

GOOD GARDEN HABITS AND TRENDS ISSUE

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GALVESTON COUNTY

TEXAS
MASTER  GARDENER
TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION
Galveston County

WRITTEN BY GALVESTON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS
IN COOPERATION WITH THE GALVESTON COUNTY OFFICE
OF TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE



MG Kevin Lancon
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The End of Another Eventful Year

2025 is coming to an end. It is time to reflect on the past year and look forward to the challenges and excitement in planning 2026. Personally, it marked the first full year for me as GCMGA President and I am proud of the accomplishments. We participated in almost 100 community outreach events across the county, delivered ~40 formal educational seminars to the public and welcomed over 1,000 visitors to the Discovery Garden in 2025. The revamped Gardening Help Desk program has been a success and has resulted in a substantial increase in responses to client questions/issues, some of which we are now featuring on our Facebook page. In addition, we continued to donate ~3,000 lbs. of fresh produce, grown in the Discovery Garden, to seven different food banks and soup kitchens across Galveston County. We also hosted four wonderful plant sales during 2025, the last of which was the 4th Annual Fall Festival, which included not only GCMGA but also the other Texas A&M AgriLife Extension services. Finally, we published over 150 articles in this award-winning newsletter/magazine, designed to inspire and assist with some of the horticultural challenges that county residents face.

Looking forward, we have many exciting plans for 2026, that include the completion of the Outdoor Classroom, an expanded Social Media presence including a new Instagram page and the completion of the Texas Superstar Trail, within our Discov-

ery Garden. We will continue to have a wonderful schedule of free educational seminars in 2026 and a Gardening Help Desk service. We invite everyone to take advantage of these services to improve gardening knowledge and success.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Gulf Coast Gardening, and invite you to visit the web site at <https://txmg.org/galveston>, the Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/galvcountrymg/> and our new Instagram page at <https://www.instagram.com/galvcomastergardeners/> for more information of upcoming events and activities. We also thank you for supporting the Galveston County Master Gardeners and hope to see you soon.

Kevin Lancon



MG John Mitchiner MG Sven Bors-Koefoed



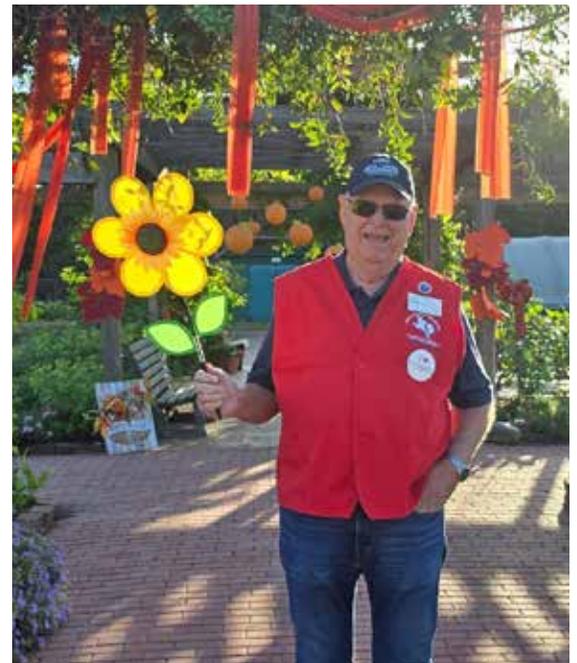
MG Karolyn Gephart
Editor,
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Sharing Good Habits and Trends

This issue offers good advice on gardening with information on good habits to incorporate as well as what trends are out there and why they are great. There is even an article on how to ENJOY weeding! Let's prune and deadhead regularly and clean tools repeatedly. Learn about trends like vertical gardening (a good habit also), DIY garden art, and repurposing the most amazing things that become planters. It's time to force amaryllis for the holidays (learn how) and to think about winterizing techniques in case we have winter. Welcome interns and learn more about them. See the Fall Festival, recent Plant Sale and MGs in Action in photo displays and travel to gardens in Tennessee and California. These 48 pages were created to give readers information as well as articles and photos to enjoy.

Happy Holidays and New Year to All

Karolyn Gephart



MG Ira Gervais MG Karolyn Gephart

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Sulphur butterfly MG Marilyn Haupt



Repurposed antique plates on she-shed MG Karolyn Gephart



Plants arrive for sale MG Sven Bors-Koefoed



Cover photo of oil funnel by MG Karolyn Gephart



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Plant Tags 101



Amaris Wendelburg
GCMG 2024

You're browsing your local plant store and stumble upon an array of plants you'd love to see in your garden. Whether they're vegetables or florals, trees or shrubs, each plant should have a tag or label. These resources can provide a cheatsheet on how to ensure the plant thrives under your care. Things like hardiness zones, sunlight requirements, watering needs, and how to space them can be found on the label. Sometimes there is limited information, but at the very least you should find a picture of the plant along with its common or scientific name. Given that information, you can figure out if you have the basic requirements to meet this plant's needs.

What's In a Name?

A plant tag will have at the very minimum the plant's common name, but it is important that you also find out the scientific name. The scientific name will be written in italics, whereas the common name will be in normal font. (Ex: Fuji Apple, *Malus pumila* 'Fuji'). Scientific names are important because they specify which one species the plant belongs to, whereas common names can be used to describe multiple types of plants. Scientific names are also used worldwide. Knowing just the common and scientific names, you can find out what the plant requirements are should there be no other information listed.

Zones

Plant tags will sometimes show you which hardiness zone the plant will grow well in. Other times they will list optimal temperature ranges or just their cold hardiness. Cold hardiness refers to the lowest temperature the plant can withstand. It's usually presented as a range since things like windchill or frost could impact the area surrounding the plant. Either way, finding out your plant's hardiness zone is key to a successful crop. If you are looking for your specific area, go to the USDA site for the hardiness zone map (<https://phzm-prod.ars.usda.gov/>). You can input your zip code and it will show exactly which zone you are in. Galveston County has both 9b and 10a zones.

Sunlight

A very common detail on plant tags is their sunlight needs. They will either spell out the sunlight requirement (full sun, partial shade, etc.) or display an image of a sun. Some labels go a step further and detail how many hours of sunlight the plant needs. When assessing your garden space, keep in mind your areas of shade and if they are consistently shady. For ex-

ample, a tree that loses all its leaves in the winter no longer provides a shade canopy for those shade-loving plants.

Water

More often than not, labels will discuss the moisture of the soil when instructing how to water. Explaining how the soil should feel (moist or dry) determines when to water. Some plants need to be watered only once the soil feels dry. For others, the soil needs to be kept constantly moist. Still others need you to measure down into the soil to feel for moisture. Another item that may be listed on the label is if the plant is drought or heat tolerant. Drought tolerant means the plant can withstand periods of time with limited watering. Heat tolerant is when the plant can tolerate high levels of heat both in air and soil temperature.

Planting Instructions

Some tags of larger plants will provide instructions on hole width and depth in reference to the root ball. Additionally, they can instruct on the creation of a water basin. A water basin is a raised ring of soil encircling the root ball of the plant. This allows water to penetrate the rootball without leaking into surrounding soil. It's an effort to concentrate the water solely on the plant.



Take a photo if instructions are placed by plants in nursery.
MG Amaris Wendelburg

“...basic requirements to meet a plant’s needs”

Size and Spacing

Knowing how tall or wide a plant gets clues you in on where you can successfully plant. Generally, the spacing requirement falls in line with the size of the mature plant. As long as you adhere to those measurements, your plant should have plenty of room to grow. It’s also important to note that if you are planting species that grow very tall next to a plant that does not, you will need to check the sun requirements of the shorter plant. You don’t want to create a shady environment for a plant that requires full sun. Additionally, if the plant’s root systems require more space, you’ll want to make sure the surrounding plants won’t interfere with root development.

Animal Resistance or Toxicity

Occasionally you will see labels that denote if the plant is resistant to certain types of animals (deer, rabbits, etc.) It is important to note that even if a label states the plant is resistant to an animal, it is not going to be 100% resistant. Additionally, some labels will provide information on plant toxicity towards animals like dogs and cats. This is not a very common thing to see on plant tags. So, if you have animals that are unsupervised outdoors, it may be a good idea to check online tools like the ASPCA site or even your local veterinarian.

Knowing plant tag details is crucial for the survival of a new plant. If you purchased a plant from the Galveston County Master Gardeners group, we have plant tag information under the store site, and it remains there for future reference.

NOTE: Many plant tags are created for usage across the US and our Gulf Coast climate might press the limits on sunlight and water. Small nurseries as well as master gardeners can mitigate confusion, but buyers should do research to make sure the tag’s information fits the climate here.

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Sample tag back
MG Amaris Wendelburg



Plant tags are usually placed in pots.
MG Amaris Wendelburg

Seeking Evidence Based Gardening Information to Answer the ‘Why’s’



Marilyn Haupt
GCMG 2019

My fondest childhood memories include tending to my father’s vegetable garden and the flower gardens of two ladies in my neighborhood. They were always willing to allow me to sow seeds, prune plants, and of course, pull weeds. Being a curious child, I constantly asked “why.” Why, why, why. I wanted to know the reasons behind the tasks I was asked to do. The typical response was, “Well honey, that’s the way I’ve always done it” or “That’s how I was taught.” Fifty years have passed, and much has changed since then. Today, what I once called “asking why” is what we now recognize as seeking evidence-based gardening practices.

Gardeners no longer need to rely on traditional advice passed down from others. Both novice and experienced gardeners now have access to a wealth of research-based information. Books, podcasts, reels, short videos, and countless websites provide guidance, but the challenge is determining which sources are credible. Creating and maintaining a garden requires time, effort, and money, so it’s important to use trustworthy resources that will maximize your return on your investment.

Two of the most reliable resources are the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and Texas A&M University. As a land-grant university Texas A&M conducts agricultural and horticultural research and AgriLife Extension translates these findings into practical information for the public. Most Texas counties have an extension office, while a few low-population counties rely on nearby offices. Each office provides a variety of educational programs and materials tailored to meet local needs. A simple online search of Texas AgriLife reveals an abundance of research-based information. When searching Texas A&M University information, the URL will include tamu.edu. In general, websites ending with .edu are good indicators of reliable, research-supported content from a higher educational institution. Just make sure that the gardening advice fits the plant zone you need. Galveston County residents live in zone 9b. Advice from a zone with differing temperatures might not give you the result you are seeking.

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service coordinates Texas Master Gardener programs in counties across the state. These programs train volunteers from the community through intensive classes and required volunteer service. In

turn, these volunteers share their knowledge by showing and teaching others, helping to spread the educational mission of AgriLife Extension.

The Galveston County Master Gardener program extends its outreach to the public through a wide range of free educational opportunities. A well-attended set of activities presented by many of the Texas Master Gardeners are seminars on a variety of timely garden-related topics. These seminars are held on Saturdays throughout the year. Many of these presentations are informational but some are hands-on workshops as well. These seminars and workshops are advertised by the Galveston County Extension Office. Scheduled upcoming events can be easily found on their website at <https://galveston.agrilife.org>.

The Galveston County Master Gardeners also provide this publication, *Gulf Coast Gardening*, a peer-reviewed newsletter/magazine published every two months. It is written by Galveston County Master Gardeners and published in cooperation with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. Each issue offers helpful seasonal information for the home gardener. Hardcopies of the newsletter can be obtained at the Galveston County Extension Office. These beautiful newsletters can also be easily found online at <https://txmg.org/galveston/gulf-coast-gardening-newsletters/> and from



Free presentations at the Extension Office in La Marque MG Herman Auer

“...seek evidence-based practices”

this site you can also sign up to receive future editions as they are released.

The group also has a strong social media presence with a good following on both Facebook and Instagram. Both sites provide postings of updates on what is happening within the group and updated activity in the Discovery Garden at the Galveston County Extension Office are shared. Additionally, educational information, and notices about plant sales are posted. The sites are monitored daily by a Texas Master Gardener who interacts with members of the community. The expansion to other social media platforms is planned for the future.

The Galveston County Master Gardeners hold four plant sales each year. Two sales are held in person on the grounds of the Discovery Garden with Texas Master Gardeners available to answer gardening questions. The other two sales are offered online, followed by in-person plant pick up the following week. These sales occur in the spring and in the fall. During the time that the public are on site, master gardeners are present to answer questions. The goals of these sales are to raise funds necessary to provide quality outreach services, and also to provide plants that perform the best here and to offer person-to-person guidance on selection, planting, and care.

The Gardening Help Desk is a very helpful program manned by the Galveston County Master Gardeners. Members of the public can submit questions and submit photos regarding a gardening problem online at <https://>

txmg.org/galveston/gcmga_hotline/. Of course, they can call 281-309-5061 or stop by Monday through Friday from 9 to noon. Volunteers will respond with a research-based response in a timely manner.

If you recognize the branding of Texas A&M University, Texas AgriLife Extension or Texas Master Gardener on educational materials you can consider the information trustworthy, research-based, and up-to-date.

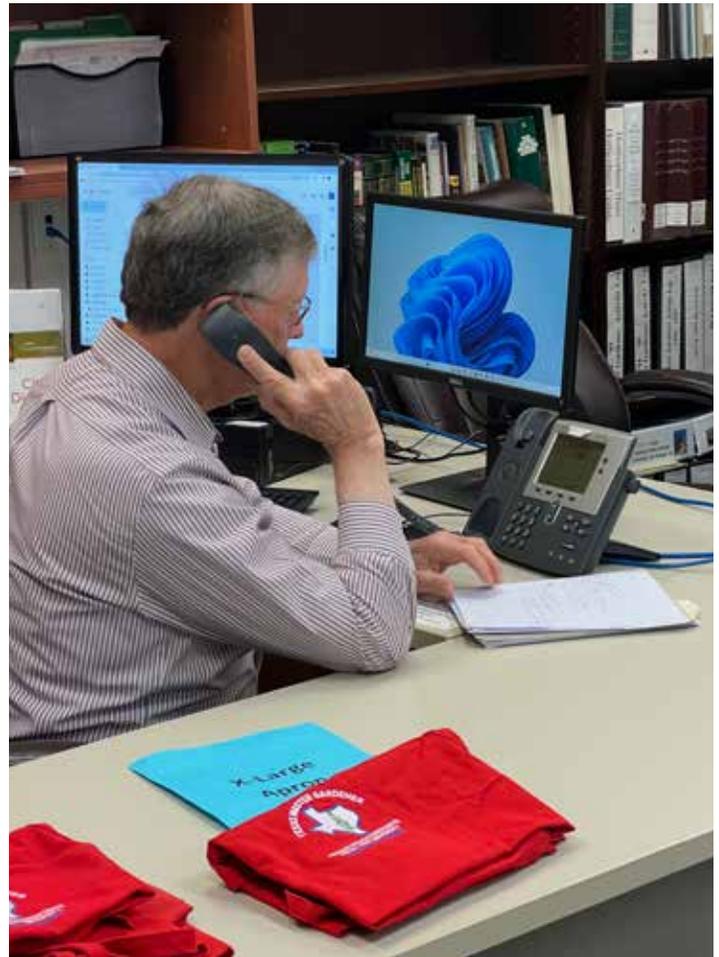
So, the next time you wonder “why,” there is plenty of research-based information available to help with gardening and to answer ‘why’ questions. And, knowing where to find it is far more satisfying than the old “that’s just how it’s done.”

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Community presentations by master gardeners Julie Engleman (League City Garden Club)



Gardening Help Desk MG Carolyn Gephart

Vertical Gardening: Up, Up and Away



Becky Jaschek
GCMG 2023

Vertical gardening focuses on growing plants upward to utilize vertical space instead of the horizontal area, usually using structures to encourage plants to grow upward. It can provide a solution to several problems, add extra layers of beauty or aromas to a space or become another improvement project to feed one's gardening passion. Gardeners have been growing upward for thousands of years, and they are still finding new twists. Today an endless array of ideas, kits, DIY projects, or even premade vertical gardening systems are available that bring purpose and beauty to all areas of a home.

Almost any type of plant can be used in a vertical gardening feature, from vines to sprawling vegetables or flowers, annuals, herbs, perennials, even trees and shrubs. With a bit of effort and imagination, the added benefits of vertical gardening can be obtained, even without a yard. Anything that grows in a container can become part of a vertical feature.

Doing More with Less Space

One of the biggest benefits of vertical gardening is growing more plants in a smaller footprint, which then would allow an increase of plant density by planting more plants in the same

area or adding diversity to create layers of color, fragrance, and texture. Using the space to plant beneficial companion plants can bring additional benefits.

Vertical features are both attractive and functional. Trellises, living walls, and growing plants on a wall or fence can all screen unwanted views, add privacy and even provide insulation from the sun, cold and noise. Using flowering plants can create a pollinator habitat while adding a fresh splash of color or fragrance to an area. Living walls work well in areas as small as a balcony, large as a yard, or even for growing produce in a field.

A living wall can also be constructed to include vertically arranged plants along a wall, panel, or frame to provide an attractive feature. It can block harsh sunlight from an area that needs more shade, soften or eliminate the view of a neighbor's fence, or just simply bring a bit of serenity to the garden.

Vertical gardening is especially helpful for crops that tend to sprawl like squash, pole beans, and tomatoes. The plants grow better because more sunlight reaches the leaves and there is better air circulation around the plant, reducing the risk of powdery mildew fungus and other diseases. Also, keeping the leaves off the ground reduces the pathway for many diseases



The Living Wall at Texas A&M. A panel of 12 Aggie maroon modules appear at eye level. Tamu.edu Laura McKenzie/
Texas A&M Division of Marketing & Communications



Peas on trellis Courtesy of *Purposeful Gardener* by Tasha Medve

“...part of sustainable food production”

and pests. When harvested, the produce is cleaner and easier to reach, making it another win for the vertical gardener.

By training trees or vines to grow in a flat configuration along a wall or trellis, a gardener can greatly reduce the amount of space needed for the plant and increase the ease of harvest. They also make excellent privacy fences once established.

Examples of Vertical Gardening

The following table provides examples of the support methods and the types of plants that might benefit from their use. Always remember to match the strength of the structure with the weight of the plant being supported.

Looking to the Future

Vertical gardening is more than a trend—it’s a growing part of sustainable food production. New techniques are constantly being developed and researched to address challenges and ensure future food security. Researchers, including those at Texas A&M AgriLife, are exploring vertical systems in controlled environments to improve nutrition and increase food production. With endless options, vertical gardening combines practicality, beauty, and innovation—whether in a field, on a balcony, or in your backyard.

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The Old Farmer’s Almanac almanac.com/

Method	Description	Examples of Plants
Stake, Cane, Pole	Simple support to direct plant growth upward. Sometimes with horizontal support such as strings	Lighter plants do better, such as pole beans, peas, flowering plants such as honey suckle, morning glory, sweet peas, jasmine, wisteria
Tepee	Poles or canes arranged in a circle around the plant and secured at the top.	Beans, peas, cucumbers, squash and melons
Cage	Sturdy lattice that surrounds all sides of the plant with large openings for easy harvest	Tomatoes, peppers, some bush beans, cucumbers, small melons, squash
Trellis	Versatile lattice support. May include an arch.	Tomatoes, peppers, pole beans, peas, squash, melons (with support), vines, climbing roses, caneberries
Arbor or Pergola	An arbor is a trellis frame allowing plants to grow along the sides and top A Pergola is a heavier structure primarily to provide shade	Grapes, caneberries, ivy, flowering vines, climbing roses
Espalier	Training a vine or tree to grow flat against a wall or structure	Grapes, fruit trees
Vertically Stacked Containers	Containerized plants arranged in tiers to maximize space.	Herbs, flowers, lettuce, small vegetables
Wall Garden	Planters attached directly to a wall or panel	Herbs, succulents, compact ornamentals
Living Wall	Wall panel system with soil or hydroponics for dense planting	Flowers, grasses, herbs, leafy greens
Vertical Garden System	Commercial or DIY modular systems for compact vertical planting. Higher technology systems are available for purchase	Vegetables, herbs, flowers, microgreens, leafy vegetables

The History of Vertical Gardening



Becky Jaschek
GCMG 2023

What do the Hanging Gardens of Babylon (or legends thereof), American indigenous tribes, ancient Mediterranean and Asian civilizations, and the Galveston County Master Gardeners' Discovery Garden all have in common? They all utilized some aspects of vertical gardening.

Historic Examples of Vertical Gardening

Greek and Roman historians wrote about the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, which are considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, and stated the gardens were built near Babylon (in present-day Iraq) in 600 BC by King Nebuchadnezzar II for his wife who missed the mountains and gardens of her homeland. The lush, tiered gardens were said to have been 75 feet tall with pillars and terraces overflowing with many kinds of plants, flowers and herbs. The towering gardens resembled a mountain, providing a stark contrast to the surrounding flat desert. There is debate about the gardens' location, but as described they represent an early use of vertical gardening by using vertical tiers and terraces to build up for a desired effect. (Happy wife, happy life?)

Asian civilizations have been able to live and sustain themselves for more than 1,000 years in the steep mountainous terrain by using terraces to carve vertically stacked rice fields along the contours of the mountains. By managing the fields and irrigating them, the farmers have been able to grow rice, their primary crop, as well as their sustenance gardens. The UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Honghe Hani Rice Terraces in China and Ifugao Rice Terraces of the Philippines are inspiring examples of how terracing creates the opportunity for vertical gardening.



Rangoon creeper grows vertically in the Discovery Garden pergola
William Johnson GCMG Database

Throughout many regions of the Americas, indigenous cultures used an ingenious method of intercropping (or polycropping) called the Three Sisters in North America and milpa in Central America. The method generated a reliable and sustainable food source. As early as 1070 AD, they planted corn to provide the structure or trellis and grain. Legumes such as pole beans grew up the stalks of corn which provided not only protein-rich beans, but replenished nitrogen to the soil. Squash grew along the ground with its leaves providing a natural ground cover that conserved water, helped control weeds while providing squash or pumpkin for food. From a practical standpoint, this technique represents vertical gardening at its finest.

Currently visitors to the Discovery Garden in La Marque can see the work of master gardeners who have research beds using vertical gardening as well as other beds overseen by MGs who use the technique to provide air circulation and additional room in their beds for ground plants. Tours are free and available on Thursdays. Check their website at txmg.org/galveston.

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Foggy Ifugao rice terraces in the Philippines
MG Robin Collins Royalty free image ingimage.com

Forcing Amaryllis for the Holidays



Vickie Hall
GCMG 2023

Amaryllis, also referred to as Dutch amaryllis (*Hippeastrum* spp.), planted in ground bloom in early spring in suitable climates (USDA Zones 9-11) after a year growing and establishing their bulbs. But as we move into late fall, we start thinking of holiday festivities and home decorations. Poinsettias may be the most common holiday plant but don't forget about an amaryllis which delivers large spectacular blooms at Christmas when forced.

Amaryllis bulbs produce magnificent trumpet-shaped blooms and are available in a wide range of colors. In addition to solid-colored petals, there are varieties with stripes, contrasting edges, double blooms and miniature cultivars. A single stem will produce four flowers, while larger bulbs may produce two stems. Forcing an amaryllis for holiday blooming is relatively easy and rewarding.

Stores and nurseries offer amaryllis bulbs beginning in October and November to use for forcing. A garden bulb could also be used but it would have to be removed in the summer and stored dormant for eight to ten weeks prior to planting.

Choose a sturdy pot with drainage holes to prevent root or bulb rot. Ensure the bulb is hydrated by soaking the roots in lukewarm water for several hours prior to planting. Place the bulb in the center of the pot with well-draining soil. Ensure that one-third to one-half of the bulb is visible above the soil level. Place the potted bulb in a brightly lit location such as a south facing window. Water thoroughly after planting and keep the soil moist but not soggy, allowing the surface of the soil to dry slightly between waterings. Rotate the pot every few days to ensure the plant grows straight and does not lean

towards the light. After about four to eight weeks, the first bud will appear, and watering can be done weekly. Amaryllis flowers are large and can be heavy making it necessary to support the flower stalk, so that it remains upright.

Amaryllis plants make wonderful cut flowers as well. When the bud starts to show color and is about to open, cut the stem at the bottom of the stalk. Fill a container with water, add a preservative if desired, and change the water as needed. Flowers can last up to 10 days after cutting but will last longer if left on the plant.

Amaryllis bulbs can be re-used if treated properly. After the bloom fades, remove the stalk but let the foliage remain on the plant. Keep indoors and continue to provide good light and adequate water until the chance of frost has passed. Depending on your hardiness zone, the bulb can be planted outdoors. Fertilize in late spring and early summer and allow the plant to go dormant. Once the foliage has died back stop watering and wait for the following fall to restart the forcing process.

There are many ways to display your amaryllis bulbs during the holidays. Think of a lovely moss-covered clay pot or a beautiful shallow dish of water with pebbles or pinecones and colorful baubles. Either way, the amaryllis blooms will compliment any home décor.

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Bare Bulbs MG Vickie Hall



After forcing, planted in yard MG Vickie Hall



Place bulb in strong pot with soil MG Vickie Hall

Trends: Tropical Garden Directional Signs



Mary Jane Fortney
GCMG 2017

A creative homemade directional sign can add charm to your garden and give it a personal touch. A well-placed sign serves as a great conversation piece and brings artistic interest to your outdoor space.

Garden directional signs are typically made from multiple arrow-shaped boards attached to a fence post set in concrete. These boards are often painted with the destinations of your choice. Since we planned to place our sign in the garden next to our pool, we chose destinations inspired by memorable tropical beach vacations. Over the years, we have tried to achieve a tropical garden vibe around our lagoon pool. Picture a garden filled with lush tropical plants like plumeria, ginger, bananas, and many others. For a playful touch, we added an extra board labeled “Gilligan’s Island.” This is where you can personalize the piece according to your style; we opted for a whimsical post featuring tropical destinations painted in vibrant colors. It became a fun family project—from discussing destinations together, to my husband Bryon preparing the post and individual signs, to the creative painting, especially by our soon-to-be daughter-in-law, Emily Saxton.

Outdoor garden signs are exposed to the elements, so applying a special sealant will protect your sign from the harsh Texas sun and any other inclement weather. For this DIY project, we used old wood fence boards that were being replaced, but you can choose other materials that will withstand sun, rain, and humidity. Visiting your local Home Depot or Lowe’s will help you find materials to match your budget and desired look.

Step One: Gather the materials—one 4x4 wooden post, wood board sign blanks, tools for cutting wood, measuring tape, pencil, and screws. You’ll also need a neutral-colored, water-based wood stain, various acrylic paints, brushes, a clear water-based outdoor sealant, and a rag. For installing the post, you may use a post hole digger, quick-setting concrete, and a level.

Step Two: Cut the boards into arrow shapes. We used seven wood fence boards for our sign. Sand each board to remove rough edges. We cut the arrows approximately 23 to 28 inches long. We wanted a very casual look, so the arrows varied by a couple of inches.

Step Three: Apply two coats of wood stain to all sides of the post and boards, sanding between each coat.

Step Four: Finalize your chosen destinations and decide which direction each arrow should point. Use various acrylic paint colors to decorate and label the boards with destination names, distances, and any other creative touches. Choose a font and size that matches the look of each destination. For example, for our Hawaii sign, the lettering resembled a tiki style and included a beach with waves rolling in at sunset and two surfboards. It was the first time our two sons went surfing. The Bahamas sign had a casual font with a sparkling beach in the background. We also painted a Yellow Bird and a Bahama Mama cocktail. Allow the paint to dry for at least two days. Once dry, apply two coats of clear water-based sealant, lightly sanding between each coat, and let the sealant dry for at least forty-eight hours.



Emily displaying two finished signs Sean Fortney

Step Five: Install the fence post in your desired location. Dig a hole deep enough to secure the post, place it in the hole, and use the level to ensure it’s straight. Mix the concrete as directed and allow it to set and dry for at least forty-eight hours before attaching the destination signs.

Step Six: Once the concrete has set, attach each arrow-shaped destination board to the post with two stainless steel screws, used to prevent rust.

Enjoy your garden directional sign and all the conversations it inspires. Have fun, make it your own, and personalize your garden area. The sign turned out better than anyone imagined! And it all started with a few old fence boards knocked down during Hurricane Beryl last year. We had lots of fun making

“...a great conversation piece”

these, from picking the individual destinations to seeing each one materialize. And of course, the camaraderie throughout it all—working together on a project—not only was a way to spend quality time together but also created a shared sense of purpose. It’s not about how quickly you assemble the post and signs, but about the memories you and your family create together.



Emily and Sean painting signs *MG Mary Jane Fortney*



Completed directional sign in garden *Sean Fortney*



A family painting session *Bryon Fortney*



Construction begins *Sean Fortney*

The Art of Weeding



Doris Durbin
Heard
GCMG 1995

For most people, the joy of gardening comes from relaxing in the backyard, admiring colorful flowers, watching butterflies and birds flit about, and listening to the wind rustle through the trees, all while enjoying a drink with friends and family. What's not part of that vision? Bending over or kneeling in the heat of the day to pull weeds! That part is usually less than fun. But I have a few suggestions that might make weeding easier—and maybe even enjoyable.

Being able to identify which plants are “weeds” is essential—but it depends on the specific area of your garden. If a plant is competing with your desired plants for sunlight, water, and nutrients, then it's a weed in that context and likely needs to be removed. Some plants are also invasive and can quickly take over a space, so regular weeding is necessary to keep them in check.

Many excellent online resources exist to help identify common weeds in our area, including this guide from the Galveston County Master Gardeners: *Galveston County's 12 Most Aggressive Weeds* (PDF). That said, you may not always agree with how a plant is classified. Take frog fruit (*Phyla nodiflora*), for example—it's listed as one of the aggressive weeds, but it's also a native plant that, in the right spot, makes an excellent ground cover. Its tiny white flowers attract pollinators, and it serves as a host plant for three butterfly species. Context matters.

However, there are two weeds I'm especially concerned about because of how aggressively they spread.

The first is mulberry weed (*Fatoua villosa*), which appears on the Galveston County aggressive weed list. This weed spreads rapidly because it begins to flower and produce seed when it's only about three inches tall. It can grow up to four feet in height and quickly take over garden spaces. When purchasing new plants, inspect the containers—mulberry weed often hitchhikes in nursery pots as a tiny, unnoticed seedling. First reported in Louisiana in 1964, it has since spread throughout the Southeastern United States.

The second weed of concern is torpedograss (*Panicum repens*), a highly invasive, perennial grass regarded as one of the world's worst weeds. It poses a serious threat in Southeastern states due to its aggressive, underground rhizomes. These rhizomes can stretch several feet deep and produce new shoots at every node, allowing the plant to form dense mats that displace native vegetation. Once established, torpedograss is

extremely difficult to control. It is in the vegetable beds at a school in Houston and no amount of effort to remove it has worked. I recently learned that it has been discovered in Deer Park Prairie, where efforts are underway to manage it using herbicides.

Tips to Make Weeding Easier and More Enjoyable:

Weed When the Soil is Moist

It's much easier to pull weeds when the soil is damp—roots come out more cleanly and with less effort. Use your fingers to find the base before pulling.

Weed Weekly

Make weeding a regular habit. By doing a little each week, you'll prevent weeds from getting out of control. Learn to recognize them early—young weeds are easier to remove.

Pro Tip: “When in doubt, don't pull out!” If you're unsure whether it's a weed or a plant, give it time or use the iNaturalist app to identify it before pulling.

Use the Right Tools

A few well-chosen tools can make a big difference:

Hori Hori knife – A versatile and effective weeding tool, available online or at most garden centers. While a bit pricey, it's worth the investment.

Budget alternative – A small serrated knife from a discount or dollar store works surprisingly well and is easy to carry.

Japanese hand hoe – A favorite hand tool for weeding.

Support Your Body

Protect your knees and back while you work:

Use kneeling pads or a garden bench.

Adjustable benches that double as kneelers or rolling seats can make the job easier and more comfortable, with added storage for tools.

An inexpensive tall plastic container (found at home stores) turned upside down makes a great portable seat.

Make It Fun

Turn weeding into a relaxing break—listen to music or an engaging podcast while you work. Invite a friend or grandchild to help you.

In 1998, at a Master Naturalist event, I picked up a Texas Agricultural Extension Service bulletin warning about gingerleaf (*Lycianthes asarifolia*), an invasive plant overtaking Houston yards and proving resistant to hand-pulling, mowing, and herbicides. The Extension Agent in College Station asked

“Turn weeding into a relaxing break....”



Large hori hori knife MG Doris Heard



Japanese hand hoe MG Doris Heard



Torpedo grass Sherry Cruse (Urban Harvest)

to be notified if it appeared locally.

Well, I had it—right in my yard, mixed in with my jasmine ground cover. But unlike others, I managed to eradicate it after months of persistent effort. My secret? Wine. Each afternoon, I’d sit on the ground with rubber gloves, a small paintbrush, herbicide—and a glass of wine. Leaf by leaf, I painted the herbicide directly onto the plant. It became a daily ritual of patience and persistence. Eventually, the weed was gone, the jasmine recovered, and I had proof that determination (and a little wine) can conquer even the most stubborn invaders.

Weeding may never be your favorite garden task—but with the right tools, timing, and mindset, it doesn’t have to be a chore. It might even become a meditative part of your gardening rhythm—one that brings surprising satisfaction.



Seat for weeding MG Doris Heard

Deadheading and Pruning



Karyl Norcross
Mehlman
GCMG 2022

Question: Why are neighbor's roses still blooming and mine don't have many flowers?

Answer: Because they practice deadheading.

Question: Do only roses need deadheading?

Answer: No, many annuals and perennials benefit from deadheading.

Question: What is deadheading, and how and why is it done?

Answer: Good question.

Deadheading, named for removing the spent bloom "heads" of plants that will become seeds, is done by pinching or cutting faded blooms. The blossom alone can be pinched off; if the stem is to be cut, the cut should be made just above a shoot with multiple leaves. Deadheading stops the plant's natural cycle of making seeds and forces it to make more blossoms. This is the primary reason for deadheading. It is worthwhile for most annuals, some perennials, but not most shrubs except for roses and camellias. Other reasons include improving plant appearance and preventing self-seeding to avoid the spread of seeds to other parts of the area. In contrast to pruning, deadheading can be done at any time during the blooming season unless you want to collect seeds for future use.

Plants that don't need to be deadheaded include flowers that produce spires and those considered self-cleaning,

that is, blooms fall naturally and are followed by new or existing blossoms. Examples of plants that produce spires include Russian sage (*Perivskia*), wishbone flower (*Torrenia fournieri*), cardinal flower (*Lobelia*), foxglove (*Digitalis*), and hollyhock (*Alcea*). Self-cleaning flowers are those that grow in clumps of blossoms such as tickseed flower (*Coreopsis*), begonia, hydrangeas, forget-me-not flowers (*Myosotis sylvatica*), hollyhock, and impatiens. Once blooming roses also do not need to be deadheaded.

In pruning, there are two basic hand pruners: bypass pruners and anvil pruners. Bypass pruners are much like scissors with sharp blades on both sides while anvil pruners have one sharp blade that closes on a straight, fixed, non-cutting surface.

When to Prune:

The timing and nature of pruning depends on the plant itself, the geographic location, and times of first and last frost. The "one-third rule" provides a basic guide: more than one-third of the total crown should not be removed in any one year. Remove dead branches, diseased branches, crossing branches, suckers, and weak stems at any time. Prune in the late spring or summer after first growth has begun. Pruning in the summer and fall is not recommended to prevent new growth that might not survive a frost. For the same reason, minimize pruning in the winter before last chance of frost is past. If plants bloom before June, they bloom on old-season growth, and you should prune them directly after blooming. If they bloom later in summer, they bloom on new growth, and you can prune during their dormant season or before growth begins in the spring.

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Purposes of deadheading and pruning differ in several ways.

DEADHEADING

Make more blossoms

Improve appearance

Prevent self-seeding

Usually done on annuals

PRUNING

Improve appearance

Remove unwanted or unsightly branches

Remove dead or dying branches

Usually done on shrubs or trees (perennials)

TIME

Summer after first bloom

Winter after first frost or spring after last frost

“...timing depends on plant itself”

Quick Reference Guide for Pruning

Jan/Feb	When dormant or as noted	April/May/June	After spring flowering
Shade Trees Ash Elm Maple Oak Pecan Pistache Sycamore	(Do not prune from Feb 1 to June 30)	Winter/Spring Flowering Trees (light trimming if needed) Anacacho Orchid Tree Roughleaf Dogwood Eastern Dogwood Fringe Tree Deciduous Magnolias (Saucer & Star) Mexican Buckeye Redbud Texas Mountain Laurel	
Summer Flowering Trees Crape Myrtle Desert Willow			

Summer Flowering Shrubs
Abelia Althea Butterfly Bush Hydrangea Mock-orange Kidneywood Mexican Oregano Pavonia Possumhaw Holly Roses (repeat bloomers) Texas Sage

Winter/Spring Flowering Shrubs
Azalea Camellia Flowering Quince Forsythia Mock Orange Viburnum Wisteria Roses (once bloomers)

Broadleaf and Needleleaf Evergreens
(Shear or trim anytime to maintain form and size)
Arborvitae Boxwood Cherry Laurel Euonymus Evergreen Sumac Holly Juniper Ligustrum Photinia Pittosporum Pyracantha Southern Wax Myrtle Yaupon Yew



Deadhead roses in summer and prune roses before they break winter dormancy to make sure they stay healthy and productive.

Laura McKenzie/Texas A&M AgriLife



Pruned crape myrtle MG Herman Auer GCMG Database

Good Habits: Clean Your Garden Tools to Save Time, Money, Plants



Tim Jahnke
GCMG 2011



Pam Jahnke
GCMG 2015

Most gardeners have at least some tools that are dirty, corroded, contaminated, or inefficient. No judgment. Cleaning your tools will save you time, money, and even your plants. It will prevent rust, make tools easier to use, and prevent the spread of harmful diseases. Corrosion damage, or rust, results when steel tools react

with oxygen in a damp environment. The pitted surface makes it harder to push a shovel or drag a hoe. That means more work for you. With enough rusting, you may even have to replace the tool. Dirty tools have been shown to transmit disease between plants by transferring bacteria, viruses, and other microbes. Disinfection can prevent transfer.

Digging tools like shovels, hoes, and weeders are used on and in soil. After working in the garden, remove soil and moisture. Scrape off soil with a wire brush and wash with soap and water if needed. Dry tool and store in a dry place. Apply a light coat of oil to the surface as a barrier coating. A general lubricating oil (like 3-in-1) or non-petroleum-based oils, like mineral and vegetable, are good choices.

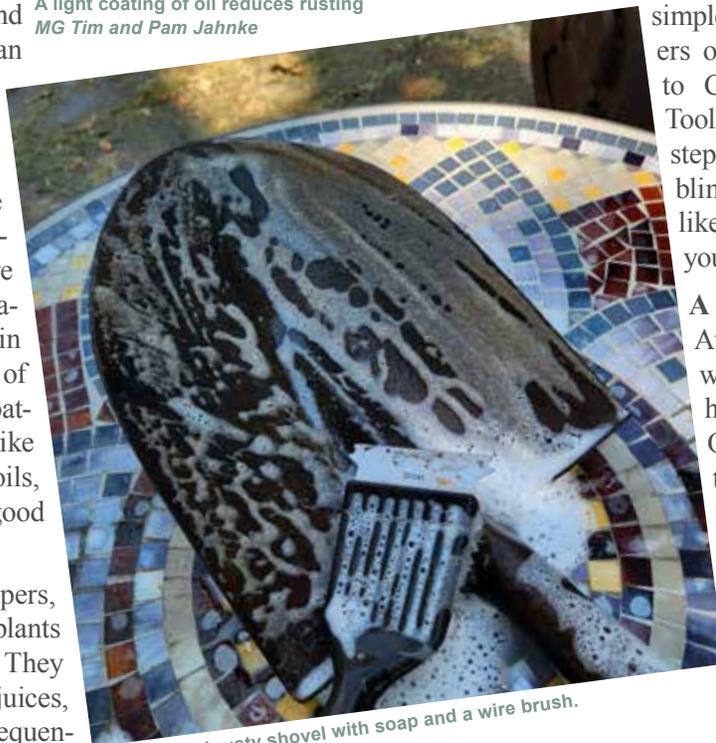
Cutting tools like pruners, loppers, saws, and knives are used on plants while pruning, harvesting, etc. They get coated with sap and plant juices, so disinfection is crucial. Frequency of disinfection depends on the job,

but should be done after each plant that you think is diseased (powdery mildew? fire blight?)

Isopropyl alcohol or a bleach solution of one part bleach to nine parts water are both proven to be effective against plant pathogens. Many other household products have been used on garden tools but there have not been scientific studies to prove their effectiveness. Alcohol or bleach wipes and pads can also be used between plants. For periodic cleaning, remove all sap and plant material, disinfect, and lubricate. You can spray them with WD-40, (named for Water Displacing 40th formulation), which will displace water from moving parts, preventing corrosion. For deep cleaning and sharpening, there are some good online videos, and some with pruners disassembled for cleaning all the inner parts. A



A light coating of oil reduces rusting
MG Tim and Pam Jahnke



Cleaning old rusty shovel with soap and a wire brush.
MG Tim and Pam Jahnke

simple video is UC Master Gardeners of Santa Clara County, “How to Clean and Sharpen Pruning Tools,” on YouTube. You can find step-by-step videos on disassembling pruners using search words like “disassembling pruners” and your type or brand.

A note about wooden handles:

At least yearly, lightly sand wooden handles and apply a heavy coat of Boiled Linseed Oil (BOL). BOL cures faster than non-BOL. Let this soak in for at least 24 hours, then wipe away the excess.

Sprayers are great for applying fungicides, fertilizers, etc. Read and follow the instructions for the chemical or solution you are using. When done spraying, fill with

“Cleaning saves time, money, plants...”

clean water and drain three times. Be careful where you discharge the rinse water. On the third rinse, pump up the sprayer and push rinse water through the hose and nozzle. Drain and leave the sprayer open to dry. If you want to leave the remaining chemical or solution in the sprayer, be sure to label and date and discard per the instructions.

Cleaning/maintaining your tools doesn't have to be a difficult chore. A little care goes a long way to keep your tools working well and your plants healthy.



Use a bleach solution or alcohol to decontaminate MG *Tim and Pam Jahnke*



Tim Jahnke with the assistance of MG Trish McDaniel presents a demonstration of tool cleaning habits at an MG monthly meeting. *GCMG Database*

Master Gardeners Share Good Gardening Tips



Karen Lehr
GCMG 2008

My enthusiasm for gardening can be more than my aging body can endure. To preserve myself and my back for future time in my garden, I set a timer. Otherwise, I do “one more thing” until I finally stop in misery—temporary or longer lasting.

Here are what other Master Gardeners gave as Good Gardening Habits for all:

Julie Moncur (2006): Due to traveling, and mobility issues I migrated to plants that would be mostly on their own. Our yard is pretty much a pollinator habitat that is a survival of the fittest xeriscape. There is lantana, gaillardia, salvias, bee balm, Esperanza, crocosmia, corkscrew ginger, milkweed, Texas star hibiscus, four o’clocks, firespike, photinia and canna lilies. I can travel and not worry about the garden.

Herman Auer (1983): I walk in my garden many times each day. Things change and I want to see the change for better or for worse. If for worse, I will try to solve the problem very quickly. I take new photos, early and late in the day. It also keeps me active.

Phyllis Koenig (2013): I make it a habit to clean my tools when I’m finished for the day. It makes for a fresh start the next time I work in my garden, and I know my tools aren’t carrying any fungus or bacteria.

Bill Cummins (2012): Before I graft a bud on a fruit tree or a rose bush, I cut a small branch from one of the trees and then practice removing each bud. My objective is to remove the bud so that I maximize the green cambium layer, while eliminating any wood layer. A bud cut in this way has a high probability of success when grafted to a fruit tree or a rose bush. At one point I had a red rose bush with a white rose and a yellow rose grafted on it.

Nancy Greenfield (2017): To determine how much water to give my plants, I keep a good rain gauge to see exact amounts of what we receive. Often the reported number of inches is not what we really get.

Lisa Belcher (2014): Learned from Tim Jahnke as an intern: Always clean your garden tools at the end of the day, no matter how tired you may be. Your tools will last longer and work better.

Ann Lyon (1989): Always carry and wear gloves

Judy Anderson (2012): Make friends with good gardeners. They just might share their garden tips with you.

Fran Brockington (2018): When you move to a new home, learn about your new environment (soil, plants, etc.)

Briana Etie (2017): Start with good soil

Pam Jahnke (2015): Before you plant a new plant, know what size it will be when fully grown

Tanya Padgett (2024): Keep a journal

Carol Hairfield (2020): You must visit your garden every other day

Jane Lindsey (2012): When you plant a seed, you are planting hope for the future

Maria Abad (2020): Identify the weed or pest BEFORE you treat it

Joanne Hardgrove (2016): Never use dull tools! Keep them sharp

Loretta Osteen (2010): The best thing to put in your garden is your shadow



Walk through your garden regularly to see the changes *MG Carolyn Gephart*

Tips for Texas Superstar® Success



Briana Etie
GCMG 2017

For gardeners who have added Texas Superstar® plants to gardens because they are heat and drought tolerant, here are some year-round tips to make them shine like the superstars they are.

Practice the “Texas Chop”. This phrase came from a term used by British gardeners who trim back their perennials in May. They call it the “Chelsea Chop” as it coincides with the Chelsea Flower Show. Texans adapted it to be done in July so that by fall plants are looking their best again. The late summer trim prepares them for fall.

For summer-blooming Texas Superstar® plants, cutting them back by a third in late July or early August stimulates a fall bloom. This will not only help their shape but also improve those that look leggy, scraggly or fatigued from hot summer sun.

For the less dense plants, be selective and keep shape in mind. For the most attractive chop, cut just above a leaf node, or where the leaf is attached to the stem.

Take care when cutting back woody shrubs as they take longer to bounce back. Use proper sized pruners that are clean and sharp. Clean loppers, pruners and shears between cutting plants. This habit can help your plants heal quicker and prevent the spread of disease.

Many superstars benefit also from deadheading spent blooms throughout the season. For example, deadheading the Vinca ‘Cora’ series can help these annuals produce a continuous supply of flowers until frost.

Deadheading spent flowers and an occasional trimming can help ‘Laura Bush’ or ‘Tidal Wave’ petunias keep blooming well into fall.

Give Brazilian Red Hots (*Alternanthera dentata*) a light pruning in late summer to promote a new flush of color.

My favorite Texas Superstars are the salvias, ‘Henry Duelberg’ and ‘Mystic Blue Spires.’ Most salvias benefit with a

trimming to prepare for the next flush of blooms and to remove summer sun damage.

Gardeners are describing *Lantana camaras* ‘New Gold’ and other varieties like ‘Bandana,’ ‘Havana’ and ‘Lucky’ as weedy and escaping a cultivated bed, popping up in wild or unmanaged areas. Plant breeders now offer sterile and compact varieties. These non-seed producing varieties bloom more often and will not escape beds. However, different varieties have varying heights. If you want a uniform height for mass planting, pay close attention to their attributes. Each can even differ with color. Most require very little maintenance.

Marigolds or as Texas Superstar® refers ‘Marimums’ (*Tagetes erecta*) are planted in late August to early September to prevent spider mites. Some of these cultivars can be tall. For compact plants, choose ‘Antiqua Yellow’ or ‘Antiqua Orange,’ for 8-10 inches in height. The blooms last two to three times longer compared to chrysanthemums.

Texas Superstar® program guidance encourages planting zinnias in the fall. For a compact, mounding disease resistant variety plant try hybrids ‘Profusion’ and ‘Zahara’ series. The more traditional *Zinnia elegans* also benefit greatly from a fall planting to prevent diseases and powdery mildew that destroy early spring plantings.

Finally, give Texas Superstar® plants a little extra love by adding compost this fall. When rainy summers wash away nutrients in the soil, rebuild those nutrients to give your Texas Superstar® plants a recharge for a fabulous fall show.



Brazilian Red Hots *Texassuperstar.com*



Vinca ‘Cora Series’ *Texassuperstar.com*

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Discovery Garden Research: Looking Back and Facing Forward



Norma Torok
GCMG 2022

The Discovery Garden research beds have offered some exciting gardening experiences this year. A new vegetable trial was planted, new plant conditions were experienced, and a trial reinforced basic planting practices.

A new bush bean trial was conducted to find the best yielding varieties for the area. The trial taught the importance of providing good plant culture. One element of this includes using the proper spacing for good air circulation which is key for a plant's growth. The bean plants were large and grew too close together, causing the plants to suffer from lack of air circulation. The yield was small and some of the beans did not form well. While there were good, beautiful beans grown, there were as many poorly formed beans in the harvest. Bush beans will go on cue for replanting in a future season.

Perhaps some of our most exciting discoveries were found in the garlic trial. A yield of healthy garlic plants sprouted.

In addition, the garlic yielded beautiful scapes which are a secondary product that is produced only by the hard neck varieties. Scapes are long tubes with a small bulbil at the top that are prepared as herbs, seasoning, pesto and miscellaneous other uses. Three out of six hard neck varieties yielded scapes.

We learned about two conditions that can affect garlic growth. The weather was not a friend to the trial. In January, the leaves appeared mottled with two-toned green spots. Master Gardener John Mitchiner believes the sleet that happened shortly prior to observing the leaves injured the garlic plants causing the mottled leaf effect. Following that, we experienced a freeze and then snow, a rarity in our area. This was followed by warm weather. What a confusing time for plants!



Winter squash in first trial MG Michael Reed

Two weeks after this sporadic weather the garlic experienced a condition called witches' broom. Witches' broom is a cluster of several leaves on one strap leaf rather than an individual strap leaf. Witches' broom can happen due to erratic weather in a short amount of time according to Keene Garlic, the company who sourced our garlic cloves.

At the conclusion of our garlic trial, the harvest yielded many bulbs that split into multiple bulbils rather than the normal single large bulb. The shelf life of the garlic harvested was reduced; the small bulbils dried quickly. Very few garlic yielded a single bulb.

As we go forward into the new year, what might we expect? A new garlic trial will be planted in our continued quest to find the best garlic varieties that can endure the Gulf Coast weather, another year, another opportunity. Likely, another trial of winter squash will be tried for a variety that will prove resistant to vine borers. The 2025 Galveston County Master Gardener interns will be working on a broccoli trial for their internship. All these trials will certainly increase our knowledge of gardening.

Not all gardening research ends in success, but the best outcome is sharing the horticultural experiences we encounter. The research team looks forward to more shared experiences in the next year.

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Garlic varieties to have second trial
Courtesy of Keene Garlic



Bush beans ready to eat
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Welcome 2025 Interns

Thirteen new interns are currently engaged in the Texas Master Gardener training program. They have attended most of their weekly classwork, undertaken a broccoli trial, worked at the Fall Festival and learned what is involved to become a Galveston County Master Gardener. They'll soon start their volunteer service hours, so when you see them out and about helping out make sure to stop and say Howdy!



MG Ira Gervais and the interns *MG Pam Hunter*



In class *MG Pam Hunter*



Discovery Garden tour *MG Pam Hunter*



Learning about intern broccoli trial *MG Pam Hunter*



Interns planting broccoli for their trial *MG Bob Siml*



Ordering aprons and vests with *MG Barbara Lyons* *MG Karolyn Gephart*

Protecting Landscapes from Frosts and Freezes



Donna Woodbury
GCMG 2024

Frost and freezes can take a heavy toll on gardens, but with a little understanding and preparation, we can increase plant survival. There are two main types of cold events to know: radiative frosts and advective freezes.

Radiative frost occurs on clear calm nights. Cold air sinks while warm air rises, and the air right at ground level becomes especially chilly. Leaves and stems that have full sky exposure can end up colder than the air around them and sometimes enough to cause damage even if the thermometer never fell below 32 degrees.

Advective freezes happen when an air mass of cold air displaces warmer air with wind speed more than four miles per hour which can cause ice crystals to pierce cell walls within vegetative tissue. Temperatures below 32 degrees kill annuals and triggers dormancy for perennials, trees and shrubs. Air inside plant tissues fall below freezing and tissue wilts, turns black, then collapses.

Choose plants wisely. Select cold-hardy varieties suited for Gulf Coast conditions. Vegetables, such as peas, lettuce, onions, cauliflower, broccoli, radish, and cabbage, can often withstand temperatures as low as 26 degrees. The USDA Cold Hardiness Zones map is a useful guide, and local nurseries or county extension agents can advise on plant choices.

Fruit trees need extra care. Each type varies in cold tolerance and chill-hour needs. Prune and fertilize in spring since new growth is vulnerable. Strings of outdoor lights or a single 100 watt light bulb inside the branches can provide warmth. Smaller trees may be protected by wrapping insulative materials from the ground up to the main branches can be wrapped with insulation or covered to trap heat. Sheets and burlap are good sources, but not plastic as it can transfer heat to leaves and damage them. Remove the coverings after temperatures rise.

Advective freezes are harder to manage than radiative frosts. Winds quickly cool plant tissues and displaces any heat provided. Cover and blankets won't be enough in severe freezes. For better results, also provide a heat source with a seal, covers, windbreaks, banks, and mulches.

Water gives off heat as it freezes, providing more warmth for trees nearby. Because water releases heat quickly when it freezes, it must be applied continuously to maintain the heating process. Know the amount of water the trees need for adequate warming. If you apply too little water or stop sprin-

gling at any time during the night, the plants may sustain more damage than those not watered at all. Wind blowing over the water and ice will cause evaporative cooling that could reduce the tissue temperature below what would have been with no water on them.

Wet soil will capture radiant energy during the day and release it upward and around the plants during the night. Deep watering a day or two before a freeze can raise ground-level temperatures by a couple degrees. Always water at the base, not on the leaves.

Covers are simple and effective. Frost cloths, blankets, sheets, towels, burlap, newspaper, and row covers all work. Lightweight fabrics protect to about 28-degree temperatures and let in more sunlight. Heavier covers protect to 24-26 degrees but block more sunlight. Remove covers once temperatures climb above freezing.

Plastic can be used if handled correctly. Place it over fabric or frame so it doesn't touch foliage. Don't let it lay on the leaves. Opaque or clear sheeting works well for waterproof shelters. Black plastic sheeting can cover raised beds if held above seedlings with stakes. Remove plastic once it warms up to prevent overheating.

Household items can double as plant protectors: overturned pots, buckets, Styrofoam coolers, milk jugs (open by day, closed at night), cardboard boxes, garbage cans, cloches, bubble wrap, or simple frames with cloth. Be creative!

Other heat sources for protection include mechanics lights, milk jugs filled with water for latent heat, cold frames, wind machines, flood lights, and heat lamps. For potted plants, simply move them indoors when possible—into a greenhouse, garage, shed, or barn. Sometimes placing containers on a porch or surrounding structures that reflect radiative energy, such as roof overhang, larger plants, south facing structures, windbreaks, or banked soil can be sufficient. Space heaters, containers of water and plant covers may need to be added to these sources to obtain the proper temperature to salvage the plant.

When temperatures rise above freezing, remove the coverings so plants can get air and sunlight. To inspect for damage, scratch the bark on woody plants to see what parts are alive (green) and dead (brown). Some plants look damaged but are not. Wait to prune or fertilize but do remove dead tissues. Many plants can be trimmed back to the ground and will reestablish themselves. Give sufficient time to determine the damage before giving up on plants and trees. Allow two

“Frost, freezes take heavy toil on gardens...”

months to recover before removing frost-killed branches to avoid accidentally pruning out live material.

The Galveston County Extension Office of Texas A&M is available to the public to answer gardening questions. Boone Holaday is the County Extension Agent-Horticulture. The Master Gardeners’ Gardening Help Desk at 281-309-5061 is also available. It is a challenge to protect our plants from frost and freezes but it feels amazing to master the art. Give it a try. We are always here to assist you. Happy gardening!

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Red tips with ice GCMG Database

Gardens Can be Canvases for Repurposing

Ordinary objects can turn whimsical and extraordinary when they are repurposed into a garden. Creativity is at its best when personality and imagination get involved. Each piece is given a second life (reducing waste) and a gardener usually has a special story that surrounds the item. Thrift markets and

garage sales, items forgotten in a garage or just objects no longer needed in one role all offer opportunities for repurposing fun. This trend can turn a yard into a showplace. What do you have that can become garden art?



A meat grinder no more
Tonya Richardson
(Heritage Gardeners of Friendswood president)



A flower "bed" MG Karolyn Gephart



Galvanized tub works well
MG Karolyn Gephart



Antique mattress springs
Tonya Richardson
(Heritage Gardeners of Friendswood president)



Bird baths become succulent homes
MG Karolyn Gephart



Bowling balls MG Karolyn Gephart



Air plants in an old basket
MG Karolyn Gephart

Plant of the Month: Monkey Tail Cactus



Pam Hunter
MG 2018

One of the distinctive features of the monkey tail cactus (*Cleistocactus colademononis*) is its elongated stems, which can grow several feet long, often reaching 5 to 8 feet. The strands are cylindrical and relatively thick, ranging from 2 to 3 inches in diameter. They are covered in dense, white, silky spines. Each spine, which resembles fine fur, gives the unique cactus its common name, as they resemble the long shaggy tail of a monkey. Common to mountainous regions of Bolivia and Argentina, the cactus thrives on rock cliff sides, where its stems can dangle freely over ledges.

For the home gardener, the growth habit of this cactus is particularly suited to hanging baskets or tall containers, where its trailing stems can cascade downward to create a striking visual effect. Over time, the plant produces multiple stems, forming a lush, shaggy display that becomes more impressive with age.

Flowering is one of the highlights of this cactus. In late spring through early summer, the monkey tail produces tubular blossoms that are bright red to orange red, measuring up to 3 inches long. These flowers stand out vividly against the pale, furry stems, creating a striking contrast. Hummingbirds are frequent visitors, drawn to vivid tubular shapes. Other pollinators include butterflies, bees, and lady beetles. After pollination the flowers give way to small fruits, each containing numerous seeds, allowing the plant to reproduce naturally.

The monkey tail prefers warm temperatures between 65 and 80 degrees. It can tolerate cooler conditions to 50 degrees but must be protected from frost, as freezing temperatures can cause irreversible damage. It can be grown outdoors in USDA zones 9 through 11 or as a container plant that can be moved inside during colder months or just during freeze events.

This cactus has a moderate to fast growth rate when conditions are favorable. Overtime, it forms the dense cluster of trailing stems that can live for decades with proper care. Regular pruning is not necessary, and plants can be propagated by stem cuttings.

It thrives in bright, indirect light indoors or direct morning sun, but protection from harsh afternoon sun is recommended for outdoor plants to prevent scorching. Like most cacti, it requires well-draining soil, ideally cactus or succulent mix with perlite or sand. It prefers infrequent watering and since the stems store water, the plant can experience long periods without water.

Fertilize monthly during the active growing spring and summer months with diluted cactus fertilizer. Reduce water drastically in winter. Provide excellent window or outdoor airflow to prevent fungal issues. The plant is non-toxic to humans but must be handled gently as the spines are soft but can possibly irritate sensitive skin.

The monkey tail cactus is admired for its ability to produce flowers in abundance. Its soft spines make it safer and more approachable than most cacti. Its trailing habit makes a natural centerpiece in collections. It combines exotic charm with relative ease of care, making it a favorite among both casual plant lovers and serious collectors.

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Monkey Tail Friendswood gardener Tonya Richardson



Monkey Tail Friendswood gardener Tonya Richardson

Sulphur Butterflies in the Pollinator Habitat



Hedy Wolpa
MG 2018

The Pollinator Habitat (the PH) in the Discovery Garden enjoyed the presence of an abundance of sulphur butterflies this year. There are many species of sulphurs, all of the order Lepidoptera, which includes butterflies and moths, and the family Pieridae. This is an expansive family, since it includes both the familiar yellow-colored sulphur butterflies as well as some white butterflies that are also members of the Pieridae family.

Last year, the PH team introduced partridge pea (*Chamaecrista fasciculata*) to the expanded area of the habitat. A favorite plant for sulphurs seeking nectar, partridge pea is a late-blooming (June through October), annual Texas native, with yellow flowers about a half inch in size. It requires only medium to low water, and loves full sun, making it a great addition to the garden. As a nectar source, it attracts butterflies, pollinating insects, and birds. We like the 2 to 4-foot height and the 1 to 2-foot spread of the partridge pea in the garden because it provides a full yellow target for pollinating insects. It spreads enthusiastically by seed, and returns after winter die-back.

Sulphurs are also attracted to senna, or cassia. There are several varieties that are native to Texas, including yellow senna (*Senna corymbosa*) and yellow cassia (*Senna surattensis*). Like partridge pea, cassia is a member of the legume family,

and is a host to some sulphurs. Cassia is drought tolerant and features bright yellow-blooming clusters from spring through late fall. It grows quickly, and can reach 6 feet in height.

Some of the sulphur varieties we've enjoyed in the PH include Cloudless Sulphur, Little Sulphur, Sleepy Orange Sulphur, Orange-barred Sulphur, and Clouded Sulphur. They move quickly and lightly, but they rest frequently on host plants. We find it hard to photograph sulphurs since they rest with their wings folded. This makes it difficult to distinguish the markings that differentiate the males from females. Females typically have brown to black markings on the margins of their wings on the upper side, and depending on the species, some females have brown or black dots on their front wings. Size varies from a 1 inch wing span to up to a 3 inch wing span.



Clouded sulphur on zinnia MG Vicki Blythe



Cloudless sulphur larvae on partridge pea
Jerry A. Payne; Bugwood.org

“...first butterflies to emerge in spring.”

Sulphurs are some of the first butterflies to emerge in spring. Both nectar and larval nourishment is needed as these butterflies reproduce up to three times per year, with fall larvae overwintering to emerge as adults as spring approaches. Locating sulphur larvae in the PH can be challenging because they can change color depending on whether they are eating green leaves or yellow flowers. They can be green with yellow horizontal markings, or green with blue markings, or green with white stripes, depending on the species. They have tiny black hairs along their bodies called setae. Pupae are small and are attached to host plant with a silk pad.

Some sulphurs are migratory, moving southward from the northeast, which may explain why we continue to see so many

lovely yellow butterflies throughout fall and early winter in our area. Sulphur butterflies have added great diversity to the many pollinators visiting the Pollinator Habitat. The PH team continues to add native plants to provide food, shelter, and colorful beauty to the north end of the Discovery Garden. We hope you'll visit soon!

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Cloudless sulphur in Pollinator Habitat *MG Vicki Blythe*

Gardening Help Desk: Winter Preparation, Brown Patch Disease



Ralinda Fenton
GCMG 2023

Question: How can I prepare my garden for cold weather?

Preparing your garden for the winter months takes only a few simple protective steps. Begin by gathering supplies that can provide insulation for your plants. Paper products such as bags and newspapers work well, as do cloth items like towels, blankets, or quilts. Be sure you weigh down all paper and fabric items with bricks, stones, and other heavier materials to keep them from being blown away. Clothes pins, staples, and twine can also be used to secure the coverings. The paper or fabric should cover the plant all the way to the ground to secure adequate protection. If using plastic coverings, you will need to also cover the plastic with fabric. You can also protect small plants by covering them with planter pots. Water plants well, since moisture helps protect them from freezing damage. Apply mulch in the fall, making sure the roots and crown have a good layer to help provide insulation. Mulching is, of course, helpful all year round.

Don't prune immediately after a freeze even if the plants look dead. Wait until late winter or early spring. Early pruning may stimulate new growth too soon.

A little planning now will help your garden bounce back beautifully in the spring. <https://agrilifetoday.tamu.edu/2024/10/16/five-steps-to-prepare-your-garden-for-winter/>

Question: How can I treat and prevent brown patch disease?

Though brown patch disease is a common fungal disease, it is typically only active in fall and early spring while night tem-

peratures are cool. If you think your lawn is suffering from this disease, first verify that it is indeed brown patch disease. There may be other causes of the brown spots in your lawn. They can also be caused by drought, take-all root rot, as well as chinch bugs or grubs. The method to prevent or treat each one of these problems is different. Let's address brown patch disease.

Brown patch thrives in lawns that have been overwatered or overfertilized. Preventing brown patch is the best solution. To prevent it, water your lawn only when it needs it and water to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. Watering early in the morning ensures the grass has ample time to dry before nightfall. Brown patch thrives in moisture and high nitrogen levels. It's important to be sure your lawn has good drainage and aeration. Be sure to remove infected patches of the disease to avoid it from spreading. Mow your lawn regularly at an appropriate height for the type of grass. (<https://agriflifeextension.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Turf-Cutting-height.pdf>) Fungicides can improve the appearance of grass although eliminating brown patch is very difficult. Prevention is the key.

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Brown patch MG Herman Auer

Discovery Garden Update



Tom Fountain
GCMG 2008

The Discovery Garden looks green and colorful despite our hot weather and lack of rain the past months. Our average high temperature was only one to two degrees above normal for the summer. Rainfall on the other hand was about average, yet it has dropped off to almost nothing over September. So, our area quickly slipped into a moderate drought in October. The National Weather Service extended forecast suggests that temperatures are likely to continue a little above normal with rainfall slightly below normal into the winter. Hurricane season isn't over until November 30; however, it looks like it is likely over for us.

Fall has always been a busy time in the garden. Activities include getting the garden beds ready for fall planting, preparing for the Fall Festival and sale, and doing all our garden update projects. This takes effort from all our Master Gardeners. I noticed Lynne Slaton, and Shiny Anand (1) were busy taking care of the plants in the hoop house and making sure they were in good shape for the Fall Plant Sale.

As many of you know, I love walking around the garden watching things change and taking pictures. Recently while walking through the Pollinator Garden, I noticed Hedy Wolpa (2) trimming some plants and standing near the giant yellow flowers. Well, I just couldn't pass this picture up. It is a great place to visit at any time of the year.

On one of the sunny, hot fall days Judy Anderson, and Steve Holliday were working in the Earth-Kind® Garden (3). Judy had noticed some insect damage on a plant, and they were discussing the best way to address that problem.

Over in the community bed area of the garden I found John Ely weeding the cucumber bed (4) and in the background Wendy Baldwin seems to be harvesting some peppers. Both John and Wendy work in this area to keep it looking nice and clean. Also, the produce grown in this area goes to local food banks.

On another hot sunny day in the Serenity Garden (5) I came across Jamie Hart talking with Michelle Turner and Yvonne Enos while taking a break from the heat. Jamie and Michelle along with a few others, always keep the Serenity Garden looking great.

The Discovery Garden is open for tours each Thursday between 9 and 11 am, so if anyone wants to see what we do or what we have done you are welcome to visit and ask questions.

With cooler weather on the way I'm hoping to see you in the garden soon until then continue to be safe and enjoy your day.



Meet Master Gardener: Michael Reed



Trish McDaniel
MG 2001

I met Michael Reed, MG class 2022, after he and his wife of 54 years, Deborah, were just home from France and Denmark. They traveled to Bordeaux to meet their niece who teaches English to corporate clientele. Impressed by her fluency in French, he said she was a joy to behold as they navigated throughout the region, including a trip to Paris. They then flew to Denmark to catch up with their grandson who studies electrical engineering and is a fluent Danish speaker.

Now retired, Michael and Deborah live in Clear Brook City. They raised three boys, and now enjoy eight grandchildren, with another granddaughter on the way this autumn.

One of nine siblings, Michael was raised in Rochester, New York, during the racially tumultuous era of the 1950-60's. With a strict upbringing, he and his siblings maintained a steady path to adulthood. Michael's father would often take the kids on road trips through the countryside to gather wild berries and visit vegetable stands. They also tended several garden plots at home. Michael loved to read as a boy and says that he gravitated to themes of good versus evil. He is still an avid reader of "hero" books in Fantasy and Sci-Fi.

After high school, Michael enlisted in the Air Force. While training at Bergstrom Air Force base in Austin, he made a friend who invited him to Beaumont for the holidays. He was introduced to his buddy's sister, Deborah, who became Michael's future bride. Michael served four years in Vietnam, Thailand, and South Carolina as support staff for the "Stinger" 119 Gunships, specializing in Infrared Detection Systems.

In Vietnam, Michael met a friend from his home town who encouraged him to play guitar. Sadly, his friend was killed in action. Michael is a member of the Houston chapter of Guitars for Vets, where he continues to play bimonthly.

Michael received a BS in Printing Management and Technology at Rochester Institute of Technology. He and Deborah moved to Odessa, Texas where he worked at McCreless Co. for seventeen years. He then launched a long career in the oil field as an independent contractor, providing oil companies with automatic field-test equipment; and later worked for Amico and Shell Oil until his retirement in 2018.

For eight years Michael has practiced the art of beer making. He has competed with varieties of stouts and pilsners, and is an award-winning member of several regional homebrew clubs. Ironically, being diabetic, Michael can merely taste his new batches, while rarely enjoying a full glass. Serendipitously, his introduction to the Master Gardener program happened after he met fellow homebrewer, John Jons, MG class of 2003, during a meeting of the Bay Area Mashtronauts.

While attending a recent MG Lunch and Learn program where he was one of the presenters, I asked his wife if she helped him in the garden. With a quick laugh, she said she was very happy to leave it all to him. Last November, Deborah suffered a stroke. Michael reports she is getting better through her diligent recovery efforts. She also enjoys aerobics and church activities. Michael is a member of the MG Speakers Bureau and has presented programs this year on garlic and strawberry varieties best suited to the Gulf Coast region.



Michael Reed in the Discovery Garden MG Trish McDaniel



Michael's gardens at home MG Michael Reed

November-December

Whispers of Color: A Winter Garden's Secret



Linda Steber
GCMG 1991

Even as winter tiptoes in, my Gulf Coast garden still holds a few colorful surprises. Among the stars of this late-season showcase:

Bleeding Heart Vine (*Clerodendrum thomsoniae*) – with its striking red and white blossoms; Turk's Cap (*Malvaviscus arboreus*) – with its bold red flowers; Senna (*Senna corymbosa*) – bright yellow clusters light up the landscape; and Wedelia (*Sphagneticola trilobata*) – a groundcover with golden daisy-like blooms still persist.

Fringe Flower (*Loropetalum chinense*) – with its delicate pink tassels, the Shrubby Bush-clover (*Lespedeza*) – with soft, arching stems. These resilient plants remind us that beauty doesn't always follow the calendar.

All photos by MG Linda Steber



GCMGs Launch Comprehensive Safety Program



Lynne Slaton
GCMG 2023



Becky Jaschek
GCMG 2023

The implementation of a safety program in the Discovery Garden occurred this year. Here is an overview. Much work has been done to help make progress in developing and implementing this program. Members of the Safety Team, as well as others, have worked hard and helped make the physical and cultural changes that facilitate this transition. It started in late 2024 when the Galveston County Master Garden Association purchased a new chemical shed. It was the perfect time to develop and implement a long-desired safety program for the garden. GCMGA President Kevin Lancon and County Horticulture Extension Agent Boone Holladay requested a team to develop a program. The scope and rigor of the initiative has grown to become a robust program to enhance safety, health, and preparedness across all garden activities operations.

Building the Safety Team

A twelve-member team was formed consisting of gardeners who had broad-based backgrounds in fields including health-care, pharmaceutical, quality control, and the chemical industry. In addition, experienced Master Gardeners provide an understanding of the needs in the garden. The safety team members include co-chairs Lynne Slaton and Becky Jaschek, Ann Ross, John Mitchner, Linda Crowston, Donna Merritt, Briana Etie, Vickie Hall, Vicki Blythe, Michael Reed, Mark Dickason, Rachel Montemayor, and Kay Sandor.

They quickly identified a plan to address two of the prime focuses of the team: (1) to move and organize the chemicals into the new shed and (2) to assess the first aid kits and equipment to ensure they were properly stocked and functional.

The Chemical Shed Changes

The team prepared the new shed with shelving, signage, containment trays, and buckets with Gama lids (lids that screw on to create tight seal) for storing larger quantities of chemicals. Team members and others transferred the chemicals and ensured they were containerized, labeled and organized in the new shed. They verified all sprayers were functional and labeled, disposing of those that did not work. The team ensured extra sprayers were available to comply with the dedicated use requirements for sprayer use.

The shed was upgraded with vents, electricity, glove and apron storage containers, hand sanitizer dispenser, and a whiteboard for recording inventory needs. A safety eye wash was installed near the Discovery House.

Chemical Safety and Guidelines

The team identified all chemicals in use in the garden, whether stored in the shed, barn, or greenhouse. They developed the list of chemicals and their uses and compiled the safety information for each. Once the list and safety information were reviewed and approved, the team placed the information in the shed for gardener access. Since chemicals not included on the list may not be used in the garden, the team needed a process for having new chemicals approved for use. The safety



The shed displays new organization MG Lynne Slaton

“...to enhance safety, health, and preparedness”

team developed guidance on which products would be used in the garden. Additionally, MG Hedy Wolpa created a reference booklet on common pests and recommended treatments, available in the chemical shed. In July 2025, the organization also implemented a system to track the type and location of all chemical applications by requiring them to be entered on the log sheet located in the chemical shed.

Training and Education

The team is preparing educational resources on safe use of garden equipment such as sprayers, weed whackers, and leaf blowers, with training planned for this fall. Two “lunch and learn” sessions have already been held—one focused on the new chemical shed, the other on the team’s broader efforts.

Health and First Aid Improvements

First aid readiness is another key priority. The team members updated all first aid kits with fresh supplies and added new kits to key locations, including the chemical shed. They inspected the trauma kits and AED, replacing needed supplies. They implemented a weekly inspection process to ensure the first aid and safety equipment is functional and available if needed. The team created and installed sting kits in all three first aid stations. They are included in the weekly inspections.

The Red Hat Program

The Red Hat Program is now functioning to ensure there is first aid support during large public events and during workdays for plant sales. Team members, identifiable by their red hats with a white cross, are assigned as first aid contacts to quickly respond if needed to provide basic first aid or call an ambulance if the need warrants more than first aid.

Heat Safety Initiative

In response to high summer temperatures, the team distributed an information sheet on heat risk and prevention. The team developed and now maintains a heat-reduction kit containing cooling rags, water bottles, and a bucket to use if someone becomes overheated. Mark Dickason and Lynne Slaton conducted a “lunch and learn” on recognizing heat exhaustion and using the kit effectively.

Looking Ahead

Future plans include:

Expanding training on safe garden equipment use and AED operation.

Finalizing the comprehensive chemical inventory of approved chemicals and the process that has been developed to approve new chemicals.

Key members with Kevin Lancon are working on the system to determine which chemicals will be purchased by the organization and how the purchasing process will progress.

Launching a “See Something, Say Something” safety awareness program.

Documenting first aid responses and product approvals to help establish future safety priorities.

Much progress has been made, but we have a long way to go. Each member has been instrumental in moving the projects forward to progress our program. However, it has not been done without the help of the entire GCMG organization. Thank you all.



Cooling towels were available during plant sales *MG Lynne Slaton*



Emergency eye wash stations are in the garden *MG Lynne Slaton*



Red Hats show the team members ready to render aid *MG Herman Auer*

Nashville - A City with More than Country Music



Barbara Lyons
GCMG 2014

In January 2025 my family and I traveled to Nashville for our holiday together. We chose Nashville as a location since my daughters had never visited it. As my family knows and accepts, it is my desire to visit gardens wherever we go. On this trip we explored Cheekwood Estate and Gardens (1200 Forrest Park Dr. Nashville, TN 37205, Cheekwood.org) a man-

sion and gardens where the scion of the Maxwell House coffee business and his family once lived. We visited the gardens in daylight hours and at night on New Year's Day to experience the 'Holiday Lights' display, in its 10th year of operation. We used our RAP benefits for the daytime garden trip but had to pay full price for the lights and mansion tickets. Reciprocal Admissions Program is through the American Horticultural Society (AHS) which permits members of participating gardens to receive free or discounted ticket admission to participating gardens within the network. On a subsequent day I also managed to get my family to agree to stop by the Garden Conservatory at the Gaylord Opryland Hotel and Convention Center (2800 Opryland Dr, Nashville, TN 37214, marriott.com) under the guise of observing their Christmas displays but really to view their fabulous indoor gardens. While this hotel garden is not on the RAP program, it is free to view.

Cheekwood was originally developed by Leslie Cheek and his wife, Mabel Wood Cheek as their home. The estate name comes from the combination of their two last names. Prominent in the grocery distribution business of the time, he was best known for investing in Maxwell House coffee. The property is 55-acres including the mansion, cultivated gardens, an arboretum, and much indoor and outdoor art. The property was donated in 1957 with the provision that part of the space

would be used as an art gallery. In 1960 the gardens and mansion were opened to the public. Since our trip was during the winter the garden areas were not at their showy best however the layout of the property with various water features and sculptures showed the style of the property so that the plants in their glory could be imagined. Various events are held throughout the seasons of the year making it an interesting place to visit year-round.

The Christmas light display was well worth the extra admission to brave the cold of a Tennessee January night following a trail of visitors making their way through the property to view colorful lights and various lighted ground displays. The mansion was about halfway through the tour and was a welcome time to warm up from the cold. The American Country Place Era style mansion was constructed from 1929-1932. Originally featuring numerous bedrooms and bathrooms, the second story of the home was renovated into an expansive art gallery. On our visit there was a timely photography display on loan from the Smithsonian of Christmas at the White House. The display showcased how the various presidents and first ladies took joy in decorating for the holiday and sharing it with the people. Besides this rotating display area, there are also items from the Cheek's personal extensive art collection. The first floor includes restored spaces to help envision how the wealthy lived including the dining room, library, and drawing rooms, among others. On our trip the rooms were decorated for Christmas and demonstrated the opulence of the time.

Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center opened in 1977 as Opryland Hotel, next to the Opryland USA theme park. Since the theme park closed in 1997, the hotel has grown to over 2800 rooms and an expansive convention center. The



Cheekwood Mansion dining room showing excesses of era MG Barbara Lyons



Holiday Lights MG Barbara Lyons

“...essential garden destinations”

original hotel is now just one wing of the facilities today. The inside of the hotel has transparent roofs which make each atrium appear to be giant greenhouses. Through the use of a sophisticated air-handling system, the area is kept at a consistent 68-72 degrees, 55 percent humidity with just a faint odor of chlorine. Gardens comprise 9 acres of property and feature over 10,000 tropical plants of 215 species. There are storefronts for retail and restaurants making the place appear to be a village of the future inside of its own glass bubble. The plants are varied from sprays of greenery and colorful flowers planted in beds, to gorgeous planters and trees which are many stories tall. Some trees were planted during the construction of the additional wings to assure trees fit into the space without damage. The garden area has numerous water features including a fountain which synchronizes its water flow in interesting ways. There are also several other fountains and waterfalls of various sizes including one which has a bench underneath so it can be viewed from behind the waterfall. A waterway winds through the property and one can ride a boat to see the sights. As it was still decorated for Christmas, the flowering planters were holiday-themed with evergreen sprigs and many red and white flowers. The decor combines elements of music throughout with stained glass, sculpture and the sounds of water moving. Walkways go through the garden areas with one having an elevated path to be among the trees and take in the view of the restaurants and gardens on the ground floor. Insider hint- to avoid the high parking fee at the hotel's onsite parking, use the free spaces at the adjacent Opry Mills Mall which is a very short walk to the rear of the hotel and grounds.

We found Cheekwood and Gaylord Opryland essential garden destinations in Nashville and a nice change from our otherwise music-focused vacation in the area.

References:

Cheekwood.org

Marriott.com

Tripadvisor.com



Palm tree varieties several stories high MG Barbara Lyons



Water feature MG Barbara Lyons



Inside giant greenhouse at Gaylord Opryland Hotel MG Barbara Lyons

The Descanso Gardens: the Majesty of the Camellia Forest



John Jons
GCMG 2003

Nestled in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains in La Cañada Flintridge, California, Descanso Gardens spans 150 acres of beautifully cultivated land. Originally a working ranch, the property was purchased in 1937 by E. Manchester Boddy, publisher and owner of the Los Angeles Daily News. In 1942, Boddy expanded the estate by acquiring an additional 440 adjoining acres, securing the mountain streams that continue to supply water to the gardens. He sold the property to Los Angeles County in 1953, initiating its conversion from a private estate to a public garden. Four years later, local volunteers formed the Descanso Gardens Guild, which transformed the land into gardens. The organization continues to manage the gardens today.

Descanso Gardens is comprised of a patchwork of nine distinct gardens, showcasing large and diverse plant collections of native plants, species plants and plants that were hybridized to thrive in the Southern California climate. These specifically designed spaces include the following:

Descanso Gardens is comprised of a patchwork of nine distinct gardens, showcasing large and diverse plant collections of native plants, species plants and plants that were hybridized to thrive in the Southern California climate. These specifically designed spaces include the following:

The Rose Garden - International Rosarium: Spanning five acres, this garden features over 1,600 of both heritage and modern roses, representing the work of rose plant hybridizers from the U.S. and many other countries. Originally created with the owner's passion for plant hybridization, the garden was further developed in 1945 when Boddy hired Dr. Walter Lammerts, a UCLA botanist and plant hybridizer, to help create new rose varieties.

The Lilac Garden: Encompassing over three acres and home to over 850 plants, this garden is the nation's leading center for lilac research. Because lilacs are typically found in cooler climates, Dr. Lammerts specifically hybridized heat-tolerant lilacs in the 1950s and 60s to flourish in Southern California:

The Japanese Garden: This one-acre garden features scenic walkways, a rippling stream, a koi pond, a tea garden and a raked gravel garden, all beneath meticulously pruned pines. Plantings include camellias, azaleas, black pines, mondo grass, flowering cherry trees and Japanese maples.

The California Garden: Covering eight acres, this garden features native California plants that provide outstanding seasonal beauty in the spring and fall. The area was designed in 1959 by Theodore Payne, a nurseryman and native plant advocate.

The Oak Forest: This garden showcases over 20 native coast live oaks—some to be 300 to 500 years old—and highlights many understory plants that are typical of Southern California's coastal landscape.

The Oak Woodland: This garden opened in 2024, covering approximately seven acres. It contains grasses, perennials, shrubs and oaks. Designed to evoke the early native landscape of the Los Angeles area, it is a mix of woodlands, meadows and chaparral plants. Originally, this garden was planted with eucalyptus and used as an area for green waste disposal.

The Ancient Forest: This special area contains some of the earliest types of flora that once existed in the region.

The Center Circle: A model of drought-tolerant design, this garden highlights water-wise plants from around the world that thrive in low-rainfall climates.

Camellia Forest: Often considered the crown jewel of the gardens and appreciated by camellia aficionados, this spacious woodland area celebrates the garden's historic camellia collection.

Each of the gardens has its own unique history, but the story behind the Camellia Forest is of particular interest. In the late



Oak Forest MG John Jons



Closeup of camellias MG John Jons

“...largest collection of camellias in North America”

1930s, Boddy began a business growing and shipping camellia plants across the United States. In 1942, he acquired the plant stock of three Japanese American-owned nurseries whose owners were forced to sell their businesses before being incarcerated along with thousands of others of Japanese ancestry by the U.S. government during World War II. It is estimated that Boddy purchased approximately 60,000 plants with the intention of expanding into the cut-flower market. Among them were rare and recently imported camellia varieties from Japan, which later became the foundation of today's Camellia Forest Garden collection.

Descanso Gardens boasts the largest collection of camellias in North America. It has been designated an “International Camellia Garden on Excellence” by the International Camellia Society. Camellia Forest spans 16 acres with approximately 10,000 individual plants and over 600 different species, varieties and cultivar plants.

Walking through the Camellia Forest is like stepping into a realm of vibrant color and delicate beauty. Hundreds of camellia varieties, with blooms ranging from pure white to deep crimson, create a stunning display beneath the shelter of tall, mature trees. Their dappled shade offers the ideal environment for these shade-loving plants.

The Camellia Forest also serves as a living history lesson that showcases the evolution of camellia breeding and cultivation. Here, visitors can admire both classic varieties and new hybrids all thriving in a natural woodland setting. The best time to see Camellia Forest in full bloom is between January through February.

Unique to Descanso Gardens are many plant cultivars now available in the nursery trade marked as “Bred at Descanso.” The Descanso Gardens Guild maintains detailed records on approximately 13,000 plants, including around 150 endangered and rare plants.

For more pictures in Descanso Gardens, please see my YouTube video “Visiting the Descanso Gardens in February.” <https://youtube/4iD3fd72tko>.

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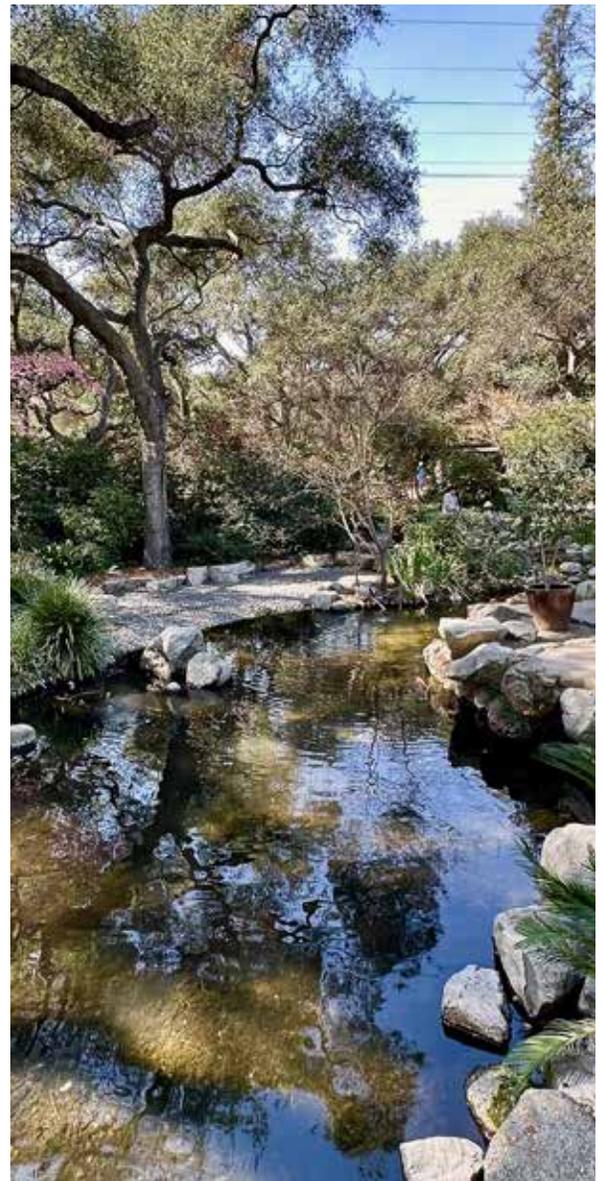
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Camellia hedge MG John Jons



Japanese Garden MG John Jons

Seasonal Bites: 2 MG Favorites for Dinner and Dessert



Briana Etie
GCMG 2017

Here are two great recipes from a wonderful cook, Linda Barnett, our Discovery House Kitchen team lead. She prepares amazing comfort food and makes beautiful and delicious desserts for our volunteers. She also organizes and caters events for our organization. In her spare time, she also cooks with an award-winning competition team. GCM-

GA is very fortunate to have Linda as a Galveston County Master Gardener, as she drives 50 miles very early in the morning to be at the Discovery Garden on Thursdays.



Blueberry Bread Pudding

Ingredients

- 3 c. brown sugar
- 2 tsp. cinnamon
- ½ tsp. nutmeg
- 5 eggs lightly beaten
- 4 c. milk
- 2 c. whipping cream
- 5 tsp. vanilla extract
- 14 c. cubed day-old bread (1 inch thick)
- 3 c. fresh or frozen blueberries (divided)
- 1 ½ c. pecan pieces

Preheat oven to 300 degrees. In a large bowl, blend the sugar, cinnamon and nutmeg. Whisk in the eggs, milk, cream and vanilla. Place cubed bread in a buttered 9 by 13 in pan. Pour custard mixture over the cubed bread and soak for an hour. Stir in fresh blueberries, reserving about a cup for the top. Sprinkle pecan pieces. Bake uncovered for 90 minutes.

Whiskey Sauce

- 2 c. whipping cream
- 9 Tbls. granulated white sugar
- 1 ½ Tbls. cornstarch
- 2 Tbls. cold water
- 2 egg yolks
- ¼ c. whiskey
- 1 Tbls. salted butter

When the bread pudding is out of the oven, prepare the whiskey sauce by combining the cream, milk, and sugar over medium heat in a quart saucepan. Place the cornstarch, water and whiskey in a small mixing bowl and whisk to make a slurry. Pour the slurry into the cream mixture and bring it to a boil. Once the sauce begins to boil, reduce the heat to a gentle simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes. Remove the sauce from the heat, add butter. Keep warm to spoon over individual servings.



Garden Breakfast Pastry

Preheat oven to 350 degrees
11x 17 baking sheet

- 1 ½ puff pastry
- 2 c. of chopped fresh spinach
- 1 small red onion chopped
- 4 green onion tops chopped
- 12 eggs
- ½ c. milk
- 2 c. crumbled fried bacon
- 2 c. gouda cheese (grated)
- 2 c. sharp cheddar (grated)

Salt, pepper, and red pepper to taste

Lay puff pastry on greased baking sheet. Layer fresh spinach, onion, crumbled bacon and half of the cheeses.

Whisk eggs and milk, pour on top of layered pastry, sprinkle salt peppers and top with remaining cheese.

Bake for 40 minutes

Book Review: *The Language of Flowers*



Cheryl Brueggeman
GCMG 2014

In *The Language of Flowers*, author Vanessa Diffenbaugh has crafted a story that is both compelling and disturbing while skillfully combining her love of flowers with her experience as a foster mother. We meet the main character, Victoria Jones, on her Emancipation Day, which occurs when a foster child who hasn't been ad-

opted reaches the age of eighteen. We learn that Victoria was abandoned at birth and was raised in the foster care system. She was placed with a number of families, but was always returned for one reason or another.

The book is divided into four sections, all important stages in Victoria's life. The author also uses flashbacks to fill us in on details of Victoria's past life that give us clues as to why she behaves and functions as she does.

As the book begins, Victoria is so utterly unprepared for living on her own. She is allowed to stay rent free in a transitional home for twelve weeks, during which time she is supposed to look for a job and find a place to live independently. Instead, she uses makeshift containers to grow plants she has uprooted from people's gardens. When her time in the transition home is finished and before her case worker, Meredith, comes to evict her, she takes her plants to a nearby park, transplants them, and nurtures them. She sleeps in the park and finds food when she can.

In the first section of the book, we also learn that one of the happiest times in Victoria's life was when she was fostered by a woman named Elizabeth. It is from Elizabeth that Victo-

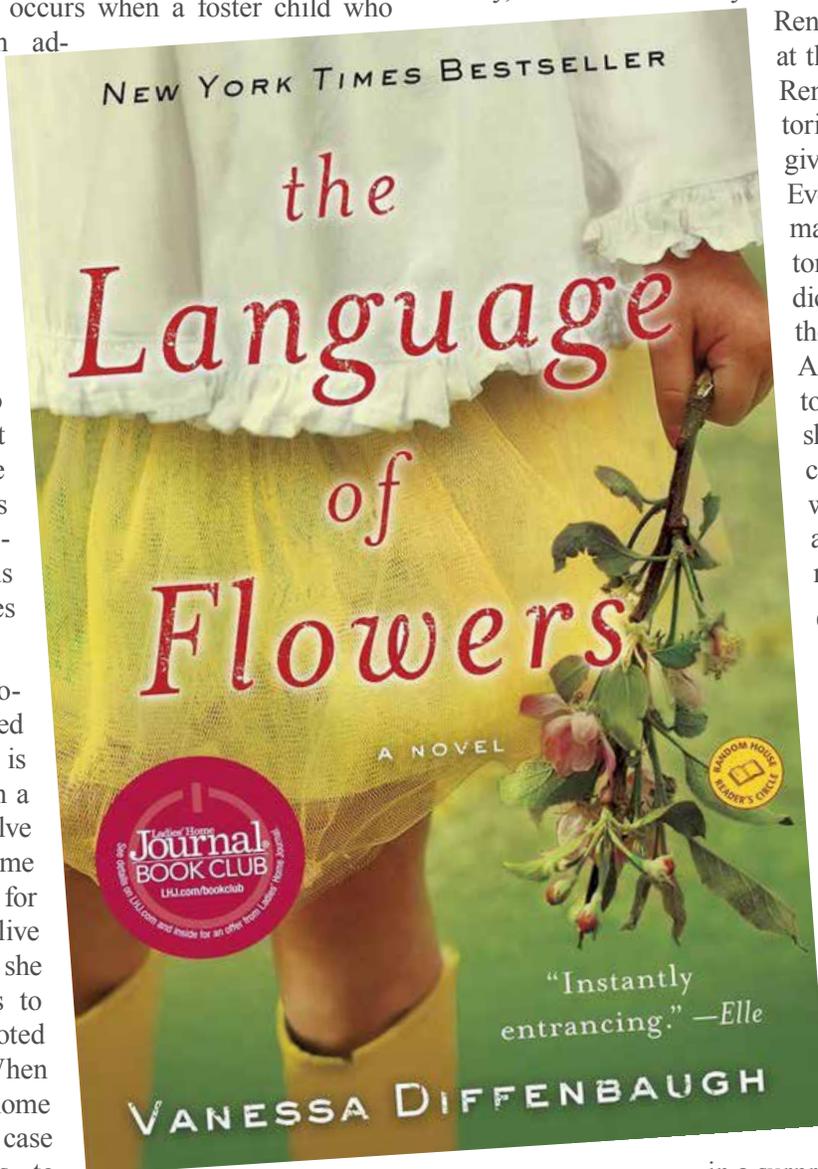
ria learns the language of flowers, which, in Victorian times, was used to convey messages and even romantic expressions. The love of plants along with the knowledge of each plant's meaning would be a lifeline for Victoria and well as a means of survival.

Luckily, she is befriended by a kind flower shop owner named Renata who hires her to help at the weekly flower markets. Renata soon recognizes Victoria's talent and gradually gives her more responsibility. Eventually, she is allowed to make arrangements for customers. She makes her own dictionary of flowers and their Victorian meanings. After listening to her customers express their wishes, she creates bouquets especially for them. Through word-of-mouth Victoria is able to start her own business.

One other important character, Grant, is introduced as Victoria becomes more involved in helping Renata buy flowers at the weekly flower market. Grant and Victoria form a tentative friendship. Through this friendship, we see Victoria slowly being able to release some of her anger and feelings of abandonment. As the story progresses, we learn that he is linked to her past

in a surprising way.

I found this book difficult to put down and frequently read for several hours at a time just to find out what happened next. There were times I read through tears because of the many heartbreaking events depicted. Ultimately, however, it is a story of resilience, hope, redemption, and forgiveness told against the backdrop of the language of flowers.



Successful Fall Festival Celebrates Gardening

The Annual Fall Festival was held October 18, 2025 in the Discovery Garden. The annual fundraiser offers a way to connect with the Galveston County community and share our knowledge and passion for gardening. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension partners who also participated with fun activities and knowledge sharing include Coastal & Marine Resources, 4H & Youth Development, Family & Community Health, and Ag & Natural Resources.



Ask an MG Booth's Herman Auer answers a question MG Linda Crowston



MG Donna Merritt leads Herb Garden tour MG Marilyn Haupt



Herb Booth MG Linda Crowston



MG Fran Brockington with bulb booth MG Linda Crowston



Junior Master Gardeners helped with wagons MG Linda Crowston



A garden of decorations MG Linda Crowston

“MGs gave time, talent, contagious positive energy...”



MG Hedy Wolpa's Bug Booth MG Marilyn Haupt



MG Kevin Lancon with wife and grands MG Marilyn Haupt



Pumpkin carving entries MG Linda Crowston



Set up group of with their decorations MG Jamie Hart



MG Donna Woodbury at Crafts Booth
MG Linda Crowston



MGs on traffic control MG Marilyn Haupt

MGs Host Summer Sundown Sale

The online plant sale was from noon to noon August 25-26 with in person plant pickup the next week. Many volunteers worked many hours to make it happen.



MGs Christie McGrath and Reagan Mears attach signs to identify plants.
MG Sven Bors-Koefoed



John Mitchiner loading mulch MG Sven Bors-Koefoed



Plant sale hustle and bustle MG Sven Bors-Koefoed



Plants were set against the fence to be loaded in wagons.
MG Sven Bors-Koefoed



Unloading plants begins the preparation routine. MG Sven Bors-Koefoed



MG volunteers Wendy Baldwin, Hedy Wolpa and Stacey Phillips.
MG Herman Auer

2025 Master Gardener Recertification Hours

Browse online to the members only webpage to review all hours: <https://txmg.org/galveston/membersonly/>

Date	Name of Program	Speaker	MG CEUs	# MGs
8/7/2025	Lunch & Learn - African Violets, water wicking	Jamie Hart	0.75	40
8/9/2025	Onions & Garlic	Kevin Lancon	2.00	33
8/9/2025	Fall Vegetables	Gene Speller	2.00	30
8/12/2025	MGA August Mtg: Positive Impact of Spaces on Health and Stress	Dr. Jay Maddock	1.50	40
8/12/2025	Pilot Presentation - Growing Strawberries	Michael Reed	1.25	10
8/14/2025	Lunch & Learn - Garlic Trials Final Report	Research Bed Team	1.00	42
8/21/2025	Lunch & Learn - Desirable Vines	Pam Hunter & Lynn Shook	0.50	40
8/23/2025	Culinary Herbs & Edible Flowers	Donna Merritt, Briana Etie	2.00	13
8/23/2025	Be a Superstar with Annuals	Patty McElhany, Stacy Mills	2.00	6
9/4/2025	GCMGA Board of Directors Meeting	GCMGA BOD		15
9/6/2025	T-Bud Grafting	Hazel Lampton	2.00	3
9/6/2025	Growing Strawberries	Michael Reed, Briana Etie	2.00	9
9/9/2025	Pilot Presentation - Crafting with Herbs	Lynne Slaton, Reagan Mears	1.50	12
9/9/2025	MGA September Mtg: Carothers Garden Community Garden visit	Jesse Jones, Nemo Jackson	1.00	32
9/11/2025	Lunch & Learn - Plant Sale Overview	Kevin Lancon	1.00	25
9/18/2025	Lunch & Learn - Hypertufa Presentation	Tanya Padgett, Donna Woodbury	2.00	13
9/20/2025	Backyard Composting	Christie McGrath	1.50	6
10/2/2025	Lunch & Learn - Turf Grass	Phil Starks	0.50	30
10/4/2025	Crafting with Herbs	Lynne Slaton, Reagan Mears	1.50	6
10/4/2025	Plumeria Care in Winter	Loretta Osteen	2.00	4
2025 Recertification Hours for MGs		Total CEUs (Hours)	97.75	
Last Updated: October 22, 2025		MG Only Activities (# of MGs)		1772

Reminder: In order to maintain your status as a certified Texas Master Gardener, each year you must complete a minimum of 10 hours continuing education, as well as 20 service hours. Additionally, those hours must be reported through the online Volunteer Management System or other means.

GCMGs who want to see any hours listed prior to August 7, 2025 should check the Educational Hours for Recertification located in the Members Only section of the website www.txmg.org/galveston.



MG volunteers working with 2025 interns: Nancy Hiefner, Karyl Mehlman, Fran Brockington, Pam Hunter (lead), Debbie Espinosa, Sandy McBride, Briana Etie, and Tanya Padgett
MG Kevin Lancon

MGs in Action

From presentations to working outside to serving tea, MGs are actively involved in their community on a daily basis.



Three 'weeders' (MGs Alice Rodgers and Laurel Stine with Extension Agent Boone Holladay) cleaned up the entrance to Carbide Park. *Jill Jesson*



A group of MGs worked together to present Crafting with Herbs: Christie McGrath, Becky Jaschek, Reagan Mears, Donna Merritt, Briana Etie and Lynne Slaton. *Aaron Mears*



MGs Donna Merritt and Briana Etie presented Herbs for the Health of It to Heritage Gardeners of Friendswood in October *MG Karolyn Gephart*



MGs Roxann Kriticos and Bobbie Ivey discuss Italian squash at a Lunch and Learn in the Discovery Kitchen. *MG Karolyn Gephart*



MGs are ready for anything. MG Nancy Hiefner serves herbal tea at a presentation. *MG Pam Hunter*



MG Norma Torok discussed native plants for an outdoor presentation at Garden Emporium in Friendswood. *MG Karolyn Gephart*

2025

HORTICULTURE NOV-DEC EVENTS

TEXAS A&M
AGRILIFE
EXTENSION

KNOWLEDGE NOT SHARED IS KNOWLEDGE LOST

GALVESTON COUNTY

Gulf Coast Gardening Seminars

Learn how native flowers, shrubs, and grasses can bring life to your garden. Native plants are hardy, low-maintenance, and help conserve water while attracting butterflies, bees, and other beneficial insects that support a healthy, thriving garden.

Kick off the Growing Great Tomatoes series and learn how to start tomatoes from seed, select the best varieties for our area, and grow strong, healthy seedlings for your spring garden. Perfect for both new and experienced gardeners!

NATIVE PLANTS & POLLINATING INSECTS

November 1 | 9 – 11 AM

Galveston County Extension Office
4102-B Main Street (FM 519)
La Marque TX 77568

Speakers: MG Sue Bain & MG Hedy Wolpa

Cost: FREE | Registration Deadline: Oct 30 at 3 PM

To register, please visit
<https://txmg.org/galveston/events/>

GROWING TOMATOES FROM SEED PART 1

December 6 | 9 – 11 AM

Galveston County Extension Office
4102-B Main Street (FM 519)
La Marque TX 77568

Speaker: MG Ira Gervais

Cost: FREE | Registration Deadline: Dec 4 at 3 PM

To register, please visit
<https://txmg.org/galveston/events/>

If you need special accommodations, please contact the Extension Office no later than seven days before the program so we can consider your request. Extension programs of Texas AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other classification protected by federal, state or local law The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.



Judy's Corner: Galveston County Monthly Meetings



Judy Anderson
GCMG 2012

November

November is the time for the Galveston County Master Gardener Association Annual Meeting as required by the bylaws. Each year at this time, the GCMG Annual Meeting is held along with the Board of Directors Meeting; this year the meeting will be held on Monday, November 10, 2025 from 10:30 am until 2 pm. Veterans Day is Tuesday, November 11 and the Extension Office will be closed. The current state of the association will be presented, including results of the plant sales, on-going projects, proposed bylaw changes and plans for future projects. Elections will also be held for open positions in the association.

The meeting will begin early with a potluck luncheon to accommodate the extensive business meeting. Please bring a dish to share, but spoons are not necessary. The social will begin at 10:30 am and lunch will be served at 11 am; the meeting will begin at 11:30 am. Coffee, tea and water will be provided. This meeting is one that all Master Gardeners should attend.



MGs Jamie Hart and Hazel Lampton MG Judy Anderson



Holidays with Tropical Santa MG Judy Anderson

December

During the Holiday Season, Galveston County Master Gardeners will be gathering for their seasonal party at the home of Mikey and Allen Isbell. The festivities will be held on Tuesday, December 9, 2025, beginning with a social at 6 pm and dinner at 6:45 pm; this is an extended social to enjoy the holiday vibes. Bring a potluck dish to contribute to the traditional feast. Holiday decorations will be lighting up the home and we can hope the weather cooperates as the social and registration are held on the front porch.

Guests are requested to donate an unwrapped toy for the Galveston Children's Center.

Join the festivities by participating in the Holiday Jingle Bells Exchange and bring a gardening gift valued \$10 or under for a man or woman.



MGs Patsy Jewell and Ginger Hopper MG Judy Anderson



MG and evening host Mikey Isbell MG Judy Anderson