

Williamson County Master Gardener Journal

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Texas Master Gardener Specialist – Vegetable Gardening Program

The Williamson County Master Gardener Association and Texas Agrilife Extension Service hosted the first Vegetable Gardening Specialist training on October 16-17th. We had 30 master gardeners from all over Texas come here to Georgetown for the training. The class was taught by Bob Whitney, our own Extension Agent; Tom LeRoy, Extension Agent from Montgomery County; and Joe Masabni, Vegetable Specialist from Texas A&M University. It was two days of intense training but we had fun, too. The only complaint was that the room was too cold but all of you know that too well. The final afternoon was a tour of Day Star Organic Farm in Weir, Texas where we learned some of the problems that are associated with trying to grow vegetables with no pesticides and—of course—little rain this year. Mark Sears, who operates the farm, also has another job and trying to do both creates some problems. We have also learned what we always try to teach our members: start small and you can always grow bigger. He found that it was tough trying to farm 2.5 acres while working at another job. We think it was a successful effort on our part. Bob has the evaluation forms and will give us the results from the students.



When we students at the Vegetable Gardening Specialist Class were handed a palm-sized Flash Drive for our computers and told it contained a virtual smorgasbord of TAMU research-based information about gardening, my first thought was "Honey, I think they have shrunk the Aggie Library!" Indeed, that exactly describes the information on this handy memory card. What a great "take away" from this class for our future use! We go forth armed with information of every kind and type related to vegetable gardening plus Power Point Lectures on soils and soil preparation, cultural practices, plant growing and, yes, vegetables from A to Z. Tom Leroy, Joe Masabni and our own Wayne Rhoden and Bob Whitney condensed lifetimes of gardening experience and expertise into a fascinating and highly informative 2 day course. Armed with all this information, I can hardly wait to be called on to plug in my mighty little miracle and share its information with fellow gardeners!

Margaret Seals



In the News

Another New Certified MG!

Slowly but surely people from the class of 2008 are still getting certified. The latest edition to our ranks is Clare Aguirre.

Clare is the fourteenth to become certified from the class of thirty students who enrolled in the program in 2008. Of that thirty, one dropped out before the end of the classes and I know we have one more person who will certify this month. That leave the fourteen more to certify by the end of this month! If you are one of those who needs help to get hours, *please* contact John Papich at texasjayp@yahoo.com as soon as possible.



Viva Las Vegas!

We have all been invited to Las Vegas from March 22 to 26 of next year!

Early-Bird Registration for the 2009 International Master Gardener Conference has been extended to November 30, 2008. It will address issues that gardeners everywhere face—water conservation, proper plant selection, soil enrichment, pest control— while also presenting new concepts in environmental stewardship and "green" technologies. Since what is old has become new again, they will also explore historical and traditional plants and methods.

The organizers from the Master Gardeners of Southern Nevada promise 24 exciting presentations and 42 incredible

tours. Conference registration includes: Keynote Presentations, Seminars, "Fit for Gardening" activities, Trade Show, Sunday "Sunset and Stars" opening reception, Monday & Tuesday Continental Breakfast and Lunch, Wednesday Continental Breakfast, Refreshment Breaks. *Admission to these included events is by IMGC badge only.* Spouses are welcome on the tours and at the Gala Dinner, but attending the conference requires them to register separately.

The Conference website at www.unce.unr.edu/imgc provides full details and registration. Early registration for Master Gardeners, spouses, and guests is \$260, but the price jumps to \$310 on December 1. If you wish to stay in the conference hotel,

use the links from the website to make reservations. If you try to contact the hotel directly, they will say they are full because the conference has reserved all the rooms. The website also has a video previewing the conference. If you have questions or need help navigating the website, call or email Ann Edmunds, IMGC 2009 Conference Coordinator at 702-257-5587 or edmundsa@unce.unr.edu.

State MG Conference

Mark April 23–25, 2009, on your calendars for the Texas Master Gardener State Conference, at Marshall in beautiful East Texas. The conference will feature world class azaleas, dogwood and crape myrtles, as

Spotted!

At the recent plant sale at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center a number of our members were spotted stocking up on their native plants for Fall planting. Nancy Moore (below left) was seen filling her cart to overflowing — I just hope she has managed to get them all planted before that first frost! Sisters, Juanita James (left) and Patsy Bredhal (right) in the picture shown below right were stocking up on plants for the JMG program. I understand that they are planing on having some fun with Chocolate daisies (*Berlandiera lyrata*) and the children in the next JMG class.



well as unique bed & breakfast establishments, just to name a few. Information will be forthcoming, both here and on the state Master Gardener website.

This year, something new, the Earthkind Rose Workshop, an all-day session, will be presented the day before the '09 conference and will feature some of the most renowned experts in the earthkind rose field! Information on registration for this workshop will be added to the regular registration form, come a day earlier and don't miss-out on this added feature and be prepared to share your knowledge when you return!

Next Monthly Meeting

At our general monthly meeting on November 10th, we will hold our elections and hear three presentations from the 2008 class about MG projects. Lisa LaPaso will be discussing plants she has found useful in her landscaping business. Jack Grieder and Paul Lawrence will be talking about the gardens that are being put in at St Richards Church in Round Rock. This is a large ongoing project under the leadership of Walt Krueger. Finally, Susan Blackledge will be telling us about the wonderful secret gem, Berry Springs Park. See you there.

December Meeting

In December our monthly meeting is going to be something really special. We will be holding a Holiday Awards Dinner for the Williamson County Master Gardeners Association on Monday, December 8, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. in the Angel Springs Event Center near Liberty Hill, Texas. A map of directions can be found at http://www.angelspringsevents.com/pdf/angelsprings_map.pdf. This event will be catered by Bowties 2 Bluejeans from Round Rock, TX. Keep checking your e-mail boxes for more details.



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:

Friday, October 10, 2008

New Shade Tolerant Bermudagrass—It is not available to homeowners yet but the University of Georgia is set to release a new bermudagrass variety that is able to grow in up to 60% continuous shade. This is fantastic and really gives us something to look forward to in the future. It would be fantastic to have the drought tolerance of a Bermuda combined with nearly the shade tolerance of a St Augustine. As more information is available you will know about it.

Fertilizing Your Lawn—I have received a number of calls about fall-fertilizing lawns. As we have cooled off, most homeowners are outside and they want to make sure they take care of their lawns. It has been a tough year for all landscape plants but turf has

suffered more than its share. We have a lawn maintenance schedule on our website but basically you can fertilize your lawn now with a 2-0-1 ratio fertilizer at the rate of 1.0 lbs of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. I recommend that at least half of the nitrogen be in a slow release form so that we don't get excessive growth too fast.

Now how much is 1 lb of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet? Well it all depends on the fertilizer you buy. If you buy a 20-0-10 (2-0-1 ratio) then you would use 5 pounds of fertilizer per 1,000 sq. ft. (5 X 20% N = 1.0 lbs of actual N). Most lawns are in the range of 5,000 sq. ft. so you only need 25 lbs of fertilizer to treat your lawn, so don't overdo it!

I also am asked about "weed and feed" fertilizers. I don't recommend them at all, especially this time of year. Weed and feed fertilizers contain a broadleaf weed killer with the fertilizer. This sounds really easy since you do two things at once. Unfortunately you don't need to kill weeds now and weed control products can really do harm to trees and shrubs if you are not very careful. The weeds we have in lawns now are predominately asters and they are all flowering. This means that they are very mature and hard to kill. They should be treated earlier

in the year, basically when you barely notice them. The weeds you have now will die with cold weather, so just remember that next May you may want to spray your yard to control the summer weeds you see now. Forget the weed and feed in the fall.

Time to Use That Fire Ant Bait—It may be dry and it may seem like you don't have any fire ants this year... but let me tell you now is the time to load the spreader and put out your fall fire ant bait. Fire ant baits are wonderful tools for controlling fire ants. They are low in toxicity to users, kids, pets, and even most other non-target ants. They are one of the most economical methods to control fire ants, and one of the most effective, consistently providing 90% or more control.

So what's not to like about baits? One of the few disadvantages is that they are not equally effective throughout the year. In the temperate areas of the southern U.S., fire ants stop searching for food (foraging) when soil temperatures drop below about 60 degrees F. If the ants stop foraging, they will not pick up baits. For this reason, baits should not be part of your winter fire ant program unless you work in the far parts of south Texas. Currently, the soil temperatures

are around 65-70 degrees in the early morning. This means that the daytime soil temperatures are well within the range for treatment. We want the fire ants out actively foraging during the day so that they bring the bait back into the mound for consumption. Fire ant baits are best used when fresh, so any containers that have been opened within the past few months should be used soon. Fire ant baits have a relatively short shelf life once opened. Even unopened bait should be used within two years of manufacture. Because of this, buying large quantities of bait (perhaps because it's at a good price) is not a wise idea unless you are certain you can use the bait up during the season of purchase.

Are you asking, "What is a fire ant bait?" Fire Ant Baits are chemically treated granules, normally corn that the fire ants consume as a food source. Fire ants will be out foraging for food and these baits are very tasty since they are corn grit that has soybean oil on the outside. This is why they don't last long once opened because the oils will turn rancid. The chemicals used on the fire ant baits are designed to control growth in the fire ants, either as larva or in egg lay. These products can be labeled as organic or nonorganic but all are insect growth regulators that are safe for human contact. As temperatures drop over the next month or two, it will be best to limit all fire ant control to treating individual mounds with labeled contact or residual insecticides. Be generous when treating fire ant mounds with liquid insecticide mixtures. Research shows that best control with liquids is obtained when 1-2 gallons of liquid is used per mound. I recommend that homeowners with pets and children and school ground keepers avoid the use of granular or dust treatments of mounds, since these products may remain visible on the soil surface for several days or weeks after application. For more information about when and how to use fire ant baits, check out the fire ant website at <http://fireant.tamu.edu/broadcastbait/>

Friday, October 24, 2008

Pond Weeds—I usually get a number of calls about all this "junk" on or in our tanks and ponds with the question, "what can I do about it?" Unfortunately there isn't much we can do about it this time of year but maybe an explanation about the categories of pond weeds and some control measures might be helpful.

The first group of weeds is the algae including plankton that makes the green color in water, filamentous algae or pond scum, and branched algae which includes chara or muskgrass that looks like underwater hay. Pond scum is probably the number one problem in tanks and causes the most aggravation. Pond scum usually begins growing near the bottom or edges of a pond and later floats to the surface where it then looks like a mass of wet, green wool. This type of algae is best controlled by pond fertilization back in February. It starts at the bottom, so if we can encourage the growth of plankton, which is a good algae, these will shade out the pond scum and keep it from growing. There is nothing worse than a clear pond because the plankton are part of the food chain which eventually feeds fish. Chemically, we control algae easily with copper or copper-complex chemicals.

A second group of weeds are the floating plants. Duckweed is one that we have in abundance in our area and it is a small, floating plant, green in color and about 1/2 inch across with usually 3 leaves. Below the leaves you can see a root. Diquat is a good, relatively inexpensive chemical control or you can rake this plant off the surface. The third group we see a lot here are submersed plants. These plants are rooted to the bottom but generally don't have plant parts above the water surface. The most common submersed weed is bushy pondweed, which resembles coastal hay growing underwater. Another similar weed is coontail and it too can fill up a pond in short order. Diquat, endothall and floridone are all chemical controls. You may want to check into the triploid grass carp, which do an excellent job of long term control of these problem weeds. Make sure they aren't

breeding stock, however! As people around Lake Conroe can attest, reproducing grass carp can be a bigger pest than the weeds. The last category includes our emersed weeds which includes all shoreline, marginal, and shallow water plants with plant parts extending above the water line. These include many species but most commonly we are dealing with cattails, willow, rushes, buttonbush, water primrose, and frogbit. Most of the emersed weeds are easily controlled with glyphosate products which we commonly call "Roundup" although Roundup® itself is not labeled for aquatic weed control. There are several name brand products that do contain glyphosate and are labeled for aquatics. Another excellent product for emersed weeds is 2,4-D. Now that last question I usually get when talking about weed control in ponds is, "Will it hurt my fish?" The chemicals themselves are harmless to fish but the dead vegetation they leave behind may not be. A lot of decaying vegetation will suck a lot of oxygen from the water and could leave your fish starving for a breath. It is best to control pond weeds a little at a time so that you don't set yourself up for a problem one morning watching all your fish floating on the surface.

Friday, October 31, 2008

Crop Variety Testing—I get asked all the time, "What do you think the average yield was for Williamson County for corn or grain sorghum?" Of course, averages are hard to get because I don't know what everybody made but I can make some educated guesses. I compiled the results of all the county grain tests I could find as well as looking at tests from just outside the county, staying only with blackland farms. In looking at 198 corn varieties we averaged 76.3 bushels per acre with a high of 113 and a low of 40. In 77 sorghum test varieties we averaged 5202 lbs per acre with a high of 6770 and a low of 2982.

If you would like me to keep "From Bob's Blog" as a regular feature let me

Master Gardeners Monthly Meeting

Salvias

Clyde Adley

Tricia Martin, owner of Forever Gardens (<http://forevergardens.net>) in Georgetown, gave a presentation on salvias, complete with several specimens in bloom, at the October 13th monthly meeting of the Williamson County Master Gardeners. Fall in central Texas is a peak time for several species of this useful family with pink to red, orange, yellow, or white to blue blooms.

Members of the mint family (*Lamiaceae*), salvias are fairly easy to propagate without needing greenhouses or hormones for success. They are part of a grouping of plants called sages, which contain several other members of the mint family and a few species in other families as well. While all salvias are sages, not all sages are salvias – such as Jerusalem sage (*Phlomis fruticosa*). Salvias occur in many forms: annual, perennial, biennial, evergreen, deciduous, and herbaceous with varied foliage shapes and growth habits. Historically, salvias have been used for culinary and medicinal purposes. The name salvia derives from Latin word meaning “to heal,” also the root for the English word salves. They can be found throughout the world – from Asia, Africa, North and South America to the tropics, growing from sea level up to 11,000 feet.

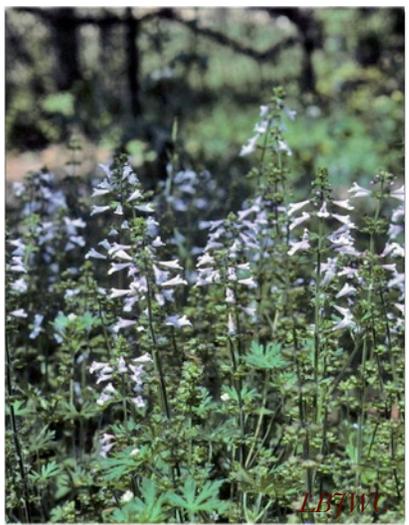
Several species are particularly good for central Texas landscapes. Most are dis-

ease and pest resistant due to their aromatic oils and sometimes fuzzy leaf textures.

While some are good for flavoring dishes, others, such as Darcyii (*Sabia darcyii*), have a less pleasant scent and deer tend to avoid them unless extremely hungry.

Many salvias have good drought tolerance, allowing for lower water usage in the landscape. Most prefer good drainage, although there's a variety found in bog areas – aptly named Bog Sage (*S. uliginosa*) with 4-foot tall sky blue or white flower spikes. A native option is Big Red Sage (*S. penstemonoides*), a shade tolerant species that was considered extinct a few years ago, but was rediscovered in 1996 and reintroduced to the gardening market. Mealy blue sage can be found growing on roadsides, getting 2 to 3 feet tall while receiving little or no care.

Salvias provide good color under varied lighting conditions and attract wildlife such as hummingbirds and butterflies. To attract hummingbirds to your garden, consider planting Magestic Sage (*S. guaranitica*) in full sun, and Mountain Sage (*S. regia*) in partial shade. Monarch butterflies like Indigo Spires, a sun-loving hybridization of the native mealy blue sage. Some are good container plants, especially the more tender varieties such as Firebird Sage (*S. confertiflora*). You can move salvias quite success-



Trish Martin at her nursery and with a Forsythia sage (top, right). Lyre leaf sage is great for the shade and volunteers often (center right). Trish and Walt Krueger discuss salvias at the meeting (bottom left). Engelmann's sage (bottom right) is a beautiful Texas native.

fully. If one isn't thriving, find a spot that makes it happy.

The combination of disease and deer resistance, low water use and ease of care in the landscape make salvias excellent choices that provide a variety of options for foliage and color.

To get a copy of the handouts go to our website.



CAP

It is not just hummingbirds that love salvias. Notice how this native Carpenter bee is taking nectar from the base of the flower from the outside of the flower head!

Salvia Salvations

*In these tunes of fashionable rages
 Let us honor enduring sages.
 Known to cure, to mend, to ease;
 Companions to cooks; splendid in teas.
 Hundreds of species our world adorn,
 Richly diverse in flower and form.
 Hail to Salvia, that scented salvation,
 Worthy of study and our admiration.*

Andy Doty

SUPERSTAR

Gaye Kriegel

By far, my preference is to plant perennials because they comply with my father's sage advice to, "do it once; do it right!" And while it's wonderful to have already paid for perennials to look forward to each year, I am willing to buy and replant a few annuals. One such must-have annual for me is the Louisiana Copper Plant. Although the leaves have stunning variegation like Coleus, the Louisiana Copper Plant is much sturdier. Whether in sun or part shade, it does like its water and will droop to tell you so. Cuttings root easily and pruning adds to the plant's fullness. The great color is wonderful all year but intensifies now in the fall and can be captivating when backlit. Add it to your "I'm beautiful and I'm worth it" list.



KG



It's coming.....

Mark your calendars for the 2009 Texas Master Gardener Association State Meeting in Marshall TX, April 23-24 & 25, 2009. Go to <http://tcaaa.tamu.edu/09statemeeting.htm> for more information.

Master Gardener Finds Great Finds
 Gaye Kriegel

Once a week I am treated to a glorious combination of plants at, of all places, a road median adjacent to a highway. What "living proof" that what could be concrete at worst, or even neglected landscape, can instead be a perfectly composed bed of ideally selected plants. Although the colors of the Knockout Roses, begonias, mealy blue sage, salvia greggi and pink abelia have looked great throughout the year against the backdrop of rocks and yaupon bushes, now that the fall aster is blooming, everything else is even more stunning. What a treat and what a testament to planning before you plant!



KG

Overseeding with Zinnias

Need a flowering annual with great color for sun beds, heat tolerance and low water use? Zinnias are a great choice. Not only are they beautiful, but they are versatile too.

Zinnias are amazingly prolific bloomers and once you seed them, they are blooming in no time. Zinnias are the type of seed you can literally throw on the soil and water in. I toss out the seeds, cover with a light coat of garden soil (no more than 1/8 inch) and water by hand for a few minutes every day for the first two weeks. They require little to no maintenance once established and have one of the longest growing seasons of any sun annual. The best part of the Zinnia, however, is that it blooms the entire season non-stop! The plant will tell you when it needs water as it will look sleepy and began to droop. The leaves and flowers recover very quickly once watered.



Zinnias come in a rainbow of colors and are as versatile in the space you use them, as they are diverse in shape and texture. They range from Mum-type heads to a daisy quality and give the illusion that no two are alike in the garden.

I like to use them in my perennial beds in the early spring when the perennials are just getting started. Once my perennials are in full bloom, I will begin removing some of the Zinnias plants to make room and light for the perennials. The Zinnias have very shallow roots so they compete for some water but not as badly as some plants that have larger water requirements.

Over-seeding your vegetable garden with Zinnias in the heat of Summer is also a really fun idea as the bed is kept from weeds. You will not only have a beautiful flower bed during the hot summer, but the flowers also make excellent cutting flowers that last for up to a week in a vase. I like to put dozens of assorted Zinnias in a shallow vase or fish bowl to make a huge ball of color. It is tremendously effective and the flowers make a great gift of cut flowers this way.

Zinnias make great potted plants as well. The plants range from 1-2 1/2 feet in height, which makes them really attractive for borders, open yard space or potted plantings.

Zinnias are very economical as well. During the growing season and at the end of the growing season before the first hard frost, I remove all of the dead heads and store them in a bucket. To prevent molding of the seed heads do not store them in a closed plastic bag. I save the complete heads for the next spring and by pulling the heads apart, I expose hundreds of new seeds for the following year.

The seeds also make great gifts for close friends who love to garden, teachers, and children alike. The seeds are very easy to grow so they are a fail-safe plant for a novice.

The plants do have some potential issues such as powdery mildew (from irrigation over spray) or mites in the dry heat. These are easily resolved by Seven dust, or fungus sprays, but I will usually just pull the effected plants out and re-seed if necessary (rarely is this the case).

Zinnias are one of my favorite flower varieties. Once you use them, they will become one of your favorites too!

Happy Gardening!

Lisa La Paso



Images: CAP

Meet Your Master Gardeners

Clare Aguirre

Each month we will be spotlighting one of 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.

"Gardening," Clare says, "helps me stop, look, breathe and appreciate nature." She also used the words "calmness, peace, and solace" to express how gardening makes her busy world more tranquil. Frequently, she smiles as she walks into her house and turns back to notice the plants or watch the butterflies fluttering around the garden. The realization, she says that "I did that. I made that area beautiful and I invited the butterflies into my yard," gives her a tremendous sense of satisfaction.

Of course, like many of us, Clare decided to take the Master Gardener course because of the dirt (or lack of it) and the deer. But, also, like many of us, the roots of gardening began early. Clare's mom grew many plants, but could never seem to grow the roses that she loved, so Clare's dad grew the roses for her mom. And to this day, at 87, even though his wife is gone, he still tends the roses every day.

Clare grew up in San Antonio in a large family—9 children. Each year her mom would have a contest to see who could pick up the most pecans and the most mesquite beans from the huge trees in their yard. As she grew older, Clare realized it was a "trick" to get the work done, and the prize was always one of her mom's carefully tended plants.

Clare met her husband Gene while they were students at St. Edward's University. They dated for six years and have been married for 22. Gene is an engineer and travels quite a bit in his job. Sometimes Clare goes with him, but now that the children are older, she is looking for work. The children are Matthew and Paulina. Matthew is a freshman at Texas Lutheran College in Seguin, and Paulina is a sophomore in Georgetown. Clare and her family



try to take one family trip each year. Frequently they go to Mexico, but this year they will be going to New York City. Eventually Gene and Clare hope to retire to Mexico, possibly the beautiful city and art colony at San Miguel del Allende.

Although they had 5 truckloads of soil hauled in to their Georgetown yard, it is still quite rocky, so Clare does a lot of container gardening. The Master Gardener course taught her what she was doing right and what she was doing wrong, and she wants to continue learning and growing.

It is hard to believe that Clare has a child in college. She not only looks young, but still has a youthful enthusiasm and a zest for life. I left our visit with a smile, but I suspect most people around Clare smile a lot -- she does!

Sandra Rosen

Submissions?

If you would like to contribute to the Williamson County Master Gardeners Journal please send your articles, item, and photographs to Christine Powell at 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!

From A Master Composter

Questions Answered

Patty Hoenigman

I am approached several times during each MG class break by folks with questions about their compost piles. So, I thought I'd share some of them since others may have the same questions!

Why isn't my pile heating up?

If your style of composting is to just toss a bunch of organic materials into a pile and hope for the best, it may be a very long time before you'll see any results. The single biggest reason a pile isn't decomposing is lack of water. It takes about a gallon of water per 4 inches of dry leaves to provide adequate moisture to get a pile going. This needs to be supplemented with additional water at least once a week to keep the bacteria active. When the materials dry out, one of the 4 essential composting ingredients is missing, (greens, browns, air, and water), and all decomposition will stop until they are all present again. Take any one away, and the whole system shuts down.

In short, if your pile isn't heating up, nine times out of ten it's because it needs more water! To keep your pile actively working, decide on a time you're going to water it every week...like every Saturday

morning. And be sure to keep a cover over your pile to reduce evaporation. I promise you'll be very happy with the results!

Does a compost pile have to be kept in a sunny spot?

This is a good question! You may well have read that it's best to put a compost pile in the sun. Unfortunately, most books about composting are written for climates where there are loads of leaves, it rains a lot, and gets cold throughout the winter. Many of us have lived in those climates. Here in Texas, we have a different situation. The summer heat is so intense that it dries out the pile. Once your pile dries out, you're not composting anymore, you're just collecting a pile of dry stuff! So the most direct answer to this question is to keep your pile in the shade, as much as possible.

Now, being a group of people with inquiring minds, you may be wondering why those in colder climates are told—correctly so—to put their piles in a sunny location. The reason is this: There are 3 types of bacteria and fungi active in each pile at different temperature levels. The slowest

acting ones are only active when it's coldest. Then, as the temperature increases, the next level of organisms kicks in. The most active ones are working hardest at the hottest temperature. If the pile is in a sunny spot, the warming rays will heat up the pile enabling the organisms that operate at the hottest temperatures to kick in a bit sooner and maintain their intense level of activity a bit longer, making for slightly more rapid deterioration. But this is a double-edged sword. You see, the temperature from a hot compost pile in a cold zone is mostly being generated by the activity within the pile itself...not from the sun. The sun in our climate is negatively affecting a pile by drying it out. So when you weigh the benefits of putting a pile in the sun or the shade, it turns out that the best situation for a pile around here is a place that has as much shade as possible. Put it where it will be shaded by a tree, a house, or from some kind of overhead shade that you've constructed. This will keep your pile working with the water you've added, without it drying out too fast.



"New Frontiers" in horticulture and gardening

March 22-26, 2009

The Las Vegas International Master Gardener Conference will address issues that gardeners everywhere face -- water conservation, proper plant selection, soil enrichment, pest control -- while also presenting new concepts in environmental stewardship and "green" technologies. Since what is old has become new again, we will also explore historical and traditional plants and methods.



A Master Gardener Walks

...along the trails

Annette Banks

A plant with an interesting name, but a not-so-favorable reputation, has offered prolific blossoms along our nature trails within the last month. This 5- to 9-foot multi-branched scrub showed a puffy white appearance against the blue skies and cumulus clouds during September and October.

The Roosevelt or New Deal weed (*Baccharis neglecta*) is known also as poverty weed, jara dulce, and false-willow. Purportedly, it derived its significant name during the Dust Bowl Era when it was planted to add vegetation to the barren and poor soil areas. It was the plant of choice because of its quick and hardy growth patterns. The new deal weed adjusts to a variety of soils and likes full sun, but it grows in partial shade as well. These plants are extremely drought tolerant, and they can be found thriving in moist areas, even tolerating saltwater areas.

The willow-like branches support dark, narrow linear leaves that are about 1 1/2 to 2 inches long. The heavily clustered white flowers are small but produce long silky, feathery hairs. They give the image of a tree in total bloom. The poverty weed grows from North Carolina to Arizona, including throughout most of Texas. They are aggressive invaders; and, within our state, they have created a problem from the Blackland Prairie to South Texas. They spread fast, overtaking other plants, shooting down deep roots that seek the scarce water source, are flammable, and difficult to eradicate as they produce large amounts of seeds.

To make it worse, they have no natural predators since cattle and deer do not eat them.

The plants have separate sexes on separate trees. The female-produced flowers have an abundance of small, furry flowers while male-produced flowers are smaller and turn brown in a very short time. A great variety of insects, including butterflies, seem to be attracted to the blossoms. Its fruit is an achene.

The seep willow, *baccharis solizifolia*, is a smaller plant with most of the same qualities and is found along sandy watercourses in dry areas. It is also called jara and water-wally.

Looking for the positives of the plant: In the year of drought that we have just experienced, the Roosevelt weed added flowers in many areas where there was a scarcity of blossoms. cuttings. Harvest the seedpods while the plant is still blooming as they ripen about seven weeks after forming. Watch closely for the capsules to crack. Each pod has numerous seeds. Clean and dry seeds and store in the refrigerator in a sealed container for about eight weeks before planting. Plant by dusting with a thin layer of soil, and water the soil from the bottom. They germinate in about a week but grow slowly thereafter.



Master Gardener Basics

Back to the Basics

Winola VanArtsdalen

In this "Back to the Basics" series, we revisit gardening techniques to be sure you get best results from our efforts. This month's timely topic is planting seed outdoors. In January, we will review planting seeds indoors.

SEEDS PLANTED "IN SITU"

Many plants grow better developing their root system "in place," rather than being transplanted. This is especially true with wildflowers and plants with a taproot, such as poppies and butterfly weed. The first step is to choose and prepare the area where they will be planted. Consider the light and air circulation and how you will be able to keep them watered, if needed. The soil must be loose and well-aerated, or the roots will be unable to achieve maximum growth. Rake the surface as level as you can and firm down the surface before planting.

Choose quality seeds with varieties adapted to our area. Carefully read the instructions (or get this information from the source of your seeds) to be sure this is the appropriate choice for your location. Check the information about any needed seed preparation to break dormancy, when to plant, light needed, and the depth to plant. Seed depth is especially important. Remember that it is much better to plant too shallow than too deep. Planting to a depth two or three times the width of the seed is a common guideline.

For small seeds, you can mix three or four parts dry sand and use a salt shaker or seasoning jar to spread them or just carefully use your fingers. With tiny seeds, you might practice first over a piece of paper. You will be amazed how quickly you can use up tiny seeds! If there is mulch over the area, you will have to remove it before planting or poke holes in it where you will plant the seed. After planting, you can either press them in with the palm of your hand, walk over them, or use a flat board to pat them in. The seeds must make contact with the soil. If you are planting a large area such as when planting grass seed, drive over the area with a lightweight vehicle like a garden tractor. During germination, they will need consistent moisture and protection from gully washers. In general, plant early spring blooming flowers in the fall around mid-October to early November, late spring and early summer blooming flowers in early spring, and fall blooming flowers in the summer.

Be sure you know what the emerging seedling will look like. Do not "weed" the area until you know this, as many times desired plants are pulled up before they are large enough to recognize! It is very easy to mistake a welcome plant for a weed. When the plants are a few inches high, you will need to thin them. Again, read the directions on the seed packet. For large flowers like poppies, there should be 6 to 12 inches between plants for them to reach maximum growth. With annuals, you can just cut them at ground level to thin them rather than pulling them up if they are close to other roots you do not want to disturb.

Care required for your plants during their growing season varies with specific varieties. Many native and adapted plants will do well on their own unless we have an unusual season. As long as the rain keeps the soil moist, you will not need to water. Remember, though, that your actively growing garden, and some perennials and annuals, need an average of one inch rain per week. If this is not provided by nature, you will need to water, preferably with a drip system which is more water efficient than other choices. My favorite test to determine the need to water is to simply poke my finger one inch deep into the soil. If it feels moist at that depth, I do not water. When plants are well established, you may choose to watch them carefully and only water if the plants are wilting.

Feeding your plants depends upon your soil, your plants, and personal choice. I keep soil amended with a variety of compost materials such as cotton burr compost, greensand, manures, and bio-sludge. Spring and fall, I spread compost on my grass. I feed my blooming plants with Hasta Gro and others with Medina Plus, and spray plants with liquid seaweed in the fall or any time a plant needs a little help. We are fortunate that both Medina and Gardenville products are readily available in our area, but there are other excellent products available that you may choose.

Once you have enjoyed your plants' beauty and/or harvest, remember to consider what happens next. Do you want those seeds to dry and collect them for next year or to share with friends? If you do not plan to collect seeds, cut them back after blooming before they spread in your yard and/or your neighbor's. It is not pleasant crawling around on your hands and knees digging up little unwanted plants! You can decide that at the end of the bloom season. For now, just enjoy!



Name that Plant

What's in a Native-Plant Name? Part V

Bill Ward

Another surname used frequently by the taxonomists who chose names for Texas plants is "Wright," as in Wright's acacia, Wright's anisacanthus, Wright's cliff-brake, Wright's evening primrose, Wright's false mallow, Wright's milkvetch, Wright's pavonia, Wright's plantain, Wright's skullcap, Wright's threeawn, and Wright's tick-clover. The species name for most of these plants is *wrightii* or *wrightii*.

These botanical names acknowledge the considerable contributions of Charles Wright, a Connecticut Yankee who made plant collections in Texas during the mid 1800s.

After graduating from Yale University in 1831, Wright moved to Natchez, Louisiana to tutor children of a sugarcane planter. Later he moved to Zavala, Texas, where he taught school and surveyed some of the counties in what is now Deep East Texas. Later he moved west to be the surveyor for Menard County.

Apparently he had developed an interest in botany as a young man, because he botanized and collected specimens as he traveled around East Texas and the Menard County area. In 1844, Wright began a forty-year correspondence with Asa Gray, a professor of natural history at Harvard and coauthor of "Flora of North America."

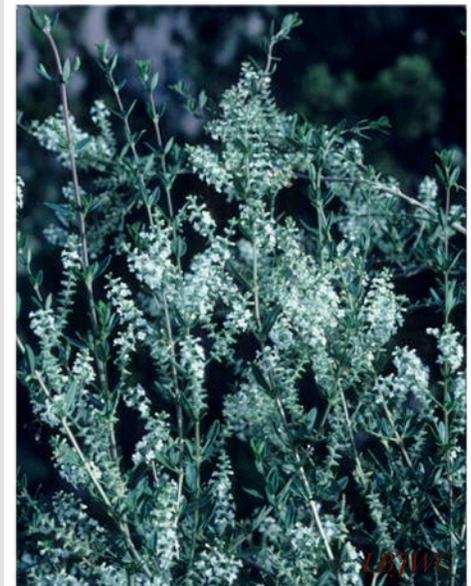
In 1845, Wright took an administrative and teaching job at the first college to open in Texas, the Methodist Ruterville College in Fayette County (the predecessor of Southwestern University in Georgetown). Later he moved to Austin to teach and collect specimens of native plants.

Asa Gray arranged for Wright to conduct a botanical expedition by traveling with US troops moving across the Rio Grande Valley to El Paso during the spring of 1849. "This expedition is of special interest because the Smithsonian's \$150 contribution to defray Wright's expenses was, according to some, one of the early steps taken by that institution toward the formation of a national herbarium" (page 64, "Illustrated Flora of North Central Texas").

Charles Wright walked the 673 miles to El Paso, collecting and preserving specimens under difficult and frustrating conditions. Wright sent 1,400 species of Texas plants to Gray at Harvard and also shipped many specimens of cacti to Engelmann at the Missouri Botanical Garden. Wright's 1849 collection was a major contribution to the botany of Texas.

After that expedition, he taught in San Marcos and then in New Braunfels, where he befriended Ferdinand Lindheimer. Then he joined Col. Graham's survey of the Mexico-US boundary. The results of Wright's extensive collections from Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona were published in Asa Gray's "Plantae Wrightianae, Parts 1 and 2, Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge, 3 and 5," as well as in other reports by John Torrey and George Englemann. Wright served as botanist on an 1853 expedition to many parts of the North Pacific, before returning home to Wethersfield, Connecticut. In 1856, still unencumbered by a wife and family, he began an 11-year botanical exploration of Cuba. Later he worked at Harvard's Gray Herbarium.

At his death in 1885, Charles Wright had become one of the best known US botanists.



Top: *Datura wrightii*, *Jimsonweed*, *Thorn apple*, *Datura*, *Angel Trumpet*, *Sacred datura*
Jimsonweed is a branching forb that blooms large, white, fragrant, trumpet-like flowers from evening through morning

Bottom: *Aloysia wrightii*, *Wright's beebush*, *This species is a member of the verbena family (family Verbenaceae), which includes about 75 genera and 3,000 species of herbs, shrubs, and trees, mostly of tropical and warm temperate regions. As suggested by its name, this plant is loved by native and introduced honeybees alike.*

A Master Gardeners Field Trip

The Return of the Nosy Butterfly

Christine Powell

On our way down to McAllen on the 18th September my friends and I noticed a few butterflies crossing Highway 281, just north of Alice. I said, 'I think those are snouts starting to swarm.' Well, think how proud I was when I was proved to be right and it was all due to my CAMN training. I read an article after my first week of study in the program about the big swarm of 2006 and apparently it stayed with me! My friends were not convinced until we stopped for lunch. That was when we saw two very happy house sparrows standing in the car park and just hopping up and down for instant dinner, or should I say very fast food?

Master Naturalists and other observers should be on the lookout for swarming insects in the next few weeks. Many areas of the Lone Star State are once again being invaded by swarms of *Libytheana carinenta*, more commonly known as the American Snout butterfly, said Dr. Noel Troxclair, Texas AgriLife Extension Service entomologist in Uvalde.

"There are tens of millions of these butterflies in this particular surge of activity," said Troxclair, who works at the Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center. Large numbers of American Snouts have been spotted throughout the Central Texas corridor from Del Rio in the southwest to San Antonio, the Hill Country and Austin in South Central Texas. "This likely will not be as large as the 2006 snout emergence, but they're still causing a stir among people in this region," he said.

Troxclair reported that the butterflies are causing some grief among drivers living in or passing through the region who have to

scrub them off windshields, hoods, grills and radiators. He added that apart from their effect on humans, especially their literal impact with their vehicles, the butterflies do not have much of an impact on the environment. The primary host for the American Snout is the spiny hackberry (*Celtis pallida*), but they sometimes feed on other hackberry species, Troxclair said. "Snouts can defoliate these trees, but the trees typically grow leaves back quickly so there is no permanent damage," he said.



I know this isn't the best of images but it tells it like it was! This was just at the start of the swarm - the bumper got steadily worse as we went further south.

Mike Quinn of Texas Parks and Wildlife wrote in the Austin Butterfly Forum newsletter: "An accurate picture of the butterfly's life history was painted by the snout research conducted by Drs. Raymond Neck and Lawrence Gilbert. These two scientists worked out much of the cause and effect of the species' phenomenal periodic population explosions. Specifically, they determined that prolonged drought followed by widespread summer rains triggers the explosions, with the drought knocking out the insect predators and parasitoids that would normally keep the snout population in check and the

summer rains inducing their primary host plant, the spiny hackberry to immediately put on new leaves on which the female snouts oviposit. With most of the predators at low ebb due to the drought, the majority of the snout larvae survives to adulthood and can quickly start another even larger generation."

The butterflies are not in the midst of a monarch-like migration but more of a northward "dispersal migration," said Dr. Bart Drees, AgriLife Extension entomologist

in College Station. "Basically they travel from south to north, but there's no clear path like with the monarch butterflies," said Drees, author of *A Field Guide to Common Texas Insects*. "They move as a mass but don't have any particular destination. Basically, they're on a road to nowhere." Drees said in past years dispersal migrations of the American Snout in South and Central Texas have been thick enough to obscure the sky.

He also noted that the American Snout is not the most esthetically pleasing of

butterflies. "Their beauty isn't always obvious because they're brown and when they land in the hackberry trees they're well camouflaged," he said. "The upper side of the wings are a dull orange, the wings have a distinctive, squared-off, hook-like tip and they have rather prominent elongated mouth parts that give them their name. I guess you could say they have a face only an entomologist could love."

For more information about snout butterflies, visit <http://insects.tamu.edu/fieldguide> and click on Lepidoptera, and <http://www.texasento.net/snout.htm>.

A Master Gardener

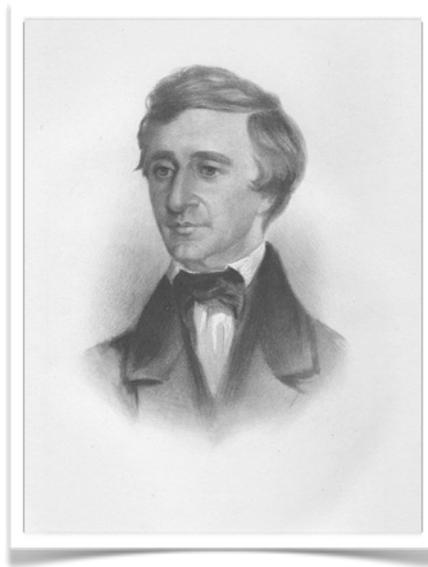
Why Being Observant Can Pay Off

Christine Powell

It is common advice to gardeners that they should keep records of planting, harvest, and other significant dates. What use could this information ever be? As an answer, we might point to the November 4 issue of *The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS, vol. 105, no. 44, pp. 17029–17033). An article by Charles G. Willis, Brad Ruhfel, Richard B. Primack, Abraham J. Miller-Rushing, and Charles C. Davis of Harvard and Boston Universities uses the observations of a noted citizen scientist to make valuable conclusions about the impact of climate change on the environment.

Like many Master Gardeners, Henry David Thoreau was a self-trained naturalist who kept a record of his observations. His journals from 1852 to 1858 show detailed information about the incidence and frequency of plant and animal species in the woods around Concord, Massachusetts. In particular, he recorded the dates each year when particular plant species emerged and bloomed and when their pollinator species of birds and insects appeared. The records in themselves are very valuable, but what makes them invaluable is that they provide a basis for observing the change in populations over time. Partly due to Thoreau's fame, development in Concord has been carefully managed since his time. As much as 60% of the woods, wetlands, and fields where he made his observations still remain undeveloped. A team of modern scientists counted 473 of the same species in this area from 2003 to 2007, which allows comparing species diversity between two periods roughly 150 years apart.

The picture is not good. Fully 27% of the plant species recorded by Thoreau can no longer be found in the Concord area, and an additional 36% have become so scarce that their disappearance may be imminent. If this were due simply to environmental deterioration, habitat



A crayon portrait of Henry David Thoreau as a young man by Samuel Worcester Rouse in 1854

destruction, and pollution, one would expect the disappearances to be across the full range of genera and families. In fact, however, it seems that the pattern is not at all random. The species that have vanished are concentrated in certain groups, including anemones and buttercups, asters and campanulas, bladderworts, dogwoods, lilies, mints, orchids, roses, saxifrages, and violets. What do these species have in common?

It turns out that the common factor is that their emergence and flowering times are not strongly dependent on temperature.

Where these species are present, they bloom about the same date every year regardless of whether it is hot or cold. So, they are (or would be) blooming at the same time today as they were in Thoreau's time. In contrast, the flowers that can respond to temperature changes are blooming on average about 7 days earlier than Thoreau observed them, because the average annual temperature in the Concord area is now 4.3° F. warmer. The pollinator species are more dependent on temperature than the endangered plants. Birds arrive and leave earlier on their migrations and insects emerge and die earlier as well.

As a result, many of the plants are blooming when pollinators are scarce. In addition, predators that eat the vegetation, flowers, or pollinators are arriving earlier as well and becoming better established before bloom time. The plants find it significantly more difficult to reproduce than their ancestors did 150 years ago when the seasons and temperatures were closer to their historic phasing. In the course of the years, this reproductive disadvantage has led to their displacement by species better adapted to the new temperature regime. The temperature changes have had other detrimental effects. For example, the generally milder winters that cause tender leaves and blossoms to emerge at least a week earlier are often followed by a spring frost that produces a dieback.

These conclusions would not have been possible if Thoreau had not kept such meticulous records. He could not have predicted what use his journals would someday be. Neither can the journal-keeping gardeners of today predict what use their observations may someday serve.

Book Review:

1491 by Charles G. Mann (New York: Vintage Books, 2006)

This Was the Forest Primeval... or Not

Longfellow begins *Evangeline* with the line, "This is the forest primeval." The poem reflects what most of us grew up believing about America before the coming of the Europeans. It was, we read in our schoolbooks, largely an untouched wilderness thinly populated by bands of simple hunters and gatherers. These few Native Americans lived lightly on the land, their primitive culture at harmony with the unmodified environment around them. The high technology and large numbers of European immigrants inevitably squeezed them out as the newcomers filled the vast empty spaces and made them productive at the cost of the natural ecology.

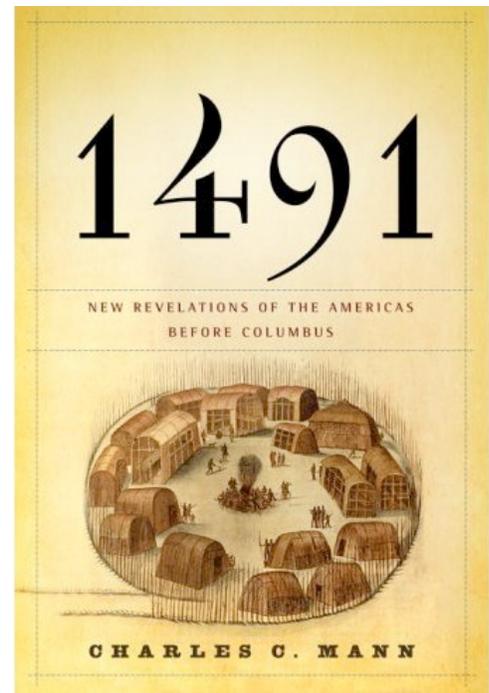
Unfortunately, that picture is wrong in almost every detail. Charles Mann's excellent *1491*, originally published by Random House in 2005, provides a popular overview of what historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists have recently learned about America as it was before Columbus sailed the ocean blue. The lessons are relevant to us today, particularly if we are naturalists or gardeners who try to understand the environment around us. It seems that much of the Western Hemisphere was once a cultivated garden to a degree not previously suspected.

To begin with, the New World was not thinly populated. Compare two successive accounts of the Southeastern United States: In 1539, Hernando De Soto began a four-year trek over much of the region looking for gold. The travelers easily rode through open woods and meadows punctuated by large fields. They passed countless great towns, so close that two or three were almost always in sight, and saw "thousands" of Indians in canoes on the Mississippi. In 1682, La Salle led the next European expedition through the area. They crossed much of the same territory and saw hardly anyone; they hacked their way through thick

undergrowth when they were not following an empty river and once went nearly 200 miles without seeing a single village. De Soto's party (and the pigs that escaped from it) had brought enough disease to depopulate the countryside. Archeologists estimate that the Caddoan population in Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas had fallen from 200,000 to 8500 between the two expeditions, a 96% drop in 150 years.

That pattern is repeated everywhere in the New World. By some estimates, there were over 100 million people in the Western Hemisphere before the arrival of the Europeans and their endemic diseases. That is more than lived in all of Europe at the time. The pre-Columbian population of Central Mexico alone may have been over 25 million, making it the most densely populated area on earth, with almost three times the population of Spain and Portugal combined. In 1518, Tenochtitlan (on the site of modern Mexico City) was larger than any European city and at least rivaled the largest Chinese urban centers. By 1623, just over a century later, the combined native and immigrant population of Central Mexico had fallen to 700,000, a 97% decline.

In other words, the reason that the white settlers thought they were moving into an almost unoccupied "forest primeval" was that it had only recently been emptied by epidemic disease. The forest itself was far from primeval. In fact, much of it was the abandoned relic of carefully managed woods where humans promoted some tree and plant varieties and controlled others, and where the undergrowth was thinned by set fires. Some of the seemingly-natural meadows were abandoned fields, while others were the remnants of managed grasslands that the Indians had vigorously maintained by fires and other means. In ecologi-



cal terms, human beings were a "keystone species" that transformed the environment by their presence and then profoundly altered it through their absence.

Humans had dominated the New World for a long time. They arrived sometime before 13,000 B.C., prior to the disappearance of the American megafauna like mammoths, mastodons, horses, camels, and ground sloths. The first urban civilization in the Western Hemisphere, on the coast of Peru north of Lima, dates back to 3200 B.C., almost as old as the first Sumerian cities and older than anything in Egypt, India, or China. The terraced fields in the Andes (mostly abandoned for 500 years, but still in good shape) rival anything to be found in the Old World. The *tilma* method of growing maize, beans, squash and other crops together in raised beds supported huge communities in Middle America. Large swaths of South America (even Amazonia), supported by other sophisticated methods of agriculture that scholars are only now beginning to understand, were far more densely populated in 1491 than they are today.

North America in 1491 was much less populous than South and Middle America, but it was hardly an empty wilderness. Anyone flying into the Phoenix airport who

knows what to look for can see the remains of ancient irrigation works covering much of the valley. Pre-Columbian trade networks extended from Mexico to Canada with nodes including Casas Grande in northern Chihuahua, Chaco Canyon in the Four Corners area of New Mexico, and Cahokia near East Saint Louis, Illinois. In A.D. 1250, Cahokia had 15,000 residents, making it comparable in size to contemporary London. When European diseases arrived, the people who had managed all of this infrastructure no longer had sufficient population resources to do so. The result was the “forest primeval.”

The Pilgrims who settled Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620 did not carve their settlement out of an untouched forest. They just occupied the vacant site of the Wampanoag village of Patuxet. Its inhabitants, like those in most of the other villages in the region, had recently succumbed to a European disease that may have been smallpox or a virulent strain of hepatitis. The population of the Wampanoag confederation had declined by 90% between 1616 and 1619 as part of an event that depopulated a strip of coast 200 miles long by 40 deep. The tribe had reconsolidated into a smaller number of villages threatened by rival nations that had been less affected by the epidemic. The survivors decided to contact the Europeans for protection. It is this that led to the alliance between “friendly Indians” and “Pilgrim Fathers” that allowed the British to establish a foothold in New England (see Sidebar).

Mann’s book is a reminder that the reciprocal relationship between humanity and nature is considerably more complex than we often imagine. Culture and horticulture are inseparable. We must tend our garden or accept the consequences. This book is a fascinating introduction to some of the issues that confronted our predecessors on this continent and confront us today.



The First Thanksgiving Demythologized

Every American has heard the story: the struggling Pilgrims at Plymouth Colony (later part of Massachusetts) were about to starve when a band of friendly Indians walked out of the woods and offered to share of their bounty. In particular, one named Squanto, who could miraculously communicate with the whites, taught traditional Indian agricultural practices that made it possible for the Pilgrims to make a crop. English and Indians then sat down together for a harvest festival feast in the fall of 1621. Americans commemorate this event every November with the civil holiday still called by its religious name: Thanksgiving.

Not quite. It is true that the Pilgrims were in quite a state in the spring of 1621. They were not farmers, having mostly been craft or tradesmen from the area around Scrooby and Babworth in northern Nottinghamshire or nearby Gainsborough in Lincolnshire who had fled from religious persecution to Holland in 1606–08. By the time they headed to America, they had been living in the industrial city of Leiden for well over a decade. However, of the 102 Mayflower passengers only 28 were adult members of the congregation. Many of the others had been hired by the investors in the colony, and their motive for going to America was financial rather than religious.

Due to a succession of problems, largely sabotage staged by crewmen who didn’t want to go, the expedition did not sail until September 1620 and did not finally land at Plymouth until December 26 (on our current calendar). With nothing but the resources on the ship to help them overwinter, half the colonists and crew died. One thing that made survival possible was their use of the buildings and supplies left by the former inhabitants of what had been the Wampanoag village of Patuxet until it was depopulated by an epidemic in 1616–19. Of course, it was this same epidemic that made the venture possible. Horses and guns did not give the Europeans enough of an edge to forcibly evict the native inhabitants of New England, so long as the Indians had a numerical advantage. Every attempt to create an English toehold

in North America before Jamestown in 1607 and Plymouth in 1620 had been driven off quickly.

The survival of both colonies was due to forming alliances with some of the adjoining tribes for mutual support against others. Probably Powhatan in Virginia and certainly Massasoit in New England were the leaders of nations diminished by disease that were desperate for anything to help defend them from stronger nations further inland that had been less affected. Similar rivalries under similar circumstances had enabled the Spanish conquistadors of Mexico and Peru to line up native assistance to smash empires that had arguably been richer and more powerful than Spain itself. In Plymouth, the Wampanoag leader Massasoit used as his local agent a fellow known as Tisquantum (Squanto), who had a rather colorful history.

He was, in fact, the only person on the scene who was actually a native of the place. He had grown up in Patuxet before being kidnapped by an associate of John Smith (of Pocahontas fame). It has hardly surprising that he could communicate with the colonists, since he had lived in London for perhaps seven years and had spent several more years traveling in Europe. It seems as if some of the “traditional Indian practices” he taught the Pilgrims (notably using fish for fertilizer) were actually the result of his observations back in the Old World. When Tisquantum finally got back to America, he discovered a very different place: everyone in Patuxet had died and the Wampanoag population had fallen by 90%. Although Massasoit suspected him of being a spy, Tisquantum proved very useful when the Pilgrims arrived. He demonstrated the Indians’ good intentions by helping the English to sow and raise the seed corn, beans, and squash they found with the skeletons in the abandoned buildings of his hometown. He was also able to show them the good fishing spots and assist them in trade. The Pilgrims reciprocated by supporting the Wampanoag against their rivals. The peace lasted about fifty years. As for Tisquantum, he caught the “Indian fever” and died in November 1622.

Treats from the Master Garden

Blending the “old favorites” with some new recipes for your Holidays

Margaret Seals

Before I start with my new “blended” side dish recipes for your Holiday tables this season, here is a sure-fire food idea for gift giving. Most of us have prepared bean soup, hot chocolate mix, or other food items in jars for gifts, but have you heard of “The Most Dangerous Cake Recipe in the World”? This one is a home run hit with Teachers, Letter carriers, Office workers, Moms, Dads, Assorted Relatives and Kids of All Ages—anyone with a sweet tooth and access to a microwave oven! Choose the mug wisely, tie a bow on the handle and insert the recipe. If you are making several of these for gifts, you could mix up the dry ingredients with the chocolate chips, and add them in a plastic baggie to the cup also. Why is this called the most dangerous cake in the world? Because now we are all only 5 minutes away from chocolate cake at any time of the day or night!

The Most Dangerous Cake Recipe in the World

(Minute Chocolate Mug Cake)

(from my friend Ruby Pecot-who knows where she got it)

1 Large (8 oz at least) Ceramic or Glass Coffee Mug,

(Suitable for Microwave Cooking)

4 T all purpose flour (NOT self rising type)

4 T sugar

2 T baking cocoa

1 egg

3 T milk

3 T oil

3 T Chocolate Chips

Splash of Vanilla

Add dry ingredients to mug, and mix well. Add the egg, and mix thoroughly. Pour in the milk and oil and mix well again. Add the chocolate chips and vanilla and mix for final time. Put the mug in the microwave oven and cook for 3 minutes at 1000 watts. The cake will rise over the top of the mug, but don't be alarmed. Allow cake to cool a little, and tip the cake out onto a plate if desired.

I lived in the Houston, TX area near the Gulf Coast for many years, and the saying there as the Holiday Season approached was “Throw another log on the Air Conditioner, the Holidays are coming!” With the hot, dry summer we have just experienced in Central Texas, we may be saying the same thing here this year. Anyway, it's time to drag out the old favorite recipes and add some new twists to our Holiday repertoire. The recipes this time are all combinations or blends of both old and new recipes. My family loves scalloped potatoes, and they are always served when we opt for a ham on the Holidays instead of turkey. I have been using the same recipe for many years, but the current issue (Nov 2008) of *Taunton's Fine Cooking Magazine* has changed the way I will prepare Potato Gratin from now on. What is the difference? Believe it or not, chicken broth! When I tried my scalloped potato recipe using Taunton's method, I couldn't believe it was the same dish. The addition of chicken broth adds such a rich layer of taste that it is well worth the added expense and change in preparation. I know that I have just lost my vegetarian readers on this recipe by adding the chicken broth, but for the rest of you, I beg you to try this once and see if you agree that the flavor of the dish is improved. Vegetarians, please try using vegetable broth in place of the chicken broth. I haven't tried this, but I'll bet the flavor would be great with that addition also.

Scalloped Potatoes or Potato Gratin

2 to 2 ½ Pounds of Potatoes, Yukon Golds or Idaho bakers,
sliced into 1/8 inch thick rounds

2 ½ C liquid: a combination of at least 1 C low-salt chicken broth, plus 1 ½ C half and half, heavy cream or whole milk or a combination of these

1 large sweet onion, chopped and sautéed in ½ stick butter
salt and pepper to taste

Topping:

Fresh breadcrumbs (1/2 C mixed with 2 T melted butter)

1/2 C cheese (I use a Gruyere and Mild Cheddar mix with about 1/4 C Parmesan)

1/2 C chopped walnuts or pecans (optional)

Step One: Combine the sliced potatoes, your liquid mix and salt and pepper in a 12-inch skillet or a stainless pot making sure the liquid covers the potatoes. Simmer, partially covered over medium to medium-low heat, stirring occasionally until potatoes are barely tender, about 8-12 minutes. Do not pour off liquid.

Step Two: Sauté the onion in the butter until translucent. Set aside. Do not drain.

Step Three: Using a slotted spoon, transfer half of the potatoes to a 2-quart gratin dish that has been buttered. Layer sautéed onion mixture on top. Top with remaining potatoes, spreading them evenly, and pour remaining liquid on top.

Step Four: Mix breadcrumbs, melted butter, cheese (and nuts if using them) and spread evenly over potatoes.

Step Five: Bake the gratin about 25-30 minutes in a 350 degree F oven until the topping is browned and the potatoes are completely fork tender. Let the gratin set about 10 minutes before serving so the liquid is completely absorbed.

Another vegetable side dish that I have always served on Holiday occasions is Succotash. Corn is a favorite of most folks, and the addition of lima beans always makes it really “festive” somehow. But this year, I am using a new ingredient in my succotash. I am updating an old favorite recipe this year with a tasty recipe I clipped from the newspaper in Nov 2007. This recipe comes from *Bon Appetit Magazine* and is made with edamame (green soybeans) instead of lima beans.

Edamame Succotash

2 slices thick-cut bacon, chopped

1 shallot, finely chopped

2 C fresh or thawed frozen edamame

1 lb frozen corn kernels, thawed

1/4 C water

salt and pepper to taste

1/4 C chopped parsley for garnish

Sauté bacon until fat begins to render, about 1 min. Add chopped shallot and sauté until bacon and shallot begin to brown, about 3 min. Add edamame, corn and 1/4 C water. Cook until vegetables are tender, about 5 min. Add salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to serving dish and sprinkle with chopped parsley.

Cauliflower (served raw or cooked) is another vegetable that my family loves at Holiday Time. My side dish file contains an old dog-eared, food-stained scrap of notebook paper with directions to “Cook cauliflower in salted water, drain and add a small jar of Cheeze Whiz to the pot. Place the lid on the pot and let the cheese melt.” I’ll bet I have had this one since the Fifties! I long ago graduated to other cheeses to melt over the cauliflower with the addition of a little cream and freshly grated nutmeg, but when our son is at the table, he expects the old standby. I used to call this dish “Gee Whiz” when he was a kid. He would ask, “What’s for dinner?” I would reply, “Roast Beast and Gee Whiz.” It always got a giggle. This year, I am updating the cauliflower with this goodie that I will make for an appetizer.

Baked Baby Cauliflower with Almond Meal and Parmesan

(an Internet Recipe)

2 T Almond Meal (Don’t keel over when you see the price of this ingredient. It will last in the refrigerator for several months, and can be added to many dishes, desserts and baked goods to improve their flavor.)

2 T grated Parmesan cheese (Use the real stuff, not that little green can type)

1 large egg, beaten with a little milk, salt, pepper and paprika All-purpose flour

Canola oil in a spray can

Head of Cauliflower, cleaned and cut into flowerets

(You may need to double the ingredients above if you are using a large head of cauliflower.)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mix Parmesan and almond meal well. Dip each cauliflower floweret in flower, brush off the excess, and dip in the egg mixture. Allow to drain for 30 seconds or so. Dip flowerets into Almond mixture. Spray each floweret with oil, and place on a baking sheet. Bake for 30 minutes or until golden brown. Make plenty. These babies are GOOD!

Finally, from our great Journal Editor, Christine Powell, comes this old favorite for vegetarians to use in place of that Holiday ham or turkey: “OK, now I am going to be honest for this but I really had trouble selecting something. Not because I didn’t have a choice, but because I had too much choice! I grew up in England where we do not celebrate Thanksgiving. We have Harvest Festival when we celebrate the bringing in of the harvest, but it is more a religious festival and not a festival at home. There is not enough space here for me to explain all the differences in our cultures, but I am finally catching onto this festival and what it represents to you all. So, with that in mind I realized I needed to do something that was impressive without being difficult. For that reason I decided on a recipe from a vegetarian restaurant in Cork, Ireland, called the Paradiso. I have never been to the restaurant to eat, even though I have walk past it and some of the best food I have ever eaten has been from the cookbooks of the owner. There are some interesting stories behind why I never ate there and if you are interested let’s talk sometime about my adventures!”

“Anyway, I always feel that presentation and looks do a lot to make a meal. However, I am lucky. I seem to be good with food and animals! (I have a pretty good green thumb too!). So with this in mind I have chosen a meal with phillo pastry and a spicy filling—looks good and tastes sensational. I don’t think it is too spicy but it could be a little different for many of you. The spices used are fabulous but not widely used here, so hold back a little if you are not too adventurous with your food. However, if you are up for a challenge go for it. I have lived in the Middle East and Turkey plus I have grown up with an Indian influence in my life, so for me the more spice the better but some of these tastes can be challenging for the untrained palate. Enjoy!”

Roast pumpkin, onion and feta tart in walnut filo pastry with cucumber and yoghurt sauce from *A Paradiso Year* by Denis Cotter

2lb pumpkin flesh, chopped into 1 inch pieces

24oz onion, sliced

olive oil

6 cloves garlic, chopped

2 tsp cumin seeds

2 tsp coriander seeds, ground

1 fresh chilli, chopped

10oz feta cheese

8oz butter

1 pk filo pastry

8oz walnuts, coarsely ground

4 eggs

150mls cream

Toss pumpkin flesh in a little olive oil and roast in a moderate oven until soft and lightly colored.

Heat some olive oil and cook onions and garlic for ten minutes, stirring often until soft. Add cumin, coriander and chilli and cook for another five minutes. Stir into roasted pumpkin. Fold in the feta (1 inch pieces) gently.

Melt butter and butter a 10inch spring-form tin. Lay a sheet of filo pastry on the work surface with the long side facing you as the bottom edge. Cut into three pieces from top to bottom. Brush with butter, scatter with some ground walnuts over half the pastry and fold lengthwise to get long strips. Place one in the tin, starting at the center, coming up the side and overhanging the top. Place the second strip on the tin in the same way, slightly overlapping the first. Repeat with next strip and more sheets until the tin is fully lined. Pile in the filling and pack down gently.

Beat the eggs and cream together and pour over the filling. Fold over the pastry leaving the center uncovered. Brush with butter and cook for about 40 minutes in a 350F oven. Allow to sit for ten minutes then remove from tin and slice carefully.

Cucumber and Yoghurt Sauce

1 medium cucumber, seeded and roughly chopped

2 scallions, roughly chopped

2 Tbsp chopped fresh cillantro

1 Tbsp chopped fresh mint

400mls thick plain yoghurt

Salt and cayenne pepper to season

Put cucumber, scallions, herbs, and three tablespoons of yogurt into the food processor until you get an almost-smooth puree. Place in a serving bowl and stir in the rest of the yoghurt. Season to taste. Serve with the pie.

President's Column

First Frost

Wayne Rhoden



We just had our first frost of the year here in Georgetown. This morning it was 32 degrees, but the air was so dry that not much was damaged in my garden. My zinnias are fast getting so leggy that they get pulled up and put in the compost. I really hate to see them go since the butterflies love them and I have had many butterflies the last three weeks. Soon it will freeze and we will have to get everything ready for next year. Check out the “Bug” of the month and page 13 for more info on one butterfly.

I am pleased that the new class is so involved getting their hours. Several have reported that they are close to completing their hours to become certified and we still have four more classes to go. Way to go!

Your Awards Committee is working to submit some projects and newsletters to the state competition for annual awards. They are also working on an awards banquet and celebration for the December Monthly Meeting. More information coming soon.

Many of you will want to mark your calendars for the State Master Gardener Association Meeting next April in Marshall, Texas. Registration forms are not quite ready but you can find a link to the meeting on the state web site. You can get to the state web site from our own web site. One interesting tour will be to Caddo Lake, the only natural lake in Texas. It usually is only about four feet deep but the wild-life is outstanding.

The greenhouse committee is hard at work propagating plants for our sales next year. Hopefully we can get all of the new class through the greenhouse to learn hands on propagation which makes it more fun.

We are finally getting some JMG work for all volunteers also. November 15th will be a day to get some hours in for that. See you there.

Wayne

Submissions?

If you would like to contribute to the *Williamson County Master Gardeners Journal* please send your articles, item, and photographs to Christine Powell at 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!

“Bug” of the month

The American Snout butterfly is pretty easy to identify. Just look at its long snout when it is perched on a plant near you during this time of the year here in Georgetown. Sometimes their drab, moth-like coloring makes it difficult to see them on a plant.

What do they eat? The adult butterfly feeds on nectar from a variety of flowers in your garden. I have seen them on salvias and zinnias in my garden. You are unlikely to see the caterpillar since it feeds on leaves of the hackberry tree.

They are very abundant in the Southwest and many times they are so thick that they will make vines seem to vibrate with their numbers. Many fly as high as 100 feet above the ground.

Wayne Rhoden
Entmologist Specialist



WR

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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.