



The Latest Dirt

VOLUME 14 ISSUE 1

FEBRUARY 2022

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Upcoming Meetings:

Feb 10—Dr. Mo Way, entomologist
March 10—TBA
April 14—TBA

Message From The President

Welcome to 2022!

We are off to a great start in the Test Garden, or rather, in the greenhouses. Michael Allen has led a crew of three to five members to remove all the cypress knees from the floor of the big greenhouse, and installing the new flooring is nearly finished.

I am particularly glad that project is wrapping up because another project is ready to go. This morning, David led a crew of six (at least) in labeling 1,770 four inch pots for tomatoes, mixing soil and filling them. Tomato plugs are due in the middle of next week, so Wednesday and Friday will be potting party days – plugging the pots with tomato plants. Michael measured the tables in the greenhouse, and there will be space for all of them.

What about the small greenhouse? Well, it is wall to wall plants. Some were left over from the Fall Plant Sale, but others were donated by Walmart. Succulents, ferns, ponytail palms, braided hibiscus, and a couple of fiddle-leaf figs, to name a few, populate the shelves and floor.

So, this is the beginning of the Spring Plant Sale. All these plants must go. Citrus and fruit trees have been ordered from Brazos Citrus. A shopping trip to Doremus was made last week. He always has lots of native plants plus unusual varieties of ornamentals. Crop lists from JJL are being watched carefully for plant availability.

The Spring Plant Sale will be held Satur-

day, March 26, in the Demonstration/Test Garden since we no longer have access to an airplane hangar. The space available will be considerably smaller, but we will still be able to socially distance. That said, your help is needed in any way you can. Propagating plants at home, plugging pots, tending to plants, and watering are just a few of the ways you can support the plant sale. On sale day, Master Gardeners greeting shoppers, helping shoppers find particular plants and explaining how to grow them, and many other activities are your opportunity to support JCMG.

All this work supports the existence of our group. What do we do beyond that? Last month 10 JCMGs gathered at the windmill in Nederland to plant tulips. They will be up and blooming in time for the Nederland Heritage Festival. The Beaumont Farmer's Market (on College Drive in Beaumont between Langham and Dowlen under the basketball pavilion) has invited us back to hand out information to their patrons. This will be a monthly affair on the third Saturday of each month, 8 – 11 a.m. We have a table, banner, and handouts at the Extension Service Office for this activity, but we need volunteers. A team of two people would be enough to man the table and let the others shop around.

Stay tuned for more volunteer opportunities throughout the year. I look forward to seeing the fruits of your volunteerism and support for JCMGs. I hope you do, too.

Marianne Kirkpatrick, JCMG President

Agent's Two Cents

By David Oates

Jefferson County Horticulture Extension Agent

*"This will
make for an
interesting
growing
year. "*

Spring is on its way! After a bumpy and confusing start with highs temperatures near 80 degrees one day and freezing temperatures in the same week, temperatures will be rebounding quickly making those freezing temperatures seem a distant memory. If you were confused on the weather, don't feel too bad. Some of plants were confused as well. We have had several plants in full bloom in December and January and now are putting on their yearly growth too early. This will make for an interesting growing year. On the bright side of things, the first day of spring is about six weeks away on March 20, 2022. Most of the gardeners have already been planning for the spring season well in advance of any date on the calendar, along with local nurseries and big box stores as they prepare for a potentially busy spring season.

The Jefferson County AgriLife Staff, in cooperation with the Jefferson County Master Gardeners, have traditionally scheduled the annual Master Gardener Shortcourse educational program for prospective new master gardeners in the early January and February months of every year. Last year, due to Covid -19 issues, the program was postponed until late August and September to accommo-

date participants and allow for as much in-person programming as possible. Moving a major program to a completely different time of the year can be challenging with all the logistics of speakers and programs to be delivered. Fast forward to the 2022 year, and we are seeing the same Covid -19 issues as before. We are planning to hold the educational short course in the later part of the year again. We were pleased with the results of having the program later in the year and will again repeat the program with an anticipated start time in the early fall season of 2022. Be on the lookout for details later in the year.

We will also resume some of our traditional in-person Master Gardener activities such as the Farmers Market educational booth, monthly meetings, and Master Gardener annual plant sales as allowed. We will be very diligent in offering multiple opportunities with in-person and digital formats, when possible, to accommodate every volunteer. Be on the lookout for volunteer opportunities when they arise and take the opportunity to get involved with any gardening activity of your choosing in southeast Texas.



ROSE PRUNING DEMONSTRATION



**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19TH
10:00 A.M. TO NOON**

**AT THE JEFFERSON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS'
TEST GARDEN – JEFFERSON COUNTY AIRPORT –
4995 JERRY WARE DRIVE**

FREE TO THE PUBLIC

**LEARN DIFFERENT CLASSIFICATIONS OF ROSES &
WHEN AND HOW TO PRUNE EACH
(MADE SIMPLE)**

PRESENTED BY JEFFERSON COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs and activities, education, and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunity throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.

Master Gardener of the Year!

Eleanor Lazenby

By: Melissa Starr

“She always has a smile and a kind word for everyone.”

Eleanor is a native Texan who has been gardening most of her life. She grew up in east Texas and helped her parents grow expansive gardens that fed the whole family. As an adult, she continued gardening. As her daughter, I remember her and my dad planting tomatoes, okra, southern peas, potatoes, watermelon, and more. The produce was abundant and shared with other family and friends. Her green thumb didn't stop there. She planted satsuma and lemon trees that provided bushel and bushels of fruit every year for 20 years.

As a Jefferson County Master Gardener, Eleanor can work with anyone and in any situation. No matter what the project, she is willing to pitch in and lend a hand. In November 2021, she volunteered to be a member-at-large for 2022 and is the perfect representative for this office. When the JCMG President, County Extension Agent, or any other JCMG member asks for help with a task, Eleanor is there to assist in any way possible. She worked unceasingly at the demonstration garden to clean beds, propagate plants, plant flowers, dead-head roses, and work with interns. She also volunteered to help with the Fruit and Nut tree sale and the fall plant sale, working with

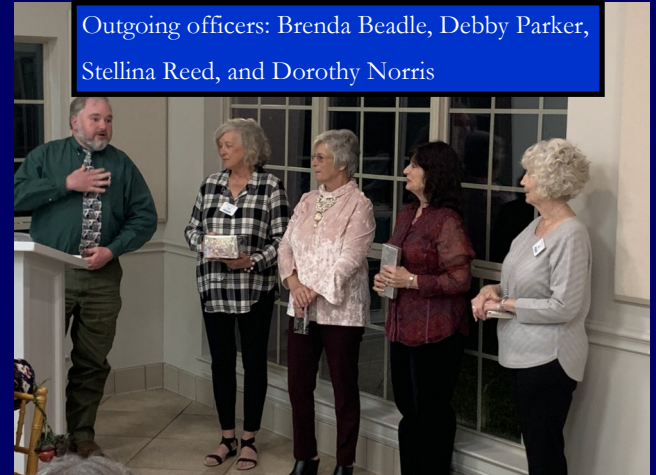


Eleanor Lazenby and Melissa Starr

other Master Gardeners to educate the public and provide quality plants. She is always willing to try new things and ideas and help in any way possible without complaint.

Not only is Eleanor a constant worker, but also a leader. She stepped up to teach a jelly workshop with only a 10-minute warning when the previous presenter became ill. Her leadership is also shown in her dependability to be at events that the JCMGs sponsor. She always has a smile and a kind word for everyone. She is a dependable leader and volunteer inside and out.

Christmas Party



New officers: President – Marianne Kirkpatrick Vice President – Michael Allen
Secretary – Belinda Bullard At Large Members – Eleanor Lazenby, John Hughes
and Kevin Pierce (not pictured), and Treasurer – Suzanne Wakeman



Eleanor Lazenby—Master Gardener of the Year



Companion Planting

By: Melissa Starr

“...planting tomatoes with carrots, onions, or basil should produce higher yields and added growth.”

Spring is around the corner; birds are singing, and buds are ready to burst out of their dormant tree limbs and into the warm, sunlit spring air. Gardeners of all ages are dreaming of warm, flower-scented days and planning spring vegetable gardens.

One key to overcoming soil-born pests and diseases is crop rotation. Remember where you planted each vegetable last year. If you have forgotten, get out some paper and write it down this year. Never plant the same vegetable (or family of vegetables) in the same place two years in a row. For example, potatoes, tomatoes and peppers are all in the nightshade family. Make sure you don't plant any of these three vegetables in the same spot two years in a row.

Another important step is to plant vegetable varieties that grow well in our area. For a list, visit the vegetable variety link on the Jefferson County Master Gardener web page (<http://txmg.org/jcmg>) or call the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office at 409-835-8461.

An additional way to increase plant growth and reduce pests is to practice companion planting. The theory of companion planting suggests that plants excrete certain natural chemicals that promote vigorous growth in some plants while inhibiting growth in others. Planting Swiss chard among potatoes will stunt the growth of both plants while planting tomatoes with carrots,

onions, or basil should produce higher yields and added growth.

Since pesky insects find their favorite plants by smell. Make it more difficult for them to find their dinner by mixing your garden crops with their appropriate companions. For example, dill and marigolds are said to repel some tomato hornworms, while basil and marigolds are said to repel some whiteflies. Also, allowing pumpkin or squash vines to grow under your corn will help deter raccoons and act as a natural mulch to keep the soil cool.

Mixing flowers, herbs, and vegetables in the garden also will attract bees and other beneficial insects. Bees are necessary to pollinate many vegetable blossoms, and beneficial insects such as ladybugs, lacewing and assassin bugs eat or kill insects that are harmful to vegetables. Plant bee balm, dill, sunflowers, basil, daisies, or chives to attract these insects.

None of these methods are 100% effective, but with a little research and planning, these methods can decrease the amount of insecticides used in the garden.

Start planning now, because soon the weather will heat up and your dreams of planting vegetables will either come true or melt away under scorching summer sun.



TEXAS A&M
AGRILIFE
EXTENSION

Beaumont Farmers Market

JCMG Educational Booth

6525 College Street

(under the pavilion)

Starting February 19th

Every 3rd Saturday

8 a.m. - 11 a.m.

TO PARTICIPATE CALL OR EMAIL THE OFFICE

(409) 835-8461 | Jennifer.coleman@ag.tamu.edu



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From the archives: Potatoes

By: Melissa Starr

“Potatoes enjoy warm days and cool nights, so they should be planted in mid-February ...”

During dreary winter days, many gardeners are dreaming of March and their spring gardens. Potatoes, however, can be planted now.

Potatoes enjoy warm days and cool nights, so they should be planted in mid-February to give them as long a period of cool weather as possible.

When preparing your soil, till deeply and test the pH of your soil. Potatoes grow best in a slight acidic pH of 6.0 to 6.5. Use lime to raise pH and sulfur to lower it. Next add organic matter and a fertilizer such as cottonseed meal or a 15-5-10. Buy only certified seed potatoes from a nursery or feed store. Do not use potatoes bought from the grocery store because they are treated with growth inhibitors. (However, I have known a few people who were successful using store bought potatoes.) Use potato pieces that are about 2 inches wide. If your seed potatoes are larger, cut them into pieces and either let them dry overnight or dust them with some agricultural lime to prevent rotting.

Good varieties for our area include Red Lasoda, Pontiac (red), and Kennebec (White). Plant your potatoes at least 3 to 4 inches deep and mulch with compost or hay. When the plants are 6 inches tall, add additional mulch or pull soil up around the plants. New potatoes grow on the stems that are covered, so the more stem that is underground, the higher your yield. If there is a freeze while your potatoes are growing, you will need to cover them, or the exposed

stems will be damaged.

Lightly fertilize your potatoes again about 4 to 6 weeks after planting or when they have grown about 6 inches. By the end of May, you should be able to dig up potatoes one at a time. When the plants begin to die at the end of May or in June, don't fret because this is normal. It is just a sign that it is time to harvest. After harvesting your potatoes, allow them to dry before storing. Do not wash the potatoes, and store them in a cool, dry, dark place in a container that allows ventilation. Use any potatoes that have cuts or bruises immediately; they will not store well.

Potatoes are a great crop for gardeners to grow. They are easy to grow and fun for kids of all ages. When I was growing up, I checked my parents' and grandparents' gardens every week to see how big the potatoes were growing. The anticipation was too much for me, so I would take one finger and dig in the dirt until I uncovered a tiny potato. When I was satisfied that they were growing, I would cover it back up and try again the next week. When harvest time came, I was always overwhelmed at how many potatoes we dug up from under each plant. Then my mom would cook those tasty red potatoes and we would feast on them for weeks.

The Latest Dirt

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We're On The Web:

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

<http://jefferson.agrilife.org>



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Facebook

MISSION STATEMENT

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

2022 Officers

President—Marianne Kirkpatrick

Vice President—Michael Allen

Secretary—Belinda Bullard

Treasurer—Suzanne Wakeman

At Large— Kevin Pierce, Eleanor Lazenby,
John Hughes

Newsletter Staff:

Editor: Melissa Starr

Announcements



Don't forget to input your volunteer
MG hours on the new site:

https://vms.texasmg.org/sec_Login/

**JCMG SPRING PLANT AND
VEGETABLE SALE
MARCH 26, 2022**

8 am—noon

Southeast TX Regional Airport

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information or veteran status. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.