

the Inside Dirt

Henderson County Master Gardener Association



President's Message

The "Texas SuperStar" designation is a trademarked label given to selected plants that have undergone several years of extensive field trials by Texas A&M AgriLife Research and the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, both part of the Texas A&M System. The plants that carry the SuperStar label have performed well with minimal soil preparation, reasonable levels of water, and no pesticides. The program began in 1989 with the introduction of Texas Bluebonnet transplants.

The Texas SuperStar plant for the summer of 2005 was the Texas Lilac Vitex, or Chaste tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*).

The Vitex, a native of India and China, is also known as Mexican lavender, sage tree, or Indian spice. Records indicate that Vitex has been cultivated in the U.S. since 1670.

For best results, plant it in full sun in a

location with good drainage. It will grow in all areas of Texas and will do well in both acid and alkaline soils. It does best in hot, dry environments. Butterflies are very attracted to the Texas Lilac Vitex. As a bonus, it is also deer resistant. The SuperStar brochure describes it as a large deciduous woody shrub or small tree that grows to a height of 10 to 15 feet. Texas Lilac Vitex needs periodic renewal pruning to remove old dead wood.



Older selections of Vitex had small spikes of flowers which were pale lilac, mauve, off-white or light pink. Horticulturists now have identified and tested improved varieties such as 'Montrose Purple', 'LeCompte' and 'Shoal Creek'. These varieties have spikes as long as 8 to 12 inches. All of these will be marketed under the name of Texas Lilac Vitex. The bloom spikes on these improved varieties are fragrant and can be used as long lasting cut flowers. The flower spikes will bloom from May to September. These blooms should be deadheaded after the first flowering so that the shrub will flower again. If the plant is not deadheaded, it will produce many black or dark-brown seeds. In some regions of the state, the seedling population will not have the same characteristics as the original plant. Propagation is from seeds, from cutting in summer or winter, or by layering of lower limbs. All dead wood and lower limbs may be removed in wintertime.

For this area of Texas, the Vitex should be a heat, drought and pest tolerant plant welcome in your landscape. A note on invasiveness from the Texas SuperStar Board: On the texasinvasives.org website, it is listed as "Found in limestone outcrops and dry creek beds throughout Central Texas." We would caution persons in these favorable environments about potential weediness. The opinion of the Texas Superstar® Board is that vitex can be safely used as an ornamental in all parts of the state that do not fit this description. However, if you are in an area where vitex has been noted to behave in a weedy manner as described above or you observe a large proliferation of seedlings around ornamental plantings, we recommend that you avoid the use of vitex in your landscape.

Farewell to All....

This is my last newsletter article as President of the Henderson County Master Gardeners. I would like to thank all the Board of Directors I had the pleasure of working with during my two terms. Each of you made my job much easier. In addition, I wish to thank all the members of HCMG for all that you do to further the mission of Master Gardeners and all the time you give to our organization. I also want to thank Sharla Paris, AgriLife Secretary, for the many times she offered her assistance. Finally, I want to send out a big "woop" to our AgriLife Agent, Rick Hirsch. He was very helpful on numerous occasions with advice and information. It has been a great opportunity to lead such a fine group.

Judy

HCMG Monthly Meetings:

Meetings are held at noon on the third Wednesday of the month at the East Texas Arboretum; 1601 Patterson Rd., Athens, TX.

Meeting Dates:

November 18, 2015

December 10, 2015

OFFICERS

President:	Judy Haldeman
Vice President of Program & Administration:	Sherry Bitz
Vice President of Member & Community Education:	Cherie Tanneberger
Secretary:	Marylee Haldeman
Treasurer:	LaTrecia Jeffcott
Historian:	Bob Erickson
Advisor:	Rick Hirsch Texas AgriLife Extension Service Agent

Master Gardener Meeting Programs

November 18, 2015: Lydia Holley, "Planning for Winter Garden Beauty"

December 10, 2015: Holiday Party and Year End Celebration

Committee Chairs:

Newsletter/Editor:	Yvonne Sparks
Volunteer Coordinator:	Marie Hancock
Publicity:	Lydia Holley
Membership:	Nancy Martin
Nominating:	Robyn Stack
Audit:	Linda Schafer
By-Laws:	Sherry Bitz
Intern Coordinator:	Yvonne Sparks
Dream Garden:	Margaret Dansby Linda Benton
Children's Garden:	Marie Hancock Bill Hancock
Newspaper:	Lydia Holley
Website:	Wayne Stafford
Plant Sale:	Jean Brewton
Member's Hours:	Margaret Rands
Hospitality:	Karla Odom

The Christmas Flower

by

Bob Erickson

For many people, one of the surest signs of the coming Christmas is the sight of Poinsettias going on sale or a mass of them carefully adorning the alter area of a church. Their bright red leaves bring color to the early winter season which often has little color available. One of the more interesting things about our love affair with the Poinsettia is that we shouldn't be that attracted to it! It is not native to North America; it requires a very tight environment window to grow; it requires a lot of attention and effort to make them look like they do; and they are difficult to maintain after the holiday season.

The Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) is a shrub native to the temperate coastal areas of Southern Mexico and Guatamala. In its native state, it is often considered a weed and can grow as tall as ten feet. The plant was introduced to this country by the man who gave it its name, Joel Roberts Poinsett, who introduced the plant in 1828. Poinsett was a botanist, physician, and the first United States Ambassador to Mexico. Commercially, there are over 100 varieties of Poinsettia with the most popular one being the traditional Prestige Red. Others are available in pink, yellow, salmon, and white.

The difficulty in growing this popular plant starts with temperature; it requires a minimum temperature of 45-50 degrees F and a maximum temperature of 65-70 degrees. It is not recommended that it be grown in

garden soil, but in sterile potting mix. One of the problems with propagating the plant is that it requires a special technique to cause the seedling to branch. This technique was a family-held secret for many years. Once it begins to develop, careful pruning is required to attain the familiar shape we are used to.

As many people know, the brilliant red leaves are not the flower at all. The flower is a small yellow ring in the center of the much larger leaves. The leaves themselves are called bracts. What makes the Poinsettia truly unique is that in order for the bracts to become colorful, the entire plant must be in total darkness for at least 12 hours a day. Individual plants are bagged at dusk and kept covered until eight in the morning. Once the bracts have achieved their color, they require good light all day long as well as frequent watering to keep them moist but not wet.

Many people want to save their Poinsettia after the Christmas season is over. The following is the recommendation of the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service to sustain a Poinsettia into the next year.

After most of the poinsettia leaves fall off, reduce the watering and store the dormant plant in a cool, well ventilated place at 60 degrees F. or above (the garage is an excellent place for these less than attractive plants).

In March prune back the stems to

about 6 inches above the ground and re-pot the plant into a container which is one to two inches larger in diameter than the original pot. A good potting mix, one of the commercially prepared potting mixes, should be used.

Water the plant thoroughly and place it in a sunny window, keeping it at 70 to 75 degrees F. When new growth begins, the poinsettia should be fertilized every two weeks with a water soluble, complete fertilizer. The rate recommended for pot plants on the label of the fertilizer container should be used.

Once the danger of frost is past, the plant can be moved outdoors where it received moderate shade in mid-afternoon. As growth develops, the top can be cut or pinched back leaving three or four leaves on each shoot. This procedure should be repeated each time the plant sends out new shoots until mid-August.

Then bring the plant indoors and set it near a sunny window where the temperature will remain between 65 to 70 degrees F.

To have the plant in full bloom by Christmas, you must keep it in complete darkness from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. starting the first week in October and continuing until Thanksgiving. Flowering will be delayed if the plant receives any supplemental lighting during this period. The poinsettia will set flower buds only after being exposed to the short day (10 hours of light or less) for about 10 weeks. In the daytime the plant must be in a sunny location for maximum growth and development of bracts and flowers. Continue to apply water soluble fertilizer until mid-December, then reduce applications to one-half the normal amount.

2016 HCMG Spring Conference Announcement

"The Natives are Restless"

*Hear about what is a native, the Best Southern natives,
how to plant them and how to use them!*

presented by

Dr. David Creech

Director of SFA Gardens and Piney Wood Native Plant Center

March 31, 2016

First United Methodist Church

Athens, Texas



Rick Hirsch

**Henderson County Agricultural
Extension Agent**

Visit our web page at <http://henderson.agrilife.org/>.

Christmas Tree Selection and Care

Plants play an important role during the Christmas holiday season. Christmas trees, poinsettias, holly, mistletoe - all have various uses.

Christmas tree selection can be one of the more enjoyable aspects of the holiday season. The acquisition of the Christmas tree has truly turned into a family affair as everyone has their own ideas as to what constitutes the "perfect tree". Fresh trees need a little help to stay fresh and beautiful through the holidays. When you and your family shop for a "real" tree, there are a few simple guidelines to follow in selecting and maintaining your tree choice.

A tree needs water, just as cut flowers do. Some trees will use as much as two gallons of water overnight when you first cut them. The first step, then, is to put the tree in water as soon as you get it home. Trees that have been cut for more than several hours will need a fresh cut of 0.5 to 1 inch off the bottom of the trunk to remove the seal that the tree has made and allow it to absorb

water.

Determine where in the home to display the tree. This will help in determining the needed height and whether all four sides must be suitable for display. Freshness is important when selecting the tree. Hold a branch about six inches from the tip between your thumb and forefinger, and pull your hand towards you as the branch slips through your fingers. The needles should adhere to the branch and not fall off in your hand. A fresh tree will have a nice fragrance and a good green color.

One extremely important decision is where to put the tree or rather, where not to put the tree, place the tree away from heat sources, such as fireplaces, radiators and TV sets. Be sure to turn off the tree lights when you leave your home and before you retire at night. A fire caused by a burning Christmas tree can have a devastating effect on your holiday season. Do not use combustible decorations, and check all electric lights, cords and connections before you begin decorating. Also, don't use lighted candles or lights with worn or frayed cords.

Fall in the
Children's Garden
at South Athens
Elementary
by
Bill & Marie Hancock



There seems to always be a surprise waiting for us on Thursday mornings in the Children's Garden at South Athens Elementary School. One day it was a caterpillar going into the pupa stage and another was seeing a dry corn stalk shaking on a still morning and then hearing a gopher chewing on the stalk under the ground. That actually happened the last two Thursdays and from close examination of the corn stalks it has been occurring on other mornings also. Seeing tomato plants full of green and red tomatoes, pepper plants full of green, red, and orange peppers, pumpkin plants growing and blooming, and beautiful red spider lilies blooming need to be included as surprises also. Hopefully, the children are learning to look for surprises in nature every day.

Besides sharing the surprises we have also enjoyed sharing lessons on the

Life Cycle of Butterflies and Moths (while watching the cycle of the Gulf Fritillary take place on our passion vine), Soil Color, Texture and Structure, and The Water Cycle. We are using the Junior Master Gardener Handbook for our text book and always use some of the hands on experiments suggested in the book. That means there is a lot of feeling, smelling, tasting, seeing, and hearing going on.

The mulch that was applied in May has cut down on our weeding but some of the classes have enjoyed planting plants and seeds. The fifth graders have planted cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and cauliflower. We want to thank Terri Bevans and Geddies for donating those plants! The PreK planted lettuce seeds in some of the blue containers. The other grades will be planting during the next few weeks.

Happy gardening and looking for surprises!



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