



NEWS . EVENTS . GARDENING TIPS. EDUCATIONAL ARTICLES

2024 Intern Class: The Wrap-Up

By Jessica Dunmire



As this year’s Intern class approaches its graduation ceremony on June 12th, we look back at the month of May. Throughout the course, this intern class has cultivated a unique sense of community among themselves and truly embraced the mission of the Master Gardener program by participating high quality, relevant, research-based horticultural education and services to the residents of Bell County. During May the group attended their final three classroom sessions.

On May 1st, Pedro Uribe, an expert on plant pathology and microbiology and member of the Tactical Science team for Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, visited the classroom. His presentation was a thorough discussion of several matters of significance for Master Gardeners. Of the topics explored, how to diagnose plant diseases and the plant disease triangle were incredibly informative and relevant.

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Monthly Meetings

WEDNESDAY SERVICE DAYS: First & Third Wednesdays, 8:30-11:30 am, is a Master Gardner 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., June 12th.

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.

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: July 17th

Herb Study Group:

Please contact Tracy Brown for further information:

bcmgtabrown@gmail.com.

Killeen Municipal Court Community Garden: Meets every Saturday at 8:30 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. If interested in earning education & volunteer hours, please contact Kathy Love lkathy021@gmail.com.

All Photos Contributed by Randy Brown, Stephanie Preciado, Natalie McAnarney, Jessica Dunmire, Dave Slaughter, Lindell Small, and April Marek, unless otherwise noted.



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Certified Bell County Master Gardener Volunteers

Class of 2024 Graduates

By Teri Marceau

Volunteers don't get paid, not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless - Sherry Anderson

I want to congratulate the Bell County Master Gardener Volunteer (BCMGV) class of 2024. We are very proud of your accomplishment. Your class worked through all the assignments and passed the final exam. As president, I am very proud of each one of you and excited to serve alongside you.

We can complain because rose bushes have thorns or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses - Alphonse Karr

BCMGVs come from all walks of life with diverse personalities, but we have two things in common: the love of everything gardening and the love of serving others. Please let me encourage you to do your best, find what brings you the most joy, and grow in that area. I can't emphasize enough that any idea, whether small or big, new or improved, that you may have is important to share. We can only perfect our skills with brainstorming. As graduates, you come with a fresh perspective—one we all can benefit from. Summertime is a little slow, which will give you time to get involved in a committee or project that complements your skills and experiences.

Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves - J.M. Barrie

The graduation ceremony will be held at our June 12th general membership meeting at the Harris Community Center. You won't want to miss it. Please join me in congratulating our newest BCMGVs.



Congratulations, Bell County Master Gardener Volunteers!!

Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart - Elizabeth Andrew

Announcements

By Teri Marceau

Community & Member Engagement

Do you have a group or someone you would like to highlight at our general membership meeting? Please let us know. We love to celebrate you and our neighbors.

Help Desk

Do you like sharing what you're learning or already know with others? The help desk is looking for more volunteers. Volunteering for this very valuable community resource helps us keep the office open when one of the regular master gardeners is unable to serve on the desk or is taking a vacation. It is a lot more fun when there are two BCMGVs. The office hours are Monday through Thursday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, and 1:00-4:00 p.m. To volunteer, sign up in VMS or see Kathy Love.

Youth Projects

Are you aware that we have summer youth projects? If you missed Susan Fogleman's email and would like to mentor young gardeners in Harker Heights, sign up in VMS or talk with Joyce Lauer to get involved.

Grounds Update

Does anyone know how to get the Platt map of our grounds? Kathy Lovelace and I met with Andrew Voelter regarding completing the north planter and mapping out the irrigation. I have reached out to other contractors with no success. I have requested from the county to have the trees trimmed along the fence and to open the oak tree canopy in July in preparation for moving the herb beds away from the dumpster and to make a better composting area, which is the best plan instead of losing the big oak tree in the sheriff's yard. The plan for the crepe myrtle trees is to wash the soil from the roots and plant them in large containers in the front demonstration beds. We are currently looking for partners to help with our overall project. For more information, please see someone in the focus group.

July Board of Directors Retreat

Your board of directors is having a brainstorming retreat on July 17th instead of the regularly scheduled meeting! We will meet from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the new Clearwater Underground Water Conservation District's meeting/conference room. We will have an abbreviated board meeting from 10:00 to 10:45 a.m., followed by our brainstorming meeting. For questions, please see a board member.

Joining the Board as Co-Directors

Remember, we will vote on board openings this fall. During the '22-'23 term, Louann Hight and the policy committee encouraged each officer and director to create a committee with an associate director. Several members implemented such committees, which helped spread the weight of the position. If you are interested in an open position, you may want to consider buddying up with someone and running as an associate officer/director. Please reach out to Glenn Melton or Louann Hight.

2024 Intern Perspective

By Viola Ming-Cospy

The Takeaway



As of June 12, our merry band of interns will officially become Master Gardeners. With the exceptions in my views on water conservation and an embarrassing dislike for St Augustine grass, I'm not sure I am any different than when I entered the program. I already miss our weekly gatherings and the daily banter in our text messages. Not so much, forgetting my name tag and Dave's stern "hush" stare before class. Deeper, there are things I have really been thinking about.

Where do we go from here?

Whenever we used the term finished in front of our esteemed instructor, he was quick to correct me. I wonder if this happened to anyone else or if it was even noticed. I heard you, Mr. Slaughter. I asked him about the part of the Mission Statement he wasn't happy with and what the attrition rate is for interns returning to volunteer after course completion. His answers didn't surprise me. See, initially, I entered the program strictly for my own selfish reasons, and I mostly just wanted to take care of my little patch of paradise.

On my first visit, I found the AgriLife extension office full of tangible resources: seeds, planting schedules, pamphlets, photos, and bugs mounted on Styrofoam. The building always seemed to be busy. Spring was fast approaching, and I was raring to glean as much free stuff as I could before the course started. My granddaughter in tow received a coloring book and crayons, all about gardening! Cool.

On January 17th, the class schedule was taped to the front of the textbook, and I was raring to go. Then, the bottom of the page loomed heavy. I'll admit now that the idea of 75 volunteer hours seemed daunting. But if I paced myself and planned it out, it could be accomplished. What I did not expect was how easy it became and how I looked forward to the next event. The Youth Fair is forever a favorite.

So why this tiny note? Well, there is another valuable lesson I learned these last few months. With all the cool stuff I picked up on that first visit, nothing prepared me for this takeaway. Pun intended. AgriLife resources, websites, pamphlets, and seeds aside, I learned that each and every member of the team, old and new, are the resources that cannot be picked up, planted, or colored in. We all bring amazing insight and energy to this organization, and I sincerely hope to continue working with the class of 2024. Thanks.

(Continued from page 1)

Following Mr. Uribe's plant pathology presentation, Dave Slaughter discussed the controversy among gardeners regarding Tropical Milkweed and Monarch Butterflies. Dave shared information about the potential risks concerning the use of Tropical Milkweed in Texas and its possible impact on migrating Monarch populations.



Photos by Jessica Dunmire; (Left) Pedro Uribe from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's Tactical Science Team; (Right) Dave Slaughter, Master Gardener New Class Director

The next week (May 8th), interns, one by one, each gave their own presentation to the group. The presentations were on a wide variety of topics, all held together by a common thread – gardening. Natalie McAnarney was up first, teaching the group about the basics of landscape design using her own experience, turning her backyard from builders' basic to a garden oasis. Then Lisa Wiesman shared her love of irises with all with a thorough explanation of iris growing tips and information about many of the available varieties. For the third presentation, Jessica Dunmire walked the class through her struggles and successes while attempting to grow a salad with a deadline. Next up, Kim Dowell elaborated on the planning process involved in planting by using her own unique property and landscaping as examples. Stephanie Preciado's presentation entitled "The Science Behind the Therapeutic Benefits of Gardening" expounded on the impact that gardening has on improving the lives of all involved, both physically and mentally.



Photos by Stephanie Preciado and Jessica Dunmire; Top Row: (Left to Right) Natalie McAnarney, Lisa Weisman, Jessica Dunmire; Bottom Row: Kim Dowell and Stephanie Preciado

Continuing with the class presentations, Lenny West shared insights about the use of seaweed extract as a vegan alternative fertilizer and his successes with using it. Next up was Jalenn Ellis, who brought a demonstration of “earthworms” (toy worms in dirt made to look realistic) to explain the vital role the world’s 4,000+ types play. Viola Ming-Copsy’s presentation warned the group about the alien-like pest plant, Dodder, which she had personal experience battling. Equipped with several colorful posters and a homemade herbal face mask for each member of the class, Berlin Rodriguez extolled the virtues of herbs and their many holistic uses. Then Denise Wolf shared her years of experience creating hydroponic vegetable gardens and introduced the class to the basics of growing hydroponically.



Photos by Stephanie Preciado and Jessica Dunmire; Top Row: (Left to Right) Lenny West, Jalenn Ellis, Viola Ming-Copsy; Bottom Row: Berlin Rodriguez and Denise Wolf

The final group of presentations began with Greg Sherrod's discussion on Xeriscaping and the importance of protecting our water resources. Afterward, Stenna Halldorson shared her experience working with a unique group of gardeners at the Temple Community Gardens. Next up, Chris Gordon's presentation elaborated on the commonly overlooked gardening term cultivar while teaching the class the history behind the practice of mapping traits for plants. After that, Danna Sellers shared her very personal journey of becoming spiritually more connected to her religion and her grandmothers, who passed away through gardening. Following this, Angela Brunaugh described the Basics of Beekeeping and included information about many varieties of honey-producing bees. The last presentation of the day was given by Will Snow, who elaborated on the topic of garden tool care and maintenance. Kim Tompkins shared her presentation about Carnivorous Plants on the following Wednesday.



Photos by Stephanie Preciado; Top Row: (Left to Right) Greg Sherrod and Stenna Halldorson; Center Row: Chris Gordon and Danna Sellers; Bottom Row: Angela Brunaugh, Will Snow, and Kim Tompkins

On May 15th, the Master Gardener Intern class of 2024 gathered together for their final class session. During this, the group took a final exam, which tested their understanding of all the information taught throughout the course. This class session wrapped up with a celebratory cake, and each intern received a thoughtfully put-together gift bag from Master Gardeners. The class gets together for their final official intern group event on June 12th, when they will graduate from the program. Having successfully completed the required number of service hours, many class members will also be granted their silver Master Gardener badge during the ceremony.



Clean Water Heroes

By Natalie McAnarney

As gardeners, water is often on our minds. Recent drought events have challenged most of us to hone our water conservation techniques. Yet, access to clean water is a privilege many of us can easily overlook. Providing potable water to over a quarter of a million people is an amazing feat that Bell County's Water Control and Improvement District (WCID)#1 performs daily. For most of us in Bell County, municipal water is sourced from either Stillhouse or Belton Lakes. At the Stillhouse Water Treatment Plant, approximately 17,000,000 gallons of water can be processed per day. Raw water from Stillhouse Lake is pumped into the treatment plant and enters a series of basins known as a "train." The first basin is a rapid-mix basin where aluminum is introduced into the water to help particulate matter clump and separate it from the water



Figure 1 Ribbon cutting ceremony for Stillhouse Water Treatment Plant in 2021

more easily. To facilitate this process, paddles agitate the water, and the particulate matter eventually settles to the bottom of the basin. The water is then filtered through a dual media filter, and then treated with chlorine. The water is potable and stored in a 1.7-million-gallon tank known as a clearwell. This process can occur on either one of the two trains at the Stillhouse Water Treatment Plant. One train is actively treating water, while the other is undergoing maintenance.

The plant is automated by the SCADA (supervisory control

and data acquisition) system, which allows the operators at the plant to analyze data and make decisions in real-time. Rosie Montalvo and John Ortiz are the key water operators at Stillhouse Water Treatment Plant. JD Dominguez is a water superintendent for WCID #1 and oversees the process. These unsung heroes help maintain a "superior water system" designation. This designation is a composite of several key metrics.



Figure 2 Floccing paddles helping separate particulate matter.

Safe and reliable drinking water is only one of these metrics. According to the Texas Rural Water Association, Texas is one of the only states to mandate third-party testing to ensure objective monitoring of its drinking water systems.



Figure 3 Water superintendent, JD Dominguez, explaining water treatment process.

In terms of future growth, the WCID#1 website states the following: "The last master plan update revealed that some additional supply is needed in the planning horizon, even with some redistribution of contracted water. Additionally, some entities will need more treatment capacity within the next ten years to support their growth."

As our community grows, it is important to be good stewards of our water. We should also be mindful of those working behind the scenes to make sure we have continued access to it.



Figure 4 Water Superintendent JD Dominguez, Sandra Blankenship, Stenna Halldorson, Water Operator Joe Ortiz, Natalie McAnarney, Water Operator Rosie Montalvo, Angela Brunaugh, Berlin Rodreguez

Echinacea

By Victoria Ezagui

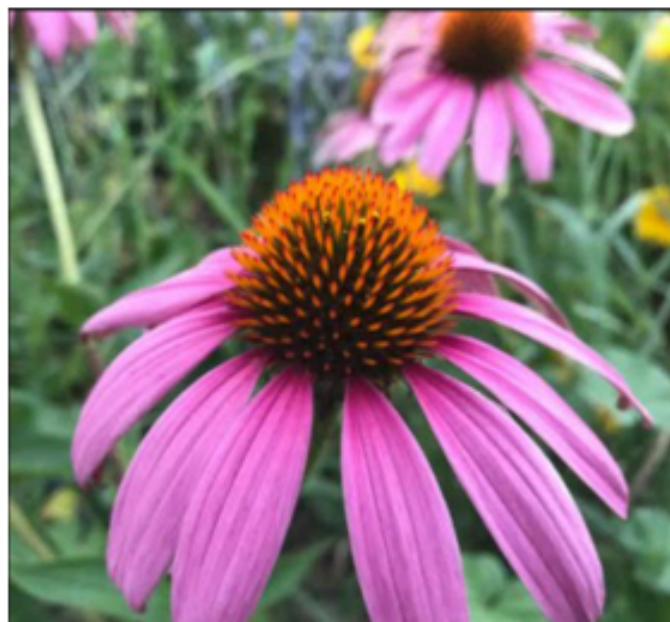
It's a genus of herbaceous flowering plants in the daisy family. It has 10 species, which are commonly called coneflowers. They are only native to eastern and central North America, growing in prairies and open wooded areas. The generic name is derived from the Greek word echinos, meaning "hedgehog" due to the spiny central disk. Some studies have shown it has beneficial effects on the immune system, but as always, do your research and talk to your doctor or healthcare provider.

Echinacea prefers full sun and moist but not damp soil, as this can cause root rot. It blooms from summer into fall and attracts bees, butterflies, and some birds like goldfinches. It is not aggressive but does self-seed if you wait until late winter to cut it back. You can prohibit self-seeding but deadheading the flowers. Hybrids will not self-seed as most are sterile (not producing viable seeds). If you save your seeds, they are viable for up to 7 years.

Seeds require a period of cold stratification for about 8-12 weeks. Mix seeds with a moist medium (e.g., sand or peat moss), one part seeds to three parts moist medium. Place it in a closed container and check on it periodically to make sure it remains moist. Then, when ready to plant, soak seeds 6-8 hours before planting. However, seed-sown plants may not bloom for 2-3 years.

Coneflowers are drought tolerant, although new plants may require more water the first year. Native in-ground plants seldom need fertilization. The plants are not normally bothered by pests or diseases, but they can have some problems. Missing or distorted petals? Eriophyid mites. White dusting? Powdery mildew is probably caused by overcrowding; they need good air circulation. Holes in leaves? Could be Japanese Beetles, especially if they are near roses. Leaves eaten to the ground? Not deer but rabbits.

Not all coneflowers are purple. There is the white, daisy-looking Fragrant Angel, and then we have the Ruby Giant, whose flowers can grow to 7 inches across. The Starlight, a German variety, has colors ranging from reddish-pink to lavender-pink. The yellow Echinacea has a chocolate-brown center and is native to southern Missouri, Arkansas, and south-central Oklahoma. A mixture of varying colors and types of Echinacea will enhance any flower or herb garden.





Photos by realsimple.com

Exploring the Enchanting World of Philodendrons By Monique Armas

In the realm of indoor gardening, a few plants are captivating, quite like the philodendron. With its stunning foliage, ease of care, and adaptability to various environments, philodendrons have earned a special place in the hearts of plant lovers worldwide. Let's delve into the enchanting world of philodendrons and uncover what makes them such beloved additions to any home or garden. These beauties are native to the tropical regions of Central and South America and have been introduced to parts of the Eastern hemisphere. Philodendrons belong to the Aroid (Araceae) family, which includes other popular houseplants like the popular pothos and monstera.

Philodendrons have evolved to thrive in dense forests where they often climb trees or sprawl along the forest floor, soaking up filtered sunlight and moisture from the air. They come in a vast array of species and cultivars, each boasting unique characteristics and foliage patterns. From the classic heart-shaped leaves of *Philodendron hederaceum* to the striking split leaves of *Philodendron bipinnatifidum*. There is a philodendron variety to suit every taste and space. There is a big market for these beauties, and they can be purchased locally or imported from different parts of the world. Their price can range from moderate to hefty depending on how rare the plant is and its size. For example, you may find a cultivar for \$24.97 at your local store up to \$10,000 from a plant collector or dealer.

One of the most appealing aspects of philodendrons is their low-maintenance nature, making them ideal for both novice and seasoned plant enthusiasts. These resilient plants are forgiving of occasional neglect and can thrive in a variety of light conditions, although they prefer bright, indirect light. They also tolerate a range of temperatures and humidity levels, making them versatile additions to indoor spaces. When it comes to watering, philodendrons prefer consistently moist but not waterlogged soil. Allow the top inch or two of soil to dry out between waterings to prevent root rot. Regular fertilization during the growing season helps promote healthy growth and vibrant foliage.

Aside from their aesthetic appeal, philodendrons offer tangible health benefits as well. Like many houseplants, they excel at purifying the air by removing toxins such as formaldehyde, benzene, and trichloroethylene. By incorporating philodendrons into indoor spaces, homeowners can create healthier and more oxygen-rich environments for themselves and their families. Beyond their ornamental value and air-purifying properties, philodendrons have a profound impact on human well-being. Studies have shown that interacting with plants, even in a domestic setting, can reduce stress levels, improve mood, and increase productivity. The simple act of nurturing a philodendron can foster a sense of connection to nature and bring a touch of tranquility to any space.

Sources:

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/philodendron-pothos-monstera/>

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/news/yard-and-garden-growing-philodendrons>

<https://homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu/factsheets/philodendron/>

KILLEEN MUNICIPAL COURT COMMUNITY GARDEN REPORT



For the month of May, there were 1,146 pounds of produce harvested. This month the team completed general maintenance and additional cleanup due to the weather. We lost several pounds of viable tomatoes. The interplanting/companion plants are doing well. So far, we have tomatoes with cucumbers, marigolds, and basil. Also, peppers with bush beans, squash with marigolds, and zucchini with radishes. The corn in 3 sisters bed took a beating from the storm but is still producing. Watermelon and cantaloupe seeds have been sowed. We are prepping rows to vertically plant butternut squash and pumpkins.



Upcoming Events

June 20

The Bell County Master Gardener Association is hosting a free monthly seminar, “Water Conservation,” on Thursday, June 20, 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 Teri Marceau will discuss how rain impacts our streams and reservoirs as well as our gardens, trees, and lawns. Teri will be addressing the importance of water conservation and how to capture rainwater. Register at: bcmgaspeakers@gmail.com

June 26

The Bell County Master Gardener Association and the Harker Heights Activities Center is hosting a special event seminar on “Raised Bed Gardening” on Wednesday, June 26 from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Harker Heights Activities Center, 400 Indian Trail, Harker Heights. Certified Master Gardener Wayne Schirner will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using raised beds for gardening, including the various types of raised beds that can be used.

Please register at <https://bit.ly/4cVYicK>

Registration opens on Monday, June 10 at 8 a.m.

Please email Kailie Gomez at kgomez@harkerheights.gov or call 254-953-5465 if you have any questions.

June 29

The Bell County Master Gardener Association and the Troy Chamber of Commerce is hosting a Lunch and Learn presentation “Raised Bed Gardening” on Saturday, June 29, 12:00 p.m. to 1 p.m. at the Troy Community Center, 201 E. Main St., Troy. Certified Master Gardener Wayne Schirner will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using raised beds for gardening, including the various types of raised beds that can be used.

Register for Lunch at hello@elevatetroy.org or call Gaby Warlick at 254-400-7345

July 11

Starting July 11, 2024, from 6-7:30pm, there will be an Herb Study Group. At the Learning Center, at Agrilife Extension Office, 1605 N Main Street, Belton. All Master Gardeners and Community are welcome. This Night’s class will be an introduction to Herbs. Suggestion and Comments, input will all be appreciated and encouraged.



Photo by Dave Slaughter

Culinary Herbs and Spices

By Sylvia Maedgen

Herbs and spices should be used to accent and enhance the flavors of foods, not mask and overwhelm other ingredients. For beginner cooks, practice a little restraint, be careful not to over-season. Not every dish needs herbs or spices. Learn to be creative with your herbs and spices. The degree of seasoning is a matter of personal preference. Once you create a blend that you enjoy, be careful not to become monotonous and repeat that seasoning over and over.

Herbs and spices can provide a variety of uses in the kitchen. You can bake an aromatic herbal bread, you can blend a spicy condiment mixture, or brew a soothing herbal tea. Keep in mind that some herbs and spices, like any organic material, could cause an allergic reaction for some individuals, so please consult with your physician should this occur.

Herbs are usually used in combination, but remember that strongly flavored herbs such as marjoram, rosemary, sage and tarragon are best used alone or in combination with milder herbs whose flavors blend easily. When using dried herbs, you need to break them up to release their stored flavor. The essential oils become concentrated in the drying process, so you will need less of the dried herb than of a fresh herb in a recipe. The old rule of thumb is:

- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. dried, finely powdered herb = $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 tsp. dried, loosely crumbled herb = $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 tsps. Fresh chopped herb

Gather fresh herbs from your garden as you need them. Wash them in cold water and remove any bad leaves. You can keep fresh herbs in your refrigerator for a few days in a sealed plastic bag or containers.

Some herbs lose their punch when they're allowed to flower. Flavors are quickly lost when volatile oils are released by heat. Add herbs to hot dishes at the last minute, unless you are preparing a simmering stock. When a recipe call for browning meat, do that first, and then add your fresh leafy herbs.

Some of the tools you may want to use (but not absolutely necessary) in using herbs include:

- Mortar and pestle – for grinding and blending herbs and seeds
- A sharp knife or kitchen scissors or herb cutting shears
- Herb leaf stripping tool
- Nutmeg grater
- Mills for grinding peppercorns
- Grinding mills – for grinding whole spices and seeds
- Garlic press
- Cheesecloth and string
- Fine wire mesh tea ball

Below are descriptions of a few herbs, their flavors and uses.

Basil (*Osimum basilicum*)

This tender annual herb is aromatic and slightly sweet with a clovelike spiciness. If you're adventurous, you can try your hand at various basil cultivars, including those that taste and smell like mint, lemon, anise, cloves, chocolate, or cinnamon. Basil is one of the most versatile culinary herbs, used to complement the flavor of meat, cheese, eggs, sauces, salads, vegetables, and of course, Italian cuisine. Basil's pungency increases with cooking. Try basil tea flavored with a little lemon and/or honey. Keep all basil pinched for fuller growth. Can be used fresh or dried, or preserve by

Can be used fresh or dried, or preserve by pulverizing them in a food processor with olive oil, then place the paste in an air-tight bag or container and store in the freezer for up to a year. The fresh leaves keep their flavor if preserved in oil or vinegar.

Bay (*Laurus nobilis*)

Sweet bay is an evergreen shrub with shiny, dark green leaves used in flavoring many dishes. Can be used fresh or dried, ideal seasoning for poultry and fish dishes, and add to soups and stews, but remove them before serving. Bay is better dried than fresh.

Borage (*Borago officinalis*)

Borage leaves are gray-green and taste a little like cucumber, and make a wonderful addition to a salad, and can also be used in rustic raviolis, soups, or fritters. The leaves can also be used as a hot or cold tea. The flowers can also be candied or added to a salad. Can be cooked as spinach or with spinach.

Caraway (*Carum carvi*)

The tender carrot-like lacy leaf of this biennial can be used as a flavoring in salads or soups, but is primarily grown for its seeds, which are used to flavor breads, cakes, cheese, pies, salads, and soups.

Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*)

Fragrant chamomile with an apple-like scent is an evergreen perennial that makes a delicious tea. The flowers and leaves can be used fresh or dried,

Chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*)

A perennial herb, and as their common names imply, garlic chives have more of a garlic flavor whereas onion chives have more of an onion flavor. You only use the green foliage of garlic chives whereas you can use both the greens and bulbs of onion chives. Clip close to the ground several times during the growing season, otherwise the foliage becomes tough. Chives can be dried, but retain their color and flavor better when frozen. Sprinkle on soups, salads, chicken, potatoes, cooked vegetables and egg dishes, but add at the end of cooking. Blend with butter or mix in with cream cheese.

Cilantro (*Coriandrum sativum*)

Yes, cilantro is the same herb as coriander. In US grocery stores, coriander typically refers to the mature seed whereas cilantro typically refers to the leaves. If you grow cilantro, you'll have access to perhaps the most delicious part of the plant that you'll never find in a grocery store: the tender young green seeds BEFORE they harden. The flavor is a combination of cilantro and fruit — amazing pickled like little capers or added to salsas. The lower leaves have more spicy flavor than the upper leaves. Add cilantro leaves to cooked food just before serving, as heat dissipates the flavor. Cilantro is best used fresh, but it can be dried but will be milder,

Dill (*Anethum graveolens*)

This is an annual and dill seeds pack a ton of flavor to bring pickled cucumbers to life. The light green, feathery foliage has a mild flavor and both seed and leaves are used as a flavoring. Add whole seeds to potato salad, pickles, bean soups, salmon dishes and apple pies. Ground they can flavor herb butter, mayonnaise and mustard. The leaves go well with fish, cream cheese and cucumber.

Fennel, Sweet (*Foeniculum vulgare*)

Fennel is a tender perennial and offers a distinct anise/licorice-like flavor. You can grow cultivars of short and stocky Florence fennel, bred for its swollen bulb-like stem which can be eaten raw, in salads, or cooked. . Florence fennel is grown like an annual although it's technically a perennial. Or you can grow the classic perennial fennel grown for its leaves and seeds. Chop the stems when tender into salads. Stuff the leaves into oily fish, and sprinkle finely chopped on salads and cooked vegetables. Add the seeds to sauces, breads, savory crackers and the water for poaching fish.

Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)

The herb is also foundational to many cuisines — the French herbes de Provence being chief among them. This evergreen shrub has fragrant purple flowers and used to flavor jams and to make lavender vinegar and syrups. Mix small amounts with savory herbs for fragrant stews. You can crystallize the flowers. Also good in baking cookies.

Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*)

The leaves of this mounding, perennial mint family plant taste surprisingly like lemons, hence its common name. The leaves may be used as a flavoring in cooking, or to brew a tea. Add generously to a white sauce for fish and spread over chicken before roasting. Finely chopped leaves add a lemony sweetness to sauerkraut, mayonnaise, sauces, and stuffings, as well as fruit salads and custards. Freeze in ice cubes to add to drinks.

Marjoram (*Origanum maorana*)

A perennial grown as an annual. The small oval leaves are light green on top, gray-green underneath and covered with fine hairs. The foliage should be harvested before it blooms. Primarily used as a culinary seasoning and combines well with other herbs. Sweet marjoram leaves can be infused as an aromatic tea. Chop finely for salads and butter sauces for fish. Add to meat dishes in last few minutes of cooking. Lay stems on barbecue embers to give foods a faint marjoram flavor. Stuff fresh haddock with marjoram and breadcrumbs. Rub into roasting meat.

Mint (*Mentha*)

Mint plants are flavorful, easy to grow perennial plants. Peppermint (*Mentha × piperita*) and spearmint (*Mentha spicata*) are perhaps the most popular mints, but there are a huge range of colors and flavors to be found in mentha plants, especially given all the new hybrids that have been cultivated over the past century. The leaves are enjoyable flavoring for tea, mint sauce, syrups, and vinegar. Mix with chocolate cakes, rich desserts and bake with raisins or currants in pastry. Crystallize the leaf for a sweet decoration.

Monarda/bee balm/bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*)

This unique herbaceous perennial herb tastes like a combination of citrus and mint, adding unique flavors to savory dishes. The flowers are edible and can be placed in salads. The leaves can be used as a tea-Oswego tea, or can be added sparingly to salads, stuffings, and pork. Use for jams, jellies and bergamot milk.

Oregano (*Organum vulgare*)

This famed Mediterranean herb is a tender perennial most often associated with Italian cuisine, but it's used in foods throughout the region. It is a close relative of sweet marjoram, but has a sharper flavor. The broad oval leaves are dark green, and unlike many herbs, the flavor of oregano is actually improved and intensified when the leaves are dried. Pot marjoram/oregano, can be blended with chili and garlic. Add to pizza, tomatoes, egg and cheese dishes.

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*)

Parsley is a biennial but is usually grown as an annual. It has very dark green leaves that are deeply curled. The Italian variety (*neapolitanum*) has flat broad leaves. When harvesting, snip leaf stalks off at the base – do not pinch individual leaves – or the foliage will become tough. When cooked, it serves to enhance the flavor of other food and herbs. Use the stems to increase its potency. Use in salads, sandwiches, soups, sauces, mayonnaise and egg dishes. Feature it in bland dishes and add to the end of cooking.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)

This evergreen herb is a bushy, drought-tolerant, pest-resistant plant with woody stems and fragrant, needle-like leaves. In the kitchen, rosemary adds flavor to a variety of savory dishes, such as meats, poultry, casseroles, stews, soups, pâtés and stuffings. Crumble dried leaves and chop fresh, or remove them before serving as they can be tough. Place a sprig in the oven to flavor baking bread. Place a sprig in a bottle to flavor oil or vinegar. Use a sprig as a skewer to meats and vegetables and barbecue it. Toss fresh in salads. Crystallize for a garnish. Pound with sugar, mix with cream and add to a fruit purée. Use rosemary to flavor baked potatoes and to make an herb butter for vegetables. Rosemary is rich in iron, calcium, vitamin B6, antioxidants, and also has anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial qualities.

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)

Sage is a familiar herb with a strong aroma and a distinctive, rich flavor, and fuzzy foliage. Growing this hardy evergreen shrub is a cinch in full-sun, dry, well-drained soil. However, sage doesn't perform quite as well in humid climates. Sage is a perennial, but the flavor declines after 4-5 years, after which replanting is recommended. Sage is used to flavor foods such as meats, vegetables, stuffing, and sauces, but keep in mind that a little of this pungent herb goes a long way. Sage tea with honey and lemon is surprisingly delicious. The flowers can be scattered in salads or infused for light, balsamic tea. The leaves can be blended into cheeses and butter, or to make sage vinegar. Sage is rich in vitamins B6 and C, as well as potassium, calcium, and iron.

Savory (*Satureja* species)

The perennial or winter savory produces weak stems to 15 inches, which annual summer savory grows a little larger. Summer savory is more delicately flavored than the winter variety. Small narrow leaves grow in pairs along the stems and are used as a condiment. Winter savory has a peppery spiciness and is good for salt-free diets, and can be cooked with beans. Make a savory jelly using grape juice. Mix with parsley and chives for roasting duck. Sprinkle finely chopped fresh leaves on soups and sauces. Use to flavor vinegar.

Tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculoides*)

French tarragon is a perennial that spreads by rhizomes. There are two varieties, French (*finest herbes* with parsley and chervil) and Russian. It has slender dark leaves that provide the sweet-flavored herb used in cooking. Use sparingly for a warm, subtle, highly desirable flavor which diffuses quickly through other ingredients. Use it to make tarragon vinegar and vinegar blends. Add shredded leaf to avocado fillings, mayonnaise for fish dishes, salad dressings, light soups, tomatoes, omelets and scrambled eggs. Make an herb butter for vegetables, steaks, chops and grilled fish. Add to preserves, pickles and mustards. Freeze in ice cubes for interesting flavor in cold drinks. Russian tarragon is used by Persians on grilled meat.

Thyme (Thymus vulgaris)

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) is another mint family plant that's achieved international garden & kitchen fame.

Thyme's tiny leaves are packed with flavor and are a staple in European, Middle Eastern, and North African cuisines. It is very pungent when fresh, so use with discretion. It's a short-lived evergreen perennial that can thrive in hot/dry climates, but it tolerates deep freezes equally well. Used on meat, shellfish, poultry and game, as well as stocks, marinades, stuffings, sauces and soups. Lemon thyme can be used to brew a refreshing tea as well as cooked in fish and poultry dishes and hot vegetables, fruit salads and jams.

Resources

The American Horticultural Society – Herbs and Spices

The Complete Book of Herbs & Spices, Lesley Bremness & Jill Norman



Photo by Randy Brown

September Iris Swap

Irises! Irises Galore!

by Lindell Small

As evidenced by many of our iris-growing friends, this year has been great for iris growers in Central Texas. We have seen some spectacular bloom production, both in beauty and abundance.

Below you will find just a few pictures showing that beauty.

This article is to share some of that beauty and alert you to a mid-September iris swap being planned by some of the iris enthusiasts from our area. More information on the specific date and times will be provided in the next edition of the Blooming Bell as well as on the BCMGA Facebook page. The Swap will be held in the middle of the day so it will be convenient for retired as well as working folks who want to stop by on their lunch break to participate. Keep an eye out for future specifics on the Swap

Now, enjoy the pictures of some of this year's crop in Central Texas.



Diamond Broker



Glitter Gulch



Feather My Nest
(Louisiana Iris)



My Veronica



Belton Beauty



Dutch Iris (bulb)



Cream Galore
(Louisiana Iris)



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May 2024 General Membership Meeting



Bell County Master Gardeners
May 2024
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