



# The Latest Dirt

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Agent's Two Cents	2
Covid-19 Victory Garden	3
Photo Contest	4
Photo Contest cont...	5
Our Texas Watershed	6
Top 10 Facebook Tips	7
Tomato Troubles	8
Hanging Baskets	9
Announcements	10

## Message From The President

JCMG Members,

I hope everyone is healthy and safe from Covid-19. The past few weeks have been nothing less than extraordinary. I think we can all say that we have never experienced a time like this in our lives.

It is not unusual to see empty grocery shelves when a hurricane raises its ugly head in the Gulf, but to have limited stock for weeks is unprecedented. Our children and grandchildren are missing more than 2 months of school, learning as much as they can through home schooling and online classes. Many have lost their jobs while doctors, nurses and first responders risk being exposed to the virus every day.

Let us look at the positive side of this quarantine. I believe families are experiencing more time together. Cooking and eating dinner every night together, playing together, studying together and generally enjoying each other. We are not running in 10 different directions; instead we are at home. I can honestly

say I have enjoyed this time. I have tackled projects that my husband and I have been putting off. I have worked tirelessly in both my vegetable and flower gardens. I have picked up some of my sewing projects and finished them.

This has been a time of worshiping online, shopping in stores where keeping six feet from you and the nearest person is normal, wiping everything you touch with a Clorox wipe, washing your hands at least 10 times an hour and ordering food for pickup only.

When times get back to normal, will we have learned something from all of this? Will we slow down a bit and enjoy the outdoors, will we spend more time with our family, will we determine our priorities by limiting our outside commitments and will we tend to our gardens?

Stay safe everyone,  
Brenda Beadle  
JCMG President

# Agent's Two Cents

By David Oates, Horticulture Extension Agent



*"Nothing beats the personal satisfaction of growing and producing a vegetable crop or even flowers."*



By now, as you read this, we have been a full month plus a couple of weeks into the Stay at home/Stay safe restriction from the Corona Covid-19 virus that has put everyone's world into a different perspective. I hope that everyone is safe and practicing good social distancing when venturing out for the house for essentials.

Saying hello to your neighbor from afar is now the normal if you venture outside. No more shaking hands or a neighborly hug. We have seen increased usage of social media, email, web chats, and social interaction through a variety of video platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft teams, Webex, etc. to name a few. We are still able to communicate with each other through these platforms and stay connected. Even the old-fashioned phone is still a good option for communication. Now you order your groceries, fast food, medications, and just about anything else online. You can pick it up at designated pick up locations or, in some cases, you can have it delivered to your doorstep to avoid social interactions with individuals. Most of us have utilized this time to catch up on some neglected reading or watching our favorite program on tv. There is an app for everything now. Who knew? Gardening online?

I would strongly encourage everyone not to forget gardening as one of those activities that can be done during this time of isolation and staying at home. You can devote any amount of time to a gardening project; all day or 10 minutes a day. It is up to

you to decide on the time spent on a variety of gardening activities and chores. Keeping active and involved with a gardening project will help in several ways. Nurturing and tending to the daily necessities of growing plants will keep you active; both physically and mentally. It will give you something to look forward to everyday. Nothing beats the personal satisfaction of growing and producing a vegetable crop or even flowers. It also instills a sense of a daily routine that must be followed on a consistent basis for good results. It also may create a sense of calm and personal achievement during taxing situations that we may be faced with during these uncertain times.

I saw an advertisement recently for a virtual gardening program. It stated that you could have a beautiful garden that was full of color, multiple plants, little to no maintenance, season long color, and was easy to achieve from any gardener despite their level of knowledge. Heck, it even allowed you change out plants if you did not like them or they did not grow fast enough for your taste. It sounded too good to be true. After a little investigation, I found out that you could indeed have a beautiful garden. All it took was a little time on the computer and a lot of \$\$\$\$. A monthly subscription and you could indeed have the best-looking garden that only you could access from your computer. That is one way to have your own private garden!

I would encourage everyone not to give up on your gardening activities during this time of uncertainty. Stay safe during this time of social distancing and happy gardening.

# COVID-19 Victory Garden Provides Enjoyment

By: Eileen Slater

Earlier in March, before COVID-19 hit the states, I decided that this year would be my first COVID-19 Victory Garden. Gardens before provided food, fun and experiments. Little did I know how widespread the pandemic would become. COVID-19's reality is: sheltering in place, wearing a mask and having six feet of distance between you and others, using apps to buy groceries and an endless chore of wiping door-knobs and surfaces. The worst is no family with which to celebrate. How do I cope with this dilemma? Gardening is one way to effectively cope with the challenges of sheltering in place.

One way to help combat the effects of this virus is to plant your own Victory Garden, or if you have limited spaces, a couple of containers of vegetables. It's not too late to find transplants at grocery stores or big box stores. Vegetables that can still be planted (as of mid-April) according to the Jefferson County Spring Vegetable Planting Guide include bush beans, corn, cucumber transplants, okra, corn, southern peas, pepper transplants and sweet potatoes. Not being able to go to these stores very conveniently had me looking at the spring seed vegetable packets stored in my refrigerator in an old coffee container. Using old seeds is a gamble but one worth taking this year. I planted a 3-year old

zucchini seed packet, 4-year old green bean seed packet and a 3-year old pepper seed packet. The zucchini is successfully growing. The green beans only came up half-heartedly, but I still have some more to sow. Amazingly, the bush beans that fell in the empty cinder block spaces have sprouted! So that will provide another source for planting and will make the cinder block garden sturdier with the extra soil. No pepper seeds sprouted yet, but I still have a few seeds left with which to try again. Four bell pepper plants from last year that still had growth on them after winter were recycled by pruning off the dead parts, fertilizing and watering. Refrigerated store vegetables can be regrown, but that's another story.

Planting flowers will provide beauty in your yard and home. Some common summer flowers to plant include, but are not limited to, coleus, impatiens, marigold, periwinkle, petunia, sunflower and zinnia. Again, I am looking in my old seed flower packets.

I am thankful for gardens, sunshine, Zoom, text messaging, Facebook, Google, drive-in church services, doctors, nurses, all support medical personnel, grocery stores and workers, teachers, the mail service and

*"Some common summer flowers to plant include, but are not limited to, coleus, impatiens, marigold, periwinkle, petunia, sunflower and zinnia. "*



**Red Velour Tidal Wave Petunia**



## Photo Contest

By Melissa Starr, JCMG

Thank you to all who participated in our contest!



With almost 60% of the votes, Debby Parker's black swallowtail butterfly photo won by a landslide. Eleanor's baby mockingbird photo got 30% of the vote and is a great representation of new life in the spring. Third place was a three way tie between Cecil Hightower's spiderweb and David Oates' pink roses and gaillardia.

Congratulations!!

**Second Place:**  
**Eleanor Lazenby**





# Photo Contest cont...

## Third Place Photos

Cecil Hightower



David Oates



David Oates



# Our Texas Watershed

By: Brenda Beadle

Water is a much-desired resource in parts of Texas. Southeast Texas is surrounded by water whether in the form of lakes, rivers, bayous or frequent rain events. We complain about too much rain, too many floods, muddy rivers and lakes failing to realize that we are surrounded by a precious resource. The quantity and quality of our water must be protected.

According to the Texas Water Development Board, Texas has approximately 191,228 miles of streams and rivers, more than 8 million acres of inland and coastal wetlands and more than 3 million acres of reservoirs and lakes. Texas has only one natural lake, the Caddo Lake in East Texas. The other 6,700 lakes are man-made reservoirs.

With all this water, there must be a watershed. A watershed is an area of land that water flows across or under on its way to a stream, lake, river or ocean. As water flows to its final destination, the watershed captures, stores and releases water safely; filtering sediments, pollutants and harmful materials and providing a healthy habitat for plants and animals. How many of us in Southeast Texas have watched a beautiful Great Blue Heron standing near the water's edge for their morning feast?

Unfortunately, there are toxins in our watershed that are affecting the water quality. The effects of pollutants such as bacteria from livestock and pet waste are introducing disease-bearing organisms. Phosphates and nitrates found in

fertilizers, livestock and pet waste and septic systems promote algae blooms and aquatic growth. Sediment and hazardous materials from construction sites, driveways, ditches and road maintenance reduce plant growth, increase flooding and contaminate our drinking water.

Water quality is a growing concern, and it is up to each of us to regulate ourselves to keep contaminants out of the watershed. Each homeowner and farmer can manage the application of fertilizer to minimize run off. We must restrict our use of herbicides and pesticides as these chemicals are now found in our water supply.

According to NOAA, forty percent of the rivers in the U.S. are too polluted for fishing, swimming or aquatic life. The Mississippi River, which drains nearly 40 percent of the continental U.S. including its central farm lands, carries about 65 million tons of nitrogen pollution into the Gulf of Mexico each year. The resulting dead zone in the Gulf each year is about the size of the state of Massachusetts.

We are all stewards of the land and water. We are using it for a short period of time, so it is up to each of us to be mindful of what we are allowing to enter our watershed.

Without clean water we cannot survive, so it is important that we all act more responsible to protect and preserve this vital resource.



# Top 10 Facebook Tips

By: Melissa Starr

During this COVID-19 crisis, many people have taken up gardening and have been asking questions on Facebook gardening pages. That caused us, Brenda Beadle and me, to come up with daily gardening tips to post on the JCMG Facebook page. Below are our top tips based on how many people were reached and the comments posted. If you want to see all the tips, visit our FB page at <https://www.facebook.com/jeffersoncountymastergardeners>.

1. Leaf-footed Bug Nymphs: Details can be seen in my Tomato Troubles article on Page 8.
2. Hibiscus: The tropical Hibiscus plant provides magnificent color to the garden or patio. They can be grown in pots so they can be moved indoors to protect them from winter temperatures. They require very little care, blooming through spring and summer. Most varieties require full or near-full sunlight. Hibiscus need to be watered often during the growing season and should be covered with a layer of mulch to retain moisture. Fertilize with a balanced fertilizer such as 7-7-7 or an organic fertilizer every two weeks starting in late April through October. Hibiscus plants can be pruned anytime during the spring, summer or fall to a desired shape.



Photos by: Brenda Beadle

3. Tomato Code: The Tomato Code:
  - V-Verticillium Wilt, a fungal disease
  - F-Fusarium Wilt, a fungal disease
  - FF-Fusarium Wilt—Races 1&2
  - N-Nematodes, pests in the soil (root-knot nematodes)
  - T or TMV-Tobacco Mosaic Virus....

4. Tomato Blight: Details can be seen in my Tomato Troubles article on Page 8.
5. Butterfly Caterpillar Identification: Black Swallowtail caterpillars eat parsley and dill, Gulf Fritillary caterpillars eat passion vine and Giant Swallowtail caterpillars eat citrus leaves.

6. Red Cascading Rose: Growing roses can be intimidating to some gardeners. They can require more care than other plants in the landscape, and some will not flourish even with the best of care. But there are some beautiful roses that are hardy and require little maintenance. One that comes to mind is the Red Cascade Rose. It is a rambler rose but can be trained to grow upright or along a fence. The dark red miniature cluster rose blooms all spring and summer. It prefers a sandy loam soil but will grow in most soil conditions. Fertilize monthly with an organic rose fertilizer and water more often during the blooming season.



# Tomato Troubles

By: Melissa Starr, JCMG



Tomato Pinworm



Tomato Blight



Leaf-footed Bug Nymph

Tomatoes are a favorite vegetable for home gardeners, but there are several pests and diseases that can affect these prized crops.

Every year gardeners post on gardening sites about little orange bugs on garden vegetables, especially tomatoes. These orange bugs can fall into one of two categories: the nymph (immature) version of the leaf-footed stink bug or the assassin bug. The leaf-footed stink bug nymph will grow into the full-size insect that we all loathe, but the assassin bug is good for your garden and will kill other insect pests.

How do you tell the difference? The easiest way is to observe how they socialize. The leaf-footed bug nymph will appear in a group, but the assassin bug is a loner and will normally stand alone.

How do I get rid of the leaf-footed bugs? You can use a commercial insecticide, but if you want to use organic methods, try an insecticidal soap. Spray both sides of the leaves of your plants to make sure to kill all of them. If you are trying to get rid of adult stink bugs, which usually show up in May, some people resort to hand-picking or vacuuming these pests off their plants.

Early blight is a fungal disease that can occur early to mid-season. When you see brown/black spots on the lower leaves of your plant, you probably have early blight.

The best treatment for this is prevention. This fungus lives in the soil, so mulch under the plants or put landscape fabric down to prevent soil from splashing on the leaves. Watering the soil, not the plants, also prevents splashing of the soil on the leaves. Make sure you don't plant tomatoes in the same spot two years in a row, cut off any lower leaves that touch the ground and stake tomatoes to help keep them off the ground and improve air circulation.

If you do see these spots develop on tomato leaves, cut those leaves off the plant and treat the plant with a fungicide. Once the fungus is present, it becomes more resistant to fungicides. However, you can use a copper spray (organic) or Serenade (biofungicide) to treat the plant.

Tomato pinworms are small caterpillars produced by tiny nocturnal moths. They eat holes into tender leaves and may damage fruit as well. According to our horticulture extension agent, David Oates, *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Dipel, Thuricide), a biological agent that kills caterpillars, can be used as a dust or spray to kill the pinworms. Spinosad, an alternative biological agent, can also be used for effective control. Other optional insecticides include methomyl, endosulfan, esfenvalerate, abamectin, cyfluthrin, emamectin benzoate, indoxacarb, zeta-cypermethrin or lambda-cyhalothrin.



# Hanging Baskets...Instant Garden Accents

By: David Oates

Hanging baskets are an easy and economical way to add some color and interest to an otherwise bland location. These locations may include a porch, balcony, patio, or any other location that might need a spot of color or a focal point. Baskets provide gardeners who are limited on space an opportunity to showcase their talents and provide a pleasing atmosphere for all to enjoy.

Spring is the ideal time to establish hanging baskets since there is an abundance of plant material to choose from. You can choose from annual types of plants to long-lived perennial types of plants that will give you multiple years of color and enjoyment. If you are overwintering plants from year to year, you can mix varieties of plants together to provide a season long span of color.

**Baskets:** There are many types of planters that can be used as a hanging basket. These can include preformed plastic baskets, galvanized wire containers that need to be lined with a sphagnum material to contain the soil, or a similar container that can be suspended. Your choices are unlimited when choosing a container. Plastic baskets have gained popularity over time as they come in multiple colors and designs, are lightweight, are reusable over multiple seasons, and are relatively inexpensive when compared to other containers.

**Preparing the basket:** If using a wire basket, then it must be lined with some type of material to hold the soil in the container. A coarse sphagnum moss or a preformed coco hair liner or similar are readily available for wire baskets. One disadvantage of these baskets is that they do dry out more quickly than other containers used. Plastic baskets are usually ready to use and require little preparation. After the basket is lined, it is important to fill the center with a good pot-

ting media that has a good texture and drains well.

**Planting:** Plants should be placed in the basket at the same depth in the soil as they were previously grown. You should allow 2 inches of space between the soil line and the top of the basket for watering purposes. After planting, be sure to water completely and let drain before hanging back into position. Because baskets dry out quickly from exposure to hot, windy, and dry locations, they must be watered on a regular basis to prevent drying out. Keep soil moist for good plant growth.

**Feeding:** Fertilizing hanging baskets is a must. After establishment of plants, fertilizing must be done on a regular basis with a liquid or foliar type fertilizer due to the loss of nutrients from the soil that is being washed away from regular waterings.

**Plants for baskets:** The real enjoyment of hanging baskets is the availability of multiple plants and the varieties that are available and well-suited for growing in containers. Cascading or trailing growth habits of plants are preferred, as they grow and spill over the sides of the containers creating a full looking basket that may partially cover the basket itself.

Varieties of plants that do well in hanging baskets may include geraniums, begonias, petunias, impatiens, lantana, wandering Jew, ferns, spider or airplane plants, vincas, ivy, and many other types of plants.

Regardless of the choice of plants, with proper care, planting, and placement hanging baskets will provide a season long spot of color to your location.

*"Baskets provide gardeners who are limited on space an opportunity to showcase their talents and provide a pleasing atmosphere for all to enjoy."*



## **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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### **Newsletter Staff:**

Editor: Melissa Starr

## **Announcements**

As of today, no events have been scheduled. We will keep everyone informed by email of upcoming changes and meeting notices.

Please stay safe and well.