little luck, Americans should be able to enjoy truffles that are easier on the pocket book.

If you want to learn more about the truffle industry, a new book was introduced this month. The book title is called *Truffle Hound: On the Trail of the World's Most Seductive Scent, with Dreamers, Schemers, and some Extraordinary Dogs* by Rowan Jacobsen. I can't wait to read it. For a comparative look at the European truffle industry, watch this 2012 *60 Minutes* segment on truffles (*https://youtu.be/LrZdvI_M4U8*).

Addendum: The *Truffle Hound* book arrived and I learned truffle oil is only olive oil with a manufactured chemical called 2,4-dithiapentane that's been added. The chemical is a critical one found in white truffles, but is one of many identified in truffles.

[1] *https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/american-grown-truffle-breakthrough-180977702/*

Plant of the Month

Ampelopsis arborea

Article and photos by Don Tyler, Master Gardener

I spent last month's article expressing my frustration, some might call it griping about Gripeweed. So, I thought why not get all my frustrations out and write about another landscape annoyance, *Ampelopsis arborea*, commonly known as peppervine.

Peppervine *Photo by Don Tyler*

Peppervine is another one of those pesky plants that seems to have a mind of its own and will literally overwhelm your landscape if not properly managed. In an article from the Gardening Know How website (*gardeningknowhow.com*), "*Once it takes hold, it will overtake a garden and choke out plants in its path.*" (*gardeningknowhow.com/plant-problems/weeds/peppervine-control-in-gardens.htm*) The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center echoes this same sentiment, "*The species is particularly aggressive and rampant, considered by many to be a pest. It is seldom cultivated.*" (*www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=NEAR5*). Even though it is a native plant, I find peppervine to be a "pest" and invasive in my landscape.

Having established my disdain for the vine, the Wildflower Center does list benefits of peppervine as "*attractive, fruits ornamental, fast growing, attracts songbirds and gamebirds*". If you are into foraging, you can use the juice from the peppervine berries like grape juice, make jelly or jams or even wine. (*www.foragingtexas.com/2008/09/peppervine.html*) There are a few cautionary recommendations in the article should you choose to "*drink it, jelly/jam it, or even make wine from it*".

Oddly enough, it is easy to find yourself in a quandary when dealing with peppervine. This is best stated in an article written by Master Gardener Marian Kimbrough, published in the Galveston County Master Gardeners Magazine, and reprinted by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, "*The desirable characteristics of its colorful berries, good ground coverage, trellis climbing ability, pest resistance and tolerance of adverse weather conditions* ***are the same characteristics which often make it undesirable in cultivation***." [emphasis mine] (*aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/newsletters/hortupdate/2008/jan08/Peppervine.html*)

Peppervine berries

Photo courtesy www.foragingtexas.com/2008/09/peppervine.html

These desirably undesirable characteristics have led me to try and eliminate the vine in my yard. I have decided not to try and rule the unruly. I try my best to avoid chemical herbicides and so I generally resort to hand-pulling. There are herbicides that can be used on the vine and so I would recommend you research that to determine the best one to use. If you hand-pull, peppervine has quite a root system and so one must be vigilant and catch the vines early. You also want to kill the vine before it produces berries which will lead for more spreading.

You may choose a different path but do not complain if you find yourself "*peppered with peppervine*"!

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION
HARRIS COUNTY

HOME GROWN LECTURE SERIES

OCT - NOV - DEC
2021

*ALL LECTURES ONLINE

REGISTER AT:
HOMEGROWN2021Q4.
EVENTBRITE.COM

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

October 7, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

SAUSAGE MAKING 101
Shannon Dietz - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Agriculture & Natural Resources

October 21, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

CITRUS TREES FOR YOUR LANDSCAPE
Brandi Keller - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Horticulture

November 4, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

RAINWATER HARVESTING
Teresa See - Harris County Master Gardener

November 18, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

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

SO YOU WANT TO BE A RANCHER?
Shannon Dietz - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Agriculture & Natural Resources

December 2, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

MAKING HOLIDAY PLANTS LAST
Brandi Keller - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Horticulture

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

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

HARRIS COUNTY TEXAS

THE MEMBERS OF TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE WILL PROVIDE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES, EDUCATION, AND EMPLOYMENT TO ALL PERSONS REGARDLESS OF RACE, COLOR, SEX, RELIGION, NATIONAL ORIGIN, AGE, DISABILITY, GENETIC INFORMATION, VETERAN STATUS, SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY AND WILL STRIVE TO ACHIEVE FULL AND EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY THROUGHOUT TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE..

Growing with Plants and Nature

Growing with Plants and Nature offers children and their families opportunities for learning about gardening and nature. Due to the impact of the COVID pandemic, we have shifted our programs to more virtual presentations and outdoor in-person events.

Check out our Facebook Group at 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 for any questions, information or comments about all of our Growing with Plants and Nature activities.

Our **October Family Zoom Event,** "While You Sleep", was presented by **Master Gardener, Candy Friday.** Candy explored insects, birds, plants and mammals that are active at night. Her presentation featured the Mexican Free-Tailed bat. Candy provided a great lesson on night creatures.

After Candy's presentation and lesson, **Master Gardener, Karen Kabacinski,** provided instructions on a fun craft project, making a stuffed bat toy.

November's program will be presented by **Master Gardener, Linda Persse**, on the **16th at 4:00PM.** It will feature "Holiday Foods From The Garden". The presentation will give you answers to questions such as:

- Which popular holiday fruit has a record weight of over 2,000 pounds and why is it a fruit and not a vegetable?
- What traditional holiday food plants were known by Native Americans as "the Three Sisters", and how are they mutually beneficial when grown together?
- Do Cranberries really grow in water?

Master Gardener, Jo Ann Stevenson, will follow the presentation with step by step instructions for creating a cornucopia for your holiday table.

Our team enjoyed events at the Towne Lake Farmers Market such as helping children create fascinating leaf rubbing art and pinecone feeders. Between the last two markets, we provided these "nature and arts and crafts" projects to over 160 children.

MG of the Month - *Jo Ann Stevenson*

by Karen Breneman, Master Gardener

Congratulations to **Jo Ann Stevenson!**

Jo Ann is a native Texan, born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley in a family of farmers and teachers. She attended Texas A&M University and has worked in Houston's international energy sector for 30 years and counting. Her passions include art, history, gardening, photography and antiquing.

Jo Ann wanted to take the Master Gardener class for several years, and finally had the opportunity to complete the class with her husband Stan in the summer of 2019. They have both learned so much and made some great friends through their class and volunteer activities.

Jo Ann currently serves as Co-chair of the Education Committee and is in awe of the amazingly knowledgeable gardeners and speakers she gets to work with. Attending many of the Green Thumb lectures in person at the libraries inspired Jo Ann and Stan to pursue their Master Gardener certifications. And now she gets to help coordinate the yearly Green Thumb schedule and presenters – what a great opportunity to use skills she has developed over years of organizing conferences, trade show booths, technical programs, industry barbecues, church picnics, community events, women's retreats, fashion shows, festivals and even parades.

Jo Ann is also active on the Growing with Plants and Nature (GPN) committee and has contributed a couple of craft presentations to GPN Family Zoom events. She is a member of the Publicity committee, assisting with Facebook and MG online store postings as well as proofreading the Urban Dirt newsletter.

Jo Ann and Stan have volunteered with Ask a Master Gardener at farmers markets, Mercer Botanic Gardens and Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo; with GPN at schools and farmers markets; at MG plant sales and GFG; and also in the Reach Unlimited and Spring Branch Elementary gardens. She loves trying new opportunities and learning more about nature and gardening so she can pass along that knowledge to others, especially kids.

Jo Ann and Stan Stevenson

Jo Ann and Stan have been married 22+ years and are charter members of Lifepath Church. They helped to start the church community garden where they are still growing fruits and veggies to eat and share. Jo Ann has served in various capacities at her church, including women's ministry, missions and outreach, fellowship, landscaping, and teaching Sunday school. She has also volunteered with other local nonprofit organizations, most notably 15 years with Habitat for Humanity Northwest Harris County, specifically on the Women Build committee.

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

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. Educational activities will resume in January.

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

When events resume in January: 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.

Getting Down to Earth

Article and photos by Pam Longley, Master Gardener

News from Genoa Friendship Gardens

We are so pleased that **Noe Tristan**, a Master Gardener for over 20 years, has come back home to GFG to volunteer with **Rick Castagno's** team. Starting in 2000, when there were only 6 beds there, he helped set up the greenhouse and plant the orchard. He told me that the soil brought in for the beds was that used for roof top gardens. Now that he has retired from Exxon Mobil, he will be taking over the stewardship of that same orchard once again and helping with the compost area. In his Baytown community, Noe helped start a community project in the downtown area over the last ten years focusing on adding park space. He loves helping people, especially kids, which motivated him to take the Junior Master Gardener training. He believes that growing food for families is an integral part of the fabric of our society. When I asked him what he hopes for the future of HCMGA, he said we all need to educate our individual communities, that education should not just be in the classroom but every day in our own backyards.

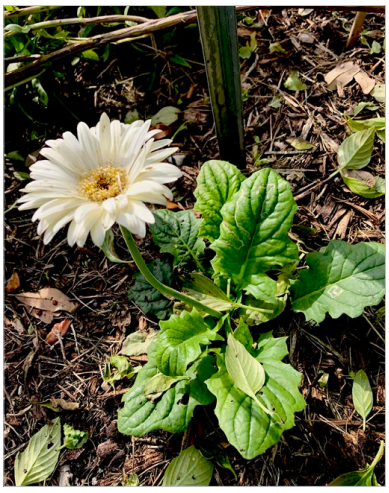
Noe Tristan

The GFG Plant Sale held October 16-18 brought in 63 orders and revenue totaling almost $4000.00! ***Janice Muhm*** and her team had a very organized set-up of grouping numbered orders in plastic nursery trays behind signs showing the order number sequences for each row. They also had perennials and fruit trees and vines for sale in person. There were quite a few people who picked up their online orders and purchased more plants on site.

A few of the GFG Fall Fruit Tree and Perennial sale crew; l-r. Bridget Richnow, Karen Shook, Linda Pearson, Carolyn Boyd and Janice Muhm

Open Garden Day was Monday, October 18, a perfect fall day. We had about a dozen curious folks, some bringing children and dogs, who took walks through our beautiful gardens and bought plants, too. MGs were on hand to answer questions. **Doug McCleod** even gave his mobile number to one of the visitors so she could call him about her ailing fruit trees.

Seen at GFG



Colorbloom White Dark Eye Gerbera

Tree frog resting on a Cherry Mocha Crape Myrtle, Barista Collection

cont'd on pg. 11

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

Article and photos by Dale Hudson, Master Gardener

Christ the Good Shepherd Garden

Gardeners today really are much like our gardening ancestors. Sure, today we have many more tools at our disposal and we have a lot more science behind our practices, but when we look at the big picture Mother Nature is still calling the shots. She has been kind to us this year in the CGS Garden and, although we haven't smashed records across the board, we can be thankful for milder temps and a wetter summer and the absence of severe pest or disease events. Let's talk about our HCMGA pepper trials, our promising sweet potato harvest and the launch of our cool weather crops.

After a walkabout in the garden on September 27th, Paul Winski agreed that 22 weeks of pepper trial data painted a very clear picture of how the nine varieties of peppers performed overall and relative to each other. There were winners for sure, but no real losers. Even the lowest performer, Chilli Pie, produced almost 100 peppers per plant. The best performer, the "not hot" Habanero Roulette, produced 618 pods per plant during the trial window and continues full throttle at press time. The full results of the almost 500 pounds of peppers harvested and delivered to food pantries during the trial will be issued in a separate report.

The sweet potato harvest is underway. There is always great anticipation of exactly what lies underneath the massive blanket of vines that have covered the beds and the aisleways for almost four months now. We like to see 1-1/2 lbs of nice potatoes per mound and early results suggest we are in the window. With eight beds total to be harvested, it's looking like Mother Nature has smiled on our sweet potato patch again this year.

The Fall crop of brassicas have gone in beds one at a time as space and manpower became available. First is cabbage, both green and red. Broccoli and Napa cabbage are going to be featured producers this year after we had beautiful results last year. Turnips are an old reliable favorite and we always make room for the salad greens like lettuce, kale, and radishes. Then in mid-November the Fall main event arrives with the setting out of eight or nine beds of red or white onions. Let's keep the faith that Mother Nature keeps smiling through the holiday season.

Green and Red Cabbage is already looking healthy and delicious.

John Zdansky and HGMGA gardener John Moss are all smiles as they sort sweet potatoes for drying.

cont'd on pg. 12

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

Article and photos by Nancy Graml, Master Gardener

McGovern Centennial Gardens Family Garden

Getting Started With Our Fall Garden

We began with Juliet tomato plants in early September inside tall cages swaddled in row covers to protect them from the scalding sun. After a week's delay from Tropical Storm Nicholas, we were off to a good start with cooler weather! We planted half our fall vegetable beds the third week of September and continued through October. Fall crops include mustard "Florida broadleaf," broccoli "green magic", kale "toscano," Swiss chard "bright lights," and kalettes "autumn star," a hybrid between kale and Brussels sprouts. We finished harvesting several varieties of eggplant and planted sugar snap peas that bed. In the meantime, we started buttercrunch and red leaf lettuce from seeds for late October planting. In addition to vegetables, we planted several special purpose plants in our herb garden such as toothache plant (*spilanthes*) for numbing a toothache, perennial "self heal," milkweed "zizotes" for hosting Monarch caterpillars, cat-loving catnip, a good pollinator, along with fennel "bronze" and dill "anethum" to replace herbs lost to the summer heat.

Toothache plant

Judith Brocklehurst planting broccoli.

Jim Rath and Lisa Rodriguez bringing fall garden plants.

Phil John watering newly planted Swiss chard.

Hermann Park Conservancy Selects Master Gardeners as Docents for its "Sip and Stroll" Member Event

150 members swarmed McGovern Centennial Gardens on the evening of September 30, sipping wine and munching spicy lamb chops as a group of Family Garden Master Gardeners volunteered to publicize our mission in the Hermann Park Conservancy Family Garden. This annual event honors the Hermann Park Conservancy members who help support the Conservancy with their membership fees. Members enjoyed appetizers and drinks as they wandered the gardens. The Master Gardeners studied up on the various gardens and were available to visit with the members about the special features in each area. Judy Thomas and Judith Brocklehurst, our native specialists, manned the two sides of the Pergola Garden. Phil John and Jim Rath were in the Woodland and Pine Hill Gardens. Lisa Rodriguez, an avid succulent gardener, manned the Arid Garden. Sherrie Steiger handled the Rose Garden with its 25+ varieties, and Will Isbell took questions in the Family Garden. A big thank you goes to each of the Master Gardeners who gave up their evening to extend our outreach in McGovern Centennial Gardens.

Sherrie Steiger as docent at the Sip and Stroll event.

Ask a Master Gardener – In-Person Activities

by Valerie Depew, Master Gardener

Our Farmer's Market table hosting activities have resumed. These events are in compliance with COVID protocols, such as wearing masks and social distancing.

For Harris County MGs interested in volunteering please see the SignUp link: *https://signup.com/go/wBSYeQe*

We need volunteers for the two new events and for the Community Garden. There are also openings for several markets. If you do not see an opening where you wish to serve, please contact Valerie Depew at vdep56@gmail.com. We will work hard to accommodate those situations!

The full AAMG schedule for November

Sat., Nov. 6	**Mercer Botanic Gardens,** 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble, 77338 – 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. **Urban Harvest**, 3401 Westheimer, Houston, 77042 – 7:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Sat., Nov. 13	**Tomball Farmer's Market**, 205 West Main St., Tomball, 77375 – 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. **Woodchase Park Community Garden**, 3951 Woodchase Drive, Houston, 77042 – 10:00 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Thurs., Nov. 18	**Westchase Farmer's Market**, 10503 Westheimer Rd., Houston, 77042 – 3 to 7 p.m.
Sat., Nov. 20	**Mercer Botanic Gardens,** 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble, 77338 – 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. **Towne Lake Farmer's Market**, 9955 Barker Cypress Rd., Cypress, 77433 – 9:30 a.m to 1:30 p.m.
Sat., Nov. 27	**Memorial Villages Farmer's Market,** 10840 Beinhorn Rd., Houston, 77024 – 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Garden Oaks Farmstand is on hiatus and will be reevaulated in early 2022.

Thank you to all of the hardworking volunteers who have been able to get back out there with the public events!

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!

November 13th
GFG Garden Workday!

8:30 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 ***November*** include the following. Wish them a ***HAPPY BIRTHDAY*** when you see them!

Wendy Barr, Sara Brana, Beth Braun, Fatma Dokumaci Ozgel Nancy Graml, Toni Lawrence, Bea Lindzon, Kim Messer, Patricia Metzinger, Judy Padar, Ruthann Pechulis, Aida Pita, Betty Sigler, and Chevvy Tang

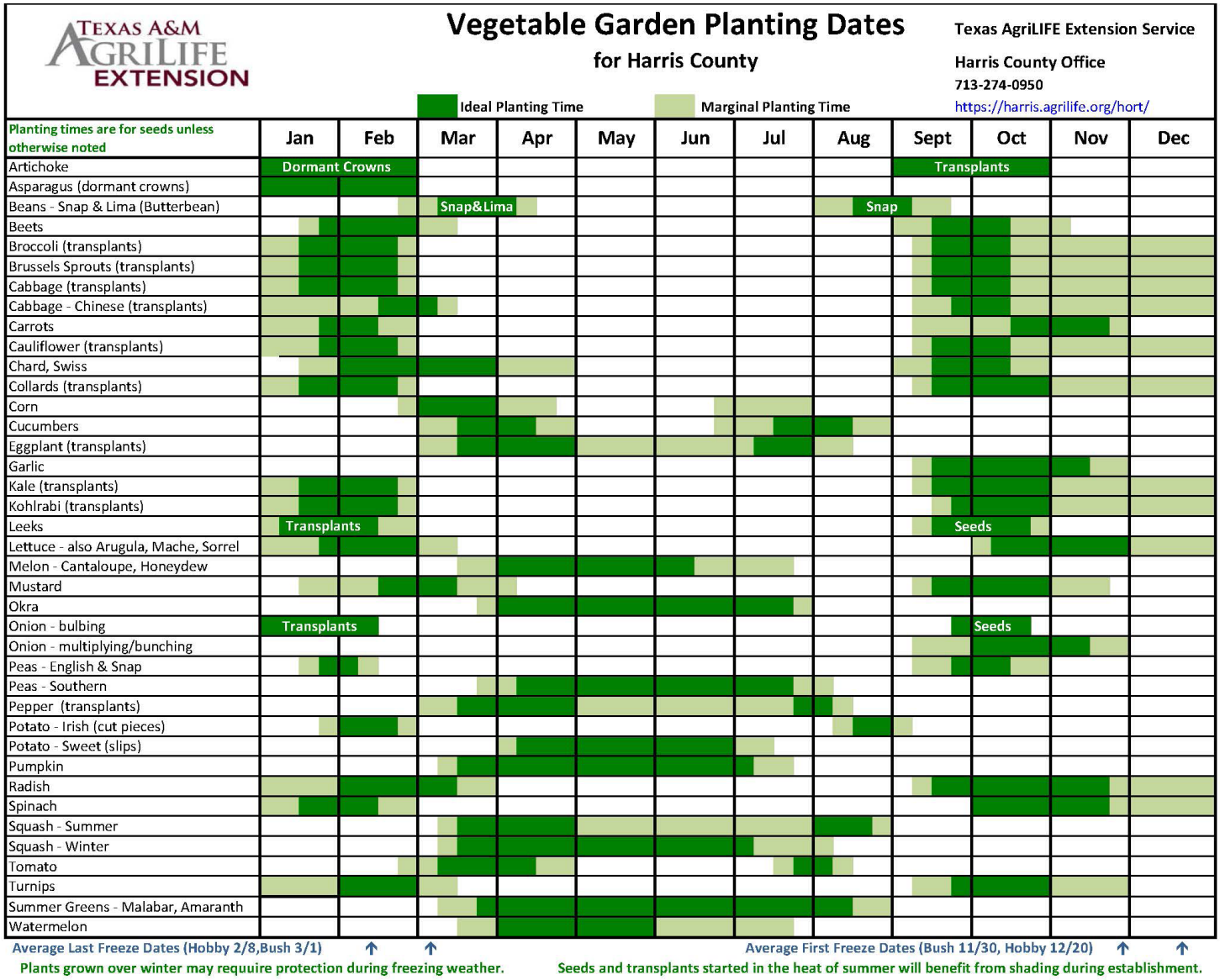
If your name is missing, please check that your online profile is complete.

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.



Download the Vegetable Garden Planting Guide here!

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

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

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

hcmga.tamu.edu

Follow Us On Facebook, Twitter & Instagram

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

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

https://twitter.com/pharrishort

https://www.youtube.com/channel

https://www.instagram.com/harriscountymastergardeners

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 *8:30 am - 12pm*

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

Weekend Workdays *8:30 am - 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