

# Urban Dirt

## Gardening Events and Information for Harris County

### Plant Gifts for the Holidays

by Jo Ann Stevenson, Master Gardener

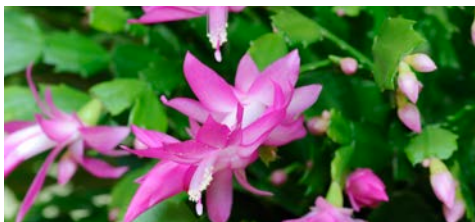
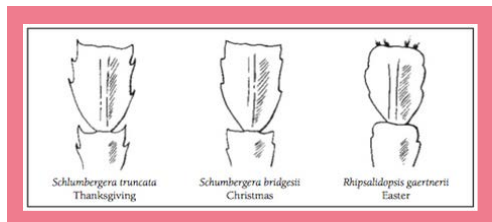
**Do you have a favorite plant to give or receive as a holiday gift?**

This season of giving gifts comes around faster each year. It's time to start thinking about what plants you would like to give or to buy for your own holiday décor. So, consider this your "plant-based holiday gift guide."



The first choice is the Poinsettia, which is named after Joel Roberts Poinsett, the U.S. Minister to Mexico from 1825-1829. He introduced America to the plant. Poinsettias are not poisonous and, in fact, they clean formaldehyde out of the air. The poinsettia is the highest-selling potted flowering plant. Bonus points if you purchase from a non-profit like Brookwood Community or Reach Unlimited.

Holiday Cactus is another popular choice and can live over 20 years. But you have to figure out which is the Christmas variety, the Thanksgiving variety, or even the Easter variety. They each have slightly different blooming times. A simple solution is to look at the leaves. (See diagram below). Flower colors include red, pink, purple, orange and white. The segmented stems gracefully arch, making them excellent for hanging baskets. The trick is not to overwater them.



Rosemary topiaries are popular and can be used in recipes (fresh or dried) and in your landscape throughout the remainder of the year. Rosemary is a symbol of remembrance and is in the *Lamiaceae* (mint) family.

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# Upcoming EVENTS



**Monday, November 3, 12:30 p.m.**

Container Gardening with Teresa See  
Fonteno Sr. Ed. Center, 6600 Bissonnet St, Houston, 77074

**Tuesday, November 4, 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.**

First Tuesday Meeting  
Lecture: Composting Demonstration, Chevvy Tang, Master Gardener  
Click here for updates <https://txmg.org/hcmga/lecture-series/>  
Genoa Friendship Gardens, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd, Houston

**Thursday, November 6, 1:30 p.m.**

Diversity with Roses, Flowers, etc with Maggie Zamora  
Fonteno Sr. Ed. Center, 6600 Bissonnet St, Houston, 77074

**Saturday, November 8, 9 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

MADD Fall Festival (Youth Empowerment Activities)  
Sam Houston Race Park  
7575 North Sam Houston Parkway, Gate #3, Houston 77064

**Monday, November 10, 2:00 p.m.**

A Few Perennials with Teresa See  
Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet St, Houston, 77074

**Tuesday, November 11, 11:00 a.m.**

Spring Vegetable Gardening with Teresa See  
Mendenhall Community Center, 1414 Wirt Rd, Houston, 77055

**Tuesday, November 11, 12:00 p.m.**

Shade Gardening with Archana Nair  
Weekley Community Center, 8440 Greenhouse Rd, Cypress, 77433

**Thursday, November 13, 11:00 a.m.**

Seed and Plant Sway with Teresa See  
Tracy Gee Community Center  
3599 Westcenter Dr, Houston, 77042

**Thursday, November 13, 12:00 p.m.**

Cooking Demo with Herbs with Chevvy Tang  
Mendenhall Community Center, 1414 Wirt Rd, Houston, 77055

**Thursday, November 13, 6:00 p.m.**

Organic Gardening with Mary Gaber  
Burnett Bayland Community Center  
6026 Chimney Rock Rd, Houston, 77072

**Tuesday, November 18, 1:00 p.m.**

Permaculture with Chevvy Tang  
Freed Community Center, 6818 Shadyville Ln, Houston, 77055

**Thursday, November 20, 11:00 a.m.**

Benefits of Gardening with Teresa See  
Mendenhall Community Center, 1414 Wirt Rd, Houston, 77055

**Saturday, November 22, 11:00 a.m.**

Rainwater Harvesting with Teresa See  
Lone Star College-Cyfair Library, 9191 Barker Cypress Rd, Cypress, 77433

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

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Volunteer Coordinator**  
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Genoa Friendship Gardens

Youth Empowerment Activities

Educational Programs

# Upcoming EVENTS

## Educational Programs

**Tuesday, December 2, 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.**

**First Tuesday Meeting**

**Lecture: Preparing Our Lawns and Garden Landscapes for Winter and Early Spring**

**Bob Patterson of Southwest Fertilizer**

<https://txmg.org/hcmga/lecture-series/>

**Trini Mendenhall Community Center  
1414 Wirt Rd, Houston 77055**

**Thursday, December 4, 2:00 p.m.**

**Winter Gardening with Bennie Matusek**

**Fonteno Senior Ed. Center**

**6600 Bissonnet St, Houston 77074**

**Wednesday, December 10, 12:00 p.m.**

**Backyard Farm to Table with Chevvy Tang**

**Mercer Botanic Garden**

**22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Houston 77338**

**Wednesday, December 18, 6:00 p.m.**

**Composting with Mary Gaber**

**Burnett Bayland Community Center**

**6026 Chimney Rock, Houston 77072**



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## Plant Spotlight Chrysanthemum

*Article by Jennifer Bennett, Master Gardener*



Chrysanthemums are everywhere right now. I love their bright colors. *Chrysanthemum x morifolium* are easy perennials that grow from six inches to two feet tall when flowering. They come in a variety of forms as well as colors. When shopping for mums, look for garden mums as opposed to florist mums. “Garden mum” applies to chrysanthemum cultivars that flower naturally in Texas and early enough to avoid a heavy frost. While cold hardy, mums prefer full sun, but can do well in morning or afternoon sun. Water as needed, prune in the summer and dead head to encourage new blooms.



Chrysanthemums are photoperiodic. As the days get shorter, a hormone they contain starts to produce flower buds. So while chrysanthemums are associated with fall, they can also bloom in the spring, so we can enjoy two bloom seasons a year.

But don't feel guilty if you grab a potted mum at the grocery store. Enjoy its lovely color and give it the care it needs. Who knows, it may surprise you and linger well into the next year.

### References:

1. <https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/chrysanthemums/>
2. <https://bexar-tx.tamu.edu/homehort/archives-of-weekly-articles-davids-plant-of-the-week/fall-garden-mums-chrysanthemums/>
3. <https://txmg.org/grayson/2020/10/22/mums-not-just-a-pretty-fall-flower/>





## Learning and Growing with Student Conservation Association

Article and photos by Kiara Carrasco, 4-H Program Assistant,  
and Isabella Fowler, 4-H Program Assistant and Master Gardener Intern

A new and exciting partnership is developing in Harris County! On October 2nd, 4-H Program Assistants Kiara Carrasco and Isabella Fowler hosted a Junior Master Gardener Curriculum Training Workshop with the Houston-based group of fall interns from Student Conservation Association. Student Conservation Association is the largest provider of hands-on environmental conservation programs for teens and young adults.

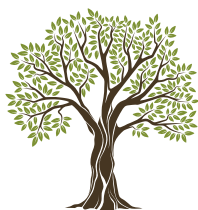


These interns began their morning with a tour of the Genoa Friendship Gardens, where they practiced their native tree identification skills. They spent the rest of the day diving into the Learn, Grow, Eat, Go Early Childhood and Operation Thistle curriculum. The interns also received a presentation on Urban Forestry from special guests Chevvy Tang and Coni Kintz, two of our very own Harris County Master Gardeners. This training was hands-on, engaging, and provided these interns with a unique opportunity for professional development from the Harris County Extension team.



From now until February, these interns will be placed with different schools and organizations throughout greater Houston, where they will have the opportunity to provide natural resource education for youth—which will now include our Junior Master Gardener curriculum! Looking ahead, we are excited to explore more ways to collaborate with these individuals as they go through their program. Thank you to our two Master Gardener volunteers and the SCA interns for joining us as we got to learn, grow, eat, and go together!





## Master Gardener Intern Class Tree Planting Project

Article and photos by Jo Ann Stevenson, Master Gardener

On September 17, the HCMG Interns learned about *Ornamental Plants*, presented by Paul Winski, and *Trees and Tree Care*, taught by Alexa Haas. After the presentation portion of the tree lesson, the interns had a chance to plant a Texas Redbud tree in Genoa Friendship Gardens. Robin Kendrick-Yates sourced the tree donation from Trees from Houston. Jeanne Dunn selected the site for the planting. Jeanne and Alexa directed the interns in the tree planting according to the lesson they had just learned.



Texas Redbud Blooms



Alexa Haas leading the Trees and Tree Care Lesson



yay!

After the tree was planted and watered, the rest of the class time was spent touring the garden and identifying the various trees and shrubs growing at GFG. It was good to have a hands-on activity to tie into the lesson. The result is a new tree in the garden that the class can be proud of. We hope to carry on this new tradition in future years.

The bulk of the digging and planting was done by Clay Schutte, David Cannefax, McKinney McNeil, Ryan Blaine and Nakia Foster, while the remainder of the class cheered from under the shade of a nearby tree. It was a hot Texas afternoon, after all.



Nakia Foster, McKinney McNeil, Jeanne Dunn, Clay Schutte, David Cannefax, and Ryan Blaine with the Texas Redbud tree they planted.



# 4-H KICK-OFF

Article and photos by Tad and Amy Wimmer, Master Gardener

713-274-0950

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We're excited to share highlights from our recent 4-H Kick-Off at Spring Creek Park and introduce the powerful ways horticulture and mental-health awareness are coming together in our community.



The Harris County Master Gardener Association recently hosted a vibrant 4-H Kick-Off event at Spring Creek Park, home of the Farm Ranch 4-H Club. This one-day field experience brought together youth, families, and volunteers to explore hands-on horticulture and agricultural activities designed to connect gardening with mental-health awareness.

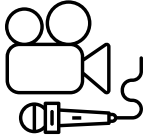
Thanks to funding from the TXPOST Grant, nineteen youth officially became 4-H members during the event. The grant supports initiatives that use garden-based learning to foster resilience, creativity, and social connection among young people.

Throughout the day, families participated in several project stations that showcased everything from soil science and plant propagation to garden art and environmental stewardship. The atmosphere was lively and engaging, reflecting the mission of both Texas A&M AgriLife Extension and the Master Gardener program to cultivate community through education and service.

By the end of the day, more than fifty children joined the Farm Ranch 4-H Club, marking an inspiring milestone for local youth engagement in agriculture and horticulture.







## Media Relations Spotlight



### ABC13 Highlights Fall Gardening in Southeast Texas



Adapted from ABC13 Houston by Meteorologist Elyse Smith

As a refreshing cold front moved through southeast Texas, ABC13 Houston spotlighted the start of the region's fall gardening season. Filmed at Mercer Botanic Gardens, the feature showcased how cooler weather ushers in new planting opportunities across the Gulf Coast.

Kari Hernandez, Curator at Mercer, explained that fall brings its own vibrant colors to the area — deep reds, bright yellows, and warm oranges from wildflowers and native plants. “Everybody loves spring wildflowers,” she said, “but there’s nothing like fall wildflowers.”

Experts featured in the story, including those from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, emphasized that fall is the perfect time to plant cool-season vegetables such as snap peas, green beans, cabbage, and broccoli, as well as trees and shrubs. Warm soil and mild air encourage strong root growth before winter.

The segment also highlighted how gardening connects people to nature and supports mental well-being — aligning closely with the outreach and education efforts of local Master Gardeners and 4-H youth programs.

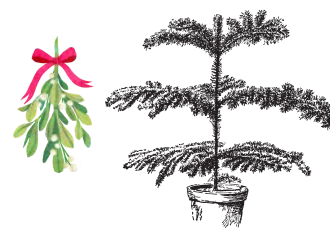
“Fall gardening gives us a second chance to grow,” Hernandez shared—a message that captures the heart of the season for gardeners across southeast Texas.

Read the full article : [Click This Link](#)





## Plant Gifts for the Holidays Continued



The Norfolk Pine can grow 4 to 6 feet tall and is evergreen. It is not a true pine, but a slow-growing conifer. It can remove harmful VOCs from the air and is an excellent living indoor Christmas tree.

Flowers such as cyclamen, and bulbs of amaryllis, paperwhites, and other pretties are fun to grow and to gift. According to Sherri Harrah at Plants for All Seasons (<https://plantsforallseasons.com/>), bromeliads are also a great seller at the holidays. They come in a variety of colors and perform well indoors.



Bromeliads at Plants for All Seasons  
(photo by Jo Ann Stevenson)

Some bulbs can be replanted in your landscape to bloom again and enjoy next year. Master Gardener Jennifer Elfert wrote a great article, “Hardy Amaryllis” for the January/February 2025 edition of Urban Dirt. She included tips on caring for the flowers and planting the bulbs for future blooms. <https://txmg.org/hcmga/files/2025/01/Jan-Feb-2025-Final.pdf>.

Buy local. Great bulb varieties can be found each year at the Houston Bulb & Plant Mart (each October), at your local independently owned nurseries, and through specialty retailers like Bungalow Blooms. Alex Lekometros, owner of Bungalow Blooms, was our First Tuesday presenter in September. Alex has a cut flower farm in the Houston Heights. She teaches classes, sells flowers and sells pre-chilled bulbs (<https://www.bungalowblooms.com/>).

If you are giving a plant as a gift, a nice idea is to include instructions on how to care for that plant after the holidays. We have included printable plant care instructions on page 30 for that purpose.



Amaryllis



Cyclamen



Norfolk pine

### Resources list:

1. <http://agrilife.org/plantclinic/files/2011/02/Poinsettia.pdf>
2. <https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/edibles/vegetables/rosemary/rosemary-topiaries/>
3. <https://bexar-tx.tamu.edu/homehort/archives-of-weekly-articles-davids-plant-of-the-week/colorful-wintery-plant-cyclamen/>
4. [Bromeliads: Houseplants That Endure // Missouri Environment and Garden News Article // Integrated Pest Management, University of Missouri](#)
5. <https://utianews.tennessee.edu/christmas-cactus/>

*Special thanks to Brandi Keller, Galveston Coastal & Marine Resources County Extension Agent and previous Harris County Horticulture Agent, for allowing me to borrow her “Holiday Plant Care” presentation and take advantage of her research.*



# Native Plant Spotlight

## Shade-Tolerant Low-Maintenance Native Plants for Your Yard

*Article by Brian Knoll, Master Gardener*

This article describes the use of the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) database for choosing native plants that will grow in shady conditions and require relatively little water and care compared with non-natives. What you learn here also can be applied to selecting native plants for other growing conditions.

What should you plant in that shady spot in your yard? We are going to focus on Texas natives because they tend to be lower in maintenance and more tolerant of our climatic conditions than non-natives. Two important factors to first consider are light and water.

**Light:** Your shady spot must receive some light, but just how much? The usual definitions of “light” for plants are: Sunny: > 6 hrs direct sun per day; Partial sun (or partial shade): 4-6 hrs; Full shade: 1–4 hrs.

The technical term for “sun” is daily light integration (DLI), the total amount of photosynthetically active light that an area receives over a 24-hour period. The total amount of light will depend on shade cast by trees and buildings, the angle of the sun, and the degree of cloud cover. Determining DLI can be done in several ways, ideally at different parts of the season (to account for varying sun angle and foliage):

1. Direct observation: Observe the area every 30–60 minutes and note the presence/absence of direct sun throughout a day for several weeks. Note also the kind of sun: afternoon, morning or early evening.
2. Use of a meter to measure DLI: These gadgets are placed in the shady area of your yard and left there to collect data. The inexpensive meters receive mixed reviews, one drawback being the inability to distinguish types of sunlight (see below). In a future article, I intend to review some of these devices.

Many otherwise sun-loving plants do not tolerate direct, hot afternoon sun and may wilt. Morning or very late afternoon sun is preferable, especially for plants that take partial sun. Despite efforts to accurately measure sunlight, a certain amount of trial and error may be needed.

**Water:** While non-native shade-loving plants tend to require more watering than average, or even a “moist” soil, native plants can tolerate “dry shade,” especially those native to this ecoregion. Many of us are slowly integrating native plants into our garden with the goal of using less water. But remember, a plant with low water needs will still need extra watering until it is established, which may take one or more seasons.

### How to find low maintenance, shade-tolerant native plants:

Searching Google or using AI will turn up lots of unreliable information. It is best to consult the database at the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) at <https://www.npsot.org/>.

**Continued**



## Native Plant Spotlight

### Continued

Click on “Native Plants,” then on “Find the perfect native plants for your yard or landscape.” In the drop-downs, select your criteria. For the Houston area, the EPA level 3 ecoregion is “Gulf Coast Prairies and Marshes.”



Figure 1 from NPSOT

**About ecoregions:** Texas occupies a large and ecologically diverse region. So plants that work in, say, Houston humidity may not thrive in the aridity of Austin. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has parsed the continental US into levels of ecosystems, 1–4 of increasing granularity. See Figure 1 for Houston’s level 3 zone shown in blue, “Gulf Coastal Prairies and Marshes.” Within this zone, the Houston area is in the level 4 “Northern Humid Gulf Coastal Plain” subregion; however, the NPSOT database does not specify these level 4 regions, so we need to inspect plant distribution maps.

After your search results appear, select a plant and wait for the Plant Ecoregion Distribution Map to load (see Figure 2 from NPSOT). This example is for American Beautyberry. As you can see, the plant distribution extends to an area well outside of our location, despite its being in the selected level 3 ecoregion.



American Beautyberry



Figure 2 from NPSOT

**A sampling of shade-tolerant native plants from the native plant database:** The list below is limited to plants under 6 feet in height, assuming your space is overshadowed by something. Preference was given to plants with white, yellow or bright red flowers that stand out in the shade. Be aware that plants in the “part shade” category will bloom more profusely if more light is available, and that an increase in light may also increase the need for water. All are perennials, and most information is from the NPSOT database. Heights and widths given are maximums.

**Wild Petunia (*Ruellia nudiflora*).** Ground cover with purple flowers that appear in the morning and collapse after sunset. Height/width 2ft/1ft. Low/medium water, any light. Deciduous.



Photo by Claire Sorenson



**Scarlet Sage (*Salvia coccinea*).** Herbaceous plant that grows under a variety of conditions with brilliant red tubular flowers. Height/width 3ft/1ft. Low/medium water, any light. Semi-evergreen.

**Continued**





## Native Plant Spotlight

### Continued

**Horseherb (*Calyptocarpus vialis*).** Excellent ground cover with very small, yellow flowers. Can tolerate some foot traffic. Probably growing in your yard now! Height <1 ft. Low water, any light. Semi-evergreen.



Photo by Claire Sorenson



Photo by Hal Livings

**Southwestern Bristlegrass (*Setaria scheelei*).** An ornamental bunch grass, one of the few native grasses that grow in low light. Height/width 3ft/1ft. Low/medium water, shade or part shade. Deciduous.

**Hairy Sunflower (*Helianthus hirsutus*).** Plant with yellow flowers that grows under many conditions. Leaves and stems are covered with coarse hairs. Commonly seen along roadsides and in vacant lots. Height/width 5ft/2ft. Low/medium water, any light. Deciduous.



Photo by RW Smith



**Coralberry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*).** Red berries, spreads by runners. Height/width 6ft/2ft. Low/medium water, shade or part shade. Deciduous.

**Arrowwood Viburnum (*Viburnum dentatum*).** Deciduous shrub with white flowers, and leaves that turn red before falling. Width/height 10ft/12ft. Low/medium water, any light.



Photo by Alan Cressler

**Frostweed (*Verbesina virginica*).** Late summer white blooms; at first freeze, oozes moisture that forms 'mini ice sculptures'. Do not confuse with *Verbesina microptera*, also sometimes called frostweed. Height/width 6ft/2ft. Low/medium water (very drought tolerant) shade or part shade. Deciduous.



Photo by Clare Sorenson

**American Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*).** Purple or white berries growing on long, arching stems. Height/width 6ft/6ft. Low/medium water, part shade. Deciduous. See picture on previous page.



**Turk's Cap (*Malvaviscus arboreus* var. *drummondii*).** Red flowers that are attractive to hummingbirds. Is very popular and tolerant of most growth conditions. Height/width 6ft/2ft. Low/medium water, any light. Some varieties have pink flowers. Deciduous.

To find more information about these and other plants, consult the NPSOT database. If you look at other internet sources, focus your attention on educational sites (.edu), especially Texas A&M AgriLife.





## Recipe Spotlight

### Stovetop Holiday Potpourri

Article by Jo Ann Stevenson, Master Gardener



I remember making homemade pomanders as a kid. We simply poked whole cloves into oranges, with the goal to hang them or place a few into a bowl to add some holiday scent to the house. You could put as many cloves into the orange as you liked and, in any pattern—a simple circle around the orange or a more elaborate pattern. Can't you just smell that combination of cloves and orange?

Let's bump that up a bit by adding more warm fall/winter fragrances, and then package it to gift to friends for the holidays. Place a gift tag with instructions on how to heat the potpourri on their stovetop and there it is! It's an easy and fragrant gift, and a great recipe to try at home, too.

I made these for friends last year and plan to make them again. Warning: Enjoying the aroma while putting the ingredients into the bags can get you into the holiday spirit!!

#### Ingredients for each bag:

1 teaspoon Whole Cloves  
3 or 4 Star Anise  
3 or 4 Cinnamon Sticks  
1/3 cup fresh Cranberries  
1 sprig of Rosemary  
1 Orange

#### Here's how to assemble the gift bags:

- Using a cone-shaped plastic gift bag, start with the cloves at the bottom point of the bag.
- Add the star anise above the cloves, and then cinnamon sticks.
- Next, add the cranberries, tuck in the rosemary, and top with the orange.
- Tie the bag with twine or ribbon and attach the gift tag.
- Refrigerate until ready to gift or use.

#### Finished design:

You can also use a glass jar instead of a bag.



#### Add these instructions to your gift tags:

To warm the potpourri on the stovetop:

- Slice orange and add all ingredients to a small pot.
- Add 2 cups of water and bring to a boil (the berries need to burst), then simmer on low.
- Add more water as needed.

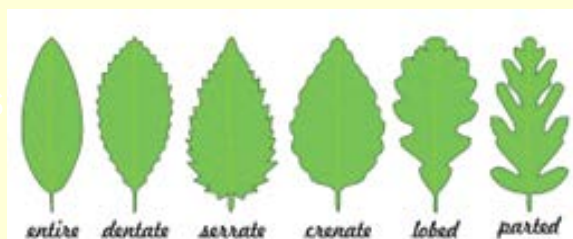


**You can make these for gifts or keep them for yourself—either way it's a win-win!**



# LEAVES

LEAVES



**PURPOSE:** for youth to identify different kinds of leaves and learn about edible leaves

## WHAT IS A LEAF?

A leaf is a flat, green part of a plant that grows on a stem, and its main job is to collect sunlight so the plant can make its own food through photosynthesis; it's kind of like a plant's kitchen, where it cooks its food with sunlight. The leaves of different plants vary widely in size, shape, and color.

## Edible Leaves:

- |             |                   |                   |
|-------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Arugula  | 5. Chives         | 9. Mustard greens |
| 2. Bok choy | 6. Collard greens | 10. Spinach       |
| 3. Cabbage  | 7. Kale           | 11. Swiss chard   |
| 4. Lettuce  | 8. Watercress     |                   |

## MATERIALS:

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. Fifteen fresh different-shaped leaves | 6. Color paper       |
| 2. Newspaper                             | 7. Adhesive spray    |
| 3. Laminator                             | 8. Crayons           |
| 4. Ten 3mm laminating pouches            | 9. 8x8 origami paper |
| 5. Scissors                              | 10. Clipboard        |
|  | 11. Painter's tape   |

## ACTIVITY:

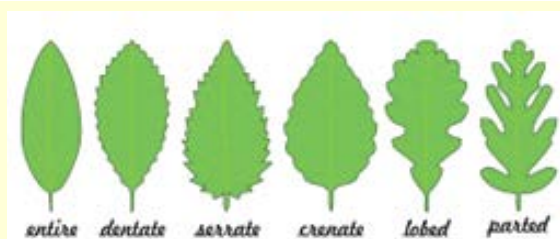
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. After collecting leaves, place them inside the newspaper and put heavy books on top.  | pouch and proceed to laminate them in a set of three or four leaves.   |
| 2. After the leaves are dry, approximately one week later, take the leaves and spray the adhesive on the front side of the leaf, and glue it on an origami piece of paper. | 5. After laminating the leaves, cut them, leaving at least 1/2 cm of the laminating plastic around the shape of the leaf |
| 3. Cut out the silhouette of the leaf and the name of the leaf from the list provided.   | 6. Place the leaves in the clipboard and under the origami paper, and secure them with the painter's tape.               |
| 4. Place each leaf on the laminated  | 7. Take the paper off the crayons  |
|  | 8. Use the side of the crayons to trace the leaves into the paper and create some art.                                   |





# LEAVES

LEAVES



## List of Possible Leaves for Identification:

1. Common Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)
2. Cypress (*Cupressus*)
3. Dutch Elm (*Ulmus hollandica*)
4. English Oak (*Quercus ruber*)
5. Foxglove (*Paulownia Tomentosa*)
6. Guava (*Campomanesina malifolia*)
7. Maple (*Acer sp.*)
8. Paper Mulberry (*Broussonetia papyfera*)
9. Pin Oak (*Quercus palustris*)
10. Plains cottonwood (*Populus deltoids*)
11. Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*)
12. Swamp Oak (*Quercus bicolor*)
13. Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*)
14. White Oak (*Quercus alba*)
15. White rose (*Rosa alba*)

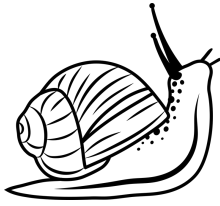


## NOTE:

This is a good activity to enjoy during the fall season. Go for a nature walk and collect fallen leaves.

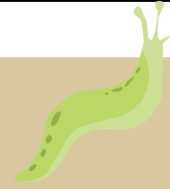
Also, the fall is a good time to plant some edible leaves, like the ones in the list below:

- |             |                   |                 |
|-------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Arugala  | 6. Collard Greens | 10. Spinach     |
| 2. Bok Choy | 7. Kale           | 11. Swiss Chard |
| 3. Cabbage  | 8. Watercress     |                 |
| 4. Lettuce  | 9. Mustard Greens |                 |
| 5. Chives   |                   |                 |



## Bug Spotlight Slugs and Snails

Article by Debra Caldwell, Advanced Master Gardener: Entomology



We are going to stretch our definition of “bugs” again by discussing slugs and snails. These creatures are in Phylum Mollusca with their squid, clam and octopus cousins. They belong to Class Gastropoda which means “stomach foot” because they use their muscular “foot” to glide along on a slimy trail of mucus.

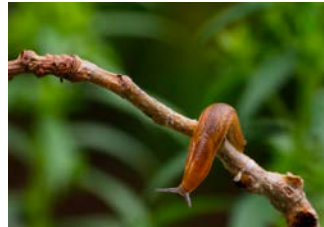
Snails protect their bodies with a single, spiral shell while slugs have no shell or just a vestige. They have rasping mouthparts called a radula that can cause considerable damage to plants. Although they can be active all year in our area, fall is prime time. As temperatures cool and rains or irrigation leave moist areas in the garden, snails and slugs lay eggs that overwinter and hatch in spring. Snails and slugs are hermaphrodites meaning that an individual can produce both sperm and eggs. However, normally they don’t self-fertilize but mate with another member of their species.



Snail family, CC BY-ND 2.0



Kale eaten by snails. Photo by Debra Caldwell



Canva



Canva

Our fall veggie gardens with lettuce, greens, cabbage and other cole crops, are very attractive to these pests. If you see big chunks of leaves that have been chewed, you may need to do a little detective work at night. Go out with a flashlight and check under leaves to search for the culprits. Look for slime trails on plants. You may find white, translucent eggs under boards or in corners of raised beds. During the day, they tend to hide in moist plant debris or under leaves.

Snails are very interesting creatures. If you find one, look on the underside. It may take a few seconds but eventually you will see a small hole open as it takes in air. Notice the “antennae” or tentacles. The upper pair are eye stalks with eyes at the tip. The lower pair are chemoreceptors that help the snail sense chemical cues in its environment.

There are several native species of snails and slugs in Texas as well as some introduced species. One species, the black velvet leatherleaf slug, is native to South America. It is considered to be dangerous according to the Texas Invasive Species Institute because it carries rat lungworm, *Angiostrongylus cantonensis*. The parasite can infect other mammals such as dogs, cats and humans. If you do find one, be sure to use gloves before handling it. When I saw one on the sidewalk in Katy, I admired it from afar!

How can we manage snails and slugs? As always, cultural methods are the first step in any Integrated Pest Management Plan. Reduce hiding places by making your garden more open and light. Clean up hiding places such as boards, stones and pots. Use drip irrigation or water at the base of plants. Improve drainage. Don’t overdo mulch because thick layers retain moisture and provide hiding places.



## Bug Spotlight

### Slugs and Snails

Continued



Black Velvet Leatherleaf Slug, Photo by Dr. Matthew McClure Source: Professor, Lamar State College-Orange, TX

The Texas Invasive Species Institute can use your help in tracking this pest. To report a potential sighting, email a photo of the slug and provide your location information to Ashley Morgan-Olvera, M.Sc. ([invasives@shsu.edu](mailto:invasives@shsu.edu)).

Physical methods include barriers, traps or handpicking. Copper barriers are recommended based on the premise that snails and slugs will get a shock when they crawl over copper strips or foil. My students tested this idea by creating barriers with copper pennies and found that they were not a deterrent. Practical issues such as the size of the strips and their placement also can make them ineffective. Diatomaceous earth is sometimes used as a barrier but doesn't work as soon as it gets wet.

Flat stones, damp cardboard or boards provide hiding places and can be strategically placed to attract snails and slugs. Check under them during the day and dispose of the pests by drowning them in soapy water. I used to collect the little bums in a coffee can and released them in a field in my neighborhood. Eventually, new houses were built in the field. I'm sure the homeowners wondered why they had such a snail and slug problem! I had to resort to the "pick and squish" method—although unpleasant, it kills them quickly, so they don't suffer.

Beer traps are sometimes employed. Place a shallow container in the soil so the top is level with the ground and fill it with your favorite beer or a mixture of water and yeast. When snails and slugs come for a drink, they fall in and drown. Providing habitat for natural predators such as birds, toads and snakes is a way to biologically manage snails and slugs.

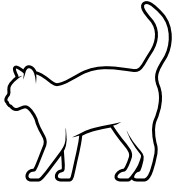
As a last resort, you can use chemical methods to control snails and slugs. Baits with metaldehyde or iron phosphate are sprinkled around plants. Iron phosphate baits are less toxic and are approved for use in organic gardens. However, they can cause harm if consumed in large amounts. Metaldehyde is more toxic to humans, dogs, cats, earthworms and beneficial insects that live in soil. It is important to read and follow directions on the label of any pesticide. The bait should be sprinkled rather than put in a pile. Putting them outside a raised bed full of veggies rather than in the bed is the best practice.

If snails and slugs are a problem in your garden, try the less toxic methods first. If you are persistent, you should be able to keep the populations in check without escalating to molluscides.

#### References:

- <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2011/03/snails.pdf>
- <https://www.uaf.edu/ces/publications/database/gardening/slugs.php>
- <https://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7427.html>





# Getting Down to Earth

## News from Genoa Friendship Gardens – Houston, 77034

*Article and Photos by Pam Longley, Master Gardener*

### A big WOO HOO:

Harris County Precinct 2, the owner of the GFG property, hired contractors to replace the roof, siding and add a door to the building we call “The Old Greenhouse.” We have had almost no ability to use the building since July 2024 when Hurricane Beryl blew off more than half of the roof. They hired plumbers to fix a broken water line for the irrigation system that had been flooding the vegetable garden. Tree experts trimmed the big trees. The old Michler portable building that held fertilizers (and some known and surprise supplies) was removed and will be replaced by a covered railroad carton that is outfitted for storage. We are so grateful to Harris County Precinct 2 for these long-delayed repairs and replacements!

### The Old Greenhouse BEFORE



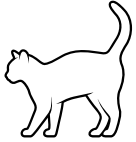
**and AFTER!**



The vegetable gardens have been planted with lima and green beans, broccoli rabe, crimson clover and buckwheat cover crops but we are waiting for the soil to cool down to put in lettuce and spinach. We decided to plant one row in each of our 30 foot beds instead of two this season as more volunteers are needed to maintain a larger crop plan.

**We have had two full classes of interns in our education building, led by Karrie Calloway with visiting speakers. Since we now have a little facelift at GFG, we are hoping to attract some intern volunteers!**





## Getting Down to Earth Continued

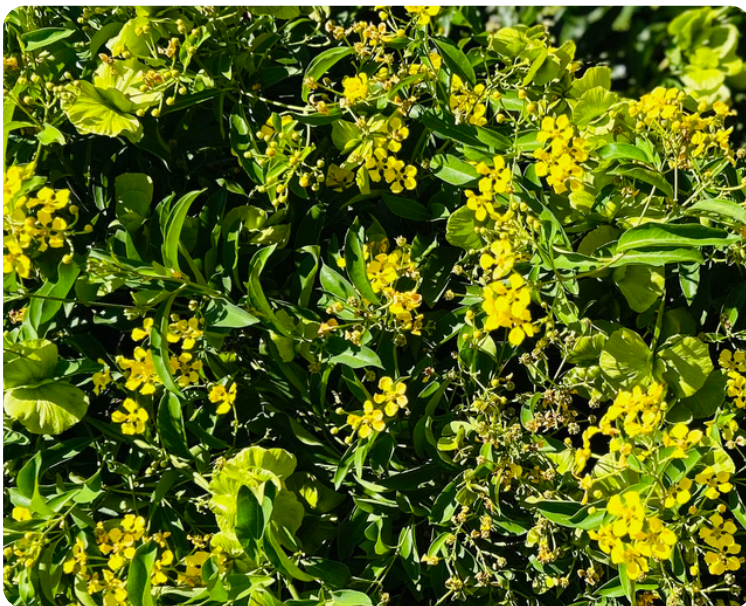
### As seen at GFG:



Doug McLeod chillin' while pulling torpedo grass



Becky McGraw-Wall planting new flower boxes in front of the education building



Mexican Butterfly Vine (*Mascagnia macroptera*)







## Herb Spotlight

**Sage, *Salvia officinalis***

Article by Jennifer Bennett, Master Gardener



Sage, a member of the mint family, is a perennial shrub native to the Mediterranean coastal areas of southern Europe. It has been cultivated for thousands of years for its medicinal qualities. Ancient Egypt and Rome burned sage in purification ceremonies. In the Middle Ages, it was considered indispensable as a medicine. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, sage tea was a popular beverage. The botanical name for its genus, *Salvia*, means “to heal” and was given to sage because of its medicinal qualities.

There are over 700 varieties of *Salvia*. It is garden sage (*S. officinalis*) that is of culinary importance. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the benefits of including sage in cooking foods rich in fat, like duck, goose, and pork, were recognized. Sage also works well in bread stuffings, hearty soups, and in traditional mixes of herbs like thyme and marjoram.



Sage grows best in full sun. It may need a raised bed if your space doesn't have good drainage. Place plants 1–2 feet apart. Once established, sage is relatively drought-tolerant. Each spring, cut the plants back by one-third to promote new growth. Sage does become woody after a year or two and at that point, the herb is not as pungent and the plant needs to be renewed. You can get new plants or try taking cuttings or dividing new growth on the outside of the plants.

With its lavender-blue flowers atop 2–3 foot wiry stems, sage makes a lovely addition to a rock or herb garden or as a perennial border plant. The gray-green leaves are about three inches long and become more silvery as the plant matures. Sage attracts both bees and butterflies to your garden, and has no serious insect or disease problems.



Pinch leaves off as you need them. After the flowers open, cut the stems back to encourage more leaf growth. Hang the cut stems upside-down to dry in a dark, airy space. Rub the stems to remove the dried leaves. Because of their high oil content, rubbed sage leaves don't feel as crisp as other herbs.

A fresh bunch of sage will last up to a week in a glass of water. Chopped leaves can be put into an ice-cube tray, barely covered with water, and frozen for up to three months. Dried sage stored in an air-tight container will keep its flavor for up to a year.

A couple more fun facts about sage: the beautiful blooms are edible; and the essential oil extracted from the leaves is used in perfumes and mouthwashes. What an amazing plant!

### References:

- <https://txmg.org/hendersonmg/plant-library/sage-common/>
- The Complete Vegetable & Herb Gardener. Karen Davis Cutler. Wiley Publishing, Inc. 1997.
- The Spice and Herb Bible. Third Edition. Ian Hemphill. Robert Rose Inc. 2006.







## Watching for Oak Wilt

Article by Terri Carpenter Simon, Master Gardener



So many people like oak trees. Oaks are large and majestic. They have nice canopies that provide welcome shade in the Texas heat, and some give us fall color. They are resilient and can handle Texas heat. The trees also provide food and nesting spots for wildlife. How many of us have taken a relaxing nap on a hammock set up under an oak tree or pushed our child on a swing hung from an oak tree's branches? Have you ever been banned from a fort built within the branches of a large oak tree? I have.

Visit Rice University in Houston to view the beauty and splendor of trees. The campus has more than 4,000 trees and nearly half of them are live oaks. Runners on the outskirts of the campus can jog beneath the shade of those trees. Rice is recognized by the Arbor Day Foundation as a "Tree Campus USA" with a staff of 31 employees to maintain the trees and grounds.

In North America, there are roughly 90 types of oak trees and about 50 types are found in Texas. With the freezing cold in the northern part of our state and desert-like conditions in the south, Texas oaks must handle some extreme weather. Texas oak trees are in the genus *Quercus*. The species can be identified by differences and color in their bark, their leaf appearance, the acorns they produce, and sometimes their flowers. Leaf color can differ depending on the season. One reference I found that can help identify a few of the more common oak tree varieties is [Types of Texas Oak Trees \(With Pictures\) - Identification Guide](#). If there is an oak tree you would like to classify, this site has nice pictures of oak tree bark, leaves, acorns, and general info on the trees' heights and canopies.

Many of our Texas oak trees are being threatened by a fungal disease. Oak wilt is one of the most destructive of the tree diseases in the United States, and its presence has been confirmed in 76 Texas counties. All oaks (*Quercus spp.*) can be infected. Red oak trees are especially prone to infection and cannot recover once symptoms of oak wilt are seen. Infected trees will die within four to six weeks. White oaks have moderate tolerance and may survive without treatment for several years. Some may recover if the infection is caught early and/or if early and proper fungicide treatment is administered. In Central and West Texas, oak trees are being killed at an epidemic level. Some cases have been found in Harris County.

Oak wilt is caused by the fungus *Bretziella fagacearum* (formerly *Ceratocystis fagacearum*). It grows through the tree's water conducting system, causing the tree to wilt and die. It is infectious and can spread to other trees both above ground and underground. The fungus can be transmitted from tree to tree via sap-sucking insects. These beetles will pick up spores from an infected tree and carry them to fresh wounds on other oak trees. To prevent infection, do not prune oak trees from mid-March through June (possibly July) as this is the primary season for oak wilt to spread, and cover fresh tree wounds with paint. By transporting infected wood to other locations, the fungus can also be introduced to any uninfected trees there. Below ground, the fungus will move from tree to tree through linked roots. The average rate of spread through these root connections is about 75 feet per year.



## Watching for Oak Wilt

### Continued

Symptoms of oak wilt are typically first seen in the leaves. First, there is a sudden wilting and browning of the leaves. Live oak leaves first become chlorotic and eventually brown. Often venal necrosis, where the veins turn yellow or brown, is also observed. This is followed by a rapid defoliation with many of the leaves still being partially green. Beneath the bark of infected red oak trees, fungal mats that produce spores can be found. White oaks and live oaks do not form these fungal mats. The mats can also form on firewood, stumps and logs.



Dr. Raj Singh of the LSU Ag Center

Managing oak wilt uses four methods. The primary process involves the removal of diseased parts of the tree or of the entire diseased tree. You must make sure to dispose of the diseased wood immediately and properly by burning, burying or chipping it to prevent further spread. Trenching can be used to disrupt interconnected roots, preventing underground transmission. For expensive trees, fungicide may be applied. This usually must be injected and cannot reverse the damage caused by the disease. Therefore, it is best used as a preventative. Finally, you may want to consider using other trees in the landscape. Consider other native trees that will not be affected by oak wilt.

Lately, some oak trees have shown symptoms that mimic oak wilt. Dr. Raj Singh, an expert at LSU AgCenter in Louisiana, cautions that the cupping seen in the leaves of some oak trees at this time may be due to the drought of 2023 that impacted the south. Some trees showed visible damage quickly, while in others are just now showing symptoms. Leaves can “cup” due to different reasons. Chemical spray, disease, severe weather and nutritional deficits can cause leaves to curl upward, or “cup”. If you observe cupping in your tree, don’t assume it’s due to oak wilt since other factors can cause cupping as well. Before destroying a tree you believe has oak wilt, consult an expert. Dr. Singh advises that you may want to wait until spring because if the cupping is due to drought, then the problem will resolve itself. Monitor the trees closely. The Texas Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab will test samples if submitted. Click on this link to obtain a form for plant testing. [D-1178-v2025\\_fillable.pdf](#).

For a more comprehensive source of understanding, preventing and managing oak wilt, visit [TexasOakWilt](#).



#### References:

- [LSU AgCenter plant doctor says recent southern red oak tree symptoms are unlikely to be oak wilt](#)
- [Types of Texas Oak Trees \(With Pictures\) - Identification Guide](#)
- [Campus Scene: Wise Trees | Rice Magazine | Office of Public Affairs | Rice University](#)
- [Your paragraph text](#)
- [Texas Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab | Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service](#)
- [TexasOakWilt](#)



## Ask a Master Gardener at McGovern Centennial Gardens



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.

**Visit our Ask a Master Gardener table in the *Family Gardens*  
on the *first Saturday of each month!***





*November*

## Ask A Master Gardener In-Person Events

*December*

**Saturday, November 1, 2025, 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**  
Urban Harvest Farmers Market  
2752 Buffalo Speedway, Houston 77027

**Saturday, November 1, 2025, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**  
McGovern Centennial Gardens - Family Gardens  
1500 Hermann Dr, Houston 77004

**Saturday, November 1, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.**  
Mercer Botanic Gardens  
22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble 77338

**Saturday, November 1, 2025, 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.**  
River Oaks Elementary School Nature Center  
2008 Kirby Dr, Houston 77019

**Friday, November 7, 2025 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**  
Harvest Festival Harris County Precinct 1  
El Franco Lee Park, Community Center  
9500 Hall Road, Houston 77089

**Saturday, November 8, 2025, 8:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**  
Tomball Farmers Market, 205 West Main St, Tomball

**Saturday November 8, 2025, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**  
Lake Houston Club Summerwood - Fall Festival 16136  
Hunters Lake Way, Houston 77044

**Saturday, November 8, 2025, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**  
Grand Parkway Farmers Market  
Church of the Holy Apostles  
1225 Grand Parkway South, Katy 77494

**Saturday, November 8, 2025, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**  
Houston Botanic Gardens, One Botanic Lane, Houston

**Saturday, November 15, 2025, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.**  
Mercer Botanic Gardens  
22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble 77338

**Saturday, November 22, 2025, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**  
Memorial Villages Farmers Market  
10840 Beinhorn Rd, Houston 77024

**Saturday, December 6, 2025, 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**  
Urban Harvest Farmers Market  
2752 Buffalo Speedway, Houston 77027

**Saturday, December 6, 2025, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**  
McGovern Centennial Gardens - Family Gardens  
1500 Hermann Dr, Houston 77004

**Saturday, December 6, 2025, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**  
AAMG Lake Houston Winter Festival  
Club Summerwood  
16136 Hunters Lake Way, Houston 77044

**Saturday, December 6, 2025, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.**  
Mercer Botanic Gardens  
22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble 77338

**Saturday, December 13, 2025, 8:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**  
Tomball Farmers Market  
205 West Main St, Tomball 77375

**Saturday, December 13, 2025, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**  
Grand Parkway Farmers Market  
Church of the Holy Apostles  
1225 Grand Parkway South, Katy 77494

**Saturday, December 6, 2025, 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.**  
River Oaks Elementary School Nature Center  
2008 Kirby Dr, Houston 77019

**Saturday, December 6, 2025, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**  
Lake Houston - Club Summerwood  
16136 Hunters Lake Way, Houston 77044

**Saturday, December 20, 2025, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.**  
Mercer Botanic Gardens  
22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble 77338

**Saturday, December 27, 2025, 8:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.**  
Memorial Villages Farmers Market  
10840 Beinhorn Rd, Houston 77024

## Genoa Friendship Gardens



The Flower Trial Garden



The Water Garden



The Greenhouse

The Texas A&M 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. – 11 a.m. (weather permitting)

We welcome professional organizations, schools, churches and individual 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. 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 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



Year-to-date rainfall is below average. August and September were very low. As I walk around my neighborhood, I see a lot of plants looking stressed and wilted. As we head toward cooler temperatures (I hope), supplemental watering may not be needed, but check for "too wet, too dry, just right" and water accordingly. Keep up with mulch. A 2-to-3-inch layer helps maintain soil temps and deter weeds.

November and December are good times to prepare planting beds for the spring and for general clean up and maintenance. If you are planning any changes, you might want to watch this [Green Thumb lecture](#) on xeriscaping.

Gather those fallen leaves (yours and your neighbors if they don't use them) to use as mulch or as the "brown" in your compost. If you pick up leaves from others, be aware that some may be gathered via lawn mower and may contain grass, weeds and weed treatments.

November comes with a chance of frost so be sure to have your frost supplies ready. Historically, first frost in Zone 8 is November 7–November 28. First frost in Zone 9 is November 25–December 13.

## Perennials, Ornamental Grasses and Natives

- Finish dividing spring blooming perennials in November. Most like to be divided every couple of years. Remember to keep the roots moist until the plant is replanted.
- As chrysanthemums and other perennials finish blooming, cut the stalks to the ground. Cutting back ornamental grasses can be done, but you might like the tan-colored seed heads as a winter display.
- You can spread wildflower seeds in November. Gently rake them into the soil.

## Annuals

- Plant cool season annuals. Fertilize and mulch. Pansies and violas are cold tolerant, but you can also still plant others like dusty miller, snapdragons and stock.
- Existing annuals should only be fertilized if they are showing deficiency symptoms.

## Bulbs

- Finish planting spring bulbs. For tulips and hyacinths, wait until December. Tulips should be refrigerated for at least three weeks before planting. While bulbs are often planted in clusters or drifts, I sometime plant a bulb or two individually. I love the surprise each year when they bloom.
- Cut back foliage that has browned. Mark the location of dormant summer bulbs. It is also a good idea to mark where you plant spring bloomers so you don't accidentally dig them up or damage them digging in the vicinity.
- When you cut back iris foliage, gently dig in some bone meal around the rhizomes.





## Gardening Calendar

*Continued*



### Trees

- Celebrate Texas Arbor Day on Friday, November 7 by planting a tree.

### Shrubs

- Now is a good time to plant or move woody ornamentals including shrubs, roses, trees and woody vines so they are well established before summer heat arrives.
- Keep azaleas moist in cold weather to avoid damage.
- In late December, most shrubs will be dormant and can be pruned. Pruning too early (before dormancy) can signal plants to set out new growth. Avoid pruning shrubs that bloom in the spring.

### Lawns

- Apply preemergent herbicide in early November if you didn't apply in October.
- Gather fallen leaves so they don't shade your lawn. Use as mulch or in compost. Or using a mulching mower, mulch them down into the lawn to help cover the soil surface and deter cool season weeds.

### Edibles (vegetables, herbs, berries, fruits)

- See the following link for recommended plantings times:  
[Harris County Veg Planting Guide](#)
- Oranges and satsumas may be ready to harvest. It is typically best if they are harvested before turning fully orange.
- Check the planting guide above for when to plant cool season crops like beets, radishes and lettuce.
- Prepare the vegetable garden for spring planting.

### Groundcovers and Vines

- Plant hardy perennial vines through the winter months with December prime time. No fertilizing needed until spring.
- Mulch tender vines covering the roots and lower stems.
- Ground covers can be divided and transplanted.

#### Works Cited

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

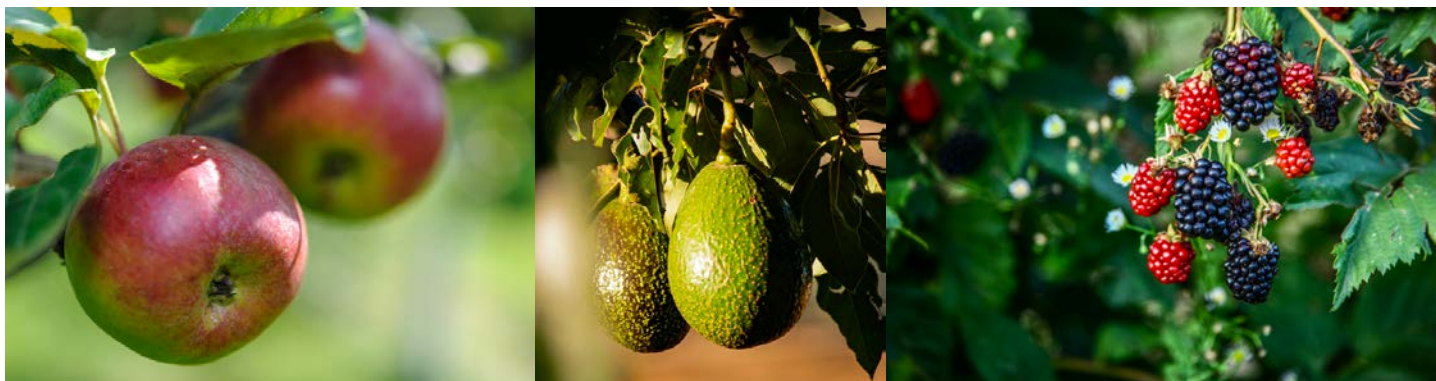




## Ask A Master Gardener Online

by the AAMGO Committee

**Q:** We just moved to the northwest part of town and have an acre of land we want to make the most of. We are really wanting to plant some fruit trees and berries. We have an amazing pecan tree that was already here and it's doing great! We will have more pecans than we know what to do with! Here are some things we want to grow, but unsure if Harris County soil would work for us: Apples, Pears, Peaches, Plums (maybe Mexican plums?), Cherry trees, Avocados, Strawberries, Blackberries, Blueberries, Raspberries.



**A:** Thank you so much for sending in your question regarding growing fruit in NW Harris County. The good news is that, with the exception of raspberries and cherries, you should ultimately be able to grow all of those things! I will provide you with some resources and information that will help you get started in your learning.

First, our area can have a mix of either sandy loam soil or clay, depending on where you are. It will be important to pay attention to the soil that you have, and ultimately some of these things will need to be grown in amended soil or raised beds. We always recommend conducting a [SOIL TEST](#) to determine your soil type and nutritional content. Because you have an acre to work with, it may help to determine where your primary orchard will be and test a few areas as you design your garden.

Another important thing to consider is the varieties of trees and shrubs that you purchase. I cannot emphasize enough that it is important to purchase those varieties that are known to do well in our area. The big box stores will stock hundreds of fruit trees every year, and most of the time they are not chosen for our county—they are bulk purchased and shipped to the stores. Fruit trees must have a certain number of chill hours in order to bear fruit. Chill hours are the cumulative number of hours between 32° and 45°. These hours are necessary for the tree to break dormancy and produce fruit. This information will help you understand and apply this requirement to your fruit tree selection: [Chilling Hours: First and Last Frost \(TAMU AgriLife Extension\)](#) and [Chilling Hour Requirements of Fruit Crops \(MS State Extension\)](#).



## Ask A Master Gardener Online

*Continued*

As you can imagine, we do not have very many chill hours in our area so it is important to select fruit tree varieties with low chill hour requirements. The selection for these, and the advice, is always better at our independently-owned garden centers. Also, there are several fruit tree sales early in the year. We only offer fruit tree varieties with a proven track record in Harris County. That information will be published on all of our social media as it gets closer to sale time.

These pages linked below will help you to understand each crop you mentioned, and their growing requirements:

[Extension Education in Harris County - Fruits and Nuts](#)—this page has links to excellent fact sheets about each type of tree you wish to grow, plus additional resource links;

[Fruit and Fruit Trees](#) from Urban Harvest—similar to the above, with fact sheets about various types of fruit and additional links to other helpful resources.

You did mention that you would be interested in growing cherries and raspberries. Unfortunately, those two crops do not succeed in our area. There are not enough chill hours for cherry trees and the raspberries do not thrive in our heat and humidity. There is a native Texas black cherry tree, *Prunus serotina*, that will produce bittersweet cherries suitable for jams and jellies, but we are on the edge of the growing range for this tree and it may or may not be successful. Research on raspberries that will perform in the humid south is ongoing, and there are some promising results from MS State research. I am hopeful that in time there will be some dependable varieties for us.

Also, avocados are an interesting fruit for Harris County. They can be very productive, but as you will read in the above information, they can suffer during prolonged hard freezes. If you select one of the hardier Mexican varieties and if the tree has a chance to reach maturity, it may be able to make it through a hard freeze (with additional protection). Chances of success are a bit better south of I-10 as the frosts and freezes tend to be milder. The same is true of many citrus varieties also.

I hope that you find all of this helpful. With a full acre to garden, you should be able to plan a really productive orchard!



**Q:** I want to use a pre-existing board structure as a raised garden bed. The structure consists of the side support boards of an old, small deck—we've already removed the horizontal boards. The vertical height of the wooden boards that are still in place ranges from 10 to 20 inches and the boards are at least 12 years old. What is the likelihood that chemicals, if any were used to treat the boards, would contaminate the soil that will fill the former deck? I plan to grow vegetables and flowers.





## Ask A Master Gardener Online

*Continued*

**A:** Thank you for your question. The general answer is that chemicals will have leached into the soil at a minimum of wherever the treated wood touched soil. The extent and amount of chemicals that would cause concern depends on how old the boards are, what chemicals were used to treat them, and the soil conditions—clay or sand, and the pH. According to several university resources, the wood-preserving industry started voluntarily phasing out the use of products containing chromium and arsenic for consumer use in 2002 and by 2004, the EPA limited the use of CCA (chromated copper arsenate) for residential wood that could be purchased at local lumber stores. The preservatives are still used for industrial wood products.

I haven't found information about how long the remaining supply of CCA treated wood continued to be sold to consumers, but assuming your deck was made less than about 20 years ago, and the deck builder didn't obtain wood from an industrial source, then the wood in your deck was likely treated with newer copper-based chemicals, CA (copper azole) or ACQ (alkaline copper quaternary ammonium). These newer chemicals can still leach into the soil in the area where the wood makes direct contact, but tests in Oregon in beds built with lumber pressure treated with CA did not show an increase in copper in vegetables and herbs grown in those beds. Other studies have indicated that while plants might absorb some of these newer copper-based chemicals, they normally obtain natural copper from the soil in small amounts for growth, and the metals may not find their way into the plants in significant amounts; CA and ACQ lumber is not expected to have adverse effects on our health.



More recent non-metallic wood treatments can still include fungicides and pesticides which can leach into soils over time, so precautions can be taken if you are concerned. Those precautions would include using the area for non-edible flowers and shrubs and building new beds out of longer lasting untreated wood like cedar (with a non-toxic wood sealer for a little longer life), or using concrete blocks, bricks, or stones, or even cattle/horse troughs to make your vegetable beds. You can also line the existing wood with plastic or a flexible pond liner, but some people have concerns about those materials too.



## Ask A Master Gardener Online

*Continued*

Be sure to wash fruits and vegetables from gardens built from pressure treated lumber, to minimize the dust as the wood breaks down. It's always a good idea to wash all fresh produce because of general soil organisms, chemical overspray, etc. If you do any sawing, hammering, or drilling of pressure treated wood, it's a good idea to wear a protective mask to avoid inhaling treated dust.



Here are some helpful resources that you can read to make the best decision for you and your family about your raised beds:

[Home and Garden Use of Treated Wood](#) from the National Pesticide Information Center—the resources listed in this article are very good, including the Publications from Oregon State University (Willamette Valley study), Clemson University, and the University of Tennessee.

[Safety of Wood Products in the Garden](#) from The University of Florida—a good summary article.

Best wishes, and please contact us again at the link below if you have future questions.



Click [here](#) if you have a question to submit to our Ask A Master Gardener Online committee.



### Texas A&M AgriLife Extension in Harris County

AgriLife Extension's Horticulture program in Harris County promotes research based horticultural practices that help residents create beautiful, productive gardens and landscapes while conserving water and other natural resources.

[Find other Harris County AgriLife Extension Publications.](#)



## Green Thumb 2025 – That’s a Wrap!

*By Jo Ann Stevenson, Master Gardener*



Another successful year of Green Thumb presentations has been completed. Every year, the Harris County Master Gardeners and the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service present a Green Thumb series of lectures from January through October. These presentations are online twice each month and are hosted by our partners at Harris County Public Library and Houston City College.

Our talented Master Gardener speakers presented the following topics this year: History of Genoa Friendship Gardens, Spring Vegetable Gardening, Seasonal Tree Care, Sustainable Gardening, Some Like It Hot (Xeriscaping), Cover Crops and Living Mulches, Fall Vegetable Gardening, Plants of the Bible, Powerful Perennials, and Composting.

The Harris County Public Library started a blog this year specifically centered around the Green Thumb topics. One of our own Master Gardeners, Steve Barefield, writes the blog each month. These can be found at <https://hcpl.net/author/steveb/>.

I would like to thank our 2025 presenters, Debra Caldwell, Valerie Depew, Stephanie Gray, Andrew Johnson, Robin Kendrick-Yates, Teresa See, and Chevvv Tang, for your time, effort and dedication to present solid, research-based horticulture information to the public.

I also want to thank John Shaffer and his team at Harris County Public Library and Dr. Latrice Rideout and her team at Houston City College for their ongoing partnership with the Harris County Master Gardeners. We couldn’t be on the air without your support, tech help, and efforts to ensure the events flowed smoothly.

Additionally, I want to acknowledge and thank the Master Gardeners who have provided online support for each of the presentations: Steve Barefield, Valerie Depew, Beverly McDaris, Jessica Marish-Jarl, Chevvv Tang, Georgia Watson, and Ivonne Zaldivar. Your hard work behind the scenes made the presentations successful.

A special thanks goes to the members of the Education committee, who select the topics each year. We already have a great slate of topics and speakers for 2026, and I look forward to sharing that with you in the January/February edition of Urban Dirt.

[Full list of all Green Thumb Gardening Series \(YouTube\)](#)







## Plant Gifts for the Holidays

### Gift Tags



#### Poinsettia – *Euphorbia pulcherrima*

Care:

Water only when dry  
Avoid drafts  
Bright light

After the holidays:

Stop watering  
Let bracts fall  
Prefer 60-70 degrees



Courtesy of Harris County Master Gardeners

#### Rosemary Topiary – *Rosmarinum officinalis*

Care:

Water only when dry  
Ensure drainage  
Bright light

After the holidays:

Put or plant outside  
Repot plants  
Full sun



Courtesy of Harris County Master Gardeners

#### Cyclamen – *Cyclamen persicum*



Note: Toxic to cats and dogs

Care:

Water when dry  
Cool temps, high humidity  
Full sun

After the holidays:

Keep as houseplant  
Let dry between waterings  
Morning sun

Courtesy of Harris County Master Gardeners

#### Norfolk Pine – *Araucaria heterophylla*

Care:

Keep soil moist  
Bright, indirect light

After the holidays:

Keep as houseplant  
Watch the water  
Bright light



Courtesy of Harris County Master Gardeners

#### Amaryllis – *Hippeastrum hybrids*

Care:

Keep moist, but not wet  
Full sun / part shade  
Organic potting soil / sandy  
Can grow 18-36 inches tall

After the holidays:

Treat as houseplant or plant  
outside after danger of frost  
Leave leaves



Courtesy of Harris County Master Gardeners

#### Christmas Cactus – *Schlumbergera bridgesii*

Care:

Not cold hardy  
Water only when dry  
(not too dry)  
Bright, indirect light

After the holidays:

Keep as houseplant  
Let go dormant  
Water and fertilize



Courtesy of Harris County Master Gardeners

## Name That Tree Game

with Terri Carpenter Simon, Master Gardener

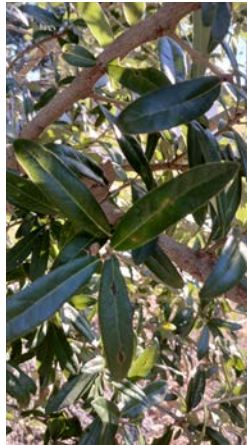
Did you read the oak tree article? Can you identify this tree? You don't need the scientific name. The common name is fine. Email your answer to [bbaggins@peoplepc.com](mailto:bbaggins@peoplepc.com). The deadline is midnight on November 12, 2025. Use the **Name That Tree** title in the subject line so I know it's not spam. A winner will be drawn from the correct answers. Good luck!



The canopy has a wide, rounded crown



Tree bark is brown with deep grooves



The leaves have smooth edges



Acorns are oval with a cap and about 1" long. Immature acorns are green and mature acorns are dark brown to blackish in color

## A Gardener's Version of the Night Before Christmas



'Twas the night before Christmas and all through the yard, the branches were bare and the ground frozen hard; The roses were dormant and mulched all around, to protect them from damage if frost heaves the ground.

The perennials were nestled all snug in their beds, while visions of 5-10-5 danced in their heads.

The new-planted shrubs had been soaked by the hose, to settle their roots for the long winter's doze.

And out on the lawn the new-fallen snow, protected the roots of the grasses below.

When what to my wondering eyes should appear, but a truck full of gifts of gardening gear.

Saint Nick was the driver - the jolly old elf, and he winked as he said, "I'm a gardener myself"; I've brought wilt-pruf, rootone, and gibberellin, too. Please try them and see what each of them can do.

To start new plants, a propagating kit. Sparkling new shears, to keep plants looking fit.

To seed your new lawn, I've a patented sower; in case it should grow, here's a new power mower.

For seed-planting days, I've a trowel and a dibble, and a roll of wire mesh if the rabbits should nibble.

For gardening all season, some gadgets to love; plant stakes, a sprinkler, and waterproof gloves;

A chemical agent for the compost pit, and for pH detecting, a soil testing kit.

With these colorful flagstones lay a new garden path, to access the bird feeder and clean out the bath.

And last but not least, some well-rotted manure. A green Christmas year-round, these gifts will ensure.

Then jolly Saint Nick, having emptied his load, started his truck and took to the road.

And I heard him exclaim through the motor's loud hum, "Merry Christmas to all, and to all a green thumb!"

Adapted from The Gardener, November-December, 1983, Iowa State University.

<https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu/gardeners-version-night-christmas>





## 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)

Plants grown over winter may require protection during freezing weather.

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

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

Enjoyed this newsletter? Check out the Urban Dirt Index [here](#) to discover our past issues with loads of gardening content!



Please help Harris County Master Gardeners continue providing gardening education with a donation



# THANK YOU!