

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION



Here's the Dirt Newsletter March 2026

March 2026

Vol. 4 Edition 3

A newsletter to distribute our love and expertise of gardening and to share some Howdy Horticulture Hospitality with you.

Brazoria County Master Gardeners

Board Members:

Officers

- President- Sheila Pierce

- 1st Vice President-Tammy Green and Ellen Armistead
- 2nd Vice President, Demonstration Gardens- Andra Halnon
- Treasurer- Tracy Ning
- Secretary- Linda Pirtle

Appointed Board Members

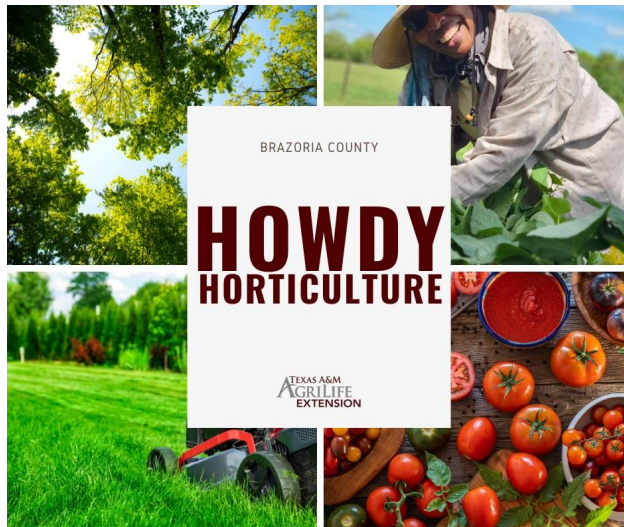
- Awards- Lisa Woods
- Membership- Loretta Allen and Karen Brennan
- Hospitality- Jan Smith and Chamane Barrow
- BEES Maintenance- Neil Newton (with Mike Mayfield as BEES Supply Chain lead)
- New Member Development- Rose Wagner
- Greenhouse & Propagation- Ruth and August Aimone
- Library Seed Exchange Program – Drake Delacruz
- Plant Sale- Sandy Shanks and Linda Erdman
- Tree Sale- Andra Halnon, Tracy Ning
- Seedling Sale- Ruth and August Aimone
- Webmaster- Lisa Woods and JoAnne Knodel
- Social Media-Sandy Shanks
- Technology- JoAnne Knodel and Linda Ulmer
- Texas Master Gardener Directors- Carol Butler and JoAnne Knodel



Brazoria County Horticulture Agent



Kimberly Mayer, CEA, CPTM



In this Issue:

- *March Happenings*
 - *Horticulture Hero*
 - *Upcoming Educational Opportunities*
 - *Agent's Corner*
 - *Community Outreach Needs*
 - *Important Dates*
 - *Contact Us*
-

March Happenings



March has officially tipped the scales toward spring, and the garden is starting to wake up—stretching, blinking, and reminding us it’s time to head back outside. Lawns are shaking off winter dormancy, trees are leafing out with fresh green confidence, and gardeners everywhere are feeling that familiar pull to dig, prune, and plan. It’s the season of renewal, and the landscape is ready for a little thoughtful attention.

As you ease back into the garden, now is a great time to focus on smart lawn fertilization, keep an eye on newly emerging tree growth, and set the stage for a healthy growing season ahead. A little care now goes a long way, and March offers the perfect window to get things off to a strong start—before spring really hits its stride. 🌱

Nominate a Horticulture Hero









We truly have an amazing group of individuals within the Brazoria County Master Gardener Association. I wanted to make sure that we recognize and fully appreciate our volunteers on more than just a yearly basis. That's where this program comes in to play. I would love for you to send me your nominations for a monthly Horticulture Hero. The requirements are simple. Just

send me an email with a paragraph explaining why this individual should be nominated for this award. I will make the final decision each month and then award that person at the General Meeting. Some examples could be: above and beyond service at an outreach event, behind the scenes planning and coordinating, or even an outstanding presentation to a local group, The possibilities are endless. Get your nominations to me by the last day of the month. Email me : kimberly.mayer@ag.tamu.edu

Here is a list of past winners:

Horticulture Heroes from 2023 - 2025 (Started February 2023)

February - Terry Bohr

March – Cynthia Finney and Linda Erdman

April – Sandy Shanks

May – Cindy Ducros

June – Sandy Henderson

July – Al Fedoruk

August – No newsletter

September – Lisa Woods

October – Preston Armistead

November – Rosa Fletcher

December – Linda Ulmer

Horticulture Heroes for 2024

January- Rose Wagner

February- Kathy Pittman

March- Mike Layman

April- JoAnne Knodel

May- Jessica Chase

June- Tracy Ning

July- Paula Hanson

August- Neil Newton

September- Ruth and August Aimone

October- none submitted

November- Tammy Green

December- Christmas Party

2025

January – none submitted

February – Loretta Allen

March – Janice Smith

April – Ann Hughes

May – Joy Hargett

June- Mike Mayfield

July- Jessie Phillips

August- Drake de la Cruz

September- David Higginbotham

October- Ricky Price

November-

December- Christmas Party

2026

January - Don Bushman

February - Bill Adriance

March - Melinda Louvier

 **Horticulture Hero: Melinda Louvier**

When it comes to growing more than just plants, **Melinda Louvier** truly shines. A dedicated Texas Master Gardener, Melinda recently took the lead in coordinating a generous donation of raised garden beds, high-quality soil, and vegetable seeds for residents of a local elderly community—turning an idea rooted in kindness into a thriving, hands-on garden opportunity.

Melinda worked behind the scenes to bring together partners, supplies, and volunteers to ensure the project was both accessible and sustainable for residents. Raised beds were selected to make gardening easier on aging bodies, while fresh soil and carefully chosen seeds set

gardeners up for success from day one. Her thoughtful planning removed common barriers to gardening and replaced them with confidence, excitement, and the joy of growing food.

The impact of this project goes far beyond the garden beds themselves. Residents now have a welcoming space to spend time outdoors, stay active, and connect with neighbors—while enjoying the physical and mental health benefits that gardening provides. For many, it's not just about harvesting vegetables; it's about cultivating purpose, pride, and community.

Melinda's efforts embody the true spirit of the Master Gardener program: service, education, and stewardship. By recognizing a need and taking action, she helped plant seeds of resilience and connection that will continue to grow long after the first harvest.

Thank you, Melinda, for being a true **Horticulture Hero** and for reminding us that gardens have the power to nourish both people and communities.



1 - Brazoria County Master Gardener Melinda Louvier (right)



2 - Special thanks to Terra Vista Landscaping for their donation of raised beds and soil mix!

Upcoming Educational Opportunities



BETWEEN THE LEAVES
book club

JAN 30 - THE LIGHT EATERS
By Zoe Schlanger

FEB 27 - GO AS A RIVER
By Shelly Read

MAR 27 - HOW CAN I HELP?
By Doug Tallamy

JUL 28 - GOOD NATURE
By Kathy Wilson

AUG 28 - THE FOOD EXPLORER
By Daniel Stone

September 25th - Wrap-up

JOIN MASTER GARDENERS FOR A MONTHLY BOOK CLUB EXPLORING HOW GARDENS, PLANTS, AND NATURE SHAPE OUR LIVES EACH SEASON. WE'LL DIVE INTO A NEW BOOK—RANGING FROM SCIENCE AND MEMOIR TO FICTION AND THRILLERS—AND CONNECT THE THEMES BACK TO GARDENING.

Location: AgrLife Extension Office 21017 County Road 171 Angleton, TX 77515
When: Last Friday of the month, 6pm

Refreshments will rotate monthly among participants.

Ready to Join?

RSVP to Piper Sparkman piper.sparkman@ag.tamu.edu or 979-864-1558 and pick up the first book!

TEXAS MASTER GARDENER **READING LINEUP**



★ The Big Grow

TEXAS MASTER GARDENER **★ TEXAS SIZED-GARDENING SERIES**

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>Little Seeds, Big Flavor: A Texas Guide to Tomatoes and Peppers 12/5/25 10-12pm no fee/cap at 25</p> | <p>Y'all Need Plants: Houseplants 101 1/17/26 10-12pm no fee</p> | <p>Lone Star Natives 03/02/26 10-12pm no fee</p> |
| <p>Texan's Guide to Growing and Cooking Mushrooms May 16th, 2026 10-12pm \$35 fee Cap at 25</p> | <p>Tame Those Texas Weeds 07/17/26 10 -12pm no fee</p> | <p>Trees for Texas Landscapes 08/28/26 10-12pm no fee</p> |

3 - Dates and times are now available for The Big Grow Series. See Facebook for event listings and to register for the classes. Feel free to share with your friends and neighbors.

Agent's Corner





Soil Health and Crop Benefits to Integrating Biochar and Poultry Litter in Plasticulture Tomatoes

Source: Southern SARE Article reprinted for this newsletter.

Biochar, a soil amendment, mixed with poultry litter, an organic fertilizer, improved soil health and increased crop performance in south Georgia tomatoes, compared to biochar mixed with synthetic fertilizers, a University of Georgia study shows.

Funded through a Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SSARE) [Graduate Student Grant](#), horticulture professor Ted McAvoy and graduate student Emilio Suarez Romero studied how effective biochar was on soil health and crop productivity in combination with organic or inorganic fertilizers.

The study was initially conducted under the widespread hypothesis that biochar is a universally beneficial amendment for improving soil health and yield. However, researchers learned that it was not the biochar, but the poultry litter, that was the main driver of yield, while the biochar provided other benefits such as carbon sequestration, pH stability and crop quality.

“We moved from cautious optimism about biochar to a firm conviction that its economic viability is directly tied to its integration within a holistic, organic-based system,” the researchers noted in their project report. “We now understand that promoting sustainable agriculture isn’t about recommending a single product, but about helping growers build a resilient and profitable system.”

In the two-year study, researchers applied five rates of biochar (0,5,10,15, and 20 tons/acre), sourced from pine wood chips, as a one-time surface amendment prior to the first plasticulture tomato growing season. The target nitrogen rate application from both fertilizer sources was 225 pounds per acre. The synthetic fertilizer treatment involved a pre-plant application providing 50 pounds of nitrogen per acre with the remaining 175 pounds applied evenly in 10 weekly fertigation events through a drip system. The full poultry litter rate was applied pre-plant in accordance with USDA guidelines for food safety.

To measure soil health, core samples were collected throughout the growing season – biweekly for nitrogen analysis and every 30 days for other chemical and biological inputs. Samples were analyzed for properties including soil pH, organic matter content, active carbon, and microbial activity.

At the end of the two-year study, researchers found improved soil health with the biochar/poultry mix compared to the biochar/synthetic fertilizer mix. Benefits included a 34 percent higher cation exchange capacity, as a measure of higher soil fertility, with poultry litter compared to the synthetic fertilizer; higher microbial activity; a 5.6 percent increase in active carbon, whereas under the synthetic fertilizer active carbon decreased 5.2 percent over the same period; and a 4.5 percent increase in organic matter compared to a decline with the conventional fertilizer.

Additionally, the biochar-poultry litter mix was more effective at holding nitrogen in the root zone. In treatments with poultry litter, total inorganic nitrogen achieved a 144 percent gain at the highest biochar rate application.

To measure crop performance during the study, the researchers measured plant growth, crop yield and crop quality. Over the two-year study, researchers observed more vigorous plant growth with the biochar-poultry litter mix, compared to the biochar-conventional fertilizer mix. On average plants were 32 percent taller and had 27 percent larger stem diameters. Additionally, plants in the conventional fertilizer plots had a 67 percent higher mortality rate.

One notable direct impact from biochar was on fruit quality. Higher biochar rates reduced the physiological disorder “zippering” by up to 47 percent. Zippering is a cosmetic flaw in the fruit characterized by longitudinal scars. The disorder affects the fruit’s appearance but is still edible.

The project outcomes provided critical insights into the short-term benefits of integrating biochar and poultry litter in plasticulture tomato production.

Kimberly Mayer is a Horticulturist with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension in Brazoria County. To reach her please call 979-864-1558 or email kimberly.mayer@ag.tamu.edu

Community Outreach Requests



4 - Master Gardener showing his daughter some plants at Harvest for the Hungry.



5 - Master Gardeners Ruth and August Aimone presenting for resident of Richwood.



6 - Horticulture Agent teaching youth how to plant vegetables.

The Brazoria County Master Gardener Speakers Bureau offers a wide variety of research-based gardening and water conservation topics for our area. We are available to speak to groups of 10 or more in our region.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Brazoria County and the Brazoria County Master Gardeners are pleased to offer Speakers Bureau services at no charge; however, we are happy to accept donations of at least \$25 in support of the educational activities of the Brazoria County Master Gardener Association, a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization.

Please keep in mind:

- We require 30 day notice for any speaker request. *Please note our February thru April season is one of high demand*, and we recommend to request speakers as early as possible.
- In general, programs are 45-60 minutes, including Q&A. We can adapt our presentations to meet specific requests. Speakers are available to speak in person or virtually.

- We appreciate a donation of at least \$25 to help support our organization's mission of providing education in research-based gardening and water conservation practices.

For outreach requests and questions, please reach out to Sheila Pierce at sheilabcmg@gmail.com or fill out our Speaker's Request at <https://txmg.org/brazoria/home/request-a-speaker/>

Upcoming Events:



March 2nd - Lone Star Natives Class

March 5th - Intern Class

March 10th - Board Meeting

March 12th - Intern Class

March 12th- KPB Facebook Live -The War on Nutsedge

March 13th - General Meeting

March 14th - Seedling Sale

March 17th - St. Patrick's Day

March 19th - Intern Class

March 21st and 22nd - NPSOT/HEB Native Plant Outreach

March 26th- Intern Class

March 27th - Between the Leaves Book Club - Doug Tallamy's How Can I Help?

March 28th and 29th - NPSOT/HEB Native Plant Outreach

Contact Us

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979.864.1558