

Urban Dirt

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

The Global Grad Show

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

As the population increases our natural resources dwindle and the available land for farming shrinks. It is painfully obvious we must become more efficient with our water usage and farming methods.

The Global Grad Show¹ in Dubai provides a forum for student projects focusing on environmental and social topics. A'seedbot and "Wastology" are two inventions submitted by grad students as possible tools to improve farming methods for commercial farming and home use as well. Farmers are beginning to use drones and other innovations to monitor their crops. Other technological ideas are being considered. Sixty university students submitted their designs.

The A'seedbot was designed by Mazyar Etehadi. Almost eight inches long it has 3D printed legs, moisture sensors and



A'seedbot

Photo courtesy CNN

can avoid collisions. After recharging during the day it travels a three mile radius at night in the desert seeking moisture in the sand where it can plant a seed.

Dalilah Mansor and Kaya Tueni's project was "Wastology". It serves as a composter and a plant grower and can be used to grow plants indoors. The composting aspect can use daily organic trash that breaks down and supplies nutrients to the plants.

Both innovative ideas are designed to give consumers more tools to use to increase our food production in different ways. The Global Grad Show showcases student projects with the future in mind and gives them a forum to present their solutions to the upcoming anticipated food and water shortages globally.



Plants growing at the top of a compost pot

Photo courtesy CNN

¹<https://www.globalgradshow.com>



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

UPCOMING EVENTS

DECEMBER 2021

Educational Programs

Dec. 7, 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/](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/homegrown2021q4-tickets-154000001007)

Dec. 2, 10:00 a.m. - *So You Want To Be a Rancher* by Shannon Dietz, Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent – Agriculture & Natural Resources

Dec. 16, 10:00 a.m. - *Making Holiday Plants Last* by Brandi Keller, Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent – Horticulture

Youth Activities

Growing with Plants & Nature

No December program.

Growing with Plants and Nature Team Planning Meeting;
Tuesday December 7, 10:00 -11:00, before the 1st Tuesday members meeting. Meeting will be held in the back part of the auditorium.

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>



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

CEA – Horticulture
Brandi Keller - Brandi.Keller@ag.tamu.edu
Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator
Lili Bauerlein - lilianna.bauerlein@ag.tamu.edu



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•

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

HERB OF THE MONTH

Epazote (*Chenopodium ambrosioides*)

by Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

Perched on the edge of 2022, we are in the wonderful Christmas season --and nothing says “yuletide” like an herb’s name derived from an Aztec word meaning “skunk sweat.” Here along this herb corner, we like to delve and dig into the different, so this month we are exploring epazote!

Also known as “wormseed” and believed to have been utilized both for culinary and medicinal use by the Mayans for many centuries, epazote is native to southern Mexico, Central America, and South America. In zones 8-10 epazote typically grows as a bushy perennial, to about four feet tall and around one and a half feet wide. The reason for its nickname “wormseed” is due to the chemical contained by epazote’s leaves, “ascaridole.” Ascaridole is a powerful chemical with a toxicity in large doses that can potentially cause sweating, deafness, vertigo, paralysis, incontinence, jaundice, and even death. With proper dosage, however, its anti-parasitical capabilities are so sound as to lead to the ground herb being added to livestock feed. Until antiparasitic drugs became available in the 1940s, many thousands of gallons of “Baltimore Oil”, also known as wormseed oil, derived from epazote, were produced as a household remedy for hookworm in pets, livestock, and also humans. The name “Baltimore Oil” stems from the 1930s, when about 250 farmers in Carroll County, northwest of Baltimore, began corporately growing epazote (as an annual in that zone) for the oil’s manufacturing.

Because epazote can become invasive when planted in the garden, in addition to being dangerous or even deadly when consumed in large quantities, it is best kept grown within a pot away from pet accessibility. The herb enjoys average soil conditions, moderate moisture, and full sun, offering few if any problems in growing. Easily grown from either seed or cuttings, epazote has



Epazote

Photo courtesy Texas A&M University

even been observed growing wild in the United States in southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, and also Texas; states where highway crews work to spray it out as a weed, only to watch it roar right back into medians and along roadways. That's because the seed heads that arrive in late summer and autumn scatter easily, jumping from garden to walkway with the dexterity of an armadillo ambling through tumbleweed.

An interesting, extra garden note about the chemical ascaridole; although epazote is great planted near flowering plants due to its ability to ward off insects, its inherent ascaridole has the added capability of inhibiting growth in nearby plants, and is therefore best kept away from plants that are not yet established.

Pruning of epazote will encourage more branching and subsequently more leafing, particularly if you lop off the center stem. As with basil, snip off emerging flower spikes, too, to encourage more leafing.

While epazote can be poisonous in large doses (particularly in its flowering stem tips), it is an edible herb and quite common in Caribbean and Yucatan/Mexican dishes. Although it is said to be an acquired taste because of its strong smell and flavor, when added to stews, sauces, and soups, epazote offers a distinct flavor profile often described as both peppery and minty. Mexican cuisine frequently taps it for “frijoles

de la olla,” which we Texans and others across the southeastern U.S. recognize as “beans simmered in a pot with some water and onion.”

Speaking of Texans, many of us enjoy at the holidays those delicious tamales, so this may in fact be a great month to give epazote a raised profile...simmer a small amount in a pot with some beans and onions and start a new tradition! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, y'all!

Citations:

- <https://heritagegarden.uic.edu/epazote>
- <https://cals.arizona.edu/fps/sites/cals.arizona.edu/fps/files/cotw/Epazote.pdf>
- https://latimesblogs.latimes.com/home_blog/2012/01/epazote-wormseed-.html
- <https://gardenerspath.com/plants/herbs/grow-epazote/>

MGs on Tour

Article and photos by Jo Ann Stevenson and Debra Caldwell, Master Gardeners

On October 29, a group of Harris County Master Gardeners visited The John Fairey Garden in Hempstead, Texas. Our tour guide was Debra Caldwell, a classmate from the 2019 MG class. In addition to volunteering as the docent trainer at JFG, Debra is reviving a collection of aloes in one of the greenhouses onsite.

The garden was started 50 years ago by John Fairey, a Texas A&M University professor of design and architecture, and it has grown to a collection of more than 3,000 plants on 39 acres. The garden features many trees and plants that one would expect in southeast Texas – such as oaks, magnolias, camellias, palms, mahonias and sycamores – but is also filled with surprises which are the endangered and rare plants that were brought from Mexico by John Fairey during his more than 100 trips to the Mexican mountains on plant expeditions. Years of exchanging plant material with a number of other gardens and institutions have resulted in a garden filled with plants from all over the world.

As we embarked on the tour, our group walked through the shady area under the oaks and I immediately sensed the architectural feeling of the garden's design. Here, there is a collection of oaks from Mexico, including Loquat-leaved oak (*Quercus rhyophylla*) and Tarahumara oak (*Quercus Tarahumara*), sometimes called the "handbasin oak" because of the large, thick leaves that can function as a drinking cup or small sink when turned upside down. There is also a great sculptural looking specimen of a Chinese fringe tree (*Chionanthus retusus*) which will be covered



Chinese fringe tree

in white flowers in March, Mexican persimmon (*Diospyros palmeri*), Pindo palm (Jelly palm) from Argentina and more.

Debra then guided us through the arid garden of agaves, various cacti, yucca, Sonoran blue and other palms such as Mazari

Palm (*Nannorrhops*

ritchieana), Agave victoriae-reginae, Cone Cactus (*Neobuxbaumia polylopha*) and then toward the Pool Plaza with the familiar Camellia sasanqua and many varieties of mahonias. Surprises along the way included a plant that looks like it belongs in a Dr. Seuss book (*Yucca desmetiana*) and a bamboo sculpture near the fountain of John Fairey's residence.

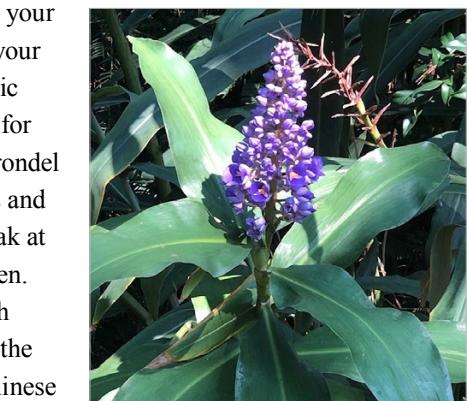
Leading toward the western woodlands, we saw tongue fern, oxalis, a spectacular Blue Ginger (*Dichorisandra thyrsiflora*) which is actually not a ginger, Japanese blooming apricot (*Prunus mume*) --wait until you see those blooms in January!, Mexican maidenhair fern, Rohdeas (similar to hostas), and a bluish Rabbit's foot fern. A striking new arched bridge designed by one of John Fairey's former students, Andrew Vrana, leads to the north dry garden, one of the oldest parts of the garden which will reopen soon for tours.

There are thousands of plantings, but also open areas designed deliberately to capture your imagination and lead your eyes through the artistic and sweeping vistas – for instance, through the rondel of Mexican sycamores and yews to the old Live oak at the far end of the garden.

Continuing through the arboretum area of the garden, we viewed Chinese



Dr. Seuss plant



Blue Ginger

MGs on Tour, *cont'd from pg. 5*

Weeping Cypress (*Cupressus funebris*), Chinese hackberry, Japanese blue oak (*Quercus glauca*), Mexican white oak (*Quercus polymorpha*), Mexican magnolias, a Chinese “many seeds” tree (*Bischofia polycarpa*), wisteria (I can’t wait to see those in bloom!), dwarf loblolly pines and much more, before making our way back to the office, greenhouses and parking area.

Plants are available for sale in the greenhouse. On this trip we saw Duranta, figs, including *Ficus gasparriniana var laceratifolia* (Lacerated Leaf Christmas Fig), Turk’s cap, Begonias and many more. Stan and I bought a Turk’s cap and a tropical *Excoecaria cochinchinensis* during our visit.

A few of us brought our lunches and stayed after the tour to eat in a cabin onsite near the amazing 24-ft long glass mosaic mural



Mexican sycamores and yews

by Houston artist Dixie Friend Gay. The mosaic was commissioned by John Fairey shortly before his death in 2020 and is filled with many images from the garden, including fallen leaves from the Loquat-leaved oak, (*Quercus rysophylla*), one of John's favorites, and a Striped Whiptail Lizard (*Aspidoscelis inornatus*).

It was a breezy, beautiful autumn day and a great way to spend the morning. The tour lasted

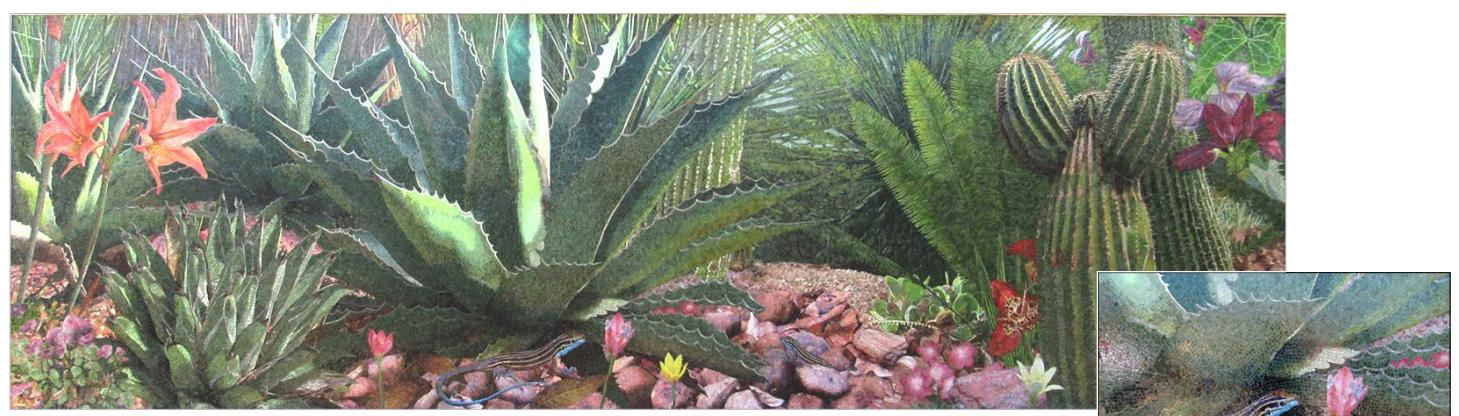


John Fairey Garden tour group

about an hour and 15 minutes, but I sure would have liked to stay for a few more hours perusing John Fairey's book collection in the cabin or just sitting on the bench near the White Jacket sculpture and soaking in the view of the spectacular gardens.

You, too, can visit The John Fairey Garden and see the seasonal changes throughout the year. Docent-led group tours are offered on Open Days (select Saturdays) and private tours are available by appointment. The garden is located at 20559 FM 359 Road, Hempstead, Texas, approximately one hour from Houston. For more details and tour prices, please visit their website at <https://jfgarden.org/>.

I think it is fitting to end with this quote from John Fairey: *“In this world of overemphasized technology in which values are often based on the superficial, gardens are a must for the public. They reacquaint us with the natural world, with our individual and shared past; they bring healing, literally and figuratively, to many of our ills.”*



Glass mosaic mural by Dixie Friend Gay

Enlarged section of mural

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION
HARRIS COUNTY

HOME GROWN LECTURE SERIES

OCT - NOV - DEC
2021

*ALL LECTURES ONLINE

REGISTER AT:
[HOMEGROWN2021Q4.
EVENTBRITE.COM](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/homegrown2021q4)

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



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 have returned to in-person programs outdoors while maintaining our virtual presence and making our virtual programs available to a broader audience.

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.



November's program was presented by **Master Gardener, Linda Persse**, featuring "Holiday Foods From The Garden". We learned:

- What traditional holiday food plants were known by Native Americans as "the Three Sisters", and how are they mutually beneficial when grown together
- That Cranberries really DO NOT grow in water



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

Just a few of the several fall activities GPN has been involved in:



Master Gardeners, Lois Pierce, Linda Persse and Connie Bihner, preparing for a planting activity for children at the Towne Lake Farmer's Market, where they worked alongside the AAMG Team.

Pinecones, jute, bird seed and a popsicle stick for spreading shortening or peanut butter made up a "grab and go" pinecone bird feeder kit, given to 96 kids to take home.



Master Gardeners, Lois Pierce, Diane Walker, Jo Ann and Stan Stevenson and Susan Visinski-Bracken and Master Gardener Interns, Deepali Cykowski, Nicole Zhao, Janelle Williams, and Amanda Mendoza made up the **GPN team** that participated in the Buffalo Bayou Partnership "Kids Day" all day event in October. We were thrilled to be able to help 278 children plant microgreens to take home.

Hummingbirds: Jeweled Messengers

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

Hummingbirds fascinate me. The flurry of wings and that scintillating flash of color still draws my attention. During their migration season my friend Jeanette places feeders around her house. I can relax with her on her porch and we have a great view. Who needs Netflix? Recently I watched a movie from 2012 narrated by David Attenborough, that I accessed for “free” (after paying my annual \$100 fee) from the “elite” website that is so popular with online shoppers.

Hummingbirds are only found in the new world and most of them are in South America. When flowers evolved 60 million years ago hummingbirds did not exist. Many plants were pollinated by insects, but insects move slowly on cold mornings. Another pollinator was required to fill the gap. Researchers believe 50 million years ago other pollinators came into being. The first birds had an insect diet, but that changed. The original hummingbirds were large and clumsy. In a few million years hummingbirds became smaller and developed longer beaks.

As birds evolved, they relied less on insects and more on nectar. They also cross pollinated the plants. Over time, hummingbirds became more agile. Their tongues grew longer and the birds became smaller. Their legs grew weak and they could not walk. They perched instead. Many birds seek shelter when it rains, but not hummingbirds. They can maneuver in the rain.

Today more than 8,000 plant varieties rely on hummingbirds. The birds drink nectar that is more than their weight daily. Flowers needed to produce more nectar, because while insects needed less nectar, the hummingbirds required more. Flowers developed longer throats to accommodate the hummingbird beaks and the birds had to hover to get the nectar.



Side view of broad-tailed hummingbird

Photo by Randall Robert



Hummingbird bathing in a flower petal

Photo by Rahul Singh

They are the most maneuverable birds, but recently a company in California developed a robotic hummingbird. The hummingbird drone has fooled live hummingbirds. It requires batteries and can only run for a few minutes. Real hummingbirds can hover for hours.

The birds are aeronautical experts. They are able to fly backwards, upside down and they can rotate in flight. They are true “aerial acrobats”. Their wings beat 80 times a second; their heart beats 400 times a minute. Hummingbirds spend 80 percent of their day perched and feed about every 15 minutes and can remember the flowers they visited. They still need protein in addition to their nectar diet and can snag an insect in mid-air. To attract partners, they use a mating dance. If they must eat every 15 minutes how do they sleep? The birds go into a torpor at night to reduce their energy needs, and while in this torpor they cannot move. A recent study found they can see colors humans cannot see.

Six million years ago some hummingbirds evolved again and became smaller. Some of these “micro” hummingbirds weigh less than a penny.

Come winter, the birds must migrate. Many of them pass through Rockport, Texas. Residents hang feeders everywhere to accommodate them. The birds must cross the ocean and this requires lots of energy so they pack on weight to make the trip.

Rockport capitalizes on this migration. The HummerBird Celebration draws lots of visitors. Tens of thousands of hummingbirds pass through Rockport. There are so many a Doppler system can pick them up. Since word spreads quickly when their migration begins, gardeners and birdwatchers set their feeders out to help the birds gain weight for their flight.

cont'd on pg. 9

MG of the Month - *Linda Persse*

by Karen Breneman, Master Gardener

Congratulations to Linda Persse!

When Linda and her husband, Bob, retired and moved to Houston from Cleveland Heights, Ohio she looked for volunteer opportunities. Discovering that there was a Master Gardener program near their new home was perfect. They had been long time community gardeners, and thus knew about Master Gardeners.

Soon after completing the Master Gardener class, Linda volunteered in the Open Garden Day at Bear Creek, focusing on the children's part of the program. After joining the Education Committee, she was encouraged to learn more about plant propagation, eventually presenting the *Seed Saving and Plant Propagation* Green Thumb program. She especially appreciates the mentors, colleagues, and dear friends she has come to know.

Following the extensive flooding and loss of the Bear Creek gardens, Linda and other Open Garden Day volunteers found space at a community center to reestablish the children's program. They changed the name to Growing with Plants and Nature to reflect the need to refocus on "hands in the dirt container gardening" and finding ways to help children to understand the interdependence of plants and other parts and creatures in the natural world.

In her life before becoming a Master Gardener, Linda was a social worker for over 40 years. Her jobs included work in a pediatric teaching hospital, a children's mental health clinic, a summer health clinic for migrant workers and their families, a research project manager, and adjunct instructor for graduate social work students. One of her most satisfying experiences was as a volunteer and founding board member of the AIDS Housing



Linda Persse

Council of Cleveland from 1987 to 1993. This was a coalition of health and social service providers, advocacy groups, people living with HIV, and religious leaders.

Linda earned a Masters Degree in Social Work at Michigan State University in East Lansing and a Ph.D. in Social Welfare from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. During their 53 years together Linda and Bob have enjoyed closeness to their extended families, traveling, camping, and caring for the many dogs and cats that have shared their lives.

Hummingbirds: Jeweled Messengers,

The cinematography in this film is stunning. The cameras show the birds in slow motion when necessary. You can see how territorial the birds are. They are, quite frankly, mean. Jeanette and I watched a female who attacked other birds when they approached her feeder yet she didn't drink from it. She used another feeder but did not allow the other birds to approach that second feeder she also claimed.

They are so vicious they use their beak as a saber if necessary. The movie showed one hummingbird spear a competitor through the chest. They are small "Zorros" without the mask.

cont'd from pg. 8

This movie lasted nearly an hour but time flew by quickly. It was the most interesting and beautiful movie I have seen in a while. If you want to know more about hummingbirds, I recommend it.

To see some short segments narrated by David Attenborough, click on the link <https://youtu.be/ABYuo4hqa04> or <https://youtu.be/Ag6-pLu3qE8>.

Green Thumb 2022 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*

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

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

Houston Community College @Home Gardening Series

Register in advance to receive the link: hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops

Second Monday of each month

January 10 – Gardening in Small Spaces

February 14 – Spring Vegetable Gardening

March 7 – Composting

April 11 – Water Conservation

May 9 – Succulents

June 13 – Gardening Open Forum

July 11 – Fall Vegetable Gardening

August 8 – Herbs 101

September 12 – Plant Propagation

October 10 – Citrus Trees

Third Tuesday, 11:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.

Harris County Public Library Facebook Live

No reservation required – facebook.com/harriscountypl/events/

Third Tuesday of each month

January 18 – Gardening in Small Spaces

February 15 – Spring Vegetable Gardening

March 15 – Composting

April 19 – Water Conservation

May 17 – Succulents

June 21 – Gardening Open Forum

July 19 – Fall Vegetable Gardening

August 16 – Herbs 101

September 20 – Plant Propagation

October 18 – Citrus Trees



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.



*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

GFG will host four plant sales in 2022 starting in early Spring with tomatoes in February, trees in March, peppers and herbs in April and perennials in May. Plants will be sold online with pickup days of Saturday, Sunday and Monday. The Monday pickup day will be in conjunction with that month's Open Garden Day, giving customers an opportunity to tour our gardens.

The October sale of fruit trees, vines and perennials was very successful with \$4200 in gross sales and \$1600 in profits!

Carolyn Boyd and **Dianne Lawrence** met with members of the MG class of 2021 and discussed the volunteer needs at GFG. They reported that several were very interested in coming out to help.

Rick Castagno and the vegetable production team put up a PVC and row cover canopy over part of the strawberry trial beds. The plants are doing great! We had so many bare root starts left over that several of us took some home to trial as well.



Dianne Lawrence, Michael Donnelly and Rick Castagno setting up the canopy structure for the strawberry trial bed

Rick and **Noe Tristan** have developed a 2022 orchard plan to replace trees lost in the February freeze. The tree varieties are Ruby Red and Rio Red grapefruit, Persian lime, Improved Meyer lemon, Blood orange, Page mandarin, Tropic Snow peach and Don Juan avocado.

Seen at GFG



The pond after much clearing work and new planting of Sweet Memory Trees

cont'd on pg. 13

Getting Down to Earth, *cont'd from pg. 12*

News from Genoa Friendship Gardens

Seen at GFG



Karen Shook, Patricia Metzinger, Carolyn Boyd and Kathryn McLeod potting up extra strawberry plants for the greenhouse



Glorious Mexican Marigold Mint (Texas Tarragon)



Waves of zinnia companion plants in the Rose Garden

cont'd on pg. 14

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

Article and photos by Dale Hudson, Master Gardener

Christ the Good Shepherd Garden

When November and December rolls around gardeners in South Texas start cashing those IOUs for all the hot and sweaty days they suffered through back in July and August. Just when gardeners north of here start shutting down and storing stuff until spring, we here in this area really go to work.

The cooler days are the wakeup call for gardeners at Christ the Good Shepherd (CGS) to grab their gloves and get the winter garden going. We have a full slate of plantings for our 28 beds every year and this year we have a mix of the old reliable standards and a few new invitees to the party. For example, this year we have transplants sourced from our own greenhouse, TX AgriLife (the strawberry trial), Urban Harvest, and the private stash of Master Gardener Lee Talley.

Brassicas were the first things planted, and by mid-November we were already harvesting beautiful cabbage. Soon to follow will be broccoli, kohlrabi, and Napa cabbage (which was a big hit for the first time last year). Two varieties of spinach, Bloomsdale and Space, which were winners from the HCMGA trial a few years back, are looking great. Most recently we have added beds of lettuce, kale, swiss chard, sugar snap peas, and turnips. Turnips don't get a lot of love in some quarters, but the fact is they are the



Tubs of leaf mulch patiently waiting to be snuggled around the base of the Kohlrabi and Napa Cabbage



Green cabbages in their prime in bed #1

#1 producer for CGS on a pounds per square foot metric, and the food pantries that we distribute to love them. Finally, our old reliable and biggest winter crop, are onions. We use the last eight of our 28 beds for a mix of Southern Belle Red and 1015Y Texas Super Sweet White onions. We plant almost 2000 slips purchased each year from Dixondale Farms in Carrizo Springs, TX.



Master Gardener Lakshmi Koripalli and Cindy Lestage planting four beds of turnips



Master Gardeners
Dale Hudson, Margie
DiGiacomo and Baxter
Swenson planting
strawberries for the
TX AgriLife Trial



Master Gardener Baxter
Swenson and Brenda
Fabian planting sugar
snap peas at the base
of the trellis

cont'd on pg. 15

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

Article and photos by Nancy Graml, Master Gardener

McGovern Centennial Gardens Family Garden

Orientation for Master Gardener Interns

This fall Will Isbell and Becky Larkin hosted several orientations, and we were pleased to introduce 20 Master Gardener interns to the Family Garden at McGovern Centennial Gardens. Several interns in the current class have already become regulars in the garden. Master Gardeners will be extending their workdays in January and we will add back educational programs on the second and fourth Saturdays of the month. Saturday programs will be from 9:00 a.m. to noon with several opportunities to volunteer: information table, children's activity, adult classes, as well as gardening.

Fall Plantings

The last of our summer crops, sweet potatoes, were abundant. This Fall, we harvested over 150 pounds of potatoes not including their greens which are also edible just like spinach or chard. We carefully worked the beds by digging with forks and our hands to try and find all the potatoes, as any potatoes or roots we miss send up many volunteer plants in the following years regardless of what is planted in the bed later. With the last of the summer plants harvested and cooler temperatures arriving, we were able to transplant lettuce, arugula, Chinese cabbage, bok choy, and kohlrabi. The rest of the winter crops were seeded: carrots, beets, turnips, radishes, and beans. Some crops like lettuce and kohlrabi

are short, only 40-50 days to maturity, so when we put in transplants, we also started seeds for lettuce and kohlrabi. That way we'll have transplants for a second crop later in the season. As always we are keeping our fingers crossed for a mild winter and a greater harvest.



Sweet potato harvest



Interns Sharon Stinson, Gloria Tobor, Myra Jefferson, Janelle Williams

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>

The full AAMG schedule for December

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| Sat., Dec. 4 | Mercer Botanic Gardens , 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble, 77338 – 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Tomball Farmer's Market , 205 West Main St., Tomball, 77375 – 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Urban Harvest , 3401 Westheimer, Houston, 77042 – 7:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Woodchase Park Community Garden , 3951 Woodchase Drive, Houston, 77042 – 10:00 a.m. to 12 p.m. |
| Thurs., Dec. 16 | Westchase Farmer's Market , 10503 Westheimer Rd., Houston, 77042 – 3 to 7 p.m. |
| Sat., Dec. 18 | Mercer Botanic Gardens , 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble, 77338 – 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Towne Lake Farmer's Market - on hiatus for December and January.
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 reevaluated in early 2022.

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

Additional dates for 2021 have been added. so be sure to check the SignUp link. 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!

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!



December 11th 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>



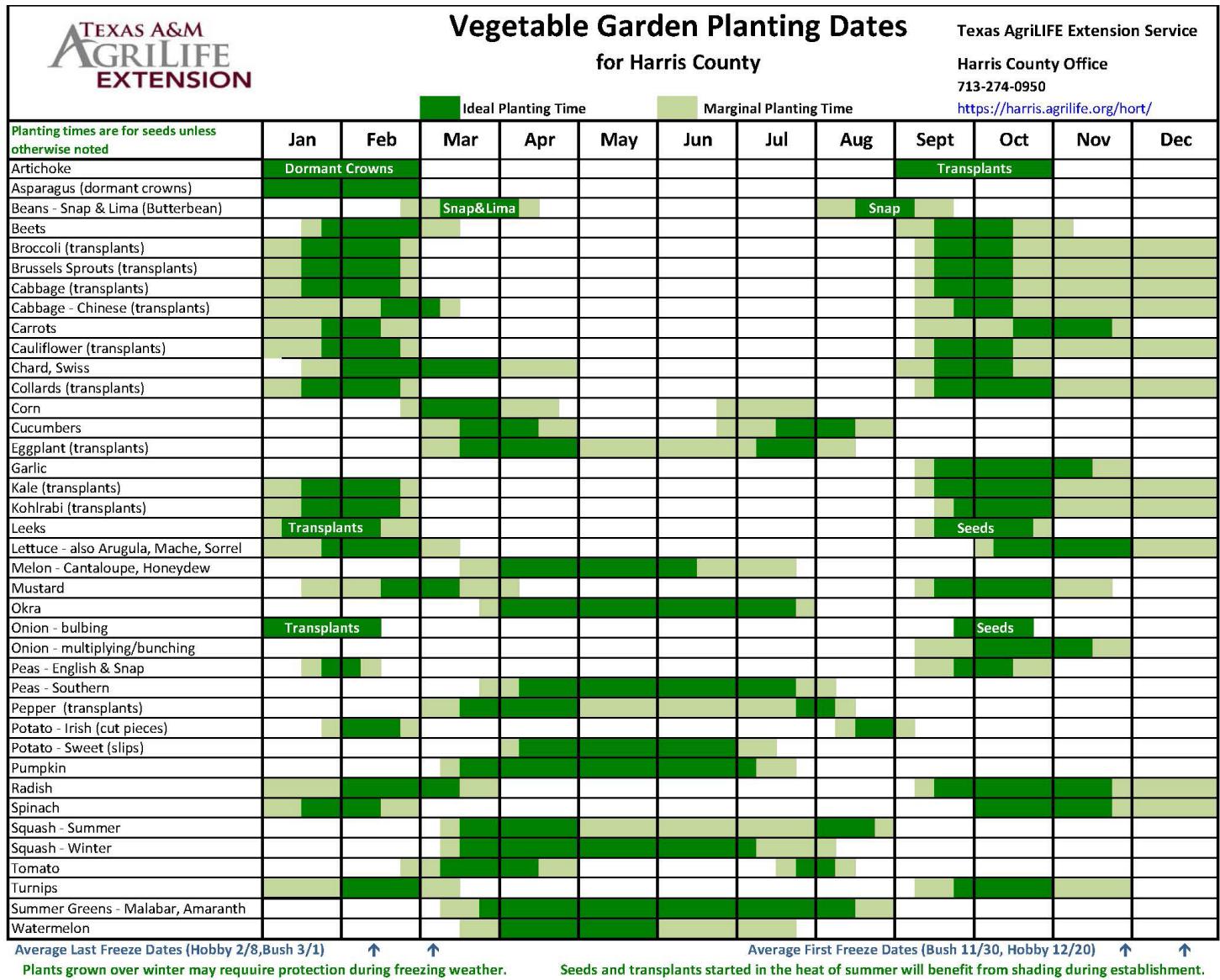
Master Gardeners and Interns who celebrate a birthday during *December* include the following. Wish them **HAPPY BIRTHDAY** when you see them!

**Marisol Arteaga, Debra Caldwell, Nancy Cansler,
Carol Curtiss, Carlos Domenech, Eileen Donovan,
Candy Friday, Gwen Fritz, Cherease Glasper, Alison Ivin,
George Kabacinski, Edie Le Bourgeois, Becky Lowicki,
Bennie Matusek, Karen McGowan, Janice Muhm,
Brigget Richnow, Linda Saxman, Nina Turner and Kim Wallace**

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

Gardening Tools

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



Download the
Vegetable Garden
Planting Guide here!



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