

Williamson County Master Gardener Journal

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QUOTE OF THE MONTH



Williamson County's first class includes 35 students

Training New Master Gardeners

The Williamson County Master Gardener program is pleased to announce that its first training class has almost completed its training. Classes have been held on consecutive Wednesdays, starting August 15, 2007, and will finish on November 14. These classes were conducted in the Training Room located at the Central Maintenance Facility at 3151 SE Inner Loop Road in Georgetown. The four-hour sessions add up to a total of 56 educational hours towards a Master Gardener Intern Certification. The interns will then be asked to complete 50 hours of relevant volunteer work and complete additional requirements before being certified as Texas Master Gardeners.

The new class will join the existing members of the Williamson County Master Gardener Association, all of whom had to receive their training elsewhere. The 2007 officers of the Association are listed on page 12 of this issue.

Master Gardeners are local community volunteers who work with the Texas Cooperative Extension to increase the availability of horticultural information and improve their community's quality of life through various horticultural projects.

New communications hub Website Launched



Williamson County Master Gardeners now have a presence on the World Wide Web at the address (URL):

<http://grovesite.com/mg/wcwg>.

The site was developed with the assistance of the Texas Extension Service at Texas A&M University in College Station using Grovesite software from Grove Technologies.

The site allows access by the general public to information about the Master Gardener program and its activities in Williamson County. For example, this newsletter will be available online as will the calendar of coming events.

The webmaster is Christine Powell, who may be contacted at (512) 863-8250.

To Guide the Public

FIRST HELP DESK ORIENTATION SAM MYERS

On October 11th the first of a series of training sessions was conducted to orient Master Gardener Students from our first class on how to work the Help Desk at the Williamson County Extension office.

These students, Christine Alexander, Winola Van Artsdalen, Patsy Brehdahl (pictured left to right below), and Juanita James will begin their “time in the trenches” the week of October 15th under the mentorship of a certified Williamson County Master Gardener. Some of their service hours towards certification can now be earned answering phone-in and walk-in questions from county residents about home landscape and gardening problems.

The training started with reiterating the purpose of the Texas A&M Extension Service and how Master Gardeners, especially in this direct contact with the public, can further the educational goals of Extension.

This was followed by an orientation on the physical equipment of the office: the phones; the computers; the reference materials; the file cabinets of Extension Publications; and how to use them. They also met Donna Colburn, the Office Manager (and invaluable “go-to person” for help). Several recent inquiries were reviewed to illustrate how they were handled and phone use was demonstrated.

The training was conducted by Leslie and Sam Myers, Master Gardeners for over seven years (with several hundred hours logged answering phones) using a pamphlet of guidelines and procedures tailored for our situation with major effort by Janet Church, VP of WCMGA.



Using Leaf Mold

Free Gold for All

Christine Powell

My earliest recollections are of hours spent with my father in the gardens he tended. Not just the 30 by 60-foot mixed flower, fruit, and vegetable garden at the back of our fourteenth-century house in the Fenland of Eastern England, but the grand estate garden around the former palace of the Bishops of Ely. These happy memories provide some of the most important educational experiences of my life. My dad was a superb teacher who said little but imparted his years of knowledge in a gentle, loving way.

My father, John, can only be described as a good man who loved nature and had an extraordinarily large green thumb. His wealthier acquaintances often asked him to do their home gardens, and he apparently had trouble saying no. One thing to remember if you asked my father to do your garden was that that garden was no longer yours. He did with it what he willed. If he took a dislike to a plant that he felt was in the wrong place or just simply out of place, it did not stand a chance. One thing all his “employees,” family, and friends would agree on was there was something about that black stuff he used that was magic.

I knew the secret to his success, as I had helped him. Throughout my childhood, I had watched the slow and gentle progression from autumn wonder to black gold. Oh yes, I have the magic too.

I am prepared to share my knowledge, but it comes at a price—a change in lifelong habits. I can tell you now it that it will not cost you a penny, will save you a fortune, and make your life richer every day. Too good to be true? No, read on...

The answer, my friends, is laying on the ground. It is around your trees, in your flower beds, and on your lawns. The answer is leaves. On every visit to woods and forests you smell that wonderful fresh humus smell, the scent of growth. Leaves fall, they break down, and put all their goodness back into the earth. We can do that too.

My father had a very simple system. He had a wonderful deeply shaded corner, with old brick walls on two sides and a third side formed by trees and shrubs. Along one wall, he had a series of two-square-yard pens. Chicken wire connecting a wooden stake against the wall with another two yards from the wall formed the sides (similar to the pen shown at right, but better maintained). Each year he would fill up one of the pens with that autumn’s “crop” of fallen leaves. When the leaves had decomposed into a wonderful rich soil, he would use it throughout the year, leaving his pen empty for the new fall of leaves each autumn.

Clearly, this system would be too large for most of us,





but a one-yard by one-yard pen (like mine at left) each year is probably manageable in some hidden corner. My father never did anything to his leaf piles, just waited a few years until each pen was ready. I realize this is not an option for most of us, especially in Texas with two “falls” a year. This is easily overcome by chopping the leaves into tiny pieces by the use of a shredder or repeated mowing to speed up the process. Just rake your leaves into a pile and mow! Now place the fragments into a pen. Turn as desired.

Since only raw leaves are used in the process, without other composting materials, the resulting humus can be higher in acid than ideal. The introduction of a little nitrogen and lime can overcome this imbalance. Leaf mold is not as rich a soil as composted leaves, but the addition of a little manure soon rights this and adds calcium and magnesium. Be careful what you add since leaf mold’s value is in its purity.

Alternatively, leaf mold makes fabulous mulch. It releases its nutrients gradually and, as it does so, improves the soil structure. Leaf mold also retains moisture at an amazing level. Some studies report moisture retention five times higher than most topsoils, so it could prove invaluable as a mulch.

Whenever I would take my father to visit my uncle, we would take the gift of leaf mold. Uncle Bill could not have been happier if we had arrived with real gold (like the six-month old sample at right). I loved his long, narrow, garden behind a terraced house on the outskirts of London. The flowers danced and the vegetables glowed with health and vigor. The secret was the yearly addition of my Dad’s famous black magic. You can do this, too.



Treating Brown Patch

“I get the blues when the lawn gets brown.” (Lamentation of a St. Augustine grass lover)

**MARGARET SEALS,
MASTER GARDENER INTERN.
WILLIAMSON COUNTY**

A few weeks ago, a friend called for some advice. “What should I do?” he whined. “My beautiful St Augustine lawn has brown circles.” I immediately checked the “Turf-O-Meter” on my phone. Yep. It was measuring “Tilt.” My friend was gripped with turfgrass terror, and down with a case of the St. Augustine blues.



“I don’t know how it happened,” he went on, “last week it was green and lush all over.”

“Now, now,” I tried to console, “it happens in the best of families.”

It’s absolutely true, no matter what your income, who you voted for in the last election, which side of I-35 you live on or what kind of dog you have, if the weather conditions are right and you have a St. Augustine lawn, chances are anytime from April through October in Williamson County you could get the down and dirty, low-blow, St. Augustine Brown

Patch blues. This year, reports have been coming in about St. Augustine Brown Patch from the beginning of spring due to rainy weather conditions. If we have a rainy fall, this minor problem could become major in the county.

Just what causes this seemingly overnight condition? Blame *Rhizoctonia solani* and high humidity with temperatures over 80 degrees in the daytime and 60 degrees at night. Add a good dose of nitrogen, and you have perfect conditions for this fungus to multiply. The good news is that St. Augustine Brown Patch won’t kill the lawn, but, while you battle the outbreak, your yard will not be pretty. Want a cure? Bad news, no “hair of the dog that bit you” is in sight. Can it, at least, be controlled then? The answer is “yes.”

Here are some tips for control of St. Augustine Brown Patch:

- Water deeply, and only when your St. Augustine grass starts showing a bit of stress. Water only in the early morning. Only an inch of water per week is all that is needed when adequate rainfall does not occur.
- Limit your fertilization schedule to twice a year, in April after the lawn has been mowed a couple of times, and again in late September.
- Do not apply fertilizer if Brown Patch is active.
- At the first sign of Brown Patch, apply a fungicide following the instructions on the label. Make sure the product can be used on St. Augustine grass. Here are a few recommended by Dr. Jim McAfee,

Turf Grass Specialist for Texas Cooperative Extension:

Turfcide 10 G (PCNB)

Ortho Lawn Disease Control (propiconazole)

Spectracide Immunox (myclobutanil)

Ferti-lome Systemic Fungicide (propiconazole)

Hi-Yield Lawn Fungicide Granules (PCNB)

Green Light Fung-Away Systemic Granules

(thiophanate-methyl)

Green Light Systemic Fungicide (triadimefon)

Dragon Systemic Fungicide 3336WP

(thiophanate-methyl)

- Remove grass clippings during periods of Brown Patch activity.

- Increase the height of the cut when mowing.

Normally, for St. Augustine in full sun, the mower can be set from 2.5 inches to 3.5 inches and for shade areas, set the mower from 3.0 inches to 3.5 inches. If you have Brown Patch problems, set the mower at 3.5 inches for the entire lawn.

My friend is now in therapy, working through guilt for overwatering, overfertilizing and low mowing, but the sun is shining, the browns are turning green again, and he no longer has the blues.

For answers to your lawn problems, call a Master Gardener at the Williamson County Extension Center at 512 943-3300.

Answers to Last Month's Quiz

Here are the answers to the October 2007 Journal Quiz:

Top row (left to right): Black and Yellow Garden Spider, Sowbugs/Pillbugs, Differential Grasshopper

Middle row (left to right): Unicorn Caterpillar, Honey Bee, Clouded Skipper Butterfly

Bottom row (left to right): Green Lynx Spider, Gulf Fritillary Butterfly, Black and Yellow Garden Spider

Did you identify all of them?

The quiz for this month is on page 10.

In the Community

Sun City Pocket Park Project

Williamson County Master Gardener Interns Bob Hazelwood and Trisha Clay have been working on the Pocket Park Project at Sun City Gardens. They are requesting assistance from other Master Gardeners and interns. Up to 20 hours of credit toward certification can be gained by working on this project. Work is usually done on Saturday mornings from 8:00 a.m. until Noon. The address of Sun City Gardens is 151 Sun City Blvd. near Tx 195 in northwest Georgetown, and work is generally scheduled on Saturday mornings from 8:00 am until noon. Look for the windmill as a landmark to guide you to the site.



(Above) Bob Hazelwood working on the Pocket Park.

(Left) Trisha Clay and Bob Hazelwood at Sun City Gardens.

Treats from the Master Garden

The Thanksgiving Feast

Margaret Seals

The worst Thanksgiving Dinner I ever cooked was the year I decided to serve something “different.” Tired of making the traditional baked turkey, cornbread dressing, green bean casserole and mashed potatoes with cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie, I threw caution to the wind and substituted side dishes and desserts gleaned from several fancy cooking magazines. After politely eating around the edges of those “different new things” on their plates, my family asked exactly when did I lose my mind? “This,” they declared, “is not Thanksgiving Dinner!” Only the dog thought it was the best Thanksgiving he’d ever had.

What follows here are some great recipes that would really go well with a Thanksgiving dinner. However, here is one word of caution: don’t use these recipes unless this is your first time to cook Thanksgiving dinner. Stick to your tradition, and feed the dog Alpo. Happy Turkey Day!

AMARETTO CRANBERRY SAUCE

Margaret Seals

- 1 C Water
- 2 C Sugar
- 1 (12oz) bag fresh Cranberries
- 1/3 C Smucker’s Orange Marmalade
- Juice of two Lemons
- 1/3 Amaretto
- 1/3 C toasted, slivered Almonds
- 1 envelope Plain Gelatin

Mix water and sugar in a saucepan, and heat to boiling. Add cranberries and cook for about 5 minutes. Remove from heat, and stir in gelatin. Add marmalade and lemon juice. Cool completely, then add Amaretto and almonds. Chill before serving. This will keep in the refrigerator for several weeks, if you have any leftover! It makes a good topping for ice cream, pound cake or cheesecake.

MANGO DESSERT

Nancy Moore

- 2 (3 oz) Boxes Sugar Free Peach Jell-O
- 1 packet of Plain Gelatin
- 1 (12 oz) Container Cool Whip, thawed
- 1 (30 oz) Can Mango Pulp (purchase at a Specialty Grocery Store)
- Strawberries, blueberries, raspberries or fruit of your choice

Dissolve Jell-O and Plain Gelatin in 2 C hot water. Add 2 C cold water. Stir in mango pulp. Refrigerate for about 1 to 1 1/2 hours, or until it looks like the consistency of egg whites when a spoon is dragged through it. Fold

in Cool Whip, and pour into large serving bowl or individual bowls. Return to refrigerator overnight until it sets completely. Add fresh fruit as a topping when serving.

OPEN FACE VEGETABLE SANDWICH HORS D'OEUVRES

Winola VanArtsdalen

About 17 slices Whole wheat bread

8 oz Cream Cheese

8 oz Ranch Dressing

Shredded Carrots

Shredded Colby Cheese

Chopped fresh Broccoli

Mix Cream Cheese and Ranch Dressing. Spread a generous amount of this mixture on whole wheat bread slices. Sprinkle on Carrots, Broccoli and Colby cheese. Cut into fourths.

PUMPKIN BARS

Bob Hazelwood

4 Eggs

1 C Sugar

1 C Canola Oil

1 (16 oz) Can Pumpkin

2 t. Baking Powder

2 t. Cinnamon

1 t. Salt

1 t. Baking Soda

2 C Flour

Frosting:

1 (3 oz) Package Cream Cheese

½ C softened Butter

1 t. Vanilla

2 C Powdered Sugar

1 C chopped Pecans (optional)

Stir together dry ingredients for bars. In separate bowl, beat eggs, and then add sugar and oil. Mix well, and then add pumpkin. Blend well before adding flour mixture. Mix well, but do not over beat. Bake in an ungreased Jelly Roll Pan at 350 degrees for 20-30 min or until it tests done. Cool on a wire rack.

For frosting, soften the cream cheese and beat cream cheese with butter and vanilla. Add powdered sugar and beat until light and fluffy. Spread over cooled cake. Sprinkle with pecans if desired. Cut into bars to serve.

November Journal Quiz

How Many Can You Name?



President's Column

Fall Butterflies

Wayne Rhoden

On Sunday I was in my back yard watching all of the butterflies that have come to visit this year and thinking how fortunate are we to live in this area of Texas. There were monarchs, queens, painted ladies, bordered patches, gulf fritillaries, pearl crescents, giant swallowtails, spicebush swallowtails, clouded sulfurs and numerous skippers flitting around and feeding on the zinnias, gold cosmos and many other plants that are still blooming in the back yard. Then came Monday,



with the rain, wind and cool temperatures. Not a butterfly in sight. I sighed and thought to myself that they have all headed south. This morning, Tuesday, they all have returned and brought with them more monarchs than I have seen all summer and fall. We always tend to plant perennials and often overlook the annuals that produce so much color during the hot summer months. Last year we sewed the cosmos seeds that we brought from our home in Missouri City and wondered if they would come up and bloom. They did not disappoint us, producing many plants, and reseeding. This year we have gold and yellow cosmos everywhere. We have had to pull up hundreds out of the beds otherwise we would only have those blooming and nothing else. Now however I am glad that we have so many because of the butterflies feeding before they take off for Mexico or further south. I hope all of you have as many butterflies as we do and take the time to enjoy them. Too soon it will be cold and icy and we will only have the pictures. Have a good garden.

Photo Credits

Page 2: Margaret Seals

Pages 3–4: Christine Powell

Page 5: Texas Extension

Page 7: Margaret Seals

Page 10: Charles Byers and Mark Picker

Page 11: Margaret Seals

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An unmulched garden looks to me like some naked thing which, for one reason or another, would be better off with a few clothes on.

Ruth Stout, *The Ruth Stout No-Work Garden Book*, 1971