

# *What's Growin' On . . .*

*The BCMGA Newsletter*

Heather Vincent, Editor

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## News...

### NOTES FROM THE PREZ...

It is the merry month of May. April showers (3-4 inches) bring May flowers, and that they have! The Education Station is bursting with blooms of all types and colors.

The Plant Sale is over and we made a few dollars more than last year. Now we'll move on to the Farmers Market. The market starts on Saturday May 26th, then on all five Saturdays in June. We will have an open house on Saturday June 2nd. There will be programs for the public and tours of

the gardens. All Master Gardeners are, of course, invited to all these events which may be counted on your hours. If you know anyone who has fresh produce to sell or jelly, honey, or so on, please tell them about the market.

Hopefully the rains have slowed a bit and we'll have our own veggies growing soon.

Happy Mothers day to all the Mothers out there.

Happy gardening!

Barbara Ross

## **MAY GENERAL MEETING...**

The evening began with another successful BCMGA pot luck dinner. As usual, there was an over-abundance of food. This was followed by an entertaining program presented by Michael Morrison, Mr. Palm Tree.

Once the business meeting was called to order, the minutes of last month and the treasurer's report were presented and approved as submitted. Treasurer Ted Jagen reported that our combined balances this month total over \$20,000, thanks to our plant sale income. Although our gross from the sale was higher than last year, our expenses were also higher; our net income was about the same.

Paula Craig presented the graduating class of interns. Fourteen of last years trainees have completed their required hours and graduated to full standing as Certified Texas Master Gardeners. Each received a certificate, a name badge, and a small gift provided by Donie Stowers.

Ray Michalik reported that all is OK at the Education Station. Jesse Knight regrettfully announced that the vegetable trial garden is still too wet to plow. At this rate, he is planning on a July 4 date for planting.

The Plant Sale committee (Barbara Brown, Carol Farmer, and Donie Stowers) thanked everyone for all the hard work before and at the sale – it was a great success, as all of us who were present can attest.

The Farmer's Market will open on Saturday May 24 and continue through the five Saturdays in June. Ray Michalik and the Peltier's are in charge of opening and closing, but they could use some help from the rest of us. Note to interns: this would be a relatively easy way to get hours.

The market needs more vendors; all products sold must be grown/made in Brazoria County.

The next Open House will be Saturday June 2, from 10-noon. It will be billed as "Eat Your Veggies", and it will feature sessions on selecting and preparing vegetables, growing and using herbs, and gardening organically. Come join us.

It was announced that the current Habitat for Humanity build would be landscaped on Saturday May 12; Roy Morgan will be picking up the plants. We need a new liaison for the Habitat projects.

We were reminded that continuing membership in BCMGA requires not only the payment of dues, but also 12 hours of volunteer work and 6 hours of advanced training. Attendance at our monthly programs counts as advanced training. Hours don't count if they aren't reported, so get your hours in.

# News and Notes From the Coordinator...

By Paula Craig

## GRADUATION

Congratulations to the latest "graduates" of the Master Gardener program. Fourteen interns earned their certifications and badges at Tuesday's meeting: Jim Atkins, Janna Bennington, George Cantu, Anne Carpenter, Don Fragnoli, Billy Heck, David Higginbotham, Jo Ann Holt, Monica Krancevic, Michael Mayfield, Dusty Rhoads, Carolyn Saunders, Debbie Soderman and Marilyn Waters. Thanks for all your hard work.

## RECERTIFICATION

That brings me to the issue of recertification. In order to maintain your certification, you must serve the citizens of Brazoria County and Texas Cooperative Extension. According to Article VI, Section 5 of the bylaws, Members will participate in six (6) hours of Advanced Training and twelve (12) hours of volunteer service annually. If you have not turned in your hours, please do so as soon as possible. If you have questions about what qualifies as volunteers service, please give me a call.

## SATURDAY FARMERS MARKET & OPEN HOUSE

Memorial weekend through the month of June, Master Gardeners will host a Farmer's Market from 7 am to sell-out at the Education Station. On June 2, from 10 am to noon, we will hold an Open House called "Eat YOur Veggies". Family and Consumer Science Agent, Sharon Trower, will demonstrate preserving and vegetable dish preparation. She'll have recipes, tasty treats and how-to tips. Ever hilarious Master Gardener, Lee Withers, will prepare herbal goodies. Outside, gardeners can learn to compost with Ellen Pedesich. Jesse Knight, Pam & David Peltier and Ray Michalik will answer your veggie questions. Volunteers are needed to prepare fresh vegetable dishes, homemade pickles, jams, preserves or other veggie/fruit dishes. Or come help with pre-program clean-up on Friday.

## EARTHKIND ROSE TRIALS

Rose Trial ratings will begin May 11, at the EarthKind Rose Beds. My volunteer list (from last year), includes:

Don & Pat Gerard

Barbara Ray

Patty Varnado

Ellen Pedishe

John Rosser

Mark Snyder

Data collection supervisor: Ann McLain

Monica Krancevic and Barbara Brown have also offered to help.

If you are no longer interested, please let me know asap. Likewise, if you would like to join us, let me know that, too. Your job will be to collect data every month during the growing season for the next three years. While you are at it, you can pull weeds. Let me know.

# The Organic Gardener...

By Ellen Pedisich

I still carry my book, *Teaming with Microbes*, by Lowenfels and Lewis, with me because I am fascinated by the soil food web. Lately I have exudates on my mind. Exudates are substances that a plant, in the process of photosynthesis, produces and secretes through its roots. The presence of exudates attracts beneficial organisms in the rhizosphere, the zone around the roots. The activity of these organisms provides nutrients for the plant. It's absolutely amazing.

I am still working to have many earthworms in this small garden plot. They are the workhorses.

My Haiku

With smiling faces  
Shoppers come, fill their wagons.  
Plants get new homes.

# The Inquiring Gardner...

By Ann McLain

My plants are playing musical beds. Now that spring is here – no, wait! There it went! Let me start that sentence again. Now that summer is here, lots of things are changing in a hurry, and my plants just have to learn to keep up.

Every winter seems to precipitate changes in the garden plan, and this winter may have been worse than usual. It seems as though more things have failed to come back, or have crawled out of the cold season so miserable and ugly that they don't seem worth the effort. And that means holes to be filled, and balance to be re-established.

And then there's the aftermath of all that rain we got from December to March. What was it? 60 inches? More? The tropical beds I had put together over last summer were planted into raised berms. But all that rain seems to have moved my top soil and mulch into the ditch, or maybe all the way to the Brazos. At any rate, those raised berms are now just minor undulations on a frequently soggy landscape. And so, remembering what the Ginger Lady told us (plant 'em high, or watch em' die), I have to raise them up again, ASAP. However, as long as I have to dig everything up to put new soil under the plants, it seems like a good time to do some rearranging.

Of course, as always, there's the temptation factor. Helping to prepare for the plant sale, visiting other people's gardens, trekking around interesting nurseries, it all adds up. What it adds up to is a lot more little pots clustered on the driveway, which really is not to be considered part of my designed garden. They have to find places. In this game of garden musical chairs, it's not so much that chairs are removed, but that players are added.

The latest change forced on my garden is the sudden death of the good-sized water oak in the front yard. If all its leaves had been stripped off by caterpillars, I wouldn't have any trouble believing it would be back in business soon. But there is no trace of insect damage, no



trace of internal fungus - it looks perfectly healthy, except for the fact that every single leaf is brown and dry. And it happened over a span of about eight days. Somehow I think this is going to turn out to be one of those cases where dead is dead. Unfortunately, this tree has been providing dappled shade for a good part of my plantings, not to mention for the shade garden I was about to put around its base. So this event has stimulated a frenzied new round of shifting plants, as I try to provide an acceptable spot in a changed landscape.

So here I am, doing what we all tell other people not to do – digging and planting in the heat of summer. At this time of year, success is not guaranteed. But to maximize survival, I need to set things into their new places in the evening as it cools off, rig up shade protection for things that look iffy, water diligently, or maybe cut back the top to balance root loss. Or all of the above. That sounds like a lot of effort for me. On the other hand, for the plants, it probably beats spending another summer in a cramped pot on a hot driveway. At least I tell them all that.

### **News for MG's and MN....**

Pictures from our successful Spring Plant sale....





Photo's courtesy of John Rosser

## ***Texas Mountain Laurel (Sophora secundiflora)***

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

**T**he Texas Mountain Laurel (*Sophora secundiflora*) is an attractive spring-flowering small tree with glossy, evergreen leaves and beautiful purple wisteria-like blooms smelling of grape Kool-aid. Another name by which it is known is Mescal Bean.

Texas Mountain Laurels usually reach a height of six to twelve feet, which allows them to fit well into the scale of the smaller modern garden. They often produce multiple trunks, and over time grow into show-stopping specimens. Texas Mountain Laurels are generally disease and pest-free, and tolerate a wide range of well-drained soils. They are native to



the alkaline soils of the Texas Hill Country, and are often found growing among granite rocks.

Plant Texas Mountain Laurel in full sun or light shade. It will probably not be cold hardy north of Interstate 20. Young trees may be purchased at the nursery, or grown from seed. The seeds may not sprout for several years unless they are first nicked with a file to start the process of germination. An easier way is to collect unripe seed, when it is pinkish in color, in late June or early July before the seed coat has had a chance to harden. Plant them immediately, and they should sprout quickly.

Texas Mountain Laurels are not easily transplanted and may require a year or more to overcome the process. One way to overcome this obstacle is to plant the seeds where you want them in the landscape or to plant them in gallon containers. Container grown plants should be handled carefully to avoid disturbing the root ball.

Although these trees are planted in many neighborhoods in the warmer parts of Texas, children should be warned that the seeds contain a poison.

Texas Mountain Laurels are an excellent source of evergreen foliage and beautiful flowers and require little, if any, irrigation once established. They thrive in the dryer areas of Texas but can be grown in East Texas if planted in well-drained.



*Texas Mountain Laurel, Sophora secundiflora*

## ***Fruit Thinning***

***William D. Adams, Extension Horticulturist, ret'd***

**T**hinning is one of the most difficult tasks for most home gardeners to face. They often plant radishes, and every seed seems to come up twice. Then, when the radishes don't form normal size roots, they wonder what happened. It is important to thin radishes to one inch apart within a week of germination if you expect to have good size roots, and it is also important to thin developing fruit, like peaches, plums, apples, etc., as soon as possible.

Fruit could probably best be thinned at blooming, but since there's no real practical way to do that yet, at least with stone fruits like peaches and plums, it just about has to be a hand thing. Developing fruit should really be removed when it is less than the size of a dime, and spaced so that the peaches, for example, are 6 to 8 inches apart. If you leave too much fruit on the trees, you may damage them, and you are bound to have smaller fruit. It takes 191 peaches that are 1-3/4 inches in diameter to make a half-bushel, but it takes only 79 peaches are 2-1/2 inches in diameter to make the same half-bushel.

The earlier you can thin the better, so start as soon as you can -- even if the tree hasn't completely finished blooming. If you only have a few trees in the back yard, it's easy enough to remove them by hand -- just give them a little twist, and off they come. Commercial growers go a step further and tie an 18- to 24-inch length of rope or rubber hose on the end of a broom handle, and knock the fruit off with this device. There is usually some natural drop of fruit later on in the year, whether you have thinned or not, but even with this, it is important to do the preliminary hand thinning.



***Excess fruit create  
smaller sized yields***

It is also important to begin spraying fruit trees if you haven't already. As soon as three-quarters of the blooms have dropped off, begin to put on cover sprays of an approved insecticide plus an approved fungicide. Regular applications of these pesticides early in the season will guarantee that you will have high quality fruit, free of the fungus brown rot and plum curculio. These unfortunately are common when fruit trees aren't sprayed. As long as you follow label recommendations, you will find that the end product is still very safe to eat.

At the Harris County Extension Center, we have evaluated low-toxicity management techniques in our small orchard. We used a standard spray program, and had the fruit analyzed for residue at maturity. The levels of insecticides and fungicides were negligible or couldn't even be found, even with spraying. So, as long as you don't abuse the right to use pesticides and you are careful to use them safely, as per label directions, you can expect good quality fruit. We use extremely low-toxicity chemicals like sulfur for a fungicide, and insecticidal soaps if insects become a problem.



# *Keys to Proper Landscape and Garden Watering*

**By Dr. Douglas F. Welsh**

In a few months we will be in the midst of another hot Texas summer. Properly watering plants during the summer tends to be one of the most confusing and misunderstood gardening chores. Often, ardent gardeners do not recognize inadequate watering until it is too late and plants are badly damaged or dead.

“How often should I water?” and “How much should I apply?” are a couple of the most-often asked questions from gardeners. Since water is both essential for healthy plant growth and often costly to apply in quantity during the summer, it is important to get it to the plant’s roots efficiently and keep it there.

The following are several suggestions for easier and more effective watering. These techniques apply to all gardening, from shade and fruit trees and vegetable gardens to lawns and house plants.

1. Never water strictly by the calendar. We don’t drink water every ten minutes or every hour, so why should plants be watered every two days or once a week? Instead, learn to recognize dry plants and soil and use these as your tip-off for watering. Too many factors determine how fast a soil dries for us to put watering on a regular basis.

2. When the plants are dry, water thoroughly. Water lawns so that the soil will be wet several inches down, to encourage deep rooting and drought tolerance. One of the worst mistakes people make in their gardens is trying to 'sprinkle' them each day by using their thumb and the end of a running hose. Most gardeners just don’t have the patience to stand in one spot long enough for deep water penetration.

Water trees by taking the sprinkler off the end of the hose and letting water run slowly for several hours out under the drip line (not near the trunk). Be sure that runoff does not occur.

2. Most plants should be watered in the morning. Evening watering increases the likelihood of disease invasion, as the majority of diseases develop most rapidly in cool, moist conditions.
3. While watering your lawn, try to keep water off the leaves of trees and shrubs as much as possible. This is especially important for such plants as crape myrtle and roses, which are troubled by leaf diseases which spread rapidly on wet surfaces.
4. Symptoms for plants which have been kept too wet are about the same as for those kept too dry. Roots in waterlogged soils die and do not take up water, so plants wilt and turn yellow. Try not to water a drowning plant!

5. Organic matter, such as shredded pine bark and composted manure can increase water absorption when they are worked into our native soil.

To keep moisture in the soil, use a thick mulch, such as shredded pine bark, grass clippings or tree leaves. In addition to reducing evaporation, mulches also keep the soil cooler and make weed pulling much easier.

6. Be especially careful to keep newly planted trees and shrubs well watered. Their developing root systems are sensitive to under- and over-watering. But again, don't drown them.
7. Always soak chemical fertilizers into the soil immediately after application. These materials are excellent sources of plant foods, but they are also salts, and can pull water out of plant tissues, resulting in burn, unless they are watered into the soil.
8. Gardeners often wonder what type of sprinkler is best. Generally speaking, most do a satisfactory job of making an even application. However the most efficient and effective type is the impact sprinkler (the kind used on golf courses and athletic fields).

For plants to thrive during the upcoming summer months, they will need plenty of water, but equally important is properly applying the much needed water.

<b><u>2007Calendar of Events:</u></b>	<b><u>BCMGA NEWS POSTS:</u></b>
<b>May 26<sup>th</sup> Farmer's Market</b> <b>June 2<sup>nd</sup> - Open House from 10 am – noon at the Education Station.</b> <b>June 2<sup>nd</sup> – Farmer's Market</b> <b>June 9<sup>th</sup> – BCMGA MEETING</b> <b>June 12<sup>th</sup> - Farmer's Market</b> <b>June 16<sup>th</sup> - Farmer's Market</b> <b>June 23<sup>rd</sup> - Farmer's Market</b> <b>June 30<sup>th</sup> - Farmer's Market</b>	<p>One of the Master Naturalists called Ed and he has a friend who has been growing blackberries &amp; dewberries on trellises.</p> <p>The friend wants to pull out the vines and wondered if anyone in the Master Gardener organization would be interested getting the vines.</p> <p>If you are interested, please contact Bill Mode @ 297-2886.</p> <p>Habitat For Humanity House # 60 has been postponed.</p>

**Happy May Birthday Wishes**  
**Ed Barrios May 12<sup>th</sup>**  
**Pat Gerard May 25<sup>th</sup>**  
**Ted Jagen May 21<sup>st</sup>**

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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