



WHAT'S GROWIN' ON

SEPTEMBER 2009

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COMING UP

⇒ BCMGA BOARD MEETING

Tues, 09/08/09
5:30 pm AgriLIFE Office
All members welcome!

⇒ BCMGA MEETING

Tues, 09/08/09
6:30 pm AgriLIFE Office

⇒ FREE September Seminar

Wed, 09/09/09
12:05 pm—12:50 pm,
Lake Jackson Public Library
"Fall Veggie Gardens"

⇒ FREE October Seminar

Sat, 10/10/09
10:00 am—11:30 am,
Lake Jackson Public Library
"Fall Flowers in the Garden"

⇒ FREE November Seminar

Wed, 11/04/09
12:05 pm—12:50 pm,
Lake Jackson Public Library
"Winterize Veggie Gardens"

⇒ FREE December Seminar

Wed, 11/04/09
10:00 am—11:30 am,
Lake Jackson Public Library
"Holiday Plants"

PAULA CRAIG'S AgriLIFE: KUDZU IN THE COUNTY

Kudzu (*Pueraria montana* var. *lobata*), a legume, lives in Brazoria County. Called "Mile-a-Minute Vine", "Foot-a-Night Vine" or "the Vine That Ate the South", this oriental invasive can grow more than a foot per day and has been known to swallow whole trucks and houses, as well as killing all vegetation in its path. Introduced to the U.S. in 1876, kudzu was used for years as an ornamental vine or as a forage plant. In the 1930s and 1940s, southern farmers were encouraged and even paid to plant kudzu as a means of erosion control. You can hack it, burn it, freeze it and poison it. It laughs. In fact, one herbicide even increases its growth! Even with the best herbicides it can take 10 years of constant application to remove the vine. Today, millions of dollars are spent annually to eradicate the problem.

Kudzu is perennial vine which lives and produces flowers and seed for many years. It is deciduous, losing its leaves in winter after a killing frost. Roots develop at nodes in contact with the soil and then these nodes develop into a root crown with many buds capable of growing into new vines. Roots at established crowns may be several inches in diameter and may grow to a depth of three or more feet.

Kudzu really is an attractive plant, with trifoliate foliage and a purple, fragrant, wisteria-like inflorescence. The Brazoria County patch started from a single passalong cutting from Louisiana about 8 years ago. Next time you catch yourself saying, "Gee that's purty. I'm gonna git me some," please look at the following websites: <http://www.invasive.org>, <http://www.texasinvasives.org/>, and <http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/unitedstates/tx.shtml>. It's also on the Texas Noxious Weed list which prohibits "knowingly importing, growing or selling" the plant in the state, subject to prosecution and fines.

If you want to see kudzu in bloom for yourself, take SH 35 north toward Alvin. At CR 192 (the main intersection south of Camp Mohawk with the yellow blinking light and Diamond Shamrock gas station), turn left. Go about 0.1 miles to the first unpaved driveway on the left. The bar ditch along that road is loaded with the escaped kudzu.



Flowers and Foliage
Photo courtesy of Purdue University



Kudzu engulfing an abandoned house in center of pic;
All vegetation covered and killed by Kudzu

THE BEES BUZZ

NEW VEGGIE SPECIALISTS

Fort Bend County was the site of a vegetable gardener specialist training at the end of July. This was the first ever training for this specialty, and it was hosted by Fort Bend's county agent, Dr. Shari Koch. Two of our BCMGA members went along to get certified as veggie masters. Instructors were well-known Texas veggie experts, including Tom Leroy, and Dr. Joe Masabni from Texas A&M. Our new certified veggie-ists are Debbie Soderman and Ray Michalik, and our members certainly know them to be on top of all things vegetable. Now they're even more so. We sat down together to talk about this specialist training.



So, who were the students?

Ray: the students came from all over the state - from down in the Valley, out in the panhandle, East Texas.

Deb: We were able to drive to each day's session, but there were a lot of gardeners in motels in Fort Bend County.

We met a lady from the Fort Bend area who has a community garden project near their court house. She was there to get more information about vegetable gardening to help run that site.

Ray: Everybody was really friendly. We were all interested in the same things. It was easy to find things to talk about.

What was the training like?

Deb: The first thing that happened was a set of questions on PowerPoint slides. There were ten or twelve. We each had a remote control to use to answer the questions. Up on the screen, as each question came up, we all could see the numbers of right and wrong answers. It was a test to see what we already knew.

Ray: Then they gave us the same quiz again at the end of the second day. And on that last day, there was still only one question that everyone got right. So I guess we all had a lot to learn. But the percentages of right answers on all the questions did go to 80 or 90%, which was higher than when we started, so we did learn.

Deb: The questions were interesting, and not real easy. One was about onions. Does a bigger onion set turn into a bigger onion bulb when it's done growing?

Gosh, I don't know. Does it?

Deb: It turns out that onion sets the size of pencils make the biggest bulbs - sets that are bigger than that don't give you bigger onions.

Ray: We got some good books as part of the deal, too. [He rummages in the bag that was given out.] Nope, don't have the insect book with me - I started reading it last night. It's really very useable.

Deb: We got a fat insect book, with lots of pictures, and another book about plant diseases. Color pictures, so we can recognize what's wrong.

Ray: And this one, called Kitchen Gardens - we all thought it was a recipe book, but it turns out to have a lot of information about when to plant, how to plant, all kinds of good stuff, and it's aimed at southern gardens.

Deb: We also came home with a flash drive loaded with all the PowerPoint presentations from the training, plus a lot of other useful stuff - lots of pictures, for instance.

That will be handy for all the presentations we're going to want you to do.

Ray: [Rummaging again, then holding up a treasure.] Plus - we each got a pocket magnifier! Now we can see those little bitty thrips and so on!

I guess this wasn't just about the party favors, right?

Deb: Right. The most important part was the instruction, and that was definitely excellent.

Ray: One of the things I got a lot out of was when Dr. Joe talked about understanding soil reports. I've gotten my soil tested as recommended, but I never felt like the report told me very much. But he explained how to understand them, at least the format that TAMU's lab uses. I'll be able to help people understand the recommendations.

Deb: We learned about fertilizers, too - over fertilizing is a problem. Most times we only need to add nitrogen, because that leaches out or gets used up. Our soils have plenty of potassium and phosphorus usually, and it doesn't leach away. They told us that using a crop of nitrogen-fixing plants - like beans, for in-

(Continued on page 3)

THE BEES BUZZ

NEW VEGGIE SPECIALISTS Continued from Page 2

stance - really helps. And you don't have to plow them under to get benefits. Nitrogen leaks out of their roots, so it's worth it even if you just pull them out.

That's good to know. I don't use a tiller in my little garden, so I always wondered if there was any point in sowing a cover crop.

Deb: Dr. Joe also got us excited about doing projects in our gardens. One thing he was wanting some of us to try out was growing square water-melons - you put this form around the melons when they're small, and

that shapes them as they grow.

He also was looking for groups to do trials on growing asparagus with coastal salt added. We're going to try that at BEES, using some square foot plots next to the potting shed. We'll have two beds with coastal salt and two without. Dr. Joe was very encouraging about it, but he wants it to be well documented. We need to take lots of pictures of how we do it, and we need to keep good written records about cost, production, and so on.

That's great. That kind of project is really what our garden plots at BEES are supposed to be about.

Deb: I have to tell you - they really fed us well, too. The first day, we had our evening meal at Caldwell's Nursery in Rosenberg. They set up big tables under the trees, and it was wonderful. The food was really good, too.

So was this something that was worth doing? Would you go back for more training?

Deb: Definitely! It was fun...

Ray: ...and we learned a lot!

MORE BUZZ

SPECIALIST TRAINING FOR MASTER GARDENERS

Texas Master Gardeners can choose to attend advanced training programs in a number of subject areas. The purpose of this training is to prepare the master gardener to teach and advise the gardening public.

Who can attend. Because the goal of the specialist programs is to spread skills across the state, each county can nominate only two members for each event. If the program doesn't fill, additional master gardeners from the county may be able to attend. If you hear about a training program you'd be interested in doing, talk to our agent, Paula Craig, to get the forms.

Pay-back hours. Each master gardener who completes the training session is required to "pay back" for the training by completing a number of hours preparing and giving presentations to the public.

Assistance with tuition. The specialist training events charge tuition, which is paid by the master gardener attending the event. Our chapter reimburses this tuition from our treasury when the new specialist has completed the class and submitted the required forms. However, the participant must pay for all meals, lodging and transportation.

What special topics are available? One topic that quite a few of our members have completed is Propagation. We also have a number of Rainwater Harvesting specialists. Ellen Pedisich is our Master Composter and Ed Barrios will soon be doing the Entomology session. Upcoming training sessions are:

Entomology: Sep 28—Oct 2, Montgomery County, Conroe, TX

National EarthKind® Specialist: Oct 7—Oct 9, Tarrant County, Fort Worth, TX (the EarthKind® concept — not just roses)

Greenhouse Management: Oct 28—Oct 30, Tarrant County, Fort Worth, TX

Rainwater Specialist: Nov 13—Nov 14, Concho Valley, San Angelo, TX

For specific and detailed information, including agendas, on any of these training opportunities, visit <http://texasmastergardeners.com>.

PEST OF THE MONTH BY PAULA CRAIG: SOAPBERRY BORER

Disclaimer: Information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by AgriLIFE Extension or BCMGA is implied

Soapberry Borer Comes to Brazoria County

The soapberry borer (*Agrilus prionurus*), an invasive beetle from Mexico, has been identified in Brazoria County. In a few short months, the flatheaded borer has taken out approximately 80% of the soapberry trees in an area near Holiday Lakes.

While the Western Soapberry is not highly valued as a landscape tree, it is a Texas native and a food source for birds and butterflies.



Soapberry larvae and sapwood damage

Infestations are easy to spot. The distinctive peach color of soapberry sapwood (exposed as squirrels and woodpeckers search out the larvae beneath the bark) is covered with curving trails. Peeling back more bark may expose larvae. It's amazing that a maggot with such a flimsy body, cream colored, limp and elastic, can chew through a hardwood tree.

Newly developed beetles emerge from the sapwood leaving a D-shaped (sort of) exit hole. The beetle is not known to attack other species, and soapberries less than 2 inches in diameter at a height of 4.5 feet above the ground are rarely attacked.



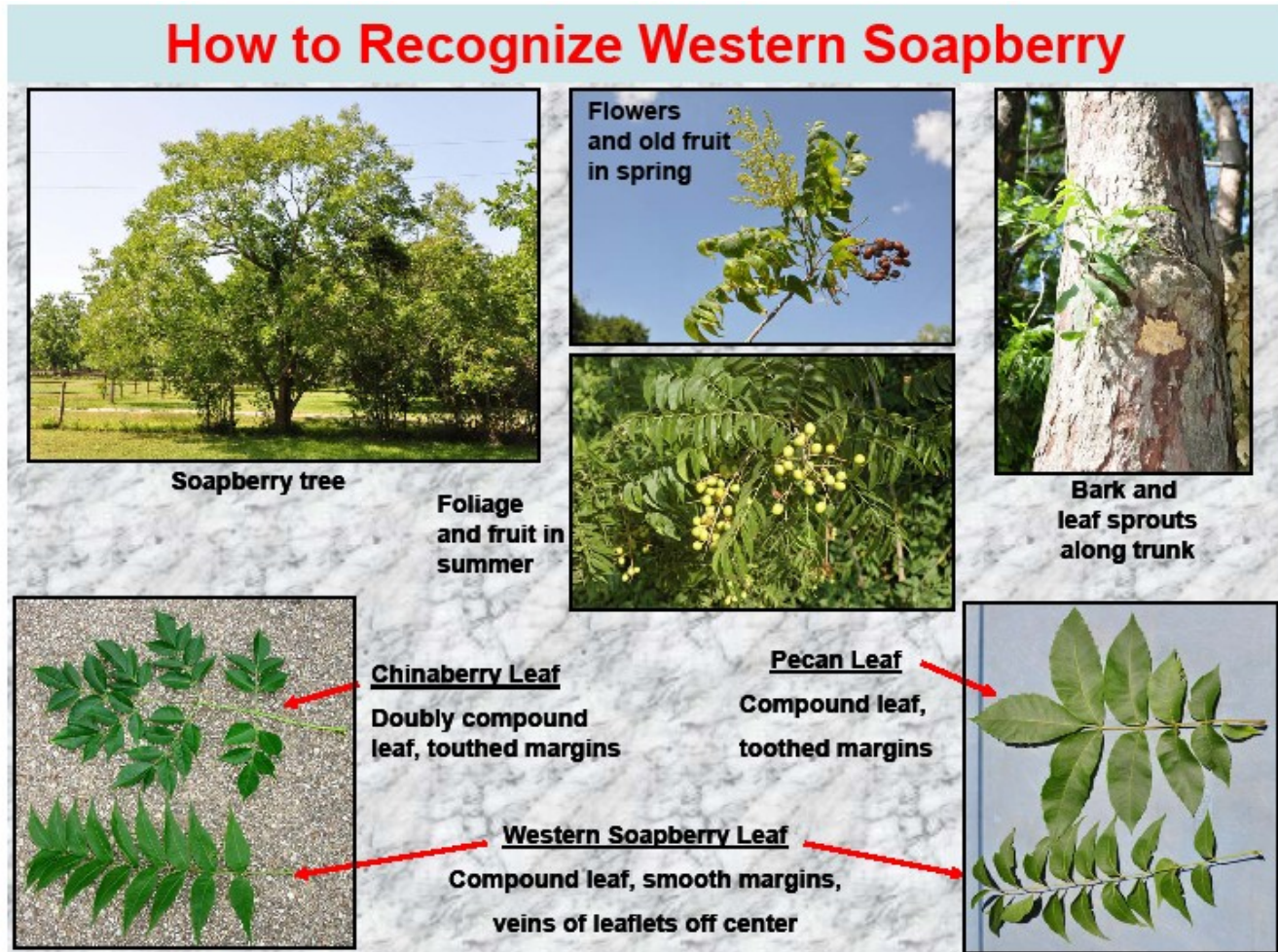
Older damage and D-shaped exit holes

Unaffected trees may be treated with Bayer Advanced Tree & Ornamental Insect Control. For more information, go to www.texasento.net/prionurus.htm.

WESTERN SOAPBERRY (*Sapindus drummondii*) IDENTIFICATION

OK, on the previous page you learned what havoc the Soapberry Borer does. So, how do you know if you have a Western Soapberry?

The Texas A&M tree people put together the following identification guide. It's odd that it's considered a trash tree here, but read the U of Florida fact sheet at <http://hort.ufl.edu/trees/SAPDRUA.pdf> to see how highly they rate the Western Soapberry.



👍👍 NOW READ THIS

Dirr's Trees and Shrubs for Warm Climates. Dirr, Michael A. Timber Press: Portland. 2002, 446 pp, \$69.96

Subtitled "An Illustrated Encyclopedia" and targeted for growers in USDA Zone 6 and higher, one might expect an exhaustive compendium of woody ornamentals for our area. Not so. Dr. Dirr's career was most recently in Georgia, and many of the plants are judged based on Georgia conditions. Of course, some of the woodies are winter hardy here, but not summer hardy. The ornamentals that thrive strictly in Pacific Northwest which may be listed as Zone 9 aren't going to live through one of our summers. He's also off on zones for the subtropics, again showing that Zone 7-8 southeastern bias.

However, if you want to know about Crape Myrtles, Dr. Dirr's 12 pages of information pretty much cover the gamut of cultivars.

The book is in A-Z format, using scientific names only. Common names are found only at the end of the book, in the "index of common plant

names", not cross-referenced in the text. Zone information is given for each entry, but a cross-check with other sources is necessary. Also take the plant size with a grain of salt — again, zone 7 rules the size determination, although he does occasionally mention that certain woodies will grow larger in warmer conditions.

It's impossible to determine what characteristics caused a tree or shrub to be listed. Some are common; others are not even in cultivation.

Dr. Dirr does cover the most commonly occurring southern trees and shrubs, as well as newer cultivars of them.

Trees and Shrubs for Warm Climates is worth checking out at the library; only plant aficionados will want to spend \$70 for their very own copy.

ANN McLAIN, THE INQUIRING GARDENER: THE BEST & WORST OF 2009

At our August meeting, I passed around questionnaires asking you about the bests and worsts of this gardening year. I think I should have asked some additional questions about where your garden is and what kind of irrigation you have.

South Drought/North Rain

For many of us, this summer (and even back to last summer) has seen severe to extraordinary drought. South of Angleton, where the total rainfall for this year to date has been less than 10", gardens are hanging on only through heroic watering efforts. On the other hand, some master gardeners from the northern part of the county lost their spring gardens to heavy rain and standing water. These differences in climate probably explain the fact that some of our most often grown plants appeared on both the best and the worst lists in this survey.

Edibles

This was most evident in the edibles department. Tomatoes, cucumbers, and beans were "bests" for one group of gardeners, while another group complained that most vegetables, but those in particular, were disasters. Only two vegetables got multiple "best" votes, with no offsetting "worsts". Those were squash - some gardeners were very enthusiastic about the squash varieties they planted this year - and okra. Well, think about that one. Okra, the vegetable from Africa, must feel especially at home in

the heat of this summer. One gardener hadn't "had good okra in years", and this year was outstanding.

Ornamentals

On the ornamental front, that best/worst trend continued. Some folks' roses were super, other folks lost theirs. Some hibiscus did very well; in other gardens, hibiscus has done very badly. I heard raves about angel's trumpet (*Brugmansia*), as well as moans. Ditto for Cannas. I have to assume that there was some factor that was different in the gardens where these plants did very well. Maybe the top performing roses were in gardens that got rain, or that had really effective irrigation systems. Maybe the really terrific hibiscus suffered less from the blazing heat because they were planted with afternoon shade. If any of you have some insight into this, please let us know.

Some plants were clearly in one camp or the other. Survey responses, and my conversations with other gardeners, tell me that this was a good year for bougainvillea. Plumeria got a number of votes for "best". Some plant families fell into both categories, but we were pretty unanimous about which members were which.

In the ginger clan, shell gingers (*Alpinia*) and peacock gingers (*Kaufmania*) were "bests" this year; but all agreed that this was a very bad year for the *Hedychium*, or butterfly, gingers.

Some *Clerodendrum*s did very well (shooting star,

musical notes), but the blue butterfly (*Clerodendrum ugandense*) was awful.

Can't Do Without These

In addition to asking about bests and worsts of 2009, this year I also asked what plant you would never want to be without in your garden. The answers were interesting, and somewhat surprising. Many plants on this list were also on the "worst" list for this year. I found this reassuring, somehow. I think it brings up an important point - if a plant you really like is doing badly this year, keep it alive until next month or next year, and it may rise to the top again.

These must-have plants seemed to fall into three categories. Some plants we try to grow every year because they are so useful to us. These seem to be mainly edibles, and it appears that no gardener gives up on planting tomatoes just because they haven't produced for the past three years. Some year, it will all come right and there will be a wonderful crop; at least, that's the hope that keeps us planting. As one respondent said, you "just gotta try - no matter the conditions!"

Other plants are always in the garden because they do the job, whether that job is attracting butterflies or providing good cheer to the observer. One gardener mentioned how tough muhly grass is, and how beautiful it is in October. Another listed *Eupatorium coelestinum* (wild ageratum or blue

mist flower), because of the swarms of butterflies on it all summer. Several mentioned blue plumbago - it looks great and it just keeps going. BCMGA needs to develop a longer list of these kinds of plants - these are just the thing to recommend to other Brazoria County gardeners.

Finally, some plants seem to be favorites for unique and personal reasons. That's true for me. I have some tiger lilies that never do very well, and have to be grown in a tub rather than in the ground, but I go to a lot of effort to keep them, because they came from a clump planted in Ohio by my great-grandmother around 1890. Or there's my tub of jasmine (Maid of Orleans) that's always near the front door - I just love the smell. It turns out that I'm not alone in that; jasmine was a must-have for several gardeners.

In other survey responses, one gardener put miniature roses on her must-have list, because she puts them in little insulin bottle vases for patients at the hospital. Another gardener always has yellow lantana, because it's "happy to look at." Bird of Paradise seems to be a favorite because we like to watch the buds open into exotic flowers - there were several mentions of that. And for one gardener, Turnera "makes me smile with its bright yellow flowers." That's as good a reason as any to plant a garden.

FAVORITES

Edibles

- * Tomatoes
- * Cucumbers
- * Squash
- * Potatoes
- * Radish
- * Lemon basil
- * Oregano

Ornamentals

- * Blue Plumbago
- * Bird of Paradise
- * Hibiscus (unspecified types)
- * Blue Butterfly Clerodendrum
- * Maid of Orleans jasmine
- * Various Gingers—especially hidden and peacock
- * Roses

Natives

- * Muhly grass
- * Gaucha
- * Salvias (some native, some not)
- * Blue mist flower (*Eupatorium*)
- * Texas Hibiscus

Other notables

- * Angel trumpet (*Brugmansia*)
- * Vitex
- * Orchid tree (*Bauhinia*)
- * Plumeria
- * Pride of Barbados



Blue Butterfly Clerodendrum



Texas Hibiscus SuperStar



PLUMERIA

PLANTS OF THE MONTH

PERENNIAL: *Farfugium japonicum* var. *giganteum*

Size: 4" H x 4' W

Shape: Clumping, rounded

Light: Filtered sun to shade

Water: Consistently moist; won't tolerate dry

Flowers: Orange daisy-like; not particularly attractive

Fertilize: Maintain high fertility for best growth

Propagation: Rootball division



TRACTOR SEATS

Commonly known in Australia as "the tractor seat plant" because of the huge leaf shape, the Giant Leopard Plant (formerly known as Ligularia) is a fabulous foil in the shade garden for finer textured plants.

The thick glossy green unspotted leaves spring from the central root ball; petioles up to 3' long support the leaves which can be as much as 2' across when well-grown. It suffers in sun, wilting terribly fast. Drought causes the plant to throw

much smaller leaves; it's even possible to lose it if the soil remains dry too long.

The homely, straggly orange flowers appear late in the season. Most gardeners remove the flowering stems as the flowers detract from the foliage.

The plant remains evergreen to about 20°, but will come back from the roots at lower temps.

Not commonly available; but specialty nurseries, like Caldwell's, carry it.

NATIVE: *Conoclinium coelestinum* (Hardy Ageratum, Blue Mist Flower)

Size: 2' x 3'

Shape: Lax rounded

Light: Full to part sun

Soil: Average

Water: Wet to moist

Flowers: 2"-4" clusters of "sky blue pink" fuzzy florets

Fertilize: Average

Propagation: Seeds, stem cuttings, root cuttings; almost impossible to NOT propagate

BLOOMING NOW

Plant nerds know this as Eupatorium, but taxonomists recently stuck it in a new genus. Another butterfly magnet, and a favorite among MGs, Blue Mist Flower blooms from July to November.

It's native range in wet woodlands, stream banks and ditches extends from New Jersey west to southern Illinois and south to Florida and Texas.

It's typically perennial, dying back in the winter... but don't be fooled

because underground it's sending out rhizomes all over the garden which will pop up new plants everywhere in spring. This aspect is less likely in very heavy soils. It's also a prolific self-seeder. The ease of propagation causes many garden books to recommend that this plant be used in "naturalized" areas rather than the formal garden.

Readily available as passalong.



Steve Christman © 2003 Floridata.com

ANNUAL: *Petroselinum crispum* (Triple Curled Parsley)



Photo courtesy of NEXTHARVEST.COM

Size: 12" H x 12" W

Shape: Rounded, bushy

Light: Full sun to part sun

Soil/Water: Well-drained/average

Flowers: Grown for foliage; flowers 2nd year (season)

Fertilize: Average

Propagation: Seeds

WINTER GARDEN EDGING

Well, it's really a biennial, but for garden purposes let's just call it a winter annual.

There's good ol' parsley: flat-leaved Italian and garden variety curled. But this is a parsley that's so ornamental you won't want to eat it. The tightly curled leaves make a tidy 12" mound of brilliant emerald green that's perfect for edging winter flower and veggie gardens.

As a bonus, the Black Swallowtail caterpillars will find it as tasty

as the more common parsleys.

Because it's become so popular in the last few years, there are now several named cultivars. Whether there's any great difference among them remains to be tested.

If you want to try the new varieties look for: 'Paramount', 'Forest Green', 'Moss Curled', 'Darki' and 'Krausa'.

Start seeds now (as parsley is slow germinating) or look for starts at most nurseries. It should be readily available.

BCMGA

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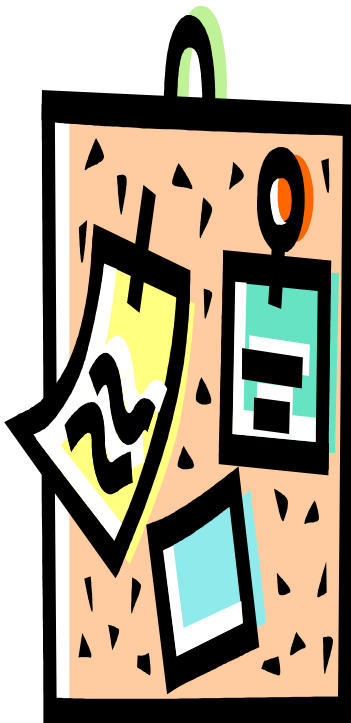


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ANNOUNCEMENTS AND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES



Volunteers Always Needed: B.E.E.S. (the gardens), every Tuesday and Friday, 7:30am–12:00pm

Fall Gardening Series

The community education series has been given a new look. Instead of 4-hour Saturday classes at BEES in Angleton, the fall series will focus on shorter sessions in the community. The sessions continue to be FREE. You do not need to be a Master Gardener to attend. Everyone is welcome!

The Lake Jackson Public Library will co-sponsor the first series, running each month from September–December.

Fall Vegetable Gardens, Wednesday, September 9, 12:05 pm–12:50 pm, a lunch-hour seminar

Bring your lunch to hear certified Master Gardener Vegetable Specialists discuss how to succeed with a cool weather veggie garden.

Fall in the Flower Garden, Saturday, October 10, 10:00 am–11:30 am

Master Gardeners will talk about fall care for flowering plants, plus planting for cool season color

Winterizing Your Vegetable Garden, Wednesday, November 4, 12:05 pm–12:50 pm, a lunch-hour seminar

Bring your lunch to learn from certified Master Gardener Vegetable Specialists how to prepare your veggie garden for next spring, plus advice on last minute late autumn planting.

Holiday Plants, Saturday, December 12, 10:00 am–11:30 am

All about plants that are available for holiday gifts and decorating, including how to keep them looking good for the season and beyond.

Remember, all sessions are at the Lake Jackson Public Library, 230 Circle Way, Lake Jackson

For additional information call 979-864-1558 or 281-756-1558, x112