

Urban Dirt

Herbs 101

Gardening Events and Information for Texans

My Patchwork of Herbs

Article and photos by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

Sometimes our taste in plants change as we continue to evolve as gardeners. I like amaryllis bulbs now, I have more flowers than before and some citrus trees have found their way in.

My first love as a gardener began with basil. It was heat tolerant and there was a heavenly scent present that begged to be stoked. The seeds were inexpensive and there were different varieties. I was a “wanna be gardener” back then. I grew Sweet Genovese basil and spread the pots out on top of a gravel driveway. They seemed to like it. Success was mine! More basil followed. For several years I grew up to a dozen varieties of basil. I became a Master Gardener and acquired five types of rosemary, five types of mint. The expansion continued with a bay leaf tree, oreganos, thyme and three varieties of chives. They were followed by a few flower acquisitions. All of this was pre- Hurricane Harvey in 2017. That changed the landscape for our area. Our personal gardens and public areas were flooded. I had flood waters at home for five days but I was not there. I was on duty at a hospital. The majority of my plants are in pots and when I finally returned home they were bobbing up and down like fishing corks in the flood waters, only a few survived. The Mediterranean herbs didn’t make it. The small bay laurel tree survived. All of the mint bit the dust. All three varieties of chives were located and survived. I started over just like most of us.

I enjoy growing herbs for different reasons. A few I use frequently but others are for birds and insects to enjoy. Humans have used herbs for a variety of reasons for millennia. The Lascaux cave paintings in France have drawings of herbs. The drawings have been carbon dated to sometime between 13,000 and 25,000 B.C. Herbs



Dark opal basil

were used liberally in the Middle Ages. They had several purposes. One was to season food, another was to disguise the taste of rotting food. Refrigeration had not yet been invented. Herbs were also used to minimize some foul body odors since frequent bathing was not a common practice.

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

AUGUST 2022

Green Thumb Gardening Series

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

Herbs 101

Aug. 8, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. For the HCC program, register in advance to receive the link: hccs.edu/community-learning-workshops

Aug. 16, 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

Aug. 2, First Tuesday 11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Program: *TBA* 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/

Aug. 4, 10:00 a.m. - *Safety in the Home Garden* by Shannon Dietz, Texas A&M AgriLife Harris County Extension Agent – Agriculture and Natural Resources

Open Garden Day at Genoa Friendship Gardens

Aug. 15, 8:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. The garden will be open to tour and master gardeners will be available to answer gardening questions. Plants will be for sale in the greenhouse. And, visit the Ask a Master Gardener table for additional gardening information. 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston, TX, 77034

Youth Activities

GPN

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

Aug. 20, Towne Lake Farmers Market, 9955 Barker Cypress Rd. Cypress, TX 77433
9:30 a.m - 1:30 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 AgriLife Extension Service
Horticulture Program in Harris County
13105 Northwest Freeway, Suite 1000
Houston, TX 77040
713.274.0950

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HERB OF THE MONTH

Anise Hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*)

by Karen McGowan, Master Gardener

Closing out summer 2022 (technically, not by thermometer) with the month of August, our starring herb is anise hyssop. Did you know that in 2019 anise hyssop garnered the 2019 Herb of the Year™ award from the International Herb Association? Neither did I. Did you know that there was an International Herb Association? No? Me, either. What fascinating facts we learn together in this monthly article, don't we?

Freely I admit to a driving tendency toward promoting herb substitutions for purely ornamental plants, whenever possible.

Maybe it's because of my role as monthly writer of the herb article for Urban Dirt; that is for sure a strong possibility. Regardless of my motive, many herbs are not only functional, but also flowering in similar fashion to strictly ornamental plants, so why not take advantage and let the bigger producer have the garden real estate, right? For one case in point regarding this month's herb, the purple spires of anise hyssop make it a perfectly functional, indeed, an ornamental alternative for salvias that are so often planted.

Perennial in zones 4-9, anise hyssop is known also by several common names, including blue giant hyssop, licorice plant, and lavender giant hyssop. Despite those monikers, anise hyssop is neither anise nor hyssop; however, hyssop is a member of the mint (Lamiaceae) family, as is anise hyssop, so there is in fact this particular commonality.

As a North American native plant, the history of anise hyssop's ancient usage comes from Native American sources. Among these verbal and written histories, a reliable written source notes that this plant was once used by the Cree, Cheyenne, and Ojibwa for fever reduction, to treat respiratory conditions, and as an external application on burns.

Preferring well-drained soil and being placed in part to full sun, the plant should grow to a mature height of between three and

five feet tall. In optimal growing conditions, anise hyssop will self-seed, spreading by rhizomes. Anise hyssop comes in several hybrid varieties with different flower colors, including pink, creamy white, powder blue, and red-violet, offering foliage ranging from dark green to lime green. It is an ideal addition to both butterfly and pollinator gardens, as it provides nectar for butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds from summer to fall. Further, seeds left remaining on the stalks of anise hyssop are frequently consumed by birds, making this one a grandly beautiful and hospitable plant,

rightly earning a position on several nature-lovers' garden checklists. Anise hyssop's ability to tolerate poor soil makes it useful in meadows and essentially many uncultivated areas, in addition to its potential for formal wildflower, herb, and butterfly gardens. It's equally at home and happy in a container. Wherever anise hyssop is planted, deadheading spent flowers can bring additional blooms.

While anise hyssop's leaf scent has been described as anise, the chemical associated with anise and licorice – anethole – is actually not found in high amounts within it. The leaves possess a scent more closely associated with basil or French tarragon. The plant offers various applications in the kitchen, including use of the leaves to make jellies, or to be crumbled in salads. Anise hyssop flowers scattered in salads are enjoyed by those who appreciate a

fresh lemon flavor. The seeds can be added to cookies or muffins to great effect. The fragrant, dried leaves make it a sound addition to potpourris, and the flower spikes can be added to either fresh cut or dried arrangements, with beautiful results.

Easy to grow, easy to propagate, easy on the eyes, and easy to eat. What's not to love about anise hyssop? In the words of my favorite celebrity chef, Ina Garten, how easy is that?



Agastache foeniculum 'Golden Jubilee' Anise Hyssop
Photos courtesy KingsbraeGarden



Citations:

<https://extension.psu.edu/anise-hyssop-for-the-perennial-garden>
<https://www.gardeningchannel.com/unusual-herbs-garden/>
<https://dsps.lib.uiowa.edu/roots/anise-hyssop/>

My Heat Survivors

Article and photos by Terri Simon, Master Gardener

How are your plants doing? This heat wave is testing the limits of my plants. Even the wildlife is thirsty. I run a sprinkler for a short amount of time and the party starts. The lizards show up, the hummingbird dips in and out of the water like an aerialist. The cardinals and blue birds get happy and the bees? They head for the nearest flower and before you know it they are shaking their little bottoms. Do bumblebees laugh? Surely they do. My new alter ego is Terri, Water Goddess. I have lost a few herbs but those remaining have hung around at least since Hurricane Harvey in 2017. Take a peek at some of my survivors.

Angela Chandler offers a home remedy to help heat stressed plants. The ingredients are water, Epsom salts, liquid seaweed and that popular additive many of us use to help treat plant shock. Click on the link below if you would like try it. [Heat-proofing your Garden \(arborgate.com\)](http://arborgate.com)

Dark Opal, Holy and Pesto Perpetuo basil – I like a purple basil in the yard and this year the Dark Opal basil fit the bill. It seemed right at home in my Talavera frog. I don't usually harvest purple basil since I grow them primarily for their color. The Holy basil is my favorite and I harvest it the most. Be aware that it is quite friendly. It may be the last basil you ever buy. As for the Pesto Perpetuo I have grown these for several years. I like this basil for two reasons: it is variegated, and I like that. The second reason is that it doesn't flower, so it never bolts. Follow up on this in the Pesto Perpetuo basil description.



Left to right: Dark Opal, Holy and Pesto Perpetuo basil

Pesto Perpetuo basil – I have grown this for a while. This year I bought two plants, one for me and one for my friend Jeanette.

Remember, this basil *does not* flower. Apparently one of the variegated basil didn't get the email. It is blooming. The flower is large and beautiful. We're going to wait and see. In the meantime the plant is wearing a hood to capture any seeds. Jeanette's not sure what to expect. Are the seeds viable? We'll plant them and wait.



Garlic Chives – this is a variety of chives that is also a member of the onion (*Allium*) family. It can be differentiated from the chive plant by its stems. Regular chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*) have a stem that is rounded and hollow, Garlic chives (*Allium tuberosum*) have flat leaves. You can dry chives to use for cooking or use them fresh. The flower is edible or it makes a beautiful dried flower. Seriously, I recommend this plant if you are truly fond of chives. They will make themselves right at home. This may be the last chive you ever buy. This photo reminds me of a firework.



cont'd on pg. 5

My Heat Survivors, cont'd from pg. 4

Gorizia and Tuscan Blue Rosemary – these are two of my favorite rosemarys. Tuscan Blue rosemary can reach up to six feet tall. I harvest this one the most, but I harvest it sparingly since I use it sparingly. It has a medium taste compared to other rosemarys I have tried. In older times rosemary was a symbol for remembrance and fidelity. The Gorizia rosemary has needle

like leaves like Tuscan Blue but they are wider. It can reach four to five feet in height. The Gorizia stems can be used as barbeque skewers. It has a milder taste than the Tuscan Blue but I could detect a slightly resinous aftertaste. The rosemarys and basil can handle the heat, but our 100 degree heat wave is pushing them to their limits.



Gorizia rosemary and Tuscan Blue rosemary



Left to right: Tuscan Blue rosemary leaf and Gorizia rosemary leaf

Curly Mint and Pineapple Mint – They are not thriving right now due to heat stress, but so far these mints have been hardy. The Pineapple mint is variegated and it has a mild, delicate, floral taste. On the other hand, the Curly Mint is like a mint on steroids. It has a strong, sharp taste that reminds me of the spearmint gum my dad chewed when I was younger. I seldom harvest the Pineapple mint since it's so mild and I am content just admiring its variegation. They are side by side in this photo, but they are separated by ten feet on my plant shelves. You know that mint is promiscuous, and things may go bump in the night. Cross pollination by the wind, bugs and insects can also occur.



Left to right: Curly mint and Pineapple mint

My Patchwork of Herbs, cont'd from pg. 1

Herbs have had a wide variety of uses throughout history and the search for alternative uses for herbs continues. They are becoming popular in today's culture since the words "high blood pressure" became more common. We are being encouraged to limit and reduce our salt intake and herbs can be used to fill in

the gap. If you are interested in learning more about herbs, the Master Gardener's Green Thumb Gardening Series has a lecture in August titled *Herbs 101*. To register and learn more, click on the following link: [2022 Green Thumb Gardening Series \(tamu.edu\)](https://tamu.edu/green-thumb).

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Society Garlic (*Tulbaghia violacea*)

Article and photos by Becky Lowicki, Master Gardener

Commonly known as wild garlic, society garlic hails from the same family as the onion, *Amaryllis*, *Amaryllidaceae*, and its genus, *Tulbaghia*, honors Rijk Tulbagh (1699-1771), Dutch Governor of the Cape of Good Hope.

Native to the rocky grasslands of eastern South Africa, this sustainable perennial is as hardy as they come with an innate ability to persevere, survive and thrive in Houston's oven-like temps above the 100-degree mark.

Although not in the *Allium* genus as garlic or onion, the common name "society garlic" comes from plant folklore that it tastes like garlic without leading to bad breath. Another plus is its ability to be deer- and rabbit-resistant, who must prefer halitosis.

Often featured as a landscape border along sidewalks in groupings or patio accents, the herbaceous perennial features slender, grass-like green leaves accented by clusters of small lilac flowers as a topper, bringing visual appeal reminiscent of a miniature version of agapanthus.

Leaves stretch about a foot tall similar in structure to a wispy monkey grass or liriopie with miniature, delicate lavender starbursts rising up to a pinnacle of about two feet tall.

Tolerant of both cold and drought, the rhizomes, leaves and flowers are edible and may

be used in cooking just as you would incorporate garlic or garlic chives. The delicate miniature flowers also make a pretty, colorful yet understated garnish to any dish.

Full transparency, society garlic does have the aroma of garlic when pruned or brushed against – i.e., sometimes emitting the fragrance of a pizza parlor – which on the upside is not such a bad thing, who doesn't love the smell of fresh-baked pizza?

A sun-lover at heart, society garlic is also a candidate for container planting as clumps may be easily divided when not blooming, which by the way is hardly never as the plant is a top producer almost year-round, but a most prolific bloomer in the warmer months.



Society garlic as a beautiful potted plant



Society garlic planted as a border treatment

Characteristics:

Type: Perennial
 Zone: 7 – 10
 Height: 1 – 2 Feet
 Spread: 9 – 12 Inches
 Bloom Colors: Lilac-Pink
 Bloom Description:
 Showy, Fragrant
 Sun: Full sun
 Water: Medium
 Soil: Sandy
 Maintenance: Low
 Leaf: Fragrant
 Attracts: Bees, Butterflies
 Tolerates: Drought
 Resists: Deer, Rabbit



References credit:

Good dirt provided for this article by

Society Garlic - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (ufl.edu)



A PENCHANT FOR PERENNIALS

Thryallis (*Galphimia glauca*)

Article and photos by Cindy Barger, Master Gardener

If you have spent any time online looking at the list of plants designated as Texas Superstars (www.texassuperstar.com), you have probably realized that you are familiar with many of the plants and may even have quite a few in your yard. The list is long and includes annuals, perennials, per-annuals (tropical perennials used as annuals), woody shrubs, trees, and specialty plants. Here you can find over 80 plants that have been singled out by Texas horticultural professionals because they have adapted so well to our climate.

A couple of years ago I discovered a plant on that list that was unfamiliar to me. I asked my mom, who seems to know every plant I point out to her, and she was not familiar with it either. When it was mentioned in my Harris County Master Gardener intern class, I knew I had to check it out. This new-to-me plant is Thryallis.

Listed on the Texas Superstar list as a per-annual, in our area it is a robust perennial shrub. Its hallmark feature is the constant display of yellow flowers during its blooming season. Thryallis can be planted in mass and used as a privacy hedge as it can grow to be 4 to 6 feet in both height and width. A similar mass planting can be cut back and used as a low foundation hedge. It can be used as a topiary as well. Because it can be pruned to the shape of a more formal shrub or allowed to be loose and open, it is a fabulously versatile plant to add to your yard.

Left alone, Thryallis has a very open and natural growth habit. It will sway in the breeze and adds movement to your landscape. To keep the shrub from getting too leggy, occasional pruning is helpful. It is tolerant of pruning, but remember the more you prune, the fewer flowers you may have (flowers form

on new growth). We have had our Thryallis about two years and it is over 5 feet tall and almost as wide. While I like the breezy natural look I think I'll cut it back soon (when it is not 100 degrees outside). Right now it is a bit of a "Wild Thing."

This fast-growing shrub likes the sun. Full sun is best. Ours does not seem fazed by this incessant heat we are hav-



ing this summer. Each day it is covered with the small yellow flowers, and we will enjoy these flowers until the first frost. A lack of sun will cause the flowering to not be as prolific, but Thryallis will tolerate some shade. Along with being heat-tolerant, it is drought-tolerant. It needs very little water and in fact does not like to be waterlogged. But even drought-tolerant plants like a bit of supplemental water during times of extreme heat.

Thryallis is native to Central America and Mexico, and in its native habitat the plant can be enjoyed year-round. In our area it will be dormant in winter and may drop its leaves. In areas with moderate winters the branches take on a reddish color that adds a bit of interest to the winter landscape. In a harsh winter the shrub may die back but the roots should survive (especially if you mulch well before the arrival of winter). While I have read some articles that indicate blooming begins in spring, ours didn't start up until early summer. Since then, we have had non-stop flowers, and it seems the hotter it gets the more it blooms. The small delicate star-shaped yellow flowers form in clusters with five sepals, five petals, and many tiny reddish anthers and styles. The leaves are very smooth and oblong. I have to say these are very interesting flowers to examine up close. Nature's detail is amazing.

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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 August

- Sat., Aug. 6** **Mercer Botanic Gardens**, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd, Humble, 77338 – 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Urban Harvest, 2752 Buffalo Speedway Houston, Texas 77027 – 7:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.
- Sat., Aug. 13** **Tomball Farmer's Market**, 205 West Main St., Tomball, 77375 – 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Mon., Aug. 15** **Genoa Friendship Gardens Open Garden Day** - 1210 Genoa Red Bluff Rd., Houston 77034
- Thurs., Aug. 18** **Westchase Farmer's Market**, 10503 Westheimer Rd., Houston, 77042 – 3 to 7 p.m.
- Sat., Aug. 20** **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., Aug. 27** **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!

Thryallis (*Galphimia glauca*), *cont'd from pg. 7*



I haven't mentioned pests or disease because this plant is not really plagued by either. Some report occasional issues with spider mites or caterpillars, but I have no personal experience. Our Thryallis is one very healthy and self-sufficient must-have plant.

Some taxonomists think the Latin name for Thryallis is *Galphimia gracilis* and not *Galphimia glauca*. I will let the experts work on the name issue and just continue to enjoy this attractive "new" find of mine. An attractive ornamental shrub with a long flowering period, a tolerance for heat and drought, a lack of pests or disease, and a host of landscaping uses? Thryallis will always have a permanent place in our yard.

Stay cool and happy gardening!



August Gardening Calendar

by Karen Shook, Master Gardener

This summer has been hotter and drier than normal and the August forecast doesn't change that trend. Look around your neighborhood and consider for your yard plants that still look good after the summer heat and drought. Personally, I am turning my thoughts toward fall gardening with focus on cleaning out summer

beds that are looking a bit ragged and preparing beds for fall planting.

Speaking of drought, I've attached an article about using water wisely in your outdoor spaces. Keep it mulched!

Water Conservation

Annuals

- If annuals are still actively growing/blooming, they may benefit from an application of balanced fertilizer. Continue to deadhead spent blooms.
- Even heat tolerant annuals may look tired. If they have stopped growing/ blooming, consider replacing with heat tolerant or perhaps foliage plants.

Bulbs

- Prune ginger and canna stalks to ground after blooms fade.
- If iris foliage is brown, cut it off. Work a little bone meal or compost around rhizomes being careful not to disturb them too much.

Roses

- Keep up with pest and fungus controls (every 7 to 10 days) and feeding (every 4 to 8 weeks). Keep yellow, dropped leaves cleaned out of the beds.
- Late August is the time for summer pruning of roses (other than once blooming). Reduce size by 1/3 (or to desired height) making cuts just above an outward facing bud. Remove dead wood, diseased canes, twiggy growth. Fertilize and water after pruning.

Shrubs

- Watch those shallow rooted azaleas, they are drought vulnerable and are setting buds for spring bloom.
- If needed visually, prune out dead, diseased wood from shrubs, but wait until mid- winter for serious pruning.

Lawns

- Sod can be laid in bare areas. Water it in well.
- The largest population of chinch bugs is typically late summer to early fall. If you see irregular patches of dead or stunted grass particularly in sunny areas near driveways or curbs, check for chinch bugs.

Ground Cover

- If your groundcover is looking sad, shear it back with lawn mower or trimmer, then water it well.

Edibles (vegetables, herbs, berries, fruits)

- If you want to grow your Halloween pumpkin, it is time to plant the seeds.
- Stop fertilizing fruit and nut trees to prepare for winter dormancy.
- See the following link for recommended planting times:
Harris County Vegetable Planting Guide

Trees

- Snip off spent blooms on crape myrtle before they set seed. Fertilize. Snip off spent blooms on vitex.

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](https://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, and our Growing with Plants and Nature Virtual Group. We welcome questions, comments and requests at: ogd.harrishort@gmail.com.



Our 4-day summer camp with children at Friends of Northside included multiple methods for teaching about Parts of the Plant. Progressing through the plant life cycle, we utilized brief videos, a PowerPoint presentation, and demonstrations to share content about each plant part. Interspersed in each stage were hands-on opportunities. The children began by each examining stages of germinated and sprouted seeds. To demonstrate the circulatory function of the stem, they conducted an experiment, noting the changes over four days of 2 celery stems, one in clear water, one in water with red food coloring. They highlighted the veins of leaves by creating colorful and fascinating leaf rubbings. These works of art were placed into frames for the children to take home.



Finally, the children broke balloons filled with seeds and measured the dispersion of the seeds around the sidewalk and parking lot.



A song we learned from our 4-H AgriLife Extension staff gave the children a chance to expend some of their natural exuberance from time to time by singing and acting out parts of a plant.

Planning ahead, we will begin to put together a detailed listing of the activities and lessons we have collected over the past years.



Picture on the left: children rubbing chlorophyll from sunflower leaves to color leaves and grass. Picture above: Julee Jackson and Lois Pierce assist children making leaf rubbings

Moving up to the blossom, in small groups, the children took apart lilies and placed parts onto labeled cards. This was followed by using chenille stems wrapped around their fingers, dipped into orange powdered cheese to simulate the spreading of pollen in nature.



Picture directly to the left: Amanda Mendoza and Lois Pierce point out nodes where new roots will grow along the stem cuttings the children planted.

Picture to far bottom left: children eagerly show the stick fans they made by coloring lady bugs on one side and learning about the life cycle on the other side of the fan.

Open Garden Days at Genoa Friendship Gardens



The Flower Trial Garden



The Water Garden



The Greenhouse

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

Open Garden Days

on the 3rd Monday of the month, March through October, 8:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
Admission to the Exhibit Gardens is free, and register at the Welcome Table
to receive additional monthly notices for children and family events.

The Genoa Friendship Gardens

is located at
1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road
Houston, Texas 77034

Weekly Garden Hours: Open all year round, Monday and Wednesday mornings,
9 a.m.-11a.m. (weather permitting).

We welcome professional organizations, schools, churches, and individuals tours of
the garden! If interested in a tour, please email Lili Bauerlein, Program Coordinator
at lilianna.bauerlein@ag.tamu.edu.

- Tour the variety of exhibits to inspire you with vegetable, perennial, rose, tropical and native gardens.
- Visit our Ask a Master Gardener table for information about about planting citrus, fruit or berries for your home orchard, or planting your vegetable garden.
- Contemplate the joy in the Earth-Kind Garden and catch a view of the Water Garden.
- Don't leave the GFG until you have shopped the Greenhouse where seasonal herbs, vegetables and perennials are available for sale until September.

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.

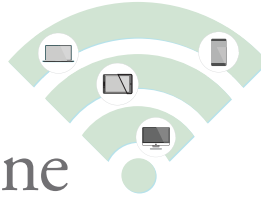
**McGovern Centennial Gardens at Hermann Park
1500 Hermann Drive
Houston, Texas 77004**

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.



Ask A Master Gardener Online

by Master Gardeners Caroline O'Hara and Lisa Rawl

Q: I planted three Mystic Spires Blue Salvia right next to the front door that I use. I also planted beautiful blue plumbago right next to them. Both are thriving and blooming. My problem is I didn't realize how many bees and wasps they attract. The aggressive wasps in particular are so active that I disturb them almost every time I go in and out the door. What are the ways to repel aggressive wasps and somehow keep the flowers in bloom??? Thank you.

A: Thanks for your question. Your flowers sound lovely, and I definitely sympathize with the wasps being too close for comfort. I would recommend starting with identification of the wasp (see different kinds of wasps in this link, [Paper Wasps, Yellowjackets and Solitary Wasps](#)). If you are seeing paper wasps, look around for a nest. There's a photo of one in the linked document. Check under railings, eaves, and stairs. If you find any nests in areas where they are likely to be disturbed by your regular activities, spray them from a distance in the morning or evening (when most wasps will be back in the nest) and wait a few days to make sure they are all dead before knocking it down. If you can't find a nest but the wasps continue to be aggressive, you may need to call a professional exterminator to find and treat the nest.

Have a look through the rest of the document to see if you can identify your wasps, and that will give you some insight on how aggressive they might be and if you need to take further action. Unfortunately (or fortunately!), wasps and bees are pollinators and beneficial insects, so they are doing good work on your flowers! If they continue to bother you, you might want to consider relocating the flowers a bit further from your door so you can use the door comfortably while still enjoying the flowers.

As mentioned in the following link, [Fascinating facts about wasps, hornets](#), most wasps are only aggressive when defending their nest, not when they are foraging for nectar, so try to look out for nests in areas where the wasps will be easily disturbed and destroy those nests to keep aggressive wasp behaviors at bay. The first document I linked has recommendations on what active ingredient in pesticides to use for the different kinds of wasp nests. Hope this helps - please contact us again if you have further questions!

Q: My mustard greens have white spots on leaves (fungus). Are the greens safe to eat?

A: Thank you for your very interesting question! It is not a good idea to eat greens with fungus or mold; while some fungal and bacterial diseases on plants may not be dangerous for us, others can be. And it can be difficult to distinguish between the various diseases that can affect greens. Here is an interesting article on the subject from Iowa State titled "[Can Sick Plants Make People Sick?](#)"

Here is an article from TAMU, "[Growing Turnip and Mustard Greens](#)", that can help you with good cultural practices to hopefully avoid future diseases, and this link to the [Texas Plant Disease Handbook](#) has information about the various diseases that can occur on turnips and mustards. Best wishes and happy gardening.

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A gentle reminder for our fellow Master Gardeners and interns: the AAMGO helpline is for gardening questions from the general public, not our HCMGA membership. Our Extension agents and HCMGA leadership feel that given our training, our members should be able to do their own research or talk through questions with each other at a variety of meetings, work days and CEU opportunities.

If you are a Harris County MG, interested in volunteering for AAMG Online and want to be trained, please contact Lili Bauerlein at Lilianna.bauerlein@ag.tamu.edu.

Getting Down to Earth

Article and photos by Pam Longley, Master Gardener

News from Genoa Friendship Gardens

GFG and the entire Master Gardener community lost a devoted volunteer recently with the passing of **Georgia Lau**. We have plans to place a garden bench near the Perennial Garden, as well as planting a blooming tree in the fall to honor her.



Georgia Lau

The Vegetable Production team planted tomato seeds in the greenhouse from Pan American Seed Company. It is the first time we have used their seeds. We hope we have a much better fall crop than our disappointing summer one. There were few edible tomatoes. **Rick Castagno** did some research and found that the agricultural consensus is “Too hot, too early” and then there were the stinkbugs.... The green bean plants were pulled up with dismay as there was NO production. The good news is the brown crowder peas, okra and eggplants are looking great. **Doug McLeod** is always happy when it is eggplant harvest time because that means his wife, **Kathryn**, will make the best Eggplant Parmesan around.

In the Perennial Trial Beds, the heat continues to separate the weak from the strong. The stalwart ones are celosia, vinca, a few petunias and bee’s knees. Shocking that we can say this about petunias in July, which is more like August.

I was tiptoeing through the Perennial Garden and it seems like every time I do, I find something new to me that has been in the garden all along.

Here’s what I found this time:

Bouncing Bet Soapwort (*Saponaria officinalis*)

The name is said to refer to the washerwoman’s “attributes” being bounced around while using soapwort to clean clothes.

Used as far back as the Stone Age (12,000 years BCE). It is likely that when people went to wash their hands in the streams, they grabbed the leaves to scrub off dirt and found that they produced a lather. Later, the Syrians used it for washing wool products while the Swiss used it to bathe their sheep before shearing. The National Trust in Britain directed that soapwort be used to clean delicate tapestries and linens because most detergents were too harsh.

Source: Howtogardenadvice.com



Bouncing Bet Soapwort (*Saponaria officinalis*)

Butterscotch Cestrum (*Cestrum parqui*)

Attracts pollinators and hummingbirds. It is said to have anti-inflammatory properties and in Chile, it is used as a pain reliever. Cestrum continues to be used by shamans of the Mapuche tribe as part of their healing practices, as they believe it contains a magical force capable of resisting black magic attacks.

Source: Vanderbilt University Center for Latin American, Caribbean and LatinX Studies



Butterscotch Cestrum
(*Saponaria officinalis*)

cont'd on pg. 17

Getting Down to Earth *News from Genoa Friendship Gardens, cont'd from pg. 16*

Jatropha

A member of the spurge family and is sometimes known as Nettle-spurge or my favorite, Physic Nut. Hummingbirds are attracted to the bright red flowers. Bio-fuel development in India centers mainly around the cultivation and processing of its seeds, which are oil rich.

Source: [Wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jatropha)



Jatropha

Pavonia (*Pavonia peruviansis*)

A tropical, commonly known as Argentine Mallow, as it is native to Argentina. The genus name honors Jose Antonio Pavon (1754-1844), Spanish botanist, noted for his botanical research on the flora of Peru and Chile

Source: [missouribotanicalgarden.org](https://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org)



Pavonia

cont'd on pg. 18

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

Article and photos by Baxter Swenson, Master Gardener

Christ the Good Shepherd Garden - Spring, TX

Yes, We Have No Tomatoes

At the beginning of summer, it looked like we were headed for a record tomato harvest. But like many gardens in our area, the heat has taken its toll. By mid-July it was obvious that this year's crop was finished and it was time to clean out the beds and get them prepared for more okra and another attempt at summer squash. Even with the shortened season we were able to harvest and donate 1,239 pounds of tomatoes to local food pantries.



Brenda Fabian and Than-Nhi Nguyen say "Season's Over"



Ann Zdansky, Than-Nhi and Diane La Rubbio are all smiles now that the beds are clear!

In A Bit of a Pickle

While cucumbers love the heat, they require a lot of water. We began to notice our cucumber plants were looking stressed and realized that our drip lines were clogged and the plants weren't getting enough water in this heat. Fortunately we noticed in time and were able to run new lines. Once done, things got back to normal and the vines are now looking fine.

This was a great reminder to make sure that irrigation systems are functioning properly. To date, we have supplied local food banks with over 1,000 lbs of cucumbers.

Peppers and Okra Coming on Strong

The silver lining to this heat is that our Peppers, (Jalapeño/ three varieties, Serrano, Bell, Shishito, Poblano, Hungarian Wax, and a few "wild cards") are doing very well. As the okra moves into full production there is always a lot to pick on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays when volunteers are at the garden.

What Grows Best at the CGS Garden

We may be biased but we believe that what grows best at CGS garden is the nurturing of friendships, the building of meaningful relationships, and the fostering of community, all with the purpose of serving others. It's a place where we work along side each other, laugh together, tell stories, and share our gardening knowledge and life experiences. It's a place where everyone is welcome. Come check us out!



Ken Bache dives into "Okrahoma".



CGS mainstays, John Zdansky, Mike Chidalek and Charles Dorchak, make MG intern Trevor (TJ) Jones-Smith (front) feel right at home.

cont'd on pg. 19

Getting Down to Earth, *cont'd from pg. 18*

Article and photos by Nancy Graml, Master Gardener

McGovern Centennial Gardens Family Garden

Mediterranean Dry Garden Update

Last November we decided to challenge the notion that we cannot successfully grow perennial herbs from semi-arid regions that struggle in our humid climate. We reported this challenge in a previous issue of Urban Dirt. High humidity encourages fungal diseases and reduces transpiration that restricts a plant's evaporative cooling. We therefore dedicated a Mediterranean dry bed to adapt gardening techniques for perennial herbs, like sage and lavender, to thrive in semi-arid conditions like heat and drought.



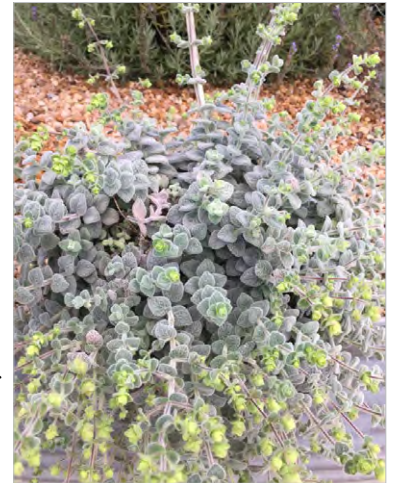
Lavender, June 21, 2022

These “dry garden” techniques included adding the “John Fairey method” of mulching with pea gravel to help dry the undersides of the leaves and planting to allow ample air circulation while keeping weeds at bay. We also added “expanded shale” to improve drainage for wet spells and turned off the irrigation system. The late John Fairey successfully grew plant specimens from arid climates in his 40-acre

botanical laboratory, Peckerwood Garden (now named The John Faiery Garden), in Hempstead TX.

We originally planted a beautiful gallon-sized lavender grown from a cutting of a seven-year old lavender that had died. We also planted beautiful Dittany of Crete, rosemary (both prostrate and upright), and a variety of sages including sage berggarten and purple sage. We can use Dittany of Crete as a herbal tea to relieve a cough from a cold and for mild stomach and digestive disorders such as a sensation of fullness. It is considered a cousin of oregano and thus can be used to flavor a variety of dishes. Sage berggarten is a good choice for the edible garden and is also well-suited to grow in outdoor pots and containers. Like Dittany of Crete, purple sage is an effective medicinal herb made into tea and it can relieve chest colds and congestion.

Despite warnings that sage does not survive a hard freeze, during the February freeze we did not cover the Mediterranean dry garden and it looked just fine afterwards. Its pea gravel mulch retains heat in winter. Included are original and current pictures of the dry garden, along with current pictures of its thriving perennial herbs. Master Gardener Jim Rath spearheaded the effort for this bed's transformation.



Dittany of Crete, June 21, 2022



Purple sage, June 21, 2022



Mediterranean Dry Garden, Dec. 7, 2021



Mediterranean Dry Garden June 21, 2022

Growing Peppers in Houston's Heat

Article and photos by Dan Shannon and Baxter Swenson, Master Gardeners

From the Garden to Harvest

Dan Shannon

I am aware that we had an informative article in last month's issue by MG Terri Simon, but I wanted to add my two cents worth to the subject based on my particular garden(s). I grow or help to grow at least three different gardens in three locations. That helps to spread the risk of a crop failure due to one pest or another. A good example is my daughter's cherry tomatoes and cucumbers which are outperforming mine in a garden only five miles away.



Peppers growing in a raised bed

We have been experiencing near record heat this spring and summer in Houston this year. The last couple of months have been particularly oppressive with both high day and night temperatures and almost no rain. Pretty much all of my fellow gardeners have been dealing with the stress that this puts on our gardens. Many crops are struggling or outright failing. I have had one particular group of star performers though. That would be peppers. Particularly the "hot peppers," such as serranos, jalapeños, and habaneros.

I am not sure of what the reason is for their performance or if it is just correlation but not causation. In my experience over the years the pepper varieties that are hotter (contain more capsaicin) tend to not only be more vigorous growers, but they also are better at fending off foliar fungal or bacterial diseases. They also tend to be more dependable fruit producers, both in quantity and quality.

The peppers that I am growing this season range from some of the milder types including two or three Bell Pepper varieties, and other sweet snacking peppers. I am also growing some with a bit more "heat" including Poblano Peppers, Jalapeños, and Serranos.

All of these peppers are derivatives of *Capsicum annuum*. This species is by far the largest contributor to the overall peppers in cultivation throughout the world. *C. annuum* is considered native to a habitat ranging from southern North America, the Caribbean, to northern South America.

The other peppers that I am growing this season are of the "habanero-type peppers". The

habaneros are considered to be the species *Capsicum chinense*. Some taxonomists, however, consider this group to be contained within the *C. annuum* complex. *C. chinense* can be crossed with *C. annuum* varieties to create hybrids, so they are closely related.



C. chinense is thought to have originated in the tropical region of northern Amazon (Southern Brazil to Bolivia).

Habanero peppers



Jalapeños and Serrano peppers



Harvested peppers including Bells, Sweet Peppers and Poblanos

cont'd on pg. 21

Growing Peppers in Houston's Heat, cont'd from pg. 20

Peppers - From Garden to Table

Baxter Swenson

Are you wondering what to do with your bumper crop of hot peppers? If so, you might want to try your hand at making this mixture of dried peppers and salt. It's what my family and friends call "Texas Fire Ant Salt". It's a flavorful pepper-enhanced salt that gives a "small bite with a slow burn". Personally, I'm not crazy about vinegar or tomato based hot sauces that mask and overpower food. For that reason I began to experiment with blending peppers and salt. These flavored salts allow you to create your preferred combination of flavors and "heat". I have experimented with different peppers, such as Thai Cayenne, Aci Servi, Goat's Horn, Habanero, Scotch Bonnet, Serrano, Jalapeño, red, yellow, green bells, Anaheim, Shishito, etc. Sometimes I have included "sweet peppers" that I have grown or acquired and the result has been great. The combinations you can come up with are endless.

After harvesting the peppers, I wash, dry and de-stem them. I always wear gloves to keep the oils from getting on my hands and skin or in my eyes. I use a pair of kitchen scissors to cut the peppers in half lengthwise and then dry them, with or without their seeds, in a food dehydrator. I try to keep each pepper variety on a separate tray so that I am able to store them according to their type. Sometimes, when in a hurry, I have dried several varieties together.



Dried Habaneros and Jalapeños on a drying tray.

When I'm ready to make my blend I use a basic ratio of three measures of sea or Kosher salt to one measure of the dried pepper powders. Sometimes I add black pepper to the mix.

What I find interesting is that by mixing a variety of peppers, their colors enhance the appearance of the salt and add color to the dish you are serving. This salt looks and tastes great on all kinds of eggs. When the pepper particles hit the moisture on the food, they tend to "pop" in color. In fact, this salt is fantastic on all kinds of foods. It's great on potatoes, vegetables, meats, fish and even fruit. Bon Appetit!



Random mix of dried peppers

I should mention that when drying hot peppers it should be done outside or in a well ventilated room. The heat can cause the capsaicin to become aerosolized which may result in irritation to eyes and lungs. The dried peppers can be stored in jars or Ziploc freezer bags until use. I grind each variety separately in a spice grinder and then put the "powder" in its own container.



Hot pepper salt blend



THE FUTURE OF URBAN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT

September 30, 2022

9:00 am - 3:00 pm

University of Houston-Downtown

(UHD Science & Technology Building)

315 N. Main Street Houston TX 77002

COST: GENERAL \$50.00 | STUDENT - \$ 25.00

Early-Bird Registration - Save \$ 10.00 (Register by 8/15)



Agenda



Gardening for Health – Dr. Joe Novak, Faculty Lecturer, Director of the Betty and Jacob Friedman Holistic Garden Rice University



Certified Organic: What is it and its value – Bob Whitney, Regents Fellow & Extension Organic Program Specialist, Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center.



Enhancing the Purpose of Food – Dr. Patrick Stover, Institute Director, Institute for Advancing Health Through Agriculture Texas A&M AgriLife Research | Texas A&M University System



Wicked Problems Lunch Topics – each table at lunch will informally discuss an urban food topic



Innovation in Urban Ag Panel

- **Brenda Anderson Koch** - VegOut! Farms, Owner/Operator
- **Sara Wilson** - Three Sister Farms, Owner
- **Cath Conlon** - Blackwood Educational Land Institute/The SKYFARM at Post Houston, CEO and Founder

REGISTRATION: [HTTPS://FUFESS2022.EVENTBRITE.COM](https://FUFESS2022.EVENTBRITE.COM)

Paul Winski, Harris County Extension Agent - Horticulture
paul.winski@ag.tamu.edu | (713) 274-0950



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MG of the Month - *Julee Jackson*

by Karen Breneman, Master Gardener

Congratulations **Julee Jackson!**

Julee graduated with the 2019 Master Gardener class. She and her husband Chris have five boys, two grandsons and four granddaughters. The grandkids are becoming involved in sports and she enjoys watching them, even in the hot sun!

Julee's father was in the Air Force, so they moved every two years, which allowed her to experience life in different regions of the United States. Eventually he retired to run the family farm



in Missouri, where they pretty much grew or raised everything they ate. Julee also served in the Air Force as a military court reporter, used the GI Bill to

Julee Jackson

obtain a degree, and worked in downtown Houston as a paralegal for 35 years.

She couldn't wait to retire so she could participate in the master gardening program and finally in 2018 was fortunate enough to take the course. Julee has enjoyed all the gardening information offered, especially hands-on advice. Growing from seeds or cuttings has always been her passion and she's proud that her grandkids can point to a shrub, tree or flower and say Grandma grew that. She particularly enjoys getting seeds, cuttings or plants offered by other master gardeners. Julee also likes growing a winter vegetable garden. Her wonderful husband made seven raised beds so she's able to grow enough vegetables for the family and the chickens. They are currently making four rain barrels for the garden. She is also an avid baker and enjoys making breads and pastries from scratch.

Julee has been volunteering with Growing with Plants and Nature even though she says it is definitely not in her wheelhouse, it's a challenge she accepts and enjoys. Plus, all the GPN volunteers are exceptionally knowledgeable and just fun to be with, and the kids are so appreciative.

Julee, thank you for all you do!

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!

Wildflower Whims

Article and photos by Robin Yates, Master Gardener

One can hardly drive around Harris County, with our constant construction, and not pass one or more common sunflowers. They prosper along disturbed areas, of which we have an abundant supply. *Helianthus annuus*, the common sunflower, was the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center's Wildflower of the Year for 2021, the first year of that designation. It is also found throughout North America and is the state flower of Kansas.



Helianthus annuus

It is a beautiful and simple flower, yet full of intrigue and mystery. Vincent Van Gogh was mesmerized by the sunflower and translated its beauty skillfully onto canvas for all to enjoy.

Its name is a straightforward combination of *helios*, Greek for "sun," and *anthos*, "flower." It is not clear if it is named for its sunlike appearance, or due to it being phototropic or heliophilic tendency to turn the inflorescence toward the sun. The Kiowa people called it ho-son-a, translated "looking at you," as it seemed to follow a traveler in her journey.

H. annuus thrives in... wait for it.... full sun! Its water requirements are medium. It is a widely branching annual, growing 1 ½-8 feet, although I have had plants that were over 10 feet tall. It has coarsely hairy stems and leaves. The bloom is a collection of flowers, tightly packed yellow rays surrounding many brown tubular flowers in the center and can be up to 5 inches in diameter. It typically blooms from May through November. As noted above, it does well in disturbed soil, either clay or sand. It

reseeds and tends to have an allelopathic effect on other vegetation. I have found it easy to propagate in my yard.

The sunflower demonstrates the efficiency of nature. Did you know that as the sunflower develops its seed, it lays them out in a mathematical pattern? It is called the Fibonacci sequence (<https://www.popmath.org.uk/rpamaths/rpampages/sunflower.html>). Any deviation from the exact angle of 137.5 degrees, would destroy the efficiency, and thus affect the viability of the species.

The sunflower has long been used for nutrition, medicine, and dyes. The seed has been roasted and eaten, ground into flour, or made into oil. It is the only major crop that originated in the current US boundaries. Introduced to Russia, it became popular as it was not on the forbidden oil-rich food list for Lent by the Russian Orthodox Church!

The sunflower is the national flower of Ukraine, and rightly so, as they are the world's leading exporter of sunflower oil. The war has hindered farmers' ability to get the crop to market, another of the many losses of war.

The common sunflower makes a great habitat for wildlife. It provides protective cover for various species. It is beloved by many pollinators for nectar and is a larval host plant for the Silvery Checkerspot (*Chlosyne nycteis*) butterfly. I recommend leaving some of the stalks up over the winter months as its seeds become a natural feeder for many songbirds.

I find it difficult to admire a sunflower and not smile. Its bright colors have long been likened to the human face, constantly smiling. I hope you will consider adding it to your yard or garden. You can brighten up your day with this beloved wildflower!



Sunflower bloom welcomes a butterfly.

Home Grown Podcast

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/



Hurricane Season is here!

Our hurricane season is June 1st through 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>.

For Harris County Master Gardeners Only!



August 13th GFG Saturday Workday

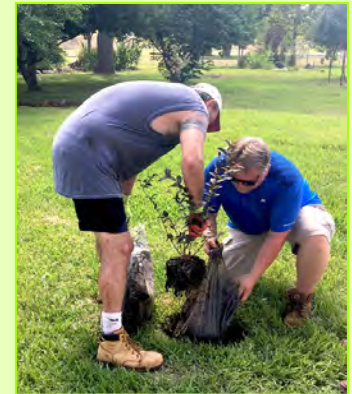
8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

1210 Genoa Red Bluff Road, Houston TX

Please email Jonathan Correia at jonathan@jonathancorreia.com
or text to 832-687-5604 if you would like to work
at GFG on a Saturday.

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 **August** include the following. Wish them **HAPPY BIRTHDAY** when you see them!

Karol Arrington, Carolyn Boyd, Brad Coburn,
Keeng Eng, Sally Goss, Nelson Harbison,
James Holmes, Julee Jackson, Brandi Keller,
Jana Lee, Sunya Lewis, Margaret Pierce, Dale Reid,
Teresa See, Jo Ann Stevenson and Noe Tristan

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.

<div>  <div> Vegetable Garden Planting Dates for Harris County </div> <div> Texas AgriLIFE Extension Service Harris County Office 713-274-0950 https://harris.agrilife.org/hort/ </div> </div>												
<div> Ideal Planting Time <div>Marginal Planting Time</div> </div>												
Planting times are for seeds unless otherwise noted	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
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)



Plants grown over winter may require protection during freezing weather.

Average First Freeze Dates (Bush 11/30, Hobby 12/20)



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 AGRI LIFE

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 **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.

Join us every 2nd and 4th Saturday at our Weekend Workdays. These are opportunities for Interns and MGs to learn and work in a variety of gardens. **Please contact Jonathan Correia at jonathan@jonathancorreia.com or text to 832-687-5604 to confirm work day schedule.**

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