



The Blooming Bell

**December, 2010
BCMGA Newsletter**

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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 Work Day 9 am New Class Orientation 1 pm <u>NO Burger</u> Wednesday	2	3	4
5	6	7	8 Plant Sale Meeting 9 am <u>NO General Meeting</u>	9 Christmas Party 6 pm sign-in 6:30 Dinner/ Silent Auction	10	11 Michael Murphey Cowboy Christmas Ball 7 pm
12	13	14	15 Board of Directors Meeting 9 am	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24 Christmas Eve	25 Christmas Day
26	27	28	29	30	31 New Year's Eve	

Important upcoming dates: New Class starts January 5th, 2011
Spring Plant Sale is March 26

The President's Corner

IS IT DECEMBER ALREADY?

Yes.....it is that time of year again. By the time the BB is digested, we will have turned the corner and be in full swing for another holiday season. It is no secret that as we mature, months go by as fast a weeks did a few years ago.

With December coming up, we kick off the orientation of the new class which starts in January. We have twenty five interns signed up and ready to go. This is always an exciting time in the life of BCMGA because this is the future of our association. We look forward to welcoming our new interns sharing their interest in gardening.

On December 9 we will have our Christmas party and business meeting at the Expo Center. We will enjoy the fellowship of our fellow gardeners and their families as well as celebrate the volunteer hours that you have put in. Just as a reminder to everyone, we will not have a regular meeting of BCMGA in December.

We have begun to prepare for the Spring plant sale and will be placing our first preliminary order in very soon. Keep March 26 available so you can participate in this important time in the life of Bell County Master Gardeners. Any suggestions you may have, please let me hear from you as we are always trying to improve our plant sale.

We also welcome Jheri Lynn Smith as part of our team in the extension office. She will serve us in several ways including taking responsibility for our web page. She also will be in our new class of 2011. Another welcome is extended to Shelly Chapman who has filled the vacancy created when Mary Pearle moved to Houston.

As you can see, many things are happening. Let me wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year as we celebrate the season.

-Mel Myers



What is this?

Werner Hahn is wondering if anyone knows what plant this is. He has no idea where it came from or what it is. He's had it for years and it's now very rootbound in a two gallon pot. Does anyone have any ideas? Write to Werner at whahn@suddenlink.net



Editor's note: I accidentally omitted credit for three photos in November's Blooming Bell including two in the President's Corner and the cover photo. They were taken by Mel Myers when he and his wife, Sharon took a trip to New York in October. I also made a mistake with Jheri Lynn Smith's email address for those of you who need to make changes on your member information. Her email address is jherilynn@sbcglobal.net

On a Mission

Submitted by Ursula Nanna

(This is the first part of a continuing series on Desert Gardens by Ursula Nanna.)

A Master Gardener's mission is to educate – usually meaning non-Master Gardeners. But we educate, un-be knowingly, among ourselves by answering a plant question or researching a plant's habits or cultural needs.

Along this line, the goal of this desert garden article is to bring cactus and succulent gardening to our area and to raise awareness of these plants' unique benefits.

Way back when...Marlene Gillman gave me my first pups of Agave Americana and Agave Americana variegata. Here, I quickly learned respect for these plants !!! One good poke from their spines hurts for days.

Shortly after, I was at Fran Idoux's home and saw beautiful cactus gardens (excuse me...Desert Gardens). She shared Agave parryii pups and some Hesperaloe pavidiflora (salmon Hesperaloe yucca). With this material, I made my 1st desert garden. I was taught that if anything but cacti – Opuntia and Cylindropuntia - go into the garden, it is no longer a cactus garden but a Desert Garden. Learn something new all the time !!

Although not a new form of gardening, desert gardening is catching on. We seem to move laterally into new fads as we carry the names of : Earth kind; smart gardens; xeriscape gardens; and water wise gardens to

gardening with cacti and succulents.

So what are succulents and what differentiates cacti in this classification? The saying is "all cacti are succulents, but not all succulents are cacti".

Succulents are plants having stems, roots, and leaves of fleshy water-storing tissue.They are found



in areas of little to no regular rainfall and their thick, herbaceous stems contain chlorophyll. In the classification of succulents, cacti are the best known examples of succulents.

Continued on page 5...



On a Mission continued...

Cacti are in the Cactacea family and don't have leaves since their spines are considered their leaves. They originated in the Western hemisphere while succulents were found world-wide. These xeriphytic plants are also distinguished from succulents by having areoles producing spines and flowers. Some cacti have very tiny spines, called "glochids", which are almost invisible to the eye and are barbed. They are very difficult to remove from the skin when struck. Cacti are adapted to arid conditions and some to cold or freezing temperatures.

Agaves, Yuccas, Dasylirion, Nolina, Hectia, Ocotillo, Dudleya, Echeveria, and Graptopetulum are not cacti even though they have succulent leaves in the form of rosettes or exhibit one or two characteristics of cacti. Some of these plants can really wound.

So what's to like about these spiny, prickly, "gotcha" plants? I said something like that, out loud, to a member of the Austin Cactus and Succulent Association and got the answers SHOT back at me.

1. Cacti handle our climate if properly chosen
2. They have very interesting shapes and varieties from smooth and flat to contorted and round.
3. Colorful and sometimes fragrant flowers are reported to rival an orchid.
4. Water conserving.
5. Evergreen.
6. No mulch needed to help moderate drastic temperature extremes.
7. They attract a variety of wildlife.
8. Serve as safe nesting and water source for wildlife.
9. They provide nectar when no other plants are blooming.
10. They are extremely disease and insect resistant.
11. They have odd and beautiful shapes and forms.
12. Less weeds because weeds need



more water than cacti do to grow. 13. Even if there's a water restriction, these plants will still look great.

Like every living thing, both cacti and succulents have basic needs.

DRAINAGE: Well drained soil – to prevent rotting. This is achieved through mounding or planting on terraced slopes.

SOIL – Must be porous and quick draining which means modifying the soil. There are as many formulas for this as there are gardens. Add no sand if you have clay soil or it will harden like

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On a Mission....continued

concrete. Instead, use organic matter and small gravel.

LIGHT – Southern exposure of at least 6 hours is required for growth and flowering. Please be aware that there are certain succulents that do not like afternoon sun.

WATER – While xeriphytic, even cacti require some water – 10 to 12 " per year is minimal for growth. Succulents require a minimum of 16 to 18 " per year. Proper water management is extremely important. How it is acquired, conserved, and efficiently utilized makes a huge difference. City water, used directly from the tap, will almost always cause discoloration and spotting of the plant surfaces.

Usually, supplemental water may be needed during July and August. To help plants prepare for winter, STOP watering by late August. Except for winter shrinkage, plants should be plump and upright.

FERTILIZING – Most cacti and succulents prefer a light fertilizing of a balanced fertilizer in late May. 10-10-10 will suffice. If plants are fertilized too much, they tend to become soft and overly lush leading to rot and death.

CULTIVATION – Because all cacti and most succulents have a shallow root system, avoid soil disturbance around the root system of the plants.

Do not plant cacti in the late fall or in winter because they go dormant and will rot and die. When handling these plants, wear good gloves, use tongs, and wear long-sleeved shirts.

DISEASE/PESTS – The primary cause of plant death is root rot from too much water, poor soil drainage, or planting too low.

Insects are easily killed with 5% seven dust.

WEEDS – Hand weeding may be required but, as always, proper garden preparation all but eliminates this problem as it will in a native plant garden.

Judicious use of a glyphosate inhibitor can be very effective.

All told, I have been bitten by the cactus

and succulent bug....You are invited to visit my experimental gardens and see what's going on and growing. These are purely experimental gardens for the purpose of expanding the local area's collection of cacti and succulents; to test carefully chosen plants for cold hardiness; to establish thresholds for water and fertilizer requirements.

Because my real estate is limited, plants that grow too



large or succumb to weather and cultural practices will be replaced so more compact plants can be used. The main challenge here is the repertoire of cold hardy cacti and succulents is limited. Right now I'm using zone 6 to 8a plant choices.

Future articles will contain some before and after photos and some how-to's in soil preparation.



Control of Indoor Pests

**Submitted by Gary Slanga,
Entomology Specialist**

This is the time of year we bring our tender potted plants indoors to escape the freezing winter weather. Occasionally, we inadvertently bring in unwanted guests with the plants. You may have seen them when you water these plants, swarming up out of the pots and buzzing around. Tiny little flies that seem to hang around the plants, never venturing far because they are not strong fliers, not normally seen in the rest of the house. Well these little guests are probably fungus gnats.

There are several varieties in the Order Diptera, family Sciariidae. Only about 1/10th to 1/8 inch long and usually black, they tend to end their one week winged lives by dying in mass around the base of the pots. But only after the female has deposited up to 200 eggs in the potting soil to spawn the next generation. Their entire life cycle from egg to this winged stage is from 2 to 4 weeks. In the larval stage, which may last as long as two of these weeks, they spend their time in the upper surface of potting soil feeding on fungus in the soil (hence their name), but some species will also feed on the fine root hairs of plants. Fungus gnats are more annoying than anything else however if their numbers are sufficient, they can damage plants.

To determine if there are enough to damage plants, Dr. Drees at Texas A&M suggests putting a

slice of potato, about 1 inch square and 1/4 inch thick on the soil surface. This will attract the larva and after about four hours, you can count the number on and under the potato to determine how large the problem might be. A large number of larva which appears unacceptable, and what is "unacceptable" is your call, may require action. That being the case, then there are some things you can do.



A good preventive measure is to quarantine the plant for several weeks before bringing it into the house. If you can't do that and are not concerned about their deceased little bodies lying around your potted plants, you may choose to do nothing. The first generation is usually the largest and each succeeding generation gets smaller and smaller. But if they don't go away then try letting the top inch or two of soil in the pot go dry for a period. Female fungus gnats prefer moist soil, which produces the best fungus, in which to lay eggs. You might also try beneficial nematodes which can be purchased and mixed in a drench and poured into the soil. Also a drench of *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis* or B.t.i. poured on the soil might work. B.t.i. is the version that is used to eliminate mosquitos and is different from the B.t.k. (kurstaki, most common form) often sold in nurseries. You may have to ask for it. If you need to go to something a little more toxic you might try any of the varieties of pyrethrins. Keep in mind that spray usually effect only the winged adults so you may need to spray repeatedly over several days. If you use any pesticide be sure it is labeled for indoor use, will not harm the plant you are spraying, and always follow all the precautions on the label.

Now sit back and enjoy your indoor garden.

The Poinsettia

by Candace Mullen

By now, I am sure that all of us are thinking of Christmas and the holiday season sneaking up on us. Some of the decorations are already up around town and perhaps the day after Thanksgiving is the traditional day for you to decorate your own house. One of the traditional holiday decorating plants is the poinsettia. Most of us are familiar with their colorful leaves and abundance during this season.

The poinsettia has a long and colorful history. During the 14th-16th centuries the sap was used to control

fevers, and the bracts (modified leaves) were used to make a reddish dye by the Aztecs.

They called the plant "Cuetlaxochitl" and Montezuma, the last of the Aztec kings, would have the plants brought into the area now known as Mexico City by caravans because the poinsettia could not be grown in the high altitude. Much like the semi trucks of today bringing loads of them everywhere across the US! Chile and Peru call the poinsettia "Crown of the Andes".

Joel Roberts Poinsett was the first US Ambassador to Mexico and was appointed by Andrew Jackson in the 1820's. Poinsett had a great interest in botany, and while in Mexico he introduced the American elm to that country. He also wandered the Mexican countryside looking for new plant species. In 1828 he found a beautiful shrub with large red flowers growing next to a road. He took cuttings and brought them back to his South Carolina greenhouse. Although his political career was outstanding, he will always be remembered for introducing the poinsettia into the US. The botanical name, *Euphorbia Pulcherrima*, was assigned to the poinsettia by German botanist Wilenow. It means "very beautiful". As the plant grew more popular, William Prescott, a historian and horti-

culturist, was asked to give *Euphorbia* a new name. He had just written a book, *The Conquest of Mexico*, in which he had detailed Joel Poinsett's discovery of the plant. So Prescott named the plant the poinsettia in honor of Poinsett's discovery.

In the early 1900's the Ecke family of Southern California started growing poinsettias outdoors for use as landscape plants and as a cut flower. Eventually they switched to greenhouses and today are recognized as the leading producer of poinsettias in the US.

Did you know that in nature the poinsettias are perennial

flowering shrubs that can grow to ten feet tall? The showy colorful parts of the poinsettia that most people think are the flowers are actually colored bracts or modified leaves. The flowers or cyathia are actually in the center of the colorful bracts! Poinsettias have also been called the lobster flower, the flame leaf flower, and "Flower of the Holy Night". They are NOT poisonous. A fresh poinsettia, one that will last the longest during the season, has little or no yellow pollen showing on the flower cluster in the center.

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Poinsettia continued...

December 12 is National Poinsettia Day and the plant represents over 85% of the potted plant sales during the holiday season! Ninety percent of all the flowering poinsettias in the world got their start at the Paul Ecke



Ranch. There are over 100 varieties of poinsettias available! Sixty million pots of them were grown in 1997 and the number of blooms determines the cost of

a poinsettia.

So how do we select a poinsettia to take home and enjoy during the season? Choose a plant with dark green foliage down to the soil line. Bracts should be completely colored. It should be 2 ½ times taller than the diameter of the container and the plant should look full, balanced, and attractive from all sides. Do NOT

choose one with yellow, fallen leaves; one that is drooping or wilted; or one that has a great deal of yellow pollen. If you choose carefully you may enjoy the colorful display for weeks and perhaps months!

We traditionally look for the red or white or pink poinsettias, but the many new colors that have been developed are quite beautiful. They



come in some unexpected colors - coral pink, plum, cream, marbled, two tones, speckled, or frosted! Here are a few to look for and admire: A speckled choice is "Jingle Bells"; marbled "Peterstar Marble"; edged in ivory "Strawberries 'n Cream"; or

frosted "Monet". Or perhaps a rounded flower shape with bracts that curl under called "Winter Rose" is more your choice. Or "Holly Point" which has variegated leaves. Or how about choosing a miniature variety known as "Mini Star"?

You also don't have to keep them in the pots either. Consider cutting the stem and using the florist's flower-picks so they can be placed in various decorations throughout the house. The Poinsettia is a wonderful, traditional way to brighten up the season and enjoy growing plants all winter. Have a wonderful holiday and enjoy your Poinsettia!



Brenham Poinsettia Festival

Eleven Bell County Master Gardeners went on a trek to the Poinsettia Festival in Brenham on November 20th. They had several greenhouses completely full of poinsettias in a large array of colors at different levels of maturity for sale. They also had several greenhouses filled with perennials, but it was the poinsettias that drew the crowds of people to Ellison's nursery. The pictures in this edition of the Blooming Bell are all from this festival.

[Orange Spice Poinsettia](#)

[Photos by Gail Christian and Terrie Hahn](#)

Brenham Is the Place To Be

By Gail Christian

The restaurant is Must be Heaven. I have eaten there several times. If you haven't, you need to go. Don't go on the weekend if you can help it. They were swamped, of course it was the Poinsettia Festival, but it is always swamped on the weekend. Brenham has a lot of nice little boutique and antique shops. I would like to go back in the spring when Ellison nursery gets full of spring plants and of course, the Antique Rose Emporium is close .



Montreal Topiary Gardens

If you google Montreal Topiary Gardens, you'll find many sights with about a dozen different pictures of everything from frogs to camels sculpted with plants like the one below.



For Your Information

With winter coming, you may be interested in checking out winter hardiness for your cactus and succulents at the following site:

www.austincss.com

Also, make sure you check our own website at

www.txmg.org/bell

Click on Educational Resources and find many interesting articles on plants, soils, birds, butterflies, compost, and more!

A book recommendation by Mike Quinn of Texas Master Naturalists:

"The Beetle Alphabet Book" by Jerry Pallotta (2004), Juvenile Nonfiction, 32 pgs.

Google shows the first few pages: <http://bit.ly/bKnup7>

NPSOT/Williamson Seminars

January Chapter Meeting of the Native Plant Society of Texas/Williamson county: Thursday, January 13th, 7 pm at the Georgetown Public Library, 2nd floor. **Ginger Hudson** will present her new book **"Landscape Maintenance for Central Texas Gardens."** Visitors welcome.

February Chapter Meeting: Native Orchids- Thursday, February 10, 2011, 7:00 pm — 9:00 pm at the Georgetown Public Library. **Jason R. Singhurst** - Botanist/Plant Ecologist, Wildlife Diversity Program, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and co-author of "Rare Plants of Texas" will speak on **Native Orchids and some rarely-seen and restricted flora in "Herbaceous Seepage Slopes and Bogs of the West Gulf Coastal Plain."** Jason's talk will include many rare flora, including carnivorous plants and orchids, that inhabit the regions just to the east of Austin.

Announcements

Refreshment Mentors Earn Service Hours! By Suzanne Boyer

Being a mentor is a wonderful opportunity to earn hours, meet the new Master Gardeners-to-be, and review one of the class topics at the same time.

Job Description: We will have two refreshment mentors who will coordinate with each other and bring refreshments. These mentors will be required to be present to set up refreshments at 12:30. They can then leave and return to clean up at 5:00-5:30. ***OR They can stay the whole time, earning those hours plus prep time.***

Dates open: (You can pick anyone of these) January 12, 19, 26, February 2, 9, 16, 23, March 9, 23, 30, April 6, 13, 27, and May 4.

Ways to sign up: There will be a sign-up sheet at the Christmas Party, call Suzanne Boyer at 780-2463 or email at suzboyer@sbcglobal.net.

MG Christmas Party is Coming Up!

Mark your calendars for the 2010 Master Gardener Christmas Party.

It will be Thursday, December 9, at the Expo center. Registration to begin at 6 pm, dinner at 6:30. Dinner will be catered and is \$12 per person. Chicken Florentine and Pecan Glazed Pork Loin are the entrees. Also we are asking people to sign up to bring salads and desserts. Once again, we will have a silent auction, and we are hoping everyone will donate at least one item.

**Checks can be mailed to Sue Judd at
2312 Stratford Dr., Temple, 76502.
Registration deadline is December 1st.**

-Jane Capen, Sue Judd

Upcoming Herb Study Group Meetings By Kim Pringle

Please plan to attend the Christmas Tea on December 8, 2010 at 10:00 am at the home of Frances Idoux. Her address is 4603 Lago Vista Dr., Belton, TX 76513 (her home overlooks Stillhouse Hollow Lake). If you need directions, please call Frances at 254-698-1666. Bring a dish to share and of course, we don't mind trying the recipe you have been wanting to make. Please RSVP to Frances so that she can have enough plates, etc. Her concept is -- Keep it simple and keep it Christmas. For fun, please bring your favorite tea cup and please tell us why it is your favorite. If anyone has any suggestions for an activity or anything at all, please give Frances a call.

Our first meeting in the new year is January 5, 2011 to study the 2011 Herb of the Year: Horseradish. This will be a home-work study. With the exception of March 2, 2011 (Gary Stone will talk about the medicinal uses of herbs), the calendar is open for coordinators and topics. Please let me know if you want to volunteer or have program ideas.



Our next presentation is February 10, 2011 for the Killeen Garden Club. We can plan at the February meeting.

I have preregistered rooms for the Herb Forum to be held March 18-19, 2011 at Festival Hill. We have reserved the 6 rooms in Artist Residence II (18 beds) where we have stayed previously. The cost is \$65.00 and includes continental breakfast. The cost of the Herb Forum is not yet available. To date, seven people have requested a bed. Payment will be due in January.

[Photo by organicgardeninfo.com](http://organicgardeninfo.com)

To all BCMG's,

Texas A & M is trying this weekend to break the record for the most students attending a college football game. In keeping with this competitive spirit, the Awards Committee has decided that Bell County will try to win the award for the most Master Gardeners from one county to attend the State Convention. We are encouraging everyone who can attend to register and do so.

The Conference will be held in Glen Rose on Wednesday, April 27 through Friday, April 29. You can go to www.2011tmgaconference.org for information or to www.2011tmgaconference.org/registration/registration.html which will take you right to the registration page. The cost of the conference is \$155 if you register before March 15.

I realize that some of you are engaged in the new intern class on Wednesdays during that time, but there is registration for "Thursday Only" at a cost of \$135 before March 15. This includes all the seminars on Thursday, a recognition luncheon and the evening awards banquet.

For those of you who do not like to drive long distances or the evening drive home for the Thursday Only conference, perhaps you can find someone to drive and carpool. A car full of Master Gardeners might be fun (can you imagine it?).

You can contact the conference committee at 2011conference@gmail.com if you have questions. Let's show some Bell County spirit and try to attend. This is the first time for this award, so let's be the first county to win it.

Gary,

Awards Committee

Kids in the Garden

Jann Dworsky's grandson, George in amongst the zinnia's this past summer.



Bernie Hurta's granddaughter, Darcy Jones, smelling the Hydrangeas in the garden, April, 2010.

Tell Me What's New?

If anyone has an article they'd like to write pertaining to gardening, etc., or information to pass along, please send it to me at the address below. Do you have any GARDEN ART? Send me your pictures! Thank you.

- Terrie Hahn

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