

# Brazoria County Master Gardeners.

"But each spring...a gardening instinct, sure as the sap rising in the trees, stirs within us. We look about and decide to tame another little bit of ground." -- Lewis Gantt

April 2011

VOL. 1 ISSUE Spring



## A Note from the President

First I would like to thank Shawn Helm and Jim Molony for volunteering to publish our newsletter! They are both members of our new intern class. I am im-

pressed that as interns they have taken on this task.

Next I want to thank Lee Withers, Billy Heck and all those that have helped with the H-GAC grant. The only thing left is to finish installing the signs for the various beds. The concrete sidewalks around the new building are complete and we have power in the building. Many thanks to Richard Hurd and his department for all the support they have given us.

Spring is finally here and the weeds have come out with a vengeance. Many of us are assessing our landscapes to see how many plants we lost or were severely damaged by the winter we had. Our Tropical garden at BEES is looking really sad. But we are in climate zone 9 which can expect winter lows from 20-30 degrees; so actually the last 2 winters have been typical for our zone. I guess we have gotten spoiled by so many years of mild winters.

But we can look forward to replacing lost plants with more hardy plants that we maybe never tried before. With an estimated 400,000 plants on earth, there are many possibilities.

Ed

***"Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God."***

***Thomas Jefferson***



## Why I Compost

By Ellen Pedisich

### Ten Reasons Why I Compost

I participate in a process that has been taking place since the beginning of plant life on our planet.

I can put my kitchen trimmings from fruits and vegetables into my compost pile.

I can make compost that has beneficial fungi and bacteria.

I like adding my yard clippings to the compost pile.

If I don't feel like turning the pile I can make cold compost which has more nitrogen than hot compost.

I know that my compost has nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium, and a PH value near neutral.

Since I put a variety of material in my compost pile the compost has trace elements.

I know my earthworms will benefit from the humus, the organic material remaining after the major portion of plant and animal matter have decomposed.

When I give my plants this humus I know the plants will receive a slow release fertilizer.

Now my earthworms continue to fertilize my garden with their worm castings.

My Haiku:  
Don't till anymore,  
You just apply your compost.  
Lazy gardener!



Improving Lives. Improving Texas.



Brazoria County Master Gardeners

## Spring Plant Sale

Saturday, April 16, 2011  
8:00am—12:00noon

**B.E.E.S.**

Brazoria Environmental Education Station  
Hospital Drive & CR 171  
Angleton, TX  
(See Map on Back)

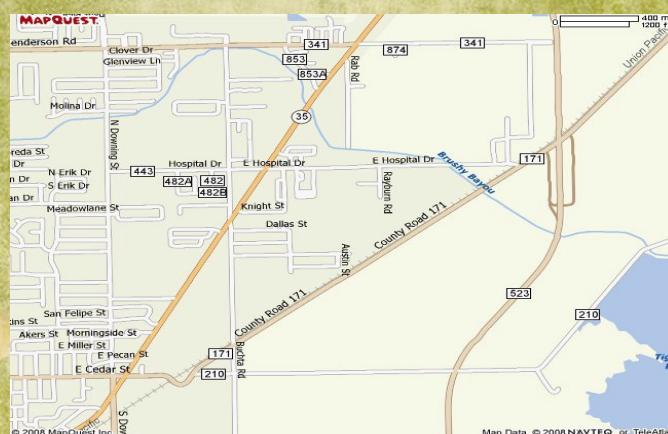
Plants for sale will include:

Perennials  
Herbs,  
Tropicals,  
& Natives

For more information, please call  
979-864-1558 x110.

Brazoria County  
Extension Office  
Corrie Bowen- CEA  
21017 CR 171  
Angleton, TX 77515  
979-864-1558  
x 110  
[http://bcmg.org/  
brazoria](http://bcmg.org/brazoria)  
[http://Brazoria-  
bc.tamu.edu](http://Brazoria-<br/>bc.tamu.edu)

Extension Programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, religion, disability or national origin. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Court of Texas Cooperating. Individuals with disabilities who require an auxiliary aid, service or accommodation in order to participate in any Extension activity, are encouraged to contact the County Extension Office for assistance 5 days prior to the activity.





## CALENDAR!

### *Coming Events.....*

**Saturday, April 16** – Brazoria County Master Gardeners Spring Plant Sale, 8 a.m. – noon, Brazoria Environmental Education Station (B.E.E.S), Hospital Drive & County Road 171, Angleton. Plants for sale will include perennials, herbs, tropicals and natives. For more information call (979) 864-1558, ex. 110.

**Saturday, April 16** -- The Alvin Museum Society and Alvin Garden Club will host the eleventh annual Alvin Area Garden Tour to benefit the Marguerite Rogers House Museum at 113 E. Dumble St. in Alvin. There will be a plant sale out of the Museum garage (beginning at 9:00 a.m. when the outdoor ticket table opens), a needlepoint exhibit inside the Museum cottage, a tour of the Museum grounds with privy/storage shed/library at the back, and tours of the large gardens of three private homes a short drive from the Museum. Although this year's theme is vegetable gardening, all of the gardens have many other attractions: gazebos, small bridges, flowers, herbs, large and small plantings, tractor collection, cold frame, large pond, etc. For more information call (281) 393-1538.

**Monday, April 18** -- Open Garden Day, 9-10:30 a.m., Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff, Houston, 77034. Tour the working and demonstration gardens maintained by the Harris County Master Gardeners at Precinct 2. Master Gardeners will be on hand to answer your gardening questions during this free event. Children are welcome, but must be accompanied by an adult at all times. Free and open to the public. For more information visit our web site at: <http://harris-tx.tamu.edu/hort>

**Wednesday, April 20** -- Master Gardener Lecture Series: Lisa Gonzales, 10 a.m., The Meeting Room at Clear Lake Park (on the lakeside), 5001 NASA Parkway, Seabrook, 77586. Research Scientist with Houston Advanced Research Center will speak on "The Quiet Invasion." Gonzales will discuss invasive plants found in the Galveston Bay Region and potential invasive plants in this region. This lecture is free and open to the public. For more information visit the website at: <http://harris-tx.tamu.edu/hort>

**Wednesday, April 27-Friday, April 29** – Texas Master Gardeners Association Conference, Glen Rose, TX. This three-day event features an awards banquet, educational sessions, tours, workshops and an opening night celebration event. Registration is open and sessions are filling fast. For more information visit the website at [2011tmgconference.org](http://2011tmgconference.org)



*Foggy conditions failed to put a damper on the Brazoria County Master Gardeners Fruit and Citrus Sale, held Saturday, Feb. 19, at the Texas Agrilife Extension Office grounds in Angleton.*

*"I want to thank everybody for all the hard work that went into this," County Extension Agent Corrie Bowen told the master gardeners who helped set up the trees and seedlings on Friday as well as worked the sale to the public on Saturday. "That it went smoothly is a credit to all the volunteers who worked so hard to make this a success."*

*Brazoria County Master Gardeners displayed 1,800 plants, including 500 blackberry and strawberry plants and 1,300 apple, avocado, fig, peach, pear and plum trees.*

*Also included were a wide variety of citrus trees, such as lemons, limes, oranges, grapefruit, tangerines and satsumas. Various specimens of persimmon, mulberry and pomegranates were offered. Dozens of tomato seedlings, from cherries to large heirlooms, were available.*

*Customers also had the benefit of readily available master gardener advice in making their selections, such as citrus expert Dan Sebesta, who was busy answering shoppers' questions regarding the various citrus trees for sale.*

*The early arriving crowd was there when the gates opened at 8 a.m. and by the time the sale ended four hours later the event had raised \$12,138, compared to \$14,201 last year.*

*"I would like to THANK everyone that made this possible!" Brazoria County Master Gardeners Association President Ed Barrios said. "We had many volunteers last Tuesday to repackaging the berries, last Friday to set up for the sale and of course on Saturday to assist with the sale. After the sale, there were lots of tired, but happy folks."*

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### **PHOTO CAPTIONS:**

*Shoppers arrived early to peruse the wide variety of plants for sale at the Feb. 19 Brazoria County Master Gardeners Fruit and Citrus Sale.*





## Sweet Potatoes!

By Jim Molony



April 15 to most of us probably means tax time. For me, however, the first thing I think of is sweet potatoes, because mid-April in Brazoria County has always been the prime time to plant this under appreciated vegetable.

If you know sweet potatoes, and I'm not talking about those things you can buy in the grocery store, often called yams, you know what I'm talking about. Sweet potatoes, the home grown, heirloom varieties like Georgia Jet, Vardaman, Nancy Hall, Beauregard, Covington, Puerto Rico, Jewel and Centennial, simply have no peer in the retail market. The taste and texture of a sweet potato grown in your garden far surpasses that which can be bought in the store, although some farmer's markets and produce stands occasionally have very good home grown tubers.

Whether made into sweet potato pie, cut into fries or chips or baked whole, homegrown sweet potatoes are well worth the effort it takes to grow them.

We grow them every year in our Pearland garden, starting with the April 15 planting date, when we put our sweet potato sprouts (called slips) in the ground. Before we do, however, there is bed work which must be done to insure the best crop we can get.

In our gumbo soil, a raised bed or hill is essential for good root crop production. For sweet potatoes, we build a row approximately 18 inches high at the crown (measured from the bed) and roughly three feet wide, working in compost as we go along.

The sides of the row are lined with newspaper, mulch or straw. This keeps weeds down and helps prevent the sweet potato vines from rooting. You only want the one central root for your potatoes. If you let the vine root as it runs you'll have plenty of small potatoes instead of one good harvest at the main stem. Last year we averaged more than four pounds per plant with this method.

Once the beds are thus prepared we place the slips in at the crown line, burying all but the green tip. Each slip is placed 18 inches apart (we trellis the vines like cucumbers, otherwise they should be placed 2 1/2 to 3 feet apart). They are then watered in carefully, and let the sun do the rest.

Sweet potatoes need full sun and consistent watering, but they have few pests and do not require much maintenance unless you're trellising the vines.

In 90 to 110 days, depending on the variety and the conditions you will have sweet potatoes of edible size. They will continue to grow until soil temperatures drop below 55 degrees or the tops die, usually between Thanksgiving and Christmas. If the tops die, dig up the crop or they will turn to mush in short order.

A lot of people do not realize that unlike regular potatoes, the entire sweet potato plant is edible.

We use the leaves as salad in the summer, when it's too hot for traditional lettuces. You can cut the tips (no more than 3-4 inches per plant or you might hurt the tuber production) and eat them raw or saute them like you would mustard or chard or spinach. According to nutritiondata.com sweet potato leaves are a good source of protein, niacin, calcium and iron as well as a very good source of dietary fiber, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Thiamin, Vitamin B6 and other minerals. I once had a Vietnam veteran tell me he ate nothing but sweet potato leaves while a prisoner of war and could therefore attest to their health benefits. They are not very flavorful but with salad dressing (lemon vinaigrette is a good choice) they are a healthy treat.

Dr. Bob Randall, in his excellent book "Vegetables, Fruits and Flowers for Metro Houston" writes: "If you needed to live off the land in our area, sweet potatoes would be a means. They are the top-rated health food in nearly all studies of vegetables, with high vitamins, complex carbohydrates and fiber. The orange ones have more cancer-fighting Vitamin A (25,000 units per half cup cooked) than any other vegetable."

Some folks like to cure their sweet potatoes after harvest (typically this is done by storing them in boxes for a few weeks – but never refrigerated) to make them sweeter. But I've eaten them baked the day I dug them up and they were wonderful.

All in all, sweet potatoes are a delicious, easy to grow vegetable with outstanding health benefits.

So if you have the space, when mid April rolls around (after you've got your taxes done), give some thought to putting in a few sweet potato slips.



April 2011

## Attention Master Gardeners!

Brazoria County Master Gardeners Association interns Shawn Helm and Jim Molony have taken over responsibility of producing the quarterly newsletter for the volunteer organization, effective with this issue, the Spring 2011 edition. This is your newsletter and we want to continue to make it a useful resource for Brazoria County gardeners. The newsletter is published in April, July, October and January. Shawn and Jim welcome any submitted items, whether listings for the calendar or tips on a specific plant. They can be reached via email at [shawn.helm@yahoo.com](mailto:shawn.helm@yahoo.com) or [jmolonyjr@gmail.com](mailto:jmolonyjr@gmail.com)

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"Special thanks to Gil, Dan, Beverly, Ted, Ray, Donnie and Lee for all the planning that went into this event. Also special thanks to Corrie and Georgia for their efforts and allowing us to use the Extension office grounds. I think everyone would agree that the Extension office grounds worked great for the event.

Brazoria County Master Gardeners  
21017 CR 171  
Angleton, TX 77515

979-864-1558 x 110  
<http://txmg.org/brazoria>