



**BIRTHDAYS:**

Volume 3, Issue 1 ..... February/March., 2017

**February**

- Pat Mullin, 2/12
- Nancy Szabo, 2/07
- Connie Tramel, 2/21
- Sherri Goss, 2/17

**March**

- Gay Mitchell, 3/2
- Sandra Rosen, 3/10

## Bob Williams, New Free State MG President for 2017

By Joan Driver



Robert J. (Bob) Williams, the energetic new president of Free State Master Gardeners, wants to make the master gardener experience a more active influence in the Van Zandt community through expanded public events and social media. He proposes additional seminars and scheduled seed and plant swaps.

I think holding more community events will get the word out better of who we are and what we do," he said. He suggested specifically a spring gardening seminar and a series of gardening topic lectures that would be open to the public, perhaps at the library. Bob also set up a Facebook page to help connect Free State Master Gardeners to one another and the community. He suggests that members grow its audience by providing a link from their own Facebook pages to the FSMG page.

Gardening has been a unifying theme in Bob's life from childhood visits to his grandfather's "truck farm" in Michigan, where he and cousins sold produce at a roadside stand out front, to backyard gardens as

an adult during his military years, to his retirement property where he has been able to expand and experiment. He grew up in Michigan and Ohio, attended West

Point, and met his wife at his first duty station in Colorado. In Germany, he said, like his neighbors, he and Regina had a small backyard garden, and in Maryland he first experimented with two raised bed gardens, each two by eight feet and fertilized with horse manure compost "that was like gold. I was amazed at how much you could grow in the little space," he exclaims.

After Bob retired from the military, he worked for Southwestern Bell/AT&T in Beaumont and Houston, where he continued to garden. In 2010 he retired for the second time and moved to 16 acres near Van in order to "build a farm that my grandkids could visit and have memories like I do," he said hopefully. Here the Williams grow tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and onions, and "this year I'm going to try potatoes."

The animals include three dogs, two Great Pyrenees named Maddy and

Gunner and Lucy the black lab mix, and six Campbell Khaki ducks.

Bob has sold at the Farmer's Market at the fairgrounds in Tyler but prefers the Mineola Farmer's Market on Saturdays both because of proximity and more of a small town ambience.

Bob joined the Master Gardener program, class of 2015, to increase his knowledge about gardening and says that he enjoys most the opportunity to meet people sharing similar interests. He has been involved in the butterfly garden and the Wills Point train station garden in addition to advancing the organization via social media.

Knowledge gained from the Master Gardener program has influenced Bob to expand his gardening projects. He has planted 30 peach trees, tilled up a 60 x 90 foot garden and began growing watermelons and cantaloupes. In 2016 he created a second 30 x 50 foot garden, which he plans to expand this year.



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We welcome all of our Master Gardeners to forward articles or information for our newsletter to our Editor: [sandrarosen42@yahoo.com](mailto:sandrarosen42@yahoo.com)  
News Committee:  
Sandra Rosen Joan Driver  
Paula Marshall Anna Baker

## Gardening Chores

Tommy Phillips  
County Extension Agent, Ag/NR

### **Gardening Chores for February**

The fickle days of February can bring sunshine and in recent years - frost and snow. It's getting time for spring - not only for dreaming and planning, but for actually planting and preparing for a new season.

**1. Planting** - Plant major trees and shrubs now. A late winter planting will allow the plants to become established prior to spring growth, and more important prior to summer heat. The dormant plants are better adapted and assure better livability.

**2. Bare-root plants** - demand a winter or February planting. They are typically a better buy at the nursery, but must be established while they are dormant or prior to spring growth. Plant bare root fruit trees, pecans, roses, ornamental peach, pear, plum and other selected plants such as crape myrtle, spirea, etc.

**3. Roses** - There are numerous varieties and several types to choose from, miniatures to climbing or pillar roses. Now is the time to plant. Select healthy plants with 4-5 canes. Locate roses in a well prepared soil in sun- full morning, noontime sun - protected from hot afternoon sun is best. Consider using one of the Earth-kind rose varieties - they are more disease resistant and drought tolerant.

**4. Transplanting** - should be completed in February prior to spring growth. Replant plants at their normal growing depth. Prune back to compensate for loss of root.

**5. Winter pruning** - of evergreens and summer flowering plants should be completed in February prior to spring growth. DO NOT PRUNE spring flowering plants, as you will remove potential spring flowers. Prune spring flowering plants immediately after their peak of bloom.

**6. Plant summer bulbs** - such as gladiolus and dahlia. Both like full sun in well prepared soil.

**7. Prepare garden beds** - Turn soil now in anticipation of spring planting. Add generous amounts of peat moss, leaf mold, compost and aged manures. A good soil is the key to good plant production.

**8. Vegetables** - get ready for the early "cool season" crops such as lettuce, radish, carrots, cabbage, turnips, beets, broccoli, onions, Irish potatoes, and spinach. Vegetables demand a well prepared soil in full sun. Select varieties for this area.

*Summer vegetables* - be patient! Don't be in a hurry to plant tomato, peppers, squash or eggplant, etc. These plants demand warm days and warm soils to grow and are very susceptible to late freeze and frost.

**9. Clean garden beds** - cut back the dead in winter. Rake clean and lightly work soils around existing plants.

**10. Houseplants** - Keep on hold, now until late March when the spring season allows for moving outdoors for re-potting and pruning back for new spring growth.

### **Gardening Chores for March**

One of the busiest gardening months of the year is here. March weather can be very fickle - it could still freeze since average last freeze is around March 12, and yet it still could be very balmy and pleasant most of the month. Freezing weather mainly affects the timing of planting cold-sensitive plants, like tomatoes or begonias. If you decide to take chances with tender plants, be prepared to give them a protective covering.

**1. Planting** - March is a great month to plant almost every kind of landscape plant. The sooner you plant, the quicker the plant will start getting established. This is important if the plants are to do well through the hot, stressful summer. Nurseries are receiving weekly shipments of fresh nursery stock, and this is prime time to buy and plant! Sometimes, though, eager gardeners jump the gun on some yard and garden chores which might be better delayed to later in spring. For example, many folks will apply fertilizer in early spring to try and force the grass to green up early. However, based on latest research, turf grass experts recommend delaying fertilizing warm season lawn grasses (St. Augustine and Bermuda) until April, and to wait to fertilize Centipede until May. Spring green-up results from nutrients that were stored by the grass last fall (hence the importance of fall fertilization). Pushing the lawn too hard in the early spring could result in a weaker root system going into the summer. Tall fescue is an exception and should be fertilized now. Caladium bulbs require warm soil temperatures, and setting them out in early spring can cause them to rot. Go ahead and purchase them as soon as they are available, but wait until the soil temperature reaches 70 degrees F to plant them. Periwinkles or vinca is a bedding plant which also loves hot weather. When set out before the days turn truly hot, they often get a fungal disease that can destroy a whole bed of periwinkles. Mild, wet, spring weather provides the perfect environment for this devastating disease which, unfortunately, has discouraged many gardeners from planting them altogether. Periwinkle is still a great bedding plant for summer color - just simply wait until May or early June to plant them.

**2. Lawns** - Control winter weeds by starting your regular mowing regime. Get your mower blade sharpened now before the spring repair rush. If you decide to scalp your lawn, wait until all danger of freezing is over. The average last freeze for our area is mid-March. If you do scalp, turn that huge amount of clippings into a fine soil amendment by composting it rather than filling up the landfill with it. If you missed applying a pre-emergent weed preventer in February and you had a summer weed problem in your lawn last year (such as grass burs), then go ahead and make an application now. You may have missed a portion of the weeds which germinate in early spring (like crabgrass), but will still control the many other types that can germinate anytime during the warm part of the year. As mentioned above, wait to fertilize your St. Augustine or Bermuda

lawn until April, or after you have mowed actively growing grass (not weeds) twice.

**3. Pruning** - Pruning of evergreen and summer flowering trees and shrubs should be completed this month. But, prune spring flowering shrubs (forsythia, quince, azaleas, spirea, etc) only after they finish blooming, if needed. Hydrangeas also bloom on prior year's growth, so prune after they bloom. Shear back Asiatic jasmine, if needed, just as new growth starts to encourage new growth from the base. As the lovely blooms of daffodils and jonquils fade away, it is tempting to remove or hide the leaves. However, let them yellow naturally. Next year's flower buds are being formed at this time, and healthy, green leaves are needed to insure an even better display next year.

**4. Landscaping** - After camellias and azaleas finish blooming, fertilize them with 2 to 3 pounds of azalea-camellia fertilizer per 100 square feet of bed area. This is a good time to start hanging baskets of petunias, begonias, impatiens and other annuals. Hanging baskets add another dimension to the landscape, allowing you to bring color and accents to other areas around your house. Dig and divide summer and fall blooming perennials this month. Fall asters, chrysanthemums, salvia and other summer/fall perennials can be invigorated and increased for expanding your beds or sharing/trading with other gardeners. The mulch underneath azalea, camellia and other shrubs may have partially decomposed, adding organic matter to the soil, but leaving areas suitable for weed invasion. Add more where needed, using organic mulches such as pine needles, pine bark or cypress bark. Begin fertilizing roses every 4 to 6 weeks from now until September. You also need to begin a spray program for controlling blackspot on roses. Uncontrolled blackspot will defoliate most hybrid tea, grandiflora and floribunda roses, causing them to decline in vigor.

**5. Vegetables** - Last freeze dates guide us as to when it should be safe to plant frost-tender vegetables and annuals. Just be ready to protect frost-sensitive plants in case of a late freeze. Planting of cool season vegetables (transplant broccoli, cabbage, and collards, and seed carrots, collards, mustard greens, lettuce, radish, turnips, Swiss chard and spinach) should be finished real soon, and summer vegetables can begin to be sown and transplanted later in March. Delay planting okra, sweet potatoes and peppers until April since they don't do well in cool soil.

**6. Fertilizing** - Fertilize vegetables about a month after growth starts with nitrogen fertilizer. Fruit and pecan trees should be fertilized this month with nitrogen applied in the area beneath the ends of the branches, never against the trunk. Shrubs and annual flower beds can be fertilized with a complete, balanced fertilizer. Slow-release formulations, though slightly more expensive, feed your plants over a longer period of time. Often the same type of fertilizer recommended for use on the lawn can be used in the landscape. Watch out for aphids that rapidly build up on tender new growth. They can be controlled with a sharp stream of water, insecticidal soap or other insecticides (be sure to read the product label to determine whether the infested plants are included on the label).

### **Just in case you are running behind January Gardening Chores**

**1. Transplanting** - If you are considering digging and moving a plant from one spot to another in the landscape, this is the month to accomplish this job. Most plants move best when they are fully dormant as a result of prolonged exposure to cold temperatures. Small and young plants are the easiest to move successfully since there is less shock and they recover from root loss rather quickly. Remember to selectively remove some top growth to compensate for the inevitable loss of some of the roots. Once the plant is moved, water it thoroughly and apply a few inches of mulch over the root area.

**2. Planting:** The ground doesn't freeze in East Texas, and many things can be planted at this time of year. At the top of the list are fruit trees and vines. These plants are dug by growers while they are dormant and shipped bare-root. The quicker you make your selection and get them in the ground, the faster they will establish a root system, which means better growth in the spring and summer. Don't let them dry out! Roses and other dormant, deciduous flowering plants are also available this month. Actually, most container-grown nursery stock can be planted during the winter, weather permitting. You can also be preparing the soil now for new flower, rose or shrub beds by mixing in plenty of organic material like compost and fertilizer. This way the soil is ready for immediate planting when the plants arrive. Start seeds indoors now for planting in late winter and early spring: broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, lettuce, parsley, petunias and begonias. Tomato, pepper and eggplant seed should be started in late January for transplanting in March. Late January is also the time to start transplants of marigolds, periwinkles and other summer flowers. Use a commercial peat-light soil mix in a clean flat. Place in a warm, bright spot. Cover the tray with a clear piece of glass or plastic or saran wrap until the seeds have sprouted. At that time, place in very bright light to keep the seedlings from stretching. Plant asparagus roots as they become available at garden stores.

**3. Pruning:** January and February are the months to accomplish pruning of fruit trees. Annual pruning keeps the harvest within reach, thins crowded branches, thus allowing more light to penetrate developing fruit, and stimulates new growth for next year's crop. Peaches, plums and apricots need this annual pruning. The dormant season of winter is also the time to do any needed pruning of shade trees to correct major problems such as cleaning out dead wood, removing lower limbs and crowded branches to allow more light to reach the ground, and removing hazardous branches which threaten property.

**4. Fertilizing:** Regularly fertilize pansies to keep them actively growing. Houseplants can be fertilized with reduced rates of water-soluble fertilizer this month. Do not over-water houseplants, and make sure that water does not sit in the saucer under the pot after watering.

## Gardening Events - February/March 2017

By Susan Dahlman

**Saturday, February 4 and Saturday, March 25:** Texas Discovery Garden at Fair Park, Dallas. 10-11 a.m. "Marvelous Monarchs: Winter". Learn all about the most famous butterfly (and the Texas State Insect!), and its annual migration phenomenon. Stay after to enjoy instructor John Watts' monthly butterfly house tour. \$15 non-members. Call (214) 428-7476, x343 to register.

**Friday, February 10:** Series 2 of 5 lectures sponsored by Smith County Master Gardeners. 11:30 a.m. in the Tyler Library's Taylor Auditorium. "The Rose Rustlers", with Greg Grant. Call 903-590-2980 or go to [smith-tx@tamu.edu](mailto:smith-tx@tamu.edu) for info.

**Thursday, February 16:** East Texas Arboretum & Botanical Society, Inc. -5:30 p.m. "Building a Bat House/Box". Information and supplies will be furnished for each person enrolled to build and take home a bat house. Reservations required. \$35 non-members. Call 903-675-5630.

**Saturday, February 25:** Texas Discovery Garden at Fair Park, Dallas. 10 a.m.-Noon. "How Do I ...Keep a Rose Plant Healthy?" Dr. Peter Schaar slashes through rose myths and teaches proper pruning and care of roses. Take home a rose plant! \$25 non-members. Register by calling (214) 428-7476, x343.

**Monday and Tuesday, February 27 & 28:** Landscape Design School held at the George Bush Presidential Library at Texas A&M University. Registration form may be obtained from: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/southerngarden/LDFeb17/>.

**Saturday, March 4:** Gregg County MG Spring Gardening Seminar at the First United Methodist Church in downtown Longview. 8 a.m - noon. \$12 at the door. Speakers: Tom LeRoy, retired Horticulture Agent from Montgomery County, "Vegetable Gardening in Containers" and Steven Chamblee, Chandor Gardens in Weatherford, "Shade Gardening". Call 903-236-8429 for more info.

**Friday, March 10:** Series 2 of 5 lectures sponsored by Smith County Master Gardeners at 11:30 a.m. in Tyler Library's Taylor Auditorium. "Azaleas" by Keith Hansen. Call 903-590-2980 or go to [smith-tx@tamu.edu](mailto:smith-tx@tamu.edu) for information.

**Saturday, March 11:** 2017 Wood County MG Spring Conference 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. at the Carroll Green Civic Center, 602 McAllister St., Quitman.

**Thursday, March 16:** East Texas Arboretum, Athens. 2:00 p.m. "Chicken 101 Workshop". This workshop will be discussing care and raising of chickens and producing organic eggs. Vendors will be present so you will be able to purchase chickens. Bring your own cage. Fresh eggs available for sale. \$15 Non-members. Call 903-675-5630.

**Thursday, March 16:** East Texas Arboretum, Athens. 9:00 – 3:00 p.m. Looking for a fun day during Spring Break for your child or grandchild? Education volunteers will provide learning activities and crafts throughout the day. Lunch and snack provided. Reservations required. \$25 non-members; 2 or more children receive \$5 discount. Call 903-675-5630.

**Saturday, March 25:** Dallas County Master Gardeners present "Garden 2 Table". 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. at Methodist-Charlton Medical Center Auditorium, 3500 W. Wheatland Avenue, Dallas. Free. Call Marvin Young at 214-904-3050 for info.

**Saturday, March 25:** Ellis County Master Gardeners "Expo 2017." 9 a.m – 5 p.m.

**Thursday, March 30:** Henderson County MG present their 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Spring Conference at the Texas Freshwater Fisheries, Athens. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. Program begins 6 p.m. Tickets \$25 per person and include dinner. Seating limited. Advance purchase of tickets is encouraged and may be purchased from any HCMG, or by calling 903-675-6130, or e-mailing: [hendersonCMGA@gmail.com](mailto:hendersonCMGA@gmail.com). "Wicked Plants" will be presented by New York Times best-selling author, Amy Stewart. The author tells the A to Z of plants that kill, maim, intoxicate, and otherwise offend. Drawing on history, medicine, science, and legend, she presents tales of bloodcurdling botany that will entertain, alarm, and enlighten even the most intrepid gardeners and nature lovers.

Happy Learning!

## The Psychology of Plants

By John Womack

When you are working and walking in your garden and start to pull a plant up by its roots, does it ever occur to you that that plant might be sensitive? That it might cringe as you throw it in the weed pile?

Okay, that's probably going a bit far, but plants and humans have many similarities and needs and wants. We both need water and in the right amounts. Plants drown if over watered and we, as humans, quickly get rid of excess water. We both need food, good food, and the correct food for our needs. Giving a plant phosphorous when it needs nitrogen is not good for the plant, as giving us sugar when we need vegetables is not good for us either.

And don't think for one minute that the plant's main purpose is to grow food for you. It's main purpose is to produce seed, to reproduce. A primary purpose of both humans and plants is reproduction.

Both plants and humans respond positively to good care. We know this because we see it. The plants that are tended to carefully grow healthy and strong, and the children who are tended to carefully also grow healthy and strong. In fact, there are some studies that show that plants respond to speech. In a Discovery channel's show in 2004, they set up multiple greenhouses. Results showed that the plants in the four greenhouses with music grew faster than the control specimen. Even if it is not positively proven yet, it's totally possible that your plants respond to sound.

Now, will you be a more sensitive gardener? Tell that tomato that it looks pretty and notice when your lettuce looks like it needs some food that it is not getting. You will be rewarded.

## January Meeting Re-Cap

By Jimmie Pierce

It is such a pleasure to write this follow-up report on the Free State Master Gardener's first lecture of 2017.

Lowell Tanksley and his partner, Cindy Thrasher, honored us with their presence and expertise in Vegetable Gardening. Their goal is to farm as organically as possible on Tanksley Farm which is just east of Mineola. They are both certified MG's in Wood County.

Lowell showed us beautiful photos of the farm as he discussed the importance of keeping our garden soil covered at all times. He plants a cover crop of Elbon Rye and this helps prevent rain and wind erosion of the vital nutrients in the soil that we all work so hard to maintain. Yearly soil testing was stressed. We were reminded of the importance of the soil's pH which can directly affect a plant's health. As Lowell spoke, the MG's who were present were allowed to ask questions. Both Lowell and Cindy answered, especially when vegetable varieties were being presented.

Neal Kinsey's book, "Hands-On Agronomy," was suggested for those that want a more detailed understanding of an ecologically balanced soil system that is essential for maintaining healthy crops.

Since this meeting was also a family occasion for me (Lowell is my brother), I would like to thank each and every one of you for being so welcoming to our first guests of the new year. They really enjoyed being with us.



## Happy New Year Master Gardeners!

First of all, a big shout out and thanks to Pat Briggs and her 2016 Executive Board for their leadership and a very successful year. I hope that 2017 with the Van Zandt County Free State Master Gardener Assoc. will continue to be a fun, fulfilling, educational and sociable adventure for all. As your newly elected president, my goals are to continue the activities you all like to do and see in our group as well as add some new initiatives that will hopefully help our association grow. Unfortunately it does take money to continue to have the sorts of activities, speakers and public seminars we all like to see and participate in, so fund raising will be a big effort this year. I encourage all of you to help us meet our budget goals. One area I will emphasize this year is Specialist Training. Since it is a Master Gardener objective to provide education to the public, we need more MG's certified with Specialist Training that will enable us to give talks and presentations to the public, schools, and other groups. In order to assist members, we have approved funds to reimburse those attending specialist training for their tuition costs as much as the budget will allow. I look forward to working and having fun with you all.

Our newsletter will be published once every two months (bimonthly). Since we got a late start this year, this first issue will be February/March. The next issue will be April/May. We will try to get the newsletter out by the first of the first month so that the wonderful activities section will be complete for those two months. Anna will, as usual, send out a copy of the newsletter via email to each member. The newsletter will also be up on our web site, and we will bring copies to the monthly meeting. As always, if you have any ideas or have attended a great workshop or think of something that we should cover, please let any of us know. Thanks so much for all your support!

## December Awards Dinner

By Paula Marshall

More than 60 members and guests, along with Tommy Phillips, Melisa Rhodes, and County Judge Don Kirkpatrick and his wife, enjoyed a wonderful evening at the Awards Dinner held on Friday, December 9th.

The event was held at the Farm Bureau Building in Canton, and the delicious dinner of brisket, sausage and trimmings was catered by Danny's Smokehouse BBQ in Athens.

Pat Briggs, outgoing president, spoke about various accomplishments made by the group during the past year, and presented the board members with beautiful poinsettias. Some of the accomplishments mentioned were completion of the By Laws and Standing Rules that will govern our group from now on, the successful fund raising of almost \$4000 by selling geraniums, implementing the butterfly garden at Canton Junior High School, the 2016 class's garden at the Extension Office, the extremely successful Fall Seminar on Native Plants, and participation by club members in several county events. Pat congratulated those who are now Specialists in various areas: Joanne Elston, Propagation, Bob Williams, Vegetables, and Donna Burcham, Jr. Master Gardener Program.

Our new president, Bob Williams, spoke about some of the plans and goals he has for the organization in 2017. They included holding a public event in the Spring in addition to a Fall event, encouraging more members to get their specialist certificates, and providing some tuition assistance for those who do.

Jimmie Pierce, Marsha Sasser and Paula Marshall were presented with denim shirts in honor of being named Rookie of the Year, Most Volunteer Hours, and Master Gardener of the Year, respectively.

Thank you to Anna Baker for heading up the committee for this event, and volunteers Sally Mitchell, Jimmie Pierce, Pat Briggs and Paula Marshall who helped plan and decorate. Also a big thank you to Nancy Szabo for putting together the slide show depicting members participating in many of the events we were a part of during 2016.



Jimmie Pierce (L), Pat Briggs (R)  
Rookie of the Year



Paula Marshall (L), Pat Briggs (R)  
Master Gardener of the Year



Award Banquet 2016



Marsha Sasser (L), Pat Briggs (R)  
Most Volunteer Hours

## Garden Guru

### Dear Garden Guru – What in the world is rose rosette disease?

Rose rosette disease, also called "witches broom," is a fairly new and incurable disease that threatens roses, even the popular and seemingly disease resistant, knockout roses. It first appeared in the northern states in the 1940's, and in the 1990's found its way to Texas. It first appears as a deformed, densely clustered "witches broom" growth with abnormal bright red coloration. The plant basically goes crazy, and the stems may be flattened, enlarged, or elongated with excessive leaf growth or thorniness. Even though symptoms might not occur on the entire plant, it is infected. The plant may die or it may remain infected for several years. It is a virus and is spread by mites – so small that they can be spread by the wind or by plant propagation or by contact with the root system of an infected rose bush. Is there a cure? NO. The only option is to remove and dispose of the entire plant, roots and all. If you allow it to live, it will probably infect other roses in your garden or your neighbor's garden. (This information came from an article in the Tyler Morning Telegraph-December 28, 2016- by Greg Grant, Smith County Horticulturist for the Texas A & M AgriLife Extension Service.)

