



NEWS . EVENTS . GARDENING TIPS. EDUCATIONAL ARTICLES

Bulb Interest Study Group

Topic: Irises
January 17 at 1:00 p.m.
1605 N. Main Street in Belton
Inside the Learning Center
Open to the public

	Upcoming Events	2/3	African Spear.....	9
	President's Corner	4	KMCCG Report.....	10
	Com, .Edu, or .Org Policy.....	5	Raised Bed Gardening.....	11/12
	Tiger Moth Butterflies.....	6		
	Seed Saving.....	7		
	Herb Of The Year	8		

THE BLOOMING BELL JANUARY 2024

UPCOMING EVENTS

JANUARY 2024

Speakers Bureau: Monthly Outreach Seminar & Workshops - 3rd Thursdays, 6:00-7:30 PM. Our monthly seminars will kick off 2024 on **Jan. 18th** with Kathy Love teaching Container Vegetable Gardening.

Feb. 15th - Roses in the Landscape with Carol Morisset

March 21st - Turf and Weed Control with Glenn Melton

Workshops:

Jan. 13th - Seed Starting with Wayne Schirner, 9:00 a.m. to noon. The cost is \$20.00 and open to the public first.

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

WEDNESDAY SERVICE DAYS: First & Third Wednesdays, 8:00-11:00 am, is a Master Gardener workday at the Extension Office. (2nd & 4th Wednesdays, prior to meetings).

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 BCMGA. Come for an hour or two or four. The Grounds Focus group will continue guiding the grounds until there is a director and associate director installed.

General Membership Business Education Meeting: Meets Wed., Jan. 10th. Fellowship time 9:00- 9:30 a.m..

The 2023 Awards Ceremony will be held in lieu of our educational portion of the meeting, followed by our business meeting. We will be hosting the business portion of the meeting on Google Meets for those who cannot make it for personal reasons (this will not include the educational portion of the meeting). Look for the online meeting link in the weekly events email from Monique Armas. We will meet in person at the Harris Community Center, 401 N. Alexander St., Belton.

Board of Directors Meeting: Beginning in 2024 our board of directors' meetings will be held bimonthly as a hybrid meeting. Look for the link in the weekly events email from Monique Armas. All of our meetings will be held in the classroom located right of the extension office and will begin promptly at 10:00 a.m..

Meeting Dates: Jan. 24th | March 27th | May 29th



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



Executive Board

President	Teri Marceau
1 st Vice President	Anna Sartin
2 nd Vice President	Barbara Ishikawa
Recording Secre-	Sophia Gomez
Treasurer	Jackie McLaughlin

Directors

Communications	Open
Facilities	Grounds Focus Group
Membership	Sherry Oermann
KMCCG	Monique Armas
New Class	Dave Slaughter
Projects	Jan George
Youth	Susan Fogleman & Joyce Lauer
Outreach/Speakers Bureau	Debra Thompson

THE BLOOMING BELL JANUARY 2024

UPCOMING EVENTS JANUARY 2024

Bulb Interest Study Group: Please join us for our inaugural meeting at 1:00 on January 17. Crystal Mears and Lindell Small will lead a conversation about irises.

Herb Study Group: Meets on the 3rd Wednesday of the month, 10:00-11:30 AM. The January herb for discussion will be Yarrow. Please contact Tracy Brown for further information: bcmgtabrown@gmail.com.

Killeen Municipal Court Community Garden: Meets every Saturday at 9:00 a.m. Please contact Monique Armas at justasimpleplantlover@yahoo.com

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. 9:30 AM. If interested in earning education & volunteer hours, please contact Kathy Love lkathy021@gmail.com.

Vegetable Container Gardening

Kathy Love will be teaching how to grow vegetables in containers at our monthly Thursday evening seminar on Jan. 18th. This class is perfect for small yards, apartments, and patios. Be sure to invite a friend or neighbor. It is time to start thinking about your spring and summer vegetables.

<https://hood.agrilife.org/publications/vegetable-gardening/vegetable-gardening-in-containers/>



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC](#)



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



Executive Board

President	Teri Marceau
1 st Vice President	Anna Sartin
2 nd Vice President	Barbara Ishikawa
Recording Secre-	Sophia Gomez
Treasurer	Jackie McLaughlin

Directors

Communications	Open
Facilities	Grounds Focus
Membership	Sherry Oermann
KMCCG	Monique Armas
New Class	Dave Slaughter
Projects	Jan George
Youth	Susan Fogleman & Joyce Lauer
Outreach/Speakers Bureau	Debra Thompson

President's Perspective

Teri Marceau

Happy New Year! I can hardly believe 2024 is here. I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season.

I want to take a moment to thank Kathy Love for her time as BCMGA president. She took over after a long hard couple of years, which I will call the "C-years". After the shutdown, it took our association a few years to get back into the swing of serving our community. As president, Kathy helped us move away from the "C-years" and into active service. During her term as president, BCMGA had four successful plant sales with the 2023 spring sale being a record-breaking event. With her encouragement, and the leadership of Susan Fogleman and Joyce Lauer as co-directors of Youth projects; they expanded beyond LGEG into homeschool groups and participated in private school science curriculum, as well as other school activities. Under her tenure with the leadership of Debbie Thompson, the Outreach project flourished to new levels by adding hands-on workshops. The Killeen Municipal Court Community Garden headed by Dave Slaughter broke their records for volunteers and produce donated during her two-year term. These are just a few areas in which we grew during 2022-2023. Kathy has set the stage for BCMGA to continue to improve as we move into the next two years. Thank you, Kathy Love!

We had our first action meeting in December. We agreed that the board's focus will be membership and community engagement, and finances; while youth, outreach, and gardening will be the focus of the association. Our goal as your board is to stick to the business aspect of the association during our bi-monthly meetings. The board of directors will begin meeting every other month starting January 24th at 10:00 am. We will meet in the meeting room to the right of the extension office. The project updates will be presented at the general membership meetings and in writing to the association secretary to record appropriately.

Finally, friends and gardeners I wish to charge you with these words and hope to make them our mantra for 2024 and beyond.

IS IT ...

- GENUINE?
- IMPARTIAL?
- GENEROUS?
- KIND?

Are we being genuine with the information we are teaching and with one another? Are we being impartial in the scope of the data we share and with the differences we find among ourselves? Are we being generous in our thoughts and words about each other? Are we kind to one another and our neighbors?

I hope we all take the time to ponder these four words and begin to think of them as part of being a verifiable volunteer of the Master Gardener Association. I look forward to seeing you all at the general membership meeting on Jan. 10th at 9:00 a.m. for fellowship, with the Awards Ceremony for 2023 at 10:00 a.m. You don't want to miss it.

Happy New Year!

Teri

.EDU/.ORG VS .COM

By Teri Marceau

Did you know we have a policy regarding the use of .com, .edu, or .org? Did you even know there is a difference?

All three are internet top level domains (TDL). You may have never really paid much attention to what comes after the dot in a domain name. For ease of understanding, I am going to refer to the whole website name as URL and the portion after the dot as TDL. Each TDL has a purpose. Below is the short list to help us better understand the reason for their use.

.com – commercial

.org – non-profit organization

.edu – education

.gov – government

.net – network resources

Whether you draft articles for the newsletter, website, or newspaper, present seminars or classes, research for a county resident, and/or volunteer at the help desk, you probably heard that we should not use .com websites. Have you ever wondered “why”?

You will not find the answer in our management guide or the state guide. Texas AgriLife Extension determines the policy. When the help desk was installed, our extension agent at the time, Lyle Zeller, put in place the policy of not using .com URLs when dispensing information to the community because, as the list above indicates, .com URLs are commercial and likely trying to sell a product, thereby presenting biased information. Our current AG agent stands by this policy. We could go as far as to say that they are not reliably researched. Is this to say that all .com URLs are unreliable? The answer is no; they can be reliable. However, this will require much extra work from the author or presenter to prove the reliability of the information in the URL used.

The state master gardener’s website is a .org URL, as is ours. We are both non-profit organizations with 501(c)(3) status with a connection to TX A&M, which uses a .edu URL. These URLs are typically non-biased. BCMGA not only uses the .org URL, but we also have to provide three sources when recommending a weed killer or fertilizer. By using .edu URLs or .org URLs, we are not 100% guaranteed that all the information is correct, but we can trust that most information found on these websites has been vetted. Using no less than three references before you use the information within is highly recommended.

If you use a .com URL in an article or presentation, it is your responsibility to verify the information and give a disclaimer similar to this one. The perspective expressed in this article does not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of Texas A&M AgriLife or the Bell County Master Gardener Association. Or provide a disclaimer stating that the information found in the .com URL is research based on other .edu or .org URLs. If you do not cite your source and give a disclaimer when using .com URLs, the editors will provide one since we are all volunteers and are not here to police everything.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the policy of staying away from .com URLs, please ask a board member or our AG agent.

Tiger moth caterpillars

By Wizzie Brown

Tiger moth caterpillars have been a common sight lately in the Central Texas area. These insects are native to the United States and are sometimes called “woollybear caterpillars”. “Woollybear caterpillar” is a more general term that refers to various species of caterpillars that are densely covered in hairs, called setae, and tend to wander.

While these caterpillars can be highly variable for individual species, the common ones seen lately are woollybear (Isabella tiger moth), saltmarsh caterpillar (saltmarsh moth), and garden tiger moth caterpillar, also known as the great tiger moth caterpillar. Woollybear caterpillars are usually black on each end with brown in the middle. Saltmarsh cat-



erpillars are variable and can be a creamy yellow to brown to black in color. Garden/ great tiger moth caterpillars tend to be black on the top part of the body and brown on the bottom.

Garden/ great tiger moth caterpillar

Saltmarsh caterpillar

All three of these caterpillars feed on a wide variety of herbaceous and woody plants, but only sometimes considered to be pests when they feed on field crops.

Tiger moths have a complete life cycle with four life stages- egg, larva, pupa, adult. Eggs are laid in clusters on the leaves of host plants. Larvae go through several instars before they pupate in soil. Larvae tend to actively disperse and may be seen in groups moving over turf, roads, sidewalks, or other locations. Adults usually emerge in the spring to mate and begin the cycle again. Moths can be active year-round in South Texas, but for most parts of Texas, larvae overwinter in the last larval instar in protected locations.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas 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.

The information given herein is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service or the Texas A&M AgriLife Research is implied.

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service provides equal access in its programs, activities, education and employment, without regard to race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity.

HERB STUDY GROUP

Seed Saving by Tracy Brown

The saving of seeds has been practiced since 'Man' cultivated plants. They were shared with neighbors and travelers. Unfortunately, as plants have evolved, whether in a lab or in Nature, seed saving has declined. So many of our Heirloom plants have gone away. Yet there is still hope. Did you know that date seeds found in a tomb dating back over 2,000 years have been planted and are thriving? Yep, it is a fact!

As more wars and climate change inhabit our everyday lives, everything suffers, especially Seeds. During the Iraq conflict, one of the largest seed repositories was destroyed. Individuals are working diligently to recover the seeds from nature once again. Some are lost forever. The extinction rate is proliferating.

However, we have hope. Here locally, seed saving is a significant project for Texas Master Gardeners. For Bell County, a small core group collects seeds wherever and whenever they can, processing and packing them to make them available to Our Community and Members. Native Seed Company out of Junction, Texas, grows and collects seeds from all over Texas.

Without the Botanical Research Institute of Texas (B.R.I.T.) and the Herbarium, seed-saving research, and programs of Texas would not have one of the largest collections of seeds of Native and Indigenous (Culinary) of Texas.

This time of year, especially, is hectic. But we need your help collecting from yards, neighbors, shopping centers, etc. (legally and with permission). We implore ALL Master Gardeners to contact someone to collect seeds or yourself. Use a small paper bag, drop seeds into it, and drop them off at the office. Be sure to write your name and contact information. Also, include the name of the seeds and where they were collected (write on the bag or container you use to collect). Paper bags allow the seeds to breathe and dry properly.

If you know of an area full of plants going to seed and do not wish to collect yourself, feel free to contact the help desk. Remember, this helps our Community, our Association, and so much more.

Here are organizations working towards preservation, networking, continuing education on seed saving, and more. I invite you to read at least the About Us page and see what is happening to our non-gmo seeds worldwide.

Here is the link to the documentary:

https://youtu.be/vKyC5b6u-f4?si=x_3sJcmRPIHMckld

Organizations:

<https://seedsavers.org/about/>

<https://www.communityseednetwork.org/about-us/>

<https://seedsources.com/about-us/>

<https://www.nativeseeds.org/pages/history-mission>

<https://fwbg.org/research/>

HERB STUDY GROUP

Herb of the Year by Tracy Brown

As I am interested in educating myself and other Master Gardeners on everything related to herbs, I was curious how and to whom they decide which herb is the herb of the year. Well, after a bit of research, I found the International Herb Association. Here is how it all started: In 1991, the International Herb Association (IHA) decided to celebrate the Herb of the Week. In 1995, it blossomed!

The International Horticulture Committee chooses each Herb. The Committee consists of members of the IHA. They evaluate possibilities based on three (3) categories. Culinary, Medicinal, or Decorative. The Herb must be outstanding in at least two (2). They have chosen every Herb of the Year from 1995 through 2025. They are already working on the following selections. Herb Societies from around the World educate the public on the importance of Herbs throughout any given year. Internationally, of course. All the herbs they have listed can be grown anywhere in the world with a little assistance.

The IHC publishes a book yearly to celebrate the Herb of the Year. These publications are put together by the IHA Members each year. If you are a Member of the IHA, you receive a free publication all about the Herb, including, History, growing, recipes and all botanical information. For a minimal fee, you can purchase past publications. Herb organizations around the world promote the Herb of the Year with education, recipes, and more for each Region/Country/State/County/Town...It just so happens that we are one of them.

For 2024, the Herb of the Year is Yarrow. Which does grow in our area. The Herb Study Group will be having a Round Table discussion about Herb at our January Meeting (January 17, 2024, in the AgriLife kitchen classroom, 10:00-11:30 am). Everything about teas, growing, harvesting, history, and recipes. Everyone is welcome. We will also be promoting Yarrow at our Spring Plant Sale. (March 23, 2024, at the Bell County Expo)

This spring, we will also have an example in our Herb Demonstration Garden, with all its pertinent information. If you have yet to see BCMG Herb Demonstration Garden, I encourage you to stop by and see it soon. Great herbs are coming!



THE BLOOMING BELL JANUARY 2024

SANSEVIERIA CYLINDRICA (AFRICAN SPEAR)

By Glenn Melton

S. cylindrica is an evergreen succulent that develops strap-shaped, stiff leaves from a basal rosette. The leaves are rounded and sharp-tipped, growing up to 7 feet tall. Underground, the plant spreads via rhizomes, developing numerous aggregations close to and far from the parent plant. Pink buds may emerge from a spiked raceme from winter to spring, followed by greenish-white flowers, tubular and tinged pink. Younger plants are more likely to bloom; long flower spikes may appear erratically on mature plants, occasionally followed by orange berries.

The African Spear plant originates from Angola in Southern Africa and commonly forms dense colonies in the wild.

When young, the stalks of the African Spear plant can be braided and tied together to create an interesting design.

Water moderately, about once every two weeks during the summer growing season. During winter, limit watering to once a month. Allow the soil to completely dry between waterings, and do not let the leaves become wet, as this can lead to rot. Prevent root rot by potting it in a sandy, well-draining cactus soil supplemented with peaty compost.

The African Spear prefers bright, direct sunlight, but avoid overly intense light, which can lead to yellowing leaves. This plant can tolerate partial shade but will suffer reduced growth in dark conditions. Avoid exposure to frost, as the plant is hardy to only 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

Feed during the growing season with a succulent fertilizer diluted to half strength, and do not feed in winter. Repot as necessary during the spring, and cultivate in a wide pot, as plants are top-heavy. Underground rhizomes are the main propagation method, but they can also be propagated by dividing tubers, corms, or bulbs, through leaf cuttings, and by planting seeds.

Resource: <https://apps.cals.arizona.edu/arboretum/taxon.aspx?id=1128>



THE BLOOMING BELL JANUARY 2024

KILLEEN MUNICIPAL COURT COMMUNITY GARDEN REPORT



★ For more details, check out the blog: <https://txmg.org/bell/kmccg-blog/>

During the month of December, we harvested 237 pounds of vegetables for local shelters, consisting of various squashes, peppers, radishes, tomatoes, and cabbage. This brings our yearly total to 8,399 pounds. During December, three young men and two young ladies worked on their community service hours. Also, during the month of December, 51 Master Gardeners participated during Saturday workdays.

During the year, 36 different master gardeners worked at the gardens on Saturday morning workdays, making a total of 674 appearances. 109 young men and 24 young ladies worked on their community service hours for the 2023 calendar year. Also for the year, twenty-nine friends of the master gardeners helped with gardening activities.



Raised Bed Gardening

By Monique Armas



Figure 1 Image by Better Homes & Garden

What is a raised bed gardening, anyway? Raised bed gardening spans from medieval times through Paris in the 18th century to the present times, where it is gaining traction as more people want to grow their own food. As such, raised bed gardening proves to be an excellent alternative for those who desire a more convenient way of gardening and/or only have small spaces to grow in. It consists of using structures that sit above ground level. These structures come in many different forms and sizes, including wood, concrete, metal, plastic, and many other materials. When building these structures, keep in mind a width that allows one to walk around the perimeter of the structure and tend to all plants without the need to step into the bed. They can also be built ranging from ground level to waist high in order to facilitate access. These structures do not require a bottom, but you may add any needed materials to keep grass and critters from accessing the bottom of your structures. Some materials include cardboard, landscape fabric, newspaper, burlap, hardware cloth, and/or stainless-steel gopher or rat mesh. Native soil in different ecoregions does not lend itself to good gardening. However, gardeners can use native soil in raised bed gardening with amendments to improve the soil's quality. But gardeners can incorporate the use of better quality pre-packaged or bulk soil/soilless media. In addition to good quality soil/soilless media, ensure the incorporation of compost and fertilizers as needed. Before amending any soil, a soil test is recommended to determine the soil's quality and composition. Soil tests can be obtained through the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Soil, Water, and Forage Testing Laboratory. Check out Skip Richter, Brazos County Extension Agent, as he briefly speaks about how versatile raised gardening is.

Benefits, anyone? As mentioned above, raised bed gardening allows for easier access by being able to adjust the height of the structures, and the gardener is able to tend to all plants from the perimeter of the structures, which provides less plant damage and soil compaction from foot traffic. There are many other advantages of raised bed gardening. Still, some that stood out the most include growing denser areas, resulting in higher yields, while being mindful of overcrowding, which restricts airflow, causing possible fungal issues. Also, the growing season can be extended since these structures warm up quicker in spring and cool down slower in the fall. They can also be used as a cold frame during the colder months. Check out Master Gardener Amy Lentz, Colorado State University Extension – Weld County, as she provides some exceptional information about the pros and cons of raised bed gardening.

Continued on next page...

THE BLOOMING BELL JANUARY 2024



Figure 2 Image by Covington's Nursery Landscape Co.



Figure 3 Image by Epic Gardening

Considerations, please? It is important to start with not only good-quality growing media but also one that has great drainage, as compacted soil hinders plant development. A variety of watering methods can be used, such as drip irrigation, ollas, watering cans with collected rainwater, and such, with consideration to water consistently, given that raised bed gardens tend to dry out quicker. Choose a site that offers some distance from buildings, trees, and shrubs to avoid competition for water and nutrients. Consider a site that is or can be protected from winds and ideally receives full sunlight. If the site does not have access to full sunlight, consider planting shade-tolerant varieties. It is a good rule of thumb to plant varieties suitable for one's hardiness zone while following planting guidelines (i.e., proper times to plant). To check out a selection of plants specially recognized by Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service for superior performance in tough growing conditions in Texas, visit the Texas Superstar website or contact your local extension office to obtain a printed brochure.

This month kicks off garden planning. Check out the Monthly Gardening Checklist for some pretty nifty things to consider in your garden planning.

Resources

<https://piedmontmastergardeners.org/dos-donts-of-raised-bed-gardening/>

https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2010/10/E-560_raised_bed_garden.pdf

<https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2021/03/09/basics-of-raised-garden-beds/>

<https://soiltesting.tamu.edu/>

https://youtu.be/AhKRRQvBoJM?si=nDSlelBfDkSfao_m

<https://youtu.be/5l9VM0pii04?si=SD-IDXL0WwxxS1G4>

<https://texassuperstar.com/>

<https://txmg.org/bell/monthly-gardening-in-central-texas/>