

What's Growin' On . . .

The BCMGA Newsletter

Heather Vincent, Editor

August/September 2006

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Little Known Facts....

August's flower is the Gladiolus

Botanical Names: *Gladiolus communis* ssp. *byzanthinus*

Other Names: Sword lily, Glads

Description: Large, thick stems with six to eight tightly packed blossoms on only one side. Blossoms shape and texture vary from fringed to ruffled to trumpet shaped to rosebuds.

Colors: pink, red, white, orange, yellow, purple, bi-color

Season: All year round

Meaning: Gladiolus is Latin for sword. Graceful, strong sense of character.

Bloom Size: 2 to 8 inches in diameter

Color Pattern: solid, bi-color

Facts: Parts of the plant are poisonous if ingested. Very fragrant. May cause allergic reactions. Mostly used in sympathy bouquets.

News...

News from the PREZ...

Walk out and take a look at your garden. Now think back ten years, was it just like it is now? If you are like most gardeners, it's changed a great deal in those years. A tree has been cut down, or one added. A plant has been moved, either out of the shade or into the shade. And new plants have been added. Gardens evolve, they change and usually for the better.

Just as gardens evolve so do organizations. Our Master Gardener organization has evolved a great deal in the last ten or twelve years. We have gone from a small group of people answering a few phone calls at the Extension Office, to a membership of around one hundred people. We put on seminars, teach classes at the college, make site visits to answer questions and much more. But, our original reason for our existence remains the same, to assist County Extension in giving horticultural information to the public.

A large part of our teaching is now being done at the Education Station. This is our home, just as Harris County has Bear Creek, Ft Bend County has their Extension office grounds, we, have our demo gardens. It was a long hard fight to acquire them, but we have them now and they are being improved every day.

This is the new evolution of the Brazoria County Master Gardeners. This is where we will be giving tours, teaching classes, giving seminars, and testing plants in our gardens so the public can look at the results. We welcome all members to join us in our endeavor, to make our demo gardens the best in the state. If you would like to have your own area for a garden, we'll find you a space. If you would rather work in an existing garden, all of us are more than ready to take on a partner. Even if you can only spare one morning or afternoon a month, we will welcome you aboard.

I have one more thing I would like to address. Those of us, who work at the Education Station on a regular basis, have been accused of being "clickish". I suppose, in a way, we are guilty as charged. We sweat together and we bleed together. We court heatstroke in the summer and freeze in the winter. We fight mosquitoes and fire ants. We have become a bit like an army unit--we have become brothers and sisters---we've been thru the war. But, please believe me when I say, we welcome you to join us. No one has ever had too many friends!
This is who we are—we love and care about one another---and we welcome you with open arms. Please come and join our click.

A garden is the purest form of human pleasure.
Happy Gardening
Barbara Ross

August Meeting Minutes...

The monthly meeting was called to order by President Barbara Ross. Minutes from the July meeting were approved, as was the Treasurer's Report. Ted Jagen reported that after depositing the Dow check and buying the rainwater collection tanks, our balance was \$19,546, which puts us ahead for the year.

New at the Education Station are a new workbench in the barn, and some equipment including an edger and a walking lawn mower. The latter is thanks to Lee Wither, who also got us some hand tools and organized their storage in the head house.

Barbara called for a "State of the Garden" roundup by all involved. Paula began by updating us on the Five Year Plan, which has been prioritized. The remainder of 2007 we will focus on taking care of what we've got, as well as beginning the Rainwater Harvesting Project. Commissioner Matt Sebesta will provide labor to clean out the cinder block barn, as well as to paint the garage/barn. Important in accomplishing the Five Year Plan are the two grants we have received this year, Dow and First Choice Power.

Rich reported on the progress of the Rainwater Project. The two 2500 gal fiberglass tanks have been purchased. There will also be a pressure tank and pump to distribute the water to the gardens. Water will be plumbed into the existing water lines east of the greenhouse, and the collected water will not mix with the potable water from the well.

Ann reported on the upcoming Open House (August 25, 9-11 am). The fourth and final open house for 2007 will be in November.

Barbara Brown reported that at present we have as many plants on hand as we propagated last year for the plant sale. The Plant Sale will be April 19, 2008.

Those with responsibility for plantings also reported. Cindy described the new water feature she is developing next to the rose trial bed. She needs broken china to create a mosaic on the concrete edge. Ellen's organic vegetable garden is doing well. She is currently focusing on earthworms. Ellen's compost is good stuff, and it is keeping the weeds down. She will be sending a soil sample in for biological testing. The tropical garden is looking terrific, and Ed and Barbara are putting together a list of plants that survived last winter. Roy has grapes and blackberries beyond the horse barn, and plans to put in more. Dan has two rows of the orchard-to-be mounded and trenched, and the plants are ordered for those beds. Jesse has a great crop of weeds in the vegetable test garden. He will keep trying to get something planted; most likely at this point it will be field peas. Lee's herb garden needs to be raised and its drainage corrected. But the pergola looks great, and the Pandora vine is almost all the way across now. Carole was congratulated on the great appearance of the Extension Bed. All our vigilant weeders and care-takers were commended.

Ted spoke about membership issues. Over the last four years our numbers have been level; we lose about the same numbers each year that we gain from the training class. If we hope to keep up with the demands of our five-year plan, we will need more participants. To increase our membership by 50% over the next five years, we would need to increase class sizes to 45, which is probably not workable. We need to be thinking of ways to improve recruitment and retention. To lead us in this, Ted recommended a membership chair.

In announcements, Paula told us that there will be an Extension booth at the county fair, and we will need volunteers to do our part. We will be looking for a nice display board for this and other events. Barbara told us that our November meeting will be on Monday, November 12, because the room will be in use by 4-H on our usual night. Also, she announced that we will have the labor of weekend prisoners on Saturday, September 22, all day; this will be a work day for large projects.

Pam Peltier reported on the recent **state meeting**. Dave, of davesgarden.com, was a speaker and Pam reported that the website has a link for master gardeners. She also told us that we can purchase TAMU Press books at 20% off for individual MG's, and 50% for books ordered by a chapter as a group.

Finally, Barbara urged all master gardeners to **look around** and see what plants are surviving, or even thriving, this season. Creating a list of plants that can take these conditions would be a good project.

At the Demonstration Gardens...

By Ray Michalik

In case you'll weren't able to go outside a week or so ago the temperature hovered around 100 degrees for several days. Hope every one survived with no heat strokes. I kinda suspected this would happen because I had my house and garage re roofed. Really felt sorry for the guys but like the foreman said someone has to do it.

We had three nice surprises the past month or so. First one of the craft ladies who participated in our farmers market gave us a donation of \$50 for letting her sit up her booth in the barn. It went into the petty cash fund. It was unexpected but greatly appreciated. And one of our Master Gardeners donated a 6 HP self propelled walk behind lawnmower to our organization. With a gentle touch of maintenance on the carburetor I was able to get the mower to run and it is doing a good job for us. Thanks Lee. Also one of our interns kept his eagle open when he was garage sale-ing and he spotted a 4 HP gas edger for us. It was a brand new one. Gas had not even been put in the gas tank. What a buy. Thanks for keeping a look out for the organization, Rich.

We repaired a broken water line over near the potting shed for the second time. It shouldn't happen again because we buried the line deeper.

Billy Heck is in the process of rebuilding the table tops we use to sit the plants on at our plant sale. There will be no sagging when he's finished with them and they are being painted also.

Just a quick note on the citrus orchard. Intern Dan is doing one heck of a job on the bed prep.. The beds have been tilled, sand has been brought in and the beds have a nice crown on them. He is in the process of sifting some mulch that we have gotten from Clute and he is putting a tub full where each tree will be planted. We will have a nice looking orchard come spring when the trees are planted. And Dan will dubs on the first citrus from each tree when they start producing.

We are still getting county help when there are folks available. They are appreciated as they do much of the heavier work for us. And if you don't have anything to do on Tue. or Fri. mornings

come out and help us enjoy the fun we have. The coffee pot is usually on and we have the ice machine hooked up for ice water.

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!

Tropical Update...

By Ed Barrios

I thought I would write a brief update each month about activities in the tropical bed. As you may or may not know, the location of the 2nd water harvesting tank was changed to the Southeast corner of the barn. That meant moving 2 large oleanders (*Nerium* sp.), an althea (*Althaea* sp.), some crinum (*Crinum* sp.), a hibiscus (*Hibiscus* sp.), a Mexican fire spike (*Odontonema strictum*) and some pavonia (*Pavonia* sp.). So with lots of help from our volunteers, these plants were moved to the new section of the tropical garden. If you haven't seen the new section lately, it is filling up with plants.

The wet weather we have had all year has changed the habits of some of the plants. For example, the Bird of Paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*), is putting on a second set of blooms. This is rare since this plant normally blooms in the winter months. The blooms are spectacular, so if you haven't seen it lately go to the gardens and take a look.



News and Notes From the Coordinator...

By Paula Craig

OPEN HOUSE

The August 25th Open House at the Education Station was great. A crop of Master Gardeners and twenty-two non-Master Gardeners attended. Despite the hot, muggy conditions and a little rain, we had a good time. Cindy Goodrum did a super job demonstrating how to make concrete leaves for use as feeders, birdbaths, planters and decoration in the garden. Unfortunately, a small person (one of three) stuck his or her fingers in the creation before it was dry.

Ed Barrios (aka Mr Perfect) and Barbara Ross toured the tropics and Barbara Brown showed folks what cuttings to take and start now. Thanks to everyone who came to learn and assist.

COOL WEBSITE

If you have not yet registered on Dave's Garden website, you should. It has lot of very cool stuff for gardeners. You'll also receive a weekly newsletter via email. Sign up at <http://davesgarden.com/edu>.

******YOUR HELP IS NEEDED******

It is time to organize the next Master Gardener training, scheduled to begin February 2007. Monica Krancevic coordinated the last one and she would be happy to take the lead this time around. But she needs your help. We need volunteers to:

- Schedule speakers. This involves phone calls and/or emails
- Follow up and confirm scheduled speakers
- Make copies of handouts
- Bring snacks
- Set up equipment
- Assist
- Be present in class

Please call either Sandra Smith or myself at 979-864-1558, ext. 112. Or email me at p-craig@tamu.edu.

MO MONEY

(FORT WORTH, TEXAS) – The nonprofit First Choice Power Fund awarded \$5,000 to Brazoria County Master Gardeners Association. It was among 10 Texas nonprofits benefiting youth, seniors and adults that received a total of \$50,000 from the fund. Each nonprofit received a \$5,000 First Choice Power Partnership Grant.

"We are thrilled that First Choice Power chose our organization," said Paula Craig, Brazoria County Horticulture agent and Master Gardener Coordinator. "This grant will help us immensely with our EarthKind Explorers youth education outreach."

The First Choice Power Fund is a nonprofit division of the PNM Resources Foundation, which seeks to improve the quality of life in Texas communities where First Choice Power serves. Applications for the annual nonprofit grants were due in June, and 39 Texas nonprofits applied.

"It's programs like these that continue to improve the communities where we live and serve," said Diane Harrison Ogawa, executive director of the First Choice Power Fund, a division of the PNM Resources Foundation. "The First Choice Power Fund is proud to partner with these nonprofits that are committed to helping those in our state who need it the most."

The Brazoria County Master Gardeners Association, in partnership with the Cradle of Texas Master Naturalists, will install an outdoor classroom with wetland, woodland and coastal prairie. They will use the grant for a 100-seat amphitheater and computerized weather station.

"We want to teach elementary students about the ecosystems that surround them, about the plants and animals, about the delicate balances and interactions at work in nature," said Craig. "We want to get the kids fired up about the natural areas here in Brazoria County and instill awareness

Other 2007 First Choice Power Fund Partnership Grants are:

- Bosque Memorial Museum in Clifton for Bosque Museum Archeology Awareness and Education Outreach
- Brazoria County Historical Museum Inc., in Angleton for Traveling Trunk Program for Brazoria County Schools
- Happy Hill Farm Children's Home Inc., in Granbury for Life Skills Class
- Junior Achievement of Brazoria County Inc., in Angleton for Effort for At Risk Students
- Lewisville Education Foundation Inc., in Lewisville for Uncover the Mystery! Math Club for Learning Beyond the Bell
- Nocona Grace Place Inc., in Montague for Emergency Assistance Program
- Sweeny United in Sweeny for Sweeny United
- The Salvation Army in Bonham for Emergency Food Pantry
- West Shore Civic Association in Laguna for West Shore Clean Up

For more information about First Choice Power Partnership Grants, visit www.FirstChoicePower.com/partner. The 2008 First Choice Power Partnership Grant applications will be available online in January and due June 5, 2008.

About the First Choice Power Fund

The First Choice Power Fund is a division of the PNM Resources Foundation, a nonprofit established in 1983 to improve the quality of life in communities where the company's customers and employees live and work. The PNM Resources Foundation is a separate nonprofit tax-exempt corporation and was originally endowed by a gift from earnings by shareholders of PNM Resources. No customer funds are part of the endowment.

Agent Craig describes the Brazoria County Master Gardeners Association as "...a group of about 100 volunteers who assist Texas Cooperative Extension, Brazoria County, in educating the gardening public, ages 3 to 93. Outreach comes in the form of seminars, workshops, garden tours and diagnostic clinics. In 2007, BCMGA members volunteered more than 10,000 hours. Anyone wanting a look around at our gardens or a solution to a garden problem, come on by. We're at the Master Gardener Education Station at Hospital Road and CR 171 in Angleton every Tuesday and Friday from 8:00 a.m. to Noon."

THE INQUIRING GARDENER

Ann McLain

It's marvelous how many great ideas just waft into my ears as I pull weeds at the Education Station. No inquiring needed much of the time. I'm sure that many more valuable nuggets waft right on through without disturbing my thoughts at all, but that's okay – I do get some of them.

Take, for instance, hibiscus flowers. I like to have fresh flowers in the kitchen window whenever possible. Last summer it was mostly zinnias, with add-ins of celosia and others. But this year the zinnias are, well, to put it bluntly, just down-right ugly. Not their fault, humidity will do that.

But some fellow master gardener, I can't remember who, told me that hibiscus flowers don't need water once they have opened. Wow! This is liberating. I had never thought of hibiscus as cut flowers before. After all, there's not much stem before you get to the woody branch, and it's hard to imagine what to do with that big blossom with no stem. But lately I have been bringing in open hibiscus flowers almost every day. I pop them right on top of one or another of my small vases (no water involved), and they look gorgeous until the next morning. An open hibiscus flower will last just one day, whether it is on the bush or on the window sill, so I might as well have them where I can enjoy them. And I'm sure not sitting around out on the sunny patio to enjoy them!

I haven't gotten any helpful hints for dealing with my demon miniature canna worms as yet, but I recently heard a discussion about unwanted ants. (Query: are there any wanted ants?) Anyway, one of our members recommended orange oil, which helped her get rid of ants trying to break into her house. Caution: this is not an approved TAMU method, and I've heard only this one report so, don't recommend it to the general public, but it sounds worth experimenting with. Second caution: I would be very cautious about getting the orange oil on any plant I cared about. (And if you try it let me know what happens.)

And then there are the weed pests. We've all had plenty of those this summer. Again, this is a method that shouldn't be used too near something you want to keep, but it works well for weeds growing through gravel or bricks, where they are hard to dig out. The magic ingredient is vinegar, the stronger the better. You can now buy so-called horticultural vinegar, but the sellers saw us coming, and this stuff is ridiculously expensive. I recently read that you can boil household vinegar to increase its concentration, but I don't know if that actually works, or if it's worthwhile. In any case, our fellow MG's who have experimented with this recommend adding soapy water to the vinegar before applying. This keeps the vinegar on the weed where it can do its damage.

Our most recent open house (August 25) was a good place to pick up some new ideas. First, I want to thank all of you who turned out to welcome our guests. Visitor turnout could have been larger in terms of numbers, but it couldn't have been more enthusiastic. A good time was had by all, including master gardeners, despite the heat and a little rain. And if you weren't there, then you don't know how cool a concrete leaf can really be. And you didn't get a chance to carry home a baby jatropha or red crinum.

While we're on the subject of open houses, you will have one more chance this year to join the fun. The fourth open house of 2007 will be in early November (date and details later), and I'd like to encourage all you master gardeners and interns to come on out. If you don't feel comfortable answering questions or leading tours, then come participate as a learner. I think every one of us present in August learned something interesting. Besides, you might get a free plant! It doesn't get better than that.

2007 Calendar of Events:

- Sept 11 BCMGA Meeting
- Oct 9 BCMGA Meeting
Oct 24-26 New MG Specialist training: Master Gardener Specialist - Greenhouse Management October 24 - 26, 2007 Tarrant County Extension Office Fort Worth, Texas Coordinator: Steve Chaney, CEA-Hort
- Nov 12 BCMGA Meeting
- Dec 11 BCMGA Meeting

NEWS AND NOTES:

Carol Farmer will be undergoing triple or quadruple bypass surgery Monday, Sept. 10 at 7:30 a.m. Please keep her in your thoughts and prayers.

The Adult Learning Leisure Program (ALLP) is run by Brazosport College for Senior Citizens. It is separate from the evening classes we have been teaching. It is a no charge class (BCMGA gets no money for this but whoever teaches does get the hours credit toward Recertification).

These are one hour day classes covering a six week period. They are held at the main College campus. We did not get enough volunteers to cover their Fall program but I told them we would see if we might be able to do something this Spring.

Anyone interested in making a presentation during the Spring semester, please contact Don Gerard, Ed Barrios, or Paula Craig.

Don't forget, one of the prime functions for Master Gardeners is Education.

Thanks to Bebe Brown, J. E. 'Smitty' Smith, Rich Tillman and Billy Heck for the great refreshments at our August meeting. Any thanks to those who signed up to bring refreshments in September, we have our quota. Maybe you would like to volunteer for October or November at our next meeting. Thanks again for everyone's participation. Donie Stowers

Growing Columbines (*Aquilegia*)

by Cynthia W. Mueller

Columbines are a favorite spring wildflower for Texas gardeners. They have the ability to grow in both sun and light shade, and under good growing circumstances will survive for several years. Flower types range from the dainty bloom with "spurs" projecting to fully double bells composed of many petals in contrasting colors.

Not all varieties of columbines are suitable for Texas gardens. Two of the best are the hybrid 'Texas Gold' and the native species *Aquilegia canadensis*. 'Texas Gold' is a very heat resistant plant with golden-yellow flowers that was bred from the rare *Aquilegia hinckleyana* which grows only along a few mountainous streambeds in West Texas. Its tough qualities and many large, showy flowers have earned it the right to be called one of the "Texas Super Stars".

The native *A. canadensis* produces a mound of foliage and delicate red-and-gold flowers several feet in height over a long period in the spring. It is found in nature from Canada through the US into Texas. These two columbines often will cross with each other, creating a range of softly colored hybrids. The classic English columbines, such as the McKana strains, the blue-flowered European varieties or the doubles such as 'Nora Barlow' are more suited to moist soils in light shade and would prefer cooler temperatures than most Texas gardens have to offer.

Set out plants in the spring to early summer. They may be placed from one to two feet apart with generous mulching between plants. During the blooming season the mounds of finely cut, soft green foliage with flowers may reach as much as three feet in height. Trim off spent flower stalks before the capsules shatter to release seed, or leave them to provide fresh plants for a later season. In times of drought the plants may go dormant for a time in the midst of the summer.

Seeds shed into the flower bed have a bad habit of trying to germinate after odd summer rains, then perishing in the heat of the summer, so it's a good idea to save some seeds for sowing in flats or in place near established plants in the late fall. These should have no trouble becoming established.

Fertilize established columbines monthly during the growing season with a good soluble all-purpose fertilizer. There are few pests to be reckoned with. Low-growing shrub roses, perennial coreopsis, penstemons or ferns make good growing companions.



Aquilegia canadensis

Garden Checklist – August/September

By Heather Vincent

- ✚ WATCH for Hummingbirds!!!! Keep feeders clean and full.
- ✚ Give perennials, annuals, roses and fall-blooming shrubs a light feeding and slight haircut.
- ✚ Prune deadwood from trees.
- ✚ Keep the lawn well watered. Mow more often to force sideways growth to fill in bare areas.
- ✚ Water less often, but leave the sprinkler on for an extended period.
- ✚ Set out fall tomatoes, green onions, cucumbers, corn and green beans.
- ✚ In Late August/early September start seeds of broccoli, cabbage, chard, garlic, kohlrabi, and squash.
- ✚ Feed plumeria's with high phosphorus fertilizer.
- ✚ In the water garden, feed all water plants.
- ✚ Plant wildflower seed in raised beds as soon as it starts getting a little cooler.
- ✚ Plant bulbs in clumps among perennials and shrubs.
- ✚ Use superphosphate or bulb food instead of bone meal to feed bulbs.
- ✚ Refridgerate tulips, hyacinths, muscari and crocus at least 4-6 weeks before planting.
- ✚ 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.

Happy August/September Birthday Wishes	
Mary Lou Christie Sept 21	Delmer Grindle Aug 27
Greg Marsh Aug 12	Ray Michalik Sept 4
Mary Katheryn Pickle 5	Theresa O'Leary Aug 2
Heather Vincent Sept 13	Marvin Petter Aug 21
Leroy Walker Sept 10	Barbara Ross Sept 12
	Mark Snyder Sept 10
	Beverly Straughan Sept 9
	Carole Wenny Sept 26

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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