

May 2013



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

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

May 9 - "Easy Orchids for the Home Gardener" - Jennifer Buckner, Horticulture Specialist, Exhibition Greenhouses at Shangri La Botanical Gardens & Nature Center

June 13 — "Texas Super Stars" - Sarah Sloan, Jefferson County Master Gardener

July — No Meeting

Texas Seasons



Recently I saw a post on Facebook that goes like this: "Texas has two seasons - summer and winter. Usually they alternate days within the same week." We have certainly seen this to be the gospel truth lately! My poor little veggie plants don't know whether to reach for the sun or duck for cover. Hopefully soon, we can put away our sweaters and start complaining about the heat.

You would think that of all the problems facing us as gardeners, watering would be low on the list. However, it can be one of our biggest challenges. Tim Schreck tells us how and how often to water those precious plants. Melissa Starr tells us how to pair companion plants, while Jane McBride weighs in on coral vine. Ann Bares takes us down memory lane with her take on spring planting. I hope you are all reading "Out In The Yard" every Sunday in the Port Arthur News. We have a dedicated group of writers who educate the public with these and other topics weekly. Check it out!

As always, I encourage everyone to send in their comments and questions. The best way to learn is from each other and everyone has something to share.

Now, off to the gardendo I need a sweater or a sweatband??

Micah Shanks

Editor

President's Message
Jackie Steen, President



If you haven't heard by now, our Spring Market Day and Plant Sale was a huge success! A Texas size "Thank-You" goes out to all the dedicated MG's and interns for all the hard work that went into making this an event the community looks forward to each year. This year was no exception. Kudos to Dorothy Norris (MG of the year 2012) and Ann Bares for co-chairing the event and especially to the plant team, Tim Schreck and Cecil Hightower for the super job of getting all the beautiful plants for our sale. Cecil, along with Donna and the garden crew really went that 'extra mile' with these plants by protecting them from the strong winds and elements that we had the week before our sale. This sale is truly a team effort and shows what a group can accomplish when working together. Great job JCMG's and Interns!

The calendar may say Spring is here, but the low temperatures we have been experiencing lately are reminiscent of wintertime. However, this has not seemed to have slowed anyone down from buying plants. This was very evident after our April program with "The Bulb Hunter" Chris Weisinger, who completely sold out of all the bulbs he had brought with him.

Thanks to our program chair Toni Clark for doing such a great job of arranging to have Chris here for our program as well as opening her home to Chris and his wife Rachel and having them as houseguests.

One of the projects that I have had on the 'back burner' for a while is the idea of starting a seed exchange. I have belonged to other gardening clubs that took part in this fun project. I have many plants today growing in my gardens because of this. This is an excellent way to increase the different plants that you would like to try without the expense of having to purchase seeds. Since we are now heading into the time of the year when plants bloom and go to seed, it would be an opportune time to start collecting seeds to exchange with our fellow gardeners. If you like this idea and are on board with it, let me know and I will see about getting this started.

Jackie

Coral Vine

By Jane McBride, JCMG



Some people love brand-spanking new homes and the city life. Others prefer older homes in the country. I'm one of the latter. I love the charm and wood-work of older structures.

Older homes also have the advantage of providing established trees and, if you're lucky, well-chosen plants started by a previous owner who loved gardening.

Because our home is more than 100 years old, most of the hardy varieties of heirloom plants already were here long before we were. That's been an amazing blessing. Who wouldn't love moving on-to two acres that had an abundance of paperwhite narcissus, hardy amaryllis, old-fashioned daylilies (often called ditch lilies), spider lilies (*Lycoris radiata*), a Queen Elizabeth rose and more?

We had a little harder time learning to love two of the three vines that already had taken deep hold: old-fashioned wisteria (two varieties are native to the Southeastern U.S. while the Asian varieties are far more invasive) and sweet autumn clematis (*Clematis ternifolia* aka *paniculata*). The wisteria had taken over the back fence, trees and surrounding hardscapes. We fought it for years before finally bringing it under control. Like an unruly child, it still tries to go where it shouldn't when your back is turned.

The sweet autumn clematis is lovely when in bloom, and the fragrance certainly is sweet, but as a vine that springs up in countless clumps where there once was a lawn or flower bed, it can be quite a challenge.

The vine we adore is the coral vine, also called Queen's wreath (*Antigonon leptopus*). It can cover a fence, trellis or climbing rose bush with spectacular effect. The cascading vibrant pink blooms contrast beautifully with the subdued yellow-green, heart-shaped leaves, lighting up everything around it.

Some vines have sturdy, hairy roots that cling to vertical surfaces. If you've ever tried to rip a long-established English ivy from a tree, you know what I'm talking about. Others, like the coral vine, have tender tendrils that gently twirl around supports.

Because the coral vine dies back to the ground in winter, it's easy to pull it away and toss it in the compost pile. The next year, new shoots grow from the base and tubers.

Like all vines, Queen's wreath can spread if left untended for many years, but I've not had any problem keeping it under control. Heat and drought don't faze it. It tolerates poor soil and doesn't require fertilizer or pest control, though it will reward you with extra lush growth if you occasionally feed it.

If you'd like this vine in your garden, ask a friend for a tuber or start it from seed. Place it where it can climb or trail to its heart's content - up to 30 feet or so.

To see a great example of what it can do, when you drive I-10 to Houston this summer, look on the north side around Winnie for one that completely covers a long, chain-link fence. It's quite the stunner.

Companion Planting *By Melissa Starr, JCMG*



Spring is here; birds are singing and buds have burst out of their dormant tree limbs and into the warm, sunlit spring air. Alas, cold air has disappeared, and gardeners of all ages are seeing their dreams of warm, flower-scented days and plans of spring vegetable gardens come true.

As you plan, remember where you planted each vegetable last year. If you have forgotten, get out some paper and write it down this year. One key to overcoming soil-born pests and diseases is crop rotation. Never plant the same vegetable in the same place two years in a row.

Another important step is to plant vegetable varieties that grow well in our area. For a list, visit the vegetable variety link on the Jefferson County Master Gardener web page (<http://txmg.org/jcmg>) or call the Texas AgriLife Extension office at 409-835-8461.

An additional way to increase plant growth and reduce pests is to practice companion planting. The theory of companion planting suggests that plants excrete certain natural chemicals that promote vigorous growth in some plants while inhibiting growth in others. Planting Swiss chard among potatoes will stunt the growth of both plants while planting tomatoes with carrots, onions, or basil should produce higher yields and added growth.

Since pesky insects find their favorite plants by smell, make it more difficult for them to find their dinner by mixing your garden crops with their appropriate companions. For example, dill and marigolds are said to repel tomato hornworms, while basil and marigolds are said to repel whiteflies. Also, allowing pumpkin vines to grow under your corn will help deter raccoons while the corn offers some protection against squash borers.

Mixing flowers, herbs, and vegetables in the garden will also attract bees and other beneficial insects. Bees are necessary to pollinate many vegetable blossoms, and beneficial insects such as ladybugs, lacewing and assassin bugs eat or kill insects that are harmful to vegetables. Plant bee balm, dill, yarrow, marigold, dahlias, sunflowers, basil, daisies, or chives to attract these insects. To learn more about companion planting, Google “vegetable companion planting,” or read *Carrots Love Tomatoes* and *Roses Love Garlic* by Louise Riotte.

Start planning now, because soon the weather will heat up and your dreams of planting vegetables will either come true or melt away under the summer sun.

Spring Market Day and Plant Sale

By Cecil Hightower, JCMG



The 2013 Spring Market Day and Plant Sale was one of the most successful we've held in a while, not only in attendance, but in profit as well. Over 1200 shoppers came through the gates and many of them were lined up for more than an hour before we opened, and it seemed like most of them left with plants in tow.

Tim Schreck was our new chairman of the plant buying committee and you would never have guessed that this was his first time in this position. His well-oiled organizational and administrative skills were very valuable in helping to make the buying trips run smoothly. He stayed in contact with the wholesalers and scheduled our trips to their nurseries so that our selections would be at their prime. This year, in an attempt to cut expenses and eliminate the trouble and possible risk to our members who previously had been renting trailers or trucks to haul our purchases, we had everything delivered. The cost was a lot less than rental fees and gasoline and was definitely easier on our old bodies.

We found many beautiful, unusual hanging baskets and bought more than in the past and when delivery day came, reality set in with the sudden realization that we didn't have sufficient hardscape to display them at the sale. Of course, Jerry Jobe came

through as usual and constructed a 10' aluminum A-frame hanger, at very low cost, which provided the needed space to beautifully display the baskets and it can be used year after year.

Everything we purchased, from tropical plants to succulents, Texas Superstars, landscaping shrubs, sunny annuals, etc. were all well received, with virtually nothing left over. Thanks to Phyllis Smith we were able to obtain two varieties of much sought after avocados which have been in very limited supply. These, as well as another new offering, Spanish olive trees found by Glenn Watz, were all snapped up in a flash with shoppers begging for more. As usual, the citrus trees were very popular and were all sold.

We took a chance this year and added a very large number of vegetable and herb plants which we grew from seed in our greenhouse and the success of this endeavor went beyond our wildest expectations. Judy and Melissa Starr added to what we had from the garden with hundreds of plants they grew at home.

(continued on page 5)

Spring Market Day and Plant Sale (continued)

We plan on doing the same for the October sale and offer many varieties of fall vegetable seedlings which cost us virtually nothing and return a hefty profit.

As you can see, our plant sales are on-going operations with preparations starting months in advance of the actual event and require the help of everyone. This year it seemed that the amount of participation at all levels was the best we've ever had and this is probably the reason for our success. We hope we can continue this spirit of cooperation and build on what we accomplished. Thanks to everyone who helped write tickets, take payments, prepare and serve food, entertain the kiddies, man the garage sale table, meet and greet shoppers and especially those like Tony Lucenti who had to keep a cool head in the holding area while everyone else was losing theirs.



Super success! Over \$8000 profit! Thanks to everyone who helped in any way.

Practicing Permaculture

By Tim Schreck, JCMG



Permaculture is derived from the two words permanent and agriculture: permanent meaning something that you can start or put in place and it becomes permanent or self-sustaining, and agriculture or culture meaning not only a group of plants but how plants interact to survive. This is much like a culture we humans live in daily. These are very simplified terms but you get the idea.

The design principle behind Permaculture is observing the landscape, noting plant types, wind, rain, water flow, and then using these energies to your advantage. The best example I know of is leaves. In the fall when they are lying on the ground, most people rake them up, put them in bags, and get rid of them. This is energy that is thrown away. They could be saved, composted and used as fertilizer in a garden.

The next best example is rainwater. Most people want it directed off their property as quickly as possible. Again, this is energy wasted. What if you directed the rainwater to rain barrels for use later? Or direct water from the downspout to a flowerbed that is mulched well? Mulch will soak up gallons of water and become a savings account for your plants and bushes. Everyone has heard the commercial line that water is a precious resource so capture as much of it as you can before it leaves your property. The drought two years ago is a good reason why.

Saving my time and energy is also part of Permaculture. We can save quite a bit of time and energy if I did not need to water, apply fertilizers, or spray pesticides. This is where native plants come into play in Permaculture. Plants that have the Earth-Kind or Texas Superstar designation are specifically known to grow in Texas with minimum care after the first year. These plants are usually drought resistant, disease resistant, and very low maintenance. Look for those designations or ask when looking for new plants.

The best part of Permaculture is that it usually requires no more work than what you are doing now to get started, but within a year or two time and money needs decrease as the plants start taking care of themselves. Also, you do not give up any beauty in your yard. Earth-Kind roses come in many colors and varieties. Texas Superstar plants come in all shapes, sizes, and colors also. There are native plants comparable to most shrubs and flowers.

(Earth-Kind and Texas Superstar are trademarks)

Growing Basil

By Melissa Starr, JCMG



Basil is an incredible herb. It can be used as a culinary or medicinal herb and it is a great companion plant in the vegetable garden. Its spicy fragrance and rich, mildly peppery flavor is found in gardens all over the world. There are over 40 varieties of basil, but most gardeners favor sweet basil. Lemon, cinnamon, purple, Thai and spicy globe are other popular basil cultivars. Basil is normally grown as an annual, but can be grown as a perennial in warm, tropical climates. It is native to India and Asia, is easy to grow and loves our summer heat.

Growing basil, as compared to vegetables, seems effortless. Seeds can be planted indoors or in the garden after the last frost. Basil is very sensitive to cold weather, so cover it if there is any chance of frost. Plant your basil 12 inches apart in a sunny location in well-drained, rich soil. Place mulch around your plants to keep some moisture in the soil and to prevent weed growth. To encourage new growth on your plants, pinch off the flower buds before they emerge, and prune it by a third every three weeks.

Basil and other herbs love to be harvested. Harvest herbs in the morning after the dew has dried, but before 11:00 a.m. for best flavor while the oils are most present. You can cut up to a third of the plant without hindering its growth. To dry basil, tie it

with twine and hang it in a well-ventilated, dark room, or put it on a screen outside and cover it with cheesecloth, or dry it in the dehydrator or oven on a low setting. You can also chop basil and freeze it in ice cube trays that contain an olive oil/basil mixture or put the fresh leaves in vinegar or oil to use in salad dressings, cheeses, or pesto.

Basil butter is wonderful. Chop basil finely, stir it into softened butter, place on a piece of waxed paper and roll into a log. After freezing, you can cut slices off as needed.

The uses for basil are numerous. Basil has historically been used medicinally to treat stomach ailments and headaches. It is used in Italian, Mediterranean, and Thai cooking, but also adds zest to white beans, eggs, fish, poultry and a variety of vegetables. It also makes a wonderful accent plant in ornamental gardens, a companion plant to tomatoes, and attracts bees to the garden. If there was a prize for the best all-around herb, basil would win.

Now is a perfect time to plant this culinary delight, so get some plants and enjoy this spectacular herb.

Saving Money By Growing Your Own? *By Micah Shanks, JCMG*



This time of year, I see lots of garden companies vying for our business. They all want to us to believe that we will save up to (fill in the blank) dollars on our grocery bill by growing our own veggies. Well, it may be true that you will save a little at the grocery store IF you get a good harvest. However, any avid gardener will tell you that you will spend that amount and more on the actual process of gardening! If you have been gardening for awhile, you already know what you are in for, but for those just getting started, there are some things to consider. First of all, you need good tools. Buy the best you can afford so you won't be replacing them every few years. A good shovel is a must, along with a hand spade, by-pass pruners and an all-purpose knife such as a hori hori knife that is indispensable when cutting out roots or dividing plants. Another one of my favorite tools is called a stirrup or Dutch hoe. This is the best tool ever for quick and easy weeding. No more backbreaking work!

You will need a small tote or basket so you can carry your hand tools with you right into the garden. Special tote belts are available, but I find them to be too hot in the summer. It's all about personal preference. Remember to budget for compost and mulch. You can make your own compost, but that takes awhile. Bagged compost in the garden centers is never as good as homemade,

but it is still better than nothing and will do a pretty good job of adding nutrients to your soil. Mulch comes in all price ranges including FREE! Doguets Rice Mill will give you as many rice hulls as you can fit in a truck. You can also get free mulch from some city landfills.

Have you considered how you will irrigate? There are new lightweight hoses available that actually shrink back to the faucet when water is turned off. They can be stored in a garden pot out of sight. They can be found at several local retail stores, and they are fantastic! You may want to consider drip irrigation which is an excellent way to save water. My favorite supply house is www.DripDepot.com.

Throw in some fertilizer, non-toxic pesticide spray, some good gloves and you are ready to go. If you become an avid gardener, you may need an extra job to fund your gardening habit. I have become a loyal customer for GardenerSupply.com. They have the newest things on the market and I want to try them all!

So you can see that gardening won't always save you money. In fact, those homegrown tomatoes may end up costing about \$15 each but they will be the best tomatoes you will ever eat!

Fundamentals of Watering Plants

By Tim Schreck, JCMG



One fundamental all gardeners know is that water is essential for plant life. Roots absorb available water, which helps transfer nutrients and then transpire out through foliage. If this cycle is hindered by too little or too much water, plants will suffer, usually showing distress with wilting or yellow-tipped leaves.

How much water is enough?

Watering time will vary, depending on soil conditions, such as sandy (shorter times) or clay soils (longer times) and a particular plant's needs. Most vegetables, small shrubs and garden plants need between one and two gallons a week. This doesn't mean pouring a gallon over each plant once a week. It means that much water needs to soak down to the root ball and out into the plant's drip line.

Watering frequently for short periods encourages shallow root growth in the top few inches of soil. This causes two problems. One, shallow roots do not give plants a good base to grow on and will not support larger plants such as shrubs or even tomato plants. Also, with shallow watering, the top two inches quickly dry out. That diminishes water and nutrient absorption, stressing the plant.

Deep watering is better because it encourages deep roots. This will ensure slow, steady water supply for the plant. In Southeast Texas, fifteen minutes of watering with a sprinkler will only soak into the first inch of the average soil. How can you tell if you are watering long enough?

The easiest method is to water for 30 minutes and then poke your finger in the ground. If the soil is wet deeper than your second knuckle (or 2 inches) you are watering adequately for most plants. If the soil is moist to the tip of your finger, that's even better. If the soil is soggy, however, either you are watering too much or the soil needs amendments to help it drain well.

Mulching around your plants is an easy method to help retain moisture. Mulch helps prevent rapid evaporation from wind and sun. It also helps keep the water closer to the plant, allowing it more time to soak down to the roots before it runs off.

Another fairly inexpensive method is drip irrigation, which offers slow, deep watering when emitters are placed properly and set to the correct drip speed and length of time. It's one of the best ways to water.

Water early in the morning before the heat of the day, which allows plants time to take up water. Watering too late in the evening can lead to problems with slugs and moisture-related diseases.

Paying attention to soil conditions and monitoring plant needs will minimize stress and produce healthier plants, which ultimately means less work for you.



“When all the trees have been cut down, when all the animals have been hunted, when all the water is polluted, when the air is unsafe to breathe, only then will you discover that you cannot eat money.”
Cree prophecy



Chris Weisinger – The Bulb Hunter speaks at Tyrell Park

Spring Musings

By Ann Bares, JCMG



Leafing through garden magazines and seed catalogs is always a good idea when planning a new garden space, or cleaning out an existing one. I see so many new ideas and mentally file them away, planning something different and interesting this year. Some of the plants I don't recognize, but think of where they would fit into my garden. Our Southeast Texas longer growing season offers a variety of plants for overlapping seasons.

The Old Farmer's Almanac promised that late spring and early summer would bring sunny, cool days, rain, more sun, then warm and wet before a short cold snap brings us into a nice spring. and they were right! Most old farmers, like my granddaddy, could tell the weather by the ache in their knees or when the robins came. I knew when he began to take out the garden tools and cleaning out the chicken house that winter was over and I could start digging for worms and planting seeds.

Now, it's when I put the catalogs away and walk around my garden, deciding where to begin. If I've put my tools away clean in fall, I have less to do, but my small greenhouse always needs airing out. A house wren likes the empty bucket hanging on a rafter, so we wait until the babies are out to avoid disturbing them. I move late cuttings to a sunnier place. Bags of soil, birdseed, bone meal and other organic amend-

ments go into before I brush down the ceiling, under the benches, and wash windows.

It's a good time to make a list of this years priorities. Should I move the gardenia? Add more vegetables? Dig up the Mexican Petunias that have overtaken the patio and garden path? The compost bed needs to be turned and the Cecile Bruner rose trimmed out of the maple and the magnolia.

If it's too early to rake back the compost from around the roses or my cottage garden plants, I clean out the garden paths and edge with Grandma's little shovel. Maybe this year I'll add some of her favorite plants: the African daisies that lined the edge of the house, the coral vine that covered the clothesline poles, the lilac hydrangeas I loved so, and for granddaddy, a little patch of squash seeds like the ones he always gave me to plant. He showed them off, telling me I was the best gardener because my seeds always sprouted first!

So on that first warm sunny day, don't feel you have to rush into anything. Sit in your swing, enjoy that first cup of coffee and remember why you love to garden. Happy Spring!

The Latest Dirt

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Beaumont, TX 77701

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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.

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Melissa Starr
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Announcements

41st Annual Fruit and Vegetable Show
Saturday, June 8th at Central Mall
Entries 9-Noon - Judging begins promptly at Noon
Enter free as many entries as you like
Call 835-8461 for a copy of the Rules and Regulations



A man walks into a flower shop. "I'd like some flowers, please."
"Certainly, sir. What did you have in mind?"
He shrugs, "Well, I'm not sure. I uh, I uh, I uh..."
"Perhaps I can help. What exactly have you done?"