

THE GARDENING SPADE

Gregg County Master Gardener Association Quarterly Newsletter



Spring is Here (Maybe)

Thoughts from the President

After much teasing over the past several weeks, it appears Spring has officially arrived. Mind you, we're still a bit hesitant to jump in and start pulling plants out of the greenhouse. Some say there is still the possibility of one more freeze, and we really don't want to lose what we've been protecting. Over the past several weeks we've seen robins arriving, although during one of those nasty freezing spells, I think I saw some of them pondering heading back farther south. Daylight savings time has arrived, and along with it the ever-present discussion of whether it is a boon to mankind or some sort of subversive plot to mess with our biological clocks. The Bradford Pear trees have bloomed and leafed out, the daffodils, azaleas, and a myriad of other spring bloomers are starting to color the landscape, and the spring clean-up and planting has begun.

Well, on to the activities of our Master Gardeners. The Spring Seminar was held on March 2nd, and despite some last-minute venue issues was a big success. Attendance was good and Tim Hartmann presented a program filled with information on Earth Kind topics, including plant irrigation, herb trials, and kiwi and peach production. We received a lot of positive feedback from attendees. Kudos to Joyce Moomau and her committee for a successful seminar.

There has also been a lot of activity on our various volunteer projects. A lot of effort is being put forth to clean and dress up the J.R. Curtis Garden and the Shade Garden for Spring. Weeding, trimming and planting are in full swing. It was great to see the turnout last week at the J.R. Curtis Garden, including several interns. We had about 15 gardeners last Tuesday, and a lot was accomplished in a short time.

Larry Ferguson reported similar activities at the First Baptist Church garden as well. He said they are poised to produce more fruits and vegetables than ever before. They have already planted onions, beans and several greens, and are preparing to plant peas within the next two weeks. At the end of this month they will begin

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building four more raised beds using wood and roofing metal as an experiment. They hope to get these beds ready for some fall planting.

It's great to see all these projects flourish, and all because of the terrific groups of VOLUNTEERS working together to make it all happen.

The members who signed up for the Dallas Arboretum field trip are really looking forward to the outing. Sylvia Sharp has done an outstanding job organizing this excursion. I'm sure they'll have a lot to talk about at our April meeting. And speaking of arboretums, congratulations to our own Master Gardeners Association for becoming the first patron sponsor of the Longview Arboretum and Nature Center currently in Phase 1 construction. We are looking forward to the success of this venture.

Well, that's enough rambling for now. I hope everyone has a great spring, and don't forget to play in the dirt once in a while. It was fun when you were a kid, and fun never gets old.

~ David Hackley



Volunteers came out in full force to "play in the dirt" for a work day at J.R. Curtis Gardens.

Feeling ambitious, helpful, creative?

Chairmen are needed for the fall plant sale and the nominating committee.

Spot Light on Learn Grow, Eat Go!



To say that Martha Grissom is excited about the *LGEG* would be an understatement. Martha has been gardening since she was born. Their family farm in Louisiana consisted of cotton, soybeans, all kinds of vegetables, peach trees, pigs, cows and chickens. Literally everything they ate was food they raised. Her uber healthy parents never relied on medicine. Martha learned by example. It's no wonder she is committed to teaching our youth the benefits and joy of growing their own food.

Fast forward to 2017 when Martha went through the Master Gardener Intern program. -While attending Dr. Masabni's lecture, Martha was inspired to convert her entire garden to raised beds.

Soon there after, the LISD Science Curriculum Director asked Randy Reeves if he knew anyone willing to start a gardening program for their elementary schools. Martha jumped at the chance.

With an enthusiastic principal, South Ward was the first to give it a go followed by Hudson Pep. Once beds were constructed and soil was in place it was planting time. Life was good up until the day Martha learned she'd have to take a break for cancer treatment. Tami Putman, the AgriLife agent who initially shared her

knowledge about *LGEG* with Martha stepped in to oversee the program at South Ward while another agent took Hudson Pep.

By the time Martha was back in action, LISD had adopted *LGEG* as their science curriculum for 2nd grade students at all seven schools! What a job to get them all ready for 2018 Fall gardens! Enter, AgriLife agent, Arvitta Scott. Arvitta had written part of the *LGEG* program and was very active in implementing it in south Texas before moving to Longview.

Martha put together lists for needs while Tami worked to secure funding. Next came shopping, construction and the search for cardboard to line each bed to prevent weed growth. Initially, adult helpers filled the beds but Arvitta recognized the importance of having the children take ownership of the gardens. The kids soon learned that by working in teams they could lift the bags of soil and fill the beds themselves.

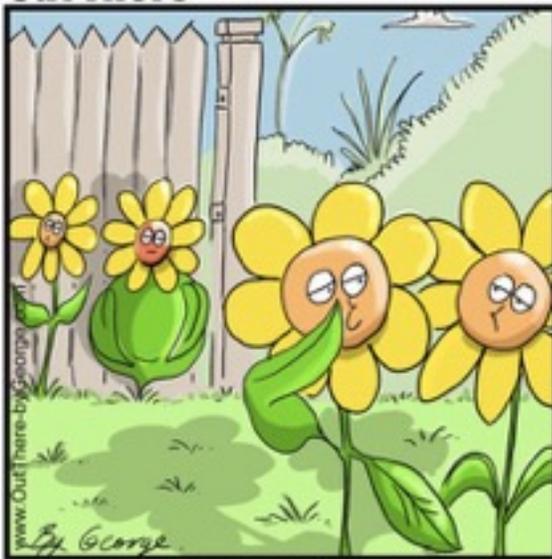
LGEG provides teachers with complete lesson plans including hands-on exercises. Some teachers embrace the program more than others. But it's evident that ALL of the kids embrace it.

As the success of the program grows, so too grows the need for MG volunteers. Volunteers are needed for each 10-week session to go by a school once a week to see if the beds need weeding or watering. If so, that need is communicated to the school's point of contact, (usually the science director or principal) so the kids can be scheduled to go outside to work on their beds. (It's all about ownership.) The students (anywhere from 80 – 120 +/-) all come out at once which is why the need is so great. Master Gardeners are relied on to help the kids recognize the difference between weeds and plants, what dry soil feels like, what bugs are beneficial, etc.

In Martha's own words, "This program has been so rewarding for me! I think it is vital that we teach our youth to grow food and to be responsible partners helping fellow students to succeed. I am proud to be able to give back to our community by participating in *LGEG* and encourage all Master Gardeners to get involved." For more information or to join in the fun, email Martha at mrthgrissom@aol.com



Out There



"Don't look...but someone has been sucking up too much nitrogen"

The Need for a Clue

I am a fairly new gardener. Not *young*, but new. We had a garden growing up but I wasn't aware of my parents fertilizing with anything. So learning about N, P, K, and trying to remember what the letters stood for required me to come up with clues other than, "Up, Down & All Around". Nitrogen for development above ground; Phosphorous for root growth and, Potassium for overall health all made sense. But, having been out of school for longer than I'd care to admit, I couldn't remember which was the "p" and which was the "k". The Periodic Chart lists phosphorous as "P" and potassium as "K". Using, *Up, Down & All Around*, I was able to remember that the first "p" was for roots, as in tunneling in which you would need a flashlight and that phosphorous is something that "shines in the dark". So, *voila!* Phosphorous reminds me of a flashlight, a tool for tunneling which is what roots do, leaving potassium (even though it begins with p) to be "K". Corny? Maybe. But it works for me. My husband simply points out that, "ph" comes before "po". What's your secret? Share your gardening clues/tips to be printed in the next issue by emailing me at ohrobeinhi@yahoo.com.

Spring Gardening 'To Do' List

APRIL

Planting:

- Plant ground covers, warm season annuals and perennials as soil temperatures warm and danger of frost has passed, such as cannas and gladiola corms. It's best to wait until next month to plant hot weather annuals such as caladiums, elephant ears, periwinkles, and zinnias.
- Plant warm season turf grasses (Bermuda, St. Augustine and Zoysia) starting in mid April. Only plant Bermuda seed when nighttime temps average 65 degrees.
- If you didn't get your tomatoes, beans, radishes, cucumbers, corn, peppers and squash in the ground in March, do so now. After threat of frost, plant watermelon, southern peas, okra, cantaloupe, sweet potatoes, eggplant, and pumpkin.

Pruning:

- Prune spring blooming shrubs and vines after they finish flowering.
- Allow foliage on spring bulbs to die back and dry before removing, so they can store food for next year
- Shade trees may be pruned. However, do not prune live oaks and red oaks between Feb. 15 and June 30.

Plant Care:

- Fertilize azaleas after they finish blooming according to soil test recommendations.
- Check roses, ornamentals, and vegetables for powdery mildew, prevalent in mild, moist spring weather.
- Check new growth on ornamental plants weekly for aphids and scale insects. Treat as necessary.
- Apply first fertilizer treatment to established warm season turf grasses (first to mid April). Use a fertilizer based on a soil test and follow recommendations. "Weed & Feed" products are not recommended.
- Mow established warm season turf grasses weekly or as needed.
- Use broad-leafed weed control products to eliminate spring weeds such as dandelions, henbit, and chickweed. Some types can damage St. Augustine. Always read and follow label directions.
- Begin harvesting cool season vegetables.
- Water plants when they're dry, but be particularly diligent with new plantings that can quickly dry out in persistent spring winds. Using 3 – 4 inches of mulch on flower, shrub and vegetable beds will help retain moisture.

MAY

Planting:

- Plant caladiums and elephant ears as night temperatures reach 70 degrees.
- Plant ground covers and hot weather annuals such as periwinkles, portulaca, salvia, zinnias, and coleus.
- Continue to plant warm season turf grasses.
- Plant perennial herbs in prepared soil or containers.



- Plant hardy varieties of palms during the warm season from now to August.
- Plant tropicals including hibiscus, bougainvillea and mandevilla now.

Pruning:

- Prune spring blooming shrubs such as forsythia and Indian hawthorn after they finish flowering.
- Prune climbing roses after their blooms fade.
- Snip off the dried foliage of early spring bulbs such as daffodils and the faded flower stalks of irises.
- Do not prune live oaks and red oaks between Feb. 15 and June 30.

Plant Care:

- Check roses, ornamentals, and vegetables for aphids and powdery mildew.
- Check roses for black spot and apply fungicide as necessary according to label directions.
- Watch for bagworms on junipers and other conifers, treat as required.
- Inspect broadleaf evergreen shrubs such as euonymus and hollies for scale insects, and treat as necessary.
- Check ornamentals, flowers, and vegetables for spider mites, which begin to appear with hot weather.
- Continue regular mowing of warm season turf grasses every 5 to 7 days.
- Mow Bermuda, maintained at 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 inches, and St. Augustine maintained at 2 1/2 inches in full sun and to 3 to 3 1/2 inches in moderate shade.
- Check for chinch bugs in St. Augustine lawns (late May to Sept). Also watch for gray leaf spot fungal disease.
- Mulch planting beds to conserve moisture, deter weeds and keep soil cool.
- Be attentive to the water needs of new plantings.

JUNE

Planting:

- Continue to plant warm season turf grasses (Bermuda, St. Augustine, and Zoysia). Early June is also an ideal time to establish new Bermuda lawns by hydro-mulching.
- Plant ground covers and tropical and warm season annuals such as begonia, hibiscus, periwinkle, portulaca, purslane, salvia, zinnia, coleus, Mexican heather, gomphrena, and caladiums.

Pruning:

- Prune out any dead or broken branches of woody ornamentals (trees and shrubs) but avoid major pruning during summer heat.
- Cut back spent flowers of annuals and perennials to encourage new blooms.
- Prune spent flowers from roses and fertilize if needed according to a soil test.
- Pinch back chrysanthemums to encourage branching.

Plant Care:

- Pay attention to the water needs of new lawns, trees, and ornamentals as hot dry weather sets in. Water in the early morning hours (3 AM to 8 AM) to minimize fungal problems and reduce evaporation.
- Fertilize annual flowers and vegetables with your favorite fertilizer type to assure continued vigor, based on results from a soil test.



- Check crape myrtles for aphids throughout the summer.
- Check ornamentals, flowers, and vegetables for spider mites.
- Watch for bagworms on junipers, arborvitae and other conifers, treat as needed.
- Watch for webworms on trees, especially pecans and mulberries, and treat as necessary.
- Apply fungicide as necessary to control black spot and powdery mildew on roses.
- Early June is an ideal time to aerate your lawn.
- Fertilize turf grasses if needed based on soil test recommendation.
- Check for chinch bugs in St. Augustine lawns throughout the summer, and for gray leaf spot fungus in periods of high humidity and temps in the 80s and 90s.
- Spot treat fire ant mounds with ant bait or a mound drench.
- Begin to harvest vegetables and fruits as they ripen: potatoes, beans, cucumbers, squash, radishes, tomatoes, blackberries and peaches.

Mark Your Calendars:

- Monthly Master Gardener Association Meeting ~1st Wed of the Month; 11:45am-1:00pm
- Black Mountain Garden's Season Opener ~13 April, 10am - 2pm
- Texas Heritage Garden's Annual Gardener's & Naturalists' Open House & Conference. 3 sessions will be presented throughout the day.~ 18 May, 9am - 4pm
 - *Check Facebook for each location for more info & updates about these & other events of interest.*



Agent's Address:

This will be the last Master Gardener newsletter I will contribute to!. Thanks to Rita Buckley for taking this task on and getting it done, she will be a fabulous newsletter editor.

As long as I have worked with Master Gardeners, I always felt it was the best part of my job as a County Extension Agent, in both Harrison and Gregg Counties. I started working with the program with Rex Youngblood back in 1998 and have not looked back.

The program has the best people to work with and Master Gardeners are a ton of fun also.

The program in Gregg County continues to grow and this is due to the talented people that help make it run as smooth as it does. The 2019 class is the largest class we have ever had, with 17 in the group. Keep up the good work and stay active.

I won't retire until the end of June, but this will be the last newsletter I will be involved with. I am looking forward to the next chapter in my life and will probably be busier than I am now. Plans are that I will be working part time at Jakes Feed here in Longview three days a week, as well as doing some consulting for the Sabine-Neches RC&D program here locally, as well as my Board position with Legacy AG Credit. We also have a new house and will be putting in landscaping and such. (My wife is letting me get a new tractor this summer).

I will be keeping in touch from time to time with you guys and want all of you to know that I have really enjoyed the time I have spent here in Gregg County and with the Extension program.

~ Randy