



NEWS . EVENTS . GARDENING TIPS. EDUCATIONAL ARTICLES



TEXAS SUPERSTAR OF THE MONTH

Natchez Blackberry

Written by Debbie Thompson



Do you want to grow blackberries in your garden? The “Texas Superstar” Natchez Blackberry is an extremely pest and disease-resistant blackberry variety, as well as high yielding, so it is an excellent choice for the home gardener.

It is a thornless cultivar created by the University of Arkansas and the USDA. It is a trailing plant that produces an abundance of large, elongated fruit. This plant exhibits dark green foliage and produces a white flower in early spring. It is self-pollinating so does not require additional plants to fertilize. The large berries will ripen beginning in June, earlier than other varieties.

Plant dormant root cutting in the early winter or plant in early spring three feet apart. Various soil types will work if it is well-drained. Iron chlorosis may be an issue when soil pH is over 7.8. If a soil test is not available, fertilize newly planted blackberries with one-half pound of 8-8-8 fertilizer per 10-foot row or 2.5 tablespoons per plant.

Once established in the landscape, the Natchez blackberry plant is drought tolerant. A thick layer of mulch around the root zone will help to retain moisture and discourage weeds. Apply two ounces of 21-0-0 fertilizer around the root system in the early spring growing season to help with growth and fruit production. In late winter and again after harvest, apply nitrogen in the form of ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) two ounces per plant and mix in with soil. Apply fertilizer close to the base of the plant and work into soil.

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Have Gardening Questions? Submit your questions and photos at: bell.mg@agnet.tamu.edu

THE BLOOMING BELL AUGUST 2023

UPCOMING EVENTS

AUGUST 2023

Speakers Bureau & Monthly Outreach Seminar

Here is a tentative schedule for upcoming seminars. Please note the bureau will be adding hands-on classes on Saturdays and working in classes on the West side of the county.

August 17 at 6:00pm - Blackberries (Learning Center).

August 31 at 6:00pm - Drip Irrigation Part 1 of the Water Conservation Series at the Harker Heights Activities Center.

For more information please email: BCMGA Speakers@gmail.com.

WEDNESDAY WORKDAYS: First & Third Wednesdays, 8:00-11:00 am, is a Master Gardner work day at the Extension Office. We have demonstration beds all around the facility. Bring a friend who may be interested in becoming a MG or just a friend of the BCMGS. Come for an hour or two or four. ***To Beat the Heat, you may want to come earlier. Check with April for what needs to be done.***

General Membership Business Education Meeting: Meets on **August 9th**, at **10:00 a.m.**; Fellowship time at 9:30 a.m. **Tim Hartman** will be discussing *Fruit Trees and the Current Research for Fruit Trees*. We will meet at the Harris Community Center, 401 N. Alexander St., Belton.

Board of Directors Meeting: Meets on **August 23rd at 10:00 a.m.**, in the Education Center (which is in the AgriLife Building).

Burger Wednesday: Burger Wednesday is currently suspended pending an individual or group to volunteer to coordinate the meal. Contact April Marek for details at april3481@gmail.com.

Service hours are available for those who set up and prepare the main course.

Herb Study Group: Meets on the **3rd Wednesday** of the month, **10:00-11:30 AM**. See the Calendar of Events for location as it may fluctuate between the learning center and the extension classroom.

August 9th How to grow mushrooms in your garden. Please contact Tracy Brown for further information: bcmgtabrown@gmail.com.

Killeen Municipal Court Garden: Meets every Saturday, time varies according to the season. Please contact Dave Slaughter slaughtd915@gmail.com. See VMS for additional Harvest Days to earn extra service hours.

HELP DESK: Monday through Thursday, 9:00 am to Noon & 1:00 to 4:00 pm.

Blooming Bell Newsletter: You can find the newsletter on the Home Page of our Website at txmg.org/bell. The deadline for articles is the 1st of each month. Publication will be on the 5th.



Texas AgriLife Extension Service
Horticulture Program in Bell County

1605 N Main St Ste 102 Belton, TX 76513

Email: bell-tx@tamu.edu

Phone: 254.933.5305

Fax: 254.933.5312



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Projects	Wayne Schirner
Youth	Susan Fogleman & Joyce Lauer
Outreach/Speakers Bureau	Debra Thompson

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By: Kathy Love

July has certainly been a scorcher! I hope everyone out there is praying daily for rain!

At the July 19th Board of Directors meeting our Facilities Director April Marek brought it to our attention again that our scheduled workdays on the landscape and grounds at the extension office are not being adequately staffed by our members. As I know many of you are aware our membership is around 150, mostly certified Master Gardeners and yet this longstanding project seldom attracts more than 4 or 5 volunteers. We certainly recognize that the heat makes it difficult for many of us to get out and do physical labor, but if we want to continue this project, we need some solutions or recommendations for how we can better staff it.

At the Board's direction, I have met with our CEA Floyd Ingram to discuss a) whether or not we should keep the project or turn the grounds back to the county for maintenance and b) any ideas how to attract more participants. It is his recommendation that we maintain the project through August, and he will attend our August 23rd Board of Directors meeting to discuss these points. He also recommends that as many members as possible, not just Board members, attend as well to offer ideas and suggestions, so we will send an email invitation to everyone as the meeting is coming up. Please consider attending if at all possible.

One idea that was offered by Jan George is that we increase our volunteer service hours from 12 annually to something higher, possibly in the 20s, to encourage members to come out on our many projects, not just the grounds, in order to maintain certification. As our longer serving members know, as far back as 2015 the organization required 50 volunteer service hours to maintain certification. I believe it was around 2016-17 that we went back to the state's hours requirement of 12 service hours and 6 education hours to maintain certification. This was done at the suggestion of Jayla Fry at the state level to meet her goal of maintaining more members. If the hours requirement is considered, it will be discussed with the entire membership and our CEA, not just at the Board level so please be considering this suggestion.

Another topic that came up at our meeting was the issues we have been having with completing everyone's required background check. As you learned when you took the new class because of the nature of our volunteer work, particularly with youth, the background check has to be completed every 3 years and is, again, **required** to maintain certification. According to Laura A. Huebinger, Ed.D., Extension Program Specialist | Volunteer Development BCMGA has 20+ members with an open invitation from the Sterling group handling the background checks for the state. Sterling is a new program, and we are aware it has been a bit daunting to many of you but again, and again, this is not something you can just ignore if you are any of those 20+ you must get it done. If you need help, the help desk at the extension office is available Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. to assist you. It was decided and voted on at the July BOD meeting that as everyone will have soon had around 8 months to get this done, that if it is not done by August 31st, anyone failing to complete and pass the background check will be deleted from the active certified Master Gardener title and placed in inactive. This was also discussed with CEA Ingram and he is in complete agreement. We don't want to lose any of you so please, please, please respond to your Sterling invitation. If you have not received the emailed invitation, please let membership director Sherry Oermann know at either 254-760-0317 or sherry@oermannfamilyfarm.com.

In the meantime, stay cool!

Can Blueberries Grow in Central Texas?

By Pat Johnson

Local Master Gardeners were recently asked if blueberries could be grown in Central Texas. After a little research, I found that the answer is yes, they can be grown in this part of Texas, but they need special care.

Why blueberries? According to <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu> "Blueberries are a very popular fruit in the United States because of their unique flavor, small edible seeds, and ease of preparation. Blueberries can be eaten fresh or used for jelly, jam, pies, pastries, or juice. Blueberry fruit is also low in calories and sodium, contains no cholesterol, and is a source of fiber.

Rabbiteye blueberries have been found to be the best for this area because they require fewer total cold hours to be successful. According to <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>, Rabbiteyes are an excellent choice for organic or EarthKind® orchards, because they have few serious pests, need little fertilization, and are native to the southeastern United States.

To be successful, blueberries need a low Ph soil, between 4.5 and 5.5, like azaleas. Normally our soil is about 7.8 to 8.2 Ph. It might be best to plant blueberries in pots, very large pots—about twenty-gallon pots, with no saucer under the pot. A quality potting soil mixed with about 1/3 sphagnum peat moss is suggested for the planting medium. Blueberries will even thrive in 100% peat moss according to Texas A & M [aggie-horticulture](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu).

Blueberries need at least eight hours of full sun to produce well. Do not apply fertilizer the first year, but in the second year apply Azalea/Camellia/Gardenia fertilizer in the early spring. Blueberries are very sensitive to barnyard fertilizer—DO NOT use it on your blueberries. It takes about seven to eight years for the blueberry plant to mature. It may grow up to 15 feet tall and 10 feet wide and will consist of several trunks from its base or crown.

Roots of blueberry plants are shallow and have no root hairs (which are needed to aid in feeding the plants), so keep weeds away to avoid competition. Avoid cultivating the soil around the blueberry plant, simply pull weeds. Blueberries are not drought tolerant. They require regular watering. Water well, filling the pot several times to be sure the peat moss is thoroughly wet. Dry peat moss is difficult to re-wet.

Rabbiteye blueberries need two varieties to cross pollinate for a high yield. Rabbiteye varieties Brightwell, Tifblue and Powderblue will cross pollinate. The Rabbiteye Tifblue variety has been found to be self-fruitful. There are advantages to each of these varieties. Plan on harvesting blueberries in late June and July.

Birds love berries and blueberries are no exception. Plan to protect your crop with bird-netting. Make sure the berries are ripe when you pick them. They do not ripen once picked. Blueberries that are not ripe are quite tart. Be sure the berries are plump and dark blue before picking them.

Check out http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/fruit-nut/files/2015/04/blueberries_2015.pdf which is a document created by Texas A & M containing more information about growing blueberries.

Closeup photo of a Rabbiteye blueberry plant is from

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/archives/parsons/publications/blueberries/Dsc01283.jpg>

This Photo of a Rabbiteye blueberry plant in a pot is from

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/archives/parsons/publications/blueberries/Dsc01271.jpg>

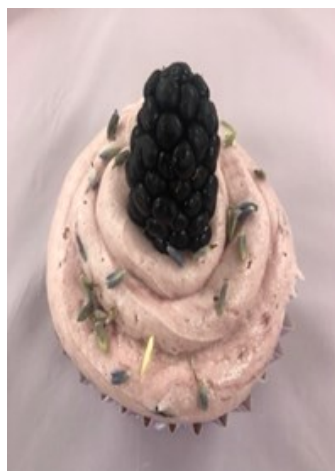
Blueberry Rabbiteye



Edible Flowers Hands on Workshop

By Monique Armas, BCMGA

“Hush and Eat Your Flowers” was presented by Master Gardener Kim Pringle and Master Gardener and Professional Baker Rowena Fengel. The attendees were warmly greeted, and invited to a choice of sparkling strawberry soda and/or vegetable juice; which were a refreshing start to a warm Texas morning. The ladies then introduced us to handouts containing a galore of research-based history, rules, tips on growing and using as well as recipes for edible flowers. In a chic ambience, we observed as Kim and Rowana showcased their culinary skills while we indulged in concoctions containing flowers and herbs such as biscuits, cheese spreads, and salad. For dessert, attendees were able to decorate a cupcake with a blackberry lavender frosting which was delightful to the palette. In addition to the cupcake, Kim and Rowana demoed how to use candied fresh flowers while attendees replicated it onto their own cookies. The workshop ended with a nice touch by gifting herb and flower transplants, and seeds as door prizes. “Where can I find fresh flowers?”, you may check with your local grocery stores for available options. Some resources include the “Ten Rules of Edible Flowers” article which can be found at <https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/1995/7-21-1995/eatflow.html>. You may also find a plethora of information on choosing and using edible flowers at <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/choosing-and-using-edible-flowers-ag-790>.



Blackberry Lavender
Cupcake



BCMG Debbie Thompson



Cookie with Flowers



Door Prizes



Sparkling Strawberry Soda

Horticultural myth(s) of the month

Wayne A Schirner

I looked for myths related to the theme for August on growing berries (blueberries, blackberries, and strawberries) and didn't find any myths relevant to these topics. I decided instead to focus on myths related to fertilizers and found many. First some definitions.

N, P, and K refer to the percentage of nitrogen (N), phosphate (P₂O₅, not phosphorus) and potassium oxide (K₂O, not potassium.) This is confusing for many, but if a soil analysis reports deficiencies in either phosphorus or potassium, the recommended additions are in terms of P₂O₅ and K₂O. That means you don't really need to think about it, I just wanted people to be aware of that.



By law (varies by state), something can't be called a fertilizer unless the NPK analysis is provided. If all three of these nutrients are provided, it is called a complete fertilizer. If one or two of these nutrients are missing, it is called an incomplete fertilizer. Even though composts provide nutrients, most of them don't have an NPK analysis provided so they can't be called a fertilizer. Epsom salts doesn't have any NPK, so it can't be called a fertilizer even though it can provide some nutrients.

A fertilizer is "balanced" if all three nutrients are in the same ratio, such as a 10-10-10, etc. A fertilizer ratio is not the same as the fertilizer analysis. For example, fertilizers that are 10-10-10 or 13-13-13 reveal the analysis of NPK but both have the same ratio of 1-1-1. Note that the term "balanced" only refers to the NPK, not any of the other nutrients plants need. The labels of most fertilizers don't provide this information either.



A "plant specific" fertilizer is one that is designed for a specific type of plant, such as a rose fertilizer or a tomato fertilizer or an orchid fertilizer.

Now let's get to the myth busting. I will provide links from two of my favorite myth busters, Dr Linda Chalker Scott and Mr. Robert Pavlis.

If you only look at one link, the one below is the one to look at. It covers multiple myths related to the use of fertilizers. There is even an imbedded link to a YouTube video if you prefer that method of learning.

<https://www.gardenmyths.com/fertilizer-myths-save-money/#more-8362>

The next two links primarily address issues related to excess phosphate. One note related to the theme for August, blueberry plants have a fibrous root system unlike most plants. For the fibrous root system to take up water and nutrients, mycorrhizal fungi must be present. Excess phosphate levels can inhibit the mycorrhizal relationship with the fibrous root structure, reducing the plant's ability to take up water and nutrients.

<https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/403/2015/03/bonemeal.pdf>

<https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/403/2015/03/phosphate.pdf>

Horticultural myth(s) of the month (continued)

Wayne A Schirner

For a deeper dive into some things from the above links, try these next.

<https://www.gardenmyths.com/fertilizer-nonsense-balanced-fertilizer/>

<https://www.gardenmyths.com/fertilizer-nonsense-match-fertilizer-plants/>

<https://www.gardenmyths.com/fertilizer-nonsense-3-all-tomatoes-need-the-same-fertilizer/>

<https://www.gardenmyths.com/fertilizer-nonsense-4-soil-tests-2/>

<https://www.gardenmyths.com/bloom-booster-fertilizer-nonsense/>

<https://www.gardenmyths.com/fertilizer-npk-ratios-what-do-they-really-mean/>

<https://www.gardenmyths.com/best-npk-ratio-growing-plants/#more-8198>

Before I leave the topic of “fertilizers,” what about any of the “teas?” We hear about compost tea, worm tea, weed tea, etc. Is there any science behind the use of these?

<https://www.gardenmyths.com/compost-tea-npk-values/#more-1605>

<https://www.gardenmyths.com/compost-tea-does-it-work/>

<https://www.gardenmyths.com/weed-tea-fertilizer/>

<https://www.gardenmyths.com/vermicompost-leachate-will-it-harm-plants/#more-8564>

Lots of links to look at in this post, but even if you only look at a few of them you will have learned something. The key points are:

If whatever you are growing is doing well, you probably don't need to add any fertilizer.

Match the fertilizer ratio to what your soil needs, not to a specific plant.

If you are going to fertilize without soil test results, use something with a NPK ratio of 3-1-2, or better yet use a nitrogen only fertilizer.

While neither compost nor mulch are fertilizers, both provide all the necessary nutrients for plant growth.

That's it for this month. Happy Gardening!

THE BLOOMING BELL AUGUST 2023

KILLEEN MUNICIPAL COURT COMMUNITY GARDEN REPORT

By April Marek and Randy Brown



July at the Killen Municipal Court Community Garden was productive despite the sizzling temperatures! The July harvest totaled 1,753 pounds, making the to date annual total 6,776 pounds, which is a new record. The harvest included tomatoes, squash, and peppers.

Another accomplishment in July was the installation of the much-needed shade structure, which now covers the break area. The shade makes a huge difference and gives the workers a nice place to get out of the sun during workdays.

Otherwise, in July, there was lots of weeding and tending to the demonstration beds to keep them looking their best in the high temperatures with no rain. New squash and cucumbers were planted. The okra that was thinned and transplanted in June is now several feet tall.



Break Area BEFORE



Break Area AFTER

THE BLOOMING BELL AUGUST 2023

KILLEEN MUNICIPAL COURT COMMUNITY GARDEN REPORT

By April Marek and Randy Brown



THE BLOOMING BELL AUGUST 2023



TEXAS SUPERSTAR OF THE MONTH

By Debbie Thompson

Continued from front page



The Natchez Blackberry requires full sun for maximum production. Canes are trailing and can grow to be 6-8' tall. The bushes can be grown in a raised bed garden box with a cattle panel as a trellis. Natchez blackberries are a biennial that grow a top the first year, those canes fruit the next year and then die. The plant continues to send up new canes each growing season for the next year's crop.

Pruning thornless blackberries is essential to get the most out of your blackberry plant. Every year the semi-erect berry bush will push out new growth or canes called primocanes. After the flowering and fruit production in the second year, the canes are called floricanes and these are what you want to prune back annually in the spring. Once a blackberry cane produces the fruit it is useless and will not produce fruit on the same branch ever again. Regular pruning techniques encourage new growth and tons of delicious blackberries to eat right off the bush or for freezing, canning, and baking!

Sources:

Natchez thornless blackberry named New Texas Superstar - AgriLife Today (tamu.edu)

<http://admin.ipps.org/uploads/16B-Grant-Greg-Texas-Superstar.pdf>

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension: Texas-fruit-and-nut-production-blackberries.pdf

Oklahoma State University Small Fruit Fertilization Maintenance Schedule HLA-6259: <https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/print-publications/hla/small-fruit-fertilization-and-maintenance-schedule-hla-6259.pdf>

Oklahoma State University Blackberry & Raspberry Culture for the Home Gardener HLA-6215:

<https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/print-publications/hla/blackberry-and-raspberry-culture-for-the-home-garden-hla-6215.pdf>



Debbie Thompson's one year old Natchez Blackberry bushes.

Elderberry

By Monique Armas

Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) is also known as common elderberry, American black elderberry, sweet elder, and pie elder. It grows as a medium to large shrub or small to medium depending on its growing condition. The average height is 10 feet, and the width ranges from 8 to 20 feet. Its leaves are smooth and shiny green, resembling that of an evergreen, and flowers grow as white clusters. In Texas, the flowers bloom from May to July. The fruit grows in clusters of dark purple berries, which can be used in medicine, pie, wine, candy, a variety of beverages, jellies, and toiletry items. Elderberry leaves have also been known to be used as an insecticide. Stems have been used for the production of toys and as tools for retrieving sap from maple trees. The Elderberry is hardy to USDA Zone 5 but grows well in Texas. It has a high heat tolerance, adapts to different types of soil, and only requires about 1" to 2" of water per week. For more information, you may visit: https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/sambucus_nigra_l.shtml or <https://aggie-hort.tamu.edu/ornamentals/nativeshrubs/sambucuscanaden.htm> - ~:~:text=Elderberry is a common shrub,tree under the right conditions.



Figure 1 Elderberry (leaves) photo by West Virginia University Extension



Figure 2 Elderberry (flowering) photo by Washington State University Clark County Extension



Figure 3 Elderberry (fruiting) photo by U.S. Forest Service

All about grapes

By Gail Pierce (Class of 2012)

I took the Master Gardener class January- May 2012, one of the classes was propagating grapes. I took two cuttings of Black Spanish grapes, brought them home, and planted them in a pot. You don't know how excited I was when I saw the 1st buds. Proud Mama. I plant them in the ground November 2012 and 2 years later I made grape jelly for the 1st time. 2019 I was unable to make jelly because the grape vines had Black Rot, but thanks to Gary Slanga with his knowledge and expertise on grapes I sprayed them with a fungicide. From then on I'm enjoying and watching the grape grow and making grape jelly as you can see. You are probably wondering how I keep up with the dates and garden events. I keep a garden journal. It helps me to keep up with vegetable rotation and what worked and didn't work in the garden. Happy gardening....

