



The Latest Dirt

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Upcoming Meetings:

February 11

March 11

April 8

Message From The President

JCMG Members,

I know everyone is happy that 2020 is behind us and we are looking forward to 2021.

Now is a good time to clean out the flower and garden beds and get them ready for spring planting. I am still harvesting spinach, cayenne peppers and jalapeno peppers. This year's Meyer Lemon and Navel orange production netted 12 dozen oranges and twice as many lemons from one tree each.

It is also time to prune and fertilize roses. I like to work Nature's Way fine mulch in my rose beds and cover with pine straw. I fertilized with a granular rose fertilizer and soaked them with diluted fish emulsion.

This year my flower beds are going to include sweet peas. You need a fence or trellis for them to grow on and lots of sun. The seeds need to be planted early for spring and summer blooms.

Many of us have oak trees and we always want a nice bed at the base but oak trees grab all the nutrients and water making it a struggle for anything we plant around it to survive, much less thrive. I have had some luck with Boston ferns but ferns can

be boring when you would like to see some color. Last fall, I found an article on Snowflakes (*Leucojum aestivum*). They are bulbs and bloom in February for about six weeks. They do well in southern gardens and Texas heat, but the best thing about them is that they thrive under pecan and oak trees. I ordered bulbs, and they shipped in September for fall planting. They are beginning to appear, and several have started to bloom. Their bloom is similar to lily-of-the-valley flowers. Hopefully, I have found a flower that will bloom year after year under my oak trees.

I am also looking forward to a productive blueberry season. I have a two-year-old Premier and Brightwell bush, and I recently planted a Vernon for additional pollination.

I hope that whatever type of gardening you do, whether flowers or vegetables, you do it because you love working in the dirt and watching what you planted grow.

Have a good time in your garden!

Brenda Beadle
JCMG

Agent's Two Cents

By David Oates, Horticulture Extension Agent

The spring season is slowly approaching here in Southeast Texas as gardeners begin to stir after our taste of winter weather this year. Parts of the state received extensive snowfall in mid-January of 2021. Southeast Texas just received a lot of rainfall and some cold temperatures instead. As temperatures begin to rebound and adjust back to normal, most gardeners are beginning to plan their early spring activities with a bit of reluctance as 2020 ended and the new 2021 year progresses.

The Jefferson County AgriLife Extension office in corporation with Jefferson County Master Gardeners were scheduled to have their annual Master Gardener new intern training in the month of February. Unfortunately, we decided to postpone this program at this time and reschedule for a later date in the year due to Covid-19 issues with scheduling of speakers and participants. We know that a lot of enthusiastic participants and residents are still interested in extension related programs and gardening activities. We feel that this postponement is in the best interest of all parties involved including volunteers, staff and the general public.

Our goal here in the Agrilife Ex-

tension and Master Gardener's programs has not changed. We are still committed to providing quality agricultural education and experiences for the residents of Jefferson County and surroundings areas. There have been and will be changes to how some of the traditional programs are delivered due to Covid-19 responses. Most folks are adjusting well to some of the new digital and online programming changes.

I am happy to let folks know that despite the postponement of our Master Gardener Intern education class, most of the speakers are still interested in visiting with our program and have agreed to come and be guest speakers during the year at a later date. I believe this interest in the volunteer programs of Agrilife Extension, such as the Master Gardeners program, proves that these programs are of value and benefit to the community.

Be on the lookout for some of these speakers possibly in digital formats in the upcoming months. We hope these speakers and their programs will be an educational event and activity that will entice everyone to become interested in horticultural activities here in Southeast Texas.

"The spring season is slowly approaching here in Southeast Texas as gardeners begin to stir after our taste of winter weather this year."

Master Gardener of the Year

STELLINA REED

By: Melissa Starr, JCMG



Stellina Reed is what the epitome of the qualities of Master Gardener of the Year. Stellina can work with anyone and in any situation. No matter what the project, she is willing to pitch in and lend a hand. She has

been part of the Jefferson County Master Gardener Board off and on for 8 years and has held several different offices. She is currently a Member-at-Large and is the perfect representative for this office. When the JCMG President needs help with a task, Stellina is there to assist in any way possible. She volunteered to water the gardens during the COVID pandemic last summer, when we could not have organized work-days, so that the plants didn't die in the heat. She also volunteered to help in all parts of the Fruit and Nut tree sale, working with other Master Gardeners to educate the public and provide quality plants. In addition, she assisted the Texas A&M Agriculture Extension Agent by willingly cleaning out plants and weeds from under the oak tree so that he could plant azaleas for a research project. She is always willing to try new things and ideas.

Not only is Stellina a constant worker, but also a leader. She took the lead in re-vamping the herb garden. She worked with and organized the digging up, repotting, and planting of herbs in the garden. She trimmed plants and mulched the beds, and then she worked with others to set up a test area for drought tolerant plants. Her leadership is also shown in her dependability to be at almost every event that the JCMGs sponsor. She always has a smile and a kind word for everyone. She is a dependable leader and volunteer inside and out.

A message from Stellina: I have sincerely enjoyed being a Master Gardener for the past 13 years. When you are having fun, time just flies by. Because of JCMGs, I now have some very close friends with whom I enjoy working in the soil and taking pleasure in the fruits of our shared labor. Initially, I signed up for the short course classes just to find out why some plants in my garden thrived while others just did not survive at all. I had no idea how much there was to learn. I must confess that for about a year after graduating, I didn't even admit to being a Master Gardener because I was so afraid of not knowing how to give a proper answer to a question that might be posed to me. The amount of information the "senior" Master Gardeners and the Agents have passed on, just in casual conversation, is astonishing. Listening to them gave me the confidence to finally admit to being a certi-

Master Gardener of the Year cont.

certified Master Gardener and to know with conviction that I could give the correct answer, find the appropriate answer or give pertinent advice about gardening dilemmas. It's the continuous learning process which holds my interest and has kept me active with the JCMG program.

Thank you to everyone for this honor and for all of your kindness, friendship, and support.



Crepe Myrtle Pruning

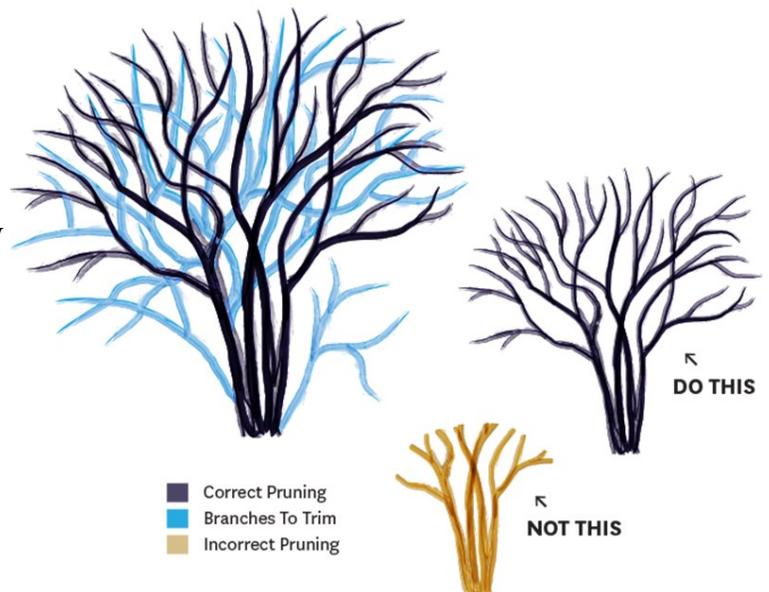
By: Melissa Starr, JCMG

As I drove home this evening, I saw my first “pruned” crepe myrtle. Every winter many well-intentioned people unnecessarily ruin these graceful trees by what I’ve heard many informed gardeners call it “crepe murder.” Chopping half the height of crepe myrtle trees with a chain saw not only stresses the trees, but destroys their natural shape and form. Here are a few tips from our extension agent, David Oates, that will help make your crepe myrtles the highlight of your landscape.

Never use pruning as a means of height control for crepe myrtles. It is never proper “to prune standard crepe myrtles back.” In other words, never “top” any large crepe myrtle at any time for any purported reason. All crepe myrtles are, by their nature, shrubs. As landscapers taught us beginning in the 1950s and early 1960s, we can remove lower branches of taller types so that they will look like small trees. However, they will continue to send up sprouts around their bases. If you do not remove those sprouts as they develop, your plant will revert to a growing shrub-form. Crepe myrtles flower on new growth, so you can often stimulate additional new growth and second, third and even fourth rounds of flowering by removing spent flower heads as soon as the last petals have fallen. Allowing them to go to seed will slow or halt further flowering for that growing season.

When pruning crepe myrtles, make each cut

flush with another branch or with the main trunk. Never leave stubs larger than a pencil-width in diameter when cutting any part of a crepe myrtle. That rule alone will prevent topping of crepe myrtles, known by many as “crepe murder.” It is the single worst and most threatening practice in routine crepe myrtle maintenance. Prune above buds and twigs that face out from the center of your crepe myrtle. Those will be the new shoots that will develop. Your goal is to encourage open, spreading growth so that limbs won’t rub together and air movement will flow through the centers of the plants. Powdery mildew is a threat to crepe myrtles, and overly dense canopies encourage its development.



Bareroot Trees

By: Brenda Beadle, JCMG

Trees, plants and shrubs become dormant during the cold winter months. Less daylight encourages plants, trees and shrubs to rest and put their energy into their root system. As a result, this is the time to plant bare root trees and roses in the landscape.

When purchasing bare root trees, they will be packaged to keep the roots moist. As you unpack the trees, untangle the roots and soak in water for 3 to 6 hours to prevent them from drying out.

When digging a hole for planting, make sure to allow for additional width so the roots can grow outward without crowding. After unlacing the bare roots, partially fill the hole and compress soil around lower roots. Do not add amendments, fertilizer, chemicals or potting soil. Add remaining soil firmly but do not pack. Water the tree and then add mulch around the base without touching the trunk.

The soil should be moist but not saturated with water. This can be tricky in Southeast Texas since the winters are

usually rainy; therefore, it is important that the tree be planted in an area with good drainage.

If the location of the newly planted tree is subject to damage by rabbits, deer or other wildlife, you might want to protect it by installing a chicken wire fence.

Planting bare root trees results in more vigorous growth than container grown trees because container grown trees need more time to adjust to transplanting. Bare root stock will be stronger and wider resulting in better anchorage once established. Bareroot trees do not experience transplant shock and they tend to have a higher rate of survival than container grown trees. Additionally, bare root trees are less expensive than container grown trees.



YOU KNOW YOU'RE A GARDENER IF:



1 You consider well aged feces a thoughtful gift.

6 You sometimes forget your to-do list because the plants need staring at.

2 When you see someone trimming trees, you wonder if you could use a cutting of that.

7 You think store bought tomatoes are disgusting.

3 You have taken bags of leaves (i.e., other people's trash) off the street to use as mulch.

8 A sale at the nursery is more exciting than a sale at the department store.

4 You have saved pits or seeds from fruit you liked, in your purse or pocket, to sprout at home. If they sprouted, you were momentarily intoxicated with your godlike ability to create life.

9 When you meet someone who likes to garden, you feel an immediate and unbreakable bond with them. You also wonder whether their harvests are better than yours.

5 You hoard yogurt containers, plastic bottles and egg cartons. What? They're useful in the garden!

10 You would not be reading this if it were not about GARDENING!

Laras_Garden_

The Latest Dirt

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We're On The Web:

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MISSION STATEMENT

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

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Vice President—Dorothy Norris

Secretary—Debby Parker

Treasurer—Susanne Wakeman

At Large— Kevin Pierce, Stellina Reed,
John Hughes

Newsletter Staff:

Editor: Melissa Starr

Announcements

Online Winter Fruit/Nut Tree and Rose Sale

January 29 through February 4, 2021
To order go to <https://txmg.org/jcmg>
And click "Shop Now"

Orders will be picked up at the garden on Saturday, February 6.