

What's Growin' On . . .

The BCMGA Newsletter

Heather Vincent, Editor

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Little Known Facts....

September's flower is the Aster

Botanical Names: Aster Ericoides

Other Names: September Flower, Monte Casino, Rainbow Aster

Description: Dainty, daisy-like flowers used for filler.

Colors: white, pink, lavender, red, purple

Season: Mid Summer to Early Fall

Meaning: Comes from the Greek word meaning star. Symbol of love, daintiness, after thought.

Bloom Size: Dime-sized

Color Pattern: solid

Facts: Over 600 species. Attracts bees, butterflies, and/or birds.

News...

The Minutes...

SEPTEMBER MEETING

The meeting opened with an interesting program by our own Gil Livanek on avocados. This was especially apropos since we will be offering avocado trees at the Fruit Tree Sale on February 16. This session was quite risqué at points as we delved into the kinky sex life of avocados.

After the program, minutes of the August general meeting were approved as presented. Treasurer Ted Jagen presented the treasurer's report, which was approved as read. Our current balance was \$23,120, which included the \$5000 grant from First Choice. Major expenses for the month included about material for the rainwater collection tanks, supplies for the plant sale, and soil. **Dues collection** will begin next month; dues are \$13 per individual or \$18 per couple.

Ray Michalik reported on the **state of the Education Station**. The telephone line is being re-run, this time overhead so it won't be cut again. There is now a 4x12 foot workbench in the barn. Billy Heck says it will withstand a Cat 6 hurricane. As for the **Rainwater project**, Ray reported that the tanks are on site, and their locations have been finalized. The next step is to build forms and pour the slabs. Paula added that 20 people have signed up for the rainwater harvesting training session, which will be after the slabs are poured and cured.

Paula reported on the **First Choice Power grant**, which has now been received. Phase 1 will be the weather station, for which Ted and Rich will lead. The proposal suggested a weather station similar to the one Ted has, which is solar powered and remotely monitored. Phase 2 includes the bleacher seating for the wetland/prairie education project. We are hoping to get some advice from Kyle Harris (a landscape architect). Galveston Master Gardeners has asked to get involved with the natural area development.

Paula announced that we need **volunteers at the county fair** to staff the Extension booth, and she circulated a sign up sheet. Judges for hobbies and crafts are also needed.

Ann McLain reported on the recent **Open House**, which was well-received. The next open house will be on Saturday November 10. Ann asked for crafters to volunteer to display garden-related craft items, along with instructions at this event. Contact Ann if you are interested.

In brief announcements:

- Lee asked for volunteers to decorate birdhouses for the herb garden.
- Barbara asked for volunteers for a Hurricane Plan committee. These folks will make a plan and see that it is implemented if necessary.
- Barbara announced that Barb Bruyere has agreed to serve as membership chair.
- Planning for the 2008 training class will be worked out soon. Monica Krancevik will be unable to take this responsibility this year; a new committee has volunteered.
- Carole Wenny and Ellen Pedisich constitute the nominating committee who will identify candidates for the upcoming election of officers.

- Donie Stowers reported that Carol Farmer's bypass surgery went well. Although still in the ICU at Memorial Hermann, she will most likely be discharged next weekend. Barbara Ross planned to send flowers from the membership.
- Donie thanked the food providers, and reminded us that volunteers are needed for next month. The meeting was adjourned.

Notes from the Prez...

By Barbara Ross

October is finally here. This has always been my favorite month of the year. It isn't quite cool yet, but the promise, is in the softening of the light. The harsh sunshine has started to move to its southern path. I can almost smell that first cool front of the year.

We had a great work day on Saturday the 22nd. The county sent us 14 workers. They did, in 8 hours what it would have taken us at least 7 or 8 work days to get done. Most of the cinder block building is ready for use and Barbara Brown is all ready moving things in there.

Lee's herb garden has been elevated, the Earth-kind roses were mulched. and the potting shed was 'refloored'. All done by those county workers and the two Sheriffs deputies. A lot of our people came out to help and were told to stand and watch, not work.

That's about all for this month. Check with Paula or me if you would like to work in the Fair booth.

A GARDEN IS THE PUREST FORM OF HUMAN PLEASURE

Happy Gardening.

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!

The Organic Gardener...

By Ellen Pedisich

I have been screening compost and putting it in the organic garden plot. It seems silly but I get a thrill every time I see an earthworm in a shovelful of organic matter. Thanks, David, for helping me.

Last week I sent two soil samples, one from Jesse's big plot and one from this small plot, to a lab in Fredericksburg, for biological testing. I had to include roots because that's where organisms live. I hope the samples are good enough for the lab person to do an analysis. When I receive the reports, I will let you know about the results.

When I took the composting class in Pearland, the teacher said biological testing is more beneficial to the gardener than chemical testing because healthy soil is organically enriched. That makes sense to me.

Then, one can do an earthworm test and count how many earthworms are in a given amount of soil. I will leave that for another time. Now, I must get ready for the fall garden.

When I first started this garden I had a drainage ditch through the middle of it. Now I am filling this ditch with compost because the water does not sit, it goes into the soil. That means I have more space to plant beets, Swiss chard, lettuce, carrots, radishes, and mustard.

Once again, Mother Nature rules.

My Haiku

A healthy food web
has beneficial earthworms.
They leave their castings.

The Inquiring Gardner...

By Ann McLain

This inquiring gardener has one big question to ask this month: where the deuce has all my mulch gone? And how did it go there so fast? Well, I do have some notion about what's been going on, but really – so much shredded stuff has disappeared at such a rapid rate, that it's quite breathtaking. It calls for some notice and contemplation.

So where does mulch go? One possible destination is Oz. Every time we get some heavy wind, some mulches will go sailing off. This is particularly true if we decided to use peat moss, or maybe we did it cheap with grass clippings or shredded up newspapers. But none of us did that, did we? Wind has much less impact on the various shredded wood products.

Another possible destination is downhill, down the ditch, down to the Gulf. Some mulches are particularly prone to this, too; bark chunks float like so many tiny boats. This is enough of a problem with some products, that the people who bag up shredded cypress label it "does not float". But if all my mulch had headed off downstream, wouldn't I see traces of it in the lawn at the base of all the raised beds? And it's hard to see how it got out of the flat-topped, boxed-in beds. So, despite our abundance of heavy rains, I'm pretty sure the best explanation for the vanishing mulch is a lot more basic.

The prime destination for most mulch is back to its component molecules (eyes glaze over here). If it's organic, something eats it, probably lots of things. As soon as we put it down, (and sometimes while it's still in the bag), mulch is attacked by an army of decomposers. The decomposers include beetles and other insects, earthworms, slugs, bacteria, and even the fungus among us. They chop, shred, chew, and digest until those chunks of woody material, aka mulch, are reduced to some simple forms of nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorus. In other

words, the same stuff you pay good money to add. Along the way, the decomposition process generates a rich slime known as humic acid, which can work miracles on soil textures, be it gumbo or sand.

Okay, so all these benefits don't occur overnight, and gumbo doesn't instantly become loam just because you threw a bag of mulch on it. But here's the thing – all this useful decomposition, being a biological process, goes faster when temperatures are warm and the atmosphere is humid. And what have we had this summer? Bingo!

Up north, decomposition proceeds slowly. In the woods of Wisconsin, partially decomposed tree parts build up on the forest floor, sometimes many inches of it. But in my garden here, I have discovered that the whole process zips along at lightening speed. In Wisconsin, mulch stayed mulch for years. Here in Texas, mulch put down in May needs a new layer by October. I don't see magically improved soil just yet, but all that goodness went somewhere – I'm hoping at least some of it is down where the plant roots are!

Tropical Update ...

By Ed Barrios

The days are slowly getting cooler and drier marking the start of a wonderful time to work in the garden. However you need to begin thinking about winterizing your tropical plants.

First a few DON'TS: Do not prune, this will stimulate your tropical plants to put out new growth. The new growth is tender and can get easily burned by the first cool front. Remember that it doesn't have to get really cold to do damage. Often, the damage done to plants in the fall is due to a large drop in temperature. We could have 80 degree weather in the day and then a cold front comes in and drops the temperature 20, 30 or sometimes 40 degrees. Do not fertilize now. Again this will stimulate new growth and the issues are the same as pruning.

Now for some DO'S: Do begin putting out mulch around your tropicals. This will help insulate the roots and the stems. Often you will read in garden books to mound the leaves falling from the trees around the base of your tropicals. Do water your plants before an expected large drop in temperature or freezing weather. The water helps dampen the temperature change. Also, do locate your old sheets/blankets so they are handy if you want to cover some of your prize plants. Again, for your prize plants, do begin to build supports around the plants where you can lay your blankets. You can use wire fencing for this or make teepees over your plants made of plastic pipe.

These are all general rules of thumb, but if you have a few prize tropicals and want more detailed information, use the internet or plant books and do some research. Also, there are many good tropical plant reference books at the head house. Finally, look at the plants in the original section of our tropical garden. All the plants there survived last year's 28 degree low with the exception of 3 plumeria's that were planted in the ground. (Note: All the plants in pots in the tropical garden were moved into the greenhouse last year.)

Master Gardener



**November 10, 2007
9:00 – Noon**

**Master Gardener Education Station
Hospital Dr. at CR 171 – Angleton**



Earth Kind Roses

Come and learn about the Earth Kind approach to landscape planning, planting and maintenance. Our minimum-input plants live in native gumbo soils, receive no chemical fertilizers and no pesticides. Our open house will showcase Earth Kind rose varieties, tested for toughness in Brazoria County.

Rose Propagation



Fall is an excellent time to start roses from cuttings. Master Gardener Barbara Brown will demonstrate nearly fool-proof methods of producing roses for you own garden. Everyone loves Barbara's demonstrations...and her freebie take home goodies.



Harvesting and Preserving Herbs

Our own garden goddess, Lee Withers, will show us how to pick, dry, freeze, bottle and otherwise preserve herbs for maximum flavor retention. More take-home goodies and taste tests are in store.



Gift Ideas from the Garden

See our display of gifts from gardeners for gardeners. Yard art, preserved fruits and vegetables, wreaths, table decorations and more, complete with do-it-yourself instructions.

Free

For information, call the Extension Office

Leaf Casting

Instructions

1. Choose a leaf with no imperfections.
2. On a flat surface make a heap of sand about 6 inches deep and 4 inches larger than leaf.
3. Place trash bag over sand and then place your leaf front side down.
4. In a tub mix 3 parts fine sand, 1 part cement or premixed mortar mix. Add concrete additive and enough water to make a paste. Add your desired pigment. Mixture should be thick –like spreadable cream cheese.
5. With gloves on, take handfuls and spread on leaf –thicker in the middle tapering to the sides.
6. Smooth edges and back of leaf with your hand or a moist paintbrush. Cover with plastic and leave overnight.
7. The next day, turn leaf over and support with sand. Pull leaf off. Smooth edges with rasp.
8. To Paint your leaf, mix 1 part paint with 2 parts water, and brush over surface of leaf. Wipe at once with cloth to remove excess paint, being sure to leave paint in veins of leaf.
9. You may paint the back of the leaf also. Let dry. Leaf fully cures in 5 days.
10. Seal with concrete sealer if going to be used outside.

Materials and Tools

Cement or Premixed Mortar Mix
Sand
Water
Concrete additive
Large trash bags
Elephant ear or other large leaf
Tub
Concrete pigment
Old paintbrush
Rasp
Acrylic paints
Concrete sealer
Rags
Latex gloves



Garden Checklist for September, 2007

by Dr. William C. Welch

Coleus and caladiums require plenty of water this time of year if they are to remain lush and attractive until fall. Fertilize with ammonium sulfate at the rate of 1/3 to 1/2 pound per 100 square feet of bed area, and water thoroughly.

Rejuvenate heat-stressed geraniums and begonias for the fall season by lightly pruning, fertilizing and watering.

Now is the time to sow seeds of the many cool-weather vegetables, greens and herbs that thrive through Texas' relatively mild winters. The fall and winter cool season is often more dependable for growing these crops than the spring season.

Nick the seedcoats of Texas bluebonnets before planting to hasten germination, or purchase started seedlings such as the popular "Maroon" variety.

Don't allow plants with green fruit or berries to suffer from lack of moisture. Hollies will frequently drop their fruit under drought conditions. Some vegetables such as cucumbers or eggplants also become bitter if under watered during peak growing times.

Remove weak, unproductive growth and old seed heads from crape myrtles and roses to stimulate new growth for fall beauty.

Prune out dead or diseased wood from trees and shrubs. Hold off on major pruning until mid-winter. Pruning now may stimulate tender new growth prior to frost.

Sow seeds of snapdragons, pinks, pansies and other winter flowers in flats for planting outside during mid-to-late fall.

Prepare the beds for spring-flowering bulbs as soon as possible. It's important to cultivate the soil and add generous amounts of organic matter to improve water drainage. Bulbs will rot without proper drainage.

Continue a disease spray schedule on roses as blackspot and mildew can be extremely damaging in September and October.

Christmas cactus can be made to flower by supplying 12 hours of uninterrupted darkness and cool nights (55 degrees F) for a month starting in mid-October. Keep plants on the dry side for a month prior to the treatment.

Plan to plant wildflowers in early September and October. Check supplies now and order seed for planting in open sunny areas. Consider bluebonnet, Indian paintbrush, coneflower, fire-wheel, black-eyed Susan, evening primrose and many others. Soils should be lightly cultivated prior to planting.

Divide spring flowering perennials such as iris, Shasta daisy, gaillardia, rudbeckias, cannas, daylilies, violets, liriop and ajuga.

Bagworms

by M. F. Potter & L. H. Townsend

University of Kentucky, Department of Entomology

Bagworms are caterpillars that make distinctive spindle-shaped bags on a variety of trees and shrubs. They attack both deciduous trees and evergreens, but are especially damaging to juniper, arborvitae, spruce, pine and cedar. Large populations of bagworms can strip plants of their foliage and eventually cause them to die. Infestations often go unnoticed because people mistake the protective bags for pine cones or other plant parts.

Description and Habits - Bagworms are the larval (caterpillar) stage of a moth that is rarely seen. Only the males develop into typical moths capable of flight. The adult female is grub-like and remains inside the bag until just before she dies. Bagworms pass the winter as eggs inside the bag that contained the previous year's female. In mid to late May the eggs hatch, and the tiny larvae crawl out from the end of the bag in search of food. By using silk and bits of plant material, they soon construct a small bag around their hind part that looks like a tiny, upright ice cream cone. As the larvae continue to feed and grow, they enlarge the bag enabling them to withdraw into it when disturbed. Older larvae strip evergreens of their needles and consume whole leaves of susceptible deciduous species, leaving only the larger veins. The bag is ornamented with bits of whatever type of vegetation they are feeding upon. By early fall, the bags reach their maximum size of 1-1/2 to 2 inches. At this time the larvae permanently suspend their bags (pointing downward) from twigs, and transform into the pupa or resting stage before becoming an adult.



Typical bagworm

Adults emerge from the pupal stage in early fall. Males are black, furry, clear-winged moths with about a 1-inch wing span. They are active fliers and fly in search of females which remain inside their bags. The females produce a powerful scent, or pheromone, that attracts the males. The creamy white females lack wings and legs and appear to be no more than grubs. The male flies to the female bag, inserts his abdomen in the hole in the bottom of the bag and mates with the female. After the fertilized female has laid several hundred eggs inside her old pupal case within the bag, she drops from the bag and dies. The eggs remain in the bag until the following May when the cycle begins again. There is one generation per year. Bagworms have two means of dispersing from plant to plant. Very young larvae may spin strands of silk and be carried fairly long distances by wind. Larger larvae may move short distances by crawling.

Bagworm Control - If only a few small trees or shrubs are infested, picking the bags off by hand and disposing of them may afford satisfactory control. This approach is most effective during fall, winter or early spring before the eggs have hatched. When many

small bagworms are infesting evergreens, an insecticide may be needed to prevent serious damage. The best time to apply an insecticide is while the larvae are still small (less than 1/2-inch long). This is usually in June. Small larvae are more vulnerable to insecticides, and inflict less damage. Carefully inspect susceptible landscape plants, especially evergreens, for last year's bags. Young bagworms are harder to see: look closely for the small, upright bags which have the appearance of tiny ice cream cones constructed of bits of plant material. Preventive treatment is often justified on plants that were heavily infested with bagworms the previous year.

Several products are available for homeowner and professional use. For homeowners, conventional insecticides such as Sevin, malathion, various pyrethroids or the microbial insecticide *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) provide satisfactory results. For commercial operators, acephate (Orthene TTO, Pro 75), tebufenozide (Cnfirm 2E), Bt (Dipel 3.2WP) and various pyrethroids work well. The Bt products have very low mammalian toxicities, but are only effective against younger larvae. If large bagworms are present (more than about 3/4-inch long), a conventional insecticide probably will provide better results. The foliage should be thoroughly wetted with the insecticide spray in order to achieve thorough coverage. Trade names are used as examples. No endorsement is intended, nor criticism implied of similar products not named. Always read and follow directions on the label.

Ornamental Vegetable Gardens for Fall

by **Andrew King**

**Extension Graduate Assistant, Texas A&M University,
College Station, TX**

It's time to start planting your fall garden. This year, let's try something new. Many of the plants that provide us with delicious produce can also serve as beautiful plants in our landscape. Throughout the year there are many "vegetable garden plants" that can help to beautify our ornamental gardens. For Texas gardeners, September is a great time to try a few of these multi-purpose plants. Swiss chard and red mustard greens are not only tasty, but also extremely beautiful plants, along with a few herbs that can not only spice up your favorite dishes, but your garden as well. Here are a couple of vegetables and a couple of herbs to get you started:



Swiss Chard

'Red Giant' mustard is a beautiful addition to any ornamental garden. It is an excellent companion for flowering plants due to its bold and unique foliage. Growing to 16-20" tall its leaves are wavy and begin to turn a nice burgundy when temperatures dip below 60 degrees Fahrenheit. It can be planted in masses for a spectacular show of fall color, but also proves to be effective as a specimen plant. In the kitchen, it is most commonly used

as a spicy addition to salads or even as a salad unto itself. It also adds a nice Dijon-like flavor to sandwiches.

Swiss chard is another attractive vegetable. It also grows in the 16-20" height range, and is effectively planted in a mass or as a stand-alone plant. Its leaves are generally glossy, and range in color from light green to purple depending upon variety. It is the Swiss chard's stalk however, that makes it a great ornamental plant. The stalks look very much like rhubarb, and come in white, red, pink, and a very showy yellow and orange. Kin to the beet, its flavor is most often likened to that of spinach. It is used in all sorts of dishes, from the common salad to stir fries to casseroles. Two of the more ornamental varieties are 'Red Ruby' and a seed mix called 'Bright Lights'.

Some herbs make for interesting additions to our gardens. Curly parsley is an excellent plant to use as a border for flower beds. It grows from 8" to around a foot tall and once it matures it will make a relatively thick, lush mass of vegetation to clearly mark the edges of your beds. Bronze fennel, sometimes called smokey bronze fennel because of its "airy" foliage, is another showy herb. Its color ranges from bronze to purple. Like the traditional fennel, it has a wonderful licorice flavor and scent that adds another dimension to the food in which it is added.

While growing these plants from seed is certainly a good option, at this time of year transplants are your best bet of receiving optimum yield and beauty this fall. All of the afore-mentioned plants grow best in well-drained soil. The addition of organic matter is also helpful in allowing them to reach their full potential. If space is an issue in your garden, these plants are also fit for containers, either alone or as part of a combination planting. I hope you'll allow these plants to shine not only in your kitchen, but in your garden as well.



Red Mustard

2007 Events:

Oct 9: BCMGA Meeting

Nov. 10: Open house 9 am- noon at the Education Station

Nov 13: BCMGA Meeting

Dec 11: BCMGA Meeting

Spring 2008 Master Gardener Training.
Jan 25th – March 27th.
Classes on Tuesday from 9 am – 3:30. Applications available by calling your friendly county extension agent at (979)864-1558.

NEWS AND NOTES:

Ellen Pedisich and Carol Wenny are the Nominating Committee for the upcoming BCMGA elections. They felt it might be worth a try to seek nominations for all officers and the state delegates via email. They will also be taking nominations from the floor at the October meeting for those members who do not have email. If any member is interested in running for an office or would like to nominate someone else for an office, please let either one of them know. Contact info: Carole Wenny 979-849-7248 or cwenny@academicplanet.com Ellen Pedisich 979-297-8058 or paul.pedisich@brazosport.edu

Fair judging information: The judging will take place Sunday, October 7th at 1 pm. No passes are required to get in. Sharon needs 6 to 8 judges. It's an easy, fun job. Judges typically give LOTS of blue ribbons. If you can help out, please let me know or contact Sharon at sftrower@ag.tamu.edu.

West Columbia is starting up a farmers market. They are looking for vendors. The West Columbia chamber phone number is 979.345.3921, and you will want to talk to Lynn. The first day is September 29.

Happy October Birthday Wishes

Pat Cayer Oct 1
Marti Graves Oct 25th
Evelyn Moon Oct 22nd
Kermit Schlameus Oct 22nd

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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