

Contents

- 1 Master Gardeners Honored
- 2 ACC Agronomy Class
- 3 I Need a Volunteer
- 4 Spring in the Veggie Garden
- 6 Growing Veggies
- 7 Book Review
- 9 Gardening Tips
- 10 Upcoming Event
- 11 2011 Officers

Master Gardeners Honored



Rick Bickling completed his MG hours.



Paula Gardner completed her MG certification.



Arlinda Ester receives her MG certification



Marlyn Hooper receives her certificate for Oak Wilt Specialist.

Photos by Grace Bryce

ACC Agronomy class, Fall 2011

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 held on Mondays and Wednesdays from 4:30 – 7:10 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/coursedetails_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>

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.

I Need a Volunteer

Chuck McKelley

You don't have to garden very long before you encounter volunteers. No, I'm not talking about the good folks who give their time and effort to make positive things happen. I'm talking about those plants that spring up, sometimes in the oddest places, even though you didn't plant them there.

OK, I realize that there's a fine line between weeds and volunteers, and I know lots of gardeners who consider volunteers to be weeds and just automatically pull them out. I'm not one of those folks however. For one thing, I don't plant formal gardens. I like things to be as natural as I can make them. So when a plant voluntarily decides to take up residence somewhere in my yard, I consider that a natural act. Of course, if that plant is nutsedge or something along those lines, out it comes. Lots of times, though, the plants that spring up on their own are things that look attractive, so I leave them in.

It's often the case that volunteers spring up in places where I wouldn't think to plant something. Sometimes it looks a little strange, and maybe untidy, to have a plant growing in the spot where a volunteer takes root, but I figure that, if the plant has decided on its own to spring up in some spot, then that spot must be one that will provide what the plant needs and make it happy.



These Dahlberg daisies decided to make a home in the crushed granite at the bottom of the steps by our side garage door. I sure wouldn't have planted anything there, but the daisies seem perfectly happy, and they don't get big enough to get in the way. They just provide some color in an otherwise drab area, and they don't even mind if you step on them once in a while. So as far as I'm concerned, they have a home as long as they want it.

The side of our house where the daisies are growing is a very narrow space between two two-story houses with a six-foot stockade fence between them. It's mostly shady but when the sun is overhead it beats down on that space without a hint of mercy. The only thing my wife and I have actually planted in that area are cacti and some really hardy succulents. Despite the inhospitable environment, the columbine in the picture below sprang up in the tiniest of cracks between the fence and a concrete walk. They never get watered unless it rains (yeah, it does do that here in Central Texas once in a blue moon) and they don't get any other care either. Still, they grow so profusely that I have to cut them back every so often so that we can walk down the path.



The daisies and columbine are examples of plants that we have planted elsewhere in our yard which produced seeds that have been carried all over the yard by birds or wind. There are other ways in which volunteers are planted though. My wife and I

feed the birds and squirrels so we get a lot of volunteer sunflowers and some peanut plants too that are a result of the blue jays and squirrels hiding their excess so they can dig up our veggie garden looking for something to eat in leaner times. We get into a sort of recycling loop because we let the sunflowers grow to produce new seed which we then feed to the birds and squirrels.

We make our own compost, and sometimes it doesn't get hot enough to kill any seeds that might have been tossed into the compost bin. So far we have had volunteer tomatoes, potatoes and some kind of squash that came up where we mixed the compost into a planting hole. In the past we have harvested tomatoes and even a few potatoes from volunteer plants, most of which came up in the ornamental beds rather than the veggie garden.

I like getting the “free” veggies from volunteer plants, and I like seeing the ornamentals growing in strange places. I keep hoping, though, that one of them will end up producing a new and exotic variety that I can propagate and make my fortune. Even if that doesn't happen, though, my wife and I will still continue to welcome volunteers in our yard and garden.

Spring in the Veggie Garden

Liz Grieder

Much has been accomplished in the demonstration vegetable garden by a wonderful group of Master Gardeners and Master Gardener Interns.

The “back forty” (aka God’s Little Acre) has two rows of several varieties of potatoes, one row of Sandy’s Compost Tomatoes (thanks to Sandy Lawrence’s compost), and one row of zucchini and yellow squash. Summer crops (field peas and okra) are planted, and as soon as the seeds begin to germinate we will find out if we have any munching bunny issues. Irrigation has been installed, and solarization will begin in some areas. Most of the harvest (an optimistic assumption) from this area will be donated to the food banks in Williamson County that take fresh produce. About forty pounds of Yukon Gold potatoes have been delivered to The Serving Center in Round Rock. Much of the work in this area has been done by Mike Harper, Chuck McKelley, Jack Grieder, Tonya Shaw, Jane Williamson, and Sandy Lawrence. The Harper family tilled six new rows.

Jack Grieder, Chuck McKelley, and Mike Harper constructed a three-compartment compost bin, and Jack has been busy filling the bins and moving the composting material.

Carol Parsonage has made and continues to make great labels for the vegetable plants. Permanent labels for the herb garden have been located (Thanks to Nancy Blansett!) and will be ordered this month.

The JMG pizza garden has been moved and expanded with thanks going to Chuck McKelley, Tonya Shaw, and Jack Grieder for the new installation. Carol Hoke’s JMG group recycled mulch and garden soil from the old pizza garden and moved it to the new garden, adding top soil and compost as needed. As much of the old mulch as possible was salvaged, and Gardenville donated a yard of new red mulch. The group returned to plant Phoenix tomatoes and several varieties of peppers. Squash and basil plants have been added. More basil plants have been added as the ones originally planted did not appreciate the wind and the mornings in the 40’s.

The former location of the small pizza garden is now a bean garden with plantings of four varieties of pole beans and four varieties of oriental long beans surrounded by two varieties of bush beans.

We have added Celeste and Alma figs, and Mike Harper donated a Brown Turkey fig. (Thank you, Mike!)

The swallowtail butterflies have been given their own dining room this year. They have a choice of raising their young in either a bed planted with three varieties of fennel, three varieties of dill, or three varieties of parsley. To date, the butterflies have only taken advantage of the fennel bed (and one carrot top), but the aphids and spider mites are enjoying the dill.

The asparagus looks beautiful in spite of the vicious winds that blow it first one way and then the other. Only one more year to wait until we can harvest some tender spears!

Two of the raised beds hold spring/summer vegetables (several varieties each of squash, carrots, radishes, eggplants, peppers, Swiss chard, and beets). One of the raised beds is a salad/salsa garden planted with vegetables used in salads and salsas: tomatoes, tomatillos, cucumbers, parsley, and onions. The lettuce and cilantro have bolted and been removed. Clyde Adley (Thank you, Clyde!) planted a Papalo, which is a “summer cilantro.”

The largest raised bed at the front of the garden holds vegetables used to make soups, and the big attraction for visitors is the large artichoke plant, which resurrected itself after being killed to the ground by the freezing weather in February. Butternut squash has been planted, and three other winter squash varieties will be planted this month along with two types of pumpkins. The irrigation system in this bed will be modified for improved coverage this month.

The “back” large raised bed holds tomatoes, mostly heirlooms. The plants look good, albeit tossed around by the hard winds. Several of the plants are covered in tomatoes, and some of the plants don’t look like they think they are supposed to bloom! We’ll see how they perform since the nights have warmed up again. We have started up with the framework for our bamboo trellises to support the growth of these mostly indeterminate vines. Again this year we will be trying to keep all the tomato plants healthy during the summer so we can have as good a fall harvest as we did last year. Of course, last year that was the only harvest we had! The difference is in the plants, or, rather, where they were raised/purchased and in the improved planting medium.

The demonstration vegetable garden has many visitors and gets many compliments. The garden’s success is due to the hard work of the gardeners who work there: Tonya Shaw, Carol Buckner, Carol Parsonage, Nancy Blansett, Teresa Robinson, Jane Williamson, Sandy Lawrence, Tommie Young, Quenby Gartner, Lynn Stude, Julie Townsend, Bonnie Stump, Chuck McKelley, Mike Harper, Jack Grieder, and I hope I didn’t leave out anybody!

This month Chuck, Mike, and Jack are installing irrigation in the “back forty,” the new pizza garden, the bean garden, and for the fig trees. At some point this year, we will modify the irrigation systems in the raised beds so that we can water seed beds automatically.

We are working on plans to modify one of our existing raised beds to create an enabling bed for gardeners with mobility issues. Plans are also in the works to construct a “walk-up” enabling bed. It is our goal to provide gardening ideas for gardeners of varied interests and all abilities.

We bounced back from the killing freezes, replanting nearly everything. Now the spider mites, cucumber beetles, squash vine borers, fire ants (yes, fire ants do eat vegetables!), and Colorado potato beetles are after us; and the howling winds are trying to blow us off the face of the earth. Isn’t gardening in central Texas wonderful...

Master Gardeners are in the vegetable demonstration garden from 9:00 to 10:00 or 11:00 every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Come and join us, get your hands into the dirt, and enjoy the companionship of fellow gardeners.

Growing Veggies at the Extension Gardens



Tonya Shaw, Carol Buckner, Teresa Robinson, and Mike Harper display potato harvest



Spring herb garden



Liz Grieder and Carol Parsonage make plant list for labels



Jack Grieder, Mike Harper, and Chuck McKelley construct compost bin



Chuck McKelley and Tonya Shaw put together new and expanded pizza garden.



Liz Grieder fills trugs at Round Rock mulch yard.

Photos by Jack Grieder

Newsletter Submissions

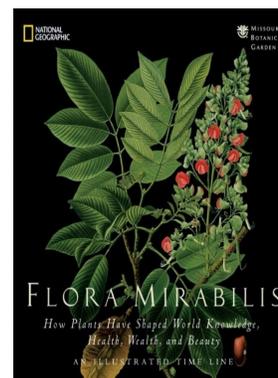
Thank you to those Master Gardeners who submitted articles, pictures, and ideas for this newsletter issue. If you would like to contribute to the *Williamson County Master Gardener Journal*, please send your submissions to Jane Williamson at jawilliamson516@yahoo.com by the 25th of the month. As you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

Book Review

Claire Hall

Flora Mirabilis

by Catherine Herbert Howell



Published in 2009, this beautifully illustrated book is a collaboration between the Missouri Botanical Garden and the National Geographic Society. The Missouri Botanical Garden, which has over 6 million plant specimens as well as a library with more than 200,000 volumes, provided many of the book's illustrations from their extensive collection.

The work is divided into 6 chapters ranging from the earliest recorded information on plants to the scientific use (and genetic altering) of plants today. The illustrations range from images of medieval woodcuts to intricate lithographs from the last century. No digital images or photographs are included because these simply do not offer the detail and beauty of the pen and ink drawings and lithographs. The illustrations are simply gorgeous and alone are worth the price of the book.

My favorite chapters are the ones entitled *Exploration (1450 -1650)* and *Discovery (1650 – 1770)*. There is a wealth of information in these chapters. For instance, in the middle of the 15th Century, European nations raced against each other in an attempt to claim new soil for their sovereigns and to find new and exotic spices. With no method of refrigeration, meats often spoiled by the time they were eaten so spices were a prized way of making the meats palatable. Black pepper was especially valuable, at one time enjoying a 1 to 1 exchange rate

with gold. Nutmeg, cinammon, clove and mace fueled many voyages into uncharted territories. Hernan Cortes was probably the first European to drink the Aztec's *xocoatl*, a hot chocolate flavored with cinnamon and vanilla. The Spanish kept the drink a state secret for a least a century but chocolate eventually became incredibly popular throughout Europe. Carolus Linnaeus paid tribute by naming the cacao tree *Theobroma cacao*, Drink of the Gods).

Linnaeus, of course, is the father of botanical classification. Some at the time were skeptical of his method which was classifying the plants according to their reproductive parts (in flowers, the stamens and pistels). One peer accused him of "loathsome harlotry".

Meanwhile, the New World offered up foods that Europeans had never encountered before such as the potato, corn and the tomato. As a food, the potato did not catch on for some time and was grown mainly as an ornamental. Tomatoes were feared for decades until the Italians gave them a try. Tomatos have become a staple in Italian cooking.

Anxious to stake their claim on the other side of the globe, the English sent Captain James Cook to explore the Pacific Ocean and its islands. Joining him on the *Endeavor* in 1768 was Joseph Banks, an Oxford educated gentleman and botanist with a passion for plants. Banks paid for the equipment necessary to collect and preserve whatever specimens they might find. He was overwhelmingly successful in Australia, collecting more than 1,000 plants. In recognition Cook christened their landing spot in Australia "*Botany Bay*".

Back in England, Banks became a national hero. King George III put him in charge of the then-royal gardens at Kew. Under Banks' stewardship the gardens were substantially enlarged. He was selected President of the highly prestigious scientific club, the Royal Society, from 1778 to 1820. To pay him honor, Carl Linnaeus (son of Carolus) named a genus of native Australian plants after him: *BANKSIA*. The genus today contains 170 species of plants. A thornless, double-blossomed climbing rose, native to China, was later named in honor of Banks' wife, Lady Dorothea. It is the *Rosa Banksiae* or *Lady Banksiae*. Imagine my surprise when I realized this was the very same rose bush I'd seen locally and fell in love with.



This book is simply a treasure of information that supplies so many "Ah-ha" moments that it is hard to read without sharing each morsel with your companion. (Just ask my husband). The prose is well-written, engaging and compelling. It's a real page-turner; one of those books you can't help but finish and then feel sad when it's all over.

I highly recommend Ms. Howell's book.

Gardening Tips for June

Winola VanArtsdalen

Bed prep, planting and maintenance:

For a riot of color, plant a grouping of lantana in front with 'Indigo Spires' salvia (blue-purple) and esperanza (yellow). A beautiful combination for fall is fall aster (light blue-purple) in front of Mexican mint marigold. For other bright summer plantings: sunflowers, celosias, Mexican sunflowers, zinnias, and perennial hibiscus. They will bloom continuously from now until cool weather if watered, fertilized, and pruned.

You can still plant container-grown perennials and shrubs, just be prepared to water to keep evenly and keep moist while getting established.

Pinch or "deadhead" old blossoms and seed heads and cut back annuals, perennials and roses to promote rebloom, then fertilize. Use slow release fertilizers or organic: fish emulsion, seaweed extracts or compost tea.

Begin to gather seeds to save as well as collect and dry colorful petals and blossoms for pot pourri.

Shade trees are an expensive, important part of your landscape and water from your sprinkler system is not sufficient for periods of drought. They need a slow, deep soak at least once every two weeks during periods of drought.

Keep reminding yourself to water more deeply and less frequently to help your landscape survive periods of drought. Mulch all bare soil areas. Use at least three inches wherever possible to get the full benefits of holding in moisture and keeping out weeds.

Lawn:

Keep watch for and dig weeds.

Water deeply (to depth of 6-8"), less frequently to encourage grass roots to penetrate more deeply into the soil where they will be more resistant to dry summer conditions.

Insects:

Continue to watch for spider mites. If you think they are present, hold white paper below branch and tap leaves.

You can see tiny dots fall on to paper. Use power water spray and/or insecticidal soap (on both sides of leaves) to get rid of them. You can use the same treatment for aphids, though I find my butterfly weed and gaura attract aphids enough that they are not a problem.

If you have a problem with grubs, begin researching symptoms, number required before treatment and options available, because the best time will probably be July and August. Using chemicals is a serious decision. Your success in using nematodes depends greatly on your source and timing.

Watch for chinch bugs during hot, dry weather. You will usually see the damage in hot spots, such as next to concrete. Look for the tiny insects in green areas next to the brown, irregular damaged patches.

Grasshoppers are not usually as severe a problem for us in suburbia as they are in the country, but, if you do have a problem, look for organic solutions. Nolo bait is the most common, and there are now two types of spray to put on the leaves that will help. One is a type of clay and the other is made with diatomaceous earth.

Happy Gardening!

Fine Art Nature Photography



Saturday, June 18 • 10 am to Noon

AgriLIFE Extension Office Training Room

3151 SE Inner Loop, Georgetown

Bruce will discuss his keys to taking better pictures and cover more advanced topics like High Dynamic Range and Focus Stacking. Something for everyone and lots of pretty pictures!

Bruce specializes in close up and macro photography as seen in his work for the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. He will also share his landscape images from travels to Death Valley, Big Bend and South America as well as his editorial work for *Texas Gardener Magazine*.

Free Admission • For more information call (512) 943-3300.

Sponsored by Williamson County Master Gardeners and the Texas AgriLIFE Extension Office

Williamson County Master Gardener Officers for 2010

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