HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER NEWSLETTER • APRIL 2023

Urban Dirt

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

Woody Ornamentals

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

Definition - *"Woody ornamentals are long-lived perennials with stems and branches that increase in girth and height each growing season"*– North Carolina State Extension

You may have noticed them while running errands. Woody ornamental plants are the most common landscaping plants used by businesses and institutions. While herbaceous plants die to the ground in the winter, generally the woodies will survive above ground. Woody ornamentals have several uses. Some can provide berries and flowers that attract pollinators. Some may have blooms that provide color or fragrance. Others can offer shade. Single plants can serve as focal points while multiple plants can be grouped together as a border. They can serve as ground covers or add vertical interest to the landscape. Some can provide spring color, colorful foliage in fall and the evergreens add green throughout the winter.

The woody ornamentals fall into three groups, trees, shrubs and vines which are further divided. Until I researched this article, I did not realize roses were in this category.

Trees can usually reach more than 12 feet with one main trunk They can offer shade and may have blooms and fruits. Consider carefully when planting trees. What is its mature height? Is your yard large enough? One mistake home owners make is planting a tree too close to the house. Some tree roots can cause plumbing problems. Does the tree shed foliage, flowers or berries? If planted too close to your driveway, these will need to be cleaned up. A good friend of mine chopped down a beautiful mulberry tree because it overhung the driveway, and his kids stepped into the mulberries, tracking them into the house.

Hibiscus *Photo by Terri Simon*

Shrubs can grow up to twelve feet high. Smaller shrubs can serve as ground covers and others can have multiple trunks, while others can have foliage reaching the ground serving as screens or hedges. They can offer flowers or fruit while providing color and fragrance.

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

Upcoming Events - April 2023

Educational Programs

Apr. 4, First Tuesday 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Program: *HCMGA Annual Awards Luncheon* Meeting in-person at Trini Mendenhall Community Center, 1414 Wirt Road, Houston 77055

Green Thumb Workshop: Lawn Alternatives

Apr. 19, 9 -10 a.m. *Lawn Alternatives*, Learn how to grow and care for lawn alternatives that support the environment. Each participant will go home with lawn alternative plant!
$15 Registration required. Register *HERE* Genoa Friendship Gardens, 1210 Genoa Red. Bluff Rd., Houston 77034

Green Thumb Gardening Series

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

Tips for Great Lawns

Apr. 10, 10 - 11:30 a.m. For the HCC program, register in advance to receive the link: *hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops*

Apr. 18, 11 a.m. - 12 p.m. Simply visit the Harris County Public Library System. No reservation required. Watch on Facebook – *facebook.com/harriscountypl/live*

Plant Sales

Apr. 1-18, Southeast Online Perennials & Peppers Sale

The HCMGA online store, *https://hcmga.tamu.edu/shop/* opens April. 1st - 16th. Plant pickup day is April 18th, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. Remaining plant inventory is available for purchase. 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd, Houston 77034.

Apr. 22, Northwest Spring Sale - Fruit Trees & Perennials, 9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. or until supplies last, 5373 Franz Rd., Katy, Tx at St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

Open Garden Day at Genoa Friendship Gardens

Apr. 17, 8:30 - 11 a.m. The garden will be open to tour and master gardeners will be available to answer gardening questions. Plants will be for sale in the greenhouse. And, visit the *Ask a Master Gardener* table for additional gardening information. 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston 77034

Youth Activities

GPN - Look for the **Growing with Plants and Nature** table at following plant sales and farmers markets:

Apr. 15, Towne Lake Farmers Market; 9955 Barker Cypress Rd., Cypress 77433
9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

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

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Woody Ornamentals, *cont'd from pg. 1*

Vines are divided into four groups: clinging, twining, scrambler and tendrils. Vines can be used to frame a doorway or cover a building but can eventually cause a building to rot. Clinging vines should not be used for this purpose. Twining vines are the largest group and they do well when threaded through some type of support such as fencing or lattice. Scrambler vines are similar to twining vines since they need help with support as well. Tendrils can wrap around wire or anything with a small diameter since they have short stems.

Twining wisteria Photo courtesy *ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook*

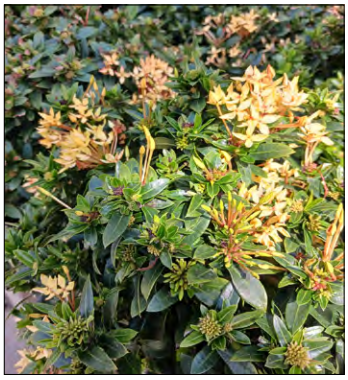
When purchasing woody ornamentals for your landscape, plan ahead and choose wisely and carefully. Always follow HOA (home owners association) guidelines for your area if applicable.

Questions to consider include:

- How much space do you have? Always keep the size of the mature plants in mind.
- How much sun will your plants receive?
- Will foliage, fruits, cones and seeds be a problem? These can be messy and someone has to clean the mess up.
- How invasive is the plant? Does it produce seeds that grow quickly or roots that can spread?
- How much water will it need?
- Is the plant heat resistant or cold hardy?
- Is it a native plant?
- What is the plant's growth rate?
- Will the plant be aesthetically pleasing and serve its purpose?

There are so many things to consider when planting woody ornamentals. Don't forget to take into account any other plants you have. Herbs, perennials, fruit trees, annuals and others should blend in and work well with your woodies. Careful planning beforehand can prevent some gardening blunders. Trees, in particular are difficult to remove if you change your mind. Enjoy planning your new landscape, which may already have some woody ornamentals.

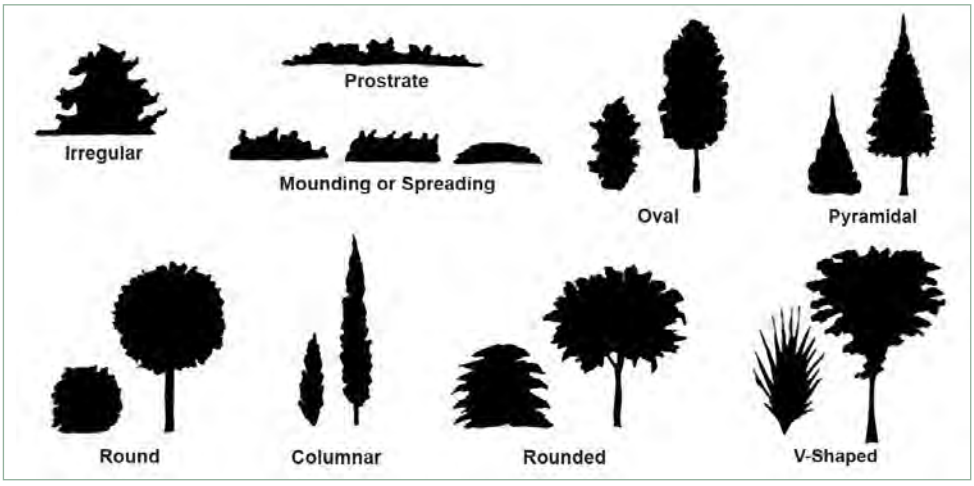
Roses



Taiwanese Yellow Bush Ixora

Spring Sonata Indian Hawthorne

Japanese boxwood



Various forms of woody ornamentals *Graphic courtesy NC State Extension Publications*

Japanese holly

Woody ornamental plant photos by Terri Simon

Native Plant of the Month

Texas Frogfruit *(Phyla nodiflora)*

Article and photos by Robin Yates, Master Gardener

Historically, when faced with a persistent and perplexing dilemma, if we stop and ask, "How does nature solve this?" we open ourselves to possible solutions that may have been right in front of us. It is my suggestion that part of the answer to how we can sustainably maintain our landscapes is to substitute ecosystem friendly native ground covers for a portion of our lawns. Douglas Tallamay, in his book Nature's Best Hope, advocates for what he calls Homegrown National Park. Everyone who puts a native plant in their yard can put their yard on the map: https://homegrownnationalpark.org/about

When I became a homeowner in Harris County, in 1990, I was introduced to St. Augustine, *Stenotaphrum secundatum*, the most common lawn grass in urban southeast Texas. Over the years, I learned to deal with diseases, weeds, and pests common to the urban lawn. Yet, what I ultimately realized was that with the need for fertilizer, herbicide, insecticide, and fungicide, this turfgrass was essentially on life support. I had difficulty keeping some of it alive and it certainly was not thriving. I began to think that there must be a better solution.

I started with Buffalo grass, *Bouteloua dactyloides*, and found that our rainfall is too much for it to handle. Then, I tried White Clover, *Trifolium repens*, yet it is not native to North America, and I found it too fragile for local wildlife.

Over the years, my search for a native drought, flood, frost tolerant turfgrass replacement has led me to suggest Texas Frogfruit, *Phyla nodiflora*, as an option to replace a portion of your lawn. Why do I say this? I am glad you asked!

P. nodiflora is a perennial herb in the verbena family. It grows to about 6" in full sun to part shade. It grows in most soils with water requirements being low to medium. It tolerates both drought and flooding. It is evergreen in warm years and will go dormant during a freeze. It is green with reddish or maroon tints in the winter. It has a white to pinkish bloom from March to November. The bloom attracts pollinators of all sorts! It is amazing to watch all the life in the Frogfruit compared to the relative silence of my neighbors' St. Augustine.

Frogfruit is a home for pollinators!

St. Augustine turf grass on the left and Robin's yard with Frogfruit on the right.

Frogfruit is an aggressive growing ground cover. It will cover any area you place it in. I have found it best as a turfgrass replacement and giving it a border or edge of some sort to keep it where I want it. It does not take long, when planted as plugs, to fill an area. With our two growing seasons, it filled my front yard within a year.

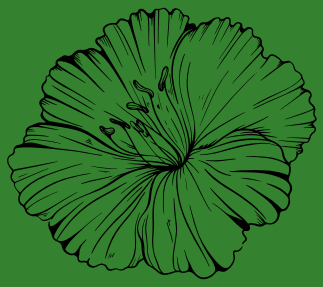
It made it through Winter Storm Uri, and this winter it went dormant with the Christmas freeze. It is coming back, but due to the lack of rain, it has not started to bloom as of this writing.

Besides not requiring fertilizer, or any of the '-cides,' it does not need to be mowed, and I prefer to wait until it stops blooming, as it is wildlife habitat. *P. nodiflora* is a larval host plant for three butterflies-the Phaon Crescentspot, Buckeye, and White Peacock! No turfgrass can say that:)

Come on out to the Genoa Friendship Gardens and see the Texas Frogfruit highlighted as the ground cover on the south side of the new Native Plant Landscaping Bed. Compare the pollinators attracted to it versus the rest of the surrounding turf.

Also, consider taking the Native Plant Society of Texas' Landscaping Certification classes (https://npsot.org/wp/nlcp/0). I have taken levels 1 & 2 and am waiting for the next two to become available. During each class you will learn to identify 45 native plants and 5 invasive species. Its nominal cost is well worth it.

Reference
https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=PHNO2



GREEN THUMB
LAWN ALTERNATIVES WORKSHOP
April 19th

Learn how to grow and care for lawn alternatives that support the environment.
Each participant will go home with a lawn alternative plant!
Adults with children welcome to bring children free of charge.

19 APRIL
9am-10am

ROBIN YATES
MASTER GARDENER

Genoa Friendship Garden
1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd.
Houston, TX 77034

$15 REGISTER HERE

For questions email Brandi.Keller@ag.tamu.edu

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.

2023 Harris County Master Gardeners Sales!

It's a new year and the area has just experienced another hard freeze. Hopefully, your fruit trees and other plants survived. If not we are here to help! Or if you just want to expand your fruit tree collection, grow some veggies or enhance your yard with colorful plantings in 2023, our sales are ongoing.

We will have to remaining in-person sales. One on the Northwest and our online sales pickup location on the Southeast side of town, at Genoa Friendship Gardens.The pickup day also offers an in-person sale opportunity of remaining plant inventory.

Check out the info below for the sale of your choice!

HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

2023 PLANT SALES

For more information go to: hcmga.tamu.edu/plant-sales/

For questions, please email: plantsales.harrishort@gmail.com

Our remaining HCMGA Spring Plant Sales

NORTHWEST SALES

9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

New location:

5373 Franz Rd, Katy, TX @ St. Paul's Episcopal Church

April 22nd

Spring Sale

Perennials & Peppers

HCMGA acknowledges and thanks those who supported our previous sales this year, which in turn supports our educational outreach.

Thank You!

SOUTHEAST SALES

Citrus not available at this location.

9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Genoa Friendship Gardens (GFG), 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston, 77034

Online sale at: https://hcmga.tamu.edu/shop/

April 15th & 17th

Perennials & Peppers

Online store opens Apr. 1st - Apr. 13th

Pick up day - Apr. 15th

May 22th

Online Vegetables & Herbs Sale–CANCELLED

Remaining plant sale inventory available at in-person Open Garden Day sales on May 22nd!

An in-person sale option is available for remaining plant inventory on all Saturday pickup days.

Southeast Sale ONLY: Order online for the best selections. Monday is our Open Garden Day; tours of our demonstration gardens and plant trials will be provided along with plant sales.

TEXAS MASTER GARDENER TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION Harris County

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

Individuals with disabilities who require an auxiliary aid, service or accommodation in order to participate arer encouraged to contact the County Extension Office prior to the sale to determine how reasonable accommodations can be made.

April Plant Sale Volunteer Options for MGs!

by Carolyn Boyd, HCMGA President

The HCMGA needs *YOU!* Plant sales are the *primary* source of funding for the organization, and member participation is vital for success.

We will have two remaining in-person sales: one on the Northwest side and our online sales pickup location on the Southeast side of town, at Genoa Friendship Gardens. These events provide multiple MG volunteer opportunities. Read the *Weekly Update* for information and go to SignUp.com to signup for any of the sales.

A plant sale is a great place to gain plant knowledge. It may be via researching plant info for the database, creating plant signage or interacting with other master gardeners and customers. I have found when customers are on their "plant hunt" they *love* to talk about their plant experiences!

Please join in the 2023 HCMGA sale experience, and stay tuned for our Fall sales.

April Gardening Calendar

by Karen Shook, Master Gardener

"Flowers always make people better, happier, and more helpful; they are sunshine, food and medicine for the soul" – Luther Burbank

I find myself smiling as I walk through my yard. It seems like each day something catches my eye. The lantana and plumeria are coming back from the December cold, the bluebonnets are blooming, amaryllis flowers grace the table, the bean and tomato plants are growing bigger each day. The garden truly does make me happier.

Perennials and Ornamental Grasses

- ❍ Remove spent blooms regularly to keep plants attractive and avoid using plant energy "going to seed".
- ❍ Finish fertilizing established perennials and ornamental grasses.
- ❍ Shear back by 1/3 if plants are getting leggy.
- ❍ Divide chrysanthemums late April, early May.

Annuals

- ❍ Plant warm-season bedding plants.
- ❍ For cool season annuals, tidy up beds, remove spent flowers, pinch back lanky growth, fertilize, water well and enjoy extended flowering time. Flowers of many cool season annuals are edible.
- ❍ As weather warms, annuals in containers will need more frequent watering. Fertilize annuals in containers once per week at 1/2 recommended rates.

Bulbs

- ❍ Two of my favorites are Louisiana irises (a rhizome) and Amaryllis. Louisiana irises should be at their peak in April.
- ❍ Watch for canna leaf rollers and treat as needed.
- ❍ Continue to plant gladioli bulbs every 2 weeks from Jan through May for successive blooms. When cutting flowers, leave at least four green leaves on the lower part of the stem.

Roses

- ❍ Spray for blackspot, powdery mildew, aphids, etc., should continue every 7 to 10 days through November. Continue to fertilize monthly.

Citations:
A Garden Book for Houston. *2nd ed., River Oaks Garden Club, Houston, Tx 1968.*
Groom, Dale, and Dan Gill. Texas Gardener's Handbook. *Cool Springs Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2012.*
Richter, Robert. Month-by-Month Gardening Texas. *Cool Springs Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2014.*
Weather.gov/wrh/climate

Speaking of bluebonnets, the experts at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center are expecting a good showing this year. Early April is a great time for bluebonnet viewing.

Our weather so far this year has been a little hotter and drier than historic averages. Predictions suggest this is likely to continue. Keep a good layer of mulch and as always, check for "too wet, too dry, just right" and water accordingly. Remember a good, deep watering is better than frequent, light watering. April is a good time to evaluate your irrigation system and make any needed repairs.

Shrubs/Trees

- ❍ Newly planted shrubs do not have established root systems and may need supplemental watering. Moisten soil 4 to 6 inches down.
- ❍ Prune and fertilize spring flowering shrubs like azaleas after they finish flowering.
- ❍ For azaleas and other acid loving plants, it is a good time to check and adjust soil acidity.

Lawns

- ❍ The lawn can be fertilized after a second mowing of actively growing grass. Note if you have weeds in the turf, bag and compost the clippings from these first two mowings.
- ❍ Broadleaf weed killer can be used in April, but check the label. St. Augustine can be sensitive to weed killer at warmer temperatures.

Groundcovers and Vines

- ❍ Transplant, divide ground covers. Fertilize if you didn't do in March.

Vines

- ❍ Prune spring vines after they finish flowering. Snip back, wind vines through support to keep looking neat.

Edibles (vegetables, herbs, berries, fruits)

- ❍ See the following link for recommended planting times: *Harris County Vegetable Planting Guide*
- ❍ Get your tomatoes planted so you can harvest before hot weather causes them to stop setting fruit.
- ❍ Cool season vegetables are likely to be done in April.

Herb of the Month

Cumin (*Cuminum cyminum*)

by Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

As I write this April herb article in mid-March, the temperature outside is a non-balmy and humid 80 degrees. Uncustomary warm weather during this not quite officially spring season (although by the time this is published, spring will have arrived) prompted me to slip forward-thinking seasonal gears to summertime heat, which likewise also seems to nip at earlier dates on the calendar. The sequential train of this thinking had me traveling toward writing about drought-tolerant Mediterranean herbs, which are just as fun and flexible to cook with as they are to implement and care for in the garden. In the coming months, we will be profiling several of these native Mediterranean herbs, starting with this month's highlighted and highly-functioning one for chefs, used effectively by many ethnic repertoires, cumin (*Cuminum cyminum*).

The second-most popular spice in the world after peppercorn, cumin is a delightfully warm, savory spice favored in many regional cuisines, among them our very own Tex-Mex. Historically, cumin has been used anatomically, medically, and in culinary practice, from Egyptian mummification to alleviating digestive issues to the ancient Greeks' practice of sprinkling cumin on all of their food, much like we currently do with salt and pepper. Today's food culture finds cumin used as a key spice in Mexican, Asian, Indian, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern cuisines.

The powdered cumin that we use is usually the dried seeds of *Cuminum cyminum*, ground into dust. This member of the parsley family is a flowering plant that can grow to 1 to 2 feet in height and about six inches across. The flowers are small, typically white or pink, and appear in fragrant umbels in midsummer. Cumin is believed to have originated in the eastern Mediterranean region but also thought to be native to the Middle East and India, where the majority of the world's supply is now produced. The very best flavor to be produced from cumin comes from using fresh, dried whole cumin seeds, which are gently pan-toasted and then ground, rather than using the bottled, store shelf version.

Mature cumin plant

Photo Courtesy of Johnny's Selected Seeds, Johnnyseeds.com

Dried cumin seeds

An herbaceous and fine-leafed annual, cumin is relatively easy to grow when the conditions are correct, which include fertile, well-drained soil (prefers sandy loam and loam) and full sun. While cumin is a drought-tolerant plant, it can also adapt well to climates with frequent rainfall, as long as the soil is well-drained. Prolonged damp soil conditions, however, can cause root rot and plant decline.

Cumin's growing period is very long, 120-150 days, requiring maintained temperatures no lower than 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Seeds can be planted outdoors once this minimum temperature is held, and seed germination will take between 7 and 14 days. When planting, keep in mind that each plant only produces a few usable seeds, so this yield will need to be considered during crop planning. Fortunately for limited space concerns,

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Cumin, *cont'd from pg. 8*

cumin benefits from being slightly overcrowded or planted in clumps, which provide support and prevents stems from falling onto the ground. In successful planting, a "stand" of plants will almost always be observed. Pests and diseases to watch out for include aphids, Fusarium wilt, Alternaria blight, and powdery mildew.

Cumin is ideal for companion planting in a mixed vegetable garden. The flowers attract beneficial insects such as predatory wasps, which feed on pests like caterpillars that attack cabbage family crops. Grow cumin alongside these crops for maximum benefit. Cumin seeds are ready to be harvested in the fall when the flowers have finished blooming and the seed heads turn brown. To harvest, cut stems close to the ground, bundle and tie the ends together and place the seed heads into a paper bag. Hang the stems and bags upside down somewhere warm to allow the seed pods to dry out completely. The bag will catch any falling seeds. Stems can also be left flat on trays in sunlight to speed up the drying process. Once everything is completely dry you can start to separate the seeds from the pods. Thrash the stems against a hard surface while still in the bag, or roll pods between fingers to separate the cumin seeds. Gently winnow any chaff, dirt, and debris from the remaining seed before storing. Although cumin plants are not grown for their foliage, fresh leaves can be harvested from mature plants to add a light tangy flavor to salads or used as a herb garnish to soups and stews. Once harvested, treat the leaves like an herb or fresh salad and store in the refrigerator for up to a couple of days.

Like most spices, cumin has anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties. The medicinal health benefits of cumin

Cumin

come from the active ingredient cuminaldehyde, which has anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, anti-diabetic, anti-cancer and carminative properties. It helps to improve digestion, minimizing gas and bloating (this is why it is added to beans early in the cooking process). Cumin acts as a detoxifying blood cleanser and also aids weight loss by increasing metabolism. Cumin is virtually packed full of essential vitamins and minerals, in particular iron, calcium and magnesium.

Hope that this article finds your April wonderful and expectant for amazing gardens in 2023! Check back next month for the next drought-tolerant Mediterranean herb profile installation in the series.

Citations:
https://www.epicgardening.com/mediterranean-herbs/#Cumin
https://www.johnnyseeds.com/herbs/herbs-for-salad-mix/cumin-herb-seed-2931.html

Plant of the Month

Vitex agnus–castus

by Becky Lowicki, Master Gardener

Everything, everywhere, all at once!

With the inundation of pollen season, buds of greenery peeking out from everywhere, and so much to do to tidy after winter, the feeling of everything needing attention instantly is apropos for any garden on the cusp of spring!

From sprucing to planning to planting, it's hard to know where to begin as there seems to be endless tasks as well as excitement to get ahead of the Houston heat that will be upon us before you know it.

Texas Superstar© Status

An outstanding, Texas Superstar©, *Vitex agnus–castus*, also known as Texas Liliac Vitex or Mexican Lavender, is one option providing both a showy and colorful addition as a proven hardy survivor of the Houston heat with ongoing visual appeal throughout the blooming season.

A native of China and India, it has been naturalized throughout some U.S. regions, with records dating to its cultivation in the U.S. since 1670.

The detail of the bark gives a minimalist look similar to that of crepe myrtle with bountiful lavender blooms that attract pollinators galore at the height of its blooming profusion.

Texas Lilac Vitex

Shoal Creek Texas Lilac Vitex

Historically, *Vitex agnus-castus* belonged to the official medicinal plants of antiquity and was mentioned in the works of Hippocrates, where use of the plant for injuries and inflammation, among other remedies was noted.

Versatile and adaptable in both acidic and alkaline soils, Vitex grows best when planted in full sun, tolerates partial sun and prefers a location that drains well as it thrives in hot and dry environments.

Favored by the Texas Department of Transportation for its toughness, Vitex, with its indigo blooms, is often spotted along highway medians where it is a top performer. A popular pollinator, the butterfly-attracting plant is also known to be deer-resistant.

While older cultivars had small spikes of flowers which were pale lilac, mauve, off-white or light pink with smaller, nondescript flowers, improved varieties such as "Montrose Purple," "LeCompte," and "Shoal Creek" – all of which are marketed as Texas Lilac Vitex – boast fragrant, larger, long-lasting cut flowers amidst long spikes reaching 8 to 12 inches.

cont'd on pg. 11

Vitex agnus–castus, *cont'd from pg. 10*

Care

Vitex has a very rapid growth rate and will become a small tree quickly reaching heights of 10 to 15 feet tall and up to 15 feet wide if not pruned judiciously. Flowering is also more spectacular if the plant is pruned annually every winter to keep the plant manageable.

With a bloom time of May until frost, many aromatic black or dark-brown seeds are produced after petals have dropped, which may result in a reduction of additional bloom spikes or produce a seedling population that will not have the same characteristics as the original plant and become a nuisance.

To address any potential bloom reduction, simply cut off or deadhead the spent bloom spikes promptly after flowering so that the shrub will bloom again. Depending on weather and cultural conditions, plants will bloom repeatedly within six weeks of seed pod/stalk removal.

To stimulate rapid re-blooming and larger flower spikes, three pounds of a slow-release formulation of lawn fertilizer (19-5-9) per 100 square feet is recommended around each plant after spent blooms have been removed. The sooner the seed pods are removed before they harden, the faster the plant will begin the re-blooming process.

From butterflies to blooms, as a drought-tolerant, pest-resistant plant, Texas Lilac Vitex offers both beauty and beneficial attributes across any home landscape.

Montrose Purple Texas Lilac Vitex

Reference credits:
https://texassuperstar.com/plants/vitex
https://bexar-tx.tamu.edu/homehort/archives-of-weekly-articles-davids-plant-of-the-week/texas-lilac-vitex-a-hot-summer-texas-superstar-plant/

Getting Down to Earth

Article and photos by Pam Longley, Master Gardener

News from Genoa Friendship Gardens

All is ready for the fruit tree sale – blueberries, blackberries, figs, apricots, apples and peaches. No citrus can be sold this year from GFG because we are in an area of Harris County that has been put into an agricultural quarantine because of spreading citrus canker. **Doug McLeod**, The Voice of The Fruit, will be on hand to give expert advice and tell some of his many hilarious stories.

The heirloom tomatoes were planted in late February and were placed further apart this time in hopes they will get better air circulation and we can stay after the inevitable stink bugs with greater visibility. The carrots and pak choi (also known as bok choy) are being harvested now and they are absolutely gorgeous! We have taken on a new recipient for some of our produce, Angela House. This is a residential facility in Southeast Houston to help previously incarcerated women get back into society.

Fresh harvest of carrots with bluebonnets in the background

Our bluebonnets started blooming so early, in mid-February, and have added a little slice of Texas native happiness to our spring perennial trial gardens. When I was a student at Roberts Elementary School here in Houston, I remember singing the State of Texas Flower Song. "Bluebonnets, bluebonnets, with your coats so blue, your white eyes are shining through the silvery dew…"

Robin Yates is putting in the last of the native plants in his new garden. I think of him as "Johnny Wildflower Seed" for his generosity with sharing his seeds, plants and joy for the natural world with everyone. When I come to GFG on Monday mornings, he is always there with a big smile, lovin' on that garden.

Robin Yates in his new Native Plant Garden

cont'd on pg. 13

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

Seen at GFG:

Dwarf Flowering Almond in the Perennial Garden

Interesting past lives of some of our volunteers

Kathryn McCleod – Family law attorney
Doug McCleod – Police detective
Pam Longley – AVP and Escrow Officer at Old Republic Title
Robin Yates – Physician's Assistant at MD Anderson
Pat Daniels – Accountant at NASA
Rick Castagno – Petroleum Engineer

Peggy Martin Climbing Rose near the GFG entrance.

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 - Spring, TX

It is always a treat to go the garden this time of year when the outdoors is coming alive from its winter break. The activities at the top of the list are not the most fun things, but the warm sun on your face gives you energy to fight the first-to-arrive weeds and the now-or-never greening of the soft wood citrus and the apple, fig, peach and pear trees. Two questions are on all gardeners' lips at this point; will the broccoli trial beds finally deliver their eagerly awaited florets for harvest, and more importantly, is it time to put the tomatoes in the ground?

First harvest of trial broccoli at CGS Garden, March 2, 2023

First let's talk broccoli. Yes, against heavy odds, we have been able to harvest two pickings of the five varieties being trialed. A full trial report was made available to the TXAgriLife office and more details can be found by contacting them, but here is the *Cliff Notes* version. Exactly three months after planting, the first harvest occurred. Two weeks later a second harvest was made and likely will be the final harvest of any consequence. Burgundy was the top producer and also the earliest to mature. Imperial came in second and was a late bloomer. Green Magic and Gypsy were about even for 3rd and 4th place, and Bonarda, even though healthy and vigorous, failed to produce even a single floret. Perhaps this is easily explained by the horticulturists. We will continue to collect data as long as it seems to add value to the trial big picture.

On March 9th we went all in on tomato planting kick-off. We planted and staked a little more than 100 tomato starts. Three of the four varieties were grown from seed in our own greenhouse. Unlike past years, there were no trial parameters to be followed so we prioritized known good producers and shortest days to harvest. We planted 30 each of Early Girl, 4th of July, and Roma. We planted 15 starts of Celebrity donated by Urban Harvest. Jack

Team Lead Jane Weatherford (l) and volunteer Blanca Delacruz complete a second harvest of the trial broccoli on March 13, 2023.

Frost seems to have left town, so if that is true we should have a nice window for production before the heat and the pests show up in great numbers.

Team Lead Brenda Fabian (r) together with MG intern Debora (Deb) Maly work quickly to plant more than 100 tomato starts across seven raised beds at the CGS Garden on March 9, 2023.

For our loyal readers, yes, our beds of kale, carrots, and onions are doing just fine. More to say about that next month.

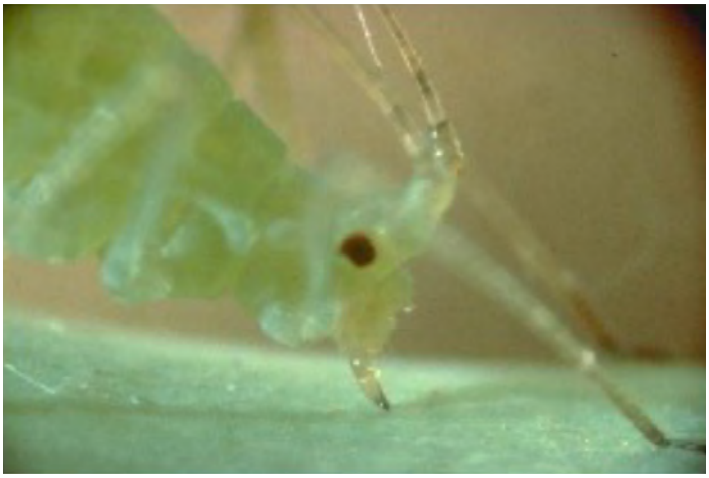
'Bug' of the Month

Sap Sucking Insects

by Caroline O'Hara, Master Gardener

Sap suckers are a group of 'bugs' from the Hemiptera family. They are soft-bodied and, while very small, can be seen with the naked eye. Common sap sucking insects in the urban landscape include aphids, mealybugs, psyllids, whiteflies, scales, and thrips.

While some are easily visible, some require closer inspection. Holding a piece of white paper under the foliage and shaking it can sometimes aid in insect detection and identification. These insects feed by piercing the leaf surface and inserting their sucking mouthpart to feed, as shown in the photo below of an aphid from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension:



Sap sucking insect

Damage to plants from sap sucking insects is varied, and close inspection of the foliage (both the top side and undersides of leaves) is often needed to identify the pest. Yellowing, curling, and stunted leaf growth can be observed, as can a stippled pattern from where the insects have pierced the leaves.

Honeydew is a sticky substance that these insect types excrete and will make the plant look shiny and feel sticky. This can lead to sooty mold, a black fungus that grows on the sugars in the honeydew and covers the leaves, inhibiting photosynthesis. As sooty mold is a symptom of the pest infestation, control should focus on the pests. Sooty mold can be rubbed off, and once the pest infestation decreases, often dries up and flakes off or is washed away by rain.

If not caught early, sap sucking insect infestations can quickly get out of hand. In the spring, warmer temperatures support growing aphid populations. Oleander aphids are yellow-bodied and often found feeding on milkweed through the spring and summer, although they do not damage the plant and therefore do not generally require action. Use extreme caution if trying to remove the aphids, as anything you spray could harm monarchs and other beneficial insects.

Oleander aphids *Photo courtesy UMN Extension*

Brown ambrosia aphids and green peach aphids are also commonly seen in the landscape, feeding on many different vegetable plants and flowers.

***cont'd** on pg. 16*

Green peach aphids *Photo by David Cappaert, Michigan State University, bugwood.org*

Sap Sucking Insects, *cont'd from pg. 15*

Brown ambrosia aphids *Photo courtesy UNM Extension*

Integrated pest management (IPM) measures use chemical control as a last resort. Additionally, it is important to remember that the goal is not to eliminate pests; by allowing pests to be present, you encourage beneficial insect populations to help control the pests. This is biological control and is highly effective. Ladybeetles are a main predator of whiteflies, and lacewing larvae can help control aphid populations, as can other predatory insects.

By scouting and monitoring your plants, you can identify and act before chemical control is needed. Cultural and mechanical controls are also effective methods for controlling sap sucking insects. A blast of water can knock off aphids, but be careful which direction you are spraying, and how strong the spray is depending on the plant. Proper fertilization and watering are also important to keep the plant healthy; improper fertilization can make plants more attractive to aphids.

If chemical control is deemed necessary, insecticidal soaps can be used to dissolve the insect's waxy covering and cell membranes, killing the insect. Other effective chemicals are oils such as neem or horticultural oils. These work by covering the insect body, suffocating it. Because these are contact pesticides, care must be taken to spray the insects – sometimes, this might be on the underside of leaves. Use proper PPE and read the chemical label, even when using organic pesticides.

References
https://landscapeipm.tamu.edu/
https://citybugs.tamu.edu/factsheets/landscape/sapfeed/
https://plantdiseasehandbook.tamu.edu/problems-treatments/problems-affecting-multiple-crops/sooty-mold/
https://extension.umn.edu/yard-and-garden-insects/aphids#garden-aphids-316410

Home Grown Podcast

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_/

https://bit.ly/3w4cUAR

HOME GROWN PODCAST
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Harris County
GARDENING HORTICULTURE URBAN AGRICULTURE

Growing with Plants and Nature

Growing with Plants and Nature offers children and their families opportunities for learning about gardening and nature through hands-on activities and lessons focused on plants and the creeping, crawling, and flying creatures with whom the plants share the natural environment.

We provide programs to community organizations, plant sales, fairs, farmer's markets, and other events.

As these pictures illustrate, our committee enjoyed encouraging and guiding children in a range of activities over the last month. These include:

Enjoying harvesting and new planting at the Friends of Northside gardening program during the month.

Teaching about seeds and how to plant them during 2 days at the "Woodchase Park" Spring Break Fun".

Encouraging creativity through painting rocks at the Towne Lake Farmers Market.

Contributing to an LGEG (Learn, Grow, Eat & GO!) training program for Early Childhood Educators by sharing knowledge about gardening with children and displaying and describing some of our gardening and nature "hands on" projects.

Preparing and handing out "Grab and Go" bags for the Northwest, Berry Center and Genoa Friendship Garden plant sales.

Contributing to the success of our programs included Julee Jackson, Diane Walker, Lois Pierce, Karen Kabacinski, Vanessa Maciel, Pam Jackson, Blanca Elder, Rita Whipple, Toni Lawrence, Regina Gardner, Marcia Braschayko, Celeste Germany, Allen Hentges, Liz Possi, Vicki Brooks, Pat Whipple and Linda Persse.

Ask A Master Gardener Online

by the AAMGO Committee

Q: Hello. We have a baby fig tree that we bought and planted a couple of years ago. It seems to have been damaged during multiple nights of freezing temperatures this winter. We did cover it up, but like I said it seems to have been damaged. There are a bunch of sprouts and new growth down at the bottom near the base of the tree. But the branches all seem to be dead. What should we do?

A: Thank you so much for contacting the Harris County Master Gardeners with your question. Thankfully it looks like your tree did survive the freeze, so that is great to see.

When dealing with situations like this, what you have to do first is determine if the top of the tree is indeed dead. Scrape the bark gently. If there is green underneath then you have live tissue and will just have to be patient. Sometimes the freeze will delay trees in terms of their leafing out in the spring.

If you have brown wood at the top, then follow the bark back down towards the base of the tree until you find green wood. At that point you can prune the trunk a couple of inches above the green. I know it seems drastic, but you will be doing your tree a favor by cutting away the dead part of the trunk.

Figs are often a multi-trunked tree, so do not be concerned about the multiple branches emerging from the lower part. These will all mature and bear fruit; in fact, many people prefer for their figs to have multiple trunks for increased fruiting.

To quote from the handout, *Texas Fruit and Nut Production – Fig* . "In years when figs are frozen to the ground, they typically respond by sending up a multitude of new shoots. Once shoots are about two feet high, select five or six strong shoots to be kept as new trunks." (this publication can be downloaded from *AgriLife Learn* to read in its entirety) What you are seeing with your tree is perfectly normal, and your tree should be fine.

If it is any consolation, I had to do this exact method for my container fig. I pruned it to about three feet tall, and the end result was much better than the original single trunk tree. I now have a healthy tree with multiple branches and the opportunity to harvest more figs.

I hope the publication on fig care will be helpful for you, and this *AgriLife* resource, with questions and answers regarding growing figs in Texas, is another great source. Good luck with your fig tree!

Q: I have a crepe myrtle that is 20+ years old. Recently found black patches around the area that was trimmed. I used systemic granules. Could I use Diazinon? Attached are two images. Hope you can tell me what this is and course of treatment.

A: I am sorry to see that you are having issues with your Crape Myrtles. The photos show that you are dealing with a common situation that can affect our trees.

Black sooty mold forms on the sugary "honeydew" excreted by piercing-sucking insect pests that feed on plant phloem. These insects include aphids, scale, whiteflies, mealybugs and plant hoppers. The sooty mold will eventually wash or flake off the plant leaves and twigs once the insects are controlled. If you prefer, you can wash the sooty mold off the trunk of your trees using a sponge and some gentle soapy water. This *article link from LSU regarding sooty mold* is very informative.

We don't know exactly what insects are feeding on your Crape Myrtles, but the most likely suspects are aphid or Crape Myrtle Bark Scale. Aphids are more of a nuisance, but bark scale will need attention. The bark scale creates a lot of honeydew, so the black sooty mold covering will be much heavier than you might typically see with aphids. This insect pest is

cont'd on pg. 19

If you are a Harris County MG, interested in volunteering for AAMG Online and want to be trained, please contact coordinator.harrishort@gmail.com .

Ask a Master Gardener – In-Person Activities

by Margie DiGiacomo, 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.

Prospective volunteers and interns: if you see that an event is full and it is one that you would really like to attend, please reach out to Margie DiGiacomo so that we can add you to the volunteer list. Please remember that we want to provide as many opportunities for you to earn your hours and interact with the public!

The SignUp is available here: *https://signup.com/group/7369887112200440118*

The full AAMG schedule for April

Sat., Apr. 1 **Mercer Botanic Gardens**, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble, 77338 – 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Urban Harvest, 2752 Buffalo Speedway, Houston 77027 – 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Sun., Apr. 2 **147th Attack Wing Family Day event, Ellington Field Joint Reserve Base**, 11210 Blume Ave, Houston 77034 – 10:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m.

Tues., Apr. 4 **North East Community Center Health Fair**, 10918 Bentley St, Houston 77093 – 10:00 a,m. to 3:00 p.m.

Sat., Apr. 8 **Tomball Farmers Market**, 205 West Main St., Tomball, 77375 – 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. .

Sat., Apr. 15 **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
Southeast Perennial & Pepper Sale, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston 77034 – 9 a.m to 1 p.m

Mon., Apr. 17 **GFG Open Garden Day**, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston 77034 – 8:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Thurs., Apr. 20 **Westchase Farmer's Market**, 10503 Westheimer Rd., Houston, 77042 – 3 to 7 p.m.

Sat., Apr. 22 **Memorial Villages Farmers Market,** 10840 Beinhorn Rd., Houston 77024 – 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.
2023 Dellrose Spring Flowers, Dellrose Clubhouse, 17312 Springfield Meadow Drive – Noon to 4 p.m.

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

Ask a Master Gardener Online, *cont'd from pg. 18*

relatively new to our country, but it has been spreading rapidly throughout the southern states.

Scale insects are attracted to pruning wounds. Bark scale presents as white, somewhat waxy looking crusts that are a protective covering for the insects. When these are crushed, a pinkish substance will ooze out from them. It appears from one of the photos that you do have some of these white patches on the bark, so check them carefully to assess whether they are indeed scale insects.

The usual treatments to control phloem feeding insects would be insecticidal soaps, horticultural oils, synthetic contact pesticides, and systemic insecticides that are watered in. Any treatment needs to be applied carefully, according to the directions on the label, and at the right time so as not to harm bees or other beneficial insects. Keep in mind that any systemic insecticide will kill the bees that feed on the flowers, so we advise stripping off flowers, if possible, this year to protect our much-needed pollinators.

The article *Crapemyrtle Bark Scale* from Clemson University and an article from Texas A&M Extension Service, *Tree Health Issues: Crapemyrtle Bark Scale* gives a good discussion of the problem and specific methods for control. If you are not sure about treating the trees yourself, finding a certified arborist might be the best way to go. The website, *TreesAreGood*, has a feature where you can search for certified arborists in our area.

I hope you are able to restore your crape myrtle to good health!

Recipe of the Month

Layered Roasted Beet and Orange Salad

by Jo Ann Stevenson, Master Gardener (and foodie)

You know when you have a bumper harvest or go to the farmers market and see all the lovely produce? Do you ever wonder, "what can I make with this?" This new monthly article is intended to showcase seasonal produce from your garden, your local farmers market or even the grocery store, and give you a new idea on how to enjoy it.

This month's feature is Layered Roasted Beet and Orange Salad, first published by Lisa Leake on *100 Days of Real Food*®[1]. Beets, oranges and spinach are all in season right now and this is a refreshing way to serve them. I first ate a beet salad at Fratelli's Restaurant in Spring Branch and it was love at first bite! Their version includes strawberries, arugula and a balsamic reduction drizzled on top.

This salad contains 4g protein, 3g fiber and almost half your daily requirement of Vitamin C per serving. If you don't particularly like red beets, then try golden beets for a milder flavor, or use avocado instead.

Why not try something different this month?

Texas is one of the largest producers of fresh fruits and vegetables in the U.S.[2] There is always something in season, and this salad just can't be "beet".

[1] www.100daysofrealfood.com/roasted-beet-and-orange-salad
[2] Texas Department of Agriculture, www.texasagriculture.gov

Layered Roasted Beet and Orange Salad

6 Servings

INGREDIENTS

2 large oranges (peeled)
2 medium red beets (roasted, peeled, and trimmed)
3 ounces goat cheese log (stored in the freezer)
1 handful fresh spinach leaves
4 chives (chopped)
1 tablespoon olive oil
Salt (to taste)

INSTRUCTIONS

Prep for beets and goat cheese

1. Roast the beets loosely in foil for 45 to 75 min at 400 degrees. Peel and trim, then put aside.
2. Place the goat cheese in the freezer for 30 - 40 minutes before you start the salad prep.

Prepare the salad

1. Cut the oranges and the beets into about 12 thin slices, placing them on separate plates (to avoid the transfer of the beet juice).
2. Thinly slice the almost frozen goat cheese log into 12 pieces.
3. Layer the slices on a platter in this order: orange, beet, goat cheese, 1 or 2 spinach leaves. Repeat until all ingredients have been used.
4. Sprinkle the chives on top, drizzle with olive oil, season with salt, and serve.

Notes: 100 Days of Real Food ® recommends organic ingredients when feasible.

Jo Ann's roasted beet and orange salad

Nutrition Facts
Layered Beet & Orange Salad

Amount Per Serving	
Calories 113	Calories from Fat 54
	% Daily Value*
Fat 6g	9%
Saturated Fat 2g	13%
Cholesterol 7mg	2%
Sodium 100mg	4%
Potassium 323mg	9%
Carbohydrates 13g	4%
Fiber 3g	13%
Sugar 10g	11%
Protein 4g	8%
Vitamin A 800IU	16%
Vitamin C 37.2mg	45%
Calcium 58mg	6%
Iron 0.9mg	5%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2000 calorie diet.

Tips

- Wear gloves while handling beets to avoid turning your hands red.
- The goat cheese will crumble when you slice it if you freeze it less than 40 minutes; use the extra crumbles as a topping.
- Beets can be roasted in the microwave if you are short on time (puncture first so they don't explode!): https://www.healthy-beets.com/fresh-beets.html

Recipe courtesy of 100 Days of Real Food
www.100daysofrealfood.com

Genoa Friendship Gardens

The Flower Trial Garden

The Water Garden

The Greenhouse

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Harris County Master Gardeners invite you to join us at

The Genoa Friendship Gardens

located at
1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road
Houston, Texas 77034

Weekly Garden Hours: Open all year round, Monday and Wednesday mornings, 9 a.m.-11a.m. (weather permitting).

We welcome professional organizations, schools, churches, and individuals tours of the garden! If interested in a tour, please email Lili Bauerlein, Program Coordinator at lilianna.bauerlein@ag.tamu.edu.

Open Garden Days

are on the 3rd Monday of the month, March ***through*** October, 8:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
Admission to the Exhibit Gardens is free, and register at the Welcome Table to receive additional monthly notices for children and family events.

- Tour the variety of exhibits to inspire you with vegetable, perennial, rose, tropical and native gardens.
- Visit our Ask a Master Gardener table for information about planting citrus, fruit or berries for your home orchard, or planting your vegetable garden.
- Contemplate the joy in the Earth-Kind Garden and catch a view of the Water Garden.
- Don't leave the GFG until you have shopped the Greenhouse where seasonal herbs, vegetables and perennials are available for sale until September.

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.

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

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.

Green Thumb 2023 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 9 – *Soil and Food Web*
February 13 – *Spring Vegetable Gardening*
March 20 – *Benefits of Growing Native Plants*
April 10 – *Tips for Great Lawns*
May 8 – *Gardening with Less Water*
June 12 – *Pollinator Gardening*
July 10 – *Fall Vegetable Gardening*
August 14 – *Exploring Ethnic Vegetables*
September 11 –*Growing Roses in Texas*
October 9 – *Trees and Tree Care*

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 17 – *Soil and Food Web*
February 21 – *Spring Vegetable Gardening*
March 21 – *Benefits of Growing Native Plants*
April 18 – *Tips for Great Lawns*
May 16 – *Gardening with Less Water*
June 20 – *Pollinator Gardening*
July 18 – *Fall Vegetable Gardening*
August 15 – *Exploring Ethnic Vegetables*
September 19 – *Growing Roses in Texas*
October 17 – *Trees and Tree Care*

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.

MG of the Month - *Julie Blanchard*

by Karen Breneman, Master Gardener

Congratulations! Julie Blanchard grew up in a small town in Missouri. Her grandparents owned a farm where Julie was exposed to vegetable gardening and canning! That farm kept her family provided with farm fresh milk, butter, eggs, a freezer full of beef and pork and jars and jars of canned vegetables. Her grandmother's beautiful flower garden was well known in the area and provided flowers for many weddings and special events.

Julie Blanchard

Julie moved to Texas where she met and married her husband, Randy, and raised three boys. She taught middle school in HISD and currently is the Office Manager for her husband's business, Structural Wood Components and works part-time for her church, Grace Community Church in Spring Valley.

Once her children were grown and left the nest and Covid provided more time at home, she found time to enter the Harris County Master Gardening program and learn a great deal about gardening in Texas. She began investing her time and knowledge creating her own backyard oasis where she and her husband enjoy their down time watching birds, butterflies and bees make themselves at home. She began volunteering at Centennial Gardens where she met Master Gardener, Marisol Arteaga, who introduced her to the Cylinder Gardening program and its amazing team of volunteers who are dedicated to providing supplies and resources to Harris County educators to expose students of all ages to gardening. She is currently co-chairing the Cylinder Gardening Committee.

"While my main objective was to develop my gardening knowledge, I had no idea how much fun I would have getting to know other Master Gardeners through volunteering and getting involved in HCMGA 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*.

Thank you in advance for your nomination!

For Harris County Master Gardeners Only!

April 8th
GFG Saturday Workdays

8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Houston TX

Please email Jonathan Correia at *jonathan@jonathancorreia.com* or text to *832-687-5604* if you would like to work at GFG on a Saturday.

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

If you would like to receive new editions of the ***Urban Dirt*** newsletter each month, please add your name to the mailing list ***HERE***.

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

Angela Bygyargeon, Ann Corbut, Valerie Depew, Diane Hosmer, Philip John, Jessica Marish-Jarl, Gabby Matringe, Cindy Moore, Mary Stokman and Patrick Whipple

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

Gardening Tools

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

Vegetable Garden Planting Dates

for Harris County

Texas AgriLIFE Extension Service
Harris County Office
713-274-0950
https://harris.agrilife.org/hort/

Ideal Planting Time | Marginal Planting Time

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

Average Last Freeze Dates (Hobby 2/8,Bush 3/1) ↑ ↑

Average First Freeze Dates (Bush 11/30, Hobby 12/20) ↑ ↑

Plants grown over winter may require protection during freezing weather.

Seeds and transplants started in the heat of summer will benefit from shading during establishment.

Download the Vegetable Garden Planting Guide

English Spanish/Espanol Mandarin

Texas A&M AgriLife
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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 Will Isbell at *mcg.harrishort@gmail.com*, if you are interested in attending.

Genoa Friendship Garden

1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Houston 77034

Weekday Workdays 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Every Monday and Wednesday we are working in the a variety of gardens. They include a large vegetable production garden and Texas AgriLife research plant trial beds. Feel free to drop in to get service hours!

Weekend Workdays 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Join us every 2nd and 4th Saturday at our Weekend Workdays. These are opportunities for Interns and MGs to learn and work in a variety of gardens. ***Please contact Jonathan Correia at jonathan@jonathancorreia.com or text to 832-687-5604 to confirm work day schedule.***

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