

February 2014

Volume 6, Issue 1



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## *Editor's Note* *Melissa Starr, JCMG*



As the cold winds blow, and the Arctic air flows in and out, most of us are only dreaming of spring. Don't fret; the warm spring air is only a few short weeks away. Start planning your gardens soon, or the searing summer heat will put a halt to all your glorious plans. Now is the time to start growing your spring transplants from seeds, planting potatoes, and preparing your gardens for spring planting.

You will need to add good layer or organic material, such as compost, to your garden. All of those fall leaves and kitchen scraps that you composted should soon be rich compost ready to provide nutrients for your plants. Add this compost to your garden, and look for the earthworms. If they are not already there, they will be in your garden soon.

February is time for planting potatoes, pruning roses, and fertilizing citrus. Look for good seed potatoes at your local nursery or feed store.

While you are there, pick up some Earthkind roses. They are effortless to grow and add mounds of beauty to the landscape. Also look for citrus fertilizer; you can find organic and non-organic brands. A good rule of thumb is to fertilize citrus on Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, and Father's Day.

Go ahead and start growing your spring transplants now so they are ready to be planted after the last frost. Also, don't forget that now is a perfect time to separate clumps of plants in your yard and move other plants to new locations. The cooler, wetter weather allows the roots to establish themselves before the summer heat and causes less transplant shock. Go through your check list of chores, and don't delay. Spring will be here before you know it!

*Melissa Starr, Editor*

Meetings are the second Thursday of each month, 6pm in the Extension Office Auditorium

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

February 13 - Recertification/Business Meeting and Potato Dinner

March 13 — Organics by Mike Serant, developer of MicroLife

April 10 — Mushroom composting by John and/or Pat Hopkins from DGM Lawn & Garden

## *President's Message*

### *Tony Lucenti*



A new year has arrived, and as with any new year, there are new beginnings. We have a few new officers to announce for 2014. I, Tony Lucenti, am proud to serve as your new JCMG president in 2014. Cecil Hightower and Phyllis Smith are also new members-at-large. Returning from last year are Toni Clark, vice-president; Dorothy Norris, treasurer; Melissa Starr, secretary; and Stellina Reed, member-at-large. You are an awesome group of officers, and I look forward to working with you this year.

In 2014, I want all members to feel welcome at every event and meeting no matter how long you have been a Master Gardener or Intern. If we all work together, we can do great things for our community and our organization. If you are interested in joining a committee, please contact me or the committee chair because we want all members to be involved wherever they can.

A special thank you goes out to our Social/Awards committee for a wonderful Christmas party and awards presentation at the Beaumont Garden Center this past December. Our committee, consisting of Patsy Alleman, Norma Clubb, Penny Gilfillian, Sharon LaBove, Ann Lott, Karen Sourdellia, Sarah Sloan, and Glenn Watz, did a splendid job preparing the appetizers and deserts, and the meal prepared by the Port Neches Knights of Columbus was delicious. A special congratulations goes out to Donna Thompson, our 2013 Master Gardener of the Year; Herbert Bass, our 2013 Intern of the Year; and Dianne Davis and Ellis Allen, our Helping Hands award recipients.

We want to thank all these Master Gardeners for everything they do for our organization. Your service is greatly appreciated.

We started 2014 off with an Urban Tree Workshop held on January 18. Tim Shreck, Jefferson County Master Gardener; Mickey Merritt, Texas A & M Forest Service; and Chuck Morris, certified arborist, trained those in attendance on the proper care and maintenance of trees.

We have a very busy year ahead. We will be one of the sponsors of the Giving Field's Organic Workshop on February 22. They will have classes and demonstrations on organic gardening plus a tour of their gardens. Also on February 22 there will be a vegetable workshop with Paul Eyre and Patty Leander. This workshop schedule is subject to change, so please call 409-835-8461 to verify the date and time.

This year, Spring Market Day will be on April 5th. We need everyone's help to make this sale a success. We will be having garden work days to prepare, and our set-up day will be April 4th. We need as many hands as possible to assist us on both days. We want this Market Day to be the best ever!

I want to say thank you to everyone who signed up to be on a committee or a committee chair. I look forward to working with all of you this year!

## *Master Gardener of the Year*

### *DONNA THOMPSON*

*By Melissa Starr, JCMG*

Donna Thompson embodies the title “Master Gardener.” She is at almost every event and test garden workday. She even comes to the garden and works when there isn’t a scheduled workday. She propagates plants faster than rabbits and even refers to them as her “babies.” Gardening is in her blood, and she is worthy to be called “Master Gardener of the Year!”

Donna became a Master Gardener in 2008, and has logged over 3,000 volunteer hours since then. She was named Intern of the Year in 2008, received the Helping Hand Award in 2009, and won Best of Show at the Fruit and Vegetable Show in 2010.

Over the years, Donna has judged fruit & vegetable shows, planted landscapes at local schools and veteran’s memorials, helped with homeschool kids’ projects at the garden, and held propagation classes at local schools and Master Gardener classes. She has also been a member of the Garden Committee, Plant Sale Committee, Plant Purchase Team, Plant Sale Set-Up Team, Airport Appreciation Committee, and Mentorship Program Team where several of the Interns she mentored became Intern of the Year. In addition, she has been Greenhouse Team leader and Plant Team leader.



Donna is invaluable to our organization. She has a passion for plants; she still nurtures a plant that she has had since she was a little girl. Her compassion and caring is not only directed toward plants, but also people. She feels hurt when others hurt and genuinely wants only the best for others.

Donna, we want you to know that you are loved by all your Master Gardener friends, and our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family.

*Our next issue will feature Herbert Bass, Intern of the Year.*

## 2013 Master Gardener Christmas Party



Our annual Christmas party was held at the Beaumont Garden Center at Terrell Park. Patsy Alleman, Norma Clubb, Penny Gilfillian, Sharon LaBove, Ann Lott Karen, Sourdellia, Sarah Sloan, and Glenn Watz comprised the social committee who were in charge of this delightful event. They decorated beautifully and prepared the scrumptious appetizers and desserts, while the Port Neches Knights of Columbus served us a delectable meal. Everyone enjoyed fellowship and the anticipation of the awards. This year's awards recipients were: Donna Thompson, 2013 Master Gardener of the Year; Herbert Bass, 2013 Intern of the Year; Dianne Davis and Ellis Allen, Helping Hands awards.

## *Edible Landscaping* *By Melissa Starr, JCMG*



Everyone wants their landscape to be attractive, but some people feel like planting flowers is a waste of time and money. If you are one of those people, consider planting an edible landscape. Edible landscaping combines beauty and utility. Since many edible plants take time and work, it is recommended that you mix in a few flowers anyway. Plan carefully, and you can have a beautiful, tasty yard.

When planning your landscape, add some interesting design elements that give structure to your gardens. Strong lines created by defined pathways, curving beds, and planters add



interest to your garden and keep it from looking like an overgrown vegetable garden. One example is laying a piece of lattice in a flower bed and planting lettuce in each square opening. For more ideas, Google "edible landscaping designs."

For your landscape to be visually pleasing, you need to have healthy plants. Make sure you plant the right plant in the right place. Fruit trees and vegetables need at least six hours of sunlight each day, and grow best in well drained soils. Annual fruits and vegetables also need more organic matter and nitrogen to grow well. Expect trees and shrubs to take three to five years to look mature and produce fruit; whereas, vegetables, herbs and flowers, can fill up a flower bed and look mature in a few weeks.

When planting edible landscapes, some plants work better than others. During the fall and winter months, lettuces, cabbages, Swiss chard, kale, parsley, and nasturtiums make striking accents to any flower bed. During warmer weather, peppers (especially hot peppers), tomatoes, eggplant, asparagus, basil, rosemary, and squash can be lovely accents

to any landscape. Pecan trees are excellent nut trees to plant if you want shade in your yard, and pear, plum, fig, and orange/satsuma are smaller trees that can be used as accents in your yard. If you want to plant something ex-

otic, try pineapple guava, jujube, persimmon, pawpaw, loquat, or mayhaw trees.

As you begin your landscaping, start small. Many new gardeners take on too much work all at once by planting huge gardens. They do not realize that it takes time to mulch, water, weed, feed, and prune. The maintenance can be daunting. With edible landscapes, you also have to take time to harvest, cook, and preserve your produce.

Now is a perfect time to plant fruit and nut trees and cool season vegetables and herbs. Start now by planning, planting, and enjoying your new edible landscape.

## *Starting Your Own Seedlings* *By Micah Shanks, JCMG*



I think if I look really hard, I can just barely see spring in the distance. As far as I'm concerned, it can't get here soon enough! Cold weather is just not for me. I want to be out digging in my garden, but since we can't do that just yet, we can always start trays of tomatoes, eggplant, and pepper seedlings for warmer weather. Now is also a good time to start annuals and perennials for the flower garden. Start with a good growing medium and add light and warmth. If you are lucky enough to have a greenhouse, you have probably already started. If not, a coldframe is good for this job, but in lieu of that, use a shop light suspended close to the flats and place in a warm room. If your location isn't warm enough, you may want to consider investing in heating mats made specifically for seed germination, which can be purchased through seed catalogs.

When choosing your growing mix, look for products that are finely sifted just for starting seeds. Keep the soil moist and well drained, but not wet, and feed with a liquid fertilizer. When the plants have 4-6 sets of leaves, gently transplant them to individual pots, and let them continue to grow until the soil is warm enough in the spring to set them out. Transplant tip: take a plastic fork and pull off all the tines but one. It makes the perfect tool for coaxing out fragile roots without causing too much trauma to the plant.

Don't forget to start some herbs now for the spring garden. They need about eight weeks of growth before they are ready to be planted in the ground. Growing herbs in containers is always a good option. It gives the gardener more control over growing conditions and can extend the growing season. Furthermore, keeping containers close to the kitchen is a reminder to snip fresh herbs for use when cooking.

So, let's say you don't want to start your own seedlings. What do you do? If you have friends who garden, ask them to share transplants with you. Also, check out the local feed stores and garden centers. Of course, there are also several established seed companies that can be found online who will ship transplants straight to your door.



## *Fertilizing 101*

*By Jane McBride, JCMG*



Every plant requires nutrients to grow and thrive. Three of the primary nutrients - carbon, hydrogen and oxygen - come from air and water. Gardeners will need to provide the other three - nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium.

The three numbers on a bottle or bag of fertilizer stand for nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, in that order. The numbers also indicate how much of each is provided by weight.

Nitrogen helps plants produce protein needed for new tissue. Give a plant too much nitrogen and it will produce great foliage but no fruit or flowers. Plants can take up only so much nitrogen, and the rest leaches into the soil and can reach ground water. Give a plant only as much nitrogen as it needs.

Phosphorus stimulates root growth, aids in setting buds and flowers and increases the overall vitality and seed size.

Potassium helps make plants strong and vigorous and more disease resistant. The best way to choose a fertilizer is to do a soil test to see what nutrients are lacking in your yard or garden. It can help you avoid the hit-and-miss type of fertilizing that can be more destructive than helpful. Many gardeners use far more fertilizer than plants need, which creates a serious problem for the environment through run-off. This is definitely one case where less can be more - efficient, that is.

An all-purpose, balanced fertilizer such as 10-10-10 will provide the needed nutrients. If you need more of one nutrient and less of the other, you can choose a mix that fits your needs.

When applying fertilizer, consider foliar feeding.

Plants can absorb nutrients up to 20 times more efficiently through leaf surfaces than through their roots. You'll get the best results applying the spray



during critical growth stages such as immediately after transplanting, during bloom time and the period right after a plant sets fruit.

**"I cultivate my garden,  
and my garden cultivates  
me."**

**Robert Brault**

## *Cottage Gardens*

### *By Ann Bares, JCMG*



It is believed what we now call cottage gardens began with randomly planted herbs used both medicinally and for cooking. Over time, vegetables were added close to the kitchen door, tended by the family chickens that kept it bug free and fertilized, and guarded by a big dog sleeping under the porch. It eventually evolved to include a split wood or stone fence to enclose it, covered with vines of both fruit and flowers, and a garden gate, not to keep friends out, but to welcome them in.

The dried fragrant blooms of herbs were used to overcome the odors of dampness and smoke from the fireplace, as well as being stuffed into straw mattresses. The welcome addition of the herbs' colorful blooms prompted the addition of flowers for the beauty they added. This became the classic cottage garden as we know it today.

In cottage gardening, space is not an issue. A corner of the yard, an area visible from the kitchen window or back door that offers a sunny spot will work. If you have room for a fence, as I have, it's handy for creating an inside area for larger plants and a border for herbs or small bedding plants that can be overshadowed. Inexpensive rabbit wire and cedar posts are long lasting. A cucumber or other small vegetable will vine on the fence, as will some berries. Be sure to leave space for sweet peas in the spring. A row of vegetables planted close to the path will make it easier to inspect for insects or other problems, and to harvest when ready. A stone or brick path allows access to weed, water, and cut flowers.

If you are fond of formal gardens, and a tidy square box hedge, a cottage garden is not for you, but its casual charm is actually a well planned and tended space. Plants live happily in a close and cozy jumble, their leaves screening the soil, keeping the weeds out and the soil cool on hot days. Plants support each other, requiring less staking or tying and the colorful blooms are always changing. Cottage gardeners are always ready with a new plant to fill an empty space, and the garden offers unexpected surprises from seeds that bloom in new spaces every year, blown by an autumn breeze. Cut flowers are never out of reach, as there are many plants that offer their color in the fall and winter.

Place a shallow dish of water in a shady spot close to the ground, with some gravel or rocks for the butterflies and frogs, which will eat bugs. Toss a few fresh citrus peels around to ward off cats and other hungry critters that may like their tender leaves or even dig up some winter vegetables.

There are many cottage garden sites on the internet and books available locally. An old favorite of mine is the "Cottage Garden" by Christopher Lloyd and Richard Bird. Now, while spring is still a few weeks off, is a perfect time to start planning your cottage garden.



## *Growing Amaryllis In Pots* *By Cecil Hightower, JCMG*



Few potted plants can compare with the stunning, stately beauty of an amaryllis in full bloom. You see many of them during the holiday season, for some varieties bloom during the winter months, are given as Christmas gifts, and with proper care will produce blooms year after year.

Growing your own amaryllis in pots is very easy by following a few simple steps. Amaryllis like to be pot-bound, so make sure that the pot, which should have a drainage

hole, is no more than an inch or two larger than the diameter of the bulb. Place a few large pebbles over the hole; then add a layer of any good commercial potting soil that drains well. Position the bulb so that its top two-thirds is above the soil level; it doesn't like to be planted too deeply. Water it well, to the point water runs out of the bottom; then don't water again until the soil feels dry to the touch. If the soil stays too wet, the bulb will rot.

About five to six weeks later, foliage and a flower stalk will begin to emerge from the bulb; large bulbs may produce two or three flower stalks. While it is actively growing, periodically give it a diluted solution of houseplant fertilizer when watering, and rotate the pot as it will want to lean toward the light.



After the flowers fade, cut them off to prevent seeds from forming, and remove the stalk when it turns yellow. Do not, however, remove any leaves because they're needed to produce food for blooms next season. When the weather warms, move the pot outside, water, and fertilize regularly through the summer to keep it actively growing. In the late fall, stop watering, and

move it to an area protected from frost; the foliage will die down naturally during this time. Keep the pot in a cool dry place for a couple of months of rest, and then bring it back in to a warm location. Start watering again to

initiate new growth and another bloom cycle.

Follow these steps, and your amaryllis will grant you with an annual show of exquisite blooms.

**"Gardening is cheaper than therapy and you get tomatoes." Author Unknown**

## *Soil Amendments and Conditioners*

### *By Tim Schreck, JCMG*



Even as an avid gardener I never paid close attention to all the pallets of soil amendments stacked up at the home improvements stores. Occasionally, I would grab a bag of potting soil or cheap compost that was on sale but never paid much attention to the other bags of "stuff." Researching, I found there are some interesting options available to help Southeast Texas gardeners.

Peat moss is used to add organic matter to the soil, loosen, or aerate. When worked in well, it does a good job of breaking up clay soils. Peat moss is acidic and since some clay soils are also acidic it can hurt some plants. Many people add dolomitic lime to bring down the acidity. Be cautious, a few tablespoons of lime will bring down the Ph of a big bag of peat moss. Peat moss is low on nutrients, so, is usually used in conjunction with other amendments or fertilizers.

Top soil is taken from the top few inches of soil. When you buy it in the bag, many times, it is just a mixture of organic matter, loam, silt and clay. It is generally a good amendment for any soil.

Perlite and vermiculite are minerals and do not add any nutrients to the soil so are only used to help aerate and absorb moisture. Their mining process sterilizes them making them great for use in potting soils.

Potting soil is usually a mixture of peat moss, perlite, vermiculite, compost, and fertilizers. It is very friable to allow roots to easily grow but does not have enough body to support a full grown vegetable plant. Usually you start your plants in potting soil and when big enough you transplant them in another pot with soil or directly into the ground.

Mulch can be many things such as freshly ground up wood shavings, different kinds of bark, or mixture of all kinds of organic matter. One thing it is not is decomposed. Mulch should not be added directly to garden soil. Since decomposition requires nitrogen, if you bury mulch in your garden it will pull nitrogen from the soil and rob it from your plants. Mulch should be put on the surface to slowly decay and retain moisture.

Compost is decayed organic plant material and one of the best amendments. Special attention should be taken when buying compost in a bag. Most commercial composts are made from one type of base material such as wood products, spent hops, or corn stalks. This is fine but the best would be to mix 2 or 3 bags of different types of compost to get a wide variety of nutrients. This is why home composting is usually the best since it will have a wide variety of decayed materials.

## The Latest Dirt

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service  
1225 Pearl Street, Suite 200  
Beaumont, TX 77701

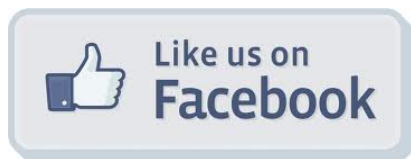
Phone: 409-835-8461  
Fax: 409-839-2310  
Hotline: 409-835-8742



We're On The Web:

<http://txmg.org/jcmg/>

<http://jefferson.agrilife.org>



### MISSION STATEMENT

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

#### 2014 Officers

President—Tony Lucenti

Vice President—Toni Clark

Secretary—Melissa Starr

Treasurer—Dorothy Norris

At Large— Cecil Hightower, Stellina Reed,  
Phyllis Smith

Past President—Jackie Steen

## Announcements

### 2014 Master Gardener Shortcourse

July 14 - 25, 2014  
835-8461 or 727-2191,  
Ext. 8461

### Spring Plant Sale and Market Day,

April 5, 2014, 8:00 a.m.-2:00 pm  
Jack Brooks Regional Airport, Hanger 4,  
Admission is free.

### Giving Field Organic Workshop:

St. Anne's School on Liberty Street,  
Beaumont, Texas. Saturday, February  
22 from 9:00 a.m.- 4:00 p.m. Classes  
and demonstrations will be in-  
doors. Need volunteers to give tours  
of the garden. Master Gardeners will  
have an information table.

### Vegetable Workshop

February 22, 9:00-1:00.  
Speakers: Paul Eyre and Patty Leander

### Tree Giveaway

by Campbell Forestry Group  
JCMG Test Garden  
Friday, Feb. 7 9:00-11:00 a.m.  
Five types of hardwood saplings (3' tall)

Every year, our group gives a \$1000 scholarship to a local high school graduating senior. If you have a child, grandchild, friend, etc. who might qualify, please contact Micah Shanks at [mshanks52@gmail.com](mailto:mshanks52@gmail.com) or 409-749-0083 for an application. The winner will be announced at the April meeting.