



MG Grapevine

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January 2010

Volume 17

Number 1

NOTICE

January 7th
MG Association
Meeting at the Rose
Garden Center
11:30 AM

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Keith's Column - pg. 2
- Good Bug/Bad Bug - pg. 2
- Coffee Walking - pg. 3
- Garden Dirt - pg. 3
- Ex. Committee notes - pg.3
- Garden Workdays - pg. 4
- Landscape Design Sch. - pg. 4
- Spring Garden Conf. - pg.4
- Irrigation Efficiency Trng. - pg.4

MG Grapevine Staff

Martin Davis, Editor

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Extension Office

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Monthly Meeting Notes

Get ready for Spring Gardening! Our January program will be brought to us by our own Harvey Collen. Harvey was born and raised in Cleveland Ohio. He holds a B.S. in Geology with a minor in Forestry. He is a graduate of Master Gardener class 13.

Harvey maintains a large vegetable garden at his home on Lake Tyler and frequently shares his bounty with friends and neighbors. He recently finished the Vegetable Specialist training and will teach us the latest methods for successful vegetable gardening. The program will address various aspects of vegetable gardening such as pest control, vegetable varieties, planting methods, watering, mulching etc.

SCMG Association Dues

At its October 29th meeting the Executive Committee voted to increase the annual dues for membership in the Smith County Master Gardener Association to \$20, effective with the 2010 year. Those dues are payable by January 31st.

Members of MG Class 16 (current interns) should also plan to begin paying dues effective with the 2010 year.

Treasurer Pat Welch will be glad to take your check, made out to SCMG, at the January meeting.

Volunteer Hours Reports

Each Master Gardener should report his or her volunteer hours every month. Not all have been diligent in making timely reports. Now is the time to get up-to-date!

Send reports to Martin Davis or bring them to him at the January 7th meeting.

The absolute deadline for reporting 2009 volunteer hours is January 15, 2010.

MG Training Class Schedule

Class XVII will begin on January 12th and will meet twice weekly through March 2010. The schedule for January is as follows:

Jan. 12 - Registration/Orientation; Pruning Trees & Shrubs; Jan. 14 - Plant Growth & Development; Jan. 19 - (At Overton) TX MG Program; Intro. to EarthKind Gardening - Jayla Fry AgriLife Extension State MG Coordinator; Jan. 21 - Landscape Plants - Keith Hansen and Tip of the Week - Linda Sargent; Jan. 26 - Soils & Fertility - Dr. Mark McFarland, AgriLife Extension Soil Fertility Specialist; Jan. 28 (at Overton) Entomology (Insect Pests)/Pesticides & Safety - Dr. Scott Ludwig, AgriLife Extension IPM. The complete schedule is available on the SCMG website.

All classes at the Extension Office classroom, unless otherwise noted, from 1:00PM to 5:00PM.

Certified Master Gardeners may audit any class and will earn 3 CE's if doing so.

Speaker's Bureau

During November Master Gardeners made Speaker's Bureau presentations to 125 people. Subjects included shade gardening, vegetable gardening, forcing bulbs, Japanese maples and daylilies. Those making presentations were Joan Thorpe, Harvey Collen, Andie Rathbone, Sharon Nelson and Jana Bowman.

Volunteer of the Day



KTBB radio continues to honor special people in our city

with it's Volunteer of the Day awards. During January, beginning on the 18th, they will honor Master Gardeners Judy Chance, Linda Childress, Sue Clark, Donna Cole and Frieda Colfelt.



Happy New Year

to all Smith County Master Gardeners! As we enter in to a new year, I hope that it will be both enjoyable and prosperous for you, especially in light of the current economic situation. We continue to see an increased interest in folks growing or wanting to grow

their own food, whether it is to reduce dependence on store-bought sustenance, or perhaps a desire to eat fresh-from-the-garden produce. National gardening surveys have indicated that the increased interest in home-grown groceries is not just to save money, but for a variety of reasons. To help those who are interested in learning how to grow their own groceries, the 2010 Spring Landscape and Garden Conference will feature a talk on home vegetable gardening, and another one on fruit gardening given by Monty Nesbitt, the new Extension Fruit Specialist in College Station. Plus there will be a short session on using tunnels to extend the gardening season by protecting tender vegetation in early spring and late fall. The Conference, which will be on February 13 at the Tyler Rose Garden, will also feature Jim Johnson, Director of the famous Benz School of Floral Design at Texas A&M, who will do a session on floral designing, with an emphasis on using locally available materials. Other topics include top perennials for East Texas, dealing with moles, and a short talk on deer and wild hog damage in the suburban landscape. Pass the word.

We have another great group of 21 trainees signed up for the new Master Gardener training class. First class is on January 12. As you get a chance over the next several weeks, stop by during class to meet and introduce yourself to the new members, and make them feel welcome. They will join us for the March monthly meeting. The entire schedule is posted online (see MG web site under "Coming Events"). Note that several of the classes will be in Overton. Keep in mind you can earn CE's (3) for each class.

I want to thank each of you for your continued support of the Texas Master Gardener program, and in particular for all of your educational efforts for the residents of Smith County. Of course, Smith Co. Master Gardener influence reaches far beyond Smith County through several of the high quality programs in which we are engaged. Also, special thanks to Cindy Harrington for a great year leading the SCMG Association. And, thanks to all the Board members who met regularly, and worked diligently to represent you all with the best interests, seeking to make the best even better (a phrase borrowed from the 4-H program). Welcome to Anne Pattullo as she takes over the leadership reigns of this great organization. I hope you will encourage her and give her your support.

Have a great year, and have fun in the garden! Keith

Good Bug/Bad Bug

by Anne Brown

Ah – winter is here and no bad bugs to worry about. Wrong! In the soil during these cold, rainy, windy days there are many critters waiting for our warm, sunny weather to return. One of the smallest is the Flea Beetle. This tiny insect is part of the leaf beetle group. While adult flea beetles are only a fraction of an inch in size (1/16-1/8th), all adults have large back legs that allow them to jump from plant to plant when disturbed. Adults spend the winter under debris that remains from summer and fall gardening. In early spring, when soils warm up, eggs that were deposited in the soil by the female hatch and the extremely small larvae crawl out and start feeding on plant roots or stems. The damage caused by the larvae usually will not kill the plant except when the plants are just emerging from seed or transplants have not had time to grow four to five leaves. Mature plants can replace the damaged leaves with new growth. Adult flea beetles can also carry diseases from plant to plant.

After several developing stages in the soil, the adult will start feeding on the mature leaves of plants and will move to other areas to renew its food supply. The adults will also feed on immature leaves and stems of plants. For gardeners in our area this means you may have flea beetles as early as January or February. Flea beetle damage is best described as many small holes over the surface of plant leaves; the leaves look like they have been stuck with the sharpened end of a pencil. This damage is described as "shotholes". Adults come in many colors black being most common but they can be brown, bronze or metallic, or even striped, depending on the species. Most species are plant specific and cold crops are the most often attacked but potatoes, tobacco, squash, beans, corn and leaf crops (lettuce, etc.) can be sources of food plus various flowering plants.

Gardeners should start monitoring their plants as soon as the weather is consistently sunny and warm. In the fall before planting seeds or transplants, remove all weeds and foliage left over from summer plants. Rotation of crops in the garden may help to control the flea beetle population but this is not a reasonable practice if the area is small as most home gardens are. Sticky cards placed in several areas of the garden will serve as traps and alert gardeners to the presence of flea beetles. Early control can be used to prevent major damage to crops. Row covers are useful to keep the flea beetles from landing on crops but should be removed when it is time for pollination. If you want to be green, a braconid wasp native to the eastern areas of the US will lay eggs in the flea beetle and the flea beetle dies when the wasp emerges. This wasp can also cause the female flea beetle to be sterile. Flea beetles can return to the same crops several times so regular monitoring is important.

None of the information sources I located mentioned systemic insecticides but Keith thinks systemic insecticides would probably affect the larvae and/or adult although none available to home gardeners is labeled for flea beetles. Available insecticides are used as a foliar spray but remember that spraying can kill beneficial insects and insecticides differ in their residual time. Pyrethrins are short-lived, spinosad is longer lasting and permethrin longest lasting. Chemical controls are numerous but be sure to read the complete label and don't exceed the recommended amounts.

Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences
National Sustainable Agriculture Information Services
University of Minnesota



Coffee Walking

by Anne Pattullo

My favorite way to start each day is to go touring through my yard with my chocolate Cocker Spaniel Ellie, and a big mug of coffee. All I have to say is "Are you ready to go out?" and she is off my lap and charging toward the door. She knows the route well, down the steps to the lake and across the little footbridge to the house next door. Along

the way we check out all the plants, or at least I do, she has other ideas. I try not to spill my coffee while climbing the hill back up to the vegetable garden.

Once there we meet Gator, the neighbor's black lab, and the two of them fight for my attention. Ellie doesn't seem to need it until Gator puts his paws on my chest and knocks the coffee out of the cup. Then they are both there, climbing on me and begging for attention.. That is usually the end of the coffee, but not the walk.



We cross the driveway to the big perennial beds to see if anything new is there. (This morning I spotted the first bloom on the Thrift!) If it is warm enough I sit on the bench in my garden and finish any coffee still in the cup. Ellie usually runs next door to see if Sasha, the cute little Westie, is up for some wrestling and I get a little quiet time to plan my day. Soon it is time to call her home and we head back to the house along the retaining wall where my newest beds are just coming into their own. I wish this walk could happen every day but if we get it in 3-4 times a week, I feel pretty satisfied. In the coming months I'll keep you updated on the little discoveries I make during our Coffee Walks. In the meantime, I just want you all to know how excited I am about the up-coming year of Master Gardener activities. I've got a fantastic group of people to help me with this big job and I know that together we all will make it our best year yet!

Executive Committee Notes

Notes from the November 19th meeting.

- ▶ Reviewed the renewal of the Certificate of Deposit.
- ▶ The committee working on Job Descriptions is still awaiting responses from several members.
- ▶ The East Texas State Fair reimbursed the SCMGs for part of their expense for the Secret Garden exhibit.

Garden Dirt

by Dee Bishop

Blueberries---Beautiful Shrubs

I have always used blueberries in my landscape, except when I lived in Dallas where the soil was much too alkaline. They are gorgeous plants all year long and provide you with beautiful foliage and scrumptious fruit. In late winter they are covered with delicate little white to pink bells that bees adore. Their small glossy leaves are lovely all season, especially in fall when they turn brilliant orange to crimson and light up an otherwise dull landscape.

I thought the birds would like the berries to eat, but my birds prefer sunflower seeds. My yard is too wooded for mocking birds who would appreciate them; so alas---I have to eat them!



Blueberries are related to rhododendrons and azaleas so they need acidic, well-drained, moist soil. Where azaleas do well blueberries will too. The crowns need to be ½ in. above ground and then mulched well. Blueberries need full sun to make the most berries, but will grow well in a half day of shade.

Did you know that blueberries are native American plants and can be found all across the eastern half of the nation? They grow in the wild from Florida all the way up to Maine and even further north. There are dozens of varieties and they come in many sizes---from the 3-4 inch berries in Maine all the way to small trees here in East Texas and south to Florida.

Rabbiteye varieties are our old standbys in the hot humid South. They ripen in June and July. You need at least two varieties for larger crops. There are early, mid, and late season varieties.

Newer Southern High Bush blueberries are supposedly earlier bearers than the rabbiteyes, as early as April and May. I hope to try some soon. Prune blueberries by removing old canes and by clipping off the ends of the twigs every year after they finish bearing.

Diseases and insects seldom if ever bother blueberries. Some say birds are the worst enemy, but my birds never bother mine.

There is nothing more fun than grabbing a handful of juicy blueberries straight off the bush while you water. Children think picking and eating them is a real treat. My suggestion to you --- get at least a couple of blueberry plants for your landscape and enjoy them for years to come, with little care or bother.

- ▶ Keith Hansen reported that he had 10 applications in hand for the 2010 MG Class.
- ▶ The Treasurer requested that information on the 2010 dues be printed in the Grapevine.
- ▶ Cindy Harrington verified that two members planned to attend the State Director's meeting on Dec. 5th.

Spring Garden Conference

The 2010 event will be on Saturday February 13th at the Rose Garden Center. While the agenda has not yet been finalized, the following is an early peek at the speakers for the day.

Jim Johnson, Director of the Benz School of Floral Design, will do a floral design session; Keith Hansen will talk about the suggested perennial list (and the plants) being developed; Dr. Joe Masabni, Extension Vegetable Specialist, will speak on growing your own vegetables, highlighting home gardening and also trendy vegetables, and also discussing using low and high tunnels to extend the growing season; Monty Nesbitt, Extension Fruit Specialist, will discuss fruits you can easily grow at home; Dr. Billy Higgenbotham, Extension Wildlife Specialist, will talk about deer and hog damage to our landscapes, and Keith Hansen will cover mole control.

Garden Workdays

Workdays in the IDEA and Heritage Gardens during January are scheduled for the 19th and 26th at 1PM.

Landscape Design School

Dr. Bill Welch and Ms. Suzanne Milstead wish to announce the latest in the Landscape Design Study Courses: Number IV, Series XXI - February 22-23, 2010. The courses are held in College Station, TX., and are co-sponsored by Texas Garden Clubs, Inc. and Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Texas A&M University. They have been attended by many Master Gardeners in the past. It is an opportunity for more in-depth training in landscape design than we normally include in the Master Gardener curriculum. The course qualifies for 12 CE credits for certified MGs. This is the last course in a four-part series, although participants can begin with any of the four.

Irrigation Efficiency Training

Master Gardener Specialist training for Irrigation Efficiency will be offered on March 29-31 at the San Antonio Botanical Garden. The training will cover hands-on practices for determining irrigation efficiency, setting controllers, soak and cycle method, minor irrigation repairs, system trouble shooting and other water conservation practices. Cost is \$200.

Those who are interested in this course should contact Keith Hansen for further information.



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