



SCMGA NEWS



Somervell County Master Gardeners Association

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Volume 2, Issue 1

January 2009

January Community Horticultural Education Program

Monday, January 12, 6:30 pm, Somervell County Citizens Center



Yes, it's winter, not too much to do outside, but it's a perfect time to think about any changes or additions that you want to make in your landscaping for next spring. Ben Oefinger, a past president of the Johnson County Master Gardeners Association and Tarrant County Master Gardeners Association, and current president of the Parks Board in Cleburne, will share some tips and advice with an emphasis on using native and adapted plants in the overall landscaping at our homes.

Less water, less labor, tolerance of the Texas summer, native and adapted plants can provide all of these benefits! Come join us.

SCMGA COMMUNITY HORTICULTURAL EDUCATION SERIES TOPICS FOR 2009

All programs will be held at the Somervell County Citizens Center, at 6:30 pm, second Monday of the month. Please visit our website for any changes.

www.somervellmastergardeners.org

Date	Topic	Speaker
January 12	Landscape	Ben Oefinger
February 9	Vegetable	Jack Rowland
March 9	Rainwater Harvesting	Greg Marsh
April 13	Container Gardening	Wanda Riley
May 11	Roses	Garey Wylie
June 8	Turf Grass	Josh/Mcafee
July	no program	
August 10	Butterfly Gardening	Karen Bitner
September 14	Fire Ants	Josh Blaneck
October 12	Yard Art	Kathy Murray
November 9	Trees for Somervell County	Carrie Smith
December	no program	

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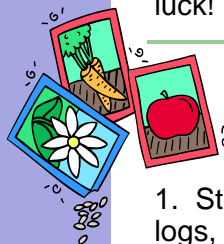
SCMGA Vying for TMGA Annual Awards

In 2001, 6 Certified Caster Gardeners formed the Somervell County Master Gardener Association and became a member of the Texas Master Gardener Association, which is composed of 115 county associations and over 5000 volunteer Master Gardeners. By 2008 the SCMGA membership had grown to 23 members, and 1 associate member. The group had several gardening projects in Somervell County, but because of our increased numbers and our dynamic and energetic president we were able to initiate many new projects. These included a renovation of the Ext. Office flower beds, planning and development of an EK Rose Trial

Garden, participation in the Paint Texas with Wildflowers program, partnerships with the Glen Rose Bird Club, Glen Rose Garden Club, and Squaw Valley Golf Course as well as assisting in the installation of a rainwater catchment system at Fossil Rim. To further expand our presence in Somervell County, we created a website, began publishing a monthly newsletter, and began holding monthly Community Horticultural Education programs. In 2008, the membership has contributed 2,500 volunteer hours in Somervell County toward horticultural education to the public and beautification projects.

After such a successful year, we decided to apply for awards that the TMGA sponsors annually. We have entered the following categories: Mass Media (our website), Association, Project Award (renovation of the Extension Office Beds), Newsletter, Individual Master Gardener (our president, Donna Hagar) and Educational Program Award (Community Horticultural Education Series).

All of this would not be possible if we hadn't had the full participation of our membership, CEA Josh Blaneck and the support of the entire community. Thank you all and wish us luck!



Seed Starting 101

By Ben Oefinger, Johnson County Master Gardener

1. Start now - get your seeds from feed stores, big box retailers, catalogs, internet, etc.
2. Most seeds need bottom heat to germinate quickly, so get SHALLOW dishes to begin with. Egg cartons, plastic dishes, disposable dishes from microwave dishes, etc.
3. Put 1/2" to 3/4" of loose, seed starting medium in each - vermiculite works well, too.
4. Moisten material fully and pour off excess water. Plant your seeds in shallow depressions made with a pencil, dowel rod, fingertip, and cover LIGHTLY with 1/4" of dry material. Press firmly so seeds make good contact with material.
5. Cover the container with clear glass, plastic saran wrap to trap and hold moisture.
6. Place on top of refrigerator, not water heater, dryer or heat pad.
7. When seeds sprout, remove cover and place in BRIGHT light. Ideally, place them under shop lights or fluorescent lights, as close to the light as possible - 1-2"
8. Keep soil moist and when 1-2 true leaves appear, lift the seedlings and repot in 4" pots filled with loose, friable potting soil.
9. Don't let them dry out and keep seedlings under the brightest light you can provide.



January Gardening Tips

By Donna Hagar
Somervell County Master Gardener

In deciding from the multitude of topics I could cover for January tips, I thought maybe I should cover something I need to do myself – desperately! **Garden Tool Maintenance**

Keeping our garden tools clean and in good repair will not only extend the life of those tools but will make our chores easier as well. And it doesn't take long. So let's go out to the shed or garage and get busy!

First and foremost, clean those tools! This should ideally be done after every use, though I am certainly guilty of procrastinating! In a perfect world, any tool that comes into contact with soil should be rinsed off with water after every use. This not only extends the life of the tools, but helps prevent spreading of diseases, weed seeds, insect eggs and fungi. In heavy clay soils, some scrubbing may be necessary. Once clean, dry the tool completely.

Tools that don't necessarily contact the soil, like axes and pruners, should be wiped with a cotton cloth to remove any sap from their blades. Dampen the cloth with paint thinner to remove any sticky, dried on sap. Again, dry with a clean rag. Cleaned and dried tools should be stored out of the elements to prevent rusting. However, if you've been less than diligent, like me, and the tools become rusty, use a penetrating oil and steel wool to remove rust.



Next we need to sharpen those tools. Shovels, hoes, axes and trowels are easily sharpened with a hand file. An 8 inch long mill file with a bastard cut will do the trick nicely. First secure your tool with a vise or other method to keep it from slipping away from you. Hold the mill file at the same angle of the previous sharpened blade and push the tool across the edge. Do NOT push back and forth; just push away from you in one direction until the entire edge of your tool is sharp.

For pruning shears and knives you will need some sort of honing stone. There are diamond, ceramic and high-carbon steel honing devices or whetstones on the market. Whichever you choose, directions for use should be included. Many gardeners color the blade edge with a black felt tip marker and sharpen evenly until all traces of the marker are gone. For pruners and shears, tighten all screws, nuts and bolts and put WD-40 on the joints or hinges.

How often you need to sharpen your tools depends on your soil and amount of use. Rocky or sandy soils are more abrasive and therefore may require more frequent sharpening.

Practice does make perfect for sharpening skills. However, even badly sharpened tools are easier to use than dirty, dull ones.



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January Gardening Tips continued

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Last but not least, check your tool handles. Wooden handles can be sanded to prevent splinters and rubbed with boiled linseed oil as a wood preservative. If they are loose, consider replacing the handle.

With very little time and effort, your gardening tools will last for years to come. And fortunately for me, even tools that have been neglected can be brought back to life with just a little effort!

And if you are one of those persnickety people who stay on top of your gardening tool maintenance, there are still many other things you can do this month.

- Add compost to your vegetable garden beds, tilling into top 4" to 8".
- Shop! – Seed catalogs that is! Nothing can be more inspiring to a gardener than the promise of what is to come. Willhite Seeds and Burpee are two common, reputable sources.
- January and February are the best time to plant bare root roses and fruit and nut trees
- Mulch, mulch and mulch. Landscape beds, vegetable and flower gardens and young or newly planted trees.
- Cut back perennials that have been killed by freezing weather. Be sure to mulch well to protect the roots.
- Don't forget to water at least once this month in the absence of significant rain to prevent added stress.
- January is the time to plant onion plants. Bunches of 1015y, which do best here, should be available at nurseries, garden centers or feed stores soon, if not already.
- Late January, early February, transplant cool season crops – asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, collards, lettuces and chard and cold tolerant herbs, chives, cilantro, dill, fennel, garlic, parsley, rosemary, sage and thyme. Sow seeds of beets, carrots, English peas, lettuces and radishes.



2009 Master Gardener Training Classes

The next Master Gardener Training Classes will be held in the spring of 2009, beginning March 26th. The classes are once per week, mostly Thursdays, a few Tuesdays, with the classes concluding May 28. Class times are 9 am – 12 noon, lunch break on your own and 1pm -5 pm. Class locations will rotate between Somervell, Hood and Johnson Counties. The cost is currently set at \$110, to cover cost of books, speaker fees, etc. Training space is limited, so if you are interested in attending training, please let us know (somervellmq@gmail.com) and we will get you registration information prior to general public notification.

Gardeners New Years Resolutions

By Shirley D. Smith

Somervell County Master Gardener Associate Member

It is now the New Year's and with the New Year come New Year resolutions.

Let's all consider our land and make a conscious effort to be better stewards of what we have been given. It matters not if you are a new gardener or if you have been gardening since grade school, we can all benefit from a few reminders of what constitutes good gardening. Nor does it matter whether you have a 3 foot by 3 foot garden or an acre or more. If you love getting dirt under your fingernails and the smell of freshly turned soil, then please read on.

1. I will conserve water: We have had very little rain in the past months so let's talk about water. Water is a precious commodity and becoming more so. Many of us are new to Somervell County and, more than likely, have moved from the Dallas/Fort Worth area or some other large metropolitan area. We are accustomed to lush, green lawns of St. Augustine or bermuda. Well, welcome to the county where rock is EVERYWHERE! If you are blessed with more than 3 inches of topsoil, then wonderful! However, many of us are not that fortunate. There are many grasses out there that do well in our poor soil and require very little watering. One of them is Buffalo grass. My husband and I put in Buffalo grass 3 years ago and it has done very well. We water approximately once every 2-3 weeks in the summer and it has spread and looks nice. If you have a sprinkler system, then please do not set it to come on at regular intervals. Water only when needed and NEVER, NEVER in during the hottest part of the day!

Another way to conserve water is to mulch around your plants. At the present time, mulch is free to Somervell County residents. You can't beat that! Just show up with your pickup or trailer at the Somervell County Transfer Station located on Highway 56 (less than one mile north of the 67 and 56 intersection). It is on your left or west side of the highway. They will load it for you on Monday or Tuesday from 8:00 am until 2:50 pm. Mulch keeps the roots of the plants cool and helps hold moisture in the soil. It also helps maintain an even, consistent temperature during the summer.

Want to REALLY get on the water conservation bandwagon? Then install a drip irrigation system. Again, there are many websites that will instruct you clearly on how to do this. Drip irrigation systems can be purchased at most garden centers and your big box stores. It is a small investment that will pay you great dividends!



Another way to conserve water is to install rain barrels around your house/barn. Again, there are many websites that will help you construct your very own rainwater collection system. Or, if you are lucky enough to know a Master Gardener, then ask one of us! We will be more than happy to either tell you how to do it or help you get started. It is really easy!

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Gardeners New Years Resolutions continued

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2. I will only use pesticides when absolutely necessary: There may be a time when it will be necessary to use a pesticide. If so, then use the one that is least toxic. However, here is a non-toxic tip (and I will guarantee it works!) for getting rid of powdery mildew on various plants: to 2 cups water add 1 teaspoon baking soda and ½ teaspoon liquid soap or Murphy's Oil Soap. Put in a spray bottle and drench your plants with this mixture. Voila! In a day or so the powdery mildew is gone or soon will be. A word of warning however: DO NOT spray during the middle of the day when the sun is its hottest and shining directly on the plants you want to spray. You will burn the leaves. Wait until just before sunset or when the plants are in shade.

3. I will only buy plants that are native to or adapted for this part of Texas: Let's be realistic, folks. You are NOT going to grow a delicate dogwood or azalea in our soil without lots of amendment to that soil. Even if you do the extra work of amending the soil, then our sun will do in these delicate beauties. There are many, many native plants that are beautiful and bloom profusely all summer. You will just need to contact your local extension office or, better yet, join the Somervell County Master Gardeners and see what all the fun is about. Know a Master Gardener, then ask them which plants will do well here. We LOVE to talk gardening. Just be prepared to be enthralled for a rather long period of time!



4. I will educate myself about non-native, invasive plants: One only need to look at some of our coastal states to see what problems can come with the introduction of a non-native, invasive plant (i.e. kudzu!). The very name strikes fear in the hearts of land managers in those areas. Before you bring something home from a nursery or from a trip to see relatives in another part of the country, make certain the plant you are going to lovingly place in your landscape is not going to be a horrible pest in a few years! There are many websites that you can go to for information about invasives.

5. I will never "top" a tree nor mangle my crape myrtles: A tree should NEVER be topped or dramatically have its crown cut back to the trunk. You may have seen this done in the Metroplex, but it is not a good thing. Trimming a few limbs from time to time is recommended. You don't want a tree rubbing on your roof or some other part of your house or power lines. You also want to be able to walk under a tree without getting hit in the face. You may trim your crape myrtles gently by removing dead branches and suckers that want to sprout from the base of the plant. Other than that, leave them alone to bloom in all their glory. What a lovely sight to see crape myrtles blooming in the dead of summer when almost everything else has given up (including many avid gardeners!).



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Gardeners New Years Resolutions continued

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6. I will remember to take care of the birds, butterflies and other critters with whom I share my space: Again, if you want to experience the full enjoyment of your gardens, then you cannot forget the pollinators such as butterflies, bees and the birds. A garden would be a lonely place without these beauties flitting around. A simple homemade bird feeder filled with black oil sunflower seed or safflower seeds will attract a variety of birds. Careful, though, or you will attract unwanted house sparrows, starlings, and/or grackles.

Also, don't forget a water feature. Something as simple as a large plastic plant saucer filled with water and located near your bird feeder will be most gratefully used by any number of birds. During the winter (now) suet feeders will help the birds to maintain fat and help them to get through the winter more easily.

Well now, here are your resolutions for the coming year. Let's try to keep these few and the one's you will come up with personally.



Somervell County
Master Gardeners
Association

Visit Our Website

<http://www.somervellmastergardeners.org>

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The Somervell County Master Gardeners are volunteers who work with the AgriLIFE Extension to improve gardening skills throughout the community. Program objectives are implemented through the training of local volunteers known as Master Gardeners. We collaborate with Extension to conduct youth and community education; establish and maintain demonstration gardens; and provide a speakers bureau. We work with special audiences in the community for youth and community outreach of a horticultural nature. We recruit and educate new Master Gardener candidates for effective volunteering.

The training for Somervell County is held in combination with Hood and Johnson Counties and is currently held only every other odd year. The next training for our area will be held in the spring of 2009. If you are interested in the SCMGA, we would like to invite and encourage you to visit one of our monthly meetings, so that you might learn more about our various projects and activities. Our regular monthly business meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 10:00 a.m. in the Somervell County Extension Office. For more information, please contact Josh Blaneck, Somervell County Extension agent at 254-897-2809 or j-blaneck@tamu.edu or you may email the SCMGA at somervellmg@gmail.com.