

Somervell County Master Gardeners

THE GREEN PIECE

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION



November 2011

Happy HallowSpring

By Shirley D. Smith, Somervell County Master Gardener

Have you happened to notice some strange happenings going on around town and our county recently? Kind of weird happenings!

I have seen many plants doing some odd things (for this time of year), therefore, I have dubbed this particular season “HallowSpring.” I have seen crocus blooming in all their springtime glory and have you noticed the Bradford pear trees lining the road in front of the Methodist camp? They are blooming! There is new growth all over many of my plants around my house and I just bet you are seeing the same around your place. With our extremely hot/dry summer, many plants went dormant as a means of survival, just as they do in winter. Then the weather kinda/sorta went back to normal, cooled off, we got a little rain and voila the plants were fooled into thinking it was spring! So, right now my red oak is in all its fall color and in town the Bradford pear trees are blooming!

It will be interesting to see what happens as fall continues into winter. Will these plants go dormant again and then only a few months later begin to do what they normally do in spring? This has been a very challenging time for gardeners. I can't believe I am saying this but I am actually getting tired of gardening! I usually look forward to a “down time” when I don't have to be out watering so much (using my rain water!), pruning, and generally taking care of my plants. I want them to go dormant so I can rest! One good thing is that my fall garden has gone crazy with this nice weather we are having. So, I will continue to be a good steward of my gardens and plants and hope they soon realize it is winter and go to sleep.

AROUND THE FEEDER: PURPLE MARTINS

By Joan Orr and Nancy Hillin, Somervell County Master Gardeners

If you are looking for great insect control, then becoming a “landlord” for the purple martin swallow is the way to go!! Their diet consists of nothing but insects, which they capture while in flight. Native Americans taught the early European settlers the worth of these beautiful birds not only for devouring insects, but for their songs and aerial antics. Gourds were offered as nesting cavities to keep the birds close to human dwellings. This is still in practice today along with birdhouses built specifically for purple martins. In fact, purple martins that migrate east of the Rocky Mountains are completely dependent on their human “landlords” for homes.



Here are some of the things you can do to entice purple martins to allow you to become their “landlord” if you choose to use a purple martin house. Place the martin house on a pole at least 10-20 feet high and in a clearing away from trees or any object, at least the distance the height of said objects. To fend off cats, raccoons, squirrels, snakes and other ground predators, place a guard at the bottom of the pole. Frequent inspections of the nest will help you keep sparrows and starlings from settling in the martin house. It is best to have a system in place to be able to move the house without endangering eggs that may be in the nest. There are telescoping poles for sale that enable you to easily bring the house down to the ground. Just try to avoid tilting the house when you are checking on the status of the occupants. Gourds may be used as nesting cavities by hanging them from racks or any design of your choosing. Try to follow the safe guards used for the martin house placement.



Martins are most likely to occupy a gourd or house if it is near a body of water. They drink while in flight by scooping up the water with their lower beak. Purple martins are not shy and prefer to be near human dwellings. So, try to place their houses 60-100 feet near your home.

Adults will be the first martins to arrive in the spring. They are faithful to return to previous housing if it is still in favorable condition. Next to arrive are the second-year martins, some of which will be interested in renting a gourd or house from you. There are many purple martin “landlords”. These folks have formed associations to help ensure the continuation of the partnership of man and these beautiful birds.

The information for this article was approved by two members of the Glen Rose Bird Club: Jim Cheatham and Jack Brady. Jim is a Somervell County Master Gardener and one of the guardians of the Glen Rose Bird Sanctuary. Jack is a research horticulturist and also a member of the Glen Rose Bird Club. Join them and others for expert information at the Glen Rose Bird Club on the third Thursday of each month. Meeting time is 6:30 PM at the Spirit Wind Church on Bernard Street on the southwest corner of the Glen Rose square.

Source: Glen Rose Bird Club

Wade's WallyWorm Word

"BD 500"



"Brrr!! This cold weather is making this old Oligochaeta shiver. I wrapped a scarf around my neck, but it just kept sliding off my shoulders." complained Wallyworm

"You should find some nice warm compost to bed down in during these cool spells." returns Wade

"I'll do that. Oh, by the way, what have you been massaging your gray matter with lately?" asks WallyWorm

"BD 500" Wade smugly replies, posturing akimbo

"What or who is BD 500?" comes back WallyWorm

"Stand by little buddy, you're going to like this. BD 500 is a soil medication, being just one fragment of biodynamic farming, which is mostly attributed to have been developed by Rudolf Steiner. There is sort of a recipe to be followed to produce BD 500, and it goes like this.



Take the fresh manure of an adult female bovine; pack it into female bovine horns which were procured from the local area. Bury the manure packed horns in good rich soil in a hole that will allow about 18" of coverage over the horns. The horns are placed points up and covered with soil; this being done in November.

Retrieve the horns after Easter, but before the lush plant growth in the spring; knock out the BD 500 into a bucket, screen it, and store it in an unglazed crock placed in a cool dark place.



Apply BD 500 to the soil in the late afternoon or evening. To prepare BD 500 for application, put $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of BD 500 along with 3 gallons of water into a 5 gallon bucket. Stir the mix to form an eddy or vortex; then reverse the stir to form a vortex in the other direction. Keep up this stirring chaos for 1 hour and immediately apply the mix by spraying or by splashing on with a large brush. This amount of mix will treat 1 acre,

but, the same amount on smaller tracts is okay." says Wade

"Well, what does this medication medicate?" asks WallyWorm

"The BD 500 preparation treats the soil with a medicine that is rich in the formative forces associated with the gravitational, or earthly, polarity." concludes Wade

"Well I'm sure glad you cleared that up. That makes me feel so much warmer." snaps WallyWorm

Info. From "A BIODYNAMIC FARM for growing wholesome food" by Hugh Lovel

Favorite Plant: Ponytail Palm

By Barbara Lancaster, Somervell County Master Gardener



Common Name/Scientific Name: Ponytail Palm/*Beaucarnea recurvata*

Native/Adapted: Native to Mexico

Height: 10-20 feet tall if grown outside, but rarely exceeds 10 ft. It is a slow- growing palm.

Spread: Can reach 12 ft in diameter if grown outside

Light: Full sun to partial shade. It prefers full sun but can also grow in partial shade.

Evergreen/Deciduous: Evergreen.

Seasonal Interest: None.

Color/Features: Mature ponytail palms produce creamy white flowers in spring or summer. They bloom for several weeks

two or three times a year. Flowers are followed by reddish small fruit, about ½ inch long.

Water Requirements: Moderate. Closely related to yuccas and thrive under the same conditions. Tolerates drought very well. Likes moist, but well-drained soil. Allow the soil to dry between watering because it is easy to overwater this palm.

Maintenance: Easy. To prevent nutritional deficiency, apply good quality palm fertilizer twice a year during growing season.

Wildlife: Unknown.

Deer Resistant: Unknown.

Comments/Experience: I have grown ponytail palms for over 35 years, and have one plant that is at least 35 years old. I grow these in containers. I have never tried growing one in the ground, but I do move several of my plants outside during the growing season. While they can tolerate cold down to 15° F when mature, my plants are inside during the winter. The ponytail palm is a great indoor plant as long as there is adequate lighting. My plants have never bloomed.

Source: www.floridapalmtrees.com

TIMELY TIPS FOR NOVEMBER

By Bonnah Boyd, Somervell County Master Gardener

PLANT CARE

This area generally has freezing temperatures some time this month. Cover sensitive plants in the landscape with cardboard boxes, burlap, blankets or containers.

To protect plants in containers, simply move them indoors or to the garage. Another way to protect these plants is to wrap the containers with bubble wrap. (See October 2011 Tips in SCMGA newsletter)

Prune freeze-damaged plants in February or March.

WINTER WEEDS

If winter weeds are sprouting in the lawn, mow to provide the most effective and environmentally safe way to keep them in check.

Mulch flowerbeds and around landscape plantings to keep the weeds in check. Hoe or pull larger weeds.

FLOWERS

Fertilize and water cool-season annuals. Water-soluble fertilizers may be more readily available to the plants than granular products at this time of the year.

Remove or compost debris from flowerbeds and gardens to help control insects and diseases.

Spring-flowering bulbs should be stored until planting. Store in paper bags or vented plastic bags in the refrigerator or a cool place.

WATER

Water lawns, landscape plantings, vegetable gardens, and fruit plantings if the ground is dry and a freeze is predicted.

Water at least once in November in the absence of significant rainfall.

TREES, SHRUBS AND VINES

Plant container grown trees, shrubs and vines.

Mow, shred, mulch or compost fallen leaves.

VEGETABLES

Remove asparagus tops by cutting them off at the ground. Mulch with compost or manure.

Sources: Doug Welch's Texas Garden Almanac
Texas Gardener 2011 Planning Guide and Calendar

**Community Horticulture Education Series
Monday, November 14, 2011, 6:30 pm
Somervell County Citizens Center**

Let's Talk About Fire and Other Emergencies

Dwayne Griffin, Somervell County's Fire Marshall and Emergency Management Coordinator will speak at the Master Gardeners Community Horticulture Education Series on Monday night, November 14. Dwayne is a licensed Master Peace Officer and has served not only with Somervell County law enforcement but was also with the Dallas Police Department (Southwest Patrol Division). He will be addressing a subject that is perhaps new to many of us: Volunteer Reception Centers. Many of the larger counties/cities have these VRCs, which gets the local community involved in any given disaster be it flood, fire, or weather. Dwayne will also talk about how the Commissioners Court determines when it is necessary to impose a burn ban, a process that is determined by State criteria.

Please come join us November 14, at 6:30 pm at the Citizens Center, 209 SW Barnard in downtown Glen Rose. See you there!