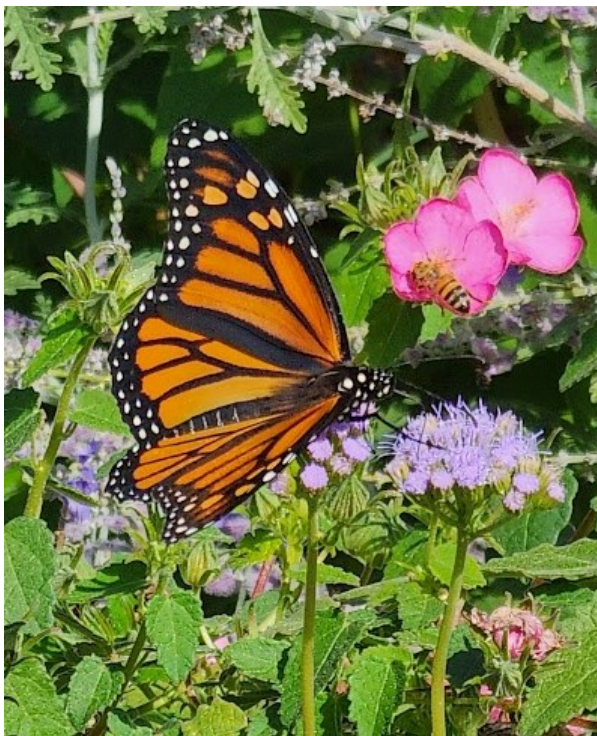




NEWS . EVENTS . GARDENING TIPS. EDUCATIONAL ARTICLES

# Spring Monarch Migration



**By Dave Slaughter**

Most of us recognize spring as blooming bluebonnets and verbena filling the fields with their hues of blue and purple, interrupted only by the occasional splash of yellow from dandelions and greenthreads. However, hovering just above the many flowers of spring are the black and orange of the monarch butterflies, searching for nectar to feed their hunger. The monarch butterfly returns to central Texas from its winter location in central Mexico, making its northward journey visiting nectar plants for fuel and searching for milkweed as a host plant to lay its eggs. The monarchs we see in spring may be the last generation from the previous year that spent their winter in Mexico or the first generation born earlier somewhere in northern Mexico or southern Texas.

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# THE BLOOMING BELL APRIL 2024

## Monthly Meetings

**WEDNESDAY SERVICE DAYS:** First & Third Wednesdays, 8:30-11:30 am, is a Master Gardner workday at the Extension Office. (2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

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

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.

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**Board of Directors Meeting:** Beginning in 2024 our board of directors' meetings will be held 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 extension office and will begin promptly at 10:00 a.m. **Upcoming Board Meeting Dates: May 29th**

**Bulb Interest Study Group:** Please join us for our April meeting at 1:00 on April 17. Please check the VMS for details.

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### Herb Study Group:

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

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

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**HELP DESK:** Monday through Thursday, 9:00 am to Noon & 1:00 to 4:00 pm. If interested in earning education & volunteer hours, please contact Kathy Love lkathy021@gmail.com.



Texas AgriLife Extension Service  
Horticulture Program in Bell County

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### Executive Board

President	Teri Marceau
1 <sup>st</sup> Vice President	Anna Sartin
2 <sup>nd</sup> Vice President	Barbara Ishikawa
Recording Secretary	Sophia Gomez
Treasurer	Jackie McLaughlin

### Directors

Communications	April Marek
Facilities	Open/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

## President's Perspective Community Engagement

By Teri Marceau

If Certified Bell County Master Gardeners (CBCMGs) were to receive a grade based on a scale 1 (fail) to 10 (excel) on our community engagement, would we pass, fail, or excel? My observation is that we fall between a 5 and 10 depending on the project. Seminars and Youth projects are at the top of the scale while we could use improvement in other projects regarding community engagement.

In December 2023 at the BOD's action planning meeting, we agreed the function of the board is to primarily focus on three things, community engagement, membership engagement, and the financial stewardship of our association. Today I want to focus on our community engagement. What does "community engagement" mean to a CBCMG? Let's first define the term.

*"in its simplest terms community engagement seeks to better engage the community to achieve long-term and sustainable outcomes, processes, relationships, discourse, decision-making, or implementation.*

*To be successful, it must encompass strategies and processes that are sensitive to the community-context in which it occurs."*<sup>1</sup>

One article I read described the flow to increasing the level of community engagement as Impact, Trust, and Communication. The first in this flow chart is outreach which we excel at with our speaker's bureau. **We made an impact with this year's plant sale!** Building trust through consulting our community may develop strong connections by involving community participation i.e., friends of CBCMGs establishing community cooperation and communication. Collaboration forms bidirectional flow of communication resulting in community trust and development of solutions.<sup>2</sup>

Our mission statement encompasses the former definition. If you have noticed by now I am always looking for ways to improve our mission efforts, asking 'how can we make this better?.' Suggestions from both CBCMGs and the public are a premium source on information. The feedback from the Outreach seminars is valuable, giving us an insight to what the citizens are interested in. In the previous paragraph we are challenged to involve these forms of community engagement.

How can we do better? With the increase of cost of living and the growth of the county, we are seeing and hearing the desire for hands-on experiences, i.e., free or donation based workshops. The grounds focus group will begin hosting such workshops from the beginning or the grounds improvement project following the progress and completion with seasonal tactical workshops.

We started to demonstrate the shift in focus with our High-5 moments. Rather than giving stats like total hours of continuing education and volunteer hours at the general membership meetings we will begin to focus on both our community and membership engagement. This month we have two wonderful examples to showcase at our meeting on April 10<sup>th</sup>, so be sure to join us either in person or via google meets.

<sup>1</sup> WHAT IS COMMUNITYENGAGEMENT | Penn State College of Agriculture Sciences | <https://aeese.psu.edu>

<sup>2</sup> PRINCIPLES COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – Second Edition | <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov>



(Continued from page 1)

The picture below is a first-generation male I observed enjoying nectar from a verbena on March 18. I knew he was a male because of the oval black spots on his hind wings, called an androconial scales. Females have much wider veining on their fore and hind wings. The monarch migration is imprinted in their DNA; they instinctively know to migrate north following the milkweed northward, propagating the species. Once temperatures begin to cool in September and they begin their journey back to their winter location in central Mexico, instinctively, they return to a location they have never been before. Normally, there are five generations of monarchs born each year during the northern migration throughout the United States and southern Canada. Intuitively the fifth generation born in the northern states or southern Canada suspends the mating cycle and begins feeding voraciously to store fuel for the long journey to Mexico. The five generations of the monarch butterfly travel three thousand miles across three countries on a wingspan of five inches with a body weight equal to a paperclip, so anything we can do to ease their journey will help the species to survive. Milkweed is the preferred host plant for monarch butterflies, where they lay their eggs, and their larva or caterpillars feed until they form a chrysalis and eventually emerge as adults. A female monarch lays four hundred eggs, but the egg survival rate to adulthood is only 5%. Normally, the cycle from egg to adult takes 23-37 days, depending on temperature. Except for the fifth-generation monarch, the average life of an adult monarch is truly short, only living two to six weeks as it travels northward. Monarch numbers are declining due to a multitude of reasons, such as loss of habitat in Mexico, loss of nectar plants and milkweed in the United States and Canada, weather, and pesticide use. However, we can help by planting milkweed and nectar plants in our backyard to support our migrating friends. Unfortunately, for this year, it is too late to grow and plant native milkweed due to the lengthy germination process. However, tropical milkweed is readily available at stores and nurseries. Although there is controversy with tropical milkweed and the parasite *ophryocystis elektroscirrha*, OE for short, just remember the butterfly carries the parasite, not the plant. Experts advise trimming your tropical milkweed to the ground several times during the growing season to minimize the transfer of OE. Tropical milkweed is the preferred milkweed by butterflies because it offers the highest levels of cardenolide, the milky latex fluid in all milkweeds. Plus, it is easy to propagate, both by seed and cuttings. Also appreciate that numerous universities and research institutes use tropical milkweed for their monarch studies and rearing programs, due to its availability.



(Continued on page 5)

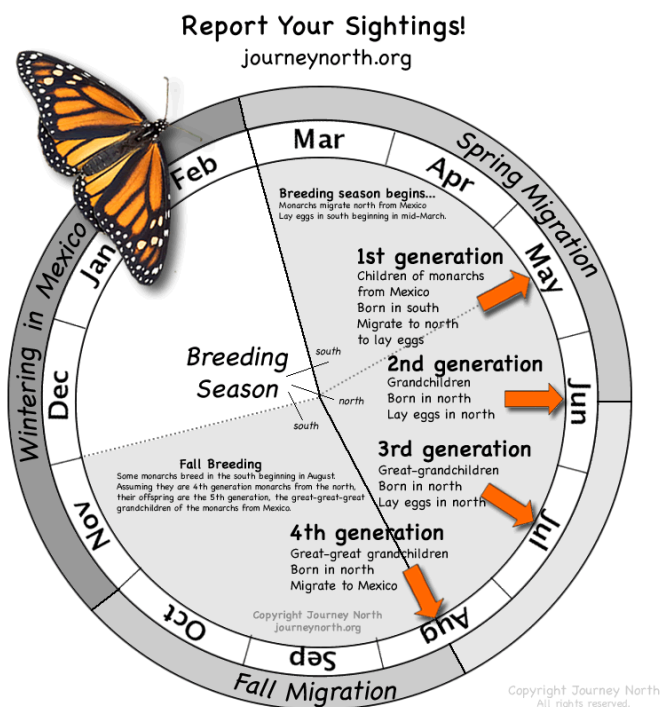
# THE BLOOMING BELL APRIL 2024

Cardenolide is a superfood to the monarch caterpillar, but to us it is an irritant to our skin and especially our eyes, so be careful if you are taking milkweed cuttings. There are multiple varieties of milkweed native to our area. The most common are antelope horn, green milkweed, and zizotes. Both antelope horn and zizotes are growing out in front of the Extension Office in the monarch waystation. In late May or early June, milkweed will begin podding and once the pods open naturally, it is the time to collect seeds for sexual propagation in late summer or early fall. I have antelope horn milkweed (*Asclepias Asperula*) growing quite



profusely at my home; on March 3, it was just starting to emerge from the ground, and as you can see from the photo taken on March 26 (left), flower heads are beginning to form. Once established, it grows quickly, returns every year, and it will even grow from a crack in the caliche. As the heat of the summer falls upon us, milkweed dies back to the ground, but it is an herbaceous perennial and will return next year. Besides milkweed, monarchs need nectar plants for fuel to support their journey northward and again in the fall to support their journey to Mexico. If you have not already done so, plant flowering plants to support their journey. Some monarch favorites are mist flowers, lantana, coneflower, flame acanthus, rockrose, salvias, and verbena, but that is just a compact list. I-35 is a major flyaway corridor for the monarch as they move northward, following the milk-

weed to give birth to new generations of monarchs until it is time for the final generation to return to Mexico, again flying south along the I-35 corridor. We are fortunate to live in the path of their major flyaway as they move north in the spring and again south in the fall. Remember, the fifth-generation butterfly is going to central Mexico, a place it has never been before, instinctively knowing to return to their ancestral winter location in Mexico. Monarchs are with us for a truly brief time during the spring and fall migration cycle, so enjoy and support them as they pass through our area.



# THE BLOOMING BELL      APRIL 2024

## Grounds Focus Group

By Teri Marceau

We have received County approval to move forward with our grounds remodel. We also have a quote for the first phase of the project. As you know, the planters along the wrought iron fence in front of the learning center have been removed along with the parking stops.

The focus group had another meeting where we divided the phases up into groups. Each phase has a team of leaders, who will be looking for sub committees to help with design, obtaining sponsorship and implementation of design.



Our goal is to get the project complete and submitted to the state awards by the end of 2025. In order for us to do so the focus group needs all hands-on deck.

Phase one work will begin Wednesday **April 3<sup>rd</sup>** by closing off the southeast pedestrian gate. The lock will be moved to the double wide drive in gate at the east side of the grounds. This will allow ADA accessibility without BCMGA have to do any additional modifications. The combinations will remain the same.

On Saturday **April 6<sup>th</sup>** at 7:30 AM Salvador and Juan Carlos Rodriguez will begin cutting the ground in order to lay the base form for the new planter. The new planter will run the entire length of the fence in order to mitigate the rainwater run-off. We will use the \$1,000 donation from Grizzlies Hidden Falls Nursery to help with the cost of the cement base. Once the base is complete and cured we will build a new planter wall with the used landscaping stones from the previous planter, replace the soil with what we saved, and replant the transplanted plants and trees. We do not have a plant design as of yet for this phase.

Team leads, current and future plans:

1. Karen Colwick & Carla Harman are leads for the irrigation, greenhouse, and area around the learning center. They are looking for help with cleanup of the grounds, relocating garden items to a better storage area and using the area to demonstrate ground covers and plants that grow well in rocky soil.
2. Betty Nejtek, Debbie Thompson, & Karen Colwick are leads on the demonstration beds (Phases 7-10) on the east side of the property. They will be working on design to widen the front pathway and fence design. They will also work with Carla Harman on a bench area the will incorporate some kind of pergola.
3. Tracy Brown & Teri Marceau will be the leads for the pocket prairie (Phase 11-12) with the help of Joyce Lauer, Charlotte Nunery, Joan Stanley.
4. The whole focus group will be working on the front demonstration beds. Rachel Glass and Kathy Lovelace have been asked to present designs.
  - A. Watering and maintenance will be part of our Wednesday service days. Gena Winston will be our go to on this when she is available otherwise see Teri Marceau.
  - B. Jan George, Gail Christian & Carol Morisset are leads for native plants in the handicapped bed.
  - C. Jan Upchurch & Carol Morisset are the leads for the rose bed which is part of phases 2-6. They have some great ideas.
5. Chuck Lauer is our finance guy. We have a budget of \$2000 which we purchased new wheelbarrow and a new greenhouse fan. He will keep track of any other funds raised for the project.
6. April Marek, Debbie Thompson, & Randy Thompson are leads on research and writing.
7. Chuck Newsom is our equipment and work crew advisor.

Our goal is to hold education classes and hands-on workshops from beginning. Therefore, if you would please join one or all of the phase team(s) today. We need articles and research as well has hands in the soil.

## From Intern to Board Member

*By Anna Sartin*

I volunteered to join the BCMGA Executive Board immediately after I finished my internship. I actually had to scramble to try to get enough hours to finish so I could qualify for the position! It seemed a little (or a lot!) crazy at the time, but looking back, it has been a great decision. Being on the board has had lots of benefits, but for the sake of time, I'll highlight just 2.

Benefit #1: I've gotten to know people in our organization.

We have so many fun people in BCMGA! As a board member I've not only gotten to know other board members, but also many folks in the general membership that I probably wouldn't have gotten to know – especially not as quickly as I have! I've learned many people's strengths and who to go to for certain questions, which can be very helpful info to know. J

Benefit #2: I've gotten to learn about how our organization works.

There are lots of great projects and education efforts going on in our community that our membership is involved in. But sometimes it can be a little challenging to learn about all the projects and how to be engaged with them. I've loved getting a more in-depth view of many of these projects. I've also learned how our organization sets its goals and priorities as well as the limitations and problems we can encounter along the way. We have a lot of energetic and creative people in our group who are solving problems and getting the job done and it's so inspiring to see! I've also gotten to lend my expertise to help with organizational efficiencies and help the organization stay focused on our goals. Win/Win!

When I was onboarding as a board member my predecessor for this position, Jan Upchurch, was so great in taking the time to sit with me to give me the lay of the land and answer my questions to get ready to take on this position. She is STILL answering my calls (I probably wouldn't have written me off as hopeless by now!), and I now have the added benefit of the support of my fellow board members and the members to help get my duties completed. I was worried that I would possibly be left lost and confused, but that certainly hasn't happened - It's a great team!

So, whether you're an intern in the 2024 class or you've been around for a while, I STRONGLY encourage you to consider becoming involved in the Executive Board or the Board of Directors. I know you'll enjoy it and you will be instrumental in helping our organization as it continues to serve the community and grow in the coming years.

## Intern Class Report - March 2024

By Jessica Dunmire

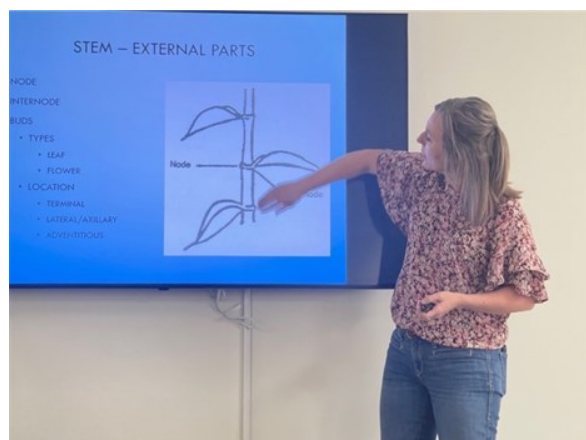


Photo by Stephanie Preciado; (Above) Master Gardener Interns Natalie McAnarney, Angela Brunaugh, and Berlin Rodriguez during Spring Plant Sale.

In March, Master Gardener Interns participated in only three class sessions, compared to five in February. Despite the reduced number, the March lessons were especially beneficial in educating interns on essential elements crucial for successful home gardening. This knowledge will enhance their ability to assist the public effectively.

Week 8 for Master Gardener Interns class fell on March 6. During this class, State Master Gardener Coordinator and editor of the Master Gardener Handbook, Jayla Fry imparted information on the topic of plant growth and development. Jayla captivated the class with her humor and lively presentation style, incorporating ballet movements to help students remember the distinction between xylem and phloem in a plant's vascular system.

March 11-15 the interns were given the week off from class for spring break. During this week many interns attended the monthly meeting, worked at the Killeen Municipal Court Gardens, and helped with preparations for the Spring Plant Sale.



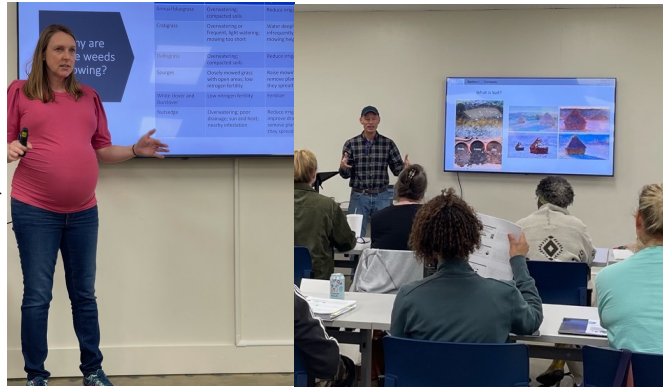
Photos by Jessica Dunmire: (Left) Jayla Fry, writer of the Texas Master Gardener Handbook, explains the parts of a plant stem; (Right) Interns Stephanie Preciado, Kim Dowell, and Lisa Weisman demonstrate flowering plants for the class.



# THE BLOOMING BELL APRIL 2024

Class on March 20<sup>th</sup>, week 9 for the interns, was taught by the Horticultural Agent Williamson County, Kate Whitney-Hajda. Kate’s lesson was all about turf grass and weeds and Earth-kind landscaping. She shared practical information about the watering requirements of various common turf grasses, explaining that many people water their lawns during times where it is unnecessary at best and detrimental at worst. Kate also elaborated on the differences between Earth-kind landscaping practices and the recent trend of “zero-scaping.” This week interns learned the importance of imparting information about home gardening and landscaping for a public who is becoming increasingly more aware of conservation and eco-friendly practices.

*Photos by Jessica Dunmire; (Left) Horticultural Agent for Williamson County, Kate Whitney-Hajda, describing how grass-like weeds take hold in turf lawns; (Right) Jake Mowrer, PhD, Texas A&M Soil Nutrient & Water Resource Management Specialist presenting on the philosophy of soil versus dirt.*



Although Spring Plant Sale preparations began weeks before the event, a majority of the set-up occurred on March 22, the day before the sale. Interns and Master Gardeners alike arrived bright and early that Friday to unload a few trucks full of plants and organize the floor for the event the following day. Many of the interns also joined Master Gardeners in managing the crowd, questions, and plants on sale day (Saturday, March 23).

For week 10 (March 27<sup>th</sup>), the intern class hosted a presentation by Dr. Jake Mowrer who is an Extension Associate Professor and Soil Nutrient & Water Resource Management Specialist from Texas A&M. Dr. Mowrer was an enthusiastic speaker who shared his philosophy of understanding soil as, “a habitat” and the living organisms within it as “citizens of the soil.” He also explained the 16 elements essential for plant growth and methods for understanding and diagnosing problems caused by excesses or deficiencies of these nutrients.

The month of April is looking to be just as busy for the intern class as the previous two. Master Gardener Interns will attend presentations which focus on pesticides, integrated pest management, drip irrigation, composting, and plant propagation. During the final week of April, the interns will take a class field trip to Gabriel Valley Farms to learn about Greenhouse management.



*Photos by Stephanie Preciado, At the Spring Plant Sale: (Top) Guillermo Viejo AKA Will Snow organizing plants; (Bottom, Left) Viola Ming-Copsy ready with the price-guide; (Bottom-Right) Kim Dowell selling her macramé plant hangers.*



Figure 1 Photo by housedigest.com

## Hummingbirds as Pollinators

*By Monique Armas*

Hummingbirds are not only captivating creatures with their iridescent plumage and swift aerial acrobatics but also play a crucial role in the ecosystem as pollinators. With their long, slender bills and specialized tongues, hummingbirds have evolved to feed on nectar from flowers, inadvertently transferring pollen from one blossom to another as they sip the sweet liquid. These tiny avian pollinators are particularly attracted to brightly colored, tubular flowers, such as trumpet vines, honeysuckles, and fuchsia. As they hover in front of a flower to drink its nectar, their heads often come into contact with the flower's reproductive organs, picking up pollen grains in the process. When they visit another flower of the same species, some of this pollen is deposited onto the flower's stigma, facilitating fertilization and the production of seeds.

The relationship between hummingbirds and the flowers they pollinate is a perfect example of coevolution, where both parties have adapted over time to benefit each other. Flowers have evolved traits like bright colors and sweet nectar to attract hummingbirds, while hummingbirds have developed long bills and specialized tongues to access the nectar deep within the flowers. The importance of hummingbirds as pollinators extends beyond just the plants they visit directly. By pollinating flowers, hummingbirds contribute to the reproduction of numerous plant species, including many that humans rely on for food, such as fruits, vegetables, and nuts. Additionally, they help maintain the genetic diversity of plant populations, which is essential for the resilience and adaptation of plant species to changing environmental conditions.

Unfortunately, like many pollinators, hummingbirds face threats to their survival, including habitat loss, climate change, pesticide use, and collisions with man-made structures. Conservation efforts aimed at preserving and restoring hummingbird habitats, reducing pesticide usage, and raising awareness about the importance of these remarkable birds as pollinators are essential for their continued well-being and the health of ecosystems worldwide. Protecting these charismatic birds and their habitats is essential for maintaining the delicate balance of nature.

### Resources

<https://www.pollinator.org/learning-center/hummingbirds>

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/hummingbirds.htm>

<https://agrifetoday.tamu.edu/2021/03/25/spring-is-the-time-to-put-out-hummingbird-feeders/>

[https://youtu.be/221siEI0SOM?si=kr8SZNfVyTSdW2\\_p](https://youtu.be/221siEI0SOM?si=kr8SZNfVyTSdW2_p)

# TORTELLINI IN MARIGOLD BROTH

I have not tried this recipe yet, but thought I would share since I am starting to see marigolds everywhere! Since dried marigold flowers add a sharp tangy taste to this pasta, the author says it softens great with butter and cream! YUM...sounds delicious! Can't wait to try it out! --Santi

FULL RECIPE BY KYLIE PERROTTI

<https://www.triedandtruerecipe.com/tortellini-in-marigold-broth/>



PHOTO BY KYLIE PERROTTI FOR TRIED AND TRUE RECIPE

## INGREDIENTS

### MARIGOLD BROTH

- 1/4 cup dry marigold petals
- 2 tsp extra virgin olive oil
- shallots peeled and quartered
- 5 cloves garlic peeled and crushed
- 1 lemon cut into thick rounds
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 5 cups chicken stock
- salt and pepper to taste
- sugar if needed
- 4 tbsp of butter
- 1/3 cup heavy cream



### FOR SERVING

- 12 ounces fresh tortellini
- 1 pound fresh asparagus trimmed and cut into thirds
- extra virgin olive oil (optional)
- a pinch of marigold petals (optional)



## INSTRUCTIONS

### START THE MARIGOLD BROTH:

1. Rinse the marigold petals under cold water for 1 minute in a fine mesh sieve, then set aside.
2. Heat the extra virgin olive oil in a wide pot over medium heat. Add the shallot and cook for 2-3 minutes. Add the crushed garlic and lemon. Cook for 3-4 minutes until fragrant.
3. Pour the white wine into the pot. Add the stock and the marigold petals. Bring to a boil and then reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, for 30 minutes. Season with salt, pepper, and sugar (if necessary).

### STRAIN THE MARIGOLD BROTH:

1. Pour the broth into a bowl with a fine-mesh sieve and discard the solids. Wipe out the pot and return it to the stove.

### COOK THE TORTELLINI:

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and cook the tortellini for 4-5 minutes until al dente. Drain and set aside.

### FINISH THE MARIGOLD BROTH:

1. Melt the butter in the wide pot over medium heat. Once melted and frothy, add the strained broth. Taste and season to your preference. If the broth seems like it has too much bite, add another half cup or so of water to cut down on the tanginess.
2. Bring the broth to a boil and reduce heat. Stir in the cream and cook for 5 minutes until thickened slightly.
3. Add the asparagus and cook for 3-5 minutes or until bright green and tender-crisp. Add the cooked tortellini and turn off the heat.

### TO SERVE:

1. Ladle the tortellini in marigold broth into bowls. Garnish with extra virgin olive oil and a pinch of marigold petals, if desired. Enjoy!

## Upcoming Events

April 6: The Bell County Master Gardener Association and the Central Texas Mycological Society presents a hands-on “Gourmet Mushroom Gardening Workshop” on Saturday, April 6 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Texas Agrilife Extension Office, BCMGA Learning Center, 1605 N. Main St., Belton. You will learn how to recycle mushroom grow blocks to build healthy soil, increase water retention, feed the soil web, your plants and eventually you. This workshop will cover basic mycology and then show you low-cost and low-tech ways to recycle mushroom grow blocks to take home.

Class Fee: \$25

Register at [bcmgaspeakers@gmail.com](mailto:bcmgaspeakers@gmail.com) Registration closes Friday, March 29 or when full.

April 13: The Bell County Master Gardener Association presents a Hands-on “Rainwater Harvesting Barrel Workshop” on Saturday, April 13 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Texas Agrilife Extension Office, BCMGA Learning Center, 1605 N. Main St., Belton. Certified Master Gardener’s Karen Colwick and Teri Marceau will be providing educational information on Rainwater Harvesting followed by a class on how to build your own rain barrel to take home after workshop.

Class Limit: Rain Barrels (food grade) included with cost of class: 15 available (one barrel per family, 2 family members, age 10 and up).

Fee: \$60

Register at [bcmgaspeakers@gmail.com](mailto:bcmgaspeakers@gmail.com) Registration closes Friday, April 5 or when sold out.

April 16: American Botanical Council, 6200 Manor Rd, Manor Texas 10 am to 12 noon <https://www.herbalgram.org/> Car Pooling is highly encouraged. Meet at the location at 9:45 am. Tour starts promptly at 10:00 am Takes approximately 2 hours for tour (just over an hour to get there) Bring something to drink. There will be leisure walking and standing, with places to sit down. Bathrooms also available.

April 17: The Bell County Master Gardener Association will be holding their monthly Bulb Interest Group meeting on Wednesday, April 17 from 1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. in the Texas Agrilife Extension Office Classroom, 1605 N. Main St., Belton. This month’s topic will include Daffodils, Ornamental Allium and Snowflakes. Meeting is open to the public.

April 18: The Bell County Master Gardener Association is hosting a free monthly seminar “Invasive Plants” on Thursday, April 18, from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Texas Agrilife Extension Office, BCMGA Learning Center, 1605 N. Main St., Belton. Certified Master Gardener Mary Ann Everett will teach you how to identify invasive plants, how they came to be here in the first place, and what you can do if you have these plants on your property. Real specimens will be available and those attending will try their hand at identifying them before beginning the presentation.

Please register at [bcmgaspeakers@gmail.com](mailto:bcmgaspeakers@gmail.com)

(Continued on page 13)

## Upcoming Events

(Continued from page 12)

April 27: The Bell County Master Gardener Association presents a Hands-on Workshop “Garden Tool Sharpening and Maintenance” on Saturday, April 27 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Texas Agrilife Extension Office, BCMGA Learning Center, 1605 N. Main St., Belton. Certified Master Gardener’s Ray Machovsky and Dennis Biggs and Intern Will Snow will

be providing educational information followed by a hands-on class on how to sharpen garden tools. There will be hands-on demonstrations on sharpening lawn mower blades, repairing hose fittings and cleaning large garden tools to remove rust and buildup. So bring your dull bypass pruners or other small garden tool and your work gloves and get ready to sharpen.

Class Limit: 20

Class Fee: \$25

Register at [bcmgaspeakers@gmail.com](mailto:bcmgaspeakers@gmail.com)

Registration closes Friday, April 19 or when full.

May 23: LBJ Wildflower Center Plant and Seed Saving Conservatory

10 am to 12 noon. <https://www.wildflower.org/> The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center is giving us a Tour of their Seed Saving Bank and Plant Conservation areas. This is open to all Master Gardeners, in cooperation with the Seed Saving Project of BCMG. It is capped at 30 people. Car pooling is encouraged. We will meet at the Entrance (under the Arches) at LBJ Wildflower Center at 9:45 am. Tour Starts Promptly at 10 am.

June 4: 11:00-1:00 Herbarium at B.R.I.T: Located on the Ft Worth Botanical Garden Grounds (Entry Fee \$16 each based on 25 people) <https://fwbg.org/research/herbarium/>

Car Pooling heavily encouraged. Lunch can be had close by the Gardens, or on grounds, if you choose to stay and tour the garden. Cost is \$16. If paying with credit card, there is an additional \$2 charge. Once RSVP is received, there will be no refunds, if it ends up you cannot make it. You can sell your spot to another person instead. Contact Debbie at [bcmgaspeakers@gmail.com](mailto:bcmgaspeakers@gmail.com) for link on payment. Or stop by the office with your cash, no later than May 17, 2024.

June 17: 8:30 a.m. Westphalia Roots 101 CR 389 Lott 76656 <https://localflowers.org/local-flowers-member/westphalia-roots/> Meet at the Flower farm. There will be lots of Flowers. Car Pooling encouraged. Everyone is welcome. Although they are close by. be ready to get some cut flowers for your Home. After we can meet somewhere for lunch.



# Spring Plant Sale Results

By Barbara Ishikawa

The reviews are in, and by all accounts, the 2024 Spring Plant Sale was a success! Here's what our customers had to say:

"I spent too much and had a blast!!!"

"It was absolutely perfect!! Our 1st time & loved it!"

"I think y'all did awesome job and held it in a better location. There was a better selection this year as well. Thank you all for what y'all do for the community!!"

And when asked what they enjoyed the Master Gardeners who volunteered said:

"Working with my master gardener friends. Seeing how the public turned out for our plant sale and how positive everyone was."

"Getting to talk to people who are new to the area and can't wait to learn all about gardening here."

"The wonderful customers!!! And working with fellow MGs who were determined to make this an outstanding sale."

"Overhearing two little boys tell their nana it was their best day ever!"

And, yes, we also met our financial goals. Great results Master Gardener team! A wrap-up meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 3, and a final report will be made at the General Membership meeting on April 10. Thank you for your energy, enthusiasm and contributions to this event.



# THE BLOOMING BELL APRIL 2024



# THE BLOOMING BELL APRIL 2024

## KILLEEN MUNICIPAL COURT COMMUNITY GARDEN REPORT



During the month of March, we harvest 87.36 pounds of radishes, carrots, turnips, various greens, and herbs. Tomato transplants were planted and already beginning to show signs of fruit. March was also a month of planning and preparation for the quickly-approaching growing season. Irrigation lines were improved and repaired, lots of weeds were pulled, perennials were divided, and squash and bean seeds were planted. Several members of the new class continue to come to the garden to earn their service hours, and their efforts are truly appreciated.





## Genista Caterpillar

*By Wizzie Brown*

Spring seems to have arrived in Central Texas and my mountain laurels are putting on blooms. If you're like me and enjoy going in for a good sniff of those grape candy smelling flowers, while you're there take a look around for caterpillars that may be munching on foliage. Genista caterpillars can be quite common on mountain laurel but may also be found on crape myrtle and honeysuckle.

These caterpillars can grow up to one inch in length and are greenish yellow to orange in color with small black and white dots along their body. They have hairs that emerge along the body but are not densely covered. Genista caterpillars create webbing like that of webworms, but to a lesser degree. Larvae, or caterpillars, feed on leaves within webbing causing defoliation of the plant. Eggs are laid in overlapping clusters on the underside of leaves. Pupation occurs in a small, white silken cocoon that is attached to plants or structures. There are two generations per year.



Normally genista caterpillars do not cause significant damage to trees, so no management is required. If you feel management is needed because of a large population, it can be rather simple. If plant size allows, caterpillars can be hand-picked and either smashed or dropped in a bucket of soapy water. Other options may include insecticidal soap, horticultural oils, botanicals, spinosad, or *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki*, also known as Bt. *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* specifically targets caterpillars but does not distinguish between "good" and "bad" caterpillars, so be careful where you apply it and be aware of drift that may occur. When using spinosad or Bt, good coverage of plant foliage is essential since the caterpillars need to consume a lethal dose. When using any pesticide product, be sure to read and follow all label instructions.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at [ebrown@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:ebrown@ag.tamu.edu).

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## HERB STUDY GROUP

### Exploring the Versatile Nasturtiums: A Guide for Herb Gardeners - Herb Interest Study Group - Nina Keeler

Nasturtiums (*Tropaeolum majus*) are not just beautiful garden additions; they are also culinary delights with a long history and a range of benefits. Originally hailing from South America, specifically Peru and Bolivia, these vibrant plants were introduced to Europe in 1684 by a Dutch Monk named Peter Bererden. Today, they are cultivated worldwide, cherished for their spicy-flavored leaves and flowers that are reminiscent of watercress.

#### Cultivation and Characteristics

Nasturtiums are easy to grow and can thrive in various settings such as pots, tubs, flowerbeds, and raised beds. They prefer well-draining soil like bark, peat moss, or potting soil. Interestingly, they do not require additional feeding to flourish, as this can result in excessive leaf growth.

These plants enjoy regular watering and are fairly drought-tolerant once established. They are best suited for cool seasons and should be planted early. Nasturtiums self-seed and spread prolifically, making them a low-effort, high-reward addition to any garden. They are also known for their ability to deter deer and rabbits once they've taken root.



#### Culinary Uses and Recipes

One of the most exciting aspects of nasturtiums is their edible nature. Both the leaves and flowers can be consumed, offering a spicy kick similar to watercress. Here are some delightful recipes to incorporate nasturtiums into your culinary adventures:

1. **Nasturtium Salad:** Combine nasturtium leaves and flowers with mixed greens, cherry tomatoes, cucumber slices, and a light vinaigrette for a refreshing salad with a peppery twist.
2. **Stuffed Nasturtium Flowers:** Fill nasturtium flowers with a creamy mixture of whipped cream cheese, herbs, and a dash of lemon zest for an elegant appetizer.
3. **Nasturtium Pesto:** Blend nasturtium leaves, garlic, pine nuts, Parmesan cheese, and olive oil into a vibrant pesto sauce. Toss with pasta or use as a flavorful spread.
4. **Nasturtium Capers:** Harvest the immature seed pods (before they harden) and pickle them in vinegar and spices to create a unique substitute for capers.
5. **Roasted Nasturtium Seeds:** Dry roast the mature seeds in the oven until golden brown for a crunchy and nutritious snack or topping for salads and soups.

#### Health Benefits and Historical Uses

Beyond their culinary appeal, nasturtiums offer several health benefits. They are rich in vitamin C and contain a sulfur compound with antibacterial properties, making them valuable for boosting immunity and fighting infections.

Historically, nasturtium seeds were used during WWII as a peppercorn substitute, showcasing their versatility and resilience. They were also employed to prevent scurvy on ships due to their high vitamin C content.

In the garden, nasturtiums act as a trap crop, attracting aphids and white cabbage moths away from other plants. Their ability to secrete compounds that deter pests and support neighboring plants makes them a valuable addition to any ecosystem.

(Continued on page 19)

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## Safety Note: Poisonous to Pets

It's important to note that while nasturtiums offer many benefits, they are poisonous to cats, horses, and dogs. Gardeners should take care to keep these plants out of reach of pets to avoid any potential harm.

## Conclusion

Nasturtiums are more than just ornamental flowers; they are a treasure trove of culinary delights, health benefits, and gardening advantages. Whether you're a seasoned herb gardener or just starting out, consider adding these vibrant plants to your garden for a pop of color, flavor, and functionality.



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