

Urban Dirt

Succulents!

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

Succulents

by Debra Caldwell, Master Gardener

What is a succulent? Succulents are drought-resistant plants with fleshy tissues that store water. Some, like cacti, lack or have very small leaves and use stems for water storage and photosynthesis. Others, such as Agave, have thick, spiky leaves that point toward the sun to reduce direct sunlight and water loss. They use their fleshy leaves for water storage while others use enlarged roots to store water. Succulent species have evolved independently from many families in response to arid conditions. It's estimated that there are at least 10,000 succulent species in the world.

Many succulents are silvery or gray in color or have fuzzy surfaces that reflect sunlight, reduce evaporation and trap moisture. Others reduce water loss by having a thick waxy cuticle. Hairs, spines, bitter taste and toxic substances make the plant less palatable to herbivores and reduce water loss. A succulent must be able to absorb large quantities of water during brief intense rainfall or flash floods in the dry environments. They usually have extensive, shallow root systems and a modified form of photosynthesis.



How to use succulents. In Harris County, we have some challenges with high humidity, soggy clay soil, and hard freezes. We can grow succulents successfully if we choose plants that tolerate our conditions and provide the right environment for them.

One solution is to grow succulents as houseplants. They need about six hours of bright, indirect light each day in a south or east-facing window. Small succulents can grow in shallow containers because of their shallow root systems. They are well adapted to growing in gutters, small window boxes, wreath frames and wooden pallets, letting you take advantage of vertical space. Growing succulents in containers outdoors makes them easier to move to a covered patio, under eaves or a high tree canopy to protect them from too much rain, sunlight or cold temperatures.

If you grow succulents in the ground, drainage is key in our humid, wet climate. Use a porous well-draining soil and create mounds to improve drainage and raise succulents above standing water and clay. Many types of succulents such as True Sedum (stonecrop) or Ariocarpus are perfect for

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY 2022

Green Thumb Gardening Series

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

Succulents

May 9, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. For the HCC program, register in advance to receive the link: hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops

May 17, 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

May 3, First Tuesday 9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. *Annual Awards Luncheon* - meeting in-person at Trini Mendenhall Community Center, 1414 Wirt Road, Houston 77055.

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: homegrown2022.eventbrite.com/

May 5, 10:00 a.m. - *Home Butcher: Making Boudin* by Shannon Dietz, Texas A&M AgriLife Harris County Extension Agent – Agriculture and Natural Resources

Plant Sales!

Online GFG plant sale goes LIVE on May 1st. Pickup day for online sales is May 14th.

May 14 Genoa Friendship Gardens Herb Sale and Perennial Sale pickup day 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Additional plants available for sale in the greenhouse!

May 16 Genoa Friendship Gardens Open Garden Day, 8:30 - 11:00 a.m., 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston, TX 77034, garden tours *and* in-person plant sale.

Youth Activities

GPN

Look for the Growing with Plants and Nature table at following plant sales and farmer's markets:

May 14 Genoa Friendship Gardens Herb Sale and Perennial Sale 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston, TX 77034 *Grab and go activity packets for families with children.*

May 21 Towne Lake Farmer's Market, 9955 Barker Cypress Rd., Cypress TX 77433 10:00 a.m - 1:00 p.m. *Hands on planting activity for children.*

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:

COVID-19
AgriLife Extension
Web Hub

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

**Texas AgriLife Extension Service
Horticulture Program in Harris County**
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HERB OF THE MONTH

Lettuce leaf basil (*Ocimum basilicum crispum*)

by Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

Special article alert for foodies; particularly those with a passion for fusion culinary arts. Yes, of course, we have all heard of and probably grown sweet basil and Thai basil, but how about lettuce leaf basil? This unusual and relatively rare basil is May's herb focus.

Most commercial basil cultivars can be divided into seven general categories, including the large-leafed robust type, into which lettuce leaf basil falls. There are in actuality three types of lettuce leaf basil; green ruffles, Napoletano and mammoth, with the latter being the mildest-tasting. All of the large-leafed basil types tend to bush out into clumps of bright green large curly or ruffled leaves, and have a pungent fragrance in addition to a mild sweet flavor. Mammoth (*Ocimum basilicum crispum* "Mostruoso") grows 16 to 20 inches tall and produces 4-inch leaves and white flowers. Napoletano (*Ocimum basilicum crispum* "Napoletano") is probably the largest of the cultivars, with 5-inch leaves and a height up to two feet. Green ruffles (*Ocimum basilicum* "Green Ruffles") also grows to about two feet and has large serrated and quilted leaves.

Derived from a Greek word meaning "king," basil is a widely-used aromatic plant that is occasionally referred to as the "king of the herbs." Basil is generally easy to grow, perhaps particularly so here in southeast Texas. Even if you are not gardening in zones 9 through 11, however -- as is the case with most basil cultivars -- lettuce leaf basil grows well indoors for year-round use in cooking. If you are blessed to live in the sub-tropical zones 9-11, lettuce leaf basil thrives outdoors as either an herb or an ornamental.

To plant lettuce leaf basil indoors, sow seeds ¼ inch deep with 10-inch spacing in flats, or place in peat pots with well-drained soil. The best germination is obtained in a warm environment of at least 75 degrees Fahrenheit. When planting outdoors, select a full sun location after the last threat of frost has passed. Germination in either case should take around two weeks.

During the active growth season, fertilize lettuce leaf basil plants two or three times, but avoid using heavy nitrogen fertilizers that can affect oil content and flavor. Water plants at their bases lightly each week, particularly during dry spells, avoiding water on the leaves in order to help prevent fungal diseases, to which lettuce leaf basil is susceptible. Whenever four sets of leaves can be left on the plant, pinch back in order to encourage bushiness and plant yield.



Photo courtesy Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds/rareseeds.com

According to experts in the growing of this basil, it suffers from plant pathogens including the soil-borne fungal diseases Fusarium wilt and Pythium blight, both of which can quickly kill young plants. A gray mold caused by *Botrytis cinerea* can infect leaves even after harvesting and may also kill the entire plant. In 2004, a downy mildew disease caused by *Peronospora belbahrii* was spotted in Italy and has quickly spread to and throughout the United States. The best

treatment for such diseases is prevention, by using only well-draining soil, and properly disposing of any plants that develop disease in order to prevent spread. Aphids, mites and Japanese beetles are common pests you can spray off with a garden hose or remove by hand.

There are so many wonderful culinary possibilities for lettuce leaf basil; using for wraps in place of lettuce leaves clearly stands out as an excellent opportunity to capitalize on this basil's unique size and flavor. Space here doesn't allow for a thorough elaboration on all of the amazing culinary chances offered to utilize lettuce leaf basil, so I am instead including a useful link that provides a good starting point -- try substituting lettuce leaf basil in one of these recipes!: <https://www.bonappetit.com/test-kitchen/ingredients/slideshow/lettuce-recipes>

Everyone, here's to excellent adventures in gardening, and many happy moments in May!

Citations:

<https://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=43280>
<https://homeguides.sfgate.com/care-lettuce-leaf-basil-30298.html>

Succulents, cont'd from pg. 1

rock gardens because they are native to dry, rocky locations and will thrive in a rock garden. The rocks promote good drainage and act as a mulch to moderate soil temperature, keeping the soil warmer in winter and cooler in summer.

How to grow succulents. Containers for succulents include terra cotta or clay pots which are attractive but dry more quickly than plastic pots. Ceramic or plastic pots have slower build-up of salt. Sturdy plastic food containers can be recycled as containers for succulents. Make sure pots have a drainage hole. Put a piece of screen over the drain hole to retain soil.

Every succulent grower has their own 'secret recipe' for perfect soil. My recipe has 3 parts good potting soil with organic matter, 2 parts large grit, expanded shale or gravel, and 1 part perlite. Even if I begin with a so-called succulent potting soil, I still add 2 parts grit to get excellent drainage. Some growers prefer a leaner soil with a 2:2:1 ratio and a few swear by a 1:1:1 ratio with equal parts of each.



Do NOT put a layer of rocks or other material in the bottom of a container. It moves the 'perched water table' higher in the pot and does not improve drainage. Gravel, crushed granite, or small rocks make good top dressings. You want to still be able to get a finger into the soil to check soil moisture.

Over watering and poor drainage are the primary reasons that succulents die. Water succulents thoroughly and let them dry completely before watering again. During warmer months (March to October) water about once a week. In cooler months (November to February) water about once a month. Some succulents should be kept dry during their dormant period. They will not take up much water and are more likely to suffer from root

rot. A succulent that doesn't get enough water will have wrinkled, wilted leaves. Water it thoroughly and it will usually perk up.

To fertilize succulents, diluted liquid fertilizer such as hydrolyzed fish or a commercial fertilizer to half of the recommended amount. The best time to apply the dilute fertilizer is when the plants come out of dormancy and begin active growth. You can continue to fertilize about once a month while they are actively growing.

There is a misconception that all succulents thrive in full sun. Even cacti can be 'burned' if they aren't gradually introduced to hot, direct sun. The brown or white 'burned' patches will remain on the leaves but you can avoid more damage by moving the plant to a spot where it gets less direct sun. Succulents that don't get adequate light etiolate or grow leggy. It's a sign that the succulent needs *more light*.

Succulents and cacti grow in a wide variety of habitats. Some species are cold tolerant while others are very frost sensitive. Most do best in temperatures ranging from 40-85°F and will require protection as the temperature dips.

One reason I keep most of my succulents in containers is so I can move them when necessary. In the freeze of 2021, I brought my succulents and other tender plants into the house. This year, I used incandescent Christmas lights to heat my cold frame. They provided enough heat to keep the temperature above freezing. A frozen succulent will often have soggy, mushy stems and leaves because the ice crystals expand and burst cell walls. Remove any damaged tissues. The plant may sprout from the roots.

You will need to groom succulents occasionally to remove weeds, debris, dead leaves or pads and dead flowers. You may want to prune plants to remove leggy stems, shape the plants and stimulate growth.

Keep an eye out for pests which can cause irregular new growth. Common succulent pests include scale, mealy bugs, aphids, and spider mites. Aloes can get aloe mites and agave are prone to snout weevils. If you see ants on succulents, they may be eating the other bugs.

A systemic pesticide might be necessary for some pests. There are specific ways to deal with certain pests, but in general you can keep pests under control and away from your other plants by using the following methods: isolate the infested plant, clean the surroundings—remove debris that may be harboring pests, physically pull off or wash off larger pests like aphids and scale,

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Succulents, cont'd from pg. 4

remove the plant from its pot and inspect the roots for signs of pests and damage, then repot the plant in fresh soil

Propagating succulents. Succulents are the gift that keeps on giving because they are usually easy to propagate—it's an adaptation that helps them survive in very harsh environments. In addition to using flowers and seeds for sexual reproduction, many succulents develop pups or offsets which are small plants that grow from the roots of a mother plant. Bulbils or little plantlets develop from stems of a mother plant, and succulents can be grown by leaf propagation and stem cuttings.

Propagation techniques that are based on a plant's natural physiology and reproductive processes are most effective. Many succulents are propagated by division by separating offsets or small plantlets. Either gently pry apart the plants or use a sharp, sterile knife to cut the 'pup' from the larger plant.

Many succulents drop leaves or you can gently pull off leaves that can be used to propagate new plants. Put the leaf on dry soil to let the cut end callus. Don't water until roots start to grow which may take several weeks. A plant without roots can't absorb water and wet soil promotes rot. After roots and the small plant develop, pot up the little plant in a container. The original leaf will dessicate and shrivel. It has done its job of producing a new plant. Water and fertilize your new succulent.



Cutting off stems or beheading a succulent are more dramatic ways to get plant material and a good way to deal with a leggy succulent. Use sterilized clippers or a sharp knife to cut the stem. Set the cuttings aside for a few days to callus off. Put the cuttings

in a container with soil but don't water until roots start to grow which may take several weeks. Don't forget the original plant and stems! The plant often sprouts new leaves and sometimes stems will root and can be planted.

Be an ethical succulent collector. Some succulent species are rare or endangered and there is a trade in succulents that poachers have illegally removed from their native habitat. Buy from reputable nurseries and collectors. Check the source of the plants you buy. Some questions to ask...was the succulent grown in a nursery or collected in the wild? Is the species at risk?



We have just scratched the surface of the huge, diverse and exciting world of succulents! Join us on May 9 or 17 for the *Green Thumb* presentation on Succulents to learn more.

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Kalanchoe

by Becky Lowicki, Master Gardener

Indoor or outdoor, this versatile succulent earns its keep for water management and the ability to withstand the heat.

Native to Madagascar, this herbaceous perennial is a genus of more than 100 species of tropical, succulent plants in the stonecrop family Crassulaceae, with most recognizable being *Kalanchoe blossfeldiana*, which was introduced in 1932 by German hybridizer Robert Blossfeld for whom it is named.

As a durable flowering potted plant requiring very little maintenance in the home or office, kalanchoe brightens the indoors with flowers in various shades of red, magenta, pink, orange, yellow and white.

Leaves

It has dark green, thick waxy leaves with scalloped-edges and small, four-petaled flowers in clusters held above the foliage.

Blooms Galore

Delicate color bursts from tiny, star-shaped flowers, which are also available in a double-flowering variety with as many as 26 petals per bloom.

Popular for its easy care, find a sunny windowsill and just leave it be! A few fast facts to ensure your kalanchoe thrives:



The pink, double-flowering variety of *Kalanchoe blossfeldiana* may have as many as 26 petals per bloom.

Photo by Millie Davenport, HGIC, Clemson Extension

Let there be Light

As a houseplant, kalanchoe loves indirect sunlight. If your kalanchoe begins to look unhealthy, it is likely a result of low light or poor light conditions.

Soil

Does best in well drained, well-aerated potting soil, such as 60% peat moss and 40% perlite.

Water Carefully

Kalanchoes will perish if overwatered, so be sure to allow the soil to dry completely between waterings. However, do ensure your kalanchoe receives ample water and remember to empty your drainage tray of any excess water to avoid potential root rot and mealybugs.

Regulate Temps for Optimal Conditions

To keep your plant healthy, avoid drafty areas, and keep the temperature of its environment above 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Ideal temperatures are 45-65 °F at night and 50-70 °F during the day. Cool night temperatures prolong flower life.

Deadhead to Bloom

Provide conditions that allow your kalanchoe to rebloom by removing the spent flowers. Apply a few drops of liquid plant fertilizer to stimulate growth and watch the buds literally form in days.

Outdoor Opportunities

After danger of frigid temps, move outdoors to a bright, lightly shaded spot for the summer. Gradually adjust your kalanchoe to outdoor conditions, to avoid burning the succulent's tender leaves. Bring back indoors before the first frost or temperature dip.

New Growth

New plantlets may occasionally appear at leaf margins and may be removed and potted up individually.



Kalanchoe blossfeldiana thrives in a bright windowsill with indirect sunlight.

Photo by Becky Lowicki

2022 HCMGA Plant Sale Schedule!

SOUTHEAST SALE

Genoa Friendship Garden
1210 Genoa Red Bluff
Houston 77034

February 19th & 21st
Tomato Sale

March 19th & 21st
Fruit Tree Sale

April 16 & 18th
Spring Vegetables &
Peppers Sale

May 14 & 16th
Perennials & Herb Sale



Online & in -person sales!
Sales will be posted separately
on the shop page. Pick up for
each sale is the Saturday date.

NORTHWEST SALE

Weekley Park
19110 Longenbaugh
Cypress 77433

February 19th & 21st
Fruit Tree & Tomato Sale

April 9th
Spring Perennial,
Veggie & Herb Sale

In -person only!



HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

2022 PLANT SALES

6 Sales - 2 Locations
Including activities for families!

For more information go to:
hcmga.tamu.edu/plant-sales/

Times for all sales - 9am-1pm
or until supplies last.



Southeast Sale ONLY: Order online for the best selections, hand chosen by Master Gardeners. Pick up paid orders on the Saturday date. In person shopping will also be available for Saturday and Monday of each sale. Monday is our Open Garden Day; tours of our demonstration gardens and plant trials will be provided along with plant sales.

Individuals with disabilities who require an auxiliary aid, service, or accommodation in order to participate are encouraged to contact the County Extension Office prior to the sale to determine how reasonable accommodations can be made.

The HCMGA website for GFG Perennials and Herbs is open for ordering on May 1st!

<https://hcmga.tamu.edu/plant-sales/>



A PENCHANT FOR PERENNIALS

John Fanick Phlox (Garden Phlox) - *Phlox paniculata*

by Cindy Barger, Master Gardener

Named after a well-known San Antonio nurseryman, John Fanick Phlox is a hardy perennial that has earned its Superstar status, a statement echoed by many plant enthusiasts. According to horticulturist Greg Grant (who purportedly discovered this plant growing amidst a patch of St. Augustine grass in a San Antonio neighborhood), this is one of only a handful of garden phlox that is recommended for southern gardens.

Let's dig into the specifics of this colorful Superstar perennial that boasts positive characteristics such as heat tolerance, mildew resistance, and disease resistance.

John Fanick Phlox has bicolor (pink/lavender) flowers with darker centers; I've heard the centers described as deep rose lavender eyes. Each flower has a long whorled tube and five flat petals, growing in tightly packed clusters and making quite the garden display. John Fanick Phlox is a hummingbird and butterfly (especially swallowtails) magnet, one more reason to add this delightfully fragrant plant to your garden.

This phlox has a compact growth habit and sports dark green foliage. Average height and width is 3 feet by 2 feet. While it prefers full sun and enjoys its primary bloom time during the summer, as with many Superstars it can tolerate variances in sun exposure and may bloom in the late spring and fall.

As mentioned, the heat-tolerant John Fanick Phlox does prefer to be planted in full sun or light shade. Since the flowers bloom at a really hot time of the year in our area, they last better with a bit of afternoon shade. There is a long list of perennials that can survive the intense heat of our summers, but there are not as many plants that will actually thrive and bloom then. John Fanick Phlox excels here. Periodic deadheading is recommended to keep the

plant looking clean and this also extends the flowering season. It is truly an ideal cottage garden plant and is also great in beds and borders. For those of us who enjoy bringing in fresh flowers from the yard, another plus about this plant is that the flowers are long-lasting in summer bouquets.

Whereas most phlox varieties require fertile organic-rich soil, John Fanick Phlox will perform in less desirable conditions. Do provide it with well-drained soil and moderate moisture. Allow the plant plenty of air circulation; spacing your plants to allow for adequate air circulation discourages the growth of fungal spores. Early morning sun will help to dry the foliage, which helps reduce the development of powdery mildew. Try to avoid overhead watering if possible. A light distribution of summer mulch is helpful, as is cutting the plant to the ground after the first frost. I was late in cutting back my John Fanick Phlox this year, but I see it is already coming back for another year of what I expect to be a repeat show



John Fanick Phlox

Photo courtesy TexasSuperstar.com, Texas AgriLife Research

of whimsical blooms.

For those of you who enjoy propagating plants, John Fanick Phlox is best propagated by dividing the clumps approximately every two years in the fall or winter. You may also successfully propagate with stem cuttings collected in the spring or early summer.

If you don't already have John Fanick Phlox in your garden, I hope you are encouraged to add this Superstar to your nursery shopping list (you have a list, right?). Two other garden phloxes in the *Phlox paniculata* family that you may want to check out are "Victoria Phlox" (another Superstar with beautiful magenta blooms and an airier growth habit) and "David" (a white-flowering phlox with a vigorous and sturdy growth habit). Happy gardening!

Succulents: Dealing With the Theft of Our Natural Resources

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

On Thursday, January 20th, 2022, South Korean Byungsu Kim, 46, a prolific succulent poacher, received a sentence of two years in federal prison from U.S. District Judge George H. Wu. Kim was also fined \$3,985 in restitution to the State of California.

This conviction resulted from a winding tale of how Byungsu Kim and his co-defendants Bong Jun Kim and Youngin Back illegally poached and smuggled a variety of rare succulents out of the United States. Kim and his accomplices gathered *Dudleya* succulent plants from the DeMartin State Beach in Klamath, California, and Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park.

Dudleya is a genus of succulents in the stonecrop family that's endemic to California and Mexico, are very slow growing in nature and large clumps could be more than 100+ years old – commonly called a “liveforever.” High end greenhouses coddle *Dudleya* plants until they grow large and sell them at a much higher price to consumers around the world.

Back to the story – Byungsu Kim, Youngin Back and Bong Jun went to a Vista, California nursery to drop off the poached plants. The next day with backpacks and hand-held radios the group went to Russian Gulch State Park in Mendocino County and collected more *Dudleya* plants and took them to the same Vista nursery. Kim told a county agriculture agent his government-issued certificate, required for the *Dudleyas*' exportation, was for 259 pounds and



Dudleya

Photo courtesy regenaxe.com

more than 600 pounds (3,715 *Dudleya* plants) boxed for shipment. The three men did not have a scientific permit or a federal permit for collecting the *Dudleya* succulents. Wardens had been

surveilling the men for more than a week. When Kim realized federal charges were pending, he and Youngin Back fled to Mexico. Kim then flew to



A rare Conophytum

Photo courtesy of World of Succulents

China and back to South Korea. The value of the stolen plants was estimated at roughly \$600,000 in South Korea.

A couple of years earlier, Kim paid a large fine and served a year in a South African prison for being caught with 2,000 rare *Conophytum* succulents. One plant was more than 250 years old. He pled guilty and after spending a year in custody was extradited to the United States. At the U.S. trial, Jared Margulies, a political ecologist, an expert witness, stated the stolen plants' value was far less than \$600,000. The lower value impacted federal sentencing guidelines and Kim received only two years in prison.

Kim had previously made 50 trips to the United States. Authorities believe he collected more stolen succulents each time, and possibly gathered approximately 120,000 wild plants since 2013.

More laws are being passed to protect the pilfering of rare plants. The International Union for Conservation of Nature projects that nearly one-third of the cactus species may be endangered. California has passed regulations to help preserve *Dudleya*. There are other plant poaching laws in the U.S., as well. In the Saguaro National Park, it's illegal to remove *any* plant and poaching Venus fly traps in some states is a felony.

What can you do to help? You can buy plants from reputable dealers. Avoid ordering from overseas suppliers. Remember, if someone offers you a rare plant at a reasonable price, it may have been poached. Also, if the supply of rare plants increases due to an increased supply from growers, then the plant's market value will decrease. Gardeners and commercial growers have an obligation to protect rare and endangered plants just as any other commodity.

Citation:

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/20/california-succulent-smuggling-dudleya>



May Gardening Calendar

by Karen Shook, Master Gardener

In May, we will start seeing the arrival of summer heat with average temperatures in the high 70's. On the plus side, fresh Texas peaches should be available to enjoy on those hot days.

Pests may be enjoying your plants as much as you are. Some damage is inevitable, but watch and limit (pick them off, spray them off).

Perennials and Ornamental Grasses

- Continue deadheading (remove spent blooms). If blooms start to dwindle, consider cutting back by 1/3.
- Ornamental grasses can be planted through summer.
- Divide chrysanthemums late April, early May.
- Plant perennials that can stand summer heat now. (I am adding purple coneflowers!)

Annuals

- Clean out cool season annual beds, plant warm season annuals.
- Most transplants benefit from addition of compost to the soil at planting time.
- Cut back petunias by 1/3, fertilize and water.
- Feed your annuals every 4 to 6 weeks.

Bulbs

- Cut back yellow foliage of spring flowering bulbs. Note: not until yellow or brown color tells you bulbs have replenished their stored reserves. Dig, and reset the bulbs if desired.
- Add summer bulbs to your landscape.

Roses

- In your morning garden rounds, cut some roses (to first leaf with 5 leaflets) to enjoy indoors.
- Continue to spray for blackspot, powdery mildew, aphids, etc. every 7 to 10 days through Nov. Fertilize every 4 to 8 weeks (some sources say 4 weeks, others say 8 weeks, so I say depending on health of the rose).

Mean rainfall over the last 25 years is about 5 inches, but most forecasts I see say to expect less. My monthly mantra, as always, check for "too wet, too dry, just right" and water accordingly.

Hurricane season is coming June 1. Now is the time to make sure trees are trimmed, no dead branches are waiting to fall.

Shrubs

- Prune spring flowering shrubs after they finish flowering. Azaleas are probably finished.
- Other shrubs can be lightly pruned to shape.
- Keep mulch several inches thick.
- Fertilize camellias (lightly).

Lawns

- We are probably well into mowing season. Mow when grass height is 1/3 more than you want (don't cut more than 1/3 height each mowing).
- Fill low areas with soil similar to native soil.
- It is probably your last chance to apply broadleaf weed killer before it is too hot. Check the labels!

Ground Cover

- Watch for snails, slugs in low growing groundcovers.
- Dig and divide established ground covers.

Vines

- Carry pruners as you walk through your garden and lightly prune regularly the vines growing in undesired directions.

Edibles (vegetables, herbs, berries, fruits)

- Harvest and enjoy (I hope!).
- It is a good time to cut back, divide, reset herbs.
- Pinch suckers out of tomato plants.
- If plants seem to lack vigor, you may want to fertilize (but not the beans and peas).
- See the following link for recommended planting times:

Harris County Vegetable Planting Guide

Citations:

A Garden Book for Houston. 2nd ed., River Oaks Garden Club, Houston, Tx 1968.
Groom, Dale, and Dan Gill. Texas Gardener's Handbook. Cool Springs Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2012.
Richter, Robert. Month-by-Month Gardening Texas. Cool Springs Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2014.
Weather.gov/wrh/climate

Growing with Plants and Nature

Growing with Plants and Nature offers children and their families opportunities for learning about gardening and nature through hands on activities and lessons focused on plants and the creeping, crawling, and flying creatures with whom the plants share the natural environment .

We provide programs to community organizations, plant sales, fairs, farmer's markets, and other events. Also we reach out through our informative Facebook group, Growing with Plants and Nature Virtual Group. We welcome questions, comments and requests at: ogd.harrishort@gmail.com

Growing with Plants and Nature has had very busy months, working at Friends of Northside, "Spring Break" at Woodchase Park, Towne Lake Farmer's Market, Cy-Fair Berry Center, Earth Day at Evelyn's Park Conservancy and giving out "Grab and Go" bags at the GFG and North West Weekly plant sales.

We had another delightful time with students in the afterschool program at Friends of Northside. They colored and put together 3-D butterflies with labels for the parts of the butterfly. We followed this with an interactive lesson about each of these parts, how they function and how the children thought an injury to any of these parts would impact the life and functions of the butterfly. For their "hands in the dirt" activity the children each planted Zinnia seeds to take home to grow for attracting butterflies.



Master Gardener, Lois Pierce, at Northside



Master Gardeners Connie Bihner, Susan Visinsky-Bracken, Linda Persse and Liz Pozzi at "Spring Break" at Woodchase Park.



Master Gardeners Linda Persse and Blanca Elder with Intern Janelle Williams at the Cy-Fair Home and Outdoor Living Show, held at the Berry Center

We were pleased to join in an Earth Day event at Evelyn's Park Conservancy in Bellaire. working along side the Environmental Sustainability Board. Our theme was "The many ways to reuse bottles, take-out containers and other materials by making them into planters". Each child had a chance to make a take home project.

2022 HOME GROWN LECTURE SERIES

Lectures will be presented on the first Thursday of each month on Microsoft Teams and include live demonstrations.
Register now so you don't miss one!

Winter

STARTING PLANTS FROM SEEDS

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

January 6, 2022 - 10:00 a.m.

BASIC GRAFTING TECHNIQUES

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

February 3, 2022 - 10:00 a.m.

TOMATOES FOR THE PATIO

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

March 3, 2022 - 10:00 a.m.

Summer

IDENTIFYING PEST & DISEASE ISSUES IN THE GARDEN

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

July 7, 2022 - 10:00 a.m.

SAFETY IN THE HOME GARDEN

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

August 4, 2022 - 10:00 a.m.

ALL ABOUT MINT

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

September 1, 2022 - 10:00 a.m.

Spring

STARTING PLANTS FROM CUTTINGS

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

April 7, 2022 - 10:00 a.m.

HOME BUTCHER: MAKING BOUDIN

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

May 5, 2022 - 10:00 a.m.

10 REASONS FOR YELLOWING LEAVES

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

June 2, 2022 - 10:00 a.m.

Fall

PROPER PRUNING IN THE LANDSCAPE

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

October 6, 2022 - 10:00 a.m.

HOLIDAY MEATS - NOT JUST TURKEY!

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

November 3, 2022 - 10:00 a.m.

PLANTABLE CHRISTMAS TREE ALTERNATIVES

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

December 1, 2022 - 10:00 a.m.

Registration

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION

homegrown2022.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..

Green Thumb 2022 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**
Got questions? Go to hcmga.tamu.edu/ask-a-question/

Second Monday, 10:00 A.M. – 11:30 A.M. Houston Community College @Home Gardening Series

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

January 10 – **Gardening in Small Spaces**
February 14 – **Spring Vegetable Gardening**
March 7 – **Composting**
April 11 – **Water Conservation**
May 9 – **Succulents**

June 13 – **Gardening Open Forum**
July 11 – **Fall Vegetable Gardening**
August 8 – **Herbs 101**
September 12 – **Plant Propagation**
October 10 – **Citrus Trees**

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

No reservation required – facebook.com/harriscountypbl/events/
Third Tuesday of each month

January 18 – **Gardening in Small Spaces**
February 15 – **Spring Vegetable Gardening**
March 15 – **Composting**
April 19 – **Water Conservation**
May 17 – **Succulents**

June 21 – **Gardening Open Forum**
July 19 – **Fall Vegetable Gardening**
August 16 – **Herbs 101**
September 20 – **Plant Propagation**
October 18 – **Citrus Trees**



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 look forward to our formal in-person programming resuming soon. Please check back periodically for those dates.

**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

There is so much glorious Spring resplendence at the gardens that I decided to adopt the adage “a picture is worth a thousand words” for most of this column and focus on images of some of the blooming wonders there.



Clockwise from upper left: Easy Wave Pink Petunias, Digitalis Panther, Foxglove (notice the tiny “paw prints”), Mexican Buckeye, Easy Wave Blue Sky Petunias, False Freesia, Eastern Blue Star and Dwarf Flowering Almond



cont'd on pg. 16

Getting Down to Earth, *cont'd from pg. 15*

Genoa Friendship Gardens

A group from the Fonteno Senior Education Center came during Open Garden Day in March for a scheduled tour, showing up in rain gear on a drizzly morning. MGs Janice Muhm, Robin Yates, Pam Longley, Dianne Lawrence and Rick Castagno were on hand to talk about their primary gardens. There were a lot of good questions and, obviously, some seasoned gardeners among our visitors.

Noe Tristan has been at work restoring the orchard that was hard-hit by the February, 2021 winter storm. He has so far planted two Anna apple trees and a Don Juan avocado. Five other fruit trees will be installed soon.

cont'd on pg. 17



Janice Muhm surveying the bounty of herb plants for the April plant sale



Robin Yates speaks to the Fonteno Senior Education Center tour group.



Pam Longley with a day's harvest of strawberries



Noe Tristan and newly planted trees at GFG

Getting Down to Earth, *cont'd from pg. 16*

Article and photos by Dale Hudson, Master Gardener

Christ the Good Shepherd Garden - Spring, TX

Spring is in full bloom here in Spring (Texas) and so is the activity at Christ the Good Shepherd (CGS) Garden. The greening up of everything outdoors naturally triggers thoughts of gardening for all those so inclined. We welcome new faces, and also old familiar faces that maybe we haven't seen since last Fall. It's good to have the extra volunteers because the work load also peaks this time of the year. We are happy to welcome future gardeners as well. Young men and women from Frassati Catholic High School periodically donate their labor in exchange for some hands-on experience and we always enjoy the visits from the pre-K kids at the CGS school across the street. Just about anyone can have fun at our garden.



Future Harris County Master Gardeners hard at work.

I'm pleased to be able to say We Have A Plan. Because of good record keeping by the Garden managers over several years we know what goes in each of the 28 raised beds and a target date for planting. Even with a plan it is sometimes a tough call when the time comes to rotate crops. It is a bit sad

to pull up carrots and beets and kale and Swiss chard that is still producing, just to plant tomatoes and squash and zucchini and cucumbers and peppers, but history reminds us that hot weather is coming and smart gardeners prepare for it before it arrives.

The strawberry trial for TxAgriLife is in full "bloom" right now. The protective plastic and frost cloth tunnels came off the beds in mid-March, and the plants are bursting with blooms and young fruit. We are picking ripe berries 3 times each week and recording weight and count on each trial bed separately. Early results are a bit surprising, but we will have a lot more to say about that next month.



The newest TxAgriLife trial is in the tomato patch. Paul Winski shared interesting studies showing favorable production from tomatoes that were mulched with reflective plastic rather than the traditional leaf mulch. We have installed a silver or a red plastic mulch in two of our six beds, and are measuring production for three varieties of tomatoes in each bed. Data logging will be challenging but we will be looking for differences in pests and diseases in the plastic beds versus the leaf mulched ones. Additionally, we've taken some of the unused

foil and placed it in our zucchini and squash beds. In our 'never say die' battle against the notorious squash vine borer, anything that might deter the adult moths or impede the larvae and their interface with the soil is worth the effort. Even if we only delay the inevitable victory of the borers, we can deliver more pounds of fresh vegetables to the food pantries in the community so we all are winning.



Tomato trial with reflective plastic mulch is under way.

cont'd on pg. 18

Getting Down to Earth, cont'd from pg. 17

Article and photos by Nancy Graml, Master Gardener

McGovern Centennial Gardens Family Garden

Marisol & Patricio Arteaga

From time to time, we feature our dedicated Master Gardeners who are critical to the success of McGovern Centennial Gardens' Family Garden. Two of these devoted, hard working individuals are Marisol Arteaga and husband Patricio, who Master Gardener Will Isbell praised as "heavy hitters" here. Many Master Gardeners already know Marisol as administering the school cylinder gardening program, but Marisol's first love is getting away from an office and working in the gardens. She will have 12 years of service as a Master Gardener, while Patricio just completed his Master Gardener certification. Patricio always enjoyed gardening in their home, but confesses that it took Marisol a while to convince him to commit as a volunteer. Marisol is my "spark plug" he said and with her extra push, these two usually drive in from their second home in Galveston. They are always together as the volunteer "power couple" on Tuesdays --weeding, planting, fertilizing, pruning, harvesting, recording the harvest, and donating it to Mission of Yahweh, a women and children's shelter.



Marisol and Patricio Arteaga

Master Gardener Elizabeth Fisher, who compiles the garden data, consults with Marisol for record keeping of what works.

Marisol always loved gardening, but it became her passion in 2000 when she was a children's Montessori teacher and computers were introduced to the classroom. She wanted children to know that good things don't always happen with a push of a button. So she and the children, ages 9 to 12, wheel barrowed the bricks and truck loads of dirt to build their school gardens in 2003-2004. They built gardens for every classroom and then we planted them. The gardens are still there at the school.

In addition to Master Gardening, Marisol keeps busy wearing many hats. She is a Montessori teacher-educator, training new elementary and upper elementary teachers, teaching many areas, but math is among her favorites. She is also the "Wee Care" committee lead in her smocking guild chapter, the "Midnight Oil Smockers."

She is fluent in both French and Spanish and previously worked as a translator in Houston and as a bi-lingual teacher in her native Ecuador. Patricio was also born in Ecuador, but they met and married in Switzerland where he graduated as a Mechanical Engineer specializing in thermo dynamics and she earned her first degree in classic French. They look forward to finishing their raised garden beds in their new home in Jersey Village and enjoying the beautiful view of a lake while gardening.

cont'd on pg. 19

Getting Down to Earth, cont'd from pg. 18 **McGovern Centennial Gardens Family Garden**

Spring Activity in the McGovern Family Garden

Master Gardener volunteers were busy with a multitude of activities from pruning, harvesting, and planting to beautifying the Family Garden in preparation for the upcoming McGovern Centennial Garden fundraising events sponsored by the Hermann Park Conservancy. We pruned or replaced the last freeze-damaged casualties--African blue basil shrubs, nasturtiums, lion's tail, and lemon grass, catnip, pennywort, chicory, and several varieties of basil in the herb garden.

In early March, we harvested all the carrots to ready another bed for new plantings. We planted potatoes, squash and four varieties of green beans in March, okra, cantaloupe, peppers, and "patio baby" eggplant in April. Historically, tomatoes should go in by March 1st, but we did plant some tomatoes in mid-March including Juliettes, Texas "wild" tomatoes and "tumbling Toms" cherry tomatoes. We planted cucumbers and radishes as well. Plants that continue to grow well include kale, kohlrabi, Swiss chard, asparagus, spinach, beets, salvia, and lavender.



Potato trenching



Will Isbell discusses spring ideas with Master Gardeners

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.

Prospective volunteers and interns: if you see that an event is full and it is one that you would really like to attend, please reach out to Valerie Depew so that we can add you to the

volunteer list. Please remember that we want to provide as many opportunities for you to earn your hours and interact with the public!

The Signup is available here: <https://signup.com/go/wBSYeQe>

The full AAMG schedule for May

- Sat., May 7** **Mercer Botanic Gardens**, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble, 77338 – 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Urban Harvest, 3401 Westheimer, Houston, 77042 – 7:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.
- Sat., May 14** **Tomball Farmer's Market**, 205 West Main St., Tomball, 77375 – 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Mon., May 16** **Genoa Friendship Gardens Open Garden Day** - 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston 77034
- Thurs., May. 19** **Westchase Farmer's Market**, 10503 Westheimer Rd., Houston, 77042 – 3 to 7 p.m.
- Sat., May 21** **Towne Lake Farmer's Market**, 9955 Barker Cypress Rd., Cypress, 77433 – 9:30 a.m to 1:30 p.m.
Mercer Botanic Gardens, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble, 77338 – 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
- Sat., May 28** **Memorial Villages Farmer's Market**, 10840 Beinhorn Rd., Houston, 77024 – 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Thank you to all of the hardworking volunteers who have been able to get back out there with the public events!

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.

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



The podcast can also be found at the following site:
www.listennotes.com/podcasts/home-grown-podcast-paul-OM7PKqityX/

Upcycling Cigar Boxes: Crafting a Mini “Minnie” Succulent Garden

Article and photos by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

What happens when three sisters and two spouses hit the cigar store? The gardening sister hauls home empty cigar boxes for miniature gardens. Sold at a discount, the cigar boxes are prime material for fairy gardens. I had a small “Minnie” figure on hand so into the box she went. Most cigar boxes are made of cedar, a natural bug deterrent. Succulent plants are ideal for the box gardens because many are slow growing and shallow rooted. I drilled holes in mine for good drainage.

Materials

1 pre-drilled box

Soil (cactus soil for the succulent)

Small plant (I chose *Haworthiopsis attenuata*)

Optional

Coir (coco liner) cut to size and placed @ bottom for drainage or use small stones

Weed barrier cut to size for the top

Mulch or small gravel for top dressing

Small figurines

Nails and crafting glue**

** Note: I use the nails and glue and attach them to the bottom of the figurines. They stay in place better. If you have animals or small children, OMIT this step. Many fairy gardens are NOT child proof or animal proof. Don't overload your cigar box. Always pick it up from the bottom.



Examples of empty cigar boxes

Step 1: Gather your materials. Predrilled box, coco cut to size for bottom drainage, weed barrier cut to size for top layer. I arrange the plant(s) and figurines in the design I want outside of the box. Use the pre-cut weed barrier to help you. Place the drainage material at the bottom of the box and add your soil. Water the soil so it will settle to the depth you want.



Step 2: Cut holes in the weed barrier if necessary. Here I cut a hole for the plant and I marked where the figurines would go.



Step 3: Ta-dah! The finished garden with small gravel sprinkled across the top for better drainage. Minnie sends her regards.



Wildflower Whims

Article and photos by Robin Yates, Master Gardener

The Texas Bluebonnet, *Lupinus texensis*, is our state flower, and a well-recognized symbol of our beloved state. Yet, it did not achieve that status easily. History lesson: Do not leave choosing state flowers to the men. Seriously. The 1901 Texas state legislature had a flower war. Due to its economic significance, cotton was first proposed as the state flower. After prickly pear cactus was added to the ballot, the National Society of Colonial Dames of America, appalled by the ‘ugly flower choices,’ nominated the bluebonnet. Although cotton was likely to win, the ladies refused to lose. “They displayed paintings of bluebonnets on the floor of the legislature and made floral arrangements of bluebonnets to adorn each politician’s desk the day of the voting. Sure enough, the bluebonnets were able to win the vote with their striking beauty” (Texan Proud, January 13, 2022).

The flower originally chosen, *Lupinus subcarnosus* (www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=LUSU), was not the most attractive, thus it was debated for years. In 1971, the legislature ruled to include not only *Lupinus texensis*, but also “any other variety of Bluebonnet not heretofore recorded” (Andrew’s 1993). We now have six species of bluebonnets reigning as our state flower. Who says Texans cannot change our minds?

The genus Lupine comes from lupus, Latin for “wolf,” and is a misnomer. As it was commonly found in poor soil, it was thought that it ‘wolfed the nutrients out,’ when in fact, due to

its nitrogen fixing ability, it enriches the soil! It belongs to the Fabaceae or Pea Family.

Lupinus texensis is native to the central Texas hill country, yet since 1930, the Texas Highway Department has been distributing the seed statewide along our highways. It can also be found in many gardens and yards across the state, including our own GFG!

It grows from seed sown in the fall. The plant has evolved to survive periods of drought by covering each seed with a thick protective coating.

Thus, it is best to scarify the seed, to improve the germination rate. It is a winter annual, establishing roots and a beautiful rosette, then blooming March-May.

Lupinus texensis has sharply pointed, light-green, velvety, palmately compound leaves. Its stems are topped by clusters of up to 50 fragrant, blue, pea-like flowers. It grows best in full sun, reaching 1-2 feet in height. It grows in most soils and conditions. If you have difficulty getting bluebonnets to grow, consider inoculating the soil with a rhizobium (soil-borne bacteria which form nitrogen-rich root nodules) for lupines.

Not only are bluebonnets attractive to *Homo sapiens*, but pollinators are also attracted to them. I love watching the different pollinators come and go from the flowers. The Texas bluebonnet is a larval host plant for the Hairstreak and Elfin butterflies. By planting them, you are making your garden more beautiful and benefiting our ecosystem!



A native bed at Genoa Friendship Gardens



Texas bluebonnets in Robin's front yard

https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=LUTE

Sotol: A New Spirit In Texas

by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

With its spiny leaves it looks similar to a yucca, but sotol (*Dasyllirion wheeleri*) isn't a yucca or a cactus. It's a semi-succulent in the Asparagaceae family. There are 18 species in the family and the perennial bush can grow in desert terrains as well as forests. Its common name is the desert spoon and the drink distilled from it is often compared to tequila and mescal which are distilled from the blue agave plant. It was called the desert spoon because the steamed leaves were used as a spoon when scraped.



Dasyllirion wheeleri

Photo courtesy of Steve Black

The desert spoon was used in numerous ways in the Chihuahuan and Sonoran Deserts in northern Mexican and the American Southwest by indigenous tribes. The leaves were used to weave baskets and mats when the spines were removed. It was also used as a food source. The middle stem or heart was cooked in earth ovens for two days. Patties were shaped and sun dried and the sotol patties were edible for months. Archeologists have found pit hearth ovens used for baking sotol as well as sandals, rope and mats made from sotol in the Lower Pecos Canyonlands. Sotol was used for food and fiber for about 13,000 years. It was also fermented as an alcoholic beverage.

Sotol is found in Chihuahua and Oaxaca, Mexico and grows further north in Texas, Arizona and New Mexico. The taste of sotol can differ depending on the terrain it is harvested from. Sotol is processed in a method similar to that of artisanal mescal. Both are cooked in ovens or pots dug in the ground, then distilled and aged in wooden barrels.

Tequila and mescal require that the agave roots must be pulled from the ground when harvesting. Then another crop is planted and it takes time for the new crop to mature. In contrast, when the desert spoon is collected the root is left behind and in time the plant will grow back. It can live for many decades.

Sotol produced in Texas can now be found on liquor store shelves. The Desert Door Distillery produces 80 proof sotol in Driftwood, Texas, and has a tasting room. The species they used is *Dasyllirion texanum*. Their product is harvested in the wild. The plant isn't cultivated. Other distilleries are expected to follow. What is the preferred way to drink sotol? Straight up and in a glass. Bottoms up.



Texas Sotol Photo by Terri Simon

MG of the Month - *Pam Longley*

by Karen Breneman, Master Gardener

Congratulations **Pam Longley!**

Pam Longley will tell you that she would rather buy plants than clothes. Her passion for gardening has spanned over 35 years. Before becoming a Master Gardener in 2019, Pam started her career as a “hippie typist” and worked her way up to Vice President at Old Republic Title. Most of her years in the title insurance business were spent closing

residential and commercial properties and handling management responsibilities.

For 20 years, Pam wanted to be a Master Gardener, but the time constraints of her job didn’t allow for the class hours. Upon retirement in 2019, she signed up to take the courses and has been volunteering primarily at Genoa Friendship Gardens (GFG) in the perennial trial beds and in vegetable production ever since. She writes the “Getting Down to Earth” column for *Urban Dirt* for news from GFG and is Secretary of the GFG Steering Committee.

Pam has also volunteered at the Houston Arboretum in the children’s nature classes and as a school tour trail guide for 18 years and is active in The Professional Group, Daughters of the King of the Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church, at Angela House and was a reading coach and girls’ empowerment group leader at Kipp Sharpstown College Preparatory Academy for 6 years.

She loves hiking and yoga and says her mission in life is to create harmony in the world by inspiring true nature discovery.



Pam Longley

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.

Thank you in advance for your nomination.

For Harris County Master Gardeners Only!



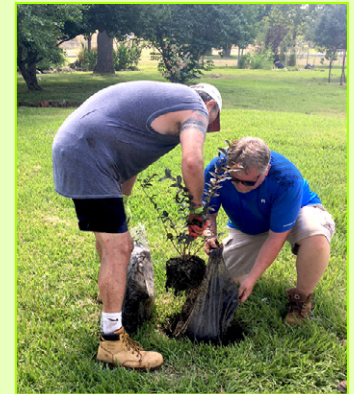
May 14th
GFG Workday
8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

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>



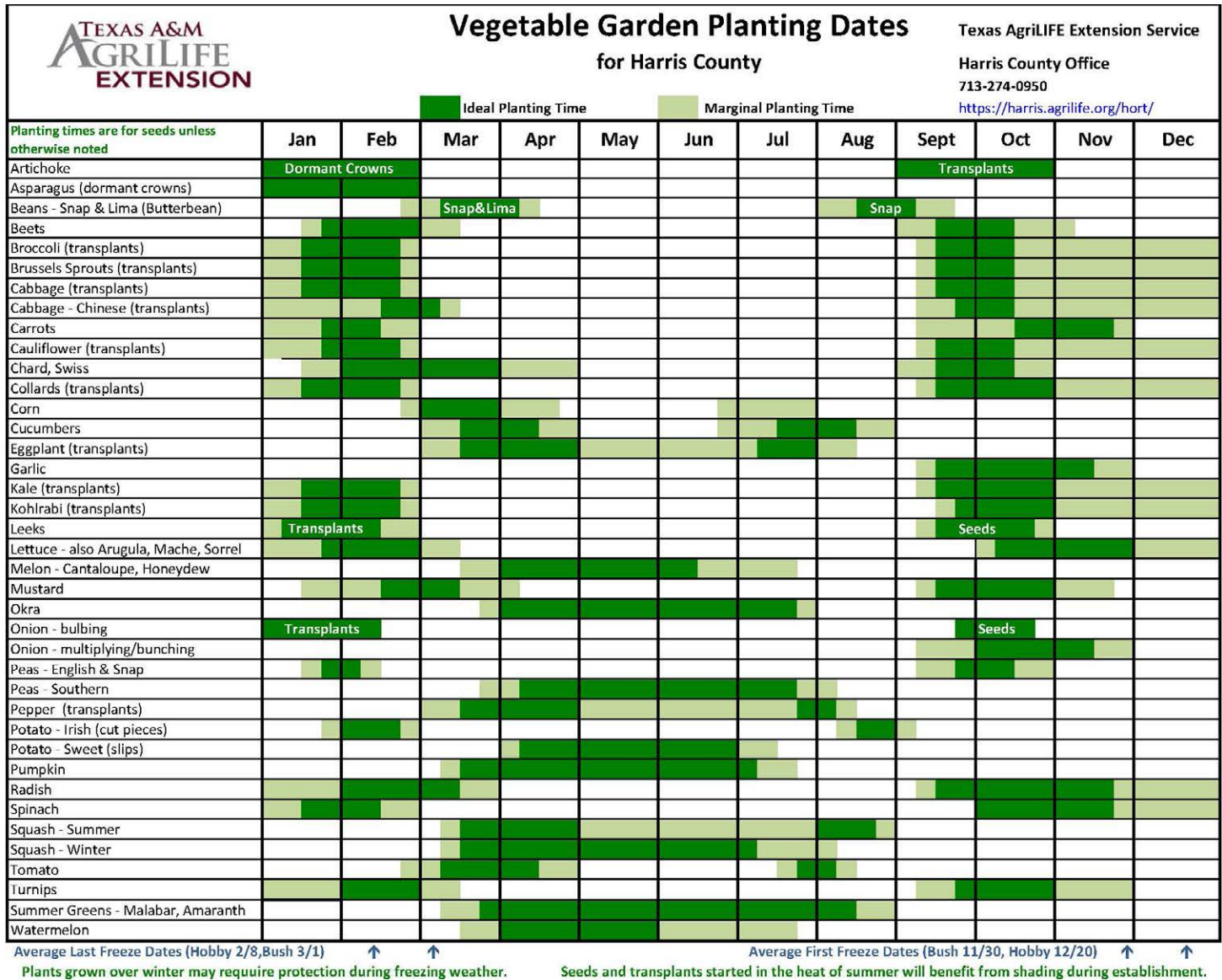
Master Gardeners and Interns who celebrate a birthday during **May** include the following. Wish them **HAPPY BIRTHDAY** when you see them!

Agnes Asscherick, Rick Castagno, Mimi Chapman, Alicia Collins, Jonathan Correia, Blanca Elder, Jean Fefer, Regina Gardner, Rebecca Hudman, Lynn Rodriguez, Sherrie Steiger, Deb Stutsman, Jeanie Trippie and Marilyn Ward

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

Gardening Tools

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



Download the
Vegetable Garden
Planting Guide here!

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE

EXTENSION SERVICE

13105 NORTHWEST FREEWAY, SUITE 1000

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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 **Will Isbell** at mcg.harrishort@gmail.com, if you are interested in attending.

Genoa Friendship Garden

1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Houston 77034

Weekday Workdays 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Every Monday and Wednesday we are working in the a variety of gardens. They include a large vegetable production garden and Texas AgriLife research plant trial beds. Feel free to drop in to get service hours!

Weekend Workdays 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

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.

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