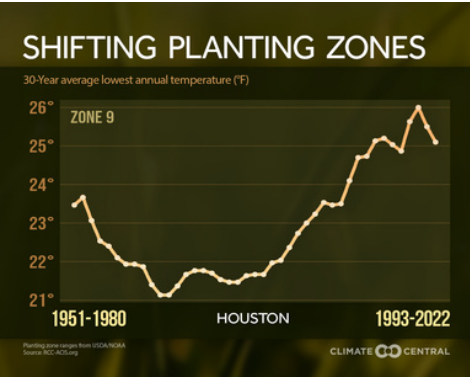
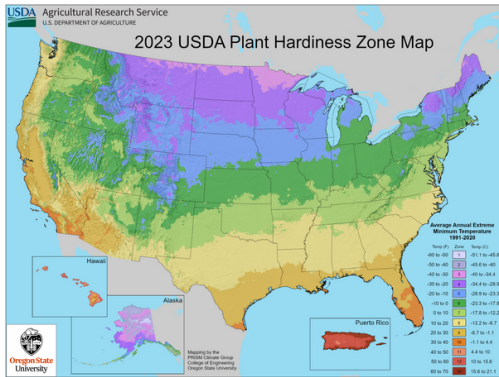


Urban Dirt

Gardening Events and Information for Harris County

USDA UPDATES PLANT HARDINESS ZONE MAP

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener



Climate change is happening, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released an updated Plant Hardiness Zone Map (PHZM) on November 15, 2023. The PHZM had not been revised since 2012. Growers and other agencies use the PHZM to see which plants will do well in particular areas. In partnership with Oregon State University (OSU), the updated map has more information than previous versions. The USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map website planthardiness.ars.usda.gov has a “Tips for Growers” section that includes “How to Use the Maps,” “Weed Your Garden,” “Soil Health,” and “Gardening Tips”.

The new map uses 30-year averages of the lowest annual winter temperatures in certain zones. Instead of using data from 7, 983 weather stations for the 2012 map, the updated map collected data from nearly twice the number of weather stations. The new interactive layout is user-friendly. Frequent users of the PHZM include home and commercial growers and other agencies as well. One government agency uses the designations to determine crop insurance guidelines. Scientists rely on the zones for their research.

continued on page 4



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

Upcoming EVENTS

Plant Sales Green Thumb Gardening Series
Educational Programs Public Gardening Lectures

JAN 8 10AM -11:30PM, INTRO TO AQUAPONICS
HOUSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE @HOME GARDENING SERIES REGISTER IN ADVANCE TO RECEIVE THE LINK: [HTTPS://HCC.IDLOOM.EVENTS/GARDENING-SERIES/REGISTER](https://hcc.idloom.events/gardening-series/register)

JAN 9 FIRST TUESDAY 11AM-12:30PM LECTURE: CITRUS TREES! WITH JANIS TEAS
FROM TDA AT TRINI MENDENHALL COMMUNITY CENTER 1414 WIRT RD HOUSTON

JAN 13 11AM NATIVE PLANTS BY ROBIN YATES
BOOKER T. WASHINGTON HIGH SCHOOL 4204 YALE ST HOUSTON

JAN 16 11AM-12PM INTRO TO AQUAPONICS
HARRIS COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY FACEBOOK LIVE
[HTTPS://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/HARRISCOUNTYPL/EVENTS/](https://www.facebook.com/harriscountypub/events/)

JAN 18 10AM INTERNATIONAL VEGETABLES GROWN LOCALLY BY TERESA SEE,
GLAZIER SENIOR EDUCATION CENTER 16600 PINE FOREST LN HOUSTON

JAN 23 10AM RAINWATER HARVESTING BY TERESA SEE
STEVE RADACK COMMUNITY CENTER 18650 CLAY RD HOUSTON

JAN 24 11:30AM SPRING GARDENING BY VALERIE DEPEW
WEEKLEY COMMUNITY CENTER 8840 GREENHOUSE RD CYPRESS

JAN 25 10AM SHADE GARDENING BY DEBRA CALDWELL
GLAZIER SENIOR EDUCATION CENTER 16600 PINE FOREST LN HOUSTON

 **JAN 27 9 AM TO 1 PM PLANT SALE ALABONSON PARK**
9650 N. HOUSTON ROSSLYN HOUSTON 77088

 **FEB-15 ONLINE PLANT SALE [HTTPS://HCMGA.TAMU.EDU/SHOP/](https://hcmga.tamu.edu/shop/)**

FEB 6 FIRST TUESDAY 11AM-12:30PM MEETING
TRINI MENDENHALL COMMUNITY CENTER 1414 WIRT RD HOUSTON

FEB 7 6PM SPRING VEGETABLE GARDENING BY ROBIN YATES
PASADENA PUBLIC LIBRARY FAIRMONT BRANCH 4330 FAIRMONT PKWY PASADENA

FEB 12 10-11:30AM SUCCESS WITH SPRING VEGETABLES
HCC @HOME GARDENING SERIES REGISTER IN ADVANCE TO RECEIVE THE LINK:
[HTTPS://HCC.IDLOOM.EVENTS/GARDENING-SERIES/REGISTER](https://hcc.idloom.events/gardening-series/register)

FEB 15 1PM ROSES BY MARIA BURGER
WEEKLEY COMMUNITY CENTER 8440 GREENHOUSE RD CYPRESS

 **FEB 17 9-1PM IN-PERSON PLANT SALE AND ORDER PICKUP**
GENOA FRIENDSHIP GARDEN 1210 GENOA RED BLUFF, HOUSTON

FEB 20 11AM-12PM SUCCESS WITH SPRING VEGETABLES HARRIS COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY
FACEBOOK LIVE [HTTPS://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/HARRISCOUNTYPL/EVENTS/](https://www.facebook.com/harriscountypub/events/)

FEB 22 10AM SPRING VEGETABLE GARDENING BY TERESA SEE
GLAZIER SENIOR EDUCATION CENTER 16600 PINE FOREST LN HOUSTON



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

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CEA- Horticulture
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HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

2024 SPRING PLANT SALES

WEST SIDE SALE

**FRUIT TREES
CITRUS**

**January 27th
9 am to 1 pm**

In-Person Sales Only

NEW LOCATION!

**ALABONSON PARK
9650 N. HOUSTON
ROSSYLN RD.
HOUSTON, TX 77088**

2 Sales - 2 Locations!
Fruit Trees & Tomatoes
Citrus available West Side only

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



SOUTHEAST SALE

**FRUIT TREES
TOMATOES**

February 1st - 15th

Online sales:
hcmga.tamu.edu/shop/

**February 17th
9 am to 1 pm**

**In-person sale and
online order pickup**

**GENOA FRIENDSHIP
GARDEN
1210 GENOA RED BLUFF
HOUSTON 77034**



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

www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners



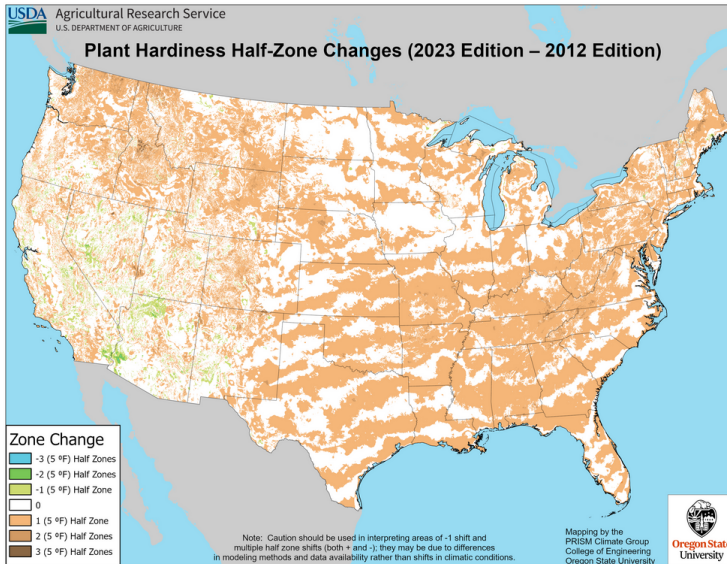
Visit us at these social media pages:

Harris County Extension Horticulture Facebook Page

Harris County Master Gardeners Facebook Page

Harris County Family and Community Health Facebook Page

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

Plant Hardiness Zone Map continued from page 1

The map has 13 zones that include the United States and its territories. The zones are subdivided into half zones using alphabet letters A and B. You can get a detailed map of our area at <https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/page/s/map-downloads> Texas is in the South Central Area. Scroll down to the Regional section. Choose either the Regional 150 dpi or the Regional 300 dpi. Click on the South Central option to see the zones for Texas. Houston and most of our surrounding area is now zone 9b.

A total of 242 locations were monitored for input on the new PHZM. A 3.3 degree increase was noted in 231 of the 242 areas. As the U.S. continues to heat up, it is causing the PHZM to shift to the north. If this rise continues, private and commercial growers will need to choose plants accordingly. Here in Houston our last two summers have been scorches. I know several local gardeners who had reduced vegetable and fruit crops. Most of my plants are ornamental, but I did lose some. The bulk of my plants are in pots so I started moving some under my carport when I saw the heat was getting to them. A few of them made it, but didn't look good. The rest just passed away from heat stroke. I'm hoping some of those will come back from their roots in the spring, but I won't get my hopes up.

If you don't know where the micro-climates are in your yard, now is a good time to look for them. A micro-climate is an area where the soil, the water drain off, shade, or physical barriers can make that particular spot either cooler or warmer than other areas in your yard. An indoor/outdoor thermometer can help you determine where these places are, or you may already know just from observation. For example, a low spot on the north side that holds water longer or a brick wall or fence that blocks the north wind. That nook on the eastern side of your house the gardenias like. That spot in the back forty that has soil as hard as a rock and rocks under the soil. You know the spot –it's the one that nearly broke your shovel and your back. Use your outdoor thermometer and move it to different areas in the yard. Keep a daily log of the temperatures for at least a week or two. Record the temperature of different spots in your yard. You may want to check them in the warmer and the cooler months. Some of these locations may be closer to zone 9, or maybe even zone 8b. Others may be closer to zone 10. Knowing your microclimates can help you determine if your plants are in the right location that allows them to thrive and reach their full potential. Our climate is slowly changing and we need to adapt as well.

Growing with Plants and Nature

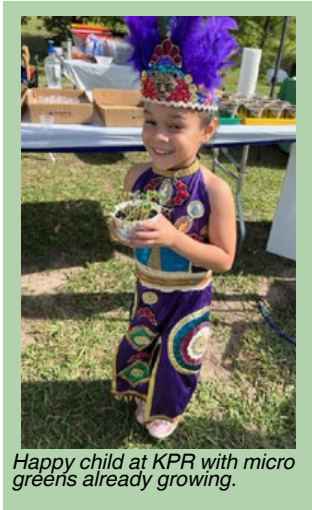
Article and photos by Regina Gardner, Master Gardener

Our Growing with Plants and Nature team is proud of the year we have just completed. Our role in the annual KBR Kids Day at Buffalo Bayou was a strong finish. We received excellent reviews from the families we served and the Buffalo Bayou Partnership staff.

Our final event of the year was at Towne Lake Farmers Market. As always, we worked alongside AAMG, enjoying the camaraderie and support.



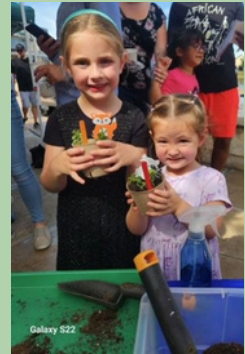
Examples at KBR of showing how children can reuse containers for growing any type of micro greens.



Happy child at KPR with micro greens already growing.



Master Gardener Liem Nguyen helping a child plant lettuce seeds at the Towne Lake Market.



Galaxy 522



Master Gardener Myra Jefferson with children at Towne Lake Market showing the pot with lettuce seeds they just planted.

Following a break in December, we are looking forward to next year. Our start will be returning to the annual MLK Peace Through Pie Celebration. For this family-oriented event, we will offer children a chance to plant herbal microgreens, and to learn how to grow their own sweet potato slips from sweet potatoes.

Some new members were welcomed on our GPN team. The enthusiasm and interest of Master Gardner students and interns will add new ideas and energy as we have the opportunity to work together.

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, farmers markets, and other events.



Native Plant Spotlight

Virginia Sweetspire - Itea virginica

Article and photos by Robin Yates, Master Gardener

I'd like to start the new year by introducing you to a long blooming, white understory shrub. It's commonly called Virginia Sweetspire, Tassel-white, and Virginia Willow. This is a plant I have grown for 6 years in full sun, in my back yard, and have grown to love it more each year.

My wife and I fell in love with the almond aroma emanating from the vibrant white blooms, when we happened upon it in Buchanan's Native Nursery. It was a small, one-gallon shrub at that time. As an understory shrub that is used to growing under larger trees, it prefers part shade. However, mine has thrived in full sun throughout the day. It can handle Houston summers, just be sure to supplement with water in dry spells.

I enjoy standing next to it, smelling the almond fragrance, and watching the pollinators buzzing around, just enjoying themselves! Mine has done well as a solitary planting, but the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center Database suggests that it does best in group plantings.



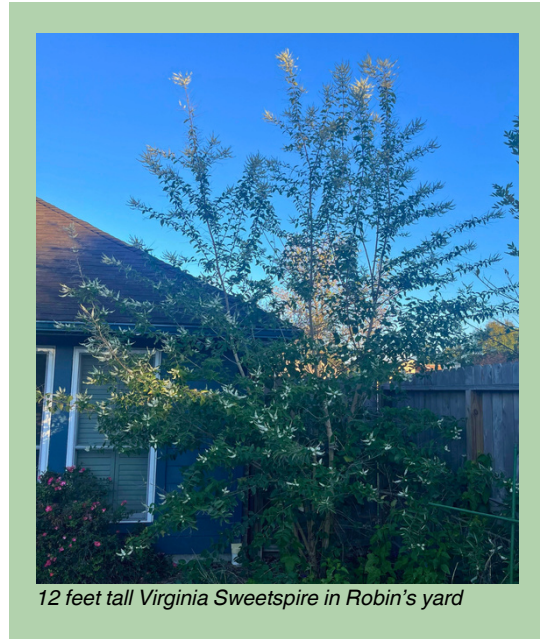
Virginia Sweetspire vibrant white blooms

A row of them could make up a beautiful visual screen at your property line, or as a wind break. Used this way, it provides visual attractiveness to us and habitat for the wildlife. Omitting the understory layer is one of the blaring mistakes we make following conventional landscaping guidelines. If you look at natural woodland edges, the spaces are filled in with plants. It is only in what I call disturbed, or human-designed landscaping, that you find turfgrass with a solitary tree or shrub, or less. Nature fills space and gives your yard a sense of place that can be calming and smile provoking!

continued on page 7

continued from page 6

Itea virginica prefers slightly acidic soil, yet it has done well in my yard which is neutral to slightly alkaline, typical for our area. It does best in well-drained soil but is not picky on the type of soil. I have been mulching my yard with hardwood mulch and my neighbor's leaves for years and haven't used any fertilizer. I adhere to the mulch in place or 'chop & drop' technique. If it is possible, I mulch the branches and blooms from a plant back into the soil it is growing in. Many of the nutrients it will require next year are in the parts of the plant that get pruned, so it saves money and time while providing a natural blanket for the plants roots during weather extremes, and habitat for overwintering pollinators! That is a win-win situation for sure:)



12 feet tall Virginia Sweetspire in Robin's yard

Virginia Sweetspire is a deciduous perennial and grows to 3-6 feet, but you can see from the photo that mine is around 12 feet tall, and that is typical now that it is well established. You can also see that it is blooming in December, when I took these pictures, thus it has a longer bloom time here in our gulf coast moderated climate. The database says that the foliage turns red in the fall, but mine has not demonstrated that particular attribute.

So, I hope you will consider adding a Virginia Sweetspire to your yard. It is an attractive, pleasantly aromatic, and pollinator friendly landscaping option. I have never regretted giving it a prominent corner of our yard to thrive in.

Next month I hope to provide an article Carolyn Boyd suggested I write when I was an intern. It has taken me 2 years to get to this point, yet I think that now I can tell you how I built a native plant landscaping bed at GFG. Stay tuned for the March/April edition of this wonderful newsletter!

Reference:

*Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center Database for *Itea virginica**

https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=ITVIhttps://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=ITVI

Recipe Spotlight

Lentil Soup

by Jo Ann Stevenson,
Master Gardener (and foodie)



A good soup takes the chill off in winter, doesn't it? Even though our Southeast Texas winters aren't as frigid as those in, say, Iowa, it's still cold to us! What could be better on a cold January or February day than a nice bowl of hot soup?

Lisa Eck from A Moveable Feast Cafe & Health Food Store (1) has generously shared her Lentil Soup recipe with us. This soup takes advantage of the abundant root crops and aromatic vegetables, such as potatoes, carrots, celery, onion, and garlic, that we have year-round. Notice the mirepoix of carrots, celery,

and onion, which forms the base of this delicious soup (a little healthier because the vegetables are not cooked in oil). The potatoes give that comfort food sensation, and the lentils give us that needed protein boost and satiates our appetite (fills our tummies and helps us feel satisfied without weighing us down). This soup is perfect with hot buttered bread or cornbread to make a complete meal. It's also a good way to help you keep that new year's resolution of eating healthier.

I hope you will make this soup to warm you up after a morning of pruning your roses or prepping your beds for spring planting. And remember to support our local small businesses like Lisa's, as they are the real bread and butter in our community.

Lentil Soup

*Drain and rinse soaked lentils and put into soup pot.
Cover with filtered water to about 2 inches above lentils.
Add everything, except carrots and potatoes.
Boil on low for about 30 minutes, then add carrots and potatoes, and cook until everything is tender.
Enjoy!*

1 You may remember the Feast Summer Salad in the June edition of Urban Dirt that Lisa shared with us (here is a link to that month's newsletter: <https://hcmga.tamu.edu/files/2023/06/2023-06-hcmga-urban-dirt.pdf> A Moveable Feast Cafe & Health Food Store, 9341 Katy Freeway, Houston, TX 77024, AMoveableFeast.com <https://www.amoveablefeast.com/>)

Recipe

- 4 cups brown lentils, soaked overnight**
- 1 cup celery, chopped**
- 1/2 cup onion, chopped**
- 1 tablespoon fresh garlic, chopped**
- 1 tablespoon dried basil**
- 2 teaspoons dried garlic granules**
- 1 teaspoon curry powder (no salt)**
- 2 carrots, chopped small**
- 1 potato, chopped small**
- salt and pepper to taste**



Talavera Pottery

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener



Talavera, a type of Mexican or Spanish pottery, is an offshoot of Majolica pottery which originated in Spain. Majolica pottery was originally made in cobalt blue since that was the most expensive color. It quickly became a favorite among those who could afford it. Only six colors were used: blue, orange, mauve, black, green, and yellow. Typically, the base is not glazed, and it has a maker's mark with the location of creation. Today, only pieces from specific areas are allowed to be called Talavera and it must meet certain standards.

In the 16th century, the skill of making pottery was brought to Mexico by Spain. The town of Puebla was chosen because it was on a well-traveled route, and it also had clay of high quality. As time passed, the Mexican potters used their own surroundings as an influence and created an exclusive style of their own. The pottery became a favorite with the elite in Mexico who used it in their homes and churches. In the 1990s the pottery became standardized. Talavera could only be labeled as such if it was made in Puebla, Mexico, and a few other regions. Animals, flowers, and other Mexican themes were used.



Photo by Terri Simon.

Several steps are used to make Talavera pottery. The clay is shaped and dried, then receives a white glaze. After firing at a high temperature, it is hand painted before being given a lead glaze. At last, the pottery is fired again. You can see Talavera in many shapes. Decorative tiles, vases, plates, bowls, animals-you name it, it can probably be found in a Talavera style.

Continued on page 10

Talavera Pottery Continued

Talavera is available in a wide variety of styles and colors. Photo by Terri Simon



I recently purchased some beautiful, numbered Talavera tiles and brackets. I'm giving some friends their house numbers on the tiles for Christmas presents. There are even Talavera toilet bowls that can be ordered.



Photo by Terri Simon.

The Talavera style has become very popular in the United States and other countries. I fell in love with Talavera pottery because of the bright colors and unique styles. The bulk of my plants are in pots, and I have included several Talavera pots with them. If I could afford it, all the pots would be Talavera. When buying Talavera pottery pots, purchase them from a reputable vendor, You want thick pottery and tiles if they are outside. I will never forget the summer I spent buying cute coffee cup planters from a big box store.

I bought a few each week until winter came. I lost all ten cups because they cracked in the cold. That winter we had no freezes either. The cups were cheaply made, and they all broke into pieces.

Continued on page 11

“ I recently began collecting head pottery. The blue Talavera head on the top shelf was perfect for my collection. ”

Talavera Pottery Continued



*Lots of Talavera animals.
Photos by Terri Simon.*



Butterflies, head pottery, and Dia de Muerte Talavera are popular. Photo by Terri Simon.



*Talavera house number tiles and bracket that purchased for Christmas presents.
Photo by Ana Garcia.*

I have been fortunate because another gardener introduced me to Ana Garcia via Facebook. Ana is the owner of Garcia's Artesanias Mexicanas in Arcola. She has a large variety of Talavera and allowed me to take many of the photos for this article. She took the photo of my Talavera number tiles I'm giving for Christmas. Naturally, I bought myself some Christmas presents from Ana.

Our monthly newsletters are jam-packed with information. The *Urban Dirt* is now indexed by various gardening categories. Go to <https://hcmga.tamu.edu/urban-dirt-index/> to dig deeper into past *Urban Dirt* issues.

If you would like to receive new editions of the *Urban Dirt* newsletter each month, please add your name to the mailing list [HERE!](#)

Bug Spotlight Fungus Gnats

by Debra Caldwell, Advanced
Master Gardener: Entomology

During the colder months of the year our attention may turn to houseplants and starting vegetables and flower seeds for the coming growing season.



The last thing you want to see are fungus gnats (*Orfelia* and *Bradysia* species) hovering over your plant trays and potted plants. These small, dark gray or black flies resemble tiny mosquitoes. Adults are between 1/8 and 1/4 inch long, have a long, slender abdomen, long legs and only one pair of functional wings. The adults are annoying but don't harm houseplants. However, their larvae feed on fungi and other organic matter in soil and will also munch on roots of houseplants.

Each adult female fungus gnat will lay hundreds of eggs on soil or plant tissue in contact with soil during her short lifetime. In about four days, the larvae hatch and begin to feed. The larvae have white bodies and shiny black heads. In addition to damaging roots and causing plants to wilt, the larvae may introduce plant pathogens that cause damping off or other problems.

When you see the annoying little flies, your first question is probably, "Where did they come from?" Potting soil, new house plants, or plants that are brought in from outdoors, all can be sources of fungus gnats. Adult gnats may fly in through doors and windows. The next question is how to get rid of them. Monitoring for fungus gnats will help you assess the degree of infestation. Yellow sticky cards can be used to trap flying adults. Leave small one-inch potato disks on top of soil for about a day to check for larvae. Sticky tape and chunks of potato can also help you remove some of the flies.

Yellow sticky traps can be used to trap flying adults



Bug Spotlight Continued



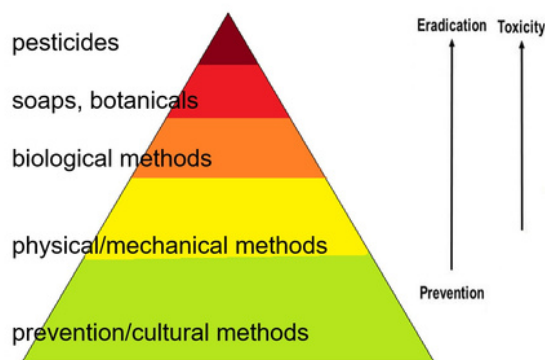
Fungus Gnats can do considerable damage to seedlings. Photo by Debra Caldwell.

To eliminate fungus gnats, you need to get rid of their breeding sites and water less often. The best method for assessing soil moisture is to stick your finger in the soil. If the soil is dry, water the plant. If it's still moist, let the soil dry out. Remove plant debris such as dead leaves and diseased plants. Eliminate standing water—check those saucers! If there is a large infestation, you may need to replot plants in new sterile media.

I have had success eliminating fungus gnats by using a product with *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) subspecies *israelensis* as the active ingredient. The bacteria kill the larvae who ingest them. Beneficial nematodes *Steinernema feltiae* are another type of biological control. The roundworms seek out and gobble up fungus gnat larvae. *Hypoaspis* predatory mites, *Stratiolaelaps scimitus*, live in soil, avoid light, and also feed on the larvae. Chemical control options are available but may not be a good choice in the home. Always read and follow directions on product labels.

Control of fungus gnats is a good example of using Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies by beginning with less invasive and toxic, nonchemical methods. Cultural controls such as letting soil dry between waterings can reduce pest establishment, reproduction, dispersal, and survival. Physical control to eliminate standing water and biological control using natural predators are highly effective. If necessary, we can move up the IPM pyramid with judicious use of chemical substances and pesticides as a last resort.

Pyramid of IPM Methods



References: Horticulture Update: Fungus Gnats by Dr. Carlos Bogran, Assistant Professor, Department of Entomology and Scott Ludwig, Extension Program Specialist in IPM, Texas A&M University https://aggiehort.tamu.edu/newsletters/hortupdate/hortupdate_archives/2004/jan04/Fungusgnat.html

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Publication: Indoor Flies and Their Control by Michael Merchant, Professor and Extension Urban Entomologist, The Texas A&M University System agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/library/insects/indoor-flies-and-their-control/

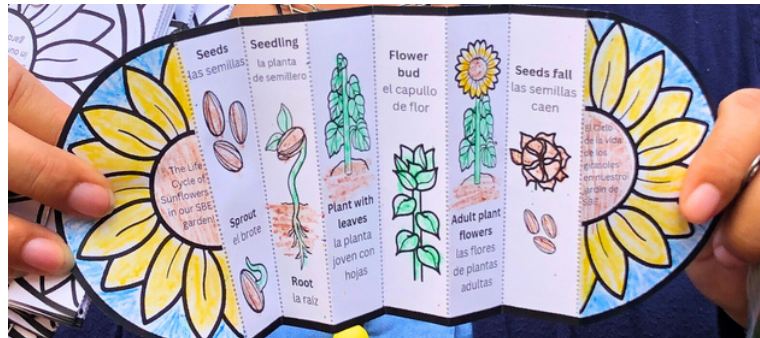
Spring Branch Elementary Garden Fall Update



Article and photos by,
Deb Stutsman, Master Gardener



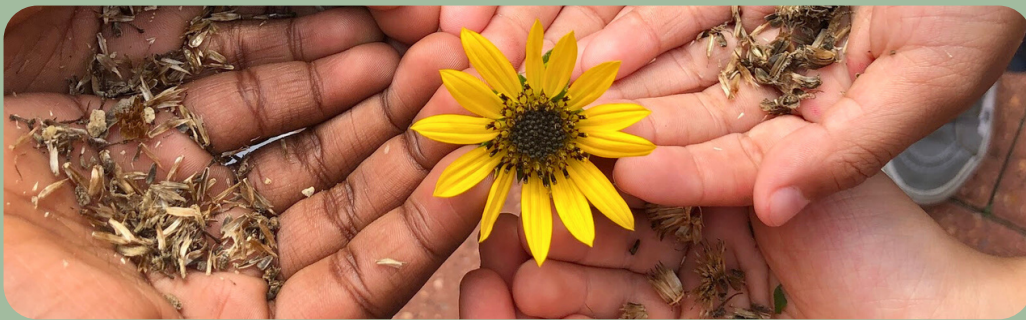
Recycling newspaper under mulch to prevent weeds and conserve moisture.



Kindergarteners learn about the life cycle of our native sunflowers.

Even though this past summer was brutal to most gardens, the Spring Branch Elementary Garden came through it all surprisingly well! Last May we put down seven layers of newspapers or cardboard around plants in all beds, and then covered it with several inches of mulch. We feel this procedure, in addition to pre-dawn watering, helped hold enough moisture to sustain plants through the blazing heat of the day.

We had also added some more native plants, donated by Master Gardener Robin Yates, to our butterfly and pollinator area– the natives did exceptionally well! Thank you to Robin for his generosity and expertise in helping our native areas grow.



Spreading our native sunflower seeds.

September was a month of sizzling garden maintenance. In mid-October, all 3rd grade students were able to plant their broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage plants during science classes. The plants grew quickly and were harvested in late December or early January. Sometimes the cabbage matures in February. The rest of the month was used to prep the other veggie beds with organic, slow-release fertilizer and soil amendments. November was a very busy month in the garden!

Spring Branch Elementary Continued

Kindergarten and Life Skills classes came to the garden for a lesson on the life cycle of sunflowers. Our native sunflowers were making seeds, so students were able to get a handful and imitate nature by scattering them around the garden like the wind blowing them or a bird dropping them. We also made an accordion book of the life cycle for each student to take home, color, and use as a teaching aid to educate their family.

Master Gardener volunteers planted a demonstration garden of healthy greens for fall: kale, Bok choy, mustard, and collard greens, along with some fun and interesting kohlrabi and Brussel sprout plants. The kids and teachers both loved these unusual plants!



Learning how seeds grow and spread.



Fall Veggie Crops

Mid-November brought all first graders to the garden to learn about the life cycle of carrots (biennial life cycle) and plant their carrot seeds. Life Skills classes also planted carrot seeds, scattered lettuce and spinach seeds, and planted bluebonnet plants in our butterfly area.



3rd graders planting cabbage



3rd graders plant their broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage plants.



2nd graders plant 1015Y onion sets.

Spring Branch Elementary Continued



1st graders plant carrot seeds.

Onion sets arrived a little later this year, so all 2nd grade students planted them the first week of December. Students learned about the life cycle of onions, also a biennial life cycle. We are going to experiment with the 2-year life cycles this year by leaving a few carrots and onions in the ground when students harvest their crop to take home and share with their families. In the Spring, 4th graders will have their turn to plant, grow and harvest peppers. 5th graders will grow cherry tomatoes, and Kindergarten students will grow green beans. We are also researching some ethnic veggies and herbs that we can add to our spring garden!

Thank you to our faithful Master Gardener and Intern volunteers this summer and fall:
Bruce Johnson, Christine Byerly, Debra Hart, Toni Lawrence, Jill Miller, Beverly Gibson, Cheryl Tucker, Victoria Polk, Jane Kremer, Allen Hentges, Robbie Sharp, Lisa Rodriguez, Myra Jefferson, Jean LaBelle, Janet Leininger.

They cheerfully shared their time, talents, and knowledge on pleasant Fall days and also in the summer heat by helping with garden maintenance, bed prep, mulching, and working with students.

We couldn't have a successful garden or gardening programs without them! We are always welcoming new volunteers of any experience level. Please, let me know if you would like to join our volunteer friends at the garden!

Ask A Master Gardener Events

- Jan 13 8:30am-1pm Tomball Farmers Mkt 205 West Main St Tomball**
- Jan 13 9:30am- 1pm AAMG Beauty's Community Garden's MLK PEACE through PIE Community Event & Fundraiser Booker T. Washington High School 4204 Yale St Houston**
- Jan 18 3-7pm Westchase Farmers Mkt 10503 Westheimer Rd Houston**
- Jan 20 10am-12pm Mercer Botanic Gardens 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd Humble**
- Jan 27 8:30am- 1pm Memorial Villages Farmers Market 10840 Beinhorn Rd Houston**
- Feb 3 10 am-12pm Mercer Botanic Gardens 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd Humble**
- Feb 3 8am-12pm Urban Harvest 2752 Buffalo Speedway Houston**
- Feb 10 8:30am-1pm Tomball Farmers Mkt 205 West Main St Tomball**
- Feb 15 3-7pm Westchase Farmers Mkt 10503 Westheimer Rd Houston**
- Feb 17 10am-12pm Mercer Botanic Gardens 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd Humble**
- Feb 17 9:30am -4:30pm Towne Lake Farmers Mkt 9955 Barker Cypress Rd Cypress**
- Feb 24 8:30am-1pm, Memorial Villages Farmers Mkt 10840 Beinhorn Rd, Houston**



Jim Rath

Article by Karen Brenemanm,
Master Gardener



Congratulations, Jim Rath!

Jim was born and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas and has four brothers and a sister. He played baseball at Baylor University. Following in his three older brothers' footsteps, he enlisted in the Marine Corps. He was employed by General Stevedores Inc., operators of the Houston Barge Terminal, transferred to Houston in 1972, and later retired after 37 years as a co-owner. He married Susan Hackney, a native Texan from Greenville 45 years ago, and the Lord blessed him with a beautiful wife, three daughters, a stepson, and 12 grandchildren. He played competitive golf for many years, but now is a Master Gardener volunteering at the beautiful Hermann Park McGovern Centennial Family Garden...come join him...it's a great place to volunteer.



Visit us at these social media pages:

- Harris County Extension Horticulture Facebook Page
- Harris County Master Gardeners Facebook Page
- Harris County Family and Community Health Facebook Page



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 in the city

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.


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/

Log on to listen to a recent interview with Master Gardener volunteer Rick Castagno. He shares his experiences at Houston demonstration gardens, and a few stories of what's been grown in the vegetable beds.

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



Getting Down to Earth Christ the Good Shepherd Garden – Spring 77379

Article and photos by Dale Hudson, Master Gardener

Now that all the best wishes for the new year have been graciously received and duly recorded, it is time to translate those wishes into hopes for another great year of gardening. Last year had its share of higher highs and lower lows, but the great thing about gardening, especially vegetable gardening, is you add some mulch, till the soil, and start again with a clean slate.



Look closely to see more than 1,000 young onion slips off to a good start for the season at CGS Garden

At Christ the Good Shepherd, CGS, garden we have put all our chips on the table, i.e. we have planted 100% of our 28 raised beds with winter crops. Right up front we have the Texas AgriLife carrot trials and strawberry trials. This includes some varieties that will be familiar to everyone; ‘Danvers 126’ and ‘Red Cored Chantenay’. Additionally, we are taking a look at ‘Carnival Blend’ and ‘Atomic Red’. If the tastes are as variable as the colors, then we should have some fun come harvest time. For the down-to-earth (pun intended) other 25 raised beds at the garden we have gone with tried and true producers. At the end of the day, our goal is to provide as much fresh produce as possible to the food pantry charities in our area, so we talk regularly with them about what is best received by their recipients.

To wit, we have planted broccoli and cauliflower. We have four beds of ‘Purple Top White Globe’ turnips. We have two beds of ‘Detroit Dark Red’ beets and four beds of carrots. In addition to the ‘Danvers 126’ carrots, we have a bed of ‘Super Sweet’ and two beds of ‘Imperator Long 50’. Although it doesn’t tip the scales in a big way, we also mix in a little ‘Bloomsdale’ spinach and some bibb and romaine lettuces because they look so nice in the garden and in the salad bowls of gardeners as well as pantry folks.

Any beds not used for the above go into our biggest winter crop, our onions. As usual, we have planted more than 1,000 slips of either the ‘1015Y Texas Super Sweet’ or the ‘Southern Belle Red’ varieties. Mother Nature sometimes plays dirty tricks on our winter garden, but our onions have proven to be survivors year after year without fail. We expect no less from this year’s class.



Carrots in the Texas AgriLife trial look healthy in these winter conditions

The Getting Down to Earth News from Genoa Friendship Gardens – Houston, 77034

Article and photos by Pam Longley, Master Gardener

We are thrilled that our own Mary Stokman was elected First Vice-President, Dianne Lawrence Second Vice-President, Kathryn McLeod Director, and Robin Yates Director at the 2024 HCMGA election held at the December First Tuesday Membership Meeting.

Our first plant sale of 2024 will be February 17 for fruit trees and tomatoes.

The perennial trial garden has a ton of returning bluebonnets popping up. In the vegetable production gardens, the snap peas are rising, the carrots are two to four inches tall, the 'Juliets' and '42s' have just started ripening and the Buttercrunch lettuce is ready to pick.

I was talking with Jeanne Dunn, who is giving the Xeriscape garden a big face lift, and I became interested in digging up (sorry) more information on the Saw Palmetto and Barrel Cactus, both in that garden.



Buttercrunch lettuce home-propagated by Doug McCleod



Saw Palmetto

The Saw Palmetto can live to be 500-700 years old and is native to the Southeast U. S. beginning from Louisiana east. The shrub is naturally fire, drought, and insect resistant. It is so adapted to fire it will come back in one week! It has medicinal value in that it has flavonoids, fatty acids, and sterols that raccoons, possums, black bears, and feral pigs add to their diet and promptly spread through their feces. I guess a fast train carrying one of more of these animals made it to Texas. If you want to see wide swathes of Saw Palmetto, be sure to visit Brazos Bend State Park.



Bleeding Heart Vine, that beautifully dramatic Bleeding Heart Vine (*Clerodendrum thomsoniae* 'Delectum') is blooming profusely at GFG. I found out it is originally from tropical West Africa, from Cameroon to Senegal. The Scottish horticulturalist, Robert Brown, is said to have discovered it in the 19th century. It is in the mint family and is also known as Glory-Bleeding Bower.



Samantha, our farm cat



Barrel cactus (above) is considered endangered in the wild due to illegal poaching of mature plants and habitat loss. Until fairly recently, it was only found in one location of about four square miles in Central Mexico.

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 the HCMGA Program Coordinator at coordinator.harrishort@gmail.com

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.



Gardening Calendar

By Karen Shook, Master Gardener

It is time for my annual New Year's resolution to get better at keeping a journal for my gardens. Maybe it should be a daily resolution until it gets to be a habit! Now is a good time to do a soil test so you can get results back and make corrections before spring planting. [Soil Testing https://soiltesting.tamu.edu/](https://soiltesting.tamu.edu/) It is also a good time to start vegetable seeds indoors. Look up best time for placing the plants you want in your garden (see Harris County planting calendar under edibles). Mark your calendar to start seeds allowing enough time for germination and growth to transplant size before time to transplant.

Reminder: Last frost in Zone 8 is typically March 13 to March 28 and last frost in Zone 9 is typically February 6 to February 28. Don't put away your cold weather covers yet. Forecasts show near normal average temperatures (mid 50's) and a reasonable chance of slightly higher than normal rainfall

Perennials and Ornamental Grasses

- Divide fall and summer blooming perennials and ornamental grasses. Cut back brown foliage before lifting, dividing, and replanting.
- Keep mulch over crown and roots of less hardy perennials
- In February, you can plant spring and summer blooming perennials like daylily, canna, daisy.
- In late February, fertilize actively growing perennials.

Annuals

- Start seeds of fast-growing annuals (alyssum, phlox, calendula) in early January for transplant in February. Other February transplants in zone 9 are coneflowers, pansies.
- Start seeds of warm season annuals indoors for planting in March and April.
- Keep the beds mulched and provide a moderate rate of fertilizer.

Bulbs

- The spring bulbs you planted in the fall are probably up and growing. Keep the beds weeded and mulched. Provide a light application of fertilizer for spring blooming bulbs showing active growth.
- Plant gladiolus (and other summer flowering bulbs). Plant gladiolus bulbs every 2 weeks from February through May for successive blooms.

Roses

- January through early February are good times for planting and transplanting roses.
- Finish spring pruning early to middle of February (according to my mother-in-law Valentine's Day is pruning day, but I admit I lean more toward end of January)
- Blackspot may be active if the weather is mild.

Shrubs and Trees

- Plant or transplant trees and shrubs.
- Check shrubs prone to scale (camellia, hollies, euonymus, privets) and apply horticultural oil sprays as needed. Check labels for effective spraying temperatures.
- Prune fruit trees as needed (pruning needs are specific to tree type). Check County Extension Office for pruning guides.
- Late February is a good time to fertilize most trees. You want the nutrients to be available to support spring growth, but don't want to encourage spring growth too early in case of another cold snap.
- Prune summer blooming trees like crape myrtles, chaste trees.

Lawns

- Keep lawn raked so sunlight can find the grass.
- Use preemergent weed herbicide (check label for use!!) or hand pull lawn weeds.

Edibles (vegetables, herbs, berries, fruits)

- See the following link for recommended vegetable planting times: [Harris County Veg Planting Guide https://counties.agrilife.org/harris/files/2019/03/Vegetable-Planting-Chart-2019.pdf](https://counties.agrilife.org/harris/files/2019/03/Vegetable-Planting-Chart-2019.pdf)
- Plan spring vegetable garden. Consider starting some seeds indoors.
- Trim blackberry and blueberry bushes. Check with county extension office for specific pruning advice.

Groundcovers and Vines

- Consider planting ground cover in areas that are difficult to mow or where grass has not done well in the past. Remove vegetation, till the soil, add organic matter to prepare.
- Do not prune spring blooming vines

Green Thumb 2024 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: <https://hcc.idloom.events/gardening-series/register>

Second Monday of each month

- | | |
|---|---|
| January 8 – <i>Intro to Aquaponics</i> | June 10 – <i>Seed Saving and Starting</i> |
| February 12 – <i>Success with Spring Vegetables</i> | July 8 – <i>Fall's Best Vegetable Garden</i> |
| March 18 – <i>Edible Landscaping</i> | August 12 – <i>Growing Bulbs in Texas</i> |
| April 8 – <i>Gardening in Containers</i> | September 9 – <i>Heirloom and Pass-along Plants</i> |
| May 13 – <i>Identifying "Good and Bad" Bugs</i> | October 14 – <i>Gardening for Extreme Weather</i> |

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

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

Third Tuesday of each month

- | | |
|---|--|
| January 16 – <i>Intro to Aquaponics</i> | June 18 – <i>Seed Saving and Starting</i> |
| February 20 – <i>Success with Spring Vegetables</i> | July 16 – <i>Fall's Best Vegetable Garden</i> |
| March 19 – <i>Edible Landscaping</i> | August 20 – <i>Growing Bulbs in Texas</i> |
| April 16 – <i>Gardening in Containers</i> | September 17 – <i>Heirloom and Pass-along Plants</i> |
| May 21 – <i>Identifying "Good and Bad" Bugs</i> | October 15 – <i>Gardening for Extreme Weather</i> |



Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service provides equal opportunities in its programs and employment to all persons, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating. Individuals with disabilities, who require an auxiliary aid, service or accommodation in order to participate in any Extension activities, are encouraged to contact the Harris County Extension Office at 713-274-0950 for assistance five working days prior to the activity.



Ask A Master Gardener Online

by the AAMGO Committee



Q: I'm prepping for next year's tomato and herb garden and I'm looking for information and or advice in a couple areas:

1. Soil amendments for my 18" deep container garden. What type? And when?
2. Tomato varieties? Looking for a good blend of harvest dates. Prefer mostly indeterminates and about half heirloom non-GMO. Probably want a few hybrids for output and beefsteak types. Want varieties that have strong track record in Coastal Harris Co. (Clear Lake 5 miles from Clear Lake/Galveston Bay)
3. Planting schedule? Will try planting from seed this year
4. Seed sources?

Many thanks for your sharing your experience/POV!

A: Thank you for sending in such good questions regarding vegetable gardening in our area. I will try to respond in order, and hope that you will find this information helpful.

1. Soil amendments: Regarding soil amendments, we consistently recommend supplementing your soil for vegetable growing with some good organic compost. This is readily available in the area, but you will be best served by getting good quality compost from an independent nursery or garden center whenever possible. In this article, [How to Use Compost in Gardens and Landscapes](#), you can read how adding organic matter to the soil will increase the beneficial soil microbes that are vital for healthy plants. Compost also helps your soil to retain moisture and consistency.

Making your own compost is also an option. We have an abundant supply of organic material around us to produce compost. On this page from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, [Don't Bag It-Compost It](#), you will find numerous links to the benefits of compost, with directions on how to produce your own. This is part of the Extension Service's Earth-Kind Landscaping program--there are many additional resources here for reading about this approach to growing your garden.

Soil amendments are best applied prior to planting your vegetable garden. January and February are ideal times to add compost to your planting beds. I personally freshen up mine twice a year, in early spring and early fall.



2. Tomato varieties: We are fortunate to have many tomato varieties that do well here. Our Genoa Friendship Demonstration Gardens are located not far from you. At GFG they conduct tomato trials often, and have had good success over the years with the following: AgriLife, Bush Celebrity, Heatwave, Champion, Early Girl, Solar Set, Early Goliath

Cherry tomatoes that perform well include Juliet, Sweet 100, and Yellow Pear. Among indeterminate and determinate varieties, Juliet is always one of the top yielding plants.



As plant breeding continues to evolve, tomato varieties continue to emerge that are more resistant to common tomato problems such as bacterial blight and nematodes. Look for varieties that are tagged as VFNT (variety is resistant to verticillium wilt, fusarium wilt, nematodes, and tobacco mosaic virus) as this will cover most of those more common diseases. Click [HERE](#) for a larger list of vegetable varieties that have been tested and deemed successful in our area.

3. Planting schedule: [HERE](#) is a link to the Texas A & M AgriLife Extension Harris County Planting Calendar. This is our guide to planting crops throughout the year. You will see notations on there that differentiate between planting out by seed or transplants. For example, mid-March is an ideal time to set out tomato transplants. However, those transplants will need to be started from seed very early in January in order to be ready for March.



Tomatoes are best started indoors early in the year, and you will need a light source for them to mature properly. Check out [Timely Tips for Starting Seedlings at Home](#) as a guide to get started. Also, this link is to a YouTube video from our Harris County Horticulture Channel on seed starting: [Starting Plants from Seed](#) with Horticulture Agent Paul Winski. There is a lot of valuable information on our YouTube channel, so we always ask that people take a look at the additional content--or even better, subscribe!

4. Seed sources: As Master Gardeners associated with the AgriLife Extension Service, we do not endorse specific products or companies. However, we can provide a broad list of companies that may have what you are seeking. There are many sources of seeds available online and locally. Also keep in mind that some local feed stores may sell bulk vegetable seeds, which is nice as you can buy as few or as many as you would like.



Some online retailers include: Johnny's Seeds, Botanical Interests, Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds, Territorial Seeds, Kitazawa Seed Company

Most seed companies will provide a catalog with good information and photographs to help in making your choices.

Below are some additional links to Extension Service gardening resources:

[Texas Home Vegetable Gardening Guide](#)

[Sustainable Vegetable Gardening](#)

[Harris County Master Gardeners Home Page](#) - resources and information on our free Green Thumb Gardening Series - as well as upcoming plant sales. There will be some spring sales at the Genoa Friendship Garden, and those sales always feature varieties that perform well in our area.

[Harris County Horticulture](#)

[Harris County Master Gardeners Facebook](#)

If you have additional questions, please use the link below. Typically, we ask that people submit one question per request as this helps us to log the information better in our database. I hope that you have found all of this information to be helpful, and that you are off to a great vegetable garden in the coming year!

Q: I have some Cherry trees and want to know the best location to transplant them: in full sun or semi-sun? I have 6-8 hours a day of full sun.

A: Thank you for the question about planting cherry trees. True cherries in the genus *Prunus* are not recommended for Harris County. One major reason is that we don't have a sufficient number of chill hours during the year (300-600 hours is average). Cherries need a period of winter rest or dormancy, when temperatures are between 32°F and 45°F, for flowers and leaf buds to develop normally. When enough chilling accumulates, the buds are ready to grow in response to warm temperatures. If the buds do not receive sufficient chilling temperatures during winter to completely release dormancy, trees may develop physiological symptoms such as delayed and extended bloom, delayed foliation, reduced fruit set and reduced fruit quality. [HERE](#) is an article from Urban Harvest about Cherry of the Rio Grande *Eugenia aggregata* which can be planted as a substitute.



Since you already have the trees, let's talk about how to plant and care for them. They will need an area with good drainage that gets full sun. Now is a good time to plant the cherry trees while they are dormant. Remove all vegetation within a 3' circle. Dig a bowl-shaped hole deep enough for the root ball, and twice the width. Use clean, sanitized shears to prune off any broken, rotted, or circling roots. Position the tree in the center of the hole, straighten, and make sure the root flare and graft are above ground level. Fill half with native soil. Tamp, water, and allow to drain. Continue to fill and water. Apply ½" – 1" of compost followed by 2-3" mulch (keep away from trunk). Fertilize when the tree has begun putting on vigorous new growth.

The above planting information will apply to many different fruit trees. [HERE](#) is a publication from AgriLife Extension with more information about planting fruit trees. [HERE](#) is another article on planting from Urban Harvest. Good luck with your trees. Please contact us again if you have additional questions.

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

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

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

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