

August 2019

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

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

Aug 8- Larry Trahan
Against the Grain Farming

Sept 12- No speaker
Sept 14- Field trip to
Creekwood Farms with
Mike Beard

Oct 10-Herman Auer
Growing Citrus

The Latest Dirt

Official Newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners

A Message From the President By Brenda Beadle, JCMG President

I hope everyone is having a great summer. Travel and vacations are great but it is always good to go home. Our gardens, if like mine, haven't fared well this summer. Maybe too much rain and humidity, or maybe I left it for too many days to feign for itself. So many of you have joined together to make improvements at the test garden. Trash accumulated over the years was cleaned out and thrown away. Volunteers cleaned everything in front of the airport generator and moved the bricks and concrete blocks. If you haven't been out there in a while, please make a visit, and while you are there, pull a few weeds, prune some of the out of control shrubs or sweep the patio area. There is a job for everyone. The garden belongs to all of us.

Our fall sale is scheduled for Saturday, October 5, 2019 from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The sale will be held at our Test Garden. We are going to have a quality selection of shrubs, vegetables, annuals, citrus, and blueberries all grown by local nurseries. A successful program must have volunteers that are knowledgeable and willing to share their knowledge with the public. We need volunteers to assist buyers with blueberry plants, citrus trees and vegetables. If you are not able to work the week of the sale setting up or the day of the sale, please share flyers with

your church, library, neighbors and friends. Information about the sale has been posted on Facebook and Instagram. If you are a FB or Instagram follower, please share. So far the Fall Sale post has reached 2,000 FB users.

It is not too early to start recruiting new members for our 2020 Master Gardener program. If you know anyone that might be interested in becoming a Master Gardener, please have them call the Extension Office and place their name on the list. We are planning to change the format next year to attract those that are still in the workforce.

Upcoming events in the extension office include: Produce Safety Alliance Training - August 21, Bee Keeping Seminar - September 7, Citrus Show - November 19 and 20. Other events include a Creekwood Farm Tour on September 14. (This tour will be our education program for September meeting). Beaumont Farmer's Market booth is every second Saturday of the month. The annual Texas Master Gardeners Conference will be held on May 12-14, 2020 in Waco.

Enjoy the remaining dog days of summer and don't get overheated while working in your yard or garden.

Until next time,
Brenda Beadle

Hot Weather Tips

By Micah Leigh, JCMG

I think it is safe to say that we are all a little tired of the rain. Seems like there is either too much or too little. We are due for some “drying out”. The pleasant thing about the rain is that it keeps the temperatures a little bit cooler. When it stops, you can bet we will be complaining about the heat again. If your garden has good drainage, most things should be fine. However, you may notice some yellowing as nitrogen and other nutrients have been washed away. Now is a good time to fertilize except for plants susceptible to winter freeze damage such as citrus. One good source of pure nitrogen is blood meal. Follow directions on the bag and scratch it in around the base of your plants. They will green up seemingly overnight.

Our Texas summer heat is extremely brutal to our plants. There are several heat tolerant flowers that you can plant in June to take you through the season into fall. For color in a sunny area, look for zinnias, marigolds, sunflowers, gazania, cockscomb and purslane. In an area that gets partial sun, choices include nicotiana (flowering tobacco), coleus, pentas, and wax begonia. If you have a shady spot, brighten it up with impatiens. Many of these plants will bloom to the point that they become “leggy”. At that point, get the shears and give them a good haircut. It’s emotionally hard to do because you will be cutting off loads of blooms, but the plant will benefit from it and you will be rewarded with a fuller plant that is blooming profusely again.

When the weather heats up, the bugs come

out. Watch closely for aphids, caterpillars and beetles. Natural controls include insecticidal soap and neem oil products. I keep a spray bottle of neem oil near my citrus trees. I spray the new growth about once a week to keep leaf miners away. Sometimes all you will need is a good blast of water. If you notice white fly on anything, you most likely have poor air circulation. Lack of circulation can also be the reason for many fungi like powdery mildew. Make sure there is ample room between your plants so they can dry out in the humidity.

As for ornamental trees, crape myrtles are in full bloom now. Keep spent blooms pulled off as high as you can reach in order to keep the tree in bloom longer through the season. Just make sure you know the difference between a spent bloom and a new bloom! The new ones are very tiny beads, the spent ones are larger and about the size of a pea. If the spent blooms are left on the tree, the limbs will get weighed down.



Fruit & Vegetable Show



The show was held at Central Mall this past June.

Sponsored by Jefferson County Horticulture Committee with volunteers from JCMGs.

Stink Bugs Really Stink

By Tim Schrek, JCMG

I live out on a farm and am surrounded by acres and acres of retired rice fields. We have a menagerie of plants, weeds, and bugs surrounding us. In the last 5 years, we have not had to go crazy keeping bugs under control. Using natural methods and occasional off-the-shelf pesticides, we can keep them under control.

The only exception, and I mean big exception, are stink bugs. These are some of the most difficult to get under control. We had a few of them in the garden before we left for 10 days on vacation and when we returned, they were rampant, and our tomatoes devastated from their attack. As I was taught in Master Gardener class, the first step in any issue is to identify the problem. A closer look at the bugs showed what looked to be green and brown stink bugs which are broad bugs with a tough shield-shaped exoskeleton. The other culprit was a leafed-footed stink bug which is similar but much narrower with longer antennas and legs.

The stink bugs were introduced to the United States from Asia around 1998 and have spread across most of the United States. The most common of these is the brown marmorated stink bug. Stink bugs are sucking insects and cause millions of dollars of damage to fruits and vegetables each year. They have a proboscis they insert into fruits and plants and suck plant fluids. They leave traces of their saliva in the fruit or plant causing dimples and discoloration. They can also spread yeast and

other infections from plant to plant adding to their devastating effects.

The best time to kill stink bugs is in their nymph stage before they develop their exoskeleton. This can be done by spraying the underside of leaves, where they congregate, with neem oil or treating with Sevin Dust. When they are mature, these methods are not as effective. If you look on the internet, there are several methods described to kill them. The three most discussed, and seemed to be most effective in controlling them, are picking them off the plant manually, vacuuming or using a light along with soapy water. Old timers swear by just picking them off by hand and throwing them in a dish full of soapy water. Do this several times a day and you can get them under control. Others swear by watering the garden and as the stink bugs come out to dry off, usually on top of the fruit or top of the plant, use a portable vacuum to suck them up. Others had success by placing a light over a cake pan full of soapy water at night. The bugs will be attracted to the light at night and drown. We tried the light and soapy water method. It did work but the results were not that impressive. Keep in mind that these methods may also kill some beneficial bugs, so I feel that a combination of methods is probably the best for us.

Growing Container Vegetables

Eileen Slater, JCMG

A few weeks ago I shared some of the bounty from my container grown garden vegetables with friends. One friend asked how I grew big vegetables and how did I get so many? I replied that I learned the hard way. These are common mistakes people make when growing vegetable container gardens.

- Mistake #1-Sunlight:

Vegetable plants need 6-8 hours of sunlight daily. After retiring, I excitedly dug up part of the yard next to my kitchen. The kitchen is on the north side of the house with an overhang from the roof. I plotted where the sun hit with rocks in the garden. Sunlight hit a small soil sliver at 1-2:00 p.m. It was 3-4:00 p.m. before most but not all the garden got light. Still I tried. Leggy tomato plants had no fruit. Short corn plants with miniature ears grew. Shade tolerant leafy vegetables grew 3 inches tall. My dream of a kitchen garden located outside the kitchen windows was gone. Then I started container gardening. Being able to move the container to the best light that plant needs is better!

- Mistake #2-Water:

Watering is tricky. Gardens need a total of 1-inch of rain and/or water a week. I wrongly thought I had to water all plants in all containers once a week. Large containers may need watering every day. Many small containers may need to be watered twice daily during the summer. Water early in the day and only water the soil to prevent fungal diseases. Daily check the soil. When the top 1 inch of soil is dry, then it is time to water. Allow water to run out of the drainage holes

of the container and penetrate the soil 5-6 inches. Water a vegetable plant before the leaves wilt. Wilting equals plant stress. I learned inconsistent watering produces bitter cucumbers and split tomatoes. After learning mulch would keep the soil cooler in the summer, I mulched the container vegetables. Pine needles, shredded leaves, newspaper, grass clippings, compost and rice hulls are readily accessible in our area.

- Mistake #3-Fertilizer:

I used new potting soil that feeds for 6 months. When transplanting I put 1-1½ teaspoons of slow release fertilizer under the roots for added nutrients. Osmocote and 14-14-14 are slow release fertilizers. But that was all the fertilizer I put in the container plants! Finally, it dawned on me that when the plant started to grow and produce it needed more nutrients. Adding a general-purpose soluble fertilizer that dissolves in water every 1-2 weeks gives the plants the additional nutrients they need. Examples include Peters 20-20-20 or Miracle Grow 15-30-15. Once a week water the container using tap water without the soluble fertilizer to leach out unused fertilizer.

Lastly, increase your vegetable yield by attracting pollinators! Grow plants with violet, blue or yellow flowers near vegetables.

Happy container gardening!

Pears

By: Melissa Starr, JCMG

One of my childhood memories is watching my grandmother can pears. At that age, I didn't understand that there are two different types of pears. Oriental pears are picked hard, ripened off the tree and used in baking and canning while European pears are softer like the ones bought in the store. Even though most people want to grow European pears, they do not grow well in Texas. Most of the pear trees in Texas are an Oriental variety because they have a strong resistance to fire blight.

Pear trees are one of the easiest fruit trees to grow in Texas. If you choose the right variety, there is not much maintenance needed to grow pears. The best tasting Oriental varieties for our area include Warren, Ayres and Magness. Warren is the best tasting of these varieties with a smooth, buttery taste. Some Asian varieties of pears are being planted in Texas, but there is not enough information to recommend them yet.

When planting a pear tree, it is good to note that most pears need a pollinator, so it is best to plant two trees. When planting any fruit tree, it is best to plant in the fall. When planting, dig a hole big enough for the roots to spread naturally, but not bigger than the root ball. Fill in with dirt and water, making sure there are no air pockets and the top of the root ball is at or above ground level. Gently adjust the tree if necessary. Weed competition can kill a young pear tree or stunt its

growth, so make sure there are no weeds from the trunk out to the width of the canopy.

It may take a few years for a pear tree to begin bearing fruit, but once it does, they normally ripen in August or September. Fruit on Oriental pear trees is best picked while still firm and allowed to ripen off the tree. You can tell the fruit is ready to pick because it will turn from green to a slightly greenish yellow color. If the fruit is allowed to become too ripe, the pears will be grainy. There are many ways to cook pears, but my favorite is a chocolate pear jam. There are several recipes on the internet.



Warren Pear



Fire Blight on Pear Tree

Tea Grown in America

By: Eileen Slater, JCMG

One of my favorite summer pastimes is drinking iced cold tea in a Ball quart jar. Did you know only Americans drink iced tea? Drinking tea is the most popular beverage after drinking water in the world.

Where does this wonderful tea grow? During our vacation in South Carolina, we visited the only commercial tea plantation in North America that propagates, grows, harvests and processes tea all in one location. It is the Charleston Tea Plantation.

“Camellia Sinensis” is the name of the tea plant, which can live for hundreds of years. It is a hardy evergreen. The new growth of tea’s leaves, called two leaves and a bud, are cut and used to produce tea. It is of the genus Camellia of flowering plants and in the family Theaceae. The tea plant was discovered in China around 2700 BC. The tea plant came from China to the Charleston area in 1799. Dr. Charles Shepard created the Pinehurst Tea Plantation in 1888 and received an award for his Oolong tea. Many years after his death in 1915, the core plants were transferred to Wadmalaw Island. In 1963, this became a Lipton Research facility. In 1987, it was purchased for the Charleston Tea Plantation by William Barclay Hall. In 2003, the Bigelo family partnered with Hall and bought the plantation.

Growing conditions for camellia sinensis include: high heat, high humidity, plentiful

rain, bright light or full sun, balanced nutrients and grown in zone 7-9 outdoors in well-drained acid soil.

Tea plants are propagated with cuttings from existing plants and placed in a climate controlled green house until they are mature enough to survive outdoors. The cuttings are stored on the back row. As they grow they move up rows until the plant is 2 years old and ready to plant in the field.



Plants are grown 18 inches apart. Each bush will become part of a hedgerow. The hedgerow is maintained at height of 38 inches and a width of 72 inches. The new growth of tea leaves, known as the “flush”, is harvested and processed into tea during a 6-month period between May and

October. There is a new growth of leaves every 3-4 weeks during harvest season. The tea leaves are harvested with 4 employees and a machine that has a 72-inch sickle bar that gently clips the new growth of tea leaves from the tea bushes. It will take 5 pounds of raw tea leaves from the field to produce 1 pound of finished tea. The tea leaves are taken to the factory onsite to process into green or black tea. Near the end of the harvest season, the tea plant produces small delicate flowers. The white blooms with yellow centers attract many butterflies to the plantation.

Look online for seeds or plants If you would like to grow your own tea.

The Latest Dirt

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We're On The Web:

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MISSION STATEMENT

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

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At Large—Dorothy Norris, Stellina Reed, Diane Davis

Past President—Eileen Slater

Announcements

Fall Plant Sale
October 5
8 am - 1 pm
Jack Brooks Regional
Airport
4875 Parker Dr.

Beekeeping for Beginners
Saturday, Sept 7
Registration 8:30-9:00
Program 9:00-4:00
1225 Pearl St, #200,
Beaumont, Tx
\$25 includes program &
lunch

T-Budding & Grafting Workshop
Sat, Sept 21, 9am-noon
Extension Office Auditorium
1225 Pearl St., Suite 200, Beaumont
\$10 per person

Texas Master Gardener
State Conference
May 12-14, 2020

JCMGs at Beaumont Farmer's Market
Second Saturday of the month

JCMGs are now on Instagram!
@jeffersoncountymastergardeners