

Williamson County Master Gardener Journal

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Dedicated to growing with Williamson County

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The President's Corner

Grace Bryce

.Hi Everyone,

I hope everyone enjoys the rain we've had lately. I can just hear the trees saying "ahhhhh". With Thanksgiving and the Awards Dinner behind us, there is not much left of 2011. I look forward to working with everyone in 2012 and hope that we can grow WCMGA together to be better for everyone.

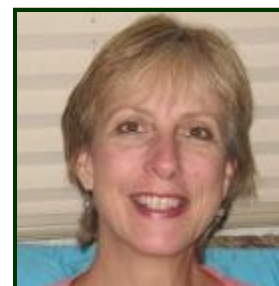
As you know by now, Liz and Jack Grieder will no longer be taking care of the vegetable gardens. I hate to see them go and sincerely appreciate all of the work they have done in nurturing the demonstration gardens we have. Thank you Liz and Jack! We will miss you. By the time this newsletter goes out, we will have had a re-organization meeting for the gardens. Hopefully, everyone who was interested in participating in the veggie gardens or possible expansions, was able to attend. If you could not attend and would like to help, please contact Chuck McKelley.

I want to remind everyone that all of the minutes of the board meetings are located on the website along with financial reports each month after the board meeting. All committee reports are located in the body of the minutes documents. Access to minutes, reports and financial information: <http://txmg.org/williamson/chapter/meeting-minutes/> (It is found under the chapter tab.) The budget for 2012 has been sent out. If you have any questions, please let me know. Our By-Laws and Standing Rules have also been revised and sent out. Both were revised to bring things up to date with better job descriptions of the committees and committee chairs and to allow for electronic meetings and reporting and posting to the website.

Our Facebook page is doing well. I wanted to say a little bit about the settings and policies for the page. The 'Williamson County Texas Master Gardeners' Facebook page will not allow anyone except the administrators to: post photos or videos, tag photos, or post status. Everyone can comment, and everyone can see everything. Our primary purpose is to try to get more public exposure and generate more traffic to our website for educational purposes, we also have to protect ourselves individually in the process. The way Facebook works, when there are more comments on a post, it is more likely to show up on your friends' newsfeed. Another way you can help increase exposure, is to share a post from the page, on your wall and ask your friends to go 'Like' the page. If you have photos that would be good to post, please send them to me. If you have a lot, do not email them, but give them to me on a cd. The photos are organized into albums and captions are added to direct people to the website. We hope to add some video in the future. Hopefully, we will get some questions to be answered through the comments, that will also increase awareness of what we do and what we offer as a service to the public. If you haven't gone to the page to "Like" it yet, try this link: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/wctxmga>

I just realized that I haven't gotten a newsletter from the Texas Master Gardeners in a while and didn't know I needed to re-subscribe. If you haven't been getting it, go here to subscribe: <http://txmg.org/news/newsletters/>.

I look forward to working with everyone in 2012 and hope that we can grow WCMGA together to be better for everyone.



Master Gardeners At Southwestern University

Sandra Pikoff

A series of gardening workshops is being conducted at Southwestern University. The first in the series occurred in September. Thirty-five enthusiastic students and faculty members braved the stifling heat in the gardens at Southwestern University to learn about Healthy Soils and Composting. After introductory remarks by Dr. Molly Jensen, Patty Hoenigman took over and gave an outstanding presentation on composting basic techniques and processes. Like a magician, she had her "magic bag of tricks" to keep everyone interested...they watched, they laughed and asked many good questions. Then Rebecca Caldwell and Jeanne Barker rounded out the program with demonstrations on worm composting, their personal experiences and how-to-do-it at home.

Master Gardeners are invited, in fact, encouraged, to participate in future programs. The students love having the real-life input of Master Gardeners. Future workshops are schedule as follows: February 9 - Container Gardening for Home and Dorm Room and March 20, 4-5 pm sharing the Harvest. Please contact Sandra Pikoff at: sspikoff@aol.com to participate.

Tree Presentation

Amy Donovan

Emsud Horozovic, Round Rock Forestry Manager, was the featured speaker at the "Trees...Some Shady Characters" hosted by the Williamson County Master Gardeners and the Texas AgriLIFE Extension Office on October 29, 2011. Mr. Horozovic spoke on a wide range of topics including selecting, planting, mulching, pruning and fighting disease in trees. He also spoke on the subject of trees and the drought here in Texas and what trees you should NOT plant.



He concluded the seminar with a hands-on demonstration using the trees outside the AgriLIFE Extension office.

Gardening Tips for Winter

Winola VanArtsdalen

December

Maintenance: Mulch will provide temperature insulation and better water retention for your plants. Be sure to give them this needed winter protection. In the country, farmers spread cow manure on their home gardens, flower beds and fields. How can we duplicate that in the suburbs? With a hand fork, mix two trowels of dried cow manure or other quality compost into soil to depth of 1" and then mulch roses, ornamental shrubs and trees. If you are in a hurry, and it is fine compost, you can just spread it over the soil and then cover with mulch. The fine compost should sift through, and your earthworms will finish the job!

Continue feeding color beds periodically.

Be sure not to work soil when it is wet. Squeeze a handful of soil, and, if it breaks apart easily, it is okay to dig.

Drain and store water hoses. Clean tools. Enjoy seed catalogs and dream new landscape designs!

Planting/transplanting:

You can still plant container-grown trees and woody ornamentals.

My gardening mentor told me years ago to "transplant on the coldest day of the year when you are most miserable," and I still follow that, but you can do it now and any time further into winter.. If it is a really prized bush or tree deserving extra care, here is a time-consuming, but safe strategy. Using a sharp shooter spade, cut roots halfway around to encourage fibrous root growth. Keep moist, and a few weeks later, cut roots on the other half. A few weeks later, transplant, keeping the root ball wrapped in burlap to keep as much soil as possible with the roots.

In this time of drought, I must repeat some information given last month. Any time you are transplanting, water the plant deeply the day before. Deeply pre-water the hole where it will be planted. This is especially important this year when we have had a severe drought. If you do not pre-water, the dry soil below will absorb the moisture away from the new transplant.

Trimming:

To avoid the spread of oak wilt, it is safer to trim oak trees now than earlier in the year, but watch the temperature. We can have some warm days in the winter. The beetle that spreads oak wilt works by the temperature, not the calendar! The best time is when it is so cold you will be most miserable. The beetles do not want to be out there either.

There is no time you can be guaranteed there is no beetle activity. You must paint all wounds to oak trees immediately, any time, any size, any season! If you hire the work done, be sure this is specified in the contract and that you watch them!

Container Plants:

Stop feeding house plants and water sparingly. Do not leave water standing in saucers of container plants. When you water containers, you flush salts through the soil. If containers sit in water standing in the saucers, they then absorb these salts back again with the water. If you use self-watering pots, be sure to flush them several times periodically and empty water out of the reservoir.

January

Welcome to gardening 2012! Let us hope for a year with more moisture than we received last year. To be prepared, check your sprinkler system monthly to be sure all parts are functioning and that you are not over watering. When making plant choices, consider not only soil, shade, and sun requirements but fire danger and water requirements as well. Avoid plants that waste water, our precious natural resource.

With the new year, let us strengthen our efforts to stop the spread of oak wilt in Sun City! This is a serious threat not only to the beauty of our neighborhood, but to the value of our property. Prevention is the key! Yes, this is the best time of year to trim, because the beetles are less active in extremely cold and extremely hot weather. There is no time, however, that you can be sure no beetle is active. Always paint wounds - any size, any time of year, immediately! A nitidulid beetle that carries the fungus has been photographed on an open wound within 15 minutes! Please share this information with your neighbors.

Landscape:

You can best see design changes needed in your landscape now. Remember what plants did well during last summer's drought while making plans.

Consider starting a gardening journal. Think how much more we would know had we kept records through the years! Your own experience has much more value than what you read in a book.

If you need some more color, consider a small strawberry pot with violas. Use lightweight potting soil with a slow-release fertilizer. Add damp soil to the first level of holes in side of jar and plant. Insert violas; add soil up to next level, plant and repeat until you've planted the whole jar. Water gently and enjoy! You can use a viola on top of a sprig of parsley to garnish a lovely luncheon plate.

Order seeds for any summer bloomers you plan to plant this spring. The average last frost date is about two months away. You can now plant seeds of larkspur, snapdragon, alyssum and sweet peas carefully following directions on the package.

Maintenance:

Yes, it is good to add compost to your soil, but do not work wet soil. Working the soil when it is wet will damage the soil structure.

Water everything well before a freeze, but do not over water.

Continue fertilizing pansies and other winter annuals the deer may have missed.

Cyclamen flowers should be picked by giving them a gentle tug away from the corm. If blooms are picked in the ordinary way, the snag left may rot back to the corm. Water carefully to the side of the corms. Cyclamens like liquid fertilizer about every ten days.

Turf: Weeds are easy to see this time of year. Get out there and dig them out now before they become a bigger problem! We find our Weed Hound, available at local hardware stores, makes this job much easier (no bending over for stiff backs) and effective!

Avoid walking on wet lawn, as you will compact the soil.

See you in the garden in the New Year!

Monthly Meetings

Williamson County Master Gardeners hold monthly meetings at the Williamson County Extension Office, 3151 SE Innerloop Road, Suite A, Georgetown on the second Monday of each month at 6:30pm. Master Gardeners and the public are welcome to attend.

Fall Festival at Brushy Creek

Quenby Gartner

It was a crisp Saturday morning on October 22 when a group of Master Gardeners headed over to our neighborhood for the Annual Fall Festival at the Ranch at Brushy Creek. My neighbor and fellow Master Gardener Byron Stephens had his suburban packed high with the Easy-up Shade tent, tables, chairs, bricks to hold things down because the wind was so strong that day, various posters and Master Gardener signs and brochures. Grace Bryce had brought the Rain Barrel so people could see an example of how to capture rain--when we get some! Wayne Rhoden helped us get the Easy-up working because he had used that one before for other Master Gardener events.



Our table was ready to go at noon and looked great! Wayne was our "plant expert" and Grace was in charge of rainwater harvesting and oak wilt. Janet White was also there to answer questions and get her rainwater certification hours. Byron and I passed out the many brochures on fire ants, rainwater harvesting, oak wilt, native plants, information on becoming a Master Gardener and business cards with the phone number of the extension office for people who had questions. Byron's wife helped with the booth set-up and even went to pick up sub sandwich lunches for us!

We counted 100 contacts that afternoon and helped spread the word about Oak Disease and rainwater collection. We may have even interested some people in joining the Master Gardener program. It was easy to do and you can do it in your neighborhood! If you need assistance with putting together a WCMGA Information Booth at your own neighborhood event, please contact Byron Stephens or Quenby Gartner. Our phone numbers are on the WCMGA phone list.



OAK WILT REMINDER from Patty Hoenigman, Oak Wilt Specialist

The nitidulid beetle that carries Oak Wilt Disease is most active from February 1 - June 1, so get your last minute pruning done on your oak trees by the end of January. Remember to paint over any cuts you make, no matter how small, with paint of any kind. Spray paint is fine as is any latex paint. Painting the cuts within ten minutes of making the cut is essential to protect your tree from this deadly disease.

Deck Them Halls - *Santa's elves work at Berry Springs*

Susan Blackledge

Holiday preparations started early this year at Berry Springs Park & Preserve. There were numerous projects underway for different events in order to “Deck the Halls”.

Projects included harvesting seeds from various locations in the park for sowing wildflower areas and for making seed ball ornaments for the centerpieces at the Master Gardener Banquet. Volunteers started early with collecting coreopsis, standing cypress, gay feather, yucca, zinnia's, and sage seeds. The seeds were cleaned and given to the MG decorating committee to put in clear ornaments. Dried leaves from a newly identified plant “White Rosin-Weed” were located on a rocky hillside and were collected by Adrian Grimmett. The leaves were sprayed with glitter and were perfect to be used in the centerpieces. Fallen pecan limbs were selected, painted gold and silver glittered to be the “Charlie Brown” Christmas trees to hang the seed ball ornaments.



Every year Berry Springs decorates the park roads with garland and bows. This year volunteers collected gourds that were found drying up in the fields from the drought. The Junior Master Gardeners lead by Carol Hoke was asked to help decorate the gourds with gold spray paint and glitter in order to make shiny decorative ball ornaments to hang underneath the bows and garland. Seeds that were left over were spread over bare wildflower areas that were ripe for the taking with the recent wonderful soaking rains.

This year's Master Gardener Intern's, Beth Ackley, Amy Donovan, Cindy Stone, Alicia Shamblin, Adrian Grimmett, Veronica Petterson, James Costabile and Master Gardeners Cathy Sariago, Suzanne Howard, Judith Carrier, honorary MG Pat Hooper, and Master Naturalists Pam Goolsby, Pat Shirk, and Bonnie Sladek need to be recognized for really stepping up to the plate for coming out in the 105 degree heat and watering to ensure our flower beds, small shrubs and small pecans survived.

Kudos' to the above mentioned folks as well as Doug Portous, Kay Mueller, Colleen Sweeney, Teresa Robinson and all of the Junior Master Gardeners for helping get into the holiday spirit and making the park decorations and the banquet centerpieces. We had a great time this year!



Mark your calendars now. We have already scheduled the “Spring Clean Up/Pot Luck for Saturday, March 10 and Archeology Days are March 23 - 24. To schedule a time to volunteer call Susan Blackledge at 512-844-4820. We always have plenty to do.

See you at Berry Springs in the New Year.

JMG at Community Montessori



Students have fun while learning with Master Gardeners in the JMG program at the Community Montessori School.



Photos by Jody French

Newsletter Submissions

Thank you to those Master Gardeners who submitted articles, pictures, and ideas for this newsletter issue. If you would like to contribute to the *Williamson County Master Gardener Journal*, please send your submissions to Jane Williamson at jawilliamson516@yahoo.com by the 25th of the month. As you garden, volunteer and learn, take a moment to share with other gardeners.

United States Botanic Garden

Claire Hall

During a trip to Washington, D.C. this past Thanksgiving, my family and I visited the United States Botanic Garden. I'd been to D.C. many times before but never realized this national treasure is located on the Mall adjacent to Congress. It has quite a history, having been established in 1820 through the efforts of Presidents Washington, Jefferson and Madison. November was not an ideal time to view the outside gardens but we were pleased to be among the first visitors of the year to the Holiday Exhibit in the Conservatory.

The Conservatory has a wonderful year-round collection of tropical plants and rare orchids. But every Christmas season a portion of it is devoted to a celebration of historic structures, recreated on smaller scale with natural materials such as willow shoots, seed pods, acorns, pine cones and grapevine tendrils. The windows are made with resin while sanded grout makes up the building surfaces. Presidential homes as well as popular government structures are scattered about the display. This year the exhibit also featured whimsical homes for animals, insects and reptiles. At least 6 model trains run throughout the exhibit, two of which were elevated 12 feet above the floor. There was something wonderful to see wherever you looked.



A Giraffe Garage



Thomas Jefferson's Monticello

The Conservatory and National Gardens are open daily from 10am to 5pm and admission to the gardens is free of charge. Cell phone tours are offered or you can sign up for a personally guided tour without making a reservation. You can find more information on the website at www.usbg.gov

Before we left, I noticed many of the trees in the foyer had been decorated with clear plastic balls containing living plants. The docents were kind enough to share the instructions for making these "living ornaments" with me, and I'm sharing with you!

Season's Greenings

Make Your Own Living Ornament

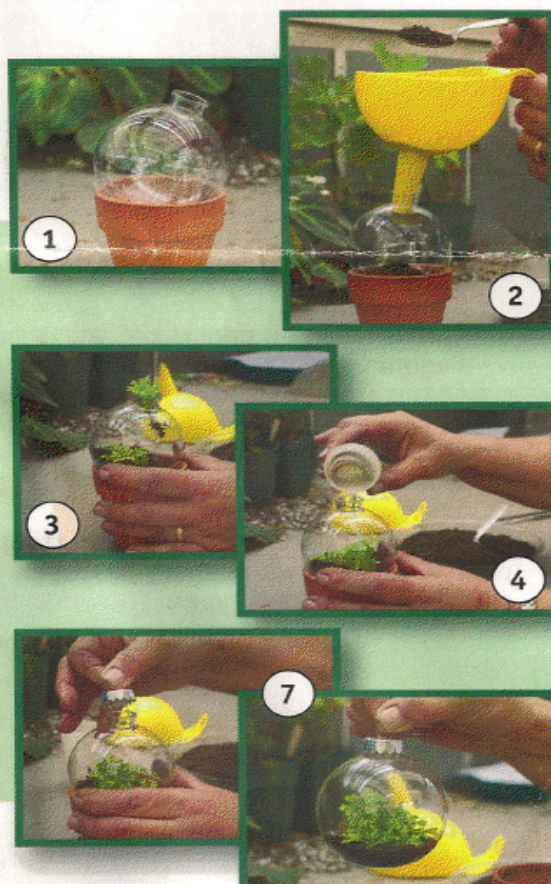
This project is essentially a mini terrarium. Be sure to use your imagination, experiment and have fun!

Materials

- Plastic ornament from craft store, 3" or 4" (bigger is easier to work with)
- Funnel
- Small pot (to hold ornament)
- Fine grain soil
- Water
- Plant (cuttings or seed – see suggested plants on back side of this sheet)
- Long tweezers

Instructions

1. Remove cap top of ornament, place on a small pot or cup (to support while you work)
2. Add 2 – 3 tbsp fine soil (use a funnel; it will help keep the sides of your ornament clean)
3. Using long tweezers, place a small cutting (or seeds) in the soil
4. Water carefully, just moistening the soil; there should be no standing water
5. Place in a bright area (no direct sunlight) until the cutting has rooted
6. Check every few days for water
7. When ready to display, put top back on the ornament and hang in a favorite spot



Season's Greenings

These living ornaments need a bright area, no direct sun and to be watered only when dry. If the inside of ornament collects condensation, remove the cap top to allow the extra moisture to evaporate.

When the plants in the ornament begin to fade you can open the ornament, add water, shake and drain it as much as possible. Use tweezers to pull out remnants of the plant and discard. If you cannot remove the plants, let the ornament dry completely and try to crumble the plants and soil to remove. Clean the ornament and start over.

Suggested Plants

Any plant that stays small could be a potential living ornament plant.

- African Violets
 - String of Pearls
 - Polka-dot plant
 - Iresine
 - Hemigraphis
 - Fittonia
 - Ferns
 - Succulents
 - Cactus (keep on dry side; it will last a long time)
 - Begonia
 - Coleus (roots fast and is very colorful but also grows fast; will be ready to display in a few weeks; will need to be redone in a few months)
 - Seeds (try grass seed; it grows fast, will not last long but looks great for a few weeks)
- Experiment with other seeds of low growing plants.

Cuttings are limited by size. The cutting has to fit through the small opening in the ornament. Most will be ready to display in 2 – 3 months, depending on growing conditions and plant types.



JMG Workday at Hutto Elementary



Photos by Veronica Petterson

Williamson County Master Gardener Officers for 2011

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