

February 2016

Volume 8, Issue 1



Inside this issue:

<i>Christmas Party Pictures</i>	2
<i>New Officers/Interns Of the Year</i>	3
<i>Master Gardener of the Year</i>	4
<i>Starting A Garden From Seed</i>	5
<i>I Dig A Techy Garden</i>	6
<i>Magnolias-A Southern Belle</i>	7
<i>Grow To Share Garden</i>	8 / 9
<i>Beware These Top Ten Gardening Mistakes</i>	10
<i>Rainy Weather Continues Seed Germination</i>	11
<i>Butterflies In The Garden</i>	12
<i>The Giving Fields Organic Workshop</i>	13
<i>Announcements</i>	14

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

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

February 11 - "Organic Farming and Sustainability", Brent & Steve Heironimus

March 10 — Clean Eating for Health and Wellness, Gale Elkins Elliott

April 14 — Speaker TBA



## *Master Gardeners Hit The Ground Running* *By Melissa Starr, Editor*

Jefferson County Master Gardeners didn't take a break because it was January. In addition to the regular work days at the test garden, we also held a short course to educate new Master Gardener Interns. We had 15 interns take the class from January 11-22. Topics ranged from vegetable gardening to herbs to insects and much more.

If you need a shade tree, come to the garden on February 19, 8:00-11:00, to pick up a free shade tree. There will be Master Gardeners on hand to answer your questions about planting and tree care. Last year we quickly gave away 7,000 trees. This year, however, we only have around 4,000 to give away due to a fire at one of the nurseries, so come early.

Many gardeners are ready to plant their spring vegetables as soon as the weather begins to warm and the danger of frost has passed. According to the "Spring and Fall Planting Guide" for Jefferson County (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/archives/parsons/publications/beaumont/jeffcountyguide.html>), the average last killing frost is around March 5. Because of this, JCMGs have decided to have a Vegetable and Herb sale on March 5 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Test Garden located at the Jack Brooks Regional Airport. Even though we are selling vegetables early, we are still planning to have our Spring Market Day on April 9 from 9-1 at the Jack Brooks Regional Airport. As always, we will have a wide variety of hard to find plants to choose from and Master Gardeners on hand to answer your questions. We hope to see you there!



Keo Bounnarith, Roberto Carreon, Belinda Geldmacher, Mary Gunter, Ima Lee Hebert, Doreen Ingram, Marianne Kirkpatrick, Owen McPayne, Rhonda Melancon, Edra Messer, Tretta Morvant, Linda Primm, Lynda Rector, Kenny Seaman and Dwayne Trahan

## *Christmas Party* *By Melissa Starr, JCMG*





*2016 Master Gardener Officers*

Left to right: Glenn Watz, Lisa Hitt, Joyce Logan, Eileen Slater and Tina Gonzales. Not pictured: Alina Blanchard and James Butaud

*Interns of the Year*

*Betsy Cheung and Emmy Auzenne (not pictured)*

## *Master Gardener of the Year—Our Own Super Starr Melissa Starr*

*Written by Ann Bares, JCMG*

In 2002, the JCMG's were gifted with our own Super Star, one that came to learn, and stayed to teach, train, encourage, and bring our Jefferson County Master Gardener's recognition, not only in our county, but at a state level. Melissa, a teacher in the best sense of the word, was soon sharing her knowledge of herbs, butterflies, and gardening, by developing Power Point presentations she used as a speaker, at Lamar, garden clubs, Master Gardener meetings, and the Master Gardener short course. Working at every plant sale over the past 11 years, she has also been a judge at many of the Horticulture Committee Fruit and Vegetable Shows, excusing herself last year in order to enter some entries of her own, which took top awards for Best Fruit, and Best Tomato.

In her devotion to our JCMG family, Melissa has devoted countless hours to researching, and filling out award entries that included photos, surveys, and extensive forms, which have been submitted to the MG State Conference, and have earned us some prestigious awards. These awards included, in 2012, 2nd place Education, 2nd place Outstanding MG Association, in 2013, 3rd place Outstanding MG Association, and in 2014, 1st Place Education (Vegetable and Herb seminars).

For all of us, Melissa has served as our Historian, organizing and filing photos from events in past years; served as our Secretary for four years; was on the Directory Committee, taking photos and gathering information, helped to create and maintains, our MG website, posting events to the calendar, and updating the "How to Become a Master Gardener" page. On our JCMG Test Garden Facebook page, Melissa



posts photos and flyers of upcoming events and answers any questions posted to FB, all this to encourage the public to become more aware of our Test Garden and the Master Gardener programs that are offered, especially our MG Class held in January. In her spare time :) Melissa writes and edits "The Latest Dirt", our quarterly MG newsletter and is on the "Out in the Yard" team that writes a weekly column for the Port Arthur News.

Because of Melissa's generosity of spirit and her time, we have earned the respect of MG Associations statewide and are very fortunate to have Melissa represent us, not only in our MG family, but to others who appreciate what we all should aspire to represent to the public. As teachers, we have not only knowledge to share, but are examples of how our gardens come to be examples of a higher purpose, as Melissa does. She taught us we can overcome many obstacles, as our gardens do, by sharing our strength, our friendships, and our Master Gardener Family, who's values are best represented by this year's Master Gardener of the Year, 2015.

### CONGRATULATIONS!



## *Starting A Garden From Seed*

### *By Tim Schreck, JCMG*

As we hopefully are wrapping up the last few days of freezing temperatures this winter, I am looking at preparing my plans for this year's garden. The first thing I am going through are my seed packets from last year and remembering which ones did well and which ones did not. This year, I am trying my hand at saving seeds. I have seeds saved from some tomatoes, beans and squash grown last summer.



Estimates show that saving seeds goes back over 10, 000 years when the first "farmers" started saving seeds and planting them the following season. These farmers watched and saved the bigger seeds, or the ones that fought off pests, for planting next year. From this process and hard work, we went from an ear of corn being the size of a thumb nail to the large ears we have today.

This was a culmination of hard work and sacrifice by many people. Think about how many people went through a winter hungry, staring at a big bag of grain in the corner; all the time knowing that if they ate the grain, it would mean none to plant in the spring and then no food for next winter. I do not envy those people but have great respect for them sacrificing for the future.

Also, I respect the European migrants who came over with no money and very little except for Oma (Grandma) Nan's brown beans in their pocket that they planted here

in America, in hopes it would sustain them until better times came. These same seeds had fed their parents, their grandparents, and on and on. When looking at the seed packets this year, don't necessarily go with the commercial ones, but try ones that your great grandpa might have sowed into the ground, all the time praying it would grow to feed his family in the years to come. I encourage you to read up on heirloom seeds on the internet or in seed catalogs and enjoy the stories that usually come with them.

On March 5<sup>th</sup> at the Jefferson County Master Gardeners Test Garden, we will have a vegetable and herb sale. We do not have seeds, but we have plants of all kinds for your vegetable garden needs. We also have Master Gardeners there to answer your with questions or help you make the right decisions for your garden. Hope to see you there.



## *I Dig A Techy Garden*

### *By Eileen Slater, JCMG*

January was the month to start new resolutions to reorganize your life. Our New Year's resolution is to update our garden journal. Free and inexpensive ways to journal are available on the computer, iPhone and iPad. Let's dig a little deeper.

The first dig is for free garden journals that can be printed and arranged in a ring binder. Check the following websites:

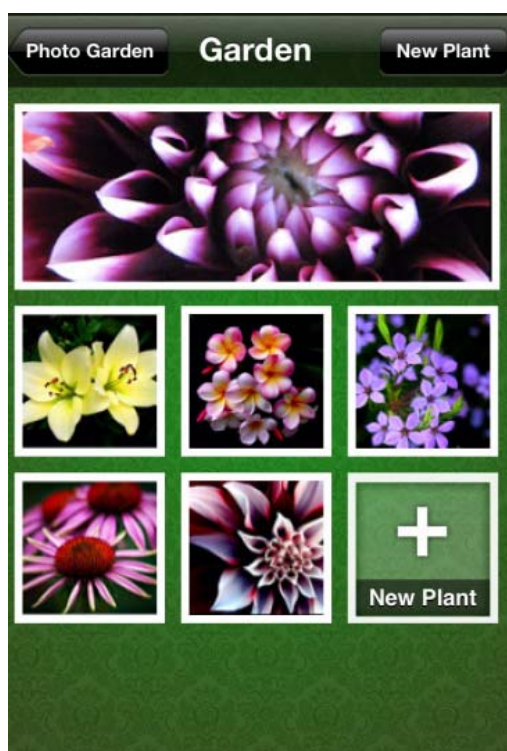
[www.frugalliving.about.com/od/gardening-](http://www.frugalliving.about.com/od/gardening-) this site has a front and back outside cover along with 18 practical journal pages to use. One practical page is the Plant Profile page.

[www.gardensandcrafts.com-](http://www.gardensandcrafts.com-) this printable garden journal includes an excellent soil analysis chart worth adding to your journal.

The second dig is also free online. The Vegetable Garden Planner includes a garden journal, gardening "to-dos", uploading pictures and smart phone apps. *Your Gardening Journal* from Dave's Garden is a website to create personal gardening journals and participate in a gardening blog. Seeds or plants can be shared with other gardeners. The plant database is extensive.

The third dig is free with an iPhone or iPad. *MyFolia Gardening Tracker* is a social tracker and organizer. It includes a garden organizer, an area to showcase your garden, and communication with other growers in your area and the world. A garden journal can be written and plantings tracked. Delve down in

this tracker. Mobile apps using the camera include the *Garden Journal*. Post the photo, document where it is purchased along with the cost, and record the growth of the plant. *Gardening companion* includes articles, blogs, gardening know how, journal weather and more. The last app tested was *Photo Garden*. Pictures of plants can be taken and placed in plots on the phone. Links are given for garden ideas, designs, planters and lawn maintenance.



The fourth dig will cost you. Texas Gardener magazine offers, for a nominal fee, a 2016 Texas Gardener Planning Guide and Calendar. The calendar includes when to plant, fertilize, prune and spray. Room is available for recording planting dates and rainfall.

The fifth dig is an online website that charges a fee. The Old Farmer's Almanac sends you email messages as to when you should start seeds or transplants in your area. It has a garden planner with a voice activated demonstration to guide you on ways to draw your garden plot.

This is just a small sampling of ways to plan your garden journal for the New Year! Can you dig it?

## *Magnolias—A Southern Belle*

### *By Ann Bares, JCMG*

In the late 70's, we were gifted with a small magnolia tree, from Florida, with shiny green leaves, but no information as to how/where to plant, or what to expect as it grew. Only 5' tall, it was perfect for a bare spot on the east side of our yard, lots of morning

sun, and no other trees. So, without any horticultural knowledge, it was planted, and, on its own, grew into a lovely shade tree. Five years later it was 12' tall, and had never bloomed.

We were assured that it was, as promised, a magnolia. In the next few years we added a wood

fence a few feet to the east of it, a winding path through what I dubbed the 'Shade Garden', a few fern and a scraggly Buford holly. They all lived and grew, but after 10 years, no blooms on our magnolia, now 25' and growing. I fertilized in the spring and mid-summer, as instructed; there was new growth, but no blooms. I mulched with straw to kill weeds, didn't hoe underneath, pruned in the summer, still no blooms. When a client who was building in the country heard my story, he insisted in gifting me with a magnolia that would bloom and brought it to me in a 5 gallon pot. Before we planted this one, about 4' tall and very healthy, I read all I could find about the what, where, and why, of growing a magnolia. Here's what I learned.



Named for French botanist Pierre Magnol, magnolias appeared before the bees did, and the fossilized remains that were found were 20-50 million years old. Their buds are enclosed in a tough branch, not petals, to protect it from the beetles that pollinate them.

Their fleshy, brittle roots grow close to the surface, so when planting, they need protection from the wind to prevent loosening them from the surface. Put stakes

into the hole before placing the root ball, fill with a fairly rich, neutral, well-drained soil, and mulch with straw. Grass won't grow under the tree, but fern and shallow rooted ground covers do very well and need little care. Do not purchase bare-rooted plants, as the roots may be brittle and not survive a cold winter.

After one year, my new magnolia was growing, and my older tree was blooming, has bloomed almost every year since, and is now almost 60' tall. The new magnolia also blooms lovely white flowers with a lemony fragrance every year. I cut a few to bring inside, one at a time, and use the leaves all fall and winter on my mantle with some red berries from the Buford holly, which provides not only color for us, but an abundance of berries for the birds we love.



## *Grow To Share Garden*

### *By Melissa Starr, JCMG*

If you haven't seen the Grow to Share Garden, you should check it out. The garden, inspired by Master Gardener, Toni Clark, is located at the Nutrition and Services for Seniors (NSS). She volunteers to grocery shop for one of their "Meals on Wheels" clients. After several trips to the store with or to shop for this homebound senior citizen, Toni noticed that she never purchased any fresh vegetables. Toni learned that reason she never bought fresh vegetables was that she had to wait several days or weeks to go to the store. Because of this, she purchased only shelf-stable products. Toni decided to start bringing her fresh vegetables from her garden. The senior was thrilled with her extra treats and often asked for more. After meeting with NSS's Executive Director, they made plans to build a garden.

Master Gardeners, Toni Clark and Tony Lucenti, worked tirelessly with NSS to acquire grants and coordinate volunteers to build fencing around the property at NSS, install an irrigation system, acquire and paint a shed, build 15 raised beds, maintain the beds, and plant and harvest the vegetables. They recruited volunteers from the Rotary Club, the Girl Scouts, and several other organizations to make this possible. In October, JCMGs planted seedlings, raised by Master Gardener, Dianne Davis, in the beds and later began harvesting. So far this project has educated over 300 people on the need for growing fresh vegetables in a food desert and/or how to grow organically and in three months has provided 473 packages (2 servings each) of fresh vegetables including broccoli, lettuce, turnip greens and cabbage to 250 homebound senior citizens. Plans are already underway to

plant tomatoes, green beans, cantaloupe, okra, purple hull peas, squash, and onions in the spring. Fruit trees and blueberry bushes are also a planned addition to the garden in 2016.

Any volunteers are welcomed, and regular work days are being planned. Please contact Toni Clark, [toniclarck.02@sbcglobal.net](mailto:toniclarck.02@sbcglobal.net), for more information.



Toni Clark gives Elaine Schellenberger, director of NSS, the first harvested vegetables



## Grow To Share Garden (continued)





## ***Beware These Top 5 Mistakes of Gardeners***

### ***By Micah Shanks, JCMG***

Everyone who has ever tried to grow a plant has had at least a few casualties. We plant again and again with the same results. Some plants just die, right? Well, there are a few common mistakes that we all make.

According to the Texas Garden Almanac, Mistake Number One is over-watering. Too much water will drown a plant, leaving it to wilt, yellow and die. When you water, be sure to water infrequently and deeply. Roots generally will go as deep as the water goes, so the deeper the water, the deeper – and stronger – the root system. Watering too often and for a short time encourages shallow root systems which result in stressed plants. A weak plant can be spindly and unsightly. It also will always be more vulnerable to pests and disease. Proper watering means watering only when needed, preferably in the morning.



Over-fertilizing is Mistake Number Two. Too much fertilizer causes excessive growth making a plant susceptible to disease. Excessive growth also requires more water and mowing or pruning. Too much fertilizer can actually burn your plants as well. Always follow label directions. Make sure you are always adding organic matter to your soil. Leaves, kitchen scraps (excluding meat products), grass clippings and compost all build up in the soil and contribute to the health of your garden. Keep enough organic material on top of the soil, and you may not need fertilizer at all!

Misuse of pesticides comes in as Mistake Number Three. All gardens need a balance between the good bugs and the bad bugs. Too many chemicals can upset the balance of nature. Learn about organic products and use the chemical only as a last resort. Also, try to avoid the problem in the first place by purchasing pest resistant varieties.

Improperly identifying a plant problem is quite common. You must know what you are treating before you decide how to treat it. Is it pest damage or a fungus? Is it an environmental problem such as the ones already mentioned? If you can't determine this on your own, take a few leaves to the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office in Beaumont for identification.

Using plants that are poorly adapted to your area happens all the time.

Learn what plants actually thrive in your area and don't fight the ones that don't. When you put the right plant in the right place, you are creating a low maintenance area and you will get much more enjoyment from your garden.





## *Rainy Weather Continues Seed Germination*

### *By Tim Schreck, JCMG*

As I am writing this article on a rainy Sunday morning, I look out on my pasture and see it filling up with water. I know it will be flooded for at least 3 days and then soaking wet for at least another two weeks. It is interesting to think that even with all this water, seeds will sprout in the spring and a whole new process of life begins again. Seeds that fell to the ground two months ago will survive spells of warm, cold, dry, and wet conditions for the next five months. With conditions like these, how do enough of the seeds survive to ensure the next generation of plants? How do seeds survive in worse conditions even further north?

Let's go back a few months ago when the seed was formed. During that process, the plant was storing carbohydrates, proteins, and lipids inside a protective seed coat. Depending on the type of seed, this coat can be thick or thin and be made of different materials. If the seed coat is too thin, moisture and warmth can trigger the seed to sprout and could be killed by a late frost. If the seed coat is too thick, it may sprout too late missing spring showers needed for young growth, or may not sprout at all. The breakdown of the seed coat is called scarification. Scarification is usually natural, but humans found other ways of doing it. Long ago humans noticed that seeds which went through certain animals' digestive systems had a

high germination rate. Since then, scarification by treating with sulfuric or hydrochloric acid has become a common practice.

To scarify a seed, care must be taken to weaken the seed coat but not damage the seed embryo. Soaking of okra seeds overnight softens their seed coat. Many bean seeds are very dry and hard and need extended soaking or a slight nick with a knife to increase germination success rates. Everyone knows that acorns have a semi-

hard shell. Acorns from the red and black oak trees require 3-4 months of continuous contact with moisture in the ground to soften the seed coat enough to allow the seed to break through and sprout.



When the seed coat has been compromised, there must be enough moisture available for the embryo to draw in the water causing the seed to expand and trigger sprouting. In most seeds, there is only enough energy stored in the embryo to sprout and develop the first two leaves. Energy absorbed from the warm ground helps the sprout break through the hard ground. As soon as the leaves break the surface, it can produce energy through sunlight and photosynthesis.

Over millions of years, the ancestors of today's seeds passed on the traits that helped them survive this delicate dance, ensuring enough seeds survive to continue the next generation.

## *Butterflies In The Garden*

### *By Melissa Starr JCMG*

Standing in my yard watching the colorful, fluttering wings of a dainty butterfly sip a delicious meal of nectar from delicate flowers blooming in my yard is one of my favorite past times. Taking photos of these stunning creatures is a passion of mine. How did I get these butterflies to come to my garden instead of chasing them all over the county?

First you need to attract the butterflies to your garden with brightly colored, flat-topped flowers. Butterflies land on the flat portion of the flower and drink the nectar with their tongue (proboscis). Native plants, such as blue mistflower, guara pink, and blanket flower (Indian blanket), dwarf Barbados cherry, and lantana are excellent sources of nectar and easy to grow. Pentas, salvias, purple vitex, and zinnias also draw butterflies to your landscape. Butterflies don't just need nectar in the summer, they need nectar all year, so have a variety of flowers blooming in every season.

Once you have attracted these beautiful creatures to your garden, they need a place to lay their eggs. Butterflies are insects and have a short life span. Therefore, you want to have plants with no insecticides that their larvae will eat. Different butterflies prefer different host plants. For example, black swallowtail larva will only eat dill, fennel, or parsley;

the gulf fritillary larva eats passion vines; the giant swallowtail eats citrus leaves; the pipevine swallowtail larva eats Dutchman's pipe; and monarch larva eats milkweeds (such as butterfly weed). After the butterfly lays its eggs and the larva hatch, they become voracious eaters. Many times

they will strip a plant of all its leaves, so you will need to plant plenty for the butterflies and yourself. Other foods some butterflies enjoy include rotting fruit, mud/wet sand, and manure. I wouldn't



suggest putting out manure to attract butterflies, but you can set up a small area of wet sand where they can get minerals or set out a plate of orange halves for them to sip on.

Some of the above plants will be available during our vegetable and herb sale on March 5 at the JCMG Test Garden or at Spring Market Day, April 9, at the Jack Brooks Regional Airport, Hangar 4. Bring your carts and/or wagons.



## *The Giving Fields Organic Workshop*

### *By Micah Shanks, JCMG*

If you haven't been to The Giving Field yet, you owe it to yourself to go for a visit. Located on Laurel behind St. Anne's Catholic Church in Beaumont, The Giving Field is a community driven donation garden. All the produce is given to Some Other Place and The Hospitality Center, soup kitchens that serve Beaumont and Port Arthur respectively. The idea is the brainchild of Sharon Begnaud and Mary Mahlie. Sharon, a backyard gardener and Mary, a certified Master Gardener, saw a need to supply fresh food to the hungry of our community. The property, owned by St. Anne's, was once the site of an apartment complex. Sharon and Mary convinced the church and then the community to support a garden on the location. Starting out in 2012 with 33 raised beds and 21 trees, they have now grown to 41 raised beds, 8 handicapped beds and 33 trees which include Meyer lemons, figs, apples and satsumas.

This winter, they have beautiful beds full of cabbage, broccoli, lettuce, kale, carrots, beets and swiss chard. This provides 40-50 lbs. of fresh produce to each soup kitchen every week. It allows for better balanced nutritious meals for those who need it the most.

The Giving Field is entirely organic and entirely built and maintained by volunteer labor. In fact, over 10,000 volunteer hours have been logged since they got started! Each year, they host a day-long organic workshop which is open to the public. This year it is scheduled for Saturday, March 19 and will, as always, feature guest speakers on various garden topics.

Built with sustainability in mind, the roof over the teaching pavilion is slanted to catch rainwater that is used on the beds. There are future plans for restrooms to be built and the rainwater will be diverted to flush the toilets.

An average 200 schoolchildren visit the garden each week where they are taught how to prepare a bed, how to identify fruits and vegetables, and how to plant and harvest. They participate in games that trace their food back to the origin. They also learn what is actually in our food, which is an eye opener for most people!

Volunteers can come out just about any time during the week. The second Saturday of each month is a designated a big workday for anyone who would like to participate. It is a wonderful way to give back to the community and get out for some fresh air while enjoying the beauty of the garden. And don't forget to visit the chickens! The Giving Field is home to a nice flock of Rhode Island Reds which are hatched by first graders at St. Anne's school. They are then brought over to their new home and the kids get to watch them grow and then gather fresh eggs. The Giving Field is a one-of-a-kind operation in our area and we are so lucky to have it!

For more information, contact Micah Shanks, Jefferson Co. Master Gardener at [mshanks52@gmail.com](mailto:mshanks52@gmail.com) or call Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service at 409-835-8461.

## 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>



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### MISSION STATEMENT

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

### 2016 Officers

President—Tina Gonzales

Vice President—Alina Blanchard

Secretary—Eileen Slater

Treasurer—Joyce Logan

At Large—James Butaud, Lisa Hitt, Glenn Watz

Past President—Toni Clark

## Announcements

**Master Gardener Vegetable  
and Herb Sale**  
**Saturday, March 5 9-1pm**  
**At the Test Garden**  
**Set up day Friday March 4, 8-am**

**Organic Workshop at the Giving  
Field**

**Saturday March 19, 8am—4pm**  
**Located on Liberty Street, behind St  
Anne's Catholic Church**

**Master Gardener Spring Plant  
Sale and Market Day**  
**Saturday, April 9, 9—1pm**  
**At the Test Garden**  
**Set up day, Friday April 8, 8am**

**T-Budding and Grafting Seminar**  
**Date To Be Announced**

**Tree Giveaway at the Test Garden**  
**February 19, 8—11am**  
**or until supply is gone**