



What's Growin' On . . .

The BCMGA Newsletter

Heather Vincent, Editor

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MERRY CHRISTMAS



News...

Notes from the Prez...

By Barbara Ross

The year 2007 is almost gone. It has been a busy year for BCMGA. We held our first Citrus Sale and sold out within an hour. We applied for two grants and got both of them. We started holding "teaching seminars" at the Education Station. We had four this year and the number of people attending grew each time. At the last one in November, we had more than sixty people.

Our Plant Sale was also a success, thanks to the hard work of our propagation crew. And they are working even harder for the 2008. We already have more plants on hand than we sold last year.

This was the first year, we put our goals on paper. We set up a five year plan, and have pretty well stayed on target. A copy of that plan will be in this Newsletter.

On behalf of the entire Executive Board, I thank you for reelecting all of us for another year. We will try hard to keep the good things happening.

MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY GARDENING

BARBARA ROSS

News at the Demonstration Garden...

By Ray Michalik

How time flies when you're having fun and fun and a little work we have/do at the Greenhouse as another year has passed.

Over all we haven't had any real major problems in the maintenance end of the organization. Maybe sometimes we thought we did. We did encounter a few water leaks, telephone line repairs, minor maintenance on the tractor and lawn mower and other mechanical equipment but with the assortment of folks with knowledge in different fields we managed to get the job done without having to call in the \$100 an hour "experts". Thanks to all who helped out.

Dan Sebesta, intern, is anxiously waiting the arrival of early spring, as he has done an excellent job of preparing the citrus beds, and is wanting to plant the citrus trees. He has two raised beds approximately two hundred feet long. We know he can grow award winning citrus because his citrus entry won second best in the Galveston Citrus show earlier this month. His entry was really a toss up between first or second.

Jessie and Billy have really done an excellent job of preparing the vegetable garden site. Earlier this fall the county came back in with their huge tiller and re tilled it. Billy used our tractor with Jessie's row disk and made I don't know how many rows and are ready for planting. A few fall/winter vegetables have been planted and are doing very good. Hopefully the weather will cooperate with us this spring and the entire site will be planted.

The rain water reclamation project is in progress. The two slabs were poured for the two 2500 gallon storage tanks. We now have a couple of experts in the organization on pouring and finishing concrete. We have one more down spout to be installed from the big barn to be tied in to the lines running from one tank to the other with another 30 or so feet of said line to be ran

and the two tanks will be ready to be filled with rain water. The next step will be setting and setting and connecting up the pump and pressure tank. And finally installing the irrigation system. Hopefully this will happen in the spring.

We are still getting some county probation folks as we need them, who are a big help when it comes to some heavy duty work. We also are in a position to get huge amounts of leaves from them at times but we are having a small problem on how to get them to our site. I will meet with Charlie soon and see what can be worked out. The leaves we can shred or just put them directly in the rows of the vegetable garden and cover them up. This would really help with loosening up the soil.

At this time we should thank Heather for keeping the news letter coming to us this past year as she has done an excellent job putting it together. Also the coffee pot is always on and sometimes Jessie bakes and brings a cake on the work days, we can have coffee and cake. And who knows we may even pull a weed.

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 the beginnings of live Christmas decorations. The very hot red peppers on the green plants sparkle in the sunlight. The bluish-green Tuscan kale, the Buttercrunch and Black-Seeded Simpson lettuces, and the bunching onions just need red ribbons to complement their green colors. I think I will bring some red bows tomorrow.

After planting kale seeds twice with no success in the garden, I planted a tray of Red Russian kale in the greenhouse. Then I planted a tray of organic mustard seeds. Now both trays have new sprouts. One must not give up hope.

Haiku

Tuesday I applied
beneficial nematodes.
Worm around down there.

The Inquiring Gardner...

By Ann McLain

As I write this, the first serious flirtation with freezing temperatures is being forecast. Some of us have had a few things nipped already, but this weekend could be the first widespread frost. Or not. Forecast accuracy has not been a strong feature of local meteorology this season.

In any case, most of us are ready for whatever at this point. If it was supposed to get planted this fall, it either is, or it's not going to be. We've had a lot of opportunities to do things like adding mulch to protect roots and grouping the tenderest pot plants in protected places. We've hunted up the old sheets or fancy frost covers and have them at hand. Or else we've decided that we have too many plants anyway – it's time for survival of the fittest.

There is one more last minute thing we can do when frosts are imminent – and that is to make sure everything is well watered. Often this is enough to stave off the worst effects of frosty temps.

Now is the time to turn our attentions to indoor activities – namely, catalogs. When I lived and gardened up north, I always set aside the new seed and nursery catalogs as they arrived throughout December. Then when the Christmas dinner was cooked, served, and eaten, I let someone else do the clean-up and I sat down and imagined new plants in the garden.

These days the catalogs seem to come earlier and earlier, which is actually a good thing, since some of my seed starting should happen a lot sooner, now that I garden on the Gulf Coast.

For instance, if you plan to start your own tomato seedlings for spring planting, you should be getting underway soon. Lots of folks recommend setting them out in the first week of March, and it seems to take a good eight weeks of effort to get from seed to sturdy little plant. But if you can't deal with that yet, no worries. Other members of our chapter will tell you that it's a mistake to start so early. They don't set out their transplants until April. And here's the thing of it, good tomatoes have been known to come from both strategies, so suit yourself.

You all have heard about my tomato nightmares, so you might imagine that I am shopping the catalogs for interesting new annuals and perennials, rather than those frustrating veggies. Well, I'm trying to work up some excitement over the flower offerings (which look pretty tame this year, for some reason). But the things that keep catching my eye this year are all peppers.

I don't even eat peppers very often, my innards would rather I didn't. And even if I did have a use for a dozen peppers a week, I already have on hand viable seed for at least a dozen nifty varieties. But in every catalog, my eye zeros in on those lovely Capsicums – big ones, tiny ones, hot ones, sweet ones, blocky ones, tapered ones, red, orange, and purple. I just love peppers – not for their eating qualities, but for the wild and wooly variety of the things. Someone stop me before I start another dozen pepper plants I don't have room for!

So, from my garden to yours, in this season of endings and beginnings, I wish you all good things. Also I hope you find something that strikes your fancy in your seed catalogs.

Tropical Update ...

By Ed Barrios

Well we've just had our coldest weather of the year, with January and February yet to come. It is always instructive to go out and wander in the yard and see what damage was done to your tropical plants. When you see that some of the plants do not seem to be affected very much, look for other species in the same genus or same family.

For example take the Araceae Family or Aroids. This is a huge family with over 15 genera and over 2,000 species. This family includes many of our most famous tropical plants for example: Philodendron, Monstera, Dieffenbachia, Anthurium, Spathiphyllum, Caladium, Aglaonema (Chinese Evergreen); Scindapsus (Pathos), Syngonium; Alocasia (Elephant ears), Colocasia (Elephant ears), Xanthosoma and Santedeschia (Calla lilies). They all have the same type of bloom, an elongated central axis called a spadix with small petal-less flowers and usually attached near the base of the spadix is a leaf-like bract or funnel shaped spathe. Sounds complicated but think of the "flower" of the Calla lily or the Anthurium or the Spathiphyllum and you'll know what I'm trying to describe.

What makes Aroids unusual is that they are all from humid tropical climates, mostly in the Americas and Asia, but some can take remarkable cold. I have Philodendron selloum, Monstera deliciosa, Anthurium hookeri (Birdsnest anthurium), Alocasia macrorrhiza, Alocasia cucullata and Scindapsus aureus (Ivy) all growing in the yard and have been in the ground for 10-15 years. Remember that in the tropics there can be very tall mountains where temperatures can get cold.

Reflections of a Garden Goddess

By Lee Wither

With Christmas just around the corner I thought many of you might find it interesting to learn how some of our traditions came to be.

The Christmas Tree

The history of the modern Christmas tree goes back to 16th century Germany. In Alsace (Elsass) around Strasbourg there was a widespread practice of bringing trees (evergreens, not necessarily a fir-tree) into houses for decoration during Christmastide. This practice may well derive from pagan times. The evergreens were symbols of eternal life in ancient Egypt and China and in Europe trees were worshipped in many places - the ancient Finns used sacred groves instead of temples.

Saint Boniface and The Christmas Tree:

Saint Boniface, an English missionary, known as the "Apostle of Germany", in 722 came upon some men about to cut a huge oak tree as a stake (Oak of Thor) for a human sacrifice to their pagan god. With one mighty blow, Saint Boniface felled the massive oak and as the tree split, a beautiful young fir tree sprang from its center. Saint Boniface told the people that this lovely evergreen, with its branches pointing to heaven, was indeed a holy tree, the tree of the Christ Child, a symbol of His promise of eternal life. He instructed them henceforth to carry the evergreen from the wilderness into their homes and to surround it with gifts, symbols of love and kindness.

Saint Boniface (feast June 5) received the name Winfrid at his baptism but took the name Boniface before he was ordained to the priesthood. He was martyred at the age of 75.

The Paradise Tree:

There is a very old and charming European custom of decorating a fir tree with apples and small white wafers representing the Holy Eucharist. These wafers were later replaced by little pieces of pastry cut in the shapes of stars, angels, hearts, flowers, and bells. Eventually other cookies were introduced bearing the shapes of men, birds, roosters and other animals.

In the Middle Ages, about the 11th century, religious theater was born. One of the most popular plays, the German mystery play, concerned Adam and Eve, their fall and expulsion from the Garden of Eden--from the Early Paradise. The Garden of Eden was represented by a fir tree hung with apples. It represented both the Tree of Life and the Tree of Discernment of Good and Evil which stood in the center of Paradise. The play ended with the prophecy of a coming Savior, and for this reason, this particular play was often enacted during Advent.

The one piece of scenery--the "Paradeisbaum (the Paradise Tree) became a popular object, and was often set up in churches, and eventually in private homes as well. It became a symbol of the Savior. Since the tree represented not only Paradise, and man's fall, but also the promise of salvation, it was hung not merely with apples, but also with bread or wafers (Holy Eucharist) and often sweets (representing the sweetness of redemption). In sections

of Bavaria, fir branches and little trees, decorated with lights, apples and tinsel are still called Paradeis.

The German and English immigrants brought the Christmas tree to America. Fruits, nuts, flowers, and lighted candles adorned the first Christmas trees, but only the strongest trees could support the weight without drooping; thus, German glassblowers began producing lightweight glass balls to replace heavier, natural decorations. These lights and decorations were symbols of the joy and light of Christmas. The star that tops the tree is symbolic of the "Star in the East".

The success of Christmas tree in Protestant countries was enhanced by the legend which attributed the tradition to Martin Luther himself (in Catholic countries the custom was unknown up to this century). In England the tradition was popularized by the German Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria. The German immigrants brought the Christmas tree to America in 17th century. Public outdoors Christmas trees with electric candles were introduced in Finland in 1906, and in USA (New York) in 1912.

A Viking Story:

This story tells us that when Christianity first came to Northern Europe, three personages representing virtues were sent from Heaven to place lights on the original Christmas Tree. They were Faith, Hope and Charity. Their search was long for they were required to find a tree that was as high as hope; as great as love; as sweet as charity; and one that had the sign of the cross on every bough. Their search ended in the forests of the North for there they found the Fir. They lighted it from the radiance of the stars and it became the first Christmas tree.

The Legend of the Pine Tree:

When the Holy family was pursued by Herod's soldiers, many plants offered them shelter. One such plant was the Pine Tree. When Mary was too weary to travel longer the family stopped at the edge of a forest to rest. A gnarled old pine which had grown hollow with its' years invited them to rest within its trunk--then it closed its branches down and kept them safe until the soldiers had passed. Upon leaving, the Christ Child blessed the pine and the imprint of his little hand was left forever in the tree's fruit--the pine cone. If a cone is cut lengthwise the hand may still be seen. The modern custom is also connected with the Paradise tree hung with apples, present in the medieval religious plays. The decorations could symbolize the Christian Hosts, too (a gruesome reminder of the human sacrifices they used to hang from the branches of holy trees). Instead of trees, various wooden pyramidal structures were also used. In 17th century the Christmas tree spread through Germany and Scandinavia. Eventually the tree was

extensively decorated, first with candles and candies, then with apples and confections, later with anything glittering mass-produced paraphernalia.

Mistletoe

Sacred to ancient druids and a symbol of eternal life the same way as Christmas tree. The Romans valued it as a symbol of peace and this lead eventually its acceptance among Christmas props. Kissing under mistletoe was a Roman custom, too.

Holly

One of the most popular Christmastime accoutrements, [holly](#) has sharp edges, symbolic of the crown of thorns worn by Jesus at his crucifixion. The red berries represent blood.

FIVE YEAR PLAN FOR EDUCATION STATION...

2007

1. Clean out cinder block barn - move equipment from other areas---**DONE**
Try to have electricity restored
Install locks
2. Place all pesticides in locking cabinet
3. Paint large barn (garage) and head house
4. Have beehives placed near gardens
5. Acquire more wagons and tables for plant sales---**DONE**
6. Acquire at least 2 more wheel barrows (2 wheel type)---**DONE**
7. Install stainless steel counter and sink in potting shed---**DONE**
8. Plant flower bed around BCMGA sign out front---**DONE**
9. Talk with county about what can be done with horse barn---**DONE**
10. Purchase an edger---**DONE**
11. Begin rainwater collection system---**DONE**
12. Build or buy a work bench and a vice in garage---**DONE**

2008

1. Do or hire done necessary repairs on greenhouse
2. Build another shade house
3. Put castle rock around all flower bed
4. Plant more grapes and blackberries
5. Plant fruit orchard—possibly add 3rd row
6. Complete rainwater collection system
7. Build cabinets or shelving in garage for storage

2008, 2009, & 2010

1. Develop wetlands area including pond
2. Plant a prairie and native grass area
3. Add a woodland area

4. Build an outdoor teaching area
5. Build or install separate restrooms for men & women (with showers)
6. Work on an additional water supply
7. Design an arboretum with paths, benches, and various specimen trees
8. Plant Lady Bird wild flower site, maybe included in or near native grass area

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2007 Events:

January...

8th – BCMGA Meeting
BCMGA Open House
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.

February...

City of Clute with the Master Gardeners –
Q & A
BCMGA Open House
12th BCMGA Meeting
Brazosport College “Landscaping on the
Go” class
16th BCMGA Fruit and Citrus Tree Sale

March....

11th BCMGA Meeting

April....

8th BCMGA Meeting
19th Spring Plant Sale

May...

13th BCMGA Meeting
31st Farmer's Market – Every Saturday
thru the end of June

June...

BCMGA Open House
7th Farmer's Market
10th BCMGA Meeting
14th Farmer's Market
21st Farmer's Market
28th Farmer's Market

July...

8th BCMGA Meeting

August...

12th BCMGA Meeting

September...

9th BCMGA Meeting

October...

14th BCMGA Meeting

November...

11th BCMGA Meeting

December...

9th BCMGA Meeting

NEWS AND NOTES:

A Message from Ted....Dues are Due!!! Please contact him if you have not paid them!!!!

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> .

GARDEN CHECKLIST FOR DECEMBER...

Now that there are fewer garden chores, take time to browse gardening catalogs or search the Internet for those hard-to-find favorites. Place orders for seeds this month so you will have them available when you are ready to plant. By ordering early, you will be more certain of getting the varieties you want. In addition to ordering seeds that you are already familiar with, try a few new kinds each year to broaden your garden contents.

The woody portions of shrubs and perennials may be left in place until further in the season. Late December through February is usually the best time to prune them.

Reduce the fertilization of indoor plants from late October to mid-March. An exception would be plants in an atrium or a well lighted window.

Take care to examine house plants on a weekly basis to discover pests such as aphids before they have multiplied extensively. Control these pests with a stream of spray outside, rub them off with your fingers or a swab dipped in rubbing alcohol or soapy solution.

Drain gasoline from power tools and run the engine until fuel in the carburetor is used up.

Drain and store garden hoses and watering equipment in a readily accessible location. The lawn and plants may need water during a prolonged dry spell.

November through February is a good time to plant trees and shrubs. In the Panhandle, planting is often delayed until February or early March.

Continue to set out cool-season bedding plants, such as pansies, violas, stock, snapdragons, and dianthus.

Prepare beds and individual holes for rose planting in January and February. Use composted manure, pine bark, and similar materials mixed with existing soil.

Use good pruning practices when selecting Christmas greenery from landscape plants. Don't destroy the natural form and beauty of the plant.

Protect your lawn from excessive winter damage by providing irrigation during dry periods.

Plant spring-flowering bulbs if you haven't already done so. Be sure to refrigerate tulips and hyacinths for 6-8 weeks prior to planting.

Prolong the life of holiday-season gift plants by providing proper care. Check to see if the pot wrap has plugged up the bottom drainage. Don't over water. Keep out of drafts from heating vents and opening doorways. Fertilizer is seldom needed the first few months.

Take advantage of good weather to prepare garden beds for spring planting. Work in any needed organic matter, and have beds ready to plant when needed.

Don't forget tulip and hyacinth bulbs in the refrigerator. They can be planted any time in December if they have received 60 or more days of chilling.

Want to start cuttings of your favorite Christmas cactus? As soon as it has finished blooming, select a cutting with 4 or 5 joints, break or cut it off, and insert the basal end into a pot of

moderately moist soil. Place it on a windowsill or other brightly lit area. The cuttings should be rooted within 3 to 4 weeks.

Don't spare the pruning shears when transplanting bare-rooted woody plants. Cut the tops back at least one-third to one-half, to compensate for the roots lost when digging the plant.

Berrying plants, such as holly and yaupon, may be pruned now while they can be enjoyed as cut material inside the house.

Happy December Birthday Wishes

Tom Nolan 7th
Barbara Bruyere 19th
Christine Kern 17th
Sherry Summers 20th
Sandra Taylor 21st
Kirby Rapstein 31st

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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