

Henderson County Master Gardener

“THE INSIDE DIRT”

A Walk In My Garden

Nina Ellis

Early each morning all winter long I have walked through my garden and wondered if it would ever return to the beauty I remember of past springs. Now with Ash Wednesday approaching the Lent lilies (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*) are showing their blooms right on time just as they have done for centuries.

It has been said the Lent Lily has been in cultivation since the 1500's, returning reliably to bloom in the garden year after year. All of our hybrid trumpet daffodils have their origin with this wild trumpet daffodil. The bulbs are sometimes found commercially but are best gotten from a friend. If you wish to grow them in your garden remember they need to bake in the dry soil of summer.

Please don't plant them in an area with a sprinkler system as they will surely rot. If the blossoms of Lent Lilies are left to mature they set viable seed to increase their beauty every year.



Soon after the Campernelles (*N. xodorus*) burst into bloom with their bright yellow two-inch blossoms. Campernelles are a natural hybrid between the true jonquilla, a tiny yellow blossom with incredibly sweet scent, and the Lent Lily. As with hybrids in general, they do not set seed but multiply by division. If you have these treasures in your garden you must remember not to mow until the foliage is nearly brown. They may be unsightly for a few weeks but I feel that is a small price to pay for the joy of seeing them bloom on a cold and dreary February morning.

Coming into bloom at the same time are the narcissus *Tazetta italicus*. Their blooms resemble those of paperwhites in that they have a cluster of white blossoms

but with a yellow center as opposed to the white cups of paperwhites. Tazettas are blessed with a sweet fragrance while paperwhites have an unpleasant scent. You will not find these reliable bloomers in catalogs only in the garden of a friend.

Then the large trumpet modern hybrids come into bloom. In my garden the large trumpet daffodils that have proved themselves reliable bloomers year after year are: Sir Watkin (yellow petals/orange trumpet), Ice Follies (white petals/frilly yellow trumpet), Carlton (yellow petals/yellow trumpet) and a long lived stand of the true King Alfred (yellow petals and the longest bright yellow trumpet of all daffodils). The King Alfred is no longer available commercially due to a viral infection. If you have a stand in your garden, treasure them! As with all spring blooming bulbs leave them with their foliage so they may store up energy for next year's blooms. As Greg Grant will tell you "you may mow in May".

Today as I take my garden walk I notice the Pearl Bush (*Exochorda racemosa*) is coming into full bloom with its clusters of snowy white blossoms. Steve Bender, garden editor for Southern Living magazine, has stated Pearl Bush is his favorite spring bloomer for the South. I heartily agree. Down by the driveway the heirloom flowering quince is bursting with reddish-orange blooms. Under the majestic oak tree the hardy cyclamen has made a solid mat of marbled green leaves, promising that soon the grass will be dotted with tiny pink blossoms.



My walk completed, I come to the dooryard garden that is filled with the blue blossoms of Star Flower (*Ipheion uniflorum*) creating a blue carpet for Carlton daffodils, Campernelles and Spring Snowflakes (*leucojum* species). Spring has truly arrived!

Free Vegetable Workshop A Must for all Gardeners!

Cecilia Bowles

Have you ever tried to grow your own vegetables and been frustrated when you achieved a “\$64 Tomato” (a great read by William Alexander!). Have you ever wished you had a “gardening mentor” from whom you could glean years of valuable gardening experience in just one easy season? Well, look no further than the Henderson County Master Gardener’s Free Vegetable Workshop coming up, Saturday, March 10 from 9:00-12:00 at the East Texas Arboretum in Athens.

We have invited Patty Leander, a Master Gardener from Austin, TX, who is also a contributing writer to Texas Gardens to present valuable insights with her topic, “Practical Tips for Year-Round Gardening.” Texas is a great place to grow an amazing array of vegetables throughout the year. Patty will offer suggestions for getting the most from your garden. Her talk will include ideas for extending the production season and increasing yield, the use of often overlooked vegetable crops, as well as guidelines for proper harvest and storage.

Patty’s husband, Bruce Leander will also present a session entitled, “A Closer Look at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.” Bruce will take us on a virtual walk through the Wildflower Center, highlighting the beauty of native plants that bloom throughout the year. He will include tips for taking garden photos along the way.

Not to be outdone, we will have two of our own Master Gardeners presenting sessions. Margaret Rand, a Master Composter, will present “Easy Composting.” She has professional expertise in this area and has attended a three-day certification course to become a Master Composter. Consistent with one of the aims of the Master Gardener Program, she is giving back to the community by presenting this valuable workshop. You won’t want to miss it!

And last, but not least, our own Bonnie Dill will present a talk entitled, “Seed Saving for the Gardener.” Bonnie grew up in East Texas and gardened with her grandmother growing vegetables and fruit. She has a gift for preserving seeds and plants from the past and gladly shares her know how. Come prepared to get excited, too!

Again, that’s the Free Vegetable Workshop on Saturday, Mar 10, 9-12:00 at the beautiful East Texas Arboretum, 1600 Patterson Rd., Athens, TX 75751.

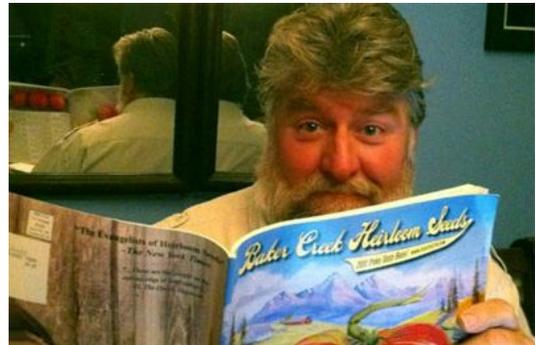
Annual Spring Conference Save The Date-April 21

Margaret Dansby

It is almost time for the 12th Annual Henderson County Master Gardeners spring conference. All of the members are busy like Christmas elves preparing for the event.

Steven Chamblee, Chief Horticulturist at Chandor Gardens, Weatherford, TX will be the speaker. His topic for the night is “Great Gardening Ideas”. He will take us “idea shopping” at Longwood Gardens, Chanticleer, Chandor Gardens, and dozens of stunning private gardens from Texas to Pennsylvania.

We will be inspired with wonderful designs for planning or restoring gardens. He will describe the notions of form,



texture, contrast, framing, detail, and whimsy from some of the finest minds in horticulture today.

Chamblee has studied public and private gardens in England, Denmark, Canada, Costa Rica, Mexico, Hawaii and across the United States. He also writes for the Neil Sperry’s Gardens Magazine, and he “talks the talk” and “walks the walk”. It should be a fun night!

The date to save is Saturday, April 21, 2012. A silent and live auction is planned for all along with entertainment and a plant sale which will began at 4:30 then dinner by Chef Justin Boswell will be served at 5:35.

Tickets are \$20.00 and can be purchased from any Master Gardener. They can also be purchase at the AgriLife office. For information call 903-675-6130.

Creating a Garden for East Texas Pollinators

Elaine Bulgar-Brown

Upon my arrival to Texas in the summer of 2006, the first bird that I encountered was a hummingbird. Not just one hummingbird but several that visited the potted plants I had recently purchased. I was new to Texas and did not know anything about Texas gardening, nothing about the plants that grew here, the climate or the composition of the soil. Having grown in the Northeast, I had never heard the words “drought tolerant” in gardening before. This was a new experience for me as was the hot and dry summer to come. I did buy several hummingbird feeders to supplement the plants I did have and these birds came all summer long. By October, there was a big migration of Hummers heading farther south stopping at my feeders along the way. By this time, I was replacing the nectar every day. From my observation, I realized that hummers can be territorial around feeders, and will drive all others away. They could fly backwards and were the aeronautical acrobats of the sky. I came to love watching these tiny birds and learn how truly amazing they are.

When I moved to my present home, I knew I wanted to landscape with plants that attract hummingbirds. I later learned that in so doing, I would attract other beneficial life to my garden, such as bees, butterflies, dragonflies and other beneficial insects I did not know. I was delighted to learn that now I could have a garden visited by hummers as well as have a butterfly garden. How to create such an environment was what I needed to learn. I also wanted this landscape to be as self-sustaining as possible. For me this means selecting plants:

- native of Texas, whenever possible,
- that were drought tolerant and had similar water needs,
- that enjoyed the number of hours of sun in a given direction,
- that grew happy in the same soil conditions,
- that provide nectar sources for both hummers and insects, and
- that had overlapping bloom cycles.

This seems a tall order as I searched the internet and read all the material my brain could absorb. There is much information available out on the world-wide-web, and it

can be a daunting task to sift through all the information. Then I remembered from my earlier days at the New York Botanical Gardens a quote I often heard and often saw in their garden designs, “*plant in large drifts*”. This sounded like such a simple concept. Find a few plants that work and plant them in a large area.

During the long summer drought of 2011, I lost many young plants. Many of these plants wore labels attesting to “drought tolerance”. They died not because I did not water enough, for I was diligent to keep my young plants well watered until they could establish themselves in their new home. What I discovered is that although I watered the hot sun was, in effect, ‘cooking’ the roots.

The plants, which not only survived this drought but also flourished with repeated blooming were Henry Duelberg salvia and Augusta Duelberg salvia, which were happily growing side-by-side. I removed spent blossoms on the salvia several times over the summer and they produced new flowers each time. Standing Phlox, Turk’s Cap, Texas Sage and Echinacea were other winner of this drought war. Now that I have one tough planting season under my belt, there are numerous other plants that I want to try and hope to plant some of these in the spring. Moreover, if another season of drought comes, I will be ready to enjoy a landscape of plants designed to thrive in East Texas weather.

Kale Sherry Bitz

What can I say about Kale? It’s my favorite plant. It grows year-round. It tastes delicious sautéed in a little olive or coconut oil seasoned with salt, pepper and lots of garlic. It’s beautiful in the landscape in any season. It has few pests. It’s easy to grow and requires very little work. It’s one of the healthiest foods I can eat.

I know I’ll never starve with kale in my garden. It’s my insurance against hunger. Last year it produced profusely all spring. In fact, I still have baggies of frozen kale yet to be eaten in winter soups, stir-fries and pasta dishes. While my other vegetables died or went dormant the kale lived and produced through last summer’s heat and drought, although admittedly, at a slowed pace.

I usually pull up my old kale plants and sow new kale in the fall, but because I was traveling in October and

November and didn't plant a fall garden, I left the old kale in the ground. Totally neglected, it lived. With the January rains and a little pruning those same plants are producing now. We just ate a big mess of fresh kale for lunch and there will be more in a couple of days. What a plant!

Kale belongs to the Brassica family that includes cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage and collards. Kale is a nutritional powerhouse with one cup containing 36 calories, 5g of fiber, 15% of the daily requirement of calcium and vitamin B6, 40% of magnesium, 180% of vitamin A, 200% of vitamin C, and 1,020% of vitamin K. It is also a good source of the minerals copper, potassium, iron, manganese, and phosphorus. Whew!!

According to medical research eating super-nutritious kale on a regular basis may provide significant health benefits. These include cancer protection, lowered cholesterol and improved eye-health. Please note that although studies show eating a diet rich in the antioxidant vitamin K reduces the overall risk of developing or dying from cancer, too much vitamin K can pose problems for some people. Anyone taking anticoagulants such as warfarin should consult their doctor before adding kale to their diet because the high level of vitamin K may interfere with the drugs.

Kale is a "leafy green" available in curly, ornamental or dinosaur (lacinato) varieties. My first kale plants were

ornamental purple, green, and white transplants that I bought along with ornamental cabbages and pansies for winter color.



As winter turned to spring the ornamental kale grew bigger and bigger. I had never eaten any kind of kale before, but decided that the luscious foliage looked edible and I didn't want it to go to waste without tasting it. I cooked some and found it delicious. I then harvested and frozen many bags of ornamental kale before pulling up the plants -

except for a purple one that bloomed with tiny lacy yellow blossoms. The bees and I greatly admired them.

The next year I bought kale sets especially for the vegetable garden and the year after started planting seeds of different varieties of kale. They all grew abundantly, so abundantly that I began transplanting them to my flowerbeds to add color and texture. A circle was completed and now I regard all kale as ornamental and edible whether in flowerbed or vegetable garden. It's a plant I can love.



SOURCES:

Nimptsch, J. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, May 2010; vol 91: pp 1348-58.

Kahlon, T. *Nutrition Research*, June 2008; vol 28: pp 351-357.

Pocket Gophers

Rick Hirsch
County Extension Agent
Henderson County

Pocket gophers are burrowing rodents that live almost entirely underground. Gophers are well adapted to their underground existence with stout forelegs and strong curved claws for digging. They have prominent, yellow incisor teeth and large, fur-lined external cheek pouches to carry food. Pocket gophers have poor eyesight, but their other senses are acute. Their tails are sensitive and are used as feelers when the animals travel backward in their burrows.

Pocket gophers are rarely seen because they spend most of their lives in underground tunnel systems. They create characteristic mounds, a sure indicator of their presence. Pocket gophers should not be confused with moles, which are insectivorous and sometimes construct tunnels and mounds similar to those made by pocket gophers

Gophers are solitary animals except during the mating season and while there are young to care for. Otherwise, there is only one gopher in



each tunnel system. Pocket gophers dig extensive tunnels or runways that consist of a main tunnel with several short lateral tunnels. A single gopher may have a burrow system that extends as much as 800 feet, covers an acre of ground, and ranges from a few inches to several feet deep. Runways vary from 2 to 5 inches in diameter depending on the gopher species. These runways serve as homes, storehouses and routes for underground food forays. The shallow runways, 4 to 15 inches below the surface, are used primarily to search for food.

The gopher pushes soil from the burrows to the surface with its forefeet and chest, forming a characteristic horseshoe shaped mound approximately 8 to 24 inches in diameter and 6 inches high. The mounds are at the ends of short, lateral tunnels which branch off the main runway. The surface opening used to expel dirt from the burrow, is plugged by pushing dirt into it. This results in a depression on one side of the mound.

The pocket gopher's diet mainly consists of fleshy roots of various plants, including trees. Gophers normally eat tubers such as potatoes and peanuts. They also eat green tops and seeds that can be pulled down into their burrows.

Under natural conditions, gophers are beneficial to the soil. It is estimated that in a year, one gopher transports 2½ tons of soil to the ground surface. By bringing subsoil to the surface where it weathers more quickly, gophers contribute to the soil building process. The loosened soil makes the ground more fertile. Air and water can easily pass through porous soil to plant roots.

Gophers can cause serious damage when they establish tunnel systems in cultivated farming areas, rangelands, orchards, tree farms and lawns. When there are many gophers they can damage field and pasture crops by eating the crops and by leaving mounds which interfere with farm machinery.

orchards, tree farms and lawns. When there are many gophers they can damage field and pasture crops by eating the crops and by leaving mounds which interfere with farm machinery.

Gophers reduce the amount of livestock forage available on rangeland by harvesting and burying vegetation. They gnaw or clip the roots of trees that may kill seedlings or small trees and reduces the vigor of large trees.

Pocket gophers in a lawn, garden or flowerbed can destroy plants and produce unsightly mounds. Gophers may gnaw through underground plastic water pipes and through electrical and communication cables. They may also interfere with irrigation dikes. A tunnel system in a dam can cause it to erode and wash out. Tunnels under paved highways may cause the pavement to sink.

Control operations should be conducted during the spring and fall when pocket gophers are most active near the surface. Their activity is usually indicated by the presence of fresh mounds of dirt. Control operations in the fall interfere the least with growing crops. Methods of control include mechanical and chemical means.

Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Brown Butter and Almonds

Linda Benton

2½ lb. fresh Brussels sprouts (about 6 cups)
3 T. olive oil
1 (2 oz.) pkg. sliced almonds (1/3 cup)
3 T. butter
2 garlic cloves, minced
¼ t. salt
¼ t. freshly ground pepper

Wash Brussels sprouts thoroughly; remove discolored leaves. Cut off stem end, and discard; cut in half. Toss Brussels sprouts with olive oil in a shallow roasting pan, coating well. Remove and discard any loose leaves. Bake at 425 degrees for 20 minutes. Transfer to a serving bowl and keep warm.

Brown almonds in butter in a small skillet over medium heat, stir often, just until golden brown. Add garlic and cook 1 minute more. Stir in salt and pepper. Pour garlic mixture over Brussels sprouts; toss gently. Serve immediately. Makes 8 servings.

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**Henderson County
Master Gardener Association**

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The Henderson County Master Gardener Association is sponsored by the Henderson County office of Texas AgriLife 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.

<http://henderson-co-tx-mg.org/>

