

The Latest Dirt



Official Newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners

February, 2011

From The President

By Melody Weaver



Soon the lawn mowers and tillers will be humming again just in time to welcome springtime! I've just started some tomato and bell pepper seeds in a small rectangular plastic container inside my house. With a little luck and lot of prayer I hope to have my own home grown plants ready for spring gardening. I encourage you to try getting your own seedlings started now. It's easier than you think and can save a few bucks.

Once again, our well deserved awards night went off without a hitch. Everyone had a rock around the clock good time! The 50's theme was so much fun and everyone came styling with their own rock and roll renditions of poodle skirts and motorcycle jackets.

Congratulations to our Master Gardener of the year, Pat Tolbert. She was very humbled in accepting her award.

Looking forward, our annual Market Day is April 16th. Mark your calendars for this fun filled Saturday event. Don't forget Friday the 15th is set up day, we'll be providing lunch and cold drinks for all participants.

Also, remember to tell your friends about the MG course scheduled for August 10 through October 26 from 1-6pm on Wednesdays only.

See you soon!

Agent's Two Cents

By Micah Meyer



It still feels like winter but spring will soon be approaching. If you like to grow tomatoes from seed, then it's time to start your seeds. The main problem people have when starting seeds is a lack of sufficient light. A south facing window lets in the most light. I would also suggest that you use grow lights to maximize the light and produce good transplants. The Vegetable Seminar will be February 12th from 8:30-Noon. Dr. Bill Adams is the speaker and he is one of the leading vegetable persons in the State of Texas. He will have a book out this spring about growing tomatoes in Texas so be sure to come and listen and learn from one of the best. On a sad note, Dr. Sam Cotner former Vegetable Specialist passed away recently. His book *The Vegetable Book A Texans Guide to Gardening* is the bible for gardening in Texas. It's a little old, but the information is outstanding. You can buy it from the Texas Gardener magazine website.

Meetings are the second Thursday of each month, 7pm in the Extension Office Auditorium

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

February 10

March 10

April 14

Anytime Gifts for the Gardener

Kathy Attaway, JCMG

People who love to garden enjoy the many gifts that nature provides. Gardeners appreciate the gifts of both rain and sun. The feel of fertile soil in our hands and the smell of fresh mulch brings a smile to our hearts. If you have a gardening friend that you would like to treat with a gift now or any time of the year, here are a few suggestions:

Have you ever heard of a trake? It is a combination of a hand trowel and a rake. Ergonomically designed tools from shovels to pruners are great. What gardener would not love a pair of Felco #2 hand pruners? They will last a lifetime and are so easy on the hands.

Speaking of hands, go for gloves! Go beyond the simple cotton gloves. We now have those that combine the gripping power of rubber with nylon for stretch and fit. Also elbow-length leather gloves, that are especially made for rose gardeners are great for ANY garden enthusiast because of the added protection.

Magazines written by Texas Gardeners for Texas gardens such as *Neil Sperry's Gardens*, *The Texas Gardener*, and *Judy Barret's Homegrown* are three to name a few.

An inexpensive but simple gift that is always appreciated is a new knee cushion for protecting the knees while weeding.

Naturally, gift certificates at any local garden center or local nursery are great because the gardener can then choose something they've had their eye on for a while, but have not yet splurged on for themselves.

Gardeners are an appreciative group. You can spend a lot or a little on your gifts. But whatever YOU choose to spend, I hope it will include YOU spending time in a garden.



MISSION STATEMENT

To encourage and support the horticultural community of Southeast Texas through education and example.

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President—Melody Weaver

Vice President—Paul Eyre

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Newsletter Staff:

Editor: Micah Shanks

Layout: Peggy Coleman

Congratulations Pat!

Master Gardener of the Year



From the front row of the Shortcourse in 2001, to the front of the classroom in 2010, Pat has continued to learn, and to share her knowledge, with the Master Gardener program and the community. After volunteering at Some Other Place, she organized a team to plant a vegetable garden to supply their soup kitchen with fresh produce, and coordinated the project to completion, acquiring donations for fencing, soil, equipment and labor, to planting the garden, including the planting of fruit trees. The Schlesinger Nursing Home atrium was cleared and replanted with Pat's help, as was the garden at the Jefferson County Courthouse honoring Victims of Abuse. When the Beaumont Beautification Project asked for help with planting 40 knockout roses on Phelan Blvd, Pat was the first, and only, Master Gardener to volunteer, and worked with Micah Meyer to make it happen. The Horticulture Class at the Taylor Career Center enjoyed her help with their projects, and she was invited to teach a propagation class at the Buddhist Festival in Port Arthur, the MG Shortcourse '09, and at the Test

Garden in '08. Pat is a Certified Propagation Specialist, Certified Fire Ant Specialist, and a licensed Private Pesticide Applicator. She makes sure the Test Garden is ant free, making random and frequent trips with her equipment.

As a Master Gardener, Pat attends all State Conferences, winning a 3rd place for the MG newsletter in '03, and 2nd place for the Story Board in the same year. She attends many other state and local meetings, and is always the first to volunteer to help. On the "plant team", Pat helps in the greenhouse, and where ever she's needed, and has assisted with registration, set up and placement at the annual Citrus, and Fruit and Vegetable shows, judging the Processed Foods division, winning many ribbons for her produce, and for the Biggest Tomato in 2010. Pat taught a Jelly Making Day, presented Bulb Propagation at a MG meeting, and was honored with the first "Helping Hand" award. At home Pat raises cattle, chickens, and a garden, but always has time for Master Gardeners, donating over 500 hours a year.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Rose Pruning

February 5 – Rose Pruning at McFaddin Ward House - 10 a.m. Cuttings are given away.

February 11 - Rose Pruning Day at the Garden 9am til done.



Vegetable Seminar

February 12 from 8:30 until Noon, featuring Dr. Bill Adams, vegetable specialist and author of many books on growing produce in the South. Admission fee \$5 per person. AgriLife Extension Auditorium.



Spring Market Day

April 16th 8 a.m. to noon at the Southeast Texas Regional Airport, Hanger #4. Free admission and parking. Vendor space is available. For info, call the office at 835-8461.



Master Gardener Course

This year, the MG Course will be on Wednesday afternoons only, from 1–6pm, August 10th through October 26th. Be sure to tell your friends!

Update Your Membership Pins

If you would like to add a "year" bar to your membership pin, we will be placing an order at the end of February. These pins are available in 5 year, 10 year, and 15 year and cost \$5.00. If you would like to have a pin that denotes anything else such as Test Garden Team, etc, they can be ordered for \$ 12.50. There will be an order sheet at the February meeting or you can contact Micah Shanks at mshanks52@gmail.com or 749-0083. Pins must be pre-paid and checks can be sent to Dorothy Norris at 10224 Peck Road, Lumberton, Tx. 77657.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU !!!!

February:

Delia Walker - 2
Tom Hargrove - 4
Arthur Newman - 6
Kara Harris - 9
Charlene Baird - 13
Kay Drake - 17
Marcia Reinstra - 26
Sharon Labove - 27



March:

Norine Passero - 2
Dan Crowley - 4
Micah Shanks - 5
Michael Murrell - 6
David Cummings - 10
Cindy Hebert - 14
Sherry Broussard - 15
Melody Weaver - 18
Paul Eyre - 24
Marion Deagle - 25
Bill Comiskey - 26
Sandra Price - 27
Melba Theriot - 31

April:

Micah Meyer - 3
Della Lee - 11
Aletha Kirkwood - 17
John Smith - 18
Francis Thomas - 23
Mel Day - 23
Phyllis Smith - 26



In The Kitchen With: Melba Theriot

Southwestern Crawfish Corn Chowder



1/2 c. butter
pepper
1 (7 oz.) can salsa verde
3 green onions, chopped (including tops)
4 c. half & half
2 (15 oz.) cans creamed corn
2 (10.75 oz.) cans cream of potato soup
1 tsp. salt

1 tsp. black
2 Tbsp. all-purpose flour
1 small onion, chopped
1 Tbsp. minced garlic
2 (11 oz.) cans Mexican corn
2 c. chicken stock
1 tsp. Creole seasoning

In a large stockpot, melt butter over low heat. Stir in flour. Cook for approximately 5 minutes, stirring constantly, to make a light roux. Add salsa, onions, and garlic. Cook until onions are wilted. Add half & half, tomatoes, corn, soup, and stock. Add salt, pepper, and seasoning. Stir to blend. Cook over medium heat for 20 minutes. Add crawfish and cook another 20 minutes. Garnish with chopped green onion.

Gardening Catalogs

Jane McBride, JCMG

Gardening is a year-round pleasure - and each season brings its list of things to accomplish. In winter, after the clean-up chores have been done, it's time to sit back with a cup of hot chocolate and indulge in a gardener's favorite pastime - thumbing through nursery catalogs.

While oohing and ahing over the many thousands of plants found in the magazines might feel like a lazy indulgence, it's actually part of a gardener's work year. Looking at photos of plants, especially in a landscape setting, can help a gardener design his or her spring garden.

Gardening catalogs are a good way to read up on new cultivars and improved versions of some old favorites. Most catalogs include thorough care instructions that can help gardeners decide if a plant is right for their landscape. It sometimes helps us discover why a certain plant is not doing well for us. Perhaps a better choice is in order.

Gardeners can find plants that suit their gardening style. Cottage gardens depend on a variety of lush colors, while more formal gardens can limit the color palette. Whatever colors you prefer, it's a certainty you can find almost limitless shades of your favorites.



Most larger nurseries have an online catalog, which computer-lovers might enjoy, especially since you can enlarge a photo and get an up-close look at a blossom or plant. Once you've chosen your seeds or plants for spring, you can Google that variety and download planting and care instructions. Just make sure that the instructions are specific to gardening in Southeast Texas.

Cats becoming a problem in your garden? Try spraying with vinegar. To chase them away and neutralize the smell they leave behind. Full strength white vinegar in a spray bottle should deter the little critters. Spray liberally around concrete and stone surfaces, but not on your plants as this will burn the leaves. The vinegar smell works like a fence to keep cats from marking their territory on your property.

Happy flowers! The Versatile and Vibrant Viola!

Kathy Attaway, JCMG

While planning for company during the holidays, I took a look at my own landscape and thought what areas would first be seen by my guests as they arrive at my house? I wanted to make those areas especially welcoming. I asked myself, what flowers would express happiness and remain beautiful all fall and winter season? One of the plants I chose was the versatile and vibrant viola, a smaller cousin to the pansy and sometimes referred to as Johnny-Jump-Ups.



I filled two big pots full of multi-colored violas for my front entryway. To me, violas are just happy little plants. Like their relatives, the pansies, they love winter weather and thrive both in containers as well as in the landscape. They only spread about six inches so you will need to plant them in mass for the greatest impact. Violas grow best in consistently moist, well-drained soil. Amend the soil with good, composted organic matter before planting. Violas prefer growing in full sun. They are prolific seed producers, and it is quite common for viola to act as a perennial in the home garden.

Viola flowers are also edible! Both the leaves and flowers of violas are high in vitamins A and C. The flowers have a nice flavor and make beautiful garnishes for salad and fruit plates. Yes, the viola is indeed versatile and happy! Choose the viola as part of your winter flowerscape. You won't be disappointed!

Lemon Balm

Pat Tolbert, JCMG

Doctors in the 9th and 10th centuries called lemon balm the gladdening herb and prescribed it to dispel anxiety and heart palpitations. More recently, a panel of physicians and pharmacologists appointed by the Ministry of Health endorsed the herb for relieving tension, anxiety, and restlessness. There's also evidence of cognitive benefits. In a study, twenty healthy young adults reported increased memory and improved mood after ingesting lemon balm. Lemon balm is fast growing. If you plant it in your garden rather than in a pot, be sure to give it a lot of space and trim it often.



Earthkind Roses

Micah Shanks, JCMG

If you are one of those gardeners who couldn't be paid to grow roses because you think they are too high maintenance, then you need to learn about Earthkind roses. Earthkind roses are roses for busy people. If you can grow weeds, you can grow Earthkind roses. This group of roses has been rigorously tested in several sites around the country including here at our own test garden at the Southeast Texas Regional Airport. Rules of the trial make sure that the roses are never fertilized, never sprayed, and never pruned except to remove dead wood. They receive no supplemental water after the first year. When planting an Earthkind rose, choose a location with good air circulation and make sure it gets a minimum 6 hours of direct sunlight. Plant in raised beds in a soil mix of 1/3 compost, 1/3 sand and 1/3 manure. Top

with 3-4 inches of hardwood mulch which improves the soil as it decomposes. These roses are highly resistant to pests and disease. They are grown on their own root and show good heat and drought tolerance. A word about irrigation: Never water at night and then on-

ly water the soil around the roots. Never water the flowers. Drip irrigation is the best choice for this job. To date, 21 roses have earned the Earthkind designation. Many are antiques roses, but not all. Probably the best known is the knockout rose which has only been on the market since

2001. There are many sizes and color choices available. Surely there are one or two you can incorporate into your landscape for beautiful maintenance-free beauty.



When To Prune What Cecil Hightower, JCMG

Pruning is a task that stumps many gardeners and as a result is often done improperly or at the wrong time, resulting in less than desirable plant shapes or poor bloom and fruit production.



A good starting point for pruning any plant is to remove dead, diseased, or damaged stems as soon as you see them as they can attract insects and invite diseases. Also, remove crossing branches and suckers, the vigorous shoots that develop near the base of the plant or from below ground.

Spring flowering trees and shrubs, like forsythia and azaleas bear flowers on wood from the previous year so any pruning should be done in late spring, immediately after they bloom; waiting too long will result in the removal of flower buds already forming for next year.

Summer bloomers, such as the butterfly bush and crape myrtles, produce their flowers on new growth from the current season so, prune them in Winter or early Spring, just before new growth emerges.

When to prune hydrangeas throws many gardeners. Most types, the mopheads, lacecaps and oakleaf forms, bloom on old wood so they should be pruned before mid summer; if done in winter or early spring, flower buds will be removed. Some of the newer re-blooming types flower on new as well as old

growth so timing of pruning is not as important.

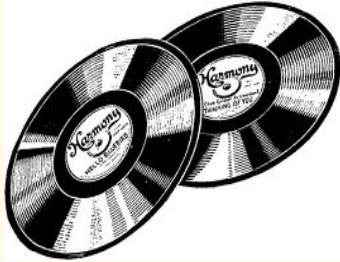
If you want your shrubs, such as boxwood and privet, to form a hedge, shear the new growth frequently during the early part of the growing season and remember to keep the top narrower than the base so that the upper branches will not shade the lower ones.

As for roses, climbers and old garden roses that bloom just once a year should be pruned after blooming. Repeat bloomers, such as hybrid teas, floribundas and the new shrub roses, should be cut back in early Spring to shape, and remove Winter damaged

"Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect."

Chief Seattle

AWARDS NIGHT



Cold Frames

Micah Shanks, JCMG

Even though we have a very long growing season in Southeast Texas, many of us would like to extend the season even more, particularly when it comes to our vegetable gardens. A good way to do this is through the use of green houses and cold frames. Before purchasing a greenhouse, do your research. Decide first of all what you intend to use it for. Is it mainly for wintering over tender plants or actually starting your own seedlings? How much space do you need and of course, how much can you afford? Greenhouses come in many sizes and prices, so shop carefully. A coldframe can be a relatively inexpensive way to get your seedlings started earlier in the season and protect them from frost in the fall. Coldframes rely on the sun for heat and should be located in a southern part of the garden. Cool season crops grown in a cold frame will often continue to produce fresh greens, herbs, and root vegetables for your winter table. Coldframe kits can be purchased through seed catalogs. Instructions to build your own can be found online. There are many styles and sizes available, so once again, do your homework. Row covers and

cloches are two other inexpensive and easy ways to protect your garden. Row covers can be made of fiberglass, plastic, or landscape cloth attached to a wire or wooden frame. A cloche can be as simple as a milk jug or as fancy as a glass bell that is turned upside down over individual plants. Cloches and coldframes are often lightweight enough to be moved around the garden. They can be re-used year after year. Whichever option you choose will extend your growing season by keeping things warm in the winter and warming things up earlier in the spring.



Strawberries are so named because this popular berry crop is covered with straw or hay by northern gardeners to protect plants from extreme cold. In most parts of Texas this is not necessary to cover with straw but the strawberry name lives on.
"Texas Gardener Seeds"

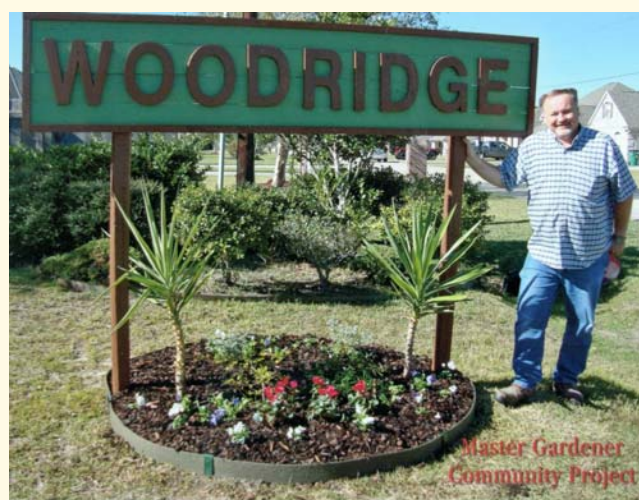
Community Service Project Bonnie Edwards, JCMG Intern

I had been working on getting the hours required for my certification as a Master Gardener, mostly working in the office, but was trying to figure out how to get the Educational/Community service hours. While turning into our subdivision one day, I noticed our community sign. It was worse than bad with faded paint and one sick looking plant. "I thought... My Community Hours". I called and received approval. After purchasing paint and getting all the necessary items to paint, I returned to the sign for the much needed makeover. While painting the sign, one resident stopped and asked if I needed help and soon she was back and began to paint. We got the sign painted and then she told me about two yucca plants at her house that I could have. Back to the store for bags of soil, flowers and mulch. I wanted things that were low maintenance so I used dwarf gardenias (which are evergreen), purple sage and the two yucca plants, along with some red, white and blue pansies. I used a binder board to border the flower bed and added soil to raise the bed. With plants and mulch, I was finished.

Many neighbors walked up the street or stopped on their way in to see what was happening. All expressed thanks for the make-over. One additional bonus—since I was new to the neighborhood, it gave me an opportunity to tell them about the Master Gardener program and to meet my neighbors!



Before



After

Camellias

Jane McBride, JCMG

After the lush blooms of spring and summer and the mellow colors of fall, gardeners look to a handful of old friends to bring color to the winter landscape. Few perform more faithfully than the favorite of many Southern gardeners - the camellia.

Today, we're exploring *Sasanqua* camellias. This member of the tea family has smaller and earlier flowers than the common camellia, *camellia japonica*, her showy cousin. But the blooms still are beautiful and the *sasanqua* tolerates more sun, heat and less-than-perfect soils as long as you water well during the first year after planting.

The *Sasanqua* camellia has a loose form with small, shiny, dark green leaves. Some cultivars are upright and form beautiful small trees, while others turn into spreading bushes. *Sasanquas* can be 4 feet to 15 feet tall - or more. *Sasanquas* with dense habits can make a stunning living hedge.

All the *sasanquas* add stately beauty to a landscape, producing beautiful flowers that stand out against the glossy deep green leaves. Blossoms can be single or semi-double in numerous shades from white to pale pink to red.

Camellias like some shade, and do well in an acidic soil. They have shallow root systems and benefit from mulching well. They also can be grown as a specimen plant in container gardens. Give your camellia good drainage in a humus-rich soil.

If you want to see a *sasanqua* for yourself, check out the Pink Snow camellia at the Jefferson County Master Gardeners Test Garden at Southeast Texas Regional Airport.



Garden Tip from Larry Jacobs::
"If you are planning to plant tomatoes in the spring, now is the time to dig in some dry dogfood (not the kind that makes gravy) and some alfalfa pellets to your soil. Then when it is time to plant, dig the hole, throw in a handful of lime and some osmocote."

Winter Blues? Grow Some Green!

Micah Shanks, JCMG

Here is a sure cure for the winter blues. Grow some green! If you would like to put in a vegetable garden, but think it is too cold, consider this: Mid



January is a great time to set out cool season veggies such as broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kale, leeks, Brussels sprouts, and onions. Get out those seed packets and plant spinach, lettuce, carrots, mustard, radishes, and turnips. Also during mid-to late January, gardeners can plant potatoes, English peas, snow peas and sugar snaps. The sugar snaps are always such a treat at our home...they are eaten straight from the vine and never make it into the house. If you want to start trays of tomato, eggplant, and pepper seedlings, now is the time. Start with a good growing mix and provide light and warmth. A coldframe is good for this job, but in lieu of that, use a shoplight suspended close to the flats and place in a warm room. Heating mats are something you might want to consider if your location isn't warm enough. Choose a good growing medium.

Some companies have products that are finely sifted just for starting seeds. Keep the soil moist and well drained but not wet. Feed with a liquid fertilizer. When the plants have 4 to 6 sets of leaves, transplant to individual pots and let them continue to grow until the soil is warm enough in the spring to set them out. Herbs can also be started now from seed. They need about 8 weeks of growth before they are ready to be in the ground outdoors. Starting herbs in containers gives the gardener more control over growing conditions and can extend the growing season. So if you don't want to start everything from seed, what do you do? If you have friends who garden, ask if they will share with you. Also, local garden centers and feed stores carry veggie transplants and can assist you with selection. Many seed companies are online and can ship transplants straight to your home. By getting outside and working with Mother Earth in your garden, those winter blues will be long gone.

"It is far, far, far cheaper to put a \$1.00 plant in a \$10.00 hole than a \$10.00 plant in a \$1.00 hole"

John Ferguson, Nature's Way Resources

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Official Newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners

February 2011

"The Latest Dirt" is the official newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners. It will be published in February, May, August, and November. Members will receive color copies via e-mail. It will also be posted on our website at <http://jefferson-tx.tamu.edu>. Click on newsletters. Black and white copies will be available at the monthly meetings and at the office. Input is greatly appreciated. Call Micah Shanks at 409-749-0083 or e-mail your suggestions to mshanks52@gmail.com.

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Programs conducted by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin.

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