

What's Growin' On . . .

The BCMGA Newsletter
Heather Vincent, Editor

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2006 Executive Board Officers:

President - George Gabriles

1st VP/ Volunteer Coordinator - Gary Gardner

2nd VP/Advance Training programs for MG monthly meetings - Christine Kern

Treasurer - Ted Jagen

Secretary – Donie Stowers

Little Known Facts....

April's flower is the Daisy

Botanical Names: Dendranthema X Grandiflorum

Other Names: Chrysanthemum, mum

Description: A multi-branched stem containing multiple blossoms.

Colors: purple, pink, white, red, magenta, bronze

Season: All year round

Meaning: Named by Carolus Linnaeus in the 17th Century. Cheerfulness, you're a wonderful friend, rest, loveliness, optimism, abundance, wealth. Red means love. Yellow means slighted love and white means truth.

Bloom Size: varies

Color Pattern: solid

Facts: There is a festival of happiness in Japan to celebrate this flower. In Europe, Chrysanthemum is a symbol of death and are used only for funerals or on graves. Flowers

are used to make a sweet drink known as chrysanthemum tea. In Asia the tea is used for many medical uses such as and aid in recovery from influenza.

News...

2006 Texas Master Gardener Conference

The conference will be held in College Station on May 4-6, 2006.

For more information on the conference, please go to:

<http://www.texasmastergardeners.com/>

From the Organic Gardener...

By Ellen Pedisich

Gardeners are all connected and the Organic Garden sign connects us with Johnny Dominguez and Evelyn Welsch.

In the fall of last year I went to a going away party for Johnny who was the Assistant Superintendent at Varner-Hogg Plantation State Historic Site. Evelyn Welsch gave Johnny a present that she made for his new home in San Antonio. It was a "stump sign" with a flower garden and the word "Welcome" on it. Since I was hoping to get a sign for the organic garden, I asked Evelyn if she would make a sign for us. She readily said yes but on one condition, that I not pay her. A few days later Evelyn called me and said the sign was ready. I went to her home in West Columbia and saw that she had painted a Texas sky and Texas wildflowers on a stump. "It's better than what I had hoped a sign could be", I told her. I am delighted with Evelyn's art, generosity, and love of flowers. Now we are all connected with Johnny and Evelyn.

Spring Plant Sale Update...

By Barbara Brown

The Spring Plant sale will be April 22nd from 8 am until 2 pm. As this is our main opportunity to make money for the association, all available volunteers are encouraged to help make our gardens as beautiful as possible. We are currently in need of weed pullers and bed maintainers before the big day. We also encourage all Master Gardeners to attend the plant sale and welcome our guests, direct traffic, or assist customers when checking out. Come on out and join us!

At the Demonstration Gardens...

By Ray Michalik

On March 18th Gary Gardner, Paula Craig and I met at World In Need in Angleton, along with some assistance from some young folks and their parents, for a Oak Tree planting

session. The holes were pre-dug which helped from a labor and time stand point. We planted a dozen trees which were approx. 6 feet tall. A tractor was brought in to help move the trees and to help back fill around the trees. All went very well. Gary recently passed by World In Need and observed the trees and all were putting on new growth, which is making every one happy. We also planted 15 Weeping Willow trees around the lake behind World In Need, but their status remains uncertain as they are hard to see from the road. I will make an effort to go by in the near future to see if they are putting on new growth. An update on our newly acquired tractor...we've had a couple of problems with it. First, the starter needed to be rebuilt, (less than \$100 expense) and the second, and more serious problem, is the clutch. More than likely we purchased the tractor with the clutch ready to come apart. When we were tilling the hard soils and put the tractor in a bind, the clutch came apart. With Brazoria County's Marine Agent, Rich Tillman's assistance, a mechanic was found at a very reasonable labor rate who is assisting us with the repair. The clutch will be rebuilt and reinstalled in the very near future. Hopefully, our tractor will be as good as new and will service the BCMGA for many years. Jessie is still letting us use his tractor and equipment, as needed, in the meantime. Thank you Jessie! Needless to say, the veggie garden and the rose trial plots have been delayed mainly because of lack of moisture, which hindered the soil preparation. Times will get better! A load of granite gravel was delivered and spread this past Tuesday around the herb bed and up to the breeze way. The area is looking very good. Come see it. Of course every one has been very busy getting all the plants ready for the big day(Spring Plant Sale). The veggies that Jessie, Ellen and Henry have planted are looking very good. We will be eating some New Potatoes very soon. The County will be mowing the grass out front and will tidy up the roads for us in preparation of the plant sale. The help is appreciated.

Demonstration Garden Work Days:

Tuesdays and Fridays from 7:30/8:00 a.m. until noon. Feel free to come out on non-workdays. You'll always be able to find some weeds to pull if nothing else!

Master Gardener Southeast Regional Conference...

In June of 2006, Chattanooga (Tennessee) will host the 2006 Southeast Regional Master Gardener Conference. We would like to invite all Master Gardeners to attend what we think will be one of the best Regional conferences that will be held in the southeast. We will have a very special project for all Master Gardeners to get their hands a little dirty while they are attending the Conference. The project will be located between the two Tennessee Aquarium buildings along the banks of the Tennessee River. Once the project is completed, it will be used as an educational tool for the schools and aquarium groups. Once completed, we feel the project will be one that all Master Gardeners can say they were proud to have worked on. The Conference Webpage link is <http://srmgc.tennessee.edu/>
The Southern Region Master Gardener Conference, A Blending of the Waters, June 9-12. Please contact Mike Payne, Committee Chairman at (423) 842-3743 or (423) 595-3360.

News and Notes From the Coordinator...

By Paula Craig

Interns:

Congratulations to our 2006 interns. They have completed the Master Gardener training and are ready to get their payback hours done. Many of them have already become regulars out at the demo gardens!

May Graduation:

Our May meeting will be filled with fun as our 2005 interns graduate. Master Gardener, Lee Withers, will present "Landscaping with Natives". The event will be a potluck and plant swap, so bring some of your favorites.

May Open House:

On Saturday, May 13, the demo gardens will be open to the public for tours and a program called "Lawns 101". The program will run from 10 a.m. to noon. Volunteers are needed for tours and refreshments.

County Assistance at Demo Gardens:

Precinct 2 Road & Bridge is giving us a big helping hand at the demo gardens. Mowers will be out every six weeks to keep the front 10 acres mowed and edged. They will also mow the back pastures at least twice a year. In addition, the County will blade and repair the road before the Plant Sale.

Brazoria County Youth Home:

Volunteers are needed to assist the Brazoria County Youth Home with its landscaping plans. Lee Withers has been helping them but would like someone else to take over. She travels from Friendswood and would like to hand the job over to someone who live closer to Oyster Creek. Please contact me or Lee if you think you might be interested.

2006 Calendar of Events:

BCMGA Training - Classes – AM: 9:00 – Noon
PM: 12:30 – 3:30

Apr 4	AM: Woody Ornamentals – David Schackelford PM: Roses – Don & Pat Gerard
Apr 6	AM: Terrific Tropicals – Ed Barrios PM: Hotline & Office Procedures
Apr 11:	BCMGA Meeting
Apr 22:	Spring Plant Sale
Apr 29	24 th Annual Herb Day Symposium
May 4-6:	2006 Texas Master Gardener Conference
May 9:	BCMGA Meeting
June 13:	BCMGA Meeting
June 20-21:	MG Specialist Training - Oak Wilt*
June 22-23:	MG Specialist Training * Rainwater Harvesting*
July 11:	BCMGA Meeting
Aug 8:	BCMGA Meeting
Sept 12:	BCMGA Meeting
Oct 10:	BCMGA Meeting
Nov 14:	BCMGA Meeting
Dec 12:	BCMGA Meeting

NEWS AND NOTES:

- ❖ The program for the American Business Women's Association would be a half hour program on gardening. In other words, they are open to any subject you would like to present on gardening (your area of expertise). Anyone interested should contact Lalla directly at 281-331-1691 or email lnelljones@ev1.net.
- ❖ Our past President, John Alcorn was in the hospital about 37 days and is now home. Please take the opportunity to wish him a speedy recovery.
- ❖ Congratulations to Junior Master Gardeners "The Groovy Gardeners" submitted by Viki Brushwood, Christopher Corbett, Eli Galetka, Madison Marques, Michael Marquez, Sydney Travis, and Danica Yates (Texas JMG of the year 2005). They are graduating May 1st after completing Level 2 curriculum, Operation Thistle. These JMG's have gone above and beyond their assignments. They have done a lot of community service and are greatly appreciated! Congratulations to all of you for a job well done!

24th Annual Herb Day Symposium – Date: April 29, 2006; Location Houston Civic Garden Center in Hermann Park. Registration fee is \$45.00 per person. Herb plants will be sold as well as handmade herbal crafts and gifts. Proceeds benefit local scholarships and public gardens. For more information call (713) 513-7808 or visit the website @<http://www.herbsociety-stu.org>

Hibiscus Show and Sale – Date: April 30, 2006 at the Bellaire Civic Center from 1-4 pm. Exotic hibiscus will be on display from the show. Plants will be available for purchase, also. For directions, go to the Lone Star Hibiscus club website at www.lonestarahs.org. Or, contact Marti Greg at 281-756-0965.

MG Specialist Training - Oak Wilt - Date: June 20-21; Location: Tenroc Ranch, Salado, Texas 5471 W. Thomas Arnold Road, exit 284/Robertson Rd. from Interstate I-35; Contact: <http://www.texasmastergardeners.com/events/events.html> or www.bcmga.org or Dirk Aaron, CEA-Ag, Bell County Extension, 1605 N. Main St, Belton, Texas 76513, 254-933-9305.

MG Specialist Training * Rainwater Harvesting - Date: June 22-23; Location: Menard County Extension Office, Menard, Texas; Contact: Billy Kniffen, County extension Agent, Menard County, 325-396-4787 or kniffen@tamu.edu. The Master Gardener Specialist * Rainwater Harvesting is charged to increase awareness and provide training in Rainwater Harvesting. The Master Gardener is required to serve a minimum of one year as a Master Gardener Specialist * Rainwater Harvesting providing a minimum of 12 hours of service.

Committee Chairs...

Audits - Gil Livanec/Ray Michalik/Patty Varnado
Cactus Garden - Ron King
Citrus Orchard - Gary Gardner
Citrus Sale - Gil Livanec
Data Collections for EarthKind Trials - Ann McLain
EarthKind Rose Trials - Paula Craig
Educational Programs Coordinator - Ann McLain
Extension Office Beds - Carol Wenny
Greenhouse and Equipment Maintenance - Ray Michalik
Hospitality and Registration for Educational Programs – Doni Stowers
JMG Vegetable Garden - Jesse Knight
Marketing - Chris Kern
Opportunity Grants - Barbara Brown/Patty Varnado
Organic Garden - Ellen Pedisich and Jesse Knight
Greenhouse Supervision and Plant Sale - Barbara Brown/Carol Farmer
Training Coordinator - Shannan Foley
All Flower Gardens - Barbara Ross
Vegetable Garden - Ellen Pedisich

Growing Tomatoes No Quick Gardening Task

By Robert "Skip" Richter
County Extension Agent, Horticulture

To many Texans, gardening means growing tomatoes. Growing tomatoes in the backyard can be a fascinating and rewarding venture or it can be a very frustrating one. A sickly tomato plant which produces few, if any, fruit certainly doesn't boost anyone's gardening enthusiasm. For home owners growing tomatoes for the first time, some simple advice might help avoid common pitfalls.

First, home gardeners should not grow tomatoes unless the plants can be placed in an area that receives sunlight for at least six hours a day. Tomato plants placed between tall shrubs, under trees, or between buildings simply will not produce maximum yields.

Second, good soil is essential for good growth and high yields. Often, poor soil can be improved with liberal amounts of organic matter and by proper fertilization. A dark, heavy clay or even a fine sand can be improved by working 3 to 4 inches of decomposed

organic matter into the soil where the tomatoes are to be planted.



Tomato cluster

If only a few tomato plants are to be grown, a space at least 2 feet square should be prepared for each plant. The soil should be worked to a depth of at least 12 inches. Raised beds work well. Liberal amounts of organic matter and a small amount of fertilizer, such as 10-20-10 or 12-24-12, should be mixed into the soil where the plant is to be grown.

Variety selection is of utmost importance and is one of the keys to growing tomatoes successfully. Select varieties that resist many of the common diseases. Look for VFN after a variety name; this indicates that it has resistance to verticillium wilt, fusarium wilt, and nematodes.

'President', 'Celebrity', 'Big Boy', 'Champion' (a good warm-weather producer), or the small-fruited 'Sweet 100' are top producers in my experience. The new varieties 'Donna', 'First Lady', and 'Viva Italia' (a paste type) also show promise. Other old-time favorites exist and may also perform well.

Plants can be started at home, although at this time in the season it is best to purchase transplants at local nurseries. When buying plants, the home gardener should look for healthy, vigorous transplants. When the transplants are set in the garden, use a starter solution to assure adequate fertility during the early stages of growth. Starter solutions can be purchased at local garden centers, or they can be made by mixing one tablespoon of a complete garden fertilizer in a gallon of water. About one cup of the starter solution should be applied in the planting hole prior to planting.

For best results, the transplants should be set in the garden on cloudy days or late in the afternoon. The plants should be protected from adverse conditions such as high winds or cold temperatures for a week or so after transplanting. Cages, wrapped in row-cover fabric, can be used to control temperatures for a week or so after transplanting. Covering the plants with milk cartons also works well.

Almost all tomato varieties should be staked, trellised, or caged for best results. Any method is good if it keeps the fruit off the ground. Fruits allowed to contact the soil often develop fruit rot. People who would like to grow tomatoes but lack the space should try growing them in a five-gallon container. 'Better Bush' is a short, stocky variety well adapted to container growing.



Egyptian Walking Onion

Give It A Grow...

By Suzanne Jerabeck

Weird Egyptian Walking Onion Is a Real Conversation Piece

Want something fun and unusual – and tasty, too – to add to your spring garden? Try the Egyptian Walking Onion. Its unusual shape, texture and growing habit will certainly add a new dimension to any garden when planted alone or with your favorite annual flowers.

The Egyptian Walking Onion (*Allium cepa*), also known as the “Tree Onion,” is a perennial that grows easily in full sun in zones 3-10. Like other onions, it produces a large bulb underground. But it also grows a thick, hollow, rubbery-looking green stalk 18-24 inches in height with a cluster of little bulbils at the top. Over time, the bulbils go from green to chartreuse to white. If left on the stalk, each bulbil produces more leaves and barren stems making the plant look like some weird outer space alien. It’s definitely a real eye-catcher!

Even more unique is how the plant “walks.” The weight of the top set causes the stem to bend over and hit the ground – sometimes as far away as five feet. The bulbils seed themselves in no time and before you know it you’ve got brand NEW walking onion plants!

Be sure to plant your first walking onions 6-8 inches apart in a moist, well-drained area that’s reserved just for them. Interplant some colorful annuals to create an even more interesting display. It takes about 100 days for the bulbs to mature.

For the first year, let at least half of your walking onions “walk.” You’ll have all the tasty scallions, mini-onions and large, delicious in-ground onions you’ll need (use either cooked or raw) until early fall. The parent bulb down under also develops a number of offshoots for even MORE Egyptian Walking Onions next year. What a treat!

So, take the leap – and walk on the wild side this spring by planting Egyptian Walking Onions now. It's guaranteed to be a gardening adventure your entire family will enjoy. Bulbs are currently available on the internet through Park Seed, Abundant Life Seeds, or Flora Exotica.

Garden Checklist – APRIL

By Heather Vincent

- ☐ Move orchids outside in shady spots. Use in baskets, or hang them from fences or walls.
- ☐ Prune spring-blooming shrubs, such as azaleas, wisteria, forsythia and climbing roses after flowers fade.
- ☐ Keep grafted roses well watered.
- ☐ Feed all container plants. Feed hibiscus with hibiscus food or a low phosphorus fertilizer.
- ☐ Plant caladiums in slightly acidic soil with good drainage.
- ☐ Plant new shrubs before it gets any hotter and keep newly set-out plants well watered.
- ☐ Cut flowers to extend blooming season.
- ☐ Pinch tips from coleus and copper plants to make them bushier.
- ☐ Fertilize azaleas, magnolias, hydrangeas, irises with azalea food.
- ☐ Plant Easter lily bulbs in the garden after they finish blooming inside.
- ☐ Water and mow St. Augustine grass often as it will help fill in the dead areas of your lawn.
- ☐ Plant bush beans, cantaloupe, cucumbers, eggplants, peas, peppers, pumpkins, squash, and watermelon. Put in large, well established tomatoes so they bear fruit quickly.
- ☐ Seed bare sunny areas with fast growers such as cosmos, tithonia, and other sunflowers.
- ☐ In the water garden, fertilize hardy lilies after they start to grow. If they aren't blooming as well as they used to, they may need dividing and repotting.
- ☐ Start an herb garden with basil, chamomile, mints, thyme, and sage. Plant basil and chives around plants susceptible to whitefly. Plant squash on small hills to discourage problems.
- ☐ Give tomatoes a light feeding of nitrogen when fruits are golf-ball size.
- ☐ Try shredded sandpaper, crushed egg shells and or seaweed at the base of plants to discourage snails and slugs.
- ☐ Try crushed egg shells, coarse sand in ring around plant stem to discourage snails.
- ☐ Give all the plants a manure tea treat: Mix in washtub: ½ rotted (or bagged) manure and ½ water (preferably rainwater). Let sit overnight. Drain off water and pour over plants. This tea is high in nitrogen, so don't use more than once a month on blooming plants.

Favorite Lazy Gardener Plants:

For Sunny Areas: Amaryllis, antique roses, beebalm, black-eyed Susan, blue daze, bulbine, butterfly bush, bush daisy, butterflyweed, caesalpinia, canna, cassia, cat whiskers, celosia, cestrum, chrysanthemum, cleome, cornflower, cosmos, cuphea, daylily, duranta, hamelia, globe amaranth, gaura, Indian blanket, lanceleaf cornflower, lantana, lion's tail, lycoris, Mexican mint, marigold, Mexican poinsettia, Mexican zinnia, morning glory, nandina, natal plum, oleander, pavonia, plumeria, pride of Barbados, purslane, prairie verbena, purslane, salvia, russelia, scaevola, skullcap, spirea, yarrow, yellow bells, and zinnia.

For Partial Shade Areas: Abelmoschus, althaea, American beautyberry, agapanthus, blood lily, coral bean, coreopsis, crinum, four o'clocks, hibiscus (hardy & tropical), hydrangea, Louisiana iris, melampodium, mock orange, penstemon, pentas, plumbago, porterweed, scabiosa, shrimp plants, summer phlox, yesterday-today-and-tomorrow.

For Shady Areas: Abutilon, balsam, banana shrub, Barbados cherry, barlaria, begonia, Brazilian red cloak, caladium, calla lily, chocolate plant, clerodendrum, coleus, columbine, erythrina, firespike, gingers, hosta, impatiens, indigo, jacobina, mahonia, narcissus, nicotiana, oakleaf hydrangea, oxalis, Persian shield, pigeonberry, pink polka-dot, ruellia, spring snowflakes, strawberry bush, toadflax, torenia, Turk's cap, viburnums, viola, and violet.

Source: The Lazy Gardener's Guide by Brenda Beust Smith.

Happy April Birthday Wishes

Dan Rhodes – 4th

Anna Gawlik – 18th

Barbara Brown – 27th

Paula Craig – 28th

Donie Stowers – 29th

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.



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