

# THE FORT BEND GARDENER



HORTICULTURE IN FORT BEND COUNTY

SPRING 2016

TEXAS A&M  
AGRI LIFE  
EXTENSION

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FORT BEND COUNTY  
Master Gardeners



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## Recent Outbreak of Biting Flies

By John Gordy, Fort Bend County Extension Agent-AG-NR

For the last couple of weeks there have been many local reports of and questions about biting “gnats”. Many of the reports indicate that the gnats are biting people during the day – particularly around the neck and head, and leaving persistently itchy swollen areas at the site of the bites. The actual culprits have been one or more species of black fly. Black fly species are small (5 mm or less) and have a characteristic “hump-back”, which is why they are also commonly called buffalo gnats. The flies are active during the day, and unlike mosquitoes, they are fast, strong fliers that can continue to be problematic even on very breezy days. Female flies have mouth parts modified to bite and feed on blood. They attack people as well as domestic animals, poultry and wildlife.

Most species of black fly larvae develop while attached to submerged rocks or logs in shallow moving waters of streams and rivers. However, there are some species that do well in sandy-bottomed streams and slow, muddy bodies of water. After the female lays eggs in the water, larval development can take anywhere from two weeks to more than two months. Adult black flies, particularly females, can disperse great distances from their breeding habitats to feed. Along with the relatively warm winter we have experienced, rains farther north have provided ample freshwater coming down both the Brazos and San Bernard rivers, helping provide good conditions for large black fly populations. And while the black fly populations may soon decrease, it is possible that there will be another generation later in the year.

During periods of adult activity biting flies can become very annoying. Staying indoors is one option, but working outdoors may require dressing in long pants and long-sleeved shirt and wearing a cap and possibly a mesh veil. Insect repellents can be applied, particularly to the neck and head, but may not be very effective against these strong, fast flies. Additionally, you may have to try different repellents to find the one that works on the species nearest you. There is some research showing good efficacy of the active ingredient IR-3535 against some species of

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## *If You haven't Already Heard It Through the Grapevine...*

By Boone Holladay,  
Fort Bend County Extension Agent—Horticulture

There are a couple standards that Texans live by. First, everything is bigger in Texas. Second, if someone says that it can't be done in Texas, well, we'll not only prove them wrong, but we'll do it bigger, better, bolder, and with a little Texas flare added for good measure. Now with that the stage has been set, let's talk wine grapes!

The viticulture industry in Texas has grown from a tiny niche in the 1980's up to a big player in the US wine market. This is due to a group of pioneer-minded



individuals and a bunch of research and consulting from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. Beyond state specialists, Extension has allocated regional viticulture specialists throughout the State. These individuals are knowledgeable on the climate, growing conditions, and varieties that do best in each region. In Fort Bend County, our region is entitled the Gulf Coast region. Yes, this region goes all the way from Orange down the complete Gulf coastline down to Brownsville. That's quite a bit of diversity.

All this said, I'd like to spend a minute to introduce our new Gulf Coast regional specialist, Ms. Fran Pontasch. Fran has extensive viticulture experience in Texas. Beyond serving in several roles with Extension, she managed vineyards at Messina Hof winery in Bryan. In her recent newsletter Fran quoted "What a privilege it is to visit your vineyards during wildflower season. Every vineyard that I've visited so far, has Blanc Du Bois planted. Blanc Du Bois, this region's first variety to bud, bloom, and ripen is a week or two from blooming in the northern parts of the region and have already set fruit in the Valley." We are lucky and proud to have Fran on board.



Several weeks ago, I got to spend the day with Fran touring local vineyards; two of the notable vineyards in Fort Bend County and a research grower in Wharton. The primary message I received that day, was that we have plenty of room to step up grape production in our region. About half of Fort Bend County soils are suitable for commercial wine grape production. This includes loam and sandy loam soils with excellent drainage, mostly found across the north and northwest parts of the county, but found in pockets throughout. The main key is drainage. If you are in areas that don't drain off for a day or two after big storms....well, this might not be for you, at least at a commercial scale.

So, if you are interested in growing wine grapes, commercially or for home use, here are a couple options to get you started. First off is the 2016 Black Spanish/Lenoir Symposium held on Friday

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### *Garden With Confidence*

By Peggy d'Hemecourt, President,  
Fort Bend County Master Gardeners

A mild winter has transitioned smoothly into a beautiful spring, and homeowners are busy caring for their lawns and sprucing-up their gardens. Eager to help, in February the Fort Bend County Master Gardeners successfully launched their latest educational program, Garden With Confidence, with 'The Kitchen Garden' followed in March with 'Landscape Plants for Fort Bend Gardens'. There is still time to take advantage of the remaining four classes in the 2016 program series, listed below. Improving the soil, managing insects, optimizing the irrigation system, and achieving a lush lawn are all timely topics as we move into the summer season.

- Saturday, May 14 - Insects in the Garden – Friend or Foe?
- Saturday, June 25 - Irrigation System Efficiency
- Saturday, July 16 - The Healthy Lawn

Classes are taught at the Fort Bend County Extension Office at 1402 Band Road in Rosenberg from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Instructors are Fort Bend County Master Gardener Specialists and other horticulture professionals. Registration fees include instruction, handouts, and refreshments: \$15 per class, \$40 for 3 classes. Children under 10 accompanied by parents are free.

For more details, visit

<http://fortbend.agrilife.org> or

contact administrative assistant Brandy Rader at [brandy.rader@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:brandy.rader@ag.tamu.edu) or (281) 342-3034.

Also visit us on Facebook at Fort Bend County Extension.

### *Seasonal Garden Checklist: April/May*

By Dr. William Welch  
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service  
Landscape Horticulturist

1. Many flower or vegetable seeds left over after planting the garden can be saved for the next season by closing the packets with tape or paper clips and storing in a sealed glass jar in your refrigerator.
2. Collect records on the usual flowering habits of plants in your garden, so that as the season progresses assemblies can be made of colorful combinations that will bloom in unison.
3. Prune spring-flowering shrubs soon after flowering. Keep the natural shape of the plant in mind as you prune, and avoid excessive cutting except where necessary to control size.
4. As soon as azaleas have finished flowering, apply an acid type fertilizer at the rate recommended. Don't over fertilize, as azalea roots are near the surface and can be damaged. Water thoroughly after fertilizing.
5. Climbing hybrid tea roses may be pruned as soon as they complete flowering.
6. Removing spent flowers, trimming back excessive growth, and applying fertilizer to an established annual bed can do wonders towards rejuvenating and extending the life of the planting.
7. Warm season annuals such as amaranthus, celosia, cosmos, marigold, portulaca, zinnia can be sown directly in the beds where they are to grow. Keep seeded areas moist until seeds germinate. When plants are large enough thin out and transplant extras to other areas.
8. Check new tender growth for aphids. While a few can be tolerated, but large numbers should be controlled. Washing them off with a strong spray of water may be all that is needed for control.
9. Start weeding early in the flower garden. Early competition with small plants can delay flowering. Adding a layer of mulch will discourage weed growth and make those that do come through easier to pull.



## ***“Oh Honey, We’ve Got Bees!!” Swarm Season is Upon Us***

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service – Fort Bend County

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service - Fort Bend County will again offer honeybee swarm traps to the community. For many years, the Extension Service has referred calls to beekeepers for help in dealing with honey bee problems. In cooperation with the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association, the Rosenberg Extension office can now provide a specially constructed trap to lure swarms of honey bees away from homes and structures. Honey bees are cavity nesters and the trap offers a desirable home as an alternative to moving into a location that would be in conflict with people. Luring the bees into a trap avoids the costly help of a bee removal service or exterminator after they have established themselves in the wall or soffit of someone’s house. According to County Extension Agent Boone Holladay, “Trapping may avoid a new infestation but, unfortunately, it cannot lure bees out of an existing nest. Preventing an existing colony from becoming a source of new problems is our plan.”



“Reproductive swarms usually happen in the springtime when forage is plentiful, so ‘swarm season’ is just around the corner”, Holladay says. (“Absconding” is the term beekeepers use for entire colonies that “swarm”, abandoning their nest, usually due to an unsuitable site, pests or disease. Absconding can happen at any time of the year.) A football-sized cluster of bees hanging from a tree limb or on a wooden fence are awaiting the return of scouts that will guide them to a new nest site. The worst advice anyone can receive is “don’t worry, they’ll leave” since the rest of the sentence may well be “and move into your attic.” The clustered swarm may wait a day or two for the scouts to locate a suitable cavity for the colony to occupy. At this point, timely advice from a beekeeper can make a huge difference. Perhaps a beekeeper can capture the swarm and introduce them into a hive as their new home. If not a managed hive, hopefully the bees will move into a hollow tree or maybe an abandoned birdhouse. Bees have a heightened sense of smell, so they easily find where bees have lived before.



If honey bees have been a recurring problem or an existing colony might result in more problems, the swarm trap program may be of significant help. Contact the Extension office during business hours at 281- 633-7029 and make arrangements to pick up a honey bee trap. Hang the trap securely about four or five feet above the ground (a tree or wooden fence makes a good trap site). Check the trap frequently and when you notice bees occupying it, call the Extension office immediately. They will have an area beekeeper contact you to remove the trap and move the bees into a managed hive. It is best to move the trap after dark so that all the bees are inside (you don’t want foraging bees to return to find their home is gone). The swarm trap is for a swarm on the move. If you have had bees in structures for some length of time, traps aren’t your answer. Contact the Extension office and we can offer a list of bee removal service providers.

## *Weather so great, you might go nuts!*

By Boone Holladay,  
Fort Bend County Extension Agent—Horticulture

2015 couldn't have been worse growing conditions for pecans in the region. Weather-wise, we went from monsoon in May to bone-dry in July. We had foliar pressure from walnut caterpillars in summer, and what nuts scab disease didn't take, the hungry crows and squirrels surely finished off. Well, knock on pecan wood, but things are lining up for a good crop year. Adding to all the pressure last year, it was an OFF year for most orchards. So, if environmental conditions continue to be favorable, you have a pretty good chance to harvest some good nuts this fall.

A quality harvest doesn't come on its own. Here are a couple things to be thinking about. The first is fertilization. At minimum, give trees the nitrogen they need to put on a good leaves. Beyond that, look at complete fertilizers to match your soil needs. Beyond that, foliar zinc applications will maximize yield potential. The second is disease management, specifically scab. If we get damp rainy periods in spring make sure to scout ahead for signs of scab on young leaves. In spraying for scab, rotate action types to avoid product resistance. The third is pest management. The first pest to scout for is pecan nut casebearer. Going later in spring and into summer, we'll scout for walnut caterpillars. And fourth, but not least, are animal pests. Minimizing tree squirrel and crow pressure will pay off greatly come harvest time.

Integrated control methods for each of these are listed online at <http://pecan.ipmPIPE.org>. As well, scouting for pecan nut casebearer includes using pheromone traps. Response recommendations concerning PNC traps can be found on the website above. Small orchards less than 50 acres need 2-3 traps placed apart in the orchard. Three state-based sources for these traps include:

### **Oliver Pecan Co. Inc.**

1402 W. Wallace, San Saba, TX 76877

800-657-9291

E-mail: [soliver@centex.net](mailto:soliver@centex.net)

### **Pape Pecan House**

P.O. Box 1281

101 S. Hwy 123 Bypass

Seguin, TX 78155

Ph: 830-379-7442

### **Southern Nut 'n Tree Equipment, Inc and PPI**

324 SH 16 South

Goldthwaite, TX 76844

1-800-527-1825

Fax: 325-938-5490

E-mail: [sales@pecans.com](mailto:sales@pecans.com)



***Recent Outbreak of Biting Flies*** *continued from pg. 1*

blackfly, deer flies and stable flies. Also, mixtures of DEET with other repellents like MGK 111, MGK 264, and MGK 326 appear to be better against blackflies than DEET alone. Some products that contain the above repellents include Avon Skin-so-soft Bug Guard, Coleman Skin Smart, Deep Woods Off, Sawyer picaridin repellent, and Cutter Backwoods. Additionally, some local reports indicate that herbal and essential oil based repellents work well, although there is no research to support it. Bites can be treated with over the counter insect bite remedies to help deaden the itching, but some people are very sensitive to the bites and may need to visit with their medical doctor.

For horses and livestock, individual animals may be stabled during the day when populations are abundant, but this practice is not possible for large herds. Fly repellents applied to the chest, belly and ears are somewhat effective but require daily application. Muslin or cotton bags fitted over horses' ears may be used to prevent fly entry of those species attacking these areas, or white petroleum jelly inside the ears of horse will reduce bites. Additional options include dense smoke, repellents with permethrin, and ivermectin ear tags or pour-on and spray formulations.

**Garden:** One of a vast number of free outdoor restaurants operated by charity-minded amateurs in an effort to provide healthful, balanced meals for insects, birds and animals.

- Henry Beard and Roy McKie, *Gardener's Dictionary*

***If You haven't Already Heard It Through the Grapevine...continued from pg. 2***

May 20, 2016 at the Cat Spring Agricultural Society Hall in Austin, County. *Taming the Beast in the Vineyard & Winery:* Lenoir or Black Spanish, regardless of what name we give it - this grape grows perfectly in the Gulf Coast region. Across the state, winemakers are making robust red wines. Join us for a day of learning, tasting, and sharing your thoughts. Fee - \$75. Pay at the door, includes lunch, materials, and tastings. Beyond this upcoming event, Fran schedules a range of events throughout the calendar. If you are ready to take the plunge, reach out to Fran at [fmpontasch@tamu.edu](mailto:fmpontasch@tamu.edu) and get signed up for announcement of future events. Next, visit <http://winegrapes.tamu.edu> for a range of online resources for commercial viticulture producers. Last, but not least, we have a small demonstration vineyard planting here at our offices in Rosenberg. Our disclaimer is that it isn't currently in great shape, but it will offer clues of what and what not to do. Give us a call at (281) 342-3034 to schedule a guided visit.

To growing wine grapes in Fort Bend County, Cheers!

## Workshop: Conserve Water in the Garden with Drip Irrigation

By Cheryl Huber,  
Fort Bend Master Gardener

Conserving water is an important element of any garden. Changing to a drip irrigation system in garden beds is an easy project to install and maintain, and it is inexpensive to purchase. Additional advantages are lower water bills, less runoff and healthy plants.

The Fort Bend County Horticulture Agent and Fort Bend County Master Gardens will present a hands-on workshop to teach homeowners how to design, and install a drip irrigation system for your garden.

There is no charge for attending the workshop which will be presented on Saturday, May 7, 2016 from 9:30a.m. - 11:30a.m., at the Fort Bend County Extension Service Office, 1402 Band Road, Rosenberg, TX 77471.

### *Gardening Thoughts*

*If you've never experienced the joy of accomplishing more than you can imagine, plant a garden.*

*~Robert Brault*

*Gardening is the art that uses flowers and plants as paint, and the soil and sky as canvas.*

*- Elizabeth Murray*

## Mark Your Calendar and Save These Dates

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## Garden with Confidence

### *FUNDamentals of Gardening*

- May 14—Insects in the Garden – Friend or Foe?
- June 25—Irrigation System Efficiency
- July 16—The Healthy Lawn

*For more information to*

<http://fortbend.agrilife.org/horticulture/>.





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## DATES TO REMEMBER

**Fort Bend Beekeepers Meeting**

**Second Tuesday of each month, 7:00 p.m.**

**Garden with Confidence Education Series**

**May, June & July, 2016**

**Coastal Prairie Master Naturalist**

**Programs, First Thursday of the month**

**For full information on events call (281) 342-3034 or visit**

**<http://fortbend.agrilife.org>**

**<http://fbmg.org>**

**<http://txmn.org/coastal/>**

**<http://fortbendbeekeepers.org/>**