

The Latest Dirt



Official Newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners

February, 2012

From The President

By Jackie Steen

As we begin this New Year with a new slate of officers, I would like to take this opportunity to say I am delighted to serve with this slate and honored to be serving as your president.

My goal as your president is not to come in and change things but to improve on the things already in place that are working for us and maybe to 'tweak' them just a little.

Soon we will be having our first public event of the year, the plant sale on March 31. This is always a fun event the community looks forward to, but it is also an event that requires a lot of manpower and a lot of hard work for us, the master gardeners and interns. Working together, we can make it a success. Some of the best friendships made in life are formed when working side-by-side as a team.

There so many different aspects to gardening that we as master gardeners should think of gardening as a 'continuing education class with nature'. One of the best places to learn of course is our test garden at the airport. We are very fortunate to have such an area in which to learn.

I look forward to working with each and everyone to make our Jefferson County Master Gardeners group the very best that we can be. I welcome your input ideas and suggestions.



Agent's Two Cents

By Ricky Thompson

As we move into the month of February, our shortest days are behind us and extended daylight is approaching. I would expect more winter like weather and I pray it has rain with it. We have received recent rainfall but we remain far from satisfying our water/moisture levels.

Now is a great time to start your spring and summer lawn and garden plans. If you plan to renovate beds or do some landscaping, I suggest that you plan it out completely. Don't wait until the springtime and you are at the nursery viewing the pretty new plant arrivals to plan it out. This usually ends up with beds and landscape with no theme and looks cluttered. I would also think about water conservation. Who knows what kind of year this will be regarding moisture.

I congratulate our new MGs who completed the shortcourse and say welcome. My hat is off to Jackie Steen with her role as president; I'm comfortable that the program will have great leadership.



Meetings are the second Thursday of each month, 6pm Fellowship and Refreshments, 7pm meeting in the Extension Office Auditorium
Upcoming Meeting Dates:
February 9 – Carol Cuccio
March 8 – Greg Bostwick
April 12 – Arbor Foundation



F.A.Q.'s



Question: Once I become certified, am I a Master Gardener for life?

Answer: No, you must continue to do the required hours yearly to maintain your certification. As an intern, you are required to do 20 office hours, 20 test garden hours, and 10 educational hours. To recertify, the hours are broken down into 10 office, 20 garden, 10 MG projects, 5 education. It has always been the policy of JCMG that if you have to temporarily drop out for a specific reason, ie: health, job, etc, you can always come back and get involved again. Be sure to turn in all your hours to Ann Bares.

Question: Can I transfer my MG membership to another group?

Answer: Normally yes. However, you would need to speak to the agent at the new group to see what is required. In some cases, if you are transferring to another zone, you may be asked to take the course and do your hours all over again. If you are staying in a zone that you are already familiar with, it should be easy to transfer.

If you have any questions regarding procedure, history, etc. please send them to mshanks52@gmail.com and they will be answered in the next newsletter.



Big Change Coming to Monthly Meetings

Please make a note that starting in February, refreshments will be served from 6-6:45 p.m. before the 7 p.m. meeting.



This should provide several benefits to members. It will give us a little more time for socializing and catching up with friends. It will hopefully relieve some congestion at the food table, and it will allow the hospitality team to clean up before the meeting instead of after. The program will begin at 7pm as usual followed immediately by the business meeting, so we should be out by 8-8:30pm allowing everyone to get home earlier!

MISSION STATEMENT

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

2012—2014 Board Members

President—Jackie Steen
Vice President—Toni Clark
Secretary—Kathy Scruggs
Treasurer—Dorothy Norris
At Large— Kathryn Stelly, Stellina Reed, Tony Lucenti
Past President—Melody Weaver

Newsletter Staff:

Editor: Micah Shanks
Layout: Peggy Coleman

Master Gardener of the Year

Cecil Hightower

Lithuanian by birth, Texan by choice, that's Cecil Hightower, our 2011 Master Gardener of the Year. Cecil was adopted as a toddler by an American serviceman stationed in Germany. They moved to Italy where he was taught Italian from his Italian nanny. When he moved to Texas, he had to learn English. If you listen very closely, sometimes you will hear him speaking to Stellina Reed

in their native Italian tongue! (In fact, they discovered that they have relatives in the same region of Italy.) Cecil's grandfather gave him his first flower seeds, zinnias, and he was hooked. At one point while he was in college earning degrees in English and mass communications, he had 3 gardens going for friends and family. If he saw an empty patch of ground, he planted it. Nothing has changed. He is still a gardening fanatic working long hours at the test garden, doing landscape jobs for the county, and then tending his own garden and yard. "I lose all track of time in the garden. Every career aptitude test I ever took said I should be a forest ranger," says Cecil. "It's my nirvana. It also saves a lot of money on psychiatrist bills!" He says he was self taught and always wanted to take the Master Gardener course but because he worked shifts at Sun Oil for 30 years, he had to put it off. One day after he retired in '08, he drove out to the test garden. Lucky for him (and us) he met Larry, Phyllis and Donna who gave him the scoop on the garden and the MG program. He took the course in '09 and hasn't looked back. He says he was so excited to learn different aspects of gardening to tap into, and he is impressed by the wide variety of knowledge and talents of the members. Cecil has two sons: Judd who is in San Antonio and works in the field of spinal pain treatment, and Cort, as aspiring actor in L.A. He is also the very proud grandfather of Caroline, born on January 20, to Judd and his wife. Cecil says winning the Master Gardener of the Year award was a huge honor and he will always try to live up to it. Congratulations, Cecil...well deserved!



Congratulations



ANNOUNCEMENTS



For all you Facebook fans, did you know there is a Master Gardener page? Go to Master Gardener Extensions United and join 762 other gardeners nationwide to share horticulture tips and pics! We will soon have a local Facebook page and website up and running.

Vegetable Seminar

Saturday, February 11

Registration at 8:30 am

Program 9–Noon

\$10/Person

Paul Eyre—Root Vegetables and Leafy Greens

Eddie Wharton—Compost, Why, Where and When

Door Prizes! A raffle for a composter (valued at \$150) will be held.

Market Day

Saturday, March 31 at the Jack Brooks Regional Airport

8am–3pm

Set up will be all day Friday.

Volunteers are needed! Call Dorothy Norris to volunteer (409) 755-6505.

Grafting Workshop

Saturday, March 10

Registration 8:30 am

Program 9–Noon

\$10/Person

Bonnie Childers will be the featured speaker.

Campbell Group will share their 1-year old seedlings with the local community on Friday February 10, from 9 am- 1 pm at the JCMG test garden at the airport. Bald cypress, white oak, sawtooth oak, cherrybark oak, and shumard oaks will be available.

If you would like to volunteer to package and hand out the trees, please call Glenn at [409 832 4929](tel:4098324929) or [409 790 4033](tel:4097904033). Thanks.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU !!!!

February

Delia Walker - 2
Tom Hargrove - 4
Arthur Newman - 6
Charlene Baird - 13
Kay Drake - 16
Robert Pittman - 18



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
Melba Theriot - 31

April

Debbie Hines
Amanda Black - 13
Madonna Cupit - 14
Aletha Kirkwood - 17
Francis Thomas - 23
Mel Day 23
Phyllis Smith - 26
Donna Thompson - 26



In The Kitchen With: Sherry Broussard

Rose Petal Pound Cake (from "The Edible Rose")

2 cups granulated sugar
2 cups butter
9 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla
1/2 teaspoon cream of tartar

4 cups sifted all-purpose flour
1/2 tsp. salt
4 tsps. Rose water
7 tsps. Rose petals

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cream the sugar and butter together. Add eggs one at a time, beating after every addition. Add the vanilla. Sift together the flour, cream of tartar and salt. Slowly add the dry ingredients to the creamed mixture, beating constantly just until completely blended. Stir in the rose water and rose petals. Pour the batter into a greased and floured 10 inch tube pan or bundt pan. Bake for approximately one hour and 15 minutes, testing for doneness with a toothpick. If the result is too rosy for some tastes, cut back on the rose water or add a few tablespoons of brandy or fruit liqueur. Decorate with fresh rose petals, candied petals of rose hip compote.

move on to something else. As coordinator, I would like to thank all those who have helped over the years. My special thanks goes to Jane McBride, Cecil Hightower and Kathy Attaway, the "RadioHeads" who have faithfully written and recorded segments with me for the last 2 years. Thanks, also, to Byron Ballentine and his staff at KVLU for making this such an enjoyable project, start to finish!

Jane McBride and Melissa Starr have been busy working on awards submissions for state conference. Jane has submitted our newsletter, "The Latest Dirt", the radio segment "Out in the Yard", and in the individual category, Cecil Hightower. Melissa has submitted her power point presentation " A Butterfly Garden: If You Build it, They will Come". She also plans to place our storyboard into competition on site. Awards will be presented at the state conference in San Antonio, May 3-5, 2012. Plan now to attend. Besides being very interesting and educational, it's always a lot of fun! Registration is now open at

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Snap Bean Rust

By Cecil Hightower, JCMG

If you've ever planted a fall crop of snap beans you know that they will produce as bountiful a crop late in the year as they do in the spring. A problem, however, that is often encountered when planting snap beans late in the year is rust.



This fungus can be very frustrating as it is hard to treat and will infect any green part of the bean plant. Rust can live in the soil for years and

although it rarely kills, it will significantly reduce the harvest. It can especially be a problem with fall crops as the fungus thrives in long, cool, wet periods which prevail during this time of year.

The best way to avoid the problem is to choose a resistant cultivar such as "Kentucky Wonder Rust Resistant," "Jade", or "Provider" and make sure that seeds are planted far enough apart so that mature bushes will have good air circulation. If you've had rust problems in the past, there are precautions you

can take to prevent, or diminish, a recurrence: spray or dust the leaves once a week with sulphur, starting as the leaves emerge and continue until the beans bloom.



Since splashing water spreads the spores, don't use overhead sprinklers for irrigation. If you see rust on the leaves as the beans begin to ripen, avoid picking after a rain or early on a dewy morning as you'll be spreading the spores as you pick. Although they don't look very appetizing, the beans are safe to eat and washing well will remove any spores.



Planting Tips

by Micah Shanks, JCMG



It will soon be spring and we will be busier than ever in our gardens. Here are some simple things to keep in mind. If you

are having trouble keeping plants alive in your landscape, it may be that you have chosen the wrong place for your plant. Always consider how big a plant will be at maturity and give it the appropriate space. Also, be acquainted with its sunlight and shade requirements. Trying to grow veggies in anything but full sun is doomed to fail.

Did you properly prepare your soil? According to the Texas Garden Almanac, eliminating weeds, tilling the soil, adding organic matter and aerating compacted soil are a few important ways to prepare for planting. If the soil is just too poor to amend, try raised beds.

Are you using enough mulch? This simple layer of organic or inorganic material works wonders by retaining moisture, moderating soil temperature, and keeping down weed populations. Organic mulches have the benefit of improving soil structure as they break down.

Make sure to plant at the right time. This is especially important when growing vegetables. Get to know your cool weather and warm weather crops. In Texas, we must also know which varieties to grow. The AgriLife Extension office is a great source of information on planting times and varieties.

Think long term. It is very easy to want instant gratification and plant a fast growing tree for shade which may die out in a few short years. Be patient and choose a slower growing tree that will reward you for many years to come. A flowerbed will look better in the long run if you don't overpack it to begin with. Remember that plants will fill in. If overcrowded, they will compete for food and water and become stressed. When planting trees and shrubs, visualize what it will look like in five years and then determine the location. By keeping some simple principles in mind, our gardening tasks are easier and the outcome is much more enjoyable!



"My green thumb came only as a result of the mistakes I made while learning to see things from the plant's point of view."

H. Fred Dell

Learning about Beneficial Insects

By Tim Schreck, JCMG Intern

Since it looks like we are having a mild winter this year our insect population will likely be more intense in 2012. I was actually hoping for a couple of longer cold spells and a good freeze or two to help my fruit trees get the chill hours I need but to also kill back some of the insect population. Most insects spend winter under leaves, in compost and cracks in bark, or bury themselves in the garden soil to stay warm. If we can get a good freeze and they did not bury themselves deep enough it will kill many of them. If you have a little time while waiting for your seeds to come in the mail, might I suggest a little time spent learning about beneficial insects and how to make your garden more inviting for them. I picked the Green Lacewing because last year they became an important ally in our small garden. Most everyone knows what the adult green lacewing looks like but it is the larvas that are the vicious eaters of many pests. Last year our tomatoes were getting attacked by stink bugs and aphids, and as we were trying to keep from using too many chemicals, they got the upper hand on us. It did not take long to start seeing green lacewings flying around because of the large number of aphids. As my wife and I were paying closer attention to the garden, we noticed the eggs in the picture and hence cut off the 4 or

5 leaves with eggs and disposed of them with as much malice we could. About half way through the Master Gardener class I ran across a picture like this and my heart sank. I realized I had



disposed of several hundred green lacewing eggs. I vowed then to start paying closer attention to bugs and not assume if it has 6 or more legs it should die a bone crushing death under my shoe. I found the Internet to be a great resource but I need something more portable. Here are two I use: "Mac's Field Guide" is a laminated two sided sheet with good bugs on one side and bad bugs on the other that I got at Barnes and Noble. For the Smart phone, I found the Bonide app for the Android that has very nice photos of many beneficial insects and bad bugs of all kinds. One of my fellow students this summer brought in a large sheet he picked up at a local feed store for free from one of the insecticide companies and had it laminated. It had nice pictures of all the bad bugs and recommended chemicals to use for control. So as the saying goes, "Keep your friends close (your plants) but keep your enemies even closer (bad insects)" and our garden will be a better place.

Leaf Management

By Micah Shanks, JCMG

Right now in Southeast Texas the trees are quickly shedding thousands of leaves. Since most people don't have compost piles, what do we do with them? They certainly don't belong in a landfill and yet most folks still rake them up, put them in a plastic bag and leave them for pickup.

There is a better way. It's called the Don't Bag it - leaf management plan and is available at aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu...or just google "Don't Bag It". Basically, fallen leaves and pine needles are a valuable resource for organic material

and can contain up to 80 percent of the nutrients a plant takes from the soil and air during a growing season. When you bag or burn leaves, you are throwing away free fertilizer. Here's what to do:

Mow with a mulching mower and leave them on the ground. As they decompose, they feed the soil. Use them for mulch around trees, shrubs, in the vegetable garden, underneath hedge rows, anywhere you would ordinarily use mulch. If you don't want to rake, use the mulching mower with an attachment then spread them around your plants. The shredded leaves will decompose faster and will stay in place better than unshredded.

In the veggie garden, leaves can also be used to create a walkway between rows. Spread a thick layer and watch them compost in place. This is the same process that happens in wooded areas. They leaves fall and with time and moisture, create a nutrient rich soil.



Leaves can be directly tilled in to the soil at this time of year. Over the winter, they decompose and ready the soil for spring planting. To speed up the process, add a small amount of ma-

nure or nitrogen fertilizer. 6-8 inches of leaves will improve aeration and drainage in clay soil and will improve water and nutrient holding capacity in sandy soil.

"Gardening is a matter of your enthusiasm holding up until your back gets used to it".

Unknown

Weeds—Friend or Foe From "The Daily Om"

Simply expressed, a weed is any plant that grows where it isn't wanted. Weeds are defined by their tendency to flourish at the expense of a gardener's overall vision, and we tend to battle their presence in our yards. It is interesting to consider, though, that a plant is a weed only within a certain context, which is to say that one person's weed is another person's wildflower. Most of us have pulled at least one dandelion up by its roots and disposed of it in the interest of preserving the look of a perfect green lawn, yet the dandelion is good medicine, packed with healing properties and vitamin-rich leaves that are a delicious, spicy surprise in a summer salad.

In the wild, there is no such thing as a weed because the overall vision is in the hands of Mother Nature, who accommodates and incorporates all forms of life. In nature, balance is achieved over the long term, without the aid, or interference, of a human supervisor. While one plant may prevail over others for a certain period of time, eventually it will reach an apex and then it will naturally decline, allowing for other forms to be born and survive. This self-regulating realm was the first garden of our ancestors, who learned the art of agriculture from studying the forests and fields of the as yet uncultivated earth. In a sense, weeds are harbingers of this wildness, pushing their way into our well-ordered plots, undermining more delicate flora, and flourishing in spite of us.

The next time you see a weed, you might want to look deeply into its roots, discover its name, its habits, and its possible uses. Instead of seeing an unwanted intruder, you might see a healer offering its leaves for a medicinal tea or its flowers for a colorful salad. At the very least, if you look long enough, you will see a messenger from the wilderness of Mother Earth, reminding you that, even in the most carefully controlled garden, she cannot be completely ruled out.



"Weather means more when you have a garden. There's nothing like listening to a shower and thinking how it is soaking in around your green beans."
Marcella Cox

Tree Planting Tips

By Cecil Hightower, JCMG

If you are considering planting new trees in your landscape, late fall and winter are the optimal times for this and by following four basic steps you can help get your tree off to a good start.

Begin by digging a hole two to three times the width of the rootball but not too deep as you want the soil line right where it is on the tree in the container.

Rough up the sides of the hole with a shovel or rake, as smooth sides make it difficult for the roots to take hold.

Although the roots should be disturbed as little as possible, if they are pot bound and circling, loosen and tease them out gently with your fingers. This will redirect their growth and stop them from circling and help them grow into the surrounding soil. If any roots are damaged or broken, prune them off at this time.

Next, sit the tree in the hole at the proper level, partially backfill with the original soil, not a commercial potting mix, then fill the hole with water. Wait

for it to soak in then finish filling the hole with dirt and gently firm it around the trunk of the tree. Water it one more time to remove any air pockets around the roots.

Finally, top the soil with a two to four inch layer of mulch, such as shredded wood, which will help maintain consistent moisture levels during this crucial period and over

time the mulch will break down thereby improving the soil. Be sure to keep the mulch several inches away from the trunk of the tree to keep unwanted pests and diseases away as they are often attracted to the wet mulch.

Wait until spring when new growth emerges

before you begin to fertilize the tree, then only feed lightly with a low nitrogen fertilizer as you want the tree to put its energy into the growth of new roots and not foliage.

This simple planting procedure will help your new tree to quickly take hold and flourish, giving you many years of enjoyment.



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February 2012

"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.

The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture and the County Commissioners' Courts of Texas