

# Urban Dirt

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

## Tulips To Go

Article and photos by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

Parrot, fringed, standard, Rembrandt, bi-colored, viridiflora, Darwin, Greigii, Duc van Tol, single lates–tulips come in many varieties and colors. There is even a “black” tulip though it’s closer to a deep red. I placed a pre-order online and went to the Garden Club of Houston’s Bulb and Plant Mart to pick up our orders. Tulips require a little more effort and only last one season here in south Texas (at least mine last one season), but they are worth the effort. The bulbs must be refrigerated for 8-10 weeks to mimic winter and planted in late January or early February. Plant them three times as deep as the bulb with the wide end of the bulb facing down. They prefer fertile, well-drained soil. Bulb fertilizer or bone marrow can be added. At least six hours of sun is required. They look better planted in groups. When mine are through blooming, I pull them up and toss them.

Tulips were introduced to Europe in the 16th century by Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, an ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. He took bulbs back to Vienna and gave some to his colleague, a Flemish botanist names Charles de l’Ecluse. de L’Ecluse took bulbs with him to the Netherlands and began experimenting with them when he was the director of the botanical gardens in Leiden.

It was the beginning of a blooming industry in the Netherlands. Tulips became so popular that their price continued to rise and beginning in the 1620s, the cost soared. Yes, tulips were

the bitcoins of the 1600s. On occasion they were used as currency. One bulb of Semper Augustus sold for 10,000 guilders in 1637. That was the cost of a house at that time. The bulb trade continued to rise and eventually, as usually happens at one time or another, the bulb market crashed. The Tulip Mania era came to an end. One movie, “Tulip Fever,” recently released in September 2017, tells the story of two young lovers who become involved in the tulip trade to earn money.

Did you know that tulips were edible? In the fall of 1944, parts of the Netherlands were cut off from food supplies since the routes were blocked off by the Germans. The famine was called “Hongerwinter.” During World War II, the Dutch didn’t grow

*cont’d on pg. 7*



## Upcoming Events

*Hurricane Harvey Impact: Due to extensive flooding at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office in Bear Creek Park, this location is closed until further notice. Please stay up-to-date on event relocations below.*

*Our satellite location in Pasadena, Genoa Friendship Garden, was not impacted by the storm and is operating as normal. Please visit us at 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Road 77034 during our Open Garden Day once a month.*

*The Master Gardener Hotline will be back up in running very soon WITH LIMITED HOURS of 9 a.m. to Noon, Monday-Friday. Please use the same number: 713-274-0950. However, if email is available, it would be the best way to contact us while we are housed temporarily, plus you can send photos! Our Hotline email is [phonehcmga@gmail.com](mailto:phonehcmga@gmail.com).*

## November 2017

### **Open Garden Day: Meet the Master Gardeners!**

**Nov. 20**, 8:30-11:00 a.m., Genoa Friendship Garden, Plants for sale in the Greenhouse. 1202 Genoa Red Bluff Rd. 77034

## 2018 Plant Sales

### *Bear Creek Extension*

#### **Fruit Tree Sale and Symposia**

**Jan. 27**, 8:00 a.m., Plant Sale Preview/Symposia / 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., Sale. Citrus, apple, peach, pear, avocado, berry, pecan suitable for our area. Bear Creek Extension parking lot, 3033 Bear Creek Drive, Houston, TX 77084

### *Precinct 2, Genoa Friendship Gardens*

#### **Fruit Tree and Tomato Sale and Workshops**

**Feb. 24**, 8:00 a.m., Plant Sale Preview / 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., Sale. Citrus, apple, peach, pear, avocado, berry and pecan suitable for our area. Campbell Hall, Pasadena Fairgrounds, 7600 Red Bluff Rd., Pasadena, TX 77507

#### **Spring Sale - Perennials, Herbs & Peppers**

**Mar. 24**, 8:00 a.m., Plant Sale Preview / 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m., Sale. Perennials, peppers, vegetables, and herbs suited to our summer growing season. Campbell Hall, Pasadena Fairgrounds, 7600 Red Bluff Rd., Pasadena, TX 77507

## Have Garden Questions?

Email your questions and photos to: [phonehcmga@gmail.com](mailto:phonehcmga@gmail.com) or  
Call us Monday – Friday 9:00 am to Noon at 713-274-0950

# Plant of the Month - Hyacinth Bean

## *Lablab purpureus/Dolichos lablab*

Article and photos by Beth Braun, Master Gardener

Research on what I thought was just a pretty vine took me around the world, from northern Africa to parts of Asia to Thomas Jefferson's Monticello in Charlottesville, Virginia. Peggy Cornett, Director of the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants, wrote that seeds often come unsolicited to garden historians, who are in the business of collecting historic plants. The Hyacinth Bean, the "legend of Monticello's bean arbor," was a gift from Mount Vernon's director of horticulture, Dean Norton.

Native to Africa and known by such common names as Egyptian and Indian bean, the Hyacinth Bean was introduced to European gardens by the early 1700s and was sold by American nurserymen by the early 19th century. In 1812 Jefferson recorded planting "Arbor beans white, scarlet, crimson, purple, at the trees of the level on both sides of the terrasses, and on long walk of [kitchen] garden." It's possible that the "purple" bean recorded by Jefferson was the Hyacinth Bean.

*Lablab purpureus* (Lablab being an aboriginal word and *purpureus* meaning purple) is a member of the legume/pea/bean family. It's cultivated throughout the tropics for human and animal food. Amazingly, the leaves are more than 28% protein, 12% fiber, 7% minerals and 7% fat. In Kenya, the nutritious bean is especially popular in the Kikuyu tribe. Boiled beans mashed with ripe bananas has been the main dish for breastfeeding mothers to improve lactation.



In fact, all parts of the plant—leaves, flowers, pods, and tubers—are used for food and medicine. That sounds benign enough, but in actuality the raw beans contain toxic levels of cyanogenic glucosides which can cause vomiting, breathing problems, convulsions and even death. The Travel Channel website offers this short video:

<http://www.travelchannel.com/videos/the-deadly-hyacinth-bean-0154864>

The Missouri Botanical Garden's guideline for cooking mature, dried beans is to boil them in two changes of water to remove toxins. Young, immature pods can be cooked and eaten as you would other types of fresh beans. The adventurous reader can find cooking tips and recipes online.

With growing interest in multi-function gardens, the Hyacinth Bean is a perfect addition to a "foodscape", where edibles are interplanted with other landscaping plants. As a precaution, you'll want to remove the colorful pods within reach of young children.

The photos accompanying this column were taken in mid-September at the Harris County Master Gardeners' Genoa Friendship Garden. It blooms for weeks on end, with the twining vines reaching out from a sturdy arbor. While various sources report that the flowers are fragrant and attract hummingbirds and butterflies, other sources say they have no fragrance. I was up



*cont'd on pg. 7*

# Herb of the Month - Winter Savory

## *(Satureja montanaobliqua)*

by Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

November's herb focus is on a cool-weather favorite, winter savory (*Satureja montana*). Unlike its warm weather moniker twin, summer savory, winter savory is a perennial plant. "Sapor," the Latin word meaning "taste," from which "savoure," an Old French word meaning "tasty, fragrant" evolved, finally to "savory," meaning "pleasing to the taste or smell," perfectly suits this beautiful, well-mannered herb.

According to online historical research, the ancient Roman writer, Pliny, named the genus 'Satureja,' which is derived from the word "satyr," a half goat and half man mythological being who reveled in all savory delights. It was the ancient Romans that introduced the herb to England around the time of Caesar's reign.

Winter savory is an evergreen herb that displays slender, dark green leaves through 3 of the 4 seasons, and has a higher content of Thymol than its relative "summer savory," meaning that it has a stronger flavor. Incidentally, if you think winter savory's appearance favors rosemary and thyme, you're right – they're close relatives. Because of its peppery, pungent flavor, winter savory may be used very successfully as a flavor enhancer to recipes, thereby decreasing the need for salt – a good option for those mindful of sodium. Another related note: Winter savory herbs are often paired with beans during cooking since the addition of salt at inopportune times in the cooking process tends to toughen the beans.

Like most herbs, winter savory thrives in full sun of at least six hours per day in well-draining soil with a pH of 6.7. Sow seeds in the spring in flats to transplant outdoors once the soil warms; transplant seedlings 10-12 inches apart in the garden. Winter savory can also be propagated via cuttings. Take cuttings, the tips of new shoots, in late spring and place them in pots of wet sand.

When the cuttings root, transplant them to the garden or into another container. It can be used as a border plant in the herb garden or planted as a companion plant along with beans where it is said that growing winter savory keeps bean weevils away (interesting reciprocal relationship going on between winter savory and beans, isn't there...). Organic (and wise) gardeners, take

note: Winter savory is also planted near roses where it is purported to reduce mildew and aphid infestations!

Harvest winter savory in the morning when the essential oils are at their most potent. It can then be dried or used fresh. In temperate climates, winter savory will go dormant in the winter and put out new leaves in the spring. Older plants tend to get woody, so keep them pruned out to encourage new growth.



Winter Savory

Photo courtesy Gonzalez:MasterGardeners.org

Categorized as a perennial flowering herb, winter savory will establish a deep root system in its initial year of growth. Winter savory plants will grow to a mature height of roughly 10 to 16 inches tall, making them perfect for pots and containers, or even in window boxes as well. The plants are primarily grown for culinary uses; however, winter savory will also make a great addition to the garden when used as an ornamental plant.

Houston's first temperature and humidity anywhere below the nineties in the last calendar quarter represent the harbinger of fall! We have to take what we can and build the season, don't we? It is a wonderful, exciting time of year, during which we also remember that many of our good friends and neighbors continue to face challenges in rebuilding their homes and lives. A potted gift of easy care, beautiful winter savory would make a wonderful way to send love and reassurances of brighter days to come!

Citation:

<https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/edible/herbs/savory/growing-winter-savory-herbs.htm>

# Indoor Plants

By Charlotte Gogola, Master Gardener

On October 12 the P2 Master Gardeners were pleased to host speaker Linda Gay, former director of Mercer Arboretum. Her presentation, “Jewels of the Jungalow,” addressed the air quality benefits of indoor plants. Ms. Gay currently works part-time at Arbogate Nursery in Tomball as well as teaching about landscape plant materials at the Houston Community College Katy campus. The latter coursework is part of a professional landscape certification program administered by the Texas Nursery & Landscape Association ([www.tnlaonline.org](http://www.tnlaonline.org))



Pothos – *Epipremnum*

The use of plants to enhance indoor air quality is not a new idea. In the 1980’s Dr. W. C. “Bill” Wolverton led the NASA Clean Air Study, which investigated the use of interior

plants for indoor air pollution abatement. The findings were published in 1989. The researchers’ goal was the removal of organic chemicals from indoor air. This study had been organized in response to the problem of Sick Building Syndrome. Sick Building Syndrome involves an increase in indoor air pollution caused by the trend of making buildings air-tight to conserve energy. People exposed to buildings with Sick Building Syndrome have an increased incidence of symptoms such as headache; eye, nose and throat irritation; fatigue; dizziness; and nausea. Symptoms increase with time spent in the building and lessen after leaving the building. No specific illness can be identified.

In the NASA Clean Air Study, thirty plants were evaluated for their effect on sick building air quality. It was discovered that “microbes associated with the root systems of houseplants naturally consume toxins from the air.” Researchers also found that “when activated carbon is mixed with the growing media, the amount of pollutants removed from the air drastically increases. The toxins collect on the carbon for the microbes to consume.”

Ms. Gay discussed hydroculture, the growth of plants without the use of soil, for indoor plants. This is an especially effective method of filtering indoor air. Plants are “supported in expanded clay pellets or specially developed ceramic stone. The wicking action of the growing media (sic) supplies the plant’s roots with moisture and minerals.” The plant’s pot is placed inside a larger pot of water, and the plant’s roots grow out into the pot with the water. This eliminates the need for replanting every year as well as the possibility of root rot due to overwatering soil. Because the roots are more exposed with this planting method, plants are more efficient at removing indoor toxins than they would be in traditional potting mix. The hydroculture growing medium (expanded shale, porous clay such as Haydite, etc.) doesn’t harbor mold, bacteria or fungi and it is inert and odorless. “Hydroculture growing can help remove odors and allergy-causing dust and dander from the air as well, making it a viable option for allergy sufferers.” Note that hydroculture growth media may not be available at big box stores, but they are carried by such nurseries as Buchanan’s and Nature’s Way.



Peace lily or closet plant – *Spathiphyllum*

cont’d on pg. 7



*Philodendron*

## Indoor Plants, *cont'd from pg. 6*

Ms. Gay recommended Dr. Wolverton's books, such as *Plants: Why You Can't Live Without Them* (Roli Books, 2010) and *How to Grow Fresh Air* (Penguin, 1997), as resources for indoor plant horticulture. She also discussed a type of plant pot that includes a fan to push clean air out of the root system. You can learn more about these pots at [www.plantairpurifier.com](http://www.plantairpurifier.com). While the pots may seem expensive, building your own can cost much more.

The presentation included a list of good indoor air quality plants. Ms. Gay cautioned that some of these plants are toxic to pets; when in doubt, consult the ASPCA website for plant toxicity information ([www.asPCA.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants](http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/animal-poison-control/toxic-and-non-toxic-plants)). The plants that were introduced included:

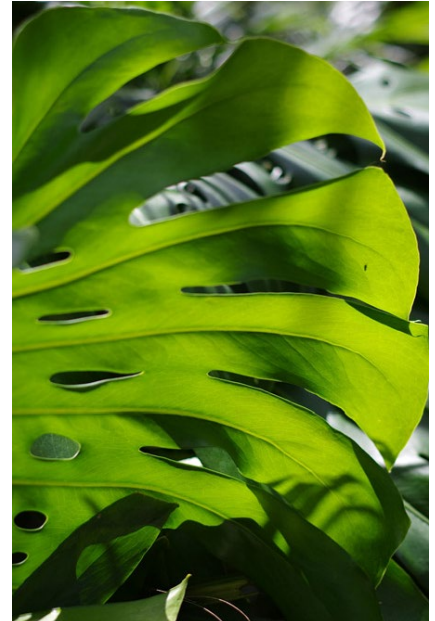
- Bamboo palm – *Chamaedorea seifrizii*
- Areca or butterfly palm – *Chrysalidocarpus lutescens*
- Chinese evergreen – *Aglaonema*
- Spider plant – *Chlorophytum comosum*
- Dragon plant – *Dracaena deremensis*, *Dracaena massangeana*, *Dracaena marginata*
- Dumb cane – *Diffenbachia*
- Fig tree – *Ficus nitida*, *F. benjamina*, *F. altissima variegata*, *F. elastic variegata*, *F. lyrata*
- Swiss cheese plant – *Monstera deliciosa*
- Arrowroot-Butterfly plant – *Nephtytis/Syngonium*
- Miniature rubber trees – *Peperomia obtusifolia variegata*
- *Philodendron*
- Pothos – *Epipremnum*



Chinese evergreen - *Aglaonema*

- Mother-in-law plant – Snake plant – *Sansieveria*
- Peace lily or closet plant – *Spathiphyllum*

A particularly useful slide was called “What’s Wrong with Your Plant?” A plant that looks long and spindly is suffering from insufficient light. A plant that isn’t flowering probably isn’t getting enough light, although the soil may be too wet. A wilting plant in wet soil has probably been overwatered. A plant with dry yellow or brown leaves (or brown leaf tips) may not be receiving enough water. Yellow leaves falling off the plant are probably the result of overwatering.



Swiss cheese plant - *Monstera deliciosa*

Ms. Gay concluded her presentation with a discussion of indoor plant pests, a list that includes mealybugs, scale, whiteflies, and fungus gnats. (The latter probably won’t occur if you’re using the soilless horticulture method discussed earlier.) Note that ants may “farm” scale or mealybugs so that they can eat the sticky film produced by those bugs. If you see ants on your indoor plants, look for other pests. Treat them with insecticides as necessary, again keeping in mind toxicity to pets.

The conclusion of Ms. Gay’s presentation was “Be Creative, Have Fun, and Set a Trend!” Go thou and do likewise, fellow gardeners.

## Tulips To Go, *cont'd from pg. 1*

tulips but stored them instead. The Dutch eventually broke down and ate the bulbs. They cooked easily and had some nutrition, but they didn't taste very good.

Tulips are the third most popular flower worldwide behind roses and chrysanthemums. Today, millions of tourists visit the Netherlands to view the tulips. One famous garden named Keukenhof has approximately 3,500 different tulip varieties. The Netherlands produced approximately three billion tulip

bulbs a year and exports two billion cut tulips annually. You don't have to travel there to get your own tulips though. You can order them online. Just do it soon so you have time to refrigerate them. There are also some nurseries and stores that carry them at this time. It may be possible to find a nursery that has already refrigerated the bulbs if you wait too late. Whichever route you choose, I'm sure you will be ecstatic when your bulbs bloom this spring.

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## Plant of the Month, *cont'd from pg. 3*

close and personal while taking the photos, and didn't pick up on a fragrance. In our garden it's grown for its showy purple stems, flowers and pods, and purple-tinged leaves. Hyacinth Bean flowers come in various shades, from white to pinkish purple to deep purple.

A tender perennial in USDA zones 10-11 and an annual in colder zones, the Hyacinth Bean blooms best in sun and is easy to grow in well-drained soils. Collect seeds in the fall when the pods are dry for direct sowing in the garden after the last frost, or start them indoors 6-8 weeks earlier. Germination will be improved by soaking the hard seeds overnight before planting. Plant them an inch or two deep, and six inches or more apart. Unless you plan to grow it as an unconventional ground cover, you'll want to have a climbing structure in place to support its vigorous growth.

As a bonus, the Hyacinth Bean is a low-maintenance plant that tolerates dry soil and has few pests other than Japanese beetles, which dine on the leaves without killing the plant.



# 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
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												



# Open Garden Days at Genoa Friendship Gardens



The Orchard



The Water Garden



The Greenhouse

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

## *Open Garden Days*

on the 3rd Monday of every month, 8:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m., 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 and native gardens.
- Meet and talk with a Master Gardener about planting citrus, fruit or berries for your home orchard.
- Contemplate the joy in the Serenity Garden and catch a 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.

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### *2017 Monthly Open Garden Days & Special Events*

January 16	Open Garden Day	June 5 & 19	Open Garden Day
<b>February 18</b>	<b>Fruit Tree &amp; Tomato Sale</b>	July 3 & 17	Open Garden Day
February 20	Open Garden Day	August 7 & 21	Open Garden Day
<b>March 18</b>	<b>Perennial, Herb &amp; Pepper Sale</b>	September 18	Open Garden Day
March 20	Open Garden Day	October 16	Open Garden Day
April 17	Open Garden Day	November 20	Open Garden Day
May 15	Open Garden Day		

# TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE

3033 BEAR CREEK DR.

HOUSTON, TX 77084

713-274-0950

[harris.agrilife.org/program-areas/hort/](http://harris.agrilife.org/program-areas/hort/)

[hcmga.tamu.edu](http://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](http://www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners)

[www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyHorticulture](http://www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyHorticulture)

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