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

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

February 14 - Baked Potato Dinner, Speaker Paul Eyre, "Growing Potatoes"

March 14 — Speaker Sarah Sloan "Texas Super Star Plants"

April 11 — Special meeting at Tyrrell Park Garden Center. Speaker Chris Weisinger "The Bulb Hunter"

Spring is within "shoutin distance" and we can already feel the excitement building! Another year, another opportunity to grow those champion roses, tomatoes, or whatever your heart desires. If you haven't already planned out your spring garden, it's time to get busy. Grab those seed packets and get your transplants started. There may still be enough cool weather ahead to harvest spinach, lettuce, radishes, carrots and cole crops if you get started now.



When weather permits, start preparing beds for spring. Add an inch of compost to existing beds, and several inches to new beds. Use those kitchen scraps, tea bags, coffee grounds to enrich the soil and attract earthworms.

February is rose pruning time. It is also a good time to plant more roses, so consider adding one or two to your landscape. The Earthkind roses are practically maintenance free and can bring fresh color to an empty spot in the garden.

Make sure all your tools are clean, sharp, and ready to go.

It won't be long now!

Micah Shanks, Editor

President's Message

By Jackie Steen



Wishing all a very happy New Year and wondering if everyone has gotten used to writing in the New Year date by now. From the feedback I have received, everyone enjoyed the holidays as much as I did and have gotten the tree, ornaments and lights packed away for another year.

A special thank you to our Social /Awards committee for a wonderful Christmas party and awards presentation at the Beaumont Garden Center this past December. We had the pleasure of enjoying NED and Company, the Nederland choral group, which provided entertainment for the evening. Congratulations to Dorothy Norris, our 2012 Master Garden of the Year and to Linda LeBlanc and Jerry Jobe, both recipients of our Helping Hand award. These two ladies and gentleman are very deserving of these awards, be sure to let them know how much we appreciate all they do for us during the year.

By now most know Ricky Thompson, our agent, has been promoted and transferred to Fort Bend County, thus leaving a vacancy here in Jefferson County. For the interim Jeanene Ebeling, Ricky's assistant and Starla, the 4H Agent will be our Go-To people of reference. Hopefully, we will be assigned a new agent sometime in the very near future.

We have a very busy year ahead. We are kicking it off with the Campbell Groups sapling giveaway. For those who participated with this last year, you will remember that we literally ran out of trees. This was also on a day when we were having a torrential rainstorm, evidence that rain never stops a true gardener. This event will be in February. Glenn Watz is in charge, so if you are interested in working with this group, let him know.

We have set Saturday, March 23 as the date for our annual Spring Market Day. We will need all hands on board since we are doing this event 2 weeks earlier than we normally do. Since Easter falls earlier this year, it has influenced the date of our sale. We also have a new crew heading this up, so whenever they ask for help, pitch in and lend a hand to help whenever you can.

I would like to say thanks to all who have agreed to work on committees for this year. Some of you I know, some are new people, but you are all an awesome group whom I look forward to working with this year.

From AgriLife Extension

By Jeanene Ebeling, Horticulture Program Assistant



The New Year is well on its way and we made it through another Holiday season! It's called the season for giving and it seems all year should be about giving.

In 1970 an Extension agent found himself overwhelmed by community requests and, realizing the importance of the information to the area, he along with others devised a plan to train "master" volunteers to assist in providing horticultural information and education to the public. The first Master Gardener class was trained in 1973. The first Texas MG program was initiated in 1979. So I was thinking . . .

The Master Gardener program is all about assisting, sharing and giving. Yes, some benefits are receiving education, hands on experience, making friends and on and on, but the bottom line is giving. What if we helped plant a garden at a food bank or homeless shelter where people are concerned about their daily existence? Wouldn't we also give them the information they need to grow it for themselves and then pass that information on to someone else? Maybe there is a bigger audience out there than we usually think about. We are not the only people that need education, hands on experience, friends, etc. Everyone in our community can use what we have.

Pass it on . . . give!

"Everything that slows us down and forces patience, everything that sets us back into the slow circles of nature, is a help. Gardening is an instrument of grace."

May Sarton

Attracting Bees

By Ann Bares, JCMG



Long ago, running barefoot through a patch of sweet clover and playing Red Rover was a favorite afternoon pastime for a summer day, and it almost always included stepping on a bee or two. Now, clover has been replaced by green lawns, and bees have been attacked by an unknown parasite that is killing hives throughout the United States.



In our area, hives have been depleted even more due to mosquito control. Herbicides and pesticides can be toxic to bees, but there are many bee-friendly plant-based fertilizers and pesticides available at local nurseries for home use.

If you have fewer blooms on your flowers and shrubs, less fruit on your trees and smaller vegetable crops, it could be due in part to a smaller bee population. Here are some tips on making your garden bee friendly.

Bees visit flowers to collect nectar and pollen for food. Open-faced blooms with single flower tops make the most pollen and provide easy access. Zinnias, daisies, coneflowers and dianthus are a few favorites with long bloom time.

In our area it's possible to have nectar producing plants almost all year. When planning your garden, choose plants that bloom in spring, summer and fall. In winter, add a few blooming plants in containers placed in a sunny spot near a doorway or under an eave for shelter. Hybridized plants have very little nectar, so avoid these for attracting bees.

Place small shallow dishes around your garden filled with a few pebbles and just enough water to cover the bottom. Both bees and frogs will appreciate it, which means more blooms for you and fewer insects on your plants.

A favorite watering hole for bees in my garden is a pot of flowers in a ceramic tray of pebbles on a table in front of my swing. I enjoy sitting with my coffee and newspaper in the morning, visiting with the early shift sitting on the rim, bobbing heads and refreshing themselves in the cool water from my rain barrel.

In our grown-up lives, we are dependent on our bee friends, and while they might still sting, we want to encourage them to enjoy our gardens.

Roses Are Red

By Micah Shanks, JCMG



February is the month of Love and what speaks more of love than flowers, and more specifically, roses? We know that February is rose pruning month, but what else do we know about the rose-giving tradition? The custom of exchanging flowers in general seems to have been born in ancient Persia, now known as Iran. It was later introduced to Europe in the 1700's by Charles II of Sweden. The "language of flowers" was born and enthusiastically embraced. But how did the rose wind up being at center stage? The answer traces all the way back to Roman mythology. The red rose was said to be the favorite flower of Venus, goddess of love and beauty. A perfect fit for Valentine's Day.

The colors of roses have their own specific meanings. A yellow rose, for instance, represents friendship, joy, and caring. A peach colored rose indicates a desire to know a person better. The lilac stands for love at first sight. A white rose is associated with young love, loyalty, devotion. And the big daddy of them all, the red rose, stands for passion and says "I LOVE YOU", straightforward and to the point.

"My neighbor asked if he could use my lawnmower and I told him of course, so long as he didn't take it out of my garden."

Eric Morecambe

Editor's Note:

Welcome to the newly redesigned "The Latest Dirt. Peggy and I have both agreed that it is time for a change. We will focus on education, projects and upcoming events both local and state. We hope you like the streamlined version. Please continue to send in your articles and pictures. All contributions are welcomed. Contact me with any comments/suggestions.

Thanks!

Micah Shanks

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Veteran's Memorial Park, Vidor



Scholarship Information

Do you have a child or grandchild who is graduating from an area high school this year? He/she may be eligible for the Master Gardener scholarship. Each year we award a \$1000 scholarship to a college bound senior who has been active in 4-H, FFA, or any other horticulture-based endeavor. If you would like more information or an application, contact Micah Shanks at 409-749-0083, mshanks52@gmail.com or Hortense Price at 409-752-7138, hlprice@paisd.org

Announcements

Market Day

March 23 8am - 2pm
Jack Brooks Regional
Airport

"The Bulb Hunter"

Chris Reisinger
April 11 7pm
Tyrell Park Garden Center

Rose Pruning Demonstration

McFaddin Ward
House
Saturday, February 2 at
10 am
Calder and Third St.
Beaumont

Sapling Giveaway

Friday, February 15
8:30 - 11:30 am
At the Test Garden
For info call Glenn Watz
832-4929
Bald Cypress, Cherrybark
Oaks, Shumard, Sawtooth,
White Oak

Winter Pruning

By Melissa Starr, JCMG



As the weather warms up a little each day, we start thinking about tasks that need to be finished before spring arrives. Pruning shrubs and small trees is a task that many people find challenging, but it can be easily accomplished if you follow these steps.

To maintain plant health, first remove all diseased, broken, or dead branches by cutting them back to the healthy branches where they originated. Next, look at all branches and find those that are rubbing or touching each other. Remove the weakest of the two branches or the one that is growing in the wrong direction. Also remove any branches that are growing toward the middle of the plant or straight down to the ground. These are more likely to rub other branches as they grow larger. Keep branches that grow toward the outside of the plant. If there are any suckers or shoots growing from the base of the trunk of a small tree, such as a crepe myrtle, remove those too. Make sure you also cut off any dead blooms that are left on your shrubs or trees. If you employ these principles while pruning, your plant should bloom more and look fuller this year.



A shrub's blooming period determines when it should be pruned. Summer-blooming shrubs or small trees will bloom on shoots that grow during the same year. Therefore, they need to be

pruned in mid to late February to promote vigorous spring growth. Some examples of these include althea, hydrangea, crepe myrtle, and most roses. Spring-blooming shrubs, however, bloom on last year's growth and should not be pruned until after they finish blooming.

Examples of these are spring-blooming roses, azalea, honeysuckle, redbud, spirea (bridal's wreath), etc.

As you try to decide which plants to prune, remember to prune selectively. Deep pruning should be saved for old, overgrown shrubs that need rejuvenated. When pruning old shrubs, prune back one-half to one-third of the plant before spring growth begins (normally mid to late February). Remove the oldest and tallest branches for best results. It is not necessary to "top" trees (cutting back to a few large branches). This results in a weaker tree and one that is more susceptible to insects and disease. If you are satisfied with the way your trees and shrubs look, and they are blooming well, consider not pruning.

A little work in late winter can provide you with many beautiful summer blooms. If you have questions, please contact Melissa Starr, Jefferson County Master Gardener, at melynstarr@hotmail.com, or call the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office at 409-835-8461.

Texas Master Gardener Awards

By Melissa Starr, JCMG

Every year at the Texas Master Gardener State Conference, awards are given to deserving Master Gardener organizations. Each county/group that paid its dues in 2012 are allowed to submit entries to be judged. Award categories include Educational Exhibit (Storyboard) and Poster Showcase, Educational Program, Graphics Presentation (PowerPoint, etc.), Individual Master Gardener, Mass Media, Newsletter, Outstanding Master Gardener Association, Project, and Publication.

To be eligible for an award, the organization must answer a list of 10 or more questions and write a summary of 150 words or less about each entry. There are strict rules about how long your answers can be to each question, and each question is awarded up to 10 points. After the points are tallied, the organization with the greatest number of points in that category is awarded first place. Second and third places are awarded accordingly. Winners will announced at the State Conference, October 17-19, in Hidalgo County, Texas (Deep South Texas). You can find more information at <http://2013tmgaconference.org/Home.aspx>.

This year, we will be entering several categories. We will be entering the PowerPoint "Introduction to Herbs" by Melissa & Judy Starr in the Graphics Presentation category, the Giving Field program by Mary Mahlie in the Educational Program category, the Field of Freedom Project (headed by Phyllis Smith) in the Project category, the "Out in the Yard" articles published in the Port Arthur News in the Mass Media category, and Dorothy Norris in the Individual Master Gardener category. In addition, we will be entering the Educational Exhibit and Poster Showcase and the Outstanding Master Gardener Association categories.

All submissions were written by Melissa Starr with the exception of mass media which was written by Jane McBride.

The Latest Dirt

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MISSION STATEMENT

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

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