



HORTICULTURE NEWS

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 Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Jefferson County

Notes from my desk:

A new year, a new opportunity...but I want to fill you in on some of our activities last year: the Spring and Fall Plant Sales were very successful fund raisers for the Master Gardeners and the Short Course trained some enthusiastic interns. The Spring Vegetable Gardening Seminar was well attended as were many hands-on workshops at our Test Garden. The Horticulture Committee again sponsored the Budding and Grafting Workshop and Beekeeping for Beginners. Their annual Fruit and Vegetable Show and the Citrus Show brought in many growers from around the area that enjoyed receiving ribbons and prizes. The first ever Urban Tree Workshop was well received and appreciation was expressed by the participants. We have many programs planned for the upcoming year and look forward to sharing those with the community at large, let us know if you have some program ideas.

Right now we are dealing with the coldest months of the year so getting outside might not be in the cards for you. This is a good time to catch up on your reading and planning for spring. There are several good resources out there, whether you prefer a book, magazine or the internet. (Texas Garden Almanac, Texas Gardener, <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>)

Planning is the first step to any gardening even if you have been at it for a while. And while you have time to reflect, consider what worked and didn't work last year. Build on your successes and learn from your missteps.

You might consider expanding the variety of plants so that beneficial insects as well as pollinators are attracted to your landscape increasing your garden bounty whether you prefer produce or flowers.

Take advantage of available educational programs then share your knowledge with your family, friends and neighbors. Kids can always use some guidance in understanding that gardening is an important endeavor since food doesn't fall from the sky like in the movies. Plus a well maintained landscape improves our daily lives.

I'm always available as a speaker for church groups, public libraries, schools, senior residences, clubs and associations.

Stay warm, contact me by phone, email or drop by my office.

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IN THE GARDEN



It seems that gardening is a year round activity. There is always something to do. It's been proven by scientists that a spot of gardening, even on the coldest and greyest of days, will lift your spirits, and warm you up! Studies released in scientific journals have shown that a short walk or a small amount of gardening does wonders for your mental and physical well being.

Have you been out into your garden recently? I don't mean the quick dash up the front path. With the winter days being cold and grey and all the plants are looking a bit tattered and weather worn: it can be hard to muster enthusiasm for the garden. Winter can be an exciting time to be outside. Okay, perhaps not if it's raining, but most of the time you can find a sheltered spot to do some therapeutic gardening to chase away the winter blues. The cooler conditions mean you can take on some tasks that raise a sweat.



“Learning is a lifelong process and great gardeners are lifelong learners.”

Skip Richter, County Extension Agent

IN THE GARDEN

Here are some quick winter jobs to get you outdoors and active:

- * **Rake the leaves and pick up twigs, sticks and bark.**
- * **Aerate the lawn.**
- * **Dig a new garden bed.**
- * **Pull or hoe out weeds.**
- * **Prune and tidy.**
- * **Keep water supplied to plant roots.**
- * **Get your seed order in.**
- * **Watch for nuisance insects in the house.**
- * **Cheer yourself with potted color.**

There are many things to do that will keep you active, outdoors and involved in your garden. Give the ideas above a try to be happier and healthier even in the winter. Happy gardening...



Easy, affordable cover extends growing season in home gardens...

COLLEGE STATION — A technique used by commercial growers to protect tender crops from harmful cold temperatures may be an affordable option for home growers as well, according to Dr. Joe Masabni, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service vegetable specialist.

“I’ve been working with strawberry producers, and we’ve found that using plastic covers to form small tunnels over the row is definitely a great tool to protect the plant during those occasional days or weeks when we have a severe freeze,” Masabni said. “Why not show that it can be done for the homeowner, using the same material that the commercial growers have?”

Masabni used a clear, 6 millimeter plastic that is 6 feet wide and has perforations about 4 inches apart in a grid pattern. He said that easily covers the typical 4-foot wide raised bed most people use for home gardens. For a 15-foot long bed, he used about \$2 worth of a 500-foot roll of plastic.

He bent four PVC pipes – at a cost of \$10 – from side to side across the bed. He used eight snap clamps, which cost about \$10 dollars, to secure the plastic to the PVC pipes. Some U-shaped garden staples may be needed to keep the plastic from blowing too much and to further secure the warm air inside.

“So, for about \$22, I can protect my raised bed from those nights that become severely cold,” Masabni said. “For strawberries, for example, the idea is to protect the flowers. The leaves can tolerate a lot of cold nights, even 32 or 30 degree temperatures. In Texas, we planted in September, and we already have fruits and flowers on them in mid-December. If we can protect them on those occasional very cold nights, we can be harvesting throughout the winter and get an earlier harvest in the spring.” He said the plastic, pipes and snaps should last for several years of repeated winter use if taken care of, making such a system even more affordable over time.

“And the beauty of the perforated plastic is that you don’t have to worry about opening up on a warm sunny day because the pre-punched holes would let the extra heat vent out, while during the night it traps air inside to keep the plants warm,” Masabni added. “Set it and forget.”

Previous tests Masabni has done on the plastic-covered crops as far north as Kentucky showed that the temperature inside the plastic-covered row is always 10-20 percent higher than outside.

He suggested that rows may be covered until around March 1, depending on the weather forecast in a given year, or until the last chance of severe frost passes.

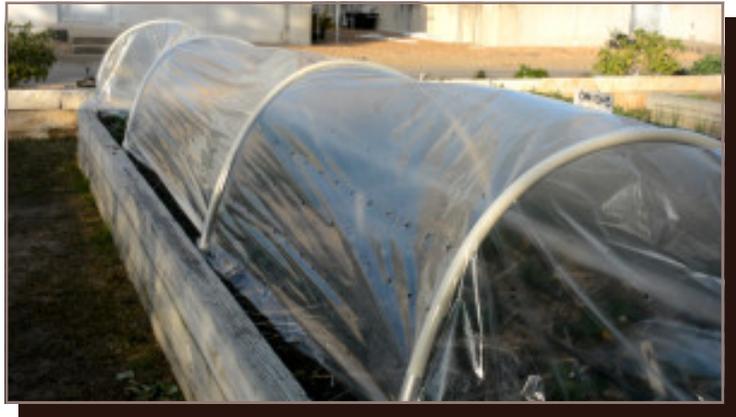
HORTICULTURE TIPS

Another benefit is that other less cold-tolerant crops, such as tomatoes, can be planted earlier under such a system, he said.

“I have planted tomatoes mid-February whereas usually they are planted around March 15 in Brazos County, for example.”

The snap clamps on the plastic sheeting are easily removable for harvesting, Masabni said. “You can open a couple or three on one side and then harvest and tend to the crop as needed.”

Source: AgriLife Today, Article by Kathleen Phillips



*“No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth,
and no culture comparable to that of the garden.”*

Thomas Jefferson



THE URBAN FRUIT TREE

»»»»»»»»»»»»»»»» **WORKSHOP** ««««««««««««««««

GROWING FRUIT ON THE GULF
COAST



■ **JANUARY 24, 2015** ■

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION OFFICE - JEFFERSON COUNTY

1225 PEARL ST. SUITE 200

BEAUMONT, TEXAS 77701

(409) 835-8461

REGISTRATION BEGINS
AT 9:00 A.M.
PROGRAM FROM 9:30-4:30
LUNCH INCLUDED



SPEAKERS:
*TOM LEROY, HORTICULTURE CEA,
RETIRED; MONTGOMERY CO.
*LOCAL CITRUS EXPERT PANEL

PRE-REGISTER BY JAN 16TH

Persons with disabilities who plan to attend this meeting and who may need auxiliary aids or services are requested to contact Cary Erickson, Jefferson County Human Resources Director at (409) 839-2391 five working days prior to the meeting so appropriate arrangements can be made.

Educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, genetic information or veteran status.

The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating

Hardy Hibiscus

The giant rose mallow has the largest flowers of any hardy perennial. Some of the hybrids may be one foot in diameter. Rich, moist soil and full sun bring the most vigorous growth, but mallows are very accommodating, and will tolerate light shade and less desirable soils. Giant rose mallows will flower from seed the first year if started very early in spring. Favorite cultivars may be rooted from cuttings during the growing season. Colors range from crimson, white, pink, rose, and in-between.



Giant rose mallows are relatives of the native hibiscus found in Louisiana and other Gulf South states. They are among the most spectacular and easily grown plants for use in the border. Following the spring and summer growing season, the plants freeze back to the ground each fall. Old stems should be cut back to a height several inches above the ground. New shoots emerge by mid-spring, and the plants quickly develop handsome mounds of foliage and flowers by early summer. Individual flowers last only a day, but each plant may flaunt several flowers at once. Numerous seedling selections, such as 'Southern Belle' and 'Frisbee' are offered in good seed catalogs. Few garden plants provide so much enjoyment for so little care.

Seeds of giant rose mallows are available from catalogs, while container-grown plants are usually in stock at Texas garden centers and nurseries. Color selection is possible when you purchase blooming-size plants. If growing giant rose mallows from seed, it is important to start them early in the season so that they will have adequate time to develop before freezing weather sets in.

Hibiscus mutabilis is an old-fashioned perennial or shrub hibiscus better known as the Confederate rose. It tends to be shrubby or treelike in Zones 9 and 10, though it behaves more like a perennial further north. Flowers are double and are 4 to 6 inches in diameter; they open white or pink, and change to deep red by evening. The 'Rubra' variety has red flowers. Bloom season usually lasts from summer through fall. Propagation by cuttings root easiest in early spring, but cuttings can be taken at almost any time. When it does not freeze, the Confederate rose can reach heights of 12 to 15 feet with a woody trunk; however, a multi-trunk bush 6 to 8 feet tall is more typical. Once a very common plant throughout the South, Confederate rose is an interesting and attractive plant that grows in full sun or partial shade, and prefers rich, well-drained soil.

Hibiscus coccineus is better known as the Texas Star Hibiscus. It has large, single, red flowers about 3 to 4 inches in diameter that appear atop branches of palmately lobed leaves with three to seven segments. Culture is very easy, with well-drained soil, an an-

FEATURED PLANT

nual application of fertilizer in spring or early summer, and a sunny location being most important. Texas Star Hibiscus may be propagated from seed or cuttings. Mulching the plants in wintertime prevents root injury during very cold weather. Old stems, if they freeze, should be pruned back to the ground in early spring. Even if frost damage has not occurred, it is still a good idea to prune back and shape the plants before growth begins.

There are several perennial hibiscus offered through the Texas Superstar program now. These plants are hardy to Zone 5 and will provide years of brilliant color.

Texas A&M horticulturists have done extensive, statewide testing of perennial hibiscus for several years and their scientific data indicate that four cultivars of perennial hibiscus are stellar performers in Texas landscapes. These highly recommended cultivars are 'Flare,' 'Moy Grande,' 'Pink Flare and Peppermint Flare' and 'Lord Baltimore.' All three provide stunning color summer to early fall, love the heat, require very little maintenance, and are so pest resistant that almost never will you need to apply any pesticides.

'Flare' has apple green foliage and large, high quality fuchsia red flowers to ten inches wide. Four feet tall, it is a profuse bloomer and has the important advantage of being self sterile which encourages luxuriant rebloom. This wonderful cultivar does great in any soil type, even our sticky, highly alkaline clays.

Texans will love 'Moy Grande' because it has the *largest, open-face hibiscus flower in the world!* The rose-pink blossoms are truly magnificent with diameters reaching a full 12 inches (dinner plate size). This cultivar will grow in acid or alkaline soils. Gives flushes of bloom throughout the summer; prompt removal of spent blossoms will encourage rebloom. 'Lord Baltimore' displays deeply cut, glossy foliage and stunning red flowers up to ten inches in diameter. Five feet tall and self sterile, this improved hybrid prefers neutral to acid soils.

These plants are very versatile and can be used in large containers, the perennial border and in butterfly and hummingbird gardens. Make sure that the plants you buy have the Texas Superstar® label in the containers - this is your assurance that you are purchasing plant types that have proven themselves in A&M studies across the state.

Adapted throughout Texas, these hibiscus are among our finest, easy care perennials. Give them a try - you'll be the envy of the neighborhood in no time.

Source: Texas A&M Garden Hotline

“The earth
laughs in flowers.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson



Plan Bee: Insecticide tags on nursery plants

Many greenhouse and nursery reared plants are treated with insecticides to ensure they are pest-free when you make your purchase in the store.

Lobbying efforts by “defenders of the bees” have been rewarded by one of the largest retailers of nursery plants requiring new tags on plants. As reported today by Nursery Management magazine, any plants treated by greenhouse or nursery producers with one of the neonicotinoid insecticides will have to carry a special tag informing customers of the treatment and potential residues.

What’s this about? It’s all part of a raging political and scientific brouhaha over a group of insecticides that were recently discovered to have some subtle, and possibly deadly, effects on bees at very low concentrations. It’s not that we haven’t known all along that these insecticides were toxic to bees; it’s all about HOW toxic they really are when applied according to label instructions, and whether these insecticides are responsible for the recent condition known as *colony collapse disorder* in honey bees.

You might think of this as a “Plan B” for those groups seeking to ban neonicotinoids. After first requesting EPA to outright ban these insecticides from the market (Plan A) and being turned down due to lack of scientific consensus on the issue, some advocacy groups have used grass-roots efforts to influence the market sector, and legislatures to press the issue.

I don’t know what the new warning tags will look like, but they are likely to confuse consumers and scare them away from purchasing these plants—regardless of the virtue of the warning. Nurserymen understand the issue. According to one producer quoted in Nursery Magazine, “We view...labeling of the plant with that tag

[as] potentially creating customers' perception that the plant should not be purchased.”

For the record, the majority of my colleagues who work in the ornamentals IPM area seem to feel the science does not back up the current level of alarm over neonicotinoids. Not all agree, but bee researchers in particular seem to favor Varroa mites and some new virus-caused diseases of bees as top suspects in colony collapse disorder.

The issue puts applied entomologists like myself in a tough spot. What puts applied entomologists (who dedicate their careers to the practical task of protecting crops, humans and animals from pests) in a tough spot is that neonicotinoids have proved to be great tools for controlling some really tough pests, like emerald ash borer, bed bugs, house flies, cockroaches, whiteflies, scales and many others. For many of these pests there are no effective or safer alternatives.

And not all uses of neonicotinoids are likely to pose equal risks to pollinators. Many applications are made to plants that don't attract many bees. Some formulations are designed to control ants, bed bugs and termites, with almost zero risk of contacting bees. Unfortunately, the public and legislative campaigns going on now are not very nuanced in this regard. All seem designed to paint the issue as black and white, with the ultimate goal of eliminating neonicotinoid use in all its forms.

So by all means educate yourself about the issue before deciding for or against purchasing a neonicotinoid-treated plant. Just keep in mind that science can't always be rushed, but it will ultimately provide the answers.

Source: Insects in the City,
Article by Mike Merchant,
Texas A&M Entomology Specialist



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We're on the Web!

<http://jefferson.agrilife.org>

The Jefferson County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service educates Texans in all areas of agriculture including horticulture, marine sciences, environmental stewardship, youth and adult life skills, human capital and leadership, and community economic development. We offer the knowledge resources of Texas A&M and Prairie View A&M Universities to educate Texans for self-improvement, individual action and community problem solving. We, the Jefferson County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, are part of a statewide educational network and a member of the Texas A&M University System linked in a unique partnership with the nationwide Cooperative Extension System and Jefferson County

UPCOMING EVENTS

Spring Vegetable Gardening Seminar

Saturday, February 7th

8:30 am to 12:30 pm, Tyrrell Park

Speakers: Paul Eyre and Patty Leander

Registration 8:00 am, \$15.00 fee