

The Latest Dirt



Official Newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners

November 2012

From The President

By Jackie Steen

I guess by now everyone is ready for some "cooler" weather. Although the calendar says it is November and autumn, it still feels like summer here in Jefferson County. Just like the saying goes "if you don't like the weather now, stick around and it will change".



Mother Nature is giving subtle hints at what may be in store for our coming winter season. Judging by the amount of acorns being produced by the oak trees, it could prove to be a very long and cold winter. The squirrels and other creatures are having an abundant supply of food provided for them. Sweeping and bagging acorns off driveways and sidewalks has become a daily ritual for many of us. Nevertheless, no matter what the temperature is now, if you have not already done so, it is time to start winterizing your plants and acclimating your bulbs.

Congratulations to all the interns who recently completed the short course. I had the opportunity to sit in on several of the classes and the pleasure to get to know many of them. They are going to be a great addition to our organization and I welcome them aboard.

Happy Thanksgiving to All,
Jackie

Agent's Two Cents

By Ricky Thompson

Congratulations and welcome to all the new interns. I am sure you are all anxious to complete your volunteer hours and become a Certified Master Gardener and if there is anything I can do to assist you, please feel free to give me a call.



This year has been another eventful year and I hope you have enjoyed it as much as I have. With the holidays coming up, we will all be busy. Don't forget to take time to enjoy all your blessings.

Jeanene has stepped in to help fill the void of not having a full time horticulture agent and I feel she has done a very good job. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the Master Gardener group and I know she enjoys it as well.

Happy Holidays to all of you!

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

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

November 8-

December 13-

January 10 -

Shangri La Scarecrow Festival



**Master Gardeners win
second place at the
Scarecrow Festival!**

MISSION STATEMENT

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

2013 Officers

President—Jackie Steen
Vice President—Toni Clark
Secretary—Melissa Starr
Treasurer—Dorothy Norris
At Large— Paul Eyre, Tony Lucenti, Stellina Reed
Past President—Melody Weaver

Newsletter Staff:

Editor: Micah Shanks
Layout: Peggy Coleman



ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Christmas Awards Party
December 13th at Tyrrell Park**



**Verna McCollom's
Halloween front yard**

Welcome all Master Gardener Interns:
Ellis Allen, Shelley Allen, Greg Anderson,
Lou Anderson, Herbert Bass, Stephanie Bo-
nin, James Butaud, Lynn Cole, Diane Davis,
David Goodell, Norma Harriman, Alice Her-
rington, Ron Hogue, Winnefred Jackson,
Evie Jordan, Krin Koehler, Arthur Lewis,
Joyce Logan, Mary Mahlie, Donna McGill,
Jonathan Moore, Linda Pittman, David Pool,
Mathilda Richardson, Bettye Schmidt, Pat
Sherlock, Debbie Vashaw, Bill Weikel, Sa-
mantha Winzer and Kathy Worden.



Last day of Master Gardener Shortcourse on Halloween

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU !!!!

November

Glen Watz - 1
Ann Abshier - 2
Dianne Duperier - 3
Michael Cate - 5
Bonnie Childers - 10
Stellina Reed - 16
Ed Wharton - 20
Charlene Stringer - 20
Patsy Alleman - 27

December

Sarah Sloan - 4
Bonnie Edwards - 10
Jackie Steen - 16
Kathryn Stelly - 23

January

Elizabeth Gibbs - 7
Charisse Miller - 9
Cecil Hightower - 10
Maxine Major - 16
Patty Bright - 17
Don Johnson - Honorary - 24
Michael Mattox - 27



In The Kitchen With: Margie Hanlon

Candy In A Crock Pot

2 pkg. almond bark
1 (12 oz) pkg. milk chocolate chips
1 pkg. German's Chocolate

1 (16 oz) jar salted dry roasted
peanuts
1 (16 oz) jar unsalted dry roasted
peanuts

Layer all ingredients, starting with peanuts, in crock pot on LOW for 2 hours. Turn heat off; stir to combine all ingredients. Drop by spoonful onto aluminum foil. Allow to cool. Store in candy tines. Makes a lot!

You can use the small muffin pan papers and that makes a pretty round candy. You can use pecans or almonds in place of peanuts.

Gardening for your Health

By Micah Shanks, JCMG

We all know the health benefits of eating fresh produce from our gardens, but do we ever stop to think about what else it is doing for us? According to recent research, just five minutes a day of gardening may significantly boost a person's mood and self-esteem.



As gardeners, we really don't need research to tell us that, but let's look at it anyway.

Apparently, exercising in areas with woods and water make people the happiest because these areas touch a something primal. They are areas which signal food and water, two things that humans need to survive. This fosters an innate sense of calm. If you wish to make your workouts more efficient, take them outside. You will tend to burn more calories because nature provides a pleasant distraction and you will work out longer. You may work out harder because you just feel stronger. And an additional benefit is that you won't feel as exhausted!

People who live near green spaces are shown to be less likely to get sick, so "living green" can be a boost to your immune system. Researchers aren't sure why this happens, but suspect it has to do with reduced stress levels. Even if you don't live near a green space, a long weekend in the country can be just as beneficial. Japanese scientists discovered that a three day outing in nature led to a 90% jump in natural killer (NK) cells, a type of white blood cell that fends off bacteria, viruses and tumors, while a trip to the city did not affect NK activity. Furthermore, the immunity boost lasted up to one week after the outing! Test participants also had more energy and lower levels of the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline. So slather on the sunscreen and get outside!



"Remember that children, marriages, and flower gardens reflect the kind of care they get."

H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

Wildflowers

By Ann Bares, JCMG

The wonderful mix of color from the zinnas is now just a memory, with only a few still lingering on their spent stalks, and it's time to clean, lightly till, and prepare the beds for fall. The mustard green seeds are scattered, and some fresh herb plants settled in, so now fast-

forward to what spring will bring, after a long winter. The time is right for sowing the seeds that will fill your garden

with wonderful color and some surprises, in the spring and into early summer, wildflowers! Our zone 9 recommends a September 15-December 15th planting. Select a well drained, sunny site and till soil lightly, only 1" deep for good soil-seed contact. Use a wildflower mix that has at least 15-20 species, since not all will germinate, or



distribute more evenly. A shaker with various size holes, or a whirly-bird spreader helps to spread seed evenly. Seeds should fall not more than 1/2" deep, and then be tamped lightly, but firmly down. Water with a fine spray just enough to settle the soil. Unless it is a very dry fall, natural rainfall will be enough to germinate the seeds. Some will germinate quickly to allow the roots to establish before going dormant in the winter, others won't emerge until the soil is warmer in the spring. Pull any broadleaf weeds, but be careful not to pull your seedlings! In the spring, take pictures of your wildflower garden, and make a note of which did the best, then when they are all spent, cut the blooms or remove the plants and shake them over the bed for next years wildflower show. For sources of wildflower seeds, and more information about the many ways you may use them in your landscape, go to www.wildseedfarms.com, or tce-bookstore.com to see the "Texas Wildflower Wheel".

"I don't like formal gardens. I like wild nature. It's just the wilderness instinct in me I guess."
Walt Disney

"TEXAS GARDENER SEEDS"

Fall will soon be here and that means it will be time to break out the rakes and leaf blowers for yard cleanup that can often present some unique safety challenges for homeowners.

According to The Consumer Product Safety Commission, 617,000 people were injured in 2008 raking leaves, cleaning gutters and doing other yard work.

Common tasks such as raking can cause muscle strain, back pain, repetitive strain injuries, tendonitis and Carpal Tunnel Syndrome if not done properly. But thanks to natural products such as Topical BioMedics Pain Relief and Healing Cream, symptoms of aches and pains don't have to interfere with autumn cleanup.

Lou Paradise, president and chief of research at Topical BioMedics offers the following safety tips to add to your fall cleanup checklist.

Warm up for at least 10 minutes before doing any heavy yard work.

Cover any exposed area of your skin with a natural sunscreen to prevent sunburn.

Use a rake that is comfortable for your height and strength.

Wear gloves or use a rake with padded handles to prevent blisters.

Wear long-sleeved shirts and pants to protect skin from scratches caused by low-hanging tree branches and other plants.

Wear shoes or boots with slip-resistant soles.

Keep a roll of trash bags close by while cleaning the yard to easily place fallen leaves and other debris into the bags so you will not trip over something that might be hidden by the leaves.

Never throw leaves over your shoulder or to the side, which puts undue stress on your back.

When picking up leaves, bend at the knees - not the waist.

Vary your movement and alternate your leg and arm position when picking up leaves.

Make sure to switch which arm is dominating to work the muscles on both sides of your body equally when raking leaves. Switch sides often to prevent overworking certain group of muscles.

Wear safety glasses to keep eyes protected from flying dirt and debris.

Be sure to have a family member hold the ladder in place when climbing a ladder and do not stand above the level indicated by the manufacturer.

Wear gloves and a facemask when handling chemicals such as lawn fertilizers and keep these items away from children and pets.

Wear earmuffs, a hard hat and a steel mesh face visor when using a chainsaw.

Wear durable safety gloves to keep hands safe from the bite of insects or plant-borne disease.

Fallen Leaves Management

By Micah Shanks, JCMG

Very soon in Southeast Texas, trees will be 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. Directions can be found at aggiehorticulture.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 80percent 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. The leaves fall and with moisture and time, create a nutrient rich soil.

Leaves can be directly tilled into 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

manure or nitrogen fertilizer. A 6-8 inch layer of leaves will improve aeration and drainage in clay soil and will improve water and nutrient holding capacity in sandy soil.



"Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago."
Anonymous

Winterizing Your Herbs

By Melissa Starr, JCMG

"Will my herbs survive the winter?" That is a question I hear over and over from people who want to grow herbs. The answer is it depends on which herb you are planting.

Herbs vary in their tolerance to cold and heat. Some herbs will survive our mild winters, and some herbs will die at the first sign of frost.

Basil is a tender annual and will begin to die at the first frost or freeze. If it is planted in a protected area, it might survive a very mild winter. I had one basil plant live for two years. However, that is not normal. Most basil will produce flowers and reseed before frost occurs. If this happens, you should have young basil plants sprouting in your garden the next spring.



Greek oregano, thyme, parsley, cilantro, dill, fennel, chamomile, mint, rosemary, chives and sage are also good candidates to survive our winter weather. Prolonged periods of freezing temperatures might cause oregano and thyme to die back some, but they normally rebound in the spring. Parsley, chives, sage and fennel will grow all winter without any problems. Rosemary will also survive most of our winters.

On the rare occasion that temperatures drop below 20 degrees, you will need to protect your rosemary or bring it indoors if it is already in a pot. Don't try to dig it up; the process of moving it into a pot may kill it.

If your herbs are in the ground, there are several things you can do to help them this winter. Do not fertilize, and do not prune the stems until spring. You don't want to encourage new growth during one of our warm winter days. You can, however, pinch off a little to use in your favorite recipes or harvest the leaves and dry them.

Do not water them unless we have more than two weeks with no rain. Herbs like well-drained soil and will die if they remain saturated with water. You can also mulch around your herbs to help protect them from freezes. Leaves, grass clippings, or bark mulch work well.

If your herbs are in pots, bring them indoors and put them near a sunny window. They will need to receive at least four hours or more of bright sunlight.





Planting Spring Bulbs

By Jane McBride, JCMG

If you love tulips, daffodils and other narcissus, fall is the time to get them in the ground so you can enjoy their beautiful blooms in the spring.

Because we live in the South, where chilling hours are so short as to be almost non-existent, it's important to make good choices of bulbs that suit our climate.

Tulips are a favorite of gardeners everywhere, but it's too hot here for bulbs to last more than one season, so we treat them as annuals. Because they require many hours of chilling to stimulate spring blooms, it's important to buy pre-chilled bulbs, or chill your own in the refrigerator for at least six weeks. Choosing tulips will add to your gardening budget each year, but many gardeners think it's money well spent.

If you want a lot more bang for your buck, I suggest you try narcissus. The genus *Narcissus* includes dozens of species, hybrids, varieties and forms, but the most popular are jonquils, daffodils and paper whites.

Jonquils have dark green, round leaves. They bloom early, offering clusters of small, fragrant yellow blooms. Paper whites have clusters of white blooms with an extremely strong, sweet fragrance. Because they naturalize so well, you can expect an ever increasing show each year.

Daffodils, perhaps the most popular, are a welcome sight after a colorless winter. To do well in Southeast Texas, choose varieties such as "Carlton," "Unsurpassable,"

"Fortune" "Ice Follies" "Tet-a-Tet" "Texas Star" and "Campernelle."

Plant your bulbs in full sun. They look their best in small clumps, rather than lined up neatly. To achieve a natural look, toss a handful and plant them where they land. They are especially lovely scattered beneath deciduous trees, which will allow them all the sun they need.

Plant in good, well-drained soil to which you've added a little compost. Toss a small amount of bone meal into the bottom of the hole, then cover with a good soil with added compost.

After they bloom in spring, be sure to wait until the foliage has turned brown and died back before mowing. The bulbs are busy storing nutrients and energy necessary to bloom again the following year.

One of my favorite websites to visit for information on all things bulbs is Southern Bulb Company. Owner and President Chris Wiesinger (Aggie '04) has built a career and a loyal following from years of saving bulbs once lost to most Southern gardeners.

As hardy as bulbs are, they can be really picky about climate. If you buy a bulb Chris says is right for your zone, like those listed above, you can be confident in your choice. Many of their bulbs are heirloom and very hard to find.

Be sure to check the variety of bulbs found locally at chain stores. They aren't always the right choice for Southeast Texas.

I highly recommend Chris' beautifully written and illustrated book, "Heirloom Bulbs for Today."



Fundamentals of Watering Plants

By Tim Schreck, JCMG

One fundamental all gardeners know is that water is essential for plant life.

Roots absorb available water, which helps transfer nutrients and then transpire out through foliage. If this cycle is hindered by too little or too much water, plants will suffer, usually showing distress with wilting or yellow-tipped leaves.

How much water is enough?

Watering time will vary, depending on soil conditions, such as sandy (shorter times) or clay soils (longer times) and a particular plant's needs. Most vegetables, small shrubs and garden plants need between one and two gallons a week. This doesn't mean pouring a gallon over each plant once a week. It means that much water needs to soak down to the root ball and out into the plant's drip line.

Watering frequently for short periods encourages shallow root growth in the top few inches of soil. This causes two problems. One, shallow roots do not give plants a good base to grow on and will not support larger plants such as shrubs or even tomato plants. Also, with shallow watering, the top two inches quickly dry out. That diminishes water and nutrient absorption, stressing the plant.

Deep watering is better because it encourages deep roots. This will ensure slow, steady water supply for the plant. In Southeast Texas, fifteen minutes of watering with a sprinkler will only soak into the first inch of the

average soil. How can you tell if you are watering long enough? The easiest method is to water for 30 minutes and then poke your finger in the ground. If the soil is wet deeper than your second knuckle (or 2 inches) you are watering adequately for most plants. If the soil is moist to the tip of your finger, that's even better. If the soil is soggy, however, either you are watering too much or the soil needs amendments to help it drain well.

Mulching around your plants is an easy method to help retain moisture. Mulch helps prevent rapid evaporation from wind and sun. It also helps keep the water closer to the plant, allowing it more time to soak down to the roots before it runs off.

Another fairly inexpensive method is drip irrigation, which offers slow, deep watering when emitters are placed properly and set to the correct drip speed and length of time. It's one of the best ways to water.

Water early in the morning before the heat of the day, which allows plants time to take up water. Watering too late in the evening can lead to problems with slugs and moisture-related diseases.

Paying attention to soil conditions and monitoring plants needs will minimize stress and produce healthier plants, which ultimately means less work for you.

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November 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.

Jefferson County Master Gardeners
1225 Pearl Street, Suite 200
Beaumont, TX 77701



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