

November 2016

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Inside this issue:

Official Newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners

Letter From The President

<i>Letter From The President</i>	1
<i>Agent's Two Cents</i>	3
<i>Pictures of the Fall Plant Sale</i>	4
<i>The Majesty of Leaves</i>	5
<i>Norfolk Island Pine</i>	6
<i>Vegetable and Herb Sale pictures</i>	7
<i>Fall Garden Chores</i>	8
<i>Poinsettia-Flower of the Holy Night</i>	9
<i>Growing Greens</i>	10
<i>44th Annual Fruit & Vegetable Show pictures</i>	11
<i>Beating The Weather With Proper Soil Preparation</i>	12
<i>Falling For Bulbs</i>	13
<i>Planting Bulbs</i>	14
<i>Announcements</i>	15

Cool nights and changing colors are sure signs that autumn is upon us. The warm scents of pumpkin, apple and cinnamon fill the air bringing with it an anticipation of the holidays to come. Autumn is also a reminder that 2016 is winding down, and the nominating committee is beginning the task of looking for new board members. I encourage you to take their call with an open heart and mind.

Our group has been fortunate in 2016 to be under the direction of a new Extension Agent, David Oates. As I look back on the past year, I am proud of everything our group has accomplished. Just to name a few....

We have served our community by lending a helping hand to area groups such as Nutrition & Services for Seniors, Best Years Center Mardi Gras Celebration, Campbell Global Group Tree Giveaway, the Giving Field Organic Workshop, Beaumont

Council of Gardens and by beautifying the Veterans Memorial Park to honor our Veterans.

A group of 9 Master Gardeners represented JCMG at the State Conference in May where the Jefferson County Master Gardeners received recognition with a 3rd place in Projects, 1st place in Written Education, 1st place in Outstanding Association and 1st place in Outstanding Individual.

Many Master Gardeners have enjoyed field trips to the East Texas Field day in Overton, Creekwood Farms in Vidor and Southern Garden Symposium in St. Francisville, Louisiana, with plans in progress for a November visit to the Antique Rose Emporium.

Several of our Master Gardeners became specialists and/or took specialist classes in 2016 in the field of Irrigation, Rain barrel, Earth-

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

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

November 10 - David & Patricia Lewis "Mushrooms and Fungi of the Gulf Coast"

December 8 — No Meeting

January 12 — TBA

Letter From The President (cont.)

Kind gardening. They will now be able to share their knowledge with others.

Spring 2016 brought new life to our irrigation system at the demonstration garden thanks to volunteers who rebuilt and managed the system which is successfully working again.

Our number of plant sales grew by 2, making a total of 4 sales for the 2016 year. All totaled, the sales were a great success. Many happy customers left our sales with their buggies, bags and arms loaded and ready to fill their gardens, landscape, patios and homes with new plants.



The Jefferson County Master Gardeners is an exceptional organization. This group is bound together by many different people with different talents. With each plant sale, there are MG volunteers who advertise our sales with newspaper, television and fliers; set up and break down tables and signs; price, beautify and move plants; greet customers; answer customer questions; write tickets; and cash out each customer. There are Master Gardeners who work each week all year with propagating, growing and bumping up plants and keeping all our plants alive and watered. There are helping hands that show up regularly to keep the grass cut, weeded and ant-free. There are so many people who work behind the scenes writing for the paper and the newsletter, keeping our Facebook page updated, keeping drinks and snacks for us to eat...the list is endless. Each person makes our organization stronger by his or her presence, ideas and efforts.

I want to offer a special thanks to each and every one of you for being a part of the Master Gardeners and enriching my life with your knowledge and friendship.

Tina Gonzales

Agent's Two Cents

By David Oates, CEA-Horticulture

The Fall season is finally here for those folks who have been looking forward to some cooler temperatures and some milder weather. For those folks that braved the almost "pleasantly" cool weather at the recent Jefferson County Master Gardeners fall plant sale, the weather was perfect in almost every respect. A cool fall morning that was followed by a bright and sunshine filled weekend was the perfect backdrop for a fantastic fall plant sale. A huge thanks goes out to all of those folks who participated and supported the fall plant sale that was held recently. I would encourage everyone to take advantage of all the cooler days and evenings that we have been experiencing recently and to work on their garden chore list. I know that my own list is pretty extensive. Take advantage of these cooler days to cross off some those daunting tasks on your lists.

Mother Nature is still throwing the Southeast Texas area some unexpected curveballs in the form unusual weather, and as a result, gardeners in this area have been hit with several unexpected and unwelcomed issues to deal with.

Most folks or their neighbors have been fighting a battle with insect damage to their lawns and trees or have been over-run with a nasty weed problem in their lawns and gardens. Depending on where you live in Southeast Texas, you have probably experienced some damage

to your lawn from the Sod Webworm this fall. This very aggressive insect has damaged a lot of turf area this year in a short period of time. The comment that I have heard most often from folks is that they have never seen such an extensive amount of damage from an insect. If the Sod Webworms did not affect your lawn, you might have had damage from the caterpillar infestation in other parts of Southeast Texas. These caterpillars showed up very quickly and have defoliated extensive amounts of trees in this area. If the insects were not enough, most lawns in these areas have become home to a huge amount of Virginia Button Weed. This overly-aggressive weed spreads quickly and can begin to compete with lawn grasses for nutrients.

As gardeners here in southeast Texas, we have learned to deal with adversity on a daily basis. We never really know what to expect from the weather or what major hurdle may lie ahead in the form of insects or weed damage. We also seem to defy the odds every season and have a victory in the landscape despite all the challenges.

Fall Plant Sale



The Majesty of Leaves

By Eileen Slater, JCMG

Fall leaf majesty begins as leaves change from green, to golden yellowish orange or to brilliant crimson. The majestic use of fallen leaves in lawns, trees, shrub beds and vegetable gardens is highly desirable.

Leaves can be used as mulch for your landscape. The benefits of using leaves are to curb moisture loss, discourage weeds, control soil temperatures, limit soil erosion and avoid soil compaction. Fallen leaves contain 50-80% of the nutrients a plant gets from the soil and air during the growing season.

The easiest way to incorporate leaves into your lawn is simply to mow over them and leave them in place. Shredded or mown leaves will decay faster and are likely to remain in place than unshredded leaves.

Mulch trees and shrubs by placing a 3-6 inch layer around their base. In shrub beds, you may directly till leaves into the soil during the fall. Add small amounts of nitrogen fertilizer or manure to the soil to speed decay. A 6-8 inch layer of leaves turned into heavy clay will improve air circulation and drainage.

In a fall vegetable garden, mulch with leaves in rows and furrows. Leaves in the furrows provides a natural pathway and will compost beautifully. During the next growing season the furrows become the rows ready with nutrients for your plants.

An easy way to compost leaves is called bag composting. Collect and shred leaves. Place in a heavy duty, plastic trash bag. Into a full bag of leaves, put 1 or 2 shovelfuls of garden soil and either 2 shovelfuls of manure or about one-half cup of a high nitrogen fertilizer. Apply enough water to thoroughly moisten the leaves. Punch 10-15 holes in the plastic bag to allow for air circulation. Turn the bag once or twice. Add water, if needed, to keep the leaves moist. Store in an out of sight place. After about 2 weeks, open the bag to check on the composting process. The compost will be ready for use generally in 6-8 weeks.

Beware that leaves which have been sprayed with herbicides containing clopyralid and aminopyralid should not be composted. This compost will injure the growth of plants and can remain active for more than 2 years.

Enjoy the majesty and benefits of leaves this season!

Norfolk Island Pine

By Melissa Starr, JCMG

The smell of pine needles in the air and the smells of cookies baking in the oven at Christmas are all childhood memories that will never be forgotten. I remember Christmas trees during family gatherings at my grandparents' house decorated with delicate, white, crocheted snowflakes, but I also remember Christmases when there wasn't a traditional tree. A few times, when all the grandchildren were small, we had something nontraditional such as a potted Norfolk Island Pine. My grandmother decorated it with tiny ornaments and set it in the living room. Sometimes the nontraditional moments are the ones you remember for a lifetime. There are many potted plants sold as decorations at Christmas time, but if you want to decorate a small tree, the Italian stone pine, Aleppo pine, and Norfolk Island pine are the most common.

Italian stone and Aleppo pines are usually bought at the store already shaped as Christmas tree topiaries. However, they can only tolerate low light indoors for a couple of weeks. Unless you have a window that allows direct sunlight for 6 hours or more, these trees need to live outdoors as soon as you are finished using them as a Christmas tree. While indoors, check the soil daily to see if they need water. Even though they are drought tolerant, they will dry out quickly indoors. If the top one inch of the soil is dry, water them. Because these pines like alkaline soil, they will not survive planted in the ground in our area.

However, if you plant one in Central, West, or South Texas it should grow to 50 feet tall there.

Norfolk Island Pines, on the other hand, do not have as much dense foliage and have a more "Charlie Brown Christmas tree" look. It can stay indoors longer than Italian stone pines, but it cannot survive Texas outdoor temperatures. Any temperature above 95 degrees will burn the needles, and anything below freezing will kill the top of the tree. If you decide to plant it in the ground, be aware that they grow 200 feet tall in their native habitat. With our cold and hot temperatures, however, that should not be a problem here.

Growing trees in pots can be rewarding, but tricky. These trees can make beautiful patio plants, but they need to be cared for more than a tree in the yard. Make sure you let the soil dry out some before watering. Once the soil is dry to a 1 or 2 inch depth, it is time to water. Every year, gently pull your tree out of the pot and either replot it into a bigger pot, or add an inch or two of fresh potting soil mixed with the recommended amount of organic fertilizer to the bottom of your current pot. Organic matter in the soil breaks down over time, and organic fertilizer won't burn the roots.

Vegetable and Herb Sale



Fall Garden Chores

By Micah Leigh, JCMG

Since summer has ended, and our first cool front has come and gone, what are you doing with your garden? Some of us have had quite enough of the heat and will be cleaning tools in preparation for winter storage. Then there are those of us who are planting a fall garden complete with broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and spinach. Whatever you plan to do, make sure your soil is well prepared with lots of organic material and plenty of mulch. This will feed your fall garden or be ready for your spring garden.

Easter comes late next spring, which means we could have a long cold winter. Do you have plenty of protection on hand for delicate citrus and other plants that could get hurt in a freeze? It's not fun to be driving around before a hard freeze in search of frost covers. Watch for them early in the box stores or order online now and be prepared.

Fall is a perfect time to plant trees and shrubs. Take some time to research the plants you like. Make sure they are suitable for Zone 9. Learn the water and light requirements and make certain you know how large the plant will get before selecting a planting site. Many gardeners have made the mistake of putting a young

plant into a small area and watching that plant get too big too fast. After your trees and shrubs are in place, add annuals and perennials. Take into consideration bloom times, color combinations and foliage color.

With careful planning, your garden will be blooming year round. Good choices for fall and winter color are mums, pansies, snapdragons, petunias, cyclamen and Bright Lights Swiss chard. Don't forget to add ornamental grasses. There are several varieties to choose from that add texture and movement to the landscape.

Gardens are the perfect place for pictures of special moments. One such garden has recently opened as a location for bridal, family, graduation and prom pictures. I am proud to say that is my garden at Leigh Manor. For more information contact Micah Leigh at mkleigh64@gmail.com.

Poinsettia: Flower of the Holy Night

By Eileen Slater, JCMG

The poinsettia is known as "La Flor de la Nochebuena" or "Flower of the Holy Night". Poinsettias grow about 8 feet tall in protected southern flowerbeds of the South Texas homes in which we were raised. Every Christmas they welcome our family back to our childhood homes with their red flowers.

In Mexico, priests first used poinsettias in Nativity processions. Joel Robert Poinsett, the first US Ambassador to Mexico from 1825-1830, sent clippings to his home in South Carolina. Poinsettias, named for Poinsett, is the most popular Christmas plant sold in the United States.

The brightly colored parts of the plant are actually modified leaves known as bracts. The flower cluster is the center part that eventually turns yellow.

When purchasing a poinsettia, the bracts should be completely colored, and the flower cluster should be tight and non-blooming. If the flower cluster is yellow, the plant will not hold as long. Poinsettia shoppers should look for dark green foliage with multiple stems at the base of the plant, choose plants that are not wilted or droopy and check the undersides of leaves for insects (whiteflies and aphids). A wilted plant and wet soil may indicate root rot. The plant should also be 2 ½ times taller than the diameter of the container.

To care for poinsettias, the foil sleeve from which it was packaged should be removed. The soil should be checked daily; properly watered soil should feel cool to the touch and not soggy. The potted plant should be placed in the kitchen sink until the water runs freely out of the drainage holes. If the plant is already wilted, it will need to be watered again 5 minutes later. Allowing the plant to stand in water in a saucer or the foil sleeve will encourage root rot. Poinsettias also need to be protected from cold windows and hot or cold drafts from air ducts and radiators. Constant temperatures of 60-70 degrees Fahrenheit keep a plant in bloom. Bright light, without full sun, is needed for at least 6 hours. The plant should receive twice as many hours of fluorescent light if no natural light is available.

If using cut flowers in an arrangement, the end of the stem can be burned in a candle flame to stop the milky sap from flowing out of it.

Poinsettias are available in red, white, pink, burgundy, marbled and flecked colors.

Growing Greens

By Tim Schreck, JCMG

When I was growing up, I was not exposed to too much culinary diversity. My dad and mom were from Missouri, so my dinners were meat, potatoes, corn or green beans. That was the way my dad liked it, and no one questioned it. Even after I moved out on my own, I slowly added some variety to my diet with Mexican and Chinese foods. Over the last ten years, my wife has exposed me to so many different types of food and flavors. One of the dishes she cooks very well is mustard greens. My mom tried them once when I was a teenager, and it was bad, really, really bad. After that, I was reluctant to get near them. My wife showed me that if you pick the leaves young and cook them with bacon grease, they are very tasty.

Mustard greens, or Indian Greens, originated in India over 5,000 years ago and then migrated into China. Both places extensively use greens to add spice to cuisine and medically for its anti-inflammatory properties. Greens migrated to Africa, Europe and then to America in many African-American dishes. The word mustard, Latin, comes from the use of the seeds in the 'must' or the first step in making wine.

Mustard greens are a staple in the south during the winter. The plants grow well in the cool weather, and the leaves are also not as spicy during the cooler season. The seeds can be planted from now through the end of December here

in Southeast Texas. It is best to plant three areas of greens two weeks apart. This way there will be a continuous supply of young leaves until the first frost. Mustard green plants are not too particular but do not like heavy clay soils or soggy areas. The soil should be prepared with a general fertilizer before planting. If seeds are planted, three seeds should be placed in each hole, ten inches apart, and as they sprout, they need to be thinned out to one plant. The seeds are very small and should not be planted any deeper than 1/8 of an inch.

The best leaves to harvest are the outer leaves from the stalk that are about as long as your hand. It may depend on the variety, but it is a good length to start. As the leaves and stalk get bigger, the flavor becomes spicier. In the spring, the flavor also gets spicier as the days get hotter and longer until the plant finally bolts and produces seeds.

In addition, growing in the cooler weather decreases insect and disease issues. Usually a light dusting will keep the insects under control and mulching will keep the rain from splashing soil onto the plants reducing the impact of diseases.

Since greens are easy and fast growing, try growing greens in your garden, in a pot, or in a bare spot in your flower garden this year.

44th Annual Fruit and Vegetable Show



Winners: Best Vegetable, Audrey Fulton; Best Fruit, Glynell Winston; Best Processed Food, Donna Hopkins; Best Herb, Eileen Slater; Youth Category, Audrey Fulton; Best of Show, Audrey Fulton.

Beating The Weather With Proper Soil Preparation *By Melissa Starr, JCMG*

The weather this year has been a challenge for many gardeners. While some have been successful, other gardens have failed. Flooding rains this spring were followed by a month of hot, dry weather. When it seemed there would be relief, inches and inches of rain fell in August. What is a gardener to do during this type of weather? The key to success is proper soil preparation and raised bed construction.

Gardens in Southeast Texas need to be able to drain well after heavy rains, but still hold enough water for plants to survive during periods of dry weather. Texas A&M's Earth-Kind® program provides a method for building raised beds that not only allow drainage of excess water, but also conserve water during times of drought.

When building a raised bed, the goal is to have healthy soil. Healthy soil allows drainage of excess water, while retaining the nutrients and water necessary for plants to grow expanded root systems. To build a raised bed, start by marking out the space for the raised bed and removing the top 3" to 4" of native soil and sod to prevent weeds from growing later. Line the bed with an edging material such as landscape timbers

rock, brick or concrete blocks. Raised beds should be at least 6" tall for good drainage. A semi-permeable weed barrier can be placed at the bottom of the bed to prevent grass and weeds from growing; however, it will not prevent nut sedge from growing. That is the reason weed removal is important before building your beds. Now would also be a good time to install any irrigation hoses/pipes that will be used. Drip irrigation is the best way to efficiently water plants without wasting water. Next, add a high quality landscape soil mix, leaving 2" to 3" of space at the top of your edging material. Work in 3" of fully finished compost, which looks like coffee grounds, to your mix. DO NOT till the native soil underneath; tilling will activate any leftover weed seeds. The soil will drain better if it is slightly higher in the middle of the bed. Pat the soil down slightly, put in your plants and add 3"-4" of mulch on top of the soil. Mulch helps retain water and prevent weeds from growing. Mulch breaks down over time, so add more mulch about twice a year. Do not allow the level of the soil to fall below the edging of your bed. This will prevent the bed from draining adequately.

Falling For Bulbs

By Eileen Slater, JCMG

Visiting a local big box store, I spied beautiful spring flowering bulbs-tulips, hyacinths, daffodils and lilies! Buy bulbs while they are fresh with no blemishes. Dried up and moldy bulbs will not bloom properly.

Chill tulips and hyacinths bulbs in the lower part of your refrigerator as soon as you purchase them and before planting. Tulips and hyacinths require refrigeration for 60 days before planting. No other spring bulb needs this treatment. Place the bulbs in a paper bag and away from fruits as apples and bananas. These fruits give off ethylene gas which can kill the flower bud inside any bulbs. Warmth and moisture will signal the bulbs to start growing. Check every two weeks to be sure they are not getting moldy or soft.

Tulips and hyacinths provide early spring blooms. Tulips are beautiful but seldom repeat blooms. Discard tulips at the end of the blooming season. Hyacinth flowers have a pleasant aroma. New tulip and hyacinth bulbs must be purchased and planted every year.

The JCMG President's, Tina Gonzales, favorite bulb is the amaryllis. "They have bold, intricate, huge flowers. The long leaves stay green throughout the year. They have been multiplying for 15 years in my yard, and I can move them whenever I want." She has planted the bulbs in masses for spectacular color in her yard.

Daffodils or narcissus are known for large trumpet shaped flowers. In Texas daffodils provide a dependable and longer bloom period, requires no special handling and some will come back year after year. Remember to let the leaves remain on the bulb until they are entirely dry to restore their food bank.

Plant after the soil temperature is 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Higher soil temperatures will cause the bulbs to rot. Planting time is usually in November through January. Most planted bulbs need 4-6 hours of sunlight each day and do well in slightly acid soil. The soil texture should be porous and crumbly. The well-drained soil needs well-rotted manure mixed in it. Tulip bulbs will rot in wet soil. Planting depth for most bulbs in Texas is 2 times their height. If you add mulch, factor it into the planting depth. Position it so that the peaked end points up. That's where the flower stems emerge. The flatter, usually larger end, goes at the bottom of the planting hole.

Planting Bulbs



1



2



3



4

To force an amaryllis bulb to bloom, place in a warm, sunny place above 70 degrees

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.

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

Golden Triangle Citrus Show

Enter November 16, 9-4 or

November 17, 9-Noon

Entries are free

Program November 17

6-8:30pm \$10/person

Master Gardener Shortcourse

January 17 through 27

9am—4pm Cost \$175

Registration due by December 16

Call for registration form or get it on
the website www.jefferson.agrilife.org

Christmas Party and

Intern Graduation

December 10th

Beaumont Botanical Garden

Appetizers 6pm; Dinner 7pm

\$10/person by Nov. 29

Pay at November meeting or
send to Extension Office