

# Inside Dirt



## A Note from our President

By Susan Skommesa

Hello Gardeners!

What a beautiful day today is. These temperatures inspire gardening. I've given my greenhouse a major cleanup makeover and it feels so good in there! I've also been seed starting for fall.



Speaking of seed starting veggies for the fall garden... Our October Fall festival is going to be absolutely amazing as we partner with the East Texas Arboretum on October 26th. HCMGA will offer 2 presentations; one on holiday flower arranging and the other on having a fall AND winter veggie garden. We will teach you how to save your plants from the winter weather so you can enjoy eating fresh from your garden much later into the season. In addition, if you have not yet started your seeds, no worries. You will be able to purchase veggie plants at the event. There will also be food and activities for kids.

We will lead-up to the festival with an online fall/winter flower sale. You will be able to pick up the plants you ordered, the day of the event. Watch for the online sale and more info on the event. Don't forget to SAVE THE DATE!

...and enjoy the rest of your summer!

**Find us online!** <https://txmg.org/hendersonmg/>

 <https://www.facebook.com/HCMastergardener>

## Farmers' Almanac Predictions for Fall/Winter 2024

This Texas summer, which the almanac predicted to be "sizzling and soaked", will come to an official end with the start of Fall on September 22. However, it's probably not time to put away your tank tops and shorts just yet... because, The Old Farmer's Almanac has predicted this fall to be "warmer-than-normal" here in East Texas. On top of the predicted warmth, above-average precipitation is anticipated.

Unlike last year's forecast touting cold and snowy weather for much of the country, this winter season is expected to be warmer with less snowfall overall.

As reported by the Almanac, the sun is reaching the maximum of Solar Cycle 25 during which the sun's activity will grow hot and stormy. Historically, this type of high solar activity has led to warmer temperatures.

Therefore, The Old Farmer's Almanac is calling for a warmer than average winter, with the coldest periods in late January through February. Fortunately, this region is not forecast to experience the extreme weather that it had 2 years ago with "snow-mageddon", the ice storms that caused massive power outages along with considerable plant and tree damage.



## Upcoming Events

Regular Meeting 9/18/24 @ 11am

**Let's Grow Fall Fest!**  
10/26/24 @ 9am-2pm

Save the Date!

@ The East Texas Arboretum  
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Regular Meeting 10/16/24 @ 11am

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## Gardening Hints for September & October:

In **September**, summer is reluctant to give way to fall and there is a mixture of undecided days that call for continued summer watering and weeding while making plans for fall gardening. **October** and autumn days represent a new gardening season with timely gardening activities to be accomplished.

- Dig and Store Caladiums.
- Prepare beds for planting Pansies and Violas in September. Obtain healthy plants to plant in Oct/Nov.
- Prepare spring bulb beds now. Spring bulbs begin in the fall; select bulbs to plant in Oct/Nov.
- Continue to water plants as they go into the autumn season.
- Divide, transplant, and establish perennials.
- Plant fall annuals in September.
- Do not prune or cut back spring flowering trees and shrubs.
- Compost. Start a compost pile to receive the leaves of fall.
- Sow annual ryegrass seed in mid-to-late **October**.
- Mulch down for winter protection.
- Remove summer veggies and get ready to plant fall/winter ones
  - Carrots, onions, radishes
  - Lettuces, cabbages, brussel sprouts, broccoli, cauliflower
- Fall fertilization. Research has proven that fall feeding is very beneficial on lawns and ornamental plants.
- Order fruit catalogs and make variety selections for a winter (January-February) planting.
- Tag native plants while still in leaf while they may easily be identified when transplanted in the winter.



For a complete list of Fall Gardening Tips, [click here to view our monthly Gardening Guide.](#)

## Purple Berries: Elderberry or Pokeweed or American Beautyberry?

Elder (*Sambucus canadensis*, s.nigra), known as the “people’s medicine chest”, is a favorite herbal remedy. In a backyard “elder forest” they grow as something between a bush and small trees at a height of 10-13 feet. Herbalist Paul Bergner points out that elderberry preparations not only boost the immune system, but also directly inhibit the influenza virus by disarming the virus of its ability to penetrate healthy cells and multiply there.

Elderberries are edible and medicinal, but it’s suggested that you cook them (e.g., in pies, muffins, jams, sauces), or make elderberry syrup, alcohol extract (tincture), vinegars, or wine/meads, etc. There is mildly toxic cyanoglycoside sambunigrin in the leaves and unripe berries; the seeds also contain a resin which can cause nausea and intestinal upset; this resin is destroyed by cooking.

Elder and Pokeweed (*Phytolacca americana*) produce deep dark purple-black berries that can be found in early fall (August to Sept) in most regions; and the mature plants are of a similar size. The American Beautyberry plant (*Callicarpa americana*), in the mint family, is about the same size as Elder and Pokeweed. Its berries, available in the same early fall time frame, are a little brighter purple colored and are clustered in small clumps along the stem. Note: the Pokeweed plant is considered toxic and poisonous, unless you are an herbalist or knowledgeable about using it. Do not pick and eat poke berries.

As with any foraging or herbal practice, it’s crucial to correctly identify plants and understand their properties. While elderberries are a wonderful addition to both the kitchen and the medicine cabinet, always ensure they are properly prepared to avoid any adverse effects. Consulting with a knowledgeable herbalist or forager can help ensure safe and beneficial use of this remarkable plant.



Elderberry



American Beautyberry



Pokeweed

# What's new at the Harvest Garden?

## Hey MGs - What's happening at the Harvest Garden?

- New Tractor! Thanks Deb Pascoe for coordinating with Lowe's for a great discount.
- Harvested red and green grapes.
- Happy honeybees foraged the herb garden.
- We made "John Jelly" in honor of our very much missed MG, John Maloch.
- We watered, watered, and watered...
- Removed all plants from the Hoop House, tilled, treated and prepped the soil for planting fall veggies and greens



## Orb Weaver Spiders

The Argiopidae spider, commonly known as the orb weaver, garden spider or writing spider, is a fascinating member of the arachnid family, renowned for its distinctive appearance and impressive web-building skills.

Argiopidae, a genus within the Araneidae family, one of the largest spider groups. Don't let that scare you though. These spiders are equipped with venom to immobilize prey, but when threatened by larger beings, their instinct is to flee. Rarely, they may bite if provoked, but their bites are typically mild.

Argiopidae spiders are large and colorful. Females, significantly larger than males, can have bodies up to an inch long, not including their legs, which can span several inches. They are often adorned with vibrant yellow and silver markings, making them quite conspicuous in their webs. This coloration is believed to serve as a warning to predators, indicating their potential toxicity or unpalatability.

The web of an Argiopidae spider is a masterpiece of natural engineering. These spiders construct large, intricate orb webs, typically with a characteristic zigzag pattern known as the stabilimentum. The web's design can vary with the spider's age, species, and environmental conditions.

The Argiopidae spider, with its blend of beauty, complexity, and ecological significance, continues to captivate both amateur naturalists and professional scientists, offering endless insights into the intricate lives of arachnids.



Save the Date!

Let's Grow!



Fall Festival!

Saturday, October 26, 2024

@ the East Texas Arboretum  
1601 Patterson Road  
Athens, TX 75751

Henderson County Master Gardeners'  
Let's Grow Fall Vegetables Festival

Find us Online at <https://txmg.org/hendersonmg/>

Henderson County Master Gardeners'  
Let's Grow Fall Vegetables Festival

Come join us for a day of fun at the beautiful East Texas Arboretum!

- Learn about growing fall and winter vegetables
- Learn how to make stunning floral arrangements for the holidays
- Watch for Pre-Order Info for our online Fall Vegetable & Flower Plant Sale

As always, our seminars are free, but as part of our fall fundraising, we will have well grown vegetable starts (15 varieties!) plus snapdragons, pansies and dianthus, all of which love the cooler weather.

Raffle P-R-I-Z-E-S!

- Hoop House Kit
- Raised Bed with soil and 6 plants
- A new, custom-designed garden apron loaded with goodies in the pockets

Our event this year is being held in conjunction with the Arboretum's Fall Fest.

Food Trucks and Bounce Houses will add to the festivities.

There's something for everyone to do and see!

## Pad Thai Spaghetti Squash

Spaghetti squash is a low-carb alternative to the traditional rice noodles in Pad Thai. One Cup of cooked spaghetti squash contains just 10 grams of total carbohydrate, compared to 42 grams for the rice noodles! Plus, the squash "noodles" are gluten free!

**Prep Time:** 15 Minutes    **Cook Time:** 12 Minutes    **Serves:** 4

### Ingredients

- 1 medium (2.5 lb.) Spaghetti Squash
- 1 Tbsp Olive Oil
- 1/2 cup Scallions, chopped
- 2 Carrots, finely diced
- 1 Zucchini, finely diced
- 1 clove Garlic, minced
- 1 tsp Ground Ginger
- 2 Tbsp prepared Pad Thai sauce (or peanut Sauce)
- 8 oz. cooked Shrimp, peeled & tail-off
- 1/4 cup chopped Cilantro



### Instructions:

1. Cut spaghetti squash in half, lengthwise; and remove seeds. Place squash in a microwave-safe baking dish, cut side down. Cover loosely with a lid and leave room to vent. Microwave for 10-15 minutes, rotating every 5 minutes. Squash is done when it's soft to touch. Set the squash aside.
2. Heat olive oil in a large saute pan over medium-high heat. Add scallions, carrots, zucchini, and mushrooms; and saute for 5-7 minutes. Add garlic and saute for 30 seconds. Add ginger and Pad Thai (or peanut) sauce and heat for 2 minutes, mixing well.
3. Use a fork to scoop-out spaghetti squash. Add the spaghetti squash "noodles" and shrimp to the pan with vegetables. Heat for another 2 minutes and mix well. Top with chopped cilantro.

## About Henderson County Master Gardeners Association

Our Mission is to educate the community about a broad range of gardening topics.

- Find us online: <https://txmg.org/hendersonmg/>
- Find us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/HCmastergardener>
- Interested in becoming a Master Gardener? <https://txmg.org/hendersonmg/about-us/>
- [Click here](#) to be added to our email distribution list.

## Shade Gardening Basics

- Patti Wilcox

When we imagine a garden, we often picture sun-drenched landscapes filled with vibrant, sun-loving flowers. However, shade gardens with plants that thrive in lower light can be just as enchanting. The definition of shade varies among individuals, with part sun or part shade areas receiving 4-6 hours of sunlight, while true shade gets 4 hours or less. Most flowering plants prefer the part-shade category. Yet, leafy or blue-toned plants like blue hostas and ferns flourish in full shade environments.

In shade gardens, textures and foliage colors should take center stage as the main attractions. Embrace the opportunity to incorporate plants that you wouldn't typically consider using. Before purchasing, be sure to read the plant tags. If plants appear leggy or are stretching towards the sunlight, they are better suited for sunlit areas in the garden. If they are not blooming or showing stunted growth, try relocating them to a partially shaded spot. Some areas in your garden may have deep shade where plants struggle to thrive. Consider adding decorative rocks, birdbaths, garden art, or other features to enhance those spots. Sometimes, it's more practical to add decorative elements rather than battling to make plants grow in challenging conditions.

Remember, the soil serves as the fundamental basis for all gardens. Plants that thrive in shaded areas typically grow in forested regions where tree canopies provide shelter. For shade gardens, the ideal soil is loamy, rich in humus, loose, and well-draining. Look for soil that easily crumbles when pressed into a ball. If the soil forms a tight ball, it requires improvement. Applying compost, aged manure, worm castings, or similar materials as a top dressing in early spring or late fall can assist in achieving the desired soil quality.

Additional tips for maintaining a lush shade garden:

- Ensure soil remains evenly moist by using light, fluffy soil that absorbs water but drains excess.
- In regions with inadequate rainfall, consider using soaker hoses for supplemental watering.
- Water in the early morning (preferred) or evening to prevent evaporation.
- Mulch beds to retain moisture and protect plants from drying out.



## ICYMI (In Case You Missed It):

- [Ornamental Grasses to Either Love or Avoid - August 25, 2024](#)
- [Composting Basics and Beyond – August 19, 2024](#)
- [The Flower That Tells Time – August 12, 2024](#)
- [Going Green – August 5, 2024](#)

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### 2024 Officers

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**VP Member & Community Ed.:** Cindy Beck

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