



**SOMERVELL  
COUNTY  
MASTER  
GARDENERS  
ASSOCIATION**

**SCMGA  
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*SCMGA Newsletter*

# *THE GREEN PIECE*



Volume 4, Issue 4

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## *Those Dreaded Brown-Headed Cowbirds!* *SCMGA Community Horticulture Education Program* *Monday, May 9, 2011, 6:30 PM* *Somervell County Citizen Center, 209 SW Barnard*



Brown-headed Cowbird  
egg in bluebird nest

Are you plagued with Brown-Headed Cowbirds or do you even know what one is? This bird is considered to be parasitic in that it

invades songbird nests, destroying either the live baby or egg. Come learn how to prevent and trap them. TPWD Natural Resource Specialist, James Edwards, will be speaking at our Community Horticultural Educational program this coming Monday. A graduate of Tarleton State University, Mr. Edwards has been with Texas Parks & Wildlife for 15 years



Male (left) and female (right)  
Brown-headed Cowbirds.

and is quite knowledgeable about this particular unwanted bird. He will have an example of a trap and demonstrate how to construct one.

Join the Somervell County Master Gardeners Monday, May 9, at 6:30pm, at the Citizens Center, 209 SW Barnard, in downtown Glen Rose, for this very timely program.

## *Community Horticulture Education Series for 2011*

Our CHES programs will continue as always in 2011 on the 2nd Monday night of the month at 6:30 pm at the Citizens Center. Some of the topics planned for 2011 include:

- \* Water features
- \* Fall Vegetable Gardening
- \* Gourds
- \* Urban Chickens
- \* Hands-on Rain Water Harvesting
- \* Composting
- \* Pruning trees & shrubs and Native grasses.

Please check our website [somervellmastergardeners.org](http://somervellmastergardeners.org) for updates as we plan our programs for 2011!

If you have a request for a specific area of interest, please let us know!

## ***BLACKBERRIES (YUM!)***

*Submitted by Julie Conner, Somervell County Master Gardener*

Blackberries are among the top 10 fruits and vegetables high in antioxidants as well as vitamins, minerals and fiber and make a wonderful cobbler. Blackberries are considered a perennial plant that will grow canes in a biennial cycle. The first-year cane is called a prima cane, but does not produce any flowers or fruit. The second year, the prima cane becomes a florican and produces the fruit. Once the florican cane has produced fruit it will need to be removed so the next year's growth of prima cane is ready to produce the following season. They can produce fruit for up to 15 years but are most productive between 3 and 8 years.

Like all fruits, the blackberry needs sunlight to be productive. The soil should be well drained sand or loam with a recommended pH of 6.0 to 6.5. They can also grow in pH soils between 5.5 and 7.5 but anything over 7.5 can result in iron chlorosis problems.

The least expensive method of planting is to use a bare root plant and place in a 2 to 3 inch hole

in January or February and mulch well. Because blackberries have a shallow root system it is important to keep grasses and weeds at bay.

Now a few words about my own blackberry patch: the berries are heavily mulched and trelised with a drip water delivery system. Because my garden soil (which is sandy loam) is almost void of nitrogen, I do supplement and the pH is now 6.3. The berries of choice are the Brazos and Kiowa, which have thorns. I did not have any luck growing the thornless berry plants. The berries are just now beginning to ripen and will produce through June.

Besides a good cobbler, blackberries make wonderful jams and jellies. If you want to freeze the berries, be sure to add sugar. My goal is a U-Pick blackberry patch, which I am launching this summer so come by and enjoy the fruits of my labor.

Source: Master Gardener Manuel, Texas AgriLife handout and Texas Gardener Magazine

## ***2011 Bluebird Symposium***



### **2011 Bluebird Symposium**

The Texas Bluebird Society, in conjunction with the Somervell County Master Gardeners present the 2011 Bluebird Symposium in Glen Rose, Texas on Saturday,

August 20th 9:00am - 2:30 pm at the Somervell County Expo Center.

**Featured speaker** - Keith Kridler on ***Nestbox Basics for Success*** and ***How, What & Why of Bluebirds***.

Other presentations include:

- Nestbox installation
- Gardening to attract Bluebirds
- Sparrow control for Bluebirds
- Success with NestWatch
- Nestbox Housekeeping

### **Registration Information**

Early Bird Advance Registration: \$12 includes Fajita Buffet and 10 door prize tickets.

Deadline July 20, 2011.

Advance Registration: \$12 includes Fajita Buffet and one door prize ticket.

Deadline August 6, 2011.

At-the-door Registration: \$6, no meal or door prize tickets.

Free Nestbox to members who pledge to "NestWatch" at least two nestboxes.

For more information or to Donate Silent Auction items:

Jimmie & Benni Konvicka

[jkonvicka@gmail.com](mailto:jkonvicka@gmail.com), 254-968-6663

[More Information and Registration Form](#)





## ***NON-Companion Plantings***

*by Julie Conner, Somervell County Master Gardeners*

I have a little book called *The Curious Gardener's Almanac* by Niall Edworth, which I have been enjoying and thought you might like some tidbits from its pages.

We all know of plants that are happy bedfellows, but here is a list of 10 combinations of plants that don't like each other:

- Artichoke / Garlic
- Beets / Scarlet runner beans
- Broccoli / Strawberries & Tomatoes
- Cabbages / Strawberries
- Cabbages / Tomatoes
- Cauliflowers / Tomatoes & Spinach
- Cucumbers / Potatoes
- Garlic / Peas & Beans
- Lettuce / Fennel
- Onions / All Beans

- Peas / Potatoes
- Potatoes / Pumpkins & Squash
- Radish / Potatoes
- Tomatoes / Fennel

The author gives no explanation as to why they don't like each other. But from his list of plants that are good bedfellows, he suggests that perhaps they are mutually beneficial to each other. Therefore, the ones that do not like each other may not enjoy the same growing conditions and may attract insects, which are not beneficial to each other.

Some of the combination of plants do taste very good together. The author has a very simple Pea and Mint Soup recipe: Boil or steam shelled peas (about a lb.) in stock and a roughly chopped largish potato (the author is British) and onion. When soft, run through a blender. Return to pot and add cream and a handful of chopped mint. Good with meat or fish dishes.



## ***2011 Texas Master Gardener Conference***

*Submitted by Shirley Smith, Somervell County Master Gardener*

The windmill was tall and stately and watched everything that was going on. Someone had moved bales of hay around his feet and decorated them with an old cow's skull. He felt right at home with the hay and his feet sitting in dirt. He could see the festively decorated tables awaiting their guests, the folks running around in their green vests touching and arranging everything. These folks seemed particularly happy and were always smiling and helping out in any way they could. He watched as others came and went to classes and overhead conversations about someone taking a class to make stone mushrooms and something for butterflies to drink from. Others said they had learned something new in classes they had taken. Then several ladies came by with new books while others carried small plants purchased from a vendor and were excited about

being able to buy so many wonderful things! And then there were the kids. Most of them did not even acknowledge the windmill's presence. They were too excited about playing their fiddles for the Recognition Luncheon.

The most fun was called the Awards Banquet. The Windmill had never seen so many people - over 900 of them! And they had good food to eat and everyone was having such a good time! There were chuck wagons bearing all sorts of good food and people dressed in old-timey clothes. His ancestors saw lots of chuck wagons, but this was his first. He also got to see his first gunfight. Then the fellow came riding in on a horse. He thought his name was Jesse James, but the lantern (who was very old) said it was NOT Jesse but a fellow from TV named Paul James. What a sight! Everyone he saw seemed to be happy to be here. He could understand. He loves the rural life and was glad to share it with all these happy people.

## *Favorite Plants Of Master Gardeners*

### *Phlox*

*By Joan Orr, Somervell County Master Gardener*

**Common Name/Scientific Name:** Phlox/Phlox-Polemoniaceae

**Native/Adapted:** This is a native perennial wildflower

**Height:** Four inches to 48 inches

**Spread:** Will spread some but fairly easy to control

**Light:** Sun to light shade

**Evergreen/Deciduous:** This is a deciduous plant

**Seasonal Interest:** Blooms in August

**Colors/Features:** Pink, rose, white and blue

**Water:** Average to moist

**Maintenance:** Little to none

**Wildlife:** Phlox attracts butterflies and hummingbirds

**Deer:** The deer do not seem to like Phlox

**Comments/Experience with the plant:** Phlox is known by several common names such as Fall Phlox, Garden Phlox, and Perennial Phlox. Perennial Phlox grow on long stems with large flower heads of Rosey-Lavender to Soft Pink colors. They are often found growing in the wild. When Phlox first opens, its fragrance is abundant and very pleasing to humans. But even after the scent fades for us, it still is a great attractant for butterflies and hummingbirds. The heads of these flowers are three to five inches across with a cluster that stands about the same height, which is also a draw to most winged creatures. You may find that the flower heads on White Phlox and also Blue Phlox will not produce as large a flower cluster as some of the other colors.



All totaled, there are about ten varieties of Phlox. There is a Wild Blue Phlox that is usually found in woody areas and likes to grow in caliche rocks. P. Maculate (ma-kew-LAH-ta) commonly called Wild Sweet William is just one other variety of this favorite plant.

I have some Phlox that my Grandmother gave me about 40 years ago. Each and every time I have moved I have left some and taken some with me. Through the years I have shared this Phlox with many gardening friends and even a few folks I just met.

*“When you share flowers with strangers they become your friends.”*

Sources:

Pictorial Guide to Perennials

National Home Gardening Perennials

Native Texas Plants



Joan Orr

## *AROUND THE FEEDER*

### *The Cardinal*

*Submitted By Joan Orr and  
Nancy Hillin, Somervell County Master Gardeners*



Nancy Hillin

The “Red Birds” that decorate our trees, gardens and fill the air with song are part of the order “Passeriformes”. Their smaller relatives, the “Finches” are also a part of this order that indicate they are “perching birds”. “Red Birds” are often referred to as the “Cardinal Finch” and sometimes called “Cardinal Grosbeak”. They have been given the title “Songbird of the Finch Family”, having sung a documented repertoire of two dozens songs.

These birds are also famous for whistling. Males are territorial and mark their space with a song. Often, you can hear the female counter-sing with a male, producing an unmistakable duet.

The female’s plumage is a dull red in comparison to the bright-colored male. The juvenile resembles the female but has shades of brown. The juvenile’s bills are black at birth, and then change to a cream color and at full maturity turn to bright red. Adults have red cone-shaped bills, red crests (the females being smaller), black masks and chins.



Although the Cardinal is not a migratory bird, chances are you will not see this winged favorite at your home all year long. For the most part, the Cardinal lives its entire life within an eight square mile area. That being said, warming temperatures play a part in the range expansion. The life span of a Cardinal is 15 years. They mate for life, but it is believed that a portion do stray from a mate, with a divorce rate of about 20%.

Females are in charge of nest building. She turns twigs, leaves, vine materials and grasses into a nest by crushing them with her beak until pliable enough to use. She weaves the materials around her with her

feet into a cup shape, two to three inches tall and about three inches in diameter. Within six days of completion of a nest, the female lays three to five eggs. They will be green, blue, to gray with purple and brown marks. She alone will incubate the eggs while the male brings food to her. The eggs will hatch within 14 days. It takes both parents to feed and care for the hatchlings. Predators of eggs and chicks include snakes, Blue Jays, Cow Birds and squirrels.

Predators of adults are hawks, squirrels and owls. Often Cow Birds steal Cardinal eggs, destroy them and replace them with Cow Bird eggs. This leaves the Cardinal stuck with raising young that are not even their own.

The Cardinals diet includes insects when they are available. Their seed preferences are millet, safflower and peanut kernels. They will readily eat suet, apple slices and other fruits. If you place a bird house facing a field for easy flight to food sources, Cardinals will make use of it.

The Cardinal is the state bird of six states. Those states are Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia and North Carolina.

Sources: Birds and Blooms 2009-2010-2011





**SOMERVELL  
COUNTY MASTER  
GARDENERS  
ASSOCIATION**

Josh Blanek, CEA AG/NR  
Texas AgriLife Extension  
Service  
Somervell County  
P. O. Box 895  
Glen Rose, TX 76043  
[http://somervell-  
co.tamu.edu](http://somervell-co.tamu.edu)

Phone: 254-897-2809  
Fax: 254-897-9323  
E-mail:  
[somervellmg@gmail.com](mailto:somervellmg@gmail.com)

We're on the web!

<http://www.somervellmastergardeners.org>

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 2011. 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 Blanek, Somervell County Extension agent at 254-897-2809 or [j\\_blanek@tamu.edu](mailto:blanek@tamu.edu) or you may email the SCMGA at [somervellmg@gmail.com](mailto:somervellmg@gmail.com).



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