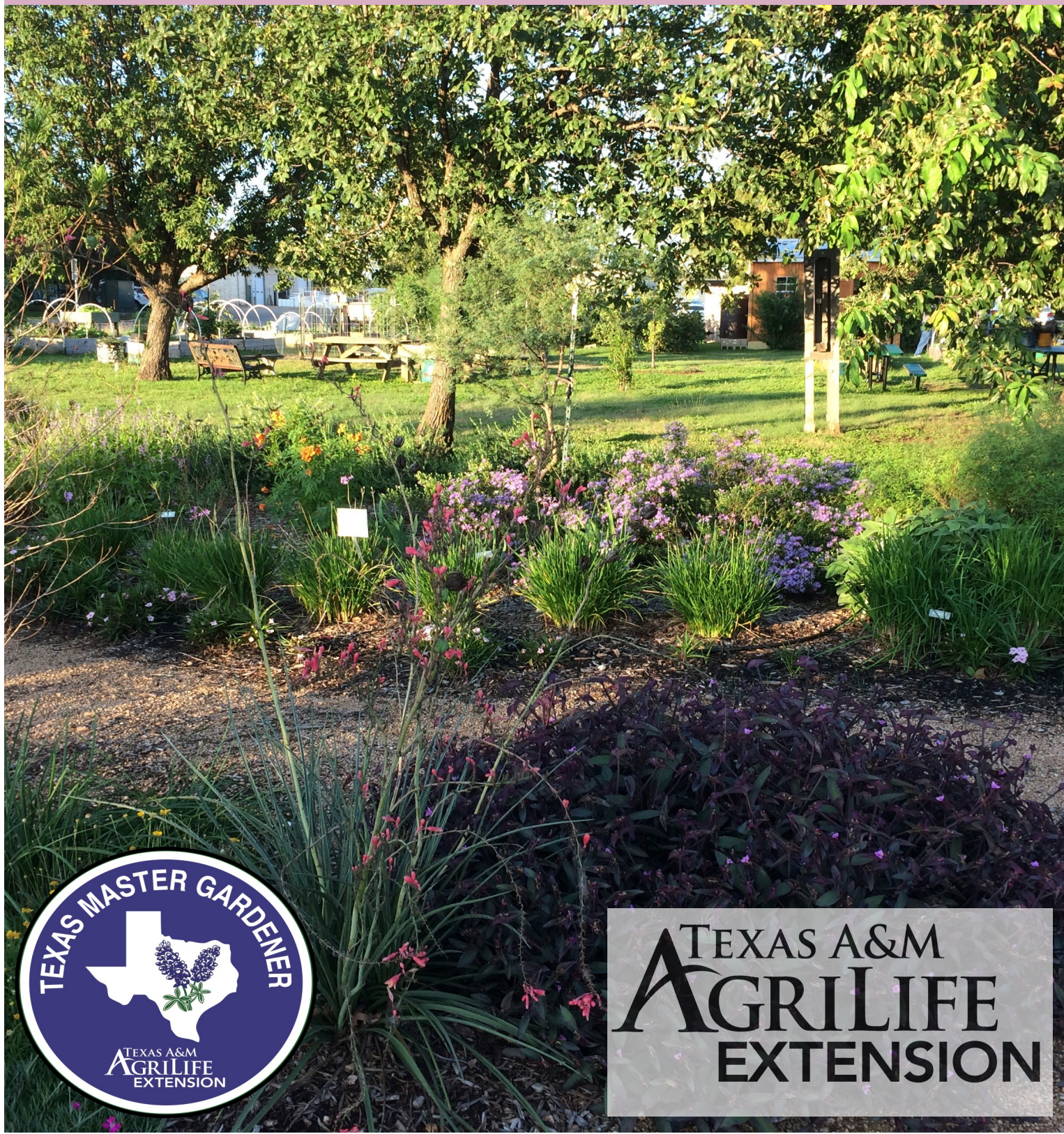


WILLIAMSON COUNTY

GARDENING

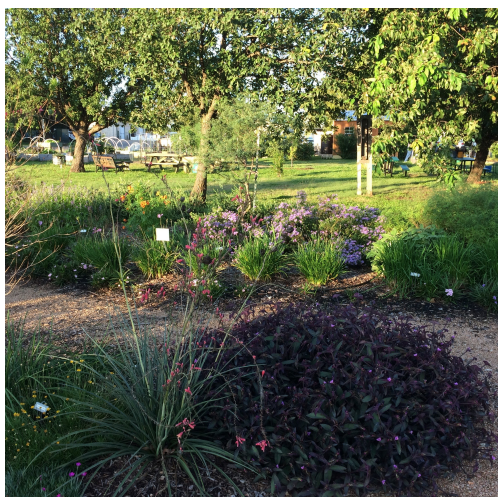
January 2019



TEXAS A&M
AGRILIFE
EXTENSION

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Cover:
 WCMG Drought
 Tolerant Demo Gar-
 den
 Photo by Jim Williams,
 MG 2017

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Williamson County Master Gardeners are on Facebook with information about programs and events.

All Rise

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello Gardeners,

It's that time of year again, the beginning of a new year and those garden resolutions. The start of the new year is a time for me to reflect on the previous year's garden and decide what I want to change. Each year I have plants that I realize need to be moved to a better location, so they will have a better chance to flourish in our Central Texas climate. The cooler weather also means I can do the heavy work without having to take a break every few minutes to cool down. It also means I can convince my wife that I will not get heat stroke out in the garden.

This time of year is also my chance to use my stockpiled compost to get all the garden beds turned and ready for the spring planting. Using the compost in the garden beds and moving plants reminds me that I need to document things better in my own landscape. Last year my thoughts were to start a garden journal and begin documenting more things in the garden. However, as is the case most years, the winter rolls into spring and the next thing you know it's January again. My goal this year is to start that journal and to keep up with it. Finding a notebook, writing the first entries and keeping up with all the additional entries in it, is my resolution this year.

What is your resolution or challenge for your garden this year? Are you starting that new compost bin, growing roses or removing more of the grass and putting in a drought tolerant garden? Challenge yourself this year by learning something new in the garden; expand those horizons.

Tommy King

2019 Texas Master Gardeners Conference

Registration for the conference is now open at <http://2019tmgaconference.com/>

This year's conference is "Victoria, Nature's Gateway" located in Victoria April 25—27.

Conference agenda, registration, speakers and lodging information are on the website.

From The Corner Office

Kate Whitney

Williamson County AgriLife Horticultural Extension Agent

Thanks to all the Master Gardeners for your work on the lettuce trial and Lunch and Learn program on December 7, 2018! We had a great turnout and a lot of fun!

Here are a few details about the lettuce trial we conducted this fall. We planted 10 varieties of lettuce that can be easily found at local stores: Black Seeded Simpson, Nevada, Buttercrunch, Prizehead, Giant Caesar, Crawford, Red Salad Bowl, Igloo, Burpee Bibb, and Limestone. All the varieties germinated well except for Nevada and Crawford. We had really great weather this fall for lettuce and were able to harvest 40 pounds from the trial bed. We should be able to get at least one more cutting from the lettuce.

Participants who attended the Lunch & Learn did a tasting panel to rank their favorites based on texture, flavor, and color. The Lunch & Learn also included speakers who talked about how to grow lettuce, the history of lettuce, health benefits, and how to cook with lettuce. MG Judy Ebaugh and MG Rick Halle did a fantastic job with the presentation.

Twenty-four people attended and completed a customer satisfaction survey and retrospective pre- and post-test to measure knowledge gains.

- 100% percent of respondents were mostly or completely satisfied with the program about lettuce.
- Respondents indicated their level of knowledge about growing lettuce and its health benefits as 1.9 out of 4.0 before the program. After the program, respondents indicated their level of knowledge as 3.6 out of 4.0.
- Results from the taste test are summarized in the chart. Participants were asked to assign a score of 1 to 5 for each variety's color, texture, and flavor with 1 = bad; 2 = poor; 3 = neutral; 4 = good; and 5 = great.

Variety	Color	Texture	Flavor	Average
Igloo	4.50	4.17	3.96	4.21
Burpee Bibb	4.39	4.21	3.75	4.12
Limestone	4.21	4.07	3.89	4.06
Crawford	4.42	4.11	3.57	4.03
Prizehead	4.30	3.96	3.78	4.01
Giant Caesar	4.21	4.14	3.68	4.01
Buttercrunch	4.32	3.82	3.71	3.95
Red Salad Bowl	4.36	3.82	3.64	3.94
Nevada	4.00	3.92	3.46	3.79
Black Seeded Simpson	4.07	3.64	3.39	3.70

What's Happening in the Vegetable Demonstration Garden?

Onions

by Rick Halle 2017

We have kept busy in the Vegetable Garden harvesting cold tolerant vegetables (lettuce, kale, broccoli, cabbage, bok choy) and preparing beds for the first wave of spring plantings. It's hard to think that it is spring in January but the days are getting longer and the sun stronger so it's time to get your garden plan in place.

January is the month to plant onion transplants. Onions are available in a variety of colors and degrees of sweetness to suit your personal tastes. The most popular onion in The Williamson County Master Gardener's transplant order from Dixondale Farms this year is the Texas Legend, a sweet yellow onion related to the 1015Y onion. Candy was the most popular white onion while Southern Belle Red and Candy Apple Red were popular red onions. Most short-day onions are sweet but Red Creole is a red onion that can be more pungent.

However, the first thing we need to pay attention to if you want nice bulbs is the "day-length" class. Onion day-length classes are: short-day, intermediate-day, and long-day types. These classes refer to the number of hours of daylight per day that trigger the onion plant to initiate bulbing. In Williamson County we need to plant onions from the short-day class and we need to get them in the ground and growing in January. This planting time gives the short-day onion transplants time to get established and of a good size when the hours of daylight and warm temperatures trigger bulbing. If you were to plant a long-day onion transplant or set from a northern source you would grow a large green onion that would never form a bulb.

To produce the largest possible bulb, we plant pencil-sized transplants about four to six weeks before the average frost-free date (early March). Protect these transplants from freezing weather to keep them growing. The eventual size of the bulb is determined by the number of rings, which is determined by the number of leaves, and the thickness of each ring, which is determined by fertilization and watering. Onions have a shallow root system. When you prepare the bed be sure to incorporate a balanced fertilizer in the top 2-3 inches of the bed. A raised bed is recommended and the pH of the soil should be above 6.0. Use a dibble to space 1" deep holes 3-4" apart to place the transplant in, firm the soil, and water well.



Mulch the soil around the onions to keep it moist. Side dressed high nitrogen fertilizer can be applied 3-4 weeks after transplanting and again when bulbing begins. Use the onions to cook with at any time if you need to thin out the rows. When the bulbs are mature the onion necks will soften and the tops will fall over. The bulbs can then be pulled and placed in a dry, protected place to cure a few days. Sweet onions don't store as well as others so keep them on a shelf in the refrigerator (not in the crisper: it's too humid). More pungent onions will keep for a month or more in a mesh bag in a cool, dark place.

Onions are high in minerals, antioxidants, vitamins, and organic compounds. Purportedly chewing raw onion for three minutes will eliminate all the germs from your mouth. Onions have antioxidants that are good for your skin and chromium which helps balance blood sugar. Onion juice will repel pests in the garden and a slice of onion on a bee sting will relieve the pain. Plant some onions this year and enjoy the benefits they have to offer!

December Hands on in the Garden—Composting

Photos by Sonia Schuetze MG 2016



In the Herb Garden

Bay Tree

by Alice Stultz, MG 1996

Madalene Hill refers to the Bay tree as “an aristocrat in the herb garden”.¹ The Latin name of *Laurus Nobilis* reflects this. In ancient Greece the fragrant leaves were made into wreaths to place on the heads of Olympic heroes and other important people signifying glory and wisdom.

The Master Gardeners who work the herb garden decided to add this pretty, glossy leaved tree in the garden after completing the A & M herb trial period. Ours is small but will grow to be a noble, understory type tree. The Bay tree tolerates temperatures as low as 15 degrees F. Although six feet tall is the average height in Central Texas, it grows taller in areas of Texas where it rarely freezes. It can be grown in a pot or up against a sunny wall to protect it from wind. The blooms are small, yellow flowers which turn into deep, dark berries. It is a slow growing tree that is hard to propagate from cuttings. With its deep, rich, evergreen foliage, it makes a nice backdrop for other plantings in the garden. The major pest is the scale insect which can be wiped off with alcohol swabs.²



Crushed, dried bay leaves are a major ingredient in Old Bay seasoning and Bouquet Garni. It is a very important herb in a pot of crab gumbo on our Gulf Coast. Besides culinary uses, it has been used as an antiseptic, for indigestion and to relieve sprains, bruises and the pain of arthritis.³

¹ Hill, Madalene and Gwen Barclay with Jean Hardy, Southern Herb Growing, Shearer Publishing, Fredericksburg, TX, 1987, p. 71.

² Editors of Sunset Books and Sunset Magazine, Sunset National Garden Book, Sunset Books Inc., Menlo Park, California, 1997, p. 365.

³ Evans, Hazel with Gloria Nicol, The Herb Basket, An Illustrated Companion to Herbs, CLB International, Surrey, UK, 1996, p. 10.

Winola's Timely Tips for January

by Winola VanArtsdalen, MG 2007

It is a brand-new year, our opportunity to enjoy benefits of past efforts and resolve to improve our relationship with Mother Nature! Take a walk through your garden to appreciate. See where you have chosen areas deserving attention and highlighted their best features. Are their shapes and contrasts interlocking, and are there focal points such as statues, ornaments, and striking plants that lead the eye through your landscape? Can you look through your landscape and imagine the different plants that add blooming interest at different times? Have you considered sun and wind protection as needed for particular plants and provided for food and protection for wildlife through the year?

Building hardscape is best scheduled for times when the weather is more settled. Now is a good time for planning, and redesigning. Prepare soil now and leave the planting to spring or fall. In our area, remember that fall is best time to plant most plants, but, if you cannot resist gardeners' spring fever and plant in the spring, you can enhance your chances of success with compost added now and shade provided in hot summer.

Planting and protection:

Check your sprinkler system even though it is turned off. Water before a freeze, but not during a freeze.

If container plants are outside, remember that the container must be wrapped to protect roots from freezing. I have successfully used bubble wrap with burlap over it.

Plant all new trees, shrubs, and roses. Transplant dormant shrubs and trees now. By the end of February, many plants and trees begin to bud, so their root system needs to be already established. Keep beds well-mulched. Some leaves and branches can be used for freeze protection, but groundcovers and other small plants should not be smothered. Keep mulch away from stems, including tree trunks.

Major pruning of non-flowering landscape trees and shrubs is best done while dormant. You can trim oak trees now, but paint wounds on oak trees susceptible to oak wilt immediately, any size, any season. Trees/shrubs like vitex and crape myrtles that will have summer bloom on this year's growth should be trimmed now. (See the article on trimming crepe myrtles in the December newsletter.)

Plants that prefer our cool winters such as chives, cilantro, chervil and Italian parsley should be planted now. Mulch well. Check instructions for when to plant bulbs that you may have refrigerated. Keep watch for insects on indoor plants and give an occasional spritzing of water.

Tools and Turf

Sharpen and repair tools to be ready for spring.

Now is a good time to see and remove weeds.

Apply pre-emergent before February 15.

Cameras in the Demo Gardens!

Photography by Sonia Schuetze, MG 2016



Curry Plant (*Helichrysum augustifolium*)

By Alice Stultz, MG 1996

The herb garden in our Williamson County Demonstration Garden has one curry plant and is a favorite to have on hand for groups on tours of the garden. When a leaf is rubbed between your fingers it does have the fragrance of what we know as the culinary mixture called curry. It can be used as a culinary herb in cream cheese and salads. It is not used in making curry powder, which is a combination of seeds and seasonings.¹



Curry thrives in dry soil and is on the higher, west side of the garden for this reason. Curry is a woody perennial growing to a size of 2 feet by 2 feet with yellow composite flower clusters blooming in late summer to early autumn.² Since it likes dry soil conditions it might be grown in a pot in combination with the trailing silver pony foot (*Dichondra argentea*) or another trailing gray leafed plant that has the same water requirements.

¹ Hill, Madalene and Gwen Barclay with Jean Hardy, Southern Herb Growing, Shearer Publishing, Fredericksburg, TX, 1987, p. 82.

² Sunset National Garden Book, Sunset Books, Inc., Menlo Park, CA, 1997, p.330.

It's Time for Dues

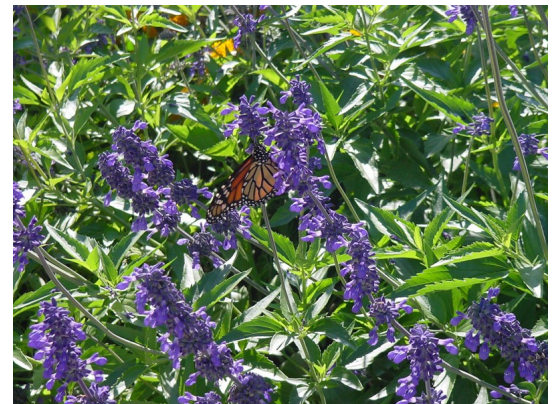
It's time to pay our yearly dues for 2019. Our new treasurer, Sandra Roberson, will be accepting your \$25 at the membership meeting Monday, January 14th. Cash or checks will be accepted. If you are not planning to attend the meeting you can mail the check to her home. Sandra sent out an email this week with her mailing address so please check your email.

Gardening Texas Style

Henry Duelberg Salvia (Salvia Farinacea)

by Val Black, MG 2014

'Henry Duelberg' Salvia (*Salvia farinacea*) is a Texas Super Star native perennial plant. Its hardiness is rated for zone 7. It was trialed and tested by Texas A&M for its disease resistance, easy care, and drought tolerance. Discovered in a small cemetery by Professor Greg Grant from A&M, it had been given little care or water for many years and it grew well. It's very low maintenance, very heat tolerant, and is deer resistant. It does need full sun and good drainage. It has showy spikes of blue or purple flowers six to eight inches long on tall stems about 3 feet high. It blooms from spring until frost. Bees, hummingbirds, and butterflies love this plant. This cultivar is more floriferous than others. It also has larger and greener leaves than modern cultivars. Pruning old blooms off will encourage new blooms. Also like most salvias, you can give them a haircut mid-summer when they look bad and they will flush out again with blooms until we get a freeze. After a hard freeze you can cut them back to the ground to one inch. Mulch at the base of the plant. You can also cut the blooms to use in dried flower arrangements. It is a great companion plant for many plants, including roses and Lantanas.



References: Aggie Horticulture— <http://texassuperstar.com/plants/salvia/index.html>

The Tool Shed

by Jim Williams, MG 2017

The Hand-Held Pump Sprayer

I love to spray so I've had many sprayers over the years to satisfy this habit. One thing I have observed is that fellow spray-loving gardeners have a love-hate relationship with the actual sprayers. So, this article reflects not only my opinions but the shared experience with a few gardeners I have had discussions with along the way.

We can spray for several reasons. Commonly we think of getting rid of pests, disease, and weeds using both organic and chemical methods depending on your personal gardening practices and the severity of the problem. Gardeners also use sprays for foliar feeding of various concoctions to help plant vigor. All this is well and good if the sprayer is working properly. If not, it's a real pain. So, let's dive into it.

Anatomy of a Sprayer

The **tank** is the first thing we observe which can be metal or plastic. I prefer metal over plastic tanks. Metal is more durable (when properly cleaned) and holds high pressure better. It seems the rubber seals on metal tanks hold the pressure better than rubber on plastic. Plastic is less expensive and is lighter but tend to break easier. In my experience, metal sprayers last much longer so, over time, the metal is probably much cheaper.

Fitting into the top of the tank is the **pump assembly** that pumps up the pressure and doubles as the carrying handle. In a cheap sprayer this is likely to be the part that will fail first. When you lift up on the handle air enters the pump assembly and when you push it down the air goes into the tank to pressurize it. Cheaper ones have a thin plastic pump which can break easily or just wear out and leak. A good sprayer will have a thicker and more heavy-duty mechanism.

Next is the **hose assembly** that screws onto the tank with one end dipping into the tank and the other screwing into the wand. Many cheaper sprayers have a thin, plastic hose whereas better sprayers have a hefty, rubber hose which is much better for handling pressure. It is also more flexible and resists kinking which is handy when you are trying to maneuver the wand onto tight spaces and positions like trying to get under the leaves and inside bushes.



Lastly is the **spray wand** that attaches to the hose. It needs to be hefty and strong. A good sprayer comes with multiple, interchangeable spray heads to provide different spray patterns.

My personal preference are the metal sprayers sold at ACE Hardware.

Using Your Sprayer

Make sure the pump assembly is well screwed on before you try and pump up the pressure. Pump a few times then listen for leakage. No sound; then continue pumping up. Some sprayers have a pressure relief valve that will start releasing pressure when the maximum pressure is reached. These are common on plastic sprayer because they can only handle so much pressure. They often are not seen on metal sprayers.

Don't bend or twist the handle when pumping as this may cause mechanical stress on the handle causing it to bend or break. Keep you body directly over the unit and slowly pump straight down with both hands for better control.

If you are going to be spraying for more than a few seconds at a time, most wands have a mechanism to lock the handle in the on position, so you don't have to hold the handle down and tire your hand out.

Once finished you need to release the pressure in the tank. Some have pressure relief valves so all you must do is turn the valve to release the pressure. When there is no valve; turn the tank upside-down then depress the handle on the wand pointing it in a direction that won't hit any plants. There will be a brief stream of fluid followed by air. Continue holding the handle down until no more air comes out. Now you can safely remove the pump assembly. It's always a good idea to think there may be some pressure left in the tank so unscrew the pump slowly and stay out of the way just in case.

Cleaning Your Sprayer

This is the key to maintaining a well-functioning and long-lasting sprayer. Whatever we are spraying, it is likely to leave residual gum and muck in the spray hoses. This is especially true of horticultural soaps, spreader sticker, & liquid molasses. Some products also have sticky substances (surfactants) in them to promote adherence to leaf surfaces. Some organic oil sprays like Organocide are quite sticky. This stuff will gum up the filters and small openings in the spray wand if it is not routinely cleaned out after every use. Any substance remaining in the sprayer and wand will surely clog everything up and decrease the life of the tool.

Here is my cleaning procedure:

1. After you finish spraying, empty the remaining contents according to label directions.
2. Wash the sprayer out with clean water and empty.

3. Fill sprayer half-way with clean water, replace the pump assembly and pump up to high pressure. Set the spray wand to spray a stream (opposite from fine mist) and depress the handle to spray. Set the locking mechanism so the spray continues and aim it to an area without plants such as a walkway or driveway. The clean water will wash out the wand. When the water is discharged the remaining air will blow out any liquid remaining in the wand. At this point the pressure will also be discharged.
4. Disengage the automatic lock on the wand and remove the pump mechanism. Set the sprayer in the sun to heat up which will evaporate any moisture and prevent rusting.
5. Unscrew the spray head on the wand and make sure the openings are clear of any debris. I often find a small piece of grass or crape myrtle flowers in mine. Some wands have small filters in them so make sure these are free of debris or gummy gunk. If your sprayer is working fine and suddenly the stream seems altered, it is probably a piece of debris. If the handle is not depressed on the wand you can take it apart to inspect and clean it without letting the pressure out of the tank.

Oiling Your Sprayer

After a few uses, lightly grease all seals with a silicone-based oil. There's the main seal between the pump mechanism and the tank, but you need to unscrew the connections on the wand and grease any small seals you find at those connections. Best to lightly coat them with oil, let them sit for an hour then wipe any excess off. Now you can reconnect the pieces of the wand. Don't forget about the round rubber seal on the bottom of the pump mechanism. Give it a little love with a dab of oil.

A Note About Vinegar

Horticultural 20% Vinegar works great to kill weeds, but it can destroy your sprayer if not washed out promptly after you finish spraying. If left in the sprayer for a few hours, it will damage the seals, particularly the little round one at the bottom of the pump assembly. After each use immediately empty and perform the complete cleaning procedure.

From Garden to Table

SALAD DRESSINGS

by Radhika Baliga, MG 2015

This month we're featuring fantastic homemade salad dressing recipes from the Lettuce Lunch and Learn event. I'd like to thank MG's Lynn, Steve, Jim, and Nancy for graciously providing us with these recipes. Try a new one each week and "lettuce" know if you find a new favorite to add to your rotation. Enjoy.

Lynn Stude's Razz-Berry/Basil Dressing

- 6 oz fresh raspberries
- 1 tsp honey
- 1 Tbsp fresh basil, sliced thin
- 2 Tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 small shallot, minced
- 1/4 tsp kosher salt
- 1/4 tsp fresh ground black pepper
- 1/2 cup canola oil



Muddle raspberries and honey. Stir in basil, vinegar, shallot, salt and pepper. Whisk, and add oil slowly. Frozen raspberries will work. I sometimes use white balsamic vinegar, but the berries were so sweet that I used the dark.

Brandon and Steve Craig's Lemon Thyme Vinaigrette

- 1 tsp lemon thyme leaves
- 4 oz lemon juice
- a pinch of sugar to balance the acid
- 8 oz extra virgin olive oil
- salt and pepper to taste
- a few strands of saffron



Combine lemon thyme leaves, lemon juice and sugar. Whisk in extra virgin olive oil to emulsify. Add salt, pepper and saffron and lightly whisk again.

Jim Williams' Tangerine Vinaigrette

This vinaigrette has a tart and sweet flavor. You can use extra-virgin olive oil for a bold taste or a milder canola oil which will not overpower the fruit. Organic fruit is recommended for the zest.

- 2 tsp minced peeled fresh ginger
- 4 Tbsp fresh tangerine juice
- 1 tsp tangerine zest
- 1 Tbsp fresh lime juice
- 1/4 tsp lime zest
- 3 Tbsp white wine vinegar
- 2 tsp minced fresh chives
- 1/2 – 3/4 cup extra-virgin olive or canola oil
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

In a medium bowl, combine all the ingredients except the oil, salt, and pepper. Whisk in the oil. Season with salt and pepper. Tangerine Vinaigrette keeps refrigerated for 2 weeks. Makes one cup.

Jim Williams' Oregano-Feta Vinaigrette

This recipe calls for virgin olive oil. Extra virgin olive oil is too intense and may not balance well with the strong feta flavor.

- 2 medium garlic cloves
- 1 Tbsp fresh lemon juice
- 3 Tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1 Tbsp dried oregano
- 1/2 cup (2 1/2 oz) crumbled feta
- 1/2 - 3/4 cup virgin olive oil
- 1 Tbsp minced fresh oregano
- Freshly ground black pepper

Combine all the ingredients except the olive oil, fresh oregano, and black pepper in a blender or food processor fitted with a steel blade. Mix. Add the olive oil in a steady stream until the dressing emulsifies. Transfer to a medium bowl. Add the fresh oregano. Season with pepper. Oregano-Feta Vinaigrette keeps refrigerated for 3-5 days.

Nancy Knickerbocker-Penick's Miso Ginger Dressing

mayonnaise

white miso paste

ginger

Aji-mirin (Japanese sweet cooking rice wine)

rice vinegar

In a bowl combine 2 parts mayonnaise and 1 part miso paste. Grate the ginger, keep the liquids and solids, and discard the fibers. Add the grated ginger to the bowl and whisk the dressing. Thin the dressing with rice vinegar and mirin, to taste. Whisk until well combined.



THANK YOU!

from Jim Williams, MG 2017

I want to thank all the authors who have spent their time to share their interests and expertise for this newsletter. I have heard only positive comments from our membership who have enjoyed them. We really appreciate their successful efforts.

A special thanks to Sonia Schuetze for all her photography. She sends me loads of pictures weekly and my most difficult task is choosing between all of them. Great work, Sonia.

And a super-duper thanks to Catherine Nickle for her great editing. Her eagle-eye and knowledge of written language is invaluable. Her work is like getting an active kid cleaned up and ready for Sunday dinner. She does a wonderful job in keeping us looking neat and professional.

In My Garden

Birds Feeding in My Garden

by Alice Stultz, MG 1996

The arrival of the Cedar Waxwings around January 1 reminded us that we can have plants that feed the birds without realizing it. Most of them were hanging around the hackberry trees (*Celtis laevigata*) but they can de-berry (if there is such a word) a yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*) in a matter of minutes. When looking up at the birds I realized there were also many female Ashe juniper (*Juniperus ashei*) in full fruit.

Agarita (*Berber trifoliolata*) growing wild in the yard attracts birds to its fruit and the spiny leaves make good nest sites for birds in undisturbed areas. When in flower, this is a good plant for bees as well. The American Beauty Berry or Turkey Berry (*Callicarpa Americana*) has lovely purple late fall fruit that Northern Mockingbirds and Baltimore Orioles covet. Theresa Wilts shared delicious cupcakes using the fruit.

Wintering sparrows like the Woodland Oats (formerly called Inland Sea Oats). Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) provides nesting materials for birds and Rufous-crowned sparrows sometimes nest in the Big Muhly (*Muhlenbergia lindheimeri*). The seeds of these and other grasses in the landscape provide food for a variety of birds wintering over or cruising through.

Coral Honeysuckle vine (*Lonicera sempervirens*) with its lovely tubular coral flowers attracts hummingbirds for its nectar and other birds eat the berries. It continues to bloom out of season in my yard in January. Unfortunately for our bare legs, the Greenbriar vine (*Smilax bona-nox*) is also on my property. It is an evergreen perennial with blue-black fruit eaten by many birds and a thicket of it can be a nice shelter for painted buntings. I have not noticed painted buntings on my property, alas, but I also like to dig up and kill the Greenbriar as it scratches legs and snags ones' clothing. If I saw a painted bunting here, I might not try to get rid of the Greenbriar vine.

We get rid of the Poison Ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) as soon as we notice it. Most of our family have experienced its itchy rashes and the birds continue to eat and plant it wherever we have lived. My neighbor still can not distinguish the poison ivy from the Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*). Some people just do not want to stand around and count the leaves. The red leaves in the fall are a lovely advertisement to the birds that the berries are ripening and at least 35 species including woodpeckers and vireos enjoy these treats. Maybe there should be a sign on the Virginia Creeper that reads "We are not Poison Ivy but don't eat our berries as they are poisonous to humans." The wild mustang grape (*Vitis mustangensis*) on the tall fence around our vegetable garden has long since shared its fruit with the birds and us for grape jelly.

The Wax Myrtle (*Morella cerifera*) provides nest sites and cover for the birds. According to the Travis Audubon Society, forty species of birds eat the berries including Yellow-Rumped warblers. Bumelia (*Bumelia lanuginosa*) is a multi-trunked tree that also has berries the birds like. The larger trees on our property are okay but the babies are thorny and not pleasant to rub against. The Texas Persimmon (*Diospyros texana*) has small dark fleshy fruit on

the female trees. They are like sculptures in the garden in the winter when the leaves fall off and the gray bark is showy against a darker foliage of the juniper trees. The fruit is eaten by birds and mammals. A jelly can be made from the fruit.

For years we lived in an area where we could not grow Possumhaw or Deciduous Holly (*Ilex decidua*). There is a struggling spindly tree that we saved from our neighbor's aggressive saw recently. As the leaves fall off the female, the berry laden branches are a nice surprise in our landscape. The limbs can also put in a vase of water for a visual winter treat in the house. Bluebirds, Cedar Waxwings, American Robins and woodpeckers like the berries.

We cleared an area behind our house and the Wafer Ash or Hop tree (*Ptelea trioliata*) popped up. They are aromatic and provide shelter and food for birds. Another tree that is prolific in this cleared area is the Western Soapberry or China Berry (*Sapindus drummondii*). The fruit is eaten by many birds but especially the bluebird.¹

¹ These plants are in my yard and I used the handout "Bird Habitat Plants for Travis County" by the Travis County Audubon Society as a guide to botanical names and types of birds that use these plants.

Lettuce Lunch n Learn

Photos by Sonia Schuetze 2016



WCMGA EVENTS

January 7

WCMGA Board Meeting

AgriLife Training Room

1 to 3 pm

All members are welcome to attend.

January 14

WCMGA Monthly Membership Meeting

AgriLife Training Room

6:30 to 8 pm

“Winter Care of the Perennial Garden” with Colleen Dieter

January 21

WCMGA Horticulture Field Trip: De Leon, TX

AgriLife Extension Office

8 am to 6 pm

This is currently full but you can contact Kate and put your name on the waiting list.

January 26

Hands On In The Garden

AgriLife Training Room

9 to 11 am

“Seed Starting” with Wendy Odlum

