

Williamson County Master Gardener Journal

CONTENTS

1	DUES AND AWARDS
2	GREENHOUSE UPDATE
3	BOB'S BLOG
5	BUG OF THE MONTH
6	PRUNING
8	POMEGRANATE TREE
10	BENOLD BUTTERFLIES
11	HUTTO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
13	MOONSTRUCK
12	BACK TO BASICS
14	WHAT'S IN A NATIVE-PLANT NAME? PART VII
15	PROFILE
16	MG TREATS
18	PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Its Time to Pay Your Dues!

Yes, I'm afraid so, it really is time to pay your dues! Now this doesn't just mean in the form of money as many of you may be supposing, and yes we are waiting for those association dues but we all owe our time.

So lets get the money out of the way first. To remain in the Texas Master Gardeners Association (TMGA) our branch has to pay our dues to TMGA by March 1st. It is hard to do this when some of you have not paid your dues. We need to know how much to send them which is hard if you haven't paid up! So come on, get your check books out and send your \$25 to John Papich or Nancy Moore.

Now to those volunteer hours. A new year means a new set of fifty hours to enable you to be re-certified at the end of the year. Remember, we need fifty hours a year and opportunities can be found on the

website or by contacting the board members. New projects are being added all the time and remember we are not just about going out and gardening. We are here to help educate the community and with the rapid urban growth being seen in the county we need to be more visible and available to help. This means giving talks, getting out into the community and sharing all the learning experienced we have been through.

Finally, don't forget those twelve hours of advanced education. Last month I put some suggestions in the WCMGJ but they were the tip of the iceberg. At this time of year there are so many interesting seminars, meetings, conferences and field trips there is now excuse not to get your twelve hours quickly and enjoyably! Get out there and get your hands dirty and show your worth!

Awards and Congratulations!

Information has been submitted to the Texas Master Gardener Association in two different categories for 2008 Annual Awards. We are entered in the Newsletter and Project Categories for small county associations with 1-50 dues paying members. Our online newsletter, the *Williamson County Master Gardener Journal*, and our ongoing project in Berry Springs Park were chosen by the Awards Committee to submit for 2008. Awards will be announced at the 2009 Texas Master Gardener State Conference in April in Marshall, Texas.

On December 8, 2008, our association celebrated its First Annual Awards Banquet in the lovely setting of Angel Springs Event Center in Leander, Texas, owned and operated by one of our 2008 Master Gardener Interns, Norma Beissner. Catering was handled by Bowties 2 Blue Jeans located in

Round Rock, Texas. Twelve of our members achieved over 100 volunteer hours during the year, and were awarded long sleeved, denim shirts with the Master Gardener logo and our association name embroidered on them. Congratulations to the following recipients of the award shirts: Duffy Banfield, Walt Krueger, Janet Church, Teresa Robinson, Juanita James, John Papich, John Womack, Nancy Moore, Sandra Rosen, Winola VanArtsdalen, Wayne Rhoden.

Finally, we have to congratulate ten members from the class of 2008 who have already fulfilled their requirements for certification. They are: Lisa LaPaso, Kris Stanley, Grace Bryce, Sandy Lawrence, Paul Lawrence, Jane Williamson, Sally Todd, Janet White, Jeanne Holms, Liz Grieder, Jack Grieder, and finally Jo Groves from the class of 2007. Well done you'll!



Master Gardeners at work

Greenhouse Update

So much has been happening in the greenhouse of late so if you haven't been out to see what we are doing you need to come and see all that is going on. The plants are looking lovely and the majority should be ready for our upcoming sales.

So you all know what is going on the plant sale dates are as follows:

March 13th—at the greenhouse beginning at 9:00 a.m. This sale is for the GHS teachers, MG's and MG interns.

March 14th—Georgetown Home and Garden Show 10th annual - we will be able to do some set-up on the 13th, but main project will be transporting our plants to the show barn (location) the morning of the 14th. We will need to arrive at the GH at 7 a.m. and start loading. The show barn is in San Gabriel Park off Stadium Drive....not far from the greenhouse. Once we have the plants delivered and set-up, the show is from 9 until 4. There will be four speakers to give presentations on herbs, ornamental plants, vegetable gardening, etc. These talks occur throughout the day. This is our "educational" contribution to this show.

April 11th—Market Days on the Square in Georgetown....pretty much a repeat from the sale on 3/14....arrive at greenhouse at 7....load and transport plants to our booth on the square - set up tent and arrange plants for our sale.....last minute detail...get everything ready for the opening at 10:00 a.m. and closing at 5:00 p.m. We will need volunteers to tear down the booth and haul the leftover plants back to the greenhouse.

May 9th— Same as April 11th

Ed Myatt has made a great prototype of the wooden frame that we will use to hold our plant signs. Ed is making these at no charge except his time. Thanks, Ed. We need volunteers to make the 8 1/2 by 11 " signs to go in this wooden frame. If you are knowledgeable in this area, maybe several can volunteer. Ed made a prototype sign. So he can guide you. Janell Crego, Clyde Adley, Jeanne Holmes and Jane Williamson are doing the labels and plant signs. Grace Bryce will provide a beautiful poster for the teacher's lounge at GHS to advertise our sale on the 13th of March. We will also ask to broadcast an e-mail to the teachers.

To volunteer, send Duffy your info and She will compile it so that we know we have everything covered. Duffy will let everyone know where we stand and where we need help.



Don't miss the Ever Blooming Magenta Geraniums at our MG Spring Plant Sale March 14th. The cuttings were taken from this plant which sat outside on my south porch all last year. Its only pampering was to be pushed back in the corner during a couple of freezes. It never missed a day of blooming until I cut it back to take slips to the greenhouse for propagation. In a few weeks, it was blooming again. This is a keeper! -- Winola VanArtsdalen

Everyone at the Greenhouse seems to want this recipe so it has been included in the newsletter for you all to enjoy. Thanks Teresa!
SOUTHERN PECAN PRALINE BROWNIES

1 cup butter
2 1/4 cups light brown sugar, firmly packed
2 eggs
2 ts vanilla
1 1/4 cups flour
2 tsp baking powder
1/8 tsp salt
2 cups chopped pecans

Preheat oven to 350. Grease a 13X9X2 baking pan. In a medium saucepan over low heat, melt butter and brown sugar, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and add eggs and vanilla and stir until well combined. Add remaining ingredients. Pour batter into pan, and bake 25-30 minutes, or until brownies begin to pull away from sides of the pan. Cool completely and serve. Also may be dusted with confectionary sugar.

Seed Cleaning Parties

Seed cleaning parties are starting again. The first one is scheduled for Saturday, February 28, 10 am - 2 pm. and a followup one will be held on Saturday, March 14, 10 am - 2 pm with the usual pizza and gossip! So, pass the word.

Let Flo (oxley@wildflower.org) know if you are going to attend so she can make sure there is space for you and seed to clean.

From Bob's Blog

Some Williamson County Master Gardeners may not know that our County Extension Agent, Bob Whitney, has a web log ("blog," sort of an internet diary) at <http://theagriculturalist.blogspot.com/> Here are some recent highlights:

Friday, January 2, 2009

Landscaping Ideas for Every Home

The really nice weather during the holidays and rolling over into a new year makes me anxious to do some landscaping. My favorite book of landscaping is "Landscaping Your Home," by Wm. R. Nelson Jr. and it is a book that I refer to all the time because he covers everything from starting with your needs to taking care of your plants. Let's cover some simple landscape concepts.

Basically there are three areas we are concerned with in planning a home landscape. The first and generally the hardest to plan is the public area which is the front, second is the living area which may include some side yard but is generally known to be the backyard and the third is the service area where we try to hide things that we don't want everyone to see when they come to visit.

In the public area there four elements we are concerned with: 1.) walks to the front door; the driveway and any parking areas 2.) tree plantings 3.) shrub plantings 4.) lawn areas. The most important consideration for the public area is the front door. This is the focal point of the whole design in the public area and it is the one spot that we want to make more attractive. If you want to show off the outside of your home, start with the front door especially focus on it with color. Because the front door is the focus then your walks and driveway become the first area we concentrate on. Where you have a walk greatly affects the appearance of the public area. An uninterrupted front lawn area gives the illusion of depth and width. If your walk is perpendicular to the house and leads straight to the front door then you have effectively divided the house in half with the walk. The best location for a walk is parallel with the house connecting with the porch or door. This is why we like to go from the driveway to the door with a curved, meandering walk that won't split your lawn in half.

Trees make up the second most important design element. Trees in the front yard serve to frame the front view of the house, provide shade and can even mask undesirable features in your home or landscape. The most effective placement of trees to obtain this framing effect is to place them at 30 to 45 degree angles off your house corners. This would allow the trees to grow up and shade the house without covering or hiding the house and since they are off the corners they serve as a picture frame with your house being the picture. The worst thing you can do is plant a tree right in the middle of the front yard and so effectively divide the house in half.

The third element we consider in the public area are shrub plantings. Typically in our area we call them foundation plantings mainly because they used to hide the tall foundations we had on older homes. Now they can be much smaller and fortunately we can do small because of the wide selection of dwarf cultivars. The problem is that we buy shrubs in one gallon containers and they just don't stay small. We plant them too close to the house and each other and almost always we put a six foot shrub under a window that is 4 foot tall. It is very important to know the mature height and width of a plant and then plant them based on those dimensions. Another rule of thumb is to plant on the rule of 3's, 5's and 7's. When you plant in multiples do it based on odd numbers and one doesn't count!

Lastly the lawn is our fourth most important element in planning the public area. It is the connecting link in all the previous elements. It ties them all together and then makes the home look bigger. A lawn should be unbroken by plantings, walks, or special features. Special features are the round planters around a tree or the special bird bath or feeder or even the island flower bed you're so fond of. These things can be used in the landscape but they go in the living area not the public area. Remember this space is dedicated to your most important feature - your house and then its most important feature - the front door!

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

Why Is My Garden So Bad?

I have had a lot of calls lately from frustrated gardeners. The call normally goes something

like this, "I planted a garden last year and it just never produced, what am I doing wrong?" Of course most of these gardeners are blaming the soil, the plant variety, the weather but I don't think any of them have blamed the real cause - water!

Seriously, it has been a very hard summer for people and animals but when it comes to plants they can handle hot weather and keep right on going if they get enough water and when I question gardeners about their watering habits I find that they are very lax at best. I have given a number of gardening programs recently and have used this illustration. A tomato plant needs .23 inches of water every day in June. This works out to be 1.43 gallons (1 and half milk jugs) of water per plant per day to survive. Most people water their garden plants by hand with a hose and unfortunately a hose puts water out so fast that it doesn't soak in, it runs off. Also I doubt that anyone stands by each plant long enough to get 1.43 gallons in the soil every day. Consequently we are severely under watering our vegetables. In my garden I use drip tape to deliver very small amounts of water over a long period of time. In fact most drip tapes will deliver 0.5 gallons of water per minute in 100 feet of tape. So if I have one emitter every foot of tape, that emitter would deliver about one-third of a gallon every hour. If I have two emitters per tomato plant then that is six-tenths of a gallon per hour and my system needs to run for 2.4 hours every day (1.43 gallons/0.6 gallons per hour) to water my tomato plants. So for me I run my drip irrigation system every day or at least every other day to ensure that all my garden vegetables have plenty of water.

A second major issue we have in vegetable gardens after water is the lack of fertilizer! Most of the gardeners I talk to are very conscientious about applying compost and some use a little garden fertilizer but overall they are not putting enough for two reasons. First vegetables need nutrients in a 4-1-2 ratio so if you apply a fertilizer like 10-10-10 (1-1-1) then you are not supplying enough of the first number, nitrogen, or the last number, potassium. In my travels I have seen plenty of gardens that look yellow and unthrifty because there was not enough nitrogen for the plants. The second reason is our obsession with compost. Now I love compost, it really helps our soils here in Central Texas, but is it

really finished compost? What I mean is that compost must have completely composted to be a garden additive or it may be harmful to your plants. Much of the compost I have stuck my hands in is hot to the touch. This means that the microbes are still working converting organic matter to humus. This process takes a lot of nitrogen and can rob the soil of nitrogen fertilizer you intend for your vegetables. This process really is bad if the gardener has been adding lots of leaves, mulch etc and tilling it in. Those microbes will immediately go to work on the new organic matter and they won't be through for months thereby making the garden a hard place to grow anything. So you see why I say that our desire to help our garden soils with all this great compost may, at least in the short run, be robbing our plants of needed nutrients. Water and fertilizer, two of the most basic of needs yet often overlooked!

Growing Potatoes in Your Garden

Potatoes originated in the higher elevations of Chile and were first grown as a food crop in Peru in South America. It wasn't until the Spanish came to South America and brought back potatoes to Europe that the many uses of potatoes started to become popular. The potato eventually got to Ireland where the Irish quickly saw their value and by 1693 it was Ireland's most important food crop.

Growing the right variety is important and the best in red-skinned varieties are LaSoda and Pontiac and for the white-skinned its Kennebec although it is hard to beat the Yukon Gold. The only problem with specific varieties is that often they are only sold as Minnesota Blues or Nebraska Reds so when faced with this problem be sure to buy the blue certificate seed potatoes. Remember that seed potatoes are only for planting and table-stock potatoes are for eating. Seed potatoes have fungicides to prevent diseases and many table-stock potatoes are treated with sprout inhibitors to keep them from sprouting in the store.

When to plant is always controversial. The books generally recommend that you plant potatoes 4 weeks before the last killing frost. Our last frost can be anytime in February or March but generally if you will plant your potatoes around the middle of February you

will do okay. Potatoes grow and do best when temperatures are 60°-75° in the day and 45° - 55° at night. Potatoes must set and size their crop before soil temperatures reach 85° the temperature at which potato initiation ceases.

Potatoes are heavy feeders and require high fertility to produce the yield and quality of tubers that you expect. Unlike most vegetables you should work all the fertilizer into the soil before planting. Side-dressing with fertilizer after the plants are up has little effect and may grow more top than tubers. Generally you need 3 pounds of 10-20-10 per 35 foot of row.

When you go to buy seed potatoes it is recommended that you avoid buying seed pieces and only buy whole seed potatoes. Cut the potatoes into 2 to 3 ounce pieces with 2 to 3 eyes per piece. Purchase and cut up your seed potatoes 5 - 7 days before you want to plant. After cutting treat the pieces with sulphur to help prevent soil-borne disease problems. Allow the cut pieces to cure at approximately 65 for the 5-7 days at a high humidity. To do this put them in a box in the garage with wet burlap covering the pieces. At planting time you will notice the pieces are a bit shriveled, have a healed cut surface and slightly enlarged eyes.

Plant the pieces either flat or in a bed 2 1/2 to 3 inches deep and spaced 8 to 12 inches in the row. It doesn't matter how you put the pieces in the furrow they will grow. If you plant more than one row make the rows at least 30 inches apart.

Potatoes will start growing by putting up a main stem which grows upward emerging from the soil to become the plant foliage. Along the underground portion of the main stem, stolons will grow which are like underground stems not roots. These grow laterally for short distances and then begin to enlarge to form the tuber. Since all underground stolons are going to initiate between the seed piece and the soil surface the deeper the seed piece (within reason) the more stolons produced. It is very important to begin to "dirt in" your potatoes when they reach 5 to 6 inches in height with 3 to 4 inches of soil. The ultimate goal is to eventually bury the seed piece 8 inches underground and so have lots of room for stolons and finally potatoes. Why don't we just plant the seed pieces that deep to begin with? Well

sometimes it works fine but if it is cold and wet, soil-borne diseases will get your plants every time simply because it's too hard for the small plant to push through that much dirt.

Enjoy your red potatoes and fresh green beans, there aint much better eatin'!

Saving Those Old Poinsettia Plants

I have a special friend who loves to save old plants and one of the plants she saves is old poinsettia plants. She is sure she can coax them into blooming again next year and she is right. Just about everyone still has a poinsettia plant left over from Christmas and for many the plant really looks good. The real question is how to keep it looking good until it blooms again next year. The following is a list of things to do to help coax your poinsettia to grow and bloom again next year.

1. At New Year's or in January apply an all purpose house plant fertilizer. Continue light, water and fertilizer. Plant will remain colorful for many weeks.

2. Valentine's Day do nothing unless your plant has become long and leggy. If it has, prune to 5 inches from the soil.

3. St. Patrick's Day. Remove faded and dried parts of the plant. Add more soil, a potting soil mix that is light.

4. May. Poinsettia should be around 3 feet tall. Trim off 2-3 inches from ends of branches to promote side branching. Re-pot to larger container and move the plant outside, first in indirect light and then to direct sunlight. They like lots of sun but be careful the pot will dry out quickly since the soil mix is so light.

5. July 4, trim plant again. Make sure it has full sunlight and slightly increase the amount of fertilizer. Remember this plant will now grow like a weed so be prepared for a much bigger plant.

6. September the poinsettia should be 5 to 6 feet tall and depending on the weather it may be time to move indoors or at least protect it from cold nights. It still needs at least 6 hours of direct sun and now you can reduce the fertilizer.

7. September 21 move the plant to a place where you can give it 13 hours of continuous darkness like in a closet with 11 hours of bright light. It is very important to keep the night

temperatures in the mid 60's so a garage may be your best bet. Continue to water and fertilize.

8. Thanksgiving you can stop the “dark treatment” and put the plant in a sunny location in the house and reduce water and fertilizer.

9. Christmas enjoy your large blooming poinsettia. It might even double as a Christmas tree.

Did you know we have our own native poinsettia here in Central Texas? Euphorbia cyathophora (Fire on the mountain, Poinsettia, Wild Poinsettia) is a dwarf poinsettia that has green stems and alternate lobed leaves, the uppermost with irregular red blotches near the base. The terminal flowers are yellowish with 1-2 small glands or nectaries. I have one in my front garden and it looked super this Christmas.—Ed.



“Bug” of the month

This month's bug is the walking stick insect. As you can see from the picture, it is sometimes hard to see, as walking sticks are masters of disguise. Of the more than 2500 species in the world, most resemble twigs or leaves in color, shape, and texture. From spring to fall, some species change colors to keep blending with the trees and bushes they live and feed on. Walking sticks are so well camouflaged that even their predators have a hard time spotting them. At night, stick insects are busy munching, but during the day, they often stand as still as death. Now and then, they might shift slowly from side to side, mimicking the movement of host plants that are blowing in the breeze.

Not all is lost if a young walking stick loses a leg to a predator. The next time the insect molts, it can usually regrow the leg—though the new one might be a smaller size. Stick insects molt five or six times before becoming adults.

Like most other insects, walking sticks do nothing to care for their young. The females just let their eggs fall to the ground where many are attacked. Help might arrive, however, in the form of ants that can carry the eggs to the safety of nests underground. Of course, the ants are not deliberately trying to be helpful. They just like to nibble on outer parts of the eggs, which does not harm the developing walking sticks. On hatching, the little insects leave the ant nests and head up to the trees to hide and feed.

This particular one (*Megaphasma dentricus*) is one of the longest insects in the United States. I took this picture in my backyard below a hackberry tree, one of their desired host plants. Because of its shape, this insect is also commonly called the stick-bug, specter, stick insect, prairie alligator, devil's horse, witch's horse, devil's darn-ing needle, thick-thighed walking-stick, or northern walkingstick, depending on locality. Host plants include apple, basswood, birch, dogwood, hackberry, hickory, locust, oak, pecan and wild cherry.

Wayne Rhoden
Entomologist Specialist



Master Gardener Meeting

Pruning of Mature Trees—some basic principles

Christine Powell

Rob Grotty from the Texas Forest Service spoke at the January 12th WCMG Monthly meeting on various aspects of pruning. The question asked was “why prune?” and Rob set about giving us a full and well illustrated presentation. His most important piece of advice must have been, unless you really know what you are doing, if you love the tree then get an Arborist in to do your pruning! I have included the main points covered but I would advise you all to visit the web for some very interesting and well illustrated sites on the subject. These are some of the ones I enjoyed:

http://www.na.fs.fed.us/Spfo/pubs/howtos/ht_prune/prun001.htm; <http://www.na.fs.fed.us/Spfo/pubs/misc/treedecay/pg12-19.htm>

The objective of pruning is to produce strong, healthy, attractive plants. By understanding how, when and why to prune, and by following a few simple principles, this objective can be achieved.

Pruning for safety involves removing branches that could fall cause injury or property damage, trimming branches that interfere with lines of sight on streets or driveways, and removing branches that grow into utility lines. Safety pruning can be largely avoided by carefully choosing species that will not grow beyond the space available to them, and have strength and form characteristics that are suited to the site. In addition, pruning can be used to stimulate fruit production and increase the value of timber.

GLOSSARY—Some Terms You Should Know

Branch Axil: the angle formed where a branch joins another branch or stem of a woody plant.

Branch Bark Ridge: a ridge of bark that forms in a branch crotch and partially around the stem resulting from the growth of the stem and branch tissues against one another.

Branch Collar: a "shoulder" or bulge formed at the base of a branch by the annual production of overlapping layers of branch and stem tissues.

Crown Raising: a method of pruning to provide clearance for pedestrians, vehicles, buildings, lines of sight, and vistas by removing lower branches.

Crown Reduction Pruning: a method of pruning used to reduce the height of a tree. Branches are cut back to laterals that are at least one-third the diameter of the limb being removed.

Crown Thinning: a method of pruning to increase light penetration and air movement through the crown of a tree by selective removal of branches.

Epicormic Sprout a shoot that arises from latent or adventitious buds; also know as water sprouts that occur for on stems and branches suckers that are produced from the base of trees. In older wood, epicormic shoots often result from severe defoliation or radical pruning.

Flush Cuts: pruning cuts that originate inside the branch bark ridge or the branch collar, causing unnecessary injury to stem tissues.

Included Bark: bark enclosed between branches with narrow angles of attachment, forming a wedge between the branches.

Pollarding: the annual removal of all of the previous year's growth, resulting in a flush of slender shoots and branches each spring.

Stub Cuts: pruning cuts made too far outside the branch bark ridge or branch collar, that leave branch tissue attached to the stem.

Tippling: a poor maintenance practice used to control the size of tree crowns; involves the cutting of branches at right angles leaving long stubs.

Topping: a poor maintenance practice often used to control the size of trees; involves the indiscriminate cutting of branches and stems at right angles leaving long stubs. Synonyms include rounding--over, heading--back, dehorning, capping and hat--racking. Topping is often improperly referred to as pollarding.

Topiary: the pruning and training of a plant into a desired geometric or animal shape.

Woundwood: lignified, differentiated tissues produced on woody plants as a response to wounding (also known as callus tissue).

To encourage the development of a strong, healthy tree, consider the following guidelines when pruning.

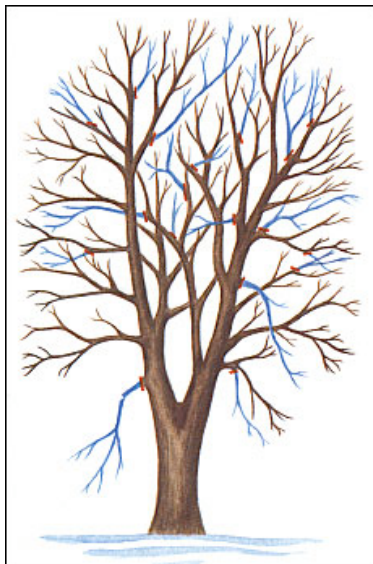
- ♦ Prune first for safety, next for ,health, and finally for aesthetics.
- ♦ Never prune trees that are touching or near utility lines; instead consult your local utility company.
- ♦ Avoid pruning trees when you might increase susceptibility to important pests (e.g. in areas where oak wilt exists, avoid pruning oaks in the spring and early summer; prune trees susceptible to fire blight only during the dormant season).
- ♦ Use the following decision guide for size of branches to be removed:
- ♦ Under 2 in diameter --go ahead.
- ♦ Between 2 and 4 in diameter--think twice
- ♦ Greater than 4 in diameter--have a good reason

CODIT is an acronym for Compartmentalization Of Decay In Trees which is the process that occurs when a tree is wounded. Cells undergo changes to form "walls" around the wound, slowing or preventing the spread of disease and decay to the rest of the tree.

Pruning Techniques

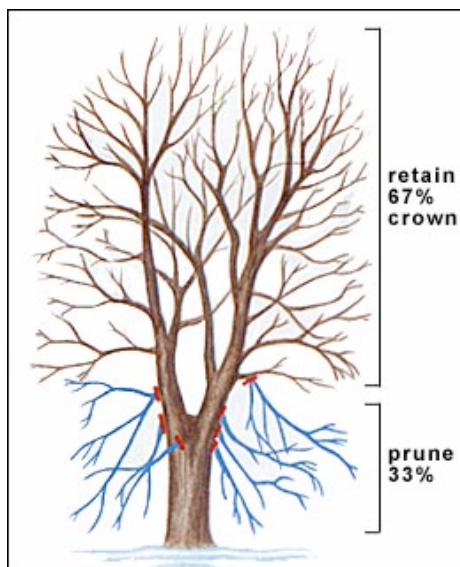
Crown Thinning

- Favor branches with strong, U-shaped angles of attachment. Remove branches with weak, V-shaped angles of attachment and/or included bark.
- Ideally, lateral branches should be evenly spaced on the main stem of young trees.
- Remove any branches that rub or cross another branch.
- Make sure that lateral branches are no more than one-half to three-quarters of the diameter of the stem to discourage the development of co-dominant stems.
- Do not remove more than one-third of the living crown of a tree at one time. If it is necessary to remove more, do it over successive years.



U-shaped angles (left) of attachment are strong and should be left untouched if possible.

Remove branches with weak, V-shaped angles (right) of attachment

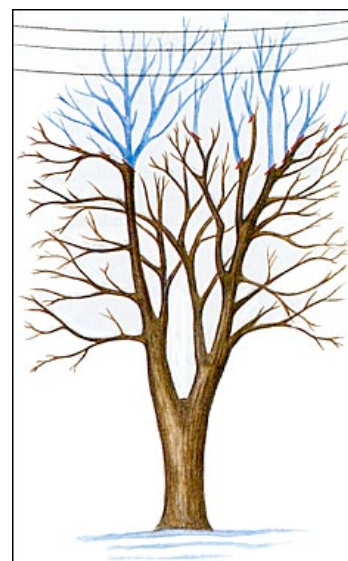


Crown Raising (left)

- Always maintain live branches on at least two-thirds of a tree's total height.
- Removing too many lower branches will hinder the development of a strong stem.
- Remove basal sprouts and vigorous epicormic sprouts.

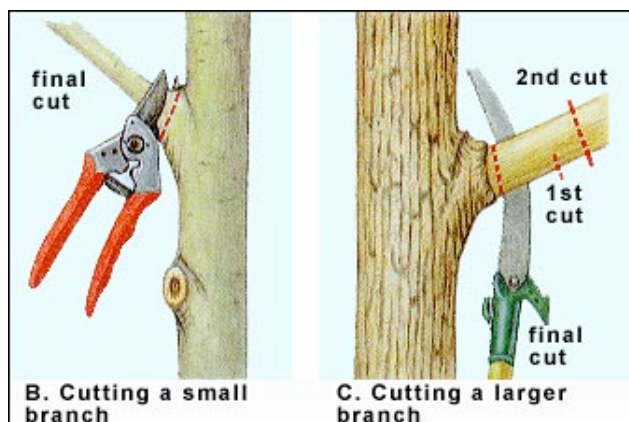
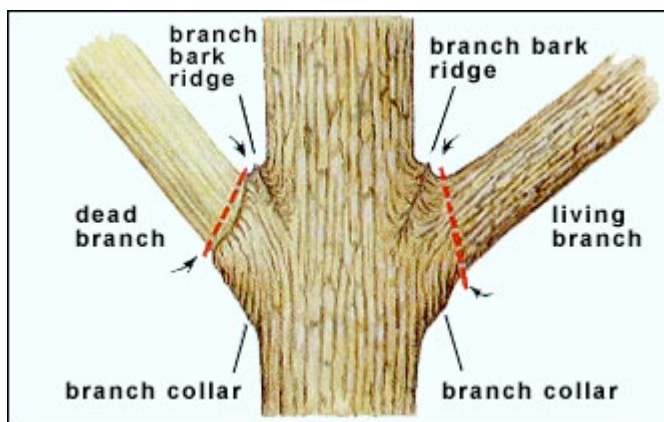
Crown Reduction (right)

- Use crown reduction pruning only when absolutely necessary. Make the pruning cut at a lateral branch that is at least one-third the diameter of the stem to be removed.
- If it is necessary to remove more than half of the foliage from a branch, remove the entire branch.



Pruning Cuts

Pruning cuts should be made so that only branch tissue is removed and stem tissue is not damaged. At the point where the branch attaches to the stem, branch and stem tissues remain separate, but are contiguous. If only branch tissues are cut when pruning, the stem tissues of the tree will probably not become decayed, and the wound will seal more effectively.



Images courtesy National Forest Service

A Master Gardener Explains

The Pomegranate Tree *Punic granatum*

Annette Banks

As with most of us, I have observed with interest the almost faddish addition of the pomegranate fruit as a component of haute cuisine. I have read many reviews of the great health benefits of the pomegranate, sometimes suspected to be the forbidden fruit.

It was the November 27 issue of the *The Economist* that edged me into more research of the fruit. The article turned attention to the fact that Kandahar, in the southern part of Afghanistan, produces pomegranates sought by connoisseurs. It also lies in the middle of the opium country of the Taliban. In November the Afghan agriculture ministry and the United States Agency for International Development combined forces to host a World Pomegranate Fair on the edge of Kabul. Their aim was to educate Afghanists on the financially lucrative possibilities of the pomegranate with "the hope that this life-giving fruit can displace the life-sapping drug trade that is, moreover, closely tied to the Taliban insurgency".

From its native region in Iran extending through the Himalayas in northern India, the pomegranate has been cultivated in the Mediterranean areas of Asia, Africa, and

Europe. It is steeped in historical literature works (Homer, Shakespeare), in mythology, and in works of fine art (Botticelli's *Madonna of the Pomegranate*), carvings, sculptures, and jewelry. It is referenced in the Koran as one of the fruits found in paradise and noted in the Babylonian Talmud. In the Old Testament of the Bible, it is mentioned in at least a dozen verses. The plant's thirst-quenching juice meant that desert caravans would carry it with them as they journeyed.

In numerous countries, such as Turkey, Albania, and Bulgaria, rows of pomegranate trees are the dominant landscape along roadsides. The Moors brought them to Spain in 800 A.D. Spanish missionaries took the pomegranate with them...to Mexico, California, Arizona. Although dates conflict, it is believed that the missionaries introduced the trees to California in the mid 1700s.

Pomegranate trees, in their native growth patterns, look like bushy shrubs.

They can be left as a bush, espaliered, or trained to grow as a tree. If a tree is desired, only one trunk can be allowed to develop, and it is necessary to continue to remove the many suckers which appear around the roots, trunk and crowns of the tree. When plants reach a height of 2 feet, they should be cut back to approximately 1 foot from the ground with 4 or 5 evenly-spaced shoots left to develop. Be vigilant about removing the suckers. Pomegranate fruit forms on the tips of the new growth. Therefore, in the first three years of the plant's life the branches should be pruned annually, shortened to promote maximum new shoots on all



sides for appearance and production. After the third year only suckers and dead branches will need pruning.

Pomegranate trees can be extremely long-lived, but they lose their vigor after about 15 years. They like sunny spots and well-drained soil, preferring a semi-arid and mild temperate area with cool winters and hot summers. In the U.S. they seem to be best suited for the hot desert valleys of California and Zone 9 of the Southwest. They will be damaged by temperatures below 12 degrees F. Some do well in partial shade; they can thrive in calcareous or acidic loam. Established trees can take drought, but they must receive water for good fruit production. New plants need water every two to four weeks.

Younger plants, 2-3 years old, may drop their fruit. This is in the period when growth from the crown is more necessary than the bearing of fruit. As the trees mature they should hold their fruit. The trees are self-pollinating, or they can be cross-pollinated by insects. There is no sizeable wind pollination. Cross-pollination results in a yield of more fruit.

An annual fertilizer of two to four ounces of a nitrogen form is suggested for the first two springs of the plant's life. After that time, most people suggest simply using a heavy composting; however, some growers adhere to a yearly nitrogen application for all trees.

The plants usually mature to a height of six to fifteen feet, sometimes taller. They have glossy, green leaves that are 2-4 inches





long and tapered at both ends. Most plants are deciduous, but some of the pomegranate plants cling to their leaves all year. The pomegranate plant is diverse: ornamental, fruit-bearing, dwarf sized; and, now, bonsai plants bearing fruits can be purchased in specialty venues.

The bark appears as reddish-brown; but with age, it fades into gray. The bark, along with some tannin within the leaves and rind of the fruit, had many uses. It was used for curing leather and was used formerly in producing Morocco leather. The rind and flowers were used for textile dyes. Steeping leaves in vinegar produced ink. In Japan, an insecticide is made from the bark. The pale-yellow wood is used for making crafts and walking canes.

Bright outstanding orange-red flowers appear on the fruit-bearing cultivars. Some cultivars do not bear fruit; they produce white, yellow, orange-red and apricot flowers. The flowers all form on the end of the branch; each showing a tubular calyx. They form singularly or in clusters of up to 5 booms. The blossoms appear in the spring, but it takes 6 or 7 months before mature

fruit is produced. The fruit ranges from 2 to 5 inches in diameter and must be removed before it becomes overripe since it has a tendency to split if left on the tree too long. Many growers gauge the time of picking by the metallic sound heard when the fruit is tapped. The fruit is not pulled but clipped close to the base. Most of us identify the fruit by its tough leathery rind and ruby red seeds. However, various cultivars produce fruits with coverings and seeds of other colors and variegated shades ranging from white, pink, yellow-red, purple, and vivid red.

When stored under favorable conditions, the shelf life of the fruit could be as much as seven months.

In the U.S., the cultivar 'Wonderful' has enjoyed first place accolades for a number of years now; but it appears to be in the process of being replaced by 'Grenada'.

Pest and diseases seem to be only a minor problem for the pomegranate. There could be leaf and fruit spot, white flies, thrips, mealy bugs and scale insects. Most of these problems can be handled with careful spraying.

Propagation of the cultivars is usually done by means of hardwood cuttings 10 to 20 in. long. Also the seeds germinate easily, and suckers from parent plants can be transplanted. Grafting has rarely been successful.

The plant got its name, *punica granatum*, from Latin. (Punica was the Roman name for the area around the ancient city of Carthage, where pomegranate groves were abundant.) The common name comes from the Old French language: *pome* apple and *grenate* seedy. Many words in today's language are derived from pomegranate. The French named the hand grenade from it since its impact projects metal bits like the scattering seeds of the pomegranate. Many geographical names have been derived from it, ex. Granada, Spain.

Customs built around the pomegranate are found in various cultures today. While on a trip to Greece, I was fascinated with their custom of throwing pomegranates on the doorsteps at New Year's. It denoted a wish for good luck; perhaps, following the ancient belief that the pomegranate signified fertility because of the multiple beautiful seeds of the fruit.

Chinese Tallow, *Ligustrum* sps., and Tree-of-Heaven make top 5 list

Dr. Jim Miller of the U.S. Forest Service has recently announced what he thinks are the top 5 invasive plants of Southern forests. "Cogon-grass, tallowtree, and Japanese climbing fern are among the fastest moving and most destructive nonnative plant species facing many southern landowners this year," said Dr. Miller. "Rounding out the top five invasive species that I'm very concerned about would be tree-of-heaven and nonnative privets." These species are already some of our most reported invasive species, so try to avoid planting them if possible.

Junior Master Gardeners

Benold Butterflies have spread their wings!

This semester the Benold Butterflies have spread their wings. Our Junior Master Gardener Group at Benold Middle School is flourishing! Currently we have twelve Junior Master Gardeners who will be certified at the end of the semester.

We are planning two large projects for this semester. In one of these projects we plan to make the front of our school more presentable. It is a high traffic area that's has lots of students moving through there. We want to create eco-friendly ways to improve that area.

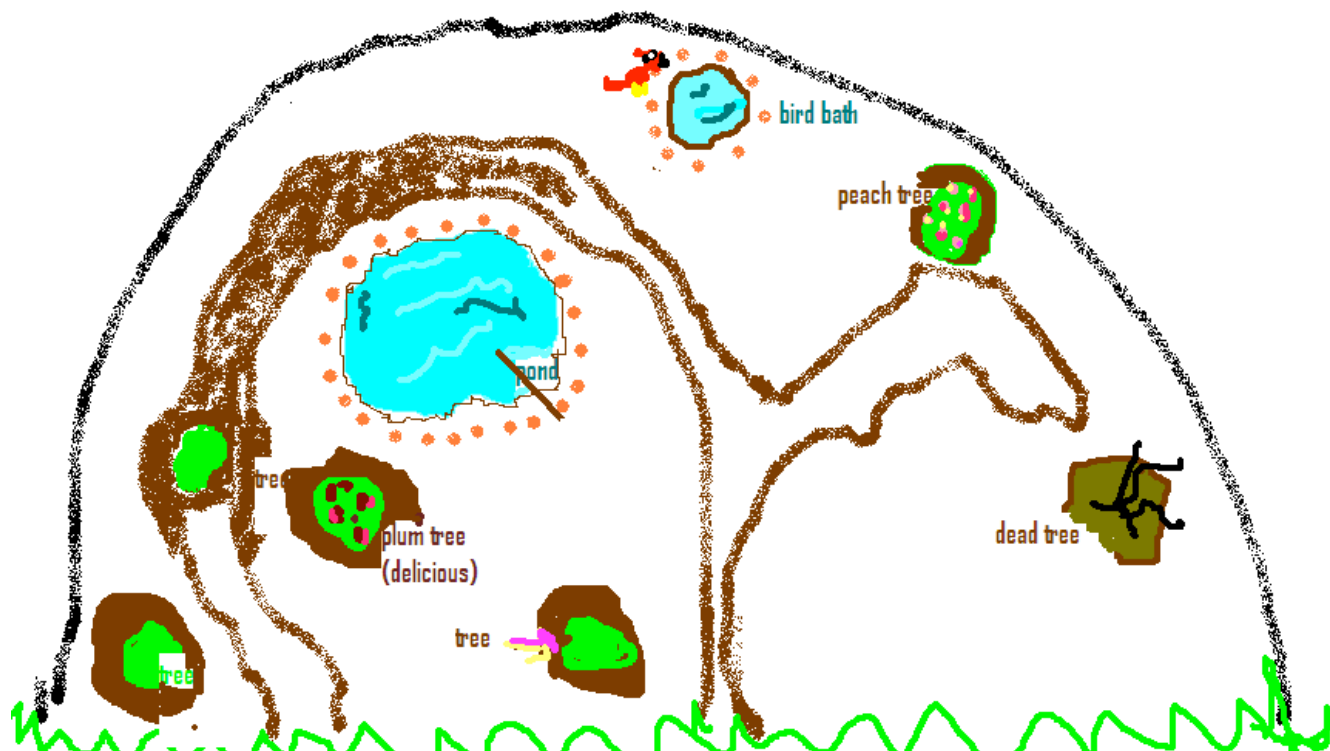
In the other project we are trying to re-grow our garden that was built by the Williamson County Master Gardeners last year. With the long summer and NO RAIN!! we have to replant our garden.

Our JMG group meets Thursdays at Benold Middle School from 4 to 6 pm and we are always looking for help.

For more information please contact Mrs Thornell at

(512) 943-5000 ext. 6925

or visit us on the web at www.georgetownasap.org



Benold Middle School

Junior Master Gardeners

Hutto Elementary School

Paul and Sandy Lawrence

On Saturday, November 15, 2008, some of the 2008 WCMG students attended their first Junior Master Gardener volunteer opportunity at Hutto Elementary School

We were faced with a almost bare planting bed with a few existing shrubs. And so the work began...

The day began in Georgetown, where three pickup trucks were loaded with "Container Mix" soil, courtesy of Gardenville. We would like to thank them for their very generous donation.

By trowel, rake, pitchfork, shovel & "sharpshooter", WCMG students pulled weeds and loosened the existing soils in the school's courtyard. The "Container Mix" was unloaded and wheel barrowed through a portion of the school into the courtyard. It was worked into the existing beds to create a rich and fertile planting medium, perfect for flowers.

We created interest by elevating a section of the bed, allowing the newly planted alyssum to spill over an existing rock. Some of the flowers added in the courtyard beds were violas and flowering kale. Once all the flowers were planted, it was then time to top the beds off with a nice thick layer of mulch. One truckload of mulch later (also courtesy of Gardenville) and more trips with the wheelbarrows, students completed their work for the day.

Enjoying the day at Hutto Elementary School under the guidance of Wayne, Patsy & Juanita were (front row) Janet, Kris, Grace B., (back row) Beth, Jane, Grace, Tonya, Joanne, Sally, Sandy, and Paul (not pictured).



Master Gardener Basics

Back to the Basics**Winola VanArtsdalen**

Earlier in this series, in the November newsletter, planting seeds in place was discussed, but this article specifically focuses on enriching the soil, preparing the seedbed, and planting seeds in the vegetable garden.

PREPARING THE SOIL AND PLANTING VEGETABLE SEEDS

For your vegetable garden to be successful, you must choose your location carefully with at least six hours of sunshine and access to water. Once you have determined your location, the soil becomes your primary consideration. The soil mix is crucial to your garden's success. As the old saying goes, "Lousy soil, lousy garden." So this is where the work begins!

Your garden must have high organic content and be well-drained which is better accomplished with raised beds. If there is existing grass and/or perennial weeds, they must be removed either with solarization or a product like Roundup. The easiest place to get your soil is to buy a garden soil mix from a reliable nursery, but do know what is in it and its source. If you mix your own, ideally it should be a mix of 1/3 compost, 1/3 topsoil, and 1/3 coarse sand, expanded shale or other aggregates. If available, the aggregates will last longer than compost and will keep the soil loose, but, if you do not have them, just use lots of compost. The soil should be tested every two to three years to determine amendments needed to correct pH and any nutrients lacking, but compost should be added each planting season. Develop a mindset where you are always looking for more organics to keep enriching your soil!

The best way to bring a large supply of nutrients to your soil is to plant cover crops, green manure. You can plan your garden to keep a third or a fourth of it in cover crops on a rotating basis. Elbon rye, a grain, will both add organic matter and help control nematodes. Leguminous crops, such as peas and beans, can take nitrogen from the air and "fix" it in their roots. For example, you could plant elbon rye before November 15, let it grow, cut it the following spring, and then till or spade it under. If you want to plant a cover crop in an area in the spring, you could use a legume like crowder peas. After you have tilled or spaded in organics, let the soil rest two or three weeks. You now need to pre-irrigate your soil before planting. Some years you might only need to do this in the fall, but, with the drought we have experienced this past year, you definitely need to do it this spring.

When you have loose, enriched soil in place with good drainage, you have pre-irrigated, and the timing is right to plant the vegetables of your choice, rake the soil several directions to be sure it is loose and well-aerated with absolutely no clods (above right). You have added amendments to ensure a well balanced soil with organics to enrich and give soil structure, but your vegetables will need even more macronutrients. You must "feed the soil to feed your plants." Mix in some balanced fertilizer such as 20-20-20 before planting your seeds. If you plan to keep your garden strictly

organic, add seaweed or other natural fertilizers. Just remember that organics have less macro-nutrients per volume, so you must use more of them.

Using something for a straight edge such as string or a board, mark shallow furrows for your seeds in rows, or whatever design you choose, at the depth recommended on the seed packet (below bottom). The seeds do not need nitrogen as much now, so it can be added at frequent intervals later while the plants are growing in the form of a synthetic food like Miracle Gro or Peters or an organic such as compost tea. Now, at the time you are planting, research has shown that plants will be healthier if given additional *phosphorus with best results realized when the phosphorus is 2 inches from the seed. To apply the phosphorus, make another trench 2 inches deep and 2 inches away from where you will spread the seed. Apply



phosphorous in this location. Now, before planting your seeds in the furrow, spread a little vermiculite to help keep the seed uniformly moist for germination. Next, spread the seeds over the vermiculite and cover them according to instructions for this particular seed. If the seed is not to be covered, you can still scatter a small amount of compost or potting medium to just hold the seeds in place and keep them from drying out. Now, press the seeds with your hand, a board, or a flat shovel to ensure the seeds make contact with the soil; then water thoroughly with a light spray.

After carefully planning your garden, preparing the soil and planting your chosen varieties of vegetables, you are well on your way to a successful gardening experience. When the seedlings have several leaves, thin them to spacing recommended on the seed packet. If you do not do this, you will have many spindly plants with

very little production. To avoid disturbing the roots of plants you are leaving in the ground, you may clip the unwanted seedlings close to the ground with scissors or small clippers. You must keep watch to be sure that your soil is kept evenly moist, fertilize regularly, and pull weeds early. Any weeds left in your garden will take needed moisture and nutrients away from your plants. Now, remember another old farmers' saying, "The best thing you can put on your crops is your shadow." With continued vigilance, you will soon be able to enjoy the fruits of your labor—a bountiful harvest to enjoy in your kitchen! Happy harvest!

* For a source of phosphorus, you can purchase blood meal at most nurseries, and Gardenville has a granular product, "Rocket Fuel" with a 2-6-1 formula. There are also many liquid fertilizers available with a high phosphorus content.

Master Gardener Basics

Moonstruck Gardening

Grace Bryce

In anticipation of warmer spring weather and the completion of construction of my raised garden beds, I have been busy starting seeds indoors. Some of them have grown so fast, I wouldn't be surprised if they said, "Feed me, Seymour!". It occurred to me that I should do my homework and see when would be the best time to plant these babies in my outdoor garden.

I consulted my Master Gardener Handbook to refresh my memory about soil temperatures, who likes to be transplanted and who doesn't, and how long it takes for certain seeds to germinate. I then consulted the planting guide which shows the time to plant in relation to the last frost. I printed a calendar on my computer and began to make notes. I had picked up a copy of Texas Gardener at a vegetable seminar I attended the week before. It had a handy planting table for various vegetables with dates according to a zone diagram. The dates are based on average freeze dates. I made more notes on my calendar.

I noticed an article entitled "Lunar Gardening" in the magazine. According to William Scheik, "Lunar gardening...refers to efforts to coordinate every activity in the garden with the phases of the moon. For some lunar gardeners, this activity is also coordinated with the moon's perceived 'journey' through the stellar constellations." I was fascinated. The phases of the moon affect our earthly ocean tides, it makes sense that it could also affect water content in our gardens. From the lunar gardener's view point, "the moisture in the ground becomes most available to the plants during a full moon.... plants are likely to absorb more water than at other times.... seed will be most viable during periods leading to a full

moon." The article went on to explain the phases of the moon and waxing and waning periods. Plants with exposed seeds do best when started during the first seven days of the moon's waxing phase. It said the second seven days of a waxing moon (after the first quarter moon) was the best time to plant above ground crops bearing fruit with enclosed seeds. The waning moon's decrease in light was more beneficial for below-ground vegetables, and they should be planted in the first seven days of the waning moon (after the full moon). The fourth quarter moon (waning) was considered the best time for controlling insects, pruning and harvesting crops. Furthermore, constellations could also be followed and there were favorable constellations and unfavorable constellations for planting. It looks a little complicated beyond that, but I was intrigued.

I remembered that my grandmother used the moon for everything from her gardening to when she cut her hair and decided to consult my trusty Farmer's Almanac to see if I could find new wisdom there. I've bought one every year since I can remember, for what I couldn't tell you, but this year it has come in handy. The almanac had each month listed with the dates of the phases of the moon, and it even had the constellations listed for each day. I proceeded to compare their calendar with the planting table and revised my calendar again for when I will plant. I don't know if I will have a more successful garden with the help of the moon, but I find it fun and it doesn't conflict with the other information I have about planting. I may be a loony gardener instead of a lunar gardener before summer gets here.

Name that Plant

People Names in Native-Plant Names, Part VIII

The Female Factor

Bill Ward

Lindheimer, Engelmann, Berlandier, Drummond, Roemer—all these are familiar surnames of early botanists who are honored in the names of our native plants. All are male. Were there any women botanists involved in early Texas botany? The answer is yes, there were a few.

By the late 1700s, it was recognized that the science of botany was well within the female comprehension. The "higher" societies of Europe came to accept botany as a scientific avocation suitable for women. Through the Nineteenth Century, women became increasingly more important to the growth of botanical science in both Europe and North America, even though most of the female botanists were not professionals.

One such self-taught botanist was Maud Jeannie Fuller Young, who wrote the first textbook on Texas botany, "Familiar Lessons in Botany, with Flora of Texas," in 1873.

Maud Jeannie was born Matilda Jane Fuller in North Carolina in 1826. When she was 17, her family settled in Houston. Four years later she married Dr. Samuel Young, who died before the birth of their son. Mrs. Young wrote poems, essays, and fiction that was published in Houston newspapers and various magazines. She was a staunch supporter of the Confederacy and was known as "the Mother of Hood's Brigade."

Mrs. Young had a deep interest in botany, and she was the Texas state botanist in 1872–1873. After her death in 1882, her son took her herbarium of Texas ferns and flowering plants to his home in Galveston, where the collection was lost during the hurricane of 1900.

As far as I can tell, no native plants were named for Mrs. M. J. Young, but another woman named Young did receive that honor. Mary Sophie Young (1872-1919) was one of the first botanists at the

University of Texas, and her botanical collections had a significant role in starting the highly respected University of Texas herbarium.

Mary was born in Ohio, the last child and only daughter of eight children. Tramps through the countryside with her brothers contributed to the strength of character and toughness in the field that would serve her well in later years. After receiving a BA from Wellesley College in 1895, Mary taught high school in Missouri, Illinois, and Wisconsin. While still teaching high school in Wisconsin, she began graduate work at the University of Chicago, eventually earning her MS and PhD in botany.

Dr. Mary Young arrived at the University of Texas at Austin in 1910. Reportedly, she was an outstanding teacher. She took her students on plant-collecting trips east to the Blackland Prairies and west to the Edwards Plateau. Later she took longer collecting trips during the summers, covering a wide range of Texas vegetation regions from East Texas to the Trans Pecos to the Panhandle. In those days she had to endure the summer hikes in heavy, ankle-length skirts.

She corresponded with well-known botanists and traded specimens with other herbariums around the country, helping build the reputation of the University of Texas herbarium. Thousands of her specimens are included in the present collection at the Plant Resources Center at the University of Texas. Mary Young died of cancer in 1919 at the young age of 46.

Three new taxa came from her collections, and the name of one honors her, Young's snowbell (*Styrax youngiae*). This species (now a subspecies of *S. platanifolius*) is known only from where Mary Young collected it in the Davis Mountains. It is listed as a Texas endangered species.



Styrax platanifolius ssp. *texasus* (Texas snowbell) is a beautiful shrub or small tree with dark gray bark that was originally named for Mary Young. It is found near streams in canyons in the Hill Country and under no circumstances should it be disturbed. It is rare and endangered in the vicinity of Austin. Leaves broadly ovate to almost circular, up to 4 inches long, with smooth margins and a broad tip, or with a terminal lobe and a lateral one on each side of it, and a lobed to rounded base. Flowers in small clusters, drooping, with 5 white petals up to 5/8 inch long, suggesting little bells, opening in April and May. Fruit a rounded capsule about 3/8 inch in diameter, with a short tip, the base covered with a remnant (calyx) of the flower

Image courtesy LBJWC

Meet Your Master Gardeners

Paul and Sandy Lawrence

Each month we will be spotlighting one of the Master Gardeners in our group. Getting to know each other is something that we don't really seem to have time to do, so hopefully, this will be a way to make some more "connections" with the people in our group.— Sandra Rosen

Don't you just love this analogy—and isn't it true? "Gardening is like politics—everything is local."

Paul and Sandy Lawrence are certified Master Gardeners from our newly graduated group. One of Paul's many interests is writing, and he does have a great way with the language. He describes his career as like a salad dressing—oil and water. First as a geologist he worked in Houston in the oil industry, and now he has a consulting company—Texas Land and Water Designs. He is especially interested in rainwater collection and in helping his clients use and appreciate the relationship between their land and the water.

Sandy has actually been the mentor and the teacher in their gardening activity. As she says, she has ALWAYS been interested in gardening. Although she grew up in the Houston area, she remembers being hauled around her grandparents' farm on a cotton sack by her parents. Her grandmother grew verbenas, zinnias, and vincas, and, of course, Sandy makes sure these flowers are always in her garden. If that weren't enough, when she was 16, she worked in a nursery and was then hooked on growing and gardening for sure.

Paul's early gardening experiences were on his grandparents' farm in Maine where he worked part-time. He remembers playing around the huge sunflowers and picking the worms as they were turned over by the tractor so that he could go fishing. He also picked beans and strawberries although he ate so many of the strawberries that they weren't a good "cash crop" for him.

As you have probably guessed by now, the geologist, after graduation from Indiana State University, went to Houston, Texas, to work in the oil industry. Sandy, after completing a business degree at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, worked as an accountant in Houston—and there they met. They have also lived in Midland, West Virginia, and spent 20 years in Windham, Maine. (In Maine the growing season was from Memorial Day to Labor Day—a big plus for moving to Texas)

In every apartment and every house where they lived, Sandy made sure they had vegetables and flowers growing—sometimes it would only be peppers and basil in cinderblocks. Paul provided the muscle for all the projects and over the years grew to appreciate and enjoy gardening also.

Their son, Matt, graduated from UT and lives in Austin, so that, plus Sandy's Texas roots, made this area a great retirement spot. Actually, however, they both still work—Paul with his land and water consulting business, and Sandy keeping books for several companies.

They both feel it is important to know the plant, to know the local growing conditions, and to know exactly what is needed to insure success in quality, quantity, and taste before planting. Since they both are so knowledgeable about gardening, I wondered why in the world they felt they needed a Master Gardener course. The answer was that they needed a vantage point for this area and also to "catch up" on anything they might have missed in their gardening education. The volunteer aspect of the Master Gardener group is quite important to them. They have been involved in community and school volunteering wherever they have lived and appreciate the value both to others and to themselves.

In addition to working, gardening, and volunteering, Paul finds time for reading, hunting, writing grants, and teaching classes and seminars. Sandy reads, paints, and does genealogy searches. I suspect that Paul and Sandy would fit into a "high achievers" category, but most importantly, they are kind and caring and a very special addition to our Master Gardener group.

Another gardening quote that all gardeners will understand—Sandy says, "I don't know why I have to do it, but I do."



Treats from the Master Garden

Stretching the Food Budget

Margaret Seals

Before I start with some hints and recipes for how to make your food budget stretch in these tough economic times, I want to tell you a story about my friend, Vivien, who was raised in Northern Ireland in a household, let's just say, that had "too much month left over at the end of the money." When I asked her once how her mother stretched the food budget, she replied, "We often had potatoes and point for supper." "Point," I replied, "what is point?" (I was thinking that it might be an Irish term for a local rabbit or other small animal.) "Well," Vivien told me with a twinkle in her eye, "you eat the potatoes and point to where the meat should be on the platter."

We may not be ready for "point" just yet since the national economic downturn has not had such dire consequences in Texas as in the rest of the United States; however, we all dreadfully anticipate what might be coming. Therefore, in the spirit of what my family has always called "using all the pig except the squeal", here are a few tips that might help you come out even at the end of the month in your kitchen.

Make a budget if you don't already have one. This may seem too obvious, but putting down a figure helps to keep you on track as you buy.

Never spend your entire monthly food budget at one time. Again, a fairly obvious tip, but one that will help in case ingredients go bad, unexpected company comes, covered dish events pop up at church or in your neighborhood, sales occur or you forget something. Also, highly perishable fresh fruits and vegetables can be purchased as they come into season at lower prices.

Make a monthly meal plan, including any lunches that you pack at home and between-meal snacks. This step is essential in stretching the food budget because it helps to plan for stretching key ingredients and using leftovers, a key in saving not only money, but your time as well. And it makes you aware of the "non-nutritious items" (junk food) we all tend to consume.

Make a grocery shopping list, placing the staples at the top of the list. Check your store weekly specials, and use those coupons. Take advantage of "day old bread" and "twofer" kinds of promotions at your store. Ask the stockers about these since some of them are unadvertised.

Now, stick to it. Make a budget and a meal plan. This is where most of us go wrong. We have good intentions, but you know where that paved road leads!

Organize your meal list so that it contains several meals from one key ingredient. For example, a large roast or chicken can stretch for several meals if you plan ahead. Cutting back on the meat consumed (or cutting out meat altogether) is another choice to save money. (Though the choice for becoming a vegetarian is usually not related just to economics.) Whole wheat pasta, brown rice, polenta or dried beans can be flavored with a just a bit of meat (cutting back) or spices only (cutting out the meat) for a really inexpensive meal that provides a big nutritional boost. And, of course, mixing eggs and cheese with other ingredients is like adding a rubber band to the dish.

Grow your own vegetables and herbs. After all, you are Master Gardeners! Move those petunias over in your flower beds, and get some lettuce and basil or other vegetables and herbs growing there.

If you have read to this point and are thinking "tell me something that I don't already know or have not already been practicing to stretch my food budget," here are a couple of new recipe ideas for putting your kitchen economics expertise into action: First, for what I call "Chicken Stretchers," bake a large chicken, unseasoned, (to be a little more economical) or purchase a large store-cooked Rotisserie Chicken (to save time).

Lickety-Split Lasagna

From Rotisserie Chickens to the Rescue

(Makes 8 Servings. Unless you have a large family, this will make two meals. If there are only 2 of you, freezing the leftovers in portions may produce 3 meals or more, especially if you serve it with a little green salad.)

Chicken Filling:

1/2 large cooked chicken, about 1 1/2 C, deboned and shredded (if you are using a Rotisserie Chicken, remember that salt and seasonings have been added)

1 large (26-28 oz) jar spaghetti sauce (also salted, probably with the chicken, enough salt for the entire dish, but you might want to taste the filling to be sure)

1 can (8 oz) tomato sauce, with basil and oregano added to taste

1 T minced garlic (optional: use 2 T chopped sweet onion)

Cheese Filling:

1 large egg

1 large (15 oz) carton ricotta cheese (about 1 3/4 C) (can be part skim ricotta to save calories)

1 small box (10 oz) frozen, chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry, or fresh, chopped spinach from your garden

1 t. dried Italian herbs (basil, oregano)

¼ t ground nutmeg

3 C shredded mozzarella cheese, divided

2/3 C parmesan cheese, divided

Pasta Filling:

1 Box, no-boil, oven-ready lasagna noodles, whole wheat if possible

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.

Lightly grease a 13x9 inch baking pan, and cut enough foil to cover the top

Make cheese filling: Lightly beat egg, stir in the ricotta, spinach, and seasonings. Stir in 2 C mozzarella cheese and 1/3 C parmesan cheese.

Make chicken filling: Combine all chicken filling ingredients.

Assemble lasagna: Spread about half of the chicken filling on the bottom of the pan, place 3 lasagna noodles crosswise over the filling leaving space between the noodles and between the noodles and the side of the pan. Spread a generous amount of the cheese filling over the pasta. Repeat layers 2 more times. Combine the remaining cheeses and sprinkle over the top. Press down lightly. Cover loosely with foil and bake for 45 min. Remove foil and bake until bubbly, about 15 min. Let rest before serving.

(For a vegetarian version of Lickety-Split Lasagna, simply omit the chicken.)

Now, you still have half a chicken for your next meal. You can either shred it and freeze it for the next casserole, or make the next casserole filling and freeze it for finishing and baking later.

Topsy-Turvy Tamale Pie

From Rotisserie Chickens to the Rescue

(Makes 4-6 Servings, depending on how many adults/children are in your family. If there are 3 in your family, it will make 2 meals, especially if served with a green salad.)

Spice blend:

2 T Chili Powder, 1 t. dry oregano, 1 t cumin, ½ t salt (mix together)

Filling:

½ large cooked chicken, deboned and shredded (remember if you are using rotisserie chicken, it has already been seasoned)

1 T vegetable oil

1 large onion, chopped (about 1 C)

1C green pepper, chopped

1 t. minced garlic (can be omitted)

2 (10 oz) cans diced tomatoes and green chiles

1 (15 oz) can pinto beans, or use 1 ½ C leftover cooked pintos

1 C frozen corn kernels or 1 (7 oz) can corn, drained

1 (3.8 oz) can chopped black olives, drained (about 1 C)

Topping:

1 small box (8 ½ oz) corn muffin mix (about 1 ½ C)

1 C shredded sharp cheddar cheese, divided

1 (4 oz) can diced, mild chiles, undrained

1/3 C milk 1 egg

1 t Chili Powder

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

Make the spice blend: Stir ingredients together and set aside.

Make the filling: Heat oil in a nonstick skillet over med heat. Add the onion and bell pepper, and cook, stirring frequently, until the onion begins to soften, about 4 minutes. Add the garlic and spice blend, and cook 2 more minutes, stirring constantly. Add the tomatoes, chicken, beans, corn and black olives. Stir well to combine, and bring to a simmer. Turn the heat to low and let the mixture simmer while you make the topping, stirring occasionally.

(If you are planning to freeze this casserole for later, stop now. Pour filling into a freezer container and freeze. Thaw completely before finishing)

To continue, this is important: Wrap your nonstick skillet handle in foil if it is not ovenproof.

Make the topping: Mix the ingredients together in a small bowl, stirring in ½ C cheese. Spoon the topping over the skillet, leaving a ½ inch border between the topping and the edge of the skillet. Sprinkle with the remaining ½ C cheddar cheese. Bake for 15-20 minutes, until the top is firm, but springy when touched lightly, or until a knife inserted in the center of the topping comes out clean. Serve immediately.

(For a vegetarian version of this casserole, simply omit chicken.)

Hope you enjoy these budget saving tips and “Chicken Stretchers.” If you have to take a covered dish to a church, neighborhood or family gathering, both of these casseroles go together quickly and are very tasty.

President's Column

New Year, New Challenges**Wayne Rhoden**

Hello Master Gardeners!

If you are like me, you are ready to cut back all of your shrubs and perennial plants and get ready for spring. I still recommend that you wait until the middle of February to cut back your perennials. Today it was 23 degrees here in Georgetown and I firmly believe that leaving the stems and limbs on will protect the plants from the cold weather. I have followed this recommendation for several years and my garden looks better than some I see that have been cut back in January. I see several landscapers that cut the Gregg's salvia back severely and it takes a long time for those to get to the bloom stage. Try it in your yard this year by cutting back some and leaving others to see if there is any difference.

I am proud of our new Master Gardeners who have completed their volunteer hours and educational hours and have become certified. Seventy percent of our initial class certified and most of those are still active members. Our latest class already has 10 members who have certified, many before the class completed. I know that more are close. All are enthusiastic and ready to volunteer to help the citizens of Williamson County. It seems that our JMG programs are getting under way and we are getting more requests to help at schools, boy scouts, and some churches that want to start a program.

We will be starting a new class in August and possibly a new teacher/JMG training session in July. We will also be participating in the Georgetown Home and Garden Show in March, so there will be many more volunteer opportunities to get your hours for certification. We have scheduled 2 plant sales in April and May, depending on how many plants we have to sell. Happy gardening!

Wayne

Submissions?

If you would like to contribute to the *Williamson County Master Gardeners Journal* please send your articles, item, and photographs to Christine Powell at xtinepowell@verizon.net by the 25th of the month. Remember to include captions and attribution details. The Editor is grateful to all those who have submitted items in the past and would like to thank those who would like to send things in the future. Thank you!



"New Frontiers" in horticulture and gardening

March 22-26, 2009

The Las Vegas International Master Gardener Conference will address issues that gardeners everywhere face -- water conservation, proper plant selection, soil enrichment, pest control -- while also presenting new concepts in environmental stewardship and "green" technologies. Since what is old has become new again, we will also explore historical and traditional plants and methods.





Specialist Training 2009

Come join **Bexar County Master Gardeners** in beautiful San Antonio, Texas on *Wednesday, February 25 through noon Friday, February 27*, to learn new ideas and techniques that will help you implement or grow effective youth gardening programs in your school class, JMG® club, after-school program, 4-H youth gardening project, home school or any group of interested young gardeners.

Hector J. Hernandez, Youth Gardening Coordinator, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, 3355 Cherry Ridge Drive, Suite 208, San Antonio, TX 78230-4018, (210) 467-6575, Fax (210) 366-0535

hjherandez@ag.tamu.edu

Submit registration form along with personal check or money order to the hosting facilitator:

Bexar County Master Gardeners

Attn: Angel Torres, 3355 Cherry Ridge Drive, Suite 212

San Antonio, TX 78230-4818

(210) 467-6575

E-mail: matorres@ag.tamu.edu

2009 Texas Master Gardener State Conference April 23-24 & 25, 2009 Marshall, Texas.

Make plans to join us for the 2009 Texas Master Gardener State Conference that will be held in beautiful East Texas.

For more information:

Harrison County Master Gardener Association
c/o Extension Office, 102 West Houston
Marshall, TX. 75670

(903) 935-8413

See this link for more information:

<http://tcaaa.tamu.edu/09statemeeting.htm>



"New Frontiers" in horticulture and gardening

March 22-26, 2009

The Las Vegas International Master Gardener Conference will address issues that gardeners everywhere face -- water conservation, proper plant selection, soil enrichment, pest control -- while also presenting new concepts in environmental stewardship and "green" technologies. Since what is old has become new again, we will also explore historical and traditional plants and methods.



September 28 – October 2, 2009 Master Volunteer Entomology Specialist Training

Texas AgriLife Extension Service Montgomery County Office, Conroe, TX

Hosted by Dr. Paul R. Nester, Extension Program Specialist, Houston/Metro area, and the Montgomery County Master Gardeners.

- Registration fee of \$300.00 includes collecting kit with lots of goodies; lectures; Extension bulletins; 3 lunches, 1 dinner, snacks & drinks
- Transportation and lodging is on your own
- Course is limited to 25 applicants; deadline is July 18, 2009

Contact Paul Nester at PNester@ag.tamu.edu or 281-855-5639 with any questions.

[Registration material](#)



Williamson County Master Gardener Association Officers for 2008

Officers:

Wayne Rhoden, President:	mgardener@suddenlink.net	(512) 869-8016
Juanita James, Vice-President	jjames20@sbcglobal.net	(512) 341-7116
Nancy Moore, Treasurer:	nancy3610@att.net	(512) 215-9697
Jeanne Barker, Secretary:	jubarker@yahoo.com	(512) 608-1296

Standing Committees/Chairpersons:

Programs/Education:

Publicity:	Patsy Bredahl	pbredahl@austin.rr.com	(512) 217-0693
------------	---------------	--	----------------

Membership/Volunteer Opportunities:

	John Papich	texasjayp@yahoo.com	(512) 863-4098
--	-------------	--	----------------

Awards:	Margaret Seals	marjim@suddenlink.net	(512) 863-4127
---------	----------------	--	----------------

Class Training/Facilitation:

	John Papich	texasjayp@yahoo.com	(512) 863-4098
--	-------------	--	----------------

Jr. Master Gardener Coordinator:

	Patsy Bredahl	pbredahl@austin.rr.com	(512) 217-0693
--	---------------	--	----------------

	Juanita James	jjames20@sbcglobal.net	(512) 341-7116
--	---------------	--	----------------

Fundraising:

Greenhouse Manager:	Duffy Banfield	villaparkcats@sbcglobal.net	
---------------------	----------------	--	--

Ad Hoc Committees:

New Class:	John Papich	texasjayp@yahoo.com	(512) 863-4098
------------	-------------	--	----------------

Newsletter Editor:	Christine Powell	xtinepowell@verizon.net	(512) 863-8250
--------------------	------------------	--	----------------

Newsletter Layout:	Christine Powell	xtinepowell@verizon.net	(512) 863-8250
--------------------	------------------	--	----------------

WCMG Website:

Webmaster:	Christine Powell	http://grovesite.com/mg/wcmg	
		xtinepowell@verizon.net	(512) 863-8250

Mailing address:	3151 Inner Loop Road, Suite A, Georgetown, TX 78626		
------------------	---	--	--

Monthly Meetings

Williamson County Master Gardeners hold monthly meetings at the Williamson County Extension Office, 3151 SE Innerloop Road, Suite A, Georgetown on the second Monday of each month at 6:00pm. Master Gardeners and the public are welcome to attend.