

# Williamson County Master Gardener Journal

Award Winning

## CONTENTS

- 1 **WCMGJ WINS AWARD**
- 2 **NEWS AND NOTES**
- 4 **ADVANCED TRAINING**
- 7 **BOB'S BLOG**
- 9 **ALONG THE TRAILS**
- 10 **BACK TO BASICS**
- 12 **BUG OF THE MONTH**
- 13 **JUNIOR MG**
- 19 **NEW MG PROJECT**
- 20 **MASTER COMPOSTER**
- 22 **MG TREATS**
- 24 **PRESIDENT'S COLUMN**
- 25 **2008 ASSOCIATION OFFICERS**

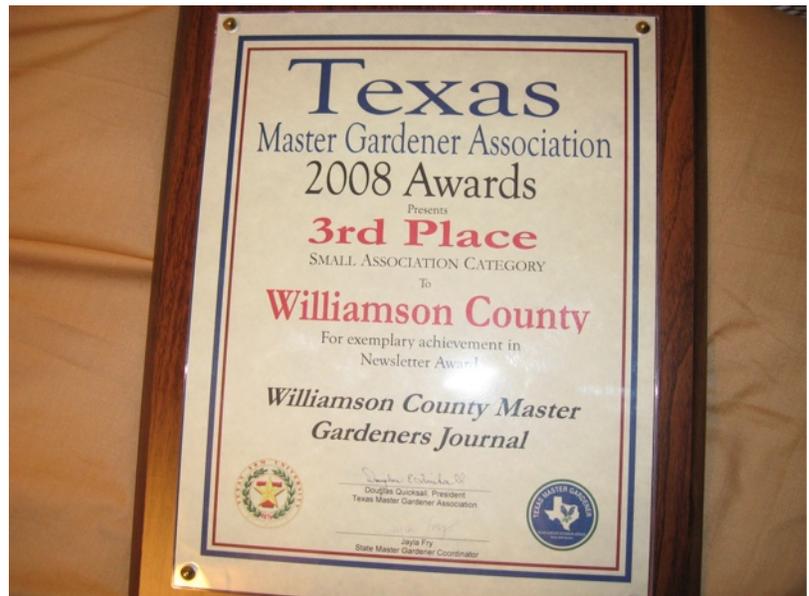


## Master Gardener State Awards

### Newsletter wins award!

At the recent state Master Gardeners Association Convention, the *Williamson County Master Gardener Journal* won third prize among newsletters produced by small chapters. This is a tribute to the hard work of the many contributors from our chapter who provide the articles and photographs that keep our members and the public

weekly press releases on a single subject rather than a newsletter with multiple articles. Second place was Brazos County (<http://www.brazosmg.com/newsletters/bcmgnews-2008-sept-oct.pdf>), which has a newsletter rather more similar to ours, although it is somewhat smaller and published only bimonthly. The first place win-



educated about horticulture and aware of our activities. Particular thanks go to our founding Editor, Margaret Seals.

The various winners take very different approaches to the task. Tied with Williamson County for third place was the Somerville and Hunt County Master Gardeners (<http://newsletter.somervellmastergardeners.org/>), who actually issue a series of

ner was Rockwall County (<http://www.rockmga.org/>), which puts out a four-page issue three times a year.

As Editor, I would like all of you to look at the other winners and see if you can see any ways in which we can improve our publication to improve our ranking in next year's competition. I look forward to your suggestions.

### Join Us May 11th for our Monthly Meeting

This month Carey Thornell and the junior master gardeners from Benold Middle School in Georgetown will be presenting a program one of the girls created on Pow-erpoint. They will also talk about what JMG means to them.

Master Gardeners at Work

# News and Notes

## Texas Master Gardener Conference

The Texas Master Gardener Conference was held in Marshall, Texas on April 23 – 25 and was another great meeting. Not as many attended this year, but it was probably because of the economy. Harrison County Master Gardeners are a small association but they did a good job of hosting. They only have about thirty-one Master Gardeners and twenty-four of them put this entire conference together. This shows us that a small group can accomplish great things when they work well together.

*(Above right and bottom left) Enders at the TMG Conference. (Bottom, right) Dallas County wins to host next conference.*



Text and images by Wayne Rhoden

## New Signs Available

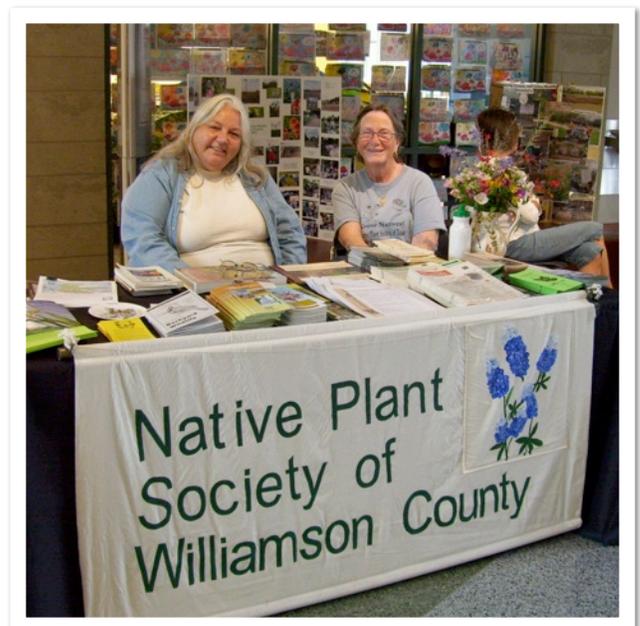
If you are involved on a project then let people know that it was a MG project. Collect your sign from the Extension office or contact Wayne for one. We need to let people know that we have been busy within our communities.

## Congratulations!

Our Congratulations go to Beth Blankenship, Joan Adams, and Sandra Pikoff from the class of 2009 and to Bonnie and Leroy Sladek from the class of 2007 for becoming Certified Master Gardeners. Well done y'all!

## Earth Day at Georgetown Library

Although it looks like I am helping the NPSOT (right, which I am), I was also aiding with gardening advice to many visitors who wanted to know information that was more appropriate to Master Gardeners. There were three “gardening” groups altogether, “Expert Gardeners,” “Georgetown Gardening Club” and NPSOT (not a gardening club) but there would have been plenty of room for MG there and indeed I would highly recommend a presence at future events. So, if this is your “thing,” why not be our representative at events and spread the word about what we do, for more information contact Paul Lawrence



**WCMGA Directory**

We will soon have a WCMGA Directory. The purpose of this directory is to efficiently share contact information with other Williamson County Master Gardeners. Communication is an essential part of volunteering and coordinating projects. This information MAY NOT be used, sold, or shared for solicitation purposes. The directory will help place names with faces and provide contact information for the purpose of coordinating volunteer efforts. By also listing specialties and volunteer skills, it makes it easier to coordinate Master Gardener volunteer projects. It is also easier to find speakers, and to find answers to difficult questions (because you'll know who to ask!) If you have not responded with your special interest or skills, please do so as soon as possible. If you need any help with this or have questions, or have not received information about this, please contact Grace Bryce 868-9191 or grace\_bryce@tscj.net

**MG Specialist Awards**

All of us should offer our congratulations to the three Williamson County Master Gardeners who were recently recognized by Texas AgriLIFE Extension as Gardener Specialists. Our President Wayne Rhoden received recognition as an Entomology Specialist. Winona Van Artsdalen has been certified along with Wayne as a Junior Master Gardener Specialist. In addition, both Wayne and Winona joined Margaret Seals as certified Vegetable Specialists.

**Workday at the Extension Office Grounds**

A number of Master Gardeners met for a work day at the Extension office. A whirlwind pruning and grooming session was carried out on the campus landscape. Plants, trees and grass were relabeled and a reorganizing of the Master gardener warehouse space was also accomplished. We had a great time together.

**WCMGA General Meeting, April 13th**

Georgetown Chiropractor Dr. Patricia Felder provided good advice to the April Meeting of the Williamson County Master Gardeners. As a gardener herself, she knows how easy it is to injure the back while working out of doors. One of the most frequent mistakes is to lift with the back, rather than with the legs. The human back and its muscles are not designed for bending over and bending back against resistance. In contrast, the legs are designed precisely for lifting the body and anything attached to it. One of the most important pieces of gardening equipment is a good pair of shoes, Dr. Felder told us. Good shoes support the foot and transmit force directly in line with the natural tendencies of the leg and foot bones. Bad shoes with wear on one side twist the foot and send those twisting forces all the way up the chain of bones into the back. Pressure on the nerves within the spinal column caused by a misaligned back can lead to a multitude of problems, of which back pain is only the most obvious. She also emphasized the need for preventive maintenance of the back. Someone who sees a chiropractor only to cure existing pain is not making the best use of the resource. Any health professional can work more efficiently to identify incipient problems and solve them than to wait until there is a major problem that requires an orthopedic or neurosurgeon.



## Master Gardener Training

# Advanced Training Opportunities

*Each month I am going to try and include new and unusual advanced training opportunities for you to try. If you take advantage of one of these suggestions then please let us all know how it goes so we can build up a record of interesting and worthwhile events to attend so we can all become more knowledgeable.*

## The Insect Pest Management New Resource for Insect Information for Master Gardeners

The Texas AgriLIFE Extension Insect Pest Management CD is a new electronic resource which contains over 160 Texas AgriLIFE Extension publications on insect pests of lawns, landscapes, gardens, trees and shrubs, fruit trees, pecans, field crops and livestock. Also included are Extension publications on termites, roaches and other structural and house-infesting insects and spiders and the latest information on controlling fire ants and mosquitoes, fleas on pets and many other stinging and biting insects.

This CD is your single 'go-to' source of information and answers to your insect questions.

These illustrated publications provide information on pest identification, biology, damage, and details cultural and biological control options, including use of beneficial insects, and lists suggested insecticides for pest control. Many of these bulletins include color images, making insect pest identification easy. The CD also has hot links to Texas A&M Entomology Department web sites dedicated to imported fire ant management and honey bees.

These illustrated publications are organized in a series of easy-to-use menus in the Adobe Acrobat format which is included on the CD. Simply insert the disk into your computer to access the publications. A search

option makes it easy to find information on a specific insect or site.

The Insect Pest Management CD can be ordered through the Texas AgriLife Bookstore at <http://agrilifebookstore.org>. Select "Insects" from the menu and scroll down to item "SP-198 Insect Pest Management CD" and click to add to cart. The cost is \$8.00 per CD plus postage.

Alternatively go to [http://agrilifebookstore.org/publications\\_details.cfm?whichpublication=1976&orderby=pubnumber&SIMPLESEARCH=sp-198&criteriastring=SIMPLESEARCH%3Dsp%2D198](http://agrilifebookstore.org/publications_details.cfm?whichpublication=1976&orderby=pubnumber&SIMPLESEARCH=sp-198&criteriastring=SIMPLESEARCH%3Dsp%2D198)

## Non-Credit Course Option - Sick Plants and a Hungry World

Targeted to Master Gardeners and others interested in learning about stories of plant diseases from a world and historical perspective. Modules cover topics such as the Disease Triangle, Irish potato famine, and bioterrorism. The course is available for ten weeks from the time participants start the course and includes reading assignments and self-tests. It is a non-credit course and no grade is given; a certificate of completion from the Office of Continuing Education is awarded upon completion. [Register online](#) (only \$35).

### From the Website:

What happened to the mighty American Chestnut?

Why did the Romans make sacrifices to Robigus, the god of wheat rust?

What plant diseases threaten our environment and food supply today?

We are offering online courses that explore plant diseases from both historical and scientific perspectives. The courses can be done on your own computer, at your own pace.

The content is not heavily technical but rich in information about plant diseases. Topics range from basic concepts and history of plant pathology to famine issues, bioterrorism and more.

Anyone can register for these courses! "The introduction of the potato from the New World in the 1500's displaced other Irish crops and became a main food crop for the Irish population. The monoculture of potato fields, in addition to the cold, wet weather, set the stage for one of the most dramatic migrations of human populations (Plant Pathology 201D)."

The death of over a million Irish and the immigration of Irish families to the U.S. was in large part the result of a potato famine caused by the late blight fungus. But what else was taking place in Ireland at this time that contributed to this death and destruction? Throughout history, there have been many stories of how plant disease has played a role in shaping society. "Sick Plant

and a Hungry world" provides an opportunity to explore and reflect on those stories.

"Sick Plants and a Hungry World" is a non-credit course offered completely online through Moodle, a course management system. There are 10 modules with topics ranging from basic concepts in plant diseases (such as the disease triangle) to prehistoric man and plant diseases, and from the Irish Potato Famine to bioterrorism. The course is completely self-paced, so you can take it anytime, anywhere. Although the course is designed for Master Gardeners, anyone interested in plants, history, and contemporary global issues will find "Sick Plants and a Hungry World" exciting.

Once you begin your online experience of "Sick Plants and a Hungry World", the course will be available for 10 weeks. Assignments consist of supplied module readings and self-tests. A certificate from The Ohio State University Office of Continuing Education will be awarded upon the successful completion of the course.

## Invasive Species Identification

I have been participating in an ongoing gardening-related project at the Gault Archeological Site on the Williamson-Bell County line north of Florence. Although it is unknown to most residents of the region, this is perhaps the most significant excavation in the United States relating to the first inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere. A long-term goal, financing permitting, is to develop the property as an interpretive center illustrating the history of the area from its initial settlement back when mammoths roamed our county, down to the Florence-Bartlett railway line in the early 20th century. As a part of this, the Gault School of Archeological Research wants to restore the native vegetation.

An essential step towards this goal is to take a census of the plants on the site now, including the invasive species that have been introduced in recent historic times. These range from grasses like King Ranch Bluestem (despite the name, this does not provide decent cattle forage) to trees like Tree of Heaven, Chinese Tallow, and Ligustrum. Fortunately, the site is isolated enough that it mostly contains native species,



*The Chinaberry tree (Melia azedarach var. umbraculifera) was introduced in the mid-1800s from Asia and widely planted as a traditional ornamental. It is a deciduous tree to 50 feet (15 m) in height and 2 feet (60 cm) in diameter, much branched with multiple boles, lacy dark-green leaves having a musky odor, and clusters of lavender flowers in spring yielding persistent, poisonous yellow berries that can remain on the tree past leaf fall. It reproduces on-site primarily from root sprouts, and over longer distances via bird-dispersed seeds. Reproductively mature when it reaches the size of a shrub. Flowers in the spring, fruits in the summer. Fruit remain on the tree past leaf fall. This tree is now getting out of hand in many areas and needs to be curtailed.*

tin Nature and Science Center, Multi Purpose Room. There is a \$15 charge for the workshop and you need to register by May 22. To register contact Alice Nance at [Alice.Nance@ci.austin.tx.us](mailto:Alice.Nance@ci.austin.tx.us) or by phone at 512-327-8181 x29. For more information, see [http://www.texasinvasives.org/invaders/workshop\\_results.php](http://www.texasinvasives.org/invaders/workshop_results.php). Maybe we'll see you on the trails.

WILLIAMSON COUNTY MASTER GARDENER JOURNAL



*A photo from the Gault Archaeological site when the excavation was in full swing. Sadly, much of the excavation is now been closed or reduced due to the economic climate.*

although not in their natural distribution since the area has been used intermittently for farming and grazing over the past 160 years or so. A census like this requires training in identifying invasive species. I was trained a few years ago by the Invaders of Texas program of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Service. This has had numerous benefits for me. First, of course, is that it helps me manage my own property in a responsible manner. Second, it has enabled me to more effectively carry out my responsibilities as a Master Gardener to educate the community about how to avoid (or overcome) the threat that invasive plants can pose to their gardens and the surrounding environment. Finally, it has allowed me to contribute to valuable survey opportunities, both local surveys like this one at the Gault Site and the statewide database of invasive plants maintained by the Invaders program. These are actually quite a lot of fun.

If you think invasive hunting might be for you, you're in luck. The City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department is hosting a local Invaders of Texas workshop on May 30 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. It will be held at Aus-



## Master Gardener Advanced Training

**Online Training****Christine Powell**

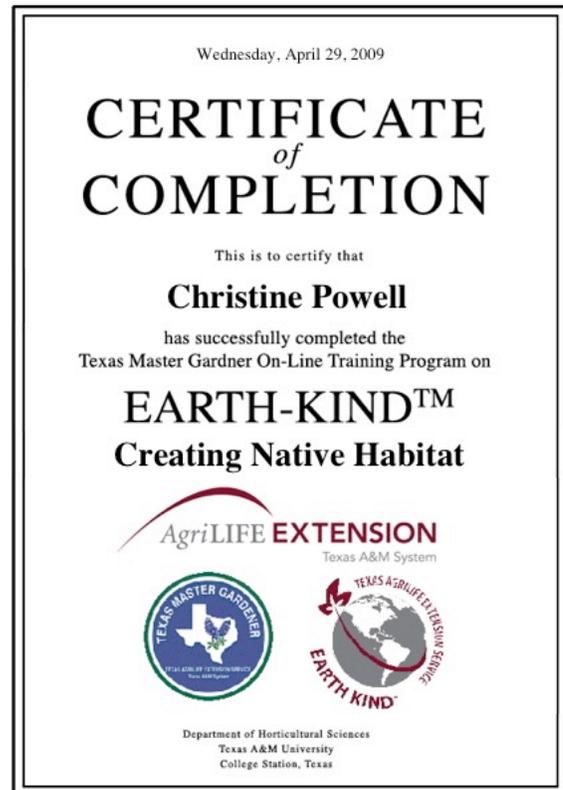
In an effort to explore all aspects of what opportunities are available to us as Master Gardeners to advance our knowledge so we can help educate others, I took an online training course this week. On the Texas A&M site at <http://earthkind.tamu.edu/index.html> there are a series of modules you can do. If you check on [Earth-Kind On-Line Master Gardener Training Program](#) then this site provides Master Gardeners with the opportunity to receive a special certification in the Earth-Kind Environmental Stewardship Program. You can make a difference in protecting our state's environment. These are the selection of courses to choose from:

- ◆ Landscape Water Conservation
- ◆ Low Volume Irrigation
- ◆ Irrigation System Auditing
- ◆ Safe Use and Handling of Pesticides in the Landscape
- ◆ Safe Use and Handling of Fertilizers in the Landscape
- ◆ Reducing Landscape Wastes - Composting
- ◆ Designing an EARTH-KIND™ Landscape
- ◆ Landscaping for Energy Conservation
- ◆ Creating Native Habitat
- ◆ EARTH-KIND™ Roses
- ◆ Integrated Pest Management
- ◆ Pest Management for Crape Myrtles

Texas Master Gardeners can select from any of these on-line modules to obtain up to three hours of re-certification education credits in a calendar year. Each module is worth one hour of credit. Master Gardeners are encouraged not to seek re-certification credit for training modules they have completed in previous years. Progress through the training program is tracked "on-line" and the results for each completed module are automatically forwarded to the Master Gardener Coordinator.

Participation in the EARTH-KIND™ On-Line Master Gardener Training will assist Texas AgriLIFE Extension Service to promote principles and practices that help conserve and protect our state's valuable natural resources. Working together we can create a healthy and sustainable environment. There are several points to remember and do follow the instructions carefully or you can end up confused and not where you want to be (the system was clearly designed for the PC and not the Mac)!

So, what did I think? I choose the "Creating Native Habitat" module but was disappointed because it was so brief (5:38 minutes) and simple. Mind you, I only received sound when I think there should have been a video playing. Now, it is true I already know a lot on the subject, but I selected it for that reason so I could judge the content. I felt a lot more information could have been given. What did take the time was getting my results registered. Would I take another module? Possibly if there was something I partially wanted to find out about and couldn't go to a class locally. This type of course would be perfect for those of us who procrastinate and find ourselves short an hour or two advanced training at the end of the year or on those long summer days when you want to be outside but it is too hot. Give it a try and let me know how it goes.



**Earth Kind:**  
Environmental Stewardship Program

## From Bob's Blog

*Some Williamson County Master Gardeners may not know that our County Extension Agent, Bob Whitney, has a web log ("blog," sort of an internet diary) at*

*<http://theagriculturalist.blogspot.com>  
/ Here are some recent highlights:*

Tuesday, April 21, 2009

### **Agriculture is Big Business in Williamson County**

There are not many of the 375,000 people who live in Williamson County who think that agriculture makes a very big economic impact. In fact, most people think agriculture is fast phasing out and it won't be long till agriculture will be gone! Well nothing could be further from the truth and in fact agriculture income is on the rise, growing faster than just about any other segment in the county. Now it may not be the same agriculture it was 20 years ago but growing nonetheless.

Bob goes on to discuss facts and figures but the bottom line is that Williamson County is 10th out of all 254 counties in total horticulture sales with a total of \$317,995,060. Broken down that is \$158,500,000 in wholesale and retail trade and \$148,400,000 in horticulture services. Environmental horticulture or the green industry includes production of nurseries, greenhouses, sod, herbs, cut-flowers, retail garden centers and florists, and landscape and tree services. The environmental horticulture industry, often referred to as the "Green Industry" is one of the fastest growing sectors of agriculture in the US. Taking all aspects of traditional agriculture together it has grown to sales of over \$75 million per year! The total for all agricultural sales in the county is close to \$400 million with horticulture making up a huge portion.

So, looking at the numbers, a very diverse agriculture industry in Williamson County is by no means fading away but instead is growing every year. The continued urban growth in our area only fuels the growth of this industry insuring a bright and long future for agriculture!! To read the article in detail go to Bob's blog at <http://theagriculturalist.blogspot.com/>

Monday, April 20, 2009

### **Budding and Grafting-What Is It?**

Most people don't have a clue what budding or grafting is or they don't know why we do it! I can sure understand this since most of the reproduction in the world on the human side is not asexual it is sexual. Wow! How did we go from budding and grafting to SEX? Well in budding and grafting we bypass the typical crossing of a male and a female to produce offspring by either budding or grafting a portion of the plant we want onto the same type of plant. For instance, in pecan trees the nut that is produced can be planted by a squirrel and grow up into a big beautiful pecan tree but the nuts on that tree may not resemble the planted nut at all. This is because the nut was produced by sexual means. The male pollen was produced on another tree and it floated on the wind and fell on the pecan tree flower of another tree. Once on the flower parts, the male and female parts mate and the resulting nut now has the genetics of the male tree crossed with the female tree. As any parent knows our children may or may not be like us! In nature this natural crossing produces what we know as native pecans.

Now in budding and grafting we bypass this uncertainty by taking a bud or a piece of graftwood with buds from a tree we like and transfer these buds onto a tree or rootstock that produces poor quality nuts. This is an asexual method which reproduces exactly the nuts we want. This is also used on all our fruit trees as well as our nut trees. Basically we can use either buds or grafts depending on the tree type, personal preference or tree size. Most nurseries growing

small trees use single buds called budding and in orchards we use grafting which is putting a small limb with several buds onto a tree.

Having said all this there are still many people who grow pecans but very few that have ever grafted one! If you are in this category then you won't want to miss the Pecan Grafting Workshop then call the Extension office at 512/943-3300 to reserve a spot at the next workshop.

Monday, April 6, 2009

### **Fruit Tree Insect and Diseases**

I think we can blame the drought for causing another problem, terrible insect pressure, especially on our fruit trees. Most if not all fruit trees have made it through the winter, and most have survived the drought, if you watered. They have made it through freezes and most have small fruit, no small miracle for Texas fruit production! Now after making it through all these problems we have one more to add to the list, stink bugs!

Both the brown stink bug and the green stink bug overwinter in grassy areas and under brush or wood. They wait for warm weather to come out and begin looking for energy sources to replace lost body reserves and the plant of choice is fruit. The brown stink bug causes the fruit to deform and the green stink bug causes the fruit to exude a resin or gummy mess that can accumulate on the fruit especially on peaches. Both insects have long snouts that they use to pierce the skin and suck out juices. In the case of the green stink bug this resin attracts wasps and bees so that they get the blame instead of the stink bug. Stink bugs are hard to control especially since they have piercing/sucking mouthparts. Carbaryl or permethrins are two of the most effective inorganic chemicals but for organic growers your only choice is neem oil and its effectiveness is not good

There is one major peach insect that everyone wants to get rid of, the Plum Curculio. This small worm or grub feeds inside the peach mostly near the seed and can cause anyone who has found one a real heartache. This worm or larva is laid by an adult snout beetle, similar in looks to the oak, pecan or cotton weevil. This adult overwinters in the soil at the base of the fruit tree and comes out early with the plums and moves to peaches as plums mature early. The adult female will chew a small hole in the

## DID YOU KNOW?

Although budding is considered a modern art and science, grafting is not new. The practice of grafting can be traced back 4,000 years to ancient China and Mesopotamia. As early as 2,000 years ago, people recognized the incompatibility problems that may occur when grafting olives and other fruiting trees.

fruit skin and lay eggs just under the surface. The eggs hatch into small larvae that feed in the fruit for 2 to 4 weeks and of course this is what causes the problems.

To control this, insect sprays have to be made from shucksplit (about the time the fruit is formed) and for two applications at two week intervals and then 30 days before fruit harvest. This last spray is probably the most important since the eggs laid hatch out and the larva are still in the fruit at harvest. Recommended sprays are malathion, carbaryl or permethrin and organic is garlic and citrus oil, and neem oil to repel the adults. There is no insecticide to treat the soil with but keeping old fruit off the ground helps prevent next year's problems.

Another problem some homeowners have complained about is the gummy mess coming out of fruit tree limbs. This gum or resin is caused by a bacterial canker that has infected the limb. This canker develops in the fall and as the trees break dormancy in the spring, gum is formed by the infection and can break through the bark and flow down the tree limb. Stress in trees is the main culprit and treatments are not effective. Keep damaged wood trimmed out and supply water and nutrients to promote tree health.

### Zinc is Essential for Pecans

In the Texas Pecan Handbook, John Begnaud, Extension Horticulturalist writes that, "Over 40 years of pecan zinc research confirms that the pecan tree is a poor accumulator and transporter of zinc, especially when grown in

high pH soils." Any commercial pecan grower in the state can testify that this statement is true and none of them will miss a zinc spray unless it rains. Unfortunately many new growers and perhaps some in the business a long time forget how important zinc is in pecan growth.

What does zinc do? Well zinc is necessary for the production of natural plant hormones that induce cell elongation and cell division or, better said, overall plant growth. In our high pH soils we can have lots of zinc but little of it is available to the tree and so we see deficiency symptoms such as small, narrow leaves. These leaves are usually on thin shoots with very short internodes. When you only have small leaves and possibly less leaves then you don't produce pecans or a smaller crop than expected. Continual zinc deficiencies can result in bunched terminal growth and even some canopy die-back. Dr. George Ray McEachern, pecan specialist, describes zinc deficiencies as small leaves that curve, leaf edges waxy, leaves with dark interveinal discoloration, shoots growing in thick bunches with some dead some alive.

Now what do we mean by zinc applications? In the many research trials that have been done the only effective and efficient way to get zinc into a pecan tree is foliar applications. Over the years soil injections, tree injections and fertilizer applications have all been tried but still foliar applications are the best. Unfortunately our high pH soils very quickly make soil applications of zinc bound up and unavailable. Tree injections move zinc to existing growth but since zinc is immobile in the plant the new growth

doesn't get the benefit. This unique set of circumstances forces growers to make repeated foliar applications to new growth to ensure adequate zinc uptake in pecan leaves.

Another aspect of the zinc research in pecans is the best formulations for zinc uptake. To date three compounds have been the most effective, zinc sulphate, zinc nitrate and NZN. Of these three the most widely used is zinc sulphate probably because it is just as effective as the other two but is cheaper. Another part of this research has shown that the effectiveness of zinc uptake is enhanced by the addition of liquid nitrogen in the tank. It doesn't take much zinc or liquid nitrogen, only 2 lbs of zinc sulphate and 1 quart of liquid N per 100 gallons of water. For homeowners there are numerous products on nursery shelves for zinc applications and all work well. Use a hose-end sprayer to reach tree tops.

Now the hard part is getting the trees sprayed on a timely basis. Remember that zinc is not translocated so a grower needs to make regular sprays during the spring flush. The first spray should be at green tip or what we call budbreak, then 1-2 weeks later followed by another 1-2 weeks later or with casebearer insect sprays and then one more 2-3 weeks later. Pecan growth is fairly mature by mid-June so that sprays can be discontinued on all but young trees which should be sprayed until August.

Of all the things you can do to a pecan tree to help make pecans there is probably nothing more important than zinc sprays and now is the time to get started!

## USE THOSE PRUNINGS

There are lots of ways of using those prunings to avoid the landfill. Of course the best thing would be to turn it into mulch or add it to a compost pile but there are other alternatives.

Dip some of the best cuttings in rooting hormone and stick them in a pot with a sand and peat mixture. Remember to keep in the shade with a ventilated plastic cover. Many will root while others will not. Result: some free plants.

What to do with those larger branches? Use as edgings for those new flower beds you are making now that we are all taking up our lawn. Alternatively, stack them up in an out of the way corner as a log pile for all those beneficial creepy crawlers in our gardens who need somewhere to live.

A Master Gardener Walks

# ...along the trails

## Annette Banks

“...The trails are alive with the sight of blossoms...” I could not erase Julie Andrews' tune nor that phrase from my mind as I hummed along the trails in early April. Expecting less because of the drought, I was pleasantly surprised to take photos of twenty plus varieties of wildflowers on my initial treks on the trails. With many flowers to point out, I decided to focus on the one that kept vividly showing up in unexpected places. One perfect flower was eye level in a large boulder's small crevice, bright red against the limestone frame.

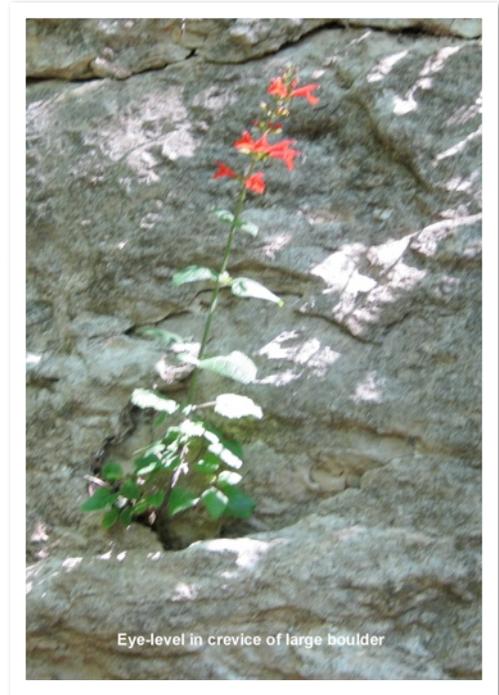
These salvia plants were just as dominant in the sunny spots of the trails as in their snuggled areas of the shade. Each plant seemed to exert its own independence and portray a complete focal point in its spot.

Other common names of the *salvia coccinea* are Texas sage, blood sage, and hummingbird sage. Because it is frost tender, it is treated as an annual. However, it offers profuse seed scattering, and the plants sprout out from the dormant seeds rather early each year. The somewhat pungent smell of the plant is a deterrent to deer, but the minty taste attracts many butterflies, hummingbirds and other birds, and bees. The plant is native to parts of Mexico, north throughout the southwestern and into the southeastern United States, as well as the tropics.

The brilliant red, tubular spikes gather around a square stem nestled among almost heart-shaped lush green leaves, reminiscent of a valentine. They reach about 12 to 30 inches and bloom throughout summer until the first frost. They are not overly fussy about soil conditions since they are growing in the rocky places on the trails.

In your garden areas of native scarlet sage, you will want to prune your plants to encourage good blooming and to avoid leggy plants. The end of May is usually the perfect time for pruning, and you can continue it as needed.

Take advantage of the cool days and hit the trails soon. With a dedicated eye you will be able to spy flowers in all shades of pinks, reds, purples, yellows, oranges, and white. When near the Booty Road area, note the splendid maidenhair ferns. They are at their peak while the weather remains cool.



## Master Gardener Basics

## Back to the Basics

### Winola VanArtsdalen

*Each month, this “Back to the Basics” series highlights a technique to help us get best results from our gardening efforts. This month, the topic is my favorite, herbs, with some “how to,” but mostly “recommendations to you, my fellow gardeners, with much love.”*

#### HERBS FOR YOUR GARDEN

If you live on the outskirts of the hill country, growing herbs is a natural for you. Herbs tolerate our alkaline soil, deter their animal predators with their “herby” scent, and strengthen our bodies. All this, while making our food more delicious and beautifying our landscape. What's not to love!

The success of any garden is largely determined by the soil, but herbs are probably the least fussy plants you can find. They not only tolerate our alkaline soils, they do not want the soil too rich. There is something they are very particular about, though. They must have good drainage! It is essential that you add enough compost and mineral amendments to have loose soil, so that their roots can easily grow, water drains away, and they get a good supply of oxygen. This makes your weeding easier, too.

Herbs, like all plants, will appreciate some mulch to keep the moisture in and to protect their roots from extreme temperature changes, especially the heat of our summers. Do not use too much, though, and do keep it away from their stems to give them some breathing room. I like to add about a half inch of compost, and then spread two inches of mulch over that. In my garden, lavender needs gravel mulch, so the sun will reflect to the under side of the leaves and keep them dry.

Now, any time it becomes known that I like to grow herbs, the immediate question is, “What is your favorite herb?” My response is always that if I could have just one culinary herb, it would be thyme. You can flavor almost any food with thyme: meats, vegetables, fruits, and dessert. As with any herb, you do not need a recipe to use thyme; just experiment with it in everything from stir fry vegetables to cookies. Do use thyme with a light hand to not overpower the dish, and do use it fresh! Some people say silver thyme grows best for them here, but my French thyme and English thyme spread profusely!

My next favorite herb would be rosemary, because it is almost as versatile. Rosemary, like thyme, should be used sparingly. You do need to be particular about the type of rosemary, though. There is a difference in the amount of essential oils different varieties have, and thus the flavoring they will add to your cooking. Three of the rosemaries tested to have the highest oil content are Madelene Hill Rosemary, Arp, and Beneden Blue. When I was volunteering at McAshen Herb Gardens in Round Top and they sent me out to get herbs for the kitchen, it was not to get just any rosemary. If it was for cooking, I was sent for Madelene Hill Rosemary, often sold as Hill Hardy. I will always have this rosemary in my garden! (This was originally Hill Hardy rosemary, but was officially renamed Madalene Hill Rosemary.)



*French Thyme*



*Madalene Hill Rosemary*



*Powis Castle Artemisia*

We have many other favorite herbs at our house. Basil is wonderful for soups and other dishes, including desserts. Use basil generously as it almost never overpowers. It is best to tear rather than chop basil, as it turns black when cut. Add whole leaves of sweet basil to sandwiches or mixed-green salads. I use sweet basil in soups and salads, usually, but cinnamon basil for desserts, and Mrs. Burns lemon basil for most anything else. Another favorite herb, oregano, can be used in almost any herb mixture, and it has been reported to have especially high antioxidant activity. We always use it when making veggie pizza. With poultry, I use Mexican mint marigold which is a southern substitute for tarragon. It is not winter hardy, so I cover it during early fall frosts to be sure we have some for our holiday turkey and for herb butter, too. This is by no means a complete list of culinary herbs I use regularly, but it is the ones I use most often.

While using any of the above herbs, hold by the tip and strip downward to remove the leaves. You can use whole leaves for garnish and in sandwiches. With herbs that have small leaves, use whole leaves for marinades or long-cooking dishes, but chop them for quick skillet recipes. You can use tender stems, too. Do not throw out the leftovers! For long term storage, I process them in the food processor with parsley and enough oil to coat them. You can keep them in freezer plastic storage bags. Basil will turn black, but I still keep it for some uses such as in soups.

After considering all these good flavors from herbs, there is one other major asset-- their addition to our landscape. They are low maintenance, and they offer wonderful contrast in your flower beds. Who doesn't love the lacy, silver foliage of 'Powis Castle' artemisia, the huge, colorful leaves of 'Bright Lights' swiss chard, and the deep green, almost "cedar" texture of *Santolina virens* (Green Santolina) that electrifies your beds in the winter! The slender leaves of society garlic give a linear line, and the delicate edged, cheerful, salad burnet perks up any plant grouping. In the summer, the delicate, floating foliage of bronze fennel is a joy to behold. Look for 'Berggarten' sage, which is a particularly attractive variety of common culinary sage. It has a tidy growth habit with lovely, varied shades of grey oval leaves and is longer-lived than most culinary sages. Not only will you love its appearance, but it has a distinctive woody taste that's great with potatoes and meats. Don't forget the beautiful sweet bay laurel tree! I have mine on the south side of the house, tucked into a little corner where a protruding bay window protects it from crosswinds, and it has survived four winters now without freezing. If you haven't livened up your beds with herbs, give it a try! You'll be so glad you did.

*Disclaimer: None of the stones you see in the pictures were part of the landscape plan. All have been placed in defense against our resident armadillo! My husband calls it "The Graveyard."*



*Green Santolina with Salvia greggii 'Farman's Red' beside it.*



*Berggarten Sage*



*Sweet Bay Laurel*

## “Bug” of the month

This month's article focuses on thrips. These insects have rasping tongues and cause damage to the flowering parts of our ornamental plants. Mine show up usually on my roses first and you will notice that the buds look dark and misshapened when they start to open. These insects are hard to see with the naked eye and you will need to take a white piece of paper and beat the rose bud on the paper. You will see the small thrips running around and can take a magnifying glass to look at them. There are many different species of our common thrips, such as onion thrips, citrus thrips and greenhouse thrips. Thrips for any occasion.

**Life Cycle:** Adult female thrips insert eggs into plant tissues. Just before hatching, the egg "squeezes" out of the tissue and hatches. Development progresses through two larval stages (instars), a pre-pupal non-feeding stage that crawls down into the soil, and a pupal resting stage from which adults emerge. Development from egg to adult takes 8 to 20 days depending on temperature.

**Pest Status:** Feeding injures developing and mature tissues of many plant parts including buds, leaves, flowers, and fruit; capable of "biting" people by poking their single mandible into exposed skin (This is often the case after people sit down in Texas' beautiful spring wild flower blooms to have their pictures taken. These wild flowers are filled with thrips!); capable of spreading plant diseases such as tomato spotted wilt.

**Management:** These insects are sometimes hard to control. You can try spraying the plant with a hard blast of water first to see if you can dislodge them. If they continue to be a problem, you can use some organic products such as insecticidal soaps, horticultural oils and Spinosad. Also practice good garden practices such as removing plant waste and weeds which attract the little pests.

For more information, you can get the publication E-194 from the Extension Office. This publication deals with many different vegetable pests and shows the methods used for control.



Wayne Rhoden  
Entomologist Specialist

## September 28 – October 2, 2009 Master Volunteer Entomology Specialist Training

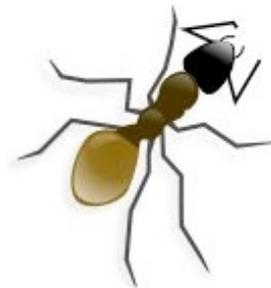
Texas AgriLife Extension Service Montgomery County Office, Conroe, TX

Hosted by Dr. Paul R. Nester, Extension Program Specialist, Houston/Metro area, and the Montgomery County Master Gardeners.

- Registration fee of \$300.00 includes collecting kit with lots of goodies; lectures; Extension bulletins; 3 lunches, 1 dinner, snacks & drinks
- Transportation and lodging is on your own
- Course is limited to 25 applicants; deadline is July 18, 2009

Contact Paul Nester at [PNester@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:PNester@ag.tamu.edu) or 281-855-5639 with any questions.

[Registration material](#)



# JMG Project at Liberty Hill

## April 15, 2009

Juanita James

On April 15 we went to Liberty Hill for a JMG project with Brigid Mejia and four volunteers from the Health and Wellness Center. Master Gardeners helping with this project were Wayne Rhoden, Patsy Bredahl, Juanita James, Grace Bryce (who brought her son Michael to help), Grace Bulgerin, Joanne Dieterich, Tanya Graham, Jean Macher-Japko, Ruth Olmsted, Jared Sudekum and Jane Williamson. Also joining us was our wonderful extension agent, Bob Whitney. We had fun helping 146 kindergardeners make "Know and Show Somberos" and "Dirt People". A few of the Master Gardeners helped Brigid with reading to the students and other projects. It was a busy, but rewarding day. Below and on the next two pages are several pictures of the students and Master Gardeners.







Images by Juanita James and Grace Bryce

## Junior Master Gardeners in Action

## After School Action Program (ASAP) Call to Action, Earth Day

By Forbes ASAP Writers College Students: Aubin, Brittany, Megan, Cierra, Daisy, Eryn

Earth day is a very exciting day for many reasons. Established in 1970 by the modern environmental movement, Earth Day brought these issues to the national agenda for the first time. On April 22, 1970 Senator Gaylord Nelson encouraged twenty million Americans to take to “the streets, parks, and auditoriums to demonstrate for a healthy, sustainable environment. Denis Hayes, the national coordinator, and his youthful staff organized massive coast-to-coast rallies. Thousands of colleges and universities organized protests against the deterioration of the environment. Groups that had been fighting against oil spills, polluting factories and power plants, raw sewage, toxic dumps, pesticides, freeways, the loss of wilderness, and the extinction of wildlife suddenly realized they shared common values” ([www.earthday.net](http://www.earthday.net)).



This caused a very rare political alignment of Republicans

and Democrats alike. Everyone from farmers to tycoons joined in to rally for one common cause, the Earth. This immense support of the first Earth Day led to the creation of the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the passage of the Clean Air, Clean Water, and Endangered Species acts. Senator Nelson was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor given to civilians in the United States, for his role as Earth Day founder.

This year the After School Action Program at Forbes Middle School organized efforts to celebrate Earth Day in a big way. It was important to us, as the students, to honor this day for a lot of reasons. One fact we found in our research really jumped out at us, recycling two hundred pounds of paper saves 17 trees. This means every piece of paper you recycle you are saving a tree, but not only that you are also one step closer to saving the rainforest. Now, I am not a tree hugger

either but when you think about it we need trees and plants to survive so really you're not only saving trees and the rainforest, but you are also making sure that we can live only that much longer. It is a collection of little acts like the ones created by the students of the after school action program that can make a big difference in our society.

There are many things you can do to celebrate Earth Day or everyday, but here are some of the things we did. The Forbes ASAP Agents of Change are a group of caring and committed young people who work to make a positive impact on their school, community, and peers. This year in honor of Earth Day our project was to organize a recycling campaign.

We started by placing various recycling bins around the school to collect plastic bags, paper, and even your old cell phones/ electronic devices. It was important to us to support the current recycling efforts of the school, but re-energize them by highlighting their efforts with information. So, in their art classes ASAP kids made posters with sayings such as “Celebrate Earth Day by supporting the Big Blue Recycling Program.” The posters included Fun Facts about things like global warming and the trash production that causes littering. Each poster had different facts about the environment to raise



awareness with our peers and teachers. During the morning announcements on the four days leading up to Earth Day, a student from ASAP would ask a question about the environment. The answers to the questions could be found on the posters around the school. Students would turn in their answers and when someone answered it correctly, they got a prize.

The announcements also told students about recycling opportunities that were going on at the school: such as the Parents-Teacher Association's (PTA) Trash to Cash Program. This program recycles electronic devices, ink cartridges, old cell phones, etc and turns them into money for the school! Highlighting these programs and matching them up with important statistics helped to draw attention to why we need to take care of our planet and how everyone no matter how old they are can do their part!

This project really opened our eyes to how the environment is being effected by our mishaps, not recycling, and littering. We tried to convey to students that even if it is easier to just throw all that old paper in your house in the trash. Recycling it is a lot cooler and can really make an impact on our earth. As kids we have a long time to still to be on this Earth. Even though ALL adults should be concerned about our future and keeping the planet healthy for us, they aren't. So maybe it is our job to step up and take control of our own destiny, because really all we are doing if we don't help is sentencing ourselves to extinction. I want to believe I can make a difference not just on Earth Day, but everyday by doing little things. Hopefully, I can convince others to do this too!

Information gathered from:

[www.earthday.net](http://www.earthday.net)

[www.globalinheritance.org](http://www.globalinheritance.org)

[www.greenpeace.org/usa/](http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/)

[my.nature.org/earthday](http://my.nature.org/earthday)

[www.recyclingcenters.org/Top\\_10\\_Ways\\_To\\_Celebrate\\_Earth\\_Day](http://www.recyclingcenters.org/Top_10_Ways_To_Celebrate_Earth_Day)

[www.recyclingcenters.org/Top\\_50\\_Things\\_To\\_Recycle\\_and\\_Reuse](http://www.recyclingcenters.org/Top_50_Things_To_Recycle_and_Reuse)

## UPCOMING JUNIOR MASTER GARDENER PROJECTS

**Juanita James**

- ◆ On May 7, 8 and 9 we will be working with Mickie Ross, from the Williamson Museum, at Pioneer Days in Round Rock at Old Settlers Park. On May 7 and 8 we will be explaining Pioneer vegetables to different groups of children from field trips coming to the Park for this event. Mickie will have spinners, candlemakers, soap making, storytellers and a dress-up area for children. The Master Gardeners are planning to plant a "Three Sisters Garden" in the area to show and explain to the children. On May 9 the event will be open to the general public. There will be Master Gardeners there for all three days explaining vegetables and the Three Sisters Garden.

Patsy and I, along with Bridget and Mickie, are very excited about these projects. Great volunteer hours for anyone that wants to help.

- ◆ The Forest Creek elementary school will be having a science day on Friday May 22nd. We were hoping to do the Know & Show Sombreros project from the JMG handbook. Is there anyone who can help? We are looking for three or four volunteers to help on this morning from about 8:15 am till about 10:15 am. The students will be ages 5-8 who you would be working with.

Thank you so much, interested people may contact me via e-mail.

Lisa Quintero

[LisaSarahQ@austin.rr.com](mailto:LisaSarahQ@austin.rr.com)

512-341-8297



# Voigt Elementary in Round Rock April 17, 2009

Grace Bryce

Voigt Elementary in Round Rock hosted a Science event on April 17, 2009. There were several hands-on stations and other demonstrations, where the children learned about science. Williamson County Master Gardeners were there to make Know and Show Sombreros and teach the children what plants need to live and grow.



(Left) Wayne Rhoden, Ruth Olmsted, Grace Bryce, Juanita James, Patsy Bredhal, Michael Bryce, Brigid Mejia (not pictured). (Center) Patsy, Brigid and Juanita prepare the newspaper for the sombrero station. (Right) The first step is to know what plants need.



(Left) Wayne explains what plants need to grow to the children. (Center and right) Juanita, Brigid, Ruth and Grace worked on making the Know and Show Sombreros.



The children decorated their sombreros with items symbolic of what plants need to live.

Show me your sombreros!



Images by Grace Bryce

Michael and Wayne with Bob the Blob.



Ed. Note: I know this issue has a lot of images from the JMG program but I wanted to include them all as I know the children get excited to see them. I hope they inspire you to volunteer with the children some-time very soon!

Master Gardener Projects

# Saint Philips Church Designated New MG Project

**Patty Hoenigman**

If you've ever driven by St. Philips' Church United Methodist Church, Round Rock, you've likely been struck by the unusual architecture of this ca. 1900 building. And, as a gardener, you may also have been struck by the desperate need for improvement in the landscaping of the spacious grounds that surround the chapel and 3 other related buildings. The square bell tower and clapboard siding are as charming from the outside as the stained glass windows of this treasured sanctuary are from the inside. This is an antique building worth preserving and well deserving of having gardens around it for all to enjoy on this very visible corner.

Mary Anne Pirics, Master Gardener and member of this church, submitted a proposal last winter and won the approval of having this site designated as a MG project. A core of volunteers is developing, but many more are needed. There is a tremendous need for gardeners to do planting, weeding, pruning and planning of new garden beds. This is a large undertaking that will require a lot of hands to bring these two acres space up to their full potential. The next big undertaking is to remove six very old and very dead clumps of Pampas grass. That's

going to take some strong folks to do some heavy work! But there are plenty of other things to do that will be much easier.

"I saw the garden last Fall, when Mary Anne was first thinking about it becoming a Master Gardener project", said Patty Hoenigman. "It was so dry, looking unloved and uncared for. We walked along the paths wondering where we'd begin! The next time I



saw it was the end of April. In that short amount of time, Mary Anne and several other very dedicated MG volunteers, had begun the process of transforming it. It's already beginning to look like a real garden. Salvias are blooming, old photinia hedges have been trimmed, birds have moved in to the new wren house and mulch has been spread. People who walk by acknowledge the hard work that's already gone into this project." What a huge

difference a few dedicated hands can make!

If you'd like to volunteer, please call Mary Anne at 971-9025, or email her at [mapirics@austin.rr.com](mailto:mapirics@austin.rr.com). Workdays are Thursday mornings, from 9:30-12:30, but may vary during the summer months.

## Master Gardener Favorites

## Favorite Websites

### Christine Powell

This is not necessarily a “favorite” website but with Eathday having just passed I thought I would introduce you to [Earth911.com](http://Earth911.com). If you have anything you are not sure about how to recycle then this is the site for you. However, it is more than just a list of where to take your recycling, it is also a very good resource for finding out how to recycle at home and in the garden. Each section, be it house, garden, construction, plastic, metal, and so forth, has links to articles, both local and from around the world, to let you know what is going on and how others are dealing with different situations. Some items are a bit obscure but fascinating.

This is one of those sites you may only use once a year when you are cleaning out the garden shed but it is so handy to have—just in case. Give it a look see and recycle safely and responsibly.

I have lots of favorite gardening and associated websites bookmarked on my computer but now it is time for you to send me yours. If you have a great site you know about or one you have just stumbled across then let me know. Ed.

## A Master Composter

## Compost Corner

### Patty Hoenigman

Being new to Texas, my hunt for leaves began last Fall. I asked everyone, “When do the leaves fall?” and no one could tell me!!! Seems my neighbors aren’t into composting...yet! Well, the last week of November the leaves began falling, and that’s when I began getting sacks of them donated to me for my fist compost pile in Texas. But tax season seems to have gotten in the way, so that pile wasn’t made for quite a while!

Here’s what happened. They were the small, tough, Live Oak leaves, so I decided to buy a trash can, dump the leaves in it, and fill it with water to really soak the leaves until the water would penetrate through that tough, drought resistant “skin”. A day or two later, they went into my Biostack Compost Bin. I like this bin in particular because it’s made of lightweight plastic layers that snap together, but can be disassembled for easy storage. Three layers stack up to make about a cubic yard, and then each layer can be restacked next to the original pile as you’re turning it. This is the best way to make sure the ingredients are thoroughly wet and well aerated. Well, I layered the leaves into my bin and didn’t

get back to it for several weeks. This morning to my horror, I discovered that all the leaves on the top and along the sides had completely dried out!!! The Biostack has just very narrow openings to keep critters out, but evidently all this wind we’ve been having got in there and dried out my leaves. No water, no compost! Shucks!

So it was back to the drawing board today. But this time, I had another can full of freshly cut grass to mix in with my partially rotted leaves, so we’ll see if this batch does better than the last! The dry leaves look very pale in color, while the wet leaves from the core of the pile had turned the color of coffee, showing that they were beginning to decay. The boost of nitrogen from the grass clippings will kick start the process and I’ll be better about churning and turning my pile this time around. Meanwhile, does anyone know where to get dry chicken manure? It’s a great source of nitrogen and perfect to get a compost pile going when you don’t have grass clippings.

## Meet Your Master Gardeners

# Duffy Banfield

*Each month we will spotlight one of the the Master Gardeners in our group. Getting to know each other is something that we don't really seem to have time to do, so hopefully, this will be a way to make some more "connections" with the people in our group.*

**Sandra Rosen**

Anyone who is a Williamson County Master Gardener knows Duffy. We all know how hard she works and how conscientious she has been at the greenhouse. What started as a large empty space is now, at springtime, a delightful kaleidoscope of colors and plants. Duffy is quick to credit the many volunteers who have so freely shown up time after time, but a project is only as strong as its leader, and Duffy deserves credit and accolades for her leadership!

Duffy's interest in gardening began on her father's rice farm in Rosenberg. (Her grandfather was also a rice farmer.) There was only one harvest per year, in late summer, so she and her two brothers and two sisters worked long hours in the rice fields during their summer vacations. They got up at 5:30, ate breakfast, fixed their lunches and then went to the rice farm. The first job each of them learned to do was shoveling the rice from the auger wagon into the tractor-trailer truck that, once full, would be driven to the rice dryer and dumped. After that came driving the tractor and finally (Wow!) driving the combine. Whereas some people might swear after this never to go near a garden again, Duffy's memories of these days are pleasant and satisfying. It is also now easy to understand where her work ethic comes from.

In his spare time (?), Duffy's dad also always had a vegetable garden. In fact, one of Duffy's biggest projects when she was young was to help her dad in the large okra garden they had. They sold the okra to Mr. Howard who had Howard's Cafeteria in Rosenberg. This was a barter deal, however, and Mr. Howard paid them (twenty-five cents a pound, Duffy thinks) in credit, so that this large, hardworking family could eat out now and then. Duffy's father retired after forty-nine years of rice farming, but

still today at eighty-five (her mom is eighty-three) grows vegetables and has fresh produce all year round.

When she left Rosenberg, Duffy went to nursing school at South West Texas University and then at Southwestern in Georgetown. She worked as a nurse for six years and then spent the rest of her work career as an administrative assistant at Thermo Electron in Round Rock. (Administrative assistant means you do everything!) She loved her job, but when they relocated to Sugarland, she decided to stay in Austin. Now the greenhouse has become her "full-time job," and she has enjoyed being a part of its success. Working with other volunteers, she really appreciates the enthusiasm and effort of the group.



Duffy does have a life apart from the greenhouse. Although she is not married now, she has a nice relationship with her stepdaughter, Gina, who she adopted and helped to raise. Her life is filled with friends, cooking, reading, Bunco evenings, and two very special pets - Maxine, a German Shepard mix and Coco Neely, a really old cat (15 1/2 years). Duffy lives in a lovely Austin neighborhood with long-time friends and neighbors. She goes for long walks along a trail behind her house where she sees herons, egrets, woodpeckers, and an abundance of other animals and wildlife. Her own backyard has a butterfly garden, wildflowers, a vegetable garden, a beautiful Lady Banksias rosebush, and a daylily garden. The front yard has huge oak trees and cedar elms. Duffy is a farm girl who has created her "utopia" in the city and has found the tranquility and contentment we all search for in our lives.

## Treats from the Master Garden

## All about Okra

### Margaret Seals

Okra dokra, let's hear it for that sun loving, drought resistant, skyscraper in the garden! What else but the "edible hibiscus" can take the Texas summer as well as Okra, *Hibiscus esculentus*? (Okra is also kin to Hollyhocks and Roses of Sharon.) Okra's blooms are as edible as its pods, and not only is it a showy plant in the summer garden, dried Okra pods often are used year round in fancy floral arrangements.

Okra originated in northern Africa and can still be seen growing wild along the White Nile River as well as in Ethiopia. Making the trip from Africa to North America with slaves, okra was being sold in American markets as early as 1781. By 1998, over 40 varieties of okra were for sale from U.S. seed catalogs. (Best varieties for growing in Williamson Co. are Lee, Emerald and Clemson Spineless.)

Okra has to have heat to grow, so wait until all danger of frost has passed before planting. Place a row of Okra in any well-drained, organic garden soil where it will receive full sun. Mature, it will shade other less sun-tolerant plants in the garden. Plant three to five seeds in hills about 12" to 15" apart. When plants are 3 or 4 inches tall, thin the hills to the strongest plant in each hill. Watering once a week is fine for mature plants.

Okra pods have short hairs that can irritate bare skin, so wear gloves when pods are ready to harvest. Pods are at peak when 2 or 3 inches long, and since they grow rapidly, harvesting is required at least every other day once the plants start producing. Use a knife or scissors to cut the pods. If a stem is difficult to cut, the pod is probably not good to eat. Let a few pods stay on the plants and dry before cutting so that you will have seed for next year's crop.

Watch out for stinkbugs, cabbage worms and aphids, okra's main pest problems. Diluted citrus oil or citrus peels worked into the soil will take care of nematodes, another common problem for okra.

Refrigerate okra unwashed in the vegetable crisper loosely wrapped in a dry paper towel. Wet pods mold very fast and become slimy. Okra will only keep for a couple of days in the fridge; however, freezing whole is a good option. Before freezing, be sure to blanch whole okra in boiling water for 4 minutes before plunging it into an ice water bath (to retain color.) Drain well, and place in freezer bags for freezing up to a year.

I like okra fried with a cornmeal coating, and the way I prepare it is to put a pound or so of small okra pods in a large bowl, sprinkle with a little salt and cover with cold water. I put this in the fridge for about an hour, then drain the pods and slice them (removing the ends) into about 1/2 inch pieces. I add a cup or more of cornmeal seasoned with a little black pepper and coat each piece, then fry them in a deep, iron skillet in about 1/2 inch of peanut oil until browned and crisp. Draining the fried okra on paper towels before serving removes some of the oil. Every cook raised in the south no doubt uses that same recipe, but I add it here for those readers who where (through no fault of their own) deprived of that privilege!

Now for the real recipe that carries okra's African name, *ngombo*:



MS



Jmbrouty



USDA

## GUMBO

This recipe comes from many Gulf Coast sources, but essentially is just a standard gumbo recipe combined with a quick, no-fat way to make roux that I learned from my Sun City neighbor, Blanche Strickland. The roux (rhymes with kangaroux) is what flavors and thickens the gumbo along with the okra. **FOR NO FAT ROUX:** 1 ½ C all-purpose, unbleached flour and 1 C to 1 ½ C warm water.

**FOR STOCK:** 2 quarts homemade seafood stock or buy 2 quarts of bottled clam juice (To make seafood stock, I use the shrimp shells, 2 quarts + 1 C water, a packet of shrimp and crab boil spices, 1 C each of chopped onion and celery, and a cup of white wine if I have it. Just boil and skim for an hour or so, then simmer slowly for a couple more hours and drain stock through cheesecloth.)

### OTHER INGREDIENTS:

1 lb small okra pods, ends off, sliced ½ inch

2 lb shrimp, shelled and de-veined

1 C chopped, green bell pepper

1 C chopped, 1015 or other sweet onion

1 C chopped celery

½ C chopped, flat leaf parsley

3-4 garlic cloves, chopped finely

1 lemon, seeded and halved

Dash of McIlhenny Tabasco pepper sauce (go easy at first, add more later if needed)

Some salt and freshly ground, black pepper to taste

Gumbo filé spice, if you like that taste of sassafras

Lots of white rice!



*Shrimp Gumbo with rice*

**BEFORE YOU START MAKING THE ROUX,** have your stock or clam juice in a pan on the stove ready to heat while you are making your roux in the microwave oven. Cut up the garlic, onions, celery, peppers and parsley, and sauté them in some butter or bacon grease until the onion is transparent. (Tell your Dr. you used canola oil. Besides, we aren't putting any fat in our roux the old fashioned way.)

**TO MAKE THE ROUX,** place the flour in a large, microwave-safe dish. Microwave on HIGH for 2 minutes. Stir well. Repeat cooking at 2-minute intervals, stirring well until the flour is the desired color. (It should be at least the color of peanut butter, or darker.) If it burns, or smells burned, start over. Sift the flour, and mix well with enough warm water to make a thick paste.

**PUT THE ROUX IN A LARGE, HEAVY PAN,** (a large, cast iron Dutch oven is what I use) and, stirring continuously over medium heat using a whisk, slowly add one quart of the heated stock, then half of the sautéed veggies. Let simmer for a minute or two, and add the remaining stock and sautéed veggies plus the okra and lemon. Simmer on low heat for at least 30 minutes. Add the shrimp a little at a time to keep the pot simmering with each addition until all the shrimp has been added. Continue to simmer the gumbo and **START COOKING THE RICE.** When the rice is done, so is the gumbo! Finally, remove the lemon halves, taste the gumbo and correct the seasoning to suit you.

**HEAP THE RICE INTO THE BOTTOM OF THE BOWLS,** sprinkle with about 1 t. filé powder and ladle in a generous helping of gumbo. **SUBSTITUTIONS** are allowed in gumbo, and here are some ideas:

**AFTER** you have added the shrimp,

Add a pound of white-fleshed, ocean fish filets (Gulf Red Snapper's the best) or crawfish tails or substitute a pound of the fish or crawfish tails for a pound of the shrimp.

Toss in some sliced andouille (Cajun spiced sausage) or smoked sausage.

Add a pound of lump crabmeat. Do not overcook the lump crab or over stir the gumbo after you have added the crab since it shreds easily (and turns your gumbo into an ugly looking mess!) or add a pound of cooked crab claws during the last 20 minutes of cooking the gumbo.

Add more OKRA!

Serve with crusty French bread and a garden salad.

And, as they say over in New Orleans, "Laissez les bons temps rouler!" (Let the good times roll!)

President's Column

## MG Conference Wayne Rhoden



Hello Master Gardeners!

I just got back from the Texas Master Gardener Conference held in Northeast Texas at Marshall. I grew up in Southeast Texas and drove through towns that we played against in football, baseball and other sports. I forget sometimes how green that part of Texas can get especially when we have rain as we did during the conference. However there was not enough to dampen the spirit of the master gardeners who attended this year. There did not seem to be as many attendees as last year, maybe because of the economy but there was good representation from all over, even El Paso. I will send an article to Christine to add to this newsletter with some pictures taken there. The directors meeting was rather short this year (only one hour) since we had presentations from two counties vying for the conference in 2011. Both Bexar and Hunt/Somervell counties gave presentations asking for permission to host the 2011 conference. The directors voted to allow Hunt/Somervell Counties to host the conference. Even though they are both small counties, they are pooling their talent to make this a great place to visit. It will be held in Glen Rose and Lake Granbury, Texas both very close to each other. They are noteworthy as a place where dinosaur bones and footprints have been found. Dallas County will host the 2010 Conference which will be in Irving at the Omni Mandalay Hotel at Los Colinas. The website for the 2010 conference is up but not much information is available yet. You can check it out at [www.2020tmgaconference.org](http://www.2020tmgaconference.org).

The awards banquet was held on Friday night and winners will be posted on the web site soon. We won 3rd place for our newsletter in the small county category. There were 157 award submissions from 40 counties and there were 120 winners.

The TMGA Nominating Committee is in the process of putting together a slate of candidates for officers in 2010. If you know of someone, or if you want to run for a state office, contact a member of the nominating committee. They are listed on the state web site, [www.texasmastergardeners.com](http://www.texasmastergardeners.com).

Our second plant sale went well at Market Days. Thanks to Duffy and the greenhouse committee for a job well done.

Happy gardening  
Wayne

## Submissions?

If you would like to contribute to the award winning *Williamson County Master Gardeners Journal* please send your articles, item, and photographs to Christine Powell at [xtinepowell@verizon.net](mailto:xtinepowell@verizon.net) by the 25th of the month. Remember to include captions and attribution details. The Editor is grateful to all those who have submitted items in the past and would like to thank those who would like to send things in the future. Thank you!

# Williamson County Master Gardener Association Officers for 2008

## Officers:

Wayne Rhoden, President:	<a href="mailto:mgardener@suddenlink.net">mgardener@suddenlink.net</a>	(512) 869-8016
Juanita James, Vice-President	<a href="mailto:jjames20@sbcglobal.net">jjames20@sbcglobal.net</a>	(512) 341-7116
Nancy Moore, Treasurer:	<a href="mailto:nancy3610@att.net">nancy3610@att.net</a>	(512) 215-9697
Jeanne Barker, Secretary:	<a href="mailto:jubarker@yahoo.com">jubarker@yahoo.com</a>	(512) 608-1296

## Standing Committees/Chairpersons:

Programs/Education:	Paul Lawrence	<a href="mailto:pwlawrence@austin.rr.com">pwlawrence@austin.rr.com</a>	
Communications: (Newsletter, Website & Publicity)			
	Christine Powell	<a href="mailto:xtinepowell@verizon.net">xtinepowell@verizon.net</a>	(512) 863-8250
Membership/Volunteer Opportunities:			
	John Papich	<a href="mailto:texasjayp@yahoo.com">texasjayp@yahoo.com</a>	(512) 863-4098
Awards:	Margaret Seals	<a href="mailto:marjim@suddenlink.net">marjim@suddenlink.net</a>	(512) 863-4127
Class Training/Facilitation:			
	John Papich	<a href="mailto:texasjayp@yahoo.com">texasjayp@yahoo.com</a>	(512) 863-4098
Jr. Master Gardener Coordinator:			
	Patsy Bredhal	<a href="mailto:pbredahl@austin.rr.com">pbredahl@austin.rr.com</a>	(512) 217-0693
	Juanita James	<a href="mailto:jjames20@sbcglobal.net">jjames20@sbcglobal.net</a>	(512) 341-7116
Fundraising:	Grace Bryce	<a href="mailto:grace_bryce@tscj.net">grace_bryce@tscj.net</a>	(512) 868-9191
Greenhouse Manager:	Duffy Banfield	<a href="mailto:villaparkcats@sbcglobal.net">villaparkcats@sbcglobal.net</a>	

## Ad Hoc Committees:

New Class:	John Papich	<a href="mailto:texasjayp@yahoo.com">texasjayp@yahoo.com</a>	(512) 863-4098
Newsletter Editor:	Christine Powell	<a href="mailto:xtinepowell@verizon.net">xtinepowell@verizon.net</a>	(512) 863-8250
Newsletter Layout:	Christine Powell	<a href="mailto:xtinepowell@verizon.net">xtinepowell@verizon.net</a>	(512) 863-8250
Webmaster:	Christine Powell	<a href="mailto:xtinepowell@verizon.net">xtinepowell@verizon.net</a>	(512) 863-8250

WCMG Website:

<http://grovesite.com/mg/wcmg>

Mailing address:

3151 Inner Loop Road, Suite A, Georgetown, TX 78626

## 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 6:00pm. Master Gardeners and the public are welcome to attend.