

Henderson County Master Gardener

“The Inside Dirt”

Fatsia Japonica and *Ricinus Communis*

Wayne Stafford

Recently, several people were making nice comments about this plant, and some asked what was the name. Going back to the horticulture class that Wayne Greenhaw taught at TVCC, I said fatsia. Someone threw up their hands and said, no that is not right. I had a senior moment and couldn't think of the several common names. We dropped it at that.



Later such names as Japanese aralia, paperplant, and *Fatsia japonica* came to me. *Fatsia japonica* is the scientific name. This plant has always been attractive to me. It has all the good looks of the castor bean plant that I was familiar with in East Texas. However fatsia has that great look of a tropical plant, and it is a evergreen, so a much better landscape plant.

Now there is no more having to gather castor bean seeds and put them in a fruit jar to plant next spring. Where the castor bean was thought of as a backyard plant to be used for chicken yard shade and planted to keep out moles, fatsia is an upscale landscape plant that has the sophisticated look suited to a Japanese garden scene.

The horticulture class at TVCC, taught by Wayne Greenhaw, was one of the best classes I have ever been privileged to participate in. The class started in mid-January and was completed the first week in May. We had a good textbook, *Landscape Plants, Their Identification, Culture, and Use* by Ferrell M. Bridwell. We were to collect about 150 leaves and cutting from woody herbaceous plants for a notebook of samples. The samples were to be pressed and dried with a description of the plant. In January, how you were going to collect all these plant leaves and cuttings was going to be a big problem.

I knew we would have to rely on the evergreen plants to get samples for the first submission of about 50 samples. I began to run through my mind the different evergreen plants I had seen in the area. The first thing I thought of were two beautiful natives, the beautiful American holly with the beautiful red berries, *Ilex opaca*, that I remember from the 'whirl pool' on Catfish Creek and my favorite yaupon holly, *Ilex vomitoria*, with the tiny evergreen leaves and red berries, how about that scientific name.

The *ilex* family is full of well adapted landscape plants that are used in this area, so this gave me a good place to start. Other members of this family include the dwarf Burford, *ilex cornuta*, and the stately Fosteri holly, *ilex x attenuate*.

Wayne Greenhaw, is a professional landscaper, so every night the class met he would bring identification samples for the class to identify. He stressed that the scientific name was the key to correct plant identification. You had to know the scientific names and how to correctly spell them. Class members were also encouraged to bring samples to discuss and identify. Every meeting was just a fun time. Then his tests were a learning experience.

I had seen a fatsia plant in the neighborhood and received permission to get a leaf for the notebook. The first leaf I got was much larger the 8 ½ by 11 paper that we were using. So I got a wire hook to pull the plant over to get a leaf from the top. That was much smaller, and would fit on the notebook page.



Ground Covers

Rick Hirsch
County Extension Agent
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As soon as I got a leaf or stem cutting I would scan the sample, get a digital image, and put them on the computer for use in collection of information for the class. Then I would put the samples in the press to dry. The drying process was a good way in the old days to save samples, but the digital image retains the fresh image of the leaf. I have attached the scanned image which was made in 2001 to this article, and I still have all of the scanned images. The book of dried leaves has since returned to dust.

A year or so after I took the class, Yvonne Perano took the same class, and asked me where is 'the book.' I said what book? Evidently there was some discussion that I had done two different notebooks. So I loaned the 'book' to her, and she did the same thing. After the class she returned the book to me, and we put it in the Master Gardener office. It may still be there.

Speaking of castor bean, *Ricinus communis*, it has become much more sophisticated looking now that when I was growing up. There are three (3) different types in the Dream

Garden, the old time green, pink and red. The red is my favorite. It is still a tropical plant, and you have to harvest the seed for next year's plant, just like always. Now you have a choice of colors and you have to label your seed jars to identify the color.



If you get an opportunity to take this class it will be well worth your time.

Although grass is generally regarded as the most desirable ground cover for the home landscape, there are situations where it may not be the most practical landscape covering. In steeply sloping or heavily shaded areas of the landscape where grass will not grow well, other methods of covering the soil must frequently be selected. One of the most satisfactory methods is the use of ground cover plants.

Ground covers are low-growing plants that spread by underground or above ground stems that have an inherent trailing growth habit. As these plants grow and develop, they produce a continuous mat on the soil surface. Ground cover plants may range from woody vines to dwarf shrubs, depending on individual needs.

Some of the more typical uses of ground covers are to cover bare areas of ground, prevent erosion of the soil, give variety in the yard or garden, regulate foot traffic in the yard or garden when used as edging for pathways, and to unify unrelated shrubs and flower beds in the landscape. In addition, ground covers are frequently used under or around trees where grass grows poorly or where exposed tree roots make mowing a problem. Ground cover plants eliminate the need for mowing and conceal the exposed tree roots.

Many possibilities for living ground covers are now available. For shade or partial shade use vinca, Asiatic jasmine, monkey grass, creeping junipers, purple-leaf honeysuckle, liriopse, daylilies, santolina, sedum and dwarf yaupon.

Proper soil preparation is needed before ground cover plants are planted. Dig the soil at least six inches deep. Rake thoroughly to remove grass roots. Spread two to three inches of organic material such as peat, well-rotted manure, or leaf mold over the ground, and spade it into the soil.

It is essential to remove all grass and to have a weed free planting area. Once the ground cover is planted, it is difficult to eradicate undesirable weeds and grass.

On rocky or uneven soil, where the entire area cannot be worked, dig individual holes. Dig these deep enough so that you can back-fill partially with soil mixed with organic material before you set the plants.

Ground cover planting will profit from a mulch such as pine needles or pine bark to hold the soil in place until the planting is established.

Ground covers can be planted anytime during the growing season. Fall and spring plantings give the best results if potted or canned plants are used. Keep the new planting well watered until it becomes established.

A Word from the President

Jane Fox

I'm trying so hard to be inspired as to what to write about for this letter. There are some "business" things we need to share with you. This will be the last letter that will be sent out by mail. We are going green...or the cost of postage has just gotten overwhelming. You choose! We will be sending the Inside Dirt out via email. We will also be distributing them in various locations around the county. If you don't have email, look for them at the Texas Agri Office, the East Texas Arboretum, Athens Organic, Mc Dade's Nursery, the sub-court in Chandler, or Malakoff Nursery. If you cannot access any of these places and you would still like to receive the letter by mail, please call the Texas AgriLife Extension office at 903-675-6130 and one will be mailed to you.

The Henderson County Master Gardeners have done some wonderful things this year. The most noticeable and impressive has been the reconstruction of the D.R.E.A.M. garden. Margaret Dansby had a vision of a garden where brides would want to have their pictures made. She with the help of Linda Benton and the plants from our home gardens has created an English Tea Garden made with native Texas plants. Every time I go, there is something blooming and that hasn't been easy since she has had to outsmart the deer and the armadillos. Thanks to Bob McDonald, the water system was put in, and thanks to

Margaret, she also outsmarted that! Things were either too wet or something until she and Bob figured it all out. If you haven't seen it lately, it's worth the trip just to enjoy the plants. Maybe you'll want to share with us, too!

Our other success was our free Summer Workshop Series given by the Henderson County Master Gardeners, The East Texas Arboretum, and Trinity Valley Community College. If you missed taking part, you'll be sure to want to watch for them next year. We started in June with a presentation by Craig Fox (yes, my husband) on lessons learned from converting agricultural land to wildlife management. This included sharing information about native prairie grasses and wildflowers. Of course, no one knows more about wildflowers than our second presenter, Nina Ellis, HCMG. She talked about how to create a butterfly garden in your own back yard. Had it not been so hot, we would have enjoyed a walk through the gardens of the Arboretum. Next were Mandy, HCMG, and Mike Mugavero, owners of Athens Organic, on going natural in your garden. Mike fed us so much information that I almost threw away the Amdro! This was followed by a real treat from Chef Jackson York from the Edom Bakery and Grill. He not only showed us how to cook using a variety of fresh vegetables, but he fed us as well! Our final presentation was by Michael Sambogna, HCMG, and former nurseryman and event planner. Michael shared a bit of his knowledge about arranging flowers from our own gardens. This was done in August and you would have been amazed at the lovely flower arrangements we took home in Mason jars!

Our last event was the Fall Workshop presented by our new group of interns. Dawnvolynn Callahan, HCMG intern, did an exceptional presentation on East Texas Herb Gardening using the eight essential culinary herbs. Other interns, Lois Mallette and Dan Reynolds treated us to such treats as Rosemary Quick Bread and Fresh Herb Cheese Torta. Our fourth intern, Margaret Rands, obviously did her part in getting the word out because there were almost 60 people in attendance at this session. Everyone went home with herbs to add to their own personal gardens.

Our thanks also go to Jim and Brenda Stevenson who opened their home to all of the Henderson County Master Gardeners for a wonderful picnic and time for us all to kick back and relax in September. It was a fun evening and once again the food was good!

We have a wonderful new class of 10 students studying with Rick Hirsh at TVCC this fall and we're really looking forward to a great group of interns. Think about joining us next year for the fall class and the 50 hours of volunteer work. Remember that you are all welcome to join us at any monthly meeting. Robyn Stack, our Vice-President, has had a great line-up of speakers and field trips prepared for us. I look forward to what she will bring us next year.

"In the planting there is faith.
In the sprouting, hope.
Growth brings enthusiasm.
And that's how a good thing catches on."
Elvin McDonald

Johnny Jump-Up Sally Keenan

The lovely flower affectionately called Johnny jump-up is a small but mighty addition to any winter garden. This old-fashioned garden favorite is the wild ancestor to the pansy. If our grandmother's came from English stock they may have called this little flower heart's ease in remembrance of the tiny flowers profusely blooming on

English meadows. Planted en masse Johnny jump-ups will bloom through our Texas winter and well into spring before becoming overcome with the summer's heat.



Johnny-jump-up looks like a miniature pansy with a little dainty face. The cultivar known as "Helen Mount" is essentially the wild variety with a cat-like face in shades of purple, yellow and white. Thomas Jefferson noted in his

garden journal that he sowed seeds at gardens in Shadwell in 1767. Many other color variations have been developed. The Sorbet group available in recent years has delicious pastel blooms.

Plants may be purchased in local nurseries and set out in sunny locations now that cooler weather has arrived. Planting clumps of Johnny jump-up will continue color through the drab days of winter. They come up well from seed also. Seeding Johnny jump-up over beds of daffodil or jonquils will provide a wonderful display in the spring.

Another nice way to use Johnny jump-up is in hanging baskets. They are especially nice planted in a wire basket lined with sheets of sphagnum moss. To prepare the basket for planting it should be filled with good potting soil. Begin planting by working a few of the root-balls through the wire mesh on the sides of the basket. Complete the array with the top planting. As the plants grow they will cover the whole basket with cascades of little flowers. To encourage lots of blooms feed the basket regularly.

Johnny jump-ups readily reseed themselves. Depending on your point of view this is either a delightful trait or a case of having an invasive pest. If you enjoy having little flowers appear between the cracks in your driveway freely plant Johnny jump-ups. If you are a purest who hates unwanted "weeds" appearing in the lawn perhaps you would do best to keep these little darlings well contained.

An added bonus to having Johnny jump-ups in the garden is that they are edible. If you avoid pesticides they can be consumed to your "heart's ease." A single bloom can be placed in each cavity of an ice cube tray and frozen into a cube. The resulting ice is a lovely decoration for cold drinks or punch. Cakes, puddings and other desserts can be decorated with fresh flowers.

An alternative is to candy the blooms to preserve them for a longer lasting display. This requires a clean paint brush, superfine sugar, and either egg whites or meringue powder. Using meringue powder is a protection against salmonella. To candy the Johnny jump-ups paint them with an egg-white wash and dust them with superfine sugar. Set the prepared flowers on waxed paper to dry and store in a dry place for use.

A last culinary use is to simply toss Johnny jump-ups into a mixture of greens for a lovely salad. What a delightful way that is to brighten a dinner on a cool winter evening.

Persimmon Pudding

(Easier to make than it may sound. Makes a great presentation.)

Peel and mash:

3 large, very ripe persimmons to produce 2 C pulp

Beat till fluffy:

½ C sugar

6 T oil

4 large eggs

2 t vanilla

Sift and mix:

2 C all purpose or whole wheat pastry flour

1 t baking soda

½ t salt

2 t cinnamon

Cloves, nutmeg & ginger (optional)

Combine all ingredients.

Pour into oiled 3 qt pudding mold or Bundt pan

Cover tightly with parchment paper and rubber band, then with foil.

Place on a rack in a large pot & add boiling water ½ way up side of mold.

Cover pot, return to boil, reduce heat & simmer 2 ½ hrs. Add boiling water as needed.

When done remove mold from pot.

Cool one hour, then run a sharp knife around mold and invert to remove.

Serve topped with Sour Lemon Sauce.

Sour Lemon Sauce

Combine in top of double boiler:

1 C sugar

1 ¼ T cornstarch

Pinch of salt

1 ¼ C hot water

Cook for 3-5 minutes whisking gently until thick

Stir continuously while adding:

3 ½ T unsalted butter

4 T fresh lemon juice

3 t grated lemon rind

Continue stirring gently for about 5 minutes.

Cool slightly before serving, but do not refrigerate & do not reheat.

Persimmon Pecan Pudding Cake

2 C pulp of extremely ripe persimmons

4 eggs

½ C butter, melted

¾ C buttermilk

1 t vanilla

½ C sugar

1½ C flour (Regular or Gluten-free)

2 T ground flax seed or coconut flour

1 t baking powder

1 t baking soda

½ t salt

1 t cardamon

1 T pumpkin pie spice

1 t ginger

1 C chopped pecans, toasted

Preheat oven to 400 F. Grease 8" round cake pan.

In a large bowl, mix persimmon pulp, eggs, butter, buttermilk and vanilla.

In a separate bowl, mix flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt and spices.

Slowly fold the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients. Mix thoroughly.

Add chopped nuts and stir to incorporate.

Pour into cake pan and bake for about 50 minutes.

When done, the center will still be very moist and soft, but the outside of the cake should have formed a firm crust and be well-browned.

Remove from oven and allow to cool in the pan for at least 20 minutes before serving. Slice and serve warm.

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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.

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