

Williamson County Master Gardener Journal

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Dedicated to growing with Williamson County

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The Joy of Composting

Carole Buckner

Hostess of Compost, Patty Hoenigman, seems to enjoy composting as much as gardening. Her class includes a handout which gives specific instructions. Here's the scoop: Benefits of mixing compost into the soil include soil improvement by adding a range of nutrients, keeping the balance of microbes healthy, loosening clay soils, and helping with water retention. If applied as a top dressing only (which she does not recommend) is can actually repel water (chemistry in action).



You need four essential ingredients to make compost: browns, greens, air, and water. Browns are leaves (variety preferred, chopped, soaked for easier breakdown), dry grass clippings, newspaper (not magazines), sawdust (just a sprinkle, not a whole layer), straw/hay are too "waxy". Greens are grass clippings, food scraps (no meat/dairy), coffee grounds. Churning/turning the pile adds air. Add a gallon of water per 4" dry leaves using a hose end spray nozzle to wet ALL the pile.

Patty uses six categories of composting from simple to more labor intensive. The first is using a mulching mower/blade for the lawn. Add the mower bag when you need clippings for the compost. The second is to dig a hole in yard/garden, bury food scraps, cover over with dirt-tamp it down, no water needed. The third is to dig a trough (however long you want it) in the yard/garden to bury food scraps, cover over with dirt and tamp down. She says this will not attract unwanted animals. The fourth is "passive" composting. You will end up with some compost in 4-6 months by filling a bin with leaves and adding greens in pocket areas which are covered by the leaves (enhanced breakdown/keep fruit flies at bay). Churn and water the pile once a week (faithfully).

Mix WELL when churning to include dry areas from outer pile. The fifth category consists of making a pile away from the house where you add brown and greens without turning it. Water will help, but the materials will deteriorate over time. The sixth category is active composting. This is where the pile temperature gets 130-160 degrees F. You can expect compost in about 4 weeks. Soak you leaves overnight. Layer browns and greens in 2-4" layers, starting and ending with browns. Let the pile sit unattended for 3 days to let temperature peak. Starting day 4, completely rebuild your pile, watering ALL the dry pockets. Do this every day for the next 11 days. Now let it sit to cure for 2 weeks. Use it fresh.



Patty's tools include garden forks-large and small, hose with a spray nozzle, gloves, something to churn the pile (rebar, 1/2" x 4 ft. with duct tape on the handle end), and your bin. There are many choices for bins. She suggests a stacking bin or a dome shaped bin for ease of rebuilding the piles and recovering the compost that is ready.



Photos by Grace Bryce

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.

Update: ACC Agronomy class, Fall 2011

In order to accommodate the instructor's schedule, the start time for this class has been moved back one hour. Please note that this class has been offered twice before, but canceled due to low enrollment – if the class doesn't make this fall, it may not be offered again. So if you've been thinking of taking it, now is the time. The updated announcement is below.

As part of its Erosion and Sediment Control advanced technical certificate, Austin Community College's (ACC's) Environmental Science and Technology department will be offering an Agronomy (soil science) class for the Fall 2011 semester.

The course will give students an understanding of soils, soil formation, soil types and classification, distribution of soil types geographically, the rates of soil formation, collection and analysis of soils, and the causes and methods to address soil erosion. The student will learn soil collection and analysis techniques, as well as the causes of soil loss and degradation and the methods to prevent soil erosion.

The Agronomy class will be held on Mondays and Wednesdays from 5:30 – 8:10 PM at the Rio Grande campus. Registration for the Fall 2011 semester runs from May 16th (current/former students) or June 13th (new students) through August 17th, and the first class will be on August 22nd.

Details can be found at:

- ACC – <http://www.austincc.edu/>
- ACC Env Sci & Tech dept – <http://www.austincc.edu/envrnsci/>
- ACC Agronomy class description – http://www3.austincc.edu/it/cms/www/catalog/course/details_fox.php?year=2012&deptcode=ESTE#AGCR1494
- ACC Agronomy class schedule – <http://www6.austincc.edu/schedule/index.php?op=browse&opclass=ViewSched&term=211F000&disciplineid=TFPHH&yr=2012&ct=CC>

Upcoming Landscape Design Study Course III

September 26-27, 2011

Mrs. Nell Zeigler of Texas Garden Clubs, Inc. and Dr. Bill Welch of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service invite you to attend Landscape Design Study Course III, which will be held in College Station September 26-27, 2011 at the Christ United Methodist Church on Hwy 6 near Hwy 40 (William Fitch).

This is the third in a series of four courses, which may be taken in any order. Master Gardeners who complete a course and pass the test may be eligible to receive up to 12 hours of their credit for continuing education. Cost of the upcoming program is \$110. Participants may purchase the text, Stewards of the Land, for \$40 (text is good for all four courses).

You may view the entire description of the course, registration form and tentative schedule at: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/southerngarden/LDSep2011/>

If you have questions, please contact Nell Zeigler at 254-865-2904 cnzeigler@aol.com, or Bill Welch 979-845-8564 wc-welch@tamu.edu.

Fall Vegetable Gardening

Liz Grieder

Fall is reputed to be the very best time of the year to garden in Central Texas, and July is the month to get your beds ready for planting your fall garden. (That's just what you want to do when the temperature is hovering around 100, and the humidity feels like 80-90%. Right? Well, that's the price we will pay for those delicious fall veggies.) Here is a combination of the planting lists that have been compiled by the Austin Organic Garden Club and by Skip Richter and Patty Leander. Bonnie Sladek of Olde Thyme Gardens in Taylor was kind enough to share some of her experience. This information is organized by month and goes through December. So, let's get to work.

August:

seeds - beans, cucumber, corn, potato slips, summer squash, and warm season greens.
transplants - peppers and tomatoes.

September:

seeds - beans, beets, bunching onions, carrots, chard, cool season greens, kale, parsley, and summer squash.
transplants - broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, and kohlrabi.

October:

seeds - beans, beets, bunching onions, carrots, chard, cool season greens, lettuce mustard, onions, peas, radishes, shallots, spinach, and turnips.
transplants - broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, and kohlrabi.

November:

seeds - cool season greens, lettuce, mustard, radishes, shallots, spinach, and turnips.

early December:

seeds - cool season greens and lettuce.

December:

seeds - radishes and spinach.

About sets and bulbs: when they become available in reputable local nurseries, buy them and plant them.

The average first killing frost for our area is November 15. If, by chance, we get early cooler weather and some rain, planting dates for seeds can be advanced. In any event, always check the "days to harvest" information on your seed packets. If you don't have that information, help is available in a flier on the hallway wall at the Extension Office.

Disclaimer: You are vegetable gardening in Central Texas, so take into consideration the prevailing weather conditions. There will be years when all of the above information will be accurate, and there will be years when very little of it will be. Good luck!



Carol Hoke, Co-Chair JMG Committee

Our Junior Master Gardeners (JMG), like most of us are taking a break this summer. During the past school year, we covered Williamson County with 16 different sites. We were in the following school districts: Round Rock, Georgetown, Hutto, Leander, Florence, and Cedar Park, as well as Discovery Church in Hutto, and Georgetown 4-H. It has been a great year, leading students toward the mission of JMG: “Growing Good Kids” by igniting a passion for learning, success and service through a unique gardening education.

JMG inspires youths to be of service to others through leadership development and service learning projects and rewards them with certification and recognition.

This year Walter and I had the opportunity to lead the Georgetown 4-H JMG with the help of Brigid Mejia, AgriLife 4-H Program Assistant. We had 20 students grades 2nd-7th, who met on a monthly basis. The students had the benefit of presentations by many of our Master Gardeners, and they got to meet many others at activities, like the Spring Break JMG camp, the trip to the Red Bud Center in Austin to learn about water conservation, and at the JMG demonstration table during the annual Garden Fair.

All of these students worked on group learning activities covering topics of plant growth and development, soils and water, ecology, insects and disease, fruits and nuts, vegetables and herbs and life skills. In addition they worked monthly on a community service activity and for those students desiring to become certified JMG, they also completed individual activities at home on a monthly basis. Ten students were certified as JMG, and ten received recognition as participants.

Community service/leadership is important in growing good kids. Some of the activities the students participated in included planting trees for the city of Georgetown at Pinnacle Park, taking plants they had potted to the Wesleyan Retirement home for Christmas gifts, making wildflower seed balls and scattering at Berry Springs Park, and under the supervision of Susan Blackledge, transplanting pecan seedlings at the Park. With the help of Liz and Jack Grieder, they have planted the pizza garden at the Extension Office.

It’s been a great experience working with these students, and we even had the extra benefit of having our granddaughters be part of the group! Next year we are looking forward to having two groups with the Georgetown 4-H.

Our JMG Committee is currently planning JMG teacher/leader training July 19-20. Our goal is that in addition to our current 16 locations we will have 20 new sites as a result of our training.

JMG is a great volunteer opportunity. For those who have helped during this past school year, thank you, thank you! For those you haven’t volunteered or would consider leading a group, send me an email or give me a call, I’ll be happy to help you get involved.



Gardening Tips for July

Winola VanArtsdalen

Planning/Planting:

Use the hot weather to plan for fall planting. Remember, here in the hot south, fall is the best time to plant perennials, shrubs and trees so they can develop a strong root system to be prepared for summer heat the following year. Consider new planting carefully. Protect transplants and seedlings by shading from excessive heat, and you must keep moist throughout root zone the rest of the season.

Maintenance:

Mulch for insulation, moisture retention, prevention of weeds, and addition of nutrition when it breaks down! “Deadhead” or remove seed structures and cut back annuals, perennials and roses to prompt reblooming. In times of drought, prune perennials lightly. Deadhead and just trim a few inches, not a third like you usually would. As you water container plantings more, feed more often with organic or time-released fertilizer.

Watering:

Watering is extremely important. Grass will usually come back, so concentrate on trees and shrubs.

Roots go where the moisture is, so water deeply. Water more deeply, less often.

Trees—Saturate under canopy to drip line. Divide in fourths. Hose drip, move; do again until circle tree. Soak established trees deeply at least once a month.

Raise mower height during hot, dry weather, so there is more grass left to shade roots.

Pests:

For grub worm control, use an approved insecticide now. Only treat if you have three or more grubs per each square foot of soil. (Dig at least 4 inches deep, one foot square to check.)

For organic treatment, you can use nematodes. Choose your source carefully and remember that timing is critical. If you have spider mites, water spray leaves, especially the underside.

And, most definitely, stay cool and hydrated!

Happy Gardening!

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.

Orchids 101

Collene Sweeney

What group of plants has more than twice the number of bird species and four times the number of mammals?Orchids, with close to 26,000 accepted species; and 19th century horticulturists have produced more than 100,000 hybrids and cultivars. Beloved by us from the time of the ancient Greeks, the Greek philosopher Theophrastus 372? - 287 BC first used the Greek word (orchids) to describe a group of plants whose dried roots were chopped and used in traditional medicine as antidepressants and stimulants. All orchids are considered perennial herbs.



Juanice Davis, owner of It's a Jungle nursery in Austin, enlightened us on these fabulous plants. She covered types, care and pest control. She brought a large selection of the more common ones, all in bloom. Orchids are epiphytes and feed on air, debris and rain. They grow in almost every habitat except glaciers—from the high altitudes of the Himalayans to the dry Australian desert and all points in-between. Most prefer broken sunlight or dappled shade. The orchids with hard thick leaves can take more heat. In the collection that Juanice brought, were Cattleya (corsage orchid), Dendrobium (tree orchid), Phalaenopsis (moth orchid), Brassia (spider orchid) and Epidendrum. Fragrances of coconut, chocolate and pepper were evident in some of the blossoms.

She explained that orchids should be planted in anything but soil. Bark (soaked 2 to 3 days), charcoal and sponge rock (perlite) is a good combination. Sphagnum moss is also used, but watering is somewhat tricky. In this medium it's best to place a wooden chop stick in the moss for about 5 minutes and if it comes out moist; do not water. A clay pot with holes is best, but she has had good luck with plastic pots with openings. You can really save on fertilizer with orchids, only 1/4 teaspoon in a gallon of water. Just don't use one with a urea based fertilizer. A 7-7-7 or 7-9-5 are good choices. The old adage, "feed weakly, weekly" is appropriate. About every 18 months repot with fresh media in the same pot if you like. Do not cut off roots that creep out of the pot. These are aerial roots and absorb humidity. In a dryer environment, a tray with rocks and water will help keep your orchid happy. When it comes to getting your orchid to bloom, cool nights and short days are the trick. After blooming, the spike should be cut off with a sharp, sterile blade as close to the base of the spike as possible. However, Phalaenopsis will bloom again from the old spike if the cut is made between the scar left by the first flower and the last node. Pests on orchids include scale, mealy bugs, thrips and aphids. Juanice mixes up 1 pint of rubbing alcohol with 1/4 cup of 409 . This can be sprayed on scale, the area ruffed up and then sprayed again. All in all, orchids are very trouble free and much easier to grow than given credit for.



You may find Juanice's wonderful collection at It's a Jungle on Kramer Lane <http://itsajungleaustin.com/> and bring a few home.

Photos by Grace Bryce

Williamson County Master Gardener Officers for 2011

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Standing Committees/Chairpersons:

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