

ANNUAL PLANT SALE OFFERS SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY William Johnson



PHOTO BY Heidi Sheesley



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The Master Gardeners' Annual Fall Plant Sale on Saturday will feature a wide variety of perennials for the home landscape and garden ranging from butterfly and hummingbird plants (pictured above left is Purple Guarantica salvia) in addition to vegetables transplants (pictured above right is Packman broccoli), herbs, roses and citrus.

The arrival of autumn tends to be a bumpy landing along the Texas Upper Coast region. While autumn technically commenced on September 22 at 9:29 p.m., we have had some pleasantly cool weather followed by bouts of warm weather.

I typically measure the arrival of autumn by four milestones: 1.) when I need to turn the heater on in my car, 2) when my home air conditioner gets to "rest" into the early afternoon hours of a day, and 3.) when the coconut oil in the kitchen stays solid (coconut oil melts at 76° F.).

The fourth milestone indicating that pleasant autumn weather is at hand is the kick-off of the annual fall plant sale conducted by

Master Gardener volunteers.

The offerings at this year's Master Gardener Fall Plant Sale will not only include perennials for the home landscape but also citrus, vegetables, and herbs. The plant sale will be conducted on Saturday, October 11, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Wayne Johnson Community Center at Carbide Park (4102 Main Street) in La Marque.

Let me start with perennials. Fall is the ideal time to plant perennials in home landscapes. The Upper Gulf Coast has several months of cooler temperatures and dependable moisture from October through March or April.

Perennials planted during fall will be have time to establish a good root system during these more moderate conditions. This head start supports strong growth, long-term health and overall plant vigor.

The fall and winter seasons present fewer pest problems as well. All in all, there are fewer sources of stress (such as heat, fluctuations in soil moisture levels, and insect pressure) on specimens planted in the fall.

As one of my gardening friends commented: "Gardening with perennials is like painting with a full palette of colors, textures, forms and fragrances." Think of your home landscape as a can-



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vas—then create your perennial garden of color that pumps out beautiful foliage and flowers for years to come

The selections that will be offered at this year's event promise to be exciting. They represent an amazing variety of color, texture, size, shape and versatility in the landscape. Many of the selections are suitable for habitat gardens to attract and support birds, butterflies and hummingbirds.

Several varieties of roses will also be available in addition to Southern Highbush Blueberries which are recommended for our growing area. Several types of citrus ranging from Republic of Texas Orange to Ruby Red Grapefruit to Owari Satsuma will be available.

There will be a "Home-grown & Home-tested Plants by Master Gardeners" booth at the plant sale. Master Gardener Terry Cuculis is a papaya expert and grows papaya from seeds. His Terry's Best Papaya will be offered at this year's sale. Papaya is a "twofer" plant in home landscapes — it provides a distinctive tropical accent to landscapes to please the mind in addition to providing edible fruits to please the tummy.

Master Gardener Ira Gervais' gardening interests include herbs. He has grown 4-inch pots of Variegated Cuban Oregano for the plant sale. Variegated Cuban Oregano is a perennial herb and is also known by a variety of other names including Spanish thyme, French thyme, Mexican mint and Indian mint. Variegated Cuban Oregano is often used in salsas, black beans, jerk season blends,

Mexican menudo, fish and mutton dishes. It has a distinct intense lemony/lime taste and is a great compliment to Mexican cuisine. Ira reports that Variegated Cuban Oregano grows easily and is the perfect plant for someone just trying to develop a green thumb. This herb, along a variety of other herbs, will be available at the plant sale.

Four varieties of seedling onions will be available including Texas 1015, a favorite of gardeners across the State of Texas. A wide selection of other vegetables for the fall and winter garden will be available including lettuce, mustard greens, cabbages collards and Swiss chard.

A new addition to this year's fall plant sale will be strawberries. Master Gardener Robert Marshall is our expert on growing strawberries. He has grown several strawberry varieties in his home garden and recommends Sweet Charlie for its early ripening and very sweet fruits. Sweet Charlie has excellent disease resistance which makes it an ideal variety for the backyard gardener.

Berries typically ripen within two or three weeks of each other making harvesting easier. While strawberry plants are grown as perennials in other parts of the country, Galveston County gardeners should grow strawberries as an annual. You can expect about one pint of berries per plant. Strawberries can be grown in containers. If you are wondering if freshly pick strawberries are sweeter than those purchased from the grocery store, know that just like tomatoes there is no comparison.

I recommend that gardeners try growing broccoli as this vegetable is remarkably easy to grow in our area. I include broccoli in my fall garden at home and it has never failed to produce. I even plant broccoli in a raised bed in the front lawn. I have yet to get a letter from the dreaded homeowners landscape maintenance squad for doing so since broccoli provides a very attractive addition to the winter landscape with its board green leaves. (That may change after publication of this column.) Mid-October is an ideal time to plant broccoli transplants.

The Master Gardeners will also have a limited selection of paperwhite bulbs. Paperwhites have naturalized to our growing area and provide some of the first flowers to be seen in mid-January when most winter landscapes are still asleep. Paperwhites require virtually no maintenance (other than planting the bulbs) and easily survived the record temperatures and drought of 2011.

As you can surmise, this year's plant sale will have something of interest to all gardeners. Be sure to visit our website (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston>) to review the list of all plants and plant descriptions that will be available at Saturday's plant sale.

Proceeds from plant sales are used toward development and maintenance of the Extension Horticulture Demonstration & Research Garden located in Carbine Park which is open to the public.