

November 2014

Volume 6, Issue 4



Official Newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners

Inside this issue:

<i>Growing Garlic in Southeast Texas</i>	2
<i>Chili Peppers</i>	3
<i>Generational Gardening</i>	4
<i>Fall Plant Sale Pictures</i>	5
<i>Christmas Cactus</i>	6
<i>Help Make The World A Little Sweeter</i>	7
<i>Purple Coneflowers</i>	8
<i>My Garden Journal</i>	9
<i>Announcements</i>	10

## *November Events By Cecil Hightower, JCMG*

As the days become shorter and October slowly fades into the distance in our rear view mirror, we begin preparing for November and the various events, holidays and garden chores this month brings with it.

Many of you have probably already started pulling up spent summer annuals and preparing your flower beds for plantings of pansies, calendulas and snapdragons, and some may even be harvesting mustard greens and lettuce if you jumped the gun and got your fall vegetables in early. At our demonstration garden we've already had several pickings of turnip and mustard greens and we're anxiously eyeing the robustly growing broccoli we planted in July for signs of those delicious, green crowns. Now that the plant sale is behind us, we've turned our attention to the remaining empty flower and vegetable beds and are planting them in earnest. Thanks to a total, all-out effort of so many Master Gardeners and interns over the last few months the garden is looking as beautiful as it ever has which is a testament to the effectiveness of working together for a common goal.

The Master Gardener calendar for November contains a couple of events we look forward to each year.

One is the work day we hold at the Veteran's Memorial Park in Port Arthur to clean up and plant fresh flowers in preparation for the big Veteran's Day celebration held there on November 11th. This year we will gather at the park on Friday, November 7th from 8:00 - noon to show our respect and gratitude to those who so valiantly served our country by grooming the park that so beautifully honors them. Also in November the Jefferson County Horticulture Committee will hold it's annual Citrus Show and many Master Gardeners will help in the staging of this event at the AgriLife auditorium. This should be a 'must' on your to-do list as you will get to see and taste a staggering array of many varieties of locally grown citrus as well as garner educational tips on growing your own from the renowned expert and Master Gardener Bonnie Childers and a panel of citrus specialists from Texas A&M.

November, as you see, has a lot to offer and, as we will acknowledge later in the month, a lot for which to be thankful...

Happy Thanksgiving!

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

Upcoming Meeting Dates:

November 13 - "Honoring Our Veterans", Sandra Womack, President of Patriot Guards

December 11 — Christmas Party at Tyrrell Park

January 8 — Speaker TBA

## *Growing Garlic in Southeast Texas*

### *By Tim Schreck, JCMG*

Almost everyone likes the taste or smell of garlic. Garlic mashed potatoes, garlic in spaghetti sauce, garlic butter on bread; I have fallen in love with pickled garlic cloves in the last few months. Garlic comes from an old English word, garleac, meaning spear leek. Garlic is a bulb and comes from the allium family along with onion, leek, chives, and other flowering bulbs. It was common across central Asia over 7000 years ago and was once used as currency in Egypt since it was so highly priced. It moved its way into Europe but never took hold in cuisine farther west than Italy. It was not until the 1940's that Americans picked it up with Italian cooking. With currently over 600 varieties, I am sure you can find a variety to suit your taste buds.

Now is the right time to plant garlic in this area. The plants need to get a good root system in before the cool of winter slows or stops the top growth. This is one of several tricky parts of growing garlic. You want to get the cloves in the ground early enough for them to get a good root system going but not too much top growth. You also want it late enough in the year that the soil temperatures stay below 60 degrees most days. Garlic likes loose well drained soil. Sandy soil with large amounts of compost works really well. The roots cannot dry out

or it will affect the growth of the plant and its ability to get through the winter healthy.

The next set of factors here in Southeast Texas which helps with growing garlic, is day length, air temperature, and soil temperature. In the spring we cannot change day length, but we can affect air temperature and soil temperature by using shade and mulch to keep temperatures down. Bulbing begins when the soil temperature is above 60 degrees and ends when soil temperature reaches 85-90 degrees. Using mulch to keep the soil temperature down will allow more time for the plant to produce more leaves later in the bright



spring sunlight. Some early varieties mature in May but most will be ready in July.

There are two types of garlic, hardneck and softneck. Softneck grows better, in general, in the south. Your best bet is to stop by an old feed store since they know what will grow well here. If you buy online here are some varieties to try: Thema-drone (buttery), Lorz Italian (strong flavor), Artichoke or Silver Skin.

## *Chili Peppers*

### *By Melissa Starr, JCMG*

If your tongue is burning, your eyes are watering, and you can't stop sneezing, then you probably just ate a chili pepper. Chili peppers are high in the Vitamin A and C, and one red pepper can meet the daily requirements for these two antioxidants. However, these fiery red delights, when hot enough, can blister your tongue and send you running for a glass of cold milk.

The heat of peppers comes from the substance capsaicin and is measured in

Scoville units, the amount of water needed to dilute the pepper until you can't feel the heat.

One million drops of water is needed to dilute the heat of 1.5 Scoville units. Most people are familiar with the com-

mon jalapeno pepper (2,500-8,000 Scoville units), but have you ever grown or tasted the ghost pepper (1,000,000 Scoville units) or the hottest pepper in the world, the Carolina Reaper (1,200,000 Scoville units)?

This year many gardeners have been blessed with an overabundance of peppers. What do you do if you have more peppers than you want, and you have shared so many that your friends don't want them either? Most people don't want to sit and eat just chili peppers, and they normally use only one or two peppers at a time when cooking. Last year and this year, we grew habanero, ghost peppers, and scorpion peppers (hotter than the ghost pepper).



When it was time to harvest, I didn't want to eat the pepper by itself because the ghost pepper itself would blister my tongue. However, I didn't want to waste them either. Therefore, I froze some, dehydrated some, pickled some, and made jelly out of the rest. When you freeze peppers chop them to the desired size, put them on a cookie sheet or small tray, and set them in the freezer. After

frozen, transfer them to a plastic zipper bag and use as needed. To dehydrate peppers, put them on a dehydrator or in the oven at 150 degrees until they are crisp, but not burnt. Then store them in a cool dry place, or put them in a coffee grinder (one used only for peppers) and grind them into a powder. Don't forget to wear gloves and a mask when working with chili peppers.

Is it worth it to grow hot peppers if they are going to set your mouth on fire? First, it is fun to say that you have grown the hottest peppers in the world. In addition, chili peppers, especially the ghost pepper, have excellent flavor as long as you use a tiny amount. I can take a pinch of ghost pepper powder and flavor a whole pot of chili. Delicious!



## *Generational Gardening* *By Tim Schreck, JCMG*

Remembering . . . .

I was born in 1967, and now that feels like a long time ago. I am starting to feel my age in many ways and that has given me time to look back to when I was a kid growing up in Missouri. It makes me ponder what the land meant to me back then and what it means to me now.

We lived in a small farming town. All the houses we rented had a good sized garden plot in the backyard.

These types of gardens fed the first settlers in the late 1800's, families through World War I and II, and then my family in the 1970s. I can remember my dad digging up gardens at each of these houses by hand and then later with a gas powered tiller. I remember being little, and not being much help of course, but still watching my parents plant tomatoes, beans, and corn. We planted what I thought was tons of potatoes and much more corn on the acre plot out at grandpa's farm that we tended to also.

On cool summer nights, when I was about 7 or 8, my sisters and I would crawl around the garden pulling weeds a couple times a week. I can remember my dad digging up potatoes with a four tine pitchfork and my sisters and I pulling potatoes out and filling bushel baskets over and over again. (Yes, in Missouri you can

turn the ground over with a pitchfork.) The potatoes were piled in the station wagon and brought home to be placed in the dirt floor basement under the house to keep all winter.

For what seemed like every summer afternoon for months, we picked green beans. (I am sure it was only for a few weeks.) We kids would snap green beans on the porch and mom would can them. Air conditioning was not an option back then so you can imagine the heat in a small kitchen. If we were not snapping beans, we were shucking corn. Then mom and dad would cut it off the cob for more canning or freezing. It was always dark when we were done, so we would run around the yard getting eaten up by chiggers and catching lightning bugs until it was too dark to see anymore.

I am running down this road of nostalgia because my dad will not be with me much longer, and these are memories he will leave me and part of why I love to garden. My dad planted for survival, but I garden for the enjoyment. I am passing that on to my kids. My great great grand kids may not remember my name, but I hope my love of gardening continues to pass from generation to generation.



# Fall Plant Sale





## *Christmas Cactus*

*By Melissa Starr, JCMG*

You have searched around for the perfect Christmas cactus and found one with tight buds that should open in a few days. You bring it home and put it next to a sunny window. However, the next week, the buds don't open, they fall off. Your heart sinks, and you wonder what went wrong. There are three reasons for this cactus debacle.

Christmas cactus is not the same as cactus grown in the desert. They do not like to dry out completely. If they do, they will drop their buds. On the other hand, keeping them too wet will also cause the buds to fall off. Water only when the soil is dry one inch deep. Also make sure your cactus has enough light. If the plant does not get enough light, it will drop its buds and redirect growth to the lower limbs of the plant. Finally, don't move the plant too much. Quick movements will cause the buds to fall off.

Now that your cactus has bloomed, you may be wondering if it will bloom again next year.

Christmas cactus has a specific bloom cycle that is triggered by temperature and light. They prefer to set blooms when temperatures are 58-65 degrees. They also need 12 hours of uninterrupted darkness for bud formation to occur. This means that the plant cannot have any porch lights or indoor lights shining on it during the night time hours.

There are two ways to ensure that your cactus has the right conditions to set blooms. First, you can leave it indoors in a cool window with natural darkness all night. In other words, you cannot turn the lights on in that room. The second option is to grow your cactus in a pot outdoors where it can experience cool temperatures at night. Then bring it indoors before the first frost. If it cannot get 12 hours of natural darkness outdoors, cover it with a box during the night time hours. Remove the box during the day. Once buds have formed on your cactus, you will not need to cover it at night. Warmer temperatures and intermittent light will not stop blooming once the buds have set. If you follow these tips, Christmas cactus can bloom beautifully every December for years to come.



## *Help Make The World A Little Sweeter* *By Jane McBride, JCMG*

"She's as sweet as Tupelo honey..." Van Morrison's inimitable voice makes that song one of my favorites. The beautiful melody and lyrics also make me grateful for the nectar of the bees. And when Blake Shelton sings, "You'll be my honeysuckle, I'll be your honey bee," I'm all in.

Just for grins, I Googled honey song lyrics. There are more than 5,000 tunes with a lyrical nod. When you want to indicate something sweet, honey comes to mind. Honey also is among the most common term of endearment between sweethearts.

Can you imagine a world without honey? This Southern girl doesn't want to contemplate such a tragedy.

As most of you know by now, honey bees are dying in alarming numbers, casualties in part of a world stupidly in love with chemicals. The big chem companies have somehow convinced us that nature doesn't know nearly as much as we do – and that anything we don't want co-existing in our flower beds or lawns should be poisoned. Chemicals like Roundup are poison, and not just to plants. Glyphosate is high on the toxicity list for bees and other beneficial insects.

Thanks to the hard work of journalists, botanists, naturalists, farmers, beekeepers and others, the public is

beginning to understand how dire the situation is and how much work needs to be done to protect bees and their environment. The publicity on bee decline and the devastating effect it has on crops helped create an interest in beekeeping. You don't have to have acreage or live in the country; large backyards are fine.

Jefferson County Master Gardeners support efforts to educate the public about bees and beekeeping. We partner with area beekeepers to provide a forum for seminars and exposure through our annual Spring and Fall Plant Sales. We devote a portion of our demonstration garden to bees.

Beekeeping is a fascinating and rewarding endeavor. I won't call it a hobby because it goes much deeper. If you've ever considered making a home for bees, we've got the perfect opportunity to learn more about it.

On Saturday, Sept. 13, our Horticulture Committee hosted "Beekeeping for Beginners." The day-long program included two sessions and lunch, and we had a packed house. Guest speakers were Bryan and Tammy Muldrow, a dedicated pair of local beekeepers whose passion for these most industrious of insects is contagious.

If you missed this year's seminar, we hope you can attend next year.



## *Purple Coneflowers*

### *By Micah Shanks, JCMG*

When looking for an easy care addition to your landscape, the purple coneflower is one of the most beautiful native wildflowers to be found in Texas. Giving the appearance of a purple daisy, it doesn't take long to get this beauty established and then it will reseed on its own, providing years and years of joy.

The most common purple can grow to three feet tall and last for weeks in the garden or as cut flowers in the home. A faithful perennial, coneflower is also known as Echinacea, which is valued for its immune building properties. All parts of the plant can be used in teas but the roots and seeds have the strongest concentration of what you need to fight off colds and flu. Once naturally abundant in the wild, they are now uncommon because of centuries of harvesting for medicinal uses.

The flower is a spectacular standout in the garden. Besides the Texas native purple, there are many other coneflower varieties available from seed or transplants offered by local nurseries or reputable seed catalogs. The newer ones are not cheap, so make sure you know the company you are doing business with. Plant breeders are cultivating new varieties all the time. We have a choice of white, hot pink, yellow, neon orange, lime green. Centers can vary. Some are brown, others black, pink, green, or orange.

They can grow to 2-3 feet and may need staking. There are also smaller versions that only grow to 12 inches.

The cultivars known as novelty cone-flowers require a bit more care in Texas than the native cone-flowers. These more expensive plants need morning sun and afternoon shade. An occasional dose of 10-10-10 fertilizer and regular watering will keep them healthy. Always remember to mulch to retain water and keep the roots cool in summer and warm in winter.

Many growers prefer to grow these in containers. With so many colors and styles to choose from, consider using cone-flowers in your garden. It will soon become one of your favorites.





## *My Garden Journal* *By Ann Bares , JCMG*

In January, 1999 I wrote this first entry in my first Garden Journal: "Raked leaves from beds, found the first strawberry!"

It was a cold day, but sunny, and I was a new gardener with more enthusiasm than expertise, learning by trial and error, channeling the hours I'd spent with my Granddaddy in his garden. It was there that the seeds I'd planted that always came up first, and where the seeds of my love of growing things bloomed.

I filled that journal with the sweat of my brow, the successes and the failures, details of the when and where and why of each day's work. I wrote of violets that appeared from nowhere, gifts from the many birds that nested in our big holly tree I'm sure. I dug them up and moved to other beds, rescued from the mower, and by February I was visualizing a garden in bloom by summer.

The Journal pages filled up quickly, and by spring I had learned that the two hanging baskets that held colorful bedding plants winding their way through the holly and the swing set were both in the Thunbergia family and were very healthy vines. It was a lesson in relocation and reading labels.

In May, I brought home a container of 3,000 Ladybugs from an Austin nursery, where I spent hours wandering, and wishing for more room in my beds. I released them with a "welcome to our garden" late in the evening, as I was instructed, and never saw any of them again.

In June the pages of the Journal were full of days spent weeding, adding new plants, soaker hoses and bird feeders. Late in the month I "mulched roses, begonias and hydrangeas with new type mulch made from recycled paper nuggets.

After returning from a two week trip I wrote "Rained every day here, nothing died, but the mulch doubled/tripled in size and I had to clear away from all plants in beds and take it out of pots where some things smothered."

As summer progressed my notes focused on my new greenhouse taking shape, our fish pond's plants and fish cohabitating nicely, and the ever-present weeding, mulching, and fall feeding.

I realize as I read this first Journal how much I learned that year, trial and error, success and failure, and what poison ivy looks like, and how to treat it. Many more journals would come, notebooks full of magazine pictures of gardens, plants, ideas and dreams, some realized and some not. The following year I started another journey, learning from the pros as I sat in the Master Gardener Class of 2000. It's been 15 years since, with lots of classes, lots of ideas shared, and always something new to learn.

But that first page really says it all: "Sitting in the swing, glass of raspberry mint tea, jar of zinnias, mint, and 4 O'clocks on the table, locust making their evening noise, and birds chiming in. It's really noisy! There's a nice breeze, it's cooling off already. Peace."

## The Latest Dirt

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

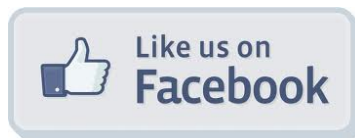
Phone: 409-835-8461  
Fax: 409-839-2310  
Hotline: 409-835-8742



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.

#### 2014 Officers

President—Tony Lucenti

Vice President—Toni Clark

Secretary—Melissa Starr

Treasurer—Dorothy Norris

At Large— Cecil Hightower, Stellina Reed,  
Phyllis Smith

Past President—Melody Weaver

## Announcements

**Veteran's Memorial  
Park Workday  
Port Arthur  
November 7  
8am until Noon**

**Christmas Party and  
Awards  
December 11  
Tyrrell Park**

**Golden Triangle  
Citrus Show  
November 20, 6-8:30 pm  
Texas AgriLife  
Extension Auditorium  
Entries accepted November  
19 from 9-4 and November  
20 from 8-Noon**