

Henderson County Master Gardener

“The Inside Dirt”

Fourth Annual Landscape Conference Presented By Master Gardeners

Gregg Grant Featured Speaker On April 20th

Upcoming Event

Henderson County Master Gardener Association is pleased to announce the 4th Annual Spring Conference to be held Tuesday, April 20, 2004 at the Henderson County Senior Citizens Center. This year's conference promises to be an outstanding event featuring Greg Grant, who will present a program on “The Old-Fashioned Cottage Garden.” Greg's presentation will cover heirloom reseeding annuals, perennials, plant diversity, and organic gardening.

Greg Grant is a horticulturist, garden writer, ornamental plant developer, lecturer, and farmer from Arcadia, Texas. He is co-author of *Home Landscaping-Texas (2004-Creative Homeowner)* and *The Southern Heirloom Garden (1995, Taylor Publishing, Dallas, Texas)*, contributing editor to *Texas Gardener*, and serves as Director of Propagation and Plant Development for *Nacogdoches Gardens (nacogdogardens.com)* in Nacogdoches, Texas.

He has degrees in floriculture and horticulture, both from Texas A&M University and has attended postgraduate classes at Louisiana State University, North Carolina State University, and Stephen F. Austin University. He has experience as a horticulturist with the Mercer Arboretum and San Antonio Botanical Gardens, an instructor at Stephen F. Austin and Louisiana State Universities, an award winning horticulturist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, the director of research and development for Lone Star Growers, and with the Antique Rose Emporium.

Greg has introduced a number of successful new plants to the Texas nursery industry including Blue Princess, Ice Princess, and Pinwheel Princess

verbenas, Gold Star esperanza, VIP and Laura Bush petunias, John Fanick phlox, Stars and Stripes pentas, Pam's Pink honeysuckle, LeCompte vitex, Henry Duelberg sage, and Marie Daly rose. He has traveled extensively to hundreds of botanical and public gardens throughout the United States and Europe and is a popular and entertaining public speaker. He is a graduate of the Benz School of Floral Design, a member of the Garden Writer's Association of America, a charter member of the Crape Myrtle Society of America, and a lifetime member of the Southern Garden History Society.

He lives in deep East Texas, where he tends a cottage garden full of old fashioned flowers, a small bulb farm, a patch of sugar cane, and the world's only arboretum dedicated to the Catalpa.

Advance tickets are available from any Henderson County Master Gardener, with a limited number of tickets available at the door. For more information, please call Henderson County Cooperative Extension at 903 675 6130.

Around The Town House and Farm House

Rick Hirsch
County Extension Agent
Henderson County

East Texas agricultural producers and irrigators will soon have access to better weather data thanks to a new, upgraded automated weather station planned for the Texas A&M University System Agricultural Research and Extension Center at Overton. The weather station data will help irrigators use water more efficiently. In East Texas, “irrigators” include home gardeners who typically over water their lawns by 45 percent to 75 percent, said Todd Magatagan with the East Texas Irrigation Association.

The weather station upgrade will also allow East Texas to become part of the Texas Evapotranspiration Network, a

part of the Texas A&M University System, that helps water users make informed choices about when and how much to irrigate.

The upgrade is made possible by a \$6,800 grant from the Sabine River Authority. A five-year commitment and a \$1,000 grant from the East Texas Irrigation Association was also instrumental in making the upgrade feasible.

Located at <http://etweather.tamu.edu> the Internet site lists daily rainfall, maximum temperature, minimum temperature and average temperature.

Horticultural Oil Sprays

Rick Hirsch
County Extension Agent
Henderson County

Now is a good time to control scale insects on evergreen shrubs and trees such as camellias, hollies, bay laurel, myrtle, Euonymus, citrus, photinias and boxwood through use of a horticultural oil spray. Fruit trees may be sprayed at this time of year in order to control insect eggs that may have been laid in bark and twig crevices.

Usually, the oil treatment will need to be applied only once a year, and is an excellent way to smother a pest that is difficult to eradicate. Horticultural oils also have the benefit of being less environmentally harsh than pesticides

Some trees and shrubs are often unable to withstand the continual drain of sap from these sucking insects and may ultimately be killed. Treatment consists of thoroughly spraying with horticultural oil according to directions, from every direction over the leaves and twigs.

There are several thousand species of "scale insects". Armored scale insects are capable of navigating to fresh feeding grounds when very small, but then live and feed under a protective hard, waxy shield as adults. Tea scales, oyster scales, Euonymus scales and wax scales are examples of these. Control sprays work best at a time when the young, unprotected 'crawlers' are present on twigs and bark and can also aid in protection against aphids, white flies and spider mites.

Scales often secrete "honeydew", a sweet solution that is soon invaded by fungus, creating a darkened, sticky appearance on leaves and even on other nearby plants known as sooty mold effect has to wear off the leaves over time.

Other species of scale present a more cottony appearance. Some, such as mealy bugs (Pseudococcidae) are able to move about on plants throughout their lives, and may be found down inside bulbs as well as in clusters over plants, or concealed in debris such as fallen leaves nearby.

For successful spraying, look for a period in the early spring or late winter that will be relatively warm, but without a forecast of rain for at least two days (45 - 70 degrees F). Carefully follow the label directions in order to apply the correct dilution formula, especially if you plan to spray fruit trees beginning to break dormancy. If there are any doubts, spray a small area and wait a few days to check the results.

After a few weeks, check to see if spraying has killed most of the scale present. Pry off a domed scale with a thumbnail and press. If the shell is dried, the treatment has worked. If there is still yellow, orange or white viscid material, the scales are still living.

How Does Your Moss Grow? Yvonne Perano

There are few things more magical than a lush carpet of bright green moss. Beyond its beauty moss is a wonderful alternative to conventional groundcovers in areas where grass cannot be grown. It is also resilient, requires little maintenance, and has few, if any, known pests or diseases!

To keep moss healthy, locate it in a shady area, (medium to fairly dense shade on a northern or eastern facing slope), protect it from rough or excessive foot traffic, provide adequate moisture, and keep leaf-litter from accumulating. You can clear debris off your moss bed with a leaf blower, or it can be swept gently with a soft broom.

Moss is heat, cold and draught tolerant, but should conditions become too severe the moss will go dormant, drying out and losing its color. It is easily injured by "scuffing" when dry. Once temperatures warm up and moisture is applied the moss will green up again. An acidic, infertile soil is preferred and fertilization is rarely required.

When choosing moss for relocation it is best to use moss that
(See **Moss** page 4)

A Word From the President

Terri Hudson

It is March. I am anxious for gardening season to be fully under way. I have ordered, received and started seeds. The flats of tomatoes, peppers, cabbages, marigold, poppies, alyssum and larkspur vie for space under the plant lights. Lacking a greenhouse, the living room of our home has been given over to the process of seed starting. I like seeing the plants as they reach toward the light. I like the potential they represent. Soon they will beautify our garden and put food on the table and in the freezer. Still, I am anxious.

Not everyone shares my impatience. While visiting with another gardener recently, the conversation turned to potato planting dates. Valentine's Day seems to be the most popular date, but I know a few daredevils who have theirs in before the first day of February. As we discussed potato varieties, another friend chimed in with, "Why would you want to grow potatoes when they are 5 pounds for 79 cents at the grocery store?" After a moment of shocked silence, the other gardener and I erupted into a litany of the wonderful world of homegrown potatoes and the ambrosia made of fresh green beans, salt pork and new potatoes. Oh! And don't forget about new potatoes with a little cream gravy.

It really hit home for me at that moment, that our world consists of people who vegetable garden and people who don't. I have another gardener friend who solemnly admits that she doesn't "grow food" yet. This woman has a beautiful yard, lovely annuals and perennials accented with charming pockets of herbs, but she doesn't "grow food." It seems that many share her plight. I have always taken for granted that those who "grow" include "food" in their gardens, but this is not the case. Is it any wonder our children are not always clear on the relationship between their food and nature?

At the farm, our landscape is teeming with mixed-use beds. A walk taken during the height of the season produces a cacophony of sights, smells and flavors.

A handful of sweet Wild Mexican cherry tomatoes is nicely complemented with the aroma of Purple Ruffle basil as you brush by. The massive mounds of Mexican sage attract bees to pollinate the pole limas climbing nearby. Big Jim peppers in shades of green, orange and red play nicely off the ferny fronds of the asparagus bed, which is edged in swaying cosmos. Nodding sunflowers tower over mounds of marjoram and oregano mixed with foliage from dozens of carrots. Each rose has its own stand of garlic; creeping phlox and thyme forming a lovely living mulch. A still-warm-from-the-sun Cherokee Purple tomato is the perfect way to end an evening stroll.

I fear my friends who don't "grow food" are missing one of gardening's greatest gifts. I love the satisfaction that comes from nurturing a small living thing into something that can stock my freezer and feed my family. I like feeling connected to the earth and to the food I eat. I relish the freedom of "shopping" for tonight's vegetables in my own back yard. I take comfort in knowing where "food" comes from.

The 2004 gardening season is young. There is still time for you to choose to grow "food". Our vegetables live side-by-side with perennial and annual flowers – no special beds are needed. If nothing else, try a tomato plant or two. There are enough tomato varieties to fit anyone's taste. Ask your friends for the names of their favorite heirloom and hybrid varieties.

Green beans are lovely plants that fit nicely in an ornamental border – and they make a delicious dish at dinner. Add lettuce, radishes, and garlic to your beds. They take up little room and enhance the space they fill. How about some nice chives or bunching onions? The spikiness of the leaves adds variety to lower-growing annuals and perennials. The combinations are limited only by your imagination. You can do it! You can GROW FOOD!

While you are about it involve a child in your "food" gardening. Help erase the disconnect between our children and "food." Be the first to show some young person where carrots come from – let that child pull a carrot from the ground, rinse it under the garden hose and eat it right there in the great outdoors. From my perspective, the look of amazement is worth more than a million dollars. Moments like that make life-long gardeners out of our youngsters. Make yourself a link in that chain of understanding. Grow a gardener!

Growing Moss

Yvonne Perano

Continued from page 2

already exists on your property. If you plan to put the moss on rocks, soil, cement or wood you will increase your chances of success if you find moss that is currently growing on that type of surface.

When transplanting prepare a clear, bare, compacted surface that is free of leaves, weeds, and other debris. Gently scratch the soil surface with a rake to roughen it a little and dampen it before placing the moss onto the prepared area. The moss should be pressed into the soil firmly then watered thoroughly. Be sure to water or mist the newly planted moss regularly for the first three weeks, or more often if weather is especially warm.

You can mix a moss "milkshake" to hasten the process of establishing its growth on paths, wood, statuary or garden pots. There are two recipes that are recommended:

Recipe #1:

1 hand-full lightly dried moss (clean as much dirt off as possible)

½ teaspoon sugar

1 cup buttermilk (plain yogurt or 1 can of cheap beer)

1 cup of water (or manure tea)

Recipe #2:

1 part liquid potters clay (cut potter's clay into cubes and soak in water until it becomes liquid clay)

1 part liquid fish emulsion

1 handful of moss

Mix the ingredients in a blender to the consistency of cream soup. Pour or paint the mixture wherever you want the moss to grow. Keep it moist, but don't over wet the area or you may wash the moss mixture off before it has a chance to take hold. Statuary and pots should be misted daily and kept in a dark, damp corner or shaded area.

Whichever method you use your efforts will create a natural work of art you can enjoy for years.

Houseplants...African Violets

Betty Minter

African violets are evergreen perennials native to a small area of tropical East Africa. Elsewhere around the world they are popular houseplants, loved for their almost constant, year-round bloom. Contrary to their dainty appearance, African violets may be the easiest and longest-lived flowering plants to grow indoors. If you want to research African violets, you must start by looking up Saintpaulia; African violet is just the common name, although you could go a long time without ever hearing "Saintpaulia" spoken aloud.

I got my first African violet off a supermarket flower stand where it had dried up and was on clearance for 50 cents. Over the years I've learned that the most critical element of care for the plant is the way it is watered. It can go extremely dry, to the point the leaves are very limp, but a good drink of water will revive it. Too much water will also cause the leaves to go limp, but the plant will not recover, because it has drowned.

A small pot, 4" or so, not more than 6", is sufficient for your African violet, even after it grows to a foot in diameter, which it may do. The plant blooms better when the roots are crowded. If the potting soil seems packed after about a year you can tip it out of the pot, shake off most of the soil, and repot in the same container with fresh potting mix. The African violet mixes you find at the garden stores are nearly perfect for the purpose. I nearly always add a little more perlite to any potting mix, because good drainage is just so important.

Your African violet may be used in the interior of a room on a coffee table or a shelf temporarily while in full bloom, but it must have plenty of light, up to 12 hours a day, to set buds. An east or south window is an ideal light source. Fluorescent or grow lights under cabinets or on plant stands work well also. If you keep your African violet in a low-light situation for a while be sure to reduce watering. When the blooming slows return the plant to high light conditions and fertilize according to package directions with houseplant or African violet food.

An African violet is likely to quit blooming for no apparent reason, just to rest. It may bloom for years without stopping. But don't think it's sick just because it's not blooming. The resting period is normal, and probably won't last more than a few weeks.

Regardless of whether your African violet is resting or blooming take care not to over-water. Never allow the soil to become water logged; after watering, check the saucer after 2 hours and pour out any standing water. If your house is dry you may provide extra humidity with gravel trays. However if you put too much water in the tray just once and the soil absorbs excess water and stays soggy you could lose your plant. I've lost a few plants from over watering, but it's the only way I've ever had an African violet die. Water only when the plant starts to dry; water enough to run through; but don't leave any excess, and your plant will be happy.

You may have heard that you can't water an African violet from the top. You can water at the edge of the pot, being careful not to soak the leaves or the crown. Room temperature or warmer water is best. Cold water may spot the leaves if they get splashed. Spotted or tattered leaves can be simply pinched off. Dried blooms are tough. You can cut them off with your fingernails or small scissors.

The African violet cachepots that fit inside a water-holding pot are attractive and functional if used correctly. The outer pot usually has openings to provide humidity, which is good as long as it's not over-filled...again, so that the potting soil does not absorb too much water. The top of the potting soil should never be soggy; barely moist is best; and dry is OK for a short while.

If your plant becomes stressed by too little water it may get mealy bugs. You can dip a cotton swab in alcohol; touch it to the bugs; they will die. Or you can get a can of houseplant spray and follow directions. While mealy bugs are hard to control on most plants I've found African violets to be very receptive to spray treatment, and you probably won't see the bugs again unless the plant becomes stressed again.

With a good light source and normal room temperature, and a little extra humidity, your African violet should give you years of pleasure. You may even become addicted and start searching the clearance counters for poor little dried-up plants that need saving from the dumpster.

Rose Pruning

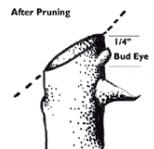
Wayne Stafford

Late February or early March, is the time to prune most roses but not all roses. You need to understand the flowering habits of the your roses in order to properly schedule pruning. Is the rose a once blooming or species rose? Once blooming roses should be pruned after the heavy spring bloom. The "Lady Banks Rose" is a popular example of a once blooming variety.

Your rose could be a repeat bloomer or perpetual bloomer. Repeat bloomers will bloom on the new spring growth. This type of rose will take a severe late winter pruning. Since this rose is the most common we will use it as an example.

In general, pruning will stimulate increased growth and plant vigor and result in more blooms. Begin by removing the dead canes as the plant begins to show life. It is easy to distinguish green tissue from the gray color of the dead canes. Pruning is also an opportunity to shape the rose bush before it leafs out. Open up the center of the plant when pruning. This aids air circulation and helps control disease. You should also check bud-union and remove all suckers and all weak canes smaller than a pencil.

The tools you will need for pruning roses include a good pair of hand clippers of the bypass type, a pair of large loppers, a pair of long cuffed leather gloves, and a dull knife for scraping. Use long handled loppers for trimming out dead canes. Then use your hand clippers for making the final finished cuts. Be aware you can transmit disease between plants with infected tools. A solution of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water will disinfect your cutting tools. Disinfect tools after you complete each bush. Keep you tools sharp and clean and seal your cuts with white carpenter's glue. A dull knife can be used to scrape dead or diseased tissue around the bud union.



Prune to shape the rose bush and force new growth to the outside. Select a bud on the outside of the plant, make the cut about 1/4" above that bud, with the cut sloped downward at a 45 degree angle to force water shed away from bud. Your cuts should be sharp and clean, a haggled cut is likely to retain foreign material that may cause disease.

During the blooming season deadhead your plants to keep them neat. Remove and dispose of any plant material infected with fungus.

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

Officers 2004

Terri Hudson	President
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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.