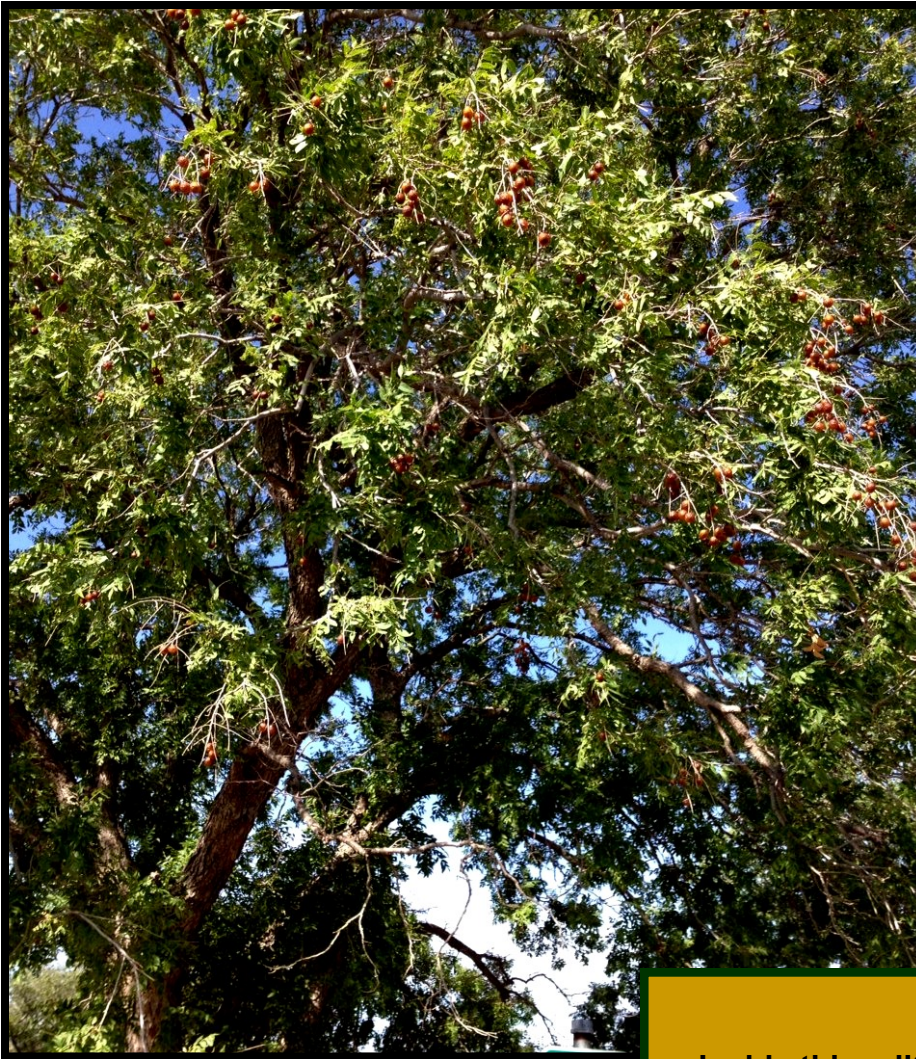


The Blooming Bell

October 2013



**Bell County
Master Gardener
Association**



Above: Soapberry tree at Coopers Break State Park, halfway between Dallas and Amarillo by Bill Vick submitted by Crystal Fisher.

Inside this edition:

October Calendar	2
President's Corner	3
The Soapberry Tree	4
Construction Going On	7
Q & A	8
Announcements	9
What's Happening in Your Yard?	10



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2 Work Day 7:30 am Conference Planning Meeting 10 am Hamburger Wednesday 11 am	3 	4	5 Plant Sale 7:30 am - 1:30 pm
6	7	8	9 General Meeting 11 a.m., Speaker from American Seed Company	10	11	12 
13	14	15	16 	17 State Conference	18	19
20	21	22	23 Board of Directors Meeting 9 am	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31 		

Upcoming dates:

Possible Field Trip to Dallas Arboretum, November 6
November/December Board Meeting, December 4

Christmas Party, December 5

The President's Corner

We begin the month of October with our annual Fall Plant Sale. The list of plants available is on the association website. The plant sale committee has been spending time, talent and energy to get the sale underway and provide a wide variety of plants. Be sure to attend and, also, encourage your friends and neighbors to shop our plant sale.

On September 25th, the state conference committee met with our local association to provide us with more information in regard to hosting the state conference in 2015. Plans are well underway to host the conference. Gary and the committees are now meeting regularly and making decisions for the convention. If you are not on one of the committees, please volunteer now. This is a big event, all hands are needed, and in addition you will have fun and be a part of something important in your local association.

As a reminder, the 2013 Texas Master Gardener conference is hosted by Cameron and Hidalgo counties in the Rio Grande Valley October 17-19. This is the first conference in the valley. It is not too late to attend.

There are several educational opportunities available within the next month or two. If you need further information in regard to specialist training contact Gary Slanga. Bernie Hurt is now assisting Gary with awards. Please send any award nominations to Bernie.

The grounds committee has been working, working, working to prepare for

future landscaping and the arrival of the pavers. On that thought, it is never too late to purchase a paver to record your membership in BCMGA. Gail Christianson is the person to contact if you wish to purchase a paver for yourself or someone else. Several individuals have purchased pavers to be placed at other locations other than the extension property.

The program for our monthly meeting in October will be presented by the American Seed Corporation. You will also have the opportunity to sign up for the field trip to the Dallas Arboretum on November 6th. The cost of the trip is \$40.00 per person; this includes the cost of the chartered bus and the entry fee. You can take guests with you, but there is limited space. A signup sheet will be available at the October monthly meeting on October 9th. Bring your check book or trip fee with you on that date. This is a beautiful time of year to visit the Arboretum. Besides the color of fall plants, an elaborate pumpkin patch is on display. There is a new children's garden that has opened within the last couple of months. If you have visited the arboretum before, things change, there are new features, and it is always a treat.

As our fall weather begins to bring cooler temperatures, I hope you will have the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors and colorful flowers and foliage of autumn. Like many people, it is my favorite time of year.....Laura



Left: photo from a few years ago during the Fall Festival at the Dallas Arboretum. Right: Abutilon pictum, "Patrick's."

Photos by Terrie Hahn



THE SOAPBERRY TREE

Sapindus Drummondii

- Crystal Fisher, '06

With Fall here, this is the time of the year that you'll see the recognizable panicles of drupes preparing to ripen. From smooth pale green through golden yellow to translucent amber, you'll find these berries worth harvesting if you are one of those venturesome Master Gardeners.



This tree is found sporadically throughout the entire state of Texas and upper half of Mexico. It is a surprise this little-known tree has so many benefits; yet few people have heard of it.

GROWTH HABIT

While the Soapberry tree is said to reach 20' to 30' with an oval crown. In our area, much depends upon the amount of water/care it receives. Developing a long tap root early enables it to endure our droughts making this a good native tree requiring little to no care. Technically, the Soapberry is *polygamo-dioecious*, meaning that each tree will produce berries from some perfect flowers and both staminate and pistillate flowers. (*Texas Native Plant Database*) As fruitful as they could be, trying to find one through nurseries may be a bit difficult.

As this tree grows, it suckers. They are easy enough to remove/mow when young. However, it is a surprise to see new plants popping up beyond the drip line - credited to stretching rhizomes. This is why you can come across a stand of Soapberry trees.

BENEFITS AND USES

Historically, Indians used the saponin from the berries in streams to confuse fish, making them an easy capture. Likewise, the hard seeds have shown up in jewelry by taking advantage of both berry and seed. Historical data in India dates back to 6th century B.C., though China lays claim as well. Several countries use 'soap nuts' as an industry, with their varieties growing slightly larger than our own *Drummondii*. Google these for yourself: soap berries or soap nuts.

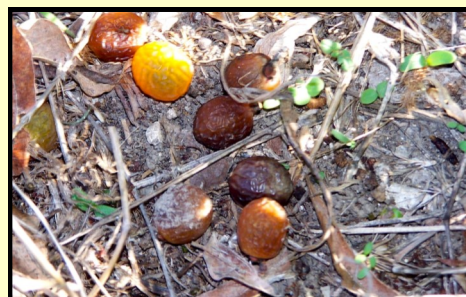
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Working With Soapberries

- Crystal Fisher

Fresh, plump juicy berries nearing harvest are pictured in the photo to the left.

Ripe berries having fallen naturally over 2+ weeks later, below.



I had harvested the berries early by loppers vs. allowing them to fall naturally 2+ weeks later. After which time, I conducted a couple of tests:

1. A muslin bags w/5 soapberries went to friends for their laundry - asking for their analysis afterwards.
2. Attempting to grow the seeds.



TEST 1

Above: 5 Soapberries with muslin bag, unused. Seeds/No seeds. Below: Soapberries have disintegrated into papery shells. Ready for trash.

Soapberry Tree...continued

The soapberries trigger fascination upon learning of the benefits derived from using them to launder clothes to washing hair; yet studies are confirming a greater benefit ahead. It's the concentrated saponin that is agitated with water, used in detergents, foaming agents, and emulsifiers. Slurpies and root beer use extract to produce a thick head of foam. In addition to this, research at the Oregon Regional Primate Center conclusively shows that saponin significantly reduces cholesterol. While the University of Toronto has found saponins to have the ability of reducing colon cancer in mice and have inhibited colon cancer cells. (*The Role of Saponins* | eHow.) Future research is being planned on the testing of colon cancer cells being reduced by saponin in human studies. More benefits are showing up underling the value of studying saponin.

The most commonly known use is as a laundry detergent substitute. The concentrated saponin produces the cleaning ability. Yet, several plants in our area provide similar features. If you've ever crushed the roots of Soapwort/Bouncing Bet to wash your hands and delicates, then you're familiar with how saponin works. While the saponin seeds are poisonous, they can be altered by chemists. Saponin has also shown up in legumes, This is the reason you rinse and discard the water used to soak beans before replacing with fresh water prior to cooking.

INSECTS

The best positive is to say that it is the home of the "Soapberry Hair-streak" butterfly.

But with the broad spectrum that saponin covers with all its pluses, there's always a downside - it attracts the Soapberry Bug. With variations too wide to list, there's no doubt of their ugliness as they cluster together in large colonies. ([http://soapberrybug.org/01 cms/details.asp?2](http://soapberrybug.org/01_cms/details.asp?2)) Interestingly enough, they go after no other plant in my yard, also indicating that there is no Balloon Vine, Golden Raintree, or Maple. In my yard, it's the Boisea Trivittatta that has found my tree, but it is not bothering any other plant in my yard. However, even this bug has a positive side to it, because of its feeding on the casings/seeds, it reduces the number of seeds that would be germinating.

"A simple way to kill these insects is mass drowning. You can do this by mixing water and detergent, and spraying it on any bug you see. The detergent breaks the surface tension of the water, and so the insects, which have evolved a fantastic physical micro-structure to instantly disperse water and avoid becoming fatally sodden, are rendered helpless. It's a bit like water-boarding except without having a question in mind. Many poisonous sprays would also be certain to have lethal consequences in your garden, though I have not experimented with them." - Scott Carroll, the Soapberry bug expert found at www.soapberrybug.org. By far, this

TEST 2

Swollen seeds, ready for planting.

In removing the casing, my fingernail pierced the shell. This led me to question whether they had to go through a dormancy before they could sprout. With nothing to lose, I put them into a thermos with very warm water for roughly 36 hours.



After which time, I continued to study them. Seeing how they had all swollen encouraged me to proceed with planting them. Of course, this is what thrills a Master Gardener. Now, it's a matter of waiting a month to see if any sprouts develop. Had I not pierced the hard seed shell, I would have tried scarification and taken more time to work with them.

Continued on next page...

Soapberry Tree

...continued

is the best website that covers these insects thoroughly. This is a worthwhile site to visit as they are asking for your help to chart its movement through the state on this website.

It is the Soapberry Borer that presents more a problem as it kills its host plant by boring under the bark and girdling the trunk where birds and squirrels have chipped away the bark. (*Texas Gardener's Seeds, The Weekly E-Newsletter for Texas Gardeners*) Once again, the state is interested in our reporting the Soapberry Beetle as well. (www.texasinvasives.org) Applying prior to insect attack, Bayer Advanced Tree and Shrub Insect Control could be the best product to rid your tree of this beetle.

CONCLUSION

Here in Central Texas, we are most fortunate to have the Soapberry around us, possibly growing more here than anywhere else in America. How fortunate we are to be able to grow our own 'detergent' that doesn't pollute our waters. It's been exciting to delve deeper into getting to know one of our natives and very worthwhile spending some time sharing this with you. I do regret the lost time from being hesitant to test this berry myself in my own laundry 2 years ago. Perhaps because of that, I'm trying to make up for lost time. I couldn't be more enthusiastic over any another plant in my yard because of the personal benefits I've received.

EXPERIMENTING

I sent berries to some friends and suggested that they look at the soapberries carefully before/after the first wash. And lastly after the second wash in an effort to learn how the berry deteriorates and recognize when to throw the berries away.

RESULTS

From those friends who responded with their laundry results:

"The first load I washed using Cold/Cold setting. 5 soapberry casings in a muslin bag. The load comprised of mixed articles of clothing & fabrics. I even threw in two of my satin pillow cases. I checked on the load during the washing (I have to being as it will sometimes pause in mid cycle, & I have to press the start button again). There were no bubbles, suds, or any visible change to the water. Emptying the washer into the dryer, I inspected everything for signs of cleanliness & other changes, such as color bleeding. No dye bled. Food, dirt, etc. and stains were removed. No other markings were added. Clothes with designs or prints on them were not affected. The satin pillow cases came out normal as ever. Now, I do not have the best sniffer in the world, but the clothes smelled clean & fresh. Also, it was faint. There is no overpowering, sometimes nauseating spring-flowery fragrance like you would have after using detergents from the store. I have worn clothes from that washing, & it passes the "allergy/irritant" test. It also does not bother my dog or my two ferrets.

The Hot/Warm water settings seemed to use more of the casings, but that is hard to determine honestly, since they were not unused casings. The warmer temperature seemed to amplify the effectiveness of the soapberries. My towels came out fluffy & soft as ever. Like before, there was no residue left behind. They smelled clean and fresh. " Alicia

"I didn't take mine out of the washer after the wash cycle. That would be a lot of trouble...probably wouldn't notice when the cycle finished. I can see why that would be the thing to do, though, to save the berries for another wash." Sue

"Yes! The soapberries did wonderful. It is a good way to go with the laundry. I got four good loads out of mine. I bought the shampoo online for your hair and just love it. It takes just a little bit." Chris

BONUS OFFER TO MASTER GARDENERS

As a courtesy to my fellow MGs, I'd like to offer you the same opportunity as the friends mentioned above: a muslin bag with 5 soapberries if you'd like to test this yourself. I have but one request - Please share your observations with me. E-mail me at cifisher@vvm.com so we can make arrangements for you to get your sample Soapberries. And keep looking up to see if you can spot one in the wild, I'm interested in your sharing this with me as I spotted one by accident on a country road near Troy.

Photos by Crystal Fisher

Construction Going on Around the New Building

- Charles Newsom



I was brought on board to oversee the site preparation going on around the new building. Beds were put in and a heart design was prepared for the new engraved pavers. A masonry border will be placed around the heart with a decomposed granite surround.



Photos by
Charles and
Gladys
Newsom



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:

- Terrie Hahn

Do Echeverias die after flowering?

And the answer is:

- Terrie Hahn

No, they do not. According to our own plant files from a previous plant sale: "The Echeveria is a rosette-forming succulent plant with foliage that comes in a variety of shapes and colors. The flowers appear on the top of stalks that grow from between the leaves.

The plant does not die after it has bloomed as do plants that have flowers which develop from the center growing point."

Sempervivums, which look similar to Echeverias, die after flowering. Often called Hens and Chicks, the Hen dies while the Chicks continue on. They produce star like flowers with many petals, and the stalk

comes from the center of the rosette. The flowers on Echeverias are tubular.

According to www.youngs-garden.com, "Echeveria do not die after flowering like Sempervivums. They are polycarpic. In other words, they can flower several times during their lives. So, if you are growing both Semps and Echeveria together, be sure that you don't accidentally pull out the Echeveria when a flower stalk appears.

Another big difference between Echeveria and Sempervivum is cold hardiness. Echeveria are native to Mexico and Central America and do not like to get very cold."

Pictured is a Red Tide Echeveria subrigida from my garden.



This month's Question is:

- Terrie Hahn

Is the color of Plumbagos (Plumbaginaceae) affected by the soil they're in as Hydrangeas are, or by the amount of sun they're getting? I have some Plumbagos that are very deep blue and others that are very pale.

Does the quantity of flowers have anything to do with soil or sun?



Photos by Terrie Hahn

Announcements

Fall Plant Sale

The Bell County Master Gardener's will hold their Fall Plant Sale on October 5, 7:30 am - 1:30 pm. For your review, the Adobe Acrobat PDF files of our plant order are now on our web site at the following location:

<http://txmg.org/bell/>

State Conference Organizational Meeting

- Gary Slanga

There will be a meeting on Wed. Oct 2 at 10:00 AM to reaffirm the tasks that each committee will be responsible for, along with some updates that the State Conference Committee indicated would be necessary. I would like each committee chairperson to attend if possible, and I encourage as many committee members as possible to attend.

If you have not yet signed up for a committee, here is a great chance to do that.

October Monthly Meeting

- Randy Brown

The October 9th monthly meeting will feature Brian Wille, owner of Native Land Solutions out of San Antonio. For over ten years, Brian has worked in the grassland restoration business. Brian received his Bachelor of Science Degree in Rangeland Ecology and Management from Texas A&M University in 2003.

Starting with the USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in 2003 he worked as a Rangeland Management Specialist in numerous counties throughout East, Central and South Texas. He primarily assisted private landowners looking to improve their farm and ranch land using the best

management practices that matched their resources and goals.

In 2010, Brian took a position working with Douglass King Seed in San Antonio, TX. There he managed the native seed farms, supervising production activities including planting, pest management, and harvest of South Texas Natives plant varieties. He then moved to the office as General Manager and Native Seed Specialist where he worked daily assisting customers with site-specific guidance regarding planting and restoration projects.

Dallas Arboretum Field Trip

- Randy Brown

We are planning a Field Trip by bus to the Dallas Arboretum on 6 November 2013. The cost is \$40.00/per person. We will contract a 49 Passenger bus. We must fill the bus in order for us to attend. The trip is open to all Master Gardeners, family and friends. There will be a final signup at the 9 October, 2013 BCMG Monthly Meeting. If the bus cannot be filled, we will try to arrange a carpool trip to the Arboretum.

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

Class Orientation, November 20, 2013

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

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

Announcements

Award Nominations Needed

- **Bernie Hurta**

We have a lot of hard-working Master Gardeners deserving of our awards. The awards are: Golden Trowel, Green Thumb, and Intern of the Year. The award time period for the Golden Trowel and Green Thumb awards is the Association Fiscal Year, June 1, 2012 to May 31, 2013.

The Intern of the Year Award is awarded to an intern from the last class, the 2013 New Class. The award's criteria and the award forms are on our website. **Deadline is October 31st**. If you need a printed form, let Bernie Hurta know.

Awards are presented at our Dec. 5th Christmas Party.

So, let's get those nomination forms filled-out. I'm sure everyone knows of a deserving Master Gardener!

HELP WANTED: Traditional Mentors for the New Class

- **Peg Fleet**

Orientation for the New Class of Master Gardener interns is scheduled for November 20th, and the New Class Committee is looking for Master Gardeners to volunteer as traditional mentors for the interns. This is a wonderful opportunity to meet the interns and to gain service hours. Classes begin on January 8th. Mentor duties include setting up the classroom, monitoring homework, providing assistance as needed during classes, and making sure that the room is returned to order afterward. Mentors should plan on being present from 12:00 noon on class days until 5:15 – 5:30. Some slots have been filled, but we still have room for more volunteers.

Signup sheets will be available at the October membership meeting. Master Gardeners who sign up will receive confirmation by e-mail. The response last year was outstanding, and I hope that we will have the same experience this year. We will not have refreshment mentors for this class, so only one set of signup sheets will be available. Please consider sharing your time and skills to help make this class the rewarding experience that it is meant to be. Thank you.

Did You Miss CTG?

If you missed seeing Mary Lew Quesinberry's garden tour on Central Texas Gardener, you can go to:

<http://www.klru.org/ctg/on-tour/10090/>

What's Happening in Your Yard?

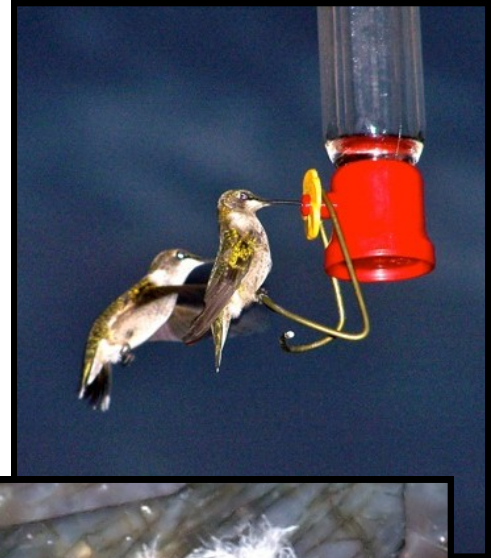
- **Charles Newsom**

This is a hummingbird on one of the flowering plants at the Extension Center the beginning of September.



What's Happening in Your Yard?

- Crystal Fisher



Above are photos of my hummingbirds and a feather next to a dry pea. Below: Thought you might find this interesting about the seeds from the Desert Willow, "Bubba." When "Bubba" was growing in my front yard and seeded out, I saved some for future plants. In my web searching, something alerted me to think that the seeds might revert back to one of Bubba's parents and not Bubba. Turns out that's the case.



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Please do not send PDF documents.

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