

Henderson County Master Gardener

“The Inside Dirt”

Master Gardeners and 2004 Interns Visit

Gregg Grant

Pilgrimage to Arcadia Texas

Sally Keenan

William Wordsworth and his wife, Dorothy, were driving back to Grasmere on April 15, 1802 when they passed a strip of land along Glencoyne Bay covered with blooming daffodils. Dorothy wrote the following in her journal. “I never saw daffodils so beautiful they grew among the mossy stones about and about them, some rested their heads upon these stones as on a pillow for weariness and the rest tossed and reeled and danced and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind that blew upon them over the lake, they looked so gay ever dancing and changing.”

More recently a group of Henderson County Master



Gardeners and the interns went on a pilgrimage down toward Nacogdoches to the town of Arcadia, Texas. There was a great treat in store for us

there. We had the opportunity to visit the gardens and home of Gregg Grant, the well-known horticulturist. Now Greg is out-spoken about one thing in particular. Gardens need to be planted with tough perennial species adapted to the Texas climate. Indeed that was what we found growing in wild profusion in his swept yard.

I had never seen such luxurious growth. There were magenta cock’s comb



three feet high with flower heads so bold and beautiful they were fit for a palace. There were turk’s cap, sages, and lilies blooming beautifully even in the days of late September. It was truly stunning.



Then came a great revelation. Greg had four large buckets full of daffodil bulbs for sale. These were the home-grown varieties, originally salvaged from old farmsteads, that are especially good for naturalizing. Paper bags were available, and all were allowed to partake. The only caveat was that everyone should get some if they liked. A cigar box was left on the table for payments. As good gardeners we shared nicely but I did notice that there were none left at the end. Come spring I expect that several dozen yards in the area will begin to sport heirloom daffodils.



In the years to come these hardy varieties will multiply and will be divided. Each spring crowds of yellow and white flowers will begin to appear in the cool days of late winter. These are the types that do best here. They need

to bloom early to so that their foliage can feed next years bulbs with food for a new year's blooming. Then as the days get hot the bulbs go dormant till another season passes.

I plan to plant my bulbs in a field near the lake. Perhaps in years to come, long after I am gone someone will look upon my work and say with Wordsworth:

I wander'd lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Greg Grants List of the Best Naturalizing *Narcissus* for Texas

1. *Narcissus jonquilla* (jonquil): Perennial throughout the state. Yellow, fragrant blooms in February. Multiplies best in acid, sandy-loam soils.
2. *Narcissus x odorus* (campernelle jonquil): Adapted throughout the state. Yellow, fragrant blooms in February. The best!
3. *Narcissus x intermedius* (Texas star jonquil): Adapted throughout the state. Creamy-yellow, fragrant blooms in February.
4. *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* (early daffodil/Lent lily): Perennial throughout the state. Creamy-yellow blooms in February. Multiplies best in acid, sandy-loam soils.
5. *Narcissus tazetta* 'Grand Primo' (Grand Primo narcissus): Adapted to all parts of the state from Dallas south. Creamy-white, fragrant blooms in February. Thrives in alkaline or acid soils.
6. *Narcissus tazetta papyraceous* (paperwhites): Performs best from 1-10 south to the coast. Pure white, fragrant blooms in December-January.

Air-Drying Flowers Lena Stringer

When the summer season ends many of my favorite flowers also end their season. I have found a fun hobby and an inexpensive way to prolong my favorite flowers' season. The art of drying flowers has been around for decades. Preserving flowers in America goes back to the English colonists. Many of the flowers displayed at Williamsburg, Mount Vernon and other historical homes

were preserved using the air-drying method.

What I like most about this method is that it is so simple. The first step in the process is gathering the flowers that you would like to dry. Some of the flowers that I have found to dry well are bachelors button, goldenrod, roses, Mexican sage, camellias, wildflowers, and hydrangeas. Just about any flower that has a seed head can be dried. Blue and yellow flowers retain their color when air dried; pink flowers tend to fade.

Cut the flowers as they are beginning to bloom, and leave most of the stem intact. Hydrangeas are the exception to the rule; they do best if you leave them until late



summer when the petals age and take on a vintage look. The best time to cut the flowers is late morning on a dry day after the dew has evaporated. I always cut more than I need to ensure a pretty bouquet. Remove all foliage from the stems to prepare for drying.

To hang the flowers, I bundle five to six stems together with a rubber band. The rubber band holds the stems together and when the stems shrink, the rubber band will adjust also. I then insert a paperclip into the rubber band and bend it to make a hook to hang on the rack. For larger heavier blooms like hydrangeas floral wire works well.

The flowers are now ready to be hung upside down. Storage needs to be in a warm, dark, dry place. The darkness will help preserve the flower color. I use a rack in my garage at the back where it doesn't receive much light. Air-drying takes approximately 4-6 weeks. You can tell when the flowers are dry by the brown stems, the closed flower petals, and the crisp feel.

Not all flowers dry well, but experimentation yields knowledge of what will work and what will not. Very little is lost by trying. I have found this to be a year-round fun-filled hobby that provides material for arrangements in vases and wreaths. Hope you have as much fun with your flowers as I have with mine.

Fall Planting

Rick Hirsch
County Extension Agent
Henderson County

Finally fall is here. The weather is becoming cooler and gardeners are migrating back outdoors after the summer's heat. Now is a perfect time to add a new tree or a grouping of shrubs to the landscape. Or perhaps you have an area in the landscape that needs "remodeling" or rejuvenating. The fall may be the best season to plant, surpassing even the spring.

Many people prefer January through March for planting, but the fall months of September through December had distinct advantages. Fall planting follows the heat of summer and precedes a cool winter season. Trees and shrubs planted use this to good advantage. Plant roots grow anytime the soil temperature is 40 degrees or higher, which may occur all winter in Texas. During the winter months, the root systems of the fall planted specimens develop and become established. When spring arrives, this expanded root system can support and take advantage of the full surge of spring growth.

Fall planting is the optimum time to plant balled and burlapped trees and shrubs. Balled and burlapped plants have ample time to recover from transplanting and proliferate roots before spring growth begins. Remember, however, all bare root plants, including roses and pecan and fruit trees, should be planted in late winter when they are completely dormant.

When buying plants for your landscape get healthy, well-grown plants. Always buy from a reputable dealer. Those in the plant-selling business year-round depend on repeat customers, and only by selling customers quality plants can there be assurance of future business. Beware of plant bargains. They can easily turn out to be real headaches. A bargain is no good if it dies. The price tag, especially the cheapest one, is not the best guide to quality.

All plants have growing requirements. Think about the plant's needs before you invest. Is it adapted to your area's soil? Will it grow in sun or shade? Does it need a wet or dry location? Is it cold hardy? Some nurseries have this type of information on tags beside the plant. If not, ask a nursery professional or the County Extension office. "Plan before you plant" is always a good rule of thumb.

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Whether you are planting a single plant or an entire landscape, plan first, then plant. Good planting is a worthwhile investment of time that will pay off in a greater enjoyment of attractive and useful home grounds, and in increasing the value of your home. It's much easier to move plants on paper than to dig them after planting in the wrong place. A plan saves many planting mistakes.

Every plant in the landscape should serve a purpose. Ask yourself if you want a plant for screening, for privacy or for shade. How large will it be five years from now? Plants, like people, grow up. Remember, that a small one-gallon size plant will look entirely different after a few years of growth in your landscape.

Growing and Harvesting Loofahs

Yvonne Perano

At the Master Gardener Spring Conference this year I found a new plant, a loofah. I had never grown a loofah before, and like most other crazy gardeners, I just had to have one. I'm embarrassed to say my poor loofah is still in its original 4" pot, but it isn't little any more. It's six feet long with lots of yellow blooms! A Master Gardener friend of mine, who is far more responsible than I, put her loofahs in the ground (where they belong) and her plants are now huge with lots of nice-sized gourds.

The loofah (also spelled luffa or lufa) is a member of the Cucurbitaceae family: gourds and pumpkins. *Luffa cylindrical* is the common loofah sponge, and has been cultivated for hundreds of years. Loofahs produce annual vines over twelve feet, and twenty-footers have been reported. The plant is cold-sensitive and requires a very long growing season in order to mature into dried sponges. Seeds are slow to sprout and resent transplanting, so if you want to start the seed indoors, be sure to use peat pots that can be planted right into the ground without disturbing the roots. Outdoors, plant seeds 8-12" apart along a fence, or in hills of 3 or 4 seeds, 1/2 inch deep, with hills 4-6 feet apart. Loofahs need lots of sun, plenty of moisture and a pH of around 6.0 to 6.8. Water deeply and cover the bed with mulch, but keep the mulch away from the stem. Damping off can be a problem with young seedlings when growing in cool, wet conditions. Gourds are heavy feeders and require fertile soil. Two or three times during the growing season add 20-25 pounds of nitrogen per acre as a side-dress, or simply spray the plants with liquid fertilizer (Schultz, Peters or Miracle Grow.) Reducing fertilizer and

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A Word From the President

Terri Hudson

Ah, fall. You know that moment... The morning air is crisp enough to send me back into the house for a sweater. My arch-nemesis, poison ivy, begins to flame in a shade of red gorgeous enough to (almost) make me forget the itch it inflicts. The sun has unmistakably begun its march south for the winter. And, once again, the garden beckons.

Although our summer remained remarkably mild by East Texas standards, even the low 90s make picking, planting and weeding exceedingly uncomfortable. The full sun that so many plants claim to love makes their parts of the garden uninhabitable from before mid-morning until dusk. Even when out of the direct sun, the hot, humid air robs me of my enthusiasm.

I am wild about fall. I admit it openly. Winter provides much-needed rest. Spring is full of promise. Summer delivers a wonderful bounty, but it is fall that makes this gardener's heart smile!

In so many ways, the big payoff comes in the fall. A season of faithful shearing has the mum bed ready to burst forth in its annual riot of yellow, rust and scarlet. The roses, courageously pruned (against my better judgment), deliver a stunning show – far more lovely than spring. A cloud of purple bee and butterfly magnetism overtakes the Mexican sage. That tee-pee of cypress vine, having teased me with its billowing foliage all summer, breaks into a mountain of red – beloved by hummingbird and gardener alike. The purple ruffles basil, having recovered from its own shearing (actually, three shearings) is once again regal and absolutely gorgeous. Crinums scent the garden for yards in every direction – heavenly at any time of the year.

So, you see, fall truly is my favorite season of the year. Planning, planting, weeding, watering, deadheading, harvesting – all done. There is nothing left to do but ...enjoy.

One last note: This is my final column as President of Henderson County Master Gardener Association. My term will end with our banquet in December. It has been my honor to serve this year and I thank everyone one who has helped make it a success. Your kindness and encouragement have been appreciated at every turn. You can count on me to be in a garden near you, trowel at the ready, in the coming years. Happy Gardening!

Loofahs

water in late summer will encourage fruits to harden off.

The vines, which grow like weeds, need the support of a strong fence or trellis; but they can also be grown up a wire or tree. One grower reported using an 8' diameter fence wire ring attached to 4x4's. You may need to hand-train the plants onto the support structure. Prune the plants by removing the first four lateral shoots (from the soil line upwards.) When the vine is about 6 feet long, it will produce male flowers – then, in a few days, it will begin producing female flowers, which will eventually grow into gourds that can weigh up to 3 lbs. Keep fruit off the ground. If any fruit develops rotten spots or holes, it should be thrown out. The fruit matures about four months after planting.

“Can I eat it?” You bet; about three months after planting, immature fruit (about 3-6" long,) can be cooked like summer squash or used in soups, casseroles and omelets. Larger fruits (over 6") may be eaten, but must be peeled first because the skin becomes bitter with age.

Toward the end of summer, mature loofahs will begin to loose weight. If you plan to make sponges, allow them to ripen on the vine and harvest when the skin has turned yellow or brown. The gourd is sufficiently dry when you can hear the seeds inside when you shake it. Break off the bud end and shake all the seeds out (or knock one gourd against another to dislodge the seeds.) Submerge the gourd in warm water, from 5-20 minutes, or until the skin and pulp can be easily removed. Soak the sponge in a weak mixture of bleach and water 1:10 until it is the color you desire, then rinse thoroughly and sun dry.

The smooth, flat, black seeds you knocked out of the gourd can be saved to plant next year, but be sure they were only pollinated from other loofah gourds. If they were cross-pollinated with other types or gourds or squash growing nearby, you are less likely to get a true loofah from the seed. It



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<http://agfacts.tamu.edu/D5/Henderso/hc-mg.htm>

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The Henderson County Master Gardener Association is sponsored by the Henderson County Cooperative Extension Service which is a part of the Texas A&M University System. Its objectives are to increase knowledge of gardening to its members and the general public, and to provide the community with information on good gardening practices.

If you have received this newsletter in error, or to provide us with a change of address, please contact the Henderson County Extension Office at (903)-675-6130.