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Peggy Rogers: President's Message


What a great WCMGA meeting for April! Thank you, Jacki Kohlman, for an interesting and informative program. A special thank you to Jacki for the door prizes. I will never look at a rock the same way again.

If you did not attend, you were missed. It was so great to see everyone in person.

The Texas Master Gardener Association State Conference is virtual this year. I hope you will attend because it has great keynote speakers, breakout sessions, and virtual garden tours.

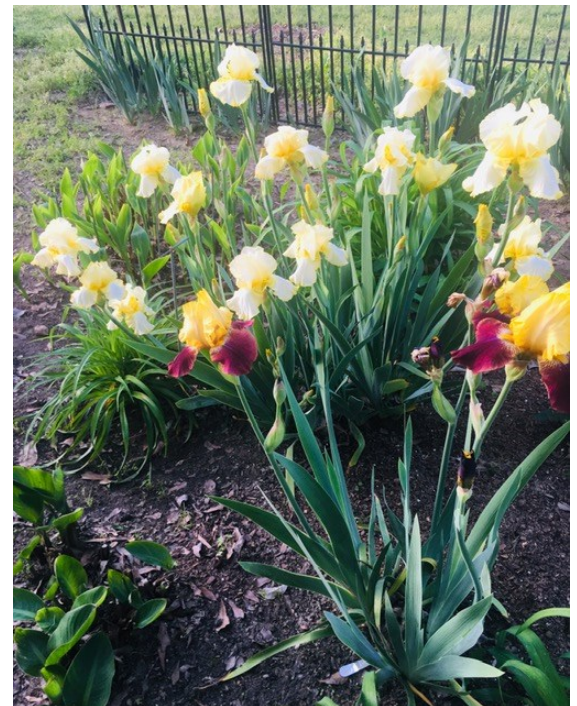
As we recover from the February storm Uri, "snowmegadon," or whatever you chose to call it, I am amazed each day at the new swelled leaf buds on plants that last week I was sure were dead. So, continue to wait on your plants that look dead, they may still have life.

So far, my crepe myrtle's (*Lagerstroemia indica*), vitex (*Vitex agnus-castus* L.), spirea (*Spiraea* L.), azaleas (minus two), and roses are leafing and thriving. I lost one of my 6-foot-tall altheas (*Hibiscus syriacus*) which surprised me, but two 6-inch cuttings survived that were sitting out on the back patio. My iris flowers are larger, their colors are brighter, and their flower stems are taller with more flowers per stem.

Have I told you lately that I love  my iris?

Don't hesitate to call, text, or email me if you have a question. I keep my iPad and phone with me. When I visit with Dean, a lot of the time he is sleeping. Keep him in your prayers as he needs a miracle to battle the sepsis. He has it in three places, hip muscle, stomach, and spine. He is in good spirits.

Happy gardening.



The blatant iris (Iris germanica) is in front and the total recall iris is in back. Both are tall bearded rebloomers and hardy growers!

More Information About the Texas Master Gardener Virtual Conference

(Registration ends May 2.)

All registered participants will have access to view the recordings for every session, keynote presentation, and tour for 4 months after the conference.

The conference offers CEU hours for MGs including three keynote presentations, twenty-four breakout sessions, and four virtual tours.

<https://txmg.org/2021-virtual-conference>

Bobbie McGee: Thank You!

I truly appreciate the caring, support, offers of help, and wonderful food my family received during my husband's final days and after his death. Master gardeners are the best!

And, as a side note, I thought my fig tree had succumbed to the week-long freeze. But to my surprise, it is sprouting from the base. I'll give it a little more time before pruning!

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Susan Jarrell: WCMGA Programs for 2021



In March, Gail Mullinax entertained us with her talk about vegetables. Photo by Ann Reynolds

First, let me say a huge THANK YOU to Gail Mullinax for agreeing to present her entertaining talk and power point for our first meeting of 2021. She was given short notice but managed to give us great info and some much needed laughs! Also, thank you Keith for the IT assistance! It was

wonderful to be back together!

In April, my roommate from college, Jacki Kohlman, gave a presentation about Yard Art. She is very creative with natural stones and other items that she finds. She demonstrated several of her techniques and had some items for sale. There was also a PowerPoint presentation highlighting our member's yard art. Thank you all for sharing your wonderful pictures.

If anyone is interested in attending one of Jacki's classes, we can arrange a Hill Country trip to her area or invite her back to Northeast Texas for a class.



*Susan Jarrell and Jacki Kohlman
Photo by Ann Reynolds*



An example of Jacki's framed stained glass art

Photo by Ann Reynolds



An example of Jacki's yard art with heart-shaped stones and a butterfly

Photo by Ann Reynolds

Here is the contact information for Jacki Kohlman's Inspirations:

Jacki Kohlman
409-201-0501
Jacki.kohlman@yahoo.com

WCMGA Meetings

Third Thursday of Each Month

8:30 - 9 AM Visiting and Sign-in
9 AM Meeting

First Assembly of God Church
909 E Goode St., Quitman, Texas

WCMGA Scheduled Speakers for 2021

Meeting	Speaker
May 20	Chris Wiesinger of Southern Bulb Company: "The Bulb Hunter"
June 17	Tracey Snow Murphy: A Garden Evolution
July 15	Linda Timmons: Garden Renewal Slide Show
August 19	Michael Alford of Alford Family Farms: Overview of Spring 2022
September 16	Asher Blair of Harvest Gardens (Wilhite): Edible Gardening
October 21	WCMGA: Annual Plant Exchange
November 18	WCMGA: Annual Business Meeting and Program Review
December 16	WCMG Awards, Christmas Luncheon, and Intern Graduation

Other Upcoming Events

TX MG Wood County Free Educational Series

- July 24, 2021, Saturday
Transitioning from Summer to Fall Gardening and Container Gardening
First United Methodist Church, Quitman
- October 30, 2021, Saturday
Different Types of Greenhouses and How to Manage Yours
Tour of the Winnsboro ISD Greenhouse

Smith County Master Gardener Virtual Lecture Series via ZOOM
May 21, 2021

11:30 AM to 1 PM via ZOOM

The Hole Truth: The Woodpeckers of East Texas

Greg Grant, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Horticulture Agent for Smith County will talk about why these birds are so important to our lives and to our landscapes.

For more information, visit the Smith County Master Gardener website <https://txmg.org/smith/coming-events/>, Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/SmithCountyMasterGardeners>, or call 903-590-2980. For the Zoom link go to the Smith County Master Gardener website.

Carolyn West: Extension Office Project

The Class of 2020 continues the Texas AgriLife Extension Office project in Quitman. The team works on Thursday mornings from 9 to 11 AM.

Although winter was tough on many plants, the freeze had a low impact on the plants at the AgriLife office. We lost two large rosemary plants under the AgriLife sign and several of the plants in the trough beds were frozen. However, many of the plants in the bed near the street were hearty enough to survive and are coming back to add color and natural beauty. Bluebonnets and other colorful spring flowers have brought bright new colors to the corner and the bed underneath the sign.

Added New Window Box Troughs

New window boxes at the front of the office have been installed. They were built by Nancy and Scott McDonald using the SIP (Sub Irrigation Planter) theory. The troughs were planted with greenery and flowers partially using the on-site compost.



Nancy McDonald adding water to one of the new window box planter troughs.

The self-irrigating troughs are being monitored as a low-maintenance project and, if successful, the system could be used in the older troughs. Having only one water faucet at the building makes watering the gardens a bit more work intensive, so the SIP system is a convenient and wonderful conservation effort. For more information about creating a

SIP system, see this article: [Sub-Irrigation Planters](#) on page 12 in this newsletter.

Sprucing Up For Spring

The remaining three beds have been refurbished and a remarkable amount of bright color can be seen on the corner lot. The compost bin has been a real asset to use in the beds. It adds nutritional value and reduces maintenance cost.

Steve Judkins does a super job mowing and edging the areas around the Extension office.

In summary, many labor hours have been given to the whole project and progress has been consistently made. Dollars will be saved as the compost pile becomes fully usable. The flower gardens will once again bring cheer to the building site and improve the overall aesthetics of the corner lot.

Next Plans

Near term efforts are to:

- 1) Paint the compost bin in Texas A&M maroon and remove the weeds and grass from the parking lots.
- 2) Add summer flowers to the flower bed with the sign in it

when the bulbs and bluebonnets have finished blooming.

- 3) Perform general clean-up at the building
- 4) Pursue getting additional water sources and perhaps a modified sprinkler system installed.



Nancy and Scott McDonald built two new window box troughs to enhance the entrance to the AgriLife office.

This is a large project for a relatively small site; however, the results are already proving to be awesome and beautiful. I must believe we have added an asset that improves Quitman's image.



Michelle Musser, Steve Judkins, Nancy McDonald, Carolyn West, and Peggy Rogers getting ready to work at the Extension office. Photo by Kathy Goodman

***We welcome help from any Master Gardener.
Ideas and improvement suggestions are
welcomed and appreciated.***

Linda Timmons: Wildscape – Aphids on the Honeysuckle

Over the years, the workers at the Wildscape garden have had truly diverse challenges. Last year's challenge was feral hogs. This year we had the "Artic Winter." We're still not sure what all will be lost. Not surprisingly, most of the locally native plants appear to be thriving.

As a result of the cold and snow many plants in our garden are stressed. They show stress in different ways. The live oaks lost all their leaves. At the Wildscape one live oak has recovered, the other is mostly bare. The Texas sages also called Cenizo (*Leucophyllum frutescens*) are native to south Texas and don't look like they will recover. Non-native Vitex, also called the lilac chaste tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*) are still not leafing out. If they do, I'm sure the early summer blooms will be sparse.



The live oaks lost all their leaves.

When plants are stressed, they are more susceptible to pests and diseases. We've already seen this on the native Coral Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*). Its new growth was covered with tiny gray aphids. We've never had a problem with aphids at the Wildscape before, but this plant had been severely pruned last fall and then the super cold winter left it weakened.

Aphids are interesting insects. They come in many colors. Aphids that like the gaura (*Gaura lindheimeri*) plants are rosy colored and the ones like oleander and milkweed are bright yellow. Others are ashy gray, green, black, or white. I have never seen ONE aphid. There's always a whole colony. Aphids

are prolific. Infestations start with a few winged aphids that fly to the plant or a few are eggs left on a plant. The immature aphids or nymphs mature quickly and produce live young. Most are females and each is capable of producing 40 to 60 offspring. This results in a tremendous population explosion. Hundreds to thousands of aphids can be produced in a few weeks.

Aphids can spread diseases and weaken a plant by feeding. They also cause problems with their excrement. When they suck out the plant nutrients, they're after protein but it comes with a lot of sugar. They excrete the sugar as "honeydew" which is clear, sticky drops that attract ants. Black sooty mold grows on the honeydew and can block sunlight to the leaves.

The good news about aphids is they are easy to kill. They are soft bodied and make a great meal for predator bugs like lacewings and ladybugs. The best way to fight aphids is with a hard stream of water. Aphids insert their mouth part into the plant cell to suck out the nutrients. When the aphids are hit with a blast of water, they are torn off the plant. Soapy water or insecticidal soap works, too, by dissolving the waxy coating on the aphids' outer skeleton. We're using the water blast method to fight the aphids on our honeysuckle and if a few live we're hoping they attract some ladybugs.

Keep your eyes open and check your garden regularly. Gardening this year will be a challenge.



Last year, the honeysuckle was healthy.

Kathy Goodman: Neem Oil Soil Drench for Healthier Plants

I recently read an interesting article titled “*Soil Drenching: How and Why You Should Be Using This Simple Technique*” by Craig Taylor. It talks about a technique for applying nutrients, pesticides, or insecticides through the roots of a plant instead of spraying it on.

There was a lot of information about using this technique for applying neem oil. It sounds like a good way to apply neem oil without wetting the plant leaves or flowers, which could be harmful to pollinators. In addition, it sounds as if it would keep the plants healthy by protecting them from insect damage, fungi, bacteria, and nematodes.

I want to try this technique on my tomato plants this year. Hopefully, the tomato horn worms would die if they ate the leaves, which sounds good. In addition, it might stop the whitefly infestation. However, you should not use this technique on newly transplanted seedlings, so wait a few weeks until the plant has a strong root system.

Note: I won't use this drench method on fennel or other plants that have leaves on which caterpillars feed.

Benefits of a Neem Oil Soil Drench

Taylor describes the following benefits of a neem oil soil drench:

- Rids plants of pests by disrupting the life cycle of insects
- Eradicates aphids, mealybugs, whiteflies, scale, grasshoppers, Japanese beetles, leaf minors, and more
- Seems safer than many pesticides because the plant absorbs it through the roots
- Assures beneficial insects aren't affected by neem oil
- Helps protect plants from many bacteria and fungi that attack plants from the soil
- Works under the surface to protect the plants roots, especially when you use a soil drench every two to three weeks (That schedule is effective on tomato and potato plants because they are affected by nematodes in the soil.)



Whiteflies are very small (about 1 mm in length), winged insects that appear as white dots on the underneath surface of the leaf, easily recognized as they take flight when leaves are rustled.

Neem Oil Soil Drench Mix Recipe

His recipe for a neem oil soil drench is:

- 2 tablespoons of organic neem oil
- 2 teaspoons of castile soap (I found this on Amazon.)
- 2 quarts of water

Combine all ingredients and mix well. Multiply the amounts to the desired volume that you need.

However, use the mixture right away because it does not store well. You can use this soil drench on fruit trees, vegetables, ornamentals, and food gardens.



Leaf miner damage on tomato plant. Photos are from the Vegetable Resources website. <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/problem-solvers/tomato-problem-solver/insect-pests/leaf-miner/>

For Pest Infestation

If you are treating an infestation of pests on a plant, apply the mixture. Then, repeat it every seven days until the pests are under control. It may seem like you aren't making a difference because it takes time for the plant to absorb and distribute the neem oil and to affect the insect population. However, over time pest numbers will decrease dramatically and your plants will look healthier and produce more fruit.

Health Maintenance

A better idea is to schedule treatment throughout the growing season to prevent insect numbers from building up in the first place. The author of the article said that he starts using a soil drench at the beginning of the season, every two weeks. Then gradually extends the gap between drenches to about every five to six weeks.

The benefit of using a soil drench like this is that the soil is always healthy with natural protection, not chemicals. Fungus, eggs, and larvae are wiped out, and plants become strong due to the lack of insect and pest attacks.

The complete article also talks about using this method for fertilizing plants. I recommend that you read the entire article here: <https://morningchores.com/soil-drenching/>

For more information about insect pests on tomatoes, see:

Aggie Horticulture Network > Vegetable Resources > Problem Solvers > Tomato Problem > Common Insect Pests of Tomatoes
<https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/problem-solvers/tomato-problem-solver/insect-pests/>

Ann Reynolds: Hawkins Project

Finally, it seems like pieces of the puzzle are coming together. Storm Uri's havoc on our gardens is proving not as bad as it looked at first. Plants are emerging; plants are blooming. Life is good!

The Allen Memorial Library gardens are growing, relatively weed free, and looking good. A few replacement plants are needed – especially Echinacea.

The Sensory Garden's rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*) is dead except for a few limbs. A cutting has been taken to grow but in the case for expediency, a new plant will be bought. All other plants are doing well. There are fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), and various species of mint (*Mentha*) for giveaways! You must be present to win.

The Pavilion Garden is a mystery. Wildflower seeds were sprinkled last fall and some have grown. Photos at the end of this article are available for you to ID!

The zinnias (*Zinnia asteraceae*) and four o'clocks (*Mirabilis jalapa*) are not up yet but Greg's mistflower (*Conoclinium greggii*) and lantana (*Lantana urticoides*) are beginning to peek out. The bluebonnets (*Lupinus texensis*) are going wild. . . after all they are wildflowers.



Texas bluebonnet from Mayor Bradley's seed.

The story about the bluebonnets is that the former mayor of Hawkins, Sam Bradley, strew many bluebonnet seeds at the First Baptist church flowerbeds many, many years ago. Those were very hardy and prolific plants. The seeds fell not only in that flowerbed but into the street. They washed down to the yards of several homes and ultimately to the Allen Memorial Library. Master Gardeners have transplanted and seeded the Pavilion garden with Mayor Bradley's seeds. Just like pass-along plants have a story; these seeds have a story too!



Texas bluebonnets in the pavilion bed

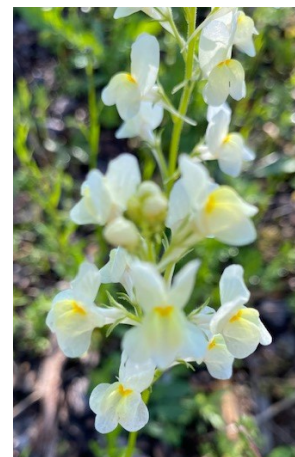
I recently came across the following quote that was written in last year's garden journal. The author is unknown. I find it pertinent.

"One of the coolest things about being a gardener (or avid nature lover) is how, over time you start to notice the profound relationships between living things and the timing of their events. It's like the ultimately symphony made up of domino effects."

Garden on!



Unidentified wildflower from seed



Unidentified wildflower from seed

Ann Reynolds: Building a Memorial Garden

Doesn't spring time bring back a lot of memories from your childhood? I remember Daddy's freshly plowed garden, the cool dirt between my toes, the smell of green grass and the birds singing once again. We all have similar memories that we keep with us in some way. But what about memories of loved ones who are no longer with us?

When our daughter passed away, I pondered what to do with all of her collection of pigs and I knew that in my heart of hearts, I could not throw them away. As I was strolling through my garden, the Homestead Purple verbenas (*Verbena*



My daughter collected pigs, so this one is part of my memorial garden.

canadensis) caught my eye. My daughter's favorite color was purple. I continued to look around and noticed the purple iris, butterfly bush (*Buddleia*), and salvias all in bloom. I then decided to take a part of my garden and make it into a memorial.



Purple iris

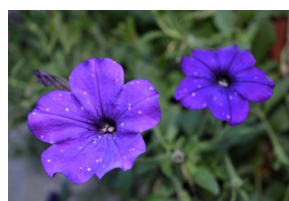


Siberian iris

Upon researching, I found that a memorial garden not only provides a long-lasting tribute to a loved one who has passed away, but it offers a place for the survivors to remember, to heal and to meditate.

The garden can be as small as a single tree or perennial plant or as large as an oversized flowerbed or garden with many different flowers, ornamental grasses, and even shrubs and trees. It can be just a secluded spot or a secret garden. Shape is important, too. A circular garden signifies eternal life and embraces the people within the garden.

When selecting plants for a memorial garden, consider the favorite flowers, favorite season, favorite colors symbolic meanings, the person's name, and fragrances that evoke their memory.



Starry Night petunia

Some plants have specific meanings that could serve as special tributes:

- Forget-Me-Nots (*Myosotis sylvatica*) prompt for memories
- Eternal Sleep poppy (*Papaver somniferum*) symbolizes rest or eternal sleep
- Peace rose (*Rosa spp*) refers to peace
- Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) kindles remembrance
- Over in Glory Land Siberian iris (*Iris sibirica*) evokes thought of eternal hope
- White lilies signify purity
- Yellow tulips exemplify friendship

Other plants with special names like Gentle Shepherd daylily (*Hemerocallis cultivar*), Remember Me hosta (*Hostas spp*), or Guardian Angel hosta (*Hostas spp*) also can be used. A Sweetheart rose (*Rosa spp*) could be used in memory of a spouse. A garden filled with red, white, and blue flowers could commemorate a war hero or veteran.

Another possibility is to include plants that have the same name as your friend or loved one, such as Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia*), Veronica (*Veronica officinalis*), or Sweet William (*Dianthus barbatus*). Or think about the fragrances or colors that evoke fond memories of your loved one, such as the scent of lavender or roses.

Landscaping a garden of remembrance is greatly enhanced with hardscape and a focal point. If you are memorializing someone who loved animals, why not include a small animal statue? For a bird lover, add a birdbath to attract backyard songbirds. If the person was known for a great sense of humor, buy or make whimsical artwork as a remembrance.

A bench where one could sit to meditate and to reflect is an excellent addition. Also, the sound from a water feature can sooth emotions.

But really, it doesn't matter what you plant, where you locate the garden, or what form, size, and shape it takes.

What's most important is that you create the garden that is most meaningful to you. Involve your family and friends, and let the planning, planting, and caring for the garden be part of the healing process not just for you, but also for others. Whether the garden is built for a special person, pet, or event, you'll always remember why you built this special garden.



A memorial stone shows that the garden is dedicated to someone well remembered.



A bench provides a place to relax and meditate.

Michele Musser: Gardening to Share with Others

In March, I planted tomatoes, lettuce, and spinach. I also added zucchini to this garden. I set up a dripper system on a timer. It should produce a lot of vegetables to donate!



These photos from March show the beginning of my garden for the food bank.



We had quite a harvest by mid April! My first delivery was 5 1/4 pounds of kale, lettuce, spinach, and asparagus for the food drive at Lake Fork Baptist Church.



Mid April, the garden is growing well.



Mid April, my first donation from my small garden.

What will you plant to share this year?

Emily Husmann: How to Keep Records for Reporting Yearly WCMGA Produce Donations

To keep up with how much produce is being grown and donated by the Wood County Master Gardeners, I ask that you keep a record of the amount of produce you have grown as well as the amount of produce you have donated. You can create the record by tracking how many pounds of fruits and vegetables you are producing per square foot or acre of your garden and tracking every time you harvest.

For my reports for the year, I need to know the total pounds of produce grown by Wood County Master Gardeners as well as the total pounds of produce donated.

I know there is some confusion about what counted for what, so let me clear that up. You need to track all of the produce that your gardens produce in pounds, as well as the pounds of produce you donate during the year.

So, if I produce 100 pounds of tomatoes, and I keep them all and do not end up donating any to local food banks, I will turn in that I grew 100 pounds of produce for the year and donated 0 lbs.

If I were to donate 60 pounds of the 100 pounds I grew, I would turn in that I grew 100 pounds of produce for the year and donated 60 pounds of that produce to local food banks.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, call me, send me an email, or come visit me at the Wood County Extension Office.

Michele Musser: Where I Donate Vegetables

I donate vegetables at this location:

Lake Fork Baptist Church
9483 FM 515
Alba, TX 75410

Their food bank is open the second Tuesday of every month. People pick up food between 1 to 3 PM. So, I take my vegetables at 11:30 AM.

Reminder... Volunteer Hours

As of the end of April, the Volunteer system is being renovated and is offline.

Please keep track your volunteer hours and CEUs manually so you can enter them when the new system is online.

Betty Stark: It's Almost Pumpkin Time

Have you ever thought about all the different sizes and colors of pumpkins available to gardeners? In the color orange they range in size from the smallest which is "Jack Be Nimble" to the largest which is "Atlantic Giant." In between those two sizes are a multitude of pumpkins of different sizes and uses. There are specialty pumpkins of varying colors and outer skin textures and giant pumpkins that are entries into local state fairs. Pumpkins are believed to have started in North America and seeds from related plants have been found in Mexico dating back to 7000 BC.

Pumpkins are loaded with vitamins, minerals and antioxidants which make them incredibly healthy. In addition, its low calorie content makes it a weight loss friendly food.

Unusual Pumpkin Facts

1. The pumpkin is a member of the Cucurbitaceae family which includes squash and cucumbers.
2. Pumpkins are grown all over the world including Alaska. Antarctica is the only continent in which they won't grow.
3. The pumpkin capital of the world is Morton, Illinois. This self-proclaimed pumpkin capital is the home of the Libby Corporation's pumpkin industry.
4. The Irish started the tradition of carving pumpkins. The Irish originally carved turnips before immigrating to the United States but found pumpkins plentiful and easier to carve.
5. In colonial times pumpkins were used as an ingredient for pie crust, NOT the filling.
6. The largest pumpkin ever grown was 2,624 pounds by a Belgian horticulturist. The largest one grown in the United States weighed 2,528 pounds and was grown in New Hampshire.

Planting

It's all about the timing if you want pumpkins for fall. All pumpkins have a germination and growing period. If you want pumpkins for the beginning to the middle of October for Halloween, then count back the growing days to determine when to plant. For example, I am planting Connecticut Field Pumpkins this year and want them for October. Their days to harvest are 110 days; so I counted back and will plant them around June 25th.



Pumpkins require a long growing season, generally 75 to 110 days. They do best when seeds are planted directly in the ground. Wait until the soil temperature is 70 degrees or more

before sowing seeds outdoors.

Optimum soil temp is 95. Pumpkins are very sensitive to the cold.

Select a site with full sun (to light shade) and lots of space for sprawling vines. However, if your space is limited, that is not a problem. Plant seeds on the edge of the garden and direct vines across the lawn or sidewalks. You can also grow pumpkins in 5 to 10 gallon buckets.

Pumpkins prefer very rich soil that is well drained. Mix lots of compost

and aged manure into the planting site before you plant seeds or transplant. Plant seeds in rows, "hills" or small mounds. With hills the soil will warm more quickly and the seeds will germinate faster. This also helps with drainage and pests. When preparing the hills use an abundance of old manure tilled deep into the soil (12 to 15 inches). If you don't have manure, loosen the soil and mix in a 2 to 4 inch layer of compost. Plant the seeds 1 inch deep into the hills with 4 to 5 seeds per hill. Space hills 4 to 8 feet apart.

Plants should germinate in less than a week with the right soil temp (70) and emerge in 5 to 10 days. When the plants are 2 to 3 inches tall, thin to 2 to 3 plants per hill by snipping off unwanted plants without disturbing the roots of the remaining ones.

Pumpkins are very thirsty plants and require lots of water. Water 1 inch per week. Water deeply, especially during fruit set. When watering, try to keep fruit and foliage dry unless it's a sunny day. Dampness will make rot and other diseases more likely. Add mulch around your pumpkins to keep in moisture and for weed and pest control. Remember pumpkins are very tender from planting to harvest, and don't over cultivate as they have very tender roots which can be damaged.

Small vines can be trained up a trellis. Also large varieties can be trained up trellises but supporting the fruit can be a challenge. Try using netting or old stockings for support.

If your first flowers aren't forming fruit, that's normal; so be patient. Both male and female blossoms need to open. To maintain good growth pumpkins like or need regular treatments of compost mixed with water.



Barbara Williams: Bullseye Toothache Plant

Howdy! I'm Barbara Williams (WCMGA class of 2017) and I'd like to share one of my favorite plants with you today.

Each year I like to try out a couple of unusual plants to see if they're low maintenance, what conditions they prefer and if the product is worth the effort. In 2018 Kim Mason shared some Bullseye Toothache seeds with me that she had purchased from Baker's Creek Rare Seeds. I'm so glad she did!

The Bullseye Toothache plant (*Spilanthes acmella* or *Acmella oleracea*) is also known as buzz buttons, electric daisy, eyeball plant, and Sichuan buttons.

Over the seasons I've learned this plant is super easy to grow. It spreads from the rhizomes and will completely fill and overflow any container you put it in. It prefers the temperature to be above 45 degrees and is hardy in Zones 9 - 11. It does well in the sun and when I forget to water, it looks sad and droopy. Then I just drench it and let it set for a few days. Perks right up!

This plant gets its nicknames from the sensations created by chomping on a flower. My nephew tried it out for me and reported a tingling sensation followed by a strong sour fruit taste and then his mouth was numb for about 15 minutes. I chewed a little on a leaf and put it between my cheek and a canker sore on my gums. It didn't stay in place well, but it took away the pain.



In 2019 I planted the toothache plant in a 15-gallon grow bag.

I stayed over the sink with constant drool for a few minutes... Now I'm thinking—maybe if I added some water to swish with? Anyway, mom applied the tincture to her gums and the sores went away. Her dentist even told her that her gums looked healthier than ever. But, the toothache tincture has a horrible taste!

I sent dried *Spilanthes* flowers to my daughter in New Mexico and she reconstituted them with hot water for a friend who had a bad toothache. He chewed on the flowers and said it was the only relief he had gotten.

A friend of mine had thrush. She just swiped the middle of her tongue with a Q-tip drenched in the tincture a few times a day

and said it was a miracle how quickly it helped.

The active ingredient in *Spilanthes* is called Spilanthal. Spilanthal is an antiseptic alkaloid found throughout the entire plant but with the greatest amounts located in the flowers.

Reference: Gardening Know How: *Spilanthes* Herb Care: How To Grow *Spilanthes* Toothache Plant <https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/edible/herbs/spilanthes/growing-spilanthes-plants.htm>

An online article at the Healthline website mentioned that a toothpick soaked in Spilanthal helps with dry mouth. I've been considering a small spray bottle for dry mouth, but this sounds easier. I just need a volunteer with dry mouth to try it out!

Reference: <https://www.healthline.com/health/toothache-plant>

Here are my plants for this year's garden. I'll be planting it on the east side of my lettuce barrel. Wasabi arugula will be on the west side of the barrel.

If you're looking for a plant that will grow exponentially in one season, likes the temp above 45 degrees, prefers not too much water, and is a real conversation piece, this is the one for you! It propagates super easy and I'm always willing to share!



Plants for this year's garden



Flowers in vodka



Barb's toothache tincture

Spilanthes is said to have antibacterial properties as well, so I made a toothache tincture with the flowers and cheap vodka (something I learned from Holly Ross). The difficulty came in finding someone with a toothache to see if it worked.

When my mom was going through chemo last year, she had sores in her mouth making it hard to eat. She was willing to try anything for relief. I decided I should try it first, so I swished a little toothache tincture around my mouth and spit it out. Then

Nancy McDonald: Sub-Irrigation Planters

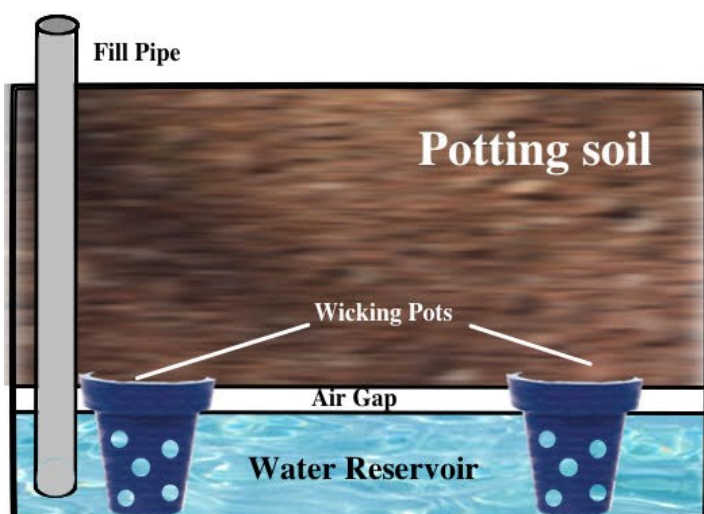
As part of the Class of 2020 Project, I was tasked with designing and creating self-standing planter boxes to beautify the entrance of the AgriLife building. I not only wanted the design to be attractive, but I also wanted them to be functionally easy to maintain. I immediately thought of a sub-irrigation planter (SIP), or self-watering planter as a solution to one of our ongoing challenges at the building. An inconveniently located hose-bibb (garden hose valve) is our only water source.



The committee decided to use galvanized metal troughs to enhance the entrance to the extension office. The committee includes Nancy McDonald, Carolyn West, and Michele Musser.

What is a SIP and how does it work?

A sub-irrigation planter is any container or vessel that has a water reservoir at the bottom, separate from a loose soilless planting mixture above. The barrier between the two levels is penetrated by a lined cup, pot, or basket filled with potting soil. The barrier acts as a wick drawing the moisture from the water



This graphic illustrates the design of the SIP system.

reservoir into the top of the planter through capillary action. The water reservoir is filled through a pipe which extends from above the top of the planter down to the reservoir. Drill a hole in the container about one inch below the soilless mix/water barrier to form an air gap above the water level. The air gap works as an air pruner on any roots that may grow to the bottom of the planter. To have continuous wicking action, the water reservoir should never be allowed to be completely empty.

What are the advantages?

The advantages of the SIP system are:

- Watering is required much less frequently
- Less water on the leaves means a lowered risk of moisture damage
- Water is distributed evenly to the plants even during drought conditions
- It is more eco-friendly due to less water lost to evaporation. Mulch and/or a plastic covering at the plant level would reduce evaporation further.

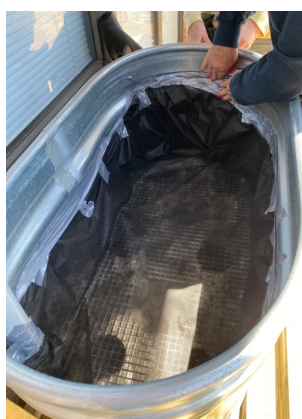
Construction and Installation of Our Planters

The committee decided to use galvanized metal troughs to match the existing troughs at the building. Then, I designed a wooden stand to set the troughs in and my husband agreed to build them.

Inside the trough, for the barrier between the water and potting soil, we used a grid that was intended for fluorescent ceiling lights. We propped the grid up with PVC pipe, which was cut to length. Two more holes were cut



Setting up the barrier



Landscape fabric for lining

in the grid to insert the two wicking pots/baskets. For wicking pots, we used recycled plastic plant pots and drilled extra holes in them for maximum water penetration.

After delivering the planters to the building, we lined both the wicking baskets and grid with landscaping fabric to keep the potting soil from falling into the water. We filled the wicking baskets with the soilless mixture, wetting it as we filled the planter. The soilless mix

(Continued on page 13)

Jessamee Mellon: Virginia Buttonweed

Virginia buttonweed (*Diodia virginiana*) is a pleasant plant discovery in our flowerbed. Moving to east Texas last year, we were introduced to many new species. Some of the “weeds” were noxious but this little plant was a pleasant surprise.



Virginia buttonweed

This low growing, sometimes hairy perennial blooms from April to October with a profusion of small white blossoms. The flowers are about 3/8 inch across with two sepals, and four petals uniting at the base into a slender tube arising from leaf axils. Many branches grow from a solitary stem produced by a woody root crown. The branches will root at each node allowing a somewhat sprawling growth habit. It can be trimmed and shaped for a more formal appearance and is unaffected by trimming. To our surprise, it was unaffected by our recent arctic blast.

Virginia buttonweed thrives in moist to wet soil and prefers disturbed areas of meadows, swales, ditches, marshy areas, streams, riverbanks, and our front yard. Barrel shaped seed

pods are buoyant and readily dispersed by heavy rains.

Native to Connecticut, the south-central and southeastern United States, it may be an invasive intruder in golf greens or manicured lawns and can be a challenge to eradicate. Hand pulling may be ineffective because of the remaining underground roots and seeds.

According to a Louisiana State University publication, “Virginia Buttonweed: No. 1 Weed Problem of Southern Lawns,” research trials were conducted and the herbicides that contain active ingredients of 2,4-D, dicamba, mecoprop, and carfentrazone have been effective in suppressing emerging perennial plants and killing the first blush of buttonweed seedlings when applied in early spring.

Reference:

<https://www.lsuagcenter.com/profiles/lbenedict/articles/page1469553935358>

I rather like our buttonweed because it blooms through July and August. It also provides nectar to pollinators and a cool hiding place for toads, lizards, and skinks. We have decided not to kill it.

Reference: For more information about Virginia buttonweed, see:

(Sub-Irrigation Planters Continued from page 12)



Michele Musser adds water through the PVC pipe.

for a SIP can be made of any loose, porous mix. A mix such as Mel's mix would work well (1/3 peat moss, 1/3 vermiculite, and 1/3 compost). The team used a premixed potting soil that we mixed with perlite, peat moss, and our own compost (another class project).

We dampened the mix as we added it to aid in starting the

wicking action. After we added the plants, we filled the water reservoir through the pipe using a hose.

The wooden stand design turned out great and the planters really enhance the front of the building. We not only have a beautiful planter filled with lovely plants, but hopefully, our watering chores will be noticeably lighter. It will be interesting to see how often water is needed, especially in the heat of the summer.



Carolyn West adds water to the new trough planters.

Melodee Eishen: Nature Watch Report

What a beginning to 2021. We had typical cold weather during January and downright frigid, freezing, icy, snowy weather in February. As I recall March temps warmed a bit and everyone got "spring fever," but it was still too cold for our warm season garden. My onions, broccoli, cabbage, and other vegetables enjoyed the coolness, but let's get real, I was ready for warm weather.

So, in talking about weather, plants, bugs, and returning birds, we're also talking about Phenology. Phenology is the study of weather, plants, animals, insects, and their interactions during certain conditions. For example, phenology studies help manage invasive species, by tracking weather, plant growth, and insect arrival.

Last year it was noted that spring arrived two weeks earlier than normal. In contrast we are about two weeks late in the arrival of spring this year. On April 18, the temperature went down to 39 degrees and we expected a frost later in that week. It was almost the end of April! You can follow the status of spring on the National Phenology Network website. In addition, there are many interesting articles and information on the website. The website also provides an introduction to Phenology observation training, a one-hour training course, to see if you are interested in this field.

Reference: <http://usanpn.org/>

I hope to have a short training session soon for those interested in making weekly observations from their home or a

designated site. You can count the time spent for observation and recording of your findings as volunteer hours.

Just to give you a little more local information that influences our growing season, rainfall so far in 2021, is about six inches behind last year. Remember last year was kind of wet. We are about the same, as far as rain totals, as 2019. In 2018 we had six inches more rain and in 2017 we had an inch less than this year's rainfall.

So, let's move on to chilling hours. From

October 2020 to February 2021, we had 829 hours under 32 degrees and 1,122 hours under 45 degrees. This should all be good for the fruit trees that have a high number of chilling hour requirements to fruit. However, we also have to take into consideration that we may have lost some trees because of that same extremely cold and prolonged freeze.

As you can see, we never have the same weather two years in a row and each year brings its blessings and challenges and we can learn how to adapt and grow through it all.

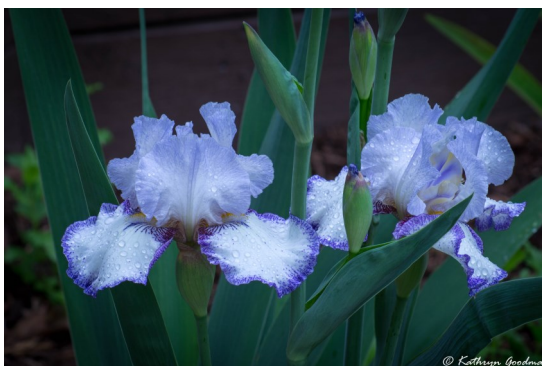


Kathy Goodman: Favorite Photos of Spring



Lenten rose (Hybrid hellebore) Wedding Party
Maid of honor

My flowers seem to be thriving despite or because of the colder weather this year.



Bearded iris (*Iris x germanica*)



Columbine, Tahiti double
and Thalia daffodils



As you read our WCMGA newsletter, you learn about:

- Educational seminars and classes
- Garden projects
- Advanced training speakers at educational forums
- Classroom instruction for county ISDs
- Newspaper educational articles written by Master Gardeners

Please send newsletter articles, suggestions, and interesting information to newsletter editor Kathy Goodman at kmgoodman0807@gmail.com.

Note: You can count time spent writing articles as volunteer hours. Please understand that all articles will be edited to fit the newsletter style or for spacing needs.

Online with WCMGA

MG Wood Works Newsletter

Unless otherwise noted, all photos in this publication were taken by the author of the article in which they appear.

Website

<http://txmg.org/woodcounty> up-to-the-minute news and scheduled events, back issues of the newsletter and seasonal videos. Send new content for the website to **Keith Zimmerman**: keithzim@yahoo.com

Wood County Master Gardeners Inc. Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/Wood-County-Master-Gardeners-Inc-205733709448425/>

WCMGA Private Facebook Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1534107646899295/>

Advanced Training

Visit the **Texas Master Gardener Advanced Training** website (<https://mastergardener.tamu.edu/master-gardener-specialist/>) for information about advanced training topics and opportunities. The *Master Gardener Advanced Training* programs offer modules about various subjects, such as Compost Advanced Training, Earth-Kind® Advanced Training, First Detector Advanced Training, Greenhouse Advanced Training, Irrigation Efficiency Advanced Training, Rainwater Harvesting Advanced Training, Texas Superstar™ Advanced Training, and Tree Care Advanced Training.

Sunshine

Know of a member who needs a get well, warm thought, or sympathy card? Contact Elaine Porter at 361-319-7300 or porterpettus@gmail.com.

To become a Master Gardener, contact the Wood County Extension Office at 903-763-2924

Volunteer Hours

As of the end of April, the Volunteer system is still being renovated and is offline.

Please keep track your volunteer hours and CEUs manually so you can enter them when the new system is online.