



MG Grapevine

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Volume 18

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NOTICE

February 3rd
MG Association
Meeting at the Rose
Garden Center
11:30 AM

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February SCMG Association Meeting

Our speakers at the February meeting will be Justin Hockman and Dana Nance. Justin is the manager of *Landscape Direct* that sells trees to the public and landscapers in Canton. Dana is one of his employees.

They are going to talk to us about trees telling us what it takes to get a tree ready for the market. They will go over names of trees that grow well in our area and selecting the right tree for the right location.

A Message from Joanie Matthews

President SCMG Association

I am really looking forward to this year as SCMG President. We will do all the wonderful stuff we have always done, but with your help and input we will do some new educational and FUN projects which are planned.



The first thing we are going to have is a two-part Tree Identification seminar given by Daniel Duncum, Urban District Forester with the Texas Forest Service at Lindsey Park, Wednesday February 16th at 1:00pm. This first class will be identifying trees without leaves. In April or May we will have the second class with leaves on the trees.

Certified MGs will receive 1CE for each class attended. There will be sign up sheets at the February Meeting and classes will be limited ...so get your name in !!!

Please do give me your thoughts about what would be interesting for you ... whether it is education or social...and we will see what we can do. Thanks to all of you - Joanie.

Spring Landscape & Garden Conference

The conference this year will be on February 12th at the Rose Garden Center. Presenters include Mark Chamblee, Keith Mills, Craig Reiland, David Gary, Mark Merchant, David Creech, Janet Rowe, Keith Hansen, Cindy Harrington and Anne Pattullo. Doors open at 7:30AM for registration. Conference begins at 8:30AM. Cost is \$20, including lunch.

The conference began in 1994. It has been the main educational program created by the Environmental Horticulture Committee, an Extension advisory group made up of representatives from various segments of the horticulture and gardening community in Smith County. Representatives included retail and wholesale nurseries, garden clubs, landscape contractors, allied industries (such as equipment dealers and irrigation contractors), Parks & Recreation personnel, landscape managers, Texas Forest Service, and Master Gardeners.

The first several conferences had concurrent sessions with three sessions and up to 18 topics/speakers in the afternoon. Logistics was the main reason we went to a single straight track program. One year, we had Dr. Bill Welch in one room, and a local pond expert in another room for a concurrent session, and the poor pond guy had 3 or 4 people, while Dr. Welch's room was overflowing. We realized if we were going to continue doing concurrent sessions, we had to watch who was "on" at the same time.

Notable speakers have included Dr. Sam Cotner, Extension Horticulturist and Texas A&M Horticulture Department head (retired) (who passed away this week), Dr. William (Bill) Welch, Doug Welsh, Dave Creech, Greg Grant, Steve Brainard (past- See **Conference**, page 3

Bush Whackers Wanted

by Dee Bishop

February is upon us and oh so many chores to do. All the grasses, salvias, lantana, clematis, as well as all the perennials you haven't gotten around to, need to be cut back to the ground or in the case of clematis, according to the type you have. Do it soon too. Grasses start putting out new growth after a few warm days. To cut back large clumps of grass, such as miscanthus or pampas, tie a string around the base and wrap it around all the way up to keep it from scratching the daylight out of you. Get a chainsaw if you have one, or an electric clipper or scissors, if you have a while, and whack it off at the ground.

Cut your lantana as far back as you wish. I cut mine back to the ground and it grows huge anyway. You ought to see all my 'dwarf' lantanas by July----HUGE! If your liriopie and aspidistra looks shaggy or singed by the cold, get the weed whacker and cut it back to the ground. It will be so much prettier for you.

If you have pansies and other winter color, now is the time to fertilize, well by mid month anyway. They will leap forth with the many warm days we usually have in February.

Plant potatoes by Valentine's Day. I love to plant some in big black buckets in early February. I cover them up with chopped leaves as they grow and always have a good mess and how fun they are to watch grow!

DO NOT cut back hydrangeas, gardenias, azaleas, or any of the spring blooming shrubs. You will not get a bloom if you do. Give your bulbs some good compost or good organic fertilizer as they come into bloom.

HOE HOE HOE! The weeds will take over if you don't. Now is when I like to apply mulch. Remember all those bags of leaves we saved? My Grandma taught me (because she was soooo old) how to hoe the weeds out and aerate the soil at the same time. You can hoe a huge bed in 1/4 the time it takes to pull the weeds. First, sharpen your hoe really well. Then just drag it under the weeds. Don't chop, You will only move the top 1/4 inch or so of soil. You are not out to slash and cut all the roots from the plants around you, just 'slide' those weeds out. Let them dry up in the sun a couple of days and mulch.

This is the last call to get bare root trees and shrubs planted. Enjoy the catalogs, but remember, watch where they are from. Most ship too late for us.

There are usually lots of wonderful sunny warm (er) days in February. Get out and enjoy!!

New SCMG Association Member

Brenda Mooring, 1519 Drexel Place, Tyler, TX 75701, 903-978-7989. Moved to Tyler from Mineola. Certified in Wood Co. during 2009. Welcome.



Another cold winter, but so far, not as cold as last year. It was dry going into this winter, which can be hard on our plants, but thankfully we received plenty of rain just in time before the cold arrived. Herbaceous plants can sometimes be adversely affected if is cold and the soil is saturated with water. If you are thinking about breaking new ground, or re-working a garden or flower bed, remember your soils class. Don't work the soil when it is wet; wait until it is dry enough so the soil crumbles when turned. It doesn't have to be bone dry, though. Working wet soil will destroy the structure. And, as always, work in plenty of well-decomposed, quality compost. February and March are busy months for the Extension office with lots of educational programs being held, along with plenty of common home gardening questions coming into the office by phone and visitors. As you are no doubt aware, the Agriculture/Natural Resources agent position which was left vacant when Brian Triplett transferred to another county has still not been filled. So this is keeping everyone extra busy. February and March are also months where we are very short of help staffing the MG Phone Help Desk. So, if you have some time on your hands, please consider helping out for a few hours. Call Cyndi Phillips (903-590-2980) for open dates and times. Thanks.

Another important item is reporting your volunteer hours monthly. Some seem to think it is okay to send them in batches, waiting several months (or worse, the whole year) before turning in hours. This causes multiple problems. The most serious one is that I cannot report your volunteer service activities and hours on my monthly reports. My reports (and all the other county agents) are used by administration to report AgriLife Extension's activities and hours to our representatives in the Texas legislature. These are sent in regularly, and once a month has past, the activities and hours we report late do not get included. With the current legislative session underway, and necessary cuts to state agencies being considered, it is important that Extension is able to consistently and accurately show how we are leveraging tax-payer's dollars through the educational programs we are delivering to the citizens of Texas.

Another problem of not regularly reporting is it lays a big burden on our faithful record-keeper, Martin Davis, as he has to spend more time imputing multiple months per person. So, please, get your hours turned in at the end of every month. Thanks.



TOMATOES!

By Herb Coursey

“Ooooooh!”, you say. “Time for tomatoes, *really?*” “Aaaaahh!, I have to tell you - with joy - YES!”

It is almost too much, *too* wonderful, this great world we live on! All we have to do is wait a few moons and we are in the new year! Oh! Such a wonderful playground for gardeners! *Almost* - as if it were designed for *us* ...

But that means it *must* be time for tomatoes! Ah! Satisfaction! I cherish the best memories of them throughout my 78 years. As a preschooler, I enjoyed long stays with my Mom’s parents in the village of Trees City, LA. My grandma Goggy grew absolutely the best food garden I ever saw. Trees, as the community remnant is now known, had a tiny post office situated about 50 yards across the pasture from their cow lot. Sometimes Goggy let me, all by myself, take a letter to be mailed. I always re-routed myself homeward so as to go over by her garden fence. It was covered with tomato vines laden with whoppers exposed all day to the sun. A kid eating sun-warmed tomatoes. That’s how I learned that sun-heated tomatoes are the best in the world.

My next-best memory of tomatoes occurred 35 years later, after my wife and I had bought an old house from the City of Tyler. We had it cut into sections and moved westward onto an 80-acre tract we named **Earthsong** (north of Pine Cove) to overlook the northernmost end of Lake Palestine. Oh! The view! But 20 yards down the hill we were on top of, westward toward that glorious view, we discovered - where wastewater from only the kitchen sink, lavatories, bathtubs, and laundry gushed forth - volunteer tomato plants! And why not? Fresh, clean dirt; dependable watering, plants that arose from salad seeds washed down the kitchen sink, and bald sunlight all day every day. So easy. And hard to beat!

Nowadays, I plant seeds in loamy, lightly & organically enriched dirt, in 16-plug Styrofoam trays that can be used over and over. Or even egg cartons, with tiny drainage holes punched in their “cup” bottoms. Two tomato seeds in each cup, covered by about 1/8 inch of dirt mixture. Keep water in another plastic tray below the seed tray. Let the seed tray rest an hour in the water tray every other day. Water will seep in through the drainage holes, and the seeds will sprout fairly soon. After the plants become about 4 to 5 in. tall - enough to sway slightly in a breeze, and the weather conditions are correct (about early April) - transplant them into the ground. You’ll probably have 2 tomato plants in every “hill” but that’s OK. Sometimes something “happens” to one of them.

Tomatoes grow best in slightly acid soil, pH = 6.2 to 6.8. For fertilizers, the best are fish emulsions and seaweed solutions, following container instructions. As your plants grow more awesome, you may want to add some chemical (N-P-K) formulation; just don’t overdo! Select one with higher middle and final numbers.



P (phosphorus) encourages more blooms (therefore fruit) and root growth and disease resistance. **K** (potassium or potash) promotes early growth, stem strength, high yields, resistance to cold, and good flavor and color. **N** in excess will produce lots of foliage, but few blooms. Crushed eggshells around the plant base will help to avoid blossom end rot. If you must use chemical fertilizer, mix it half-strength, apply twice as often! If a tomato looks like it has plague on its bottom half, you over-fertilized!

I now have a Greenhouse! Before Christmas I took half of a cherry-tomato inside it and squeezed the seeds along the dirt floor. Guess what? YES! 13 plants I already have!



Conference - Continued from page 1-----
 president of the Azalea Society of America), Geyeta Ajilvsgi, Felder Rushing, Steve Bender, Skip Richter, John Thomas (of Wildseed Farms), Jimmy Turner, and Neil Odenwald.

Other Extension educators who have spoken at the conference include Dr. Mike Merchant, Dr. Dotty Woodson, Dale Groom, Keith Hansen, Ted Fisher (County Extension Horticulture Emeritus), Dr. Jerry Parsons, Dr. Joe Masabni, Dr. Monte Nesbitt, Dr. James Robinson, Dr. George Phillely, Dr. Billy Higgenbotham, Billy Kniffen, Dr. James McAfee, Dr. Mark McFarland, Marty Baker, Lisa Whittlesey, Bill Adams, Dr. Calvin Lyons, Dr. Richard Duble, Wayne Pianta, Dr. Bill Knoop, and several others. Research and Teaching speakers included Dr. Brent Pemberton, Jim Johnson (Benz School of Floral Design at Texas A&M) and Dr. Garry McDonald.

Master Gardeners who have presented at the conference, include Patsy Besch, Dee Bishop, Chuck Desmond and Jerry Holmes.

Have had up to 400 attend one year. Attendees have been from all over East Texas, plus Dallas, Waco, Belton, Houston, Shreveport, and many other localities.

Master Gardeners have been helping out before and during the conference with compiling handouts, morning registration, refreshments during breaks, and manning the lights.

The 2011 conference schedule can be found at <http://easttexasgardening.tamu.edu/programs/programs.html>

2011 Perennial Plant of the Year

submitted by Sue Adee

Amsonia hubrichtii, also know as Arkansas bluestar and Hubright’s bluestar, has been named the 2011 perennial plant of the year by the Perennial Plant Association. Its most notable feature is its pale blue spring flowers and its golden-yellow fall color. *Amsonia* is a low-maintenance plant, growing up to 36” tall and wide. It grows best in full sun to part shade preferring well-drained soil. It suffers from few pests and deer don’t like it.

MG Class XVIII Training Continues

Training for Class 18 continues on Tuesday and Thursday as follows: Feb.1 - Perennials & Roses, Dr. William Welch; Feb. 3 - no class; Feb. 8 - Home Fruit Production, Keith Hansen; Feb. 10 - Trees, Daniel Duncum; Feb. 15 - no class; Feb. 17 - Turfgrass, Dr. James McAfee (at Overton); Feb. 22 - Rose Pruning, Dr. Brent Pemberton (9AM at Rose Garden) & Annuals (1PM at Ext. Office); Feb. 24 - Landscape Water Conservation, Dr. Dotty Woodson.

Classes are from 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM except as noted. Certified Master Gardeners may audit any class, earning 3 CEs for each class. For the full schedule of classes go to <http://scmg.tamu.edu/coming-events/> and click on the link there.

Landscape Design Study Course

Dr. Bill Welch and Mrs. Nell Zeigler wish to announce the latest in the Landscape Design Study Courses: Number II, to be held in College Station on February 21- 22. This is the second course in a four-part series, although participants can begin with any of the four. The course qualifies for 12 CEs for Master Gardeners.

For further information and registration forms, go to: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/southernngarden/sglandex2.html>

Tulip Bed at Jack Elementary

It all began when Jack Elementary counselor Sandra Green contacted Anne Pattullo about assisting her in a plan to plant tulips in front of the school. After Anne agreed to help, she asked for other MGs to help. Ronny Duncan prepared the bed and on January 3rd the first bulbs were planted with Anne Pattullo, Ronny Duncan, Pat Welch, Barb Krizan and Martin Davis present. The remaining bulbs were planted on Jan. 5th and 6th with Ken Stegall and Jay Dickson helping. See pictures below.

Kindergarten and 1st graders planted over 200 tulip bulbs. Each student planted one bulb, pointed end up, with MGs pointing the way. Sandra Green sent a thank-you note which said, in part: "I want to let you all know how much I truly appreciate the help of several of your members with a tulip planting project at our school....Your organization is a gift to our community. Thank you!"

Coming Events

- February 3 - ET Turfgrass Conference - 8AM - Overton
- February 12 - ET Lawn & Gardening Conf. - Rose Garden Center - 7:30AM reg. - 8:30AM -Conference.
- February 15 - ET Comm. Fruit Conf. Rose Garden Center



June McClain named TX MG Emeritus
Go to <http://scmg.tamu.edu/whats-new/>
for more information



Joanie Matthews
2011 President



Tulip Planting at
Jack Elementary School

