

Williamson County Master Gardeners September/October 2016



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President's Message

By Jane Bowman



Good Morning Gardeners,

There are several things going on as we approach Fall:

Our new class of 2016 is full and well underway. **WELCOME.** I have seen the new students volunteer in several places and I am starting to learn their names. I would encourage you to go up and introduce yourself to them. Help answer their gardening questions and take some time to get to know each other.

We received notice we are approved for the \$12,000 grant. Goodbye old storage containers! While we are talking about \$\$\$\$\$\$, please be sure to add your contacts and hours. The Grant awarded was reflective of the amount of volunteer work we generate and our impact on our community. This is also true of the Extension Office funding. They have to turn in regular reports, and our information is included.

When you talk to anyone about gardening or any of our programs, etc. whether it's over the phone, one on one, over the fence, or down on your knees be sure to record your contacts. You can do this by going to [view your hours](#), click on one of them, scroll down to [contacts](#) at the bottom of the screen and select the appropriate box. [Add the number of people](#) you talked to in the box and click on [save](#) at the bottom. It doesn't matter which event you volunteered for originally. If you have questions on this or anything, please contact me.

THERE IS STILL TIME TO REGISTER for the SOUTHERN REGION MASTER GARDENER CONFERENCE of 13 states to be held November 1-4, in Arlington, Texas. Go to the conference website at <https://2016southernregionmg.com> for information on the four-day conference. Choose between the 20 breakout sessions and 11 tours—not to mention the chance to share tips and techniques with hundreds of fellow MGs and rub elbows with leading horticulturists.

We have started the Hands On In the Garden series, with 24 in attendance the first time. I thought everything went well for our 2 hours together.

Please update your information on VMS. Go to the projects tab. Select all the projects that you are interested in and be sure to click volunteer. Then when the chairperson of that event sends out an email to those with a specific interest, you will get the email. For example, if you select JMG, when Arlene sends out an email to JMG on the email site, it will go to all the Master Gardeners who selected JMG. It will not go out to the others. There is also a description of each project with other information.

In closing, who would have thought we would have received this much **RAIN in AUGUST!!** I would have lost the bet.

Happy Gardening!
Jane Bowman

Election of Officers

By Brenda McIndoo

2017 Proposed Slate of Officers

The Nominating Committee, comprised of Brenda McIndoo, Inez Vance, and Steve Echols, proposes the following slate of officers for the 2017 Executive Board.

President – Jane Bowman

Vice-President - Teresa Wilts

Treasurer - Gail Kelly

Secretary - Tamara Drummond

Nominations from the floor will be accepted at the October 10th monthly meeting. Please be sure that the person whose name is entered as a nominee is willing to serve. If there are no nominations from the floor, then certified Master Gardeners can vote to accept the slate by acclamation at this meeting.

Introducing the 2016 Texas Superstar® Annuals

By AJ Senchack, Ph.D.

It's time to replace those spent or burnt garden annuals to set up a fall color bonanza. Begonias, marigolds, pentas, and petunias are at their best in the fall, growing deeper in color as the nights begin to cool off. However, new choices to consider are this year's new Texas Superstar® plants. Who knows, maybe some merit a home in your garden.

Brief Background. Even though most of you are familiar with the Superstar® program (<http://texassuperstar.com>), let's start with a brief refresher. Superstar® is a registered trademark that earmarks outstanding, Texas-tough plants. Texas A&M Research and AgriLife Extension Service horticulturists identify candidates, following rigorous field tests from around the state (at least 2-3 years for annuals and up to eight years for woody plants). Each year, 3-6 new plants are chosen to wear the Superstar® crown; namely, those "...outstanding plants specifically adapted to Texas" and its different climate zones. A seven-person Executive Board of horticulturists has the final word on which ones make the cut and which don't. Consumers, growers, arboretum and botanical garden representatives also provide valuable input into the selection process.

Demanding selection criteria require a plant to satisfy all of the following attributes:

- Attractive and useful to the gardening public,
- Is unique and offers desirable and ornamental characteristics not normally found in commonly sold plants,
- Consistent performer for most Texas consumers, regardless of their gardening expertise and growing location,
- Resistant to pests and diseases,
- Propagates easily, so it can be mass-produced at low cost to meet high consumer demand.
- Attractive in a retail container, so it sells itself to consumers who may have never seen or heard of the plant's many attributes.

Altogether there are currently 68 different plant materials in the program (versus, for instance, 40 in 2010). The breakdown in numbers by type of plant is as follows:

| | |
|---|--|
| Annuals = 18 | Woody plants = 7 |
| Perennials = 17 | Trees = 3 |
| "Per-Annuals" = 10 | Specialty plants = 13 |
| (Tropical perennials used as an annual) | (Tomatoes, mandarin oranges, <i>et al.</i>) |

This article is based on the 2016 Texas Superstar® brochure and various press releases. See <http://texassuperstar.com/press/index.html>.

In fact, many of us are probably growing Superstars in our yard, yet may not even know it. For fun, take a look at the complete Superstar list, with important details and cultural requirements, in the 2016 Superstar® brochure. The online version of this brochure is found at

http://texassuperstar.com/press/superstar_brochure_2016.pdf.

You might find some surprises, as I did. Sorta “by gosh, by gum,” I learned that most of my favorite go-to plants, that I return to year after year, actually turned out to be Superstars, e.g., larkspur (*Consolida ambigua*) and “Baby’s Breath” or “Diamond Frost” euphorbia (*Euphorbia hypericifolia*--syn. *Chamaesyce hypericifolia*). My biggest surprise came this summer when I discovered quite by accident that a July H.E.B. purchase, Thyralis or Shower-of-Gold (*Galphimia glauca*), is a Superstar that became a real pleaser in my garden.

But let’s get to this year’s class of Superstars of which two are annuals: Whopper begonia, Brazilian Red Hots, and Basham’s Party Pink crapemyrtle.

Whopper Begonias. *Wax* or *fibrous begonias* have always been a mainstay in my garden, whether potted or bedded. They seem to reward you with blooms all growing season (in extreme heat or summer sun, afternoon shade is necessary to keep them looking perky). So, fittingly, the first Superstar® introduced this year is the super-sized *Whopper begonia* (*Begonia x semperflorens-cultorum* Whopper® series). Aptly named, Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the Whopper’s incredibly large and showy red or rose flowers that seem to rest atop equally large green or bronze leaves. In the shade, this begonia can reach 24–30 inches high (!), with a more modest 12–16 inch spread. Given more sunlight, they remain more compact. Either way, you have to see them to appreciate how truly enormous they are! These gargantuan plants are definitely not your Mother’s begonias!

The Whopper prefers shade or partial shade, but will take full sun, except in the dead heat of summer and high relative humidity. While the usual well-prepared bed with organic matter and good drainage works best, this begonia seems to better tolerate various Texas soils and our intense heat and sun than other wax begonias. Like your typical wax begonia, though, its soil should remain moist, but not too wet (or crown rot will take them from you). Whoppers also vigorously resist pests and diseases. If Williamson County experiences yet another mild winter, then your Whoppers may turn into a short-lived perennial. Plant with shade-loving impatiens and blue, mounding-but-cooler-loving lobelia, and dianthus.



Figure 1. Check out the size of these begonia flowers!



Figure 2. A row of Whopper begonias at the Texas A&M research and AgriLife Extension Center in Overton, Texas.

Little Ruby and the Brazilian Red Hots. Nope, not a new Latin rock group. Rather, a “new and improved” Joseph’s Coats (*Alternanthera ficoidea*), which offer an alternative to traditional blooming bedding plants. You may be old enough to remember the Joseph’s Coat that was so popular decades ago. Its leaves are richly laced in purples, bronzes, oranges, reds, purples, and yellows that made it such an eye-catching ornamental addition to container or border. Too bad it became tall and rangy and was so hard-pressed to adapt to our Texas climate(s). Well, not to worry, Joseph’s Coat’s new cousins have moved to Texas and brought their own brand of blazing colors and vitality, plus they are so well-behaved at one-third to one-half the size of their older cousin. For a second consecutive year, a “per-annual” alternanthera variety won Superstar® fame--*Alternanthera dentata* ‘Brazilian Red Hots’. In 2015, its older “sibling”, *Alternanthera dentata* ‘Little Ruby’, was selected as one of that year’s three new Stars.



Figure 3. *Alternanthera* ‘Little Ruby’.

Both alternantheras prefer partial shade, but their foliar color will be more subdued than when in full sunlight. They are surprisingly drought tolerant, once established. ‘Little Ruby’ is a smaller, fuller, more compact, and mounded version of its older tropical cousin. Thus, it makes a great ground cover, with a 12–15 inch height and a 14–16 inch width. Its younger brother, ‘Brazilian Red Hots’, on the other hand, tends to be a larger plant, growing 24-36 inches tall, with a 12-18 inch spread, although it does retain a mounded form.



Figure 4. *Alternanthera* ‘Brazilian Hot Pinks’ in full sun.

While both alternantheras lack the wide range of colors found in Joseph’s Coat, they more than make up for this limitation with their enhanced Texas hardiness as well as attractive, lively, hot pink and rose-shades-outlined (‘Brazilian Red Hots’) or burgundy-and-green (‘Little Ruby’) foliage. Give them plenty of sun to bring out their intense colors. See Figures 3 and 4. Moreover, they are super easy to grow, prefer partial shade, and tolerate our hot Texas summer if planted early enough in spring to get well established. ‘Brazilian Red Hots’ is the more vibrant sibling, if exposed to full sun. They also appreciate a light trim as summer begins to bring out a flush of summer color. Repeat this in late summer to bring out its inner beauty in the fall. Both also like a well-prepared soil that has been amended with organic material and provides good drainage.

They are an excellent standalone plant as an accent piece or as a mass border, especially to accent or complement Serena angelonia and heat-tolerant hybrid alyssum (two more 2015 Texas SuperStars®). Or try it with dusty miller (looks good with everything), and Butterfly pentas (one of the earliest designated SuperStars®). It’s also a top pick for containers. Don’t expect much in the way of flowers; this is definitely a colorful ornamental in the ilk of caladiums. If we receive little or no frost, then you may be rewarded with inconspicuous, ball-shaped white flowers that will push through the foliage in mid-winter.

So, what are you waiting for? Superstar your garden this fall with the best of the best!!

Volunteer Opportunities for You and Me!

By Sandra Roberson

Do you ever wonder what different WCMG committees or projects do? Have you wanted to get involved but you didn't know how? We at the newsletter want to help you by presenting brief paragraphs from committee chairs' about their particular group with information on how to join them. Hope this helps you find a 'home' for your volunteer efforts.

Vegetable Demonstration Garden

The purpose of this committee is to maintain the demonstration garden by preparing the soil, planting seasonal vegetables and providing irrigation and food for the plants. We control pests and weeds, harvest vegetables, and deliver produce to The Caring Place and The Annunciation Maternity Home (both in Georgetown).



The demonstration garden committee educates the public on varieties of vegetables that grow well in our area and the best methods to use when growing them. Each year we test new vegetable varieties and new methods of planting. We try to label all the plants so visitors that come when we aren't there will be able to see what is doing well (and sometimes, what isn't). We also have different fruit trees growing on the property and an active compost bin. Anyone who shows up at the garden somewhat regularly is pretty much on the committee. Among all the regulars there, we have more than 150 years of gardening experience. We meet in the garden year round on Tuesday and Friday mornings where we work, eat, socialize and generally have a great time. Come out and join us!

Teresa Wilts

Junior Master Gardener Committee



Wilco JMG provides services to youth from pre-school through high school. We provide assistance to public and private schools, homeschoolers, 4-H, and special services programs. We utilize several curriculum series for topics ranging from plant parts to butterflies; from ecology to careers in agriculture. Presentations include hands-on activities for classes, family science nights, and festivals. Actual gardens are not required, but several sites do maintain landscapes and gardens.

Volunteers are always welcome. We have opportunities for MG volunteers to maintain grounds and to prepare activities when children aren't present as well as assisting with ongoing classroom education. Contact me if you would like to join these fun activities.

Arlene Boyer

Publicity Committee

The Publicity Committee informs the public and membership about upcoming monthly membership meetings, our new monthly '*Hands On In The Garden*' series, the annual plant sale and upcoming Master Gardener Training classes. Press releases are sent to 22 newspapers and to 7 Facebook sites and recently, we established a Pinterest site. I was able to get the producer and film crew from the TV show "Central Texas Gardener" to come and film a segment last spring. This will air spring of 2017. We also have a writer for *The Williamson County Sun* who writes special articles for us periodically throughout the year.



Publicity for WCMG opportunities has not only successfully increased our MG membership but has increased participation from the public; one of the goals of the WCMG association. I am looking for two or three computer savvy members or students to learn what we do and assist with writing press releases, preparing flyers, etc. Contact me if you would like to help in this very important activity.

Viki Strauss

Earth-Kind Herb Trial Study Committee

The Earth-Kind Herb Trial Garden is in the second year of a three year study of different cultivars of rosemary, oregano, and sage. The committee is challenged to maintain the study plants (those with red dots on the labels) in the natural growing conditions of Williamson County. We follow the guidelines of the study which means weeding and watering only when necessary. Similar studies are being done in four other counties.



If you are interested in all herbs and would like to learn more about them, please join this group of dedicated 'herbies'. Also, check out the sign by the herb garden to learn more about this study. Contact any 'herbie' if you would like to work with us.

Sandra Roberson

Tomatoes in the Demonstration Garden: Part One

By Teresa Wilts

The following is a brief overview of how we manage tomato plants in the vegetable demonstration garden. If you need more details, be sure and join us at the garden Tuesday or Friday mornings!

Planting time

This depends on the weather. We plant our spring tomatoes in February. This year some tomatoes were planted on Feb. 26 and the rest were planted as we had time and the weather cooperated. The fall crop was planted on July 29.

Preparing the soil

In the row garden area we amend the soil in each row every time we replant. Since the garden is producing year-round, that means we amend at least twice and depending on the crops, possibly up to 4 times. We add 2-4 inches of compost, enough cottonseed meal and molasses to cover the row and then we use a broad fork to mix it all in with the native soil. Years of working the soil in this manner has resulted in really great soil.

Planting

In the row garden area we find that the tomatoes grow into huge plants, so we dig holes 4 feet apart knowing the plants will still manage to get tangled together. The holes need to be at least a foot deep, depending on the size of the plant, to accommodate the addition of 2 shovels of compost and another handful each of cottonseed meal, molasses and cornmeal. Before actually planting the seedlings, we remove all but the top three sets of leaves. Next, we loosen the roots and pour 1-2 teaspoons of mycorrhizal fungi and 1 teaspoon of bone meal on them. After settling the soil back over the newly planted seedlings, we surround the plant with 1 tablespoon of Epsom Salts and water the plants in well with Sea Tea or Fish Fertilizer, diluted as directed on the container. Next we lay out irrigation tape for drip irrigation.



Protection

In spring, we have a couple of ways that we protect the plants from the weather. We have used the commercial “wall of water” product, which protects from wind and cold. We also use 5 gallon buckets with the bottom cut off. The bucket is partially



buried in the soil with the tomato inside, keeping the top of the plant below the top of the bucket. This keeps the plant out of the wind and cold and we can cover the buckets if freezing weather is predicted. As the plants grow, we raise the buckets to keep the wind out. Usually, both methods work well.

When the plants outgrow the wall-o-water's and/or buckets, it's time to remove the protection and mulch around the plants. We use cattle wire to make really big cages to contain the growth and support the plants. These are held in place by zip tying them to 6-foot t-posts. Then we surround the cages with row cover fabric and clip them in place with binder clips. We cover the bottom of the row cover with mulch, to provide protection from the constant, cold winds at the demo garden. If a frost is predicted, we cover the tops of the cages as well.

In the fall, we surround the cages with row cover fabric but leave a very small gap (about 1 inch) for air flow, to protect from the strong summer sun.



Maintenance

As the plants grow, we remove the bottom leaves to prevent any leaves from touching the ground or being splashed from below by rain. This helps prevent diseases. As the seasons progresses, the plants are encouraged to stay in the cages and the vines are tied up to keep them off the ground and out of the walkway. As the inevitable diseases start, we remove dead leaves and branches. We spray the plants with fish fertilizer at least once a month.

Harvesting

We have chronic problems with birds poking holes in the tomatoes, so we pick them as soon as they start to show color. This also prevent cracking and provides a nicer looking tomato.



The tomatoes in this picture were all picked from one Celebrity plant at the same time! During our peak spring harvest, we harvested 215 pounds of tomatoes in one morning. Fall tomatoes are almost always harvested green, since we usually have a freeze in the garden around mid-November, before the tomatoes ripen.

Summer cutback

We usually try to cut at least some of the plants back to encourage new growth and another harvest of tomatoes in the fall. This won't work with every plant, because some will not survive our brutally hot summers.

Part two in the next newsletter, will have information about the varieties we've been testing and the ones we really like. We will also talk about some of the less well liked varieties.



Paper Wasps

by Wizzie Brown



Paper wasps are reddish brown wasps, and may sometimes have yellow markings. They are about $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 inch in length with smoky wings.

Paper wasps make a paper nest out of chewed wood fiber.

The nest is open and hangs from single filament.

The nest is

typically constructed in protected areas such as under the eaves of homes, in shrubbery, mailboxes or on fences.

Mated queens overwinter and emerge in spring to start a small, new nest in which to lay eggs. The colony, if left alone, grows in size throughout spring and summer. During this time workers forage mainly for protein, usually other insects, so they are great at helping to manage pests. Colonies reach their peak size in late summer to early fall. Starting in late summer, paper wasps forage on sugars and may be drawn to human inhabited areas that may contain a food source, such as garbage cans, outdoor patio areas or hummingbird feeders.



Paper wasps tend to be unaggressive, so if the nest is in an area where a stinging incidence is unlikely, it is best to leave it alone. If the nest is built in an area where someone may get stung- in a mailbox, on playground equipment, etc.- then it is recommended to manage wasps and then remove the nest.

Early in the season, when nests are just being started by founding females, it may be possible to discourage paper wasps to nest in a certain area by knocking down the nest repeatedly. This is not recommended when the nest is larger and contains multiple wasps.

Aerosol formulations- both synthetic and naturally derived- are available for paper wasp management. The nest should be treated either in the early morning or late evening to ensure that wasps are not out foraging for food. Use caution when treating paper wasps nests. Not only are you using a pesticide, but you are dealing with insects that can sting repeatedly. After all wasps are gone, knock down the nest and throw it away. You may want to clean the area where the nest was hanging to rid the area of any pheromones that could quickly attract new wasps to the area.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com

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Growing Brassicas or Cole Crops

By Jane Bowman



This family includes broccoli, cabbage, collards, cauliflower, kale, kohlrabi, Chinese cabbage, Brussels sprouts, bok choy and mustard greens. (1) I find this group is a relatively easy one to grow. Here are a few suggestions to help you have success.

Garden bed. The garden bed needs to drain well. Make sure your bed is clean from the previous season's planting. I also like to check the soil for garden pests such as cutworms, slugs and pill bugs. You can treat them with your preferred method. I usually rake the soil with a garden trowel to check for cutworms and then use a turned over clay pot or ½ a grapefruit rind to attract pill bugs and slugs. (2) You can then gather them up or use a vacuum to pick them up. Check the labels if you are using chemicals and follow directions. Add your 3 inches of good compost and work it into the top 6 inches of soil. Then work in an organic fertilizer per package directions. I like a balance of 8-2-4. Brassicas like to grow in a fertile soil with a neutral to alkaline pH range of 6.5 to 7.5. Choose a location that gets full sun. (3)

Plants. Be sure to select good transplants. You want to get the ones which are small, in which the 4" pot isn't full of roots. I turn the pot over in my hands, with my fingers supporting the top of the soil and the transplant. I want to look at the roots to make sure they are healthy, (nice and white) and have no other insect problems; check for aphids and cabbage loopers. I like to get them when they are about 3 or 4 inches tall. You could plant kale, kohlrabi, bok choy, collards and mustard greens seeds directly into the soil. For the others in this family I would use transplants.

Spacing. Follow the package directions for planting the seeds. I like to lightly sprinkle coarse **vermiculite** over the area where I have planted the seeds. (5) This medium will help retain moisture for the seeds to germinate. Once the seeds have come up, thin out the unwanted plants by clipping them off. If you pull them out you can damage the seedlings growing nearby. In spacing transplants, think how large the plant will get. I like to have 1 1/2 to 2 feet spacing between my plants. Especially cabbage, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts need this spacing.

Planting. I mix up a solution of sea tea or seaweed about one half of the recommended strength. I put the young plant into a small container in which the soil/roots can get well watered by soaking up the solution.

I make a hole the depth of the pot then add 1-2 cups of worm castings and mix it around inside the planting hole. Once my hole is prepared, I take the transplant out of the pot and gently loosen the very bottom of the soil. I sprinkle about 1-1 ½ teaspoons of [Mycorrhizal](#) fungi (4) over the loosened soil and then plant the transplant the same depth as it was in the pot. Firm up the soil around the base of the plant and water the transplant into the soil with more of the seaweed solution. Once done, I sprinkle diatomaceous earth or crushed eggshells around the top of the soil under the transplant. (2)

Mulch. I like to use pine straw around the plant for mulch. You can put it up close to the plant to give it support and protection until it can stabilize the root system. I also use the pine straw to mulch the entire garden bed.

Row cover. Because these cole crops do not need to be pollinated, I like to cover them with a light weight row cover. This will keep the unwanted pests off of the plants. I use rebar to support the pvc tubing. I then put the row cover over the pvc hoops and use rocks to weigh down the sides. Preventive steps in keeping the insects off your plants are always better than dealing with an infestation and using chemicals. Sometimes, you can pick the insects off the row cover.

Maintenance and fertilizer. Every week I pull back the row cover and check for pests. You can easily pick off any cabbage loopers and check for aphids. Two weeks after I set out the transplants I do a soil drench of the regular strength of sea tea, seaweed or fish emulsion. Then two weeks later I give each plant a handful of the organic fertilizer. Be sure to use a soil drench on the cabbages and cauliflowers. If you pour it directly on the plant and we have a freeze, the drench may affect the quality of your harvest by freezing the leaves of your plants. I also like to trim off any leaves that are touching the ground attracting slugs and pill bugs. I also take steps to control them.

Harvest. I let the cabbages grow until the head begins to crack or split. The broccoli and cauliflower need to be cut before the flowerets start to pull apart. I like to harvest the broccoli and then pull out the plant and replant. I don't think it is worth it to let it continue to grow and get the small pieces. On kale and the greens, pick them from the outside. They will continue to produce all winter. On the Chinese cabbage and the bok choy, I pick while the heads are somewhat tight and midsize. I think they have a better flavor than letting them get really large.

Note. I like growing the flat Dutch cabbage. Mine usually get about 11 to 12 pounds each. The red cabbages are smaller, usually about 4-5 pounds.

Sources: Pictures are by Garry and Jane Bowman

(1) <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/guides/the-crops-of-texas/brassicacole-crops/>

(2) http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/weekly_Q&A/p&dc_3.htm

(3) Leander, Patty (2015). Brussel Sprouts, *Texas Gardener*, September/October, 34, 6, pp. 14-19

(4) <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/?s=mycorriazal&submit=Search>

(5) <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/ornamental/greenhouse-management/growing-media/>

Gardening Tips

By Winola VanArtsdalen



SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2016 TIPS

Plant trees, shrubs, and perennials now! Get plants in ground and covered with mulch ready to snuggle in and grow roots to withstand next summer's stress.

Best to prepare soil in planting area, either for a whole bed or one plant, in advance, cover with mulch and give microorganisms time to work. For new beds, add at least a third compost and any additional materials like granite sand or expanded shale to give additional drainage. For existing beds, add compost spring and/or fall, as well as when adding new plants.

October 1 is target date for planting wildflowers, depending on weather. Remove weeds and provide drainage. For tiny seeds, it helps to mix them with sand for even spreading. Loosen and rake back the soil, or poke holes through the mulch, so seeds make contact with the soil. Many seeds need light to germinate, so barely cover, if at all. Some seeds, such as blue bonnets, must be scarified before planting, so follow packet instructions or ask the person who shared seeds with you. Press the seed into the soil and keep moist, not soaked, during germination period. If wildflower planting fails, it is usually because seeds were too deep or plants were mistaken for weeds and pulled up in early spring!

Trees:

Paint all wounds on oak trees susceptible to oak wilt any time, any size, immediately. There is no need to apply pruning paint to other trees.

Turf:

September 1: Apply pre-emergent for annual winter weeds.

September 15-30: If you have large brown, circular areas appearing when the weather cools, you may have brown patch. You can use a preventative spray in late September and again two or three weeks later. Avoid extra water and fertilizer.

October 1-15: Fertilize Bermuda and zoysia. Keep watch for brown patch.

Save those fall leaves! Shred them several times and leave on grass to return the nutrients to the soil.

When weather has cooled, apply one-fourth to one-half inch top dressing, compost or mix of soil and organics, to lawn. Organics not only add nutrients, but increase moisture retention of soil.

Be prepared:

Protect young trees from deer rubbing antlers on bark. One strategy is to encircle with a cylinder of fencing material.

Cut back watering schedule and mulch plants well, keeping mulch away from stems and trunks.

Our first frost can be as early October 15, or even earlier, so buy supplies for frost covers now while available in stores.

Summer in the Vegetable Demonstration Garden

By Radhika Baliga



Images (from left to right): Edible Sweet Potato Greens, Mexican Sour Gherkins, Long Purple Eggplants

If you're looking to learn more about vegetables, I highly encourage you to spend a season in the Demo garden. You will get hands-on experience with dozens of crops and work with several passionate gardeners. I can't even imagine how many years of backyard gardening it would take to acquire the knowledge and experience I gained in just one summer at the Demo garden. Here's a taste of what I learned this season and some ideas for your garden next year. I hope you'll join us for a workday soon.

Watermelon

I'd never considered growing watermelon, but after learning the ropes from MG Jane, I'm tempted to try next year. Jane is growing personal-sized ***Sugar Baby watermelons***. They are the sweetest and juiciest locally grown melons I have ever eaten. Who says you need lots of space to grow melons? These melons are thriving in our ***container garden***. Visit the garden to see how the plants are trellised and how the fruits are supported using ***handcrafted melon hammocks***.

Here's a harvesting tip: when a watermelon is ***ripe***, the ***tendrils*** closest to the fruit will be ***brown***.

Sweet Potatoes

Are you growing sweet potatoes? Get double duty from your crop by eating the ***greens***. Unruly vines that block walkways are prime candidates for harvesting in the demo garden. The nutritious greens can be enjoyed cooked or raw. I prepared them for the first time following MG Teresa's foolproof recipe for sweet potato greens with lemon, ricotta, and pasta. This recipe will make a sweet potato green lover out of anyone. Yes, kale, I have finally found your summer substitute.

Southern Peas

Southern peas deserve space in every garden. They are tasty, heat-loving, drought-tolerant, and soil building. Did you know that peas also bring beautiful pops of ***color*** to the garden? We have lovely hues of pink in the row garden thanks to our ***Pinkeye crowder pea*** pods. The showy, colorful pods dangle conspicuously from the tops of the plants for beauty and easy harvesting to boot. In MG Betty Jo's pea patch, we're constantly marveling at the spectacular displays of ***pale purple blooms*** that greet us at the start of each workday.

Squash

If you've ever grown squash here, you know it's a struggle, namely because of *squash vine borers*. This year was no exception to the rule. The borers emerged in *late May* and have been actively taking down vines ever since. Even *Tatuma* and *butternut squash* were victims this season! And these two varieties are touted for their immunity to borers. It just goes to show that there are no sure bets in gardening.

Mexican Sour Gherkins

Are you familiar with Mexican sour gherkins? They are *volunteer* plants that returned to our garden for the second straight year. We don't know how they got here, as we certainly didn't plant them, but they are fruiting along the trellis row like crazy. They start off green, looking like mini watermelons, and then ripen to a canary yellow color. We harvest them at both the green and yellow stages. If you know any traditional or modern uses for these gherkins, drop us a note or visit us on a workday.

Eggplant

Long Purple eggplants are a new favorite in the raised bed gardens. Thanks, MG Teresa, for the home-grown transplants! These plants are a great fit for container gardens and tight spaces because they are *compact* and do not require caging or staking. Just as the name implies, fruits are long, thin, and purple-skinned. Our gardeners have enjoyed *prolific* harvests of Long Purple eggplants this season. MG Tracy roasts her Long Purple eggplants with tomatoes and garlic to make an outstanding (and gluten-free!) pasta dish.

If you can't find Long Purple, try a Taiwanese variety called *Ping Tung eggplant*. Ping Tung eggplants are incredibly *creamy, tender, and sweet*. The plants are quite a bit taller than Long Purple and do require staking.

Cucumbers

This was my first year growing cucumbers. I planted a Mediterranean-style slicer on a whim. For weeks, I enjoyed perfectly sweet cucumbers and had plenty to share with friends. I really felt like I had a green thumb. Then July rolled around, and the cucumbers turned bitter from heat and water stress. And, yes, folks, I tried the "rubbing cut ends" trick to remove the bitterness. By then, the cucumbers were irrecoverable and the plants had to be cut back.

Next year, I think I'll plant *Armenian cucumbers*, just like the ones in the row garden. Armenian cucumbers are crisp and remain *sweet* throughout the summer. They are technically *melons*, but are grown and used just like cucumbers. Sow the seeds directly in warm soil and support the plants with trellises. The fruits are long and slender with pale green or striped skins. Armenian cucumbers work great in everything from salads to cold soups; there's no need to peel the skins or remove the seeds.

I learned a couple more things about cucumbers this year. Some varieties are *burpless*. Burpless cucumbers are less likely to cause indigestion and burping. I'm sorry for the embarrassing question, MG Teresa! Some cucumbers have short *spines* on them. Once the cucumbers are harvested, remove the spines by running over them with a towel, a stiff brush, or a gloved finger. And if you're looking for an easy way to *trellis* your cucumbers, try using a *tomato cage* tied to a T-post for extra support.

Flowers

Attract beneficial insects to the vegetable garden with flowering plants. In small spaces, try *zinnias* and *cosmos*. They are easy to "direct-sow" into your garden beds. Once they take off, you can have great cut flowers from them too. In larger spaces, *African blue basil* is a must. *African blue basil* earns a spot in the demo garden each spring because its blooms are absolute *bee* magnets. Plant one right next to your squash patch.

Gardeners Who Cook

Zuni Stew

By Ann Harmon



A firm I used to work for had a great cafeteria with specials on Fridays. Although I was not a vegetarian, I looked forward to their end of the week offering called Zuni Stew and had to learn to make it.

When I researched Zuni Stew it was shown to be a dish offered by a restaurant in San Francisco called Greens. It is a nod to the Native American way of planting known as the three sisters; corn, beans and squash all grown together.

I still make and enjoy it today although I have tweaked the recipe to accommodate my omnivore family. Everything is better with a little bacon, right? This year I added the Okra that has been prolific in my garden rather than the requisite beans found in most recipes. We found we like it even better this way. Hope you do too.

4 slices bacon, diced
1 med. onion, diced fine
2 lg. cloves garlic minced
3 or 4 roasted, peeled and seeded Hatch chilies, diced finely (or 1 can diced Hatch chilies)
1 teaspoon cumin
1 teaspoon coriander
1 T ancho chili powder (you can use regular chili powder if needed)
2 med. zucchini, sliced lengthwise and then into ¼" half-moons
2 cups pumpkin or butternut squash, peeled and cut to ¾" pieces
1½ cups okra sliced to ½" pieces
1 large red bell pepper, seeded and diced to ½ inch pieces
2-3 cups chicken broth
1 can (14.5 oz.) stewed tomatoes, crushed
2 cups corn kernels from 2 ears fresh corn (or frozen corn if needed)
Salt and Pepper to taste
1 cup shredded jack cheese

In a large pot or Dutch oven cook the bacon until crisp. Remove bacon to drain on a paper towel leaving the drippings in the pot. Add onion to drippings and cook until starting to soften. Add garlic, roasted chilies, cumin, coriander and chili powder. Cook stirring until combined, about 2 minutes. Add bacon, zucchini, pumpkin, okra and red pepper. Stir well. Add chicken broth and bring to boil. Reduce heat to simmer and cook, stirring once or twice, until pumpkin is easily pierced but not falling apart and stew has begun to thicken. Stir in corn kernels and cook an additional 10 minutes to bring the flavors together. Add salt and pepper to taste and top with jack cheese to serve. Makes 4-6 meal sized servings.

Educational Opportunities In Our Area

Monument Market, 500 South Austin Ave., Georgetown www.themonumentmarket.com/

All gardening classes are now on Saturday at 2:00 pm. There is now a \$5.00 fee good for both the 1:00 pm. wellness class and the 2:00 pm.gardening class. **Please note: Wellness classes attended do not count toward WCMG education credits.**

October 8 Growing Herbs Organically

October 15 Growing Garlic and Onions

October 22 Backyard Composting

October 29 Organic Pest Control

Georgetown Garden Club, 1101 N. College, Georgetown (Recreation Department Community Room)
Meets the first Thursday of each month at 1:30 p.m. (no meeting June - August).
www.georgetowngardenclub.org.

Monthly Meeting

1:30pm, Georgetown Health Foundation (Lone Star Circle of Care) Community Room, 2423 Williams Drive, Suite 101

October 6 Main Program: Nature Photography **(does not qualify for WCMG education credit.)**

Speaker: Ted Keller, is a retired Aerospace Engineer and accomplished photographer. He is currently serving as President of the Williamson County Art Guild. Ted is co-owner and President of a nationally-acclaimed Photography company, He will share with us one of his nature photography projects which led to the publication of his book.

November 3 Main Program: Rain Water Harvesting

Speaker: Ed Parken has a bachelor and master degree in mechanical engineering. He is a Master Gardener. He completed the Master Gardener program at Texas A&M to become a specialist in Rain Water Harvesting. Ed is going to talk to us about how he installed five tanks behind the Zilker Botanical Garden Center to catch water from the roof of the building and other projects that we may use to collect rain water in our homes.

The Garden Club will have no speaker in December as this meeting is their Christmas Luncheon.

Round Rock Garden Club, Meets at the Baca Center, 301 W. Bagdad Ave., Round Rock

Meets the first Monday of each month. 9:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

See the Baca Center website for monthly speaker information. Cost for non-members \$1.

The Natural Gardener 8648 Old Bee Cave Road Austin www.thenaturalgardeneraustin.com

Saturday, October 15 at 10 am – George Cates of Native American Seed Company (seedsource.com) presents “**Native Texas Wildflowers, Lawns, and Ornamental Grasses.**” Are you looking for beautiful and sustainable landscape solutions to the challenges of living in the hot and dry Central Texas climate? Would you like to create a piece of authentic Texas in your yard, but don’t know where to begin? Have you ever planted Texas wildflower seeds, only to find that nothing happened? George Cates will tell us just how to successfully prepare, plant, and maintain our beautiful native wildflowers & grasses – and why it is important. We are privileged to have George, from the most well-respected native seed company, coming at just the right time for planting the perfect wildflower garden.

Saturday, October 22nd at 10am – Pearce Jones from Texas Metal Tanks will be here to talk about “**Home Rainwater Collection.**” Rain water is the “gold standard” for water, come out and learn how to capture and use this precious (and free) resource.

****Special Weekday class** Thursday, November 3rd at 10am – Audrey Stewart** from TreeFolks will be here to present “**TreeFolks Austin Tree Map Workshop.**” This workshop will teach participants how to use the [TreeFolks Austin Tree Map](#), a web-based, interactive, tree survey tool, to map Austin’s trees and help support our urban forest. Participants will learn how to map their trees and how to use the map to keep track of their tree care activities, explore city tree data, share information with their communities, and promote the value of our urban trees. The TreeFolks Austin Tree Map is sponsored in part by The City of Austin’s Urban Forest Grant Program. Audrey Stewart is the Education Coordinator at TreeFolks, a local nonprofit with a mission to empower Central Texans to build stronger communities through planting and caring for trees. She earned her B.S. and M.A. in Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior from The University of Texas at Austin and has worked in science education as an environmental educator, Adjunct Professor in Biology at Austin Community College, and co-leader of the Austin-based art/science project, Animal Facts Club.

Saturday, November 5th at 10am – Don Gardner, Registered Consulting Arborist, presents “**How to Grow Healthy Trees in Central Texas.**” Happy Texas Arbor Day! Trees are the most valuable feature of our landscapes. In addition to providing shade, cooler streets, and clean air and water, they also contribute to the monetary value of our homes. Don will walk us through all of the basics, from pruning to watering, to ensure we are the best care possible of our established, mature trees. He will also teach us how to get new trees off on the right foot – um, root – with instructions on proper planting, watering, and pruning. Don Gardner has been a Registered Consulting Arborist for over 40 years and is a regular guest on John Dromgoole’s radio show *Gardening Naturally* on KLBJ-AM and his expertise is well regarded by homeowners and professionals alike.

The Red Barn 12881 Pond Springs Road Austin TX

Schedule unavailable at publication. See the website (info@redbarngardencenter.net) for upcoming classes.

Hill Country Water Gardens, 1407 N. Bell Blvd., Cedar Park

Schedule unavailable at publication. See the website (www.hillcountrywatergardens.com) for upcoming classes.

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center 4801 La Crosse Ave, Austin

At publication no individual gardening classes were available. See the website (www.wildflower.org) for information on multi-day classes (fees vary).

Countryside Nursery and Landscape 13292 Pond Springs Rd, Austin, TX 78729

Schedule unavailable at publication. See the website (www.countrysideaustin.com) for upcoming classes.

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This issue of the *Williamson County Master Gardener Newsletter* was made possible because of the contributions of the following Williamson County Master Gardeners : Jane Bowman (President), Articles by Radkia Balinga, Jane Bowman, Wizzie Brown, Sandra Roberson, A.J. Senchack, Winola VanArtsdalen and Theresa Wilts. Recipe by Ann Harmon. Editor: Ann Harmon. Proof readers: Catherine Nickle, Sandra Roberson and A.J. Senchack . Cover photo by Mark Harmon.

If you would like to contribute to the November 2016 *Williamson County Master Gardener Newsletter*, please send your submission to Ann Harmon at aharmon@sonic.net by October 25, 2016. As you garden, volunteer and learn, please take a moment to share your stories, experiences with other gardeners. Thank you!

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