

# MG Grapevine

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**The next  
SCMG Association meeting is  
not scheduled at this time.**

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#### Debby's Digressions...



Well...not much has changed since last month. Life as we know it is still totally disrupted. Though by now that disruption may have become your new normal! In some ways it will be hard to give up the routine that we have

now because social distancing has given us time to focus on ourselves and the things that we enjoy. I hope you have taken advantage of that and done things that bring you pleasure that you haven't had time to do before. I know I have thoroughly enjoyed the extra time to spend in my gardens and playing with my dog, cats, and horses; plus, reading the myriad of books I've been putting on my Kindle and the physical books that I've had piling up, and enjoying some relaxing moments with my husband.

In all seriousness, I hope you haven't developed new routines that will preclude you from your involvement with the rest of us master gardeners. This lull in activity is only temporary and, hopefully, soon we will get back into the swing of our goings-on. Unfortunately, we had to cancel our 2020 Garden Celebration and Conference that was scheduled for June 6. We have returned all the sponsors' donations and asked that they consider continuing to support us next spring as later this year we will revisit our plans for the celebration and conference. The Graduation and Awards Luncheon that we normally

hold in April was postponed till the monthly membership meeting on June 4. We are still hoping that it will happen then and will keep you posted. The May monthly membership meeting was cancelled due to the Social Distancing Directives and the Rose Center being closed. We have been unable to work in the gardens since March 16 when the Social Distancing Directives went into effect and things shut down. Even though the gardens are showing the effect of us not being there and displaying way too many weeds, they are still incredibly beautiful and demonstrate how important it is to have the basic "bones" of your garden in place so it can survive on its own as ours have had to do. I know the Trainee/Interns are chomping at the bit to get involved and the Intern/Certified Master Gardeners want to get the official designation as being certified. That all "officially" happens at the Graduation and Awards Luncheon but we hope that we can soon get back to our "new-normal" of activities and will function as if that is all unofficially official until it is official! Behind the scenes, the Calendar/Garden Guide coordinator (Susan Stone), the East Texas State Fair coordinator (Delane Caesar-Sykes) and the Bulbs to Blooms coordinator (Brenda Strong) are all quietly working on what needs to be done as soon as we can ramp up our operations. I know everyone is concerned as to how volunteer and continuing education hours will be handled because we have missed time being able to participate in activities. **See Debby page 3**

Until Texas AgriLife Extension comes out with a definitive directive that allows us to begin holding meetings or working in the gardens we will continue to practice our social distancing. That means there will be no May membership meeting and no work in the gardens.

The Texas AgriLife Extension Office is scheduled to open on a controlled basis on May 1.



## Going Deep in Troubled Times

By Greg Grant

*I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.*

**-Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* 1854**

We all have ways of coping with grief, stress, and depression. But recently, millions of fellow earthlings learned to deal with boredom, loneliness, and idleness during our pandemic global emergency. Naturally boredom and idleness might be foreign words to a gardener; they certainly are to me. But handling all of these feelings without a pay check brought out worrisome emotions the like most had never dealt with before.

For true gardeners, boredom is not an issue or even an option. Heck at the very moment I write this I've got a lawn to mow, a garden to till, a perennial border to weed and mulch, piles of seed to be sorted and stored, cilantro to thin, pots to plant, bulbs to dig, tomatoes to plant, pine savannas to thin, herbicide to spray on invasives, etc. The list never ends. Every year I spend my one week vacations trying to catch up, but I never do and never will. This is why gardeners grow old. There's never a time to stop.

Unfortunately half of the world doesn't garden. But hopelessly pandemic prodding led them into the fold. After all, gardening improves both mental and physical health. Not only can one be happy and productive during alone time, they can produce healthy and nutritious food on a budget, if planned and implemented properly. And with loads of information available from the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Texas Gardener magazine, there's no excuse for not knowing how.

I can literally kick myself in the plants for not seeding my usual giant patch of turnip and mustard greens last fall. It's no excuse at all, but commuting hours each day and turning my garden over to my chicken flock doomed my annual greening of the garden cover crop ritual. I'll never make that mistake again as I've always been proud of potentially being popular during a food shortage. After all, bulk turnip and mustard seed is cheap and my chickens provide plenty of fertilizer. The greens cover the soil during the winter, mine nutrients, prevent erosion, and provide meal after meal for anybody that wants them, including both the leaves and the turnip roots. The more you pick them, the more they produce.

As I pushed and shoved my way through the grocery

store each week trying to find toilet paper, rice, and ground meat for the hungry Cajun, I was constantly reminded how important it is that every person possible grow a garden for their mind and body and for their self sufficiency and sustainability. I mean good grief, what gardener or farmer has to worry about not being able to go the gym or being afraid to be socially distant. I was born socially distant!

If you are new to gardening or know somebody that is, go to the feed store or big box store each February or October and buy a jumbo six-pack of Georgia collards. Plant them in the full sun in well prepared soil and fertilize them every two to three weeks. Once they start growing and the leaves get the size of your hand, start picking the larger lower leaves and eating them anyway you can. They can be sautéed, added to soups, chopped in salads, etc. And for those that think they don't like collards, they are botanically the same thing as kale, only without the dirt hugging ruffles. Collards (and kale) are the most nutritious vegetable of all and oftentimes live for several years though the leaves are most palatable during the cooler months of the year.

But granted, not everyone has time or a place to grow a vegetable garden. That's what farmers markets and produce sections are for. But everyone should have access to a quiet, contemplative "secret garden" in a landscape, park, farm, ranch, prairie, or woodland. No gardening is even necessary. I find constant hope and solace in wind, rain, clouds, birds, bees, butterflies, wildlife, trees, and flowers.

When times are really tough and I need a mental break to avoid a mental breakdown I head as deep into the forest as I can get. I usually head in with a project in mind. Sometimes it's trash pickup and sometimes it's invasive plant control. Other times it's with a pair of pruners or loppers to limb up tree branches and sometimes it's with camera or binoculars. Still yet, I love a good scavenger hunt and long to find species or specimens that I didn't know existed in my woods. This year I was particularly excited to find a number of small stands of jack in the pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*) when I previously thought I stewarded a single socially distant plant.

I know I'm mostly preaching to the choir but for the betterment of society and civilization we gardeners and nature lovers need to do a better job of sharing our passion with the public. Their physical and mental healthy may very well depend on it.

I wrote this for Texas Gardener magazine. Hopefully you all subscribe and have already read it. Although the county office is back open on a limited basis, Texas A&M is still banning face to face meetings through May 20. Hang tight, stay tough, and stay well! -Greg

### Shade Garden

If you were able to visit the Shade Garden in late March and April, you would have enjoyed a pretty good showing from our azaleas. The Japanese maples revealed their spring leaves; impressive now that there are more than 90 there. All the new hellebores donated from our friends at Overton bloomed and are very healthy. The Rose Garden crew installed the new fountain to replace the old one damaged by vandals. They will be painting the 2 metal benches and the iron scroll work on the wall behind the fountain black, which should make that area much more appealing.

There will be much to do once we are able to get back to work in the Shade Garden. Weeds have seriously invaded several of the beds. It's time to fertilize our azaleas and

check and treat them for lace bugs. Also need to treat our camellias for tea scale. Some damage was already evident in late February. The 2 beds on the east side of the garden will be enlarged. We will need several volunteers with strong backs and wheelbarrows to move 15 yards of premium soil from the entrance on Houston Street to the beds. Hopefully, we will still have time to add some new plants before the heat sets in.

The Shade Garden Crew will be excited to welcome and get to know our new team of interns, and offer thanks to Class 26 for their tremendous contribution over the past year. Here's wishing we can get back to work soon. I miss the friendship and camaraderie of all my fellow MG's

Think positive and stay healthy! *Steve Farrell*



### The Help Desk is Teleworking!

I'm working remotely from home with help from Andie Rathbone and Mary Jo Madden when needed. Hope to get back into the office sometime in May at which point I'll send out a call for volunteers to staff on site.

Waiting on A&M to give the OK for volunteers to be in the AgriLife office. *Susan Stone*

### Updates

Planning on June Graduation and Awards Luncheon – will keep you posted

The Board of Directors is aware of members' concerns about obtaining volunteer and continuing education hours and will evaluate the situation and make adjustments once we are cleared to begin participating in activities

Still no meetings, work in the gardens, or in person Help Desk until we are given the go ahead by AgriLife Extension

*Jean Smith*

### Debby Digressions—from page 1

Once we can begin participating, and it is known exactly how much time we have not been able to participate, the Board of Directors will evaluate the situation and determine what kind of adjustment needs to be made in the number of hours needed. The Board of Directors was unable to physically meet in April but did make some decisions via emails. We are hoping to be able to physically meet in May, but if that is not possible, we will make arrangements to have a meeting via Zoom and teleconferencing as there is business that does need to be addressed. If at any time you have any questions about the business of the association, please do not hesitate to contact me.

We would like to develop an "Audio-visual Communications Team" to do videotaping of speakers, events, activities, "How To" videos, etc. and post on social media sites, AgriLife sites, U-tube, etc. If this is something you would be interested in, please contact me.

Please continue to be safe during this unconventional time. Just like our gardens awaited the warmer days filled with sunshine, we too must look forward to the day when this has passed and we can return to seeing each other once again.

*Debby Watkins, President*

### Online Training Resource



<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/training/>

**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.**



### Victory Gardens

I was reminded of World War II Victory Gardens when I heard that there is a renewed interest in vegetable gardening. I was only 10 years old in 1942, growing up in a small town of about 900 people in eastern Iowa. The government suggested that everyone should grow Victory Gardens to support the war effort.

Our family lived on the edge of town and we had a vacant plot of about one acre behind our house. My dad had a local farmer plow that lot, staked out a path down the middle for a walkway and announced that anyone could stake out a garden plot (free) to plant their family garden. People in my town were either of Czech or German descent and most grew their own beautiful vegetable gardens, thus we were surprised by the number of people who quickly staked out their gardens, using all of the space available.

I researched Victory Gardens on the web and discovered that the idea of these gardens actually started during World War I (they weren't called Victory Gardens then) but the premise was the same. Today we have a different kind of war, but the benefits of fresh vegetables never changes. *Martin Davis*



### Photos for 2021 Calendar

Despite our social distancing constraints, we continue to work on the Calendar and Garden Guide for 2021. If you remember from past issues, we include small photos of plants on each calendar page, and this year is no exception. If you have good quality photos you'd like to share of plants from your garden or elsewhere, we'd love to see them. Just send your photo in a jpeg format to Scherel Carver ([eddiecrvr@aol.com](mailto:eddiecrvr@aol.com)). Be sure to include the name of the plant (both popular name and botanical name if possible), as well as the name of the photographer. If you have any questions, contact Susan Stone ([slstone11@gmail.com](mailto:slstone11@gmail.com)) or Scherel Carver.

Online Gardening courses link: <https://agrilifelearn.tamu.edu/catalog?pagename=Plants-and-Garden>

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