

Henderson County Master Gardener

“The Inside Dirt”

A Memorable Day

Nina Ellis

The Stephen F. Austin University Pineywoods Native Plant Center (PNPC) was established in 2000 in association with the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Their stated mission is to promote education, conservation and the use of native plants of the southern forest. Dr. David Creech is director, and Greg Grant is research associate. PNPC is located just north of the SFAU campus on Raguette Drive. The center encompasses 60 acres. The land and the family home were donated by the Tucker family. At present there are 2.5 miles of paved walking trails through the wooded areas, a number of demonstration planting areas, including a “firewise” area, xeric garden (meaning no supplemental water), a mesic garden and plantings along LaNana Creek which runs through the PNPC.

A year or so ago I attended a lecture at SFAU. Mr. Grant spoke of the work being done at PNPC to develop the demonstration beds. He hoped to enlighten the public about the landscape use of the many native plants suitable for the home gardens. He made an appeal for knowledgeable gardeners to be volunteers to work in the beds. With a limited budget for labor, he needed willing people who knew the difference between a weed and a desirable plant, especially when it was not in bloom. Four women who would rather pull someone else’s weeds than their own began working in the gardens in February. Our efforts have resulted in many hours of pleasure and friendship as well as new knowledge gained from working along side a master gardener.

During the first part of August we were working in the “firewise” bed. We were told to put up our tools. We were going on a field trip. We were driven several miles to a dusty county road to see the rare Carolina lily (*Lilium michauxii*) blooming by the roadside. The sight was breathtaking. This exquisite flower was blooming in profusion while competing with county road maintenance, oil field construction, loggers and landowners unaware of this glorious gift of nature. We were in awe of the sight before us.

It is believed these lilies were once plentiful in our East Texas’ woods. It is my hope that by working with gardeners and those with similar interests we can restore many of nature’s treasures to our environment so that all may enjoy these beautiful gifts.



A Fall Warning To Gardeners: Beware The Asp And Other Stinging Caterpillars

Carol Atfield

I had known about asps (stinging caterpillars) for a long time, but never encountered them. Then one fine Sunday afternoon in my Dallas backyard, I was sitting on the concrete in my shorts trimming yaupon holly shoots. I was scooting along the pavement UNTIL I sat on an asp which had apparently dropped out of the holly! I guess my body weight really hammered him into my thigh. The pain was immediate and SEVERE.

I went inside and called the Poison Control Center since I’d had a moderately bad reaction to a wasp sting in the past. They told me to go to the ER. Luckily a hospital was nearby, because when I got in the car I was bent over in pain until I got there.

I explained to the ER people what had happened and they informed me that they had never heard of an asp. I asked if they had any resources in which they might look it up! They didn’t. So, I asked if I could just stick around until the pain passed. They said yes, and I stayed for about 2

hours in really bad pain.

That was my experience. I now see them – many of them – on oak leaves in the fall, and I think about all the gardeners who may be picking up those leaves by hand!

Mike Merchant, PhD, Urban Entomologist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service (see endnote) says that “most stinging caterpillars belong to the insect family known as flannel moths. Flannel moths get their appearance from the flannel-like appearance of the wings of the adult which are clothed with loose scales mixed with long hairs. The immature stages of flannel moths are caterpillars with fine hairs and venomous spines. The spines, when brushed against the skin, produce a painful rash or sting.”

“The best known flannel moth and sting caterpillar in Texas is the puss moth caterpillar, *Megalopyge opercularis*, commonly called an ‘asp’. This caterpillar is often abundant and may infest shade trees and shrubbery...”

The caterpillars are teardrop-shaped and their hairs resemble fur. Their color ranges from yellow or gray to reddish brown. They can also be a mixture of colors, but most I’ve seen around here appear to be orange. Their favorite host trees, according to Merchant, are oaks, pecan, elm, hackberry, dwarf yaupon and other shrubs. Check your oak trees this fall and you’ll see them.

Although they rarely cause serious damage to trees, “Intense, throbbing pain develops immediately or within five minutes of contact with the caterpillar. Other symptoms include headaches, nausea, vomiting, lymphadenopathy, lymphadenitis, and sometimes shock or respiratory distress.”

First Aid

Ice packs and oral antihistamines are recommended to relieve the itching and burning. If you think spines are in your skin, carefully apply cellophane tape and strip it off to remove the spines. If you have allergic reactions, such as generalized itching or difficulty breathing, see a doctor immediately.

Control

Puss moth caterpillars can be controlled by using pesticide sprays labeled for control of caterpillars on ornamental plants.

Endnote - [Asps and Other Stinging Caterpillars](#), "Arlington Forestry," July 20, 2006, written by Michael Merchant, PhD., Urban Entomologist, Texas Agricultural Extension Service.

Good Stewards of Our Land

Maurena Spradley

As living creatures, we are all related to everything on earth because we are all an inextricable part of this ecosystem. We share in the rhythm of nature and we effect our environment with each and every action we take. As we are not separate or apart from the earth, it is vital that we get to know the place we live and what makes it unique by becoming familiar with the native plants and wildlife.

The word steward is defined as one who manages the property, finances or household of another. Applying this definition to the natural world, managing our land as a steward may be equated to the responsibility of a parent. Provide for and nurture your land as you would a child. Being a good steward of the land is an attitude, a dedication, an obligation to the land to nurture it for today and preserve it for tomorrow.

Being a good steward of your property can be as simple as putting out feeders for birds and wildlife or clearing areas where native plants can thrive and render shelter. Becoming a good steward can involve attending classes in horticulture or studying ecology and conservation. Stewardship includes the management, protection and understanding of nature and its diversity.

Being a better steward means developing a careful and responsible plan for your land. Whether you have 5 or 5000 acres, dedicate yourself to doing the best to ensure the land’s health and well being for the future. By utilizing good practices such as mulching, weeding, IPM, Xeriscape, along with soil testing and the responsible use of pesticides and fertilizers, we honor our own intimate environments which in turn honors the whole ecosystem of which we are a part.

Education is crucial in becoming a good steward of the land. As the public becomes more aware of the importance of sound antipollution and conservation practices, classes such as Principles of Horticulture and the Master Gardener Program instruct today’s stewards whose efforts will

(see **Stewards** pg. 5)

A Word from the President

Sharon Barrett

Being a people watcher, I amuse and educate myself by observing the processes that go on while groups are about their business of being. The Master Gardener program has not escaped my thoughts as I have tried to determine how best to lead us toward our goals, nurture our membership and manage our time and resources. For the two years of my term I have observed and focused on individual parts of our organization, mostly in response to the need to quickly assess a problem and steer us to a correction or to looming deadlines. It is only now that we're wrapping up our term and our year that the full picture of our success has become clear to me. I believe that we can find life lessons and answers in gardening. So join me, if you will, for an imaginary trip into a garden.

We enter through a gateway and begin to survey the landscape. Directly in front of us lies a patch of young seedlings, bright green, fresh and growing eagerly. In a far corner is a plot of soil that is carefully weeded and mulched but otherwise dormant. Perhaps the soil there is depleted or lying fallow while energizing nutrients are being added back. It is resting and being nurtured. There in the center of the garden is the main production. The soil is alive with energy and the crops are healthy, orderly and abundant. Then there is that little patch, yes, you know about that little patch that is a bit weedy and confused yet bursting with energy and promise. That's the one we all overplant because we haven't quite decided what it is going to be, but we wanted some of everything! As we look at the borders we see inconspicuous green plants accented occasionally with bright bursts of floral color. Beneath it all lies the soil that supports all that goes on in the garden.

Here in our imaginary garden I find us. You. Me. Us. Those who have just entered the gateway of the Master Gardener class and are eagerly learning so much; those who have served well and worked hard and are in need of a respite and nurturing; those who are the steady, dependable workers on our projects; the interns who just want to do everything but are still learning how; the quiet ones who do so much behind the scenes; the ones who have special talents to contribute to special functions; and the leaders of the organization who help manage all the plots and keep them flowing from season to season. It

takes all of us to make the whole of us function. From my observation point, it is a very beautiful and lively garden.

A Pocket Garden

Karen Bassett

Anyone who wants to have a garden can. The size of the space available, whether there is sun or shade, poor or good soil conditions, rocks, cement – whatever and wherever – it just does not matter. You *can* have a garden – a *pocket* garden.

Your pocket garden can be nestled in a corner, a hidden surprise on a garden path, a tiny area in the shade of the trees, or in a private spot on your patio or balcony. Imagine drinking your morning coffee enjoying the sounds and scents in the morning air, or having a private place to go to find solitude after having chaos around you all day to regenerate and find peace.

To create a pocket garden survey your property, and find a spot that can be your “pocket.” Assess the size of the space, the growing conditions, note where the sun and shade are, then imagine your plantings – the colors, the textures, the scents. Sketch a drawing of your garden, consider trailing, upright and flowering plants and select varieties of dwarf shrubs, small bulbs, succulents, herbs and flowering plants. Just one plant is a start! A small bench, some container plants, a trailing vine on a trellis – all to add to the colors and textures you are wanting to create.

Anyone who wants to have a garden can. All it takes is a little imagination, a little work, and a little love for the project. A pocket garden is for anyone and everyone.

Hot Water Plant

Dodie Tucker

Hot water plant!!! That's a funny name for a lovely plant. It's also called magic flower, orchid pansy, widow's tears. Hot water plant is in the genus *Achimenes*. The plant's flowers may be blue, peach, pink, red, orange, white, purple or yellow. My experience has been with *Pulcherrima*, a rich violet purple flower. Native to tropical America it is related to the African violet and the gloxinia.

These plants produce blossoms one to three inches across that are lovely, elegant, flaring, five-petaled trumpets that will last all summer on one to two foot arching stems ideal for hanging baskets. Mine is in a moss lined basket. The plant grows out the bottom and sides as well as the top which makes it even prettier. They also make a great ground cover in a bright but mostly shaded garden. Keep hot water plant moist but not waterlogged and enjoy!!!! In our zone it will come back if protected outdoors. Baskets should be allowed to dry out and be stored in the garage to be enjoyed next spring.

Jane's Hot Sauce

Jane Fox

Begin with:

10-15 garden fresh red, ripe tomatoes

OR

2 quarts home canned

OR

2 cans (28 oz) diced tomatoes...if that's what you have...drained and very quickly put into food processor

In food processor add:

10 fresh jalapenos

1 large yellow onion

5-6 cloves garlic

6-8 green onions

Add:

2 tablespoons salt

In a sauce pan combine:

½ cup distilled white vinegar

½ cup water

1 tablespoon salt

2 teaspoons olive oil

Bring to a slow boil; let cool before adding to tomato mixture.

Combine all ingredients and place in jars. Best after it has set a while. Will keep in refrigerator a long time.



To Overseed or Not to Overseed

Rick Hirsch

County Extension Agent

Henderson County

Do you like having a green lawn throughout the year? Do you like to mow, irrigate and fertilize during the winter? Is it appropriate to overseed your lawn for the winter? These are just a few questions that you need to ask yourself before you overseed your turf.

Overseeding is defined as seeding onto an existing turf, usually with a temporary cool-season turfgrass (i.e. annual or perennial ryegrass) to provide green active grass growth during dormancy of the warm season turfgrass (i.e. bermudagrass). It is done extensively on sports fields and golf courses, and to some extent, on commercial and home lawns. Sports field managers and golf course superintendents overseed their turfgrass primarily to offset the excessive traffic during winter play as well as to have a green, quality turf.

But are there negative effects to overseeding? Yes!!

Competition between the cool and warm season grasses can be great, especially in the early spring when the warm season turf is trying to re-grow after winter dormancy - often referred to as spring transition. If the spring is cool and wet it will favor the persistence of the overseeded grass at the expense of the re-growth of the warm season grass. Improved turf-type annual ryegrass typically has a better spring transition than do the overseeded perennial ryegrasses. Many turf managers have experienced delayed bermudagrass transition. In years that favor continued persistence of the overseeding, there can be significant damage to the bermudagrass turf.

Another big negative with overseeding can occur if the existing turfgrass is "scalped down" to provide a seedbed to favor a quick fall transition to the overseeding turfgrass. This scalping, along with the fall competition from the cool season grass prevents the warm season turfgrass from being able to store the necessary carbohydrates in the fall months. This means the turfgrass is going into winter dormancy in a weaker condition, with less stored reserves to recover well the following spring.

So, you need to think a bit more about whether or not to overseed. If you have a great deal of traffic during the winter period at your site, then overseeding may be

appropriate. Remember, as long as your turf is weed-free, brown (dormant) turf can be aesthetically pleasing too!

The fall season usually brings rainy, humid and cool conditions which are favorable to many lawn diseases - especially brown patch. This disease decreases overall turf quality and can be quite stressful to your grass. Most turf species are susceptible, especially St. Augustinegrass, zoysiagrass, and centipedegrass. Brown patch develops rapidly when daytime temperatures are between 75 and 85 degrees Fahrenheit and impacts leaves, stems and crowns.

Turfgrasses with brown patch normally exhibit circular to irregular shaped patches of light brown, blighted and thinned turf. Yellowing of the leaves is not uncommon, especially at the edges of the patch. Inside the infected area, the turfgrass may remain green which leaves a "frog-eye" appearance. Leaf sheaths in the infected site also become rotted and water-soaked to the point that a gentle tug of the leaf blade easily separates it from the runner. To prevent this disease from attacking your lawn, pay close attention to your watering habits, thatch accumulation and your nutrient management program. Several fungicides can also be used for the prevention and control of brown patch.

For more detailed information on "Brown Patch" and recommended fungicides, go to the Aggie-Turf web site at <http://aggie-turf.tamu.edu>. Click on "Answers 4 You", then "Diseases". Another good site is the Texas A&M Plant Pathology web site at : <http://plantpathology.tamu.edu>.

Two Recipes To Celebrate The End Of Summer

Carol Atfield

If you, like me are "suffering" from an over-abundance of basil, try this to get you through the winter.

MAKE AHEAD BASIL PESTO

Wash and dry as many basil leaves as you need to use. Put them in the food processor and add enough olive oil so that they will process into a medium thick mixture. Spoon the mixture into plastic ice cube trays, cover with plastic wrap and freeze.

When frozen, pop them out of the trays and into a plastic freezer bag.

When you want to make PESTO, thaw the number of cubes you want in the food processor bowl, add the following ingredients in amounts to your liking, and process.

- Roughly chopped garlic
- Toasted pine nuts (or other nuts)
- Grated parmesan cheese
- Olive oil to emulsify to the consistency you want.

The frozen basil cubes will last for several months in the freezer. The pesto, once made, will last a week or more in your refrigerator.

TOMATO SALAD WITH RED ONION AND HERBS

Serves 4-6

Ingredients:

- 1 T fresh lemon juice
- 1 T Sherry vinegar (Balsamic may be substituted)
- 1 t Dijon mustard
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ½ t sugar
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- salt and pepper
- 2 ½ pounds (about 6 medium) tomatoes, cored and cut into ½ inch thick slices
- ½ cup thinly sliced red onion, separated into rings
- 2 shallots, sliced thin
- 1/3 cup mixed fresh herbs such as basil, parsley, tarragon, and/or mint plus an herb sprig for garnish

In a small bowl whisk together the lemon juice, vinegar, mustard, garlic, sugar, salt and pepper to taste, add the oil in a stream, whisking, and whisk the dressing until it is emulsified. Arrange the tomato slices on a deep platter, scatter the onion and shallots over them and pour the dressing over the salad. Chill the salad for 20 minutes, sprinkle it with the minced herbs, and garnish it with the herb sprig.

Stewards (continued)

improve the soil, the wildlife habitats and plant life. As committed stewards our purpose should guarantee that tomorrow's stewards inherit land that is enhanced and healthier than when we began.

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.