

“The Inside Dirt”

Green Dragon

Wayne Stafford

I am a Master Gardener that has gone astray, or wild about wildflowers. This year we have found an unusual and very interesting plant. There are some similarities with tropical plants.

Green dragon, *Arisaema dracontium*, is a plant with a single stalk about 1 ½ to 2 ½ feet tall. It usually has a solitary leaf with 5 to 12 individual leaflets. The leaflets may be 2 ½ inches wide and 8 inches long. The leaflets form an umbrella parallel to the ground and are narrowly ovate, smooth along the margins, glabrous and dark green giving an interesting tropical look.



The naked flower stalk shoots off the main stem about 4 to 5 inches above the ground, and consists of a spathe and spadix. The lower portion of the spadix is about 2 inches long with tiny fruit that looks like an ear of green corn. The ears later turn red as they mature. The spathe is cylindrical at the bottom enclosing the spadix. The upper portion of the spadix is 8 to 12 inches long, ending in a long pointed spike resembling a dragon's tongue. This gives the plant its name. The root system consists of a corm with secondary roots. This plant can spread by forming offsets or by reseeding itself. The roots contain calcium oxalate and are poisonous.



The presence of this plant is a good indication that the area may provide conditions that are good for producing other interesting plants. This small area first attracted my attention because of its healthy population of mayapple, *Podophyllum peltatum*. As we continued our search we found oldfield milkvine, *Matelea decipiens*, with its beautiful heart shaped leaves, and very interesting brown flowers. This plant produces a fruit called angle pod, that looks like a misshaped cucumber, with rough places on the surface.

The list of interesting plants in the area continues! The ground nut, *Apios Americana*, was an important source of food for the American Indians, and early settlers, before what we call the Irish Potato was introduced. This vine resembles the wisteria and has a sweet smelling, somewhat sticky flower.



Other great finds in the area: are the arrowleaf violet, *Viola sagittata*, a type of violet that we had not seen previously; white avens, *Geum canadense*, a pretty white flower with the sepals forming a star shape; whiteleaf mountain mint, *Pycnanthemum albescens*, a plant whose small leaves around the bloom are a frosty white hence its name; common goldstar, *Hypoxis hirsuta*, is a very pretty yellow flower. We also found the white crownbeard, or frostweed, *Verbesina virginica*.





Whiteleaf Mountain Mint

This small area is just 150 feet off a busy state highway in a heavily wooded area. People seem to think it is a good place to throw away their bottles and cups. What a shame they don't take time to stop and admire the beauty that is available to them!

Announcement: The Summer Series starts June 25th!

Sherry Bitz

Henderson County Master Gardeners, with co-sponsors, The East Texas Arboretum and Trinity Valley Community Services Department, are launching *The Summer Series*, five two-hour gardening related workshops led by Master Gardeners and our supporters. The classes are on Thursdays, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. at the East Texas Arboretum.

These are “How to” classes taught by gardeners who are successful at “doing it” here locally. They want to share what they’ve learned with you. The wide range of topics reflects the interests and know-how of our speakers. Applying principles from the Texas A&M Agrilife Program they will show you what experience has taught them. The classes will be informal, interactive, practical and a lot of fun.

Summer Series Schedule

Thursday, June 25th “Lessons Learned Converting Agricultural Land to Wildlife Use”

Presenters: Craig and Jane Fox, Fox Meadows Guest Homes and Nature Conservatory

Starting with zero experience and 55 acres, Craig and Jane cleared, plowed and planted using a wild life management plan Craig wrote after attending a two day course at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. They now have 3 acres of native prairie grasses and an acre of wildflowers. They enlarged a small pond to 4 ½ acres and stocked it with perch and bass. They have an established quail release program. They also created miles of hiking trails to provide a Native Texas get-away for their B&B guests.

Come and hear about the lessons they have learned during the development of this site.



Common Goldstar

Thursday, July 9th “How to Create a Butterfly Garden in Your Own Back Yard”

Presenter: Nina Ellis

Nina is Henderson County’s Master Gardener Extraordinaire. She learned to garden with her grandfather as a child and has never stopped gardening or learning. She is always willing and eager to share her extensive knowledge of East Texas gardening.

Nina has a special interest in native plants and the animals and insects they support. She has been instrumental in creating the Palestine Public Library’s Butterfly Garden and the Henderson County Master Gardeners’ butterfly attracting DREAM Garden. Nina will share photos, stories and a walk in the Arboretum Gardens pointing out butterfly host and nectar plants. You will leave inspired and with the tools to create your own butterfly garden.

Thursday, July 16th “Going Natural in Your Garden”

Presenters: Mike & Mandy Mugavero, Athens Organic

Mike and Mandy, owners of Athens Organic, began their interest in organic gardening in 2001 while successfully using corn gluten to control grass burrs. In 2004, weary of traveling to Dallas or Tyler for organic supplies and seeing the need for a source for organic supplies in the Athens area, they bought Athens Organic, expanded, and continue to expand their inventory of organic products as demand grew. With the wealth of books, magazines, websites, newspapers, radio and TV shows offering information on organic gardening it’s easy to get overwhelmed. Mike and Mandy will make it simple showing us where to start and how to do it.

Thursday, July 23rd “Cooking with Herbs & Vegetables”

Presenter: Chef Jackson York, Edom Bakery and Grill

Executive Chef at the very popular Edom Bakery and Grill, Chef York believes in sharing his talents, whether

with starter cooks or true culinary students. He teaches at area community colleges and now serves as the Director of the East Texas chapter of the Texas Chefs’ Association. He strives to promote delicious, healthy options in the kitchen. Chef Jackson will share recipes and demonstrate some of the many delicious ways to prepare fresh vegetables and herbs. You’ll be able to taste samples of the food he prepares. You are invited to bring vegetables and herbs from your garden for Chef to cook.

Thursday, Aug. 13th “Natural Flower Arranging”

Presenter: Michael Sambogna, Cedar Creek Lake House

As an innkeeper and experienced florist and event planner, Michael creates environments of extraordinary beauty, comfort and grace. He will share his talent for arranging gorgeous floral arrangements using whatever may be blooming or growing in the garden and yard. Please bring a vase/mason jar, scissors and flowers, foliage, branches, vines and grasses to create your own natural floral arrangement as Michael guides you through the process.

Tropical Joy

Jane Fox

The Henderson County Master Gardeners met on Wednesday, June 17, 2009, to hear Donna Ziegenhals of the La Tulle Foundation in Bay City, Texas. Her informing presentation on tropicals got me to thinking about the tropicals in my life. I have a philodendron that has been under my care for over 30 years and several others that my husband and I have moved in and out for decades.

Plant snobbery has always been an allure for me. My first home was filled with plants because I couldn’t afford furniture. With certain smug satisfaction gained by not killing what I had, I also enjoyed the power in simplicity and undeniable appeal in doing something that is so easy. The poster child for trouble free gardening would unquestioningly be the *Sansevieria*, but these plants are also a class act, exemplifying the commonplace gone chic. Their combination of utility and sleek stylishness makes them the botanical equivalent to the little black dress.

The most prevalent are *Sansevieria trifasciata*, commonly called the snake plant, with horizontal bands of dark and

light green. It is one of a group of 60 or so described species originating primarily in Africa which hit the European scene in the early 19th century. As one of the few plants able to survive dim lighting and laissez-faire maintenance, they were popular houseplants with the Victorians, becoming living fixtures in over-stuffed English parlors and villa patios along the Mediterranean alike. But they are so ridiculously effortless to grow (the only thing easier is plastic), that their popularity midcentury was not limited to modernism aficionados. Everyone had snake plants (also cheekily called mother-in-law's tongue), and pieces of them were routinely cut off and shared with neighbors, making them a classic pass-along plant.

For me, Sansevieria was an early initiation into the wonderful world of green leafy things. As one of the plants my mother, like so many other people, grew well, it was a steady bit of potted greenery about the house. I remember the first time it flowered. I was mesmerized by the line of ants marching up the flower stalk, each freesia-fragrant little bloom glistening with a drop of nectar.

Though Sansevierias are the most undemanding of plants, surviving isn't the same as thriving, and if you want them to be in their prime, there are a few factors to keep in mind. Good drainage is paramount...these plants that evolved in hot, dry location don't like overwatering. In fact, that's about the only way to kill it. And they don't like extended periods of cold, so in our area, they must be brought inside in winter. While they can endure low-light conditions, they prefer bright, indirect light. Some can take full sun, with the risk that they can acquire a burned look. And though seemingly content to be pot-bound, their thick rhizomes can eventually bust through a container; fortunately dividing them is as easy as growing them.

While their name is Old World, Sansevierias are not only thoroughly modern, they're space age, having been named one of the best plants for cleansing indoor air of toxins in a NASA study. So sit back, breath deeply and enjoy!

Ginger

Sally Keenan

When I was a child growing up in New England Sunday dinner was customarily in the early afternoon. Dessert

was reserved for an evening treat. Gingerbread covered with slices of bananas all hidden under a thick layer of whipped cream was a family favorite. I haven't eaten it in years, but somehow it all came to mind recently when I happened across a magazine article about ginger. Those sweet memories came flooding back to warm me.

Although frequently identified as a root ginger is really a rhizome or an underground stem. Its official name is *Zingiber officinale*, and it is most likely native to South-East Asia. Ginger was known to Chinese herbalist 2500 years ago as both a medicinal herb and as a flavoring. It was brought eastward centuries and centuries ago. The Greeks were known to mix it into their breads. Perhaps they can be credited with the original gingerbread.

For centuries ginger has been known to have a vast variety of medicinal properties. Even today we give people a glass of ginger ale to help tummies recover from motion sickness whether on land, sea or in the air. Ginger is known to be a good digestive aid, neutralizing stomach acid. It also is a natural antihistamine providing some relief from colds and allergies by dilating constricted bronchial tubes.

Ginger is a tall grassy looking plant that grows to about 1 meter in height. The shoots rise from buds on the rhizome and appear to be wrapped tightly about one another. The flowers are cone shaped and appear on shorter stems. A series of yellowish leaf-like braches appear topped with a yellowish bloom tinged with purple. The rhizome itself is a knobby stem with a cork like covering. The interior edible portion is yellow and has a spicy, sharp lemon flavor.

Ginger can be started from sections of the rhizome purchased in the grocery store. It is best to be sure to purchase fresh sections with lots of "eyes." Ginger needs to be planted in well-drained soil in a shady area. Cover the rhizome with no more than an inch of soil. It is best to plant them in the spring to ensure a good harvest of the ginger rhizomes in the fall. Ginger doesn't like very cold weather. If you plant it outside be sure it is in a protected area and mulch it well in the winter.

Ginger has become increasingly popular in recent years as Asian cooking has become more widely touted. No longer is ginger relegated to bread and cookies but, it is now an important ingredient in many recipes. Many meat,

vegetable and dessert recipes call for this versatile spice. Don't be hesitant to try out a new one.

Summer Has Arrived

Scott Forney

Summer in Texas is a very trying time for plants. Proper watering is the most important factor in keeping the plants healthy. A good mulch helps by keeping moisture in the ground and plant roots cool, especially shallow rooted plants, i.e., azaleas. Large trees will transpire (give off moisture through leaves) at the rate of as much as 600 gallons per day. If this is not replaced, it will take moisture from the lawn or other plants under the trees. Generally 1" of water applied weekly will keep your plants and trees healthy.

Something else to watch for in summer is browning leaf margins (on wax begonias both brown and green leaf). What happens is toxins collect on the leaf margins (edges) and cause brown lesions all around the leaf. To avoid this don't water them during the heat of the day. It is best to water in the morning. It is never a good idea to water later in the day as that promotes disease when the foliage is wet all night. If you can stop watering by 4-5:00pm there will usually be enough daylight to dry the leaves before dark. I realize that it is difficult for working people to water before they get home from work. That is why a sprinkler system is not only a luxury, but also much more effective and economic. It's much like going to the dentist: you have to spend a little to save a lot.

Whether you have an automatic sprinkler system or not, the proper choice of sprinkler heads is important for effective watering. Basically, what you want is a sprinkler that puts out large drops. The sprinklers on most shrub risers that put out a fine mist are the least economical. More than 50% of the water flow evaporates and never hits the ground, especially during the hot, dry days of Texas summers. Impact-type sprinklers are the most effective. They offer large droplets and are adjustable to full or part circles with different diameters. Oscillating sprinklers aren't as versatile (i.e. can't use under trees) but do have bigger drops so you get more economical water usage. Soaker hoses are excellent provided they are the type that ooze water from pores, not spray a fine mist into the air. If you are lucky enough to have a sprinkler system, then set it for 5-6:00am for the most beneficial and economic performance.

A New Year For Master Gardeners

Sally Keenan

About this time seven years ago I was merrily going about my business. One hot afternoon Jim Stevenson called to ask if I wanted to take the Master Gardener course with him in the fall. All I knew about the program was that it deals with gardening; it was sponsored by the Texas A&M Extension Service; and that it involved both classroom and volunteer work. Oh well, I thought, why not.

The next afternoon the two of us headed to Athens to the Trinity Valley Community College (TVCC) campus. There we filled out the necessary application and paid our fees conditionally on our acceptance into the program. Several weeks later we were students again. By now we had received letters of acceptance and were armed with our fat textbook, notepads and pencils.

Henderson County Agent, Rick Hirsch taught the class. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he orchestrated the class. It was a great experience that included Rick's lectures, talks from wonderful guest lecturers and a variety of field trips. Here and there were some tests. Ick!! They were mostly to keep us honest.

Now it's time for the next class of Master Gardeners to begin. This is an invitation to those of you who might be interested in joining. You do have to have some free time because the classroom part of the program is two mornings a week for the fall semester. Additionally 50 hours of volunteer service is required. Each candidate has a year to complete the program.

Now why do this. First, it's a great way for people fascinated by gardening to learn more, and second it's a great way to serve the community by volunteering in an educational, community-based effort. You don't have to be a whiz or know everything about gardening. You just need to be interested and willing. A wonderful bonus is that you get to meet a variety of other people who are in the same boat. The other Master Gardeners and interns have a vast repertoire of experience and interests. You will learn as much from them as from the program itself.

If you are interested call Rick Hirsch (903-675-6130) or go by the Texas Cooperative Extension Office, 101 E. Tyler St., Athens. Join us!!!

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.