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Volume 8, Issue 2



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

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

May 12 - "Irrigation in the Garden" Jerry White

June 9 — TBA

July 14 — Meeting at Terrell Park, speaker TBA



The Latest Dirt

Official Newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners

Agent's Two Cents *By David Oates, CEA-Horticulture*

It has been a fast paced three months since I first stepped foot into the office here in Jefferson County as the new County Extension Agent for Horticulture. Like most folks, not sure of anything on your first day of a new job, I arrived early at the office only to find out that the secretaries were already there and hard at work answering the phones and answering questions before 8am. Just wondering what I had gotten myself into, I wondered and thought to myself, "Is every day like this? Is some big event happening? Did I already miss something important?" I introduced myself and was quickly greeted with a warm and enthusiastic greeting from all of the staff in the office. Their reply was "No, it was just a standard Monday morning here at the Agrilife Extension office in Jefferson County." As I settled in for my first day in the office and started to better understand the daily happenings of the office and some of the requirements of the job, I began to wonder if, maybe, I might be "in over my head" in this new career I had chosen.

Fast forward three months later, and I can say without a doubt, "I have definitely found a

career that I enjoy and want to excel at." During my first week here in Jefferson County as the new County Extension Agent for horticulture, I was introduced to a group of hard working volunteers, called the Master Gardeners of Jefferson County, at one of their monthly meetings. The auditorium was filled to capacity with sixty plus members and guests present for their monthly lecture series. As I introduced myself to the group, I immediately saw the interest and desire that this group of volunteers possessed. I was hooked from that point.

With the Spring vegetable sale, free tree giveaway, Spring plant sale and market day, budding and grafting seminar, and numerous visits to the test garden to visit with Master Gardeners behind me, I look forward to what the future holds for the Jefferson County Master Gardener Volunteer organization. I have met many new folks in just a short period of time, and I am still meeting new folks all the time with this organization. I am truly looking forward to becoming an integral part of an organization that promotes great values, leadership, and agriculture education in the area of horticulture here in Jefferson County.

Thank You!
By Stellina Reed, JCMG

Plant sales take a lot of work and effort for which the Committee would like to thank all of YOU who helped to make this year's endeavor an outstanding and very successful Veggie and Plant Sale. If you combine the numbers of both sales - it's the best turn out and the best profit to date.

We all have our own strong points - Ann Abshire and Toni Clark know all the ins & outs of advertising, creating flyers and negotiating pricing deals. Diane & Ima have magic fingers making seeds/cuttings grow like Jack's Beanstalk. Betsy can coax even the most stubborn bulb to sprout. Ann Lott, Emmy, Lisa, Patsy and other ladies have the patience to transplant the tiniest seedling into its own pot so it grows so big it has to be repotted many times over. Cecil, Sharon, Penny, Phyllis and Ann can create the most intriguing combination plantings, succulent plantings and miniature gardens. The Guys ("the brawn with the brains") - Jimbo, Ron, Arthur, Larry and Tony - tackle the heavy jobs loading and unloading, truck driving, repair work, maintenance, construction, honey-do jobs, and handling the customers vying for space in the Holding Area. They are assisted by some very capable ladies who really don't mind hang'n with the guys - Sarah, Tina, Tretta and Melody and three boy scouts from troop 232. The Numbers People - Karen, Kathy, Glenda, Patsy, Donna H. & Rhonda had all the receipts and money boxes balanced to the penny; along with their assistants, the Roving Writers - Alina, Emmy, Ilene, Cindy, Joyce, Dorothy, Hazel and Linda helped process customers through check out and moved them happily out the gate. Our Customer Service Specialists - Melissa, Judy, Valerie Gleason (Dtr of Donna Hopkins), Phyllis, Pat, Ann, Lisa, Toni, Aletha, Donna T., Bonnie and even Agent David, with

Service, The Booths - Holly at the Plant ID Booth; Jeanine, Jay and Glenn at the Master Gardener Booth; Marianne flying solo at the Food Booth; Ann Bares and Frances at the Children's Booth - informed, fed, and entertained which helped to keep customers in the buying mode. And of course Gate Keepers, Dwayne Trahan and Jerry Blackstone, kept track of the number of customers and checked tickets while Security Guard, Linda LeBlanc, made sure no airport rules or regulations were breached. Some of you, thankfully, did double duty in more than one position where we were short-handed and then went back to the position to which you had originally requested.

And working with Joyce just blows my mind. Not only is she a "Numbers Person" but she knows the names and characteristics of so many plants. It was impressive to watch her interact with the wholesale growers. We had so much fun picking out plants that we personally tended to like and then found ourselves having to regroup after remembering that we were shopping for the community not for ourselves! It seems the customers also liked our selections because there was very little inventory left at the end of the day.

So all of us working together, each with our own specialty, is what makes a huge undertaking like this plant sale possible and profitable and gives us a positive reputation in the community.

Again, a huge thank you to all.

P.S. My apologies if I neglected to mention your name. I did try to make a note of everyone who was present but with all the moving around I may have overlooked some.

Vegetable and Herb Sale Pictures



Market Day and Plant Sale Pictures



Earthworms

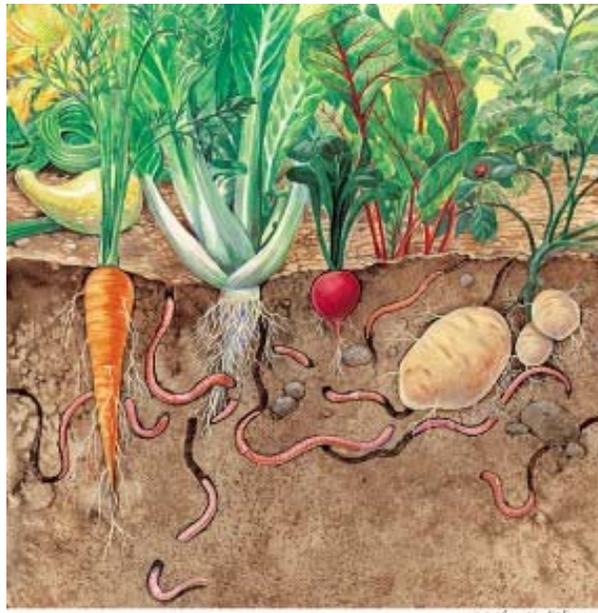
By Ann Bares, JCMG

In my little corner of Granddaddy's garden, I learned some of my first life lessons. One that has served me best was "everything He created has value, even the worms." That became more clear to me as I grew up and even more when in a corner of my own yard, I turned the first shovel of soil and smelled the fresh earth. Then deeper, I saw the first fat, healthy, worm, the first of many. I'd taken them for granted as I grew up, living on a canal that had an abundance of tasty perch and a coffee can of worms.

Then, my time was my own, and we decided to put in a garden. It wasn't a big project, but it led to good vegetables, some herbs, and gradually to the turning of many shovels of good, rich earth, which for many years was fed by leaves and allowed to lay dormant. I found the worms had been working all along, and the soil was rich and well-tended by them.

Forward 25 years, more yard became gardens, shrubs, roses, herbs, vegetables, fruit trees and always worms, always plentiful, rarely given credit for their work. Earthworms, as they tunnel

through the hard soil, aerate it, allowing their tunnels to hold more water and good bacteria to increase. In the process, as organic matter and micro-organisms removed through the soil, their excrement, called castings or "worm poop," become excellent fertilizer. They love decaying leaves, rotten wood and manure. In the fall, raked leaves and pine bark chips are good additives and bring the worms to the spring garden. Some plant nutrients are not available for plants to uptake until they have been processed by the worms, and some bring minerals up from as deep as eight feet below the soil.



Roto-tilling and chemical fertilizers may add salt to the soil and destroy the worms' burrows, and a shovel may cut them into segments too small to regenerate, so respect their efforts to work beside you to make your garden grow.

Still, on a summer day, with the lure of a shady spot on the creek bank, perch biting well, a few worms may end up in the coffee can, but it's part of the cycle of life.

Dewberries and Blackberries

By Tim Schreck, JCMG

Last year, my Memorial Day weekend was great. After taking some time to remember the members of the Armed Forces who gave their lives so we can enjoy the freedoms that so many in the world only dream of, I took a little walk. On this walk, I noticed that the dewberries were starting to ripen, so, of course, I picked a few and enjoyed each one. The ones I found were actually a little bigger than normal (a little smaller than my thumb nail), I guess from all the rain we have had the last few weeks.

Up until a couple years ago, I did not know that the wild black berries growing along the fence lines and in pastures around here are really dewberries.

Dewberries are a close relative to the blackberry and are native to most of North America. If picked when fully ripe, dewberries are usually sweeter than blackberries. Both are good for you as they are loaded with antioxidants and essential vitamins and are a great source of fiber. However, dewberry canes are usually thinner and grow close to the ground, while blackberries grow from a heavy upright cane and, if staked, can grow up to six feet tall. All dewberries have thorns (which are slender with red hairs) on the stems. Most blackberries not only have thorns which are hard and tough, but also have smooth, hairless stems. However, there are several varieties that are thornless.

Dewberries can be very invasive if left unchecked for several years, growing and intertwining with themselves and other vegetation. This tangled mess is commonly known as a bramble. Blackberries can also be invasive but usually grow a little slower in the wild.

A recent article in the Houston Chronicle said that dewberries and blackberries did not thrive very well until settlers came in and cleared the dense grass and forests for pastures, which allowed the long canes room to grow. I own 22 acres of what was rice field 20 years ago and can attest to that fact. It has taken me three years to tame them on only about five of those acres.

Picking dewberries can be a real challenge. Fighting the thorns and bugs is a deterrent to many. I do not mind the dewberry thorns, but my kids do not last very long picking them. Therefore, I planted two varieties of thornless blackberries, Ouachita and Arapaho, last year



and wish I had planted a few more. They are doing well in a berm of clay and sand mix. Berries produce on second year canes, and since I planted these late last year, I will not get any berries from this planting until next year. I was reading up on thornless blackberries and found the Natchez variety was named a Texas Superstar® a couple years ago, which gives it the distinction of, once established, being drought tolerant and requiring minimal care. If you do not mind a few thorns, the standard from Texas A&M is still the Brazos, a very heavy producer with great disease tolerance.

It doesn't matter if they are dewberries or blackberries, with or without thorns, they all make great cobblers!

Landscaping A Boggy Area *By Cecil Hightower, JCMG*

Low lying areas of your property that drain poorly or stay boggy can pose a problem when trying to find plants that can adapt to these conditions. There are actually quite a few specimens that will not only grow in such wet areas, but will actually thrive.

To add a colorful, tropical flair to a soggy area, try cannas. This plant has big leaves and spikes of bright red, yellow, orange and pink flowers. You can choose from a variety of heights as cannas can range from 8 feet to dwarf selections under 2 feet.

Elephant ears can also add a "touch of jungle" to that low spot and likes wet soil so much that it will even grow in standing water.

A moisture loving plant that will attract butterflies is Joe-Pye Weed. This show stopping prairie native grows from 4 to 6 feet tall and produces huge, fragrant, puffy, pink flower heads. Because of its extensive root system, it can even tolerate drought and will continue to do well should that bog become dry.



For a delicate addition, try Siberian irises, which have thin, grassy foliage and slender spring blossoms that give them a graceful elegance. Unlike their cousin, the bearded iris, which requires good drainage, these irises will grow in shallow, standing water.

Add a little sunshine to a partially shaded, wet area with the golden flowered ligularia. Like the Joe-Pye, they attract butterflies and are deer resistant.

A good ground cover is the creeping Jenny. It has chartreuse foliage and small, bright yellow blooms and will even climb beautifully over rocks and structure as long as its roots stay moist.

The unique form of the dwarf papyrus makes it a great focal point in a swampy garden. It has a grassy stem topped by a starburst of long, thin bamboo-like leaves.

So, you see, your landscape doesn't have to be hampered by that annoying low, soggy spot. You can add color, variety and impact to an area that was once an eyesore with these and many other moisture loving plants.

Not Too Late To Plant

By Melissa Starr, JCMG

March and April were busy months for gardeners. However, roller coaster temperatures, torrential rains, and flooding have left many gardeners frustrated and wondering what they will be able to harvest this year. Have no fear; there is still time to plant vegetables and flowers while performing other garden chores.

Several different vegetables can still be planted now. It is probably too late to plant small tomato plants, but if you find one that is large enough to have blooms, you still have time to plant it. If you hurry, you can still plant peppers, eggplant, and cucumbers. Don't forget to add a little nitrogen fertilizer to tomatoes and peppers when they begin to bloom. Apply the fertilizer about 12 inches from the base of the plant to maximize production.

If you have cool season vegetables that are bolting (going to seed), pull them up and plant summer vegetables in their place. The best summer vegetables/fruit to plant are okra, southern peas, watermelon, and sweet potatoes.

May is also a good time to maintain flower beds. If you haven't pruned your azaleas and other spring blooming shrubs, do it now. This will promote new growth and keep them shaped up for next year. Remove dead blossoms from your roses and other spring and summer flowering perennials.

This will increase their flower production throughout the year. You can also prune old blossoms off of spring annuals, such as pansies and snapdragons, to lengthen their growing season. If you have spring blooming bulbs, leave the foliage on them until it yellows. This will help feed the bulb and give it time to mature.

The summer heat is near, so many summer annuals can be seeded or transplanted. Plant zinnias, sunflowers, and cosmos in May, but wait until late May or early June to plant vincas.

It is not too late to transplant shrubs and other perennials. If transplanting now, make sure to water them regularly through the summer. Do not water them too much, however, because their roots will not grow well in soggy soil. Before watering, check the ground next to the plant and the native soil surrounding the plant. If they are both dry, these plants need to be watered. Perennials for sunny areas include, but are not limited to, Shasta daisy, coreopsis, mallow, salvia (many varieties), daylily, and summer phlox. Shade loving perennials include phlox (can be planted in

partial sun), ferns, hosta, and liriop.

In addition, don't forget to fertilize your citrus trees this month. Go to <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/fruit-nut/fact-sheets/citrus/> for more information.



Mayday Throughout Time

By Eileen Slater, JCMG

Traditional May Day celebrations were agricultural festivals known for the coming of summer and associated with flowers and trees. The earliest known May Day celebrations date back to pre-Christian time. The Celts celebrated Beltane, a Gaelic May Day. It was held halfway between the spring equinox and summer solstice. Cattle, doors, windows and byres were adorned with yellow May flowers. The yellow flowers were believed to be primrose, hawthorn, gorse, hazel and marsh marigold. These flowers were sometimes made into bouquets, garlands or crosses. These flowers likely imitated fires commonly started as part of the celebration. The May bush was a small tree or branch decorated with bright flowers, ribbons, painted shells and so forth. There were household May bushes and community May bushes. Community May bushes were decorated by whole neighborhoods.

In ancient Roman times, Flora, the goddess of the flowers, was celebrated by the wearing of floral wreaths in your hair. The Floralia festival began in Rome between 238-240 B.C. This holiday ran from April 28-May 3 and was officially determined by Julius Caesar when he fixed the Roman calendar. The Romans introduced these rituals to Britain and they were integrated into May pole dancing.

Many of our May Day celebrations are traced to medieval England. At that time the English would celebrate by going out into the country or woods, "going a maying", and gathering greenery and flowers or "bringing in the May." May poles or May trees were found

in every English village. Trees symbolized great vitality and fertility of nature and were often used at the spring festivals of antiquity. Dances were held around the tree.

May Day is celebrated in many ways here in America. It is the Feast Day of St. Joseph the Worker, Law Day, Loyalty Day and Lei Day. The pure white lily is associated with Mary for the Feast of Saint Joseph the Worker.



In Hawaii, the first of May is celebrated with the tradition of the lei and since 1929 has been called Lei Day. Plumerias, orchids, maile leaves and ti leaves are commonly used to fashion garlands or wreaths

called leis.

In Texas, practices include school children holding ribbons while dancing around the May pole, annual community festivals, dances, parades, barbecues and crowning of the May queen. May Day baskets can be made of paper plates, cups or tiny baskets and filled with fresh flowers, cookies or candies. Hang one on a neighbor or friend's door to celebrate the day as a gentle reminder of this ancient custom. Pinterest has a plethora of ideas for ways to celebrate May Day next year! Or, if you wish to get into the May Day spirit, remember the 2nd annual May Pole Festival on Saturday, May 7, from noon to 6:30 pm at Beaumont Botanical Gardens.

In the meantime, Happy May Day to all!

Ground Covers Aid Moisture and Upkeep *By Micah Shanks, JCMG*

If you haven't taken advantage of groundcovers and ornamental grasses, take another look. Both can be valuable problem solvers and are generally lower maintenance than your lawn and flowerbeds! They can grow in almost any soil and/or light condition, and they add height, texture and color to your landscape. They often bloom when all other plants have stopped, so take this into consideration when planning seasonal color. Groundcovers also have the added benefit of preventing erosion and holding in moisture. In Texas, we

are fortunate to be able to grow a wide variety of these plants, and there is a place in every garden for one or two.

For instance, if you have a flagstone patio that has a little bit of shade during the day, consider tucking some dwarf mondo grass between the stones. It will provide year round color, never needs mowing and grows to only 3 inches. This is also a good choice for pathways and borders.



Another one of my favorites is ajuga, commonly known as bugleweed. It comes in purple, white, blue, and rose. I particularly like the variety called Chocolate Chip. I have used this at the base of trees, around shrubs and in small pockets in flower beds. It has a low spreading habit and tiny, deep blue blooms in the spring. Ajuga is a good option for a cascading plant over a wall or edging. It will wilt in the heat, but pop right back up in moist soil.

Strawberries also provide a beautiful groundcover with the added benefit of berries in the spring. They reproduce from runners and will fill an area rather quickly. Strawberries are normally planted as an annual in our area because older plants make smaller berries. However, if you just want the foliage, there is no reason to dig

them up.

Pink Muhly is an autumn favorite at my house. After the summer flowers are gone, this plant, which has stayed light green all year, suddenly explodes into a deep rich pink, making sure there is color throughout the year.

The Latest Dirt

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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

44th Annual Fruit and Vegetable Show
Saturday, June 11
9am—Noon; Judging at Noon
Central Mall, Port Arthur

Lawn & Ornamental Care Program
May 31, 10am—Noon; Lunch Provided
Hardin County Extension Office
Pre-register by May 27; 246-5128
\$20 payable at the door
Speaker Tim Hartman, Earthkind
Program Specialist

Fruit Tree & Vegetable Garden Program
May 23, 9am—12:30pm
Lunch provided
Hardin County Extension Office
440 W. Monroe St, Kountze
Pre-register by May 19
246-5128
\$20 fee payable at the door
2 CEUs offered