

Henderson County Master Gardener

“THE INSIDE DIRT”

Save These Dates

Henderson County Master Gardeners plan to present two spring events of interest to all gardeners.

Spring Conference

The Thirteenth Annual Spring Conference will be presented on Thursday, April 11th, at the Cain Center in Athens. The featured speaker will be William (Bill) Welch, PhD. He will discuss sustainable alternatives for Texas gardens.

Dr. Welch is well known in Texas as the author of Perennial Garden Color and Antique Roses for the South. He will be offering these books for sale at the conference. He contributes to Southern Living Magazine, Neil Sperry's Gardens and other publications. He is a professor in the Department of Horticultural Sciences, Texas A&M University and a landscape horticulturist with the Texas AgriLife Extension Service.

The conference will feature a plant sale, a catered dinner by Tilo's Restaurant, and a silent auction. Tickets are \$20.00 and can be purchased from any Master Gardener, at the Agriculture Extension Office, or at the Athens Bank.

Vegetable Workshop

The Vegetable Workshop will be presented Saturday, March 16th at the East Texas Arboretum in Athens, Texas.

Pat Kriener, a Johnson County Master Gardener, will be the featured speaker. She will discuss and demonstrate “Square Foot Vegetable Gardening”. Ms. Kriener will speak from 9:30 AM to 11:00 AM and will answer questions following her talk.

The workshop will begin at 8:30 AM. Master Gardeners will be on hand to answer questions about worm composting, seed saving, and other gardening subjects. The meeting is open to be public.

Walk With Me

Nina Ellis

As we enter my garden three bur oaks (*Quercus macrocarpa*) will catch your eye. They shade my home from the searing Western sun during July and August. The first friend I made when I moved to Montalba 35 years ago gave me the acorns. Beneath one of them are the Lent lilies (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*) and campenelle jonquils (*Narcissus xodorus*) that must have been planted in this hard red clay by a determined gardener long before my tenure. These two narcissus have scattered themselves throughout the garden, blooming faithfully every spring as they have for centuries in their Southern European habitat.



Along the driveway the *Narcissus tazetta Italicus* are usually the first bulbs to bloom in spring. They were a gift from a friend's garden that is on the site of a long gone log cabin. Nearby are many narcissus that were given me by a bulb grower in Mt. Pleasant. In the same area a blue plumbago thrives in hot dry soil. My daughter-in-law brought it to me from her garden in San Antonio. It is a magnet for butterflies all summer long.

Moving along, we encounter two heirloom roses (Monsieur Tillier and J.E. Murphy Pink Tea), probably 4' by 8' that I propagated from cuttings I received while attending a Texas Rose Rustlers' meeting. Across the way a *Gardenia jasminoides* reaches to the roof of the house. This was my husband's favorite flower, a treasured Valentine's Day gift from many years ago. A Mexican buckeye shades the gardenia. My son brought the seeds to me after a visit to the San Antonio Botanical Garden. Today it is 20' tall and rivals the redbuds for outstanding pink blossoms.

There are many irises in the garden. The first spring I was here I discovered the very old variety "Purple King" with tall stems and velvety purple falls, along with the early white *Iris albicans*. The pecan tree is surrounded by an incredibly fragrant old species German iris, a gift from a dear friend. It is very early blooming and signals the arrival of spring. Many of the newer varieties of iris are gifts of Master Gardener friends.

Crinum – I have many- some purchased but most offsets from friends. Growing crinum is surely a lesson in patience. One morning, maybe years after planting, you will see a bloom spike and rejoice. It is surely worth the wait! While you were waiting for a bloom though they covered a lot of ground in the garden with their strap-like leaves and did their part in keeping out the weeds.



A recently planted butterfly garden sports a number of native Texas salvias. My garden staple, *Salvia farinacea*

and its cultivars grow along with the fall blooming *Salvia regla* and the sprawling summer blooming *Salvia darcii* that were purchased from Natives of Texas in Kerrville. (If you find yourself in the area it is a great nursery to visit and to purchase native plants.) Four different varieties of passionflower grow alongside. Milkweeds are there in abundance for the Monarchs: *Asclepias tuberosa*, *A. curvassia*, *A. incarnata*, *A. texana* and *A. viridis*. My hope is that my garden may qualify as a Monarch way station. Native purple verbena (*Glandularia bipinnatifida*) and our Texas lantana (*Lantana horrida*) assure me there will be many varieties of butterflies for watching and catching on camera.

Under the umbrella of tall trees you will notice a dozen mature dogwood trees. There were none here when we arrived. Through the years the birds have planted them in the garden. To return the favor, they furnish the birds with shiny red berries in winter.

Turning the corner, we come to a perennial bed planted with coneflowers I have grown from seed. You will see *Echinacea pallida*, *E. augustifolia*, *E. tenesseeensis*, and the yellow flowered *E. paradoxa*. Growing with them are another favorite of mine, several species of penstemon: Brazos, cobeia, digitalis, laxiflorus and Murrayanus that I rescued from my pasture. These are all native perennials that have thrived for many years and bloom reliably every spring.

Completing our tour we come to native deciduous azaleas with yellow blossoms and meadow rue (thalictrum), that were given me after working in the gardens at Pineywoods Native Center. Spreading across the bed are columbines, both *Aquilegia canadensis* (red) and *A. chrysantha* (yellow) that are from the original plants given to me by my daughter. They readily reseed and act as a ground cover when not in bloom. Here you see my hip gardenia ("Martha Turnbull") taken as a cutting from Greg Grant's garden in Arcadia. It roots easily so I have been able to share with friends.

We have arrived back at the beginning of our walk and I realize I have not begun to point out all the plants that bring out fond memories of friends, family and exciting gardening experiences. I hope your garden is just as full of treasured memories.

The Children's Garden

Bill and Marie Hancock

It is always a pleasure to interact with the children at the South Elementary School garden. They can visit to the garden at any time, but Master Gardeners are there on Thursday morning when the weather permits. On Thursday, January 25th, they were able to see five different vegetables that are still growing in the fall garden. We helped the pre-kindergarten class find the vegetables. They had fun counting them and tasting the kale. Their teacher, Sunni Starkes, was going to harvest some broccoli the next day and cook it for them. She had already prepared some broccoli soup for her class. They loved the experience!

The first and second grade classes got to see if they could identify the five vegetables. Most of the children found all five plus some bees! The second grade class told us what part of each plant they could eat. What amazed them most was discovering that when they ate broccoli they were eating the part that turned into the flowers because a few broccoli plants had bolted. That is also where they found the bees busy at work. One class wanted to take a sample of all five vegetables to their room to wash and eat. What they wanted to try were kale, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts.

The children's garden is a great place to introduce children to vegetables. When they are able to watch the vegetables grow, they are more willing to taste and sometimes even enjoy them.

Illegal Weeds?

Richard David

During a recent internet search for aquatic plants for my new pond, I was surprised to discover that some aquatic plants are illegal in Texas. Specifically, water hyacinth and water lettuce are banned. These were both available for sale on an internet site I viewed. The accompanying pictures were quite attractive and I was tempted to purchase some. I did not know, and perhaps you do not know, that Texas has a specific list of illegal plants.

For those of you wondering, marijuana is not the only weed that cannot be imported into Texas. According to the Texas Agriculture Code enacted in 2005, bringing any plant on this list into Texas is a punishable offense.

These banned plants are known as noxious and invasive plants. Most of them are nonnative (introduced from foreign lands) and do not have natural competition or predators in Texas. Therefore, they can spread unchecked and choke out native plants in the landscape. They can also fill up lakes and ponds, killing native aquatic plants and animals. Other noxious plants can invade agricultural fields and destroy crops.

This is a particular problem for new construction sites where the native plants have been removed to bare soils. The problem got national attention when these noxious plants began to take over roadway right of ways. This resulted in the writing of a national "Most Wanted List" of noxious plants. In 1999, President Clinton signed an executive order into law governing weeds. Since then, many states have developed their own lists of noxious plants that should be quarantined. Texas has a list of 31 plants that are illegal to bring into the state. This list is available on the U.S. Department of Agriculture website (plants.USDA.gov/Java/noxious). Be sure to check the list before purchasing plants from an out-of-state website.

Examples on the list that I found interesting include camel thorn, alligator weed, water spinach, torpedo grass, itch grass, salt cedar, and Chinese Tallow trees. The USDA site has information on each illegal plant, including its scientific name, its distribution, its preferred habitat, and often times a photo or drawing of the plant.

You won't find "Most Wanted Posters" at the U.S. Post Office for these plant criminals, so you budding plant



crime detectives will have to sleuth the internet for information. Before you make a citizen's arrest, remember to respect private property and that accidental unintentional distribution of these plants is not punishable under the Texas Code.

All About Tomatoes

Latitia Shaddock

My favorite garden vegetable is the tomato! There are more than one hundred varieties of the tomato. They come in different shapes, colors, sizes and even flavors! Tomatoes can be hybrid or heirloom. They can be bush, paste, cherry and pole. Tomatoes can be broken down into seasonal varieties, early, mid and late. It is all about your preference or purpose.

In Texas some recommended varieties include, Heat Wave, First Lady, Celebrity, Bush Celebrity, Carnival, and Champion. Several cherry tomato recommendations are Sweet 100, Sun Gold, Jolly and Juliet. Experiment with some of the newer varieties and see what your experience is! Last year, I planted my first tomato hybrid; they were a Better Boy variety. They took off and did great. Each plant grew into large vines that continued to produce all the way into September! They had wonderful flavor, especially freshly pick with the salt shaker in hand! Many of them became salsa or spaghetti sauce and I still have several containers of canned tomatoes!

Tomatoes are a warm season crop and grow best in early spring, when temperatures are warm in the day and cool at night. They prefer a well drained, loamy soil with a pH of 6.0-6.7. The soil should be moist, but not saturated. They can be grown from seeds or transplants. Most tomatoes grow tall and should be stabilized either with something simple like bamboo stakes or tomato cages. However, tomatoes can be grown almost anywhere. A five gallon bucket on the patio works great!

Issues with tomatoes include diseases, insects and cultural problems. Some diseases that affect tomatoes include tobacco mosaic virus, blight, leafspot, bacterial spot, verticillium and fusarium wilts. Insects that can harm tomatoes include aphids, cutworms, whiteflies, hornworms, flea beetles, stink bugs, fruitworms. Cultural issues generally involves water, not enough water or too

much water. For example, blossom-end rot can occur with inconsistent watering.

Tomatoes are low in fat and calories. They contain a mere 18 calories per 100 grams. They are also a fine source of antioxidants, fiber, vitamins, and minerals. In particular tomatoes contain lycopene, an antioxidant unique to them that has been shown to help prevent skin damage from the sun. Add to that they are a good source of vitamins A, B, C and E.

So whether you like them off the vine or cooked in your favorite dish tomatoes are a rewarding crop and a perennial favorite in almost every vegetable garden.

Growing Something Different and Tasty

Bob Erickson

Several years ago, I saw a blurb in a seed catalog (I think it was Seeds of Change) for sesame seeds. Not being familiar with how they grow but loving them on everything from salads to bread, I ordered a packet of seeds. I sprouted the seed in a seed pack and transplanted them to my mostly compost and sand garden. They grew nicely for a couple of months and then the most wonderful thing happened; they started to flower.



Beautiful little white bells began to appear and continued adding new ones as the stalk got taller and taller like a hollyhock or a foxglove. Later in summer the flowers turned to pods and then they started turning brown. Finally I opened one of the pods and there in neat little rows were

sesame seeds. There were about 8 rows of seeds in each pod and each plant may have 10-12 pods so there are quite a few seeds generated by each plant. In summary, it was really nice to have a beautiful plant with beautiful flowers that generated such a tasty result.

Sesame needs well-drained and fertile soil, without too much nitrogen added. Sesame can be direct-seeded after all danger of frost is past. It must be planted shallow, preferably 1/2" deep, just after a rain, or if the soil has been irrigated to slightly damp. Germination is 1-2 weeks, and they mature in 80-125 days on average. (Sesame is indeterminate so maturity is spread over time.) This herb will tolerate dry conditions once the seedlings are well established. Sesame typically grows 2-4 feet tall but can get taller. The hairy, single stem needs space so plant seedlings in rows 2-3 feet apart. Sesame flowers white before becoming seed capsules with 8 rows of seeds in each 1 to 1-1/2 inch fibrous seed capsule. The seeds are tiny, flat and pointed, averaging 15,000 seeds per pound.

Sesame (*Sesamum indicum*) has been grown for over 4000 years in many areas of the world primarily for its oil which is more stable than many other vegetable oils. The seeds also have a higher percentage of protein than other seeds. Americans are most familiar with the white sesame found on bread and in the spice and herb section of the grocery store. However, there is also black sesame that is popular in Asian cuisine.

Only a small percentage of sesame seed worldwide is grown in the US, primarily in Texas. Unfortunately, planting seeds are rarely available. Most of the commercial production is controlled by a San Antonio company who provides proprietary seed to contract growers. Occasionally small samples of imported seed are available in seed catalogs such as the ones I found at Seeds of Change. They have not carried sesame seeds since that time. I found a small quantity of black sesame seeds in a catalog last year but did not have my garden in good enough shape to plant them. They will be in the ground next spring however. There are a number of reports of people successfully growing sesame from culinary seeds. I would suspect that seeds from a natural food store or an imported food store might be a better choice than seeds from a bottle.

Growing the sesame plants was an interesting experience providing a beautiful plant plus a savory seed at the end of

the growing season. Consider trying sesame for something a little different.

LEMONGRASS

Margaret Dansby

Cymbopogon citratus is commonly known as lemongrass. With its citrusy scent and hint of rose, lemongrass is an important culinary and medicinal herb. Traditional Chinese medicine uses it to relieve headaches and abdominal pain. It has been used as a sedative, an analgesic and to relieve spasms and muscle cramps. It is a treatment for lice and ringworm. The mild insect repellent (citronella) is lemongrass. It is an essential oil used in perfumes.

Lemongrass can grow to 6 feet high and 4 feet wide. It spouts in dense clumps with narrow leaves. The plant thrives in soil with pH level of 4.3 to 8.4 and needs full sun. Our Texas gardens are a perfect environment for lemongrass. Its pretty green foliage and pleasant lemon scent make it an attractive addition to an herb garden.

Cut stems of lemongrass stay fresh to 2-3 weeks. It is best to use only the lower tender portion of the stalk. Take care to store lemon grass away from other foods and spices, as they may pick up lemongrass' aroma.

For maximum flavor infuse lemongrass in warm water before cooking. Discard tough stems and fibers. My favorite recipe is:

Lemongrass Shrimp Pate

In a small saucepan, bring to a boil 1/2 cup water and 2 stalks lemongrass. Remove from heat, cover and let stand till cool, 30-45 minutes. Strain, reserving liquid, discard lemongrass. Sprinkle with 1 envelope unflavored gelatin; heat, just until gelatin dissolves; then cool.

Combine in a blender 3 oz cream cheese, 1/2 cup sour cream, 1/3 cup chopped cilantro, 3 minced cloves of garlic, 1 small fresh finely chopped and seeded red chili pepper, and 1/8 tsp salt.

Add this mixture to the gelatin.

Stir in 1 1/2 cups shrimp.

Pour shrimp mixture evenly into a plastic wrap lined loaf pan or 3 1/2 to 4 cup mold. Cover and chill for 4 to 24 hours. Unmold into serving platter; remove plastic wrap. Serve with crackers. Makes 12 servings.