



HOE! HOE! HOE!

Grimes County Master Gardeners Newsletter



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EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES & FUN NOV/DEC 2008

- Nov 02 DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME ENDS
- Nov 04 Card making at Stuckeys, 9.00 a.m.
- Nov 08 First wildflower seed planting - time and place to be notified by email
- Nov 11 Regular Monthly meeting—Program by John Milligan “Tool care” . Second wildflower planting after meeting - again, watch for details.
- Dec 05 GCMG Christmas party—details to be advised
- Dec 06 TMGA Directors’ meeting—TAMU, 11.00 am

Vegetable Radicals

Growing vegetables as a form of protest has a long and respectable past. When a clothier, Gerard Winstanley, was ruined during the Civil War in England, he was reduced to herding cattle for a living. In 1649, outraged by the poverty he saw around him, he and his community of “Diggers” invaded common land and proceeded to dig it up and plant vegetables.

‘In Cobham on the little heath the digging still goes on
And all our friends, they live in love, as if they were but one’ he rhymed.

Oliver Cromwell’s Lord Fairfax sent in the army to deal with this vegetable riot and destroy the diggers’ parsnips, carrots and beans. Another nine colonies suffered the same fate. Winstanley appealed to Cromwell, the Lord Protector: “If the wasteland of England were manured by her children, it would become in a few years the richest, the strongest, and the most flourishing country in the world” he predicted.

Three centuries on, in the 1970s, a new group of diggers went into action, organising demonstration “dig-ins” on empty ground, and in 1980 there were 121,000 on the waiting list for allotments.

From: “Spade, Skirret and Parsnip, the Curious History of Vegetables”, by Bill Laws

MEETING SCHEDULE 2008

Regular meetings are held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at the Go Texan Building 9.00 a.m. Other meetings are held in the evening at members' homes and on Saturdays.

Whenever weather permits, work time at the various beds at the Fairgrounds will take place before or after meetings held at Go Texan. Bring a brown bag lunch!

Nov 11 Tool Use & Care, John Milligan

Dec 5 Party! (place TBA)

Updates to programs, activities and projects will be announced when available.

October Bloom list

What is blooming in your garden? The week of October 28th all the roses are blooming profusely, the coral vine is still hanging on, and the turks cap has started. This is the large-flowered variety, Malvaviscus penduliflorus, which is always late-blooming. The lawn has been invaded by roadside asters, which have taken the opportunity to plant themselves in all the bare patches, along with all the other noxious weeds! Despite digging them up as soon as they appear, some Cannas always manage to escape the massacre, and there are some survivors who are blooming like crazy. .

TREATS ON THE STREET

At 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, October 30, seven hardy Grimes County Master Gardeners took their station on Washington Avenue to prepare for the onslaught known as Treats on the Street. Alvie brought the table, which meant she had to forego the pleasure of trying to find the bull that had gone astray on her property. Sandy brought the pencils and table decorations, but she forgot to bring any tape, so Alvie hot-footed it to Brookshire Bros. to purchase same. Edmond had the good sense to bring a chair, which he shared with some of us. At 6:00 p.m. we tensed our muscles and began giving out pencils and erasers to the thousand or so trick-or-treaters marching past our table. Alvie, Sandy, Edmond, Jennifer & son, Dorothy, Linda and John alternated between handing out pencils & erasers, holding up the wall behind us, and keeping us alert with conversation. . We distributed almost 1,000 pencils with "Grimes County Master Gardeners" imprinted on them and lots and lots of erasers. See ya next year. Sandy R

OCTOBER MEETING NOTES

After the business part of the meeting, we started making the seed balls for the wildflower planting project. Unfortunately, the photos are on the computer that just bit the dust, and it is doubtful that they can be recovered. The recipe is simple :

5 parts dry red clay (in powder form)
3 parts dry organic compost
1 part seed (mixed Texas selection)
1- 2 parts water.

Mixed up and rolled into penny-sized balls (more or less) they are left to dry, then thrown out to the four winds.

From the comments of those present, a lot of members enjoyed making mud pies when they were kids!



(photo from
www.pathtofreedom.com)

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Nov 01 Peggy Sloan
Nov 03 Kenneth Falco
Nov 11 Sandy Kobalchinski
Nov 12 Sandra Starnes
Nov 26 Bob Hare
Nov 27 Alvie Vesperman
Nov 28 Carolyn Guillotte

2009 MASTER GARDENER TRAINING CLASS

The next class will begin Tuesday January 27th, and run through Tuesday April 21st, 8.30 - 12.30, at the Go Texan Building. Tentative schedule is as follows, but note that not all of the speakers are confirmed so they are not listed here.

Jan 27 Intro/Orientation
Feb 03 Soils Sam Feagley
Feb 10 Botany
Feb 17 Entomology
Feb 24 Lawns/turf
Mar 03 Fruit & Nuts
Mar 10 Landscaping
Mar 17 Vegetables
Mar 24 Plant disease
Mar 31 Herbs
Apr 07 Propagation
Apr 14 Composting/Organic Gardening
Apr 21 Communications Skills, Overview of what comes next, followed by pot luck lunch.

We will be emailing out a copy of the Flyer and the Application to each of you, so please share this information with your friends, family, and even those people you don't get along with! We need to have a big and enthusiastic class, and as always, everyone is encouraged to audit any and all of the classes. For certified Master Gardeners and interns there is no charge, cost to Auxiliary Members and members of the public will be \$10.00 per class. There will be much more information forthcoming!

Chairing the class committee this year is Jennifer Corzine, with Julia Cosgrove as the resident Expert and guide. Let's all help to make this a great class!

PAINTING TEXAS WITH WILDFLOWERS

Sandra Stuckey is spearheading this project. At the first meeting a plan was drawn up to try to plant five sites around Historic Markers out in the county. The optimum time for planting wildflower seed is upon us, so there is not a lot of time to prepare for a larger scale operation. I'm sure we'll go really wild in 2009!! This will be a really fun thing to do, and the aim is to educate the public about the importance of wildflowers and also about the historic importance of Grimes County. Be watching for more information from Sandra, and please step up to help where you can. The first planting will be November 8th.

UPCOMING SEMINARS TO BE PRESENTED BY GC MASTER GARDENERS

Following is the schedule of events to be held at Coufal-Prater in Navasota :

Nov 01 Wildflowers /kick-off to our Painting Texas w/wildflowers - Julia Cosgrove & Jennifer Corzine
Nov 10 Bulbs by Helen Quinn
Dec 06 Gardening with Children by Jennifer Corzine

GARDENS OF TUNISIA

Flowers and gardens might not come to mind when thinking of Tunisia, which is wedged between Algeria and Libya on two sides, and the Mediterranean Sea on the other, but even in the Sahara, bougainvilleas of all colors created a stunning show. Many plants that do well here also seem to thrive in that climate, including lantanas as big as houses, many varieties of ice plants and geraniums, and jacaranda trees sporting their beautiful blue flowers. In the north there are acres and acres of grape vines, which produce a very decent wine (the country was occupied by the French for many years, until Independence in 1957, and the legacy of the vineyard flourishes). In the middle of the country there are olive groves as far as the eye can see, with olive oil being a major agricultural crop. 'Tis the season for pomegranates, and colorful fruit stands lined the roads, selling them, as well as pears, apples, figs and dates, and many kinds of egg-plants, peppers, tomatoes, etc. In the south the date harvest had just started, and there were fresh dates everywhere.

The date palms are grown in the oases, and one we stayed in, Tozeur, is said to contain at least 200,000 trees, and this is only the second largest "Palmeraie" in the country! In this area of minimal rainfall, rain is welcomed early on in the year, but once the dates have formed and are nearing harvest time, the huge clusters are covered with plastic bags in the event that it does rain, in which case the harvest could be ruined with mushy dates. In this same oasis there is a botanical garden and zoo, and this is where we really noticed the similarity of our plants and theirs. The area is fed by 200 springs that produce almost 60 million liters of water per day, distributed among the holdings by an elaborate system devised by the mathematician Ibn Chabbat in the 13th century A.D. In another oasis, between Tozeur and Douz, the three-tiered oasis agriculture system was explained - date palms being the top layer, fruit trees under them, and vegetables on the bottom tier. This method saves space, ensures all the roots go to the water source, and provides the right amount of light for all the plants.

Chile peppers hanging out to dry



Three tier agricultural system



Flowers



FALL "NEW POTATOES"
by special guest contributor, Stanley Jobe

We all remember the great taste of "new potatoes" from spring plantings. Much to my pleasure, I have found that it is possible to enjoy that great taste throughout the fall and winter. When I began serious gardening, I attempted to purchase seed potatoes for fall planting but was never successful. No one had any seed potatoes. I was told that I should have held over some of my spring production for the fall but I never seemed to be able to do that - until this year. I gave away my spring planting and sold a few and then moved on to other garden chores, completely forgetting that I had two one-half bushel baskets of Red Lasoda potatoes in the back of the barn behind some hay. Late in the summer, after I was cleaning up the barn for more storage, the two baskets of unsold new potatoes appeared, still in their baskets and under empty feed sacks. Last Spring I had graded these and they were all about 1 1/2 to 2 inches in diameter, and now each one had small green sprouts. I was amazed that they had not rotted in our hot Texas weather, but they were in excellent condition. Oh, I did find two that had begun to rot, so I threw them away. I decided to plant the good ones and hope for the best. On October 4, 2004, I planted them. Each 200 ft. row contained 1/2 bushel of Red Lasoda potatoes planted about one foot apart. For this planting, I prepared the potato beds a little differently. First of all, our fall weather becomes very wet in November, so I planted them a few inches higher than usual so that if a heavy rain fell for several days, they would still be above the water level in the rows. Secondly I planted them with an organic fertilizer! In the past I would use 10-20-10 or 12-24-12 in the rows about an inch below the level of the sprouting potatoes but due to the large price increase of petroleum-based products I sought an old and proven method of fertilizing. As a boy, I watched my grandfather use manure and old feed that had fermented on the barn floor to fertilize his garden. It worked very well! A neighbor down the road used organic fertilizer on his watermelon patch for about 70 or 80 years, and he produced many very nice watermelons. Well, I do not have a barn full of manure so I went to the feed store and to the co-op and bought cotton seed meal. It is about 6-2-1 and lasts a good while (6% Nitrogen, 2% Phosphorus and 1% Potassium). Cotton Seed Meal also has about 0.20% Calcium and is slightly acidic which helps control scab. I laid a bead of Cotton Seed Meal about an inch below the potato pieces and then covered them. The amount of fertilizer was about 1/4 lb. Per foot of row or about 50 pounds per 200 foot of row. About October 12th, 2004, the new potato sprouts began breaking through the soil in the rows. About December 4, 2004, I figured, I should be able to harvest fall "New Potatoes". I checked them on November 4, 2004 and found that they were about the size of a marble. In about one month they should be about the size of a golf ball, a gourmet potato! We usually do not have a "killing frost" until the last of November, and sometimes not even until the last part of December, so I should have time to get a great harvest. I examined the potatoes fertilized with Cotton Seed Meal. They had dark green lusty leaves and stalks whereas some volunteers with no fertilizer were light green and spindly. November 9, 2004, potato flowers were noticed. November 16, 2004 the soil at the base of each plant was breaking as the tubers began to grow. I took a picture of the volunteer potato leaves and the Cottonseed Fertilized potato leaves and there was a noticeable difference. The Cottonseed fertilized potato plants were greener. I should've been digging potatoes by this date, but had to wait because this fall had been much warmer than usual and there was no heavy frost in sight. If I can, I will plan to dig in the early part of December and have fresh "new potatoes" during one of the Christmas meals along with mustard and turnips and then again with rutabagas. Or how about "new potatoes" and sugar snap peas? I am anticipating a good harvest of at least one pound of potatoes per foot of row. November 27, 2004, I dug some potatoes that "volunteered" from last spring's planting (in other words I had forgotten to dig them up so they grew fall potatoes). They were all about 1 -2 inches in diameter, beautiful red color, easy to wash and they were delicious that night with green beans. At this time, I was still waiting, letting the two rows that I planted October 4, 2004 continue to grow. Our weather so far has not produced a frost. For our area the frost should have occurred in late November, but apparently this year, I decided that the first frost would most likely be in December. Well, we had a frost December 1, 2004, after which the tops were laying down.

My wife and I began trying to harvest Saturday, December 4, 2004, but the soil was too wet. We dug a small amount, about 15 pounds from a 25-30 foot row and the mud was a problem. Wetness at the wrong time is one of the problems with fall potatoes.

Next fall I will plant on a part of the garden that is very sandy. If the weather remains dry for the next few days, I will be able to plow the rows and eliminate most of the shoveling.

Most importantly, it is reassuring that in Texas, it is possible to enjoy that home grown new potato taste, even in fall and winter!!