

November 2014

## The Tree

by Sheryl Kleinschmidt, Somervell County Master Gardener



One deciding factor in choosing my house in Glen Rose was the fact that “the tree” was on the property. Being a tree-hugger/appreciator, it was love at first sight when I saw the old native pecan hugging the carport behind the house. This sturdy tree has stood guard near the Paluxy River for well over a century—his girth will attest to that fact alone.

Old Man isn’t the only native pecan in my yard, but he is the biggest and has thrown his weight around (literally) more than once. He has been known to shed some rather large limbs, seemingly at will, in some rather inconvenient places such as my neighbor’s driveway!

But, even with the surliness that comes with age, Old Man has his finer points. For starters, he gives me much-needed shade from the Texas heat, puts off a lot of fresh oxygen, and looks good in the landscape. The squirrels are especially fond of him and lie on his knotty (arthritis?) ledges for naps. He also is a

quiet companion when family or friends come over to sit around the fire pit beneath his branches—or maybe he’s just napping.

After living with Old Man for seven years now, I’ve gotten to know his habits fairly well. For instance, he has only been generous with his pecan crop once in all this time—the year when even the acorns were abundant (2012). Given we’ve been in a drought for several years, I can’t fault him too much, but I would appreciate a little more effort on his part! Native pecans generally produce every other year, but they will adapt to survive. I guess Old Man must be thinking of self-preservation.

Now I must tell you of the trick Old Man played the year of the big harvest (2012). Between him and the other pecan trees, I had more nuts than the grandchildren and I felt like harvesting. There were pecan pies, cookies, roasted pecans, and nuts in the freezer! I’d give anything to have another year like that one.

One morning as I was kicking around the grass in search of yet more pecans, my eye zeroed in on a huge, round pecan—no not just one, there were two, three.....then more. Where did these come from? Old Man’s tasty pecans were small, round natives. I picked up the strange fruit and put them in my sack, the whole time looking over my shoulder for the trickster who tossed them

out. I even considered that a squirrel had carried them in from across the street and dropped them.

Continuing my harvesting routine, I took a few more steps only to find oval-shaped pecans in the mix. Okay, now I knew someone was messing with me. This continued on/off for a couple of weeks until I consulted an expert who explained what was going on.

Apparently, an early settler grafted some other pecan wood onto Old Man when he was but a youngster. Since these branches are on top of Old Man's head, they are not easily seen from the ground (he's very tall). For some reason, the grafted branches had not produced fruit for me up until the big harvest year.



Yes, Old Man stymied and stumped (pun intended) me alright, but now I'm onto his tricks. So far, I have found 2 of the large, round pecans that fell during the thunderstorm last week. I expect he'll toss me another one or two just to keep me interested, but it doesn't look like we'll have much pecan pie this year!

But, given his history and stamina, I must give Old Man his due respect. After all, my relationship with him will be found in but a few tree rings that record his life here on earth. He was here long before I was born and will likely surpass me by decades—I hope that is the case. To your health, Old Man!

# American BeautyBerry

By Donna Hagar, Somervell County Master Gardener

Common Name: American Beautyberry - Botanical name: *Callicarpa americana*



American beautyberry is a fast growing native perennial shrub; growing five to eight feet tall and almost as wide. It has long, arching branches and yellow-green fall foliage, but its most striking feature is the clusters of glossy, iridescent – purple fruit (sometimes white) which hug the branches in clusters along the branches in the fall and winter.

The fruit is an important food source for more than forty species of songbirds. The berry clusters are eaten by armadillo, foxes, opossum, raccoon and squirrels. White tailed deer consume the fruit in the fall after leaf drop. They will also browse the leaves in summer when highly preferred foods are not available.

The roots, leaves, and branches were used by various Native American tribes for medicinal purposes to treat fevers and rheumatism. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, farmers would crush the leaves and place them under the harnesses of horses and mules to repel mosquitoes. The farmers rubbed the crushed leaves on

themselves to repel mosquitoes and biting bugs.

American beautyberry is used as an ornamental shrub in mass plantings or borders or can stand alone as a specimen shrub. It is best suited to semi-shaded sites with some moisture. It is remarkably tolerant of various soils and habitats.

I can attest that this is one hardy shrub. I transplanted a sapling from a friend in the dead heat of August. It has been dug up by armadillos and my chickens several times, but hasn't given up yet! Maybe next year the chickens will be able to eat the berries!

# November Gardening Tips

by Linda Heideman, Somervell County Master Gardener

Ah! November! The weather is cool, flowers are blooming in season, the leaves on the trees are starting to turn. It is truly fall! Winter and Thanksgiving are on the way. Time to get ready, but don't forget there's plenty to do in the garden!

1st week: Finish dividing spring-blooming perennials. Plant pansies (my favorite), ornamental cabbages, kale, snapdragons and dianthus. Prepare to protect tender plants – average first freeze is November 21.



2nd week: Cut back fall-blooming perennials as they finish blooming, and finish mulching all beds. Fallen leaves can be used in mulching your beds and/or added to your compost pile.



3rd week: After a killing freeze, cut back freeze-damaged perennials such as chrysanthemums, lantana and cannas.

4th week: After a hard freeze transplant established trees and shrubs. Mulch and water them well. Hardy, ornamental grasses can be cut back and divided after a hard freeze.

# Community Horticultural Education Series

Sommervell County Master Gardeners proudly announce

**Local Master Gardener, Virginia Reynolds,**

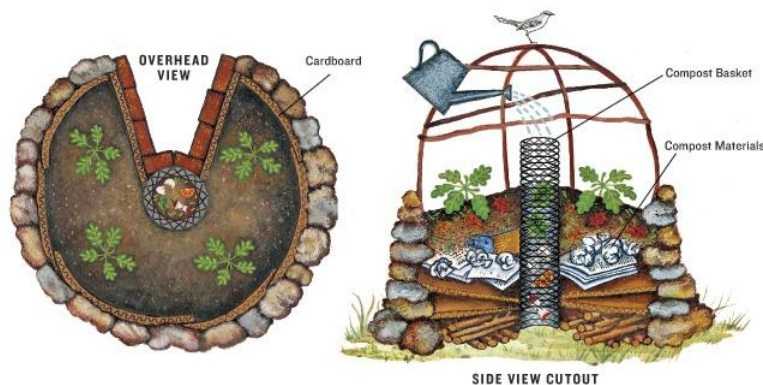
will present the November Program

on **Keyhole Gardening**

Monday, November 10th, 6:30 pm

Citizens Center, 209 SW Barnard, Glen Rose

Free and open to the public



Keyhole gardening was introduced years ago by missionaries in several African countries, where they needed to produce more food in a small space under drought conditions. This intensive gardening method was very successful, and the word has spread to the drought-stricken areas of our own country, especially here in Texas.

From personal experience with keyhole gardening, Virginia will share her knowledge of what works best in our area. Don't miss what promises to be a very interesting program.