

Henderson County Master Gardener

“The Inside Dirt”

Henderson County Master Gardeners Seventh Annual Spring Conference Features Lucinda Hutson

Athens, Texas, March 3, 2007: The Henderson County Master Gardener Association is pleased to announce its Seventh Annual Spring Conference to be held Thursday, April 5, 2007 from 6:00 to 9:00 pm at the Cain Center in Athens, Texas. This year's conference will feature Lucinda Hutson, nationally celebrated food, garden and lifestyle writer, and designer of festive events. She is the author of *The Herb Garden Cookbook* and *Tequila! Cooking with the Sprit of Mexico*.

The program, sponsored by Dr. and Mrs. Sam Hurley & House Nursery, entitled “Fiesta in Lucinda's Garden” will provide an opportunity for you to gather ideas and inspiration to transform and personalize your own garden into an intimate outdoor living space. Lucinda will share her passion for gardening, cooking and entertaining by providing suggestions for incorporating unusual ethnic herbs into your own theme garden and using them to create tasty and memorable meals.

Doors will open at 6:00 pm and attendees will have an opportunity to purchase plants and garden related materials, bid for items in a silent auction, ask Master Gardeners questions and visit vendor exhibits. Dinner, provided by Danny's Barbecue, will be served at 6:30 pm to be followed by Lucinda's presentation. The evening will close with raffle drawings and a live auction.

Advance tickets are \$20 and are available from any Henderson County Master Gardener or the Henderson County Cooperative Extension Office. A limited number of \$25 tickets will be available at the door. For more information or tickets call the Extension Office at 903-675-6130.

Container Herb Gardening Mandy Mugavero

I've noticed that most gardeners that I have crossed paths

with also enjoy good food. Even those of us without the space or inclination to have a large vegetable garden have the ability to spice up our recipes and our lives by tending a container garden of herbs. A container herb garden may consist of a few pots of your favorite culinary herbs kept on the kitchen windowsill for easy harvesting. However, with some careful planning and imagination, you can create a container garden that fulfills several purposes. It can provide the cook with fresh herbs that will add delicious flavor to dishes, and it can provide an attractive and pleasant place to sit and enjoy the fruits of your labor. Most importantly, it can provide you, the gardener, with a sense of satisfaction and a feeling that you have achieved something worthwhile.

Container gardening with herbs has many advantages no matter what *size* garden you have. The containers can be positioned just outside the kitchen door so that they are easily available to the cook. Many herbs, such as mint, can be invasive in the ground and may be better confined to a pot. A number of herbs are tender and are best brought indoors in winter or at least sheltered by the walls of the house. Most are easy to grow, and even a small container will produce enough for everyday use in the kitchen.

Container herbs can be planned in three ways. Small containers can be devoted to individual herbs; a large container can be divided up into compartments in imitation of the traditional herb garden; or a number of herbs can be planted together in one container, grouped for color and contrast. Containers of kitchen herbs can include a number of varieties of just one herb or herbs that appreciate the same growing conditions. Choose the varieties carefully to ensure that each container has different leaf colors and shapes to add interest. Several varieties of one herb, such as sage, can look very attractive. Another idea would be to grow herbs from a particular part of the world, such as the Mediterranean, in one pot. Some of these herbs, thyme, oregano, sage, and rosemary, love our Texas sun and heat. These are evergreen so they provide year-round interest. Just remember that containers of herbs should please the eye as well as the palate, but most of all remember to enjoy your garden.

The Damp Garden, Wet Feet and Dry Ankles

Sherry Bitz

I'm new to East Texas; new to gardening in very sandy soil. Water drains through it like a sieve. I wasn't expecting this much sand. I also wasn't expecting this much drought. (I wasn't expecting this many gophers either, but that's another story.) The sand and drought present a real dilemma: how to keep my moisture loving plants happy and thriving while being environmentally responsible.

Rick Hirsch's baritone rings in my ears, "Don't fight nature. It'll beat you every time. Work with it." How can I work with Mother Nature on this one? How do I enjoy a lush, juicy garden in hot, dry conditions while conserving water? "Got it! Build a bog garden; been doing it for years combined with water gardens. Why not build a stand alone bog garden, and try a little drainage remediation with nature?"

Now in deference to those passionate folks who occupy the niche of true bog gardening let me say that I didn't build a real bog garden. It's a "damp garden." Even the bogs designed as part of the water garden to filter pond water or transition from water to land garden are not true bogs. Natural bogs have soggy, wet soil and lots of slowly decaying plant matter providing a very organically rich, acidic environment suitable only for specific plants adapted to those conditions. The damp garden is an adaptation of the bog garden. Although technically it is a misnomer to call it a bog garden most people do.

A damp garden is designed to slow water percolation enough to create a favorable environment for plants that like "wet feet, but dry ankles." It works with nature. If you would like to try one it's really simple; just takes a lot of digging. Create your damp garden by selecting a garden site and plan as usual keeping good garden design in mind. Excavate the soil to a depth of 12" to 18" to form a basin. Store the soil close at hand on a large piece of plastic or cardboard. You'll be putting it right back. Note that the soil pile can get pretty impressive if you're ambitious, so plan ahead. The area of the damp garden can be any size you desire; it's the depth that counts. The sides should be mostly straight up and down and the bottom mostly flat, but this design is very forgiving.

Once the basin is dug line the bottom and sides with a piece of 4-6 mil plastic or 30-45 mil EPDM rubber. The EPDM is more expensive and harder to work with than plastic, but it is tough and lasts for 25 years. Allow plenty of excess liner around the perimeter of the basin to allow for sinking once the basin is refilled. Cut several 10" slits in the liner base about every foot for drainage. Some people cut slits in the sides too, but I chose not to given my sandy soil. If gophers and/or moles are a problem line the basin with galvanized hardware cloth or a heavy, woven weed cloth barrier before laying in the liner. Use rot/rust resistant materials. You may want to install perforated pipes vertically in the corners of the damp garden to expedite watering with a hose. Soaker hoses buried three inches below the surface and two feet apart work great too.

Before returning the excavated soil to the basin add compost and other organic amendments to increase the soil's water holding capacity. If you use EPDM rubber liner you can add amendments after returning the soil to the basin without concern for poking excess holes in it. Fill and tamp down the soil to about an inch below the surrounding soil level. Plant your plants in the dry soil and mulch heavily to discourage weeds. Next gently water the plants with a sprinkler. More than likely the soil will sink. Wait a day or two and add more soil or mulch, and trim the exposed liner to 12". Finish the perimeter of the damp garden by simply burying this liner under mulch or soil or adding stonework, brick, pavers, or landscape timbers.

These are some favorite aquatic plants you might enjoy in a damp garden. They're called *marginals* in the water gardening trade because they grow in the margin between water and land: bog lilies, water cannas, creeping jenny, dwarf horsetail, dwarf papyrus, dwarf variegated sweetflag, Japanese iris, Louisiana iris, Siberian iris, pickerel rush, ribbon grass, ruby creeper, sensitive plant, spider lily, spike rush, star grass, thalia, variegated spider lily, taro and zebra rush.

Avoid these marginal aquatic plants: aquatic mint, cattails, chameleon plant, horsetail, parrot's feather, red stemmed thalia, umbrella palm, water clover and yellow iris. They're invasive by nature and require too much maintenance in a damp garden. They'll wear you out!
(See **Damp Garden** pg. 3)

A Word From the President

Sharon Barrett

I work in an adult world of great diversity and sometimes feel that my mind just can't keep up or switch gears fast enough. Perhaps as a relief I sometimes find myself thinking in very childish terms for my own amusement. Or perhaps that is the real Sharon. Whatever the reason, I'm doing it again!

It's Spring! Spring! Spring! Spring! It's such a bouncy word; an uplifting word. Spring brings sunshine. Spring brings new beginnings. Spring brings flowers. Spring brings smiles. Spring brings energy. Spring brings.....continuity? Odd. I've never thought of that before but that is what we are experiencing as we move forward in our Master Gardener year.

I've noticed that the planning committees and project chairs are having a much easier time this year and I attribute that to experience. We are acquiring experience. We have volunteered in the past and participated in the projects and the needs and responsibilities are no longer intimidating because we know how it works and what to do. The work is flowing. Flowing; not jumping out of one year into a new one and starting all over. The seasoned members are working with the new members and the interns to give experience and guidance, and the new members and interns are bringing new energy and fresh ideas. This is what we dreamed of. This is what we planned for. This is happening.

Yet, while my head is floating in Spring my calendar is working in Autumn and I want you to join me there. In the autumn the nominating committee will begin to seek people to fill the offices which must be vacated due to term limits. Since all of your officers are in a second term your executive committee will need new faces. Many project chairs have served in that capacity and others for several years now and may be ready for a change. All this is to say that we will need you. We will need you to say yes when asked to serve as an officer or project chair. In order to say yes you will need to know what the position entails and the intent of it. To know that you need to be paying attention now, in the Spring! Spring..while you have energy and enthusiasm and opportunity to observe. As an educational arm of Extension we have a responsibility to them and to the community. To serve our mission we should each expect to participate in the

activities of the organization. While we all should be working on the spring conference, I encourage each of you to choose at least one project or activity to which you will contribute. It will make the workload less on everyone and it gives us experience and then at the end of the year, in the autumn, you will be ready and willing to say yes to becoming a part of the leadership to carry us seamlessly into 2008. At the very least you will be an experienced team member for the new leaders, and leaders are easier to find when there is an experienced work team.

And it will be Spring again and Spring brings...continuity?

Thanks for all that you do.

Damp Garden (continued)

It's exciting to experiment with non-aquatic plants in the damp garden; it adds to the adventure. Astilbes, butterfly ginger, butterfly weed, calla lilies, day lilies, forget me not's, fox glove, helleborus, hibiscus, hostas, Joe Pye weed, liatris, meadow rues, obedient plant, primulas, society garlic, trilliums are all possibilities.

It's good, indeed, to work in harmony with nature.

Fertilizer Provides Three Major Nutrients

Rick Hirsch

County Extension Agent
Henderson County

Sixteen nutrients are considered essential to plant growth and development. Thirteen of these nutrients are furnished by the soil. Under natural conditions, plant nutrition is not a problem (note the forests, woods and native pastures). However for a successful and productive vegetable garden some type of fertilizer usually must be added.

But what's in a fertilizer that makes it so important? And what do those three numbers mean? The numbers stand for three major nutrients, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, in that order. The numbers tell how much of each nutrient is present as a percentage of the total weight of the fertilizer.

Thus a 50-pound sack of 10-20-10 contains 5 pounds

nitrogen, 10 pounds of phosphorus and 5 pounds of potassium, or their chemical equivalents. That's only 20 pounds total. The rest of the fertilizer is simply an inert carrier or filler, such as sand, perlite or rice hulls.

Nitrogen is necessary for all vegetative growth, roots, leaves, stems, flowers and fruits. Among other functions it is partially responsible for the green color of chlorophyll, and it is essential to protein formation. A nitrogen deficiency causes lower leaves to turn yellow.

Phosphorus is essential to cell division, root formation, flowering and fruiting. It's also involved in the storage and transfer of energy vital to all growth processes. Consequently, a phosphorus deficiency causes stunted growth and poor flowering and fruiting.

The role of potassium is not well defined, but experience shows that plants cannot grow properly without it. Potassium deficiency symptoms vary, but stunted growth and dark or purple discoloration are common symptoms in many plants.

Are Groundcovers Right For My Landscape?

Peggy Wyatt

If you have not yet taken the opportunity to add groundcovers to your landscape, you need to become familiar with what they have to offer. Groundcovers are generally low growing plants that shelter the soil, prevent erosion, and may have attractive foliage, flowers, or berries. Some spread by rooting from branches as they grow, some by underground runners, or from seed as they sprawl over the ground.

There are several situations where groundcovers can be a solution to problem areas in your landscape. Such areas might be; (1) steeply sloping, (2) deeply shaded, (3) small or oddly-shaped, (4) extremely hot, or (5) in rock gardens or on berms.

Sloping areas in your yard can be a real problem to feed, water and hazardous to mow. Erosion can also be a big problem on sloping areas. Planting a deeply rooted species of groundcover can keep erosion under control and minimize mowing and grooming.

Shady areas can also be good candidates for groundcovers. Our Texas lawn grasses do best in full sun, but most landscapes have at least one shady area. This is the perfect spot to try groundcovers that thrive in shade.

Small or oddly-shaped areas are problems for watering, mowing, and edging. A neat bed of groundcover can add beauty and diversity and subtract maintenance.

An extremely hot area, such as near pavement, against your house, or a wall on the west, may benefit from a hardy groundcover.

Rock gardens and berms are the perfect showcase for groundcovers. They look lovely cascading over raised beds or retaining walls and require little attention once established.

According to Neil Sperry's book, these are the steps for planting groundcovers; (1) Use your garden hose to lay out a new groundcover bed. Work on a warm day, when the hose is most supple. The hose can easily be placed in sweeping curves. (2) Apply the appropriate weed killers to eliminate existing grass and weeds, or dig and spade several times to remove all roots. Allow two to three weeks for complete kill with weed killer. (3) Incorporate a 4 to 6 inch layer of organic matter into the soil. Rototill to a depth of 6 to 10 inches. (4) Install edging along the side of your new bed for a separation from turf grass. (5) Measure to determine the proper spacing of plants for your planting area. Nursery tags should give this information. Determine the number of plants to buy. (6) Set plants at the same depth at which they were growing originally. (7) Water deeply until well established.

The best feature of groundcovers is their beauty. They enhance your current landscape and act as a bridge to move the eye smoothly from turf grass to your taller shrubs and trees.

The following plants are groundcovers that should do well in East Texas. Read nursery tags carefully for planting dimensions and requirements for that particular plant to be sure they will do the job you want them to.

Common Name	Scientific Name
Ajuga	Ajuga reptans
Ardisia	Ardisia japonica
Asian Jasmine	Trachaelospermum
asiaticum	
Candytuft	Iberis
Carolina Jessamine	Gelsemium sempervirens
Catmint	Mentha
Columbine	Aquilegia
Cotoneaster	Cotoneaster
Dianthus	Dianthus chinensis
English Ivy	Hedera helix
Golden globes	Lysimachia
Holly fern	Cyrtomium falcatum
Hosta	Hosta
Ice plant	Mesembryanthemum
Lamb's ears	Stachys byzantina
Lenten Rose	Helleborus
Liriope	Liriope muscari
Mock Strawberry	Duchesnea indica
Mondo grass	Ophiopogon japonicus
Moneywort	Lysimachia nummularia
Moss Pink	Phlox subulata
Oregano	Origanum
Periwinkle	Vinca major and minor
Purple Japanese	Lonicea japonica
'Purpurea'	
Honeysuckle	
Purple wintercreeper	Euonymus fortunei
Santolina	Santolina
Stonecrop	Sedum
Sun Drops	Calylophus
Thrift	Armeria
Thyme	Thymus
Trailing junipers	Juniperus
Verbena	Verbena
Wine Cups	Callirhoe

Earthworms
Sally Keenan

When my children were little Richard Scarry's books were among their favorites. We read and re-read *Busy, Busy World* and *What Do People Do All Day*. I saved many of the books and still like to give copies of them as gifts to little children. Of all Scarry's busy, busy characters my first love is still Lowly Worm. Scarry draws the cheerful worm most often in an upright position

wearing a raffish cap, a single sneaker and a big grin.

The burrows formed as the earthworm tunnels through the ground provide a great service to the plants and trees above. As worms plough through the soil their burrows aerate the soil and create pathways for rainwater to more effectively seep in and bring with it additional nutrients. Just think, all day and all night those worms are out there below the surface of the soil tilling away and fertilizing as they go.

Now what can we do to encourage this wonderful effort by the lowly worms? The best advice I can imagine is to provide lots of good organic material to the surface of the soil. Worms just love it. They are all set to dig in; grind it up in their guts; and return rich castings to the soil. What a deal!! Think carefully before applying harsh pesticides to the soil. Many of these chemicals are not specific and kill the good as well as the bad. One indication of pollution and problems with soil is that there is little or no sign of earthworm activity.

As you begin to prepare gardens for spring planting keep an eye out for the earthworms. These lowly creatures are a hallmark of good soil and they continue to refresh the soil through the growing season and beyond.

Remember!
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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.