

Inside Dirt

Henderson County Master Gardener Newsletter



Upcoming Meetings:

Effective October 1, 2017, Henderson County Master Gardeners will have it's monthly meetings at the Hart-Morris Conference Center located on the grounds of the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center at 5601 CR 4812 (also signed Peninsula Point Road). The meeting will be November 15 beginning at 12:00 pm.

President's Message

A Visit to the Gardens at Texas A&M

by Yvonne Sparks, HCMG

Last month, the speaker for the Master Gardener class was Joseph Johnson, Director of The Gardens at Texas A & M. This project by Texas A&M Agrilife is a 40 acre plot located on the west campus. The gardens will serve as an outdoor classroom for faculty and staff to teach students and the public valuable concepts about food production, landscape beauty and the natural environment. The Gardens will become a peaceful sanctuary on campus, a place where everyone at Texas A&M and the surrounding community can relax, enjoy and learn. In addition, it is a green way focused on expanding Texas



A&Ms research and outreach.

Mr. Johnson showed an enlightening slide show of the plans and the construction of The Gardens. It was the vision of Vice Chancellor and Dean Dr. Mark Hussey. He saw a need to enrich lives by connecting people with the living world of horticulture. It was also a goal of Texas A&M to have a garden space on campus similar to the gardens on all the other schools of the SEC. In 1998, the Board of Regents designated White Creek and the surrounding riparian areas (con't on page 4)

Nov 15th, 2017
Dec 13th, 2017

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Pecan Pie Bars

Submitted by Janelle Cole, HCMG

The Best Pecan Pie Bars - this easy recipe includes a simple shortbread bottom and a one bowl mix and pour topping.

Course Cookies

Cuisine North American

Prep Time 15 minutes

Cook Time 1 hour 10 minutes

Total Time 1 hour 25 minutes

Servings 36 cookie bars

Author Barry C. Parsons

Ingredients

- 1¾ cups all purpose flour
- ½ cup sugar
- ¾ cup cold butter

For the top layer

- ⅔ cup firmly packed brown sugar
- ⅓ cup +1 tbsp flour
- 4 large or extra large eggs
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- ½ tsp salt
- 1½ cups corn syrup dark is best
- 2 cups roughly chopped pecans no need to toast the pecans

Instructions

1 This recipe uses a 9x13 baking pan. In this recipe I think it is best to lightly grease the pan and line it with parchment paper so that you can lift the entire batch out of the pan after they have cooled and cut them on a cutting board. With cookie bars like this, which have different textures in the different layers, this enables you to have a more precise feeling for how to cut them well. More about that a little later in the recipe.

2 Preheat oven to 350 degrees F for aluminum bake ware and 325 degrees F for glass bake ware.

3 Mix together the 1 3/4 cups flour and ½ cup sugar. Rub the butter through the flour mixture until it is well incorporated and resembles a dry coarse meal. (You



can pulse the butter into the flour mixture using a food processor if you prefer.)

4 Press the crumb mixture firmly and evenly into the bottom of the prepared baking pan and bake for 20 minutes. The edges should just be starting to brown. Remove from oven and pour on the topping while still hot.

To prepare the top layer of the cookie bars

1 Mix together the flour and brown sugar well. This will ensure there will be no lumps of either flour or brown sugar in you cookie bars when baked. Whisk in the eggs, vanilla extract, salt and corn syrup.

2 Let the mixture stand for about 15 minutes while the bottom layer pre-bakes, stirring it occasionally. This gives the flour time to soften and help thicken the top layer.

3 Mix in the chopped pecans and pour the topping over the partially baked bottom crust as soon as it comes out of the oven.

4 Return the pan to the oven and bake for an additional 40-50 minutes until the filling is set. Times vary a few minutes depending on the baking pan material. Shake the pan a little. The center can wobble a little like set jelly but it should not be runny.

5 Cool the pan to room temperature before chilling the cookie bars in the fridge for several hours or overnight before attempting to cut them

6 I lift the cookies from the pan after they have fully cooled in the fridge and lay them out on a cutting board. I've found the best thing to use is a sharp serrated knife held vertically to saw through the nut layer before pushing on through to the softer layers below. I cut one entire row of cookies off at a time and then cut each row separately into individual cookie bars.

7 As these are quite rich I tend to cut them a little smaller than other cookie bars.

<https://www.rockrecipes.com/pecan-pie-bars/>



Winterizing for Birds

by Judy Haldeman, HCMG

One of the benefits of planting more native plants in our gardens over the last several years has been an increase in the number of birds that now visit regularly. With the onset of cooler weather and with winter not far behind, the insects that populate a balanced garden have begun to disappear. As a result, as we winterize



our homes, we shouldn't forget our feathered friends. Birds that don't migrate will provide

color to our winter gardens as they go from trees and shrubs looking for food and shelter. As gardeners, we can help them by providing food and water during the winter months.

One method we use is to leave seed heads on plants. What a sight to see an acrobatic titmouse upside-down on a seed head enjoying a meal! We also have several birdfeeders in sheltered areas so that the birds can feed without danger from predators. One downside of hanging feeders from tree limbs has been the constant battle to keep squirrels from overrunning the feeding stations. The birds don't seem to mind an occasional visit by our squirrel families, so we have given up trying to discourage the squirrels. One of our favorite feeders is in our cottage garden situated just outside our breakfast area. We can watch the birds through a sliding glass door. However, we learned early on that having a birdfeeder that close to a glass door often resulted in birds flying into the glass.

We solved that problem by hanging ribbons on

the outside of the door frame. The north wind constantly agitates the ribbon and the birds now avoid the door area.

We do not use seed mixes in the feeders because we have found that the birds will toss out some of the seeds to search for a favorite treat. The result is mess under the feeders. Our favorite seed is black oil sunflower seed. These seeds are soft shelled and enjoyed by a wide variety of bird species. Just be aware that you could have a nice crop of sunflowers growing beneath the feeder if the birds scatter seeds while feeding. We have also used nyjer or niger seeds. These seeds have been heat sterilized so that the chance of producing invasive plants is limited. Finches and buntings really enjoy these seeds. In winter we also hang suet feeders. If you use these

feeders, it is best to hang them so they are at least five feet from the ground and close to a tree trunk.

Most birds that enjoy suet feeders are clinging birds like woodpeckers, titmouse, and chickadees. Our most common winter visitors include tufted titmouse, finches, black-capped chickadees, downy woodpeckers, and cardinals.

Water is also important for bird survival during the winter months. If you use a birdbath, be sure to locate it away from the feeders to avoid water contamination. Rinse it daily before refilling and clean it once a week. If the water freezes, add a little warm (not hot) water to it, or invest in a birdbath heater.



President's Message (con't)

by Yvonne Sparks, HCMG

as the West Campus Greenway. In 2011 Dr. Hussey initiated a project to turn the area into The Gardens.

The Gardens will have 29 separate vignettes of gardens to illustrate many different aspects of horticulture. Many of the vignettes are geared toward the cultural heritage of Central Texas near TAMU. There is a "Bees and Butterflies" Garden, a Mexican Heritage Garden, a Czech and German Heritage Garden, a Rose Garden, a Wine Grape Vineyard, an Herb Garden, a Citrus Grove, a Farmer's Market, an octagon shaped Pavilion (designed in the style of the Czech Halls found throughout Central Texas), a Bird Garden

and an Overlook. There is also an outdoor classroom to teach school children, TAMU students and Master Gardeners. These are just a partial list of the vignettes being constructed.

I am very proud to say that HCMGA was able to make a sizeable contribution to the fund that is financing the construction of The Gardens. Other larger donations from mostly proud Aggies have been made to establish a fund that will ensure maintenance and future additions. The Gardens will be open for viewing during the State Master Gardeners Conference in College Station the first week of April.

On November 15th Henderson County Master Gardeners will have it's monthly meeting at the Hart-Morris Conference Center located on the grounds of the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center at 5601 CR 4812 (also signed Peninsula Point Road). The meeting will begin at 12:00 pm.



Henderson County Master Gardener Member Meeting Dates	
November 15th	Native Plants & Wildlife (Cole Boys) Officer Elections
December 13th	Annual Holiday Party

Are you Looking Forward to Winter?

by Lydia Holley, HCMG

Most gardeners say their favorite season is spring. That is completely understandable. Bulbs spring up from the ground, blooms begin to form on plants that have lain dormant, while fresh new growth is bright green. Summer brings a kaleidoscope of blooms, too, while autumn delights with asters, autumn sedums, solidago, and grass plumes in different colors and sizes.

Then there is winter. Hardly anyone says that winter is their favorite gardening season. Although I would not say that winter is my favorite season in the garden, either, I do look forward to it every year. The reason is simple enough: that is when the garden's skeleton is obvious.

I always design for winter first when designing a new garden. This structure is the foundation of your garden, and is best evaluated in winter. Even in spring with an abundance of blooms, your eye perceives the backbone of your garden. It is an integral part of your garden's beauty.

Forming part of my garden's skeleton are camellias. Not only do these evergreen shrubs look beautiful in winter, this is also when they bloom. These are not tiny blooms that you must search to find. They are large, bright blooms that delight the gardener and are appreciated by the bees.



The camellias in my garden have already started to bloom. With several different types of camellias in my garden, I will enjoy blooms

from now through March. Camellias are available in garden centers in late autumn and early winter, when there are few other plants to choose from. It pays to go into the garden centers during the off season!



Camellias love to be planted near dormant trees. There, they are shaded in summer and can still



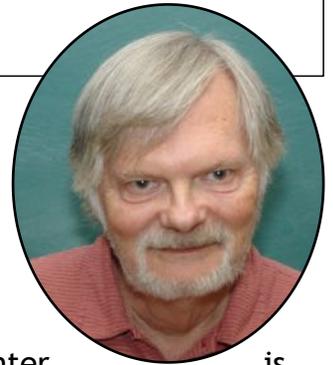
enjoy winter's warming rays. They appreciate good soil, and being protected from strong winds. They need to be watered consistently during times of drought. In return, you will be rewarded with abundant blooms during a time when the rest of your garden is sleeping.

The three most commonly sold types of camellias are japonicas, sasanquas and sinensis. Although there are always exceptions with camellias, in general, sasanquas have smaller leaves, and usually bloom in autumn or early winter. Sasanqua blooms fall off petal by petal. They are also usually more sun tolerant than japonicas.

Japonicas, in general, grow tall (some as tall as a small tree), have large, glossy leaves, and usually bloom in late winter or early spring. On japonicas, the entire bloom falls off all at once. Sinensis are intriguing because tea can be made from their leaves. The next time you have a shady spot to plant, consider adding a camellia. It just may have you looking forward to winter, too!

Quiet but Busy Time in the Garden

Robert Erickson, HCMG



Even though fall is still in the air and our gardens are still in bloom, it is time to begin looking forward to winter and next spring. Annuals will slowly wither for the year and perennials will begin to go dormant. But it is a good time to take care of maintenance work in the garden before winter sets in.

Likewise, preparing a bed for onions and perhaps potatoes is a good idea as the sets and seed potatoes will be available in January/February for planting

Officially, the average first frost/freeze date in

In general, fall and early winter is a great time to do those necessary but often postponed chores in the garden while it is cool but not yet cold. Cleaning out old growth and refreshing the soil helps ensure a healthier garden. Before the weather gets very cold, it is a good time to refresh garden beds with compost and mulch. Adding organic nutrients is also good since they are slow release and will prepare the garden for spring. Using quick release fertilizers



is generally non-productive at this time of year.



It is also a good time to do

our area is November 15. This is not guaranteed, of course, but is the historical average of the first freeze date. Many garden vegetables like tomatoes and peppers will be done for the year when that first freeze hits. Be prepared to harvest all of those crops when you hear the first freeze is coming. Some veggies will survive for a while like carrots, beets, turnips and some leafy plants but a layer of compost and mulch will give them a nice additional blanket to survive the cooler weather. It is also time to plan when and where to move susceptible container plants indoors for the season.

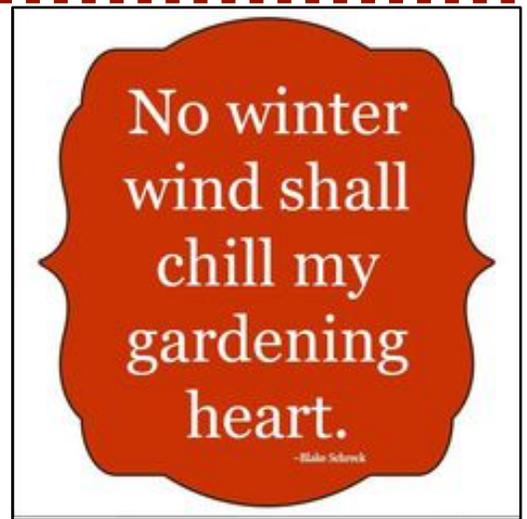
maintenance on garden tools, both hand and power ones. Cleaning off any soil residue from the metal parts and applying a coat of protective oil will help increase the life of a tool. Wooden handles can be maintained with a coat of linseed oil or other protective material for wood. It is also a good time to perform maintenance on your power tools. (con't on page 7)



Fall is the best time to plant trees, if you desire, but it also the best time to prune existing trees to get rid of dead wood and unnecessary limbs and branches. Shredding leaves and adding them to the garden as mulch is also a good idea. If you plant on planting garlic, doing so in October and November is desirable as they will begin growing but go dormant during the colder months.

2017 Officers

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Quiet but Busy Time in the Garden (con't)

Robert Erickson, HCMG

Cleaning, changing the oil, sharpening blades, and putting them away for the season will help ensure that they are ready when you need them in the spring.

know, every year is different. If we don't get any rain for a 10 day to two-week period, turning the sprinkler on will keep the plants going through the season.



That last thing to remember is that even though things are not growing rapidly or visibly during the late fall and winter, plants are still alive and need water occasionally. In normal years, we tend to get

The last thing to consider for fall and winter is to think and plan next year's garden. Reading through seed catalogs always shows the many different varieties of plants and vegetables available. It may be time to try a new variety of an old favorite or to try something that you have never grown before.

The busy garden season is slowing down but there are many things that can be done to get ready for next year. So, it may be quiet but not necessarily idle in the garden.

adequate rainfall during the winter but as we

New Boots on the Ground

by Spencer Perkins



I believe Mrs. Cole has provided a short introduction of me in another part of this newsletter, however I thought we might discuss my gardening and horticulture background. I know learning about the new County Agent and hearing he has an Animal Science degree might be the most frightening thing you experience this Halloween. Although, I have “roots” deep into the livestock and horse industry we must remember that they all still fall under the umbrella of Agriculture. It didn’t matter what horse or livestock show was scheduled, when my Great Grandad said it was the Saturday to plant onions, we were there. It might have taken half a row for us all to understand that the green side went up, but we all learned from an early age the importance of gardening and tending to the land.

Throughout junior high and high school, I was fortunate enough to work for a man that has been involved in agriculture his entire life. I could write for days on the lessons and knowledge I gained from my tenure with him. After finishing high school and heading to Lubbock, my first three jobs were conducting research in agriculture. It ranged from herbicide testing, sorghum trials, and even the quality of different forages for livestock production. For a short time after graduating I worked for a family who ran approximately 300 head of cattle and farmed about 6500 acres of cotton, peanuts, and sorghum. In July of 2013, I began my career with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension in Camp County as the County Extension Agent of Agriculture and Natural Resources. At first look, Camp County looks very similar to

Henderson County in the sense that beef and forage production are the largest agriculture commodities in the county. Shortly after moving to Camp County, I learned that there were 50 lakes within 50 miles. With those lakes come aquaculture, recreational use, homes with lush lawns, homes with flower beds larger than some homes, and most importantly the people who cared greatly for each.

I write all of that, which seems to be irrelevant, to give you my background. However, I want to focus on my future. I look forward to working and learning with a growing Master Gardner Association. I have learned in my short tenure that more times than not, when going to a person’s property to help with a problem, I am able to learn more through their years of experience with certain crops and plants. All the information gained, I am able to use and pass on to other gardeners throughout the county. Moving forward into my new beginnings in Henderson County I want to insure you that I may not know the answer to every question you might have. However, I will use our team of experts in Extension, as well as the many local resources and find out the problem and provide a solution as soon as possible. It is my firm belief that no matter if you run 1500 head of cattle or own a .25-acre lot and home in downtown Murchison, it is my responsibility and passion to provide you programs, tools, and resources that help you to improve agriculture and food production. As always, if you have a question or need assistance please call the office at 903-675-6130 or send an email to spencer.perkins@ag.tamu.edu.

Check us out online :

<http://www.facebook.com/HCMastergardener>

<http://henderson-co-tx-mg.org>

or email : Hendersoncmga@gmail.com

* Keep up with our calendar of talks around the county! *



Pollinator Gardens

by Janelle Cole, HCMG



Winter time is a great time to dream about future gardens. Planning during the winter months makes the most of

your time as well! Most seed companies know you are inside and possibly snuggled up by a fire during the winter months, so they bombard you with lovely illustrations of flowers, vegetables and more!

Let's dream about putting in a pollinator garden!! I recently shared my experience of converting my front yard to a butterfly/bee garden in the early part of 2016. Gulf Fritillary butterflies, Black Swallowtails, Monarchs, Honey bees and Hummingbirds rewarded my work all summer long and into the fall months as well!!

Installing a pollinator garden in your yard does take a little work: some planning, preparation and planting and you too will reap the rewards.



First, I found a sunny spot on our property that received at least 6 hours of sunlight. The more sunlight your plants get the more blooms you will also have! Next, we killed the grass that was there, so that

our constant fight would not be terrible. Then, we tilled up the area. Tilling is up to you. We wanted the ground ready for compost and plants and did not want to have problems with the plants getting established. Some will advise not tilling, but as soon as we tilled we put mulch on the flower beds to help keep weeds down to a minimum. The tilling helped us to prepare the ground to receive new, young plants and allow them an easier time of growing their roots.

After adding mulch we put plants in our garden. Some will spend a great deal of time deciding the perfect spot for each plant. I am not one of those people. My approach was "if I do not like where it is I can move it." So plants went in when I bought them, where I thought I may want them. I will be moving many plants this fall, but if I had waited for the perfect spot, we would still be mowing our front yard.

There is a quote about plants in a garden: The first year they will sleep, the second they will creep, the third year they will leap! For our second year I sure felt like our plants were leaping - they were filling in nicely! We added a few new plants this year, but for the most part we enjoyed the returning perennials we carefully chose!

Some of our favorite plants are: African Blue Basil, Bronze Fennel, Borage, Comfrey, Mexican Sunflower, Milk Weed, Obedient Plant, Passion Vine, Salvia, Turk's Cap and finally Zinnias. Most butterfly garden plans will not suggest Zinnias if they are leaning toward natives, but the butterflies in my garden love the Zinnias!! Most of these plants are perennial, those that are not are heavy reseeder. The only annual plant I recommend that is not a heavy reseeder is African Blue Basil, and I love this plant because it is a hearty, almost aggressively growing "bush" that buzzes in my yard every day! The pollinators of all types love it and I enjoy watching them!



If watching butterflies and honey bees foraging for nectar and pollen is something that makes you happy, it is well worth the time to design and plant your own Pollinator Garden! We love sitting out and watching the many butterflies and bees work and travel all around in our front yard!!

HENDERSON COUNTY EXTENSION AGENT NAMED

Introducing Spencer Perkins

OVERTON- Mr. Spencer Perkins has been named Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's County Extension Agent-AG/NR Henderson County, effective October 1, 2017 according to a joint announcement by Henderson County Judge, Richard Sanders, the Henderson County Commissioners Court, and Ms. Shelia Lewis, District Extension Administrator, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, headquartered at Overton, Texas.

"I am pleased to have Spencer join our County Extension Faculty in Henderson County. He will be a great asset to the county and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service," says Ms. Lewis. "I feel certain he will do an excellent job because of his enthusiasm for providing quality, educational programs and working with the public."

Mr. Perkins earned his Bachelor of Science degree from Texas Tech University with a major in Animal Science. Most recently he has been a County Agent in Camp County.

The County Extension Office in Henderson County is part of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, an agency of the Texas A&M University System. Local Extension programs extend university resources to local residents by

providing practical information and education in the four areas of agriculture and natural

resources, family and consumer sciences, 4-H and youth development, and community development. Extension is a cooperative effort of the United States Department of Agriculture, the State of Texas through Texas A&M University, and the Henderson County Commissioners' Court.

Spencer commented, " I am looking forward to moving back closer to home and getting involved in the Henderson County community. It was very encouraging meeting the staff and other agents in the county office, I think we'll have a great team that will provide quality educational programs for the community. At the end of August, I also met several members from the various Extension Committees and Master Gardeners, all of whom were very welcoming. I am eager to begin working with them and provide them the support needed to continue their great programs."

