

The Blooming Bell

Bell County Master Gardeners Association

September 2006, Newsletter

Monthly Meeting Wednesday, September 13, 2006, 11:00 a.m.

Bell County Extension Office

1605 N. Main St., Belton, Texas 76513

Speaker

Cathy Slaughter

of

Gabriel Valley Farms

on



BCMGA Events Schedule

- Belton Greenhouse Workdays,
Wed. & Thurs., 7 am, Belton
- Burger Wednesday, 1st Wednesday
- Herb Study Mtg – 8:25 a.m., Greenhouse
- Fall Garden Tour, Oct 14, 2006
- Fall Seminar & Plant Sale,
8am-1pm, Oct 21, 2006

Area Events of Interest

The Herb Association of Texas and the Antique Rose Emporium will host A Celebration of the Herbal Harvest: A Focus on Culinary Herbs, **September 22 through 23**, San Antonio. The event will include a road trip, cooking classes, herbal refreshments, lectures and a vendor fair featuring locally grown herbs and related products. To register or for more information, contact Beth Patterson at (830) 257-6732 or e-mail info@texasherbs.org.

The Austin Herb Society celebrates Herb Awareness Month in October with HerbFest, Saturday, **October 21**, from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. at the Sunset Valley Farmers Market, located in the Burger Center, 3200 Jones Rd., off I-290 between Brodie Lane and Westgate Blvd. No entrance fee for shoppers, free parking. For additional information, call (512) 468-9126.

The Johnson County Herb Society will hold its Herbal Thymes Show and Symposium, **October 28** from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Cleburne Senior Center, Cleburne. The event will feature speakers, demonstrations herb plants and related products. For more information, contact Esther Chambliss at (817) 263-9322 or visit www.cleburnearea.info/herbies/.

Road Trip Time!

By Raymond Marr

Spring is probably the last thing on your mind

right now, but if you want a great looking spring garden now is the time to start planning. My favorite spring flowers are narcissus and daffodils. I don't mean the ones you get from one of the Big Box stores that last for a year or two and then disappear. I mean the ones that my Great Grandmother played with as a child; the ones that still come up each year at the old homestead where she grew up. The bright yellow jonquils that leap out the ground each spring to warm your heart and drive away the winter chill.

Have I got your attention? Ready for spring? Well here's what you need to do. ***Mark your calendar for a road trip to Tyler in October.*** The Smith County Master Gardeners hold an Heirloom Bulb Sale each year. This year the sale is on October 28, 2006. The event is held at the Tyler Rose Garden. The day begins with lectures from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (what would a MG event be with out a lecture?). The bulb sale will begin at 11:30 a.m. and is officially over by 2:00 p.m. You do need to know, the bulbs sell fast and you may not have much to pick from if you get there late. The bulbs are bagged, normally 5 bulbs to a bag, and costs begin at \$5.00 per bag. Some of the rarer bulbs are more expensive, but the price is on the bag. The official website has not been updated, but it should any day now. The link you need to follow is:

<http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/county/smith/programs/programs.html> Look for the link: "Fall Heritage Bulb Sale and Conference." It was the third link down when I last checked. It's not active yet but should be soon. Once it's active you can find out about the speakers are and what topics they are covering, but most important you can check the list of bulbs that will be for sale. The bulb sales list not only shows the bulbs offered for sale, it also has a link for most varieties to a page with detailed information on the bulb and a picture of it in bloom. Make plans before you go so you will know what you want to buy. The sale area is not opened until after the lectures are over and everyone has had time to come outside. Once

they open the gates, it's a mad rush that you have to see to believe.

Tyler is easy to get to, just take I-35 to Waco. Then take Hwy 31 to Tyler. It's about a three hour drive. The Rose Garden is on the right side of Hwy 31, just inside the Loop in Tyler.

Road Trip Contd.

The day lily society normally joins in the fun and sells named varieties as well. Since the sale is in October this year, maybe the Rose Garden may be in bloom for you to tour. The Smith County Master Gardener also has a wonderful test garden there at the Rose Garden. It's well worth taking the time to tour it as well.

Study carefully; make plans on what you want and where you can plant them. Oh and don't miss the other bulbs they offer such as crinum, rain lilies and spider lilies just to name a few. Some of these are a little higher priced, but most can't be found in our area. There are lots to pick from and with a little planning you can have blooms for a long time next spring. And remember with a little luck, these bulbs will be blooming long after you and I are just a fond memory.

Greenhouse News

On behalf of Lawrence Cox, Karla Tomaka (in absentia) and myself, we would like to thank all the volunteers that participated in the Fall Vegetable Sale. Everyone's help was truly appreciated and made a difference to those of us who enjoyed your company. Until we actually get the figures from Jan, we anticipate that we made more money than our previous vegetable sale. Lawrence is calling our sale a success. The additional vegetables left will be offered to the membership at next week's meeting. In the weeks ahead, we look forward to having your help as we repot all the plants with the previous soil into Lawrence's new mixture.

Crystal Fisher

Herb Booklet

Frances Idoux announced that she is compiling herb information and recipes to develop an **Herb Booklet** for sale. Anyone having

information to share please contact Frances at idouxf@tarleton.edu or 254-698-1666.

BCMGA 10th Anniversary Book

Do you have a garden hint or special recipe you'd like included in the BCMGA 10th Anniversary book? If so, please bring it to the September association meeting, or mail it to Frances Idoux.

Pick a Pot



Plants can be placed in almost anything from an old boot to a classic urn provided there is a hole for draining excess water. Without this, the plant's roots will drown when over watered. Be sure to drill a hole in the planter if it doesn't already have one. Then place a piece of wire mesh, a coffee filter, or a layer of rock over the hole to keep soil from washing out. Some of the more traditional commercial choices include: Terra-cotta clay pots are all time favorites as they are inexpensive and complement any style garden with their rich warm, color. Regular terra-cotta wicks water away from the soil, which helps prevent over-watering. By sealing terra-cotta with a commercial sealant or high-fired clay, one can reduce the need to water. Both will crack from the stress of freezing and thawing during cold weather. A concrete planter is heavy enough to keep plants stable in our windy climate and comes in a variety of sizes and styles. Concrete will also absorb moisture from the soil. But once it is filled with soil, it is almost impossible to move. It is more expensive than some of the other choices, but it will probably last longer. Glazed ceramic will give the gardener the most variety of color and texture. They should be brought inside in winter and they may be moderate to expensive. Lightweight foam pots have become popular, as they are lightweight and inexpensive. They insulate plants well, but need protection from high winds. They also may crack in cold winter weather. Fiberglass has many advantages as it

comes in many styles and can be made to look like a variety of other materials. It is light-weight and durable to be used indoors as well as out. Best of all, it's affordable. There are more planter options now than ever before, and with so many choices, selecting the right container can be more than just a matter of taste. Each material has distinct advantages to consider. Once you know the pros and cons, you are one step closer to having pots full of beautiful flowers.

Violet Okeson

A Short History of Asters

Aster oblongifolius is a Texas native, and the one we find blooming in fall in Texas. Growing to about 3 feet, it attracts butterflies, is deer resistant, xeric and pretty tolerant of our alkaline soils. In other words, it's a good one to grow. If you have ever been to Fredericksburg in the fall, you have seen this beautiful perennial growing all over town. The blue-purple blooms seem to blanket every landscape.

However, the oblongifolius is just one aster among many. The family Asteraceae (also known as the sunflower family) is one of the largest families of vascular plants to be found, with over two hundred species found in north America alone. Most aster species are perennial and bloom in the fall. They have small star or daisy like heads, often on leafy tall stems, and are most often white, pink, blue or purple. Another member of the aster family, frequently favored by florists, is the China aster or *Callistephus chinensis*. Originating in Asia, the China aster is known for its very full head of ray flowers, and its colors which vary from white and pink to deep purple. Interestingly, both lettuce and the Jerusalem artichoke are members of the Asteraceae family.

There is some wonderful mythology connected with the aster. They are a symbol of love and daintiness. One myth says that they were created from stardust when Virgo gazed down from the sky and wept. Roman poet Virgil tells us that asters adorned the altars of the gods. The

aster was the herb of the Goddess Venus, and ancient people believed that the smell of burnt aster leaves would drive away serpents.

The English referred to asters both as asters and as Starworts. Aster is the Latin word for star, which referred to the flower's shape. Wort means root and typically referred to plants that were used for healing. In the case of the aster, it's roots were beaten with hog grease and used as a cure for mad dog bites.

The French laid asters on the graves of their soldiers to signify the wish that things had turned out differently.

In about the 17th century North American asters were hybridized with European Starworts. Among the created plants were Michaelmas daisies, so named because they bloomed about the time of the feast of Michaelmas. Since then of course, there has been more hybridizing in an effort to produce wider variety, more colorful, more disease resistant and of course more profitable plants. However, despite all of that, it is hard to find an aster any prettier than our native Texas Aster oblongifolius.

Jane Capen

References:

100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names - by Diana Wells

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>

<http://columbia.thefreedictionary.com/aster>

<http://www.baacks.com/thelanguageofflowers/item.nhtml?profile=thelanguageofflowers&UID=129>

<http://www.flowermonthclub.com/history.htm>

<http://www.igifts2go.com/articles/aster.htm>

World Book Encyclopedia online

HERB CONTAINER EXHIBITION

The Herb Study group is hosting its First Herb Container Exhibition. All BCMGA members are welcome to participate. We are looking for fun, creative, original and interesting containers to grow herbs (as they say "thinking outside the terra cotta pot"). No need to buy anything, just look around the house, garage or barn. Found, recycled and junk objects are permitted and encouraged. The containers should be presented to the greenhouse anytime prior to the October 11 BCMGA meeting with your name

somewhere attached. If you have a name for your design, please include it also. **All participants and containers will be recognized.** In addition, the exhibition will be on display to the general public at the Fall Plant Sale on October 21st. Don't worry about growing the herbs as herbs can be used from the greenhouse. The Herb Study group will pot up the container for you.

If you would like to donate your container to the plant sale, kindly indicate to the Herb Group. Otherwise, your containers will be available for pickup following the fall plant sale. We look forward to your participation.

Kim

Pringle

President's Corner

Fellow Volunteers:

All the work on the vegetables that we grew from seed paid off big-time. Our sale on August 5 was a huge success both from a financial as well as a community education standpoint.

Now that we are over the first "hurdle" of the year, what comes next? I think it would be important to leave a description of the projects that are coming up in the next few months and spend some time reassessing the events of the past 3 months - that period of time that I call the "summer slump" - and attempt to start developing a plan to combat this in the future.

It has been a difficult summer. There has been a deluge of problems that have impinged directly upon the greenhouse leadership. Some of the events have included:

1. Having to appoint a new, untrained, and untested greenhouse crew that has had to function without the help or advice from the old,

self-exiled greenhouse crew.

2. The annual confusion resulting from the change in officers (especially a new President) and committee assignments at the end of May

3. The need to produce quality plants for the August 5 vegetable sale during a time of unprecedented environmental heat, lack of rain, and without the help of interns, as we have each spring. The greenhouse staff was preoccupied with producing a large crop of vegetables from seed, a feat that required dedicated watering on a daily basis to produce the desired plant quality.

4. And then there was the usual summer attrition that results from summer vacations, volunteers concentrating on their own yards, and the unpleasantness of working in a greenhouse when the temperature is usually above 100 degrees.

All of these have served to reproduce the exact problem that plagued the last greenhouse crew and resulted in their problems with the Association. This is exactly what I did not want to happen this year or any time in the future - the greenhouse leaders need their time to lead and supervise the function of the greenhouse, not spend it doing 80% of the work themselves. While there have been some extremely dedicated workers, we have really needed much more help. While most volunteers consider Wednesday to be the day to come and work, our leaders had to come in 5 and 6 days a week.

The solution to the "summer slump" problem is extremely important to the future of our Association and its ability to carry out meaningful projects. If we, as a group are unable to at least minimize it, I would not be surprised if no one volunteered to take a leadership position in the greenhouse next year.

The potential solutions to this problem led to a lively discussion at the last Greenhouse Committee Meeting this morning. The committee decided that, first of all, we should not panic - but we should have a plan. Some of the items in the planned solution have already been started; others have not. There seemed to

be general consensus on the following points:

1. Reduce the workload: We must remember that the primary goal of the greenhouse is not income generation, but demonstration and education. An important part of reducing the workload was started today - that of repotting the rest of the plants with the new soil mixture so that we can realize the goal of only watering three days a week. This alone would reduce the current workload by 50%. Disposing of the excess vegetable plants that were not sold would increase this another 10 to 20%, depending on the size of the inventory. Although the diversity of our product would make the use of automated drip lines difficult, Neil Cochran and D.J. Campbell are going to attend a growers conference in San Antonio later in August, to look for a vendor that might have a possible solution to our problem. In spite of this, we need to seriously consider reducing the inventory of greenhouse plants over the summer months. This might mean moving the vegetable sale up into September, and possibly limiting the size of the October plant sale, concentrating our effort more on the Spring sales when we have the help of the interns.

2. Increase volunteer rewards: This program has just been implemented. We now offer 2 hours of credit for every 1 hour of time logged in for greenhouse service, including yard tours and sales. This offer is only good on specified days during the months of August through October. If it works out well this fall, next year there is talk of starting it the first of June and extending it through October. It will only be offered on days that activities can be supervised, although in time, I would hope that supervision could be minimized as experience is gained.

3. Volunteer education: The development of a formal education program for volunteers on designated days should draw interested volunteers, especially if coupled with hands-on experience. The programs could be formal presentations by one of our numerous MG specialists, the goal being to extend and update the education our volunteers have received in their original course work as an intern. The

presentations could also be modeled after the presentations in our Herb Group. In that case, volunteers would research information that they might be interested in sharing and do an informal presentation to the group. Hopefully, once the workload lightens, regular education can also be a part of the MG experience.

I personally feel that we have made it through the worst of the year and have survived. Yes, volunteers will have to continue to come and work in the greenhouse, but they deserve to have rewards. It is neither smart nor right to leave the work to just a few. In doing that, we will be asking for more trouble as an Association. We need to direct our efforts to developing positive steps that will deal with the perennial "summer slump". In writing about the "summer slump" problem, I need to point out that the Vegetable Demonstration Garden crew is facing exactly the same problem as the greenhouse. Joyce Pack, Joan Hinshaw, and Charles Spencer also need volunteer help with their important project. They would certainly like to see a couple of Master Gardeners come to help them start the fall garden.

**Gy Okeson
President BCMGA**

Quick Stop for the Road Trip

By Raymond Marr

If you decide to make the drive to Tyler for the Bulb Sale, there is a nursery you need to stop at in Malakoff. It's on Hwy 31 just as you get into town. If you're on the way to Tyler it will be on the left hand side of the road. It's called Malakoff Nursery and Garden Center. There is a four way stop as you go through Malakoff, if you get to it you've passed the nursery. If you want to wait till you are on the way home from Tyler, start looking for it on the right about a half mile past the four way stop.

It does not look like much from the road. The main brick building sits kind of low with a

couple of greenhouses you can see on either side. You park in front, but to enter the nursery you have to go down a few steps. Your first surprise will be the number of greenhouses hidden behind the main building. The second surprise will be the prices. Flats with 18 four inch pots start at about \$7.00. The price varies depending upon the plant variety, but I've never found healthier plants for less money. They also offer discounts for volume purchases. Each greenhouse will have prices posted for the plants growing there. Some greenhouses will only have a price for the plants by the full flat and you cannot break or mix a flat. There is another area where you can buy individual plants. If you have any questions the people who work there are friendly and very knowledgeable about their plants.

It's an adventure to look through all their greenhouses and decide what you want. Of course, the problem is trying to go back and find all those treasures if you didn't pick them up the first time through. Get a wagon and drag it with you, it makes shopping much easier. One small word of warning: Malakoff is in an area where you can grow Azaleas, so they stock them as well as lots of other acid soil loving plants. Enjoy!

Lawrence Cox, "Vegetable King"

Dr. Gy Okeson, president of Bell County Master Gardeners, proclaimed Lawrence Cox "the Vegetable King" and presented Mr. Cox a trophy following the successful fall vegetable sale at the Master Gardener greenhouse. Lawrence Cox, Master Gardener Greenhouse Coordinator, revised the planting benches and soil mixture enabling the Master Gardener volunteers to grow an abundant, healthy crop of vegetables suitable for fall gardens. Visitors to the fall vegetable sale toured demonstration gardens and attended D.J. Campbell's seminar on rainwater harvesting. Mr. Campbell is a rainwater harvesting specialist and a graduate of the Master

Gardener class of 2005. "A few doing the work of many" could be the motto of the demonstration garden crew. Joyce Pack, Joan Hinshaw and Charles Spencer did outstanding work in oppressive heat to educate the public with raised bed gardening, solar weed kill methods and drip irrigation resulting in beautiful vegetables. Their demonstration gardens were an asset to the fall sale. Thank you to Ace Hardware-Killeen, the Hard Hat Crew, Crystal Fisher, Lawrence Cox and Raymond Marr, the dedicated greenhouse and demonstration garden volunteers for the most successful fall vegetable sale ever. Crystal Fisher, Lawrence Cox and Raymond Marr put in long hours in triple digit heat to insure that the vegetables would be the best. Crystal, Lawrence and Raymond and greenhouse volunteers are in the process of repotting and bumping up plants for the October 21st sale. Come spend an hour with your friends in the greenhouse on Wednesday or Thursday. You will learn something new, have fun and you might be tempted to buy a new plant for your garden.

Mary Lew Quesinberry

LEMON VERBENA PEACH COBBLER

(Recipe from Along the Garden Path, by Bill and Sylvia Varney, a favorite in the Fredericksburg Herb Farm tea room.)

4 to 6 cups sliced peaches
2 cups sugar
½ cup butter
2 Tablespoons lemon verbena
Zest of 1 lemon
1 cup flour
1 cup milk
¼ teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons baking powder
Cinnamon to taste
Mix peaches with 1 cup sugar in bowl; set aside.
Melt butter in 9 x 13-inch glass baking dish.
Mince ¼ cup sugar, lemon verbena and lemon zest in food processor. Combine flour,

remaining $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar, milk, salt and baking powder in large bowl; mix well. Stir in lemon verbena mixture. Pour over melted butter in prepared baking dish. Spoon peaches over batter. Sprinkle with cinnamon. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour or until bubbly and lightly browned. Yields 10 to 12 servings.

Lentil Couscous Salad

Light & Tasty Aug/Sept Edition

1 cup dried lentils, rinsed

5 cups water, divided

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup uncooked couscous

1 medium sweet red pepper, chopped

1 cup frozen corn, thawed

4 green onions, thinly sliced

2 tablespoons canola oil

1 tablespoon red wine vinegar

2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro

1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and chopped

2 to 3 tablespoons hot pepper sauce

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon ground cumin

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper

In a large saucepan, bring lentils and 4 cups water to a boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer for 18-22 minutes or until lentils are tender.

Drain; transfer to a large bowl. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour. Meanwhile, in a small saucepan, bring remaining water to a boil. Stir in couscous. Cover and remove from the heat; let stand for 5-10 minutes or until water is absorbed. Fluff with a fork; cool. Add the red pepper, corn, onions and couscous to lentils. In a small bowl, whisk the oil and vinegar. Whisk in the cilantro, jalapeno, hot pepper sauce, salt, cumin and pepper. Drizzle over salad and toss to coat. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

*Requested of Barbara Beebe,
By Burger Wednesday Workers!*

Pocket Dinosaurs

The first month we lived in our house I glanced out one day to see  a very young armadillo near the kitchen window.

Intrigued, I grabbed a camera and headed out to get a picture. Of course I frightened the poor little thing, who half ran, half rolled down the

yard and into the tall grass. Seven years later I am still watching for them.

Now, of course, they are less cute. They make an enormous mess of my garden path. Some mornings the mulch path looks as if it has been plowed by a drunken farmer behind an equally inebriated mule. Piles of mulch here, holes there. Sometimes there are holes in the garden and yard as well.

Depending upon how annoyed we are feeling in any particular week, we sometimes set out a live trap, the plan being to catch the critter and release it somewhere far away. We set it last week after a particularly busy night in the garden by an armadillo, either singly or with his buddies. The trap is set along with two lengths of wood making a kind of chute leading to it. Armadillos are nearly blind and supposedly guiding them with barriers along the way to a trap aids them in getting there. So far we have not caught anything. I do not know what I will do if I find one in the trap. I can hardly leave it in the sun all day to roast until my husband gets home (wild animal disposition is his chore). On the other hand, I am more than a little intimidated by them, they have sharp claws, and some may carry leprosy. Maybe I could just move the trap to the shade temporarily. A neighbor says if I catch one I should shoot it. Somehow I just cannot see myself doing that. After all, he was not digging out of meanness, it is just what armadillos do. Generally nocturnal animals, they are perfectly made for hunting the food they love. Their sense of smell is excellent. They can detect a grub or worm as much as eight inches below the ground surface. Not only that but they can hold their breath for up to six minutes while they dig for it; and they are capable of eating over 40,000 ants at one feeding. Like their relative, the anteater, armadillos have long, sticky tongues.

- Also known as hillbilly speed bumps, possums on the half shell, pocket dinosaurs, Hoover hogs (because they were sometimes used for food

COMMENTS FROM YOUR COORDINATOR

By: Dirk Aaron – CEA Bell County

during the Depression, when Hoover was president), or pill bugs on steroids, armadillos are found in the south central and south eastern United States. The female armadillo gives birth once a year to four identical babies (all from the same egg), which makes them useful in medical research. They are often killed on roads because when approached by a predator, armadillos jump straight up into the air in order to frighten them. While it may work with a dog or coyote, it is a poor strategy with cars. At least our armadillos are not too big. The only armadillo that lives in the US is the nine banded armadillo, which is about the size of a large house-cat, with a length of about 30 inches (of which about half is tail length) and weight between eight and seventeen pounds. In contrast, the Giant Armadillo, which is a native of South America can be up as long as 50 inches long (with about 20 of that being its tail) and weigh between 40 and 72 pounds. How would you like to have something that size digging up your yard?

Still, if you are determined to discourage them, an internet search will yield suggestions about hot peppers, mothballs, traps, fencing and less humane solutions. More fun is reading this article on the subject, found on the Texas A&M site :

<http://plantanswers.tamu.edu/misc/armadillo/armadillo.html>

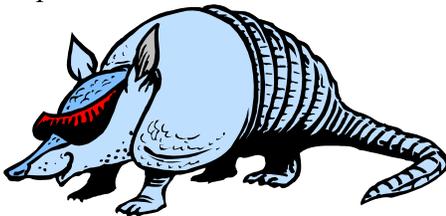
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<http://pelotes.jea.com/armad.htm>

<http://www.msu.edu/~nixonjos/armadillo/index.html>

Jane

Capen





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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION OF TEXAS A & M UNIVERSITY
1605 N. MAIN ST, BELTON, TEXAS 76513
254-933-5305**

Newsletter Staff

Reporting & Production:

Jean Kitchens

(254) 771-2942

Jeankitchens1@aol.com

Laverne Adams

(254) 791-3808

L16Adams@sbcglobal.com

Jane Capen

(254) 939-3835

Janec1@clearwire.net

Editor

Jeanne Richard

(254) 931-7228

Jeannerichard@hughes.net