Bell County Master Gardeners
Tip of the Week
By Candy Mullen
“The Magi Gifts”

“Tis the season to consider many things and I started to think about the first gifts
given at Christmas. I will give a little background of Frankincense, also called
**olibanum**, which is an aromatic resin obtained from trees of the genus *Boswellia*,
particularly *Boswellia sacra* (syn. *B. carteri*, *B. thurifera*), *B. frereana*, and *B.
bhaw-dajiana* (Burseraceae). It is used in incense and perfumes.

It is tapped from the very scraggly but hardy *Boswellia* tree by slashing the bark
and allowing the exuded resins to bleed out and harden. These hardened resins
are called tears. There are numerous species and varieties of frankincense trees,
each producing a slightly different type of resin. Differences in soil and climate
create even more diversity of the resin, even within the same species.

Frankincense trees are also considered unusual for their ability to grow in
environments so unforgiving that they sometimes grow directly out of solid rock!
Maybe we should try some here in Central Texas! Generally speaking, the more
opaque resins are the best quality. Dhofari frankincense (from *Boswellia sacra*) is
said to be the best in the world, although fine resin is also produced more
extensively in Yemen and along the northern coast of Somalia. Little wonder it
was considered to be a very precious gift to be given to a King!

Frankincense is used in perfumery and aromatherapy. The aroma of
frankincense is said to represent life, and it is used in many religious ceremonies
of different faiths.

In the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament, it was an ingredient for incense (Ex
30:34); according to the book of Matthew 2:11, gold, frankincense, and myrrh
were among the gifts to Jesus by the Biblical Magi "from out of the East." I will
discuss myrrh next week for those of you who are curious!

The **Frankincense Trail** is a site in Oman on the Incense Road. The site
includes frankincense trees and the remains of a caravan oasis, which were
crucial to the medieval incense trade. Many miles were traveled and many dangers were present to the hardy individuals working those routes, which enabled the world to have the wonders of the incense at that time. The Frankincense Trail has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Although we don’t grow frankincense trees here in Central Texas, it would certainly be interesting to see the “tears” of the trees if you were ever in the region where they do grow!

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com