

November 2013



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*President's Message*  
*Jackie Steen, President*



If you are familiar with the saying 'Hit the ground running' this could also be a very good description of my October calendar.

We kicked the month of October off with our fall plant sale. This event, chaired by Stellina Reed and her crew, turned out to be one of the most lucrative and successful fall plant sales we have had to date, coming in second only to our spring sale, which took place this year back in March. Although the attendance numbers were down, we still made a remarkably large profit considering we were competing with the 6000 participants running in the Gift of Life 5-K run held on the same date as our sale.

Kudos to Stellina and her Super crew-Great Job, Well Done!

The third week of October saw six people, I included, from Jefferson County attending the Texas Master Gardeners Conference held in the Rio Grande Valley city of Mc Allen, Texas. We were welcomed by beautiful bright sunshine, clouds of butterflies and warm and friendly fellow Master Gardeners from Cameron and Hidalgo counties who were proudly showing off their beautiful new conference center. Those of us attending were extremely impressed by the workshops and classes arranged for this conference. I came away with a new respect for the agave plant. From one of the presenters doing a demonstration using an agave leaf, I learned that fibers from this

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

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

November 14 - Business Meeting, Veteran's Salute

December 12 — Christmas Party at Tyrrell Park Garden Center

January 9 — Business Meeting

## *President's Message - (continued)*

plant are used to make ropes. Not only did we come back with new knowledge about plants but Jefferson County also brought home 6 awards for entries in the photos, Melissa Starr for her gorgeous pictures of butterflies, which took first place, and my single one entry for backyard habitat with my kitty Sweetie Pie that placed third. Three of our JCMG's, Pat Tolbert, Ed Wharton and Paul Eyre were recognized and awarded with pins for their completion of programs.

The week after the conference, we were back on the road again. This time we were headed over to La Marque, TX to tour the gardens of the Galveston County Master Gardeners. This is one remarkable garden indeed and such great hospitality-they served us lunch in their garden house!

### Recipe for Butterfly Food By Melissa Starr, JCMG

10 overripe bananas

Imported beer such as Guinness. It has to be imported because the U.S. pasteurizes beer.

1 lb. brown sugar

Mix all together and store in a container with holes in the lid. If the container does not have holes, it will explode and make a sticky mess.

Store in a refrigerator or a cool place. When ready to use, place it in the cracks of a log. Do not place it all over the log or the butterflies' feet will stick to it.

MAAS Nursery, where the 'drool factor' is about a TEN, was our next stop. The friendly folks there treated us to a 'garden class' under the trees and a quick tour around the nursery. This place is definitely one you put on your bucket list to visit. Leaving the nursery behind, we headed over to Armand's Nature Farms, where you step back in time. This would be a perfect place to take your children or grandchildren for a day trip outing with nature and all things natural.

This has indeed been a very busy October!

*Jackie*



*Editor's Note*  
*Micah Shanks, JCMG*



In 2007, Micah Meyer, our agent at the time, requested that we start a newsletter. I volunteered to serve as editor and in May of that year, the first edition of "The Latest Dirt" was published. It was seven pages of member news, announcements, and recipes. Fast forward six years and "The Latest Dirt" has gone through many changes and won several state awards by sharing the most up-to-date gardening information written by a group of dedicated Master Gardeners. Just as the newsletter has changed, so has the life of the editor! I have been blessed with grandchildren as well as new ventures and commitments that make it difficult to continue on as editor. For that reason, this will be the last newsletter for me, but not for the group. I will be passing it on to the talented and quite capable Melissa Starr. I know she will have wonderful ideas and will build on what has already been established. Of course, this has always been a group effort! I could never have done it without the help of so many who sent me articles, reports, and pictures. In the last two years, we have had a group who writes every Sunday for the Port Arthur News. They have allowed me to use those articles in the newsletter. A huge THANKS to Jane McBride, Tim Schreck, Ann Bares, and Melissa Starr for your constant help.

Thanks to all those who answered the call to write up Market Day results, the garden news, the fall plant sale and anything else I asked for. No one has ever turned me down. Thanks to all of you who sent me little tidbits of garden trivia. I used everything!

A super special thanks goes to Peggy Coleman who has been my "right hand" since the beginning. Peggy has done the layout on every issue. She has been so patient with me when I have asked her to "change this" or "move that", even when I asked her more than once! She reminds me if I have left anything out, she keeps me informed about Extension news. None of this would have happened without her and I will miss working with her. So that's it for me! It has been an honor, and I appreciate all the help and support I received from so many of you! I know you will all support Melissa in the same way.

*Micah*

"Gardening is how I relax. It's another form of creating and playing with colors."

Oscar de la Renta

## *Planting Broccoli and Cauliflower*

*By Tim Schreck, JCMG*



If you are not preparing to plant a fall garden, be sure to do a few things before walking away from it 'till next spring. At a minimum you should be cleaning the dead plants from the garden and covering the area with a couple inches of mulch or some of the leaves that soon will be falling.

For those planting a garden, cauliflower and broccoli always are good bets. They are simple to grow and very healthy vegetables, touting both anti-oxidant and anti-cancer agents.

Mark Twain once said that "A cauliflower is just a cabbage with a college education."

Cauliflower was indeed cultivated from a cabbage somewhere in Asia Minor. At the time, cauliflower was still green and closer related to broccoli. Many credit the Italians with the white version we have today. This variety had leaves that curled up around the head, keeping it out of the sun and blanching it white. In the sixteenth century, it was held in high honor in the French gardens of the aristocrats and Thomas Jefferson planted it at Monticello. But it was not until the 1920's when Italian immigrants planted it in California that it really took off in America.

The head of the cauliflower that we eat is actually the undeveloped flower buds. If you let a cauliflower fully mature, these flower buds eventually will develop small flowers and go to seed.

This unique vegetable is a heavy feeder, so compost is a must. It grows best with

regular watering since sporadic watering and drying out will cause the stem to be woody and hinder the leaves from curling around the head. If you do have problems with the leaves, use a clothespin to fasten the leaves around the head to keep out sunlight. Fertilize cauliflower when the first new leaves appear and at the first sign the head is forming. Harvest can happen at any time during head formation without loss in flavor.

Broccoli also was cultivated from a cabbage, originating in the Mediterranean by the ancient Etruscans around 6 BC. The head or florets also are the flower buds of the plant. Broccoli is rich in calcium and many anti-oxidants. That sulfur smell of overcooked broccoli and cauliflower are the sulfur compounds that provide antiviral and antibiotic properties and keep the nutrients inside even after boiling.

Growing broccoli in the fall usually is best. It will mature during cooler days and is sweeter than grown during warmer temperatures, which can cause bolting or small head formation. Broccoli is a heavy feeder; provide a good amount of compost mixed in when planting and water regularly. Broccoli is different from cauliflower in that it produces heads on branches more spaced out. After the first harvest, leave the plant in the ground and harvest smaller florets from the same branches over the next few weeks.

## *Create A Gardener's Journal*

### *By Ann Bares, JCMG*



In January of 2000, I moved beyond the small vegetable garden patches of the past and began my first "real" garden project. At that time, all my gardening notes were scattered on Post-it notes, note pads, and pages torn from garden magazines and newspapers. I had lots of information, but no organization.

Then I discovered "The Cultivated Gardener," a hardback garden journal where I could put those sticky notes on the "hints, clues, and advice" pages as I read through the month, using those notes to plan ahead and to remind me what did and didn't work.

My first notation on Jan. 18 read "Started Master Gardener Class today!" My Journal filled slowly as I learned and put those lessons to use, preparing the beds as I looked forward to the warm spring days when I could plant all the things I dreamed of growing. Compost, top soil, cow manure and a blending of egg shells, table scraps, coffee grounds were all noted as I added them to my beds.

Skip ahead to pages of weeding, spraying, pruning, then to another cold winter, and the spring of a bigger fish pond and our first water lilies. As the years passed, my Journal was filled with pages of gifted purple Iris, milkweed, butterfly bush and purple ruellia.

My cottage garden was a blank slate, and my journal pages were filled with ideas, clippings from the Antique Rose Emporium catalog, and herbs for the border. Wherever the lawnmower wouldn't fit, a new path went in, and soon, a small cedar greenhouse with big windows for light and room for potting and storing in the winter.

Journal year 2005: "Hurricane Rita spared the greenhouse and cottage garden fence, took a big oak, the west side of my garden, and with it the beautiful lantana, New Dawn and fern bed. The pond overflowed and the fish are gone. We'll have firewood for a long time."

Ike followed a few years later, taking out the blue plumbago, climbing roses, and most of the bedding plants.

Not able to find the blank journals I loved, I turned to hardback notebooks of clear page holders full of notes, pictures of ideas for beds, and suggestions from other gardeners. Some I've enjoyed; others are still on the "wish list."

My gardens now are overgrown with lots of pea-vines and mint beds gone wild, but the blue plumbago is back in its glory and Katy Road claims her place as Queen of the Cottage Garden among the unknown and un-invited weeds. The pictures will be a reminder someday that my garden isn't always as I've planned, or planted. My joy is in knowing that there is always a new Journal to begin, and days to sit by this winter's fire and begin again.

## *Jefferson County Master Gardeners Fall Plant Sale*

### *By Stellina Reed JCMG*



It may come as a surprise to most that the planning of the Fall Plant Sale actually begins soon after the spring plant sale concludes. It takes a few months to propagate, sow seeds, separate seedlings as they become crowded and pot and repot suitable plants, herbs and vegetables. As Mother Nature sent most of her beneficial rain to areas beyond Southeast Texas, the long hot summer took its toll on plants and the Garden Team had to work hard to keep them in good health. Although the calendar last month announced the fall season was upon us, the temperatures were still very summer like. The Plant Purchasing Team began an earnest search for fruit trees, various flowering trees, unusual specimen plants, vines, shrubs and perennials suited for our area. At the end of September, many volunteers helped to unload the deliveries of these new plants. Fighting mosquitoes and ants, this troop of volunteers assisted with pricing and temporary placement of the gorgeous eye-catching colorful assortment. The month of October began with the announcement by local meteorologists of severe weather and ensuing cooler temperatures causing some concern about the welfare of all the stock out at the garden. But the wind, rain and lower temperatures eluded us once again.

Set-up days of Wednesday and Friday were productive but grueling in the oppressive summer temperatures of the 90's. Some changes were made to the location of entrance/exit gates, new location for parking, a special area for plant loading, enlarged holding area, re-



location of ticket writing and cashiering areas to make customer traffic flow better. We also extended the "floor plan" past the vegetable gardens to allow more room in the middle of the garden so as not to crowd the cashiering area. This allowed customers to browse past the vegetable beds and be able to admire all the rose beds and muscadines. New this year was a Day Lily Booth, and along with the day lilies there was also a variety of other bulbs from which to choose. Shade loving plants and houseplants were showcased in the shady area of "Pat's Bed", some basket plants actually hanging from the crepe myrtle tree branches. To promote the sale, the PR Team sent e-mails to the customer list we obtained from the spring plant sale;

## Fall Plant Sale continued

used social media – Facebook –; three television news at noon spots were arranged for exhibiting some of the exotic plants available for sale; and newspaper ads and billboard ads all helped announce the upcoming sale. To get a jump on advertising for the next spring plant sale, customers were given a “save the date” announcement to post on the refrigerator or calendar and email addresses were again requested from customers. Despite the competition from the 5K Breast Cancer Awareness event, our profit this year, @\$4,000.00, exceeded all prior years. Many thanks to all of you who helped to make this plant sale an outstanding success.

Mille Grazie,  
Stellina Reed



## Butterfly Weed

By Melissa Starr, JCMG



Who wants to plant something with “weed” in its name? The butterfly weed, however, is not only a native plant, but also a host to the Monarch butterfly caterpillar. This two foot tall plant might get overlooked at many garden centers before it blooms, but the clusters of yellow-orange flowers beckon Monarchs to my yard each fall and spring.

Monarch butterflies are such fascinating creatures. The first three generations born during the year have a lifespan of only six weeks, but the fourth generation lives six to eight months. The longevity of the fourth generation is not the only miracle in this butterfly’s life. Beginning in August, they start a 2,500 mile journey of a lifetime. They leave the soon to be frigid temperatures of North America and travel south to Mexico. Along the way, they search for milkweeds, such as the butterfly weed, on which they lay eggs. The eggs hatch in four days, and the yellow, black, and white caterpillars begin their feast. For two weeks they eat every leaf and flower of my butterfly weed, which also makes the caterpillars distasteful to birds. I have to keep several plants growing because I don’t want any of these precious insects to die of hunger.

At the end of two weeks, they make a chrysalis and begin their transformation. After 10 more days, they emerge as a beautiful orange and black Monarch butterfly and begin their journey south to join the rest of their family. The butterflies that arrive in Mexico to overwinter do not lay any more eggs until they begin their journey north in March.

To entice Monarch butterflies to your yard, first get some butterfly weed (*Asclepiastuberosa*), also called butterfly milkweed, orange milkweed, and pleurisy root. It can serve as not only a plant for the caterpillars to eat, but also a nectar source for the adult butterflies. This perennial also can be sown by seed, and is drought tolerant. Plant it in a sunny spot in well-drained, light soil in the garden or in a container. Although it dies back in the winter, butterfly weed will regrow from the same roots in the spring and from self-sown seeds. Most butterfly weed will get aphids; however, you can either leave them for ladybugs to eat or spray the insects and foliage with soapy water. Do not use pesticides or you will kill the Monarch caterpillars.

If you plant butterfly weed now, hopefully you will have enough to feed the hungry caterpillars this fall and next spring.



## *Garden Gloves*

*By Jane McBride, JCMG*



Do you wear gloves when you garden or work around the yard?

Gloves greatly reduce chances of injury. Hazardous materials can lurk in the soil, from glass shards and sharp pointed rocks to rusty nails and metal with jagged edges. Many plants have thorns and sharp needles and pieces of wood or mulch can leave a nasty splinter. Gloves can help prevent blisters and scratches that can become infected.

Gloves also keep your nails clean and once your work is done, make clean-up much easier.

If those aren't enough reasons to put a barrier between your hands and garden soil, consider this: cats and dogs love to use your garden as a bathroom. Gloves protect you from animal feces as well as fungus, bacteria and other things you don't want clinging to your hands.

Today's gloves are colorful, stylish and functional. For roses, long gloves with tough leather gauntlets can protect your arms as well as your hands. For digging in the dirt, gloves coated with nitrile or latex on the palms and fingers are flexible but don't get as water-logged. Always use non-absorbent gloves when working with fertilizer, pesticides or chemicals.

I keep an assortment so I can choose the right one for the task. I love a bargain but find that many of the cheap gloves won't last more than a day or two. Some of the treated gloves will literally dissolve in our Texas heat, fusing together like a lab experiment gone bad. A good pair of leather gloves are a must. They can be hosed off and thrown in the washer.

Whatever gloves you choose, be sure to try them on first. Gloves that are too tight or too loose and bulky limit movement and can be a real annoyance. Gloves that fit well make gardening a pleasure.

*"They know. They just know where to grow, how to dupe you, and how to camouflage themselves among the perfectly respectable plants, they just know, and therefore, I've concluded weeds must have brains."*  
Dianne Benson

## *Ornamental Grasses*

*By Ann Bares, JCMG*



As much as I love the cool weather of October and watching the beautiful fall color as the leaves turn, I know the trees will soon be bare and the leaves will become mulch or compost. Gardens will be turned and prepared for fall planting or seeded for spring.

The landscape threatens to become bland and boring, but it doesn't have to.

A recent trip took us down rolling Highway 290 toward Austin and the Hill country. On the drive, I rediscovered - moving gently in the wind and covering the roadside for miles on end - the beautiful ornamental grasses that are thriving and becoming a part of the natural landscape of Texas.

Many grasses are native to Texas, and are seasonal, so there are choices for every time of year for the space available in your landscape. Many years ago, in our new landscape, we planted Pampas Grass for privacy on one side of our yard. After a few years, when it became a haven for mice and other unwanted critters, it took a team to remove the 7-foot grasses and restore our lawn.

Yes, it might be lovely on the overpass landscape, but gardener beware!

When buying ornamental grass, you can find everything from a 4-inch to a gallon pot, or as seed, like that used for highway plantings

Most have fine textured foliage, offering good movement in the wind and a variety of spikes that provide color. What appear to be blooms actually are the seed heads.

Native grasses need minimal care, are mostly pest-free and need little water. Good garden soil and occasional watering are all you need to help your new plants get a good start. Cold weather might freeze grasses, but resist the impulse to cut them back until new foliage in the spring is about 6-inches tall. Then prune out the dead or damaged parts.

Older plants that show a dead center should be dug up and divided in the fall to jump start new growth.

After returning home from the trip, I spent an afternoon with my favorite gardening book, "Doug Welsh's Texas Garden Almanac" to learn more about native grasses and identify the rose-tinted grass that made our drive so pleasant. In the list of Texas Natives I found "Gulf Coast muhly." This grass, 1 1/2 to 2 feet tall offers fine foliage, pink fuzzy seed heads, fall color and is small enough to add to the existing home landscape, or to cover a larger area with a soft, swaying grass to the landscape. For more choices, go to [www.tamu.edu/upress](http://www.tamu.edu/upress), and select Ornamental Grasses for Texas Landscapes.

## Texas Master Gardener Conference 2013

By Melissa Starr, JCMG



The 2013 Texas Master Gardener State Conference was held in McAllen, Texas, October 17-19. From gardening workshops to tours and entertainment, this fun-filled, rewarding trip was one we will not soon forget. Jeanene Ebeling, Jackie Steen, Judy Starr, Pat and Wayne Tolbert, and I attended the conference. The first night, we attended a welcome reception where we were entertained by a female mariachi band and feasted on delicious Mexican food. After enjoying fun-filled butterfly and birding tours on Friday, we attended the Master Gardener awards banquet. There our group earned three awards for our work in 2012: third place for educational program (The Giving Field), second place for graphic presentation (Introduction to Herbs), and second place for outstanding association. Jackie Steen and I also won awards in the first (hopefully annual) photo contest. I, Melissa, won the grand prize for my photo of a Gulf

Fritillary butterfly and first prize for my photo of a Nashville Warbler bird, and Jackie won third prize for her backyard habitat photo of her cat Sweetie Pie. On Saturday, we attended workshops with subjects from Ornamental Edibles to Medicinal Plants of the Borderlands.

During the luncheon on Saturday, three of our Master Gardeners were awarded specialist certificates and pins. Pat Tolbert received greenhouse specialist, Ed Wharton received plant propagation specialist, and Paul Eyre received compost specialist. Another honor that was added this year was recognition of Master Gardeners who have served 15, 20, 25, and 30 years. If you are about to reach one of those milestones, you may be recognized at an upcoming conference. Congratulations to all of our Master Gardeners; our group worked diligently in 2012 to receive all these honors. Next year's conference will be held in Odessa, Texas from September 25-27, 2014. Don't miss it!



# Texas Master Gardener Conference 2013



Group State Awards



Pat Tolbert, Greenhouse Specialist



Grand Prize, Melissa Starr



First Place, Melissa Starr



Third Place, Jackie Steen

## *Preserving Herbs*

*By Micah Shanks, JCMG*



As summer comes to an end, you may be wishing that those wonderful herbs you have enjoyed would make it through the winter. If winter is mild enough, you might get your wish, but there are things you can do to preserve that fresh taste just in case.

Many herbs freeze well. Start by picking them early in the morning when their essential oils are at the highest point. Wash, pat dry on paper towels, and strip the leaves from the stems. Place them on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper which then goes into the freezer for 4 hours. After the herbs are frozen, place them in freezer bags. Remember to label and date them. Another way to freeze herbs is to put them in ice cubes tray with water. Use the cubes in soups and stews throughout the winter. Frozen herbs are best used within three months.

Herb oil pastes are another storage method. Process the clean, dry herbs in a food processor with enough olive oil to make a thick paste. Freeze in small freezer bags and use in soups and stews.

Many cooks like to use herb vinegars. They are easy and fun to make and another good way to use the bounty of the herb garden. You start with a purchased vinegar: red or white wine, cider, sherry. Put fresh clean herbs of your

choice into a sterilized wide mouth jar and add vinegar. Use one cup herbs to one quart of vinegar. Place the jar on a sunny windowsill for two weeks, turning frequently. After two weeks, test for flavor. If you are satisfied with the taste, strain the herbs, filter the vinegar through a coffee filter and into a pretty bottle. Add a sprig of fresh herbs, seal and label. These also make great gifts.

If you have a bumper crop of basil, wash and dry the leaves, then roll into a cylinder. Tie the bundle with unflavored dental floss and freeze in a sealed freezer bag. When you need fresh basil for a favorite recipe, cut off the dental floss and slice as much as you need from the end of the bundle.

Of course, cool weather brings an opportunity to grow herbs that won't take the heat. Dill, parsley, and cilantro are cool weather favorites. They can be directly seeded into the garden or in a patio container. Transplants will soon be available in garden centers.

Remember to plant your herbs close to the back door so they are only a few steps away when you need them.

## The Latest Dirt

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We're On The Web:

<http://txmg.org/jcmg/>

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### MISSION STATEMENT

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

### 2013 Officers

President—Jackie Steen

Vice President—Toni Clark

Secretary—Melissa Starr

Treasurer—Dorothy Norris

At Large— Paul Eyre, Tony Lucenti, Stellina Reed

Past President—Melody Weaver

### Newsletter Staff:

Editor: Micah Shanks

Layout: Peggy Coleman

### Photographers:

Melissa Starr

Verna McCollom

## Announcements

Master Gardener Christmas  
Party December 12 at Tyrrell  
Park Garden Center.  
RSVP by December 2.

2014 Master Gardener  
Shortcourse  
July 14 - 25, 2014

Golden Triangle Citrus Show  
Thursday, November 21. En-  
tries accepted 9-4 November  
20 and 9-noon November 21.  
Program Nov. 21 6-8:30pm  
Speakers: Weslaco Citrus  
Specialists