



Williamson County Master Gardener Newsletter

Contents:
Presidents
Message
WCMG Help Desk
A Raised Bed Project
Gardening Tips
2014 Board
Positions
Save The Date

President's Message by Wayne Rhoden



Fellow Gardeners,

I have to tell you that I like cold weather but perhaps not quite this cold. It is good for our gardens to go through cold temperatures to get rid of diseases and insects that may live through our normal winters. This will also be a good test for those plants we wonder about living in our area. If they make it through these times they should make it through most of our winters.

On the volunteer side we will have several opportunities this year with new gardens to work in and old ones to upgrade and change. We want to try to have workdays in the gardens to get them in shape for our Garden Fair/Plant Sale which we have scheduled for April 5th this year. Plenty of events will need your help to showcase our activities to the community. You will be hearing more about these workdays soon.

We also are holding a Volunteer Fair before the Monthly Meeting on February 10th to introduce you to the committees we have available for you to join and get some experience working with the leaders. It will be from 6:00 – 7:00 PM right before the regular meeting. You may want to join more than one so you will be able to learn more about our association's volunteer efforts. You may find that you want lead one of them next time.

I hope you will join me at the workdays. There may even be some food!

WCMG Help Desk

by Martha Baddour



The WCMG Help Desk is undergoing an exciting change. Starting in March, the WCMG's will staff the Help Desk inside the Williamson County Extension Office. The Help Desk will be operated during the winter on Tuesdays from 9am to 1pm. During the summer the desk will be staffed on Tuesdays and Thursday from 9am to 1pm. The goal is to provide the public with research-based information for horticulture related questions and inquiries.

The Help Desk volunteers will undergo a training session to familiarize themselves with the policies and procedures and equipment. All information provided to the public will be research-based from TAMU and other recognized sources. The Help Desk has a computer with internet access, pre-loaded files with information on a variety of common issues, microscope, and digital camera for transmitting photos.

Volunteers will earn volunteer hours so if you are interested in attending a training session please contact Martha Baddour at mars418@yahoo.com. Don't worry about having to know everything! You can take the information, research the question, and contact the individual with the response.



A Raised Bed Project

by Jinna and Kirby MacLaurin



Kirby MacLaurin's 10ft x 10ft raised beds in Virginia.

My brother, Kirby, and I have shared our gardening stories, ideas, questions, success and failures for many years. However, I was still *very* surprised in September by a wonderful birthday present! My present was a vegetable bed similar to one my brother had built at his home in Virginia! It was delivered, in December, when my brother, Kirby, flew to Texas to build it. My son, Andy, who had tipped Kirby off as to what I *really* wanted for my birthday, also worked on the bed with Kirby.

The raised bed uses concrete blocks set into a curbed concrete footing and further reinforced by a wooden seat along the top edge. The blocks are kept nicely in place by the footing, the wooden top frame (which is nailed into the concrete blocks) and the weight of the dirt inside the bed.



Andy and Kirby model a couple of my gardening hats before starting to work on the vegetable bed.

These instructions are for construction of a 6ft x 12ft bed, using 4in x8in x16in hollow concrete blocks available at big box stores. Choose a fairly flat spot for your bed, or a spot to create a flat (planar, though not necessarily level) foundation. Please refer to the list of materials and tools you will need, listed at the end of this article. Check the actual dimensions of the blocks you plan to use, to make sure that the measurements used below are correct: 7.875 (width) x 3.875 (depth), where each 1/8 inch = .125 inch, or adjust your calculations to accommodate the blocks you have.



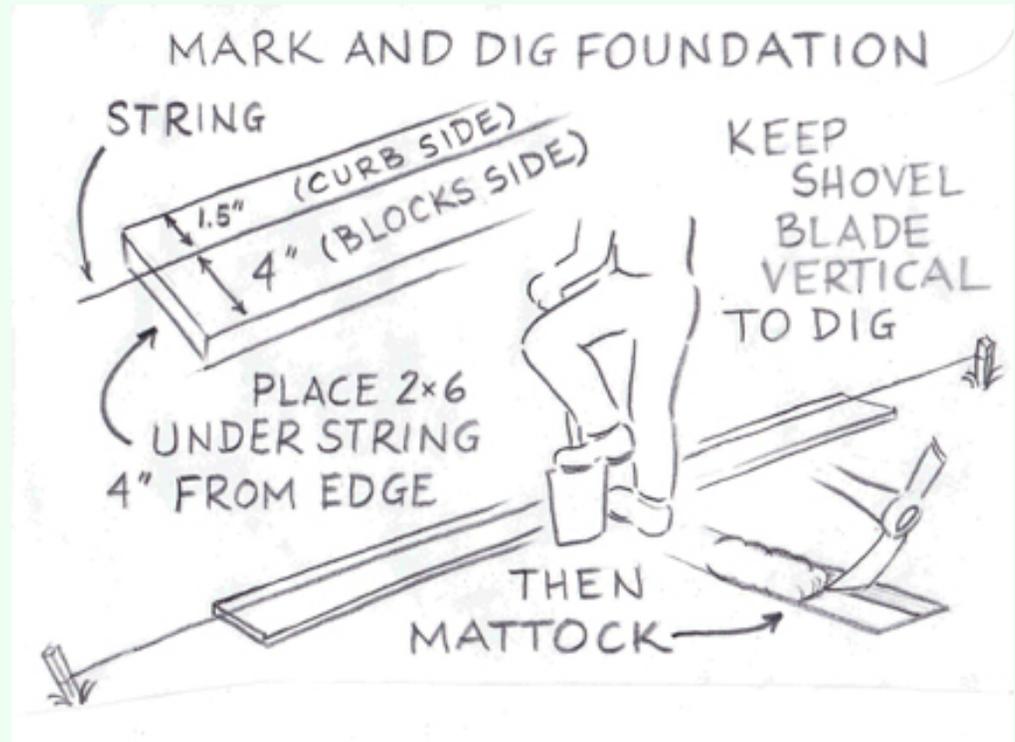
Concrete block

Figure, measure and mark the perimeter of the future bed as described below:

1. For the length of end (short) walls: use multiples of 7.875 inches (the actual width of a 4in x8in x16in hollow block). The approximate equation is: wall length x 1.5 = number of blocks. Example: a 6 foot wall requires 9 blocks. But use a calculator; better precision is needed (see below).
2. For the side (long) walls: use a similar method. But because the end walls will overlap the side walls, you'll have to add the width of the end walls to the total block width of side walls. So multiply 7.875 x (number of blocks), then add 2 (the number of end walls) x 3.875 (the depth of each end wall block).
3. Example: for our bed with outer dimensions of 6ft x 12ft:
 end walls: 9 (blocks) x 7.875 = 70.75 inches
 side walls: 18 (blocks) x 7.875 = 141.75 inches, plus 2 x (end wall block depths) 3.875 = 7.75, for a total of 149.5 inches.
4. Note that these are outer dimensions of the actual walls. Space your strings and stakes accordingly, remembering that these will be the outer edges of block, not foundation. The foundation will actually extend another 1.5 inches further out.
5. Use stakes and sturdy string to mark all four outer edges of future block walls, using above calculations. Keep stakes back from fence edges by at least 2 feet.
6. Drink some water and congratulate yourself!

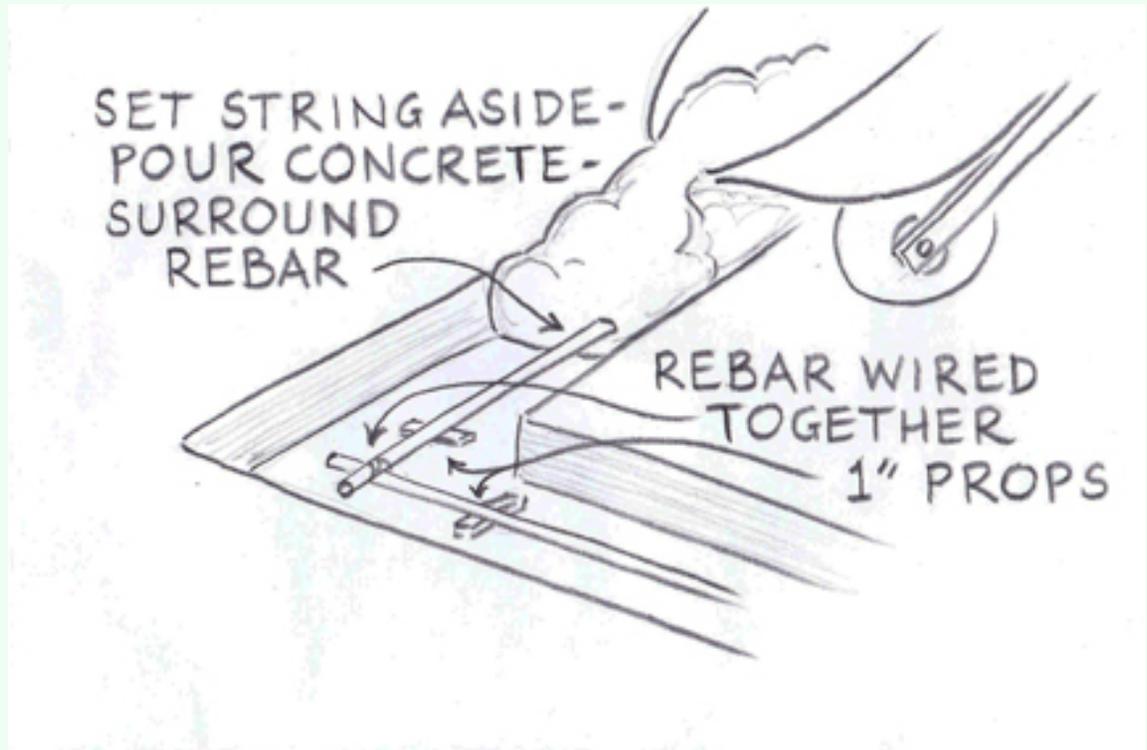
Now that your area is marked and ready, and dig the foundation:

1. Mark and lay one of your 12ft pressure-treated 2x6s under a side-wall string so that 4 inches are inside the string (bed side) and 1.5 inches are out. Weigh down each end of the 2x6 so it won't move. The foundation will be directly under where the 2x6 is now.
2. Using the edge of the 2x6 as a guide, take the shovel and dig approximately 4 inches into the soil on either side of the 2x6, in a straight line. Keep your shovel vertical. Your goal is to create a fairly uniform, vertical outer wall for the foundation. If soil sticks to the shovel and comes up with it, disturbing the soil, mark both ends of the incision, then move the 2x6 to the outside of the foundation "channel". Stand on the 2x6 as you withdraw each shovel stroke, so that the soil only is disturbed within the channel area, thus keeping the foundation outer walls intact.
3. When the channel is completely circumscribed, remove the 2x6 and carefully begin removing dirt from the channel, using the mattock. Be careful to keep the mattock blade stroke parallel to the surface of the soil - the bottom of the foundation channel should ideally be of flat, undisturbed soil. After a little practice, you will get a feel for just how far beneath the surface you want to swing to create a uniform channel, at least (but close to) 4 inches deep. Don't obsess here – it'll work out. Go a little deeper if in doubt.
4. Finish all four sides this same way, taking care to not disturb the string and stakes.
5. Lean on your shovel and congratulate yourself. This is the hardest part for sure! Drink more water or beverage or your choice (electrolytes are good here)!



Place rebar:

1. Lay out rebar in the center of the channels, overlapping two 8ft lengths at one corner, and the other two 8ft lengths at the kitty corner. Bend the end wall length of rebar as needed (measuring, stepping on it, pulling up sharply) around the remaining corners so that it remains near the center of the channel all the way around. Wire the corners together tightly and check the fit of the bends.
2. Add the two 2ft lengths of rebar to bridge the gap left between these Ls, ensuring an overlap between of at least 6 inches. Wire together each overlap in 2 places, spaced apart, as tightly as possible.
3. Prop up each length of rebar in several places with the 1 inch thick props. Ensure that there is at least $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of daylight under the rebar in all places, and that the rebar is near the channel center.
4. Cut one of the 12ft 2x4s into 2 lengths, each as long as the end wall total block length (in this example, 70.75 inches, from the above calculations). Cut each of the other 2x4s to the length of blocks in the side wall, minus the width of the end walls (in this example, 141.75 inches). These 2x4s will form the future block footprints in the foundation. Note: the 2x4s are slightly more narrow than the block, so you may have to widen the footprint a bit.

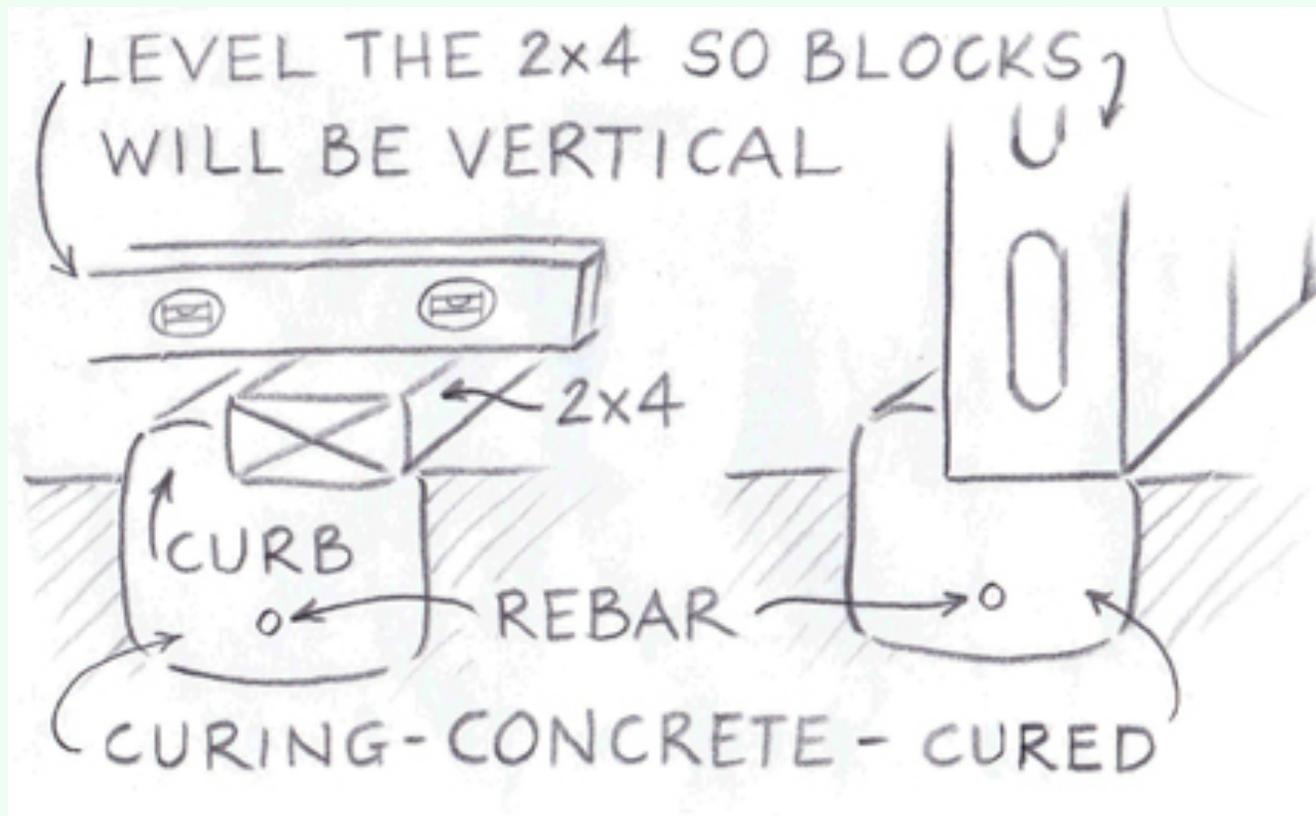


Pour concrete:

1. You'll want good weather for two days running, with temperatures at least 40F, plus a morning start for this part. A helper is very welcome too – the rhythm and camaraderie makes it all work so much better!
2. Pull the hose over. Lotion your hands, maybe add a couple squirts of olive oil to save your skin from the alkaline concrete, which can find it's way even through gloves. Add gloves. Put your dust mask handily around your neck, and goggles handy if you want them.
3. Don't hurt yourself! It is best if the whole foundation is done at once, but better you quit than pull a muscle! The foundation will perform just fine in two or even three pours.
4. Bend your knees, pick up a bag of concrete, hold it close to your body at all times, and place it in the wheelbarrow. Using the shovel, slice open one end. Slowly pick up the other end of the bag and empty it, dusk mask in place. Expect a serious cloud of dust – don't inhale it.
5. Gradually wet the concrete, mixing with the shovel. Avoid adding too much water. You'll know you have the right consistency if the concrete has some body and will pour only with effort, but otherwise will retain it's shape if mounded. If you overdo the water in a batch, add a little more concrete from a partial bag you keep alongside for that purpose.
6. Tip the wheelbarrow to pour the concrete into the foundation channel, starting on a long side. With a little practice you can get in where you want it. Two people, one up-one down, operate much more easily than one. Add concrete until the channel is overfull by about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, working out air bubbles and ensuring that the rebar is fully surrounded, and not displaced off of it's props.
7. Use a 12ft 2x4 on it's edge to check the top of the concrete for straightness, end-to-end. If not straight, add or scrape off extra concrete, by hand or with a hand trowel, as needed to achieve a fairly uniform surface.



8. Now place the 2x4 flat on the surface of the concrete, so that the outer edge of the 2x4 is aligned with the string for that wall. The 2x4 is therefore exactly in the future footprint of the blocks for that wall. Working along the board, press down enough so that the bottom of the 2x4 is parallel with the ground, level with or just above the ground. The amount of concrete that is thereby forced up should extrude outside the string, forming a slight mound along the outer edge of the 2x4. Smooth, add to and adjust this mound as needed to create a uniform outer curb, roughly half or two thirds the depth of the 2x4, and the width of the remaining foundation-space (1.5 inches). This curb, when cured, will contain the foot of each block, keeping the wall in place. Ensure that the 2x4 is level side-to-side, across the wood, so that future blocks will stand upright. Leave this 2x4 in place while concrete is curing.



9. Continue around the foundation, filling the next short, end side, then another long side. Use the 2x4s to gauge how the future walls will join, and be just a little loose on the fitting-together.
10. Finish at least the foundation for the two long walls and a short wall in one day, and if possible foundations for all four walls, for the strongest foundation. If unable, this is not a big concern – the foundation will be strong enough set in 2 sections.
11. Mist the fresh concrete and adjoining soil all the way around with a fine mist, and cover all with the large tarp, for the night. Clean your tools and wheelbarrow, and clean and lotion your hands very thoroughly. Let all concrete cure for at least 48 hours before placing block.

Laying the block:

1. Again, prep your hands with lotion and gloves. You shouldn't need goggles or a mask.
2. Before laying the block, you can sink PVC pipes into concrete to provide future support for garden structures such as trellises or supports for frost cover. One (or two) 10ft PVC pipe can be cut into four 2.5ft lengths and sunk into concrete at desired intervals along the concrete footing, inside the bed.
3. Cut both of the 12ft 2x6s to a length of (total side wall block length, in this example 141.75) minus 2 inches, or 139.75. Cut the remaining 2x6 in exact half.
4. Begin with the first side wall completed, by setting and caulking a perpendicular end wall block, sitting on it's smallest face (4x8 inch end). All blocks will be vertical like this one. From there, line up blocks one by one, running a healthy (1/2 inch) bead of the exterior caulk under and between all blocks. (Caulk is optional if you feel confident that invasive grasses or other weeds are not a threat.) Tap each block into tight contact with it's neighbor. On each wall, keep the blocks lined up evenly. The next 2 steps are best done before the caulk sets completely.



5. Place one of the 2x6s on top of the new side wall, holding the end of the 2x6 one inch back from the end of the final side wall block (it should be close to one inch short at each end if cut correctly), and hanging about 5/8 inch over the outside. Mark the center of the board width-wise along the entire length, at the center of each block. Drill through the 2x6 with a standard drill bit, being careful to avoid damaging the drill bit by propping up the 2x6 away from the blocks an inch or two. When all holes are drilled, line up the board on the top of the blocks again. Drill through the existing holes at each end of the 2x6, into the top of the blocks at each end, using the concrete drill bit. Do so after making sure those blocks are well centered under the 2x6.
6. Hammer a 16p nail into each end block. This will keep the 2x6 in place while you drill the remaining blocks, using existing holes in the 2x6. As you do so, ensure that each block is lined up smoothly with it's neighbor, so the wall will be flat. Hammer a nail into each hole, checking for fit.
7. Line up blocks on end wall, starting at the finished end wall, caulking each in turn, if desired. Place one of the 6ft 2x6s in place on top, measure for holes as before, drill, and hammer in nails as before.
8. Finish the 2 long walls and one end wall in turn in the same manner. If your measurements don't coming out exactly right on the end wall, don't fret. Adjust spaces larger with the flatbar or claw of the hammer, gently clearing away unneeded concrete and keeping wall lines straight and flat (so blocks fit together tightly). Always keep blocks well-faced and tight together, and plan to caulk or fill in with extra concrete as needed. It will be beautiful, trust me!
9. We would suggest quitting now, with only 3 walls up, to leave an opening through which you can wheelbarrow dirt for your bed. Otherwise, you will have to shovel it over the walls. See below for groundcloth and dirt-filling suggestions, then follow with the wood seat for the final wall as before.





One side of the bed can be left open to allow for partial filling of the bed before completing the last wall.



Looking at the corner, with short side of bed on the left.

Remove soil and lay ground cloth:

1. Before going further, you may want to consider removing several inches of soil from within the bed, especially if it is contaminated with invasive weeds like Bermuda grass. Be very careful to remove all such pests as completely as possible!
2. If you wish, line the bed with ground cloth, overlapping each layer by a foot or more, draping up the sides, and duct-taping the edges up to the top of the bed all the way around, in order to hold it in place as the bed is filled.



Looking down from the top: the PVC pipe is sunk into concrete before filling bed. When bed is full, the pipe can be capped when not in use or used to hold supports for shade cloth, frost cover or trellises.

Fill bed and finish seats:

1. Trim wood at corners as desired for fit. I take an inch or so off the outer corners, at a diagonal.
2. Connect the inside corners of 2x6s with corner braces, drilling as little as needed to start the screws.
3. Over-fill bed with soil by about four to six inches, allowing for settling. If you have left the fourth wall open, you can pile the dirt higher at the other end and build a temporary wood barricade to hold the dirt until you build the fourth wall. After the fourth wall is built, the boards can be removed and the dirt can be leveled up to the fourth wall.
4. Complete fourth wall and seat if not already done.
5. Finish the wood with preservative if wanted, for a longer life.
6. Get out the seed catalog and take it to the hammock with a high-electrolyte drink!



Tools and Materials:

Power tools:

Circular saw (with rip blade)

Drill (with 1/8 inch wood bit, phillips-head driver, and 1/8 inch concrete bit listed below)

Hand tools:

Square-ended shovel

Mattock

Sturdy wheelbarrow

Hose

Level

Hammer

Hand trowel (optional)

Gloves

Dust mask

Goggles

Kneepads

Tarps – at least two, one bigger than your bed size

Hand lotion before and after each session

Liquids to drink!

Materials:

Fifty-four 4x8x16 hollow blocks (Wear gloves! and try to move these, and the concrete, as few times as possible. Place on and under a tarp near your site).

Eighteen to twenty 60lb bags of redi-mix concrete (Buy 15 to start, unless delivery is a problem and gauge your further need as you progress.)

Three 2x6 12ft long (one of these will be cut in half later) – check these for straightness when purchasing

Three 2x4 12ft long – check these for straightness when purchasing

Four 8ft lengths and two 2ft lengths of 3/8 inch rebar

Sturdy but easily workable steel wire, 4 feet

(Optional) One to two 10ft by 2in PVC pipes

Monthly Gardening Tips

February 2014 by Winola Van Artsdalen



Gardening Tips:

- ~ Plant trees, shrubs, and roses.
- ~ Prune fruit and nut trees, roses, landscape trees, and evergreen shrubs, except spring bloomers.
- ~ Avoid wounds on oak trees February through November, as this is the most active time for beetles. If there is a wound of any size, spray immediately! Nitidulid beetle which carries the fungus has been photographed on open wound within fifteen minutes!
- ~ Water only as needed. Look to see if you need to transplant some plants to be grouped better by like watering needs. Most landscape plants, including ground covers can be moved now.
- ~ Our average last frost date is mid-March.

Lawn care:

- ~ Put out pre-emergent by February 15th.
- ~ Do not fertilize until after second mow.
- ~ Scalping is a debatable issue, but, if you scalp, do it first; followed by aeration, then top dressing. If you spread top dressing, skip early spring fertilization, as it would be too much nitrogen.
- ~ If aphids are a problem, strip with fingers or water blast. If still a problem, use insecticidal soap.

2014 Board Positions

President – Wayne Rhoden

Vice President – Cat McGrath-Farmer

Secretary – Annie Bowersox

Treasurer – Sandra Lawrence

Past President – Jeanne Barker

Programs – Alicia Johnson

JMG – Jane Bowman

Landscape – Chuck McKelley, Janet White

Rose Garden – JoAnne Dieterich

Drought Tolerant Garden – Janet White, Sandra Lawrence

Water Conservation – Carol Parsonage

Vegetable Gardens – George Prall

Projects – Steve Echols

Awards – Claire Hall

Training – John Papich

Communications – Catherine Nickle

Publicity – Betty Jo Phillips

Help desk – Martha Baddour

Speaker's bureau – Open (Could be a part of the Help Desk)

Online Presence – Diana Kowalska-Somerville

Newsletter – Jinna MacLaurin

TMGA Directors

1. Wayne Rhoden
2. Cat McGrath-Farmer

Alternates

1. Jeanne Barker
2. Claire Hall

SAVE THE DATE

Williamson County Master Gardener Meetings

Monthly meetings are held at the Williamson County Extension Office, 3151 SE Innerloop Road, Suite A, Georgetown, Texas.

February 10th, 2014, 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm:

6:00 pm: Volunteer fair with information about Master Gardener volunteer activities and an opportunity to ask questions or to sign up for various projects. We also be taking pictures for our online directory and offering help with updating online profiles.

7:00 pm: *Caring and Cultivating Olives in Central Texas* with Josh Swofford from Heart of Texas Olive Orchards. (One hour of educational credit.)

Educational Opportunities for Master Gardeners

Williamson County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Classes and Master Gardener Classes

Residential Irrigation Workshop

Saturday, March 22, 2014, 9:00 am - noon, Williamson County AgriLife Extension Office, 3151 SE Inner Loop, Georgetown TX.

This free class will include education and demonstrations covering many aspects of sprinkler system use.

Travis County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Master Gardener Classes

Composting for the Home Garden

Thursday, February 6, 2014, 10:00 am – noon, Travis County AgriLife Extension Office.

Cathy Wood, Master Gardener and compost specialist, will teach how to build an effective compost pile, and how to use its contents as an aid to increase water retention in soils of all types.

Part of the Texas AgriLife Extension Water Conservation Series. Register at <https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/TravisCounty> or by phone 979-845-2604. \$10 fee, \$15 at site. Class is limited to 40 people.

IMPORTANT: Due to road construction in front of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office at 1600-B Smith Road, all seminars normally held at Extension will be temporarily moved to the classroom at 6011 Blue Bluff Rd, 78724. For further information, please call (512) 854-9600.

Rose Selection and Care

Saturday, February 8, 2014, 10:00 am – noon, Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Road, Austin, TX, 78746.

Master Gardeners Carolyn Williams and Holly Plotner will discuss rose selection and care to encourage better bloom production. They will cover the different types of roses and their features, as well as handy tools and their proper care.

This seminar is free; Zilker park entrance fee is \$2 per adult, \$1 per child or senior. For information, call (512)477-8672.

Monument Cafe Market Gardening Classes

500 S Austin Ave, Georgetown, TX 78626, 512-240-4715

Introduction to Aquaponics

Saturday, February 8, 2014, 10:30 am with Joe Schram from Joli Farm. Learn how to raise gorgeous produce and fish in a sustainable system that is 90% more efficient with water than in ground growing!

Alternative Garden Designs

Saturday, February 15, 2014, 10:30 am with Michelle Perry from Monument Cafe Market. Learn about water wise garden bed building techniques including wicking beds and keyhole gardens.

Natural Gardener Gardening Classes

8648 Old Bee Caves Rd, Austin, TX 78735, 512-288-6113

Classes are subject to change so please call first to confirm. Classes are held outdoors under an open air canopy – be sure to dress for the weather. Arrive early for best seating. You are welcome to bring your own chair.

Antique Roses - The Ultimate Landscape Plant

Saturday, February 8, 2014, 10:00 am - 11:00 am, Mike Shoup, founder and owner of The Antique Rose Emporium and author of the book Empress of the Garden will speak about antique roses.

Water Efficiently Using Drip Irrigation

Saturday, February 15, 2014, 10:00 am - 11:00 am, Pat Dillon, General Manager of Submatic Drip Systems, and David Becerra, Drip System Specialist, teach us how drip systems put the water right where we need it – into the soil. Learn the basic steps to setting up your own Submatic system - before the weather gets too hot. It's relatively easy, versatile, and a real water- (and money-) saver. It's like a Lego set for adults!

Online classes

The state Texas Master Gardener Association allows only three online educational hours per year. They offer 12 different free online EarthKind Modules from which to choose. The link for these classes is here: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/training/>

WCMGA also has approved the webinars from the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center to the approved list. There is a small fee associated with their webinars.

A total of three online educational hours per year is allowed whether they are all through A&M or a combination of EarthKind and Wildflower.

This issue of the *Williamson County Master Gardener Newsletter* was made possible because of the contributions of the following Williamson County Master Gardeners: Wayne Rhoden (president), Jinna MacLaurin (editor), Martha Baddour, and Winola VanArtsdalen.

If you would like to contribute to the March 2014 *Williamson County Master Gardener Newsletter*, please send your submissions to Jinna MacLaurin at jinna_maclaurin@yahoo.com by February 16th, 2014. As you garden, volunteer and learn, please take a moment to share your experiences with other gardeners. Thank you!



Copyright 2014 Williamson County Master Gardeners Association. WCMGA is a volunteer program of the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service.