

August 2014

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Official Newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners

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Meetings are the second Thursday of each month, 6pm in the Extension Office Auditorium

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

Aug. 14 - Speaker Emilee Bean
"Everything You Want To Know"

Sept. 11 — Speaker, Micah Shanks "The Tulips of Keukenhof"

Oct. 9 — Speaker Ralph Beard "All About Terrariums"

Editor's Note

By Melissa Starr, JCMG

Summer rains are here! Butterflies and bees hum amongst fragrant blossoms, while spring planted vegetables wilt in the afternoon heat or drown during pouring rainstorms. Among the plants that thrive in our hot humid weather, tiny weed seeds start pushing through the soft soil after each summer rain. What do you do when you can't keep up with the weeds that threaten to choke out your beautiful garden?

The best weed fighting strategy is prevention. Many weeds are brought into our gardens through contaminated topsoil. Check sod to make sure it does not have any visible weeds, and check for nutgrass "nuts" before bringing topsoil into your yard. Also ask your friends and neighbors about their experiences. Many can tell you if they have gotten weedy topsoil or garden soil and where it came from.

The first sure way to get rid of weeds is to pull them by hand. It is tough on the back and knees, but it gets the job done. However, when you work full time, it is not always the best method. After a hard day's work, the last thing you want to do is get down on your hands and knees and pull weeds out of your garden.

To control weeds in your garden, choose plants that grow well in our area and prepare the soil well by adding organic matter that will loosen the soil and provide nitrogen for your plants. If your plants grow rapidly enough, they will eventually shade the weeds that are trying to

Editor's Note, continued

sprout. If you also add a two to three inch layer of mulch on top of the soil in your garden, the weeds will have an even more difficult time sprouting. The few weeds that do make it to the surface will be easier to pull. Summer is a challenging time of year to garden, so try to prevent weeds before they sprout.

This summer, we enjoyed a successful Fruit & Vegetable Show, graduated ten interns, and welcomed fourteen new interns. In October, we will have our annual Fall Plant Sale. We will have many wonderful and exciting plants, so don't miss out!

Vice-President's Message

By Toni Clark, JCMG

July was a busy month for us. The intern graduation picnic was a delightful time. How exciting for JCMG to welcome ten new, enthusiastic and knowledgeable Master Gardeners to our group. Be sure to introduce yourself when you see someone new whom you don't know. Their contributions, like all of our members', are important, and we're thrilled to welcome them. We also welcomed a new group of fourteen interns who took the short course for two weeks in July. You will see them in the office and at the garden as they earn their certification hours. Hopefully, many of you had the chance to hear some of the short course presentations and earn education hours, as well.

Although we are in the "dog days of summer", work is underway for our Fall Plant Sale. If you have plants to share for the sale, start potting them now so they will be well established before the sale October 18th. The sale will be at our garden

that is really looking good. Remember if you bring plants for the sale or to add to our garden, and they should be in a greenhouse, we are asked to put them on the porch, not in the greenhouse, so they can be treated if need be before going into their new home. We are working to keep "critters" out of the greenhouses, and adding new plants is one way they are introduced.

There are so many great vegetables that can be planted starting in September, so get out your seed catalogs and order something new to try in your home garden. My goal this season is to put edible fall and winter veggies in the open spaces in flower beds.

We will have election of officers in November, and all of the officer positions need new people elected. We have many capable and knowledgeable members who can easily step up to serve as an officer. Please be thinking about a leadership role and where you might best contribute to JCMG.

Stay cool the next couple of months . . . and happy gardening!

Congratulations Master Gardener Graduates!!!!



Front row, left to right: Charlotte Adams, Lisa Hitt, Maggie Fontes, Alina Blanchard, Davey Smith and Martha Kessler

Back row, left to right: Logan McGuire, Jackson Roberts, Jerry White and Anthony Britt

Welcome Master Gardener Interns!!!!



Front row, left to right: Betsy Cheung, Roxanne Whiteley, Emeline Auzenne, Tina Gonzales, Darlene Harvey, Rod Hatch

Back row, left to right: Cory Spikes, Jay Sturgis, Irene Aydelott, Bethanie Penning, Eileen Slater, Tyler Spikes, Larry Dopson, Tommie Porter

Pomegranate Memories

By Ann Bares, JCMG

When I was growing up almost every yard in the neighborhood had a variety of fruits, vegetables, and berry vines scattered among the flower beds. Some neighborhoods even had a chicken house or two, but we had the only pomegranate tree. It grew beside the garage on the north side, shaded on the west by the pecan tree, but with lots of sun from the south.

The pomegranate wasn't very big then, but every summer it would be filled with small orange blooms that later became smooth, pale orange fruits that eventually grew into larger red pomegranates. Very few of the ladies picked these, but those who did turned the fruit into beautiful tart, tasty jelly. Our taste was more pure. We picked the reddest fruit we could reach and threw it as hard as we could onto the concrete sidewalk. When the husk popped, we scooped up the juicy seeds into our hands, or tin cans, and found a shady spot to sit and enjoy our treat.

In recent years, the pomegranate has become known for its healing properties. The tiny white seeds inside the juicy sac contain puniceic acid, and the oil from these seeds has been used for skin care to aid in moisturizing, and for dry skin conditions such as eczema. Pomegranate juice can be found in many health food and even grocery stores. Its seeds can be juiced

or used as a colorful garnish. Grenadine, which is used for cocktails, is made from pomegranate juice.



Pomegranate trees grow best in southern states and on the west coast where there is a long growing season. They are self-pollinating so a single tree will bear fruit. They are resistant to drought, fast growing, and have few diseases. I found them easy to propagate from cuttings, and have had several through the years, sadly lost to storms.

In one especially abundant year I decided to make jelly, and after researching the recipe, I started the process by hulling the fruit, adding a little water, and bringing it to a boil, the same way I had rendered juice for mayhaws. I didn't realize how much harder the seeds were, and how more acid. At the end of the day, after many calls to my more knowledgeable friends who are veteran jelly makers, I had six half pint jars of pomegranate jelly, from four dozen pomegranates. I gifted three of my helpful friends and our horticulture agent with a jar each, and advised them not to expect pomegranate jelly from me ever, ever, again.

That pomegranate tree is now more than 75 years old, still in the same spot, bearing its fruit every year, though not as abundantly. I enjoy the beauty of the tree and its history like an old friend, but its jelly days are over.

Bee Balm

By Melissa Starr, JCMG

In the heat of the summer most of our vegetables and spring flowers are stressing from heat exhaustion, but in the herb garden beebalm's red flowers are popping up and tantalizing the native bees, butterflies, and us.

Scarlet beebalm (*Monarda didyma*) is an herb with a lot of history. The name beebalm came from its ability to soothe bee stings. It has also been used for centuries by the Native Americans as medicine to treat wounds and was later made into a tea useful for treating headaches, colds, insomnia, and gastric disorders. After the Boston Tea Party, colonists made a black tea from this plant that replaced the popular English tea of the time, and today many people make a tea from the flowers that resembles Earl Grey Tea.

Beebalm is not only medicinal, but it can also be used for culinary purposes. Its flowers can be sprinkled on a salad or steeped in water and strained to make sorbets or jellies. They can also make a great substitute for Earl Grey Tea in recipes.

To make beebalm tea you first need a tablespoon of beebalm leaves or flowers (preferably dried). Bring one cup of water to a boil and then remove from heat. Put the beebalm in a tea ball or tea bag and steep for 10 minutes. Remove the tea ball/bag, add sweetener to taste, and enjoy.

Beebalm is part of the mint family and grows wild in the eastern half of the United States; however, it can be easily grown in garden soil in your backyard. It prefers full sun and moist, fertile soil, but can be grown in dappled shade. The three foot stems develop showy flowers in late June and continue through August and sometimes September. The flowers have a citrus scent that provides a paradise for bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds and makes a great potpourri.

It is best to dig or separate beebalm in the fall or spring, but you can also grow it from seeds. Therefore, if you want some for your garden, ask an herb gardener to share, order seeds, or visit your favorite herb nursery. The flowers can be either red, pink, or lavender, so ask about the color before your purchase.



Fruit and Vegetable Show

June 14, 2014



Crape Myrtles

By Micah Shanks, JCMG

Whether you spell it “crepe” or “crape,” the crape myrtle is one of our best ornamental trees in Southeast Texas. They can take the heat and absolutely have to be in full sun to bloom. And when they do, it is a sight to see. I have two Neches Whites in my yard that are just beginning to bloom. They are stunning!

From white to red to watermelon to purple, there are hundreds of varieties to choose from. The flowers are showy and the bark is beautiful on its own. With so many color and height choices from dwarf to over 30 feet, there is a crape myrtle for every landscape and it is vital that you choose the correct one.

First, decide how much room you have and then choose a plant that will fit in that space as it matures without constant pruning. Also, choose the one with the most powdery mildew resistance in the color and size you want. To control powdery mildew, make sure you plant in an area with good air circulation. If you do see mildew, spray with a non-toxic fungicide. Some new crape myrtle varieties are even showing resistance to the crape myrtle aphid.

If you notice sticky black soot on the leaves of your tree, that is aphid “honeydew.” a really nice name for aphid droppings. Turn the leaves over and you will find the offenders. Once again,

you can select a non-toxic pest control. Some brands are actually a pesticide/fungicide/miticide combination, so you only have to purchase one product.

Once you select your crape myrtle, you will need to add organic matter to your soil if you are planting in a

flowerbed. No soil preparation is needed if planting for hedges or shade trees. Water deeply when first planted, and then irrigate for the first year as your

trees become established. After that, rainfall will typically be all they need.

Now, about pruning, we have all seen what is referred to as “crape murder” . . . trees that are cut off straight across the top. This ruins the natural structure of the plant and results in larger blooms but fewer of them. Larger blooms are also heavier blooms which weaken the branches.

The only pruning that needs to be done is to remove sucker shoots at the base and keep dead branches trimmed out. Deadheading your blooming plants will keep them blooming easily for 100 days. No wonder the crape myrtle is such a popular landscape choice.



Roses

By Jane McBride, JCMG

Summer is perhaps the most chosen time for weddings. Summer brides are a long-standing symbol of the beginning of a life-long relationship.

How fitting that the birth flower for June is the rose. Roses are considered by many to be the most perfect flower, with their delicate petals, sweet scent and long stems. Who doesn't enjoy receiving a bouquet of roses?

The color of the rose has its own symbolism: white stands for purity, red connotes passion, yellow indicates platonic friendship and pink stands for grace or gratitude. Legend says Cleopatra lured Antony into a room filled with rose petals knee-deep. As for the Greek symbolism, here's a description of the rose's origin taken from <http://www.rosemagazine.com/>

"Flora, the deity of flowers, was walking through the forest and found the body of a beautiful nymph. Sorrowful at the sight of the lovely creature dead, she decided to give her new life by turning her into a flower whose beauty surpassed all others. She called on Aphrodite to give beauty, brilliance, joy and charm; Zephyrus, the west wind, to blow away the clouds so that Apollo, the Sun, could cast warm rays upon it, and Dionysius, the god of wine to give nectar and fragrance. When the new flower was complete, Chloris placed a crown of dewdrops over her and named her the Rose, Queen of Flowers. Aphrodite presented the Rose to her son Eros, the deity of Love." The white rose became the symbol of charm and innocence and the red rose the symbol of love and desire.



A garden somehow doesn't seem complete with at least one rose bush. For those who love heirlooms, many of the roses of our ancestors have been saved and cultivated for later generations. The "Rose Rustlers" who combed the country searching for old varieties in abandoned homesteads, cemeteries and private yards did us all a favor by saving these antique roses from disappearing.

I won't go into rose care in this abbreviated space. I will say that those who haven't tried their hand at growing roses should put aside their fear, usually based on the idea that roses are finicky, prone to diseases and require constant chemical care.

That's not true - at least in most cases. Some antique roses are among the easiest to grow, while many modern cultivars are highly resistant to black spot, mildew and other rose nemeses.

If you want a pretty-much guaranteed problem-free rose, choose from any of the roses designated by Texas A&M as "EarthKind."

They include Belinda's Dream, Caldwell Pink, Climbing Pinkie, Carefree Beauty, Marie Daly and Perle d'Or.

In addition to the Texas AgriLife team, Southeast Texas has a great resource for rose growers with the Golden Triangle Rose Society, which meets each month at the Garden Center at Beaumont Botanical Gardens. Contact the Gardens at (409) 842-3135 for more information.

Summer Pruning

By Tim Schreck, JCMG

There are several different plants that you might want to think about pruning during the next couple of months. Pruning is a natural progression of growing in the wild. Low lying limbs get rubbed on animals as they walk by and eventually get broken off. Other low-lying limbs touch the ground and might eventually contract disease and drop off. Other limbs might cross nearby limbs and as the wind blow, the bark is rubbed off. Eventually one or both limbs die.

First, I will start in the garden. The one plant that I prune in the garden is the tomato plant. I always remove the bottom two to three limbs after the plant is medium sized. These limbs might touch the ground, allowing insects an easy path to the plant. When dirt is splashed on them it increases the spread of fungal disease. The next pruning I do is of suckers that grow in between two stems. I do not remove all the suckers but most of them. These suckers will never produce a fruit on that limb but do provide some energy to support the plant. The next plant to discuss is wisteria. During the summer you will see wisteria growing and flowering like crazy. Heavy pruning is done in late winter but in summer you should be pruning back the wisps or limbs that are popping out of the main stem. You can

easily spot them because every two to three feet you see a skinny limb jumping out looking for something to climb out on and increase its domain. Cut these off at the main stem. This will also promote more flowering during the summer since the energy is not wasted on the limbs but put into the flowers. This is especially important if this is a newer plant. Keep the side shoot cut back to less than six inches to let most of the growth go to the main stem you are trying to train it up the arbor or fence.

The next pruning topic is around flower bushes and plants. Most people lump this into what they call deadheading or removing the flowering part only. I plant marigolds in my garden to help deter pests and as I see the flower wilting and losing its color I remove the flower. The plant realizes that it did not produce any seeds from that flower and starts another bloom. You can keep doing this almost all summer. Another flowering shrub blooming right now is the vitex or Texas Lilac with its distinctive purple flowers. As soon as the flowers start to die, moderate to heavy pruning of all the spikes will encourage another burst of blooms in about four weeks.

The Latest Dirt

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We're On The Web:

<http://txmg.org/jcmg/>

<http://jefferson.agrilife.org>



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MISSION STATEMENT

To encourage and support the horticultural community of Southeast Texas through education and example.

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Announcements



Introduction to Beekeeping

Saturday, September 13, 8-4pm,
Texas A&M AgriLife Auditorium

\$25, includes lunch

Speakers: Bryan and Tammy
Muldrow

Pre-registration required by
September 8

Fall Plant Sale

Saturday, October 18

Jack Brooks Regional Airport

Set up on Friday, October 17

More info to come.

2014 Master Gardener Conference

September 25-27, 2014

For more info:

<http://2014tmgaconference.org/>

