

The Blooming Bell

December 2013



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**Bell County
Master Gardener
Association**

Above: One of the pumpkin houses at the Dallas Botanical Garden, taken by Randy Brown while on the recent field trip.





Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4 Board Meeting 9 a.m.	5 Christmas Party 6 p.m. Pecan Show 9 a.m. 	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21 
22	23	24	25 	26	27	28
29	30	31 				

Upcoming dates: New Class starts up January 8th.

Photo by Terrie Hahn, Art from diehardimages.com

The President's Corner

Winter has arrived a little early. I hope you have finished preparing your garden and plants for a winter's nap. I chased the last of the grasshoppers off a lemon tree this afternoon. Hopefully, I have seen the last of them for a few months.

November was a busy month with school programs, a field trip, classes, preparing the gardens for winter, a great program on bats at the monthly meeting and state conference plans. We also had a presence at the Clearwater Symposium. Lyle generously provided funds to purchase ten native plants to be given as door prizes by Master Gardeners. Thank you Lyle, and thanks to Carla for selecting and caring for the plants we gave to conference attendees. The plants were well received and created interest and questions about native plants.

The class of 2014 orientation was held this past week. 17 people will make up the new class. Please welcome our new interns and get to know them.

Classes begin January 8, 2014. Propagation classes will be offered again this year. Interns are given the first opportunity to sign up for the classes, but current Master Gardeners are welcome to take the classes if space permits. The cost is \$6.00 per class.

Though some of the garden activities are finished for the year, Master Gardener events continue. The November/ December board meeting will be held at 9:00am on December 4th. The revised by-laws will be presented at this meeting. Jerry Lewis and committee have been working on the revisions for several months. Thank you Jerry and committee for your time and persistence.

The annual Christmas party will be held at Expo on December 5th at 6:00pm. The cost is \$20.00 at the door. The Christmas party serves as our December monthly meeting. The long awaited book on the history of our chapter will be available at the Christmas Party. The book not only records

our history, but contains every article published by our Master Gardeners. It is several garden books rolled into one. The cost of the book is \$25.00.

That same day, December 5th, the Pecan Show will take place at Expo. This year there will be a pecan food show. Enter yourself or encourage a friend to enter. Some of you have volunteered to work the show, thank you for your time.

On Saturday, December 7th, Gary Slanga will formally present our bid for the 2015 Master Gardener State Conference to the State Master Gardener Board. This is just a matter of protocol; we expect to be the host for 2015. Our slogan and logo are nearing completion. The committee's final decision for the slogan was: "Trails and Rails", (Blooms along the Chisholm Trail). If you are not on a committee, please sign up for one or two. Everyone's help is needed to produce a successful conference.

Time does fly, can't believe it is time to wish everyone a Merry Christmas. So, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and yours.....Laura

Pine Valley Christmas Tree farm in Maryland (taken from their website). Pretty, but it looks very cold. Makes the weather we're having now seem toasty.

- Terrie



Welcome Bats Into Your Neighborhood

- Frances Idoux

An excellent speaker from Bat Conservation International, Fran Hutchins, pictured below, gave Master Gardeners an insight into the real nature of bats rather than their Hollywood representation.



Some bats do lap, rather than drink blood, but there are only three types of vampire bats out of more than 1,200 species and they all live in Latin America. Some bats eat insects – an enormous number of insects—and other bats eat fruit. When bats feed on nectar, they serve as pollinators for many plants.

Bats vary greatly in size. The smallest is the bumblebee bat, which is the size of your thumb. The largest bat, which is called the flying fox, has a wingspan of six feet. Most bats have a lifespan of 7-12 years.

Bats employ echolocation, the use of high frequency sounds, to help find food and avoid danger. They also have to drink while flying.

Bats are slow to reproduce and usually have only one pup at a time. The pup has to hang on to its mother.

Currently the main threats to bats are white nose disease that has killed over 5 million bats and is spreading; rapid pressure changes caused by the spinning blades of wind turbines; and habitat destruction. Only .0005% of bats carry rabies, but ill bats are excluded from the group. Bats found alone or on the ground are ill and should be avoided.

Texas has several locations to watch bats. Austin has the largest urban bat colony with about 1.5 million, but the Bamberger Ranch and the Bracken Cave are also places to observe bats. The bats in Bracken Cave take 3 1/2 to 4 hours to emerge from the Cave. Randolph Air Force Base doesn't allow night flights during summer nights because of the number of bats in the area. You can go on tours of Bracken in July and August. You can help protect bats by joining Bat Conservation International.

Photos to the left by Randy Brown. Photo below of bats emerging from Bracken Cave from: <http://www.cooperativeconservation.org>



Saffron Crocus

(Crocus sativus)

- Gary Slanga

The Saffron Crocus is grown commercially for the spice saffron that is harvested from the flower. This particular crocus is a fall bloomer, normally in October. The leaves, which are very thin and grass like, will grow all through the winter and then die out when the weather turns warm in about May. When the vegetation dies it will literally disappear and not a trace will be seen until the next fall.

Saffron crocus corms can be planted from June to September. They can tolerate a soil pH of 6 to 8 so will do well here in Central Texas as long as they have well drained soil. Plant the corms about 6 inches deep. If the soil is prepared well with compost the plants do better. If nitrogen is added, it is better to spread it on the surface after planting. Fortunately climate is not a real issue for these plants. Corms can also be planted in pots.

The corms multiply rapidly. The ones I planted this spring, individual corms, have sent up from one to four plants indicating several more corms developed, so it is best to thin them out every two or three years.

The spice saffron comes from the harvested stigmas of the flower. These bright red stigmas are in sharp contrast to the lilac-colored flower. The stigma can be removed from the flower with a tweezers or you may pick the flower and then harvest the stigma. The stigma consists of one stem with three filaments. These filaments must be dried to preserve the spice. Saffron can be kept up to two years in a well sealed container.

Saffron was cultivated by the Egyptians as early as 1600 BC. There it was used exclusively for medicinal purposes. There is no real way to determine the origin of the true saffron since it is very rare in the wild. The Greeks and Romans used the saffron as a perfume since it has a very pleasing aroma.

The plants produce only one stigma and they are very tiny. If you wish to buy saffron rather than grow your own, expect to pay as much as \$300 dollars per ounce. If you think that at that price it might be a good commercial venture, it takes about an acre of plants to produce one ounce. To put it another way, considering you must pluck each stigma by hand, expect to pick 75,000 flowers to collect one pound of saffron. But that will earn you \$4800 for your efforts.

This is a picture from my crocus bed at the Agrilife Office. Look closely and you can see the tiny red stigmas.



Photo by Gary Slanga

History Comes Alive In the Garden

- Article written by Jeff Osborne for the Temple Daily Telegram, November 21, 2013, Edited by Mary Ann Everett

Students at St. Mary's Catholic School focused on gardening and the use of herbs in colonial America during a presentation to their Junior Master Gardener Level 2 class on Wednesday, November 20 at the school.

The class is an elective for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders and was taught by Mary Ann Everett, Kim Pringle, Pat Smith and Mary Bradburn, all dressed in colonial garb. They talked about how gardens were laid out and the important uses for herbs in America's past.

Gardens were important to the colonists as a source of food and medicine, and designs were influenced by ideas from England, France and the Netherlands, where many early settlers came from.

Wealthy landowners such as presidents George Washington and Thomas Jefferson had beautiful and large gardens. Slaves also were allowed to tend gar-

dens to supplement their diet. Some of the herbs that were discussed in class were grown in a garden on the St. Mary's campus and from the Master Garden-



Students trying on some of the Colonial costumes. Below, Kim Pringle, Pat Smith and Mary Blackburn demonstrating medicinal herb preparation.

ers' gardens. Among the herbs highlighted were:

Aloe vera, a natural healing remedy used to soothe burns, and also sometimes as a laxative.

Artemisia abrotamun (also known as southernwood and wormwood) which is strongly aromatic, bitter and repels insects.

Salad burnet, sometimes used to stop the flow of blood and as a tea to reduce fever. It has a delicate cucumber flavor.

Coneflower, an herbal medicine used to treat sore throats, head

Continued on next page...



History Comes Alive...continued

aches, and coughs, as well as snakebites and for pain relief.

Costmary, used as Bible bookmarks and sometimes even eaten during sermons. The plant has a winter-green scent and is popular for flavoring and preserving beer.

Dill, used to sooth fretful infants, and also in pickling and flavoring.

Johnny jump up, which was used to create love potions and has medicinal and culinary uses.

Lemon balm, which was used to keep homes smelling sweet in an era when livestock were nearby and bathing was infrequent. It is used as a medicinal tea as well as in soups, stuffing, salads, and drinks.

Soapwort, traditionally used for cleaning purposes, and sometimes for medicinal purposes.

Wooly lambs ear, used in the treatment of wounds. Because of its antiseptic properties, the plant was often used for bandaging.

Several herbs were passed around the room for students to touch and smell, and the students even sang the plant parts rap song in honor of plants during the class.

Comments from the students: "I like going outside and looking at what we have planted. I like watching the plants grow every day. My family likes mint and jalapenos. They like to cut them up and spice up our food." (Jade, a sixth grader)

"I love how I get to grow my own food and take some of it home to share with my family. My favorite plants in the garden are squash and the herbs, especially rosemary, mint, and oregano." (Joann, an eighth grader)

"My family likes to grow things in our garden. This class teaches me how to take care of a garden and to help my parents, and it's a lot of fun. My favorites are iris, squash and beans. (Brenn, an eighth grader)

St. Mary's Principal Nisa Lagle said she approached Everett with the idea of teaching a gardening class. "I wanted to add electives and she mentioned she loved

gardening. The kids are working hard in the garden, learning a lot and really enjoying it. They thought it would just be playing around in the dirt, but it's been very educational, and they love the hands-on experience."

The American Colonial Garden power point was put together by the Bell County Master Gardener Herb Study Group led by Kim Pringle. The bonnets were made by MG Joyce Richardson's mom, Charlotte Skaggs. The aprons were made by Patty Newton and the collars were provided by Frances Idoux.

[Photos on previous page by Rusty Schramm of the Temple Daily Telegram and Mary Ann Everett.](#)

Trying to Stay Warm!



We saw this Roadrunner all poofed up on the driveway on one of our recent cold, wet days. - Terrie Hahn

BCMG's on the Job

KMCG

- Randy Brown



We cleaned up the garden for winter, harvested 37.5 lbs of tomatoes, pulled 3 rows of tomato and 2 rows of okra expended plants.

Getting the gardens ready for the winter at the Killeen Municipal Court Gardens: Beverly and Larry taking a break; left Bob Gordon tilling the field; below, BCMG's clearing out the gardens.

2015 Conference Planning

- Randy Brown

Below, a group of BCMG's iron out details with the Expo Center Managers, and the logo for the 2015 State Conference is debated.

Photos by Randy Brown



Field Trip to Dallas Botanical Gardens

- Randy Brown

Seventeen Bell County Master Gardeners visited the Dallas Arboretum in early November. We had a great time. The park was almost empty and some of us had their own personal tour guide!

Photos by Randy Brown



Master Gardener First Responder Specialist Course

- Mary Ann Everett

First in a Series

In June of this year, Louann Hight and myself attended the first National Plant Detector Network Specialist Course at TAMU. Dr. Kevin Ong was the innovator of this course, and as I had attended several of his talks in the past and really enjoyed his style of teaching, I talked Lou into attending along with me. I don't think I was disappointed with the outcome, and the finale was a tour of the plant disease lab on the TAMU campus. It is amazing how much these 'detectives' can do in such a cramped area, but this they do.

Why is there a need for NPDN? For various reasons, among them being maintaining profitability of crop production and maintaining security of food production. We want to make sure we have enough food for our country. In addition invasive species costs billions of dollars a year. Some pathogens that have impacted history in the past include the Late Blight of Potato in Ireland, Dutch Elm Disease and Chestnut Blight in North America. Some recently introduced insects include the Asian Longhorn Beetle, which could surpass Dutch Elm Disease and Chestnut Blight in its impact, the Emerald Ash Borer, and the Soybean Aphid. Is Ag bio-terrorism a real threat? This is nothing new, and the threat is real.

The NPDN was founded in June, 2002, with a mission to enhance national agricultural security by quickly detecting and identifying introduced pests and pathogens. The method used is a nation-wide network of land-grant universities, providing training to first detectors and diagnosticians, and establishing protocols for reporting to responders and decision makers. A first detector is alert to

the unusual or different, receives NPDN First Detector training, is placed on a national notification registry of First Detectors, and receives pest alerts and other relevant updates.

With that said, no, I have not received any alerts, yet. However it is exciting to know we are on a team who is trained with the skills and knowledge regarding plant biosecurity.

We have to know what we are seeing. Observation skills, vigilance to clues, persistence, good communication skills, organization skills, asking the right questions, access to reference materials, common sense and a detective enthusiasm.

There are five steps in field diagnostics:

1. Identify the plant. Word to the wise, the vendor selling should know the plant. If they don't, buyer beware! You might have to ask the person who submitted the sample, ask your county agent, ask a fellow Master Gardener, consult literature. Try to get at



Continued on next page...

First Responder...continued

least the genus of the plant if possible.

2. Define the problem: Is there a problem? What is the nature of the problem, insect, fungi, bacteria, virus, etc.? Find the history of the planting and site, check for patterns with the individual plants, the whole plantings, and the surrounding plant community, and then identify affected plant parts.

3. Develop a suspect list. Hmmmmm, what could cause the symptoms that were noted? Examples: root rotting fungi, marginal leaf scorching, root damage, venal necrosis.

Come up with suspects, either biotic (symptoms are usually scattered, develop gradually over time, sign of pathogen is observable) or abiotic (symptoms are uniform, generally appear all at one time, does not appear to spread, affects more than one type of plant in the immediate area)

4. Refine diagnosis. Ask the right questions. Match up the symptoms and the potential suspects. Match up notes taken and notes from literature.

5. Getting additional help. Look for confirmation of diagnosis by sending sample to Texas Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab or by getting opinions from area experts. Always provide as much pertinent information as possible.

The pictures shown in this story, taken from Google images, were what I saw several years ago in Belton, off highway 439, where there are a group of pine trees growing. The home-

owner was having difficulty with one growing in his yard. At the time, we had a horticulture student working on her master's degree and she went with me to this site. I will mention that Clyde White and Jeanette Karr also had been on this call, and we were uncertain at what we were looking at. It is not every day you see something like this. Turns out it was Armil-

laria root rot. Some of the trees roots were oozing, and you will notice this trunk is also oozing. The horticulture student helped us to figure this one out.

As parasites, the fungi cause mortality, wood decay, and growth reduction. They infect and kill trees that have been already weakened by competition, other pests, or climatic factors. This type of activity occurs throughout the United States--especially in deciduous forests of the East. The fungi also infect healthy trees, either killing them outright or predisposing them to attacks by other fungi or insects. Such behavior typically occurs in the relatively dry, inland coniferous forests of the Western United States.

This article is the first in a series of articles that will acquaint you with this program. It is challenging, no doubt about it, but when you take calls from the Extension Office, and meet and visit with homeowners, you learn all sorts of things. Just having good communication skills helps greatly in this endeavor. *Next month: Rose Rosette, is it in your neighborhood? It is in Texas!*



They May Look Tasty, But Don't Try Them!

This story was submitted by MG Crystal Fisher. It was written by a friend of hers living in Temple as a warning to others to be careful what you taste.

While not being a Master Gardener, I am someone who has been around plants my whole life...in other words, I should have known better!!! This would never have happened had my Polynesian friend not pointed out these upright, Giant Elephant Ears as something they eat as a food source on her island. They had begun to be bitten by the frost, and from past experiences I know they turn to mush and are much more difficult to remove later.

They were really healthy and I hated to cut them down. As I cut the stem where it comes out of the ground, the plant was literally dripping--it was that juicy. Without thinking or applying any thought other than having been told these are eaten in her country, I nibbled a quarter size piece off the fleshy part. It was sweet. Within 2 seconds I started to drool like a St. Bernard on a hot day and the most excruciating pain began.

It was liquid fire all the way down. Not only did it sear my tissue instantly, but it felt like needles of fire stabbing away, all the while producing copious amounts of ropy, soapy drool. As the tissue it touched in my mouth, esophagus and stomach suddenly swelled, it caused the bones adjacent to this tissue to ache with

internal pressure. UNBELIEVABLE PAIN!!!

I had brought with me one giant leaf on a long stalk to help with identification. After the physician had checked with the CPC, Center for Poison Control and had started me drinking milk to neutralize the chemical burn, he wanted to see what it did so he barely touched the tip of his tongue on the flesh. He started to say, this isn't too bad but only got out, " This is..." before exclaiming in pain and rushing out for milk. When next I saw him he said he could only imagine the degree of pain I was in and improvised and made up a concoction of Lidocaine and Maalox, which he had me swish and swallow slowly.

This happened Wednesday morning and today is Friday and I can tell you it is better but still very, very, VERY painful. My pallet, cheeks, tongue and throat, all the way down is scaled bald . Every time I swallow it hurts like when you swallow something hard and too big--except it hurts like that all the way down. My stomach burns and it feels like the worst case of heartburn ramped up about a 1000 times. I am only able to eat ice cream, buttermilk, mashed potatoes, avocados and hummus. Sucking on ice chips helps.

Funny thing...ER nurse asked me if I was suicidal. I could not help but laugh at that...Death By Poison!!!

Bluebonnets!!!

- Terrie Hahn

It's Going to be a Beautiful Spring! The gardens are thick with them already! This picture was taken in a rose bed.



Fall Festival at the Rose Emporium Rocks!

- Terrie Hahn

The Rose Emporium in Independence really knows how to throw a party! Werner and I attended Saturday afternoon and Sunday of their 3 day free festival early November. We heard several speakers including Pam Penick giving ideas on how to replace your



lawn. She's written the book, "Lawn Gone" and has a blog called Digging. As a landscape designer, she gets her clients to use the lasagna method of getting rid of any existing lawn or weeds by layering cardboard and mulch. Hardscapes are the next step, then adding focal points and finally putting in the native or adapted plants you'd like to have. The majority of her slides were of yards in and around Austin, but the goal was to give us ideas as to what we may be able to do in our own yards. We got some interesting ideas from her. I've decided to replace an area of semi grass and weeds with decomposed granite, sedges and some natives.



The next speaker was Chris Wiesinger of the Southern Bulb Company. He talked about wild bulbs coming up during different seasons. One of his long hunts for a hot

weather red tulip found its way to this area -the Blackland Prairie of Central Texas. He found *Tulipa praecox*, Texas Tulip. He has had trouble with voles eating these bulbs, so doesn't have any for sale right now. He encourages everyone to plant native bulbs like Lent Lily's, Grand Primo Narcissus tazeta, Johnson Amaryllis, and Crinum. You can go to his website to see what you should be planting or hunting right now: www.southernbulbs.com.

Felder Rushing topped off the afternoon with an inspiring talk about having fun in the garden and not worrying about what "horticulturists" tell you is right or wrong; but to do what you feel is right for you and your garden. Libations awaited us after the talk.

Saturday, owner, Mike Shoup and his two top people, Glenn and Robbi gave us a behind the scenes tour of how all those thousands of roses are grown. It was pretty amazing. They use 4 greenhouses staggering the cuttings one week

apart. There are 30,000 roses (pictured here) in tiny pots in each of the greenhouses. They'll stay in these



tiny pots in the greenhouses until February when they'll be placed in 2 gallon pots.

Continued on next page...

Since they've started using compost tea on a weekly basis on the roses, they have had 85% survival rate! The amount of pesticides and fungicides they used to use killed a lot of microbes and made for less healthy plants. The compost tea they make, they've tested quite a bit to make



work for them. They keep it at a constant 72 degrees and have a large motor aerating it and add a little bit of seaweed fertilizer and fish emulsion. And then it must be used within a couple

of hours. Robbi said that at home, rather than making her own compost tea, she mixes seaweed fertilizer and Super Thrive plant food together and sprays on roots and foliage.

We also went out to the field to see the thousands of roses in 2 gallon pots. They have their own pond that they use for watering. Row cover is used when there's going to be a freeze to keep the roots from being injured in those plastic pots. It was quite an amazing operation. Everyone went home with a 2 inch pot containing a Belinda's Dream.

If you ever have the chance to go the Rose Emporium's Fall Festival, don't hesitate. It's well worth the drive.

Pictured above are experts, Glenn with the compost tea machine and Robbi; below is Mike Shoup in the rose field.



Photo of roses at the Extension Center by Frances Idoux. Photos of Emporium by Terrie and Werner Hahn. Tulip photo from the Southern Bulb web-site.

Q & A

Editor's note: Let's learn from one another. Submit your questions and answers to me at moompie45@hotmail.com or call me at 512-863-9837.

Last month's Question from:

- Pam Dragoo

Does anyone know what this plant is? It is growing on a friend's land. Bees and butterflies seem to enjoy it.



And the Answer is:

- Mary Ann Everett

It is frostweed, I think. Botanical name: *Verbesina virginica*, also known as white crownbeard, iceweed, iceplant, and multiple other common names. I think that is what your plant is from the flowers and the leaves.

And from:

- Jerry Lewis

My granddaughter found this caterpillar on the Clear Creek Golf Course in September, while she was practicing with her high school golf team. I couldn't find it in any of my guides. It does not look like any of the pictures. Several people were contacted, including Wizzie Brown, Extension Entomologist. I have been told that it might be



sulphur or a skipper. What do you think?

And the Answer is:

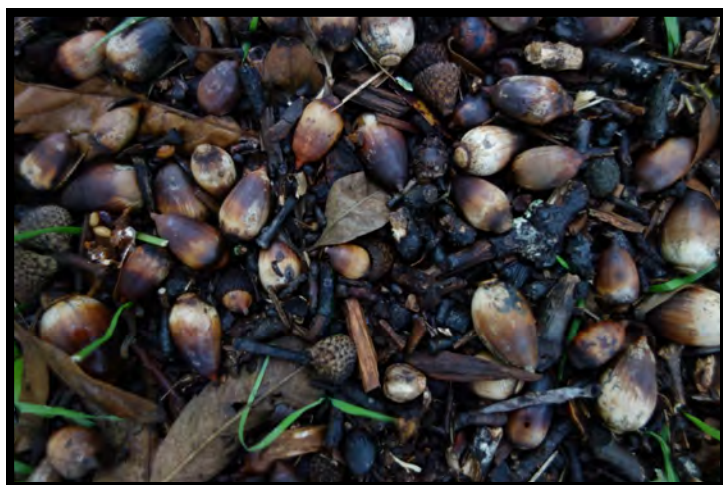
- Terrie Hahn

Well, we didn't get a definitive answer on this. I looked at what answers Jerry got and it looked like a Skipper to me as opposed to a Sulphur. According to About.com: "Skipper caterpillars have enlarged heads, constricted necks, and tend to be slightly thicker in the middle of the abdomen." There are almost 300 species of Skippers in North America. Since it was found in the grass, it could be a Grass Skipper. I didn't find any photos with the same markings on top, but many with similar heads. Skippers are butterflies.

This month's Question is from:

- Terrie Hahn

There seems to be an abundance of Live Oak acorns this year, but most of them are quite small. Does this mean the trees are stressed, since they're small? Or does it mean that the trees are doing well, since there are so many?



**You are cordially invited to the
Bell County Master Gardeners
Red, White and Blue
Texas Christmas Party**

At

6:00 p.m.

December 5, 2013

**Come to the Bell County Expo Center
The Special Events Room**

Join us for a Silent Auction, as well as a Live Auction, a Slide Show of activities this past year, and of course a nice meal catered by the Bell County Expo Center. The Golden Trowel Award, Intern of the Year, as well as the Green Thumb Awards will be presented. Nametags will be presented to those completing 5 years, 10 years and 15 years of service to Master Gardeners.

Menu Choice of ONE Entree per person

Pecan Crusted Chicken with Apricot Bourbon Sauce

Served with wild rice pilaf and green beans

Cheddar Pecan Stuffed Beef Rollup

Served with Roasted Herb Potatoes and Green Beans

Three Mushrooms Stroganoff (vegetarian)

Served with Green Beans

Cost of the meal is \$12 per person (\$20 after November 30). A delightful salad bar and dessert bar will be available. Call Kathy Patterson: 254-931-1661. Checks should be made out to Bell County Master Gardener.

Announcements

Christmas Party

- Jann Dworsky

We're looking for donations for the Silent Auction at the MG Christmas Party. Anything garden related would be especially appropriate. Bring items to the Extension Office between now and party day.

Facebook Page for BCMG's



- Terrie Hahn

One of the new interns, Justin Hammonds, has set up a facebook page for BCMG's and a group page for the intern class. So any of you that are on facebook or just want to look at the pages, go to:

<https://www.facebook.com/BCMGA>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/453302588111883/>

New Master Gardener Classes

If you know anyone interested in attending the next Bell County Master Gardener classes, please give them the following information:

Classes start January 8th, 2014

They meet 1-5 pm at County Extension Office

Cost: \$250.00

Application may be obtained at the County Extension Office or by downloading from:

<http://txmg.org/bell/join-bcmga/application-certification/>

BCMG Book Available

- Frances Idoux

The Bell County Master Gardener 16th Anniversary Book will be available at the Christmas party on December 5th. The cost is \$25.00.

What's Happening in Your Yard?

- Dee Coffeen

My Cactus Garden.



Officers

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Please do not send PDF documents.

Photo for Christmas Invitation from www.sodahead.com.
Photo below by Randy Brown

A publication of the Bell County Master Gardener
Association sponsored by Texas AgriLife Extension of
Texas A & M University

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