

# WHAT'S GROWIN' ON

APRIL 2010

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## SOME LIKE IT REALLY WET

Instead of despairing over those wet areas in the garden, fill them up with plants that revel in wet. Tree or shrub, perennial or annual, native or cultivated, sun or shade — there are plenty to choose from.



**Top Row:** Buttonbush, Crossvine, Obedient Plant, Umbrella Plant  
**2nd Row:** Cardinal Flower, Swamp Sunflower, Calla Lily  
**3rd Row:** American Holly, Bald Cypress (summer & fall), Canna

Don't forget the Crinums, Hardy Ageratum, Maypop passion flower, Elephant Ears either. If you garden near natural wetlands, be especially careful with non-native plants. Some, like Elephant Ears or the Yellow Flag Iris, are creeping out of gardens into bayous and wetland edges.

## COMING UP

⇒ **Container Gardening FREE**  
 Wed, 04/07/10  
 12:00 noon—1:00 am  
 Lake Jackson Public Library

⇒ **Garden Insects FREE**  
 Thurs, 04/08/10  
 6:30 pm—8:00 pm  
 Alvin Public Library

⇒ **BCMGA BOARD MEETING**  
 Fri, 04/16/10  
 10:00 am, **BEES**  
 All members welcome!

⇒ **BCMGA MEETING**  
 Fri, 04/16/10  
 11:00 am, **AgriLIFE Office**  
 Plant Sale Prep

⇒ **Spring Plant Sale**  
 Sat, 04/24/10  
 8:00 am — noon  
 BEES, Angleton

## A FEW THOUGHTS ON RE-MAKING A GARDEN (AFTER THE 'BIG FREEZE')

It's been a few months now since the big freeze of 2010, and the seasons have turned at last. Where we had only dead brown sticks to look at last month, now there are bits of green popping out all over. But the big freeze aftermath isn't over yet; and so, I hope you will forgive one last commentary on the issue of tropical plantings and Texas weather.

Some of our tropical favorites are recovering, now that warmth and sunshine are back. But others look worse each week. In this category are some of the biggest and most noticeable specimens, such as the Norfolk Island pines. If you were growing these Zone 10 giants, you've just been caught by Zone 9 reality. Remember? We live in Zone 9, where minimum temps in a cold winter will be in the 20 - 30 degree Fahrenheit range. Zone 10 plants, adapted for minimum temps ten degrees higher, can't be expected to take a hard freeze.

And lest we think that it can't possibly happen again for at least twenty years, consider North Dakota. The folks in Fargo were caught last year in a 100-year flood. This year? Same thing all over again. What are the odds of two once-in-twenty-year events happening in adjacent years? One in 400. (That's 1/20 times 1/20.) Folks who play the lottery are bucking much higher odds, and are still fully prepared to win.

So how do we respond to the damage in our gardens? Many of us will simply **replant**. That's the easiest thing to do, although it may get pricey this time around. (Many nurseries are struggling to find suppliers just now, and don't think that won't translate into bumped up prices.) The re-planting group will need to consider which not-quite-dead things they are willing to coax back to health, and whether they can wait for those to get back to a decorative size and condition. Obviously, the more things we can revive, the less costly the bill for restoring our gardens to our original plan.

Fortunately, some of our casualties will be popping back up, good as new. I'm sure you've already seen vigorous new growth at the base of firespikes and in many patches of ginger. We don't usually see our shell gingers collapse completely, as they did this winter, but by summer they will be back in business. Even some woodies, dead to the ground, are beginning to show green coming from the roots. So don't be too quick to pull it all out - procrastinating may save you money and effort.

And of course, there is one compelling argument for re-planting. After all, one of the really fun parts about gardening is the hunt for something new and interesting. We have been presented with a bunch of empty spots that require us to go do just that.

Another group of gardeners are taking up positions at the other end of the spectrum - they're going to **rethink** the whole garden plan. For some, it may be time to have a different kind of garden altogether. So much for watching favorite plants turn slimy black. We're tired of the big empty holes where big specimens have become a bundle of dead sticks. We don't like spending the next summer waiting for puny little survivors to live or die; and we don't like spending the grocery money to replace all the deceased. We may be ready for a hardier garden plan.

We may be ready for a garden of natives. Native shrubs like beautyberry and yaupon aren't bothered at all by freezing weather; they have no complaints about hot and humid summers, either. If we include the near-neighbors from whichever direction our garden leans - to the west for a dry spot, to the east for wet and soggy - we have quite a list with which to make a garden. A native garden can be interesting throughout the year; even in winter, we can have flowers on coral honeysuckle and berries on yaupon and possum haw. And with a garden like this, we wouldn't have to reset to zero every time we have a hard freeze or a year-long drought. A number of BCMGA members would be glad to offer suggestions to those of us who haven't gardened with natives before.

If we can't quite line up with a completely native landscape, why not mix it up by adding old-timey heritage plants. Most of the things grown in gardens here in 1880 were not native, but they were tough, and they have been adapting themselves to our climate for a very long time. Folks in 1880 wanted pretty flowers to look at, but they also appreciated durability. Old favorites such as gardenias, clematis and China roses blend quite well with natives like beautyberry, wax myrtle, and buttonbush. Tie it all together with sweet peas, lemon daylilies, and zinnias, mixed with native butterfly weed and gaura. Result? Permanent, year round garden.

As for me, I seem to be gravitating toward a middle way that I'll call the **redesign** path. After all, one of the perks of living here along the coast is that we can have in our gardens

(usually) some of those tropical things that the rest of the country can only grow in greenhouses. We don't want to give up those exotic things. Maybe what we need to do is to be a little craftier about how we use those tender treasures. We can resolve to:

Minimize damage by thinking now about what protection worked and what didn't. That first freeze, in December, caused little damage to plants that had been covered. The January freeze, on the other hand, took a lot of "protected" things. Covering isn't quite enough when temps are that cold for that long - in times like those, plants need a heat source (maybe lightbulbs) as well. Be ready for next time. (And there will be a next time.)

Plant hardier versions of the tender plants we enjoy. Some palms were very badly damaged this winter, but others weren't fazed. So, plant freeze tolerant windmill palms instead of dwarf date palms, unless you're a collector that needs to have them all. Monkey puzzle trees are hardy, and could replace the Norfolk Island pines that bit the dust everywhere. If we love a particular fancy variety of Chinese hibiscus, we should be prepared to protect it; if we just want a big bush of brilliant red hibiscus, we can plant one of the old, tough varieties we see in parking lots.

Establish a backbone of tough hardy plants for our garden beds. Then work in more tender things between, behind, in front of that backbone. Next time the tender things crash, the debris won't dominate the scene, and we won't be as depressed when they don't return for six months.

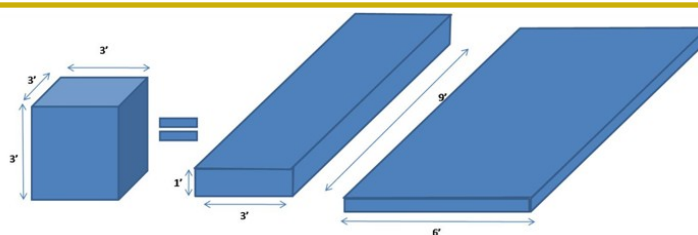
Let cold season annuals (and perennials) carry the show in winter. Gardens that looked good this winter were gardens with a lot of tough, hardy winter color. Tom Peace, in his book *Sunbelt Gardening* (available at the library), offers a lot of suggestions for ways to use things that are happy in cold weather to cover for our wimpy tender favorites. He calls it "floral time-sharing".

Keep our absolutely must-have tender plants in containers. That way we can enjoy them most of the year and save their lives in a cold winter. If that sounds reminiscent of all the tubbed plants I moved twice a year when I lived in snow country, at least it shouldn't be every year. And here I won't have to carry them all up and down the flight of stairs to the basement. Into the garage should do.



## BULK OR BAGS BY PAULA CRAIG

You set out to add a garden bed or amend an existing one or lay a path of stones or gravel. The garden store has bags of soil mix, sand, compost, mulch, gravel and rocks. Some of it is measured in cubic yards, some in cubic feet and some in pounds. At the bulk sale outlets, it is measured in yards or tons. So how much do you need? What is the cheapest way to get it? The second question is a no-brainer. **To get the best price, buy in bulk.**



$$1 \text{ yard}^3 = 27 \text{ feet}^3 = 9' \times 3' \times 3' \text{ or } 9' \times 6' \times 6'$$

As the table below illustrates, the savings can be significant. This is especially true with garden soil mixes. Nowadays, about all you can find at garden centers are designer Scott's fertilizer enhanced mixes and its knock-offs. If you don't need much, or don't like piles in the driveway that need to be hauled, bags may be worth the expense. As shown below, unless you require very little, there is no excuse for buying sand in bags.

### How Much?

It depends on the area you wish to cover and to what depth. Most bagged products have a table to show how much you'll need. For a rectangle or square:

$$\text{width} \times \text{length} \times \frac{\text{desired depth}}{12} = \text{cubic feet needed}$$

For example: To add mulch 4" deep to a bed that is 27' by 3', you'll need

$$3 \times 27 \times \frac{4}{12} = 27 \text{ cubic feet or 1 yard of mulch}$$

Triangles and circles are a little trickier. Go to [http://www.landscapemulch.com/mulch\\_calculator.asp](http://www.landscapemulch.com/mulch_calculator.asp) and let them do it for you.

### Cost Comparisons

I recently visited Home Depot and Texas Garden Soils to price out various mulches, soils, composts and rocks. Here is a comparison of costs for a bed 3' x 27' that I want to add 4" of material to. This would require 1 yard of material or 14 bags (2 cubic feet each) of garden center product.

Material	TGS Bulk Price - 1 yd	Home Depot Bag price - 1 yd = 14 bags
Garden Soil	TGS Prima Organic \$27.00 plus tax	Miracle Grow Soils for Flowers and Vegetables - \$7.47 per bag \$104.58 plus tax
Mulch	TGS Cedar Mulch \$35.00 plus tax	Florida Gold Red Cedar - \$3.19 per bag \$44.66 plus tax
Sand	TGS Masonry Sand (2100 lbs) \$26.00 plus tax	All Purpose Play Sand - 50 lbs = 420 bags/yard at \$3.28 \$1377.60 plus tax

**Note:** All prices are subject to change without notice

Also of note: Two Home Depot "soil" products were sold in 40 lb bags. So what determines how much soil weighs? Amounts of sand, silt, clay organic matter, air and water. What's in these bags? Who knows besides the manufacturer?

**Rubber Mulch** is big this year at prices ranging from \$8.97 to \$10.00 per 2 cu. ft. bag. If the price doesn't deter you, the environmental ramifications should.

- Rubber mulch is not as effective as other organic mulch choices in controlling weeds
- Rubber mulch is highly flammable and difficult to extinguish once it is burning
- Rubber mulch is not permanent; like other organic substances, it decomposes
- Rubber mulch is not non-toxic; it contains a number of metal and organic contaminants with known environmental and/or human health effects

For the complete article on rubber mulch "myths" from Dr. Linda Chalker-Scott, Washington State University, see:

[http://www.puyallup.wsu.edu/~linda%20chalker-scott/horticultural%20myths\\_files/Myths/Rubber%20mulch.pdf](http://www.puyallup.wsu.edu/~linda%20chalker-scott/horticultural%20myths_files/Myths/Rubber%20mulch.pdf)

## ANN McLAIN, THE INQUIRING GARDENER: DAYLILIES & AMARYLLIS, OH MY!

Even some regulars at BEES may not realize that the garden I am featuring this month exists. We don't have a yellow brick road to follow, but if the curious master gardener will enter the "cement block barn" at the door between the Japanese garden and the Tropical Garden, and trek down the length of it, that gardener will emerge into daylight at an interesting spot. Straight ahead is Roy Morgan's berry and grape vine patch; to the right is Mike Mayfield's demonstration plot for seed grown daylilies and amaryllis.

Thanks to our cold winter and continuing chilly spring, the only flowers to be seen from this spot are on Roy's blueberry bushes. (Note to self: don't forget to revisit those bushes in June.) Most years, the amaryllis would be sending up buds by late March, but, like many things this year, they are a bit behind. Mike says that, at least for the daylilies, our cool spring has been a good thing. Cool weather has encouraged them to put on a lot of healthy growth. They'll be stimulated to flower once warmer temperatures and sun come.

There are not a lot of amaryllis bulbs in the plot this year. But the daylily seedlings were planted very close together, and this should be quite a show once bloom begins. (Mike has set out a bunch of daylilies along the wooden fence enclosing the rainwater tanks as well - more possibilities there.)

One of Mike's interests in gardening is in breeding new varieties. Daylilies and amaryllis are excellent plants for this. Their flower parts are good size and simple in shape, the seeds that result are big enough to handle and germinate fairly quickly, and the seedling plants will bloom in two to three years. Collecting pollen and delivering it to the pistil of another plant is quite a bit more challenging with composite flowers like daisies.

The plants in this demonstration garden are all seedlings approaching their first flowering. Although Mike has batches of seedlings from his own crosses growing at home, the daylily seedlings at BEES have all come from the breeding program of Leon Payne, a serious daylily fancier in the Lone Star Daylily Society. It will be interesting to watch this plot as it comes into bloom in May - we may see something no one has ever seen before.

Modern daylilies are not what I knew and loved when I was a kid. My mother always had daylilies, but they were either yellow or orange, with plain, single flowers. Later, when I

had my own garden, I discovered double or -ange flowers (the variety 'Kwanso', which is now considered old-fashioned and weedy). In planting modern daylilies, the gardener will need to choose among a plethora of characteristics: plant height, height of flower stalk, flower shape, and color. Some flowers are double. Some are fragrant. It may be easiest to just choose the one with the coolest name, as these plants get saddled with some amazing names: 'Halloween Masquerade' (Payne, 2003)



Mike says that he has produced some crosses that he really likes, but he hasn't named any as yet. He says he's "too picky" - he wants his first named variety to be extra good. Naming a new variety is complicated. There are forms to fill out and fees to pay. The breeder selects a name that has never been used, and that doesn't imply that the variety has illustrious ancestors that it can't honestly claim. Pictures of the flower and plant are required, along with a detailed explanation of the cross and all the prospective variety's relatives. I can see why Mike is waiting for a special baby.

So what is Mike aiming for with his crosses? It turns out that most successful new daylilies are repeat bloomers. Unlike my Mom's plants, these bloom more than once during the year, some as many as four times. Bouts of blooming seem to last longer, too. For one thing, re-branching is very popular now. This means the flower stalks are branched, and thus have the potential to carry more flowers. In addition, some plants have "extended bloom" - the flowers open earlier and stay open later. All this makes the modern variety showier.

The first re-blooming variety widely sold was a short little thing. Remember 'Stella de Oro'? Nowadays the most popular height for flowering is around 24". Thirty six inches

(36") is considered about as tall as a daylily should be.

And then there are the flowers themselves. Daylilies are available in all flower colors except pure white and pure blue. But it doesn't stop there. The flower may be all one solid color, or the three petals and the three sepals may be of different colors. Petals (and sepals) may be marked with contrasting edges, or dusted or dotted with another color. Contrasting eyes (a pattern in the throat of the flower) are extremely popular now. And the possibilities go on.

Despite the endless fancy variations, daylilies are a good choice for a low-maintenance garden. Mike claims that they actually do better with neglect. Drought and heat are not problems for them. They do prefer moist soil, but they don't want to stand in water, and one thing that will do them in is root rot. Daylilies should not be transplanted between May and October. Transplanting usually damages the fine root hairs, leaving the plant with only those fleshy, tubular roots. This makes it hard for the plant to suck up enough water to get through hot weather. But the evergreen varieties that we plant here in the South will be active all year, except in the coldest weather, leaving plenty of time from November through April to plant more.

There is a lot more to know about daylilies, and once you see the variety available you may want more information. The American Daylily Society has an informative website, and Mike is always happy to talk about them. There are also at least two county daylily societies to join: The Lone Star Daylily Society based in Alvin, and the Brazosport Daylily Society in Lake Jackson. When his seedling patch comes into bloom in May, have a look. It will give you an idea of the possibilities in the daylily world.



Photo of 'Halloween Masquerade' courtesy of Lone Star Daylily Society. Award-winning and a top 5 pick in Region 6 popularity polls, it was bred by Leon Payne, Paynes in the Grass, of Pearland: <http://www.paynesinthegrassdaylilyfarm.com/>



## PLANTS OF THE MONTH

### NATIVE: *Iris virginica* (Southern Blue Flag)

**Size:** 3'-6' H x 3'-6' W

**Shape:** Upright, spiky

**Foliage:** Typical iris fans, clumping, pale green, pointed tips, evergreen

**Water:** Moist to permanently wet; in standing water

**Soil:** Rich, moist

**Flowers:** Species blue; white and lavender cultivars

**Light:** Full sun

**Fertilize:** Moderate to heavy

**Propagation:** Clump division in early autumn; seeds



#### SURE SIGN OF SPRING

Magnificent clumps of this iris give a blue blaze in spring. Throughout the eastern half of the U.S., *Iris virginica* can be found in fresh-water and brackish pond edges and marshes. Although it may occur as far north as the Hudson Bay in Canada, the largest populations and largest plants are in the southern Gulf states where it remains evergreen.

Native populations flower in shades of blue, with an occasional white flower.

Little hybridization has been done with this iris, but there are two noteworthy cultivars in the trade:

The most popular is 'Contraband Girl', introduced by Plant Delights Nursery. It's larger in all its parts; a robust, rapidly increasing plant with lavender flowers standing at 6' in a bog/pond planting.



'Carl Amason', to 4', looks to be a beauty with a purple flush on new leaves and pinkish flowers on dark stalks. Only supplier to date is Plant Delights on-line.

### PERENNIAL: *Iris x louisiana* (Louisiana Iris)

**Size:** 1½'-3'+ H x 2'-4' W

**Shape:** Upright, spiky

**Foliage:** Fans, clumping, evergreen

**Light:** Winter full sun to summer full sun (in summer, protection from p.m. sun may be required)

**Soil:** Silty to heavy clay, acidic to neutral

**Water:** Moist to wet; at least 1" of water/week; thrive in standing water w/ 1" of water over the rhizomes

**Flowers:** Large, beardless, wide color range

**Fertilize:** Heavy; use 13-13-13 acid fertilizer slow release in spring; cottonseed meal, alfalfa pellets can be used as well

**Pests:** Relatively pest-free when grown in their preferred conditions

**Propagation:** Clump division in early autumn

#### RAINBOW OF COLORS

While we may not have bearded irises as garden mainstays, the Louisiana Iris can take its place. They appear to be under-used in our area, but with a little attention to cultural needs, they will be very successful.

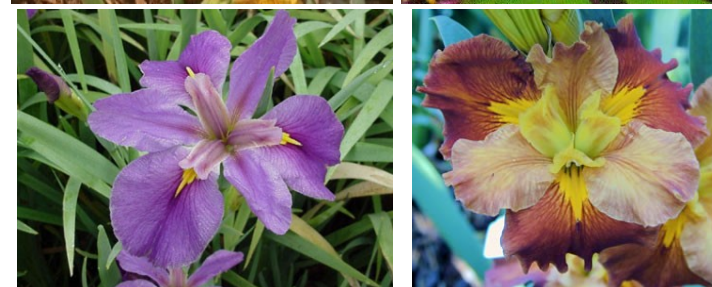
Louisianas were bred from 5 different species of irises in the Hexagonae series. The original species in acidic lowlands of the Mississippi River amazed early explorers.

Hybridization picked up when it was discovered that their hardiness wasn't limited to the Deep South.

An excellent source for learning more about the history and culture of these beauties is the Society for Louisiana Irises at <http://www.louisianas.org/welcome.html>

The definitive book, *The Louisiana Iris: The Taming of an American Wildflower*, is no longer published by Timber Press, but can be purchased through the Society at a reasonable price; or through Amazon's sellers. Even the Brazoria Library system doesn't have a copy.

There's a Louisiana iris waiting for your garden.



Local nurseries don't have a large selection of Louisianas. The Houston Bulb Mart in October offered 63 varieties in 2009; on-line sellers, mostly located in Louisiana of course, also have a wide selection.

# BCMGA

Brazoria County Agri-Life Extension  
21017 CR171  
Angleton, TX 77515

Phone: 979.864.1558  
Phone: 979.388.1558  
Phone: 281.756.1558



Editor: Monica Krancevic  
[bcmga-newsletter@att.net](mailto:bcmga-newsletter@att.net)

BCMGA Website:  
<http://grovesite.com/mg/bmg>

## THE JOB JAR—LOTS TO DO IN APRIL

**Vegetable gardens:** Most of our veggie specialists have got their tomatoes in at last, but they're behind on at least a few other crops. Bev Straughan has peppers and squash in already, but will plant cucumbers this month. Ray Michalik has potatoes growing fast to keep his tomatoes company, but will be planting peppers, cucumbers, and squash soon. Deb Soderman's beans and cucumbers are coming up. Get that planting done soon, and keep on weeding.

**Tropical plantings:** When Ed Barrios was asked what he would be doing in his garden in April, he was quick to answer "Waiting for life." Next suggestion: "Thinking about what to plant in all the empty spaces." That seems to be a pretty common plan. Some tropical woodies are just now showing some signs of life, so give the things you really like a few weeks more to declare themselves. When you start to replant, why not do some further soil amendment, while the space is empty.

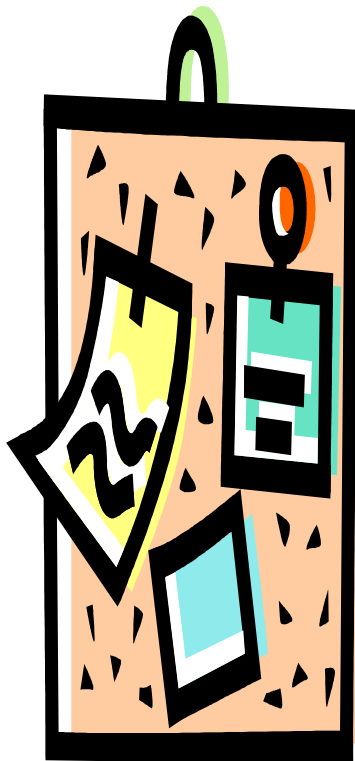
**Lawns:** March and April are the months for fertilizing your lawn. Keep in mind that if you feed it, it will grow, and you'll have to mow more.

**Flower beds:** Most of us haven't really caught up with the weeds that arose from our abundant rains, so keep weeding. Lots of new things are appearing in the nurseries - that can be your reward for getting the weeding done. If you still have any dividing or transplanting to do, get it done ASAP.

**Woody ornamentals:** It's really too late to be transplanting shrubs, but the wicked winter and spring may have you behind on this as well. If you do transplant now, be absolutely conscientious about watering. A little shade protection for the new transplant would be good, too. Get your pruning done this month for sure; wounds heal best now when new growth is bursting out.

Educational programs of Texas AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating

## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES



**TAMU: Small Acreage Horticultural Crops, Video Presentations, most about 30 minutes long**

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/smallacreage/presentations>

Geared to small producers, but there is a lot of good information for home gardeners as well.

Qualifies as advanced training for Master Gardeners

**Brazosport Garden Club: "Secrets of Success with Orchids", Tuesday, April 6, 7:00 pm, Lake Jackson Civic Center**

The speaker will be John Stubbings, 30-year grower, hybridizer, world-wide lecturer, American Orchid Society judge, and owner of Clown Alley Orchids in Pasadena, TX

Orchids will be for sale after the program

**Lake Jackson Garden Club: Spring Plant Sale, Saturday, April 10, 8:00 am-noon, Lake Jackson Civic Center Plaza**

Restock your garden with plants from members' gardens. Some unusual, some tried-and-true

**Lone Star Daylily Society: Plant Sale & Flower Show, Saturday, May 15, 9:00 am—sellout, Alvin Senior Citizen's Building, 309 W. Sealy, Alvin**

Flower judging starts about 10am and flowers are open for public viewing from 2:00 pm—4:00 pm. Free.

Contact Michael Mayfield for more information at 281-996-9310 or 713-303-6035.

**Volunteers Always Needed: BEES. (the display gardens), every Tuesday and Friday, 7:30am—12:00pm**

**BCMGA: The week of the plant sale. Be sure to attend the BCMGA Meeting on Friday, April 16, 11:00 am at the Extension Office to hear how you can assist make the Plant Sale a success.**