

What's Growin' On . . .

The BCMGA Newsletter

Heather Vincent, Editor

October/November 2007

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News...

The Minutes...

OCTOBER GENERAL MEETING...

The meeting was preceded by Ann McLain's program on Pot Gardening, in which she delved into the common problem of the compulsive collection of plants and pots, and how to keep the one happy while growing in the other.

Then the meeting was called to order by President Barbara Ross. Minutes from September were approved, and Ted Jagen presented his treasurer's report. Our current balance was \$20,568. Major expenditures for the month included supplies for the plant sale, parts for the Rainwater Collection Project, and our new weather station. Debbie Soderman is helping Ted with 2008 dues collection. The **2008 budget cycle** begins next month.

The first order of business was to welcome back Carol Farmer who is still recovering from surgery. Ray Michalik, who was not present, also is in recovery mode from his surgery.

Ted and Billy Heck have installed most of the **new weather station**. Readings can be monitored in the head house. The remaining sensors (soil temperature and moisture) will be installed soon.

Barbara Brown and other members shared their **observations of the Galveston Plant Sale** held the previous weekend. Galveston's plants are all purchased from TreeSearch, and we already have a lot more material than they offered. It was very crowded, and pricey. One good idea was the use of flags to speed up check-out lines.

Ellen Pedisich announced the **slate of candidates** developed by the Nominating Committee: for President, Barbara Ross; First Vice-President, Ed Barrios; Second Vice-President, Lee Withers; Treasurer, Ted Jagen; Secretary, Ann McLain; with Pam and David Peltier as State Delegates. Ellen asked for additional nominations from the floor; there were none. She also asked that anyone interested in being an alternate Delegate let her know. The election will be at the November meeting.

Jo Ann Holt proposed a project to make **plant information CD's** using our plant sale booklet, plus lots of pictures. These could be sold or given as incentives at our plant sales and other events. Donie suggested that we try to get first-hand experiences from the membership to enhance the plant information and make it truly local. Jo Ann is willing to chair the project, but she needs people who are technically able to take pictures, organize the material, and create the HTML.

Barbara Ross asked for volunteers to work on a **landscaping plan in West Columbia**. Walgreens is supporting a redevelopment of a downtown block of buildings, and the project is to include thirty feet of gardens. Christine Kern, Debbie Soderman, and Anne Carpenter volunteered to advise on this project.

The **Landscape on the Go series** that we have taught at Brazosport College for the last few years is being dropped from their listings, by mutual consent. We are planning to offer the same classes at Extension this spring.

In **brief announcements**, Billy Heck reported that our equipment is working, and mowing is getting done at the Education Station.. A sign-up sheet was circulated again for volunteers for the booth at the fair. Jesse reported that the county has plowed under the weeds in the vegetable garden, and as usual, the beds are too wet to work further. Barbara Brown asked that anyone pruning roses at home bring in cuttings for propagation. Keep them moist. Cindy Goodrum is now in charge of organizing the spring training class. Four speakers have been scheduled already. Classes will be on Thursdays, from January 24 through March 29.

Other **upcoming dates**:

- October 18: Hurricane Preparedness Committee to meet at the greenhouse.
- October 26: Lunch for county workers, at 2 pm, at Extension. We will be buying the barbecue, but we need volunteers to bring sides and to help serve.
- November 10: Open House at the Education Station.
- November 12: November meeting. This is MONDAY, not Tuesday.
- November 15: Working meeting for the 2008 budget, at noon at Extension.
- February 16: Fruit Tree Sale.

Thanks to Jesse for organizing a contribution of tired and unwanted plant material from the Angleton WalMart. And thanks to the members who brought food for the meeting – it was great. See you in November.

NOVEMBER GENERAL MEETING...

The meeting was called to order by President Barbara Ross. Minutes of the October general meeting were approved with one minor correction. Treasurer Ted Jagen presented the treasurer's report. Our current balance was \$19,794. The major income for October came from payment of dues; major expenses were for the engraved stones for the Memorial Garden, meat for the County Worker Barbecue, and materials for the plant sale. For the year we are well ahead. The report was approved as presented. We were reminded that **2008 dues** are being collected. The annual budget planning meeting will be at the Extension Building at noon on November 16.

In the report on the Education Station, Ray Michalik told us that maintenance is going well. We had the use of a lift truck recently, which allowed the installation of the downspouts for the Rainwater Project. However the lift was too big to use inside the barn for installing the telephone line, so we need something else. The concrete pads for the rainwater tanks have been poured. Jesse Knight reported that the Vegetable Garden has been worked up, again, and is ready to be planted.

Ann McLain reported that the November 10 **Open House** was quite successful, with 50-60 visitors. Thanks to all who worked on this event or turned out to participate. We plan to do six open houses in 2008.

Cindy Goodrum, Coordinator of the **Spring Training Classes**, reported that she has all the speakers lined up, although she is still working on the field trip details. Later there will be a sign up sheet to insure that there will be members present at each session to help out.

It being **Election Night**, the Nominating Committee (Ellen Pedisich and Carole Wenny) read the list of nominees again, and asked for additional nominations from the floor. There being none, Roy Morgan moved that we accept the slate as presented; Barbara Brown seconded. It was approved unanimously. Barbara expressed thanks on behalf of the entire board.

The **County Workers Barbecue Lunch** on October 26 went well. They are very appreciative of this event, and we appreciate their help at the Education Station.

Cindy expressed thanks to all who contributed breakables to her mosaic project at the Education Station. Barbara urged all who have not seen the results to have a look. The old watering trough is now a **beautiful water garden**.

Donie Stowers thanked all who brought food for the meeting, and reminded us that the **December meeting is a pot luck** – everyone bring a covered dish. There is barbecue left over from the lunch last month, which will be added to the feast. Spouses are welcome. We will have an **optional gift exchange**. Those who wish to participate should bring a wrapped gift, gardening related and appropriate for either male or female, \$15 or less.

Notes from the Prez...

By Barbara Ross

CAN YOU BE LIVE THIS WEATHER! EVERY YEAR AROUND THIS TIME I REMEMBER WHY I LIVE IN SOUTH TEXAS. I PUT UP WITH THE HEAT AND THE HUMIDITY IN THE SUMMER, THE WET AND GLOOMY DAYS OF JANUARY AND FEBRUARY JUST SO I CAN HAVE THESE FANTASTIC DAYS OF OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER.

OF COURSE ALL THE PLANTS ARE CONFUSED. WE HAD SO MUCH RAIN THIS SUMMER, THEN ALL OF A SUDDEN IT STOPPED, NO RAIN, NOT A DROP. ALL OUR PLANTS ARE SAYING 'HEY, WHAT HAPPENED TO THE RAIN FOREST WE WERE LIVING IN?' KEEP THOSE WATER HOSES RUNNING, BECAUSE IF WE GET A SUDDEN REALLY COLD SPELL, PLANTS WITH WET ROOTS WILL FAIR MUCH BETTER . MANY THINGS THAT REFUSED TO BLOOM ALL SUMMER ARE NOW FULL OF BLOOMS.

THE BLUE SKY'S THUMBEREGA VINE IN THE TROPICAL GARDEN IS LOADED WITH FLOWERS AND HAS COMPLETELY COVERED THE TRELLIS IT'S GROWING ON. THE WHITE BUTTERFLY GINGER AROUND IT IS ALSO STILL BLOOMING. THE MAPLE LEAF HIBISCUS HAS, JUST THIS WEEK STARTED TO BLOOM. THE CASSIA BESIDE IT IS COVERED WITH YELLOW FLOWERS AND YELLOW AND GREEN WORMS (FUTURE

SULFUR BUTTERFLY'S). FIRE SPIKES ARE ANOTHER COLORFUL FALL BLOOMER. AND OUR YELLOW DOUBLE (TRIPLE) DATURA IS A SHOW STOPPER!

AS YOU CAN TELL, I LOVE FALL!

HAVE FUN OUTDOORS

BARBARA ROSS

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

Melinda Kneese sent me the results of the soil sample I sent to her.

The total bacterial biomass is 500+ and the desired range is 25-500. The total fungal biomass is 10 and the desired range is 2-20. The total nematode number is 7 and the desired range is 2-10. The sample contained 4 different root feeding nematodes and 3 bacterial feeding nematodes.

Melinda's recommendations are to avoid soil additives, such as molasses, that will increase bacterial numbers, to use fungal foods such as worm castings and alfalfa meal. She highly recommended that I continue to use compost made on location and to apply beneficial nematodes to solve the predatory nematode problem.

I did a search on Yahoo and read about nematodes. I am not alone with this situation. I will not plant carrots, tomatoes, and okra for some time and I will not put tomato plants in the compost pile.

Jesse has the results of his biological soil test.

Haiku

Harmful nematodes,
Beneficial nematodes,
Let the good ones win.

The Inquiring Gardner...October

By Ann McLain

If you love sweet peas like I love sweet peas, now is the time to do something about it. November seems to be the time, in our climate, to get those seeds started. I grew up in Ohio, and there sweet peas are a summer feature. But as with many other legumes, these flashy peas don't much care for humid heat like ours; they are strictly spring garden material here.

Sweet peas have gotten a bad reputation as fussy, difficult annuals, not worth the bother. A hundred years ago they were grown in every garden, and dozens of beautiful varieties were offered in every seed catalog. But the wild explosion of "improvements" often led to flowers that didn't smell so sweet. More recently, the one-garden-plan-fits-all approach of modern seed catalogs has made the sweet pea something of an outcast in American gardens. You need to take the sweet pea's requirements into account for success. You need to plan ahead. And, at least in Texas, you need to accept that the space occupied by your sweet peas in March will need another occupant in May.

Success with sweet peas begins with picking out a suitable variety. What breeding has taken place in recent decades has focused on novelties: some catalogs offer a stubby thing for hanging baskets, while others offer "knee-high" sweet peas. Do their descriptions mention sweet fragrance and lovely colors? They do not. They talk about cute, or novel, or convenient. What good is a flower that's merely convenient?

Other "improvements" have aimed at greater heat tolerance. This sounds good, except that those varieties tend to begin bloom later, and I'm not at all sure that their alleged heat tolerance has anything to do with the kind of heat Brazoria County offers in early summer. Plus, the typical seed catalog of today may have only one or two sweet pea varieties, and darn little practical information about them. So I decided to try to avoid "new and improved" as much as possible. I also decided that rather than hope for heat tolerance, I would look for varieties with the word "winter" in the name, in hope of getting an earlier start to the bloom period.

As it happens, there is a variety named "Winter Elegance" that is still available in some catalogs, and it does the job. It starts to bloom for me in late February. I also tried "Old Spice", which was somewhere described as early. It turns out that it blooms about three weeks later – not as good, but it still gives me two months of flowers. Other varieties may work as well. I suspect that if you know someone who has been successful with sweet peas for years, some saved seed will probably work better than anything.

As for how to start sweet peas, many of you probably don't need any help from me.. But if you've had trouble, here's what has worked for me. Remember – this is strictly non-TAMU, non-official, purely anecdotal!

I soak the seed for one to two days (starting in hot water), as I would with any other legume. Then I treat the seed with legume inoculant before planting. I don't know if this is necessary or just hoodoo, but I think it helps speed the germination and subsequent growth. I sow where they are to grow, in early November (remember. Depending on weather, they should be popping up in a week or two. (Just a note: Winter Elegance seems to be more

erratic about germinating than Old Spice). Flowers start in late February or early March, and the vines generally get ratty in May.

The baby vines may not climb for quite awhile, especially if the weather is chilly or gloomy. But when they do start to run, look out Nellie. The preferred climbing material is string or twine netting; their tendrils aren't happy with wider supports. Once the show begins, try to keep seed pods from forming, which is easy. Pick a big bunch of fresh sweet peas every morning, and give them to all your favorite people. And don't forget to smell them – they're all the more special because sweet pea season doesn't last long.

The Inquiring Gardner...November

By Ann McLain

We just came back from a three-week road trip to Utah to visit our grandkids. As a transplant from the north, I took a lively interest in the state of the leaves all the way there and back. When we left home, it was hot and rainy – no sign of fall around here. But as we worked our way west and into higher elevations, we could see a different scene. Cutting across the Colorado Rockies, fall was definitely in the picture, with the brilliant yellows of aspen against the dark green pines. In northern Utah, many deciduous trees had lost their leaves. Coming back through New Mexico I was hoping for mellow yellow cottonwoods along the Rio Grande, but they weren't quite there yet.

And nearer to home, we stopped at Lost Maples State Park to see the big-tooth maples. Unfortunately, their leaves had only just begun to turn, and the prospects weren't looking good for this year's show. The rangers told us "the weather's been weird this year". (Now, where have I heard that before?) The main culprit has been an absence of cool nights, leading to muddy brown leaves, rather than the flaming red-orange of the leaf-peeper's dream. Ah well, maybe next year.

When we rolled into our driveway, the only sign of fall I could see was that some of the gingers were dying back. Somehow that isn't a sight to write songs about. But just in the past few weeks I can see other changes.

For one, the green ash is definitely losing its grip on its leaves, although those falling leaves aren't exactly yellow. Our woods has a different look these days, what with the yellowing (and browning) leaves and newly bare branches. One part of my nandina is turning sort of red, and there are a few red berries on the yaupon. And, in a sign of fall unknown in more northerly locations, the satsumas are turning orange. Around here, we have to take our fall color where we can get it. Like it or not, fall signs or not, winter really is just around the corner, and may have made its first appearance by the time you read this.

What to do? Dress up in whatever strikes you as winter clothes and dance on your front yard to celebrate having gotten through another long, hot summer. That's my plan. Apart from that, here are some more useful suggestions.

- Add mulch to your beds, especially over tender plants. Extra mulch can protect roots from a freeze, even if you don't protect the tops.
- Make plans to protect those tender things you really can't bear to lose. Last year Carole Wenny's husband built a winter igloo over her papaya tree, and it has rewarded them all this fall.
- Clean up your garden. When I gardened in the north I always left dried seed heads and stalks in place until spring. The seeds fed the birds, and soft fluffy snow and sparking ice crystals looked neat on the dark brown stems. But I have had to amend my ways. If you leave dried plant material in place for the winter here, you are providing lots of room and board for all sorts of insects you don't really need to encourage. Cut the dried stalks down, and get rid of them.
- Sow larkspur, and maybe lettuce. (Not in the same place, please. All parts of larkspur are poisonous, and you don't want to risk mixing larkspur seedlings in with the salad greens.)
- Most important of all: be thankful for the marvelous enjoyment you got from your garden this year, and start looking forward to another glorious growing season, which will begin very soon.

Tropical Update ...

By Ed Barrios

I was in Australia for 3 weeks in October and the plants I saw were tremendous. (Australia is about 90% the size of the continental US with only 21 million inhabitants.) First off, there are over 700 species of Eucalyptus trees in the country. They are divided into 4 large families and they are found in the drier parts of the continent – which compromises a majority of the landscape. This genus of trees dominates the drier landscape like no other trees on any other continent. Most of the species shed their bark periodically, like crepe myrtles and sycamores, as a defense mechanism to protect against bark insects.

Because of the British influence, most of the larger cities in Australia have large botanical gardens which are a treat because of the different plants you see growing. Australia is also home to many species of cycads, ferns and grevilleas. Grevilleas are in the Proteaceae (Protea) family from South Africa and the spectacular blooms are similar. The blooms are so rich in honey, that they were food for the Aborigines. In the tropical forests of the America's you normally see bromeliads, philodendrons and orchids in the tree canopies. In the tree canopies in the rain forests in Australia, you see primarily ferns – many species related to bird nest ferns; and stag horn ferns.

We visited one rainforest that was touted as being one of the oldest rainforests on the planet. I was skeptical as to what data they had to prove that. Turns out this rancher had some of his cattle dying and he cut their stomachs open to find out what might be the problem. The rancher found his cattle's stomachs full of seeds. He sent the seeds to a botanist friend at an Australian University. The botanist got excited when he analyzed the seeds and asked where the tree was. The rancher said he cut it down because he thought it might be killing his cattle. The botanist rushed out to the rainforest and started to look for similar trees. Luckily there were many more of these trees in the forest. Based on the analysis of the seeds, this species of tree was one of the first trees on the planet to produce seeds. In fact these rainforests, located in the North Eastern part of Australia, are home to most of the oldest trees that have evolved on the planet!

BRAZORIA COUNTY

Pecan Plus **BAKE-OFF!!**

December 5, 2007
Brazoria County Courthouse
Check-In: 8:00-9:15 a.m.



*Categories:

Cookies
Candy
Cake

Pie
Snacks
Salad

Miscellaneous

Quick Breads
Yeast Breads
Main Dish

**Each category will be awarded a 1st, 2nd, or 3rd place ribbon. All others will receive participation ribbon. A trophy will be awarded to the Champion and Reserve Champion.*

The Pecan Plus Bake-Off is open to all Brazoria County citizens.

A tasting will be held after judging for \$1.00 to tasters, so come join us.

All tasters will receive bake-off cookbook

For Pecan Plus Bake-Off Contact

Sharon Trower
979/864-1558, 979/388-1558 or
281/756-1558 ext. 125

For Pecan Show Contact

Paula Craig
979/864-1558, 979/388-1558 or
281/756-1558 ext. 112



PECAN SHOW **2007**

PECAN ENTRIES DUE:

Monday December 3rd by 5:00 p.m.
County Extension Office - Angleton

PECAN CRACKING:

Tuesday, December 4th, Noon.
County Extension Office - Angleton

PECAN JUDGING, SHOW & DISPLAY:

Wednesday, December 5th, 11:00 a.m.
Brazoria County Courthouse - Angleton

AWARDS:

Will be presented to winners Noon
Brazoria County Courthouse - Angleton

The Pecan Show is open to all Brazoria County citizens. An individual may enter one entry of each named variety as well as two seedlings (two known hybrids) and three native varieties.

2007 Events:

Dec 11: BCMGA Meeting

Spring 2008 Master Gardener Training.
Jan 24th – 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:

A reminder that the new BCMGA bylaws require 6 hours "Advanced Training" and 12 hours all other activities. This is an increase of 6 hours annually over previous years. Please check your records and be sure you will have enough hours to continue as a BCMGA member. If not, there are still a couple months left. Remember that meetings with a speaker count as one hour "advanced training" plus the rest of the meeting time counting as "BCMGA meeting". --- and be sure to turn in your hours. Don Wilkerson and Dan Lineberger have worked diligently to produce 11 on-line Earth Kind training modules for use by Master Gardeners to obtain continuing education hours for re-certification. The modules are accompanied by an on-line test, as well as, an on-line evaluation to document Outcomes of participants.

When a MG completes a module, the appropriate County MG Coordinator will be notified via email; plus, you can access a list of all MGs from your county that have completed modules via the 'Agent Only' site on the website.

"Texas Master Gardeners can select from any of these on-line modules to obtain up to 3 hours of re-certification education credits in a calendar year. Each module is worth 1 hour of credit. Master Gardeners are encouraged not to seek re-certification credit for training modules they have completed in previous years."

Please review this website and guidelines
<http://earthkind.tamu.edu/MGtraining.html> .

Happy November Birthday Wishes

Laurel Brinson Nov. 4th
Barbara Burkhardt Nov. 26th
Shannon Foley Nov. 20th
Pam Littlefield Nov. 29th
Roy Morgan Nov. 27th
Frances Mount Nov. 19th
Randy Tucker Nov. 1st

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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