

Urban Dirt

Permaculture!

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

Permaculture Basics

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

“Permaculture Design is not the rain, the roof, or the garden. Permaculture Design is the connections between these things. Permaculture brings cohesion where there was once isolation.”

-Bill Mollison

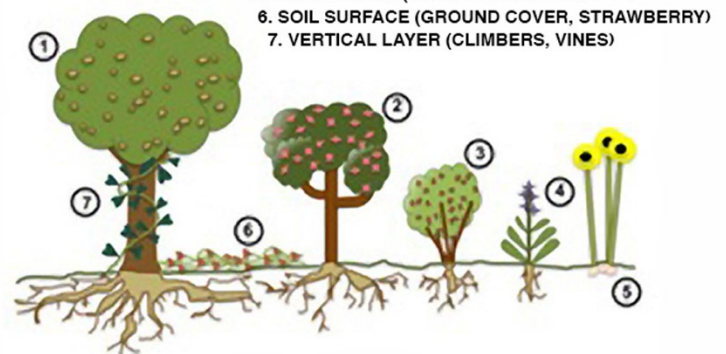
I think of permaculture gardening as “the big picture” when it comes to gardening. Permaculture gardening is a system that considers the local environment as well as your garden. It also focuses on sustaining the soil and the nutrients it provides. As you build up the soil, it takes care of your plants. There are three permaculture ethics: take care of the earth, care for its people and take no more than your share.

Having a sustainable garden can be accomplished in a few steps.

1. Know your location. Where are the low spots and the high spots in your garden? Which areas get the most sun? Which areas get the least sun? Which plants are present that you can incorporate into your new permaculture garden? What native plants are present? Do you have beneficial insects or predators in your yard?
2. Pick native plants if possible for your garden. Choose companion plants that benefit each other. Grow plants that draw butterflies. Select nitrogen-fixing, green plants to benefit your soil.



FOREST GARDEN



Forest Garden

Graphic courtesy SycamoreSpringFarm.org

3. Design your beds. Select plants that grow in your zone. Place plants in areas that will meet their light and water requirements. Group plants that complement each other. Stack plants to get the most use out of your space. Use herbaceous plants for the ground, shrubs as a second layer or understory plant and trees as the top layer. One important step to keep in mind- have your soil tested. This link will

cont'd on pg. 4



Upcoming Events	2	Getting Down to Earth	11
Herb of the Month	3	Open Garden Days at GFG	14
Plant of the Month	5	Ask a Master Gardener	15
Home Grown Podcast	6	GFG Garden Workdays	16
Home Grown Lecture Series.....	7	Master Gardener Birthdays.....	17
Growing With Plants and Nature.....	8	Gardening Tools	18
Green Thumb Lecture Series	9	MG In-Person Gardening	
Master Gardeners in the City	10	Opportunities	19



Have Garden Questions? Submit your questions to: <https://hcmga.tamu.edu/ask-a-question/>

UPCOMING EVENTS

SEPTEMBER 2021

Green Thumb Gardening Series

We have collaborated with the Harris County Public Library and Houston Community College. Join us for one or both!

Permaculture

Sept. 13, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. For the HCC program, register in advance to receive the link:

hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops

Sept. 21, 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Simply visit the Harris County Public Library System

No reservation required. Watch on Facebook – facebook.com/harriscountyp/live

Educational Programs

Sept. 7th, First Tuesday 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Program: *Master Gardener Committee Reports* presented by Committee Chairs. Meeting virtually via ZOOM

Home Grown Lecture Series - This webinar is provided by our Harris County Ag/Natural Resources Department. Registration is required for these free events. Please visit: homegrown2021Q3.eventbrite.com/

Sept. 16, 10:00 a.m. - *Growing Microgreens at the Windowsill* by Brandi Keller, Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent - Horticulture

Sept. 17, 10:00 a.m. - *Enhancing Your Dishes with Flavored Butter* by Shannon Dietz, Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent - Agriculture and Natural Resources

Youth Activities

Growing with Plants & Nature

Please visit us on our Growing with Plants and Nature Virtual Group found at the following link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/GPNVG/>.

Sept. 21, 4:00 p. m. - Growing with Plants and Nature Family Zoom Event - *Fall Vegetable Gardening*

Open Garden Day

September 20, 8:30 - 11:00 a.m., Genoa Friendship Garden, 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston, TX 77034. Tour the variety of exhibits including vegetable, perennial, rose, tropical, desert/xeriscape, native, Earth-Kind and plant trial gardens. Meet and talk with Master Gardeners about our plantings, and they are happy to answer questions you may have. Plants may be purchased online at <https://hcmga.tamu.edu/shop/> as the Greenhouse is currently closed.



Please visit us at the social media pages below:

- [Harris County Extension Horticulture Facebook Page](#)
- [Harris County Master Gardeners Facebook Page](#)
- [Harris County Family and Community Health Facebook Page](#)

For more information on COVID-19, please visit the following website:



Texas AgriLife Extension Service
Horticulture Program in Harris County
 13105 Northwest Freeway, Suite 1000
 Houston, TX 77040
 713.274.0950

CEA – Horticulture

Paul Winski - 713-274-0981

CEA – Horticulture

Brandi Keller - 713-274-0950



2021 Board of Directors

President

Alan Fisherman
 Alan.Fisherman@hc-mga.org

First Vice President

Jonathan Correia
 Jonathan.Correia@hc-mga.org

Second Vice President

Carolyn Boyd
 Carolyn.Boyd@hc-mga.org

Past President

Beth Braun
 Beth.Braun@hc-mga.org

Secretary

Mary Stokman
 Mary.Stokman@hc-mga.org

Treasurer

Kathryn McCleod
 Kathryn.McCleod@hc-mga.org

Directors

Douglas McLeod
 Dianne Lawrence
 Janice Muhm
 Dale Hudson
 Alexa Haass
 Carlos Domenech

Genoa Friendship Gardens Steering Committee Advisors

Evan Hopkins
 Georgia Lau

Urban Dirt Editor

Carolyn Boyd
 UrbanDirt.harrishort@gmail.com

Assistant Urban Dirt Editor

Terri Simon

HERB OF THE MONTH

Ginger Mint (*Mentha gentiles*)

by Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

If you are looking for a spectacular herb to suit a sunny-to-mostly-sunny pot locale this September, this month's featured herb, ginger mint, may just be the one for you. No doubt, lovers of both ginger and mint flavors will be in heaven with this one.

A cross between spearmint and corn mint, this beautiful herb offers precisely the appearance you might expect from its name, with the size and leaf shape of mint and a coloring reminiscent of variegated shell ginger. Ginger mint is really a lovely plant with so much potential in the kitchen! And if you are not inclined toward its culinary use, ginger mint is quite useful as a rodent detractor, as well.

Native to Asia and Europe, ginger mint is hardy in North America to Zones 5-9. While it may be best kept in pots due to inheritance of its Lamiaceae family trend toward invasiveness, ginger mint can easily be grown in sandy, loamy, or heavy clay soils in the garden. Placement of any mint in a container prior to planting in the ground will be helpful in containing its aggressive nature, but of course isn't a guarantee to totally keep its aggression contained forever (or even for long!) when planted in the ground rather than in a pot.

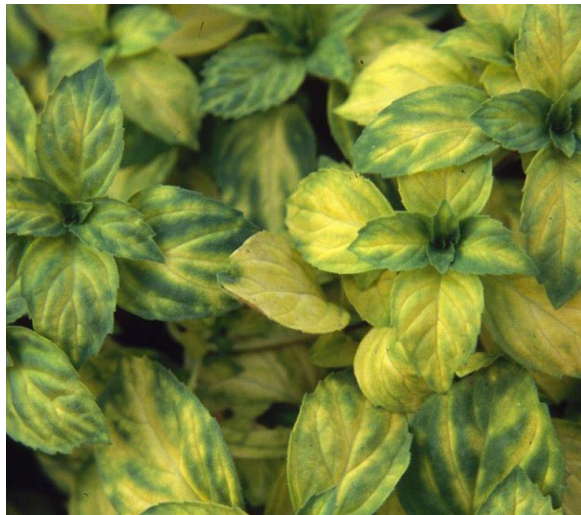
Ginger mint should be kept moist and maintained at a pH level between 5.5-7.5. The herb grows best in full sunlight or in a partially shaded area with well-drained soil. This mint possesses an upright habit reaching at maturity a height of about one and a half feet tall and two feet wide. Additionally, this plant is a great companion for cabbages and tomatoes, since it performs well in warding off insects.

For autumnal planting, ginger mint is best grown via cuttings, preferably of at least three inches tall to start. In the spring, growing from seed is usually quite successful, given proper conditions. Once the seeds have germinated, they can be transplanted into individual pots and then planted outside in the summer. Ginger mint should be mulched with compost, bark, or wood chips to help retain moisture and prevent the growth of weeds. The plant should be given bone meal twice a year to increase the nutrient content of the soil and promote growth.

At the end of the growing season, when the leaves are turning yellow or brown, the plant should be cut down to the ground. Doing so will help ginger mint survive the winter and allow it to grow back the following year.

If you are a fan of cooking pho (or want to be), ginger mint is your go-to herb to set this dish off to absolute perfection! Beyond pho, ginger mint elevates many Vietnamese dishes to their beautiful best. Another group of ginger mint aficionados recommends partnering with Asian flavors like garlic, chili, coriander, lemon grass and ginger for stir-fries, and with other mint; scented geraniums, lemon and lime balm for salads and sweet dishes. It's also suggested for pairing with seafood.

With its alternating chartreuse and deep green tones, ginger mint would contrast beautifully with crotons, fall mums, and pumpkins for your autumnal, sunny porch or patio décor, and offer a delicious new flavor for cooling weather dishes, as well. Happy fall, y'all!



Ginger mint

Courtesy brooksidenursery.co.uk

Citations:

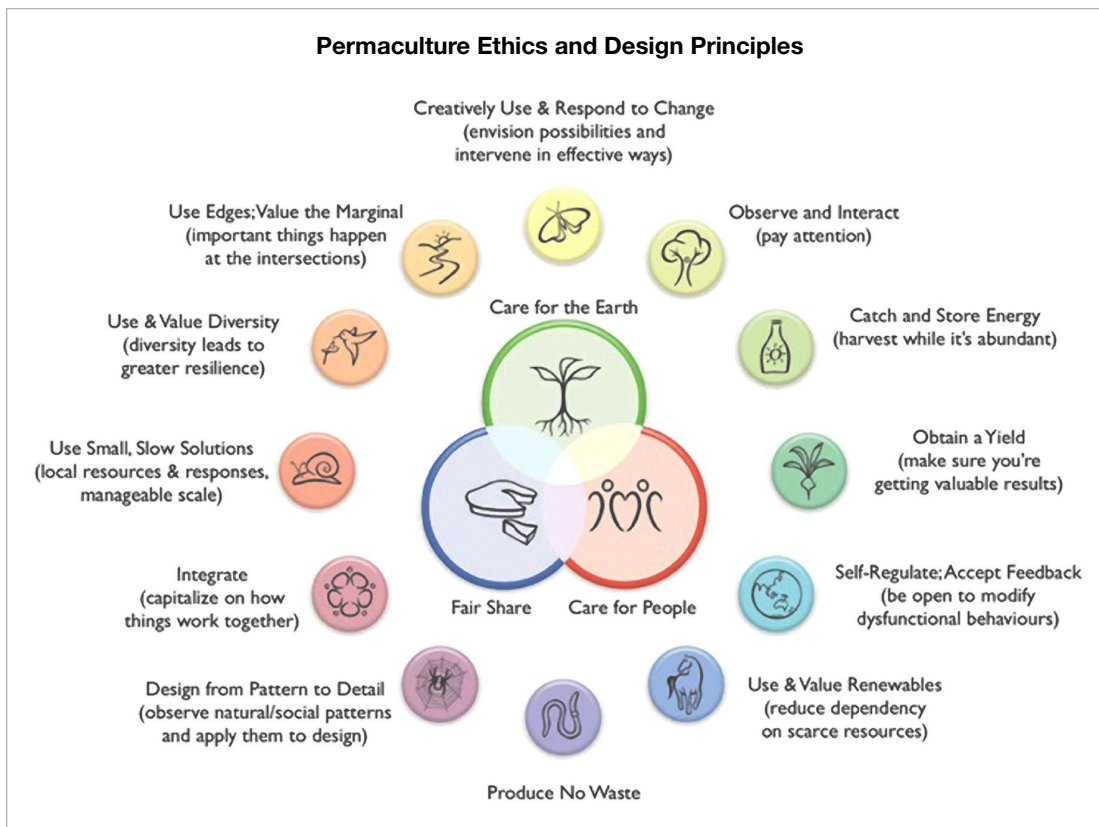
<https://heritagegarden.uic.edu/new-page-5/>

<https://renaissanceherbs.com.au/product/ginger-mint/>

Beginner's Gardening Tips, *cont'd from pg. 1*

- provide you with info for submitting your soil for testing <http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/files/websoilunified2021.pdf>.
4. Raise your beds. Six to twelve inches high is recommended.
 5. Plant your garden. If you plant your tall plants first they can provide shade for plants that need less light. Your plants' needs should be compatible if they are planted together. Group together plants that have the same light and water needs.
 6. Use organic mulch for your top layer. Do NOT use colored or dyed mulch. Using mulch will help reduce weeds and retain water.
 7. Use compost. Try using natural composts instead of chemical fertilizers. Earthworm castings or worm tea, compost from your compost bin and decomposed manure are loaded with nutrients for your soil and plants.
 8. Use the minimum amount of water. Rain barrels can be used to recycle rain water. A low-waste drip irrigation water system is ideal for reducing evaporation.

If you are interested in learning more about permaculture, please view our online *Green Thumb Gardening Series* on September 13 and September 21. The link can be found at <https://hcmga.tamu.edu/2021-green-thumb-gardening-series/>.



Graphic courtesy permaculture.co.uk

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Figs

Article and photos by Don Tyler, Master Gardener

I must admit a Fig Newton was not one of my most favorite “cookies” from my childhood. I have always had a texture issue with food and so the fig “paste” never really set right with me. It is kind of like gum with a liquid center....LOL. That said, I was noticing the figs on one of our trees and thought it might make for an interesting Plant of the Month.

Before getting into the specifics of a fig tree, it is very important we set the record straight. The Fig Newton is not named for Sir Isaac Newton but instead Newton, Massachusetts. Newton, Massachusetts is the home of the Fig Newton.

Now on to growing figs.

Of all the plants in our yard the fig trees are not just low maintenance, these plants are literally no maintenance. (Have I mentioned how much I love low maintenance plants!)

Texas A&M AgriLife Fact Sheet, *Figs*, written by Jim Kamas, Monte Nesbitt, and Larry Stein, states, “Figs perform best when planted in locations that receive full sun exposure.” I am



Fig tree receiving partial sun

obviously not to contradict these specialists, but I have found our fig growing under the canopy to be healthier than the one planted in full sun. Obviously, it is not just sun, but soil conditions play a critical role in a healthy plant. In any case, I would defer to the experts and you can be confident the fig tree can handle full sun in your landscape.

We have one growing in a sunny location and one growing under a tree canopy. Can you spot the fig tree in this picture? Even though this tree is producing like crazy this year, I would expect the tree would produce more if in full sun.

In addition to a sunny location, be aware of the tendency of the fig tree to spread out. So, pick a spot that offers the fig tree ample room to grow. You can see our fig tree planted under the tree canopy. The plant is easily 5’ across.



Fig tree under tree canopy approximately 5’ wide

There are four types of figs, Capriganis, Smyrna, San Pedro and Common. The common fig is the most common for home growers as it is “parthenocarpic, meaning the fruit forms without fertilization” (www.gardenerspath.com, *How to Grow Beautiful and Productive Fig Trees*, by Gretchen Heber, February 19, 2019.) Of the common type, AgriLife has identified three varieties which are “reliable choices” for home production: Alma, Celeste and Texas Everbearing. The following table from the AgriLife fact sheet provides key information regarding these three varieties.

cont'd on page 6

Variety	Climate	Fruit	Harvest	Notes
'Alma'	Very frost sensitive, especially when young.	Very high quality, excellent, rich, sweet flavor, skin is unattractive	Very productive; produces at an early age; late season; produces little or no fruit in years after severe freeze injury	Moderately vigorous tree; eye is closed; best grown no more than 200 miles from the Gulf of Mexico
'Celeste' ('Celestial')	Appears to be the most cold hardy of all fig varieties that have been evaluated in Texas	Small, brown to purple; excellent fresh dessert quality with a rich sweet flavor; an excellent processing fig, either frozen or processed as fig preserves	Very productive; harvest is often in mid to late June, well before most other fig varieties in Texas; usually produces fewer fruit in years after winter injury; heaving pruning of mature trees reduces the crop	Large, vigorous tree; tightly closed eye; adapted to the most diverse portions of Texas
'Texas Everbearing' ('Brown Turkey', 'Ramsey', 'Everbearing')	Less cold hardy than 'Celeste'	Medium to large; plump with a short stem; reddish-brown skin; reddish-pink pump; mild, sweet flavor	Reliable producer almost every year; fruit ripens over an extended period from June through August; produces a fair to good crop on new growth after severe freeze injury	Moderately closed eye; the fruit can sour or crack in very wet years

Information provided from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Texas Fruit and Nut Production, 'Figs', written by Jim Kamas, Monte Nesbitt, and Larry Stein, Extension Fruit Specialists, The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, EHT-019, 11-13.

Figs, cont'd from pg. 5

The following are pictures of some of the figs from the tree shown under the canopy. Our other fig tree, planted in a sunny location, took on serious damage from the freeze but is slowly rebounding.



Under the fig tree canopy



Samples of Don's fig harvest

Aside from the fruit, the fig tree is an aesthetically pleasing addition to the landscape with the large beautifully shaped leaves and sprawling multi-trunked branching. Our landscapes should have a mixture of plant textures and so the fig tree will provide a different texture to our landscapes.

Another thing I like to dabble in from time to time is plant propagation. I have had great success with pomegranate trees. I was pleased to read on the GardenersPath website as well as the *AgriLife* fact sheet that figs are “one of the easiest fruit crops to propagate” (*AgriLife*). Either resource will provide the basic steps, but GardenPath’s summary:

- Take an 8” to 10” cutting of wood in early spring.
- Stick it in a pot of good dirt, with several inches below the surface and one or two buds above the dirt line.
- Let the cutting grow in a container for a season before transplanting.

Apparently, that is about as simple as it gets so that might be something to consider early next spring.

I most certainly will not be starting my own Fig Newton business anytime soon; however, fig trees are a nice addition to any landscape and rather easy to grow. Even if you, like me, are not necessarily a big fan of figs, enjoy the textural benefits to your landscape and let your friendly squirrels and birds have a go!

Home Grown Program Expands to a Podcast

<https://bit.ly/3w4cUAR>



The Home Grown podcast is presented by the Agriculture & Natural Resources (ANR) Unit of the Harris County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office. The series provides information on urban agriculture / horticulture / gardening and ag literacy. The program focuses on topics that are relevant to the urban gardener.

The podcast can also be found at the following site: www.listennotes.com/podcasts/home-grown-podcast-paul-OM7PKqityX_/



HOME GROWN LECTURE SERIES

JULY - AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2021

THE LATEST & GREATEST IN BEDDING PLANTS FOR 2022

Paul Winski - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Horticulture

July 1, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

GARDEN HUMMINGBIRD SAFETY

Brandi Keller - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Horticulture

July 15, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

COOKING SAFELY OUTDOORS

Shannon Dietz - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Agriculture & Natural Resources

August 5, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

FALL VEGETABLE GARDENING

Paul Winski - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Horticulture

August 19, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

ENHANCING YOUR DISHES WITH FLAVORED BUTTERS

Shannon Dietz - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Agriculture & Natural Resources

CHANGED to September 17, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

GROWING MICROGREENS AT THE WINDOWSILL

Brandi Keller - Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agent-Horticulture

September 16, 2021 - 10:00 a.m.

**TEXAS A&M
AGRILIFE
EXTENSION**

TO REGISTER FOR THIS FREE ONLINE SERIES,
PLEASE VISIT
[HTTPS://HOMEGROWN2021Q3.EVENTBRITE.COM](https://homegrown2021q3.eventbrite.com)

THE MEMBERS OF TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE WILL PROVIDE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES, EDUCATION, AND EMPLOYMENT TO ALL PERSONS REGARDLESS OF RACE, COLOR, SEX, RELIGION, NATIONAL ORIGIN, AGE, DISABILITY, GENETIC INFORMATION, VETERAN STATUS, SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY AND WILL STRIVE TO ACHIEVE FULL AND EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY THROUGHOUT TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE..

Growing with Plants and Nature

Growing with Plants and Nature offers children and their families opportunities for learning about gardening and nature. We are excited about our outreach to more children and their families through a collaboration with our AgriLife Extension agents.

Check out our Facebook Group at www.facebook.com/groups/GPNVG where you will find videos of all of our Family Zoom presentations as well as many crafts and activities related to those presentations. Email ogd.harrishort@gmail.com for any questions, information or comments about all of our Growing with Plants and Nature activities.

Like so many others, we were beginning to enjoy face to face activities such as these planting projects with youth from a 4-H group. However, as it became apparent that the Covid Delta variant surge was impacting how children could return to school safely, we delayed our plans for further indoor activities at Community Centers because the children are too young to be eligible for vaccinations. Some of the things we were able to participate in, in August:

Bridgeland Melon & Berry Fest and Towne Lake Farmers Market - we provided an opportunity for over 100 children to plant seeds or stem cuttings and explained caring for the plants at home. Also, we offered a brief education about seeds and propagating plants with stem cuttings. We were pleased to add over 25 families requesting information about our Facebook Group and email notification of our upcoming activities.



Collaboration with Extension agents at two elementary schools



Master Gardeners preparing fun, craft and planting activities for children



Green Thumb 2021 Gardening Series

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Harris County Master Gardeners are pleased to offer the FREE *Green Thumb Gardening Series of Lectures* now provided virtually twice a month. We have collaborated with the Harris County Public Library and Houston Community College. Join us for one or both!

Got questions? Go to hcmga.tamu.edu/ask-a-question/

Second Monday, 10:00 A.M. – 11:30 A.M. Houston Community College

Register in advance to receive the link: hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops
Second Monday of each month

January 11 – *Pruning Basics*

February 8 – *Spring Vegetable Gardening*

March 8 – *Composting*

April 12 – *Butterfly Gardens*

May 10 – *Integrated Pest Management*

June 14 – *Intro to Plumeria*

July 12 – *Fall Vegetable Gardening*

August 9 – *Gardening for Beginners*

September 13 – *Permaculture*

October 11 – *Plant Propagation*

Third Tuesday, 11:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M. Harris County Public Library Facebook Live

No reservation required. Watch on Facebook – facebook.com/harriscountyppl/live
Third Tuesday of each month

January 19 – *Pruning Basics*

February 16 – *Spring Vegetable Gardening*

March 16 – *Composting*

April 20 – *Butterfly Gardens*

May 18 – *Integrated Pest Management*

June 15 – *Intro to Plumeria*

July 20 – *Fall Vegetable Gardening*

August 17 – *Gardening for Beginners*

September 21 – *Permaculture*

October 19 – *Plant Propagation*



Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service provides equal opportunities in its programs and employment to all persons, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating. Individuals with disabilities, who require an auxiliary aid, service or accommodation in order to participate in any Extension activities, are encouraged to contact the Harris County Extension Office at 713-274-0950 for assistance five working days prior to the activity.



*Visit the Harris County Master Gardeners
Facebook page for event details!*

www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners



Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

in partnership with

Hermann Park Conservancy

are pleased to present

Master Gardeners in the City at McGovern Centennial Gardens

The Harris County Master Gardeners maintain the vegetable, herb, berry, and citrus beds in the Family Garden on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, so if you see one of us working there, feel free to say hi. We will resume educational activities in September.

McGovern Centennial Gardens at Hermann Park

1500 Hermann Drive

Houston, Texas 77004

When events resume: free tours and children's activity. "Adult workshop at 10:30 a.m.

No registration required.

These educational programs are FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin.

The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating.

Getting Down to Earth

Article and photos by Pam Longley, Master Gardener

News from Genoa Friendship Gardens

Conversation with a dragonfly

While deadheading one of the trial gardens, I spied this baby dragonfly perched on a lower branch of one of our black crape myrtles. She looked at me, moving her head back and forth as I talked to her, seeming to be listening intently and trying to communicate with me. We stayed together in this “miracle of nature” moment for more than 15 minutes!



Dragonfly in GFG gardens

Rick Castagno, Vegetable Production Manager, reported that the crop inventory so far for 2021 is 531 pounds of vegetables. The Celano cherry tomatoes were the champion tomato, producing 129 pounds or 63% of the total tomato harvest. The “lesson learned”, he said, was to plant one row of tomatoes per raised bed or stagger two rows with each plant having its own tomato cage. They planted two non-staggered rows, which made it impossible to get between the rows to thin them out to allow adequate air circulation and insect control. Sadly, most of the larger tomatoes either rotted on the vine or were eaten by insects. The squash yield was a bit

disappointing. Squash vine bore beetles killed the plants in mid-June. **Doug McLeod** found seeds for a variety called Talume summer squash that is supposed to be resistant to the beetles, so they planted some the first week in August and we will see how they do.

You may remember that Rick is a home beer brewer and he and **Paul Winski** were excited to trial some hops, but the trial failed. Rick suspects bad rhizomes from the vendor. Vegetation killer will be applied to the hops beds and they will eventually be prepped for new hops trials. There will also be three beds prepped for a strawberry trial in October.

Planning is underway for GFG’s 2022 plant sales. The *Fruit Tree and Tomato* sale will be online with a tentative pickup date of February 19, 2022. And, the tentative sale pickup date for the *Perennial and Pepper* sale is March 19, 2022.

Our Earth Kind Garden, planted last year, is maturing beautifully. Take a look at this saucer-sized Summer Spice Crème de la Cocoa hibiscus.



Summer Spice Crème de la Cocoa hibiscus in the Earth-Kind garden

cont'd on pg. 12

Getting Down to Earth, cont'd from pg. 11

Article and photos by Dale Hudson, Master Gardener

Christ the Good Shepherd Garden

If you are a grower of fruits and nuts, or your specialty is flowers and shrubs, then summer is your season of plenty. If, however, you are a vegetable grower like the folks at Christ the Good Shepherd Garden, then summer is the time to take a break and enjoy the A/C. When I encounter new garden enthusiasts who ‘came from away’ they generally are quizzical when I explain that our three growing seasons in south Texas are spring, fall, and winter. This isn’t absolutely true of course, as I explain below, however after experiencing just one August here most newcomers become believers.

A visual survey of our 28 beds at CGS in mid-August show the only things standing are peppers and okra. Full disclosure however does require me to acknowledge the eight beds of sweet potato vines tucked in the back, hugging the ground.

Both the peppers and okra are part of HCMGA trials started earlier this year. Nine varieties of “not hot” peppers have been on trial since the beginning of May. Every week each variety is separately harvested, weighed, and counted. All varieties have performed well through periods of cool and wet, followed by hot and dry. This is not the place for



Aji Rico has been the most productive variety in our trial with almost 400 pods per plant.



The eight beds of sweet potato vines form a blanket over the back of the garden.

details, but suffice it to say that thru early August gardeners harvested and delivered to the food pantries more than 10,000 peppers weighing more than 375 pounds. The okra trial is focused on one well known variety, Candle Fire. One bed of Candle Fire was planted alongside one other bed comprised of three varieties previously grown at CGS. Candle Fire has been a flaming success (pun intended). After a mid-June planting of all varieties, the first production occurred mid-July. Candle Fire was the clear winner for July, and although the CGS varieties have picked up the pace in August, the Candle Fire has remained more productive up through the time of writing by a factor of more than 2:1.



Lovely Candle Fire okra blossom



Candle Fire okra daily harvest

Fall is coming, and so is cooler weather. Cabbage seedlings have already been bumped up from the 50-paks to Solo cups. Thoughts of turnips, collards, and other cool season veggies are creeping into our minds. Paul Winski, on his last visit, teased us with the possibility of strawberry trials later this year. Better gardening days are just ahead.

cont'd on pg. 13

Getting Down to Earth, *cont'd from pg. 12*

Article and photos by Nancy Graml, Master Gardener

Centennial Gardens

Blackberry Clean-Out

Blackberries produced very well this year. We trimmed them after harvest during late July, but unfortunately we did not have very many to harvest because visitors in the Family Garden enjoyed them. We went back in and took out all the dead canes that produced last season which were the Ouachita, Kiowa, and Arapaho varieties.

As the Master Gardeners worked to re-attach the vines to the wires with rose gloves, we joked that we really needed Kevlar vests to stay “thorn proof.”

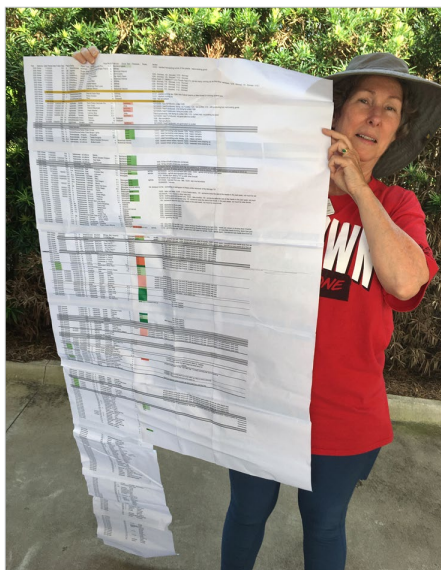


MG Lisa Lawrence ties blackberry vines

Scientific Research in the Family Garden.

Master Gardener and retired geophysicist Elizabeth Fisher uses her research and data collection skills to keep track of what is in the Family Garden.

She records the data in a spreadsheet. She assigns each bed with a distinct identifier, and collects the beds' data in order to track our rotation plan. We try to rotate our crops each year and make sure we do not put the same plant family in the same bed. In addition to the plant families, Elizabeth records the dates of planting,



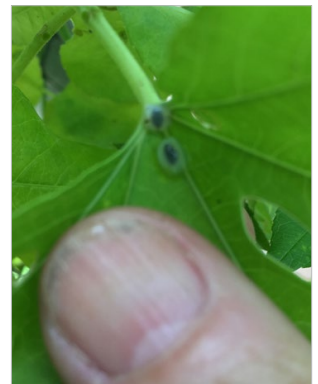
MG Elizabeth Fisher collects data

fertilizing, and harvest, as well comments on pests and diseases and a general ranking of each plant as “good, bad, or ugly.” In August, we prepared for the fall crops we are planting now.

Elizabeth conferred with the Family Garden leader, and using her spread-sheet, they easily sorted crop families and beds to make sure we properly rotated the crops. Then they selected varieties based on garden history.

What in the World is Basil Seed Mucilage?

We spotted small squishy bulbs spread out over leaves, wood frames, and on the surface of the bedding soil in the herb beds. At first, we thought they might be fungal spores. When they germinated they produced basil seedlings. It turns out they were basil seeds disbursed from the surrounding plants, and they were covered in mucilage. We learned that basil seeds produce their own mucilage which acts as a reservoir to hold loosely bound water for seed germination and early seedling development. Who knew? For more information about this “seed goo,” go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6C7ZkBVU190>.



Basil mucilage

Master Gardeners meet new Manager of Hermann Park Conservancy

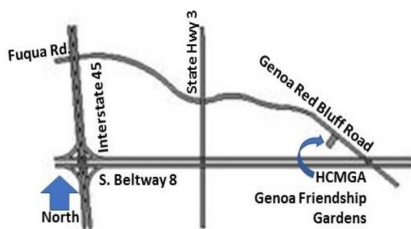
The new Manager of Hermann Park Conservancy, Daniel Haywood, met with Master Gardeners in the Family Garden to learn about our activities and plans. Mr. Haywood was also eager to learn about our climate and growing season. He remarked how “everything grows so much bigger down here,” including plants here that struggle in Dallas where he worked. While there was a skeletal crew in Centennial Gardens during COVID, he is now hiring more people “to get back to high standards.” He appreciates the perennials in Centennial Gardens versus the quarterly changes of annuals in the Dallas Botanic Garden. He said he was impressed that our Family Garden was so well cared for. Mr. Haywood is the former Horticulture Supervisor at The Dallas Arboretum & Botanic Garden and a recipient of a Masters of Agriculture in Horticulture from Texas A&M.

Genoa Friendship Gardens Open Garden Days

Open the 3rd Monday of every month,
8:30 a.m. until 11:00 a.m., March thru October.

Admission to the Exhibit Gardens is Free.

- Tour the variety of exhibits including vegetable, perennial, rose, tropical, desert/xeriscape, native, Earth-Kind and plant trial gardens.
- Meet and talk with a Master Gardener about our plantings, and they are happy to answer questions you may have.
- Contemplate the serenity of our gardens and catch a view of the water garden.
- Plants may be purchased online at <https://hcmga.tamu.edu/shop/> as the Greenhouse is currently closed.



HCMGA
1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road
Houston, TX 77034



Ask a Master Gardener – In-Person Activities

by Valerie Depew, Master Gardener

Our Farmer's Market table hosting activities have resumed. These events are in compliance with COVID protocols, such as wearing masks and social distancing.

For Harris County MGs that are interested in volunteering for these events, the SignUp is available at:

<https://signup.com/go/wBSYeQe>

The full AAMG schedule for September

- Sat., Sept. 4** **Garden Oaks Farmer's Market**, 949 Wakefield, Houston, TX – 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.
 Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble, TX 77338 – 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
 Urban Harvest, 3401 Westheimer, Houston, TX – 7:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.
- Sat., Sept. 11** **Tomball Farmer's Market**, 205 West Main St., Tomball, TX – 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Thurs., Sept. 16** **Westchase Farmer's Market**, 10503 Westheimer Rd., Houston, TX – 3 to 7 p.m.
- Sat., Sept. 18** **Mercer Botanic Gardens**, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble, TX 77338 – 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
 Towne Lake Farmer's Market, 9955 Barker Cypress Rd., Cypress, Texas 77433 – 9:30 a.m to 1:30 p.m.
- Sat., Sept. 25** **Memorial Villages Farmer's Market**, 10840 Beinhorn Rd., Houston, TX – 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.
 Harris County Precinct 4 Civic Adventure Day, Collins Park, Spring TX – 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Thurs., Sept. 30** **SE Texas Ag Summit**, Baytown Community Center, Baytown, TX – 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.
 (lunch and dinner provided)
- Fri., Oct 1** **SE Texas Ag Summit**, Baytown Community Center, Baytown, TX – 8 p.m. to 2 p.m.
 (breakfast and lunch provided)

Starting in October! Woodchase Park Community Garden AAMG

Nominate a Master Gardener of the Month

We want to recognize the people who are working hard to keep our organization functioning.

To let the Membership committee know about the volunteers deserving of the award, contact

Karen Breneman at kbreneman2017@gmail.com or phone at 281-463-2110 or 832-923-1712.

Thank you in advance for your nomination.

For Harris County Master Gardeners Only!

September 11th & 25th GFG Garden Workday!

8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Houston TX



Appropriate Covid-19 protocols will be observed. As a reminder, please remain socially distanced at least six feet apart, wash your hands and use hand sanitizer. If working closer than six feet, a mask is required.

Genoa Friendship Garden Workdays are an opportunity for Interns and Master Gardeners to meet with other gardeners, and to learn by working in a variety of gardens. Test your practical gardening skills and learn from other gardeners' knowledge. Explore the various options of working in a collection of gardens with perennials, proven Earth-Kind winners, the fruit tree orchard, native plants, composting, and greenhouse activities.

Come and enjoy a few hours working in the garden with fellow Gardeners while gaining your required membership service hours. Work tasks will be outlined, and available to gardeners to seek their interest. Garden leads will be on hand to guide you through the tasks.



For some of you that have considered this a distance you couldn't commit to on a regular basis, it is *always* available if you want to be surrounded by old or new friends.

GFG also offers Mon./Wed. workdays (8:45 a.m. – Noon) for MGs who can attend during the week.

Please join us at our GFG Garden Workdays!

Evan J. Hopkins,
Master Gardener



Have Garden Questions?



We have developed a new form located at <https://hcmga.tamu.edu/ask-a-question/>

You can submit your question and up to three photos. Be sure your photos are focused and clear.



Please subscribe to our Harris County Horticulture YouTube page for access to recorded videos.

Thank you for your support.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel>



Master Gardeners and Interns who celebrate a birthday during *September* include the following. Wish them a **HAPPY BIRTHDAY** when you see them!

Nancy Beeson, Karen Breneman, Ginnie Duffy, Elizabeth Fisher, Joyce Flott, Gwen Fritz, Dana Goeggel, Christa Kaiser, Kim Kaub, Linda Persse, Liz Pozzi, Tony Ruppe, Marilou Schopper, Shirley Swansey, Baxter Swenson, Jacque Tatum and Kelly Vernon

If your name is missing, please check that your online profile is complete.




It's that time of year!

As you all know, we are in hurricane season until November 30th. Hopefully, storms will bypass our area this year. But, to make sure you and your families are prepared for an event, check out <https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/prepare/ready.php> .

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	Texas AgriLIFE Extension Service											
	Harris County Office 713-274-0950 https://harris.agrilife.org/hort/											
Planting times are for seeds unless otherwise noted	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
	Ideal Planting Time			Marginal Planting Time								
Artichoke	Dormant Crowns								Transplants			
Asparagus (dormant crowns)												
Beans - Snap & Lima (Butterbean)			Snap&Lima					Snap				
Beets												
Broccoli (transplants)												
Brussels Sprouts (transplants)												
Cabbage (transplants)												
Cabbage - Chinese (transplants)												
Carrots												
Cauliflower (transplants)												
Chard, Swiss												
Collards (transplants)												
Corn												
Cucumbers												
Eggplant (transplants)												
Garlic												
Kale (transplants)												
Kohlrabi (transplants)												
Leeks	Transplants								Seeds			
Lettuce - also Arugula, Mache, Sorrel												
Melon - Cantaloupe, Honeydew												
Mustard												
Okra												
Onion - bulbing	Transplants									Seeds		
Onion - multiplying/bunching												
Peas - English & Snap												
Peas - Southern												
Pepper (transplants)												
Potato - Irish (cut pieces)												
Potato - Sweet (slips)												
Pumpkin												
Radish												
Spinach												
Squash - Summer												
Squash - Winter												
Tomato												
Turnips												
Summer Greens - Malabar, Amaranth												
Watermelon												

Average Last Freeze Dates (Hobby 2/8, Bush 3/1) ↑ ↑ Average First Freeze Dates (Bush 11/30, Hobby 12/20) ↑ ↑
 Plants grown over winter may require protection during freezing weather. Seeds and transplants started in the heat of summer will benefit from shading during establishment.

Download the
 Vegetable Garden
 Planting Guide here!

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE

EXTENSION SERVICE

13105 NORTHWEST FREEWAY, SUITE 1000

HOUSTON, TX 77040

713-274-0950

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

hcmga.tamu.edu

Follow Us On Facebook, Twitter & Instagram

The Harris County Master Gardeners as well as Texas A&M AgriLife Extension - Harris County Horticulture are actively participating on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram 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 to your account and easily share information with others. This is a definitely a timesaver for these busy garden days and helps promote our organization. Reach us via these links:



www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyMasterGardeners

www.facebook.com/HarrisCountyHorticulture



<https://twitter.com/pharrishort>



<https://www.youtube.com/channel>



<https://www.instagram.com/harriscountymastergardeners>

MG In-person Volunteer Gardening Opportunities

Learning Tuesdays at Centennial Gardens

As a reminder, every Tuesday, we will have a 30-minute lesson on a component of the garden for MGs and Interns. So you can get in an hour and a half of volunteer work and 30 minutes (sometimes more!) of continuing education. The workday begins at 9 a.m. We'll take a break mid-morning for a rest and the 30 minute class, then should finish up by 11 a.m. Email Becky Larkin directly, if you are interested in attending at rebeccalarkin117@gmail.com

Genoa Friendship Garden

1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Houston 77034

Weekday Workdays 8:30am - 12pm

Every Monday and Wednesday we are working in the gardens. Feel free to drop in to get service hours!

Weekend Workdays 8:00am - 12:00pm

Please join us every 2nd and 4th Saturday at our Weekend Workdays. These are opportunities for Interns and MGs to meet with other gardeners to learn and work in a variety of gardens while observing safe physical distancing.

Gardening on the North side at Christ the Good Shepherd Church (CGS)

Monday, Thursday and Saturday - 8:00 - 10:00 a.m.
CGS garden is located between TX 249 and I-45 just north of FM 1960 at 18511 Klein Church Rd, Spring, TX 77379.

All work tools and equipment are provided, including gloves, water, sunscreen, and bug spray. We welcome new faces to join our group. Contact **Dale Hudson** by phone or text at 832-659-7799, or email at UTVOL66@gmail.com.

The garden has 28 raised beds for vegetables and two uniquely designed raised beds for herbs. There is a heated greenhouse where veggies and herbs are started from seed. And, there is a specifically designed composting area where all of the compost and mulch requirements for the garden are met on site. Gardeners with special skills or interests can focus on a particular area and lead or learn in the setting they enjoy.

CGS garden is approved as a Texas AgriLife research site, and as such we conduct plant trials throughout the year.

Would you like to contribute to the Urban Dirt?

Send all questions and/or submissions to: UrbanDirt.harrishort@gmail.com