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Debby's Digressions—

Well...a lot has changed since last month. Life as we know it has been totally disrupted. As I sit here and ponder what to write my mind is blank. Cancellation after cancellation has left us with no activities for me to report about for April. So, that gives me freedom to truly digress....

We are all experiencing the Coronavirus disruption in different ways and with different emotions. We all hear the same mantra of instructions: Social distance. Wash your hands. Flatten the curve. How do we handle all this "stuff"

that's taking place around us??? This is all a huge routine-interrupt with uncertainty for the future, so it's a great time to refocus our attention on the "Here and Now"...it's an opportunity for each of us to work for the *good of all* by being adaptable to the moment and to be considerate of our actions on others. Hopefully that's not too far from how we are on a daily basis anyway!

Meanwhile, let's remember how lucky we are to have our love of gardening in our lives in *this* moment... walk around your garden...breathe in the smell... touch the flowers...pull the weeds...rejoice in new life coming up out of the ground...bring some of the blossoms in the house and spread them around. This can melt away stress and frustration and help us be at our best to handle what we need to handle!

Since we're stuck at home, it's a great time to read those gardening books you've been collecting! (heck, it's way more fun than cleaning your closet) If you're like me, you've collected quite a few and they're stacked in a pile by your reading chair waiting for you to have time to pick them up. Or, maybe your Kindle is stuffed with books you've added but haven't had the time to read yet (mine is). Our favorite author, Greg Grant, has quite a few books that you can pass the time with. If you're a techie, now is the time to browse all the gardening sites online. I have quite a few of them bookmarked that I never seen to have enough time to read. So, take advantage of social distancing and make the time now and read!

In conclusion, remember being outside in your garden is a safe activity. We can't meet in groups but we can share pictures of our gardens on Facebook and Instagram to remind each other that the flowers are going to continue to bloom and we will all get through these trying times together.

Debby Watkins, President

The next

SCMG Association meeting is not scheduled at this time.

MG Grapevine Staff

Martin Davis, Editor

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The SCMG Board of Directors has cancelled the April monthly membership meeting due to health and safety concerns for our members in light of the current situation with the coronavirus. Even if the city of Tyler would lift the closure of its facilities our concern is for our members. Thus, the Graduation and Awards Luncheon has been postponed and will be held at the May meeting which is being rescheduled to sometime in May..



Greenhouse Basics

Now that folks are actively socially distancing, many Master Gardeners are deciding mentally and physically what to do with their spare time. During different periods of my life I've chosen to spend my extra time in my woods, my garden, or my greenhouse. Unfortunately I'm without a greenhouse these days. I sure do miss a greenhouse, especially propagating new plants from seed and cuttings.

As you may know, the Smith County Master Gardeners have been exploring the possibility of sharing a greenhouse with the City of Tyler at the maintenance facilities across from the IDEA Garden.

Actively maintaining a functional greenhouse is a 7 day a week, 24 hour a day responsibility and commitment. I loved my greenhouse at the SFA Gardens Pineywoods Native Plant Center where I propagated and grew plants for our annual plant sales along with my own plant development projects for about a decade. Earlier in my career I used a section of the glasshouse at the SFA Mast Arboretum for new plant development and even earlier in my life I had my own 8 x 12 greenhouse at our home that I used, primarily for overwintering plants and starting vegetable transplants.

Since a number of you are interested in greenhouses, I thought I'd cover some of the basic information and protocol I used at SFA. We'll start with temperature. To actually grow plants during the wintertime, greenhouses must be heated. We used a commercial greenhouse heater that ran off of natural gas and of course had a thermostat. Typically we aimed for around 75 degrees during the winter. Six circulation fans helped distribute the warm air around the greenhouse. With the proper sized heater, warming a greenhouse covered with a double layer of poly (with air blown in between for extra insulation) wasn't so hard, assuming the greenhouse is pretty air tight. But keeping one cool enough during the summer to be able to work in is very problematic in Texas. It's so problematic that most greenhouses are emptied during the summer or have the poly removed entirely each year as it's easy to reach 130 degrees Fahrenheit on hot sunny days.

We used ventilation vans, evaporative cooling, and shade cloth to keep temperatures down to the 90's starting in May but still tried to get most of the plants out each summer. Around October we'd take the shade cloth off and start preparing plants for the spring sale. Watering is critical at all times of the year in a greenhouse but especially when it's warm with many plants needing water every day. Unfortunately with many different types in many different pot sizes growing in different media, this means hand watering which took about an hour each day for a 30 by 80 greenhouse. Sprinkler systems don't work well in greenhouses unless a single crop the same age is being grown. If watering is missed a single day during the summer, herbaceous annuals and newly transplanted plants can die.

We also used an automatic intermittent mist system with bottom heat run by a solenoid valve for propagating cuttings, germinating seeds, and watering in newly transplanted seedlings. I'd change the timing depending on whether it was hot or cool, sunny or cloudy, but typically it would run with shorts bursts of mist every five minutes or so for about ten seconds at a time. The goal is to keep the air around the cuttings humid but to not saturate the media. The bottom heat (from a hot water heater) made rooting cuttings faster and easier, especially for tropical plants during the cool times of the year.

One of the most critical aspects of running a greenhouse is making sure that the electricity, water, and gas are still on and all equipment is running. If anything goes out or off, plants, seedlings, or cuttings are dead. Scouting for diseases, mites, and insects was also a daily routine since they are a breeding ground for all. I took care of these things five days a week and on holidays, with the help of a few student workers and volunteers, while volunteers handled the watering on Saturdays and Sundays. Next time we'll talk about soils, containers, fertilizers, and other supplies needed. -Greg



The Help Desk is Teleworking!

We may not be working in the IDEA, Shade, or Heritage Rose Gardens...we may not be lunching together on April 2...we may not be in class or roaming the halls of the Cotton Belt Building ... but, the Help Desk is alive and well and on the job! We are now teleworking from home using the internet for research (Aggie Horticulture!) and email for communications. Thanks to the AgriLife office staff, incoming telephone calls and gardening questions will be sent to the Help Desk via email to be handled. Susan, Andie and MJ are ready to answer the call (s).



So far it's been very quiet...people have had their minds on other things. But when the sun starts to shine and the buds begin to pop open, the best therapy in the world is digging in the dirt. And the questions will come. When this is over and we are once again "manning the desk", be sure to sign up for your shift. Just send an email to SmithMGHelpDesk@gmail.com and let us know when you can come. - *Susan Stone*

Treasurer's request

For those needing to submit Expense Reimbursement Requests, as a temporary measure, Henry Burch requests that the forms and receipts be mailed to his home or scanned and emailed to him. If you do not have a Project Leader's signature on the Request, Henry will electronically confirm authorization with the Project Leader; no need to hold off sending because you do not have an approval. Contact information: Henry Burch 2202 Pinehurst St. Tyler, TX 75703 henryb1955@att.net - *Henry Burch*

Board of Directors

The SCMGA Board of Directors is monitoring the COVID-19 situation, abiding by the directives from the agencies that impact us (Texas AgriLife Extension, City of Tyler, Smith County and the State of Texas) and making all decisions based on the health and safety of our members.

Decisions are being made via email on things like moving the luncheon to May and some decisions affecting the Garden Celebration and Conference. A lot of items that don't need immediate attention have been tabled till the April BOD meeting. Though, with the city keeping facilities closed through April 17 and AgriLife canceling meetings through April 17, the April meeting may be in jeopardy and we'll have to do more online. - *Debby Watkins*

Shade Garden News

Mother Nature has not been so kind to us of late! The hard freeze in late October of last year ruined our autumn color and killed off most of the beautiful camellia blooms that all could have enjoyed through the winter season. So much rain since the new year has prevented us from working in the garden on many of our scheduled days. And now the virus pandemic has us locked out entirely. What a shame that we can't be in the Shade Garden to enjoy the blooms on our 44 new Frostkiss Hellebores.

Watch the weekly email blasts for workday updates. Once the garden is opened again, and we can congregate more than 10 of us at a time, we will resume our normal schedule of 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. on Wednesdays and 8:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. on 1st and 3rd Saturdays. It will be super great to enjoy the spring beauty in our Shade Garden, and welcome our new Master Gardener Interns to join us there. Stay healthy till then! - *Steve Farrell*

Membership Directory

The Membership Directory for 2020-2021 is available at the SCMGA website on the Members page. Please review it. Look for your name and check the information there for accuracy. If you find any information that is not correct, please notify Martin Davis at mred2853@sbcglobal.net. Reported changes will be published in the MG Grapevine. Copies will be available at the May meeting and at the office after that. - *Martin Davis*

Due to changing guidelines, while we deal with the COVID-19 virus, there is no calendar with this newsletter. Announcements of events will be made via e-mail, Facebook and on the SCMG website.

Joanie Matthews

It is with great sadness that we pass along the news that Joanie Matthews, past President and Lifetime Member of the Smith County Master Gardener Association, passed away Thursday, March 19. The attached picture is her favorite SCMG photo. She always commented on that photo and how much she loved it. - *Jean Smith*



Conference Cancelled

There is no higher priority than the safety of our community. Due to the quickly evolving situation regarding **COVID-19** (novel coronavirus 2019), we have been following local, state and federal government advisories regarding travel and group congregation guidelines closely. We are taking prudent action as recommended by the Center of Disease Control (CDC) and have made the difficult decision to **CANCEL** the 2020 Texas Master Gardener Conference scheduled to occur May 12-14, 2020 in Waco, Texas. Leadership Training on May 11th has also been cancelled.

For more information concerning the details of refunds, etc. go to: <https://txmg.org/conference/>

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