

August 2015

Volume 7, Issue 3



Official Newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners

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## President's Message

Greetings Fellow Gardeners!

The June 27 luncheon at the Tyrrell Park Garden Center was an exciting time for us to proudly welcome thirteen new Master Gardeners to our group.

Congratulations to you all, and welcome!

Your responses to our recent JCMG member survey have helped us define a slight shift in direction for JCMG that refocuses us on our mission statement: "The Jefferson County Master Gardeners (JCMG) supports the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service by sharing and promoting horticulture in Southeast Texas through a wide variety of educational, social and volunteer activities".

As we look forward to the next few months, we have more opportunities for education and service to our community. The newly formed seminars committee has some great ideas for

monthly education opportunities, beginning with a web seminar with Dr. Masabni from Texas A&M in August. (August 19 is the tentative date.) If you have some suggestions for topics or activities, please call Peggy Coleman at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office, and she will pass the ideas along to the committee.



The huge activity on our horizon is the Fall Plant Sale on October 3. The sale will again be at the garden, and plans are to include some demonstrations and short seminars that will help us all be better gardeners. We all need to "dig in" to make the sale a success ... so get ready help.

Happy Gardening!

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

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

August 13 - Bees - Bryan Muldrow

September 10- — TBA

October 15 — TBA

## *Herbal Theme Gardens*

*By Micah Shanks, JCMG*

One interesting thing to do in the garden is to plant a "theme". Themes can be anything. You can plant an area with different flowers of all one color. You can plant an area or container with nothing but lemon scented herbs which is one of my personal favorites. I plant lemon verbena, lemon balm and lemon thyme all in one container. I love to run my hand across it to release the fragrance whenever I walk by.

One very popular theme for culinary herb growers is to plant for your favorite cuisine. Plant one or all in your garden for four different flavors- Italian, Asian, Tex-Mex and French.

For pasta lovers, include both sweet and Genovese basil, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage and thyme. All of these are very easy to grow in our area. Just give them a sunny location and well drained soil.

Asian herbs include lemongrass, cilantro, Thai basil or lemon basil. Thai basil is different from sweet basil in that it has a purple stem and has a strong licorice and mint taste.

For Tex-Mex, consider epazote, also known as goosefoot. Be careful with this one. It is a weed and can quickly take over, so plant in a container. Also, you will want cilantro/coriander and Mexican tarragon, sometimes called Mexican mint marigold. Keep in mind that in our area parsley and cilantro are cool weather plants, so harvest before the summer heat sets in. Although not an herb, peppers are easy to grow and are staples in Mexican cooking. Tuck some into a corner and enjoy the harvest.

To season your French inspired recipes, grow chervil, lavender and French thyme. These particular herbs are used in combinations to make fines herbes, bouquets garnis and herbes de Provence which are all used heavily in French cooking.



*Lemon Basil*

With a little research and imagination, you can harvest fresh herbs for your recipes a few steps from your door!



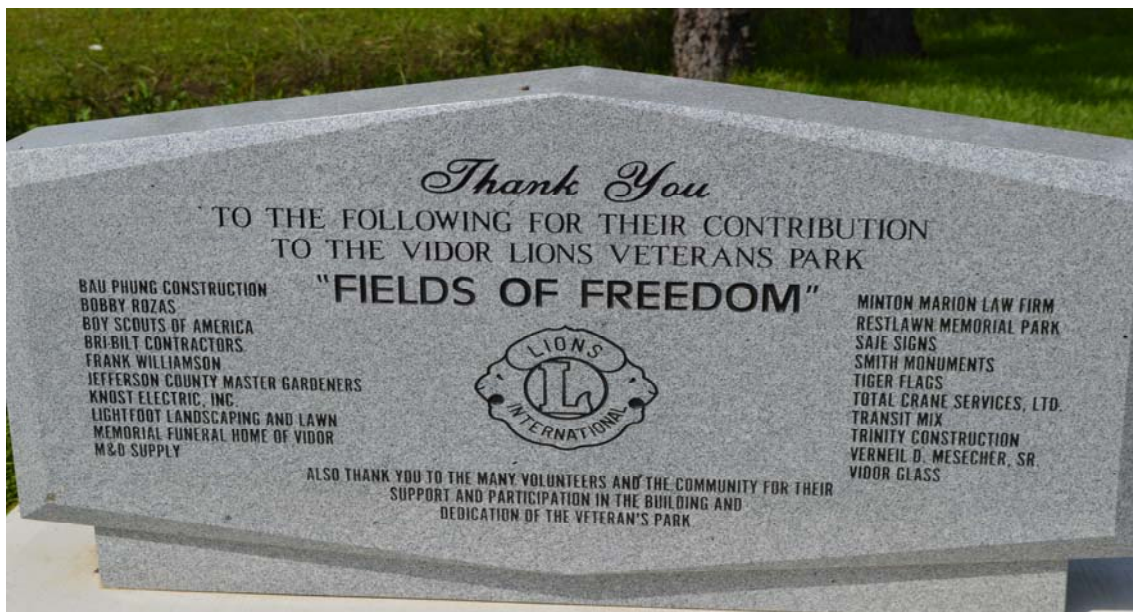
*Lemon Balm*



# *Fields of Freedom Memorial*



Pat Tolbert and Phyllis Smith accept a plaque for our landscaping contribution to the Vidor Veteran's Park, "Fields of Freedom"



## *Okra*

*By Melissa Starr, JCMG*

Beautiful hibiscus flowers, tall strong stalks, large prickly leaves, and elongated green fruit are all a part of this Southern staple. Growing up, I watched my grandfather and father grow and pick Louisiana Green Velvet okra. They would wear long sleeves while walking through the jungle of stalks and leaves picking buckets of this velvety smooth vegetable. I begged to help, but when I was finished, I ran inside and washed off my arms because they were itching from contact with the leaves. That night, my mother would stir fry this delicious treat and we would eat until there were no leftovers. As an adult, I went to every feed store I could find searching for Louisiana Green Velvet okra seeds, but could find none. I asked my father if he had any extra because I knew that he and my grandfather saved their seeds from year to year. Thankfully he did, so I planted some and continued the tradition. Okra is in the hibiscus family and is very easy to grow in our area.

Okra grows three to six feet tall depending on the variety. Before planting, choose an area that receives full sun and has well-drained, fertile soil. Okra seeds should be planted in the ground one inch deep and three to five inches apart in rows that are 36 to 48 inches apart. Planting dates are flexible depending on the weather but usually occur from April 1 - July 15. If the seeds do not germinate well, they can be soaked overnight. I usually plant mine in wet soil. Seedlings should be thinned to 15 to 24 inches apart. When I thin my seedlings, I dig them up and transplant them to places where seeds did not germinate. Okra is sensitive to being moved, so as much dirt as possible should be kept around the

roots, and they should be watered well. The transplants will look wilted for a day or two, but they should perk up and grow nicely. According to the Texas A & M AgriLife Extension Office, the best varieties for our area are Clemson Spineless, Louisiana Green Velvet, Dwarf Green, Emerald, and Long Horn.

When harvesting okra, the smaller pods, less than five inches, are the most tender. If the pods are allowed to grow too large, they will be harder to pick and too tough to eat. If the plants begin to slow in their production, one-third of the plant can be pruned. This allows side shoots to form and produce



more okra. My grandfather used to prune his okra back every year in order to get a second crop. To save seeds, a few pods should be left on the stalk until they turn brown.

Okra can be prepared many different ways. Some people put it in gumbo and other soups, others fry it or cook it with tomatoes. My favorite preparation is stir fried. To stir fry okra, cut it up into small ¼ in size rounds and shake it in a plastic bag with cornmeal and the seasoning of your choice. Then stir fry it in a skillet with several tablespoons of hot oil until it is browned and tender.

## *Fruit and Vegetable Show*

### *By Ann Bares, Chairman, Horticulture Committee and JCMG*

Thank you to all of you who volunteered to help with the 43rd Annual Fruit and Vegetable Show, came early, stayed late, did the paper work, placed the entries, kept things moving along, assisted the judges, answered questions from the public, and most of all, worked together to show the public what our Master Gardener community is about.

A special thank you to Jay for setting up the MG corner, with story board and handouts, and visiting with the public, who may become next year's Interns. A very special thank you is sent to Linda Leblanc for, as always, keeping us fed, both breakfast and lunch, with hot coffee and plenty of snacks! We all really appreciate the extra mile you go for us! To our judges, who found that fewer entries wasn't necessarily easier or faster, you did a great job, had some very hard choices, but made good decisions. We couldn't do it without all of you! Even though there were fewer exhibitors, 21, they showed us what could be grown in Southeast Texas even in the worst of times. The produce was fresh, beautiful and, as some of us who took home a cucumber or tomato can vouch for, very tasty! Processed foods, as always, filled several tables, and the jellies and jams made us wish for some hot biscuits!



*Eileen Slater, Grand Champion*

Congratulations to our "Best of Show" winner, Eileen Slater, MG Intern, class of 2014, for her beautiful Sage and to these winning Exhibitors also:

Vegetables: Margie Hanlon, Green Beans

Herbs: Eileen Slater, Sage

Processed Herbs: Glenn Watz, Herbal Vinegar

Best Tomato: Melissa Starr

Fruit: Melissa Starr, Figs

Processed Foods: Penny Gilfillin, Blackberry Jelly

Youth: Audry Fulton, Patty pan squash

Largest Tomato: Jay Jactzold

We look forward to your participation every year and always appreciate your help with our Horticulture Committee events.

Thanks again, Ann





## *Peppers*

### *By Tim Schreck, JCMG*

As the summer heats up, one of the most heat loving plants is the pepper. The pepper comes from the genus *Capsicum* of the nightshade family. There are several types and colors of peppers ranging from sweet banana pepper to extremely hot and spicy chili peppers. Peppers are native to Mexico, Central America, and South America. These seeds were carried to Spain in the 1500s during their occupation and spread across Europe. It is said that Christopher Columbus named the plant "pepper" for two reasons. Peppercorn was a very sought after condiment and "pepper" was also used as a general name for hot pungent spices. The Portuguese took peppers to Asia in the 1600s, and India and China are currently the two largest exporters of many kinds of peppers.

There are two major types of pepper, sweet and hot. Sweet peppers include bell and banana. Hot peppers include chili, cayenne, and jalapeno. Both types have the element that makes peppers hot, Capsaicin. The more Capsaicin in the pepper, the hotter the taste. Sweet peppers lose some of the sting as they mature and move toward sweet. On the other hand, as hot peppers mature and turn colors, their heat intensifies. This intensity is measured in Scoville heat units. The sweet, green pepper has zero. The banana pepper registers around 200 and the jalapeno around 2000. The Carolina Reapers and Ghost Peppers are near 2 million on the scale.



Peppers grow best in moist, but not soggy, soil. Because color and Capsaicin are complex molecules, the plant needs fertile, well balanced soil as building blocks. Mulching is a must with peppers to keep them producing. The plants grow into bushes and should be spaced 18 to 24 inches apart in full sun. They are quick growing and usually produce large amounts of fruit if they are picked regularly. Do not over fertilize especially with a high nitrogen fertilizer. That will result in a beautiful green plant with no

fruit. Most peppers are self-pollinating but can cross pollinate by bees and insects. Because of this, you should not plant sweet peppers near hot peppers. This cross pollination will result in varied results in future generations of seeds. Most of the time pepper plants are very insect and disease tolerant. Occasionally you can have spider mite issues

or minor fungal problems if you over water.

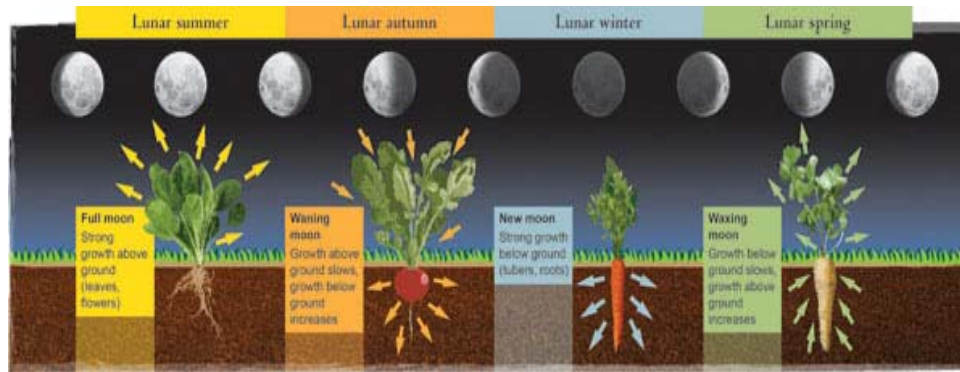
You can pick peppers at any stage of growth. The fruits will have different flavors; the flesh will have different textures and vary in colors. Be sure to check your seed packet to know when the fruits are mature. Most packets will state maturity with a color and approximate size. Since peppers are hot weather plants, they do not store well and start to deteriorate within a couple of days of picking. They do not store well in the refrigerator either. Many people freeze or pickle them.

## *Lunar Gardening*

### *By Melissa Starr, JCMG*

"Lunar gardening is the oldest form of gardening known to man," said RJ Harris, author of *RJ Harris' Moon Gardening*. Is gardening by the moon a myth or a rule to garden by?

I remember my



grandparents and parents telling me that you only plant crops that produce fruit above ground on the grow, waxing phase, of the moon when the light is increasing, and you plant root crops on the waning phases of the moon when the light is decreasing. It is said that the moon not only affects tides, but also the flow of water in the soil. When the moon is waxing, "growing", there should be more water near the surface of the soil and sap in plants is drawn up, so seeds and plants sown during this time grow more vigorously. In addition, you should fertilize and graft fruit trees during the waxing phases. When the moon is waning, decreasing, there should be less water near the surface and sap in plants is drawn down, so root crops fare better and soil is easier to till or turn over. During this phase you are also supposed to prune shrubs and mow your lawn. Since there is less moisture, there should be less growth on the pruned shrubs and your lawn grows back slower.

Planting by the moon has been used by gardeners for many generations, but is there any scientific proof that it works? I have searched, but I have not found any scientific

studies that either prove or disprove this gardening method. In 1995 researchers at the Agricultural Research Service's National Soil Tilth Laboratory

in Ames, Iowa did research that showed weed seeds brought to the surface of the ground germinate

slower in the total darkness such as what is seen during the new moon. However, they did observe that any light source, not just the moon, will cause these seeds to germinate. Other gardeners, such as RJ Harris, do their own gardening experiments. Harris plants one group of potatoes during the correct moon phase and another group during the incorrect moon phase. He says that the potatoes planted during the correct moon phase are obviously growing better than those planted during the wrong phase of the moon.

I have planted my garden during the correct and incorrect phases of the moon, but I have not stopped to record which plants/seeds were sown at the correct time. If you would like more information about moon gardening, you can Google "moon gardening" or look up planting dates in the Farmer's Almanac.

## *Ewww! What Is That Green Stuff Mom?*

### *By Eileen Slater, JCMG*

Have you heard this before? Children and spouses frequently snarl this statement when viewing a meal proudly and lovingly made with great health benefits. No, I am not speaking of spinach, kale or broccoli, which are great. I am talking about those magical herbs! It is that something green that adds flavor, texture, color and aroma to a dish without adding calories or sodium, and they are easily grown by beginning gardeners.

The most favorite herbs grown and sold in Texas, according to AgriLife studies, are basil, cilantro, dill, mint, parsley and rosemary. Sage is my favorite, but we will stick with the basics.

Herbs should be grown in a suitable area that has good air circulation and well-drained soil in pots, gardens or flower beds. Six hours of direct sunlight is needed daily. Apply a slow release fertilizer, water during dry periods, and mulch to conserve moisture and to reduce weed growth. Tall herbs should be planted in the back of the growing area and smaller ones to the front. Usually one herb plant per family is enough.

All of the herbs below are easily found in many varieties in feed stores, big box stores, and grocery stores. Check local for the best selection.

Basil is a warm season annual that is the easiest and most attractive to grow. Seed or transplant in March -August or after the last frost. They like sun. The first frost will kill basil, but the good news is that they will probably reseed themselves. Wash and blot dry 4-5 stems. Air dry upside down indoors with good air circulation. Place in an air tight container. Pesto sauce on grilled chicken is molto delizioso!

Cilantro is a cool season annual crop. Plant in the fall from September-February. Sow in sun. Harvest in 5 weeks. Muy deliciosa in Mexican salsa!

Dill is a cool season annual plant. Plant in the fall from September-February. Dill loves sun or part shade. The beautiful feathery green leaves, and open, umbrella-shaped heads of yellow flowers are beautiful. There is a distinct pickle odor when you rub the seeds and leaves. It is sehr lecker when making German pickles with those fresh vegetables you have in abundance.

Mint is among the easiest and most popular perennial herb to grow. Spearmint grows in most soils, is hardy and likes the sun. They prefer moist soil conditions like the clay found in our area. Peppermint likes the sun and shade. There are more varieties, but these are the most common. It is very delicious, ya'll, in sweet ice tea in the South!

Parsley is a cool season annual crop. Plant in the fall from September-February. Sow in sun but it will be slow to germinate. Parsley is celebrated as a beautiful garnish and the most popular herb sold. It is tres delicious in Cajun foods!

Rosemary is a beautiful, tough perennial that grows well in non-acid soil. This sun lover grows from cuttings or seed. Rubbing your hand over the gray-green foliage will emit oils from the plant that is soothing and relaxing. It is baie lekker or as one of my students used to say, "The bomb diggity bomb"!

So when your children and spouse ask, "What is that green stuff?" you can say, "Very delicious" six, no seven, different ways!



## *What's Happened to the Plums?* By *Ann Bares, JCMG*

In the fruit bins at the local grocers, there are purple ones, some lovely dark red ones, and a smaller one that doesn't look too appetizing to me, but it could taste better than it looks. There was some discussion during a seminar a few weeks back about the fate of this once plentiful and tasty fruit. Like figs and pecans, plums were once common in many back yards; wherever there was a little spot, there was a fruit tree of some kind for the kids to snack on, the birds to enjoy, and the moms to make a few jars of jelly or jam from whatever was leftover. Some were too small for us to climb, but we could reach the ones on the low branches. The hose was always handy to wash off the dust or a bug or two. In our neighbor's yard, behind the garage which sat at the back of the yard, grew a huge purple plum tree, shading the back of the garage roof, giving us a cool place to climb into with a few pieces of the juicy fruit, and take a break from playing in the hot summer sun. Biting into that sweet fruit was better than candy, and finding a worm, or better, half a worm was the best joke of the day, bringing on a fit of gagging, spitting, and of course laughing from the on-lookers.

While easier to grow than peaches, plums also need a certain degree of maintenance and attract a variety of insects and some diseases that harm the trees and the fruit. Spraying several times a month with neem oil and spinosad, both organic, will help to control

both of these. Well-drained, sandy soil, about three feet deep, gives your plum tree the best start. There are a few varieties that do well in our area, but not many new ones being bred. One of three varieties recommended for Texas is the Methley, a medium sized, self-pollinating plum with purple skin and amber flesh often used to pollinate other plums that are not self-pollinators. The Ozark Premier, also a self-pollinator, is a large plum with red and yellow-streaked skin and yellow flesh. Both are harvested from early to late June. One plum developed especially for Texas, at Texas A&M, is the Morris, a large reddish-purple plum with red flesh, which requires a pollinator, and is harvested in mid-June.



So many of our memories from childhood seem to be of summers full of plums, figs, and the smell of mayhaw jelly cooking in the neighborhood kitchens after the "berry lady" and her wagon of deep red, shiny mayhaws came by, and the dishpans were brought to the curb and filled with whatever fruit was in season. I miss those times, but carry on the tradition of jelly making with my friend, Pat, when we make our yearly batch of Muscadine jelly, fruit harvested from our Master Gardener Test Garden, and pass the tradition to our new MG's, who add their touch to next year's batch. Maybe someday we'll make some plum jam.

## *Garden Chores in the Heat*

### *By Micah Shanks, JCMG*

It seems like lately there is either too much or too little rain. During the spring we had an overabundance of rain, but now we have really "dried out". The rain kept the temperatures down, but now that it has stopped, we are all complaining about the heat!

If your garden had good drainage, most things should have survived the spring rains. However, you may now notice some yellowing as nitrogen and other nutrients were washed out. Now is a good time to fertilize. One good source of pure nitrogen is blood meal. Follow the directions on the bag and scratch it in around the base of the plants. They will green up seemingly overnight.



Our Texas summer heat is brutal to our plants. There are several heat tolerant flowers you can grow that will last through the season. For color in a sunny area, look for zinnias, marigolds, sunflowers, gazania, cockscomb and vinca. In an area that gets partial sun, choices include nicotiana (flowering tobacco), coleus, pentas and wax begonia. If you have a shady spot, brighten it up with impatiens. Many of these will bloom to the point of becoming "leggy". This is when you have to steel yourself, get the shears and give them a good haircut. It's hard to cut off all those blooms, but the plant will benefit from it and reward you with several more weeks of blooms.

Now that the weather is hot, the bugs have come out. Watch closely for aphids, caterpillars and beetles. Sometimes all you need to get rid of them is a strong blast of water. However, sometimes you need something stronger. Reach for natural controls like insecticidal soap and neem oil products.

If you see tiny white flies on any of your plants, you most likely have poor air circulation. Lack of circulation can also be the reason for many types of fungus, like powdery mildew. Make sure there is ample room between your plants so they can dry out in the humidity.

As for ornamental trees, crape myrtles are in full bloom now. Keep spent blooms pulled off as high as you can reach in order to keep the tree in bloom longer through the season. Just make sure you know the difference between a spent bloom and a new bloom! The new ones are very small; the spent ones are the size of a pea. The old ones will weigh down the branches.

## The Latest Dirt

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service  
1225 Pearl Street, Suite 200  
Beaumont, TX 77701

Phone: 409-835-8461  
Fax: 409-839-2310  
Hotline: 409-835-8742



We're On The Web:

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

<http://jefferson.agrilife.org>



### MISSION STATEMENT

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

#### 2015 Officers

President—Toni Clark

Vice President—Herbert Bass

Secretary—Melissa Starr

Treasurer—Joyce Logan

At Large—Carolyn Barras, Stellina Reed,  
Phyllis Smith

Past President—Tony Lucenti

## Announcements

Check the website for more details

**Beekeeping Seminar—speaker, Bryan Muldrow**  
Saturday, September 19, 8am—4pm  
Texas AgriLife Extension Auditorium  
\$25 per person; RSVP by Sept 11

**Fall Plant Sale**  
Saturday, October 3  
Test Garden at Jack Brooks  
Regional Airport  
8am until 1pm

**Urban Fruit Tree Workshop**  
Saturday, September 26, 9am until 4:30  
AgriLife Extension Auditorium  
\$20 per person; RSVP by Sept 22  
Speaker, Tom LeRoy

**Fall Vegetable Seminar**  
Saturday, October 17  
8am until Noon  
\$15 per person  
Beaumont Botanical  
Gardens

**Master Gardener Shortcourse**  
January 11 through 22, 2016  
Application and pre-payment  
required. Call the office for more  
info at 409-835-8461