

Urban Dirt

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

Environmental Kudos, So Sos, and No Nos

Article by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

Environmental kudos go to the city of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The Cedar Rapids Parks and Recreation department began setting up pollinator habitats, about ten years ago, by establishing prairies along the city trail system. With the help of the Monarch Research Project, a plan was started to help the decreasing monarch population. Biotents are used to raise monarchs. In the wild, only a small percentage of monarch eggs hatch and become adult butterflies.



Photo courtesy of cedar-spring.org

With the biotent, the adult survival rate is 90 percent. The department also determines areas that would be ideal for pollinator zones. The zones are kept up so neighbors can enjoy nature. In addition to this, the small town has set

aside 1,000 acres to create a bee haven. The 1,000 Acre Pollinator Initiative was developed with the Monarch Research Project's help. This spring the town will begin by seeding 188 acres with native grasses and wildflowers. A collaboration between Cedar Rapids and the City of Marion has developed to meet the 1,000 acre target.

On the other hand, General Mills receives an environmental "so-so". Its "Save the Bees" campaign has suffered from some consumer backlash. Though it removed the Honey Nut Cheerios' mascot, Buzz Bee, from the Honey Nut Cheerios box for a while as part of its campaign to highlight the



Photo courtesy of GeneralMills.com

dropping bee population, the free flower seed packets it sent out in March 2017 have received some bad publicity. Sowing commercially provided wildflower seeds in natural public lands should be done under the auspices of a professional to avoid upsetting the delicate balance in some areas. While General Mills collaborated with the Xerces Society to improve its pollinator preservation efforts, it didn't use their customized seeds specifically tailored for different regions. It used wildflower seeds from a Canadian company, Veseys Seeds Ltd. Unfortunately, some of the seeds included in the seed packets were considered noxious weeds in some states, one was considered an "invasive exotic pest plant" in other states and many of the listed flowers are not native here in the U.S. On a positive note, even though the oats used in Cheerios are wind pollinated, General Mills says that by the end of 2020, for every 60,000 acres used to grow its oats, 3,300 acres will become pollinator habitats.

Finally a huge environmental "no-no" goes to Philip Cullen, a convicted butterfly killer in Britain. He didn't receive jail time, but was ordered to perform 250 hours of community service, has been banned from three nature preserves and was fined by the court. Cullen was accused of killing two endangered Large Blues (Maculinea arion), one of Britain's rarest butterfly species. A raid on his home found 30 trays of dead butterflies and moths, including the two large blues. Cullen was selling them on eBay.



Photo by Neil Hulme

Upcoming Events

May 2017

Green Thumb Gardening Series

Insects in the Garden

May 12, Barbara Bush Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

May 16, Spring Branch Memorial Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

May 18, Freeman Branch Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

May 20, Maude Smith Marks Library, 10:00 - noon

Open Garden Day: *Meet the Master Gardeners!*

May 15, 8:30-11:00 a.m., Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston, 77034

May 23, Workshops & children's activities, *Insects in the Garden*, 10:00-11:00 a.m. Bear Creek Gardens/Extension, 3033 Bear Creek Drive, Houston, 77084

June 2017

Green Thumb Gardening Series: *Plant advice and tips from the Master Gardeners*

Propagation and Seed Saving

June 8, Barbara Bush Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

June 15, Freeman Branch Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

June 17, Maude Smith Marks Library, 10:00 - noon.

June 20, Spring Branch Memorial Library, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Educational Program

June 8, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m., *Beneficials* by Dr Johnson, Galveston Count AgriLife Agent., Harris County Master Gardener. Genoa Friendship Garden Education Building, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston, 77034

Open Garden Day: *Meet the Master Gardeners!*

June 5, 19, 8:30 - 11a.m., Genoa Friendship Garden, 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston, 77034

June 27, Workshops & children's activities, *Propagation and Seed Saving*, 10:00 - 10:45 a.m. Bear Creek Gardens/Extension, 3033 Bear Creek Drive, Houston, 77084

Have Garden Questions?

Master Gardener Help Line - (281) 855-5600

9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m., Mon.-Fri.

Email your questions to: phonehcmga@gmail.com

You can also drop in, or mail us at 3033 Bear Creek Dr., Houston, TX 77084

Herb of the Month - Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*)

Article by Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*) is our herb of the month for May. There's just something oddly fun about the phrase "edible landscaping," isn't it? In the case of this month's featured herb, Nasturtium, fun, edible landscaping is happily bright, colorful, and delicious, as well. It probably goes without saying that if you are a regular reader of this particular Master Gardener article series, you are also probably a foodie – and no foodie's wheelhouse of culinary tricks would be complete without nasturtium in the mix.

Nasturtiums are native to the cool highlands of Central and South America. Derived from Old English, from Latin, apparently from *naris* meaning 'nose' and *torquere* meaning 'to twist,' this pretty plant from a bygone era is enjoying a resurgence among gardeners, following an alternating pattern of rising and waning popularity that has been the plant's trend since the early 1800s. Boasting a vivid color palette that includes red, orange, yellow, orange, cream, and bi-colors, nasturtiums have a peppery flavor that resembles watercress.

Although nasturtiums can certainly be propagated from cuttings, propagation from seeds is generally considered the best method. According to *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, nasturtium seeds should be planted in early spring, placing in moist, well-drained soil in full sun. Place the seeds about half an inch deep and 10 to 12 inches apart. Plants should appear within seven to ten days. Although nasturtiums can grow in partial shade, they will not bloom as well. Interestingly, nasturtiums prefer poorer soils and they do not need fertilizers (unless your soil is extremely poor). Fertile soil will actually produce fewer blooms!

Citations:

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/newsletters/hortupdate/2008/jan08/EdibleFl.html>

http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/newsletters/hortupdate/hortupdate_archives/2004/mar04/Nasturtium.html

<http://www.almanac.com/plant/nasturtium>

http://www.lsuagcenter.com/portals/communications/news/news_archive/2011/october/get_it_growing/try-growing-edible-flowers

Utilization of edible flowers is not as common in the United States as in other parts of the world; however, before you consider the idea as particularly exotic, remember that most of us enjoy broccoli, cauliflower and artichokes, all of which are flower buds!



A quick tutorial on edible flower buds: not all flowers buds are edible...some, like the plants that produce them, are actually poisonous. In her excellent reference book, "Edible Flowers from Garden to Palate," Cathy Wilkinson Barash names the most popular and well-known edible flowers in a section called "The Big Ten." Included are: calendula, chives, day lily, mint, nasturtium, pansy, rose, sage, marigold and squash blossoms.

There are some general rules that should be observed when consuming edible flowers, including nasturtiums. Of course, never consume flowers that have been treated with pesticides. According to Louisiana State University's Rick Bogren, "to get the maximum quality, you should pick flowers during the coolest part of the day, preferably early morning. Select flowers before they reach their

prime – choose those that are young and not completely open. The flowers should appear very fresh and bright.

Harvest flowers on the day you intend to use them. After harvesting, place long-stemmed flowers in a container of warm water and put them in a cool place until they are used. Pick short-stemmed flowers within three to four hours of use. To store, place short-stemmed blossoms between layers of damp paper towels or put them in plastic bag in your refrigerator. Just before using the flowers, gently wash them in cool water."

While nasturtiums, like other edible flowers, can be utilized in baking and via other cooking methods, why not enjoy the beautiful color in its native, most vibrant state? Add nasturtiums to your favorite fresh salads, and say "hello" to spring! Enjoy, everyone!

Plant of the Month - Mock Orange, Sweet Mockorange, English Dogwood (*Philadelphus sp.*)

Article by Beth Braun, Master Gardener

Growing happily in dappled shade at the Genoa Friendship Garden are two white-flowering ornamental shrubs—Mock orange and Deutzia ‘Frosty White’. Both belong to the Hydrangea family of plants. This month’s feature is the Mock orange, described on its garden sign as *Philadelphus sp.* If you too need a refresher on plant nomenclature, you’ll find an explanation of sp. in the Royal Horticultural Society’s article:

<http://counties.agrilife.org/harris/files/2011/05/RHSnomenclature1.pdf>

Sp. stands for Species, and in the case of the GFG specimen the species is not identified.

Common names are usually more descriptive and easier to remember than botanical names (i.e., snapdragon vs. *Antirrhinum majus*), but it’s not unusual to find more than one plant going by the same common name. Case in point is a pittosporum that also goes by the common name Mock orange.

Mock – Adjective: Not authentic or real, but without the intention to deceive.

Mock orange earned its common name due to its fragrant white blooms that appear in the spring. Worldwide, about 60 species of shrubs have been identified, ranging in height from 3-20 ft. They’re native to North and Central America, Asia, and southeast Europe, and there are cultivated varieties as well. Flowers can be pure white to creamy, single or double, upright or droopy, intensely or mildly or even non-fragrant, and their leaves, bark, size, and heat/cold tolerance vary. An online search of images will give you an idea of its visual variations.



The Genoa Friendship Garden specimen isn’t specifically identified. It could even be a *Philadelphus inodorus*, ironically the Scentless Mock orange. I didn’t detect a fragrance,



but am curious to know what we have! The specimen in our garden produces perfect four-petaled flowers on arching stems reminiscent of Bridalwreath (*Spiraea prunifolia*), a popular plant in these parts.

Mock oranges generally like sun or part shade; in our climate some afternoon shade will protect it from scorching. They can be planted as a privacy screen, hedge, or a specimen in a mixed bed. It grows in acidic, alkaline, loamy, moist, rich, sandy and well-drained soils. So really, just about any soil will do, as long as it drains well. Sun exposure, moisture, and spacing are important.

Flowers of the Mock orange appear on the previous year’s growth. When grown as a screen or hedge, shear the plants after blooming. A specimen plant will do best with a rejuvenation pruning, which involves removing up to one-third of the oldest and largest stems at ground level. This encourages vigorous and full growth from the ground, and also improves flowering by allowing more light to reach the interior of the plant. A scraggly specimen can even be cut back to the ground to rebound with fresh growth.

Did you know?

The Harris County Master Gardeners has a satellite garden complex. The Genoa Friendship Gardens is located at 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Houston, TX 77034.

Genoa Friendship Gardens is open to the public once a month during the school year and weekly during the summer. There is an orchard, greenhouse, vegetable garden as well as a pond, rose garden and other beautifully landscaped areas to enjoy. Below is an overview of our gardens and map of the garden areas.

See our announcement on the next page (pg. 6) for our open garden dates and special events. Bring the kids and come out for fun and education in the garden!

The Gardens

ENTRY GARDEN & WELCOME:

- ❖ A beautiful display of popular Gulf Coast perennials fitting for any neighborhood yard.

ROSE GARDEN:

- ❖ Major display of rose varieties including antiques, china, hybrid tea and shrub.

SENSORY GARDEN:

- ❖ Vertical container gardening.
- ❖ Features colorful plants and herbs that evoke your senses of sight, smell, tactile, and taste.

WATER GARDEN:

- ❖ A spectacle of all things "water garden", water lilies, cattails, and turtles to complete the experience.

BUTTERFLY GARDEN

- ❖ Certified Monarch Waystation, *National Monarch Waystation Organization*, 2012.
- ❖ Unique habitat of host and nectar plants to support migrating butterflies and hummingbirds.

PERENNIAL GARDEN:

- ❖ Organic gardening using natural composting materials and non-toxic sprays and chemicals.
- ❖ Demonstration garden filled with seasonal sun and shade perennials grown to their maturity.

VEGETABLE GARDEN:

- ❖ A dual-purpose garden conducting vegetable trials logging pertinent produce performance.
- ❖ The harvest is donated to local food banks.



GARDEN MAP

1202 Genoa Red Bluff Road,
Houston, Texas 77034



HERB GARDEN:

- ❖ An informal garden filled with essential herbs, shrubs and edible flowers.

GREENHOUSE:

- ❖ Major roll is for the propagation and cultivation of vegetables and herbs for the Spring Tomato and Pepper sale.

SHADE GARDEN:

- ❖ A collection of plant varieties that thrive and bloom in deep shade.

ORCHARD & FRUIT GARDEN:

- ❖ A donation garden to local charities providing a variety of fresh fruits, grapes, blueberries, blackberries and raspberries.

DESERT GARDEN:

- ❖ Xeriscape landscaping supporting low water consumption with drought tolerant plants.
- ❖ Garden is filled with bold and blooming vitex, agaves, cactus and succulents.

NATIVE GARDEN:

- ❖ Southwest garden demonstrating how to incorporate heat tolerant perennial flowers and vines with lower water consumption.

TROPICAL GARDEN:

- ❖ A green lush garden featuring ginger, philodendron, bamboo, ligularia, ferns and ground covers.

Open Garden Days at Genoa Friendship Gardens



The Orchard



The Water Garden



The Greenhouse

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Harris County Master Gardeners invite you to join us

Open Garden Days

on the 3rd Monday of every month, 8:30 AM – 11:00 AM, January through December and the 1st Monday of every month, June through August. Admission to the Exhibit Gardens is free, and register at the Welcome Table to receive additional monthly notices for children and family events.

The Genoa Friendship Gardens

is located at
1202 Genoa Red Bluff Road
Houston, Texas 77034

Email: phoneHCMGA@gmail.com Phone: 713-274-0950

To schedule a special event for your Garden Club, School, or Professional Organization, please contact us to make your arrangements

- Tour the variety of exhibits to inspire you with vegetable, perennial, rose, tropical & native gardens
- Meet and talk with a Master Garden about planting citrus, fruit or berries for you home orchard
- Contemplate the joy in the serenity garden and catch the view of the water garden
- Don't leave the GFG until you have shopped the Greenhouse where seasonal herbs, vegetables and perennials are available for bargain prices until September.

2017 Monthly Open Garden Dates & Special Events

January 16	Open Garden Day	June 5 & 19	Open Garden Day
February 18	Fruit Tree & Tomato Sale	July 3 & 17	Open Garden Day
February 20	Open Garden Day	August 7 & 21	Open Garden Day
March 18	Perennial, Herb & Pepper Sale	September 18	Open Garden Day
March 20	Open Garden Day	October 16	Open Garden Day
April 17	Open Garden Day	October TBD	Family Fun Day
May 15	Open Garden Day	November 20	Open Garden Day



Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Harris County Master Gardeners invite you to join us for the educational and enjoyable:

Open Garden Days

On the 4th Tuesday of every month from January, 2017 through October, 2017.
The event is FREE. However, please register in the lobby when you arrive.

We are located at: 3033 Bear Creek Drive, Houston, TX 77084

Email: ogd.harrishort@gmail.com Phone: 281-855-5600

Like us on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners/>

From 9:00 to 11:30 you are welcome to wander around the grounds and to visit with the Master Gardeners as they work in the gardens.

From 10:00 to 11:00 workshops and activities adapted for all ages are held.

Workshop for adults and older teens will include a hands-on gardening experience related to the Green Thumb Lecture topics listed below.

Activities for 7 year olds to younger teens will include hands-on gardening and/or a project with a nature theme. A parent or responsible adult must be on the premises, and is welcome to attend the adult workshop.

Pre-school to 6 year olds and their parents can share a hands-on gardening and / or a nature theme craft activity.

If you wish to participate in the workshop / activity session from 10:00 to 11:00 AM, please RSVP to the email or telephone number above by the Sunday before the event, and include the ages of children attending with you. We want to have enough supplies for everyone.

Monthly 2017 Green Thumb topics and the Open Garden Day dates:

January 24 – Soils and Compost
February 28 – Spring Vegetable Gardening
March 28 – Roses: Planting, Growing & Upkeep
April 25 – Herbs
May 23 – Insects in the Garden

June 27 – Propagation and Seed Saving
July 25 – Raised Beds, Drip Irrigation & Rain Barrels
August 22 – Fall Vegetables
Sept. 26 – Gardening with Children and Grandchildren
Oct. 24 – Trees: Planting and Care (includes fruit trees)

May gardening tips

Article by Betty Bailey, Master Gardener

The saying, “April showers bring May flowers,” this year became April deluges bring heat, humidity along with flowers and vegetables.

Vegetable Gardening

Many of us are rushing to plant and eager to have both fresh vegetables and colorful yards. When many of us think of fresh vegetables we may first think of a salad full of great tomatoes.



Or are thoughts may turn to Hatch Peppers. Other vegetables that are ones to plant in May include okra, cucumbers, watermelons, pumpkins, and sweet potatoes.

And sprinkle in some warm weather herbs for your salads such as basil, chives, fennel, and oregano. One way to garden on a small plot is to mix colorful peppers along with other flowers or herbs such as rosemary. You will have vegies, color, and herbs for flavor. See the simple recipe for Caprese salad at the end of this article with basil, tomatoes, and mozzarella cheese.

Mulch your garden to maintain soil moisture, prevent weeds and modify soil temperature during the heat. And based on your soil, apply fertilizer for healthy growth.

Flower Gardening and Your Landscape

May brings a stampede to garden centers. Add some “bling” with annuals as well as colorful perennials which keep on giving year after year. Look at www.texassuperstar.com to view plants, their



Laura Bush Petunia

Photo courtesy of TexasSuperstar.com

growing conditions specifically for Harris County along with tips to keep them healthy. This web site is like a wish book to bring you the choices that are called Texas Super

Stars because they are known to thrive in our climate. A thought about your plant choices, look out three years to envision the size of perennials, vines, and shrubs. The phrase “sleep, creep, leap” applies to what we plant. Plants start small, like a baby sleeping and in two years they have taken a leap in growth.

Layer your plants for an inviting landscape with tall ones in back, varying first with tall plants followed by midheight plants with shorter plants in front. Mix both the depth and interest of plant



Mexican bush sage

choices with texture, and dimension. An example is to plant first, a short, textural plant such as Euphorbia, with next a medium size plant such as Confetti Lantana with lastly, in the back, a taller plant such as Salvia Leucantha or known as Mexican bush sage, giving you a red, white, and blue combination.

Develop a garden plan for your lifestyle and

think about time commitments. Choose plants which are drought tolerant and provide your own personal vision of what you want to see when you relax in the landscape.

To keep your flower choices healthy use compost and mulch to conserve water and save you time from pulling weeds just like you do with vegetables.

Recipe

Easy Caprese salad is made with sliced tomatoes, sliced mozzarella cheese, chopped basil and olive oil or balsamic vinegar mixed with olive oil.



Gardening Tools

This chart is a handy guide for knowing the best times to plant in Harris County.

	Vegetable Garden Planting Dates for Harris County											
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
AgriLIFE EXTENSION Texas A&M System												
	Marginal Planting Time						Ideal Planting Time					
FACT SHEET Texas AgriLife Extension Service 3033 Bear Creek Dr, Houston, TX 77084 281.855.5600 • http://harris-tx.tamu.edu												
ASPARAGUS, Crowns												
BEANS, Lima & Snap Bush												
BEANS, Lima & Snap Pole												
BEETS												
BROCCOLI, Plants												
CABBAGE, Plants												
CAULIFLOWER, Plants												
CARROTS												
CHARD, Swiss												
CHINESE CABBAGE												
COLLARDS												
CORN												
CUCUMBER												
EGGPLANTS, Plants												
KOHLRABI, Plants												
LETTUCE												
MUSKMELON, Cantalope												
MUSTARD												
OKRA												
ONION, Bulb-type sets												
ONION, Transplant for scallions												
ONION, Multipliers												
PARSLEY												
PEAS, English & Snap												
PEAS, Southern												
PEPPER, Plants												
POTATO, Irish												
POTATO, Sweet												
PUMPKIN												
RADISH												
SPINACH												
SQUASH, Summer												
SQUASH, Winter												
TOMATO, Plants												
TURNIP												
WATERMELON												



Not a Master Gardener?

Get Master Gardener Event Notifications
Sign up for email alerts for upcoming
Master Gardener events open to the public.



TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE
3033 BEAR CREEK DR.
HOUSTON, TX 77084

281.855.5600 FAX 281.855.5638

harris.agrilife.org/program-areas/hort/

hcmga.tamu.edu

Like Us On Facebook

The Harris County Master Gardeners as well as Texas A&M Agrilife Extension - Harris County Horticulture are actively participating on Facebook offering tips, lists, news and plant advice almost daily. The best part, instead of locating planting guides or insect documents, and sale dates for individuals, you can add the HCMG site



your account and easily share information with others. This is a definite timesaving device for these busy garden days and helps promote our organization.

www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners

www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyHorticulture

URBAN DIRT • MAY 2017



May Green Thumb Gardening Series *Insects in the Garden*

May 12

Barbara Bush Library

6:30-8:30 p.m.

May 18

Freeman Branch Library

6:30-8:30 p.m.

May 16

Spring Branch Memorial Library

6:30-8:30 p.m.

May 20

Maude Smith Marks Library

10 a.m. - Noon