

May 2015

Volume 7, Issue 2



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Official Newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners

## *May Gardening Tips* *By Melissa Starr, JCMG*

March and April are busy months for gardeners. However, roller coaster temperatures, torrential rains, and hail 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 accomplishing other gardening chores.

Many stores are discounting spring vegetables, so you can pick some up at a reasonable price. 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 may still have time to plant a few peppers, eggplant, and summer squash. Don't forget to add a little nitrogen fertilizer to your 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), you can pull those up and plant summer vegetables in

their place. The best summer vegetables/fruit to plant now are okra, southern peas, watermelon, and sweet potatoes.

May is also a good time to do flower bed maintenance. 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 your vincas.

It is not too late to transplant shrubs and other perennials. If transplanting now, make sure you

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

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

May 14 - "Succulents"  
J. Gregory

June 11 — TBA

July — No Meeting

## *May Gardening Tips (continued)*

water them regularly through the summer. Do not water them too much, however, because their roots will not grow well in soggy soil. Before you water, check the ground next to the plant and the native soil surrounding the plant. If they are both dry, you will need to water. Perennials for the

sun include, but are not limited to, Shasta daisy, coreopsis, mallow, salvia (many varieties), day-lily and summer phlox. Shade loving perennials include phlox (can be planted in partial sun), ferns, hosta and liriopse.

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.

## *Remembering Our Friend, Kay Drake*

*By Sarah Sloan and Ann Bares*

Our friend and fellow Master Gardener, Kay Drake, has been a friend, teacher and mentor to so many. It's hard to imagine having an event, seminar, or Master Gardener meeting without Kay. We looked forward to her ideas, her help and always one of her desserts. A Port Arthur native, Kay graduated from Thomas Jefferson High and Methodist Hospital School of Nursing. Her kind and patient manner was the perfect choice for a nursing career and endeared her to the staff and the many nurses who were able to complete their continuing education hours at the Hospital during her 35 years of service at St. Mary's.

A few years ago, Kay decided it would be fun, and a great fund raiser, to ask the Master Gardeners to share the recipes that they have prepared for all our many meetings, events and picnics. This became the JCMG "Favorite Recipes and Garden Tips" cookbook and, thanks to Kay, has been sold at all our Master Gardener and county events and enjoyed by many families in Southeast Texas and beyond.

Whatever the event, Kay would ask, "Where do you need me?" As a volunteer, she was always available. When she learned that the nursery in Houston who supplied most of our Plant Sale inventory couldn't deliver to us, she told us, "Don't worry; J.C. and I have the craft trailer with

shelves. We'll store our inventory and use it to pick up the plants." They did, keeping them carefully tended until the day of the sale. What a blessing that was! Kay's help prepping and preparing the food for our Christmas parties and graduations was always appreciated, and she was always there at the end to help clean up.

Kay was an active member of the United Methodist Women and the Missions Program at the United Methodist Temple. She chaired a new way to raise monies to fund one of the Mission's programs in 2014. She believed it was time for something different, so she organized an "Arts and Crafts Fair", sold booths, and held a very successful event.

Kay was generous in spirit, kind of heart and a good example of the person we all aspire to be. We will miss her smile and her gentle humor. She will be missed, but not forgotten.

In addition to her many friends, Kay is survived by her husband of 55 years, J. C. Drake; sister, Mary Ann Cavazos; two sons, Stephen Anthony Drake and wife Sue Ellen, Andrew Clinton Drake and fiancé Anne Margaret; two daughters, Elizabeth Ann Craigen and husband Kyle, Kelly Jean Kebodeaux and husband Kirk; grandchildren, Pamela Hughes, Jayce Drake, Katelyn, Karlene and Karyssa Kebodeaux, Taylor and William Craigen, and Sophia Dynne; great-grandchildren, Hannah and Joseph Hughes.

## *How I Learned To Keep Critters Out of My Garden*

### *By Ann Bares, JCMG*

In my gardening books, there is a wealth of information on garden pests: ants, aphids, beetles, caterpillars, ground wasps, hornworms, and on and on through the alphabet. These books contain both purchased and homemade remedies to keep the critters at bay without causing my garden to reek of chemicals or having to spray every two hours to make sure the stuff hasn't evaporated. Nowhere have I found any information on keeping the larger critters at bay in my gardening books, so I had to learn the hard way.

Now I'm a city gardener, so that day in 1976 when I walked the perimeter of our newly purchased lot, marveling at the big oaks and sweetgums, I wasn't expecting to feel the smooth weight of the big snake that slithered across my foot. It continued its journey for another three or more feet, making a trail in the tall grass. It wasn't in a hurry, but I was, and ran for help! Our neighbor identified it as a chicken snake, not venomous, but a great help in keeping down the mouse population. We made sure the crews that were clearing our lot didn't harm it, but as the house went up, it found a new home on the undeveloped land next to us.

After moving into our home, we added a small vegetable garden and a few landscape plants. We noticed that some of our smaller tomatoes and a few berries had been tasted and left below the plants, but we never saw any sign of animals or birds near them. One night a tiny bandit wearing a little mask appeared at the back door. With his hands against the glass pane, he was apparently checking us out, hoping for a handout. He later became a resident of one of the large oaks, drinking from our fish pond and sunning himself on the new wood fence. We put a bowl outside the back door and fed him once a day, which seemed to satisfy him since he stopped nibbling the tomatoes. I wouldn't suggest

keeping a raccoon as a pet, but he wasn't a nuisance as some guests can be after an extended stay. If you have a raccoon in your attic, put on some loud rock music, and they will evacuate ASAP!

With a garden, came a compost bed, and with that, came the opossums. Not only did they dig, they weren't cute. After dark, when our dog was inside, they feasted on compost. Animal control suggested traps, and they provided a pick-up service that soon had us possum-free.

Never planning to be multiple cat owners, we attracted them like magnets. No expensive remedies kept them out of the garden beds. Our expanding mint beds were not usable since our own cat loved to nap there and used it as his afternoon/ anytime "boys room." After our satsuma tree had an overabundance of fruit one year, we chopped some up and scattered it under the roses and into all 1,000 feet of beds. The cats hated it! I now use the peel inside to keep our diva-kitty out of the closets and cabinets. It was a suggestion from a cat magazine, not a gardening one.

I am sorry I can't help with the squirrels. Any and all suggestions would be appreciated!





## *Spring Market Day and Plant Sale*



Thank you to everyone who came and worked tirelessly to make this sale possible



## *Master Gardener of the Year*

### *Diane Davis*

Diane is an industrious and dynamic Master Gardener. Not only is she extremely dedicated, but she also possesses a wide range of horticulture knowledge which she shares in the garden and in the community. She has a special sage-like wisdom and passion for tomatoes and personally seeded over 20 varieties for the Spring Market Day as well as hundreds of other vegetables and blooming annuals. She has not only tended to the seedlings at the Demonstration Garden on a daily basis, but has also donated countless supplies to the garden as well as trailer loads of soil. She attended a variety of garden related seminars last year and was quick to impart all kinds of helpful information. As a garden team and plant sale team member, if you have a question about a plant, ask Diane!

Twice a year, the Master Gardeners plant seasonal flowers and spruce up perennials at the Veteran's Memorial Park in Port Arthur. Diane assisted in gathering donations of hardy plants and soil to make the park beautiful for Veteran's Day and Memorial Day. Her devotion didn't stop there; she went back to the park weekly to check the plants, prune and water as needed.



Diane has been a fixture at the JCMG Demonstration Garden. She was there at almost every workday in heat and cold, rain or shine. She has been seen planting seeds, transplanting in the greenhouse, watering, pushing a wheelbarrow, unloading mulch, weeding, mowing, and answering questions for visitors.

She has also answered questions at educational booths, such as those the Beaumont Botanical Gardens' butterfly release and at Port Arthur Wal-Mart's spring garden center opening, promoting the Master Gardener and AgriLife Extension goals and offering advice on butterfly and native plants. Diane has a wealth of knowledge that she enjoys sharing with others.

Recently, Diane has been struggling with some health issues, but she continues to volunteer wherever she can. Diane is an integral part of our Master Gardener community, and we are proud to call her Master Gardener of the Year for 2014!



## *Ferns*

### *By Micah Shanks, JCMG*

I have always been drawn to ferns. From the upright Kimberly Queen, to the fluffy Foxtail, to the delicate Maidenhair and everything in between, I love them all! Ferns were one of the first known plants on Earth, existing over a hundred million years before dinosaurs. Many ferns remain the same as their primeval ancestors. Botanists have identified eleven thousand different species!

Lucky for us, growing ferns is easy in South-east Texas. They love the tropical climate. All they need is partial shade and lots of moisture. I have several hanging baskets of Boston fern around my patio. When I purchase a new one, I immediately transplant it into a wire basket with a coconut fiber liner. That way, the fern has plenty of room to grow. Too many times, I have watched ferns get so big that the roots break the original plastic container. With the wire basket, it can actually grow right out of the bottom, which gives you a lovely full plant as opposed to one that is only top heavy.

Ferns are the stuff of magical tales. Flowering plants did not appear until two hundred million years after ferns, so there was much mystery surrounding this feathery plant. European folktales claim that the fern actually does bloom but only once a year on June 23, St. John's Eve, at the stroke of midnight, supposedly the same time that John the Baptist was born. Ferns were used to keep away vampires, werewolves and other evil spirits. Shepherds in ancient Normandy used crosses made from ferns to protect themselves and their flocks. In Slavic countries, if someone wanted to swim, ferns were first woven in their hair to protect them from freshwater sirens that would drown a mortal if given the chance.

Ferns are self procreating. They have no pollen, are not dependent on bees or birds, and are great at detoxifying the air. Therefore, ferns are a great choice as houseplants for just that purpose.





## *Starting Your Garden Right*

### *By Tim Schreck, JCMG*

The last few days have been beautiful spring days, and I am enjoying every minute of them outside. Since we finally had time to dry out, and we are past the last frost, most people are planting their gardens.

If you just purchased your plants or have just put the vegetables in the garden, you should keep a few things in mind to get off to a successful start. Remember that patience is a virtue in the garden. When you plant, especially seedlings, most plants will look like they are doing nothing for the first ten to fourteen days. If you have fertile ground, the plant is creating an elaborate root system to feed itself during this time. These young plants have rapidly developing root systems, and if they dry out, it can kill or severely stunt their growth. Many times you will buy seedlings that, when you pull them out of the 6-pack, will be root bound. If it is not too bad, you can go ahead and put them in the ground. The roots will grow deep and away from the plant just fine. If they are extremely root bound, the roots will have grown round and round and become entangled with each other in the pot. If you leave the roots in this condition, you limit the area and the amount of nutrients they can absorb. Before you plant, attempt to pull some of the roots loose using a pencil, or chop stick, taking extra care when pulling them loose, and then put them in the ground while carefully and firmly packing the soil in around the roots. For older root bound plants, you definitely need to pull the roots out and cut a few of them since older established plants can easily handle the shock.

Young seedlings need protection. One thing that many gardeners do to protect young plants is to put something around the base of the plant to deter bugs. It is very common to put a 2 inch piece of a toilet paper roll around the plant to keep cutworms away. You can use pretty much any circular object like large yogurt cups or, my favorite, paper oatmeal boxes cut down. These are easier to get down over the plant and are biodegradable. Another couple of options that you can put around the base of your plants are finely crushed egg shells or diatomaceous earth. The egg shells keep slugs and some worms from getting to your plant. Diatomaceous earth is cheap and easy to use but must be applied regularly since it washes away easily. It is also harmful to some beneficial insects, so use it only where needed.



Healthy Seedling



Root Bound

## *Texas Gold Columbine*

### *By Micah Shanks, JCMG*

It's spring planting time! It's always so much fun to finally get back out in the sun after several gloomy months of winter. (Not that I complain much about our winters. At least our ceilings don't cave in from snow!) This year I am anxious to redo some areas of my garden, so I have been researching and shopping for just the right plants. One of the plants on my list is Texas Gold Columbine also known as Hinckley's Gold. Most columbines are difficult to grow in our hot environment. If you are familiar with columbines, you may have noticed them growing in crooks and crannies while you hiked on a mountain trail. They generally prefer cooler climates, and they are usually blue. However, the Texas Gold is a bright yellow columbine and holds the distinction of Texas Superstar. The Superstars are those plants that will grow all over the state.

The strikingly graceful flowers bloom on long branching stems, making them great for cut flowers as well as beautiful in the garden. They have a sweet honeysuckle fragrance, which makes them irresistible to hummingbirds. They will bloom from late March to early May. Unlike many perennials that start to look "leggy" after awhile, this columbine has attractive bluish gray-green foliage and a compact rounded growth habit which looks nice all year round.



As with all plants, the proper site selection and soil preparation are key factors. The Texas Gold Columbine prefers partial shade. Planted in drifts under a tree that drops its leaves in the fall (deciduous) is the perfect place but certainly not the only place. Just provide an area out of direct sun. It doesn't like wet feet, so make sure your location is well-drained and high in organic matter. Space plants two feet apart and add a slow release fertilizer.

**Landscaping tip:** Plant in easy drifts that look natural. Mass them in the perennial border or tuck them into corners of flowerbeds, up against half buried clay pots, peeking out at the base of a tree, etc. The goal is to achieve a look that Mother Nature would have planted herself.

Never plant flowers of any kind in straight rows!

I am excited to incorporate this wonderful Texas superstar into my garden! What are you growing this year?



## *Squash Vine Borers*

### *By Tim Schreck, JCMG*

I like squash: stir fried, in casseroles and cooked in many other ways. Squash are fun and easy to grow, that is, until the squash vine borers do their damage.

Squash vine borers are actually the larva of a clear winged, wasp-like moth *Melitta curcurbitae*. The moth, which does not sting, is red and black and may have black dots down its back. Unlike most moths, they fly during the day rather than at night. Thus they are more active in the garden in the morning. The moths lay their eggs near the base of the vine. Starting at the base of the vine, look for little reddish brown flat dots that are smaller than a pinhead. They are usually spaced out along the vine. You will also want to look under the first few leaves for clusters of these same dots. These can be removed and disposed of but this is tedious work. Sevin dust works very well on controlling the moth and its larvae. To be effective it must be applied every four to five days. Apply around the base and under the leaves so as to minimize killing of other beneficial bugs that might be pollinating your squash.

Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) is also a very effective control method. The larva will die within a couple days of eating the Bt and before they are able to do much damage. If the eggs do hatch into larvae (which are white or cream colored with brown heads and grow to about an inch long) they bore into the vine and slowly eat the inside of the vine out. After they have entered

protected and pesticides are useless. If you do notice the borer's hole you can make a small incision into the vine and dig the larva out and try to save the vine. (Note: Fellow columnist and Master Gardener Micah Shanks says she has "tried several times to cut those borers out of a vine, but I have never been able to save the plant. Also, once borers [which feed for four to six weeks, then exit the stems and burrow into the ground to pupate] get into your soil, you will see them every year. I can attest to that! I have finally given up trying to grow squash and pumpkins.")

Signs that you have been affected usually start with wilted leaves, the holes near the base, and frass (excrement) coming from the borer's hole. The base of the vine is also where you will start to see yellowing and brown decay as the vine dies. Be sure to promptly pull and destroy all plants killed by Squash vine borers.

An organic way, starting to be popular on a small scale, is using row covers and generally only uncovering the vines before the plants

have started flowering and then only in the afternoons when the moth is less active. This allows bees and other flying insects time to pollinate. Some gardeners, as an exception, are using row covers and hand pollinating. I did not have enough space here to explain, but it is a matter of knowing which flowers are male and which are female. However, do not use row covers in the same spot from year to year because when the borers emerge the next year they may end up trapped under the row cover rather than being kept outside of it.



## *The Ageless Herb*

### *By Melissa Starr, JCMG*

Have you ever brushed against a luscious aromatic shrub in front of an office building and wondered what it was called? You probably just encountered rosemary. Rosemary is a timeless herb that grows well in our area, is drought tolerant, and can be used in countless ways.

Rosemary has been used in medicines and cosmetics for thousands of years. It's most notable quality is its power to strengthen the memory, but it is also known to calm the nervous system, relieve aches and pains, and treat skin conditions. Hundreds of years ago Greek and Roman students wore rosemary in their hair while studying for exams. Rosemary essential oil has anti-fungal and antibacterial properties and is said to be an antiseptic. A lotion made from rosemary can also be used to help stimulate hair growth, make hair shiny, and treat dandruff. If that isn't enough, rosemary is also known to help relieve digestive problems such as indigestion, increase circulation, and reduce headaches.

There are several ways to use rosemary. Rosemary is an excellent seasoning for lamb, pork, and chicken. Its woody stems can also be used as skewers for kabobs. When cooking with this fragrant herb, use it sparingly. Its strong flavor can have a tendency to overpower some foods. Rosemary is also dried and used in teas, made into lotions, and put into bath bags. To make a bath bag for achy muscles and joints, put some rosemary and other herbs of your choosing in cheesecloth and tie it closed with cotton string or raffia. After a long, hard day at work, put this bag in your bath water, and relax away your aches and pains.

Rosemary is one of the easiest herbs to grow. It can be a container plant or a shrub in your yard or garden. When planting rosemary, make sure it is planted in a location that contains well-drained soil and gets at least 6-8 hours of sunlight a day. Rosemary

is drought tolerant, so it doesn't want to have "wet feet". If you plant it in a container, make sure you keep the soil moist, but not soggy. Its roots cannot grow into the ground to find water, so it will die if it dries out in a pot. As a container plant, rosemary will need to be repotted when its



roots have outgrown its pot. However, if you want to keep it in the same size pot, then trim its roots a couple of inches in the spring, but don't forget to trim the top too. This will lessen the work load on the roots and keep it from becoming too stressed. Rosemary will grow all year in our climate, so you can enjoy it year round.



## The Latest Dirt

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service  
1225 Pearl Street, Suite 200  
Beaumont, TX 77701

Phone: 409-835-8461  
Fax: 409-839-2310  
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.

#### 2015 Officers

President—Toni Clark

Vice President—Herbert Bass

Secretary—Melissa Starr

Treasurer—Joyce Logan

At Large—Carolyn Barras, Stellina Reed,  
Phyllis Smith

Past President—Tony Lucenti

## Announcements

Check the website for more details

**43rd Annual Jefferson County  
Fruit and Vegetable Show  
Saturday, June 13, 9-Noon  
Central Mall  
For a copy of the rules and  
regulations, call the office  
at 835-8461**

**Master Gardener Intern Graduation  
June 27  
Beaumont Botanical Garden  
(Tyrrell Park Garden Center)**

**Urban Fruit Tree Workshop  
Saturday, September 26  
9am until 4:30  
AgriLife Extension Auditorium  
\$20 per person; RSVP by Sept 22**

**Fall Vegetable Seminar  
Saturday, October 17  
8am until Noon  
\$15 per person  
Beaumont Botanical  
Gardens**

**Master Gardener Shortcourse  
January 11 through 22, 2016  
Application and pre-payment  
required. Call the office for more  
info at 409-835-8461**