



December 2011

Comal Gardener

A monthly publication of the Comal Master Gardeners Association through the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in

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Thank You, Sheriff Bob Holder!



Comal County Sheriff Bob Holder rallies the CMG's during the Chili Supper and Live Auction at the November meeting. Auction Chair Mary Helen Phillips displays a beautiful watercolor by CMG's Karen Scherrer. Below CMG members Lucy Huff and Judy Chantos exhibit hand-painted candleholders. The auction proceeds of \$1477 will go for scholarships for specialty training for CMG members.

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CMG CHRISTMAS PARTY

December 8 6 pm

Forke Store



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December



Garden Posts

- The CMG Christmas Party will be held on December 8 at 6 pm at Forke Store. Members are asked to bring a covered dish or dessert, to accompany the provided turkey and ham, and a few non-perishable items for the New Braunfels Food Bank. Janet Sweet will provide piano music, and door prizes will enliven the evening. To find Forke Store, turn off Loop 337 North at Churchill Drive and follow it to Conservation Plaza.
- The January issue of *Comal Gardener* will have some important updates on all activi-

ties taking place at the AgriLife Extension Garden Complex.

- Christmas came early to members attending the November 28 meeting. Lee Franzel handed out the photo membership directory he created. If Lee does not have your photo, make arrangements with him or send him a digital one (leefranzel@gvtc.com or 830-885-7733).
- John Kittle reported that the mushroom farm tour was impressive. Harold Voges said he thought the tour

guides were the best he had ever experienced in his many trips to the farm. Be sure to sign up early next time the tour is offered.

- CMG is seeking a new volunteer chair for Kids in Bloom to help with spring planting and other projects. Please contact Michael Welch for more information (welch580@yahoo.com, 830-837-8788).

Poinsettias All Abloom

Poinsettia sale volunteers get plants ready for distribution



The poinsettia sale was a great success with 682 plants sold. The estimated profit is around \$2300. A big thank you to Alba Johannessen, Lucy Guerra and Catherine Hall for all their hard work and dedication.

Report your CE and Volunteer Hours!

Chairs, send volunteer hours to Linda Ray at lray@satx.rr.com

Send your CE hours to Don Tuff at CERecorder@MasterGardener.Comal.TX.US

Be sure to include title of talk, speaker's name, date and time of talk, location, CE hours and sponsoring organization.

December Gardening To-Do List

Poinsettias need special treatment to keep their beauty the full season and beyond. First and most important, remove the outer wrapping or punch holes in the bottom so the plant can have proper drainage. It is very easy to drown the plant. Give plants the finger test and water only if soil is dry. Second, put the poinsettia in a bright window and out of a draft. Third, enjoy.

The recent freeze might have stopped the warm-season vegetables, unless you covered them. Pull all tomatoes of any size off the vine and have fried green tomatoes. If you prefer, wrap the tomatoes in newspaper and store in a cool place or windowsill. Check often to see if they are ripening.

Herb SIG Holiday Decorating with

Germaine Tuff was the presenter at the November Herb SIG held on November 14 at Forke Store. The theme of Germaine's presentation was "Decorating with Herbs for the Holidays." The SIG was well attended, and all were impressed by the decorations that Germaine created using herbs and other materials. Germaine created table decorations and wall hangings, with wreaths and swags, all made with herbs. She demonstrated that herbs are not only for cooking, scents and medicinal purposes, but that they can be

Winter vegetables are not all equal in their hardiness. Some will benefit from a light cover and light fertilizer feeding.

The fall asters are gorgeous this year. If you don't have this plant, please consider it for your garden. Mexican mint marigold and Copper Canyon daisy are both blooming now, and their foliage smells divine, so brush your hands across it as you water.

If you are lucky enough to have a fruiting Satsuma orange or Kumquat, harvest the fruit now. And those "gifted" enough to have other fruit trees, check for scale on tree branches. If you find

beautiful in themselves. Not only is Germaine a great gardener, but she is very creative in crafts.

Two lucky attendees won drawings for some of Germaine's creations, and then everyone indulged in spice cake and hibiscus Jamaica cooler. Many of the attendees gathered after the meeting at TJ's for lunch.

The Herb SIG is open to anyone who has an interest in herbs or wants to learn more about herbs. Herb SIG Chair Mary Moses is finalizing the calendar of pro-

by *Barbi Briney*

any scale, tie a colored ribbon around the branch so you can apply dormant oil later. Be sure persimmons are really ripe before picking.

Pick up pecans as they fall to keep them at their most flavorful – and away from the squirrels and deer.

Potted plants probably will not need to be fertilized until spring. Their growth will naturally slow. Do not over water.

If you've never tried forcing bulbs, this is a great time. Bold and vibrant amaryllis will add beauty, and paper white narcissus will also add fragrance.



Germaine Tuff

grams for the new year, with programs starting again in January. If you have interest in the Herb SIG, contact Mary Moses (marycm@me.com or 830-2226-5552) for further information.

December Committee Updates

EXECUTIVE BOARD

The Executive Board will have its monthly meeting the first Wednesday, December 7, at 10 am.

AGRILIFE EXTENSION GARDEN COMPLEX (AEGC)

The board approved combining the AgriLife Extension Gardens with the VEG/Rose Gardens at their November meeting. The entire area is now called the AgriLife Extension Garden Complex or AEGC. Workers are finishing the fence around the vegetable and rose gardens. There are no scheduled workdays in December. Dates will depend on the availability of Glenn Avriett, welder Tom Malek, (Patty Malek's spouse), and weather conditions. For more information, contact Linda D. Valdez (ldvaldez@satx.rr.com or 210-651-0356), Rich Bradley (rmbroad@gvtc.com or 830-980-2081) or John Kittle (jkittle@satx.rr.com or 830-626-8254). See you in the gardens!

NEW BRAUNFELS CONSERVATION PLAZA GARDENS

There will be one workday the second Wednesday, December 14, at 8 am. The garden can really use some more help! Workers will hand water, weed, spray liquid seaweed and continue pruning the arbor roses. Anyone with a ladder and/or loppers, please bring them. For information, contact Judy Chantos (4csons@sarcooftexas.com or 803-608-0535), Dan Krueger (830-639-5338 or dan.krueger1@gmail.com) or Janis Womack (gwomack1@satx.rr.com or 830-620-7002).

BUTTERFLY GARDENS AT THE BULVERDE/SPRING BRANCH LIBRARY

Because of the holidays, the next Butterfly Garden workday will not be the usual fourth Thursday of the month. The last workday for the year will be Thursday, December 1 at 9 am. Tasks will include installation of the Monarch Waystation sign. Contact Bill Puckett (bnpuckett@gmail.com or 830-885-2242) for more information.

NEW LIFE BUTTERFLY GARDEN

The New Life Butterfly Garden workday is the third Monday, December 19 at 9 am. For more information, contact Lois Ricci (poepjr@aol.com or 830-899-5362).

HOPE HOSPICE NEW BRAUNFELS

The usual third Wednesday workday for December is cancelled. There is always weeding and pruning to be done, so if any volunteers want to work on their own, they can report their hours independently. For more information contact Jean Petersen (jeanpetersen@sbcglobal.net or 830-620-8454) or Kathy Nelson (knelson57@satx.rr.com or 719-964-2370).

COMAL COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS GARDEN

The Fairgrounds Committee will not meet in December. The need for a workday in January will be assessed at that time. If you interested in participating with this group but are not on the reminder email list, contact Aleta Meyer (aleta_meyer@hotmail.com or 830-629-2929).

LINDHEIMER GARDENS

There will be no workday in December, but work will resume in January. Contact Germaine Tuff (germainetuff@hotmail.com or 830-629-1127) for questions or information.

December Committee Updates Continued

KIDS IN BLOOM

Memorial and Seele Elementary schools are actively seeking volunteers. If you would like to participate, contact Alba Johannessen (2Johans@sbcglobal.net or 830-620-4453). There is also an urgent need for volunteers for Oak Creek Elementary School and Startzville Elementary Schools. They need donations of perennial butterfly/hummingbird plants, winter veggies and cover crops for immediate planting, as well as advice on plant selection. Contact Nancy Pappas (azop@gvtc.com or 210-385-5981) for information about getting involved at these schools.

NEWSLETTER

The Newsletter Committee will celebrate the holidays with a luncheon. Details will be emailed to all committee members. If you are interested in joining the committee or would like more information, contact editor Cindy Sansone (cindy.sansone@yahoo.com or 830-481-3062).

December Gardening Opportunities

Saturday, December 10 & Sunday, December 11, 6 – 9 pm. Luminations. Tour gardens glowing with hundreds of luminarias. Enjoy trees twinkling with lights; music by local musicians; crafts for the kids; holiday trees and food. Free with a donation to the Capital Area Food Bank. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, 4801 La Crosse Ave., Austin. For information call 512-232-0100.

Ongoing until December 23, 10 am – dark. Vogel's Tannenbaum Farm. Explore the farm and select and cut your own tree from a wide selection: Eldarica Pine, Afghan Pine, Pine and Leyland Cypress. They also stock imported Fraser Firs and smaller potted trees perfect for post-holiday planting. All tools are provided and assistance is available if needed. You may choose your tree early and come back and cut it later. East-500 Tannenbaum Lane, Seguin. For information call 830-372-4335.

Saturdays and Sundays, Ongoing, 8 am - 4 pm. Mitchell Lake Audubon Center. Explore a place just minutes from downtown San Antonio where nature is continually renewing herself. \$2 per person. Closed on holidays. 10750 Pleasanton Rd., San Antonio. Entrance gate on Moursund Blvd. For information call 210-628-1639.

Saturdays, Ongoing, 9 – 10 am. Lawn and Garden Show. Host Bob Graf and Guadalupe County Master Gardeners answer listeners' horticultural questions. KWED Radio 1580 AM, Seguin.

Wednesdays and Saturdays, Ongoing, 9 am – 1 pm. Boggy Creek Farm. Explore a USDA certified organic market farm and buy fresh produce. 3414 Lyons Rd., Austin. For more information call 512-026-4650 or visit <http://www.boggycreekfarm.com/>

December CE Opportunities

Friday, December 2, 10 – 11 am. “Watersaver Walk.” Take a guided tour of garden exhibits for ideas on conserving water and choosing plants that grow best in the area. Free with admission. San Antonio Botanical Gardens, 555 Funston. For information call: 210-207-3261. **1 CE**

Saturday, December 3, 10 – 11 am. “Indoor Seed Starting for the Spring Garden.” Jeff Ferris, cofounder of Neighborhood Harvest Project, teaches how a little planning, a sunny spot and a tiny seed can come together for a head start on your spring gardening season. Find out how easy it can be to start your own veggies, including heirloom varieties. Classes are held outdoors. Dress appropriately and bring a chair. Natural Gardener, 8648 Old Bee Cave Road, Austin. For information call 512-288-6113. **1 CE**

Saturday, December 3, noon – 1 pm. “Central Texas Weather.” Bob Rose, LCRA Chief Meteorologist, presents a fascinating and informative class on one of the most critical components of gardening: the weather. Classes are held outdoors. Dress appropriately and bring a chair. Natural Gardener, 8648 Old Bee Cave Road, Austin. For information call 512-288-6113. **1 CE**

Monday, December 5, 12:15 – 3 pm. “Winter Gardening Tips Highlighting Tool Care.” Tom Horvist and Ron Csehl, Texas Master Gardeners, outline essential activities best done when the temperature drops. \$5 donation to the Gardening Volunteers of South Texas. Bring hand-pruning tools and have them sharpened, \$2 donation per tool. San Antonio Garden Center, 1333 N. New Braunfels at Funston, next to the Botanical Garden. For information call 210-251-8101. **2.5 CE**

Saturday, December 10, 10 – 11 am. “Gardening Success with Microscopic Allies.” Matt Kowalski, President of Natural Industries, explains that for every plant problem, there’s a microorganism that can solve it. He discusses innovative products that use microorganisms. Classes are held outdoors. Dress appropriately and bring a chair. Natural Gardener, 8648 Old Bee Cave Road, Austin. For information call 512-288-6113. **1 CE**



Tricia Boucher and Claudia Mendenhall receive their certificates and warm welcome from CMG’s President-Elect Carol McWilliams. (Not pictured is newly certified Margo Woollven).

The Victorian Spirit of Christmas

by Lu Allen



We have the Victorians to thank for the magic and sparkle of Christmas, for they invented many of the charming traditions we enjoy today.

Twinkling Christmas trees bejeweled with delicate decorations, cheerful cards gracing the mantle, a plentiful feast with turkey, dressing and all the trimmings are some of the pleasures and delights that have their origins in the Victorian era.

It is surprising to think that Christmas was barely celebrated at the beginning of the nineteenth century in England, but within a hundred years it had become the most important and wonderful of the year's holidays. While no single event sparked this change, there is no doubt that a drawing published in 1848 in the *Illustrated London News* depicting the Royal Family gathered around their Christmas tree had a huge impact on their adoring subjects.

German-born Prince Albert is credited with bringing this long-standing German tradition to England in 1841 when he erected a tree at Windsor Castle to the delight of Queen Victoria and their children. Within ten years the Christmas tree had become a firm British custom.

The Victorians enjoyed creating their own Christmas decorations. Children made paper chains and garlands of popcorn, cranberries and other dried fruits or nuts, while mothers crafted small dolls and other trinkets to hide among the branches. Ribbons, gilded pine cones and painted flowers added even more color and sparkle, with edible treats such as gingerbread men, star- and heart-shaped biscuits and other sweets brought tasty temptations to this visual delight. Topped with a Christmas angel, doll or star and radiant with candles, the tree was a wondrous sight. At a time before electric lighting, this would have been one of the most dazzling and anticipated displays of the year. Unlike today, the Victorians did not put their decorations up until Christmas Eve, believing it was bad luck to do so earlier.

Christmas cards were another way of adorning the home, and Henry Cole, the first director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, invented them. In 1843 he commissioned the artist John Callcott Horsley to design what was to become the first commercial Christmas card. The year 1843 also saw the publication of Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, which shaped our view of Christmas forever, marking it out as a time of merriment and benevolence.

Christmas carols were another source of mirth, and many of our most popular carols, like *O Come All Ye Faithful* (1843), *O Little Town of Bethlehem* (1868) and *Away in a Manger* (1883), were written in the Victorian era, forever etching their harmonies on our collective consciousness.

With this history in mind, as we celebrate Christmas this year, let us give some thanks to the Victorians, to whom we owe so much.



Comal Gardener

Promoting Knowledge and Volunteerism

325 Resource Drive

New Braunfels, TX 78132-3775