



NEWS . EVENTS . GARDENING TIPS. EDUCATIONAL ARTICLES



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

THE BLOOMING BELL NOVEMBER 2023

UPCOMING EVENTS NOVEMBER 2023

Speakers Bureau: Monthly Outreach Seminar & Workshops

Nov. 16th:

Holiday Herb Compound Butter & Cream Cheese Spreads from 12 to 2 p.m. at the Copperas Cove Public Library, 501 S. Main St., Copperas Cove.

Planting Trees at 6:00-7:30 PM in the Learning Center.

For more information please email: BCMGSpeakers@gmail.com.

WEDNESDAY SERVICE DAYS: First & Third Wednesdays, 8:00-11:00 am

are Master Gardner workdays 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. *Check with April for what needs to be done.*

General Membership Business Education Meeting: Meets on **Nov.**

8th. Fellowship time 9:00-9:30 a.m., followed by the educational portion with **Dave Slaughter** at 9:30 am. He will be speaking on awards and hours. We will be hosting the business portion of the meeting on Google Meets for those who cannot make it in person. (this will not include the educational portion of the meeting). <https://meet.google.com/wxn-bjsi-yiv>

We will meet at the Harris Community Center, 401 N. Alexander St., Belton.

Board of Directors Meeting: Meets on **Nov. 29th** at **10:00 a.m.**, in the Education Center (which is in the AgriLife Building).

Burger Wednesday: Looking for one or more volunteers to organize these events. Please join us for our service day and fun fellowship.

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. Please contact Tracy Brown for further information: bcmgtabrown@gmail.com.

Killeen Municipal Court Community Garden: Meets every Saturday, 9:00a.m.

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. The help desk **needs a lead volunteer for Tuesday mornings**.

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.



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Executive Board

President	Kathy Love
1 st Vice President	Anna Sartin
2 nd Vice President	Louann Hight
Recording Secretary	Sophia Gomez (acting)
Treasurer	Jackie McLaughlin

Directors

Communications	Teri Marceau
Facilities	April Marek
Membership	Sherry Oermann
KMCCG	Dave Slaughter
New Class	Pat Johnson
Projects	Wayne Schirner
Youth	Susan Fogleman & Joyce Lauer
Outreach/Speakers Bureau	Debra Thompson

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Kathy Love

New officers and directors were elected via acclamation at our October general membership meeting as follows:

President: Teri Marceau
2nd Vice President: Barbara Ishikawa
Recording Secretary: Sophia Gomez
New Class Director: Dave Slaughter
Facilities Director: Open
KMCCG Director: Monique Armas
Projects Director: Jan George

Thanks to these members for stepping up to fill these important positions. Please be sure to thank these folks when you see them.

Local awards were voted on by the Awards Committee for 2023 on November 1st, and unlike in previous years when the awards were handed out at our Christmas party, they will be awarded at the January 2024 general membership meeting. The committee received many nominations from various members, and thanks to everyone who took the time to prepare the write-ups.

Please remember that state awards will be accepted by the State Awards Committee starting January 1, 2024, and will close at 10 p.m. on January 31st. The state awards categories are: Youth-JMG, Youth-Other, Teaching Site, Workshop-Presentation, Written-Recorded Educational Content, Research, Marva E Beck JMG Leader of the Year, Outstanding Individual Master Gardener, and Outstanding Master Gardener Association. For more information and detailed descriptions of these categories, please check out the Awards page on the State Master Gardener website. If you are interested in preparing a nomination for the Association in any of these categories, please advise Dave Slaughter or a member of the awards committee, as each Association is allowed to submit in any or all categories, but only one entry for each. Be sure to study on that site How to Write an Impact Statement, as the out-of-state Extension Service Agents are looking for impacts specifically.

Thanks to all who worked on the Fall Bulb Sale, which was successful and profitable. The bulbs will have been distributed to the public by the time this article appears.

Our Seed Savers have been extremely busy this fall. We have an abundance of seeds of many different varieties for our events and to distribute from the Master Gardener Education Center. Thanks to all of you for the efforts that have gone into this project.

Finally, the annual BCMGA Christmas Party is scheduled for The Christmas Luncheon, which will be held on November 30, 2023, at the Harris Center in Belton. Social hour will start at 12:00p with lunch being served at 1:00p. That Chicken Place is catering the meal, consisting of grilled chicken breast, corn souffle, and roasted veggies. Members will furnish desserts. We will also have a silent auction. Please get in touch with Jeanne Richards if you would like to contribute to the auction. The cost of the party is \$20 per person. You may register by dropping your payment off at our office, which is open 9-12 & 1-4 on Mon-Th, or pay at the Nov membership meeting. I am sure everyone has appreciated the recent rains and cooler weather, though maybe not the freezes!

Happy Gardening All!

THE BLOOMING BELL NOVEMBER 2023

November Community Outreach Events

The Bell County Master Gardener Association and Keep Copperas Cove Beautiful presents “Holiday Herb Compound Butter & Cream Cheese Spreads” on Thursday, November 16, from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m. at the Copperas Cove Public Library, 501 S. Main St., Copperas Cove. Certified Master Gardeners Jeanne Richard and Charlotte Nunnery will demonstrate how to elevate your holiday table or consumable gift-giving using fresh herbs like sage, rosemary, and thyme. In class, participants will enjoy tasting samples of different compound butters and cream cheese spreads, as well as receive a variety of recipes.

Class Limit: 30

Class Fee: Free

Free Box Lunch Provided by KCCB

Register at bcmgaspeakers@gmail.com

Registration closes Wednesday, November 15, at 5 P.M. or when full.

The Bell County Master Gardener Association Free Monthly Seminar presents “Planting Trees” on Thursday, November 16 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Texas Agrilife Extension Office, BCMGA Learning Center, 1605 N. Main St., Belton. Certified Master Gardeners Sylvia Maedgen, Bob Gordon, and Jerry Lewis will discuss how the elements, overhead obstructions, and maintenance play into your tree selection. In addition, they will tell you how to select the best tree for your property. You will also receive a list of trees that grow best in Texas. Last but not least, they will discuss diseases such as oak wilt, what to look for, and how it affects your trees. You will also learn to manage frost and freezing temperatures to protect your trees.

Class Limit: 50

Please register at bcmgaspeakers@gmail.com

Donations up to \$5 are appreciated to support continuing education opportunities in Bell County.





Tarantulas

By Wizzie Brown

Tarantulas, also known as baboon spiders in Africa or hairy spiders in South America, are the largest spiders in the world. They can be found on every continent except Antarctica. Tarantulas have two body regions, eight legs, and hairy bodies. Tarantulas found in North and South America have hairs used in defense. These tarantulas use their legs to flick hairs off their abdomen and into the face of predators. Hairs cause irritation to the eyes and mucous membranes. Tarantulas can be attacked by birds, lizards, snakes, and tarantula hawk wasps.

Tarantulas are nocturnal predators and feed on insects, other spiders, small lizards, frogs, and snakes. When prey is captured, it is bitten with the spider's fangs and injected with venom with digestive enzymes that kill and liquefy the prey. Once prey is soupy, the tarantula sucks up juices through their fangs. While tarantulas can bite humans, their venom does not react with our body chemistry like widow or recluse spiders. Tarantula bites are comparable to a bee sting.

There are fifteen species of tarantulas in Texas, and they create burrows in the ground, typically in well-drained soil. They use their webbing to line burrows, which helps to shore up tunnels so they do not collapse. Webbing can also be used to create a molting mat, which is laid down before the tarantula sheds its exoskeleton, as well as used for handling prey. In other parts of the world, tarantulas live in trees and may use webbing to create a sling as a nest. Tarantulas are solitary, so there will only be one tarantula per burrow.

Tarantulas are arthropods, so they have an exoskeleton that requires them to molt numerous times to grow. When ready to molt, which is controlled and signaled by hormones that only arthropods have, the tarantula lays down a silken molting mat, flips over on its back, and pops open the old exoskeleton along a weakened area called the ecdysial cleavage line. The spider must push out of the old exoskeleton by expanding and contracting its body to help wiggle its way out. Once the spider has emerged from the old exoskeleton, it stays on its back until the new exoskeleton hardens, and then it will flip back over.

Some in Texas may come across mass "migrations" of tarantulas. These are not true migrations as the tarantulas are not moving to live in a new area, but instead, are males out searching for females for mating.

While tarantulas may be disconcerting for people when they venture indoors, they are not a pest and don't warrant control. The best thing to do is to keep tarantulas outside where they belong, excluding the home, so the spiders cannot enter.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist, at 512.854.9600. This work is supported in part by the Crop Protection and Pest Management, Extension Implementation Program [award no. 2021- 70006-35347/project accession no. 1027036] from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

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Horticultural Myths and Truths on Tree Planting

By Wayne Schirner

Disclaimer: The perspective expressed in this article does not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of Texas A&M Agrilife or the Bell County Master Gardener Association.

This month's theme for the BCMGA is "Planting Trees and Shrubs." This is particularly appropriate since this time of year is considered by many to be the best time of year in Texas to plant trees. I'm changing the format of this month's article to include myths AND truths. There are lots of myths associated with planting trees, so let me start with some of those first.

The first claim to address is the recommendation to "plant a tree at the same depth as the tree was in the container." This may be true IF the tree was correctly planted in the container. When planting a tree in a container or in the ground, the root flare at the base of the trunk should be visible at the soil line. Unfortunately, some nurseries don't pay attention to this. If you purchase a containerized tree or a "ball and burlap" tree, inspect the trunk at the soil level. If you can see the root flare, you know it has been properly grown. If you can't see the root flare, pass on that tree. I have seen trees in containers where the root flare wasn't visible until 6 inches or more of soil had been removed. The tree should be planted so that the root flare is visible at the level of the surrounding soil, no matter how deeply it was planted in the container.

The following article addresses seven common myths associated with planting trees. Even though it was written for the Pacific Northwest, the principles still apply. It's a quick read, but there are three pages of references if you want more information.

<https://www.nacaa.com/file.ashx?id=3cfb296f-3fce-4199-85b1-0e0ddbbaa6a6>

Remember, I said this article was written for the Pacific Northwest. That leads me to Myth #5 in the above article. They don't have live oak trees in the Pacific Northwest, and they don't have oak wilt disease. Pruning oak trees at the proper time of the year can make sealing pruning cuts unnecessary. Still, most experts say that any oak tree pruning done in Texas should be immediately followed with a sealant to reduce oak wilt disease.

Now that you know what not to do, let's address how to plant a tree properly. First up, from the Texas A&M Forest Service, review the links for selecting and planting a tree:

<https://texastreeplanting.tamu.edu/TreePlantingTools.html>

The remaining articles are all from the GardenProfessors.com blog. Even though this is a .com website, the articles are written by horticultural professors at various universities. They only use information that is research-based and has been peer-reviewed. There is even a Facebook group for them that I have found very useful.

Here's a good summary that addresses tree planting problems written by Dr Jim Downer:

<https://gardenprofessors.com/problems-with-planting-trees/>

Here's another great article, this one by Dr Linda Chalker-Scott:

<https://gardenprofessors.com/save-the-planet-learn-how-to-plant-a-tree/>

Another good article by Dr Linda Chalker-Scott addresses diagnosing problems with trees, with lots of photos:

<https://gardenprofessors.com/whats-wrong-with-my-tree-you-wont-find-the-answer-in-a-book/>

Finally, a personal story. I have a tree in my backyard that died this year, 12 years after a local nursery had planted it. That was long before I became a Master Gardener and learned how to plant a tree properly. The tree was one that a certified arborist had recommended as appropriate for our area and one that usually grows well in Bell County. To discover what caused its death, I excavated some soil around the tree after consulting with my arborist. There was a single root that extended out from the trunk. The rest of the roots were tightly circling the tree, eventually strangling it to death. Now that you know how to plant a tree correctly, hopefully, this won't happen to you. That's enough for this month. *Happy Tree Planting!*

COULD YOUR TREE BE SUFFERING FROM CONSTRUCTION DAMAGE?

By Teri Marceau

“Can someone from your organization come to my house and look at my trees? They are not doing well.” This is a common call we get on the help desk. Kathy Love has several sad stories of construction-damaged trees in the Salado area. People buy property for the trees. They hire the best construction company in town and begin building their dream home surrounded by big, beautiful trees to find, in a year, those big trees appear to be declining. If they are oak trees, their first thought is Oak Wilt. However, upon investigation, the dying tree is due to construction damage.

How trees are damaged during construction:

Physical injury to the trunk and crown – Construction equipment can injure the above-ground portion of a tree by breaking branches, tearing the bark, and wounding the trunk. These injuries are permanent and, if extensive, can be fatal.

Root Cutting - Digging, grading, and trenching associated with construction and underground utility installation can damage roots. A tree's root system can extend horizontally at a distance of 1 to 3 times greater than the height of a tree. It is essential to cut as far away from a tree as possible to prevent damage that can compromise tree health and stability. Cutting under a tree's crown can reduce tree vitality. Cutting roots close to the trunk can severely damage a tree and limit its ability to stay upright in storms.

Soil Compaction - An ideal soil for root growth and development contains about 50 percent pore space for water and air movement. Heavy construction equipment can compact soil and dramatically reduce pore space. Compaction inhibits root growth, limits water penetration, and decreases oxygen needed for root survival.

Smothering Roots by Adding Soil. The majority of fine water-and-mineral-absorbing roots are in the upper 6 to 12 inches (15 to 30 cm) of soil, where oxygen and moisture levels tend to be best suited for growth. Even a few inches of soil piled over the root system to change the grade can smother fine roots and eventually lead to more considerable root death.

Exposure to the Elements. Trees in a forest grow as a community, protecting each other from the elements. The trees grow tall with long, straight trunks and high canopies. Removing neighboring trees during construction exposes the remaining trees to increased sunlight and wind, which may lead to sunscald or breakage of limbs and stems. ¹

Before removing trees to build your dream home, it is advised to contact a certified arborist because not all trees should be preserved. You can find a local certified arborist through the TX A&M Forestry website (<https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/>) or treesargood.org. Once you have found a local tree expert, have them assess the health and integrity of the trees.

Continued on next page..

Encourage your builder to work with the arborist to plan the construction site. Making the appropriate and necessary changes to your building plan may mean life or death to the property's trees. There are some suggested measures your builder can take to avoid the root zone of your trees. If the trenching for utilities cannot be rerouted, there are less damaging techniques available. Planning is one key element to preserving trees during construction.

Using Barriers - Treatment for construction damage is limited, so trees must be protected from injury. Set up sturdy fencing around each tree to remain as far from the tree trunk as possible to provide above- and below-ground protection. Place fence approximately one foot (0.3 m) from the trunk for each inch (2.5 cm) of trunk diameter. Instruct construction personnel to keep fencing intact and the area clear of building materials, waste, and excess soil. No digging, trenching, or other soil disturbance should be allowed in the fenced area.

Limit Access - If possible, allow only one access route on and off the property. All contractors must be instructed where to drive and park their vehicles. This same access drive can later serve as the route for utility wires, water lines, or the driveway. Specify storage areas for equipment, soil, and construction materials. Limit areas for burning (if permitted), cement wash-out pits, and construction work zones. These areas should be located away from protected trees.

Specifications - All measures intended to protect your trees must be written into the construction specifications and should detail what can and cannot be done to and around the trees. It is a good idea to post signs as a reminder. Fines and penalties for violations should be built into the specifications. The severity of the fines should be proportional to the potential damage to the trees and should increase for multiple infractions.¹

Clear, concise communication is key to preserving your trees, whether you are building from scratch or renovating your home. If your trees incur damage, they will require several years to adjust to the injury and environmental changes, i.e., hardscaping such as driveways and patios. Be prepared that damage can still occur even with the most stringent preservation methods.

For more information on avoiding damage and treatment of damaged trees by construction, stop by the help desk.

¹International Society of Arboriculture | www.isa-arbor.com



THE BLOOMING BELL NOVEMBER 2023

KILLEEN MUNICIPAL COURT COMMUNITY GARDEN REPORT

By April Marek and Randy Brown



The Killeen Municipal Court Community Garden has transitioned to a fall phase with cooler temperatures and much-needed rain in October. There were four Saturday workdays. The harvest total for October was 577 pounds of okra, tomatoes, peppers, and various squash varieties. Peppers and squash made up the majority of the monthly harvest. The carrots and radishes planted in September are thriving, and the first radishes will be ready for harvest in the next few days. Lots of maintenance continued throughout the month.



TEXAS SUPERSTAR OF THE MONTH



Mexican White Oak Newest “Texas Superstar” *By Debbie Thompson*

The newest Texas superstar is the Mexican White Oak. This tree is most known as the Monterrey Oak which is native to both Texas and Mexico. If you are considering planting the Mexican White Oak, plan for anytime between December or January. The Mexican white oak trees thrive in full sun and soils with good drainage. Trees endure open exposures, even those with reflected heat, minimal irrigation, and windy locations. It tolerates a wide range of soil pH and prefers drip irrigation rather than overhead.

The Mexican white oak will mature to a height of 35-45 feet but can grow to as much as 60 feet tall. The canopy can reach around single and double story structures, and with a spread typically two-thirds to equal its height. They offer a perfect blend of shade and aesthetic appeal.

Preferred by professional landscapers and homeowners, its foliage has an array of variable lobes and casts a canopy of green and hues of blue. In its youthful stages, this oak has an upright oval form before maturing into a medium-sized tree that is perfect for shading streets, parks, and gardens. The Mexican White Oak are considered oak wilt resistant making it an excellent choice in the landscape.

Trees also tolerate humid climates with minimal foliar diseases. Its ability to endure environmental changes has made it a valued landscape addition to the South-Central U.S., notably in Texas. Young oak trees need regular watering but do not overwater. Once the tree has matured, water about once a month, do not water more than that. There is no need to water your oak in the winter – let the winter precipitation water it for you. It is recommended to use a drip system, which allows for slow and gradual watering. Evergreen oak trees are beautiful without pruning but the Deciduous oaks can benefit from an annual trim. A great reason to prune is to control the size and remove diseased branches. Always leave the branch collar and hold off on trimming until after July. Young oak trees will require fertilizer to grow while mature oaks need fertilizer to maintain good health. A balanced fertilizer with nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium is a good option. You can also fertilize with a nitrogen-based fertilizer. Leave the leaves on the ground and use as a natural compost that can saturate the soil with nutrients. It also aids in soil stabilization and has acorns to help sustain wildlife populations in the fall. However, one of the major causes of oak seedling death are small predators.

If you are shopping for a tree this winter, the Mexican White Oak is an excellent choice for your landscape.

Sources: <https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2023/09/20/mexican-white-oak/>
<https://www.westlakehills.org>



Mexican White Oak in the
Spring/Summer Landscape



Mexican White Oak Leaf and Acorn



Mexican White Oak leaf changes
color in the fall and winter

THE 2023 BULB SALE WAS A SUCCESS!
LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEXT ONE!

