

# Brazoria County Master Gardeners Newsletter

March 2012

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## *Notes from the President*



Wow what a busy 2 months. The veggie green house was completed and was completely full with tomatoes and peppers for the Fruit Tree sale. We received a \$6550 check from Kroger's for paver stones for the Enabling Gar-

den. We had a surprisingly successful Fruit Tree sale in spite of a down-pour. Beautiful bridges have been installed in the Tropical Garden. Great progress is being made on the rose garden & phase 2 of the Enabling Garden. Our greenhouse is full and our shade houses are almost full with hundreds of plants ready for the April plant sale. Our new intern class has a record 27 students. And we've had RAIN and lots of



it. Life is good, Gardening is good. Thanks to all of our Association members for making all these great accomplishments possible!! At the rate we are going, there is no telling what is left to accomplish this year. Yea!!

Ed Barrios

*Behold, my friends, the spring is come; the earth has gladly received the embraces of the sun, and we shall soon see the results of their love!*

*Sitting Bull*

## KROGER Awards Grant to Brazoria County Master Gardeners



Kroger Company recently awarded a grant to the Brazoria County Master Gardener Association (BCMGA) for purchasing pavers for the Enabling Garden at the Brazoria Environmental Education Station. The grant was for \$6,550 to buy the pavers, and volunteers will install them in the garden this spring. Cynthia Leonard had written the grant application for non-profits on-line with the company late last year.

An enabling garden is a concept for easier gardening for physically challenged individuals such as handicapped or elderly. The beds are raised to various heights to accommodate the needs for people with walkers, wheelchairs and scooters. In Phase I of the project, 18 planter boxes were erected and planted. This was funded from a grant by the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Lone Star Chapter. The second grant by NMSS was awarded in the fall to erect the entrance and rear pergolas and install side fencing. The Kroger Company grant will allow

master gardeners to install handicapped accessible pavers in the garden. Kroger is sending volunteers from the area stores to help install the pavers later in the spring.

Pictured receiving the check from Amy Howe, Consumer Affairs Specialist with Kroger are Cynthia Leonard, seated; and standing left to right are other Master Gardeners James Leonard, Ted Jagen, Billy Heck, Carole Wenny, and Ed Barrios.

*"Last day of Winter, leafless walnut trees--form is emptiness.  
First day of Spring, clear sky to Mt. Shasta--emptiness is form."*

*- Michael P. Garofalo, Cuttings: March*

## Winter Rains Bring Wildflower Show

AUSTIN — Timely rains last fall and this winter have benefited early spring wildflowers, which will likely put on a good show in much of Texas despite last year's drought, according to the senior botanist at The University of Texas at Austin's [Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#).

"The seeds left behind by annual wildflowers such as [bluebonnets](#) don't care if it's the worst drought in recorded history, as long as they get bouts of rain at the right time for germination and growth," said Damon Waitt, who also is the center's senior director.

The bumper crop of wildflowers in 2010 also helped add to the seed stockpile in Texas soils that can be revived by recent rains. Rain showers should provide decent viewings in regions of North, Central and East Texas. However, it is possible that the Panhandle, South and West Texas won't fare as well.

Among the early sightings of wildflowers this year are: Carolina jessamine blooming in North Houston along FM 1960, and along Woodlands Parkway between Interstate 45 and Kuykendahl Road; hundreds of trout lilies blooming in Dogwood Canyon and elsewhere around Dallas; Texas mountain laurel trees blooming in Dripping Springs and Austin; and patches of stiff green thread spotted in north San Antonio, such as along U.S. 281 above North Loop 1604.

Complementing these sightings will be a bumper crop of Texas bluebonnets and other wildflowers at the Wildflower Center and sites such as Brenham and the Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens in Houston. Bluebonnet rosettes the size of dinner plates are hugging the ground at the Wildflower Center, and Texas mountain laurel, windflower, plains fleabane and Mexican plum trees are already blooming.

Other early spring bloomers will include Indian paintbrush, winecup and Indian blanket. Center



*Bluebonnet.—photo by Doug Sherman*

staffers will mark peaceful spots for taking bluebonnet photos. And a sneak peak of bluebonnets growing on site is available online via live broadcast.

Regions that missed pre-season rains may still have drought-tolerant wildflowers that bloom. For instance, Fendler's bladderpod may become noticeable soon near Amarillo. A Wildflower Center plant conservationist has also seen a few Big Bend bluebonnets and yucca prepping to open blooms in the national park. The outlook may not be great for many tree species, such as Mexican plum and Texas redbud in Central Texas, though.

"Trees had such a tough year in 2011. They may not have the energy resources to put on a significant flowering display this year," Waitt said, adding that perennial wildflowers may share that predicament.

For public sightings, visit the Wild About Texas Wildflowers website, contact the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) at 1-800-452-9292, or view TxDOT's online flora map.

To learn more about wildflowers nationally, search the Wildflower Center's Native Plant Information Network. To purchase seeds to sow of mid-to late bloomers or potted native plants, visit the suppliers directory.

## About that Live Oak Leaf Drop

By Corrie Bowen / Brazoria County Extension Agent  
– Agriculture

Without a doubt our trees took a "beating" last year during drought. Some species fared better (e.g. live oak, elm, and pecans) than others (e.g. water oaks and pines). The rain we've been getting has been enjoyable, and much needed. But Brazoria County is still classified as being under severe drought and the situation for 2012 is precarious. Those trees that have made it through the drought thus far are closely being watched by homeowners and landowners. We keep a close watch so that we don't wait to do something until it's too late. But as a result of our increased observation, we see "normally occurring" things that in the past we never noticed.

When temperatures begin to rise a little, typically in late January and in February, we get calls for help with "dying" oak trees. The yellowing and scorched leaves often result in defoliation (dropping of the leaves). Quite often, they discolor in a relatively short



time. This is NORMAL and NOT a disease problem, nor a result of the drought. This particular symptom might be confused with a disease called "oak wilt."

Although the oak wilt fungus may attack the tree in the late winter and early spring, oak wilt symptoms are most often observed in the summer. "So what do I look for to determine if my tree is experiencing NORMAL leaf drop?" Look closely at the dying leaves, particularly for new buds that are found at the base of the leaf petiole (the stalk attaching the leaf blade to the stem). This bud may be very small early on, but they become more prominent as the older leaves begin to die.



### *Live Oak*

But my other live oak still looks okay. So why the difference?" The best explanation that I can give is that each tree can be looked upon as an individual, with specific characteristics. Those trees may be different genetically, making one shed and produce new leaves quicker than another. It is also possible that there are environmental and/or physical factors that influence a particular plant to shed quicker. If you do not see any buds and are still concerned, bend the small branches or twigs. If they are pliable, the tree is alive (NORMAL). If it is brittle (and snaps easily), chances are that the branch is dead (PROBLEM).

If you find more than 10 percent of the branches on your tree are dead, it is recommended that you talk to a certified arborist or contact your local county Extension office for assistance.

**"I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze."  
- William Wordsworth, Daffodils**

## February showers fail to dampen annual sale!

A steady rain couldn't dampen the 2012 Brazoria County Master February showers fail to dampen annual sale

A steady rain couldn't dampen the 2012 Brazoria County Master Gardeners Fruit Tree and Plant Sale Feb. 18 at the Extension Grounds in Angleton.

More than \$30,000 worth of plants and fertilizer was sold despite of drizzle, rain, torrential rain, thunder and lightning. It was made possible because more than 50 members and interns braved the inclement weather.

BCMG President Ed Barrios extends thanks to all who helped out and special thanks to the planning committee: Donie Stowers, Gil Livanec, Dan Sebesta, Barbara Bruyere, Bebe Brown and Carole Wenny.

To see more pictures of the soggy sale go to: <http://www.pbase.com/ed77566/bcmga&page=all>  
Tree and Plant Sale <http://www.pbase.com/ed77566/bcmga&page=all>

### THE Plant Sale!!



## More Pictures from the Plant Sale



*In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt. ~Margaret Atwood*



**By Jim Molony**

**BCMG**

"We may be annihilated, but we cannot be conquered."  
— Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston upon accepting his command in August, 1861. (Source: Encyclopedia of the Civil War).

The highest ranking officer killed during the Civil War was none other than Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnston, who was mortally wounded during the Battle of Shiloh on April 6, 1862. Johnston, a Kentucky native and West Point graduate, fought in the west and Mexico before resigning his commission to care for his dying wife. When she passed away in 1836 Johnston came west again to serve in the Republic of Texas Army, and in 1837 was appointed adjutant general.

Johnston remarried in 1843 and settled in Brazoria County, Texas, on a large plantation called China Grove.

## Search for General's Cherokee Roses Comes to a Dead End



China Grove, primarily a fig and orange operation, would remain Johnston's home until the Civil War broke out. Once war came Johnston headed to Virginia, where he was appointed CSA general by his old school mate, Jefferson Davis, president of the CSA.

But before Johnston met his fate in Tennessee nearly 150 years ago he reportedly planted a hedge of Cherokee roses at China Grove. According to The Handbook of Texas Online, the roses were the last remaining link to Johnston's stewardship of the property. All of the buildings and barns from the plantation days had long since disappeared.

If you're unfamiliar with Cherokee roses they are the state flower of Georgia and legend has it that during the Cherokee Nation's journey west the roses were an answer to the tribe's prayer for deliverance. It was fast growing and was found on the trail west. According to legend the plant gave the Cherokees hope on the Trail of Tears.

Cherokee roses are beautiful, hardy and prickly, and as such I thought there was a good chance they'd still be around, although the last sighting I could find in my research was from 1991. There was only one thing to do: Road trip.

*"Each leaf, each blade of grass vies for attention. Even weeds carry tiny blossoms to astonish us."* - Marianne Poloskey, *Sunday in Spring*

## Swiss Chard: *The underappreciated green*

**By Jim Molony, BCMG**

In some ways describing Swiss Chard is like describing the perfect wife: Good for you, reliable, easy on the eyes and low maintenance.

A good wife, the Bible tells us, is a precious treasure. Swiss Chard, on the other hand, is arguably the most under rated green in the garden.

While most greens, including lettuces, collards, kale and cabbages, to name a few, tend to bolt or fade as soon as the hot Texas summers arrives, chard keeps right on going until the very hottest part of the summer, and even then it usually doesn't die, it just dies back a bit and then returns as good as ever in the fall. I have some plants that are a few years old, they keep coming back with new leaves each year and they are always eye catching.

Those leaves are not only beautiful (see photos), they are also one of the most nutritious you can eat. According to the USDA chard is high in Vitamin C, carotenoids, potassium, iron, fiber and calcium. It can be eaten raw or used in a variety of cooked dishes, or used as a braising green.

This versatile plant is easy to grow, tolerates a wide range of soils as well as heat and cold and doesn't have a lot of pests.

I planted mine from seed buried about a half inch deep in rows, with eight inches between each plant. I keep them moist until the plants are established and



mulch around each plant with straw. Once the plants have formed true leaves I feed with a diluted sea kelp mixture and feed every month after that, more frequently if I'm growing chard in a pot — and it fares well there too.

Chard takes about 55 days to produce decent sized leaves but you can eat them at any size. And there's no need to harvest the whole plant. Just cut a few outer leaves off at the soil line and it will keep producing. And producing.

Like I said, it is maybe the most under rated green in the garden.

**"Spring is nature's way of saying, 'Let's party!'"**

***Robin Williams***



March 2012

## Attention Master Gardeners!

Brazoria County Master Gardeners Association interns Shawn Helm and Jim Molony have taken over the 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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