



INSIDE DIRT



President's Message

David Bickerstaff, Master Gardener

Did we blink and miss winter? As we experience 70-degree weather in February, we must fight the urge to plant gardens that require us to be past the last frost! In our area the average last frost is at the end of March.

Hopefully you have been planning your garden, ordering seeds and starting seeds indoors in preparation of another planting season. We have been busy as

well, some of the activities of our association include:

- Planning our educational and community outreach events – Library Series, Summer Series, booths and other community events
- Working in the TVCC greenhouse to grow hundreds of plants in preparation of our annual plant sale (April 25th at the Athens Senior Citizens Center)
-
- Preparing our DREAM Garden (located at the East Texas Arboretum) so that you can enjoy the beauty and serenity of the garden
- Final preparations for the upcoming grand opening of our new Harvest Garden (located at the Henderson County Fair Grounds)
- Working with Carolyn Tyler, County Extension Agent – Family and Community Health, to assist in the Junior Master Gardener Program (Grow, Learn, Eat, Go) in Henderson County schools
- Attending various continuing education events to ensure that we have the most recent fact-based and research-based information to share with the community
- Enjoying fellowship and having fun!

At the time of this writing we are excited for the visit to our group by the Texas Master Gardener Association President, Louie McDaniel. He is not only the state president, he is also the chair of the state



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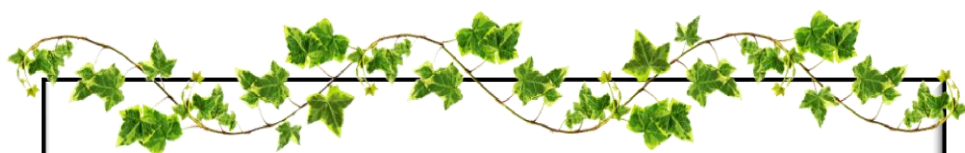
As I enter the second (and final) year as President, I continue to be amazed at the dedication and energy of our members. I would like to highlight a member of our board- Barbara Thompson. Barbara is not only our Treasurer, but she seems to be everywhere. You will see her smiling face at the greenhouse, DREAM garden, Library Series and other events. She is also a co-chair of this year's Plant Sale. We recently conducted a financial audit and Barbara's eye for detail and quality record keeping made the audit a quick and painless effort. I really appreciate Barbara and she is an asset to our group!

Please enjoy reading this issue of *Inside Dirt* and happy gardening!

"Gardening adds years to your life and life to your years."

~ Unknown

David Bickerstaff, President HCMGA



ANNUAL PLANT SALE

The Henderson County Master Gardener Assoc. will hold their Annual Plant Sale on **April 25, 2020** at the Senior Citizen's Center, 3344 State Hwy. 31 E., Athens (adjacent to the Fairpark Complex). This year's plant offerings include **over 275 plant species**; annuals, perennials, herbs, vines, succulents, house plants, hanging baskets, and Texas Superstar plants will be available at the sale.

The plant sale will open at 9:00 am and close at 2:00 pm. Plan to bring a wagon to help carry all the wonderful plants you'll want to take home!

Again, this year, Master Gardener, Bill Walter, will be making **bat and bird houses** for the sale. These are very popular and typically sell out early in the day.

Continuing with HCMG's focus on education, we'll **provide important information about every plant in the sale which customers may access on our website**, txmg.org/hendersonmg. If you have any other questions, please contact the Henderson County Texas AgriLife office at 903-675-6130.

HCMGA Projects

- **Children's Garden:** HCMGA is available for consultation on school or teaching gardens.
- **DREAM Garden:** (Demonstrate, Research, Educate, Apply, Maintain) The HCMGA maintains a cottage-style ornamental garden at the East Texas Arboretum in Athens.
- **Fall Conference:** The largest fundraiser for HCMGA, this conference includes a guest speaker, possible raffles and/or auctions and a dinner.
- **Greenhouse:** The HCMGA maintains a greenhouse located at Trinity Valley Community College. This greenhouse allows us to propagate and grow plants that are sold at our annual spring plant sale.
- **Harvest Garden:** The HCMGA's newest project, the Harvest Garden, is a teaching garden on growing fruits and vegetables with hands-on demonstrations. It is located inside the Regional Fairpark Complex.
- **Library Series:** Educational presentations are hosted by the HCMGA on the third Tuesday of each month. These programs are open to the public at the Clint W. Murchison Memorial Library in Athens.
- **Plant Sale:** The HCMGA hosts an annual plant sale in the spring which is open to the public. Master Gardeners propagate and grow different varieties of plants and trees. This event is a major fundraiser for the organization.
- **Summer Series:** Workshops are provided in the summer months to share expertise and educate the public on various gardening topics.

LIBRARY SERIES - Open to The Public

Tuesday, March 17th, at 5:30 pm: Library Series presents Master Gardener **Addie Matney**, who will take us into the world of *House Plants*.

Tuesday, April 21st, at 5:30 pm: Library Series presents Master Gardener **Lydia Holley**, who will teach on developing a *Deer Resistant Landscape*.

Library Series meets the **3rd Tuesday** of every month. All presentations are held at the **Clint W. Murchison Memorial Library**, 121 S. Prairieville, Athens at 5:30pm. Come early as all presentations start on time and last for an hour. For details on the above presentations, turn to page 12, or visit us at <https://txmg.org/hendersonmg/welcome/events/learn-at-the-library-series/>



Henderson County Master Gardeners

The master Gardener program is a volunteer development program, offered by Texas AgriLife Extension Service, that disseminates horticultural information to individuals and groups in Henderson County. The mission is to develop and cultivate community projects related to horticulture. We are a group of volunteers who share a love of gardening and are eager to learn and share our knowledge.

Watch for celebration details in the coming months.

Keep Your Itchy Fingers Under Control

Robert Erickson, Henderson County Master Gardener



It's Spring, right? I mean we have 70-degree days and 60-degree nights. Time to get the garden started, right? Slow down, itchy fingers. We've had two winters so far and will probably have another one or two before we can get really dirty. Officially, our average last frost day is around mid-March. The emphasis is on the word *Average*. In recent years, we have had freezes in April and a couple in May. This d

oesn't mean we can't work in the garden however; we just have to be smart about it. Let's talk about our gardens. I will talk mainly about vegetables but most of this also applies to flowers and ornamentals.

It's still winter, until March 20th, but the warmer weeks allow us to do all of the prep work we have put off since fall. Getting rid of weeds and dead plant material comes first. If the compost bin is full, it's time to dig out the black gold and put it in the garden. The

dead and any new material will be welcome by the bugs which are tired of the same old menu. The next thing on the agenda is to loosen the soil. It has probably compacted over the winter with the rains and any foot traffic which might have taken place. This can be done at the same time you add the compost and work it in. Most likely, you won't have enough compost and might need to add some more. The goal for existing beds is 1-2" of fresh compost worked into the top of the soil. More is desirable but might strain the budget if you have a larger garden. With a larger garden, buying bulk compost can save some money. There are a number of local sources for bulk compost. If you have a trailer or truck, you can pick up what you need. If you don't have a trailer, you can order it for delivery but might have to pay for a minimum amount to have it delivered. Shop a

round. It's also a good time to work in organic nutrients and fertilizers. They tend to be slow release and take time to be ready for your new plants. Chemical fertilizers are mostly quick release and should be applied at the time you plant.

Some plants can be put in the ground now but do some research on what is cold tolerant. As a general rule, greens like lettuce, cabbage, mustard, collards and others are tolerant. They are already in the plant stores and can be planted anytime now but be alert to the weather for an upcoming freeze. If they are recently transplanted, you might want to cover them. Once they are established, they should be fine. They will shut down growth for a couple of days until it warms up again. This list also includes onions. We think of onions as bulbs but they aren't. The onion bulb is actually the base of the green leaves. You should also remember to buy short day onions. These include the Vidalia, Texas Grano, and 1015 varieties which do very well locally. Long day varieties don't do well in the south. You can try but don't expect good results.





A couple of other notes: It's too late to plant garlic. In the south, it's usually planted in the fall. They and onions have about a six-month growth cycle to maturity. The hot summer here will be too much for them. We need to harvest them by June. The onion sets available now have been growing since October and are ready to plant. They will survive a freeze. Seed potatoes are also available now and can be planted. However, a late freeze might kill off the above ground greenery. My experience is that the potatoes will grow new greenery and will be fine. A few might not make it but most of them will survive.

With these out of the way, your garden is started but you still need to keep your itchy fingers under control. April is usually the month to put out the warm weather plants. It's certainly a good time to buy the plants but you still need to keep an eye on the weather. Most late freezes last only a short time. Tomatoes and peppers particularly might need to be covered when the temperature drops into the mid-thirties. Beans and peas will probably survive. The concern in April and later is about any seeds you plant directly in the ground. Rather than rely on the weather reports, consider getting a thermometer and testing the soil temperature. Soil is a lousy conductor of heat. It will take longer to warm up than the air and will take longer to cool off. Seeds germinate at a variety of soil temperatures but most seeds germinate best when the soil gets to sixty degrees or above. If you wait for that point, even a very late freeze won't change the soil temperature very much and seeds can be safely planted. Planting seeds too early might mean the early seedlings with only minimal roots in place might not survive a cold spell. Plan your planting accordingly.

Finally, when you plant anything, starter plants or seeds, water them in well to ensure the soil and the plant or seed make good contact and can begin its journey. Then, all you have to do is keep your itchy fingers busy pulling weeds and things, until it is time to harvest your well-earned bounty.

Enjoy your spring.



Resources for Natives Plants

Filling your garden with native plants may seem like quite the challenge. Which plants are native? Where do you find them? How do you care for them? The HCMGA **Monthly Gardening Guide** has an article on Earth-Kind from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. In that article are listed many native grasses, groundcovers, perennials, shrubs and trees of all sizes, as well as vines. The index lists about 325 plants, trees, shrubs, and vines, by both their common name, as well as their scientific name. The natives all have stars next to them. Here are a couple more awesome resources:

- Native Plant Society of Texas: <https://npsot.org/wp/>
- Ladybird Johnson Wild Flower Center: <https://www.wildflower.org/magazine/landscapes/natural-accents> - click on "South Central Plains"
- Texas A&M AgriLife Extension: <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/> and <https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/solutions/best-plants-trees-grow-texas-landscapes/>
- Texas A&M Agriculture Program: <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/ornamentals/nativeshrubs/>
- Texas A&M East Texas Gardening: <https://easttexasgardening.tamu.edu/east-texas-home-gardening/plants-for-east-texas/>

Calendar Of Events

March

3/1 – 4/22 TXMG Conference: Early Bird rate is gone, but there's still a reduced rate available
 3/03 – Super Tuesday
 3/07 – Keep Athens Beautiful (KAB) Home & Garden Show
 3/08 – Daylight Savings Time
 3/17 – Learn at the Library Series
 3/17 – St. Patrick's Day
 3/18 – HCMGA Monthly Meeting



April

4/05 – Palm Sunday
 4/08 – Passover begins at Sundown
 4/10 – Good Friday
 4/12 – Easter
 4/21 – Learn at the Library Series
 4/22 – HCMGA Monthly Meeting



Events Around Town



- ✓ **Now thru April 12th - Dallas Arboretum** <https://www.dallasarboretum.org/events-activities/dallas-blooms/> **Dallas Blooms (9 am – 5pm)** “Music and nature come to life at the Dallas Arboretum with more than 100 varieties of spring bulbs and over 500,000 blooms. Experience one of the country’s most colorful floral displays, and celebrate the joy of music in “Sounds of Spring.” Six majestic topiaries adorn the garden, each depicting a different musical instrument, including a harp, bass, guitar and saxophone, as well as two topiary musicians. One is playing the violin, the other is playing the piano. Come for the flowers and stay for the fun during Dallas Blooms.”
- ✓ **March 7 – Keep Athens Beautiful** <http://kabtx.org/index.htm> **Home Garden Show (9am – 3pm) See flyer below!** HCMGA’s own **Peter Cole** of Milk & Honey Meadows, will be presenting, as well as **HCMGA will have a booth.** “Henderson County Master Gardeners will be at the Keep Athens Beautiful Home and Garden Show on Saturday, March 7, 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m., at the Henderson County Regional FairPark Complex, 3356 State Hwy 31 E, Athens. Master Gardeners will have several tables at the event and invite you to stop by. One table features seed starting and will involve participants in a fun activity. In addition to gardeners, non-gardeners and children are welcome to come and learn about growing green beans in containers. Another table’s media will concentrate on nutrients, soil, and compost. Soil test kits will be available.”
- ✓ **March 20th - Smith County Master Gardeners:** <https://txmg.org/smith/coming-events/> **2020 Master Gardeners At the Library (11:30am - 1:00pm / Tyler Public Library FREE and open to the public)** “Changes to Bird Life in Texas” – What’s All the Flap About? with **Cliff Shackelford**, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Non-Game Ornithologist
- ✓ **March 21st - Kaufman County Master Gardeners:** <https://www.kcmga.org/events-4/> **2020 Spring Seminar: New Plants from Old (10:00am)** Oasis Amenity Center, 3556 Kirby Lane, Heartland “Join Kaufman County Master Gardeners on Saturday, March 21 at the Oasis Amenity Center in Heartland for a hands-on workshop on plant propagation. You’ll learn how to create new plants from ones you--or your friends and neighbors--already have. Techniques shown include starting seed, making cuttings, and dividing bulbs. You will have an opportunity to try each of the techniques yourself and will take home the new plants you start. The cost is \$10 per person, payable at the door, for the simple propagation kit provided, Registration begins at 9:30; light snacks will be available. Please call Sharon at 972-932-9069 to register so that we will have enough kits for everyone.”

✓ Late March thru late April – **BLUEBONNET SIGHTINGS**



some websites to help plan your bluebonnet adventure for Spring of 2020.

- ✓ <https://www.wildflower.org/bluebonnet-faq>
- ✓ <https://texashillcountry.com/5-great-places-see-bluebonnets-texas/>
- ✓ <https://www.highlandlakes.com/wildflowers/>
- ✓ <https://www.visitennis.org/bluebonnet.htm>

✓ April 9th - **Kaufman County Master Gardeners:**

<https://www.kcmga.org/events-4/> **Terrell Garden Club: Texas Superstar Plants (9:30am)** "Join Master Gardeners Beverly Curtis and Linda Wells, Kaufman County Advanced Master Gardeners – Texas Superstar Plants, to learn about plants that have proven to be winners in our north Texas environment. They will discuss several categories of plants, show photographs and discuss how to grow the plants."

- ✓ April 17th - **Smith County Master Gardeners:** <https://txmg.org/smith/coming-events/> **2020 Master Gardeners At the Library** (11:30am - 1:00pm / Tyler Public Library FREE and open to the public) "Fixin to Garden in Texas"- How to Bloom Where You Are Planted, with Andie Rathbone, Smith County Master Gardener



KEEP ATHENS BEAUTIFUL PRESENTS

2020 HOME AND GARDEN SHOW

LOCALS TEACHING LOCALS

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 9- 9:45 | Amber Marquez - Rustic Arrow - Homemade Goods for the Home & Kitchen |
| 10- 10:45 | Heather Howard - Good & Able Farmstead - Usefulness of Heritage Breeds |
| 11- 11:45 | Peter Cole - Milk & Honey Meadows - Native Bees & What They Love |
| 12- 12:45 | DJ Warren - Athens Farmers Market - Being A Market Vendor |
| 1- 1:45 | Carolyn Tyler - HCO Family & Community Health Ext Agent - Cooking FRESH! |

SATURDAY
MAR 7
2020

Henderson Co Fair Grounds
3356 STATE HIGHWAY 31 E, ATHENS, TEXAS 75751
9 am - 3 pm

Sponsored & Organized by:





Henderson County Master Gardener Association

~~ Members Page ~~

2020 HCMGA Meetings

For more events, see the calendar on page 6

When: Noon (luncheon), 3rd
Wednesday of the month

Where: Richard M. Hart & Johnny
Morris Conservation Center
5601 Country Road 4812 Athens, TX 75752

* March 18th

* April 15th

* May 20th

* June 17th

* July 15th

* August 19th

* September 16th

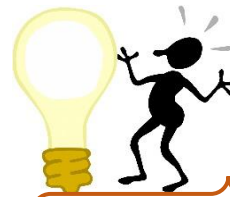
* October 21st

* November 18th

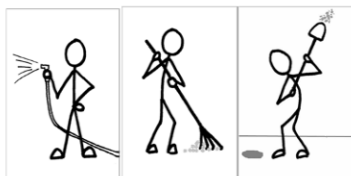
* December 16th

For information on how to become a Master Gardener

- ✓ Call: (903) 675-6130
- ✓ Email: hendersoncmga@gmail.com
- ✓ Visit: txmg.org/hendersonmg

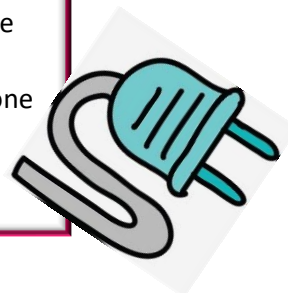


*Master Gardeners,
remember to
record your hours!*



Try something new in 2020

HCMGA has many projects that need you! If you are not **plugged** in yet, one of our projects will fit your schedule, energy level, and mobility. Talk to someone to explore a good fit for you.



Camellia

~~ HCMGA Members Page Continued ~~

Texas State Conference

May 12-14, 2020 in Waco, TX



hotels are now taking reservations, so don't wait!
<https://txmg.org/conference/2018-conference>.

*Early bird pricing may be gone,
but you have until April 22 to register!*

You can also follow the Facebook page
<https://www.facebook.com/tmga2020/>

TIP:

Print out the agenda HCMGA President David Bickerstaff sent you in your email. Circle the sessions that you want to attend. Once registration opens the most popular sessions fill up quickly. Please pay careful attention to the times because some events overlap and this may cause you to miss out on something you really want to be a part of.



Look Forward to Member's Meetings:

- ✓ **March general meeting (March 18th)** Jim Henry will be our guest speaker. He is owner of the Texas Olive Ranch. With over 40,000 olive trees, they are the largest producer of extra virgin olive oil in Texas and the Southwest <https://texasoliveranch.com/>
- ✓ **April General Meeting (April 15th)** – The new Executive Director of the East Texas Arboretum, Adam Black will discuss his vision for the Arboretum which sounds exciting!

Join a Member's Fieldtrip:

- ✓ **March 19th** Depart at 8:30 am and arrive **Southern Bulb Company** around 10 am (about 60 miles)- 4020 US 69 North Mineola, TX 75773- we will have a 30-minute talk from Chris Wiesinger and then enjoy a walking tour (no rest rooms and walking is un-level ground). He will have lots of bulbs for sale. We plan to eat in Mineola TX. Chris presented a great Summer Series for us last year and is opening his doors for our group. Chris focuses on bulbs that thrive in warm climates, many of which are heirloom and rare flower bulbs. More Details coming soon! www.southernbulbs.com

Pruning Dwarf Crape Myrtle Shrubs

By Lydia Holley, Henderson County Master Gardener



Purple Velvet Dwarf Crape Myrtle
Lagerstroemia indica 'Purple Velvet'

I was recently asked how to prune dwarf crape myrtle shrubs. Most everyone, I hope, knows not to top their regular crape myrtle trees, but if you have dwarf crape myrtle shrubs, the rules are completely different.

Late winter/early spring is the perfect time to lightly prune your dwarf crape myrtle shrubs. Look at them carefully — instead of pruning, they might just need to have their old seed heads removed. If, however, your shrubs are getting too large or are not shaped properly, pruning may be in order.

Remember how regular crape myrtle trees send out numerous shoots of blooms when they are cut? Well, that is exactly what you want your dwarf crape myrtle

shrubs to do. Wherever your dwarf crape myrtles have holes which need to be filled in, cut a branch. Do not be afraid to cut back several inches, down to one-half of the branch's length.

When the branch grows back, it will send out several shoots, and if you have trimmed several branches, your dwarf crape myrtle will end up with a nice (upside down) bowl shape which should erupt with blooms in summer.

In the future, you can determine whether your dwarf crape myrtles need to just have their seed heads removed or if additional pruning should be done. If you feel they need more pruning, you can then cut the branches again, trying to make certain you cut above the original pruning cut. Once again, these branches will put out additional branches, making your dwarf crape myrtle shrub even fuller. Pruning in this manner will keep your dwarf crape myrtles at the proper size, with a

pleasing shape, and blooming for years to come.



Learn at the Library Series

Open and Free to the Public

These presentations are free and open to the public. They are held at Clint W. Murchison Memorial Library, 121 S. Prairieville, Athens. Come early as all presentations start on time and last for an hour. For more information, please call 903-675-6130, send an email to hendersoncmga@gmail.com, or visit our website: txmg.org/hendersonmg.

March 17th at 5:30pm: *House Plants*



The Clint W. Murchison Memorial Library, 121 S. Prairieville, Athens, will host the Henderson County Master Gardeners Library Series at 5:30 on March 17, 2020.

The March presentation will be on **Houseplants** and presented by Master Gardener Addie Matney. This presentation will cover potting soil, types of pots and when to fertilize and water. It will also cover several plants suitable to be grown in your home. Come and learn which plants are suited to thrive in an indoor environment and beautify your home.

This presentation is free and open to the public. For more information, please call 903-675-6130, send an email to hendersoncmga@gmail.com, or visit our website: txmg.org/hendersonmg.

April 21st at 5:30pm: *Plant a Deer Resistant Landscape*

Master Gardener Lydia Holley will present "Deer Resistant Plantings: Don't Let Your Garden Become a Buffet" on Tuesday, April 21, 5:30 p.m., Clint W. Murchison Memorial Library, 121 S. Prairieville, Athens. This presentation is part of Henderson County Master Gardener Association's "Learn at the Library Series" and is **free and open to the public**.

Do deer ravage your landscape? Are you frustrated but unsure exactly how to deter these pesky critters? If deer treat your garden as their own gourmet cafe, come learn how to dissuade them from munching on your plantings. Participants will be provided with a comprehensive list of plantings shown to be unpalatable to deer so they will turn up their noses and pass



by your garden without so much as a nibble. Come learn how to keep your landscape protected against one of our largest garden pests.

This presentation is free and open to the public. For more information, please call 903-675-6130, send an email to hendersoncmga@gmail.com, or visit our website: txmg.org/hendersonmg



By Jose Maria Nieto



Did you know?



The HCMGA Website has a lot of good information. We have articles on a variety of gardening topics and events our organization hosts. This newsletter (*Inside Dirt*) is but an appetizer for the depth and breadth of topics, pictures, and great practical information you will find in that treasure trove, which gets added to every week by member writers.

<https://txmg.org/hendersonmg/welcome/our-impact/publicity/>

Here is a great example of a recently posted article...

WEEKLY NEWS ARTICLE

Plant Intelligence

January 6, 2020

By Lydia Holley, Master Gardener



Do you think plants are just bystanders in an active world around them? Think again. The latest research shows plants can look, listen, talk, taste, smell, and even medicate themselves.

How do plants see? They see through special receptors in the tips of their stems. These receptors see wavelengths. Red and blue light are detected, and even some ultraviolet light that we are unable to see. When blue light is detected by the plant, it releases a growth hormone.

Plants talk to each other by emitting ultrasonic vibrations. These vibrations have been recorded during drought conditions. Other plants made these sounds when they were pruned. These particular vibrations are intensified when plants detect stress. For instance, most plants only made this particular sound about once an hour, but under stress, the vibrations increased up to 35 times. Additionally, the type of stress seems to make a difference in the number and volume of the vibrations. It is almost as if the plant was screaming.

How do plants smell without a nose? Through special receptors, plants can sense different scents. It is common knowledge that fruit will ripen faster if exposed to ethylene gas. Scientists now know that the ripening is caused by the odor of the ethylene gas. Since ethylene gas is naturally released when fruit ripens, exposing fruit to the gas makes it believe that it is time to ripen. Fruit likes to ripen all at the same time in order to be eaten and its seed dispersed. Ripening late might mean it would be left behind, and its seed left unused.

Acacia trees use ethylene to warn against giraffes. To combat being eaten, when the tree smells ethylene, tannins are released into the leaves, which will sicken their predator. Scientists believe this is why giraffes forage over a large range — to move past the area in which the neighboring trees have been alerted.

But what about medication? Do plants help each other? The answer to both questions is yes. Up to twenty percent of energy from a plant's photosynthesis is used to make chemicals for their root system. Nitrogen from the air is converted through the use of these chemicals.

Roots also use mycorrhizae, a type of fungus. This underground fungus actually brings nutrients to the plant. One study found that sheared grasses produced these chemicals at double the normal rate. Scientists found these chemicals enticed the mycorrhizae to transfer nitrogen to the plant, which was needed for the grass to grow back.

Some roots reach for antibiotic-producing microbes, or generate antimicrobials to fight against disease and infection. This is why soil structure is so important. It can house microscopic organisms that are powerful. Some soil bacteria are so potent it can counteract the antibiotic-resistant MRSA bacteria.

A plant's roots fight against plants it does not like, and help those that it has a kinship with. Scientists have found that mother trees transfer sugars to young trees that are growing in too much shade to produce adequate photosynthesis.

The next time you walk outside, look around. You may not be able to see a plant feeding its baby, talking to its friends, or being thankful for the sunlight, but that just might be what they are doing.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email hendersonCMGA@gmail.com, or visit txmq.org/hendersonmq.

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March & April Gardening Tips

By Susan Skommesa, Master Gardener

In General:

Gardens are springing to life! After all, we've had enough warm weather to convince bulbs to shoot up, trees to sprout their buds, and blooms to explode everywhere!

But be careful. Watch for that unexpected frost or last freeze. Have frost blankets ready. Did you know you can just lay opaque or clear plastic over plants for a short period of time? When you do so, moisture and warmth build up underneath the plastic and provides just the protection you need in the middle of a frost. Frost or freezes never last very long this time of year. However, plants can survive for quite a few days under this kind of plastic. The hardware section in Walmart carries rolls of it. Painter's think it's for them, but it's really for us gardeners. It's called Husky Plastic Sheeting. the roll is 10' by 25' of 3.5 mil opaque plastic. There is a very thin clear plastic in the paint section. That is not the one you want. This is a heavy opaque plastic. The roll is about 5-6 inches in diameter and about a foot and a half long. The plastic unfolds into widths of 10 feet, and can be draped over raised beds, laid out over rows of cold hardy veggies, tented over early blooming bushes and flowers, and any other favorite tender green thing you want to protect from frost.

This is about the time when mulching, mowing, fertilizing, planting and propagating will keep you busy. Little by little, mowing will be more and more on your agenda. Wait until you have had 3 - 4 good mows of real grass before you even begin to think of fertilizing.

As March rolls into April, the main tasks of spring fill our garden-time: planting, weeding and thinning. Have fun as you watch your tender shoots grow and flowers bloom. That's why we're out there.

Did you know that you can share your upcoming projects? Include photos and you'll be published in the next edition of *Inside Dirt*. Send submissions to the editor, Susan Skommesa, at susanloves1life@gmail.com.

Love veggies and herbs?



Let's talk about Herbs. If you grow more than you can use, you can always dry your fresh herbs. Doing so will mean herbs for the rest of the year. You can start herbs either through seed, division or propagation. When starting annual and biennial herbs, if not starting seeds indoors, start outside after the last frost. In general, you can propagate herbs via cuttings, by taking 4"- 6" cuttings in the spring for rooting. You can propagate perennial herbs via division. Simply separate the plants, in the early spring, into 3 to 4 clumps.

Moving on to veggies, cool-season crops should be in the ground by March 1. Sow seeds for summer vegetables and put in transplants after the average last frost date (March 15 for Henderson County). Again, be ready to cover them in case of a late frost.

Want some general dates for planting veggies? Starting in early March, plant Bush Beans, Cucumber, Summer Squash, and Winter Squash. Starting in Mid-March, start planting Lima Beans (bush and pole), Pole Beans, Cantaloupe, Eggplant, Pepper transplants, Summer Muskmelons, and Watermelon. In early April, plant Pumpkin and Sweet Potato slips. In mid-April, plant Southern Peas and Okra. How is that for variety?

How about Flowers?

This might sound silly, but though I love flowers, I didn't think they were worth planting, ...because you can't eat them! Oh, how wrong I was. Not only are they beautiful and mesmerizing to looking at their details, but they bring pollinators. If you are a veggie gardener, you need your pollinator magnets planted all around your veggie garden. These visitors, that may be highly drawn to a vining South Carolina Jasmine, will stop by to enjoy your cucumber flowers. In so doing, you increase your cucumber harvest!

So let's talk flowers. How about planting Dahlia and Caladium tubers? Or Gladiolus? I bet your porch would love hanging baskets of Begonias, Impatiens, Petunias, and other annuals. Just be prepared to bring them indoors as weather dictates.



Dahlia



impatiens

My Daffodils are blooming like crazy! They are gorgeous this year. When your Daffodils start to wear out, don't remove the Daffodil bulb foliage, as the foliage feeds the bulb; therefore, it should brown or "ripen" on the plant before removal. If Daffodil foliage interferes with neighboring plants or become unsightly, braiding the foliage is an old English tradition!

The Caladium is a warm weather plant and does best when planted after the soil warms up to an average of 70 degrees or more. which could be as early as March or as late as May. To be safe you may want to wait until Mother's Day. Even though Caladiums like warm temperatures, they prefer cool, moist, well-drained soils in the landscape. The tubers should be planted approximately one and one-half to two inches deep and from 12 to 18 inches apart in loose, organic soil.

Be sure to plant spring and summer annuals after danger of frost and freeze.

Need ideas for great ground cover plants? Try Confederate Jasmine, Dwarf Junipers, English Ivy, Liriope, and Vinca.

Come April, it should be safe to plant most ornamentals. Select and plant Mums for fall blooms. If planted now, Mums have time to develop deep roots before winter. However, the plant's tips should be lightly trimmed back through spring and summer to prevent blooming until fall.



Mums

Do you care for your trees and shrubs - or are they just there?

In March finish pruning summer-flowering trees and shrubs. Prune evergreen shrubs and spring-flowering shrubs and trees after they have bloomed. Fertilize Azaleas and Camellias after they have finished blooming. Add more organic mulch underneath Azaleas and Camellias and other shrubs as needed. Begin fertilizing Roses every 4-6 weeks until September.

When fertilizing trees be sure to apply in the area beneath the ends of the tree branches and not against the trunk.

It is recommended not to use an all-in-one weed and feed product as they rarely coincide as to when it's time to weed and when it's time to feed.

And what about your grass?

In March, while there is still the possibility of the temperatures dipping below freezing, hold off planting warm-season grasses. It may be a good idea to send in a lawn soil sample for testing, if it has been more than 2 years since you last did so.

If your clover is as big and as plentiful as my clover, and you are without the advantages of cattle, it is time to mow...as soon as it is dry enough to do so. But really, mowing doesn't become a regular job until April. Did you know that there are recommended heights for your mower given the type of grass you have? Here they are:

- ✓ **Common Bermuda** 1 to 1 1/2 inches
- ✓ **Hybrid Bermuda** 1/2 to 1 inch
- ✓ **Centipede** 1 to 2 inches
- ✓ **St. Augustine** 2 to 3 inches
- ✓ **Zoysia** 1/2 to 1 1/2 inches

Editor's Note:

The *Henderson County Master Gardener Association's Monthly Gardening Guide*, features two amazing resource lists in the months of March and April.

March features a list of resources such as gardens, event, and festivals for you to explore, with their website link so you can get the information you need to attend. The resource list also offers a list of Master Gardener associations all around us, also with their website links, so you can see what events they are sponsoring. In addition, there is a plethora of other related resources such as the Monarch Watch. That's March!

In April, the guide offers a list of plants, shrubs and trees that attract bees and butterflies. This resource offers great host plants you can provide for caterpillars to feed off of so they'll hopefully leave your favorite flowers and vegetable plants alone. Additionally, the resource provides a list of Texas native plants that provide nectar for butterflies.

If you would like this guide, call 903-675-6130, email hendersonCMGA@gmail.com, or visit txmg.org/hendersonmg



The Life of a Master Gardener

By Lydia Holley, Henderson County Master Gardener



Have you ever wondered what a Master Gardener does? I've been certified as a Master Gardener for five years. And I spent a year as an intern before that, and had four months of classroom instruction before that. So, I've been with the Henderson County Master Gardener Association (HCMGA) for a while. Not as long as some, longer than others.

In that time, I've seen a lot of changes to HCMGA's programs. The Dream Garden was long established before I joined. Located in the East Texas Arboretum, it is a fun place for us to volunteer to work and commune with other Master Gardeners. It's also a beautiful place for the public to visit.

Since then, we have added some other projects where we volunteer and have fun together. We gained permission from TVCC to use their greenhouse. We use it to grow plants offered at our Plant Sale. Before, each Master Gardener brought plants to the sale from their own gardens. We still do that, but we now have a greater amount of plants offered due to the use of the greenhouse. Mark your calendars for April 25th, because that is when our next Plant Sale will be held, and you will be amazed at the number and variety of plants offered at reasonable prices. It's a favorite for many gardeners in East Texas.

We also began construction on an edible demonstration garden. Called the Harvest Garden, we plan to educate, demonstrate, and allow hands-on learning on growing vegetables, herbs, grapes, fruit trees, and berries. We have a hoop house for seed starting and will demonstrate composting and rainwater harvesting. We will also have a cutting garden for beauty and fun. I'm certain this project will become a favorite of the public. The grand opening is set for May 9th, so be certain to come out and see what we've done.

Personally, this year is the first year I've not been a committee chair, an officer, a coordinator, or on the board. (I did volunteer for a position, but was declined.)

Fellow Master Gardeners have asked: what are you going to do this year? My answer: Lots. Working in my own garden, writing a novel, and volunteering with other organizations. Oh, wait! You mean as a Master Gardener? The answer is still: Lots.

HCMGA's mission is to educate the public on horticulture. As certified Master Gardeners, we give educational programs and I've already volunteered to do a program at our popular Library Series. This is held on the 3rd Tuesday of every month, 5:30 p.m., Clint W. Murchison Memorial Library. Free and open to the public, we offer presentations on a variety of horticultural subjects. Come out and learn something.

Besides the Library Series, I've already scheduled five other presentations with garden clubs, civic, and community organizations. Since gardening is a popular subject, our speaker's bureau stays busy, and we have several Master Gardeners who give presentations and demonstrations on numerous gardening topics.

Writing has been a passion of mine for some time, and I have written gardening articles for HCMGA since 2014. Some are published in newspapers, others in the Master Gardener e-newsletter, *The Inside Dirt*. It's a fun way to share gardening information.

Additionally, Master Gardeners are required to acquire Continuing Education Units every year, and I'll be certain to obtain those. There is so much to learn about gardening, which is just one of the reasons I love being a gardener. I've always enjoyed a challenge. Gardening (and HCMGA) provides just the perfect touch of fun, education, and challenge — with flowers as a bonus!

What do we do as Master Gardeners? Volunteer our time, share our knowledge, continue to learn, and cultivate friendships. If that sounds like fun, think about joining us. Classes will start in late summer/early fall.



Harvest Garden - Learning Area



***Master Gardeners at work
in the Green House.***

Getting ready for the plant sale!



Spring Means Bluebonnets

Robert Erickson, Henderson County Master Gardener



In most of Texas, there are two certain signs that spring is here or close at hand: Dogwoods bloom and Bluebonnets emerge. The bluebonnets actually show their faces from Central Texas to the edges of deep East Texas. In Henderson County, we are blessed with both. But how much do we know about Bluebonnets? Did you know they now come in colors like white, pink, maroon and red? And did you know all of the colors are considered to be the Texas State flower? Let's take a brief walk through

horticultural history and discover some of the interesting facts about everyone's favorite flower.

The simple fact is bluebonnets aren't domesticated plants; they are wild flowers. However, they are also easy to grow in a garden if desired. In simple terms, this means they have a mind of their own and will grow on their own when they are ready; not when you want them to. The fields, pastures, and roadsides filled with blue flowers represent a natural spreading of plants rather than an intentional one.

As a general statement, Bluebonnets like poor to average loose (sandy) soil with little fertilization. Heavy clay or wet soils aren't good planting sites. They prefer neutral to alkaline soils which means we may need to amend our natural soil to raise its pH level. They are naturally drought resistant. The biggest hurdle for most people is the seeds have a very tough outer covering. It's nature's natural protection to ensure the continuation of the plants. The seeds may lie dormant for several years in soil before they germinate. Scarification of the seed by sanding or nicking with a knife can improve germination rate when first sown but overall, bluebonnet seeds will never reach the germination rates of domesticated plants.

Our familiar bluebonnets are one member of a species called Lupines. There are a number of related wildflowers in this family in a variety of sizes, heights, and colors. The two most important ones to Texas are *Lupinus subcarnosus* (also called buffalo clover) and *Lupinus texensis*. Both are native to Texas. In 1901, The State of Texas declared *Lupinus subcarnosus* to be the State Flower. However, most Texans preferred the *Lupinus texensis* variety. It wasn't cleared up until 1971 when the Texas legislature declared any variety of *Lupinus* found in Texas to be the State Flower. In short, don't tread on *Lupinus* when you find them, all five or six varieties of them.



The next chapter began in the early 1980s when a young Texas A&M vegetable specialist, Dr. Jerry Parsons, was challenged to grow a garden of the Lone Star Flag using bluebonnets for the 150-year anniversary of the independence of Texas. He says, "Being naïve, I said, 'We've already got a third of it done!' like an idiot,"

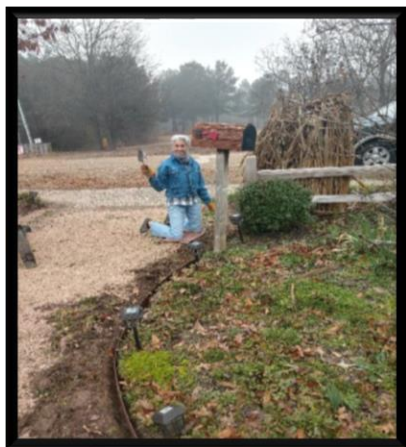


To make a long story short, he did the reverse of cross pollination by isolating the natural but rare white bluebonnets until after five or six generations, he had collected a seed bank for white variety. In 1986, the bluebonnet flag was made using white and blue *Lupinus* but the red was red phlox. It took him over 20 years after this to build a red bluebonnet from naturally occurring and also rare pink varieties of bluebonnets. Before he created the red, he came out with a maroon version. This, of course, raised eyebrows since Jerry worked at A&M. The red version came in 2003 after he crossed the pink with maroon ones. The burnt orange

crowd still demand a burnt orange bluebonnet. At last report, Dr. Parsons was working on a purple variety but a burnt orange one may be in the cards eventually.

Now if he would come up with a black one, Texas Tech could have their own bluebonnet gardens to crow about.

Enjoy the Bluebonnets this year.



The Dream Garden

A cottage-style ornamental garden, maintained by Henderson County Master Gardeners, at the East Texas Arboretum in Athens.



Plant Sale!

Saturday, April 25 – 9am until 2pm

Inside Senior Citizens Center

3344 State Hwy 31 E, Athens (by the arena)



Offerings will include annuals, perennials, herbs, vines, succulents, house plants, Texas Superstars, as well as bat and bird houses.

Customers are welcome to bring wagons to carry their plants.

txmg.org/hendersonmg 903-675-6130

Did you know HCMGA has been winning State awards every year since 2014?

Year	Group Size	Award Category	Submission	Award
2019	Med Large	Written Education	Articles published in area newspapers	
2019	Med Large	Outstanding Individual	Cynthia Holifield	
2019	Med Large	Outstanding Association	HCMGA	
2019	Med Large	Education	Information developed on website for plants offered at plant sale	
2018	Med Large	Educational Program	Facts and Fantasies of Texas Gardening, An Evening with Neil Sperry	3rd
2018	Med Large	Written Education	Monthly Gardening Guide	2nd
2018	Med Large	Outstanding Individual	Yvonne Sparks	2nd
2018	Med Large	Outstanding Association	HCMGA	1st
2017	Medium	Educational Program	Learn at the Library Series	1st
2017	Medium	Outstanding Individual	Jeanne Brown	2nd
2017	Medium	Outstanding Association	HCMGA	1st
2016	Med Large	Outstanding Association	HCMGA	2nd
2015	Medium	Project	DREAM Garden	2nd
2015	Medium	Education	Summer in the Garden: Dream of Blooms, Butterflies and Bees	3rd
2015	Medium	Written Education	Inside Dirt Newsletter	3rd
2015	Medium	Outstanding Association	HCMGA	1st
2014	Medium	Outstanding Association	HCMGA	1st
2014	Medium	Outstanding Individual	Marie Hancock	1st
2014	Medium	Education	Vegetable Workshop	2nd
2014	Medium	Written Education	Weekly Gardening Articles for the Chandler Brownsboro Statesman Newspaper	2nd

CHILL HOURS

What Can We Expect from Our Fruit and Nut Trees This Year?

By Susan Skommesa, Master Gardener



As I write, it is still dead of winter - February 1st. However, this is eastern Texas. We've had so many mild overcast days and misty nights that new life is bursting forth from the ground. Mums are putting leaves on stems cut to the ground just a month and a half ago. Bulbs are not just poking through the mulch, they're starting to show their splendor! The new life contrasts with weeks of cloudy skies and months of dormant brown grass.

As wonderful as the blooms are, it makes you wonder: *"With a mild winter, did we get enough freezing temperature hours to satisfy our fruit and nut trees?"*

Most people who grow fruit, nut, and berries, know that those plants and trees require a certain amount of cold weather to produce plenty of healthy, well-formed, sweet fruit and tasty nuts. Since, for the most part, we've had a pretty mild winter, you may be wondering if we had enough cold weather (chill hours) to have a good harvest this fall. Will the quality of the fruit and nuts be ok? Will the flowers even set fruit? At this point, you may also wonder, *"What are chill hours, and how are they calculated?"*

Fruit and nuts bud in the late summer to fall. As winter approaches and temperatures drop, the buds go into a state of dormancy. This state protects the bud from freezing temperatures as well as from prematurely responding to a warm spell. Buds will not come out of dormancy until they have experienced a certain number of chill hours. This number varies by species.

Texas A&M, [Overton Station](#), keeps track of chill hours. They have been doing so for 24 years. Their findings can be found on their website. Overton Station logs hours based on 2 different calculation methods. One method is to count the number of hours at or below 45° F, from October 1st through February 28/29th. The other method is to count the number of hours between the temperatures of 32° F and 45° F during the same period. The difference between these two methods can sometimes amount to a couple hundred hours. That may be an unnerving fact if your fruit and nut trees needed those couple hundred hours. It's also important to remember that there are numerous microclimates all over northeast Texas. The number of chill hours gained in Overton may vary from your location.



So, what about the 2019-2020 winter season. How did we do? By either means of calculation, the news is surprisingly good – if you have the right varieties. We'll get into why variety matters a bit later, but for now, just know that different varieties require a different number of chill hours. According to the first method described, we accumulated 929 chill

hours. According to the second method, there are 1081 chill hours. Either way, this is good – if you have the right varieties...yep there's a theme there, *"the right varieties"*.



If you look at the number of chill hours on record, over the past 23 years, the least number of chill hours occurred in 2016-2017, with 509 chill hours (1st method) or 394 chill hours (2nd method). The greatest number of chill hours happened in 2013-2014 as well as 2018-2019, depending upon which method you use to calculate. By the first method, 2013-2014 recorded 1,404 chill hours – 166 more hours than the winter of 2018-2019. With the second method though, 2013-2014 recorded 1018 chill hours – 22 hours less than the winter of 2018-2019. The average number of chill hours over the past 24 years, using the first method of calculation, is 1046 hours. Using the second method, the average chill hours over the last 24 years is 854 hours.

How many chill hours do fruit and nut trees need? Great question with a simple answer: Totally depends on the variety! Ok, maybe not so simple. There is however a simple way to manage the issue: follow the recommendations of Texas A&M.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension recommends varieties for East Texas that require no more than 800-900 chill hours. Since the chill hour requirement can vary greatly between varieties, the following varieties are recommended for East Texas:

- * **APPLES:** Fuji, Gala, Granny Smith, Holland, Imperial, Gala, Jerseymac, Mollies Delicious, Mutsu/Crispin, Pink Lady, Red Delicious, Royal Gala, Smoothee, Super Gala.
- * **APRICOT:** Blenheim, Bryan, Chinese/Morman, Moorpark.
- * **ASIAN PEARS:** Shinko, ShinLi, Ya Li.
- * **BLACKBERRIES:** **Thorny** - Brazos, Brison, Cheyenne, Chickasaw, Kiowa, Rosborough, Womack. **Thornless** - Arapaho, Natchez, Navaho, Ouachita.
- * **BLUEBERRIES:** Rabbiteye (need more than one variety of Rabbiteye for pollination) Alapaha, Austin, Brightwell, Climax, Ochlockonee, Powderblue, Premier, Prince, Tifblue, Vernon, Woodard. See https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/fruit-nut/files/2015/04/blueberries_2015.pdf for best variety pairing.
- * **FIGS:** Alma, Blue Giant, Bournabat, Celeste, Lemon, LSU Purple, Texas Everbearing (Brown Turkey).
- * **GRAPES:** Black Spanish, Blanc du Bois, Champanel, Conquestador, Cynthiana (Norton), Daytona, Emerald, Herbemont, Miss Blanc, Miss Blue, Orlando Seedless, Roucaneuf, Stover, Victoria Red.
- * **JUJUBES:** Lang, Li.





* **MUSCADINE GRAPES:**

✓ **Female:** Black Fry, Darleen, Fry, Higgins, Hunt, Scarlett, Sugargate, Summit, Supreme, Sweet Jenny, Scuppernong.

✓ **Self-Fertile:** Carlos, Cowart, Dixie, Doreen, Granny Val, Ison, Magnolia, Nesbit, Noble, Regale, Southland, Tara, Triumph, Welder.

✓ Plant 1 self-fertile plant (within 30 feet) for every 3 female plants. In a vineyard formation, that would be a self-pollinator every 3rd vine of every 3rd row.

* **NECTARINES:** ArmKing, Crimson Gold, Karla Rose, Redgold, Rose Princess.

* **PEACHES:** Bounty, Cary Mac, Cresthaven, Denman, Derby, Dixieland, Fairtime, Fireprince, Flameprince, Flavorich, Frank, GaLa, Harvester, Loring, Majestic, Ouachita Gold, Parade, Redglobe, Redskin, Regal, Ruston Red, Sentinel, Springgold, Topaz.

* **PEARS:** Kieffer, Magness, Moonglow, Orient, Warren.

* **PECANS:** (Need a type I and Type II for cross Pollination): **Type I** - Caddo, Cape Fear, Cheyenne, Desirable, Houma, Oconee, Pawnee, Prilop. **Type II** - Candy, Choctaw, Elliott, Forkert, Kanza, Melrose, Sumner, Jackson, Moreland, Osage.

* **PLUMS:** Allred, Methley, Morris, Ozark Premier, Santa Rosa.

* **POMEGRANATE:** Al-Sirin-Nar, Flavorful, Russian 18, Salavatski, Spanish Sweet-Uvalde, Sumbar, Surh Anor, Wonderful.

* **RASPBERRIES:** Dormanred.

* **STRAWBERRIES:** Chandler, Douglas, Festival, Oso Grande, Seascape, Sequoia.

We've all done it: There is something we really wanted to grow, and probably at a time of the year we really shouldn't, but we try anyways. So, what's the big deal if you go with that variety the big box store carries? Yes, the one that's more suitable for Washington State than Northeast Texas. Well, here are the symptoms of insufficient chill hours:

* Delayed Foliation: Branches develop small tufts of leaves at the very tip, but foliage along the branch is significantly delayed.

* Reduced Fruit Set and Buttoning: Fruit set is describing whether flowers become fruit. Poor fruit set means very little fruit on the tree. Buttoning is when fruit is misshapen or exhibits stunted growth.

* Reduced Fruit Quality: Such as lack of fruit firmness and poor coloring when ripe. These are more than cosmetic issues that impact flavor and texture.



Enjoy your harvest!

Please Share with Us!



There is so much creativity amongst our readers, that I'd like to invite you to share your projects, ideas, clever quotes, humor, pictures or the interesting and beautiful things happening in your gardens or landscaping. You can send a blurb, a quote, an article or contact me to interview you. Photos are always worth a thousand words. Send submissions to the editor, Susan Skommesa, at susanloves1life@gmail.com.



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