

BLOOMING BELL

BCMGA NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2009

FEBRUARY 2009

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4 WORKDAY Burger Day 9AM Greenhouse Com. Mtg. 1PM 2009 Class	5 WORKDAY	6	7
8	9	10 Mel Myers will speak on "Container Gardening in the Earthbox"	11 WORKDAY 8:25AM Herb Study Group* 10:30AM Monthly MG Meeting 1PM 2009 Class	12 WORKDAY  Abraham Lincoln Birthday	13	14  Happy Valentine Day
15	16  President's Day	17	18 WORKDAY 9am Board of Directors Meeting 1PM 2009 Class	19 WORKDAY	20	21
22  George Washington Birthday	23	24	25 WORKDAY 1PM 2009 Class	26 WORKDAY	27	28

*The February Herb Study Group will be hosted by Suzanne Boyer and will discuss herbs traditionally associated with love potions with emphasis on patchouli and jasmine. They will also make Valentine cards featuring herbs.

President's Corner

For any of you, who are still in doubt that changing the greenhouse focus from production to education is the right thing to do, please be at the greenhouse some Wednesday morning. It is simply unbelievable what is happening. When I began with the Bell County Master Gardener Association, fired up and excited about the new experience I imagined. I was anxious to get to the greenhouse on Wednesday mornings before class to get some real "hands on" experience. It turned out to be a great disappointment. There was very little interaction with new students and active members. I was given little or no direction except to be occasionally handed a hose and asked to water some seedlings. After a few weeks I quit going. I always enjoyed the afternoon classes but did not care much for the greenhouse experience.

Well, all that has changed. There are now several benches occupied by groups of new students and their mentors. They are currently doing propagation exercises. Truly educational and productive but the real story is involvement. The students are meeting active members. Active members are meeting students and there is interaction. Interaction combined with a great learning experience. I can guarantee you that the class of 2009 will be more "plugged-in" and more capable of "hitting the ground running" than any class in recent years. You have to go see it to really get a sense of appreciation. The new class committee and the mentors are doing a fantastic job. You all need to take part and share the excitement. The lessons learned from this experience will drive our new education program for members of BCMGA as well as for classes for the general public.

We had the first meeting of the Landscape Task Force this past Wednesday. It was an organizational meeting but we did get quite a bit accomplished. The committee divided the overall project into three phases: the first being the area along Main Street; the second being the area between the greenhouse and the bank leading down to Main Street; and the third phase being the area surrounding the greenhouse and including the greenhouse. Dirk is going to request a preliminary cost proposal for the basic layout construction

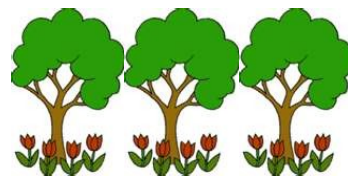
for Phase One and Phase Two. This will provide us with our first estimates and subsequent insight as to the potential overall cost of the project.

Let me reiterate here that the function of the Task Force is to compile and make recommendations to the Board of Directors. This Task Force has no authority to commit BCGMA to anything. And let me say this again that the Task Force is and will continue to seek active participation from all members as the process moves forward. We have a lot of talent in our membership and we want to put it to good use. Accordingly, please contact Mel Myers or me if you have any interest, small or large, in participating in any way in this monumental project. If you are reluctant to step forward because you do not know what functions or activities are needed, not to worry. Just let us know what your level of interest is and we will plug you in.

The Task Force is purposefully leaving Phase Three alone for a while because it involves coming up with a resolution on the hardening house matter. There is a concern to wait until more information is available, such as the plant sale results and a formal analysis of the greenhouse operation and physical structure. To that end, Dirk, Donald and I met with a representative of Texas A&M University this past Thursday. He is considered the number one authority in the state of Texas in greenhouse management. He will compile a list of recommendations for us to consider. He will also make himself available to the membership to discuss his review and recommendations. More on that as it develops. I can tell you that he said, after reviewing our new Strategic Plan, that we are way ahead of most Master Gardener associations in the state in our focus and sense of direction.

I feel good about the direction we are heading in. I hope you do as well.

David Fitch
President



Did You Know?

One tree can remove 26 pounds of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere annually, equaling 11,000 miles of car emissions. Landscape plants, such as shrubs and turf, remove smoke, dust, and other pollutants from the air. One study showed that 1 acre of trees has the ability to remove 13 tons of particles and gases annually.

New Class Field Trip

Submitted by the New Class Committee

Mark your calendars and plan to go with the new class on our upcoming spring field trip! This year's trip is scheduled for Wednesday, April 22, 2009 and tickets for a seat on the bus will be \$20. In the morning, we will be traveling to The Natural Gardener, Austin's premiere organic garden center to tour their fabulous demonstration gardens. John Dromgoole, owner of the The Natural Gardener will be speaking to our group about organic gardening practices and answering our questions. In the afternoon, we will be visiting Gabriel Valley Farms, a certified organic wholesale nursery specializing in growing a wide selection of quality herb, perennial and vegetable plants. Co-owner, Cathy Slaughter will be giving us a tour of their facility. More information on the field trip will be coming in the next few weeks! It should be a fun and informative day. Hope you can join us!



Yea Bell County Master Gardener Program!!

Submitted by Diane Calderwood

The following excerpt is from an e-mail I received from Mary Jo Ludvigston, a member of the class of 2006, who moved to Maryland in 2007:

"I am taking the Maryland Master Gardener's course. Boy, is it ever different from Texas! I would have to say that I like the way Texas does everything in a big way -- from introductions, to field trips and FOOD! This course is smaller, shorter, more formal, mostly taught by the Ag agent with a few speakers, and no greenhouse! There is a quiz each night and final exam and you have to apply (3 references, and an interview) to join the ranks. The commitment is only 40 hours for the first year and 20 thereafter. It is still a good course, but Bell County is a hard act to follow! I have met a couple of very nice women in class and hope to go to some nurseries and do yard comparisons with them, but I do miss the camaraderie of our group."

Notes from Herb Study Meeting

Submitted by Kim Pringle

Linda Young is coordinating the presentation on February 12th for the Killeen Garden Club. So far, Gail Christian and Kim Pringle are assisting. Please contact Linda if you would like to help. We did a program for this group last year. They are a fun group and some of our Master Gardeners also belong.

Kim Pringle will coordinate the presentation to the Floral Arts group on February 20th and Dee Coffeen will assist. We could use two more people, so please check your calendar and let Kim know.

If you have an inquiry about an educational herb presentation for the public, we can easily do the following five programs:

1. American Colonial Gardens
2. Crafting With Herbs
3. Herb Identification/Herb Butters
4. Cooking With Herbs
5. ABC's of Herbs

SWEET BAY LAUREL (*LAURUS NOBILIS*)

Submitted by Beverly Wickersham

Also known as Bay Laurel, Grecian Laurel, Roman Laurel, Sweet Bay.

I was shocked to read the following statement concerning a favorite culinary herb:

"You almost certainly have never tasted a True Bay Leaf in your entire life. The reason is in America, the leaves of California bay (*Umbellularia californica*) are sold to you as bay leaves you buy at your grocery store and use in your recipes. The two trees are not even in the same plant family and there is no comparison between the two for culinary use. Only *Laurus nobilis* is the true Laurel of Greek and Roman mythology." (mgonline.com/LaurusNobilis.html)

General Information about the true bay leaf tree:

1. A drought tolerant perennial tree native to the Mediterranean regions.
2. Fragrant, leathery leaves are dried for use as a cooking herb. Do not eat the leaves. They can cut into intestinal tissue.
3. Mature Grecian Laurel trees flower in clusters of white to yellow blooms that turn into small berries.
4. Bay leaves are dark green and up to 4 inches long and 2 inches across.
5. Sweet Bay can grow into a tree 40 feet tall. In the South it can grow from 6 feet to 25 feet. (Tolerates pruning.)

6. It tolerates low water in the garden and poor soils.
7. It likes full sun to part shade, although in hot areas they benefit from a bit of shade during the hottest part of the day.
8. The trees are hardy to about 20 degrees, or USDA Zones 8-10.
9. They are perfect for low water landscapes.
10. They are compact plants that grow slowly.
11. The true bay leaf tree can be used as a potted plant and brought indoors in very cold weather (20 degrees or below).
2. A poultice made from the boiled bay leaves is used for disorders such as bronchitis and a hacking cough.
3. The oil of the Bay Laurel can be used to reduce swellings in the tendons as well as to soothe arthritic aches and pains or muscle sprains.
4. The Greek physician Dioscorides who lived in the 1st century AD said that the bay laurel bark "Breaks (kidney) stones, and is good for liver infirmities."

Cooking Uses:

1. Sweet Bay leaves can be used fresh from the garden; the flavor is noticeably different from dried bay leaves.
2. Add the leaves to spaghetti and other sauces, soups and stews.

Insecticidal Properties:

1. Keep in kitchen cabinets to protect grains from moths and other pests.
2. Keep a leaf in the flour bin to keep flour beetles from hatching.
3. To keep leaves from curling, press them between paper towels under a heavy book or board.

Bay Laurel in Mythology:

1. It is associated with victory, strength and protection.
2. Conquering heroes wore laurel wreaths upon returning to Rome in victory.
3. A crown of bay is worn by Apollo, the Greek god of the sun; and it is known as one of his emblems.
4. When consulting the Oracle at Delphi, the priestesses of Apollo held a bay leaf under their tongue to help induce their trances.
5. Bay leaves have been used to banish poltergeists, bad luck and to break evil spells.
6. the sudden withering of a bay tree was said to be a bad omen for the owner.
7. Poet laureate, Ovid, retold the story of the Greek nymph, Daphne, who was transformed into a Laurel Tree by her father, Peneus, so that she could avoid the amorous pursuit of the god Apollo. Thereafter, Apollo wore a wreath of Laurel to show his love For Daphne.

Medicinal Uses:

1. A solution made from the bay laurel is a very potent anti-dandruff rinse.

Special Note: Native laurels, such as Texas Mountain Laurel, are toxic and should be used for ornamental purposes only.

Additional Sources:

herbs2000.com and Ezinearticles.com.



Sweet Pickles With Bay

Submitted by Beverly Wickersham

- 25 small Gherkin Cucumbers
- 1 quart Boiling Water
- ½ cup Salt
- 1 1/2 quarts White Vinegar
- 1 pint Water
- 1 ½ tsp. Allspice
- 1 ½ tsp. Peppercorns
- 1 ½ tsp. Whole Cloves
- 1 ½ tsp. Celery Seeds
- 1 ½ Mustard Seeds
- 1 stick Cinnamon, broken
- 2 Bay Leaves, crushed
- 1 ½ cups Sugar

Wash cucumbers and drain. Place in a large crock. Combine boiling water and salt and pour over the cucumbers. Let stand overnight. Drain. Combine the remaining ingredients in an enamel kettle. Heat to boiling. Add cucumbers to the kettle, and return the contents to a boil. Pack the cucumbers at once into sterile glass jars; then fill the jars with hot pickling liquid and seal. Let stand 4 weeks or longer before using.

Planting the Seeds of Knowledge: Class 09 Update

Submitted by Robin Pohl, Class Reporter

Hello from the Class of 2009!

Ever since Orientation in December, we have been itching to get started and now we are on our way. In our class lectures, we've absorbed a ton of information from a series of exciting speakers. We started from the beginning in our basic botany class. I vaguely remember doing these things in college biology, but it was way more interesting this second time now that I have a reason to use it. Before the lecture I would have thought "woody" was a famous cartoon woodpecker and "herbaceous" was a pasta sauce in a fancy restaurant. After class I came home and talked to my yard plants and proudly informed them of their classifications.

In our plant propagation lectures we learned a lot of scientific and procedural information on starting new plants from cuttings and seeds. Prior to this lecture I couldn't have imagined that a plant could get a callous when it can't walk or that such a callous would be beneficial to a sensitive rootless cutting. We also learned that there are many ways to coax a seed to grow. If getting wet isn't good enough, soak till it gives up. Or for cold stratification, lock it up in the fridge until it succumbs. For those obstinate, stubborn coated seeds, scrape them until they promise to absorb water.

With all this newfound knowledge we confidently picked up our clippers and marched out to the greenhouse to get dirty. First, we made self-watering containers and took cuttings from various herbs and roses. Historically, I've been a failure at propagating plants from cuttings, but now that I've learned to take most of the leaves off and put enough nodes under the ground, I think I'm going to do better.

Our second activity involved planting various types of seeds. After scraping one with a knife to scarify it, I'm convinced that Mountain Laurel seeds could serve an alternate purpose as bullets or ball bearings.

Now that we've learned all this theory and took some time to practice it, some of us have

started to think forward on how we might share this information with those around us. Jann is looking forward to volunteering at the Bell County Youth Fair. Laura, who is on the Garden Tour Committee, is excited to meet other Master Gardeners and plan for the big event. I don't know what I want to do with myself; but, in the meantime, I'm sending my husband a miniature herb growing kit in Iraq to see we can finally turn his black thumb a nice shade of Army green.



It's Not Too Early

Submitted by Betty Nejtek

No, it's not too early to start thinking about putting your yard or garden in this year's Spring Yard Tour. This year's tour will be held on April 18th and the committee is currently gathering the names of those interested in participating.

Don't think your yard has to be a showplace; maybe you have something that is interesting or educational to others. Just remember, if you are interested in it - others probably are too. Do you have compost bins or a worm bed? Or maybe you have a different method of gardening that you would like to share? Or possibly an herb or vegetable garden?

If you are interested or have questions about having your yard in the Tour this year, contact Betty Nejtek for more information.



Burger Wednesday is back!

Submitted by Karla Tomaka

Chef Nolan will be fixing either chili or stew to try to keep us all warm! The projects for the day are clearing out and reorganizing our shed and trimming/cleaning up the area behind the hardening house. If you plan to work with the trimming/clean up crew, bring your favorite pruners and tree trimming poles (if you have them).

If you can bring a side dish, desert or drinks, please contact me at kstomaka@aol.com.

Hope to see you there Wednesday February 4th!

All About Thyme

Submitted by Susan Firth & Kim Pringle

Author and herbalist Susan Wittig Albert's internet site All About Thyme Podcasts has a link to her podcasts featuring a variety of herbs. Just click on the podcast of your choice and listen to the narration! The URL is <http://www.abouthyme.libsyn.com/>.



Did You Know?

A hummingbird is the only bird known that can fly backwards. The average hummingbird weighs less than a penny. A hummingbird will feed at over 1,500 flowers in an average day.

2009 JMG Specialist Training

If you are a CEA, Master Gardener, school administrator, or anyone interested in growing effective and sustainable youth gardening programs in your area, your county or your district, you are invited to join us at the 2009 JMG Specialist Training on February 25-27, 2009 in San Antonio!

Attendees will participate in presentations, hands-on workshops and discussions to:

- gain a working familiarity with the JMG program & curricula components
- get the latest current youth gardening research
- learn successful ideas for creating successful partnerships
- develop proven strategies for cultivating community support

In addition, there will be a specific emphasis on successful fund raising, an opportunity to engage in a panel discussion group to learn from practicing experts, networking sessions,

and even tours of youth gardens at a local school and the San Antonio Botanical Garden!

All attendees completing this dynamic 2 1/2 day 2009 JMG Specialist Training Conference will receive certification as a JMG Specialist by the Junior Master Gardener Program office and a host of invaluable resources to grow JMG & youth gardening programs.

An early bird registration of \$275 is currently open!

Registration also includes:

- JMG Specialist Resource Book
- JMG Specialist Presenter Kit including
- digital copies of presentations
- sample training agendas and handout material
- JMG Curriculum
- Meals, snacks & drinks during training

For more information, go to: www.jmgkids.us/texas

Thanks,

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Did You Know?

Only female mosquitoes bite and drink blood. Male mosquitoes do not bite; they are vegetarians, and feed on the nectar of flowers. Mosquito repellents don't actually repel. The spray blocks the mosquito's sensors so they don't know you're there. Mosquitoes are attracted to the color blue more than any other color.

Editorial Note: This is soooo *BAD* that I just couldn't resist sneaking it in at the end.

A Real Tongue Twister

Two friars are having trouble paying off the belfry, so they open a florist shop. Everyone wants to buy flowers from the men of God so business is quickly booming. The florist across town sees a huge drop in sales and asks the two friars to close their shop, but they refuse.

A month later the florist begs the friars to close because he's having trouble feeding his family. Again, they refuse, so the florist hires Hugh McTaggart.

Hugh is the roughest, toughest thug in town and is hired to "persuade" the friars to close. Hugh asks the friars to close their florist shop. When they refuse, he threatens to beat the crap out of them and wreck their shop every day they remain open, so they close.

This proves once again that Hugh and only Hugh can prevent florist friars.

BELL COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

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TEXAS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION of TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

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