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The Latest Dirt

Official Newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners

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Editor's Note *By Melissa Starr, Editor*

Summer is in full swing bringing with it the challenges of heat, humidity, drought, and insects. The Master Gardeners take vacations, but do not rest in between. While summer is not the time to plant many ornamentals or vegetables, it is the time to travel and get ideas from other gardens and gardeners.

In May, the Jefferson County Master Gardeners visited the Collin County Master Gardeners' Earth-Kind gardens while at the Texas Master Gardener State Conference. They saw many beautiful plants and garnered ideas to use in their own gardens. They also brought back four awards!

In June, they visited Overton, Texas, where a plethora of plants are being tested, hoping to join the ranks of the Texas Superstar plants. The overwhelming numbers of beautiful plants made the choice difficult, but attendee eventually chose and voted for their favorite three plants.

In July, they joined the Orange County Master Gardeners and toured Creekwood Farms. This blueberry farm in Vidor, Texas has many cutting edge ideas and is meticulously maintained. They are also in the beginning stages of becoming a satsuma orchard, which is in great demand in Texas. Master Gardeners learned how this farm is run and how the blueberries are packaged and stored for shipment.

Now that August is here, JCMGs are not slowing down. They are feverishly preparing for the Fall Vegetable Sale on September 17 from 8-noon at the Test Garden. October 15 brings the much anticipated Fruit & Vegetable Show at Central Mall sponsored by the Horticulture Committee, and the Fall Plant Sale takes place the next Saturday, October 22, from 8-noon at the Test Garden. In addition, there will be several other fall workshops to assist with and attend. For more information, call the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office at 409-835-8461.

Meetings are the second Thursday of each month, 6pm in the Extension Office Auditorium

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

August - No Meeting

Sept 8 — TBA

October 13 — TBA

Agent's Two Cents

By David Oates, CEA-Horticulture

Summer time here in South East Texas can be a difficult time for anyone. Especially anyone interested in gardening. The last couple of months have been a roller coaster ride with the weather here in Jefferson County. We started off with a constant barrage of late spring showers which turned into a record amount of rainfall for the spring months. Mother Nature then decided to throw us a curve ball this summer with a prolonged dry spell and adverse heat conditions. This has been a huge challenge for everyone who wants to try and enjoy outdoor activities in the yard and garden. We have gone from one extreme to the other in terms of gardening issues and problems. If your spring garden was not completely waterlogged and suffering from too much water in the spring, then you faced extreme heat and temperatures that limited your gardens harvest in the late summer months. Follow all of that with a multitude of insect problems, and you would have had our gardening season here in South East Texas.

Through all of this adversity in the weather, Master Gardeners have prevailed in their actions. Several folks were still able to have decent harvests with their gardens and maintain their landscape despite the brutal spring and summer conditions that prevailed. Master Gardeners are a resilient group of folks who will work against the odds in order to grow the perfect garden or have the best landscape on the block.

I want to thank all of the volunteers who have worked tirelessly to improve the test garden and beds and other events held by the Jefferson County Master Gardeners this spring and summer. Your participation, hard work, and dedication throughout all of these activities are greatly appreciated. I am looking forward to a great fall season with the Master Gardeners!

A garden requires patient labor and attention. Plants do not grow merely to satisfy ambitions or to fulfill good intentions. They thrive because someone expended effort on them.

Liberty Hyde Bailey

Plant The Fall Garden Now

By Eileen Slater, JCMG

The dog days of summer are here! With temperatures over 95 degrees, it is too hot to garden or NOT! Now is the perfect time to look online or in catalogs to find those fall vegetables you want to plant. As a relatively new urban gardener, I am always gleaning information from whatever source I can find. I can't wait to begin! An excellent source to view when planting your fall garden is aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/. Yes, use that last forward slash. The last forward slash is important to get to the final destination. Here you will find under *Vegetable Resources* a selection titled "Easy Gardening Fact Sheets." Homeowners will learn ways to plant a variety of vegetables in Texas. The second selection, "Vegetable Variety Recommendations by County or Area", directs you to use your county or area to find the correct vegetable selections for your garden. Directly under *Vegetable Variety Recommendations* is "Vegetable IPM (Vegetable Integrated Pest Management) for the Home Vegetable Garden" which illustrates pictures of the good and bad insects for your garden. The local Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Jefferson County has a fall planting guide printout. The approximate killing frost in the fall is November 15 for our area. That is why we need to plant seeds now and transplants later.

Here is a brief summary of vegetables suitable for planting from seed now:

August 15-broccoli, cucumber, Irish potatoes (Neil Sperry's Complete Guide to Texas Gardening states the need to get the potatoes from a garden supply dealer. Potatoes purchased in the grocery store have been sprayed with a growth inhibitor to retard sprouting. However, Groom and Gill in the Month-By-Month Gardening in Texas states to use small whole potatoes saved by your spring crop, but don't cut the potato into seed pieces as the warm soils are full of active fungi that cause rotting to occur). One local garden expert told me potatoes usually are planted later. Maybe that is why I have not found any seed potatoes locally. How about you? Let me know where you find yours.

September 1-Brussel sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, collard, mustard, onion (seed), radish, spinach, turnip

September 15-beet, garlic, kohlrabi, leaf lettuce

October 1-carrot, English peas

Inspiration comes online from other sources as well. You will find other pretty COOL things to see on the website:

<http://txmg.org/jcmg>.

Plant The Fall Garden Now, continued

The last bit of gardening advice to view is the Fall Vegetable Gardening Guide EHT-056 5/14 written by Larry Stein and Dr. Joe Masabni, Professor and Extension Horticulturist from Texas A&M University. You can get it from the local Extension office listed below or access it by computer using the following link: gregg.agrilife.org/files/2011/04/Fall-Vegetable-Gardening-Guide1.pdf. I think an interesting fact to remember from this document is to never use poultry manure on a fall garden. Bonnie Plants representative, Jenny Peterson, states, "Chicken waste is the highest in nitrogen but is so hot it will burn your younger plants or seedlings if used fresh. Compost it for at least six months before using, making sure to turn the pile on a regular basis. You can also make manure "tea" for your plants. Add some dry, aged droppings to a bucket of water and let it sit for a day or two, stirring occasionally. Strain out the droppings, then pour the tea around the bases of your plants. This is especially good fertilizer for leafy greens, which need extra nitrogen to help them grow a steady supply of new leaves to replace all the

harvested ones. Out of courtesy for your neighbors, be aware that fresh poultry manure is perhaps the most offensive of all, and place your compost accordingly."

All right, you have the basics available to you! Now while the weather is still hot, plan and work your garden, plant those seeds and prepare for the fall transplants. Not too many dog days left! I think I feel a cool breeze coming on! If you have comments or questions, email Jefferson County Master Gardener, Eileen Slater, at enslater08@gmail.com.



Master Gardener State Conference

The 2016 Texas Master Gardener State Conference was held in Collin County. Eight Master Gardeners and one guest attended from Jefferson County. There were enticing vendor booths, informative workshops, and beautiful Earth-Kind gardens to enjoy. A special congratulations to Jerry White who received Rainwater Harvesting Specialist and Irrigation Efficiency Specialist. During the awards banquet, Jefferson County Master Gardeners received the following awards in the Medium Large Association Category: 3rd place Project - Grow to Share Garden, 1st place Written Education - "Out in the Yard" Garden Articles in PA News, 1st place Outstanding Association, and 1st place Outstanding Individual - Melissa Starr.



Master Gardener State Conference



Outdoor Rooms Can Be A Pathway to Landscape Enjoyment

By Micah Shanks, JCMG

For the past several years, there has been a growing trend toward creating “outdoor” rooms in your landscape. An outdoor room is any area that breaks up the existing landscape plan. It is a special area that draws you in. When thinking about how to create your own outdoor room, consider how you would like to use the space. Do you have small children that play outside? Then you might need a small area of grass. Add some whimsical touches such as a fairy garden and small garden tools and toys. Build a pathway from this area to another that is a designated butterfly garden for an instant nature classroom. A simple rose covered arbor can entice you to walk through it and into a fragrant herb garden filled with lavender, mint, and rosemary for instance. You can turn your deck or patio into a separate room by adding lots of colorful containers and hanging lights. Basically any area can be a room of its own. Winding pathways made of stepping stones, crushed granite, or pea gravel can get you started. First, mark of the area you want. If it is on top of existing grass, put down a layer of heavy landscape plastic; then top it with a thick layer of your stone of choice.

A side note here about black plastic: Black plastic will kill whatever is underneath it. However, that does not mean you will never see another weed in that area. Weed seeds will always be introduced by bird droppings and wind. They will find a way to grow if they can find even the smallest space with a drop of soil between the rocks, so don't be dismayed that the plastic didn't work. When I moved into my present home, the previous home owner had laid down several sheets of heavy plastic in the flower beds. It was covered with at least a foot of soil. At that point, it was totally worthless, and it took me months to get it all dug out. I'm sure her intentions were good. She may have thought she would never see another weed. Black plastic will only kill whatever is underneath it at the time, so use mulch for weed control.

Summer Field Trips



*Trip to
Overton to
view and vote
on future
Texas
Superstars*



Take Care With Wicked Plants

By Melissa Starr, JCMG

Did you know that some of the plants you have in your home or yard could cause death or serious illness if eaten by humans or pets? In May, I had the privilege of attending a workshop by Amy Stewart entitled "Wicked Plants." She has found that plants have been responsible for many deaths including Lincoln's mother and Socrates.

In 399 BC, Socrates, a Greek philosopher, was sentenced to death for "corrupting the youth of Athens." He was put to death by drinking poison made from Poison Hemlock. This biennial weed looks a lot like parsley or carrot ferns when young, but if eaten, it will cause paralysis and death within hours if not treated. I have personally not seen this plant in our area, but it is reported to grow in central Texas and many other states. In the 1800s, many people, cattle, and horses died from a mysterious illness. The cattle and horses would stagger like they were drunk until they died. People would suffer from weakness, vomiting, tremors, and delirium. Abraham Lincoln's mother died of this illness, called milk sickness, when he was only nine years old. Even though a few doctors recognized the cause of the disease in the late 1800s, it wasn't until the 1920s that snakeroot was widely recognized as the cause of this

disease. When cattle grazed on this plant, the toxins would pass into their milk and meat and sicken all who consumed these products. Snakeroot is still found growing the eastern United States and in the South today.

Some popular landscape plants in our area are also highly toxic. Oleander, if eaten by people or animals, will cause nausea, vomiting, severe weakness, irregular pulse, and a decreased heart rate that can lead to death. The castor bean plant's seeds contain ricin, a deadly poison, and the sago palm plant's leaves and seeds contain carcinogens and neurotoxins that have poisoned people and animals when eaten. Another plant to keep away from pets is the lily. When cats eat lilies, they experience kidney failure and death. Gardeners beware of the Angel Trumpet. This beautiful plant is highly toxic if eaten, but the toxins can also enter the bloodstream if gardeners consume food and do not wash their hands after handling the plants.

There are many other plants that contain poisons, but if you have small children or pets, do your research before landscaping your yard. Also, teach your children to not eat any plant material unless they ask you if it is safe. For more information, visit www.wickedplants.com.

Summer Field Trips



Creekwood Farms with Orange County Master Gardeners



Pumpkins and Halloween Memories

By Ann Bares, JCMG

One cool October day, I held hands with two other little girls and walked up the tall steps to my first day of school. I was 4 and was excited to get to spend the day with my "Baboo," who taught first grade at Pennsylvania School. She was carrying a brown paper bag and, under one arm, a large, round pumpkin.

Children of all sizes crowded around us asking her, "Why are you bringing that to school?" In her classroom, she placed it on her desk. After they were all out of their coats and in their seats, she introduced me to them; and their day began.

After lunch, there were many hands up, asking, "Ms. Caswell, what's that pumpkin for? What'er you gonna do with it?"

At last she cleared her desk, lined it with newspaper and told them to come and stand around her. They were going to make a Jack-o'-Lantern! The face was quickly drawn on, and she began to carve out the eyes, nose and, at last, a scary smile! All the seeds and pulp were put into a bag. When the face was complete, she put a small candle into the hole and lit it, making the scary face even better! "This was, many years ago, made to look like a man with a lantern or night watchman, 'Jack with a Lantern'," she explained.

After a few minutes, she asked if they knew what else they could do with the pumpkin. Out of her paper bag, she took a small hot plate, a small pan and some spices. Removing the candle, she began to cut the Jack-o'-Lantern into slices. Then scraping the soft insides into the pan, she added some butter, spices and a spoon or two of brown sugar.

As it warmed, the room filled with all the wonderful smells of fall, and the children were wide-eyed to see that they could eat the same pumpkin that was once a scary Jack-o'-Lantern. It was a surprise to them that pumpkin didn't come in a can but grew from a vine in a garden. Little spoons were handed out, and we all tasted the warm, sweet pumpkin, a perfect treat, and a good lesson for a cool October day.

Now, many years and Halloweens later, remembering that day, I wondered why we didn't see more pumpkin patches in our local gardens, so I decided to do a little research.

Pumpkins appear in our area in the fall, beginning in October, but rarely are seen growing in Southeast Texas backyard gardens. To have pumpkins for fall cooking, and Halloween, plant in mid-summer, in rows or hills, depending on how many you plan to harvest; they take a lot of room!

For a small garden, plant in hills, at least six feet apart. Dig a hole 12 to 18 inches deep, and two feet diameter, filling the bottom with four to six inches of compost or good garden soil. Put excavated soil back into the hole to form a mound six to eight inches high.

Hills should be four to six feet apart for bush, or eight to 10 feet for vines. Sow six seeds to a hill, about one inch deep. Thin to the two or three strongest plants when they are six inches tall. Feed with complete and balanced fertilizer, at monthly intervals, one to two pounds per 100 square feet. Water deeply after feeding and when soil feels dry, as this ensures good fruit size. Pumpkins should ripen in 100 to 120 days.

In the gourd family, pumpkins are simply a kind of squash. They need a lot of room to spread out, whether on vines or bushes, and should be thinned out and allowed to mature before harvesting. When they have changed color, the vine has dried and the rind has toughened, cut the vine, leaving at least three inches of the stem to allow for longer storage life.

For a family project, especially for younger children, this is a good way to help them learn to like, and look forward to growing things that are not only good to eat, but are fun to grow, too. Happy Halloween!

JCMG Projects and Events



*Airport Personnel
Appreciation Luncheon*



The Scoop on Watermelons

By Melissa Starr, JCMG

Summer is a time for vacations, swimming, and watermelons! Watermelons have always been a part of my life. My mother craved watermelon while she was pregnant, and my father grew watermelons when I was young. He would take me and my brother to my grandfather's Kirbyville farm, and we would pick Charleston Gray watermelons that were almost as large as us. Then we would haul them home to Port Arthur and sell them out of the back of his truck. Those are great memories! To grow or purchase great tasting watermelons, a few simple steps should be followed.

Growing watermelons requires fertile soil, fertilizer, a lot of space, and the right weather at the right time. For maximum yields, a spot should be chosen that will give watermelons at least eight hours of direct sunlight. The ground should first be prepared by tilling in several inches of compost or organic matter and garden fertilizer and then creating a raised bed or row that is 6 inches high and 12 inches wide. Watermelons should be planted by seed or transplants in warm soil after the danger of frost has passed. Seeds should be planted $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch deep. Transplants should be planted 4 to 6 feet apart or seedlings thinned after they have grown their second set of leaves. When the vines begin to run, about three tablespoons of a high nitrogen fertilizer should be worked into the soil around each hill. The fertilizer, however, should not touch the plants. If applying an organic fertilizer, more may be needed since it does not contain as much nitrogen.

Once the fertilizer is in place, a layer of organic mulch such as hay, rice hulls, or grass clippings should be applied to conserve water and prevent weeds. If newspaper is spread on the ground before applying the mulch, fewer weeds will grow. Watermelons need to be watered to a depth of 6 inches while they are developing, but a week before they are ripe, they should only be watered enough to keep the vines from wilting. Withholding water causes sugar to concentrate in the melons.

When is a watermelon ripe? This is a question asked by gardeners and store customers alike. The same principles used to pick a ripe watermelon in the field/garden can be used when finding the perfect watermelon at the store. The tendril next to the watermelon (only seen in the field) should be brown, and the underside of the watermelon that lies on the ground should be a white or cream color, not green. Finally, the melon can be thumped or patted with your hand. If the thump is high pitched, it is not ripe. If it is a low, dull sound, it is overripe. Somewhere in between is perfect.

Enjoy a cool refreshing water melon this summer! If you have any questions or comments, you can reach Jefferson County Certified Master Gardener, Melissa Starr, at melynstarr@hotmail.com.

JCMG Projects and Events

**Veteran's
Memorial
Park**



*Flower Bed at
Commissioner
Weaver's Office*

The Latest Dirt

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
1225 Pearl Street, Suite 200
Beaumont, TX 77701

Phone: 409-835-8461
Fax: 409-839-2310
Hotline: 409-835-8742



We're On The Web:

<http://txmg.org/jcmg/>

<http://jefferson.agrilife.org>



MISSION STATEMENT

To encourage and support the horticultural community of Southeast Texas through education and example.

2016 Officers

President—Tina Gonzales

Vice President—Alina Blanchard

Secretary—Eileen Slater

Treasurer—Joyce Logan

At Large—James Butaud, Lisa Hitt, Glenn Watz

Past President—Toni Clark

Announcements

Beekeeping For
Beginners
September 10,
8:30—4pm

\$25/per person
in the Extension
Auditorium
Pre-registration
by Sept. 1st

Fall Vegetable Sale
September 17
at the Test Garden
8-Noon

Rain Water Harvesting
Barrel Making Class at
the Jerry Ware Bldg. near
the Test Garden
September 24
8:30—Noon
\$30 prepaid by
September 14

44th Annual Fruit and
Vegetable Show
Saturday, October 15
9am—Noon; Judging at Noon
Central Mall, Port Arthur
Free to enter

Fall Plant Sale
October 22
8-Noon at the
Test Garden

Golden Triangle
Citrus Show
Enter Nov 16, 9-4
or Nov. 17,
9-Noon
Program Nov 17
6-8:30pm \$10