

November 2015

Volume 7, Issue 4



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# The Latest Dirt

Official Newsletter of the Jefferson County Master Gardeners

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

### Upcoming Meeting Dates:

November 12 -  
"Honoring Our Veterans",

December 10 —  
Christmas Party at  
Tyrrell Park

January 14 — Speaker  
TBA

October has been a glorious month for weather and activities. We started the month with our Fall Plant Sale. Even though there were many activities in the community, we still had a great turn-out and many people were excited to bring home rare and unusual plants. Many attendees of the Urban Fruit Tree Workshop, which occurred a week earlier, came looking for hard to find fruit tree varieties. Phyllis and Ann Bares' "Lasagna Gardening" workshop was well attended and provided the public with information on a great method of no-dig gardening. On October 17, we held a vegetable seminar with Paul Eyre and Patty Leander. Their workshop is always fun and left the audience with an eagerness to cultivate a fall garden. November is here, and winter will soon be upon us. However, that doesn't mean the JCMGs stop working.

On November 19, we will be on hand to help the Horticulture Committee with their annual Golden Triangle Citrus Show. Bring any citrus that you want to enter to the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office from 9:00 am – 4:00 pm on Wednesday November 18<sup>th</sup> or from 9:00 - Noon on Thursday, November 19<sup>th</sup>. The program and awards are Thursday, November 19<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 pm - 8:30 pm. Featured Speakers will be Citrus Specialists, Jim Hearn and Robert Saldana from Texas A&M Univ. Weslaco Citrus Center. Bonnie Childers, our expert from Southeast Texas, will also be on hand to answer your questions.

On December 10 at 6:00 pm, we will hold our annual Christmas party at the Beaumont Botanical Gardens in Tyrrell Park. Glenn Watz will be the chef, and he has prepared a delicious menu for us.

### *Upcoming Events (continued)*

During the party, we will also crown our 2015 Master Gardener of the Year and introduce our new officers for 2016. The new officers include: Tina Gonzales, President; Alina Blanchard, Vice-President; Eileen Slater, Secretary; Joyce Logan, Treasurer; James Butaud, Member-at-Large; Lisa Hitt, Member-at-Large; and Glenn Watz, Member-at-Large. Don't miss it!

January is cold, but there is still no rest for the JCMGs. We will have our 2016 Master Gardener Short Course from January 11-22, 9:00 – 4:00 M-F. We have a great line-up of speakers and topics including organic gardening, soil fertility, home fruit production, herb gardening, insect management, native plants, vegetable gardening, lawn care, and many more. If you or someone you know would like to become a Master Gardener, go to the “How Can I Become a Master Gardener?” page of our web site (<http://txmg.org/jcmg>) for more information. We will also post the class schedule there if any current Master Gardeners want to come and participate.

We hope to see you at our fall and winter events, and don't forget that Spring Market Day will be here sooner than you think (tentatively March 19)! Stay tuned for any changes and more details.

### *Shortcourse Agenda*

**January 11**—Welcome, Program Requirement, Conflict Management and Botany for MGs

**January 12**—Soil & Fertility, Earthkind Landscaping, Composting

**January 13**—Insect Pest ID & Management, Water Gardening

**January 14**—Landscaping with Natives, Organic Gardening, Urban Tree Management

**January 15**—Jr Master Gardeners, Turf Management

**January 18**—(classes held at Airport) Test Garden Tour, Vermicompost, Propagation, Pruning

**January 19**—Home Fruit Production Plant Disease ID & Management

**January 20**—Vegetable Gardening Top Garden Mistakes, Urban Greenhouses

**January 21**—Growing Roses, Herb Gardening

**January 22**—Landscape Design, Pesticide Safety, Exam & Survey

## *Persimmons*

### *By Melissa Starr, JCMG*

Fall is a delightful time of year. Pumpkins of various sizes, shapes, and colors pop up in stores and farmer's markets, leaves begin to change from green to golden hues of yellow, yellow wildflowers flourish along roadsides, and strange "orange balls" hang from leafless trees. While traveling down the highway, the sight of these leafless trees with "orange ornaments" deserves a second look. Upon closer examination, this strange-looking fruit is the persimmon.

Persimmon trees have been a part of the landscape for centuries. The fruit is high in Vitamin A and other nutrients, and the wood is loved by golf club makers and woodworkers. The American Persimmon is native to the United States and was much loved by the Native Americans. Its small fruit are astringent, very tart until fully ripe. Once they ripen to a soft mushy texture, they are very tasty. My grandfather used to tell a story about a time he and his brother ate unripe persimmons in the piney woods of East Texas. They ate so many that their mouths puckered. When they arrived home and tried to speak, they could only make nonsense sounds.

Japanese persimmons are very popular today. They are grafted onto the American persimmon rootstock, which allows them to grow in almost any soil type found in Texas. The Fuyu (non-astringent) and the Hachiya (astringent)

are the most common. Many people like the Fuyu because they can be picked and used when they are firm. Be aware that once picked, the persimmon will continue to ripen, so use it before it rots or freeze the pulp for future use.

Persimmons are an under utilized fruit in Southeast Texas. I have driven past houses with a persimmon tree in their front yard and seen countless fruit rotting on the ground. Persimmons can be very versatile. In Indiana they make persimmon pudding, a dessert which is the consistency of pumpkin pie without the crust. On the internet you can also find recipes for everything from persimmon jam to persimmon muffins.

Persimmons are extremely easy to grow since it is not necessary to spray them, and fertilizer applications are kept at a minimum. To grow a persimmon, plant the tree the same depth as the pot and thoroughly water the ground. This will allow the soil to settle around the tree. Do not fertilize your tree yet. Once the roots are established, you can give it a small amount of fertilizer once in the spring. If the new shoots grow more than three feet long, reduce the amount fertilizer. Persimmons are pruned to a central leader, one main trunk, during the first few seasons. During the winter months, crossover and broken branches are removed. If rainfall is low in the spring or summer, water the tree. For more information, visit <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu>, select "Fruit & Nut Resources," and then select "Persimmons."

## *Planting A Fall Perennial Border*

### *By Micah Shanks, JCMG*

As temperatures become cooler and more tolerable, it's a great time to get back into the garden. If you haven't planted a fall garden yet, you still have time. Transplants of broccoli, cauliflower, swiss chard, and Brussels sprouts are now available. For something quick and simple, throw some carrot seeds in a pot of finely sifted soil for perfectly straight carrots in a few months. Now is also the best time to plant trees and shrubs. If you have been planning to rework an area in your yard, get out those plans and get after it!

Planting a perennial border can be a fun project for fall. Perennials are those plants that come back year after year as compared to annuals that only last for one season and have to be replaced. Plot out your design on paper, making sure not to put anything in straight rows. Nothing grows naturally in a straight line. The border needs to look as if the plants just popped up where they are. Think sweeping curves. If you need a visual aid, lay out a garden hose or rope to get the look you want. Plant in drifts or clumps all the while keeping in mind how tall the plant will be at maturity. Plant taller varieties at the back of the border, mid-size plants in the middle, and of course, smaller plants in the front. Consider which color combinations to use. Do you like cool colors or warm colors? Warm colors can create an intimate space while cool colors bring a sense of harmony and tranquility. As a rule of thumb, in a small space, use more cool colors and less warm because cool colors give the area more of an open feel. When choosing plants, remember to include those that are grown only for foliage ie: ferns, ginger, hostas, etc. Pair strong textured foliage with warm colors and delicate textures with cool colors. You can create a monochromatic theme such as only white, which can be very dramatic against green foliage, or pair warm with cool colors for a balanced unified landscape. Also take into consideration the bloom times of your plants. The

goal is to have something in bloom year 'round. You will be rewarded with an ever- changing display of color throughout the seasons.

Need help deciding what to do? There are lots of excellent gardening magazines and books available. One of my favorite books is Doug Welch's Texas Garden Almanac which gives month by month advice on what to do in each area of Texas. Another good reference book to have on hand is The Lone Star Gardener's Book of Lists. There is also a wealth of information online including pictures of breathtaking gardens. It only takes some planning and you can create your own personal paradise. Whatever you decide, always give yourself permission to make changes! Gardening is not an exact science. It is an experiment and an adventure!

Member Micah Shanks is a featured writer in the November –December issue of Texas Gardener Magazine. Texas Gardener, with a subscription base of 26,000, is one of the most trusted publications for gardeners in all parts of the state. Regular writers include such well known names in horticulture as Greg Grant, Skip Richter and Patty Leander.



"I have always enjoyed writing. As I was flipping through my latest Texas Gardener magazine, I came across a column called "Between Neighbors" which is always written by free lancers. It dawned on me that I could probably do that. I looked up the submission rules, knocked out an essay and emailed it to the editor. Within two hours, I was accepted! I'm pretty fired up about that. So are my grandkids because their pictures are attached to the article and for some reason, they think they are going to make a lot of money from it."

The November-December issue is available in late October.



## *Gifts From The Garden*

### *By Melissa Starr, JCMG*

Are you looking for a gift for someone who has everything? Do you want to save money this holiday season, but you still want to give a present to everyone on your list? Try giving gifts from your garden. Surprise your friends and family with a basket full of delectable delights or an aromatherapy gift that will have them asking for more.

If you have an abundance of citrus fruit, you can make a tantalizing fruit basket that will tickle the taste buds. Dehydrated oranges/satsumas also make great additions to potpourri or a wassail spice bag. If bags of blueberries, blackberries, or other fruit from your spring/summer harvest are hiding in your freezer, take them out and make some jelly. With a few jars of jelly and some homemade bread, your friends and family will love you forever. Satsumas and Meyer lemons also make delightful jellies. Try this recipe for Meyer lemon jelly. Take 4 cups of Meyer lemon juice and mix with powdered fruit pectin. Bring to a rolling boil, stirring constantly. Add 7 cups of sugar, bring to a rolling boil, and let it boil for two minutes, stirring constantly through the whole process. Read the directions on the fruit pectin box for canning instructions.

Herbs are also another great resource for gifts. Wash and air dry herbs, and then dehydrate them in a dehydrator or at a low temperature (175 F or lower) in the oven. Fragrant herbs can be used to make potpourri, herbal bath sachets, and other aromatherapy products. The

calming smell of lavender or the invigorating aroma of rosemary will delight the senses, while dried roses, zinnias, and marigolds add a splash of color to the mix. Edible herbs can be used to make tea bags, herb and spice blends, herbal oils, and herbal vinegars. Homemade Italian seasoning can be made by combining dried basil, marjoram, oregano, cut and sifted rosemary leaves, thyme, and garlic powder. Package the mix in a glass bottle, and tie with a bow. Add olive oil



to this seasoning mix, and you have a savory herbal bread dip. If you want to really impress your family, you can make herbal lotions, soaps, and other toiletries.

This Christmas let the aromatic smells of

herbs and the delicious flavors of your bountiful harvest become delightful gifts for your loved ones.

## *Brassicas—On Your Table This Winter?*

### *By Tim Schreck, JCMG*

Last year, early freezing temperatures took me a little by surprise. I was hoping to have a couple more weeks of cool temperatures before the first freeze. I did, however, have some of my favorite vegetables, broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce, Brussels sprouts, and cabbage in the ground, and they did very well.

Most of these are known as Brassicas and are a group of plants coming from the mustard family. The Latin word Brassica comes from the Celtic word meaning cabbage. This group is also known as Cole crops coming from the Latin word of caulis meaning stem from where cauliflower originates. Scholars found many references in

Mediterranean and English writings of long stem cabbages growing in the cool shades of the cliffs. Most of these type plants are believed to have originated near Italy and moved north and east. These plants sustained people in England, France, and northern European countries for centuries where their fall season is, much of the time, long, cool, wet, and overcast. These plants easily survive all these conditions.

These plants are very good for you in many ways. They are rich in vitamin C, carotenoids, and other complex compounds that your body cannot produce on its own. Have you ever noticed that if you cook any of these vegetables too long they give off a sour or sulfur smell?

Cooking these vegetables breaks down the compounds into more unpleasant tasting and smelling compounds. The best way to eat these vegetables is raw or lightly steamed.

Growing these crops is easy in Southeast Texas. You can still get transplants at the local feed stores or nurseries and you can still get a good winter crop if you just get started. These plants love nice, rich well-

drained soil. Since they are slow growing, they can handle some shade especially here when we do not know from one week to the next if it will be near freezing or in the upper 70's. Speaking of freezing, Brassicas can handle freezing temperatures and can even survive under snow. Water freezes at 32 degrees and that is what most plant

and leaf tissue is made of. When the water in the leaves freezes it expands and contracts killing the plant tissue. Brassicas, instead of water, have a mixture of the complex compounds mentioned above and a higher concentration of sugar, in essence a type of antifreeze. This lowers the freezing point in the plant allowing it to survive a good hard freeze.

Brassicas are some of the most interesting vegetables. Everyone knows of white cauliflower and green broccoli or cabbage. What about trying yellow, orange or lime green cauliflower? Ever seen purple broccoli heads? Cabbages can come in green, yellow or purple. Search the web for more interesting facts.



## *Ruellia, The Rogue Petunia?*

*By Ann Bares, JCMG*

My mother-in-law was a casual gardener, throwing the coffee grounds and apple peels out the kitchen door and then tilling them into the little patch that would become tomatoes, greens or compost for the cuttings or seeds she'd gathered from friends, and put into whatever empty jar or can that was available. It was said, but never documented, that her tomato stakes bloomed. The west side of her house, along the driveway, was just a grassy, weedy strip. It was not wide enough for a bed, but each year sported some dark purple blooms on one to two foot stems. When the time came, her assortment of healthy, but often unidentified plants, went to whoever had a place for them. The driveway plants were left in the ground. No one thought of digging them up until the next spring when they came back from their winter rest. Then we decided to take a few home, mostly for sentimental reasons. My gardens were mostly borders across the back fence and around my cottage garden, so I dug a few of them into wherever there was a bare spot.

Now, forward 18 years. The few small plants from the driveway, for many years unidentified and unnamed, have become like the once welcome guests that overstayed their welcome, and no amount of hints will make them leave. It was after I had tried to dig them up, and thin them out, that I learned the roots of the ruellia went deep and long, sending up their stalks randomly. The first time I filled a wheelbarrow with the wilted leaves and stems, I was sure they were gone and planted other less invasive plants in their place, only to be greeted in the early spring

with even more ruellias, bigger and more plentiful than ever. When the storm took our wooden fence down, and all but a few plants remained, I started over with more shrubs and less garden plants. A small purple flower caught my eye one morning under the azalea, and on closer look, there were even more closer to the fence and taller. The ruellias were back and filled in the spaces before my seeds and transplants had even had time to root! It was time for professional advice! Going on line, and adding to my collection of gardening books, I quickly learned it was too little too late!

Unfortunately, my ruellia is the one most people know as Mexican petunia or *Ruellia brittoniana*. Our native ruellia, *Ruellia nudiflora*, is not as tall or as aggressive. Listed in some gardening books as an annual in North Texas, in our area of SETX, it's listed as a perennial, popular ornamental plant and not closely related to petunias. While the stems and leaves die back, the roots and root systems survive even the coldest, wettest winters, multiplying in both sun and shade. The blooms, a beautiful intense purple, last only one day, but there are many on one stem, often six or more at the top and others scattered down the stem. The leaves are food for the caterpillar of several moths and butterflies, and the hummingbirds enjoy their trumpet shaped blooms. In the last two years, with no help from me, some of the older ruellias have grown as tall as the six-foot fence, and are blooming with all the energy of the newest ones.

If you have a space that needs some color, and is in sun or shade, I have ruellias to spare, and I share!



## *Fall Plant Sale*

### *By Melissa Starr JCMG*

Saturday, October 3, the Jefferson County Master Gardeners held their annual fall plant sale. Over 350 people from around the Golden Triangle and a few from the Lakes Area attended. Several new residents of our area, who just moved here from places such as Michigan, Tennessee, and Utah, were thrilled to learn that we can garden year round in our area. Even though there were many activities happening on the same weekend, we had a great response to our sale.

Joyce Logan and eleven other Master Gardeners did a great job selecting plants and planning for the sale. Planning began after the Spring Market Day was over in March. They put in countless hours planting seeds, propagating plants, and searching for unusual and native plants to buy. Many trips were made to wholesale nurseries in East Texas, Southeast Texas, and Houston to make sure we have a great selection at the right price. Many more hours were spent preparing the garden and working to grow and water vegetables, herbs, and other annuals for the sale.

This year we tried to focus on Texas Superstars, native plants, fruit trees, vegetables and education. During the sale, we offered a free demonstration of a no-dig type of gardening called Lasagna Gardening. We had 35 types of fruit trees/plants for sale including citrus, pomegranates, pears, plums, apples (Anna and Golden Dorsett), pears (Biscamp and Tennhosui), mayhaw, blackberries and blueberries. For the first time this year, we also sold strawberries. The most unique fruit tree that we sold was the Sherbet Berry (Phalsa, *Grewia Asiatica*) which originated in India and Southeast Asia. Its berry can

be eaten as a dessert or made syrup. We also offered native plants such as the PawPaw tree, which is a host for the Zebra Swallowtail butterfly caterpillar, and Yellow Berry Yaupon. The perennials offered included some unusual varieties such as Musical Notes Clerodendron and Cat's Whiskers. Texas Superstars, plants that have been tested in all regions of Texas for hardiness, included Belinda's Dream Rose, True Blue Plumbago, Red Flare Hibiscus, and many more. In total, we had over 100 different varieties of plants for sale.

The fall plant sale has been an annual tradition since before I became a Master Gardener in 2002, but this year was a breeze compared to 2005 and 2008 when Hurricanes Rita and Ike barreled through our area. In 2005, Rita hit the week before the plant sale. We had put most of our plants for the sale inside the greenhouse in order to protect them from the winds. We had no idea how strong those winds would be. After we were finally able to return to the garden to look at the damage, we found that our greenhouse had collapsed in the wind, and that most of the plants were damaged beyond repair or dead. The remaining plants were salvaged by Master Gardeners who took care of them at their homes. Needless to say, we did not have a sale that year. In 2008, the sale was scheduled for the first weekend in October, but Ike delayed the sale until the last weekend of October. After the storm, Master Gardeners fertilized and trimmed damaged plants until they were well enough to sell.

We hope you enjoyed the sale this year, but if you missed it, join us next year at Spring Market Day, tentatively scheduled for March 19, 2016, and our next fall plant sale in either September or October of 2016. Watch for future announcements or join us on Facebook.



*Fall Plant Sale*





## *Time Is Running Out!*

### *By Eileen Slater, JCMG*

Tick tock goes the clock. Time for seed planting in fall gardens is running out! Transplant time has arrived!

As a new urban gardener, I glean information from many resources. An excellent fall garden computer source is [aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/). Under Vegetable Resources, click on Easy Gardening Fact Sheets. Learn ways to plant a variety of vegetables in Texas. Continue with Vegetable Variety Recommendations by county or area to find the correct vegetable selections for your garden. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Jefferson County has a fall planting guide available to anyone. Our area's average first killing frost in the fall is November 15. This is an important date to remember when planting so your vegetables produce before the cold weather kills it. Vegetables suitable for planting from seed now are listed below. Remember the dates below are the last days in which to plant these vegetables from seed.

Oct. 1-Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Cauliflower, Collard Greens

Oct. 15-Garlic, Leaf Lettuce, Radishes, Turnips

Nov. 1-Beets, Carrots, Mustard Greens, English Peas, Spinach

Nov. 15-Cabbage, Onion

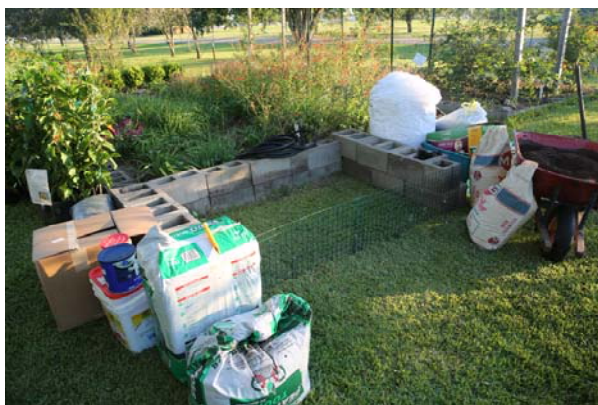
The last bit of gardening advice is from the Fall Vegetable Gardening Guide EHT-056 5/14 written by Larry Stein and Dr. Joe Masabni. Call the number below or access it by computer at: [gregg.agrilife.org/files/2011/04/Fall-Vegetable-Gardening-Guide1.pdf](http://gregg.agrilife.org/files/2011/04/Fall-Vegetable-Gardening-Guide1.pdf). An interesting fact to remember from this document is that fall crops generally do better when started from transplants than from seed. Buy the largest transplants available as their root systems will spread faster and will produce sooner. Water every day for 2 weeks for the transplant's root system to support active plant growth. This is just a small sampling of the wealth of information in this article for fall gardening.

Now you bemoan. I waited too late, and I am out of time. What shall I do? As an urban gardener with limited sun and space available, transplants are perfect to get a head start on your fall vegetable production!

Prepare your fall garden now. Time is running out! Tick Tock!



## *How To Build A Lasagne Garden As demonstrated at the Fall Plant Sale by Phyllis Smith and Ann Bares, JCMG*



1. Pick a sunny place for your garden with a border such as cinder blocks.



2. Cover the space with black & white newspaper.



3. Water well between each layer.



4. Add Peat Moss.



5. Add hay.



6. Add coffee grounds.



## *How To Build A Lasagne Garden (continued)*



7. Add shredded paper and top it with compost.



8. Spread a layer of leaves; then add topsoil.



9. Add some organic fertilizer, water



10. and plants!



## 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.

#### 2015 Officers

President—Toni Clark

Vice President—Herb Bass

Secretary—Melissa Starr

Treasurer—Joyce Logan

At Large—Carolyn Barras, Pat Tolbert

Past President—Tony Lucenti

## Announcements

**Master Gardener  
Shortcourse  
January 11-22  
9-4pm  
Extension  
Auditorium**

### Golden Triangle Citrus Show

November 19, 6-8:30 pm

Texas A&M AgriLife

Extension Auditorium

Entries accepted November 18 from 9-4  
and November 19 from 8-Noon



### Christmas Party and Awards

December 10, 6pm social, 7pm Dinner

Beaumont Botanical Gardens, Tyrrell Park

\$10; Pay at November meeting; RSVP to 835-8461