TEXAS MASTER GARDENER
TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION
Bastrop County

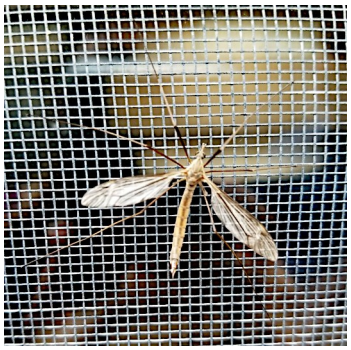
What's Growing On?

BASTROP COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

February 2025

Crane Flies

By Wizzie Brown



It's a bit chilly and raining as I write this, but I know that soon the weather will warm up and the "Texas groundhogs" will be out in force. "Texas groundhogs" is the term I use for crane flies as these typically are the first insects we begin to see emerging in the spring. Like Punxsutawney Phil, crane flies signal that spring is coming soon.

Crane flies can be small to large depending on species, with some reaching up to an inch (not including their legs). Legs are long and slender and they have a V-shaped suture on the thorax. The spindly legs of crane flies tend to break off very easily, so you may often encounter these insects with less than their allotted amount of 6 legs. Adults sometimes are mistaken for giant mosquitoes and may frighten people.

Crane flies are sometimes called "mosquito hawks" which is a misnomer. The name mosquito hawk is usually used to refer to dragonflies, but sometimes is also used to refer to a large species of mosquito that has a larval stage which feeds on other mosquito species. Other incorrect information about crane flies is that they eat mosquitoes, which is untrue. Adult crane flies feed on nectar or are non-feeding.

Crane fly larvae are found in moist soil where they feed on decaying organic matter. Larvae are wormlike and legless without well-developed heads. Some species of larvae feed on roots of turfgrass or other plants. Crane fly larvae usually do not cause enough damage to be considered a pest, but with very high populations may require management.

In Texas, crane flies tend to be abundant in the spring. While adults may be a nuisance when entering homes or disturbing outdoor activities, they do not cause damage and do not bite. Keep doors and windows closed and make sure screens are in good repair. Either turn off outside lights at night or use "bug bulbs" to reduce the number of crane flies that get drawn near the home because of light sources.

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For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at ebrown@ag.tamu.edu.

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The Joy of Volunteering at Bob Bryant Park

By Gina Martin

Bob Bryant Park, a serene oasis in Bastrop County, owes much of its charm to the dedicated volunteers who pour their hearts into its upkeep. Among these volunteers are the Bastrop County Master Gardeners Association (BCMGA), a group of passionate individuals who have transformed the park's Demonstration Garden into a thriving example of sustainable gardening.

Courtney, a devoted volunteer, describes the garden as a "hidden gem" where native and Texas-adapted plants tell a story of resilience and beauty. This project, which began in early 2021, has blossomed into a living classroom. Visitors can witness firsthand how sustainable gardening supports pollinators, conserves water, and enhances the landscape. Every path, flower, and tree reflect the dedication of volunteers who nurture this space, inviting the community to learn, explore, and be inspired by the power of plants.

For many, volunteering at Bob Bryant Park is more than just a hobby—it's a way of life. Ann Marie, another passionate volunteer, shares how the park and the Master Gardener community have given

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New Website Features

Check out our website, which features project slideshows, a new photo gallery section, and an events calendar to check out upcoming activities. Find news articles and our newsletters. Thanks to Dave Posh for keeping the info timely for us https://txmg.org/bastropcounty/

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her a sense of belonging. “It’s become a true home,” she says. “Being part of this group has made me feel included and connected to something bigger than myself. I’ve formed lifelong friendships with people who have become like family.”

The mentorship from experienced gardeners like Rudy and Rebecca has been invaluable. They have fostered a sense of community among interns and new Master Gardeners through various activities, from picnics and BBQs to small gatherings. Ann Marie emphasizes that it’s the people—Rebecca, Rudy, Marcia, Maxwell, and many others—who have made this experience truly unique and special.

Gina, another enthusiastic volunteer, highlights the joy of learning and growth that comes with each season. “I love volunteering at Bob Bryant Park,” she says. “There’s so much inspiration and learning from preparing beds, installing starts, and watching it all grow. Each season is exciting, and I’ve learned so much. Bed prep in the Fall and Winter leads to a successful demonstration garden in the Spring and Summer. Much of what I’ve learned, I apply to my own home garden. Everyone is so friendly and kind. Smiles all around!”

Sheila, a Certified Master Gardener, underscores the importance of education and support in her journey. “Creating a sustainable future for myself starts with growing my own food. Becoming a Certified Master Gardener was the first step on my journey. Without the BCMGA program, I would still be planting seeds and failing. Knowledge is power, and having the support of the BCMGA’s subject matter experts and Texas A&M AgriLife’s top-notch instructors has been instrumental in my success.”

Volunteering at Bob Bryant Park has also inspired personal growth and future aspirations. Ann Marie is excited about her next step: becoming an herbalist. She plans to study herbs and take advanced gardening courses. She’s also interested in trying her hand at growing Moringa, loofas, and sugar cane—plants she learned about through the demonstration garden.

If you’re passionate about gardening, community, and making a positive impact, consider joining the dedicated volunteers at Bob Bryant Park. Whether you’re an experienced gardener or just starting out, there’s a place for you in our vibrant community. Come visit the Demonstration Garden, attend a workshop, or simply enjoy the beauty of the park. Together, we can learn, grow, and inspire others through the power of plants. Join us today and be part of something truly special!

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Volunteering

Master Gardeners volunteer in the community to teach others about horticulture. We follow the research-based recommendations of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. Members who complete 50 hours of volunteer service in the year after training earn the designation “Texas Master Gardener.” We use our title only when engaged in Texas A&M AgriLife Extension activities.

Lazy Gardening 101: When Should You Clean Up Your Garden?

By Howard Nemerov

[Too soon kills beneficial insects that prey upon plant pests.]

I'm seeing internet memes along the lines of "you'll kill 80% of garden insects if you clean up your garden too early." Like most anti-social media memes, they're long on scare tactics to drive eyeballs to pages and bereft of science-based citations.

It's true you should wait as long as possible for spring cleanup. A Cornell University author offers one metric: "wait until you are ready to plant tomatoes..." For Bastrop County, the means sometime in March to April.[1]

Penn State offers a more general recommendation: "In the spring, wait as long as you can to clean out dead stalks and grasses in the garden, as these may be the home of overwintering invertebrates."[2]

Xerces Society also mentions tomato season: "If it's time to plant tomatoes in your area, chances are conditions are neither too hot nor too cold for pollinators to be out and about."[3]

The same Xerces article mentions that fruit trees like peach and plum are among the earliest to bloom, coinciding with "many ground-nesting bees." This means that many of our native bees—such as bumblebees and iridescent sweat bees—emerge just in time to partake of these nectar-rich flowers while also pollinating to create this summer's fruit harvest.[4]

This synchronization between nectar plants and insect pollinators highlights the science of *phenology*. In plants, this describes "the reoccurring life cycle stages of plants such as leafing, flowering, fruiting, and the maturation of crops."[5] Phenology also describes the bumblebee lifecycle: bumblebee queen emerges in early spring to feed off flowers, builds her nest, lays eggs, produces a hive, then focuses on laying more eggs while newly hatched workers take over foraging, etc.[6] The queen's emergence from her over-wintering nest coincides with early-season flowers like fruit trees and certain native flowers. In Nature, timing is everything.

Returning to the point of this article, emerging native bees need to be left alone until they emerge, which is why it's important to wait on spring cleanup as long as possible.

Last year, I planted Elbon (cereal) Rye to control root knot nematodes in my tomato beds. Another benefit was when I could late-winter rye loaded with Lady Beetles happily consuming aphids attacking the rye grass. As aphids began appearing on ornamentals in spring, Lady Beetles were ready to "welcome" them (left).[7]

Of course, there's another implicit warning: Don't clean up your yard in fall, either. Ground-nesting bees need undisturbed sites for their over-wintering nest. Others need undisturbed stems and leaves. What we may call

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"detritus" is shelter for over-wintering insects, many of which will repay your "messiness" by eating early-season aphids and other plant pests. Eliminating fall cleanup has other benefits. For example, fall leaves decompose to release their nutrients, and winter rains leach those nutrients into the soil because that same layer of leaves reduces runoff. Leaving fall leaves provided shelter for beneficial insects while feeding your soil.[8]

Bottom line: Being lazy saves money and reduces the need for pesticides and fertilizers.

Endnotes

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[7] Howard Nemerov. "Lady Beetles Find a Home." *What's Growing On?*, March 2024, pages 2–3. Accessed February 12, 2025. https://txmg.org/bastropcounty/files/2024/03/03-Mar.pdf
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Attracting Early Season Beneficial Insects

by Howard Nemerov

I grow a lot of native milkweeds for seed stock and plant sales. Aphids *love* milkweed. Fortunately Syrphid Fly larvae, from eggs laid by *Allograpta obliqua* and others, love aphids. Attracting them into the garden requires flowers with easily-accessible nectaries like those on *Calendula officinalis "Orange Flash"* (both pictured on right). While I'm converting landscaping to all Bastrop County natives, there's still room—especially in winter—for non-native flowering annuals that draw pollinators when there's little natural forage. Syrphid Flies perform double duty, pollinating the next generation of seed while getting ready to "welcome" spring aphids. Building up beneficial insect populations protects milkweeds from damaging aphid levels, but it's a balance: Having some aphids around means maintaining food for Syrphid Flies, Ladybeetles, and other beneficial insects, keeping them around all season.