

# Williamson County Master Gardener Journal

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From the Williamson County Extension Agent

## Exciting Times Ahead

**A. Zan Matthies Jr., M.S.**

As we get closer to the end of the cold season, many exciting events are nearing the Williamson County Master Gardeners. At this point, I would like to recognize several Williamson County Master Gardeners for their continued endeavor to move the organization forward. Wayne Rhoden, Janet Church, Leslie Myers, and Neil Cochran recently met to discuss a five year strategic plan for the Williamson County Master Gardener Association. The plan they have designed will be presented to the membership in February for approval. This was a hard undertaking and the Executive Board should be congratulated on developing a plan which includes not only organizational goals, but also has a component of activities which are in place for the membership to gain their service hours. Secondly, I would like to thank Christine Powell and Margaret Seals for the outstanding newsletter and website they have initiated for the benefit of the membership. Each has a professional look and contains information useful to the membership and prospective members.



In early January, the Williamson and Bell County Extension Offices conducted a joint educational program at the Bell County Expo. The 22nd Annual Professional Grounds Conference was tremendous success, in part because of the Williamson County Master Gardener Association. The Quick Reference Guide compiled from the intern homework was very well received by the participants. I would especially like to thank Annette Banks for her work on this publication. Enhancement of Extension

programs through tools such as the Quick Reference Guide help to make programs of this size better every year.

Finally, I would like to touch on the new name of our agency Texas AgriLife Extension Service. The new name is an exciting component of positive change which will encompass not only Extension, but those programs associated such as the Williamson County Master Gardeners. I am looking forward to an excellent year with the Williamson County Master Gardeners as representatives of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service of Williamson County!

As always, if you have any questions, concerns, or ideas, feel free to call me at 512-943-3300.

Zan



- 2008 Menard, Texas - June 17-19,
- 2008 Kaufman, Texas - July 16-18,
- 2008 Conroe, Texas - Sept 11-12

The purpose of this course is to provide advanced training whereby Master Gardeners can obtain specialization in rainwater harvesting that support or expand designated educational programs of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service. This training was created as an intensive multi-day, hands-on course to provide Master Gardeners with knowledge and skills required to communicate rainwater harvesting information to others. Completion of the course and other requirements results in recognition as a Master Gardener "Rainwater Harvesting Specialist". This certification does not empower the individual with supervisory or administrative authority within his/her local county programs. For more information visit: [http://rainwaterharvesting.tamu.edu/training\\_gardener.html](http://rainwaterharvesting.tamu.edu/training_gardener.html) Taylor Blackburn coordinates the MG trainings in rainwater harvesting. [TABlackburn@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:TABlackburn@ag.tamu.edu)

## **June 5-7, 2008 Propagation Specialist Training - Abilene, TX Taylor County Extension Hosted by Melissa Clifton, CEA-Hort, Taylor County and the Big Country Master Gardeners**

Registration fee of \$130.00 includes lecture, hands-on instructional sessions and materials; resource CD and copies of lecture materials; misc. propagation equipment; transportation for field trips; 2 dinners; 1 lunch; and, snacks. The first 25 paid registrations will receive a Fiskars® hand pruner, pruning knife and other equipment to help you with your propagation work and trainings. Transportation and lodging is on your own. Course is limited to the first 30 applicants. Each county Master Gardener program is limited to 2 attendees. However, should space allow after the deadline, a county may ask to register additional attendees. This must be coordinated with the Taylor County Extension Agent. Return your completed registration form with payment and forward to the address below.

Make checks payable to: Big Country Master Gardener Assoc. or BCMGA, and return to Taylor County AgriLife Extension Service, 1982 Lytle Way, Abilene, TX 79602. Contact Melissa Clifton, CEA-Hort, at [dmcclifton@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:dmcclifton@ag.tamu.edu) or at 325.672.6048 should you have any questions.

[Registration Form]

## Native Substitutes for Invasive Plants

## Alternatives

### Christine Powell

I have always loved Pampas grass (*Cortaderia selloana*) and I long one day to see it in its native Argentina or Uruguay landscape. It had never occurred to me that this regal plant that forms dense clumps could become invasive. When I saw the stands of it along Loop 360 and Mopac, I just assumed it had been planted by whoever had landscaped those roads. I recently found out this was not the case. Little landscaping actually goes on at road edges, and when it



does, native plants and adaptive alternatives are increasingly being used. Pampas is not one of those. The attractive stands are actually there because seeds have been blown from private landscapes out to the sides of the highways. It is easy to think that these are beautifying the area and providing habitat... but sadly, that is not the case. This otherwise lovely grass pushes out native flora and fauna and becomes almost impossible to remove.

I think we all love to see the stately Pampas grass swaying majestically in the wind in someone's home landscape. It is a robust tussock grass that can form stands up to ten feet in diameter, and its flowering stalks can reach towering heights. It forms a big clumps of glass-like leaves that are gray or bluish-green with narrowly tapering tips that grow tall and then droop over. It is true that the leaf margins are rough and sharply serrated, but most grasses cut, don't they? The leaves are mostly basal to two-thirds of the height of the flowing stalks. It is the inflorescence that we all seek. That heavy branching majestic silver or white feathery stem grows way above the leaves and flutters in the breeze. Pampas grass is often planted as an ornamental, and can also be used for wind barriers along highways and fodder for stock. What is there not to like?

Here is what not to like: In its native range in South America, *Cortaderia selloana* grows in relatively damp soils, along river margins, along streams and in the low wet areas of Argentina and southern Brazil. However, Pampas grass is very adaptable, to the point it is becoming naturalized in the United States as a weed in damp places, depressions, along stream banks, the margins of mangrove swamps and, in particular, disturbed areas associated with roads, pipeline cuts, walking trails, and even gardens where it is not wanted. Anyone who has traveled along Loop 360 or Mopac can see it advance from one year to the next without any help from managed planting.



*Cortaderia selloana* reproduces by seeds (left) that are primarily wind-dispersed and are capable of dispersal distances up to 20 miles. Female plants can produce up to 100,000 seeds per flower head. Pampas grass forms dense stands that exclude virtually all other plants. The skin-cutting action of the sharp leaves limits use by humans or even wildlife. These stands can quickly become a fire hazard. A combination of physical and chemical control is required to manage this species. Seedlings

and small plants can be hand pulled or dug up, but larger plants may only be removable by heavy machinery. To prevent re-infestation, care should be taken to contain any seeds or flowering stalks, which should be double bagged and disposed of in the garbage. Care should also be taken that all rhizomes are removed so there is no re-establishment.

So, the lovely stand in a garden landscape may be creating problems for humans and the natural environment for miles in every direction. It seems wise to use an alternative that avoids those problems whenever possible. Here are a few possibilities:

*Muhlenbergia lindheimeri* (Big muhly, Lindheimer muhly, Lindheimer's muhly) is a 2–5 ft. cold-tolerant perennial Texas bunchgrass with fine blue green foliage and a fountain-like form. Native to the Edwards Plateau, it is a semi-evergreen with a basal leaf arrangement and impressive seedheads which are silvery or white. The inflorescence varies from an open diffuse panicle to loosely or tightly contracted and spike-like. The bloom period can be long, starting in May and continuing through to November. Happiest in our well-drained loam clay limestone soil, it prefers to be near streams or a moist area in full sun. It can fulfill all the job requirements met by pampas grass. Big muhly forms an elegant specimen or focal point and can be used for screening. It is a marvelous soft-textured substitute for introduced



Pampas grass. The leaves provide nesting material for birds and the plant is highly resistant to deer. It is not necessary to cut muhly's back every winter and they are slow to fill in afterwards. To keep tidy looking, break off old flower stalks when they become brittle and comb the plant with a leaf rake to remove dead leaves. Collect the seeds in December and when planted they will germinate well and grow fast.

*Muhlenbergia lindheimeri* (Lindheimer's muhly) is a native alternative for: *Cortaderia jubata* (purple pampas grass) *Cortaderia selloana* (Uruguayan pampas grass) *Cortaderia selloana* (Uruguayan pampas grass), and *Miscanthus sinensis* (Chinese silvergrass).



*Panicum virgatum* (Switchgrass, Wand panic grass) is a native perennial lump-forming warm-season grass that bears open lacy sprays with small seeds from August to October. It has purple stigmas at flowering time. Switchgrass is a 3–6 ft. rhizomatous loose-sod former with a large open finely textured reddish-purple seedhead. Fall color is pale yellow. Bright green leaves occur up and down the stem turning bright yellow in fall. The rich yellow-colored clumps last throughout the winter. Switchgrass is a perennial that grows in large clumps with many persistent curly leaves. It is one of the dominant species of the tallgrass prairie, but also grows along roadsides where moisture is present. Like many of the local grasses it is highly resistant to deer.

Switchgrass grows in sun or part shade, in dry or moist prairies, bluffs, stream banks, or open woods in moist and seasonally damp open places throughout

Texas (except the Trans-Pecos). It can handle a variety of different soil and poor drainage, making it a good choice for a dry creek bed or rain garden. It has attractive fall foliage, while the seeds attract ground-feeding songbirds and game birds. The plant also provides cover and nesting material. For butterfly lovers, it is a larval host in particular to the Delaware Skipper but it is also an essential larval host for most banded skippers and most of the satyrs.

*Panicum virgatum* (Switchgrass) is a native alternative for: *Bromus inermis* (smooth brome), *Cortaderia selloana* (Uruguayan pampas grass), *Imperata cylindrica* (cogongrass), *Miscanthus sacchariflorus* (Amur silvergrass), *Miscanthus sinensis* (Chinese silvergrass), *Phalaris arundinacea* (reed canarygrass), *Phyllostachys aurea* (golden bamboo), and *Schedonorus phoenix* (tall fescue).



*Muhlenbergia capillaris* (Gulf muhly, Hair grass, Hairawn muhly, Hairy-awn muhly) is a smaller native bunch grass but is one I cannot resist mentioning. Usually only reaching to three feet, it is a deer-resistant perennial grass with a large airy much-branched seed head up to half as long as the entire plant. The spikelets are purple. In fall, the plant takes on a feathery deep pink hue. Gulf muhly is usually found in sandy pine openings, prairies, and dry exposed ledges. This grass prefers full sun and moist sand soil. It should be burned or raked out in early spring. Gulf muhly is easily propagated from seeds that should be collected in November when they start to lose their pink color. Using a comb for seed collection will prevent damage to the appearance of the plants.



*Muhlenbergia capillaris* (Hairawn muhly) is a native alternative for: *Pennisetum setaceum* (crimson fountaingrass).



Here we can see the use of two of the grasses mentioned above, Big (back) and Gulf (front) Mulys. In the foreground is the wonderful sturdy low growing *Dalea greggii* or Gregg dalea, Gregg’s prairie clover or Indigo bush. Usually only growing four to nine inches the trailing sub-shrub can spread for several feet. It’s silvery blue-green foliage complements beautifully with native grasses. In Spring and summer the dalea becomes awash with tiny pea-shaped purple flowers,



### A Master Gardener's Tip

## My Garden Tote

Gaye Kriegel

My gardening experience spans 30 years and four suburban yards. Throughout that time and those yards I have always stored my small garden tools in a low, rectangular, plastic container with a handle: a tote.

You will not find a garden tote at the plant nursery, the outdoor garden department of a big box store, or even an upscale, hoity-toity garden supply store that sells stuff to people who only pretend they get dirty. This tote is designed to hold cleaning supplies but I do have a reputation for using things for purposes for which they were not intended.

One advantage to having all these small garden tools collected in one place is that they appear consecrated – set apart – from other stuff that tends to multiply around a home. My family knows these tools belong to Mom and carry the caveat: ask before borrowing and be sure to return.

For the most part, my garden tote sits patiently on the potting bench where every tool is oh-so-conveniently within arm's reach. Then there are those times that I need to traipse around the yard and can enjoy saving precious time and steps by having my tool assortment at hand, literally, because, of course, the garden tote has a handle. Genius!

Add to that all the times I have headed off to garden elsewhere: going to the garden of a friend who has asked for help, beautifying the sign at my dentist's office, planting and tending flower beds at my church, and most recently earning Master Gardener service hours at the Georgetown High School greenhouse. Always, always I can grab my garden tote and go with the confidence that I'll have what I need.

So what do I need that I have collected in my tote over the years?



- ◆ Pruners – three sizes: regular bypass pruners, smaller snips, and tiny snips for stems like moss rose which also requires the patience of a saint
- ◆ Scissors – so I won't use pruners to cut things I shouldn't
- ◆ Dibble (or dibber depending who's talking) – two sizes: a sharpened birch branch and a chopstick which I actually had to purchase because I've never ordered Chinese takeout
- ◆ Plastic knives – to serve as plant sticks when propagating (because I don't know where to buy real plant sticks) yet longer lasting than the tongue depressors I used to use
- ◆ Sharpie Pen – to write on the plastic knives
- ◆ Weed knife – there is solace, to a point, in the monotony of digging weeds
- ◆ Kitchen knife – from Goodwill, not from your kitchen set; easier to use than the weed knife for smaller weeds or painstakingly digging tiny violets to transplant
- ◆ Long-handled kitchen serving spoon – no longer needed in my mother's kitchen and perfect for scooping soil into containers
- ◆ Whisk-broom – to rid the potting bench of spilled soil that didn't reach containers
- ◆ Trowel – yes, for digging holes, but not used nearly as often as the ...
- ◆ Hand-hoe – the one garden tool I could never be without because it digs small planting holes infinitely easier, quicker, and with less effort than using a trowel
- ◆ Envelopes – recycled from all those credit card offers that come in the mail and handy for filling with harvested seeds
- ◆ Plastic twine and bamboo stakes – when the occasional plant is vertically challenged
- ◆ Rooting hormone – on the off chance that I'll actually take the time to use it during plant propagation
- ◆ Glass jar – to capture insects for close examination
- ◆ Mosquito spray – enough said
- ◆ Gloves – virtually untouched by human hands
- ◆ Band-Aids – for all the times I should have had gloves on

So there you have it, the essential tools that live in my garden tote, ready to use or ready to travel. And yes, I'd love to come help you but please don't everyone call at once!

Brenda McCall has a constant pile of composted horse manure for any who would like it. She doesn't deliver, but she does have a tractor with a bucket to load pick up trucks and anyone can just fill plastic bags full if they don't need as much. It does have some hay in it, but the farmer she buys her hay from does it organically so not only does she not worry about her horses' well being, but her garden and well water as well. If anybody wants some, they are welcome .

Contact Brenda at 512-260-5957 for more information.

## Native and Little Known Vegetables

**Super Veg? The Jerusalem artichoke****Christine Powell**

Who hasn't dreamed of a vegetable that, once planted, can be left alone to produce year after year with little to no care? Not only that, but it is immune to most pests and diseases, looks fabulous, is nutritious, and tastes really good—much like a potato, but without the calories or the starch? Does this perfect food exist? I am beginning to think so. What is this wonder vegetable? Read on!



A couple of weeks ago I was preparing a mixture of roasted winter root vegetables for dinner when I remembered I had some Jerusalem artichokes in the fridge I should use up. I thought they would work, and they did. However, I suddenly realized I had very little idea about either what they were or where they came from. I have to admit that I spent a wonderful couple of hours in search of the fabulous Jerusalem artichokes. Here is what I discovered:

Jerusalem artichokes, Sunchokes, or girasole (*Helianthus tuberosus*) are actually a member of the Aster family. They have absolutely nothing to do with Jerusalem or, for that matter, artichokes. Sunchoke is a much more appropriate name, since this is one of the nearly ninety species of sunflowers that grow all over the world. Early settlers in the New World sent the tubers to Europe where the Italians called it the *girasole*, Italian for sunflower, later corrupted to “Jerusalem.” *Helianthus tuberosus* is a large, robust, yellow, perennial sunflower native to the United States. It has slender, thick leaves and rough, branching, hairy stems that can produce a prickly rash on sensitive skin. The stout stems bear large golden-yellow flower heads as much as six to ten feet above ground. The plant has wonderful gnarly and uneven tubers (the “artichokes”) that have delighted people for hundreds, if not thousands of years. These vary in color from pale brown to white, red, or purple.

The sunchoke is found over most of North America, growing wild in waste places, thickets and woodland border. It has been cultivated for at least hundreds of years. Its ability to grow in full sun with low water use and its ability to tolerate almost any soil means it is easy to raise. However, it can become aggressive and invasive if it es-

## The Sunchoke through time

The large coarse sunflower known as the Jerusalem artichoke or sunchoke was possibly native to the Mississippi Valley. It was cultivated by Native Americans on the Great Plains and has spread eastward. The Iroquois grew this plant for its tubers, which somewhat resemble potatoes. In 1805, Lewis and Clark dined on sunchoke prepared by a native woman in what is now North Dakota. Samuel de Champlain, the French explorer, found them being grown at Cape Cod in 1605. He is reported to have sent the first samples of the plant to France, noting that its taste was similar to an artichoke. The French called them *poire de terre* ("earth pears") or *artichauts de Canada* ("Canadian artichokes"). The plant spread rapidly and today they are sold in produce markets and stores all over Europe. The common name Jerusalem artichoke is a corruption of the Italian *girasole* meaning turning to the sun (*girare*, "to turn" and *sol*, "the sun"). Fernald and Kinsey, in their book *Edible Wild Plants of Eastern North America*, tell us that: "The name Jerusalem applied to this plant is likely to lead to misconception. The tubers, early introduced into Europe, were soon popular in the Mediterranean countries and in Spanish were called *girasol*, in Italian *girasole*. True to their genius in such matters, the English promptly changed it to Jerusalem."



This diorama of the Iroquois growing sunchoke for their tuberous 'roots', which somewhat resemble potatoes is from an exhibit at the New York State Museum

capas from the garden setting. Livestock, hogs, and deer enjoy both the foliage and the tubers, the flowers are popular with most pollinators, and the seed heads attract birds (as seen from the picture on page 9). The plant also provides cover for wildlife. The alcohol fermented from the tubers is said to be of better quality than that from sugar beets... although I have never seen or tried either! It is a good weed eradicator, as it makes such dense shade that few other plants can compete, so it is good in ridding fields of quackgrass. Jerusalem artichokes are a folk remedy for rheumatism and diabetes. You can buy an extract at herb shops said to have various medicinal properties, including use as an aphrodisiac. Yet their most amazing use is as a human food.

As a vegetable, the tubers of sunchoke have taste and texture something like a potato, although sweeter and crunchier, but are more versatile in the kitchen. Sunchoke are delicious eaten raw, adding a sweet nut-like taste to salads or as a crudité with a dip. They also make a tasty substitute for water chestnuts in stir-fry dishes. Like potatoes or yams, they can be boiled and mashed, baked, roasted, French fried, even cooked in a casserole with a cheese sauce and topping. They contribute a novel flavor to stews, and their juice helps thicken and jell the liquid. In cooking with sunchoke, the most important thing to keep in mind is that they should not be put in an iron pot, or they will blacken. It is also important to add lemon juice if you are not eating at once after peeling and slicing, or they will discolor.

### JUST WHAT IS INULIN?

Inulin is a dietary fiber found in common foods such as sunchoke, asparagus, onions, garlic, leeks, bananas, wheat, and rye. Inulin added to processed foods usually comes from chicory root. Because it is not digested, inulin provides a feeling of satiation without adding fat or carbohydrates. However, it does promote healthy digestive biotics, regularity, and calcium absorption.



**The edible tubers of the Sunchoke, *Helianthus tuberosus*, ready for eating or planting.**

### Nutritional Values:

So far, so good. There must be a catch, right? Wrong. Sunchoke could almost be the nutritionally perfect food. Their greatest asset is a low caloric content: four small, freshly harvested sunchoke tubers contain just 7 calories; they are just 2% sugar. However, their carbohydrate content increasingly turns to starch the longer you keep them. The same four sunchoke tubers could end up with as many as ten times the calories, but still only the equivalent of a medium apple. One of the sunchoke's special advantages is its protein content—a whopping 2.3 grams in an average serving. It is also rich in minerals like potassium (650 mg per 150g (1 cup) serving), iron, phosphorus, and calcium. As a bonus, it contains small amounts of Vitamin A, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, and Vitamin C. All these values should be taken with a pinch of salt as very few studies have been carried and even less are available to the general public.

Unlike most tubers, but in common with other members of the Asteraceae (including the artichoke),

the sunchoke stores the carbohydrate inulin (not to be confused with insulin) instead of starch. This is metabolized directly into sugar. For this reason, Jerusalem artichoke tubers are an important source of fructose for industry. Jerusalem artichoke also has a great deal of unused potential as a producer of ethanol for fuel, using inulin-adapted strains of yeast for fermentation.

However, inulin is not well digested by some people, leading to the misconception that sunchoke tubers are not edible or an assumption that they cause flatulence and gastric pain. *Gerard's Herbal*, printed in 1621, quotes the English planter John Goodyer on Jerusalem artichokes:

"which way soever they be dressed and eaten, they stir and cause a filthy loathsome stinking wind within the body, thereby causing the belly to be pained and tormented, and are a meat more fit for swine than men."

**How to Grow:**

Jerusalem artichokes are incredibly easy to cultivate, which can be a problem if you don't want them to grow someplace. There are two schools of thought when it comes to growing sunchokes: leave them in the ground year after year or dig them up yearly. Some sources suggest that if the tubers are just left to grow they can become degraded and so suggest digging up the whole plant and all the tubers to replant in fertile soil. This can be a chore, as even a small piece of tuber will grow if left in the ground, making the hardy plant a potential weed.

If care is taken, the lazy gardener probably can get away with leaving the tubers in the ground. I am sure the crops will continue to flow year after year with the addition of just a little compost. Tubers should be planted four inches deep in early spring or late fall and left the first season. They can be planted like potatoes in rows and mounded up for easier harvesting. The tubers begin to form in August and little hoeing is needed, as the plants shade out weeds. Harvest sunchokes from September to March just as and when you need them so they are fresh and low in calories. After March they will start to sprout. So where to get this wonder crop? I have seen tubers in the exotic vegetable section of a supermarket; they can also be purchased online.

Often, especially east of the Mississippi, *Helianthus tuberosus* can be found growing wild along roadsides or in abandoned fields where they held on and spread long after homesteaders who planted the tubers disappeared. Although resembling ordinary sunflowers, they are easy to identify when in bloom. They tend to be taller, more slender, and more graceful than common sunflowers. The golden blooms lack the large mosaic seed centers so typical of cultivated sunflowers, and they are even smaller than the centers of wild sunflowers. The leaves are different too. They are more pointed and more slender than other sunflowers.

**Storage and preparation:**

The wonderful properties of this vegetable just go on and on. Once cleaned, dried, and placed in plastic bags, sunchoke tubers can be stored in the refrigerator for up to three months. The freshest roots are plump and vibrant in appearance. If they are left too long in the open, they become wrinkled and soft, and can develop a bitter taste. Sunchokes just need to be either peeled, scraped, or scrubbed to be ready for use. The skin is edible and nutritious but some may prefer the look of the tubers if the "jacket" is removed. They are better steamed than boiled to avoid mushiness. Fresh sunchokes, properly steamed, have a mild, sweet, and nutty flavor that requires no additional sauce or condiment to accentuate it. If you want to be more adventurous, they can be used in virtually any way you desire. They only need half the cooking time of potatoes, showing yet another quality... energy efficiency.

I don't really have room to grow vegetables as I live on a limestone cliff. However, I think the time has come to build a small raised bed along that neighbor's ugly chain-link fence. I think I have found my perfect crop!

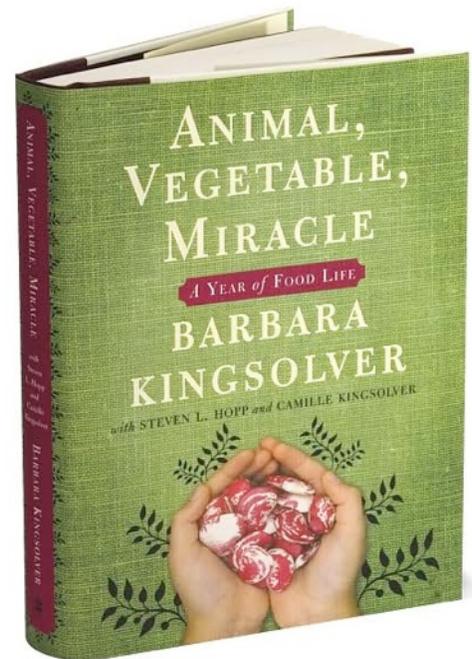
Treats from the Master Garden

## “Eating Locally” (The new buzzwords)

Margaret Seals

The “Food” section of the newsletter will be a little different this month, as you will find a few book reviews before the usual recipes. As an avid cookbook collector, my Christmas Wish List always has a couple of cookbooks at the top of the list. This year, Santa brought James Peterson’s wonderfully illustrated “how to” book, *Cooking*, and Mark Bittman’s fantastic “artichokes to zucchini” *How to Cook Everything Vegetarian*. Both are worth a look if you are interested in learning some new tricks in the kitchen, and I will be sharing some recipes with you from each of them later. However, the book that really caught my eye this holiday season, although about food, is technically not a cookbook. The author, Barbara Kingsolver, is a well-known novelist (*The Bean Trees*, *The Poisonwood Bible*) who, upon embarking on a new marriage and realizing the advantages of the “eating locally” trend at about the same time, decided to experiment with growing food for her family, or purchasing only food grown within a short distance of her home, for one year. *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* chronicles that year with explanations about why the decision was made to grow food and eat seasonally/locally and how it actually worked. The author’s husband, Steven L. Hopp, and oldest daughter, Camille, also contribute to the book, giving extra insight into the family dynamics of the decision and adding well-researched sidebars on topics from “Hungry World” to “How to find a Farmer.” (A bibliography is included along with references and lists of organizations related to living “green” and “eating locally.” Several websites are included as well.) If you are already into growing some of your own food or shopping at local Farmer’s Markets, you will find kinship throughout this book, but even if your kids think all food comes table ready (never mind how it gets that way), you will still find kinship in knowing you are not alone. The author makes her point: we must rid ourselves of this “botanically outrageous condition of having everything [to eat] always.” She methodically explains why. And what we can do about it.

I am not yet willing to give up fruit, such as bananas, that will never be grown within a short distance of my home in any season, but I am on board with the “grow your own or eat seasonally/locally” trend for the majority of foods that we normally eat. Still, Kingsolver’s points are well taken and certainly worth reading.



Montgomery County Master Gardeners invite you to join fellow Texas Master Gardeners for the 2008 Texas Master Gardener Conference April 24-26, 2008 at the Lone Star Convention Center, Conroe, Texas. The 2008 Conference promises opportunities for sharing gardening interests, fun, educational activities and enjoyment of the numerous amenities offered in the lovely Lake Conroe area of Montgomery County.

Registration forms are available at:

For a great learning experience and a delightful time come to the 2008 Texas Master Gardener Conference. April 24-26, 2008 - Conroe, Texas.

Here are a couple of recipes from the *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* files:

### **Sweet Potato Quesadillas**

2 medium sweet potatoes

½ onion

1 clove garlic

1 T oregano

1 T basil

1 t cumin

Chile powder to taste

Olive oil for sauté

Cut sweet potatoes into chunks, cook in a steamer basket or microwave until soft, then mash. Chop and sauté garlic and onion in a large skillet. Add spices and sweet potato and mix well, adding a little water if it's too sticky. Turn burner very low to keep warm without burning.

4 Whole-wheat flour tortillas

4 oz Brie or other medium soft cheese

2-3 leaves shredded Swiss chard (or other greens)

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Oil a large baking sheet and spread tortillas on it. Spread filling on half of each tortilla. Top with slices of cheese and shredded chard, and then fold each tortilla to close. Bake until browned and crisp (about 15 min.) Cut into wedges before serving.

### **Braised Winter Squash**

2 lbs winter squash, peeled, halved and sliced into ½ inch rounds

2 T butter

2 C apple cider

1 t salt

Rosemary and pepper to taste

Melt butter in skillet with rosemary; after a few minutes, add the squash, salt and cider. (You may need to add some additional cider or water to cover the squash.) Bring to a boil, the lower heat and braise for 20 minutes or until tender. At this point, the juice should be reduced to a glaze. If not, raise the heat for a few minutes until excess liquid evaporates. Add pepper and a splash of balsamic vinegar if you like.

Other recipes and information about “eating locally” can be found at [www.animalvegetablemiracle.com](http://www.animalvegetablemiracle.com).

## **Monthly Meetings**

**Williamson County Master Gardeners hold monthly meetings at the Williamson County Extension Office, 3151 SE Innerloop Road, Suite A, Georgetown on the third Wednesday of each month. Master Gardeners and the public are welcome to attend.**

## President's Column

## Happy New Year

### Wayne Rhoden



This month everyone will be out working in their yards and gardens pruning, planting, and dividing plants. I have had a hard time not cutting back the plants because I am afraid of that one last big freeze that would kill the foliage that is being protected by the upper part of the plants. I have only been in Georgetown for two springs and each of them have been different so who knows if it will be a cold, warm, wet, or dry this time. I guess that is what makes gardening fun, all of the suspense of planting and watching whether the plants will make it past March.

We have several opportunities for volunteers now and Christine has been putting them on the web site for all to see. We need your help on several projects and cannot get enough folks to come out and help. Maybe it is too cold for some of them but we have many Junior Master Gardener projects that need help. Not all of them are teaching kids. The last projects involve teachers and those are the ones that we have not been getting the help we need.

We will be giving presentations at the Georgetown Home and Garden Show this year. Some of you are already involved but even if you do not volunteer, come out and watch some of your members give programs on growing herbs, perennial gardening, butterfly gardening, and propagation. This will be on March 1<sup>st</sup> at the show barn in San Gabriel Park. Check out the *Georgetown Sun* for times and we will have the schedule on the web site when it is published.

We had a good turnout for our monthly program and are looking forward to more of the same. Remember the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of each month and come visit with your fellow members and some of the community folks that show up.

Wayne

## June 11-14, 2008 - Junior Master Gardener Specialist Training



Williamson County Extension  
Williamson County Master Gardeners

### A Date to Remember

Please save the date of June 11-14,08. Junior Master Gardener Specialty Training will be held at the Williamson County Extension Office in Georgetown, Texas. Costs are being calculated and an application will be available soon.

Contact: Neil Cochran JMG Coordinator Williamson County

### Photo Credits

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# Williamson County Master Gardener Association Officers for 2008

## Officers:

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## Ad Hoc Committees:

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## Quote of the Month

**"With regards to seeds—some look like snuff, others like very light blond nits, or shiny and blackish blood-red fleas without legs; some are flat like seals, others inflated like balls, others thin like needles; roaches and tiny like specks of dust. I tell you that every kind is different, and each is strange, life is complex."**

Karen Capek, *The Gardener's Year*,