

## Henderson County Master Gardener

# “The Inside Dirt”

### Heirloom Bulbs

Michael Sambogna

### Slow Food

Sally Keenan

The Henderson County Master Gardeners will host our Spring Conference on Thursday, April 10, 2008 at 6:00pm at the Cain Center in Athens. Keynote speaker will be Chris Wiesinger of the Southern Bulb Company. You can find out more information about Chris

at [www.southernbulbs.com](http://www.southernbulbs.com). Chris is known as the "bulb hunter" as he works to preserve heirloom bulbs that were once used in many southern landscapes around the homes and farms of our parents and grandparents. Strong and reliable these "old school" flower bulbs are making a comeback as we search for easy-care, proven producers for our busy lives.

Chris is a graduate of Texas A&M and will be an interesting and entertaining speaker for our conference.

He has been featured in many publications including the New York Times, DHome and in the March 08 issue of Southern Living Magazine. He is in great demand throughout the country as an educator/speaker and travels the world following his passion for bulbs.



Sadler's Catering of Jacksonville will provide our gourmet meal with a plethora of delicious vegetables and succulent meats that will nourish and satisfy.

The ever popular Plant Sale and Silent Auction will begin at 6:00 pm when the doors are opened. A wide variety of unusual and useful plants will be available to our guests at bargain prices. Many are grown by our members who will be on hand to discuss their culture and offer advice on their care and placement in the garden. The plant sale has become known for rare and native plants at incredible prices.

Tickets are \$20 each and may be purchased at the County Extension Office, East Texas Arboretum or from any member. We look forward to an evening of fun, great food, cool plants, and a very entertaining speaker. -- Chris Wiesinger!

“Slow down, you move too fast. You’ve got to make the morning last.” So begins Simon and Garfunkel’s 60’s favorite, “The 59<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge Song,” more likely remember as “Feelin’ Groovy.” Since that era time seems to be moving even faster. We watch quick video clips, listen to sound bites and eat fast food.

New movements are trying to reverse those trends. The snail has been adopted as the symbol of one organization begun to resist the fast pace. The new movement is called Slow Food and was initiated by an Italian, Carlo Petrini, to fight the fast food culture. It was begun in 1986 in response to the opening of a MacDonald’s restaurant on the Piazza di Spagna in Rome.

Petrini aims to fight standardization and commercialization of food. His goals are to encourage local food production and to support traditional methods of preparing and preserving food. The Slow Food movement has grown to be an international organization with an increasing following. There are now chapters called *convivia* in over 122 countries. Each group supports and encourages local farmers, artisans and food specialties. Although Slow Food is sometimes viewed as an elitist and epicurean organization many of its goals are attractive to a broad range of supporters.

Why do people find it important to reverse what seems to be progress? Large commercial farms and growers do provide abundant cheap food. The large growers use staple crops and industrialized methods to bring fruits and vegetable to market. That seems to be a commendable goal. However, in doing this the number of species both in the animal and vegetable world have been shrinking at an alarming rate. Every year fewer and fewer varieties are brought to market.

As a simple example think of the small number of tomato species that are customarily available in most grocery stores. Throughout the year there are only a small handful for sale. If one were to choose to shop at a fancy specialty market not more than a dozen varieties would be present

even at the height of the season.

Does this matter? Yes, and for several reasons. One has to do with maintaining biodiversity, that is, maintaining a wide range of plant and animal materials that are suited to different cultures and climates. Solar Flare and Heat Wave tomatoes do well in our hot Texas' summers but may not fare well in the short cooler growing seasons of North Dakota or Montana. A second reason is simply the pleasure of variation in color and taste. How beautiful it is in mid June to line up red, yellow, orange and even striped green tomatoes on the counter top and plan for an elegant colorful salad.

It was just a few years ago that I became acquainted with heirloom tomatoes through Master Gardeners. Neil Poore gave a presentation about growing heirloom tomatoes and peppers. He even brought seedlings that we could purchase for our gardens. I was hooked. The first year my favorite was an almost black tomato called Cherokee Purple. It's a large tomato with thin deep purple skin and a wonderful flavor. It wouldn't stand up to extended handling and transportation so it will never be a commercial success but for a home gardener it's a winner with its great flavor.

Now I peruse the seed catalogues during the winter. There are literally hundreds of varieties of tomatoes in red, pink, yellow, green, and black. They come in all sorts of sizes and shapes, from cherry to ox-heart to goliaths. Some have delightful stories to tell. They come from all over the world and bring their heritage with them. The hard part is choosing.

As gardeners there is an attraction to the slow lane. Take time. Try a few new varieties. Search out some heirloom vegetables for your summer vegetable garden. Then when they are ready try a new recipe. Make a double batch of a slowly simmered sauce. Save part for the winter months to preserve the summer sunshine. It may help to make more than the morning last.

### **Composting Tip**

Sharon Barrett

I recently viewed one of the new "Green" TV episodes. It was a tour of a plant making traditionally plastic products out of cornstarch. They produce an array of dinnerware, cups, take-out boxes and bags made of cornstarch. These

items biodegrade in a matter of days as opposed to plastic which stays with us for years.

I first wondered why we don't see many more of these products in the marketplace, but then realized it's because we have not demanded them. So, to do my part, and now yours, I made a mental note to search out these products.

The first one I found is a composting bag from a well-known garden supply catalog. It is perfect for collecting kitchen scraps. It can be deposited into the compost pile without the undesirable task of cleaning out the slimy pail. My test indicates it functions well in the kitchen. I'm still counting the time to total decomposition. I wonder what issues a landfill filled with cornstarch will produce. The idea of looking upon a landscape without plastic bags in the trees appeals to me so I hope you will share other such products as you find them.

P.S. A note from the editor.

Packing peanuts made from cornstarch are available.

They can be reused or annihilated by spraying with water.

### **Flowering Maple**

Karla Odom

When is a maple neither a maple nor a tree? When it is an *Abutilon* or flowering maple. It is related to the hibiscus, but derives its name from its maple-shaped leaves. The flowers are pendulous and bell-shaped, leading to another common name -- Chinese lantern.

This plant is hardy to Zone 8, but is often grown as a house plant. The light requirements are partial shade outdoors and bright light indoors. *Abutilon* will flower almost year round in the right conditions. Moist soil is important for ideal growth and flowering; do not allow the soil to dry out. Regular fertilizing is also needed to encourage those tissue-paper like blooms. The blossoms come in many colors: white, red, yellow, orange and shades of lavender.

There are two types of hybrid flowering maples, tall (6-10 feet) and dwarf (2 to 3 feet.) The taller types can be maintained as shorter, bushier plants with frequent pruning. The smaller varieties can easily be grown in containers and are especially nice in hanging baskets.

(see **Flowering Maple** pg. 3)

## **Lena**

Gwen McLaun

Lena M. Stringer was born July 13th, the year insignificant to me. The year that was significant to me in respect to Lena, was 2004. In the Master Gardener Program Lena was the intern I was assigned to mentor that year. The first time I met this feisty wisp of a woman I felt like we had always been friends. That was because of her warm friendly nature, quick wit, and funny sense of humor. What a lucky draw for me! Lena got the short end of that deal.

I soon learned that Lena, who as a retired nurse practitioner for the Dallas ISD, and her husband Larry had moved to her childhood home place in the countryside near Callender Lake a couple of years prior and built their dream home. Eager to landscape their new home and meet people with gardening interest similar to hers, Lena joined the Master Gardener Program.

Over the next couple of years while working on projects together, lunches after business meetings, field trips, and Jim Stevenson's annual MG social, life's joys such as gardening, traveling, and marriages of our respective daughters and the anticipation of grandchildren were shared.

It was in mid-November while in California for the birth of their second granddaughter that Lena was diagnosed with a brain tumor. A war was waged, but soon all defenses were depleted. On February 1, 2008, from the midst of those she loved, the Lord beckoned her to seek respite with Him.

As were her wishes services on February 3, 2008 for Lena Stringer were held out doors. "In the Garden" was sung as blue birds (her favorite bird) paid their respect nearby and butterflies uncommon in February fluttered among her favorite flowers sent in memoriam.

In the summer when the lavender phlox Lena brought to our annual MG plant swap in October blooms I shall try not to let the sadness of a budding friendship that was pruned before it came to full bloom over take me. Rather let the happy memories envelope me like a warm cocoon spun by those beautiful butterflies. The bluebirds in my back yard will take on a new significance, reminding me to be thankful for friendships the Master Gardener program has allowed me to cultivate.

## **Flowering Maple** (continued)

Abutilons can be grown from seeds which will germinate in 21 days when kept at 75 degrees. Additional plants may also be propagated from softwood cuttings taken any time of the year.

The flowers on Abutilon will attract hummingbirds and butterflies. So reward yourself as well as these visitors to your garden by planting a flowering maple.

## **Rainwater Harvesting**

Rick Hirsch  
County Extension Agent  
Henderson County

Texas' water supply planning process indicates that surface and groundwater supplies will not be able to meet projected demand for water. Water conservation and development of alternative water supplies are necessary to meet the growing demand for fresh water.

In many communities 30 to 50 percent of the available water is used for landscape irrigation. Rainwater harvesting techniques directly benefits Texas by reducing demand on the water supply, by reducing run-off, by preventing erosion, and by reducing contamination of surface water. Customers benefit from lower water bills. Capturing rainwater for use in the landscape makes efficient use of a valuable resource.

Rainwater harvesting captures, diverts, and stores rainwater for later use. Captured rainwater is ideal for use in landscaping, because the water is free of salts and other harmful minerals and does not have to be treated. As rainwater percolates into the soil, it forces salts down and away from root zones, allowing roots to grow better and making plants more drought tolerant. It is also useful in attracting and providing water for wildlife.

Rainwater harvesting can also help to prevent flooding and erosion, turning storm water problems into water supply assets by slowing runoff and allowing it to soak into the ground. Reducing run-off also helps to reduce the contamination of surface water with sediments, fertilizers, and pesticides in rainfall run-off.

"Run-off" is the rainwater that flows off a surface. If the

surface is impermeable (for example, pavement, concrete, roofs), run-off occurs immediately. If the surface is permeable, run-off will not occur until the surface is saturated. Run-off can be harvested (captured) and used immediately to water plants or stored for later use.

A rainwater harvesting system consists of the supply (rainfall), the demand (water needed by plants), and a system for collecting water and moving it to the plants. Simple systems distribute rainwater immediately. Complex systems store some or all of the rainwater for later use.

Plant selection can also reduce the need for water. The types and numbers of plants in your landscape, along with their growth stages and sizes, determine the amount of water your plants need to be healthy. Because rainfall varies throughout Texas different plants have become adapted to conditions in different regions of the state. Plants native to our region are the best choices for your landscape because their water requirements are usually met by normal rainfall amounts.

## **Asparagus** Gloria Dean

Ancient Persians named the plant “asparagus”, meaning sprout. Asparagus is one of several vegetables in which the edible part is in the shoot. Other shoot vegetables are globe artichokes, fennel, rhubarb and celery. Asparagus will grow in all parts of the south except the costal south. Wild asparagus can be found in some East Texas pastureland. This is edible. There are about 150 kinds of asparagus besides the edible one. All are members of the lily family. Do not try to eat your asparagus fern.

Asparagus is an expensive vegetable to buy and not very appetizing when canned or frozen but absolutely delicious when fresh from the garden. It is well worth one’s effort to establish a bed of asparagus because it is a perennial. An asparagus bed that has been properly planted and placed in a well drained sunny location will produce abundantly for a dozen years or more.

Place your asparagus bed at the edge of your garden where it can be out of the way of other vegetables. The plants take plenty of space for the amount of harvest produced. They attain a height of 4 to 5 feet and the root system spreads out 20 or more inches on either side of the

asparagus row. The roots also go deep into the ground.

Although the asparagus can be grown from seed, it is best to buy one year old roots or crowns. Well before the arrival of your asparagus roots, dig and prepare a trench to plant them. Early spring is the best time to establish an asparagus bed.

A trench for planting asparagus roots should be a foot wide and 8 to 10 inches deep. If you plan to plant more than one row, the rows should be spaced 4 to 6 feet apart. Soil pH for asparagus should be above 6.5. The ideal is a neutral reading, pH 7. If the soil at the bottom of the trench tests acid add a little ground limestone to sweeten it. Put about 4 inches of old compost in the bottom of the trench or amend with a mixture of peat moss, cow manure, sand and throw in a couple of handfuls of blood, fish and bone meal per square yard. Mix all this well in the bottom of the trench.

Before placing roots in the ground soak them in water overnight. Space the roots or crowns one foot apart setting them so that tops are 6 to 8 inches below the top of the trench. Spread the roots out evenly and put about 2 to 3 inches of soil over the crowns, but do not fill the trench further. Water the roots. Wait a day or two then add two to three inches of soil and water. Wait a day or so more then add more soil and so on until the trench is full and the ground is level with the ground on top. There is no need to mound the soil.

Plants must be kept watered adequately, especially the first year. Apply fertilizer annually in the spring and in the autumn. Spread well rotted compost or manure around the plants. Keep weeds cleared from the plants. After the asparagus has gone dormant, mulch and be sure the bed location is marked so someone will not inadvertently plow over it.

It is advisable not to harvest asparagus until the third season. (We planted 24 crowns in the spring of 1999. The bed produces enough for four adults during the spring with enough left over to put in the freezer.) Stop harvesting asparagus when the shoots are no thicker than ½ inch in diameter. This is an indication that the season’s harvest is spent and the plants are about to enter their revival period. Fertilize at this time and again in mid July to August. When the asparagus has become dormant, you need to mulch.  
Happy gardening!

**The  
D.R.E.A.M  
Demonstrate Research Educate Apply  
Maintain  
Garden  
Henderson County  
Master Gardeners  
Carol Atfield**



The D.R.E.A.M. Garden is divided into two areas, the **Demonstration** area and the **Trial** area. The **Demonstration** area consists of 1 large oval bed and three smaller beds. The large oval bed is planted with six varieties of roses that have already received the “**EarthKind**” designation. These varieties are:

<b>Belinda’s Dream</b>	<b>Mutabilis</b>
<b>Duchesse de Brabant</b>	<b>Perle d’Or</b>
<b>Knock Out</b>	<b>Spice</b>

The **Trial** area includes three straight rows. The roses planted in this area are part of the “**EarthKind**” **Rose Trials** developed by Texas A & M horticulture specialists. These plants will be observed for three years for their growth rate, insect resistance, drought tolerance and bloom profusion. During this time, there will be no miticides, insecticides, fungicides or other pest controls used. No fertilizer, organic or chemical, will be applied. Pruning or deadheading will not be practiced. Water will be applied only when the soil becomes dry at a depth of 1” or more. The varieties being tested are:

<b>Amiga Mia</b>	<b>Pink Knock Out</b>
<b>Blushing Knock Out</b>	<b>Prairie Breeze</b>
<b>Carefree Beauty (control)</b>	

The “**EarthKind**” Program

In an effort to promote environmentally responsible gardening methods, Dr. Steve George, Extension Landscape Horticulture Specialist for the Texas Cooperative Extension Service, along with other Cooperative Extension Service horticulturists have developed a program called “**EarthKind**” Gardening and Landscaping. With the foundation of the program being the use of techniques proven through extensive research the best of organic, traditional gardening and landscaping methods are combined to create a new system of gardening that maintains a steadfast reverence for our environment.

Many familiar principles employed by the “**EarthKind**” program include site selection, soil preparation, composting, mulching, and crop rotation. Selection and culture of plants play an important roll in avoiding pest problems. When pest problems do arise, the “**EarthKind**” gardener would use pesticides only if all other methods have failed, and then selecting the most environmentally friendly product available.

Plant selection is such an integral part of the program that a segment called “**EarthKind Roses**” has been introduced. Roses given this designation are grown on their own root stock and have been identified for their high performance, low maintenance, disease and insect resistance and tolerance. At this time, there are eleven varieties of roses which have flourished after extensive field trials in which they were planted in a heavy alkaline clay soil, in the full sun with no additives or amendments. Although the beds were mulched and drip irrigated, fertilizers, pesticides or fungicides were not used.

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The D.R.E.A.M. Garden is a joint project of Henderson County Master Gardeners, Henderson County Cooperative Extension, Texas A&M University and the East Texas Arboretum & Botanical Society. Proceeds from the HCMG annual spring conference help fund this project.

**Sunflower-Cherry Granola Bars**  
Linda Benton

4 cups old-fashioned oats	1 cup sliced almonds
1 cup flaked coconut	1 cup sugar
1 cup light corn syrup	1 cup peanut butter
½ cup raisons	½ cup dried cherries
½ cup sunflower seeds	

Spread the oats on an ungreased 15-inch by 10-inch baking pan. Bake at 400 degrees for 15 –20 minutes or until lightly browned. Stir several times while the oats are baking. Meanwhile spread the almonds and coconut into another ungreased 15-inch by 10-inch baking pan. Bake for 8-10 minutes or until lightly toasted.

Bring the sugar and corn syrup to a boil. Cook and stir for 2-3 minutes until the sugar is dissolved. Remove from the heat and stir in the peanut butter. Add the raisins, cherries, sunflower seeds, toasted oats, almonds and coconut. Using a metal spatula, press mixture into an ungreased 15-inch by 10-inch baking pan. Cool and cut into bars.

# 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.**