

Henderson County Master Gardener

“The Inside Dirt”

HENDERSON COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM NEW CLASS BEGINS AUGUST 30, 2005

For those of you interested in becoming certified Master Gardeners – listen up! The class will be held at TVCC beginning August 30, 2005, and the deadline for submitting your application to the Extension Office is Friday, August 19, 2005. Cost for the program is \$160 tuition and \$65 for the book.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION - The program is operated under the authority and guidance of the Texas Master Gardener Association and Texas Cooperative Extension. The purpose of the program is to enhance the ability of Texas Cooperative Extension to provide public education programs in the areas of horticulture and gardening utilizing the volunteer efforts of Master Gardeners and interns.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS - Individuals participating the Master Gardener program are required to attend a 15 week course which includes 70 hours of training in plant and horticultural science and pass a test at the end of the course. Topics include basic horticulture and basic botany, fertilizer and irrigation, tree and plant selection and planting, vegetable gardening, perennials and roses, plant propagation, landscape design, and a number of other topics. The course is taught by Henderson County Extension Agent Rick Hirsch, with numerous other speakers and experts on gardening topics.

VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS - You must also devote at least 50 hours of volunteer service to Master Gardener projects in Henderson County. This is considered your “intern” year. After fulfilling these requirements and becoming a certified Master Gardener, you are expected to maintain your certification and membership through annual volunteer requirements.

We are seeking people who have some basic experience, skills and/or knowledge in gardening, ornamental

horticulture, vegetable gardening and/or related areas. We are also seeking volunteers who would be able to communicate with the public by telephone, personal contact, group programs or through written communication.

This exciting program provides a unique opportunity to expand your gardening knowledge and provide community service in Henderson County. The 2005 class of Henderson County Master Gardeners will be limited. An application is included in this newsletter.

TWO NEW TEXAS SUPERSTARS

Sally Keenan

Aggie horticulturists are once again “singing the blues.” This year's Texas Superstars™ are two more blue flowering plants, plumbago and vitex. These two oldie's but goodies were singled out for development to meet the high standards of the A&M program.

The Texas Superstar program began in the 1980s as a cooperative effort between Texas A&M horticulturists and the agricultural business community to identify and improve plants that are widely adapted for growth in Texas, are disease resistant and perform well in the landscape with minimal care and water. Plants that bear the trademarked superstar label have gone through an extensive testing program for a period of three to eight years.

The 2005 additions, plumbago and vitex are especially desirable because they are both butterfly attractors and deer resistant. Wow!! That's certainly a combination of traits worthy of consideration.

Plumbago, a native of South Africa, is a tender perennial. Its name is derived from the Latin word, *plumbum*, or lead. In fact the old English name for this lovely sky-blue flower is leadwort, because it was thought to be a cure for lead poisoning. Plumbago is a heat-loving plant that blooms continuously throughout the summer. It blooms
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ROOT KNOT NEMATODE CONTROL

Rick Hirsch
County Extension Agent
Henderson County

Root knot nematode is a major problem in many Henderson County gardens. Some gardens become infected from contaminated transplants or topsoil. Taking steps to prevent this problem is just as important as implementing controls later. When a garden is first planted, if the soil is infested, nematode levels are generally low. After several years of gardening and growing susceptible plants, nematode populations increase to the point that damage becomes noticeable. Control practices include solarization, summer fallowing, rotation, adding organic matter, planting trap crops, removing diseased plants and using tolerant or resistant varieties. All these control measures are designed to reduce the soil's nematode population.

Removing host plants and keeping the soil dry reduce nematode populations because nematodes require a moist environment for survival. Although these practices reduce nematode number, the nematodes are not entirely eliminated. Growing one susceptible crop can bring populations back to damaging levels. Repeated use of these practices is necessary for success

Rotating susceptible crops with non-hosts or poor hosts of the root knot nematode is another means of reducing the population. Sweet corn is a poor host and is good to use in a rotation, especially in an area where root knot has done severe damage. Onions, garlic, asparagus and shallots are also poor hosts. Cool season crops such as cabbage, Irish potatoes, greens (turnip), radishes and broccoli are less likely to suffer yield loss from root knot nematodes. Even though these are susceptible plants, they grow best in cooler temperatures that are not favorable for root knot nematode development.

Just having lots of organic matter in the soil does not ensure root knot nematode control. However, the more organic matter there is, the better the chance that antagonistic organisms will develop. Some organic matter works better than others. Turning under a green manure crop, such as small grains, several weeks before planting is the best. The crop may need additional nitrogen as they break down the green manure crop.

Sometimes people resort to home remedies to control nematodes. These include planting marigolds or mixing sugar or lye into the soil. Of these three, only marigolds are effective in controlling nematode populations, and their effectiveness has limitations. Some people think marigolds secrete a toxic substance that kills nematodes, and that by planting a few marigolds around annual plants in infested soil, they can prevent infection. This is not true. Marigolds may produce some antagonistic chemicals, but the primary reason for control is that they act as a trap crop. Nematodes enter their roots, but are unable to complete their life cycle. Trapped nematodes die without reproducing.

Root knot resistant vegetable varieties are not plentiful. Fortunately, progress has been made in developing root knot-resistance tomatoes. The best resistance is found in certain hybrid varieties. Root knot-resistance varieties are noted in seed catalogs by "N" following the variety name. Often "V" and "F" precede the "N". "VFN" stands for Verticillium wilt resistance, Fusarium wilt resistance and nematode resistance. Hybrid tomato seed are more expensive than open pollinated seed, but the benefits in disease resistance alone are enough to justify buying them.

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

Jennifer Mason

Do you ever wonder where that plant you just purchased was originally grown? It may surprise you to know that it quite possibly was grown in Texas and maybe even in Henderson County.

Texas is a leading floriculture state by value of sales and is also ranked in the top 5 producers of bedding, potted and foliage plants. While the majority of these producers report gross sales of fewer than \$100,000 a year we have over 40 plant producers reporting gross sales of over \$1,000,000 a year. In Henderson County alone we have over 29 "plant" farms with over 806,860 square feet in a greenhouse format and 511 open acres in production. Henderson County is ranked 19th in commodity value of nursery, greenhouse, floriculture and sod sold and 7th in acreage used for nursery stock. Currently greenhouse and nursery agriculture is outpacing all other major farm sectors in growth rate.

The next time you go shopping remember that there is a 2% chance that the palm tree was grown in Texas, a 12%

chance that the ornamental grass was and a 7% chance that your woody ornamental or vine is from Texas. Maybe your purchase even came from Henderson County?

SUPERSTARS

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most profusely in full sun but it can tolerate some shade. To keep plumbago at its best cut deadheads back. This keeps the plant neat and encourages flowering since new blooms appear on fresh wood. In the winter plumbago needs to be cut back to the ground and mulched well to protect it though the dormant season.

The other new Texas Superstar™ is vitex. When I first heard that name I thought it sounded like some new vitamin supplement. Its alternate names, Texas lilac or chaste tree, bring Victorian romantic images to mind. In fact this native of China was naturalized into the United States as long ago as 1670. So, you might ask, what's the big deal? If this plant has been around for hundreds of years why is it being touted now?

The traditional vitex had good growth properties but its blooms were small and wan. Enter the Texas Superstar program! Texas A&M horticulturists developed vitex cultivars with improved flowering characteristics. Three varieties have been identified and tested that now have beautiful blue/purple flower stalks as long as 8 to 12 inches. Not only are they a pleasure to the eye, but they are fragrant and hold up well as cut flowers. The improved varieties are 'Montrose Purple,' 'LeCompte' and 'Shoal Creek.' They are marketed under the trade name Texas Lilac Vitex.

Now we should also discuss what I consider to be the important drawbacks. Although vitex now can produce long lovely spikes of fragrant blooms the new cultivars can also then produce black or brown seeds. Production of seeds first discourages further floral display and second can also produce plants that have reverted to having properties of the old-style vitex plant. This is not desirable. To maintain quality blooms and to reduce seed production it is essential to deadhead spent blooms promptly.

The other negative aspect of vitex is that in most locations to it is essential to severely prune the shrub back in the winter. Vitex can grow to a height of as much as 25 feet. Okay you might say so now I have a small tree instead of a

shrub. You also have a tree that will not flower as profusely and has seedpods that cannot be reached easily from the ground. Remember, letting the plant go to seed increases the risk of producing additional plants with undesirable traits. In order to have a truly well-behaved bloomer cut Texas Lilac Vitex back to the ground every winter. Then in the spring have patience. Vitex is a late starter. Don't expect to see much growth till nearly June.

There you have it – two new superstars. The caveat though is deadhead and prune.

THANKS FROM THE SPROUTS

Sharon Barrett, Coordinator
TVCC Community Services Department

The Henderson County Master Gardeners have volunteered to support the Trinity Valley Community College (TVCC) Sprouts' camp for the past three summers. This camp is built around the Junior Master Gardener Curriculum developed by Texas A&M and used nationally. During the camp Master Gardeners help to educate the children about gardening and give them hands-on experience. Some of our children come from as far as Carthage; many express regrets that they can't attend a second session.

The actual garden work is the favorite activity for most of the children. We get a lot of positive feedback from our students, their parents and their schools. The flag garden has been an extremely popular activity all three summers. The sprouts arrange red, white and blue flowering plants into a flag pattern. The children are quite delighted with their blooming success. We usually find students bringing their parents by for a look after the session has ended. The first sight of a tomato or pepper on a plant brings excitement. Holding a squiggling worm evokes both squeals of glee and noses wriggled in disgust.

For most Master Gardeners it is difficult to imagine life without soil and plants in the daily routine. Many, if not most, children do not experience that connection to the earth. They aren't deprived; they just live in other worlds. If we are to preserve the beauty and food chain that we all love, then we must maintain our connection to the children who are the future and pass on to them the joy of gardening. In later years we will be dependent on the next generation for these things.

The TVCC Community Services Department thanks you

again for your support in the way of materials, labor, and time. Most of all, we thank you for touching the lives of the sprouts.

A GARDENER'S TALE PART II

Jim Stevenson

Okay, as Dr. Phil would say: "Let's get real." So, let's get real about my ability to plant and tend a garden.

First, you have to have time to tend to a garden. After planting, you still have to water and fertilize and pluck weeds --- BORRRRINGGGG!!! And, did you know that if you plant your tomatoes directly under the drip line of your greenhouse and it rains -- the water off the roof really plays havoc with your plants. Specifically, with a real hard rain, it pounds the living daylight (I used another word, but I was censored!) out of them. Oh well, survival of the fittest is my motto!

Speaking of fit, I'd like to give you my take on what those capitalistic plant salesmen really mean when they tell you how big their tomatoes will get: Cherry tomatoes = the size of a good pea, and if you are lucky enough to harvest any, it will take you a good three hours to pick ripe ones in quantity sufficient to put in a decent salad (six hours if I'm making a salad that I have to share with Brenda). How about those medium sized ones, you ask? Well, cut one in half and you've got two pretty dang good cherry tomatoes!

The only ones I'm planting next year are the ones advertised to be the size of softballs. At least then I can get a couple of decent slices to put on a burger and still have enough left over to share with birds that seem to have a "box of chocolates" syndrome. Oh, you know what that is. It's when you pick out a piece of chocolate, turn it over, and find that someone (my mother to be exact) had stuck a finger in it first to see if it was to her liking before committing to eat the whole piece. Well, that's just what my birds have done. You pick out a BEAUTIFUL red tomato. You hold it delicately in your hand and admire its beauty. You turn it over and AAAAGGGGGGG! a bird has punched a hole in it. Mommmm!

While we're still on the subject of tomatoes -- let's talk the purples. Or, as I like to think of them -- purple wannabees. So, when is a purple tomato ripe? What shade of purple should it be? If you wait for it to turn the color of a Concord grape --- you've waited to long. Trust me. Next

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year I'm going to pick my purple tomatoes when they get to be a nice shade of mauve. Oh yeah, and before my cucumber plants snake out their vines and strangle those poor purples to death. You would think that anything being strangled would actually turn purple, wouldn't you?

I'm keeping a close eye on those cukes next year, though. The way they want to take over a garden you'd think they were all Republicans! On the plus side, they're really producing! They provide more acid than a DieHard!

Well, the plants are slowly wilting away. Soon it will be time to turn under the garden and dream of the one I could have had if it hadn't been for location, marketing hype and my mother's chocolate candy syndrome. Just wait until next year.....

SHARON'S GARDEN JOURNAL

Sharon Barrett

My plans for a perfect summer garden are fading as I realize I've lost the battle of the weeds. Those early walks I envisioned where I leisurely pulled the few intruders while I sip my morning coffee have been put on hold for less harried days and cooler temperatures. Alas, it is July and my only mission now is to just keep it all alive! I feel a sense of failure and doom.

Still, if I am lenient on myself, I can see that most of my flower garden is dancing with blossoms swaying in the wind high above the ugly grasses. There is now more structure than last year; more plants than bare soil. The pathways are on the way to being tamed. The old fashioned petunias from Bonnie alive and well and are spilling onto the path. There's the Sangria Crinum I almost lost at the Tyler bulb sale. Almost lost because so many wanted me to part with it when they realized there were only three to be had. Oh, and I can't overlook the yarrow! That wonderful yarrow that helped me fill space; space that I no longer have to weed. Gwen warned me about its' invasive habit but I have a lot of space to fill and I love the green of it.

And what is that brilliant orange? Why it's the canna I got just this year from Jo Ann at the plant swap. It's doing so well for a newcomer! I still have a lot of space in the back of the garden. I wish I had planted those seeds I got from Nina but I was afraid of losing them with all the other projects I had going on. Can't wait to give them a try. Still, Granny's amaryllis and Mrs. Bennett's daylilies

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were spectacular this year. Mama's azaleas are healthy as they lurk beneath the trees. There's a new one there now; a native azalea purchased as a memento of the native plant tour taken in deep East Texas with my daughter, Nicole, Nina and her daughter, Carol. I'd never seen a native azalea in bloom like the one beside the canyon creek there.

Night smells. My new favorite thing in the garden is the fragrance. The Belinda's Dream rose Terri rescued and gave me was hiding its lovely bloom from sight but there was no missing its fragrance. The four o'clocks, a love I share with K-Lu, spread their scent all through the garden as I walk under the trellis. As I sit on the porch for my evening tea, I watch the moonflower shrubs slowly unfurl their trumpet-like white blossoms before my eyes. A move closer and I hear the sound of hundreds of insects in search of their sweet perfume.

I must start to consider how I will overwinter my citrus this year. The greenhouse now seems too small for the Satsuma, Mandarin, lime and lemon. Must keep them growing; the grandson loves the citrus. And he expects to find tomatoes and strawberries when he comes in the fall. He loves the Mexican cherry tomatoes I get from Neal Poore.

Weeds? The weeds are of no consequence. They will freeze back in the winter. What I have is a wonderful garden of new friends and old; family from generations past; the excitement of a child as I help him discover his connection with the earth. My garden is a journal of my life. And, yes, there are weeds; but it is the blossoms and the fragrance and the fruits I choose to enjoy. It is a collection of memories of special times and special people. It feeds my soul - weeds and all.

COOKING WITH HERB

Carol Atfield

What is an herb? The term *herb* is sometimes mistakenly extended to flavorings that don't quite fit the definition. Herbs are the fragrant leaves (or stalks, as with chives) of plants whose stems are not woody (like those of trees or shrubs). Spices, on the other hand, are derived from the bark, buds, fruit, roots, seeds or stems of plants and trees.

Keeping Fresh Herbs Fresh

- Loosely wrap herbs in a damp paper towel, then seal in a zip-lock bag filled with air. Refrigerate for up to five

days. Check herbs daily as some of them lose their flavor after a couple of days.

- Store herbs bouquet-style when in bunches: Place, stems down, in a jar with water covering one inch of the stem ends, enclose in a large zip-lock bag, and change the water every other day. Most herbs will keep for up to a week this way.

- To revive limp herbs, trim ½ inch off the stems and place the plant in ice water for a couple of hours.

- Wash herbs just before using; pat dry with a paper towel.

- In most cases, heat kills the flavor of fresh herbs, so they're best when added to a dish at the end.

Making the Cut

- To chop herbs easily, place the leaves in a measuring cup and snip with kitchen scissors. If your recipe calls for a large amount, do this in several batches.

- Recipes often call for a chiffonade of herbs – especially basil. To make a chiffonade, stack the leaves, roll them cigar style, and cut the roll into thin slices.

THE SURVIVORS!

Nina Ellis

As I toured my garden this morning following 1 3/4 inches of rain in the past 24 hours, I made a list of the plants blooming in spite of 100 degree days with very little or no supplemental water.

Reseeding annuals: orange cosmos, zinnias, old fashioned petunias, standing cypress, gomphrena (Strawberry Fields), tickseed, periwinkles

Perennials: purple cone flower, Mexican petunia (Katie), phlox paniculata (pink, white, purple), salvia farancia, salvia azurea, pavonia (rock rose), salvia guarantica, salvia coccinia (Lady in Red), black eyed susan (Goldstrum), clematis jackmani, clematis pitcheri, Crinum (Elizabeth Traub), Mexican oregano, salvia greggi, Texas Lantana (trailing purple and white), lantana horrida (orange and yellow), mallow (Moy Grande), altheas, Mexican bird of paradise, esperanza (Gold Star), Mexican butterfly weed.

I feel gratified that in spite of Nature's whims, I have been able to provide some sustenance for her creatures.

Henderson County Master Gardener

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

Officers 2005

Jennifer Mason	President
Carol Atfield	Vice-President
Sally Keenan	Secretary
Jim Stevenson	Treasurer
Bonnie Dill	Historian

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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.