

What's Growin' On . . .

The BCMGA Newsletter

July 2004

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At the Meeting:

Speaker - Our speaker this month was Don Oakes who discussed and demonstrated how to plant and grow Stag Horn ferns. He carved up an enormous fern that had been brought in by a visitor. Some of the plants were given out as door prizes. The remaining plants went to the greenhouse, and Don came out the Friday after the meeting and helped us plant all the "pups." If you didn't make it to the meeting, but are interested in obtaining a stag horn fern (or know someone who is), contact Don Oakes at 979-265-7138. He announced that he does have some for sale. Thanks to Smitty for making a bunch of boxes for the pups.

Herb Fest - Paula announced plans for an herb program in mid-October. A brainstorming meeting was held on July 21, and the following plans were made. The First Annual Brazoria County Herb Fest will be held Saturday, October 16th, 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Brazoria County Extension Office. Programs include: Botany and History of Herbs - Ann McLain; Herbs for Butterflies - Cheryl Vining; Landscaping with Herbs - Lee Withers; Cooking with Herbs - Debbie Warren; and Herbs for the Cold and Flu Season - DiAnna Munson. There will also be ongoing craft demonstrations, herbal tea tasting, smelly cups, sachets, tussie mussies and herbal goodies. Anyone with a great recipe or craft idea is invited to contribute. We will need several volunteers. Registration is \$8 in advance, \$12 at the door. We will invite local shops and individuals to show their soaps, candles, herbal health products, cosmetics, etc. If we can talk Barbara into it, we'll have some plants for sale. Anyone wishing to know what smelly cups are will have to wait until the next meeting.

Tropical Instructor Needed - Alvin Community College would like to have a presentation on tropicals sometime during the day on October 5. If you are interested, please contact Paula.

JMGs - Classes will be held at Northway Baptist on October 25, November 1 and November 8 from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. There are 15-16 kids ranging in ages 9 to 12. If you can come out and help any or all of the days, please let Paula know.

Will You Be Working With Children? - If so, you need to have a criminal background check done. The cost is \$6.00. Read more about this in Paula's section.

Herb Bed - A new herb bed is going in at the DG. More info below - just keep reading.

Calendar Pictures - Cathy Chalfant is looking for places around the county to take pictures for a calendar. If you know of a place in your area that you think would look good for the calendar, please contact her.

Extension Office Beds - Lisa Darby has volunteered to make transform these beds.

Fall Plant Sale - It's time once again to prepare for our plant sale. The date is September 18 from 9-2, so put that on your calendar. Two months away sounds like a long time, but it will go by fast. Check for plants you can share. We need plants - any and all. Bring anything you can to the greenhouse. Also, plan to come out on a work day and help clean up the beds, so the place will look as good as it did in the spring.

Shade House - Ray and Ted have researched the building of a shade house for the demonstration gardens. More info below - keep on reading.

Grant Application - Our grant application was hand delivered to Dow and we are hoping we made it through the first cut. The money would be used for a fruit orchard at the DG. The proceeds from the sale of any fruit will be given to the Food Pantry.

The Grass Just Keeps on Growing - Since we have more ground to cover at the DG, those who mow say our mower isn't going to cut it much longer (hahahaha - get it?) A motion was made to research whether or not we should consider trading in our original riding lawnmower for a larger mower or for a tractor.

New MG Program Coordinator - A sigh of relief was felt when Ann McClain volunteered to be the new program coordinator. THANKS, ANN! Of course, she won't be doing the job alone. It will just open up many more new volunteer opportunities for the rest of us. She will be making sure our future seminars happen, which is very beneficial to BCMGA, so let's give her a bunch of help and support.

Cookbook - Please bring in recipes, mail me recipes or email me recipes. We really need them. Also, at the June meeting, someone gave me a recipe. I left my recipe folder on the table and they are now both gone. (Yes, I've been called a ding dong before - usually by my son!) If you remember who you are, would you please bring it again?

Brazosport College-Landscaping on the Go Series:

The Brazosport College class schedule has gone to press. Here's the info on it. **PLEASE NOTE: WE NEED AN INSTRUCTOR FOR THE PERENNIAL PLANTS AND FLOWERS CLASS.** If you are able to teach this class, please contact Don Gerard ASAP. ALSO - Marti needs someone to cover the *Hibiscus* class from 6:00 until 7:00. If you can help her out, please let Don know. All classes meet from 6 to 9 p.m. at the Lake Jackson CE Center.

Vegetable Gardens at Their Best	Sept. 13	John Alcorn
Perennial Plants and Flowers	Sept. 15	Need Instructor for This Class!!!!
Landscaping with Native Plants	Sept. 20	Lee Withers
The Mysterious Hibiscus & Plumeria	Sept. 22	Marti Graves (Needs someone to cover from 6 till 7)
The Wonders of Herbs	Sept. 27	Diana Munson
Tropicals	Sept. 29	Kathy Walton
Water, Pond & Bog Gardening	Oct. 4	Tom Hamilton
Propagation	Oct. 6	Dick Merrifield
Critters & Plants	Oct. 11	Tom Collins
Roses Are Red ... and Wonderful!	Oct. 13	Don/Pat Gerard
Soil & Soil Additives	Oct. 18	Paula Craig
Turf	Oct. 20	Rob Brown
To Bee or Not to Bee?	Oct. 25	Don Bush
Insect Management	Oct. 27	Pam Peltier
Landscape Design	Nov. 1	Sandra Taylor
Citrus and Fruit Trees	Nov. 3	Gil Livanec

At the Demonstration Gardens:

Herb Bed - An area has been marked off for a new herb bed at the Demo Gardens, and Lee Withers is in charge of the installation. She will need help, so anyone interested in learning more about herbs should get in touch with her. Also, she is looking for the following items for the project:

- broken concrete (for stepping stones for the walkways)
- broken pieces of tile
- several benches
- a satsuma tree
- an avocado tree

If you are able to donate any of these things, you can bring it to the DG. Tuesdays and Fridays are the best days to drop off things as there are always people there.

Let's Make Some Shade - The poor plants are sitting out in the sun on black plastic. How much hotter could we make it? They need to be cooled a bit, so Ted and Ray are planning to build a shade house for them. It will be approximately 18' X 52'. I bet that if you wanted to help them, they wouldn't turn you down. Call one of them to find out what their time frame is.

Work Days - Tuesdays and Fridays from 7:30/8:00 a.m. until noon.

**Mark your calendars for these
August work days:**

August 3
August 13
August 24

August 6
August 17
August 27

August 10
August 20*
August 31

*Third Friday

Calendar of Events:

**see below for details*

new items in bold

2004 Dates:

Aug 7: Houston Gardens: Sun And Shade*
Aug 8: Soil Building by Composting*
 Aug 10 : August Meeting
Aug 12: Native Ornamental Trees/Gulf Coast Prairie *
Aug 14-15: Cactus Society Show and Sale*
Aug 16: Edible Native Plants*
Aug 17: The Piney Woods Wildlife Society*
 Aug 20: Third Friday
Aug 21: Ginger Workshop*
Aug 21: Turf Grasses*
Aug 21: Green Garden Landscape 101*
Aug 22: Global Worming – Composting with Worms*
Aug 25: Introduction to Permaculture*
Aug 26: Garden Photography: Disposable to Digital*
Aug 26: Native Ornamental Trees/Gulf Coast Prairie*
Aug 28: Living with Shade*
Sept 8: Permaculture & Land Design begins*
Sept 13: Vegetable Gardens at Their Best
 Sept 14: September Meeting
Sept 15: Perennial Plants and Flowers
 Sept 17: Third Friday
 Sept 18: Fall Plant Sale
Sept 20: Landscaping with Native Plants
 Sept. 20-21: Landscape Design Study Course III
Sept 22: The Mysterious Hibiscus & Plumeria
Sept 27: The Wonders of Herbs
Sept 29: Tropicals

Oct 4: Water, Pond & Bog Gardening
Oct 6: Propagation
Oct 11: Critters & Plants
 Oct 12: October Meeting
Oct 13: Roses Are Red ... and Wonderful!
Oct 16: HerbFest
Oct 18: Soil & Soil Additives
Oct 20: Turf
 Oct 22: Third Friday
Oct 25: To Bee or Not to Bee?
Oct 27: Insect Management
Nov 1: Landscape Design
Nov 3: Citrus and Fruit Trees
 Nov 9: November Meeting
 Nov 19: Third Friday
 Dec 14: December Meeting
 Dec 17: Third Friday

2005 Dates:

Jan 11: January Meeting
 Feb 8: February Meeting
 Mar 8: March Meeting
 Apr 12: April Meeting
 May 5: State MG Conference
 May 10: May Meeting
 June 14: June Meeting
 July 12: July Meeting
 Aug 9: August Meeting
 Sept 13: September Meeting
 Oct 11: October Meeting
 Nov 8: November Meeting
 Dec 13: December Meeting

Houston Gardens: Sun And Shade - Date: August 7; Time: 10:00 a.m.; Location: Buchanan's Native Plants, 611 E. 11th, Houston; Phone: 713-861-5702. Presentation by Kathy Huber, Chronicle Garden Editor.

Soil Building by Composting - Date: August 8; Time: 2:00 p.m.; Location: Houston Arboretum and Nature Center, 4501 Woodway, Houston; Phone: 713-681-8433. Native Plant Society member and Wildlife Habitat gardener J. Kolenovsky is an ardent and skilled composter. Both beginning and experienced organic gardeners will receive useful information on building, maintaining, and benefitting from compost. Free.

Native Ornamental Trees/Gulf Coast Prairie - Date: August 12 & 26; Time: 6:30 p.m.-8:00 p.m.; Location: City of Bellaire, Recreation Center, 5125 Laurel, Bellaire; Phone: 713-662-8280. Fee: \$20 - Bellaire residents, \$30 - Houston residents. Digital Powerpoint, handouts.

Cactus Society Show and Sale - Date: August 14-15; Time: 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; Location: Houston Arboretum and Nature Center, 4501 Woodway, Houston; Phone: 713-681-8433. Members of the Houston Cactus Society will be on hand to consult on general care of cacti and succulent plants. A portion of the proceeds from the sale benefits the Nature Center's educational programs.

Edible Native Plants - Date: August 16; Time: 7:00 p.m. to 8:45 p.m.; Location: Houston Arboretum and Nature Center, 4501 Woodway, Houston; Phone: 713-681-8433. Carmine Stahl will give a presentation at the meeting of the Native Plant Society.

The Piney Woods Wildlife Society - Date: August 17; Time: 7:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.; Location: Mercer Arboretum, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble; Phone: 281-443-8731. The Piney Woods Wildlife Society is a nonprofit organization for people interested in nature and the environment. Featured speakers give presentations on nature topics. New members and visitors are welcome.

Ginger Workshop - Date: August 21; Time: 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.; Location: Mercer Arboretum, 22306 Aldine-Westfield, Humble; Phone: 281-443-8731. This one-day workshop includes local and out-of-town guest speakers who will present information on a variety of ginger-related topics including culture, propagation, and the best species to plant in your yard. Learn about these wonderful plants from *Alpinia* to *Zingiber*! Between lectures, participants may purchase a wonderful variety of select gingers. The sale is only available to workshop registrants and will include hard-to-find species. Class size is limited to 50 individuals and reservations are guaranteed through payment on a first-come, first-served basis; lunch is included. The Mercer Society members fee is \$40 and the non-members fee is \$50. Make checks payable to The Mercer Society. Please contact Greg Harmison, (281) 443-8731 or ggharmison@hcp4.net, for more information.

Turf Grasses - Date: August 21; Time: 11:00 a.m.; Location: Martha's Bloomers, 8101 Highway 6 Navasota; Phone: 936-870-4111. Presented by David Smith.

Green Garden Landscape 101 - Date: August 21; Time: 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.; Location: Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Rd., Austin; Phone: 512.477.8672. Details coming soon.

Global Worming – Composting with Worms - Date: August 22; Time: 2:00 p.m.; Location: Houston Arboretum and Nature Center, 4501 Woodway, Houston; Phone: 713-681-8433. Presented by Mary Sacilowski, Nature Center volunteer. They dig in the dirt, eat dead things and are some of the most helpful animals on earth. What are they? Earthworms! Learn about these great recyclers in a PowerPoint presentation and observe a composting worm bin. Take home a "mini-starter kit" of worms to begin worm composting at your own house. Free.

Introduction to Permaculture - Date: August 25; Time: 7:00 p.m.-9:30 p.m.; Location: Greenway Plaza Building at 2990 Richmond; For information call: Urban Harvest - 713-880-5540 (Monday through Friday). Permaculture is being practiced all over the world, and is the most advanced design concept for creating gardens, landscapes, and ecosystems. It also helps design sustainable buildings and societies that can prosper easily and efficiently for centuries while minimizing energy and the use of materials. In this introduction, learn about four courses over the next year that will help you turn your yard or farm into a vibrant bird and butterfly filled space, resplendent with gourmet vegetables and fruits. If, after this orientation, you enroll over in one or more of the four courses, you'll learn how to renew rural Texas and how to produce a city with less concrete, with fewer dead trees, unproductive lawns, and noisy leaf blowers. NOTE: Students who complete four courses receive a permaculture designer's certification. Members of The Permaculture Guild of Houston: Gary Edmondson, Diana Liga, Shawn McFarland, Dr. Bob Randall, Ray Sher, Cas & Gita van Woerden, and other certified practitioners lead this class. Free Class.

Garden Photography: Disposable to Digital - Date: August 26; Time: 7:00 p.m.; Location: Texas Cooperative Extension Office, 21017 CR 171, Angleton TX 77515 979-864-1558, 979-388-1558 or 281-756-1558 ext. 112. Horticulture Agent emeritus, freelance writer and photographer, Bill Adams, will speak. Bill has recently returned from a trip to England where he toured numerous gardens, including Kew and Chelsea. He will share some of that experience, as well as his best shots from his days as Harris County Agent. Bill will have lots of tips on how to capture the beauty of any garden setting. Fee: \$8 if preregistered and paid by Aug 20, \$12 at the door.

Living with Shade - Date: August 28; Time: 11:00 a.m.; Location: Martha's Bloomers, 8101 Highway 6 Navasota; Phone: 936-870-4111. Presented by Martha's Bloomers' Staff.

Permaculture & Land Design - Dates: Sept 8, 22, Oct 13, 27, Nov 3, 17, Dec 8, 15 + 2 field trips; Time: 7:00 p.m.-9:30 p.m.; Location: Greenway Plaza Building at 2990 Richmond; For information call: Urban Harvest - 713-880-5540 (Monday through Friday). Sustainable land designs result in people living better with less effort and waste. This class includes: methods for observing the natural and material environment; using natural patterns in garden designs; assessing land's potential to meet social needs; placing things where they will be most useful; studying how plants relate to, support, and benefit each other; guiding surface and rain water to places where it will be beneficial; understanding and controlling fire, flood, wind, and other potential disasters; raising vegetables, fruits and animals using sustainable methods; and weaving vegetables, fruits, herbs and domestic animals into a landscape so that they increase overall production. A field trip to two urban Houston gardens, each containing an abundance of native and adapted flowering plants, fruit trees, herbs, vegetable gardens, and ponds, and another to a farm 90 miles west of Houston to study hands-on, permaculture principles you have been learning in the classroom is included. Fee: \$120 + \$40 for materials and food.

News and Notes from the Coordinator:

from Paula Craig, CEA

Background Checks

As most of you are aware, Texas Cooperative Extension now requires criminal background checks of all employees and volunteers working with children. This includes anyone involved with JMG, anyone assisting with 4-H Beach Day, Safety Town, and other youth oriented programs. Volunteers who have been screened by their church, school, employer or other institution will not be required to re-screen, provided they can show proof. Individuals who undergo FBI screening for concealed weapons or other security issues are also exempt with proof of screening.

Forms will be sent out shortly to individuals who have worked with children in the past. Additional forms will be available at the next monthly meeting. If you would like to work with children in the future, please fill out a form at that time.

Herb Fest Planning Meeting

The planning meeting for the upcoming Herb Fest 2004 was too much fun. Ann McLain, Dianna Munson, Cheryl Vining and Lee Withers brought enough ideas to the table to fill up several years worth of events. We decided to hold the Fest at the Extension Office this year on October 16th instead of at the Lake Jackson Convention Center (since we were unable to book a Saturday this year). We will use the entire building, upstairs and down for a slew of wonderful talks, demonstrations, craft projects and goodies. Anyone who can help with set-up, registration, projects or herbal goodies (baked goods, teas, oils, aroma thingies or other herbal whatnots) should contact our Seminar Volunteer Coordinator, Carol Farmer, any of the committee members or me.

Citrus Committee

Currently, Extension Horticulture has two committees serving the educational needs of the community. The Horticulture Committee is otherwise known as the Master Gardener Executive Board. The Pecan Committee is a separate group, responsible for planning the annual Pecan Grafting Field Day, the Pecan Show and relevant seminars for pecan growers. The Master Pecan Scouts are also part of this committee.

With a growing interest in citrus and other fruits around the county, a citrus or fruit committee would be a valuable tool for program planning, information sharing, and the latest research news. Committees meet a minimum of twice a year and plan a minimum of two programs. If you would be interested in serving on this committee, or if you know someone outside the BCMGA who might be interested, please let me know.

A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds. A good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love.

--St. Basil

News to Know:

Future Speakers - Our August speaker will be Mark Walton speaking on plant breeding and genetics.

How to Add Pizzaz to Your Presentation - Kathy held a workshop on July 29 for those who were interested in working on their presentation skills.

Master Gardener Hotline - We are getting a lot of calls on the hotline - too many for just the interns to handle a couple days a week. John Alcorn has requested that every MG sign up to answer phones and/or respond to messages. We need people every day from March through October. Please call Sandra at the Extension Office to sign up. Also, if you sign up, show up. If you can't show up, call Sandra and let her know.

Volunteer Hours - Don Gerard has a lot of blank spaces in his spreadsheet when it comes to hours. Please turn in your time to him. You can mail it, bring it to the meeting or bring it to the MG office. Don't wait until the end of the year. He won't have time to input everything if you do!

Special Thanks - I would like to give Don Gerard a really big thanks. During each month, Don gets all kinds of emails from me with all kinds of crazy questions, and then when it's time to mail out the newsletter, he always shows up to help, even though I'm almost always late. Don, I really appreciate all of your help.

New Columns - I'd like to welcome our two new columnists: Lee Withers and Suzanne Jerabeck. Thanks to both of you for helping make the newsletter better. I'd like to encourage anyone else who would like to submit an article or do a regular column. You can send it to me by email, mail or at the meeting. We'd love to hear from you!

On the Herbal Side - Fall Gardening Plans:

from DiAnna Munson

Even with temperature in the 90's, planting fall gardens are in the planning stage. When I read the results of a study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, I thought the results might help you decide what to plant.

Eating 6 servings of a fruit or vegetable a day reduced your heart disease risk by 4%. If one serving is a citrus fruit, such as an orange or grapefruit, you reduce your risk of heart disease by 6%. A serving of a dark-green leafy vegetable, like spinach, mustard, or turnip greens, you reduce your risk of heart disease by 23%. That's nearly a six times risk reduction if you put spinach on your sandwich in place of iceberg lettuce.

An extra serving of any fruit or vegetable each day would reduce stroke risk by 6%, but pick an orange or grapefruit, and your risk goes down by 19%. Eat the green leafy vegetables and reduce your risk of stroke by 21%. If that vegetable was a member of the cabbage family, it would reduce your risk for stroke by 32%. Eating deep yellow-orange fruits or vegetables will provide a 32 % reduction. Try substituting carrots, winter squashes, sweet potatoes, cantaloupe, oranges, and grapefruit for corn, white potatoes, and bananas.

The green leafy vegetables decrease your risk for eye disease by 22 to 50%, with the average being 30% lower risk of age-related maculopathy, a major cause of blindness in older people.

I hope this information was as interesting to you as I found it, and that it will make tending the garden this fall a little easier.

Reflections from the Garden Goddess:

from Lee Withers

Well, I thought you might be wondering by now how do I have the nerve to proclaim myself to be a Garden Goddess? It really isn't as though I decided one day to name myself that special title. I admit I can be very confident, but not that conceited. When one has a name of that importance one must earn it, and it is best when something of that magnitude is bestowed upon you by a dear friend. That is exactly how it happened to me.

We were living in Beaumont at the time, and I was in the process of completely redoing the backyard. When we had moved into that house all that was there was along two sides of the yard was a 40 ft fence row of hedged ligustriums and another 30 ft section of hedged ligustriums. (Another fine example of inspired and creative landscaping. It only took a couple of seasons of their powerful blooms to convince my husband and myself that when these shrubs bloomed our allergies were at full tilt. So after trying to dig up quite a few shrubs the hard way, I decided to work smarter. I backed up my Explorer into the back yard, hooked up a chain to the bumper and then to the plant, strapped my 12 month old precious daughter in the car seat with the radio blaring and began to systemically yank those suckers out. After recovering several weeks and a couple of shots later from my first ever encounter with poison ivy (I guess I got it while attaching the chain to the trunks and yanking; The doctor said he

thought I was quite overexposed to it and that was the reason for the extreme reaction - too much over a short period of time), I went about making the yard into my version of paradise.

Over the next several years I became friends with a landscape designer who ultimately became a dear friend. He owned a nursery/gift shop that specialized in natives. Rette (as in Everette) not Rhett, (as in frankly my dear) was hard to get to know at first perhaps because he at first thought I was one of those West End Wandas (as they were called in Beaumont) notably similar to Super Soccer/PTA Moms. These are the women with near perfect hair, nails and body (he should have figured that part out quickly), and also drive Suburbans or similar SUVs. Quite a few of them came through his shop as it tended to cater to a higher end clientele. Usually they had their kids in tow and expected his attention right then and now. They obviously thought they were special people.

I was a stay at home mom at the time and the 12 month old I mentioned before was now toddling and she had the uncanny ability to capture many a man's heart as she does even now at age 15. I think my daughter Kathleen truly helped cement my friendship with Rette with the help of a flower. If my memory hasn't faded too dimly she was just turning 5 and all the spring flowers were in the nurseries. The Garden Shoppe (Rhett's place) was always one of my most favorite haunts and a good place to take Kathleen because it was gated and prevented her usual escape antics. I was looking around at all the newly arrived good stuff and Rette and Kathleen who were on speaking terms by now began chit chatting while he was deadheading some flowers.

She leaned over to carefully inspect some Dragonsnappers, she called them then, which were really Snapdragons. She looked up at with those mischievous green eyes of hers and asked him if he knew why they were called Dragonsnappers. Well, Rette being smarter than the average bear realized she was talking about the Snapdragons and thinking this might be one of the Art Linkletter moments where kids will say anything prompted her to continue with something profound like "No why are they called that?"

This is where she bowled him over by showing him how to pinch the mouth part of the flower a certain way to make it seem to open its mouth as if it was snapping at something. (He had been in the plant business for many years and thought he knew everything.) Both of them went around to the entire snapdragon collection snapping all imaginary dragon mouths until one of the other partners in Rette's business told Kathleen she had to stop. (Just one of those people who didn't get it – he thought they were damaging the flowers) Oh well, it still was a splendid moment even though it didn't last long.

Not too long after that, I came to their rescue when they needed someone to keep the shop open while they went to market. Mary, who usually ran the shop when the owners were out had several days of personal business to which she had to attend at that same time, and she suggested I take over since I knew the place better than some people who actually worked there. I did take care of the shop and run things). After market was over and the shop was still standing, (quite a bit cleaner, and better organized) everything was growing, flourishing and intact, my time sheet read "Garden Goddess."

I have worn that imaginary badge of honor for over 10 years and hope to continue for many, many more. Rette and I continue to be friends even though distance separates us. Kathleen, who is now a vivacious teenager still remembers about Snapdragons, but won't admit it publicly with her age group. But that's okay, too. Maybe one day she will sit at a computer, type up some of her special memories to share with others, and remember her mother with her individual "Garden Goddess" style and some of my special friends and smile.

Happy Gardening – may all your vegetables produce and your flowers bloom.

Give it a Grow:

from Suzanne Jerabeck

My hummingbirds are still here. Birders will tell you that's not so unusual with our continuous warm weather. But it's never happened before – not in MY garden!

After weeks of watching these tiny "leftover" birds, I have decided that it must be the colorful Cupheas I planted in my garden last year that are keeping them here. I can truly say that if the hummingbirds get as much nectar from these plants as I get pleasure, then I don't blame them at all for sticking around.

If you don't have at least one Cuphea, get one. This easy-care native of Mexico and the West Indies is a prolific grower in this hot and humid area. The butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds love the nectar of the tubular flowers that continuously display a riot of color from late spring through autumn.

There are many species of Cuphea available, though not all nurseries carry many varieties. Cupheas range in color from white to vivid red and purple flowers with small, bright green, lance-shaped leaves. As for size, the small Cuphea rosea, with its tiny lavender flowers, can easily be grown in a pot. On the other hand, Cuphea x purpurea or “firecracker plant,” with its bold cerise-red flowers and 12-24” height, does well planted in the ground.

The garden books say that Cupheas generally prefer partial shade or partial sun to full sun and the soil should be dry to moist. My best grower is on the west side of my house and gets a half day of the most intense sun. I’ve also found this plant is definitely drought-tolerant with average water needs. In fact, don’t water too often – it will get woody and die. And, while the experts say most Cupheas grow to about two feet, mine is at least three feet tall. But, to keep it bushy, I need to give it a good trim.

In our Zone 9, Cupheas are considered to be a frost tender tropical plant. If it gets too cold or freezes in winter, your plant may be killed back to the roots, but will usually return. In other areas, this fast growing plant is considered an annual.

Probably the most popular species is the Cuphea ignea, commonly called “cigar flower” or “cigar plant.” Use it wherever you want bright, hot color throughout the summer. This showy plant gets its name from the small, orange tubular flowers that have white tips and a hint of black, suggesting the ash at the tip of a cigar or cigarette. It grows to about 24 inches. As with all Cupheas, occasional pruning will keep it full and compact.

Other “cigar plants” include Cuphea micropetala which is a taller variety of the Cuphea ignea with bright red and yellow flowers. The beautiful Cuphea lanceolata, with vivid purple flowers, is sometimes hard to find.

My favorite is the Cuphea llavea, or “bat-faced” Cuphea. These flowers are so cheerful-looking, they actually make you smile. Look closely at the red, dark purple, and black flowers and you’ll swear they really DO look like little bat faces. Planted last summer, my bat-faced Cuphea overwintered beautifully and doubled in size by mid-summer this year. This beautiful plant blooms like crazy.

So, go on. Get just one Cuphea growing in your yard or garden, and you’ll be hooked! Then, share it. Propagation is easy by softwood cuttings. Or, you can collect the seed head/pod when the flowers fade and allow it to dry.

In the Garden:

Hardy Hibiscus

By: *Dr. William C. Welch,*
Professor & Landscape Horticulturist, Texas A&M University

The giant rose mallow has the largest flowers of any hardy perennial. Some of the hybrids may be one foot in diameter. Rich, moist soil and full sun bring the most vigorous growth, but mallows are very accommodating, and will tolerate light shade and less desirable soils. Giant rose mallows will flower from seed the first year if started very early in spring. Favorite cultivars may be rooted from cuttings during the growing season. Colors range from crimson, white, pink, rose, and in-between.

Giant rose mallows are relatives of the native hibiscus found in Louisiana and other Gulf South states. They are among the most spectacular and easily grown plants for use in the border. Following the spring and summer growing season, the plants freeze back to the ground each fall. Old stems should be cut back to a height several inches above the ground. New shoots emerge by mid-spring, and the plants quickly develop handsome mounds of foliage and flowers by early summer. Individual flowers last only a day, but each plant may flaunt several flowers at once. Numerous seedling selections, such as 'Southern Belle' and 'Frisbee' are offered in good seed catalogs. Few garden plants provide so much enjoyment for so little care.

Seeds of giant rose mallows are available from catalogs, while container-grown plants are usually in stock at Texas garden centers and nurseries. Color selection is possible when you purchase blooming-size plants. If growing giant rose mallows from seed, it is important to start them early in the season so that they will have adequate time to develop before freezing weather sets in.

Hibiscus mutabilis is an old-fashioned perennial or shrub hibiscus better known as the Confederate rose. It tends to be shrubby or treelike in Zones 9 and 10, though it behaves more like a perennial further north. Flowers are double and are 4 to 6 inches in diameter; they open white or pink, and change to deep red by evening. The 'Rubra' variety has red flowers. Bloom season usually lasts from summer through fall. Propagation by cuttings root easiest in early spring, but cuttings can be taken at almost any time. When it does not freeze, the Confederate rose can reach heights of 12 to 15 feet with a woody trunk; however, a multi-trunk bush 6 to 8 feet tall is more typical. Once a very common plant throughout the South, Confederate rose is an interesting and attractive plant that grows in full sun or partial shade, and prefers rich, well-drained soil.

Hibiscus coccineus is better known as the Texas Star Hibiscus. It has large, single, red flowers about 3 to 4 inches in diameter that appear atop branches of palmately lobed leaves with three to seven segments. Culture is very easy, with well-drained soil, an annual application of fertilizer in spring or early summer, and a sunny location being most important. Texas Star Hibiscus may be propagated from seed or cuttings. Mulching the plants in wintertime prevents root injury during very cold weather. Old stems, if they freeze, should be pruned back to the ground in early spring. Even if frost damage has not occurred, it is still a good idea to prune back and shape the plants before growth begins. Consider hardy types of hibiscus for the back of flower borders where their impressive flowers can appear over other summer flowering plants. Some gardeners and landscape professionals plant daylilies, lantana, gomphrena, zinnias, portulaca, purslane, celosias or other summer annuals and perennials in front of their hardy hibiscus groupings.

Several years ago, Dr. Jerry Parsons, Extension Horticulturist located in San Antonio, released a new giant rose mallow named 'Moy Grande' from the San Antonio Botanical Garden. 'Moy Grande' has huge flowers of dark rosy pink. Best availability is in the San Antonio area.

Source: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/newsletters/hortupdate/jul04/HardyHib.html>

Date: July 26, 2004

Fall Gardening in Texas

Soil Preparation and Fertilization

If you made a mistake by not properly preparing your garden soil last spring, now is the time to correct it. This should be done before establishing the fall garden, because soil problems encountered during the spring growing season can be expected in the fall also.

Adding liberal amounts of organic matter to all types of garden soils is a highly recommended practice. Hay, compost, rotten grass clippings, or leaves, applied to the garden surface 2 to 3 inches deep and tilled or worked into the soil, greatly improve sands or clays.

Heavy clay soils, which are sticky when wet and hard as a brick when dry, are much easier to cultivate if a washed, coarse sand is added. Washing sand removes calcium carbonate, which makes alkaline soils even more alkaline. Add 3 inches of sand to the garden surface if the soil is to be tilled to a 10-inch depth.

Gypsum (calcium sulfate) added to a 'sticky' soil makes it more workable. Gypsum is a neutral product which does not increase or decrease the soil's alkalinity. Not only is it a good soil conditioner, but it also furnishes certain amounts of calcium, which may prevent such minor element disorders as blossom-end rot of tomatoes and cabbage leaf-tip burn.

Never add lime or wood ashes to alkaline soils. Use iron sulfate or a chelated iron product in the soil to prevent plant yellowing (iron chlorosis) caused by lack of iron. Adding fertilizer to the fall crop is necessary because spring fertilizer has washed out of the soil or been used for plant growth. Use a slow-release fertilizer at a rate of 3 pounds per 100 square feet. If manures are used, 20 to 50 pounds per 100 square feet should be adequate. Incorporate fresh manure into the soil several weeks before planting.

Thoroughly pulverize soils at least 10 inches deep. Mix the above ingredients into the garden, and add nematicide if necessary. A properly prepared soil insures a successful fall flower and vegetable garden rather than a disappointing failure.

Additional amounts of fertilizer are needed later in the season to insure optimum plant growth and production. Add 1-1/2 ounces (3 tablespoons) of ammonium sulfate per 10 feet of row to cucumbers, cantaloupes, eggplants,

okra, peas and beans, peppers, squash, and tomatoes after the first fruits are set, after the first harvest, and every 3 to 4 weeks thereafter.

Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, lettuce, mustard, spinach, and turnip greens require 1-1/2 to 2 ounces (4 tablespoons) of ammonium sulfate per 10 feet of row 2 weeks after transplanting or 4 weeks after sowing seed. Flowering annuals require 2 ounces (4 tablespoons) of ammonium sulfate every 4 to 8 weeks for the life of the plants. Sandy soils need more frequent fertilization than heavy clay soils. Crops such as beets, carrots, potatoes, radishes, turnips, and watermelons usually do not need additional fertilization. Excessive amounts of nitrogen reduce yields, or lower quality, or both.

Use Drip Irrigation

One of the best ways to water a garden is by using a drip irrigation system. Drip irrigation is the controlled application of water at a very low flow over a prolonged period. It differs from conventional watering systems in that the soil is not supersaturated with water. When the rate of drip irrigation is adjusted correctly, there are no puddles of water, and no run-off. If puddling occurs, decrease the irrigation rate.

Many types of drip systems are available. Some use small water-releasing mechanisms called emitters, which drip a certain volume of water when a specific water pressure is supplied. Many of these systems are prepackaged, and allow little versatility or adaptation to the various sizes and shapes of gardens. Other systems currently available in garden centers can be adapted easily to almost any garden size and situation.

The most common has small holes pre-punched in plastic tubing at 12-inch intervals which allow the water to come out in small amounts. The tubes are placed along the plant rows so that root zones are moistened by the dripping water. To insure adequate moisture when the garden is planted, apply at least 2 inches of water to the planting zone before seeding or transplanting. This is referred to by farmers as pre-irrigation. Be sure rows are well firmed at the time of pre-irrigation so the water moves laterally in the soil as well as downward. Sprinkling the entire garden may be necessary to settle the soil enough for the drip irrigation water to move horizontally, and not go straight down the rows. This is needed especially in sandy gardens.

Once the drip irrigation system is in place and operating, how long it should be used for optimum plant growth varies with the plants grown and the season of the year, but a general recommendation is to operate the system 3 hours a day on alternating days, such as Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. When rainfall is adequate, it is not necessary to water for several days.

Source: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/newsletters/hortupdate/jul04/FallGdn.html>

Date: July 26, 2004

Happy Birthday!

Happy August Birthday Wishes...

Mary Kathryn Pickle - August 5

Tom Harris - August 10

Greg Marsh - August 12

Doll Mayfield - August 15

D. Z. Grindle - August 27

Marvin Petter - August 28

Linda Gibson - August 31

Thanks - Anna Gawlik, Editor

Happy Gardening!!!

The Brazoria County Master Gardener Association shall not be affiliated with any commercial enterprise for the profit of an individual member or group of members. No member shall use their position with the Association to further the manufacture, distribution, promotion or sale of any material, product or service in which they have either a direct or indirect financial interest.



Paula Craig
CEA - Horticulture
Brazoria CountyBrazoria