

November 2017

Volume 9, Issue 4



Official Newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners

## *Agent's Two Cents*

### *David Oates, Horticulture Agent*

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The Fall season is finally here for those folks who have been looking forward to some cooler temperatures and some milder weather. For those folks that braved the almost “pleasantly” cool weather to work in their yard or garden, it has been a refreshing treat to do so without the discomfort of the heat or the mosquitos. I would encourage everyone to take advantage of all the cooler days and evenings that we have been experiencing recently and to work on their garden chore list. I know that my own list is pretty extensive. Take advantage of these cooler days to cross off some those daunting tasks on your lists.

Most folks or their neighbors have been fighting a battle with insect damage to their lawns and trees or have been over-run with a nasty weed problem in their lawns and gardens. Depending on where you live in Southeast Texas, you have probably experienced some damage to your lawn from the Sod Webworm this fall. This very aggressive insect has damaged a lot of turf area this year in a short period of time. The comment that I have heard most often from folks is that they have never seen such an extensive amount of damage from an insect. If the

insects were not enough, most lawns in these areas have become home to a huge amount of Va. Button Weed. This overly-aggressive weed spreads quickly and can begin to compete with lawn grasses for nutrients.

As gardeners here in southeast Texas, we have learned to deal with adversity on a daily basis. We never really know what to expect from the weather or what major hurdle may lie ahead in the form of insects or weed damage. As gardeners here in Southeast Texas, we seem to defy the odds every season and have a victory in the landscape despite all the challenges.

As Southeast Texas and Jefferson County continues to rebuild from the damage caused by hurricane Harvey, our thoughts and prayers still go out to the residents who were affected in some way by the flooding and damages that occurred. I have seen the absolute best result from the amazing residents since this storm. It is simply a neighbor helping their neighbor, a stranger helping a stranger, and family and friends helping each other in a time of need. Residents of Southeast Texas will return stronger and better than ever before.

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

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

November 9 -

December 9—Christmas Party at Extension Office in Auditorium

January 11—

## Behind The Garden Gate

By Eileen Slater, JCMG, President

Hurricanes are funny things. They all have their own personality and levels of destruction. Some are windy like Hurricane Rita. Hurricane Ike brought in flood waters from the Gulf of Mexico. We had a rain party with Hurricane Harvey. We learn something new from each one. I have learned of the resilience of the people all along the Texas coast. We help each other. We don't blame. We get up and do. You have heard the phrases used after this hurricane, "We are Texas" and "Texas Strong." It sounds good and feels good. But it hurts to see the people who have lost homes, cars and businesses.

Jack Brooks Airport officially reported 47.5 inches of rain. I believe in some parts of Jefferson County it was different. One local engineer I know collected rainwater in a bucket and inserted a ruler to measure the rainfall. He measured 52 inches on the west end of Beaumont. From what I heard from friends in Mid-County and Port Arthur, the rainfall was closer to 60-62 inches of rain. Only God Himself knows!

After caring for our homes and for people's needs, our yards and gardens will need attention. All plants, trees and shrubs are under stress due to this historic flood. Some of us have fresh floodwater, and some of us have polluted floodwater from oil, pesticides and sewage. These waters brought debris and silt to yards which will need to be removed from every plant, tree, shrub, lawn and garden. After debris removal, wash all plants with fresh water. Heavy rains can leach available nutrients from the soil in the landscape. Fertilize trees, shrubs and lawns next spring.

Trees- Trees are stressed and need a longer recovery. Remove large branches that are broken but still hanging in the tree by pruning

outside the branch collar. Pruning next to the trunk will invite disease. Fruit on trees touched by flood waters should be discarded and not eaten. Eat fruit from trees that produce in the future.

Shrubs-Trim broken branches. After flood waters recede, remove all mulches from around shrubs and beds. Allow the soil to dry. Reapply mulch.

Lawn-Turf can be lost after 4 days of continued submersion and may be severely damaged or killed. Rye grass or dormant sod may be planted for the winter. New seed, sod or sprigs can be planted in the spring. Raise your mower's cutting height a notch to help the turf regenerate a stronger root system.

Garden and Food Crops-Remove and discard any fruit, vegetable or herb touched by floodwaters. Eat only new growth of herbs and vegetables produced after the floodwaters subside. To help garden beds dry out use a garden fork. Place the fork down in the soil 6 to 8 inches deep and pull straight out. Repeat every 10 inches. Digging with the fork is not recommended.

Diseases-Root rot causes wilting, scorched or brown leaves, leaf drop, dieback or kills the plant. Little can be done after this occurs. Expect to see more leaf spot disease. Leaf spot may show up on crape myrtles. Roses may have black spot.

Because of this untimely natural disaster, the Jefferson County Master Gardeners cancelled their annual Fall Sale. We will again host the Spring Plant Sale on April 14, 2018, so that new plants will be available for you to plant in your landscape.

### Behind The Garden Gate (continued)

Bring your unwrapped white elephant Christmas gift and wrapping paper or bags to the November meeting. The Social Committee will wrap the gifts for the December Christmas party. Our Christmas party will be December 9, 2017 for installation of 2018 officers. We will also honor the JCMG Master Gardener of the Year and JCMG Intern of the Year.

Tuesday, Jan. 16- Friday, Jan. 26, 2018, is our Jefferson County Master Gardener short course. Some topics include landscaping, viticulture, lawns, Earth Kind production and plants, plant botany and roses. Encourage all you know to attend.

God's peace and blessings to all as we go forward to build our community. "We are Texas" and "Texas Strong". Yes, this I still believe.

## *The Many Fruits of the Elderberry Bush* *By Ann Bares, JCMG*

There are times from the past, distant and recent, that remind me that the best times are the ones that make me smile and give thanks. None more than my elderberry tree, a gift from a friend, with a jar of dark, purple juice, a jar of jelly and a bag of elderberries, fresh from the tree. As we enjoyed the jelly with hot biscuits and read the recipe, I knew I would make this soon to share with other friends, and I did. Printing out the recipe, I found that these tiny, dark, and juicy berries were full of antioxidants, rich flavor and would stain my fingers a dark blue! I was already planning where I would plant them, but needed more information.

I learned this was a lovely, spreading, small tree or shrub with beautiful dark green leaves that in the spring and summer holds clusters of tiny white flowers that become dark blue, black or red berries loved by birds. I watched my tree carefully and put a net over the top to protect my berries. When the crown is covered with color, I clip the stem off and shake it gently into a bowl to release the berries without losing any juice. I then keep them cool until I have enough to make jelly or jam.

I planted my two small cuttings on the west side of the house, under the shade of the neighbor's tree in rich, rocky soil and protected by my wood fence. It's a good landscape plant but doesn't like its roots disturbed, so I suggest planting all plants at the same time. Mine are now eight feet tall! I look forward to making jelly in the spring and think of my friend and fellow Master Gardener, Robert Bradberry, when I see the first berries on the tree and wish he was here to have a biscuit with us, with some of his elderberry jelly.



# Pumpkins

By Tim Schreck, JCMG

My heart goes out to those still dealing with the effects of Harvey. We were lucky and only got six inches of water in our house. I lost all the plants for my fall garden and everything in our raised beds. We are blessed to see renovation estimates put us back in our house before Thanksgiving. This is especially great news since Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays and is mainly due to pumpkin pie being readily available everywhere I go. I like mine with a good bit of cinnamon and ginger with only a hint of nutmeg, but who is dreaming right now?

Pumpkins originated near Mexico over 7500 years ago. The first ones did not resemble the oranges ones we know today but were hard and bitter. American Indians cultivated them into something similar to what is used today. The American Indians used them in their diet for centuries and had many other uses including cutting the rinds in strips and weaving them into mats. In 1584 French explorer, Jacques Cartier found “gros melons” (large melons) while exploring the St. Lawrence area, and brought them back to Europe where the English translated the French pompon to pompon. Immigrants brought the word back to the Americas as pumpkin.

The colonists created the traditional pumpkin pie by cutting off the tops of the pumpkin, pulling out the seeds, and filling the inside with milk, honey, and spices. The pumpkin was then put in the dying ashes of a fire to cook, and the insides were scrapped out as a soup or thick mush and served.

Jack ‘O Lanterns are another reason I like pumpkins. There is not enough room in this article to tell you the whole story, but there was a tradition in Europe to carve out large turnips or potatoes and put a little glowing ember inside to scare off Stingy Jack. For a funny story, look him up the next time you are on the Internet. When immigrants came to America, they found pumpkins a better substitute for turnips and potatoes.



If you are feeling incredibly adventurous in Southeast Texas, pumpkin seeds are planted in early May and take around 120 days to mature. Since pumpkins are a squash, they have the same

problems as any squash would, especially with squash vine borers. Pumpkins take so long to mature that only one borer can easily prevent a pumpkin from reaching maturity. Proper management of the pest by covers or insecticides will be needed to get just a few pumpkins to maturity. We get so much rain here that you must keep the pumpkins up off the ground on a good high pile of hay to keep them dry. They require a lot of work, keeping them well watered during summer droughts since pumpkins are 80-90% water. Pumpkins are one of the easiest seeds to save and propagate for next year, so if you are in for an adventure, try pumpkins next year.

## Left Over Citrus

By Melissa Starr, JCMG

This year, many citrus trees were inundated by flood waters, causing citrus fruit to rot on the vine. However, if your citrus crop survived Harvey's flood waters, you may have a bumper crop. There are far more uses for leftover citrus than one might imagine (hint: not just talking about food).

November is the season for pumpkins, scarecrows, turkeys and citrus. Before I became a Master Gardener, my parents introduced me to satsuma trees.

Every year, they harvested hundreds of satsumas and lemons and gave away bags full of them. Once all of our friends and family had enough, my mom would start juicing the rest. Now I have citrus trees, but what can be done with the overflow?

There are many culinary uses for citrus. My favorite is making satsuma jelly. To make this scrumptious jelly, bring 3 1/2 to 4 cups of satsuma juice, 2 teaspoons lemon juice and 1 package Sure-Jell to a boil in a tall pot. Stir continuously until the juice reaches a hard boil that will not stir down, add 5 cups sugar and bring to a hard boil again. Time for one minute while stirring. Put in sterilized half pint jars and process in a water bath for 10 minutes.



There are thousands of citrus recipes on the Internet, but do leftover citrus peels have uses in the garden? Citrus peels will add nitrogen to compost piles. When dried and ground into a powder, they will add sulfur, calcium and magnesium to soil. One savvy gardener suggests taking orange peels, cutting slits in them and sliding them onto plants to keep away aphids. Butterflies are attracted to citrus peels left in a dish in your garden. They love to drink the juice left on the peels.

Citrus is also a good pest repellent for pets. Orange peels contain d-Limonene which repels fleas and ticks. Simmer orange peels with water and strain them, and you have a natural repellent spray for dogs.

If you have any prize citrus you would like to showcase, bring three of your best, cleaned and polished, to the Citrus Show at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office, 1225

Pearl Street, #200, Beaumont. We accept entries 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 15, and 9 a.m. to noon Thursday, Nov. 16. The winners will be announced and a lecture on growing citrus (\$10 admission) will be presented 6 to 8:30 p.m. Nov. 16.

## *Christmas Amaryllis* *Micah Leigh, JCMG*

You may have received an amaryllis bulb this holiday season, and may be wondering what to do with it. Well, you are in luck. The amaryllis is one of the easiest plants to grow, indoors or out. Native to South America, the amaryllis is well suited to our tropical climate. It comes in several shades of red, white, pink, salmon and orange. There are also multi-colored and striped varieties. The prices can range from \$4.00 to \$40.00 for a single bulb depending on the variety.

If your bulb came prepackaged, all you have to do is follow the directions in order to get it to bloom. If you have a bare bulb that you intend to grow in a container, place it in lukewarm water for a few hours before you plant. Use a good potting soil and plant the bulb up to its top being careful not to damage the roots. Press the soil firmly around the bulb to hold it in place. Water lightly. Place the container in a warm place with direct natural light if possible. Amaryllis will grow under fluorescent light but only if it is left on round the clock. Water when the soil feels dry to the touch. Once a month, fertilize with a water-soluble plant food. Blooms will appear in 7-10 weeks. And they will be spectacular!

If you want to make it flower again, cut the old flowers from the stem. Then cut the stem down to the bulb when it starts to wither. Continue to water and feed as usual for at least 5-6 months. When the leaves begin to yellow in early fall, cut the plant back to 2 inches from the top of the bulb. Remove the



bulb from the soil, clean it and place it in a dark cool place. Your refrigerator will work just fine unless you have apples next to the bulb in which case, the amaryllis bulb will become sterile. Keep stored for at least 6 weeks. After the chill time, decide when you want them to bloom again, and plant 8

weeks beforehand. If all of this seems like too much trouble, you can always plant them outside in your garden. I am a low maintenance gardener. I have many bright red ones that have naturalized in my flowerbeds. I do nothing special to them and they come back stronger year after year. That's my favorite kind of plant!

## *Leaf Footed Stink Bugs*

*By Melissa Starr, JCMG*

After Harvey, there was an explosion of flying insects. One of these pesky bugs is the leaf-footed stink bug. Adult leaf-footed bugs are brown, close to an inch long and their hind legs are shaped like a narrow leaf. The nymph, or younger version of this pest, has a soft body and is an orange-red color. They look a lot like the Assassin bug, a beneficial insect. However, leaf-footed stink bugs in the nymph stage cluster together. It is not an easy task to get rid of these bugs in the garden.

The leaf-footed bug sucks juices from plants and fruit. Its favorite fruit is tomatoes, but it can also cause damage to citrus. Damage can range from discoloration of the rind to dry spots in the fruit itself. Because these bugs tend to gather in one place, sometimes only one citrus tree will have damaged fruit while another tree's fruit is left untouched. Satsumas are their citrus of choice because they ripen early and the rind is thin. Most thick-skinned citrus will not show stink bug damage.



Nymphs (youngsters)

There are several methods to control the leaf-footed bug population. Insecticidal sprays can be used. Our horticulture agent, David Oates, recommends using malathion, permethrin based products or cyfluthrin based products to control adult leaf-footed bugs. If insecticides are used close to harvest, read the label and follow the “days-to-harvest period” on the product and wash the fruit before eating. If leaf-footed bug nymphs are seen, insecticidal soaps or neem oil can be used. However, they do not kill the adult bugs.

To control leaf-footed bugs organically, some planning is necessary. Overwintering sites, such as woodpiles, should be removed. Weedy areas are also a food source when fruits are not plentiful, so keep weedy areas closely mowed or remove weeds altogether. Leaf-footed bugs can also be physically removed by hand or with a handheld vacuum. If removed by hand, wear gloves to prevent the stench from getting on hands. Leaf-footed bugs only produce one generation per season, so this method can be helpful if the gardener is persistent.



Adults

## O Christmas Tree! O Christmas Tree!

By Eileen Slater, JCMG

O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum, wie treu sind deine Blätter! Our children's church choir was taught this song by an elderly German lady whose name is long forgotten but not the lesson. The song resonates in my heart from so long ago. Images of the fresh 20-foot Christmas tree laden with delicate handmade Christmas ornaments during the Christmas Eve service always brings a joyous smile. I continue to worship faithfully at the Christmas Eve service in the rural church that my grandparents help found, in which my mother and my siblings were raised and where my brothers and their wives still attend. Yes, a Christmas tree is still there.

Another Christmas family tradition is to go into the woods or a local Christmas tree farm and cut your own. Known Christmas tree farms in our area include: Beavers Christmas Tree Farm in Nome, Bozeman Christmas Tree Farm in Lumberton and K&K Evergreen Farm in Orange. You may also go to a local grocery store or large commercial business to purchase your tree.

A fresh tree will have a fragrant aroma, healthy branches and firmly attached green needles. To test the freshness of the tree, tap the tree trunk on the ground. Lots of falling needles indicates dryness. At home, cut off at least one-half inch from the base of the tree trunk to improve water absorption. Allow the tree to sit in a bucket of water in a cool, shaded area for 1-2 days. A tree may absorb as much as a gallon of water the first day. The Christmas tree stand should hold at least a quart of water per inch of stem

diameter. Check the water level daily. Keep the tree away from heat sources for the health of the tree and safety of your home. Avoid allowing pets or children to drink water from the Christmas tree stand.

Some people prefer a living Christmas tree. This is a Christmas tree planted in a container that is decorated and used inside before Christmas and afterwards planted outside. Choose a tree grown in a 3-15-gallon container because anything bigger will be harder to move indoors and outdoors. Keep your tree in the brightest natural light possible. Check the soil moisture daily and keep the soil moist but not saturated. Use a large plastic container under the pot to protect your floors. Keep the living tree inside for 2-3 weeks. Plant the tree outside immediately after Christmas so the root system has time to develop.

The Christmas memories you make today will be forever etched in your children's minds!



## The Latest Dirt

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Beaumont, TX 77701

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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.

### 2017 Officers

President—Eileen Slater

Vice President—Jeanene Ebeling

Secretary—Sarah Sloan

Treasurer—Joyce Logan

At Large—James Butaud, Lisa Hitt, Glenn Watz

Past President—Tina Gonzales

## Announcements

**Veteran's Park Clean Up day**  
**Friday, November 3**

**Christmas Party and  
Intern Graduation  
December 9th  
AgriLife Auditorium**  
**Appetizers 6pm; Dinner 6:30pm**  
**Please RSVP by Dec. 1st**  
**Free to MG and 1 guest**  
**Pay \$10 for additional guests at  
November meeting or send to  
Extension Office**

**Golden Triangle Citrus Show**  
**Enter November 15, 9-4 or**  
**November 16, 9-Noon**  
**Entries are free**  
**Program November 16**  
**6-8:30pm \$10/person**

**Master Gardener Shortcourse**  
**January 16 through 26**  
**9am—4pm Cost \$175**  
**Registration due by December 22**  
**Call for registration form or get it on**  
**the website [www.jefferson.agrilife.org](http://www.jefferson.agrilife.org)**