Williamson County Master Gardener

Journal

VOLUME 4, NO. 2 Dedicated to growing with Williamson County FEBRUARY 2010

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Master Gardeners Prepare for Upcoming Sales

Wayne Rhoden, Carol Hoke and Charlie Dieterich discuss the upcoming plant sales.

Master Gardeners prepare plants for future sales.

The President's Corner

Winola Van Artsdalen

Hold on to your seat belts! March 12th plant sale at the Greenhouse; March 13th Market Days plant sale on the square; and then it's off to Fort Worth for the state convention. We then have just a few days home, and it's time for our big event—Master Gardener Spring Garden Fair at the Agri-Life Extension Building April 17th. Are you ready?

The months of planning, meetings, talking with wholesalers, training cashiers and sales people, mapping the property for plan of traffic flow, digging in the dirt getting the gardens ready, checking rainwater harvesting equipment, studying our lists and checking them twice, all comes to fruition in the early morning hours of this special Saturday. Will we have a few stragglers coming in for the 8:00 a.m. Plant Preview, or will we fill the room? No one knows, but when I hear your great ideas for publicity, I'm betting on the latter. What I do know for sure is that we will be there eagerly waiting to display the results of our effort and fulfill our mission—educating the good citizens of Williamson County! Keep those plans moving. That day will be here soon!

Out in the garden, fellow MG, Marlyn Hooper offers a few tips.

Wait! Yes, the nurseries and box stores are bringing in all those beautiful warm season plants that have been waiting to burst forth from the greenhouse; but think about this winter. Do you really believe spring is going to come early this year? Sure could be the time to be cautious! Instead of buying those plants now, get the beds ready for when the time arrives, (at least after mid-March), by adding compost as soon as the soil is dry enough.
Use this time to make some notes in your garden journal about how your cool season plants did. Which ones survived the extreme cold of 2010? Check other gardens in your neighborhood. Did they have the same results? Be sure you have divided clumping perennials and ornamental grasses. It is so easy to let this time slip by, and then it's too late!

Do you want to include some plants in your design that lift your heart a bit during the winter giving you hope that spring really is coming? Poppies and other wildflowers are great for this. When most plants are dormant, but you have something light green coming up, it carries the promise of spring blooms to come. Bees enjoying the blooms on your winter honeysuckle in January are a delightful site to behold. Look for other possibilities and share them with us for our planting next fall!

If you have your beds ready for spring planting, but it's still not warm enough, do some planning. Low growing plants like sweet alyssum or veronica groundcover "Georgia Blue" look wonderful with taller plants in back. Geraniums can tolerate 28 degrees and are great for pots with sweet alyssum. Ivy looks great there, too!

Vegetable gardeners, we know you are chompin' at the bit to get those tomato plants in. That's okay, but think row cover! You're going to need it! Especially, don't get in a hurry with those peppers. They just sit there in cold weather, waiting for it to warm up anyway.

Those of you that think you can't grow vegetables because you do not have a vegetable plot, look for some space in your flower beds. Swiss Chard, parsley, fennel, green onions, and leeks add great texture and color to your beds! All of these can handle earlier planting than those greenhouse perennials at the box store.

Strengthen your attack on those cool-season weeds now or pay the price next year! It's doubtful spraying will make much difference. You simply have to get out there and dig them and get rid of them before they go to seed! Yes, you know what's coming next. A healthy, dense lawn will keep out those weeds. Get that lawn mower ready and pick up info sheet on the wall at the extension office telling you the height and how often to mow. It's sure to be more often and thus more work than you want to hear, but it does pay big dividends in the lawn of your dreams.

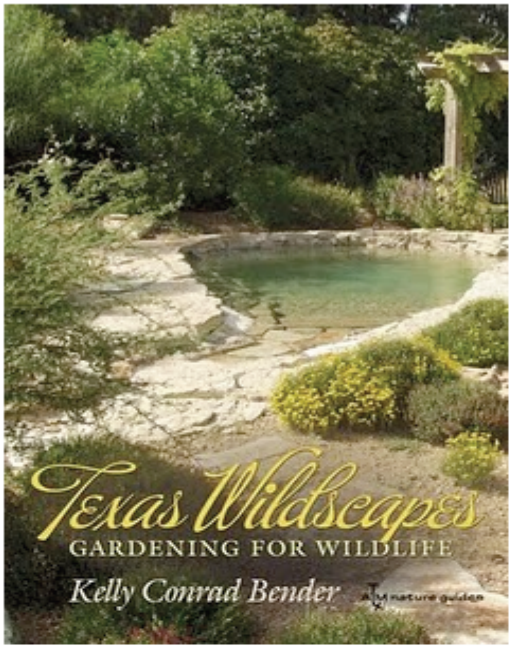
BOOK REVIEW

A Must-Have Book for Texas Nature Lovers

Kelly Conrad Bender, Texas Wildscapes: Gardening for Wildlife.

College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009.

A Review by Christine Powell



One of the greatest threats to keeping Texas looking like Texas, with Texas animals and Texas plants, is the fragmentation of natural habitats due to agriculture and urbanization. A typical suburban lawn supports about as much wildlife as a parking lot, and monoculture farms aren't much better. Smaller populations of native flora and fauna are isolated into pockets where inbreeding eliminates genetic diversity and any transitory natural or human-made disaster can wipe out the entire natural community. One way of avoiding this is to provide bridges between the pockets, right through the intervening farm, ranch, and urban areas. Landowners who maintain what the National Wildlife Federation calls "Backyard Habitats" and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department calls "Texas Wildscapes" can help provide these bridges. Even though a single metropolitan-area residential tract providing wildlife with food, water, and shelter may only host a few species, a number of these tracts checkerboarded through a neighborhood can go a long way towards protecting the native species over a much wider area. Kelly Conrad Bender's *Texas Wildscapes* is a remarkably comprehensive how-to guide for those who wish to assist in this mission… and save money on water, landscaping, and entertainment in the process.

The book has a number of chapters dealing with different aspects of the Wildscapes program that has helped Texans improve 153,116 acres of wildlife habitat. After an introduction describing the advantages of establishing habitats for wildlife and the TPWD programs that assist landowners to achieve that goal, the book describes the ten ecoregions of Texas and their native flora and fauna. Portions of Williamson County fall within three of these regions (Post Oak Savannah, Blackland Prairie, and Cross Timbers and Prairies) and arguably a fourth (the Edwards Plateau). Ms. Bender goes on to describe the basics of providing food, water, and shelter for wildlife and gives detailed advice on designing a Wildscape (and on where to go for help). Several chapters then focus on how to attract specific Texas critters. There are three chapters on various issues relating to attracting native birds (and discouraging "weedy" species like house sparrows, grackles, and starlings). After an introduction to the subject, there is a guide to some of the most common backyard birds and a special discussion on gardening for hummingbirds. Similar chapters deal with mammals, reptiles, amphibians, beneficial insects, and butterflies. The last three chapters deal with special problems like nuisance animals, difficult microenvironments, and exotic or invasive plants. A particularly valuable feature of this new A&M Nature Guide edition is a searchable DVD that is packed with relevant information.

Native plant lovers and Texas gardeners—from novices to the most experienced—will find this book particularly valuable as an overview of a wide variety of issues within their concern. To be certified as a Texas Wildscape, a tract must not only meet the Backyard Habitat requirements of providing wildlife with food, water, shelter, and a place to raise their young, but the additional requirement that at least half the plants in the habitat be native Texas varieties. The book provides lists of appropriate plants for promoting particular wildlife species. Of equal importance is the list of plants to avoid because of their potential to become invasive in a Texas environment. Far from a boring textbook, *Texas Wildscapes* is written in the lively manner that those who have met Ms. Bender would expect and is very richly illustrated with photographs, charts, graphs, maps, and other visual aids. It would be hard to recommend this book too highly.

Taxonomy in a Nut*shell

*a dry, dehiscent fruit

Claire Hall

Did you know there are over 300,000 known species of plants? And scientists estimate at least another 300,000 have yet to be discovered! There are potentially a million different plant species. Once these plants are discovered, they must be classified and named, and that's what Flo Oxley's February 6 workshop was all about.

Approximately 20 Master Gardeners spent the day at the Georgetown Public Library learning the fundamentals of Taxonomy. Flo, the Director of Education and Conservation at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, first explained that a plant is identified by comparing its characteristics with known species. The plant is then classified by grouping it in families where the plants share common characteristics. Basic vocabulary was next. Herbaceous plants have non-woody aerial stems which die back to the ground every year. A liana is a woody plant with a flexible, non-supporting stem. Shrubs are woody perennials with more than one principle stem while trees have one single main stem. Flo pointed out that the red bud is technically a shrub although many folks train it as a tree. A vine is an herbaceous plant with flexible, non-supporting stems. Therefore, Passion vine could be either a liana or a vine.

Stem terminology was next. We learned that thorns are stems while the smaller prickle (such as found on blackberry stems) are leaves. A corm (e.g. gladiola) is different from a bulb (e.g. tulip) because it is surrounded by dry, scaly leaves. Lilies and dahlias, like the potato, are tubers.

Then it was on to leaf terminology. A node is the point of attachment of the leaf to the stem. The distance between nodes (internode) can be used to classify a plant. Leaf arrangement (alternate, opposite or whorled) is also used as is the shape of the leaf. The leaf composition may be pinately (meaning feather-like) as with the Texas Mountain Laurel or palmately (the shape of one's hand) or a compound variety of those two when the leaves have leaflets. Leaf shape is critical. There are over 20 general shapes, including acicular (needle-shape), cordate (heart-shaped), deltoid (as in the deltoid muscle), lanceolate (as a lance), and ovate (egg-shaped). Leaves can be smooth, dentate (coarse, angular teeth), serrate (coarse, saw-like teeth), or lobed. The veins in leaves can be parallel (spiderwort), netted (geranium), palmate (maple) or acute. Leaf tips and bases are also considered in classification.

While leaves are important, however, flowers are most commonly used to identify plants. Flo defined a flower as a *stem tip bearing two whorls of appendages that are sterile and two that are fertile.* The sterile parts are the petals (the pretty part that attracts pollinators) and the sepals which protect the flower bud. The fertile parts are the stamens (male) and carpels (female). A complete flower has all 4 parts (petals, sepals, stamens and carpels) while an incomplete flower is missing one or more parts. A perfect flower is one with both stamens and carpels, such as the bluebonnet, iris or rose. An imperfect flower is missing one or the other, but not both. Such plants must be wind-pollinated and usually require planting both a male and female plant. Yaupons produce an imperfect flower. Inflorescence (the arrangement of one or more flowers on a flora axis) type is next used for classification. The fruit of a plant is the matured ovary. It may be dry (peanuts, grains) or fleshy (grapes, oranges). Strawberries and kiwi are actually the fibrous receptacle for the seeds. A pineapple is considered a false fruit because it is formed by the fusion of the entire inflorescence.

To give us some practical experience with classification, Flo had us practice by separating nails, screws and other hardware into groups with common features. We gave them a family name, genus and species. It was great fun and actually helped us understand the process.

The final hour of class was devoted to examining five plant families: the Onagraceae (Evening Primrose), Lamiaceae (Mint), Malvaceae (Mallow), Verbenaceae (Verbena) and Fabaceae (Pea) families. The most significant characteristic of the Onagraceae is the 4 stigma that fuse together and form an “X” in the middle of the flower. The Pink Evening Primrose (Gaura Lindheimer) is such a flower.

Turk's Cap and the Texas Mallow belong to the Malvaceae family. Their stamens are fused to the style and are connate (or sheathed) in the middle of the flower. Members of the Mint family have leaves that are aromatic and often hairy. Their stems are square-shaped. The Fabaceae (Pea) family have alternately arranged compound leaves and the fruit is a pod. Texas Yellow Bells and the Mimosa tree belong to this family. Finally, the Verbena (or Vervain) family features oppositely arranged simple leaves on square stems. The American Beautyberry and Texas Lantana belong to this family.

Before class began, Flo promised us that she would provide us so much information that our "hair would hurt." She was right! Flo is an excellent instructor who brings humor to an otherwise highly technical subject matter. She is able to break down esoteric ideas and make them tangible so that all of us can grasp them. The good news is that she has promised more classes and perhaps even a "walk through" at the Ladybird Wildflower Center for hands-on classification practice.

Kudos to Janet Church for arranging this class. For a nominal fee we were treated to first-rate instruction and a delicious lunch. Thank you, Janet.

In My Garden

Norma Beissner

My new friends have been busy all winter making castings and lots of new offspring earthworms. The earthworms do tolerate cold conditions! Just keep them fed and moist - makes them happy. I will be testing out the addition of worm castings in my home garden. One of the biggest challenges is to remove the castings without removing the egg capsules and smallest of worms. Each capsule will hold up to 7 eggs. Vermicomposting is not for everyone, but the rewards are well worth it. I have found this to be similar to driving a car. I do not need to know everything to make it work! Here is a new site I found that gives great tips on vermicomposting. http://earth911.com/news/2007/04/02/composting-with-worms/

My garden is ready for spring planting. Our lawn needed a mowing, and for the first time I decided to bag my clippings. Instant hay! The additional carbon to my garden and beds was much needed. I have no signs of weed seeds sprouting in the lawn...yet! But with the grass cut back and still dormant, weeds will be easy to spot. Every one of my roses is budded out, and my purple plum tree is starting to flower. My white yarrow and lambs ear perennials never missed a beat through the cold teen temperatures we experienced last month.

The Amazing Cucumber

Submitted by Susan Blackledge

This information was in The New York Times several weeks ago as part of their "Spotlight on the Home" series that highlighted creative and fanciful ways to solve common problems.

1. Cucumbers contain most of the vitamins you need every day, just one cucumber contains Vitamin B1, Vitamin B2, Vitamin B3, Vitamin B5, Vitamin B6, Folic Acid, Vitamin C, Calcium, Iron, Magnesium, Phosphorus, Potassium and Zinc.

2. Feeling tired in the afternoon, put down the caffeinated soda and pick up a cucumber. Cucumbers are a good source of B Vitamins and Carbohydrates that can provide that quick pick-me-up that can last for hours.

3. Tired of your bathroom mirror fogging up after a shower? Try rubbing a cucumber slice along the mirror; it will eliminate the fog and provide a soothing, spa-like fragrance.

4. Are grubs and slugs ruining your planting beds? Place a few slices in a small pie tin, and your garden will be free of pests all season long. The chemicals in the cucumber react with the aluminum to give off a scent undetectable to humans but drives garden pests crazy and makes them flee the area.

5. Looking for a fast and easy way to remove cellulite before going out or to the pool? Try rubbing a slice or two of cucumber along your problem area for a few minutes. The phytochemicals in the cucumber cause the collagen in your skin to tighten, firming up the outer layer and reducing the visibility of cellulite. Works great on wrinkles too!!!

6. Want to avoid a hangover or terrible headache? Eat a few cucumber slices before going to bed and wake up refreshed and headache free. Cucumbers contain enough sugar, B vitamins and electrolytes to replenish essential nutrients the body lost, keeping everything in equilibrium, avoiding both a hangover and headache!!

7. Looking to fight off that afternoon or evening snacking binge? Cucumbers have been used for centuries and often used by European trappers, traders and explores for quick meals to thwart off starvation.

8. Have an important meeting or job interview and you realize that you don't have enough time to polish your shoes? Rub a freshly cut cucumber over the shoe, its chemicals will provide a quick and durable shine that not only looks great but also repels water.

9. Out of WD 40 and need to fix a squeaky hinge? Take a cucumber slice and rub it along the problematic hinge, and voila, the squeak is gone!

10. Stressed out and don't have time for a massage, facial or visit to the spa? Cut up an entire cucumber and place it in a boiling pot of water; the chemicals and nutrients from the cucumber react with the boiling water and are released in the steam, creating a soothing, relaxing aroma that has been shown to reduce stress in new mothers and college students during final exams.

11. Just finished a business lunch and realize you don't have gum or mints? Take a slice of cucumber and press it to the roof of your mouth with your tongue for 30 seconds to eliminate bad breath; the phytochemcials will kill the bacteria in your mouth responsible for causing bad breath.

12. Looking for a 'green' way to clean your faucets, sinks or stainless steel? Take a slice of cucumber and rub it on the surface you want to clean; not only will it remove years of tarnish and bring back the shine, but it won't leave streaks and won't harm your fingers or fingernails while you clean.

13. Using a pen and make a mistake? Take the outside of the cucumber and slowly use it to erase the pen writing. This also works great on crayons and markers that the kids have used to decorate the walls!!

Master Gardener Recognized

Jane Williamson

Walt Krueger, Williamson County Master Gardener, has been named Man of the Year by St. Richard's Episcopal Church in Round Rock. Walt's journey with the gardens at St. Richard's began two years ago with the planting of three trees. His efforts have grown considerably since then.

With the help of other Master Gardeners and church members, Walt's initial planting has grown into beautifully landscaped grounds. Walt has been responsible for designing the gardens, planning and planting the landscape, and maintaining the gardens. Walt propagates many of the plants at his home and then transplants them to the Church grounds.

Gardens at St. Richard's include a Memorial Garden with beautiful roses. This is a wonderful place to sit and meditate while you enjoy the wonderful flowers and aromas. Walt also organized the planting of various trees including the Montezuma Cypress which is well-suited to our soil and climate. Walt's plans for the grounds include a labyrinth which will be planted with plants from the Bible or plants indirectly associated with the Bible that grow well in Texas.

The work that Walt has done and overseen is truly inspiring. This is a great place to get ideas for your own gardens and to see how various plants grow in our area. If you get a chance, come by and visit. Workdays are on Saturdays and extra hands are always welcome.

Growing Wine Grapes In Texas

Grace Bryce

Ever wonder about the horticultural aspect of wine grapes or want to see behind the scenes at a winery? Wouldn't you just like to get your hands on those vines? Well, recently, six of our Master Gardeners got to experience just that. The Messina Hof Winery and Resort in Bryan Texas, is home to a 40 acre vineyard, a bed and breakfast, restaurant and wine bar. They do daily tastings and tours and some people even get married in the vineyard. Our hosts for the day, were Messina Hof owners, Merrill & Paul Bonarrigo and Charla Anthony of the Texas AgriLife Extension, in Brazos County. Paul Bonarrigo presented the material and is very knowledgeable about growing grapes and making wine.

Texas Vineyard History

Currently there about 200 wineries in Texas. In the 1600's, the Spanish brought missions and vineyards to Texas. The early missions needed sacramental wine, and they grew their own grapes to meet this need. There were probably several native grapes growing in Texas long before the Spanish came. Many people throughout history grew their own grapes. Sam Houston and Thomas Jefferson were both wine makers.

In the early 1900's, Pierce's disease threatened the whole French wine industry. Our very own T.V. Munson, a grape taxonomist from Denison, Texas, took Texas root stock to France and saved the day. Munson spent 30 years classifying grape vines; he also bred and evaluated them, selecting outstanding cultivars. The profits from his nurseries funded his love of studying the vine. For four months he organized a group of workers and land owners and collected 15 wagons of dormant stem cuttings, between Bell County and Bexar County, and prepared a shipment to France. They were, of course, all classified by species and sent in three shipments. Today, you can ask any French child who T.V. Munson was, and they can tell you all about it. For his effort, T. V. Munson was awarded the Legion of Honor, Chevalier du Merite Agricole, by the French Government. The wine history in Texas is rich in stories and entertaining anecdotes.

Taunya Vessels and her husband learn about propagation from Paul Bonarrigo.

Getting Started

So what does it take to grow wine grapes in Texas? Your soil needs good water drainage for one thing. The texture, structure, amount of organic matter, depth, color and compaction are all factors to consider. Taking a soil sample is a good first step, and then making adjustments is a good second step**. (**See: **http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/)** There are several Viticulture Specialists around the state, who are assigned to different areas. We are fortunate to have an extension agent assigned to our Hill Country region, who specializes in Viticulture, named Penny Adams, from Fredericksburg. She is happy to visit any of the aspiring wine grape growers in our area and offer advice.

Location, Location, Location! Planting a vineyard on a hill has many considerations,

like air movement, water movement, erosion and the location and exposure to the sun. Grapes typically need to be watered every 7 - 10 days. The quality of the water is very important. Poor water quality can result in reduced yield and eventually loss of the vines. With a well water supply, it is a good idea to get the water analyzed. (See the soil testing website above for that information; they also test water.) The primary concerns with water quality are salinity and dissolved salts. Salts accumulate in the soils and affect the pH. Of course, when the pH is too high, many of the soil nutrients become unavailable. Find someone familiar with your area to consult about wells; you may need to drill another well. The depth of the well can impact your water quality and deeper is not always better. It is important to tell them what you need and what you are looking for in a well water supply. A professional, with experience, can tell you if the flow and quality is adequate for your purpose before digging a well. I

Support and The Vine

Setting up supportive structures is important in your vineyard field. Typically, your drip irrigation line is about knee level, so equipment doesn't tear it up. The cordon line is about belt level, and the catch wire is at chest level. A typical grape vine has one main shoot that comes up from the ground, which splits into two, a y-shaped cordon. The cordon is trained along the cordon line, and spurs are trained from that branch up to the catch wire. Fruit is produced from the spur growth. Growth tubes are placed around new plants to restrict new shoots and train the plant upward rather than encouraging it to bush. The tubes are removed before the hot summer and fire ant precautions may be needed, so they don't set up house-keeping in the tubes.

Judy Gibney and her husband prune grape vines.

Ideally, the vines are pruned an optimal amount so that the fruit yield is maximized. The cordon will grow to approximately 4 feet on each side and meet the next plant. Pruning to this point is done each year to ensure new growth and new fruit. There is a definite art to pruning grape vines. Even the positioning of pruners is important. To discourage growth, the flat edge of the pruner is used, and pruning is done close to the main branch. Vines are either discouraged or encouraged depending on the direction they are growing. All dead wood is pruned away.

Challenges

There are many diseases associated with wine grapes, and some grape varieties are more disease resistant than others. Disease is a major challenge in growing wine grapes. At the vineyard, rose bushes are planted at the end of each row of vines as indicator plants. If the roses get sick or show signs of disease, there is a two week window to figure out what the problem is and fix it, or there is a chance of losing that row of grape vines or even the whole vineyard. Unpredictable freezing weather can also ruin a vineyard. Texas A & M University has done quite a bit of research with different root stocks, disease resistance and even pruning techniques to help overcome some of these challenges and improve grape growing in Texas.

Did I mention that deer like grapes? A fence is a good idea. You will need a big fence. The vineyard rows are 10 feet apart, and the vines are 8 feet apart. With this planting, there are 544 vines per acre. Typically, one vine will yield 15 pounds of fruit and 1 gallon of wine. It takes about 3 pounds of grapes to make a bottle of wine.

Propagation

Paul Bonarrigo also gave us lessons in grape vine pruning and propagation. While we were pruning the vines, we selected cuttings for propagation and placed them in a bucket of water. A good cutting is about the size of your little finger in thickness and is 9 - 12 inches long. The cut on the bottom is straight across and about

1/2 inch below a bud. The top cut is diagonal. Cuttings are also stripped of their outer bark layer to expose much of the cambium layer, and buds are removed. Paul says he has a 98% success rate using this method. Cuttings are dipped in water and then dipped in a special concentrated rooting hormone. The starter pots are 3 x 3 x 6 inches and filled with a mixture of masonry sand, perlite, peat moss and potting soil. It takes about 2 1/2 months for them to really root. Plants should be nurtured until the root systems are well established, and the roots are brown, not white. When they reach this point, they are ready for planting. When planting grape vines, make a V in the ground with your sharpshooter shovel, and bury the plant with one bud showing. Mulch will help to keep the weeds and disease down. We should know by May if our cuttings survived. It was a fun day! If you go on the wine tour, you get tasting lessons too.

Clyde Adley, Sandra Rosen and John Womack prepare their cuttings.

Education and Career

There is a push to teach viticulture in Texas. Grayson County College in Denison offers a 2 year program for Viticulture Certification. Grape growing and winemaking are a part of the new agribusiness profession. Within the wine industry there are employment opportunities as cellarmaster, winemaker, winery manager and enologist. Viticulture, the art of growing grapes, has openings for positions such as vineyardists, vineyard manager, and viticulturist.

For more information about growing grapes, vineyards and learning more visit: http://winegrapes.tamu.edu/

Clyde Adley finishes pruning vines for optimal yield.

MASTER GARDENER EVENTS
SPRING 2010

Winola Van Artsdalen

We are the volunteer horticulture educators of the Texas Agri-life Extension Agency in Williamson County, and these events fulfill that mission. We can proudly prepare and invite our friends and neighbors to enjoy them with us. Yes, it takes a lot of effort, but what an opportunity to enjoy working together as we proudly share our gardening experience!

Let's not sidestep our two fundraising events to begin the spring season. Greenhouse workers, led by our Greenhouse Manager, Brenda McIndoo, have spent many hours lovingly preparing plants to sell on March 12th at the Greenhouse. This sale, with Teresa Robinson as coordinator, not only provides funds for our many service activities, but it also gives us an opportunity to reach out to teachers at the school, displaying our expertise and sharing the fruits of our efforts.

The next day, March 13th, Clare Aguirre is in charge of our plant sale on the square at the Market Days event. Here, we will have more plants from the greenhouse to sell. This is public relations as well as a fundraising event. There will be oak wilt information to share as well as rain barrels and information on rainwater harvesting. It's always much fun to spend the day together, getting to know each other better, as we proudly sell our plants and share information with those who shop with us.

We will have little time to catch our breath in later March before it's time for the state convention in Fort Worth, and then we get back just in time for the big Master Gardener Spring Garden Fair April 17th at the Extension Building! We will be working fast and furious getting the vegetable gardens ready for this event with some demonstrations right out there in the gardens. The rainwater harvesting team will be teaching classes on how to build a rain barrel, and those attending class will have an opportunity to buy one for their own home.

The actual time listed for the fair is 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., but inside in the training room, there will be classes from 8:00 a.m. until 2:00. Morning classes will be repeated in the afternoon, so that all attendees will have a chance to learn desired information. That 8:00 a.m. class will be a special Plant Introduction Class. People who attend that class will be admitted to an early sale at 8:30 a.m. for class attendees only. What a deal!

And what a plant sale this will be! Carol Hoke, Karen Black, and Wayne Rhoden will be visiting Joss Growers in advance, and we hope he will be bringing a large selection of Native and Adaptive Plants. They will also purchase a few annuals from Grateful Growers. Both of these wholesalers provided plants for BOOfest last fall, and they were excellent specimens! Just ask any of the lucky people like myself who were fortunate enough to have bought some of those!

We are getting great publicity thanks to the hard work of Rebecca Caldwell, publicity coordinator, and Grace Bryce who is helping make signs and posters, AND with the creative ideas many of you have sent us about places where you can reach people in your area. Way to go!

At the March meeting we will have a limited number of posters that have cost us $1.39 each for members who have located high traffic areas that will accept them. Every time you're out and about, look for places you might put a poster or a flyer. Later, we will be sending out flyers via computer that members can use. Let's be sure we give as many people as possible the opportunity to come enjoy the benefits of this great fair!

Keep up the good work and remember to reserve at least six hours of your time for that date, April 17, for our Master Garden Spring Garden Fair 2010!

Huisache, Sweet Acacia, Cassie, Texas Huisache

Acacia farnesiana (A. smallii) Leguminosae (Fabaceae)

George Whiting

Abstract: Huisache is pronounced "weesash" derived from the Aztec Natuhl meaning "many thorns". A drought tolerant, showy, multi trunk tree with small fernlike compound leaves, Huisache is a member of the legume family related to the mimosa. The branches have, profuse, needle sharp spikes along branches, typically appearing in pairs. Intensely scented flowers arrive in early spring (This image was taken in late February). They are cold hardy as far north as Austin, Texas and extremely drought tolerant, needing very little water. Huisache is a wonderful cover for many kinds of wildlife and can grow in rough, rocky terrain.

Natural Habitat: Huisache grows in Mexico, the south Texas Plains, and the Edwards Plateau as far north as Austin, Texas. It does not do well north of USDA Zone 8.
Flowers and Fruit: Bright, fragrant, golden yellow flowers appear in early spring. These flowers attract pollinators and insects for the honey production and food. Leaves have a delicate fernlike look. White tailed deer, Javelina and other animals eat the fruit while quail love the black pod seeds.

Propagation: Fumigate seeds and store in refrigerator. Use concentrated sulfuric acid and soak for 30 minutes or nick seed with a knife for germination. Plant 3/4" to one inch deep and grow under strong sunlight. This tree/shrub can grow in harsh, open, rocky areas (2001 Jill Nokes)

Texas Huisache is well-adapted to our area.

Konjac—A Smelly Investigation

Beth Blankenship

Last spring a friend shared some Konjac (Amorphophallus konjac) bulbs with me. Amorphophallus is a genus of the Aroid family, and the konjac is also known as voodoo lily, devil's tongue, and snake palm. It is native to an area from Japan to China and southward to Indonesia. A perennial, it is grown from a large corm which can be up to 10 inches across. The single leaf is up to 50 inches across, bipinnate, and divided into many leaflets. It is related to the giant corpse plant (Amorphophallus titanum) which makes the news and attracts curious visitors to botanical gardens around the world when they produce rare blooms (which can be 6 to 9 feet tall!).

Konjac is used as a cooking supplement in many countries. The tubers are raised and then cooked or reduced to a substance somewhat stiffer than gelatin, which is pressed and sold like tofu in grocery stores. It is also used to create a flour. It can be used in soups or candies, and in fruit jelly snacks. The main substance in konjac (called glucomannan) is often used in diet food because it is low in calories but high in dietary fiber.

This plant has provided some exotic indoor gardening excitement during this very long winter! After enjoying the unusual foliage all summer, when the plants went dormant I placed the pots in the garage. When I moved them into the house for protection from the "big freeze", I noticed that one bulb was already sprouting. After a few days it became apparent that the sprout was actually a bloom stalk!

I began taking pictures and doing more research. I quickly determined that I would need to move the pot back to the garage when the flower opened because one of the strange things about this plant is that it is pollinated by flies and carrion-eating beetles, and accordingly has a very distinctive odor to attract those insects. In short, it really, really stinks! The inflorescence is large, with a reddish purple spathe (modified leaf) surrounding the spike. The structure reminded me of a calla lily.

The female (pistillate) flowers are at the bottom of the spadex and the male (staminate) flowers above. Male and female flowers grow on the same inflorescence, but the male flowers open a few days after the female flower to prevent self-pollination. As soon as the flowers are pollinated, the odor disappears.

The entire bloom structure was 28" tall from the top of the pot, with the "flower" being a full foot tall. The huge size provided a great botany lesson because all the parts were easy to see and photograph. Being in a cool garage undoubtedly affected the normal bloom cycle--the flower lasted several days longer than expected, and the odor was not totally overwhelming (although still pretty disgusting!). All in all, experiencing a konjac bloom was very interesting, and I believe the steady stream of visitors who came to see the flower were as fascinated as I was.

The Blooming Konjac

Photos by Beth Blankenship

January 29

January 31

February 3

February 7

February 8

February 12

Master Gardeners' Tour

Claire Hall

Sunshine and blustery winds greeted 22 Master Gardeners who visited Joss Nursery in Georgetown for a tour graciously given by owner Dave Joss. We got a first-hand look at the nurturing care given to each cutting as it is groomed into a plant ready for sale.

The nursery specializes in Texas native plants and emerging new varieties of plants. The emphasis is on drought tolerance. Dave's nursery is a wholesale business. He sells to retail customers all over Texas, throughout the states and as far away as Europe. Europeans are especially interested in the succulents which must seem exotic to them.

We started the tour in the "prop" greenhouse where cuttings taken just two weeks ago were already rooted and thriving. The floor beneath the plants is heated, and the mist sprays every twenty minutes. Dave does not shade the plants as some growers do, so the plants have the benefit of whatever sunlight is available, especially important in a year with winter weather as we've just experienced. Because of the weather Dave said they were about three weeks behind a normal year's schedule. Interestingly, some of the cuttings used at Joss are Fed Ex'd in from Costa Rica. The Costa Rican's are growing Texas natives, taking the cuttings and providing them to growers stateside.

Joss has a great variety of succulents and cacti in one of the greenhouses. This was my favorite greenhouse as it felt like a sauna. Some of the succulents are started from tissue culture. Many, many agaves and yuccas (some giant) are available. Dave showed us his mixer for potting soil which blends the material, elevates it and then automatically fills the pots.

We visited yet another greenhouse with ornamental grasses and small shrubs. Some trees and larger shrubs inhabit the area outside the greenhouses.

As a wholesale grower, of course, Joss's plants are not for sale to the public at its Georgetown location. But the good news is that we will have a good many varieties available for our April 17 plant sale at the Extension location. Come early to get a good choice. Better yet, volunteer for the sale.

If you'd like to learn more about Joss Growers, visit their website at www.jossgrowers.com.

Master Gardeners admire plants in one of the perennial greenhouses.

JMG at McCoy Elementary

Juanita James

The February 18 meeting of the JMG program at McCoy Elementary involved cleaning out the garden beds and trimming the perennial butterfly garden. The children had a wonderful time, as you can tell by the attached pictures. The teacher involved with this project is Tina Bertucci, who is also a Master Gardener. Brigid Mejia of the 4-H office and myself, Juanita James, are having a great time working with these wonderful children. Intern Linda Zazula has also helped with this class and last week Jane Thorngate came to help us clean out the garden. We have also had some wonderful Master Gardeners come to teach a lesson or two to these children such as Wayne Rhoden, Hank Belopavlovich, Joanne and Charlie Dietrich and Jeanne Barker. On March 11 Bee Keeper, Elizabeth Exley, is coming to talk to the children about bees.

Brigid Mejia works with Junior Master Gardeners.

Last fall the children planted lettuce, cauliflower and broccoli. They used the lettuce to make a salad that was served at the Community Outreach program to which they invited their parents and teachers. We are having another program this spring, and the children are again looking forward to planting their garden and serving some of the fruits of their labors to their parents and teachers.

JMG students clean a garden bed.

Master Gardener Meeting

Liz Grieder

The February meeting of the Williamson County Master Gardeners Association (WCMGA) featured a volunteer opportunity fair. Paul Lawrence introduced WCMGA members and interns to project leads and committee and subcommittee chairpersons. Members and interns were encouraged to volunteer and were given the opportunity to visit stations that were manned by volunteers with project/committee information and sign up sheets.

Grace Bryce compiled a comprehensive list of projects, committees and subcommittees and the contact information for each. If you were unable to attend the February meeting and/or have decided to sign up for one of the volunteer opportunities, please take advantage of the information that Grace has provided.

Liz and Jack Grieder share vegetable garden plans.

WCMGA Volunteer Opportunities

Board Committees:

Junior Master Gardeners- Juanita James jjames20@sbcglobal.net
(512) 341-7116h (512)426-3975 cell

Communications Committee- Clyde Adley cadley@gmail.com
(512) 657-3185

Programs & Education Committee- Paul Lawrence pwlawrence@austin.rr.com
(512) 351-9678h (512) 608-5445 cell

Fundraising Committee-

Greenhouse Committee- Brenda McIndoo browndog1986@verizon.net
(512) 868-9212

Awards Committee- Norma Beissner norma@beissner.org
(512) 535-6584

Membership & Volunteer Opportunities- John Papich texasjayp@hotmail.com
(512) 863-4098

Class Training and Facilitation- JoAnne Dieterich crdieterich@yahoo.com
(512) 778-6690h (512) 903-5747cell

Program Subcommittees:

Rainwater Harvesting Subcommittee - Sally Todd sallytodd@verizon.net
(512) 930-5188w (512) 630-6008h

Vegetable Garden Subcommittee- Liz & Jack Grieder elizabeth.grieder@earthlink.net
(512) 218-1367

Speaker's Bureau- Wayne Rhoden mgardener@suddenlink.net
(512) 869-8016h (512) 966-7373 cell

Oak Wilt Subcommittee- Grace Bryce grace_bryce@tscj.net
(512) 868-9191h (512) 818-7857cell
Rose Garden Subcommittee-
Field Trips Subcommittee- Teresa Robinson terobin@suddenlink.net
(512) 240-5079
Newsletter- Jane Williamson- jawilliamson516@yahoo.com
(512) 863-3129
Publicity- Rebecca Caldwell- keithrebeccacaldwell@gmail.com
(512) 591-7491 h (714) 673-9586 cell

Community Projects:
Discovery United Methodist Church- Patsy Bredahl pbredahl@austin.rr.com
(512) 642-6184
Saint Phillip's Church- Mary Anne Pirics mapirics@austin.rr.com
(512) 388-0210
Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center -Flo Oxley oxley@wildflower.org
(512) 232-0160
Old Settler's Park Project- Paul Lawrence pwlawrence@austin.rr.com
(512) 351-9678h (512) 608-5445 cell
Berry Springs Park & Preserve- Susan Blackledge berrysprings.wilco@yahoo.com
(512) 930-0040 (512) 844-4820
Saint Richard's Project- Walt Krueger (512) 255-1138
Country Store- Charles & JoAnne Dieterich - crdieterich@yahoo.com
(512) 778-6690h (512) 903-4367 cell

Upcoming Scheduled Community Events Organized Through Fundraising Committee:
Market Days- March 13, 2010
Plant Sales- March 12, 2010

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.

Children's Garden Grows

Janet White

The Children's Garden at St. Richard's Episcopal Church in Round Rock finally is a reality. Blessed with soft mist and light drizzle the fence posts were set. With directions from Johnny Williamson (Jane's husband) and help from several Master Gardeners, interns and spouses the work progressed methodically.

Summer 2009 with the support of the church, the preschool board approved this project for their enrolled children. Solarization of an approximately 20 X 40 plot seemed to rid the area of grass and weeds. The area was tilled thoroughly and the dead grass hauled away. An attempt to solarize a second time was thwarted by September rains when a crop of nut grass grew under the plastic. Finally the nut grass was covered with layers of newspaper and topped with several inches of mulch.

Several small gardens are planned within the plot so the children can have a hands- on experience. The children will enjoy a humming bird garden and a root garden bounded by plexiglass where they can see the root crops. Also planned is a butterfly garden, vegetable garden, a Peter Rabbit garden and a pizza garden. Wonderful fragrances and interesting things to touch like rosemary and lambsear will delight the children's senses.

Master Gardeners and spouses build a fence for the Children's Garden.

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.

Williamson County Master Gardener Officers for 2010

Officers:

Winola Van Artsdalen, President	jimwin@verizon.net	(512) 863-4923
Walter Hoke, Vice-president	swhoke@gmail.com	(512) 869-1948
Jeanne Barker, Secretary	jubarker@yahoo.com	(512) 608-1296
Sandra Lawrence, Treasurer	swlawrence@austin.rr.com	(512) 351-9678
Wayne Rhoden, Immediate Past President	mgardener@suddenlink	(512) 869-8016

Standing Committees/Chairpersons:

Programs/Education	Paul Lawrence	pwlawrence@austin.rr.com	(512) 351-9678
Communications	Clyde Adley	cadley+mg@gmail.com	(512) 918-8024
Membership/Volunteer Opportunities	John Papich	texasjayp@hotmail.com	(512) 863-4098
Awards	Norma Beissner	norma@beissner.org	(512) 535-6584
Class Training/ Facilitation	JoAnne Dieterich	crdieterich@yahoo.com	(512) 778-6690
JMG Coordinator	Juanita James	jjames20@sbcglobal.net	(512) 341-7116
Fund Raising	Annette Banks	awbanks@suddenlink.net	(512) 868-8223
Greenhouse Manager	Brenda McIndoo	browndog1986@verizon.net	(512) 868-9212