

Henderson County Master Gardener

“The Inside Dirt”

New Master Gardener Class

Sharon Barrett

Who are the Henderson County Master Gardeners? We are a group of volunteers who assist the County Agent with horticultural education in Henderson County. We are your neighbor down the street; your co-worker; perhaps a family member and YOU could become one of us.

It isn't difficult to become a master gardener but it does require some commitment. The process is simple. First, contact the Henderson County Extension office at 903-675-6130 for an application. Complete and submit the application and wait for a letter of acceptance.

With your acceptance letter in hand, proceed to Trinity Valley Community College to register for the class. Here you have a choice. You can register for the Master Gardener class at any time thru Continuing Education with no previous college experience or credit; or, you can register through the regular registration process on August 22 and 23 for the Principles of Horticulture class if you have met the requirements for college entry.

The class meets from 8:00 a.m.-10:50 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays from Aug. 29 thru Dec. 14 and includes guest speakers and field trips. Cost of the class is \$125 plus the cost of the manual.

Upon completion of the course an intern must complete 50 assigned hours of volunteer work on specified projects within one year. Those who have fulfilled the requirements at the end of the year will be certified as master gardeners and will join the ranks of the current membership to participate in educational activities. Membership is maintained by completing volunteer hours and continuing educational requirements each year.

Come and join in the camaraderie and diversity of interests as we learn and share our love of earth and plants.

(Editor's Note: An application form is attached to this issue of the Henderson County Master Gardener's News Letter, "The Inside Dirt".)

The Little Cactus That Could

David McDowell

This spring the Master Gardeners held their annual spring conference. A plant sale is always a part of this program. After the show the volunteers took home the plants that



did not sell. I took two cacti. Each plant had a tag that read, "Fist Size Yellow Blooms". A friend from West Texas was visiting. I loaded up her car with extra plants that I had including one of the

cacti. When she saw the cactus she gave me a strange look, and graciously accepted.

Later I visited her home and realized the bitter irony of what I had done. From Midland to her home in Rankin (60 miles South) is what seems to be one giant cactus plant blooming fist size yellow blooms! She had cleared 5 of her 20 acres of this very same plant to build her home. Now she has planted the cactus right in her back yard. She could have thrown it over the fence, and I would have never known. I have a feeling that this cactus had originally come from her area. Now an offspring has returned to its indigenous homeland.

Next year I will bring a cutting of that plant back to East Texas. Then it will have come full circle. My friend recently called to say that, yes indeed it is blooming, "Fist Size Yellow Blooms", just like the 10 million cacti around it.

Tussie Mussie

Sally Keenan

Tussie mussie is a quaint old-fashioned term. It means a nosegay, a small bouquet of flowers and herbs tightly bound together to be either worn or carried. In Britain during the seventeenth century they were carried by both men and women who tried to avoid the evil odors of both man and beast along London streets. At this time tussie

mussies were made up of fragrant herbs, rosemary, thyme and rue. It was hoped the herbs would also keep plague at bay. It was perhaps an early form of aromatherapy.

It was during Victorian times that tussie mussies came into their own. Historically herbs and flowers have found their way into rich lore and myth. The art of florigraphy, the sending of messages through flowers, became highly developed. Both ladies and gentlemen went to great pains to send friends and lovers special nosegays with hidden meanings meant to speak only to the other. The meanings of the flower arrangements were taken from religious symbolism and ancient tradition. Those who were honored to receive a lovely bouquet spent hours decoding the message by identifying each flower and herb. The sender would know that the gift and message were accepted if the tussie mussie was worn over the heart.

Beware!!! It's possible to make mistakes. The same flower can have different meanings depending on the color or arrangement. A red carnation in the center of the tussie mussie indicates admiration; a pink one means my heart aches for you; a yellow carnation signifies rejection or disappointment. Even a single flower can have a variety of meanings. A daffodil could mean regret, unrequited lover or even folly. One must tread carefully here.

In the 21st century a suitor would most likely roll his eyes at the elaborate Victorian charade. However, a little gift of herbs and flowers is a lovely gesture for a loved one on a special occasion, as a gesture of friendship, or to someone under the weather. The tussie mussie is quite easy to construct. It customarily begins with a central flower surrounded by layers of leafy herbs and small blossoms all tightly bound together. The stems of the arrangement are evened off, wrapped in damp moss and fitted into a conical paper holder edged in lace.

If one truly wished to go the whole nine yards there are lots of books and information available to code a message. Perhaps the most famous reference is "Le Langage des Fleurs" by Charlotte de la Tour (Louise Cortambert) originally published in 1818. This volume inspired numerous imitators. Now it's probably easier to google the internet for information. It might be fun to try. Everyone could use a little romance in their lives.

Landscape Fabrics on the Vegetable Garden

Elmer Beissner

If you have planted a vegetable garden you have fought a war with weeds. The enemy has either brought you to your knees in hand to weed combat, or forced you to resort to chemical warfare. This may be a war you never will win, but with the use of landscape fabrics you can create a physical barrier almost eliminating invading weeds.

Landscape fabrics can be woven, needle punched, nonwoven or spunbonded from synthetic fibers. Woven fabrics can restrict the movement of air and water, encouraging the growth of harmful fungus, mold, and bacteria. Needle punched fabrics have openings through which weeds can grow. Both nonwoven and spunbonded fabrics have proved successful, but spunbonded fabrics are thicker and more porous allowing for greater water and airflow while providing a longer lasting barrier to weeds and roots.

When selecting a fabric choose a weight (preferably 4 oz./sq. or more) that is barely translucent when holding up to sunlight, but will allow air to pass through when you blow on it. I prefer using light gray fabrics in East Texas. Black fabrics may be beneficial in warming the soil in spring for early plantings, but will prove detrimental when the high temperatures of summer arrive.

I have 10' x 30' raised garden beds. In late winter after adding soil amendments I cover the center portion lengthwise with two strips of 3 inches wide polyester spunbonded fabric overlapping by 4 inches. When it is time to plant, I cut an x in the fabric three inches long for seeds or one inch larger than the container for transplanted plants at the desired plant spacing.

I fold the x-flaps back for seed plantings until the emerging plant stem is ¼ inch thick. Then I fit the landscape cloth around the base of the plant. I plant single planting items, (e.g. broccoli) in the center area where the cloth strips are overlapped. I cut additional fabric into 12 inch strips and lay them 3 inches away from the center fabric making two open rows around the perimeter. I plant onions in the center rows and lettuce and other row crops (See Landscape Fabrics Pg .3.)

The President's Corner

Sharon Barrett

Over the past few years I've had a good deal of contact with the Texas A&M Junior Master Gardener (JMG) Program and have been aware of their training for JMG specialists. I didn't pay a lot of attention to the specialist program in general. As I've read the state newsletters this year and the calendar of events I've become more aware of the opportunities we have to specialize in particular areas of interest and to use that specialization to educate the public in our locations.

Trainings are scheduled during the year for various specializations and the Earthkind™ training can be done online. After training, a participant must conduct trainings in order to complete certification. You'll note that the state website contains a listing of the current specialists in the state for each program. Our own Victoria Hamelin has recently completed training to be an Oak Wilt specialist.

I encourage you to research the specialist programs for your own information and to possibly consider one of the trainings for yourself. You can check the calendar of events for training dates and locations.

The current areas of specialization are:

Entomology
Earthkind™
Fire Ant – Ant
Firewise
Junior Master Gardener
Oak Wilt
Propagation

Landscape Fabrics (continued)

in the outer row openings. In the corners I place mounded plants, (e.g. melons). Initially I anchor the fabric down with weights or pin it down with large 6 inch long staples shaped from wire coat hangers.

Once the weather warms up, usually in 2-3 weeks, I cover the entire garden with 1½ inches of mulch. As the season progresses and plants are removed I unfold the x flaps to cover up the openings. I leave my fabric on the garden during the winter as a barrier against weeds and to reduce erosion while covering with a three inch layer of mulch

whose gradual decay adds nutrients to the soil.

In late winter/early spring, approximately 2 weeks before I plant I remove the fabric leaving the mulch on the garden soil. I add any supplements again, e.g. lime, compost, and fertilizers to the soil; turn the soil one shovel depth; and replace my fabric covering it with 1½ inches of mulch.

The landscape fabric acts as a barrier to the perennial weeds stopping them from reaching the surface and preventing airborne weeds from taking deep root. Depending on the type of mulch used some weeds may take hold, but they are easily removed since they are shallow rooted. When you temporarily remove the fabric in the spring you can dispose of any perennial weeds that are still trying to retain a foothold underneath the fabric.

Harborage for harmful insects is reduced as is erosion from strong winds and heavy rains. The lack of weeds eliminates competition for moisture and nutrients resulting in healthier plants and higher yields. I have been using the same pieces of fabric for approximately 25 years harvesting enough vegetables to provide for my family and several happy neighbors. During this time I have used no herbicides and the only serious weeding I have done is in my asparagus beds where I do not use a fabric because asparagus sends up shoots over a wide area.

Select and care for your fabric properly and you can grow healthier plants with less effort for years.

Mary's Garden

Mary Jane Miller

Your assignment is to write a paper on ----what? what did the instructor say? Write a paper, on gardening? Mary's not a gardener. The extent of her gardening has been mowing the lawn, watering when the plants looked wilted, and fertilizing one out of the three (3) times her neighbor did.

Several years ago when we had the grasshopper plague, Mary listened to Neil Sperry and Howard Garrett. Howard suggested using garlic pepper spray. Off to the organic shop Mary went to make her purchase, went home, mixed the ingredients, attached the hose end sprayer and sprayed. Killed the shrubs. What happened? Planted one boxwood in the back yard. If it survived she would replace the

deceased shrubs in the front yard with boxwoods; if it died - the neighbors wouldn't know. It lived. Planted a peach tree, died; pine tree, died; Leland Cypress, died. Mary planted a hodgepodge of plants, trying to find something that would survive but this was getting expensive. It was time to take control of the situation.

Mary enrolled in TVCC's horticulture class. It was the best thing she could have done. She learned that she has acidic soil. That must be why her Indian hawthorns and gardenias survived - they love acid soil. She learned what amendments need to be added to the soil and in what amounts, and the hose end sprayer may not always be best for the job. Her fertilization program and her watering program needed improvement. Now she cringes when she thinks of all the leaves that were raked, bagged or burned that should have been in the compost bin. Little did Mary know the benefits of compost. Black gold!

Since learning all she could in class about soil, pH levels, watering, fertilizing and plants best suited for her area - Mary thinks her garden will grow.

Nature's Fragrant Pharmacy

Jeanne Caillet

Nature's fragrant pharmacy is rich in holistic healing possibilities. These fragrant plants can be dried and used for cooking or teas. When freshly harvested these healing plants can be dissolved in oil and vinegars for cooking, or added to baths, simmering pots, potpourris, shampoos, conditioners or body lotions. Here is a natural system of help that can prevent, treat, give protection and pleasure. Five of these fragrant aromatherapy plants: basil, lavender, peppermint, rosemary and thyme may be growing in your garden now, if not, they should be.

Basil's light sweet herbaceous scent with a just a hint camphor is said to open the heart and the mind. It's uplifting and stimulating and helps to get rid of the "blues." It's great for digestion; grow it to make your favorite pesto. This bushy plant can fill in empty spaces in your garden or form an attractive, low border along a pathway. Set pots on a sunny porch or windowsill to repel flies and mosquitoes. You may as well plant basil from seed because it sprouts in only about one week. If you cut back the flower stalks your plants stay compact and continue to produce throughout the summer. Basil is an annual; needs full sun and a well-drained soil; and grows

to 2 feet wide.

Lavender's light floral scent is calming for a good night's sleep, a bad headache, or an inhalant for respiratory problems. In the kitchen it can be used for cookies, loaf breads, salads, and ice cream. The fragrant, vivid purple flower clusters grow on tall spikes in the summer. Once established lavender lives at least 12 years. This perennial needs full sun in sandy well-drained soil. Mulched well lavender will grow 2 to 3 feet tall by 2 to 3 feet wide.

Peppermint's grassy-minty camphor scent is highly penetrating as an inhalant. Make a peppermint tea from dried leaves to relieve nausea, headaches, mental fatigue, respiratory problems and indigestion. It grows so easily that you may want to curb its growth in a container to keep it from taking over. Peppermint can be propagated by separating the roots and replanting. It likes partial shade and moist soil. It can even handle excessive wetness to grow to 3 feet tall by 1 foot wide.

Rosemary has been historically regarded as a preserver of youth. Just smelling the honey and incense-like scent was thought "to keep thee youngly," Culpepper wrote 500 years ago in his book, Garden Of Herbs. Rosemary is probably one of the best known and most used of aromatic herbals. It is reported to be strongly antiseptic and beneficial to muscle, joints, colds and bronchitis. It has been used as a hair tonic to stimulate growth and in a bath for itchy skin. Rosemary is a perennial that needs full sun and well-drained, dry soil. It is a tall, graceful bush that grows up to 5 feet tall by 4 feet wide. Rosemary is an early bloomer with pale blue flowers. It lends itself to pruning and being formed into interesting topiary shapes or trimmed into a hedge.

Thyme is an antibacterial plant that has been said to destroy staphylococcus virus. It helps with headaches, mental clarity, insomnia and stress-related complaints. It reduces tiredness and builds strength after a long illness. Thyme looks great when planted along a pathway, in a rock garden or as a fragrant ground cover. It's particularly attractive cascading over a raised terrace or the side of a hanging pot. There are a few hundred different species of thyme including lemon, caraway and creeping thyme. It is a perennial that needs full sun and well-drained, light soil. It grows to 8 inches tall by 8 inches wide and has a sweet herbaceous scent.

Enjoy the fragrant delights of these five plants while you enrich your life and your surroundings.

Water Features In The Garden

Dixie Smith

With a history dating back to the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10) water features have stood the test of time. In many cultures water is the very symbol of life. No other feature can quite match water when it comes to adding dimension and beauty to your garden. There is the obvious visual interest it adds, but also, who can hear the gentle trickle of water and not feel more relaxed and serene? However, water features have other benefits as well. They encourage bio-diversity by attracting toads, frogs, and birds, which are all natural pest controllers.

Water features can be as diverse in size and style as they are in price. On one end of the spectrum is the simple bird bath requiring only to be filled with fresh water on a regular basis. On the other end of the spectrum is the exotic pond filled with expensive plant and animal life, featuring a variety of depths, water falls, running streams and exotic rock formations. But there are many options between these two extremes. There are small portable units which can be moved about the area and even be set on table tops. These units usually have a pump for circulation. Prefabricated ponds can easily be purchased at home improvement stores and can be installed above ground or below the surface. They come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Some showcase multi-levels thus creating a simple water fall for added interest.

Another option is an in ground pond. After checking for underground utilities simply dig a hole in the shape and size you prefer. Varying the depth adds interest and creates a natural habitat for a greater variety of both plant and animal life. Then add a liner to keep the water contained. A re-circulating pump should be added to keep the water moving. This is my personal favorite because, if deep enough (approximately 3 to 5 feet), it can sustain both plant and animal life even in our harsh Texas winters. If you are artistic, or have a creative flare, much can be done with decorative pots, reeds, stones, or any other material to create a pleasing yet simple focal point for your garden.

After creating your water feature you may choose to add aquatic plants. If you are new to water gardening you will

be amazed at the beauty and diversity available. Some of these beauties are considered bog plants and do not like being totally submerged but prefer saturated soil. Some of the most beautiful are sedge, bog orchids and irises, and various reeds. Other aquatic specimens prefer having their roots totally submerged to varying depths. The most common is the water lily which comes in a wide range of colors. Winter hardy varieties of the water lily can easily be grown in our area. The leaves of water lilies vary greatly in size and provide the shade a pond requires to prevent the growth of algae. Other plants such as the mosaic plant and water snowflake prefer to float on the surface and require no soil whatsoever. Still other varieties live totally submerged competing with algae for nutrients and providing cover and spawning grounds for pond fish.

However you choose to incorporate water into your garden I am sure you will not be disappointed.

A Recipe

Jennifer Mason

If you grow herbs and vegetables then you are constantly looking for a way to use your entire harvest. While friends will often accept the first few offers of tomatoes, squash, zucchini, cucumbers, lettuce, peppers and rosemary- often your harvest gets harder to give away. The following recipe utilizes several crops in your garden so that nothing will go to waste!

Baked Peppers with Tomatoes- 6 servings

6 red, yellow or green peppers- cut in half lengthwise w/ core and seeds removed.

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

3 cloves garlic thinly sliced

48 cherry tomatoes

3 tablespoons drained capers

2 tablespoons fresh thyme leaves

½ cup balsamic vinegar

Salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 425. Oil a large baking dish and arrange peppers cut side up and brush peppers with oil. Place garlic slices in each pepper, place 4 cherry tomatoes in each pepper, Sprinkle capers and thyme in each pepper. Drizzle with olive oil, salt and pepper. Bake for 35 minutes, cool to room temperature. To serve lightly drizzle with balsamic vinegar.

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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.