



Henderson County Master Gardener

"THE INSIDE DIRT"



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The 2014 14th Annual Spring Conference was a success. I would like to thank the Conference Tri-Chairs: Elaine Brown, Cherrie Tanneberger, and Judy Haldeman for their work in organizing the event and for the Committee Chairs for their hard work, as well. A special recognition must be given to Margaret Dansby and her committee for our table centerpieces. Normally we hold this event later in the spring when our Master Gardeners' yards are overflowing with the flowers that makeup our centerpieces. Because of the earlier date, that was not possible. Margaret did a wonderful job of creating those centerpieces. I would also like to thank the HCMG members that helped find support through our sponsors, donors and guests. Their support insures that our goal of providing free educational workshops for the public will continue throughout the year.

In 2011 the HCMG won first place in the Graphics Presentation category of the Texas Master Gardener Association state awards. That presentation was a PowerPoint titled *Wildflowers of the Post Oak Savannah*. It presented photographs and identifications of over 200 wildflowers that Wayne Stafford photographed in Henderson and Anderson counties. Wayne has generously agreed to provide additional information on some of those wildflowers. The first of several articles on his favorite wildflowers appears in this edition of *The Inside Dirt*. Wayne will also be speaking on April 19 on Butterflies. His PowerPoint on *Why Study Butterflies*

won 2nd place at the 2012 TMGA state awards program.

SAVE THE DATES:

- April 19. Wayne Stafford will present a program on butterflies common to East Texas. 10AM at McDade's Nursery at 1000 N Tool Dr., Tool Texas
- May 3. HCMG Plant Sale. 9AM-2PM on the lawn on west side of the Henderson County Courthouse, 100 E. Tyler Street.
- June 5. HCMG Summer Series#1. Chandler, Texas. First United Methodist Church, 507 Broad Street. Speaker: Dave Whiting
- July 17. HCMG Summer Series#2. East Texas Arboretum, Athens Texas. Speaker: Dee Bishop, Smith County Master Gardeners.

Wildflowers of The Post Oak Savannah Virginia Springbeauty Wayne Stafford

This is one of earliest of the wildflowers, one of the smallest, and one of the most beautiful of the wildflowers. Get down on your knees with a magnifying glass and you will see the beauty of this flower. The scientific name is *Claytonia virginica* and the USDA Plant Index is CLVI3. The scientific name honors the early Colonia botanist, John Clayton

(1694-1773), who sent many plant specimens back to European botanists Carl Linnaeus and George Clifford.



The honey bees love this flower because it is one of the first flowers of spring. Do you ever wonder what the bees do when there are no flowers blooming? Many of these pictures were made in my back yard in Athens before many of my trips to the Engeling Wildlife Management Area in Anderson County. We always traveled the back roads looking for wildflowers.

The plant is best described as grass-like with opposite leaves. The blooms have 5 petals that are white with pink to purple veins going to the center of the bloom. These colors attract pollinators and lead them to the nectar and the pollen bearing part of the flower. The plants originate from an underground corm or tuber, which may be eaten. It is reported to taste like a radish, with a little bit of "bite" in the flavor. The tubers will not yield much fruit, but you can then say you have tasted one. When you dig up a root ball and wash off the soil, it contains a mass of roots with the corms. It has been called "root gut" and can be cooked to eat. A more accurate description would be starvation food.

Always positively identify wild plants before nibbling on them. This type of plant is called a geophyte, a plant that is able to retain energy in their fleshy underground parts. This allows the plant to survive in a partially

dormant state during the harshest weather of the year. And then, when the weather and soil conditions are right, the plants come alive.



The Springbeauty blooms will open up when the morning sun appears. When the weather is overcast they will close until the sun shines again. This spring look for the Springbeauty and look at it with a magnifying glass or make pictures with you macro lens. You will see its beauty.



Flower of the Month
Sweet Pea
(Lathyrus odoratus)

April is associated with sweet pea flower which bloom in a wide range of soft colors as well as two tone colors. It is said to symbolize pleasure or good-bye. In the Victorian era these flowers were sent to someone to convey gratefulness.

Botanical name: *Lathyrus odoratus*

Sun exposure: Full Sun

Soil type: Loamy

Soil pH: Alkaline/Basic

Flower color: Red, Pink, Yellow, Blue,
Purple, White

Bloom time: Early Spring, Summer, Fall



The pea-like flowers grow in many lovely colors and are suitable for an annual border, a woodland garden, and a trellis or arch.

Cultivated sweet peas go back at least 300 years. In their native Sicily, these ornamental peas have weak stems and intense orange-jasmine-honey scent. Modern hybrids are stronger-stalked and have larger blooms. Sweet peas are quite hardy, growing from large, easy-to-handle pea-like seeds. It's worth experimenting with different seeds each year. In Zones 8, 9, or 10 plant sweet peas in the late fall so they can develop and bloom in late winter and early spring. Sweet peas are happiest with their heads in the sun and their roots deep in cool, moist soil. When possible, plant low-growing plants in front of them to shade their roots. In Texas, sweet peas are usually planted in the fall for spring bloom. If planted in spring, it should be very early. Place in well-drained soil and water regularly. During hot spells, provide some filtered shade all day. Remove any spent blossoms to encourage the plant to continue blooming.

"The Off Season"

Lydia Holley

"Look at that!" my sister exclaimed. "You have flowers blooming at Christmas!" My sister lives in Colorado, so flowers blooming at Christmas time are an unusual sight for her to see. But here in Texas, we are fortunate enough to be able to have flowers blooming even in winter.

The blooms that surprised my sister were from a sasanqua camellia. Sasanqua and japonica camellias are the most common types of camellias, and they bloom during our winters. Having a flower bloom during the "off" season is such a delight!

If you don't have camellias in your garden, I recommend getting one. Here's a little primer to get your started:



Sasanquas are generally shorter than japonicas, tolerate more sun, and bloom during late autumn/early winter. Japonicas are generally larger than sasanquas, and can grow to the size of a tree. Japonicas have beautiful glossy leaves, and most bloom in late winter or early spring. Sasanquas lose their blooms petal by petal, but a japonica will lose the entire bloom all at once.

Not only do you need to decide what size of plant you will need, and when you want your camellia to bloom, you will also need to figure out where to put your camellia.

Camellias love shade in the summer and sun in the winter. They would grow wonderfully under deciduous trees. I don't have those conditions in my garden, but I do have areas that are mostly shady, and my camellias are happy there. Try the north side of your home, or the east side. Any shaded area that gets under four hours of direct sun is a possibility. A good rule of thumb is: if a hydrangea would grow there, a camellia will be happy. If possible, plant your camellia where you can see it from indoors, so you can enjoy the blooms from the comfort of your home.

Don't plant your camellia deep - camellias like to be planted shallow, and the secret to having a lot of blooms is to make sure your camellia receives consistent watering in the summer. They are also dormant during their blooming season, so now is the time to put one in the garden.

California Poppies
(*Eschscholzia californica*-Papaveraceae)
Judy Haldeman

When Ted and I moved to the Athens area in March, 2011 we were excited about the new adventure of living in East Texas. Our home in Dallas had a fairly small backyard that was heavily shaded by a 40 foot tall elm tree. Try as we might, the only things that grew in that yard were our three dogs. Moving to a farm outside the Eustace area gave us a chance to grow plants in full sun. After taking the Master Gardener class in the fall of 2011, I convinced Ted to built two raised beds and I began the task of deciding what to plant. One bed became an herb garden. The other bed was reserved for vegetables. I researched square foot gardening and over several weeks dutifully planted broccoli, cauliflower, tomato plants, various lettuces, and 12 carrot

seeds. All did very well, except for the square foot reserved for the carrots. Finally, a plant sprouted! It was only one, but it was an exciting event. The plant thrived. The foliage, however, looked a bit different than the carrots tops I had seen in the grocery store. However, I was not familiar with the various species of carrots that existed and was undeterred. We waited patiently for the right time to harvest. I dug around the stem expecting to find a huge carrot waiting to be picked and consumed. Unfortunately, there was nothing orange at the base of the plant.

Amazingly, one day soon after, there appeared a single orange flower. I was fairly convinced carrots had white flowers, but I was still focused on my quest for the perfect carrot. Soon a second, then a third, and then a plethora of beautiful orange flowers appeared.



At this point a neighbor who was much more experienced in vegetable gardening came by and asked why we planted a California poppy in our vegetable garden.

That “carrot” became one of my favorite flowering plants. It survived that hot summer, bloomed profusely, and even survived the multiple freezes the following winter. That fall I tossed out additional seeds in a different area of our yard. They all survived until this winter when our

temperature here dropped to 18°F. As the name might imply, these poppies grow well in California and are the state flower.

The plants prefer full sun in light to sandy soil and are hardy to 20°F. The flowers are 2" to 4" in diameter. They are extremely drought tolerant and prefer arid environments, but did well in the more humid East Texas setting.



This fall I will spread more seeds in a newly prepared garden. Nothing can compare to the poppies that grow wild in California, but I look forward to a small part of the garden that will delight us with the orange blossoms.

Texas A&M AgriLife April Gardening

PLANTING TIPS

Amazing April-Mother Nature returns from her winter vacation. Nurseries are fully stocked and ready for eager gardeners. The following offers some suggestions for gardening tasks for April.

VEGETABLES

There's still time in early April to plant many vegetables, including bush and pole beans, cucumber, cantaloupe, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, summer & winter squash, and watermelons from seed; and transplants of tomatoes, peppers and eggplants. All these

should be seeded or transplanted right away for best results. Okra and Southern peas do better with warmer soil and therefore should be planted a bit later in the month. Thin these seedlings to allow room between each individual plant. If the plot is too crowded, the plants will be weak, spindly, and the harvest will be disappointing. For best growth and yield, make additions of nitrogen fertilizer (called side dressing) every couple of weeks, starting about a month after transplanting or seeding. This will keep vegetables growing vigorously so they reach their maximum yield potential.

AZALEAS

Since azaleas bloom on growth produced the previous year, you must wait until they finish blooming before pruning. The same holds true with spirea, forsythia, pearl-bush, wisteria and any other early spring blooming plant. Azaleas don't have to be pruned every year. The Azalea Society of America suggests the following: Older plants may have a number of tall branches which need to be eliminated. Doing that over several years reduces the shock to the plant. Remove two or three of the tallest branches, taking care to cut back to a side branch which is heading in the desired direction, and which is about 1/3rd the size of the cut branch. Cut close to that side branch, as any stubs will die back to the side branch anyway, and leave dead wood which may become infected later. Next year take out two or three more branches using the same process, spreading the pruning over a three year cycle. This approach will result in the plant sending out new growth near the base, and lets you manage the shaping of the plant to achieve a nicely shaped bush.

FERTILIZING

Once azaleas finish blooming, fertilize them to stimulate new growth. Just be careful not to fertilize too heavily, and evenly distribute the fertilizer over the root zone. Their shallow roots can be easily burned when fertilizer is applied in concentrated piles. Camellias should also be fertilized this month. Roses have relatively high fertility requirements, so fertilization can begin now and continue every 4 to 6 weeks until September. If you recently purchased roses, ask your nurseryman when to apply fertilizer. Many nurseries have already fertilized their roses and may suggest waiting to apply fertilizer. April is the month to begin fertilizing lawns. The ideal time to apply fertilizer is after you have mowed actively growing grass once or twice. Early April is a good target date for St. Augustine and common Bermuda grass. Centipede lawns are usually slower to green up and turf experts recommend that they be fertilized in early May. For best results, have your soil tested for pH and fertility before applying fertilizer. Soil test kits are available from all county Extension offices; otherwise use a 3-1-2 or 4-1-2 fertilizer ratio.

GROOMING LANDSCAPE PLANTS

Prune overgrown, spring flowering trees and shrubs once they have completed blooming. Think in terms of “thinning” rather than “hacking” the plant back. Winter freeze damage will kill many crepe myrtles. Unusual cold, plus drought at the time of a freeze will cause this unusual kill. Many plants will return with sucker growth from the roots. Remove all dead wood and encourage the new root growth.

PLANTING

Annual flowers may be seeded now, including amaranthus, celosia, cosmos, marigold, portulaca, zinnia, gomphrena, and several other warm-season annual flowers. These can be sown directly in the beds where they are to grow. Keep seeded areas moist until seeds germinate. Thin out as soon as they are large enough to transplant so the remaining plants will not be crowded. Surplus plants can be transplanted to other areas. For faster color, purchase annuals already started. Select short, compact plants, preferably ones that have not yet begun to flower. Remove flowers and buds to give the plants an opportunity to become well established before flowering. One of the best hot-weather, summer plants is the periwinkle (vinca). Eager gardeners setting out vinca too early may lose it to a fungal blight. By waiting until it gets hot (later in May) to plant vinca in the sunny part of the yard, you almost totally avoid this problem. Mulching can also help reduce disease problems by reducing soil splashing up onto the leaves. Perennials for summer color include lantana, daylilies, verbena, hostas, salvia, sedums, ornamental grasses, purple coneflower, rudbeckia, ferns and summer phlox.

PESTS

Watch new growth for insect pests. Aphids, also sometimes called plant lice, may get on the new growth of any type of plant. While a few aphids can be tolerated, large numbers can distort growth and should be controlled. A strong jet of water to knock them off can provide temporary control, and insecticidal soap products will also help control them.

Recipe

Grilled Sweet Potatoes Recipe

- Prep time: 20 minutes
- Cook time: 10 minutes
- Yield: Serves 4.

Ingredients

- 2 pounds sweet potatoes
- 3-4 Tbsp olive oil
- Kosher salt

Dressing

- 1/4 cup finely chopped fresh cilantro (including tender stems)
- 1 teaspoon of lime zest or lemon zest
- 2 tablespoons of fresh lime or lemon juice
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- Pinch of salt



Method

1 Prepare your grill for hot, direct heat. While the grill is heating up, peel the sweet potatoes and slice lengthwise, or on a diagonal, into 1/4 inch-thick pieces. Coat the sweet potato slices with olive oil and lightly sprinkle with Kosher salt.

2 Combine all of the dressing ingredients into a small bowl.

3 Once the grill is hot, lay the sweet potato pieces down onto the grill grates. Cover the grill and cook until each side gets some grill marks, between 3-6 minutes for each side, depending on how hot your grill is.

4 Toss the sweet potatoes in a bowl with the dressing and serve hot.

Master Gardener Earth-Kind® Online Training can be found at:

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/training>

You can select from any of 12 on-line modules to obtain 1 Continuing Education Unit (CEU) for up to 3 hours CEUs per year.

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.