

Henderson County Master Gardener

“The Inside Dirt”

Henderson County Master Gardeners Support Sprouts

Sprouts

Sharon Barrett

If you haven't helped a SPROUT to grow you have missed out on a treat. Of course, we've all sprouted our seeds and our cuttings and our potatoes. But I'm talking about human SPROUTS!

In researching curriculum for my real life job in the Community Services Department at TVCC, I realized that the Junior Master Gardener (JMG) curriculum written by Texas A&M perfectly fit the goals we were trying to achieve in a summer program for children. That curriculum incorporates elements of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), on which the curriculum in Texas schools is based. I got on the phone with Texas A&M and the TVCC SPROUTS program was born (or I should say, sprouted).

The SPROUTS come to our campus during the month of June for some stress relief from academia. There they use concepts and skills taught to them in the academic setting and learn how they relate in real life situations. They learn spatial concepts down in the dirt, measurements in the kitchen, math with flower petals, scales and musical rhythm, and a bit of biology from plants and insects. But it is all disguised as fun!

During the course of their stay with us our SPROUTS rotate thru stations where they do food science projects that become snacks, math and science in the form of experiments, music, arts and gardening. A new element is being added this year with the new Wildlife Gardener curriculum from JMG.

When they rotate into the gardens our Master Gardener volunteers have them participate in all sorts of projects and demonstrations. They also help them to create various kinds of gardens. Last year they produced a very impressive flag garden. Both Master Gardeners and

children enjoyed such activities as Inspecta Insecta, Suck-a-Bug, Planting Trash, Earth Apple, Cloud Maker, Secret Smells, Morpho Puppets and Gas Gobblers. Junior Master Gardener training is available to youth leaders who want to form organizations. We provide that training to our SPROUTS teachers and volunteers and I strongly encourage anyone who has an opportunity to take the training to do so. This is a nation wide program and our area is an open opportunity for you to make a difference in the future of children you know. As a TVCC Coordinator, I thank the Master Gardeners for their participation and spirit in this project. As a Master Gardener, I say this is the kind of project we're about. I'm glad we do it well.

Indoor-Outdoor Houseplants

Betty Minter

Most houseplants can go outdoors for the summer. It's a pleasure to see porches and doorsteps lined with flowers and foliage, soaking up fresh air and sunshine in preparation for the next indoor season. Some houseplants can stay outside year round; some can be planted outside after blooming; and some need to stay outside until the days shorten so that they will set buds.

Chlorophytum, also called Spider Plant or Airplane Plant, has long been popular as a hanging basket or pedestal plant. Given plenty of light it makes lots of little plantlets that are easy to pot up. So, after a couple years, you've given everyone you know some Airplane Plants and you're tired of bringing several dozen pots of them in every fall. You don't have to leave them to freeze. Plant them in the ground in a shady location where you'd like to have groundcover. Let them die down just as their family members, the lilies, do. In a mild winter, with 3 or 4 inches of leaf mulch, they won't even die all the way down. Come spring you have groundcover that compares favorably with hosta or liriop.

Begonias are often grown indoors in an east window for

constant, abundant blooms. They can be planted outside and mulched for protection through the winter. They will emerge lush and beautiful in the spring with a well-rooted head start over the bedding plants you'd buy at the nursery.

Many of us enjoy forcing amaryllis and narcissus bulbs indoor. Not everyone saves the bulbs after they've finished blooming. The plants are frequently discarded. Don't do that! Plant the bulbs outside after they've dried out some. Don't worry about what time of year it is. It's better they're in the ground than in the fridge where they'd probably get thrown out with the leftovers. Plant the bulbs at a depth of at least twice their height in well-drained soil in a sunny or partly sunny location. Fertilize with a little bone meal once a year, and you'll be rewarded with those blooms for years to come.

Two plants that will reliably set buds outside are kalanchoe and zygocactus, or Christmas cactus. Both are succulent, but can tolerate more water than most other succulents. They do need to be kept somewhat dry for 5 or 6 weeks prior to bloom however. They're considered "day-length" plants, because their bloom triggers aren't activated until the days begin to shorten. If the plant you bought over a year ago has not re-bloomed it may be that it was kept inside with long hours of artificial light. It just didn't think it was time yet! After the buds form, the plants can be brought inside to brighten the house through their blooming season. The zygocactus blooms for only a short time, but the flowers are so exotic they're worth waiting for. The common red kalanchoe, on the other hand, may bloom for months. It may still be blooming when you take it out again for summer. When the flowers dry and you cut them off, you will still have an attractive foliage plant for a shady spot.

So many plants, so little space! If you can leave some of the "house" plants outside all year, you'll have more room inside for the new ones that you just can't do without.

Lurking Amongst the Flowers - Ticks!

Yvonne Perano

After a few hours of weed-pulling last week, to my horror I discovered a tick happily munching on my leg! I was sure I was going to end up bedridden and useless for the remainder of my shortened life. In my ignorance, I tried to pull it off. When that didn't work, I held a hot match to its backside, bathed it in alcohol, gave it a liberal coating

"Jungle Red" nail polish, and smothered it in Vaseline, but it remained firmly attached.

Finally, in desperation, I took a single edged razor blade and scraped it off. The head remained embedded and I ended up with an itchy, infected bump on my leg and a sense of impending doom. I decided it was time I did some research on how to deal with ticks and what my chances were of contracting a horrible disease from one.

Ticks consider mammals, amphibians, reptiles and birds fair game as hosts. Unlike fleas, ticks do not jump; however they do perform a truly acrobatic act by climbing onto vegetation, holding on with one or two legs and stretching out to grab or fall onto any passing host. They are aided in their quest for a blood meal by their ability to detect body heat, sweat and body odors, exhaled carbon dioxide and vibrations and shadows cast by passing animals. Because of their flat bodies and light frames, ticks can wander around your body unnoticed for hours before choosing a feeding site, often on the neck or scalp. The tick will make a small incision into the skin and then burrow in, inserting its barbed piercing mouthparts which are next to impossible to dislodge. Some ticks also secrete a glue-like substance from their salivary glands. After a blood meal an adult female tick can weigh up to 250 times her unfed weight. Full of blood, she will drop off the host, lay a few thousand eggs and die.

The most common ticks found in Texas that attack humans are the American dog tick, and the lone star tick. Both of which are about the size of a pencil eraser in their adult stage and most prevalent in the spring. The bite of an American dog tick usually causes little or no pain, while that of the lone star tick can cause a painful wound. Neither the American dog tick nor the lone star tick has been shown to carry Lyme disease; however, they can transmit other diseases, including Rocky Mountain spotted fever. The type of tick most responsible for transmitting Lyme disease, the *Ixodes dammini*, or deer tick, is about the size of the head of a pin. Although cases of Lyme disease have been found in over 47 states, including Texas, the deer tick is not common to Texas. It is important to understand that ticks harboring disease don't always infect their host. The tick usually has to be attached and feeding for 24-48 hours before the pathogen will be released; but squeezing the tick while trying to remove it can cause instant release.

(See **Ticks** page 4)

A Word From the President

Terri Hudson

My! What a busy Spring this has been! I hope everyone enjoyed the prolonged cool weather as much as I did. The Henderson County Master Gardeners have been extremely active during this first half of the year. January, February and March were spent preparing for our 4th Annual Spring Conference, and oh, what a marvelous evening it was! Although the Conference has come and gone, it made lasting memories. I suspect everyone in attendance raced out to start or add to his or her own old-fashioned cottage garden. Greg Grant is such a well-informed and very entertaining speaker. We all enjoyed the personal anecdotes that accompanied his wonderful slides. And, they were SLIDES. Greg must be the last person on the face of the earth still using a slide carousel and projector. Kodak should consider putting him in their hall of fame! Greg shared with us his love of the tried and true performers, and, I hope, rekindled old love affairs with some of the less flashy members of the plant world. They are all worth a second look. Greg also helped our annual plant sale to be a huge success. There is nothing like having your guest speaker feature in his talk some of the very plants you have for sale!

Lots of planning and hard work went into making the conference a success. Thanks to our exhibitors and advertisers, those who donated plants and door prizes and to everyone who volunteered, especially those who managed to stay to the bitter end of clean up; we could not have done it without you. Our top ticket seller was K-Lu Cowan with forty tickets sold. And our main organizational force was Yvonne Perano. I could not have managed without her!

Right on the heels of our Wednesday evening conference was the East Texas Arboretum and Botanical Society's annual Spring Festival on Saturday. Our tent was erected and plants stashed on Friday afternoon, and then... RAIN! Lots and lots of rain! Our Saturday volunteers, still bone weary from Wednesday night, were up and headed out their doors when the call came – postponed for two weeks. At least there was a little time to catch our breath.

Mother's Day weekend took us to the postponed

Arboretum Spring Festival. Our good friends at ETABS put in lots of work of their own to put on such a nice event. The Master Gardeners identified some plants, made some new friends and, hopefully, encouraged more than a few folks to take the MG training when it is offered again beginning this September.

The next weekend took us to an Open House at Sticks and Stones Nursery in Tool. We answered questions and, once again, got folks pointed toward MG training in September. Is it possible that it is just May 15th?

Who knew May had so many weekends? The next one had Master Gardeners taking Junior Master Gardener training at TVCC. Those volunteers are working with gifted and talented children during the month of June in a TVCC program called SPROUTS. This is our second year of being involved with SPROUTS and I suspect the MGs learn as much from the children as the children learn from the MGs.

And then we made it, mercifully, to June. The 11th took us on a tour of the gardens of four of our interns, plus the grounds of Elmwood Gardens. K-Lu Cowan, Nina Ellis, Shirley Hobbie and Peggy Wyatt put in lots of overtime getting ready for us. Downed trees from the storm the week before were still awaiting the chainsaw in more than one instance. Dee Dee Turnage, at Elmwood, had her staff working steadily to have things ready for a wedding the next day. I was exhausted just watching.

Now that we are getting to the hot part of summer, we are preparing to kick off our new demonstration garden project at the Arboretum. The ETABS board has been kind enough to allow us our own plot to conduct plant trials, demo various gardening methods and offer additional educational information to our community. We are delighted at their generosity and cannot wait to get to work. Look for progress reports in our newsletter in the coming months.

Just in case you missed our conference, check our web site (www.henderson-tx.tamu.edu) and click on Master Gardeners) for the plant list from our sale. There is much useful information, as well as a clue to some of the plants Greg Grant recommended. Happy reading!

Ticks

Yvonne Perano

Continued from page 2

Lyme disease is a bacterial infection that is difficult to diagnose because early symptoms such as fever, chills, swollen glands and severe head and body aches mimic the flu. The most definitive early symptom, occurring in 70% of infected individuals, is a gradually expanding circular or oval-shaped red rash that may look like a bulls-eye. If you exhibit these symptoms, your doctor should perform a blood test, although you may get a false negative up to two or three weeks after exposure. Be sure to tell your doctor the date you were bitten so a second test can be done should the symptoms persist. Lyme disease can be successfully treated in its early stages using antibiotics; however, as the disease progresses, it becomes more difficult to treat, so early detection is vital. If left untreated, the disease can cause chronic arthritis, heart palpitations and neurological problems, including numbness, loss of concentration, hearing and memory, double vision, lethargy and paralysis of facial muscles.

Rocky Mountain spotted fever's initial symptoms are also flu-like with a severe headache and fever of 104-106 degrees F. within two weeks of exposure. The most characteristic symptom is a rash that appears on about the second to fifth day on the wrists and ankles, later spreading to other parts of the body. If left untreated, Rocky Mountain spotted fever can cause heart or brain damage and medical experts estimate that without treatment, 20% of those infected could die. Antibiotics administered in the early stages can eliminate the infection. The primary vector is the American dog tick, although lone star ticks may also transmit the pathogen. In most cases, the tick must be attached for at least a day for infection to occur.

Tick paralysis is another little understood health threat posed by certain ticks attacking humans and other animals. It occurs during the feeding process when the host is afflicted with a paralytic condition, which develops gradually and in some individuals, can result in death. Paralytic symptoms disappear rapidly upon removal of the tick and there seem to be no serious after effects.

Ticks avoid direct sunlight and will usually not infest areas that are well maintained, so now you have even more reason to get out the riding mower and nippers. Wear

light colored, long sleeved shirts and long pants tucked into your socks. (Ticks can be spotted more easily on light colored clothing.) You can also spray yourself with an insect repellent containing DEET, but that won't necessarily keep the little buggers from crawling under your clothing. After working or playing outside, do a full-body inspection, paying particular attention to the scalp and any folds in the skin.

You can treat tick-infested areas with a pesticide during April and May when ticks are first detected. If you're not sure there are ticks on your property, drag a 3x3 foot white flannel or cotton sheet through any suspected areas. The ticks will attach to the fabric and you'll have a pretty good idea of your current tick population.

Do not remove ticks with your bare fingers. Use gloves or smash removed ticks in some tissue paper. Ticks can transmit disease, especially Rocky Mountain spotted fever, through tiny cuts and abrasions on your fingers. Embedded ticks should be removed with fine-pointed tweezers by grasping the tick just behind the point of attachment and pulling slowly and steadily until the tick is dislodged. (Depending on how deeply embedded the tick is, this could be a little painful.) You can also try using the tweezers to turn the tick counterclockwise, but use extra care not to squeeze the body and make sure you get the whole tick out, including the part that is in your skin. Afterward, wash the bite area thoroughly with soap and water and cover it with a band-aid. If you find one tick, it is always a good idea to check the rest of your body for others that may be feeding.

I've lived in Athens for over 7 years, tromping all over the brush around our property, and while I have been stung and bitten repeatedly by any number of creatures, never a tick. In my research I discovered ticks have one primary enemy, the fire ant. An unfortunate downside of our making headway in the effort to control this scourge has perhaps opened the door for a reemergence of the native tick population. I'm not sure if it is a good tradeoff, given the ants sting is painful, but not necessarily life threatening. For now, I will keep "two-stepping" and use my newfound knowledge to reduce my risk of tick-borne diseases. Safe gardening to you all!

Stretching Your Garden Dollar

Rick Hirsch
County Extension Agent
Henderson County

Henderson County homeowners enjoy gardening, yet sometimes they spend needless dollars. Although dollars spent on landscaping can pay big dividends, the trick is to stretch those dollars and make the most of the money invested. This time we will discuss some money saving, dollar-stretching suggestions for you to consider.

Purchasing the biggest trees is not always a wise landscape investment. Big trees are often set back drastically during digging and transplanting, and may take years to recover from the shock. Many times a smaller tree will re-establish more rapidly, producing a nicer tree in a shorter time period. With the money you save buying smaller trees you can get a good start on the rest of your landscape.

High quality trees are a good investment. Although there is a time and place for fast growers, do not overlook the dependable oak varieties, cedar elm, bald cypress and Chinese pistachio. They will last longer and you will have fewer insect, disease and pruning headaches in the future.

Beware of door-to-door tree trimmers who insist that topping your tree is a good idea. Topping trees opens up large wounds, leaving them vulnerable to insects, disease and decay. It also makes for ugly trees.

Select plants well adapted to your area. There are excellent choices available, including many interesting native varieties. You may not have the unique landscape on the block, but it will be healthy.

When using chemicals, read and follow label directions carefully to avoid mistakes and save money. You can ruin quality plants by spraying before reading.

Using the wrong insecticide in your vegetable garden may make the harvest unsafe for the dinner table. Use only pesticides specifically labeled for the vegetable to be treated.

Save money by making and using compost as a soil conditioner. Any home landscape has an out-of-the-way spot large enough to accommodate a compost pile. This not only saves money spent on peat moss, but it gives you an easy way to dispose of leaves and grass clippings.

Beware of 'miracle' products. They may or may not aid your landscape or garden. Every year dozens of deceptive products hit the market. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Read labels carefully, and use common sense with regard to unbelievable claims.

Top dressing your lawn with sand or soil on a regular basis is not a recommended practice. While minor low spots can be corrected this way, you can easily overdo it and smother your lawn. Using topsoil from an unknown source may also introduce weeds into the landscape, creating additional work and expense to correct the problem.

The Three Sisters and Cinderella

Neil Poore

The Native Americans grew corn, squash, and beans in the same plot. The 3 inter-planted crops do so well together they became known as the 3 sisters. This goes to show that companion planting is not a new concept. But I guess I'd better save that story for another time. Back to the 3 sisters, corn, beans and squash were all taken from the New World to the Old. The rest, as they say, is history. Since being contrary seems to be part of my make-up, I think history should also recognize a 4th sister, Cinderella. Being a step-sister, Cinderella, often doesn't get the respect she deserves. This plant is also a native to America, although it originated in Central America. It spread first to North and South America, and thanks to Christopher Columbus and his huge blunder in geography, the rest of the world. Cinderella's identity? The pepper, of course.

If any plant deserves the name of Cinderella, I believe it's the pepper. The plants can range in size from a few inches tall to the size of a large shrub. The colors of the ripened fruit can cover the colors of a rainbow. The fruit can range from the size of an English pea to the size of a large beefsteak tomato. Its shape can range from oval, blocky, to long and slender. One old heirloom variety is said to

resemble an unmentionable part of the male anatomy. It can be used as a beautiful landscape plant or as a garden staple. It can be grown as an annual or potted and brought indoors to grow as a perennial. My wife and I have a chiltepin or bird pepper that is 4 or 5 years old. Thanks to the mild weather this past winter it survived outside in a bed with no protection. It loses its leaves like a tree in the fall and re-grows the following spring.

If the information above isn't enough to make you want to grow peppers, I should mention one other thing. Flavor. The pepper has become a staple in many different cuisines. The Italians use a mild pepper known as Bulls Horn for roasting and frying. Hungary is famous for its Paprika. Thai food gets its fiery heat from you guessed it, peppers. The humble bell pepper has become an often used ingredient in American cooking. I think Texas would be a poorer place without Chile relleno's and hot sauce. Cajun cooking wouldn't be the same without Cayenne and Tabasco. Maryland uses a pepper known as fish pepper in many seafood dishes. New Mexico and green chili go hand in hand. I'm sure many additions could be made to this list.

Care and Cultivation:

The needs of peppers and tomatoes are very similar. There are, however, 4 important differences. These are:

- (1.) Pepper seeds are much slower to germinate than tomatoes. Even with additional bottom heat they can take as long as a month to germinate. Extra time for growth should be allowed because of the slow germination.
- (2.) Peppers that are exposed to temperatures below 45 degrees can become stunted. Even a short exposure can damage the plants. Peppers should be thought of like okra and southern peas. Wait till the nights are warm and/or provide protection.
- (3.) Peppers should be planted at the same depth as the plants were growing in their containers. Do not bury the stem like a tomato.
- (4.) Pepper plants are very brittle. The taller varieties need stakes or cages to prevent wind damage. Never pull fruit from the plant. I like to use a pair of scissors or hand pruners.

Peppers prefer a slightly acid to slightly alkaline soil. The old trick of adding a few matches to the planting hole probably worked because the sulphur made the soil more acidic.

Pepper spacing should be 1 to 2 feet apart depending on the variety's final size. Contrary to what is commonly written, I think most peppers appreciate some light shade. I've grown them in groups of 4, 6, or 8 in beds planted 2 feet apart in either direction. They seem to like the shade produced by the adjoining plants.

After the plants are established, I like to fertilize with an organic foliar feeding. If using conventional fertilizer. I would recommend a tablespoon of garden fertilizer scattered around the root zone every 1 to 2 weeks in our sandy soil. A weekly deep watering is also good. Peppers should be well mulched during the dry and hot summer months.

Personal favorites:

- (1.) Bells - California Wonder, Chinese Giant.
- (2.) Roasting - Bulls Horn.
- (3.) Green Chile - Anaheim, Big Jim, Sandia Hot, Chimayo,
- (4.) Landscaping - Super Chile Hybrid, Chiltepin, Purple varieties.
- (5.) Hot Sauce - Jalapeno, Serano, Tabasco.
- (6.) Chile Rellenos - Ancho, Anaheim, Big Jim.
- (7.) Smokey flavor - Pasilla Bajio.
- (8.) Spice - Boldog Paprika, Long Red Cayenne, Pimento.
- (9.) Novelty - Peter.
- (10.) Organic Bug Spray - Habanero . (Add six to 1 gallon of water, let sit one week, spray, May not kill them but will make them leave.)

Have You Seen A Rose?

Nina Ellis

Have you ever seen a rose in a friend's garden that you wished to have in your own garden but didn't know its name? You can't find it in a catalog or in a nursery without some information. Here's my solution! Ask for a few cuttings. The cuttings are best taken on stems with recent bloom. Snip cuttings at least five inches long. Longer ones may be cut again when potting. The ideal time to take cuttings is just after spring or fall bloom. If you must travel some distance put the cuttings in a plastic bag, then put the bagged cuttings in a cooler with ice. This will prevent the cuttings from drying out.

To pot up cuttings:

- (1) Wash your pots and disinfect them by dipping in a weak bleach solution to. One quart or one gallon pots do nicely.
- (2) Mix up a seed-starting grade of potting soil with about 1/3 by volume of "Perlite". This mixture will assure reasonably sterile soil and proper drainage and air flow for the cuttings.
- (3) Moisten the potting mixture thoroughly and firm it up. Using a pencil or small stick, make two or three holes about 2 or 3 inches deep into the mix.
- (4) Remove the cuttings from the cooler. Cut the stems into five-inch lengths making sure there are two nodes to go below the soil level. Remove old flower buds and all but three or four leaves at the top of the cutting. These remaining leaves are necessary to promote root formation.
- (5) Dip the end of the cutting in rooting hormone, tapping off the excess. Carefully insert the cuttings into the prepared mix and firm up the soil.

At this stage I put a couple of sticks at the sides of the pot and cover my potted cuttings with a clear plastic bag and tie it securely. I understand clear beverage containers with the bottom cut off work well. Place the pots in a well lighted but shady spot well out of the sun. Do not poke around in the soil during this crucial time. New roots are hair-like and easily damaged. In two or three weeks you should see new growth beginning. Untie the plastic or unscrew the cap of the bottle to allow some air circulation. Check the moisture level regularly. Keep the cuttings damp but never wet.

In about two more weeks there should be vigorous growth. Remove the plastic bag or bottle at this time. Leave your cuttings in the shady location; as they will be extremely tender so keep them out of the sun. At this time begin fertilizing with a complete water-soluble fertilizer at half the strength recommended on the label. As the rooted cuttings mature and harden off they may be moved to dappled shade. As a rule I keep my rooted cuttings in their original one-gallon pots until the following spring when they are transplanted to the garden or given to a friend. Using this method, I usually have a 75% success rate.

Mexican Oregano

Sally Keenan

Something old and something new, a good adage for any herb gardener. I have had oregano in my garden for a number of years. Last year I added Mexican oregano at the urging of my neighbor. She's a great cook and was singing the praises of this herb that she bought dried in Mexico. It's stronger tasting than common oregano (*Origanum vulgare*), so one doesn't need as much, but it has very good flavor for both Italian as well as Mexican cooking. It is a brittle plant and will require a gentle hand during planting.

The *Origanum* species have been known since ancient times and were used for both medicinal and culinary purposes. The Greek legend is this herb was found by Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty. She discovered it in the depths of the ocean and took it to the top of the mountains where it would be touched by the sun's warming rays. It has thus been associated with love and with the abolishing of sorrow.

To my surprise I discovered that Mexican oregano is actually a totally unrelated plant. It does, however, contain the same essential oils that are in the *Origanum* species thus of course the similar flavor. There are actually two Mexican oreganos. One, *Lippia graveolens*, is a frost-tender species. The other, *Poliomintha longiflora*, is hardy down to about 20 degrees Fahrenheit.

The good news about all oreganos is that they are strong antioxidants. A USDA study done by the Agricultural Research Service found that oreganos scored highest of 12 medicinal herbs and 27 culinary herbs tested for antioxidant activity. The oregano activity was more potent than even vitamin E. So these herbs are very good for you as well. Sprinkle them liberally into stews and tomato sauces and enjoy.

Henderson County Master Gardener

<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.