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Official Newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners

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Agent's Two Cents *David Oates, Horticulture Agent*

If you stepped outside any time during the month of June and July here in Southeast Texas, you were quickly met with a sudden blast of high temperatures and high humidity that would have sent even the seasoned Master Gardener back indoors. With such warm temperatures and high humidity levels, even the simplest task can become a struggle and an ordeal. There have been several days of activities and programs that were cut short due to the temperatures and outside weather conditions, so take some precautions when working in the heat.

When working outside in the extreme heat and humidity, always exercise caution and plan your outdoor activities accordingly. Several things to remember include dress appropriately (long sleeves and loose fitting clothes), avoid dehydration (lots of water to drink), frequent rest breaks, sunscreen and hats (a must if you have fair skin), and avoid working the heat of the day (think early morning or late evening). Following these simple steps will help to avoid becoming overheated or having a heat stroke.

While the weather has been a constant reminder of the arrival of the summer season, gardening has still managed to flourish. We had an excellent result demonstration of various trials of tomatoes with decent amounts (insect damage was pretty high) of tomatoes being produced and donated. Our Lantana trial is still up and running with the summer season and will conclude in the late fall season. The annual Jefferson County Horticulture Fruit and Vegetable Show was held with several entries and a great showing of what can be grown here in Southeast Texas despite the weather. Many gardeners reported having good yields despite the heat, excessive humidity from high rainfall, insects, and even a minor hurricane this summer season.

If the summer weather was not to your liking, the fall growing season is just around the corner. Good luck on a fall gardening and some cooler temperatures.

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

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

August 10 - Micah Leigh, JCMG, Tulip Trip

September 14 — Will Humber, BISD Ag Farm

October 12 — Debbie McHenry, Cottage Cuttings

Behind The Garden Gate

By Eileen Slater, JCMG, President

Have you ever read our mission statement? Did you even know we had one?

“Our mission statement is to encourage and support the horticultural community of Southeast Texas through education and example.”

So how have we done that this summer?

June was a great month! We celebrated our tenured members of 15, 20 and 25 years with ladder pins and state certificates. We acknowledged 2 beautiful high school women graduates who each received a \$1,000.00 scholarship to the college of their choice. All this was done in a beautifully decorated room with delicious food created by master gardeners. This encourages our JCMGs and hopefully future JCMGs through example.

Horticulture Field Day was our next adventure. A group of JCMGs toured the Overton experimental east farm field trials of flowers and vegetables growing in the fields in sun and shade. Everyone was given two flags to vote for their favorite plant. Oh, the decisions were hard. Some of my favorites were Petunia ColorRush Pink, French Bonanza Orange Marigold, Whopper Red Bronze Leaf Begonia, Flame Thrower Spiced Curry Coleus, Creamsickle Caladium, Mystic Spires Blue Improved Salvia and Cora Punch Vinca. My chosen favorites were the Zahara Cherry Zinnia and the Magellan Cherry Zinnia. I love zinnias, but those whopper begonias have become one of my new favorites. The tomatoes were fabulous! They had so many tomatoes growing on them. Over 900 pounds of tomatoes had already been donated to a local food bank. At the demonstration garden at the main building of the Agrilife Research Center we were given two more flags. A wide variety of flowers,

trees, shrubs, and a few vegetables were on display. I loved the madhatter pepper plant and a cherry tomato plant. One memorable plant I liked was the Moy Grande hibiscus. The flowers are about 12 inches in diameter. Education for our JCMGs is being supported by this activity.

We have had a couple of new projects at the garden. John Byerly, a new intern, built a butterfly garden next to the lily bed. It is beautiful and already has bees buzzing busily around and in it. It was a simple process. Ask John how he did it. Melissa Starr and several other master gardeners have created a keyhole garden close to John's butterfly garden and the pink crepe myrtle tree. She is recycling common items found at the garden and at home to create the garden. A keyhole garden is a raised bed with lasagna style layering of organic items and a compost pile at the top to feed the plants. She will plant vegetables and herbs in it and identical items in another small test garden to document the results of using a key hole garden vs a simple raised garden bed. The results will be shown at the test garden during the Fall Plant Sale. Education to the community is being supported by these projects.

Speaking of our annual Fall Plant Sale; these sales support the local community by providing plants for their gardens. The community depends on us to educate them with the newest varieties of proven plants, the latest education for growing these plants and the healthiest of plants available to buy. The date will be Oct. 14th

Behind The Garden Gate (continued)

at the Jack Brooks Airport Test Gardens. It will begin at 8:00 a.m. and will end at 1:00 p.m. Dorothy Norris will be the Overall Plant Chairman, and she will determine the schedule. All email concerning the plant sale will come to her and through her. Joyce Logan, Ann Lott and Sarah Sloan will buy the plants for the sale. Dorothy will have plenty of help in the holding area. We appreciate all that these individuals do to make the plant sale a success. Let's all support them in any way we can. This plant sale is one of the biggest ways we support our Southeast Texas community.

Another opportunity for individual JCMG's to impact the community and make a little money is to have a booth at the Fall Into Fall Plant Sale sponsored by the Beaumont Botanical Gardens at the Tyrell Park Garden Center. It will be Saturday, September 16, 2017, from 8:00-2:00 p.m. They are asking participants to sell garden type items only (plants, pots, containers, decorative garden items, lights, wind chimes, etc.) The cost is \$25.00 per booth. Call 842-3135 and speak to Emily Baize. This is a great opportunity to support horticulture community.

Let us continue to lead by example through education and to support the Southeast Texas horticulture community. Let us continue to support each other by recognizing and honoring our individual talents and by working together to build a strong Master Gardener organization.



Madhatter Pepper



Zahara cherry Zinnia

Cultivating Strawberries in Southeast Texas

By Tim Schreck, JCMG

My family loves strawberries pretty much any way you can prepare them. I love them as preserves on toast. My son loves them fresh. My daughters love them with a little sugar. Since we moved out to the farm, I just have not had time to get my beds prepared, but when we lived in town, we had four to five years of good strawberry crops on nice raised beds. The berries from the grocery store have actually been good this year, so I am not going to complain. Did you know that the U.S. produces 1.3 million tons of strawberries each year? That is one-third of the world's production.



Strawberries are an interesting fruit and are actually part of the large rose family. They are not really berries but an enlarged end of the plant's stamen. Because of this, the fruit seeds are actually on the outside of the fruit rather than inside like an apple. It is very rare these seeds will produce a new plant though. Nurseries propagate plants by pinching off runners that have rooted at the nodes.

If you want to grow strawberries in Southeast Texas, you should start preparing your beds now for planting in October or November. Strawberries like sandy loam soil, so if you have clay soil, a raised bed or pots are

your only option. Otherwise, the plants will easily rot in compacted soggy soil. Since you have a month or two before you can plant, you can amend your sandy soil with a little compost and then cover with plastic or mulch until you are ready to plant. Many people are starting to follow the commercial method and keep the soil covered with plastic and plant through slits in the plastic. This requires a watering system under the plastic or extra time must be taken to water the plants directly. The plastic keeps the weeds down and the fruit off the ground. The best varieties for our area include Sunrise, Chandler, Sequoia and Douglas. They can be hard to find in the fall, so you may have to order them online.

After planting them, you will just need to keep them weeded and protected from frost over the winter, watering occasionally if needed. Ninety percent of the root system is in the top six inches of soil, so keeping them moist through spring and into fruit production is crucial for plant survival and fruit production. The varieties above are called June-bearing since they bear all their fruit before June. During the heat of the summer, the plants will produce runners that you can pinch off and relocate in the fall.

Fruit and Vegetable Show

By Ann Bares, JCMG

Growing up in Southeast Texas, I remember trying out my new roller skates on Christmas day, wearing shorts and drinking lemonade! It was never about the weather but how we used our days, floating in washtubs, broom handles for paddles, on our always flooded streets, or picking the figs that ripened too soon, so mom could make the jam. Little families with a wagon and some produce came around ringing their bell, and the neighborhood soon was fragrant with all those mouth-watering smells. Then, there were the days when there was little on the vine, or the branch, so the neighbors shared what they did have and planned for next year.

Southeast Texas growers work hard and share, and our 45th Fruit and Vegetable Show held on June 10 at Central Mall was a good reminder of that.

The Jefferson County Horticulture Committee welcomed a smaller group of exhibitors, but their 73 entries were as unusual, interesting and different as always. Tiny, red wild tomatoes on little vines were as tasty as they were pretty, and the herbs as fragrant. Most interesting was that many of our growers are so versatile, one harvesting kale, blackberries and lima beans from her garden and another cantaloupe and hot peppers, plus a variety of other tasty, interesting additions to our everyday menus.

We are always pleased that there are entries from exhibitors in the surrounding counties who have entered and supported this event for many years and come even when their gardens didn't produce as much as they would have liked this year.

Our mission isn't just to showcase only the best of the best, but to encourage our youth, our beginning growers, and new families to Southeast Texas who are surprised that so many different and interesting things can be grown here. As diverse as our area is, we all have the opportunity to learn from the trial and error that gardening is all about and to share our knowledge. The abundance of these gardens does not go to waste as the table devoted to processed foods is always laden with mouth-watering jars of pickled vegetables, from carrots to vegan veggie soup.

Our "Best of Show" this year was poblano peppers entered by Jo Williamson in vegetable category; Donna Hopkins took first place for her "Russian Tomatoes" in the processed foods category; Cecil Hightower won for his Pesto Basil in the herb category; Deborah Portwood won in the fruit category with her cantaloupe; and the largest tomato was entered by Jerry Jobe.



Fruit and Vegetable Show Pictures



Citrus Leaf Miner

By Micah Leigh, JCMG

Perhaps you are seeing some strange things going on with the new leaves of your citrus right now. They may be twisted, gnarled, and rolled on the edges. They can also look yellow on top but brown on bottom. If you see a tunnel design on the bottom of the leaf, you have leaf miners. Leaf miners are the larvae of several different in-

sects such as beetles, flies and moths. Each particular species can have a distinctive pattern, from straight, meandering, zig-zag, or circular blotches depending on the insect involved. The female adult insect will lay her eggs inside or on the underside of leaves. The tiny

larvae, only 1/5" to 1/8" long, hatches and burrows between the layers of the leaf to feed on the soft inner tissue, literally sucking the life out of the leaf. As they eat, they form the patterns on the leaf.

As unsightly as it can be, leaf miners rarely kill a plant. (I found that out the hard way when I tossed out a three year old Meyer lemon tree. It was heavily infested, and I thought it was beyond salvation). When I found out that it was just a cosmetic problem,

I got a bit ill....gardening is all about learning after all. When the larvae are done feeding, they eat their way out of the leaves and drop to the ground to pupate. Depending on the weather, there can be up to three generations in one season.

Along with citrus, leaf miners can attack other plants such as kale, spinach,

peppers, tomatoes, pumpkins and squash.

One of the best ways to control leaf miners is with neem oil. Neem oil is non-toxic and can be sprayed directly on the leaves. It will suffocate the insects and disrupt the life cycle to the point that they do not reproduce and, therefore, they die off. As always, follow the directions on the bottle.

Parasitic wasps are also a good control

for leaf miners. These natural predators, which are harmless to humans and animals, are hardworking beneficials in your garden. These wasps lay their eggs on the immature larvae, which in turn are eaten as the wasp eggs hatch. Parasitic wasps are available for sale through online sites and are great for home gardeners who don't want to keep up with a spraying regimen. They also control other pests in the garden such as aphids and tomato worms.



Chinch Bugs

By Dr. Kathy Attaway, JCMG

In the hot, dry summers of Southeast Texas, lawns of St. Augustine grass can become susceptible to chinch bug infestation. Occasionally chinch bugs may feed on zoysia, centipede, Bahia or Bermuda grass. If you do not currently have chinch bug activity in your yard, treat your lawn preventively with a granular insecticide. Granular insecticides are not effective on infested lawns. If you suspect your lawn is under attack, you will notice grass turning yellow-brown, particularly along driveways and sidewalks. The grass will then begin to dry and die. Chinch bugs literally suck the life juices from grass blades with their needle-like beaks while injecting toxic saliva into each blade.

The next step in visually checking your lawn is to closely survey the suspected areas. Simply get down on your hands and knees and pick through the thatch to look for bugs. Adult chinch bugs are about a quarter of an inch long and are black with whitish wings marked by a dark triangle on the outer edges. Young chinch bugs are bright red with a white band across their backs. The best test for chinch bugs is to cut both ends out of a large can. Force one end of the can into the soil and fill it with water, keeping it full for about 10 minutes. Chinch bugs will float to the top.

If there is an infestation, a granular insecticide should not be used until you have first broken the egg cycle of the chinch bug. This is done by first applying a liquid insecticide. Randy Lemmon, renowned Texas gardening expert, says in his book, *Texas Tough Gardening*, “Any liquid insecticide, like bifenthrin, permethrin or cypermethrin will treat the spot well. It can take three applications over two weeks with the liquid insecticide. Then apply a granular insecticide like bifenthrin, deltamethrin or granular permethrin one time in a broadcast applicator throughout the rest of the yard.” This should successfully eliminate the chinch bugs. Because thatch provides a home for chinch bugs, it is important to keep thatch from building up. Mow regularly using a sharp blade, never removing more than 1/3 the height of your grass blades. Cutting at a height of 3” is



better than cutting 2”. When watering, apply enough water to wet the soil approximately 6” deep. Let the lawn dry out between watering. This watering practice is better than frequent shallow watering. Proper watering and good mowing practices should help defend your yard from future invasions.

Earth-Kind® Raised Garden Beds

By Melissa Starr, JCMG

The weather this year has been a challenge for many gardeners. While some have been successful, other gardens have failed. Soaking rains have caused muddy gardens, but when the rain subsides, the garden gets a scorching steam bath. What is a gardener to do during this type of weather? The key to success is proper soil preparation and raised bed construction.

Gardens in Southeast Texas need to be able to drain well after heavy rains, but still hold enough water for plants to survive during periods of dry weather. Texas A&M's Earth-Kind® program provides a method for building raised beds that not only allow drainage of excess water, but also conserve water during times of drought.

When building a raised bed, the goal is to have healthy soil. Healthy soil allows drainage of excess water, while retaining the nutrients and water necessary for plants to grow expanded root systems. To build a raised bed, start by marking out the space for the raised bed and removing the top 3" to 4" of native soil and sod to prevent weeds from growing later. Line the bed with an edging material such as landscape timbers, rock, brick or concrete blocks. Raised beds should be at least 6" tall for good drainage. A semi-permeable weed barrier can be placed at the bottom of the bed to prevent grass and weeds from growing; however, it will not prevent nut sedge or torpedo grass from growing. That is the reason weed removal is important before building your beds. Now

would also be a good time to install any irrigation hoses/pipes that will be used. Drip irrigation is the best way to efficiently water plants without wasting water. Next, add a high quality landscape soil mix, leaving 2" to 3" of space at the top of your edging material. Work in 3" of fully finished compost, which looks like coffee grounds, to your mix. DO NOT till the native soil underneath; tilling will activate any leftover weed seeds. The soil will drain better if it is slightly higher in the middle of the bed. Pat the soil down slightly, put in your plants and add 3"-4" of mulch on top of the soil. Mulch helps retain water and prevent weeds from growing. Mulch breaks down over time, so add more mulch about twice a year. Do not allow the level of the soil to fall below the edging of your bed. This will prevent the bed from draining adequately.



Two Thumbs Up For Keyhole Gardening

Written by Eileen Slater, JCMG

Part of Earth Kind training was to visit the Field of Plenty community garden behind the Orange Christian Services building in Orange. We saw round garden beds with a place to walk into the garden. That is exciting! Perhaps you have heard of them-keyhole gardens. A keyhole garden is a raised garden, filled lasagna style and fed by a compost pile that does not require turning. That's my kind of gardening! Two thumbs up!

Keyhole gardening first began in England. Missionaries took the idea of keyhole gardening to Africa to help poor families grow crops to feed their families.

Build your keyhole garden wall by measuring a 6-foot diameter circle for the wall. Trace a pie shaped piece into the northern side of the garden wall. This piece is where you feed the compost container in the center. Build the wall three feet or waist high using any material that can support the weight of wet soil. That height is so you don't have to bend over to garden. Two thumbs up!

Use wire mesh to create a compost container about one foot in diameter and one foot higher than the height of the completed garden. Stand the compost container in the center of the circle. Plants will need to be no farther than 3 feet from the compost container to receive nutrients.

To build the lasagna layer, line the inside walls and floor with wet cardboard. Place a four to five-inch layer of thin, short twigs at the bottom to serve as drainage. Fill the garden area, but not the compost container, with layers of compostable materials.

Wet each layer as you go. A suggested ratio is three carbon (brown) to one nitrogen (green). Carbon includes cardboard, leaves, paper products and straw. Nitrogen includes vegetable, fruits, eggshells, coffee grounds, tea bags, manure and fresh grass clippings. Make multiple layers of the above suggestions with cardboard between each



lasagna layer. Fill with 6 to 12 inches of good soil, compost or potting soil. The top is shaped like a volcano. The soil should slope from a high point downward to the edges of the garden so the nutrients can flow toward the plants.

Fill and water the compost container with alternating layers of compostable material, along with layers of kitchen scraps and greens that provide the plants with moisture and nutrients. Water each layer. Feed the compost at any time with your kitchen scraps. Water the compost container and garden when the plants will not survive without it.

You may plant your keyhole garden immediately. Two thumbs up!

Editor's note: We are building a keyhole garden at the JCMG test garden. Feel free to come and see how the plants are growing.

Earth-Kind® Summer Tips For Plant Survival

By Melissa Starr, JCMG

The heat of the summer has arrived and with it comes mosquitos, searing heat, sunburn, and brown plants. In this extreme climate, here are some tips to help plants survive the summer.

Water is key to plant survival, but plants must be watered correctly. The best method is drip irrigation. This will conserve water and save money over time.

Plants need water during the heat of summer, but watering with overhead sprinklers wastes water. Not all the water hits its target and some evaporates before reaching the plants. In addition, watering with sprinklers at night encourages powdery mildew and other fungal diseases because the leaves do not dry out overnight in this humid climate. For someone that cannot afford drip irrigation, use a water hose to water the plants at the roots. I used to watch my grandfather water his garden by placing a running water hose between raised rows and letting the water travel down the row and soak into the ground.



Pulling weeds can also be a tedious summer chore. To prevent weed growth, newspaper or cardboard can be spread out between plants and covered in three to four inches of mulch. In addition to preventing weed growth, the mulch also prevents evaporation of water so the plants don't dry out as quickly. Rice hulls also work well as a mulch and are a cheap way to mulch a vegetable garden. Any stray weeds that pop up can be pulled in the early morning hours or late evening.

Herbs that have started looking long and lanky need to be trimmed back. Trimming back 1/3 of the growth will cause them to put on new growth.



Many vegetables, such as tomatoes, that have finished producing their spring crop can be pulled up. The empty places left can be prepared for the fall garden. There are some spring vegetables, such as squash and tomatoes, that can be replanted in September for a fall harvest. For more information,

a vegetable planting guide is located at <http://jefferson.agrilife.org/files/2011/05/PlantingGuide.pdf>.

Stay cool, drink plenty of water, and enjoy your summer.

The Latest Dirt

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Beaumont, TX 77701

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Fax: 409-839-2310
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We're On The Web:

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

<http://jefferson.agrilife.org>



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MISSION STATEMENT

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

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At Large—James Butaud, Lisa Hitt, Glenn Watz

Past President—Tina Gonzales

Announcements

Home Vegetable Garden Series

August 26, 8:30—Noon, \$15

“Fall Gardening”

At Extension Office

Beekeeping For Beginners

Saturday, September 9, \$25

At Extension Office

Fall Plant Sale

Saturday, October 14

Test Garden