

THE COMPOST BIN

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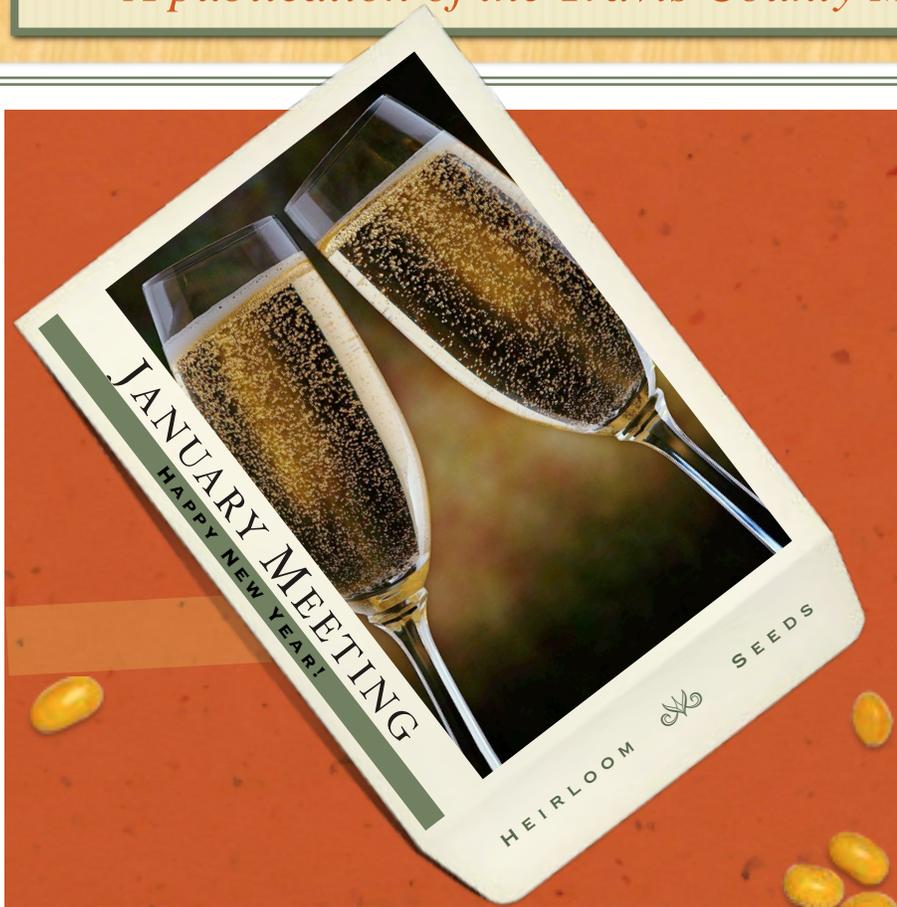


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HERE'S TO A HAPPY NEW YEAR OF GARDENING!

Happy New Year!

The President's Message

Happy New Year Y'all! When I started my first year as president, I had no idea how quickly 2008 would fly by. But it is gone and we're off and running in 2009.

If you were unable to attend our holiday party in December, you missed a lovely event. Thanks goes to Anita Mapes and her volunteers for pulling it all together. The room was festive and the food was delicious...of course!

Following dinner, the 2009 officers were installed—Manda Rash, President; Jerry Naiser, VP-Programs; Vicki Blachman and Bonnie Martin, Co-VPs-Education; Cheryl McGrath, Volunteer Coordinator for Projects; Sherrill Nilson, Volunteer Coordinator for Trainees; Hope Dyson, Secretary; Marty Berdan, Treasurer; Susan Jung and Jo Kautz, State Council Delegates; Cheryl Harrison, Publications Director; Janet Newton, Membership Director; Anne Van Nest, Greenhouse Manager; and Joe Posern, AAGC Representative.

The out-going board members were recognized for their service—Rosalie Russell and Bill Hyland (Co-VPs, Education); Pat Creswell (Volunteer Coordinator for Projects); Michelle Butler and Carolyn Williams (Co-Volunteer Coordinators for Trainees); Marty and Cindy Berdan (Membership Directors); and Angie Dixon (AAGC Representative).

Recognized for their service was Joyce Cooper, chair of the 2008 Inside Austin Gardens tour and Susan Decker for her work organizing and executing the East Austin Garden Festival: A Passion for Plants.

Honored for their contributions to TCMGA since its inception with Life Member status were Don Freeman, Ron Miller and Liz Caskey.

Embarrassingly, we omitted Bud Kane. When I talked to him a few days later and apologized, he started laughing. He then told me that he had left the party just before the program began. Then we both had a good laugh and a great conversation. I learned so much about the organization of TCMGA that day. Thank you, Bud!

Recipients of the Peggy Stewart Service Award and the Golden Gloves Award were Rosalie Russell and Kevin Byrne, respectively. Rosalie was honored for her work over the last 3 years as our VP for Programs and her many other contributions to our organization. Kevin Byrne was recognized for his contributions to the Demonstration Garden even though the temperatures were often 100 degrees or more!

Congratulations to all of our award recipients and to every single Travis County Master Gardener. This organization would not be as effective as it is without your dedicated and passionate work.

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your president again this year.

Manda Rash, President



Plant Portrait - Copperleaf (*Acalypha wilkesiana*)

With a distinctive leaf, sometimes more vibrant and showy than many flowers, Copperleaf (also called Joseph's Coat, Beefsteak plant, Figan Fire-bush, Fire dragon, Match-me-if-you-can) is *Acalypha wilkesiana* in the botanical world and is an eye-catching tropical shrub for containers or the garden. The large, swift-growing evergreen (in milder areas) shrub can grow up to 8 feet if protected or grown in frost-free sites. A container grown plant can usually reach 4 feet tall and wide within one season here in Austin. The distinctive bronzed-red, copper, copper-red colored leaves of the most popular cultivar are a wonderful accent for the garden, but the fun doesn't stop there. Also exciting are the less common *Acalypha* cultivars with combinations of green, purple, yellow, pink and orange foliage colors. Frilled, serrated, ruffled, narrow and elliptic leaf forms also make this group an interesting addition to the garden. Most have foliage more colorful than many flowers, including their own. The red catkin-like flowers are non-descript and only showy for one relative; the chenille plant (*Acalypha hispida*).



The showy foliage of Copperleaf

Copperleaf are great to use as an accent plant since the colors are often very dramatic (some may even think they are a touch on the gaudy side and need softening). Whether you revel in the excitement of *Acalypha* or like them in small doses, they are easy plants to grow. They belong to the Euphorbiaceae family and are originally from the Pacific islands. The only drawback is their limited cold tolerance. They are hardy to zone 10b and in Austin, they are best grown as an annual or container plant (moved or protected during below freezing temperatures). They are happiest during 60-85 degree temperature weather, in bright light conditions and good humidity. Part shade to part sun is ideal for copperleaf here in Austin. While they are quite tolerant of drought and able to revive when slightly wilted, they can take on a permanent wilt and death if they get too dry.

Propagate copperleaf by air-layering or stem cuttings taking during the growing season.



Copperleaf cultivars:

'Blaze' dwarf, elliptic leaves smoky burgundy color.

'Brazen' large leaves, light copper.

'Ceylon' ('Fire Dragon') large frilled leaves bronzy-red with cream margins,

'Cypress Elf' narrow, red and green leaves with cream margins.

'Fairy Dust' elliptic leaves gold with green veins.

Acalypha godseffiana narrow, drooping leaves green with cream margins

'Haleakala' large leaves deep burgundy with irregular margins.

'Hoffmannii' large leaves dark green with narrow cream margins.

'Inferno' small leaves with yellow, orange and red colors.

'Jungle Dragon' elliptic leaves copper green with pink margins

'Macafeana' leaves red, crimson and bronze

'Macrophylla' leaves russet-brown, cream, yellow and red.

'Marginata' leaves with crimson or pink margins.

'Miltoniana' oblong, drooping leaves with irregularly cut, white margins.

'Musaica' leaves green with orange and red markings.

'Obovata' leaves bronzy-green with rosy-pink margins.

'Petticoat' ruffled leaves green with irregularly cut, white margins.

'Tequilla Sunrise' large leaves yellow with green and gold splotches and red specks.



Anne Van Nest



In The Vegetable Garden

Interest in backyard vegetable gardening is running high these days, and it will continue to be a popular pastime in 2009. The benefits of growing your own vegetables are numerous - exercise, fresh air, nutritious food for the family - and if you grow it yourself you are more likely to eat it! And who among us would not benefit from increasing our vegetable intake? If you have been toying with the idea of growing some of your own food, I encourage you to make it one of your New Year's resolutions. Just wait for the next warm January day, find a sunny spot in the yard, remove any grass, weeds, rocks (I know - this is sometimes easier said than done), amend your soil with a 2-3" layer of compost and approximately 1 cup of organic fertilizer (like 8-2-4) for every 10' of row, and then follow the



January is time to plant onions

planting guidelines and vegetable variety recommendations that can be found at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/travis/> under the heading 'Gardens and Orchards'. It is always a good idea to start with a small area and try just a few of your favorite vegetables and herbs. In no time you will be hooked. Watch the newspaper and TCMGA messages for seminars and other information on growing vegetables.

We are blessed in Central Texas with a very long gardening season, and January is a good time to kick off the year with the planting of onion transplants. Purchase bundles of transplants this month at local nurseries or farm supply stores. A few short day varieties that do well in Central Texas include 1015Y, Granex, Contessa, White Bermuda, Burgundy and Southern Belle. Transplants can also be purchased by mail-order, and Dixondale Farms is family-run business in Carrizo Springs, Texas that specializes in onions. Check them out at www.dixondalefarms.com. Plant your onions transplants about 1" deep and 4" apart in loose soil that has been amended with compost and fertilizer. Onions have small roots and will require regular water and fertilizer throughout the season. They are heavy feeders so every 2-3 weeks scratch in $\frac{1}{2}$ c of a nitrogen fertilizer down the row. Most varieties take 120-160 days to harvest.

The National Garden Bureau recently published the All-American Selections for 2009. These AAS winners are new hybrids that have been selected for flavor, disease resistance and earliness and have been tested in trial gardens around the country. There are three vegetables selected this year, and all sound like they would be winners in a backyard



vegetable garden – let me know if you give them a try:

‘Gretel’ is an eggplant that produces 3-4” white fruit in clusters that can be harvested 55-60 days from transplanting. It is an attractive, 3 foot plant for large containers and is available from Park Seed (www.parkseed.com).

‘Lambkin’ is a small, oval melon (2-4 pound) with yellow and green mottled rind. It is early maturing at 65-75 days to harvest and is noted for it’s sweet, juicy white flesh and is available from Park Seed (www.parkseed.com).

‘Honey Bear’ is a bushy, compact, acorn squash that produces in 100 days. It is bred to produce 3-5 dark green, “personal sized” squash that weigh less than a pound and is available from Johnny’s Seed (www.johnnyseed.com).

Are you familiar with the term ‘pot likker’? My entry in the December Compost Bin that included this term generated some lively discussion and a few jokes – mostly at my husband’s expense! But Bruce is the first to admit that he is a bona fide ‘pot liker’, and he has licked more than a few pots, plates, beaters and bowls over the years, especially the ones containing chocolate or ice cream. But the pot likker that I am referring to (also known as pot liquor) is a southern treat; that rich, nutritious liquid that is created when cooking a pot of beans or hearty greens. If you’ve ever sopped up that flavorful liquid from a bowl of pinto beans with a piece of cornbread (or white bread if you happen to be at a Texas BBQ joint), then you have enjoyed this southern custom. And if you haven’t, it’s never too late to adopt this ‘south of the Mason-Dixon’ tradition. Here’s one way to do it with greens:



1. Harvest or purchase a big bunch (about 2 pounds) of collard, turnip, beet or mustard greens (I like using a combination of greens). These are often available at local farmers markets this time of year.
2. Trim the stems from the leaves, and rinse the greens well in a big (I mean BIG) bowl or the kitchen sink. Rinse two or three times with fresh water to remove all dirt. Save the stems for your compost pile.
3. Roughly chop or tear the leaves and set them aside.
4. Cook 4 slices of coarsely chopped bacon in a large pot until limp and sauté one sliced onion in rendered fat for 3-5 minutes.
5. Add 2 quarts of water or chicken stock to pot and add greens, stirring them in as they cook down.
6. Add about 2-4 tablespoons of cider vinegar and a spoonful of sugar or honey.
7. Cover the pot and simmer greens for 45 minutes to an hour, stirring occasionally. Add more water if necessary, so that greens are just covered with liquid.
8. If you have turnips, peel and chop them and add to the greens after 45-minutes, and cook for 20-30 more minutes.
9. Serve with a wedge of cornbread, hot and fresh from the oven.



Many Southerners cook their greens with ham hocks, I happen to prefer bacon. If you are opposed to using any kind of pork, but you still like that smoky flavor, try seasoning your pot of greens with a little smoked salt (I’ve seen this available at Central Market).

Young, tender greens do not need to be cooked so long. They can simply be chopped up and sautéed in a little olive oil or butter and

cooked until they are wilted and bright green in color.

Hope you have a chance to warm your body and soul with some hearty greens and pot likker this winter.

Here's to a bountiful harvest,

Patty Leander



The Greenhouse Bench

Thanks to everyone who lent a hand during our Greenhouse Work Days in 2008 (including many new interns). It has been a busy year in the greenhouse with at least one work day each month (and 8 scheduled last March just before Zilker Garden Festival). A continuous crop of tough, Austin-hardy plants were propagated throughout the year and were donated to community gardens or sold to raise funds for the TCMGA. Other 2008 activities in the greenhouse included upgrades to the irrigation system, propane tank and forced air heater. One of our biggest activities was the 3-day project in October to replace the double poly greenhouse roof. Although long and tedious, with many people precariously balanced on ladders, the



project was successfully completed just a few hours later than anticipated. Good work! Thanks to all who helped in so many numerous ways to make it a great year in the greenhouse.

All the best for the New Year from...Anne Van Nest, Marian Stasney and Molly Clark



Over The Back Fence

PUBLIC SEMINAR

Rainwater Harvesting and Waterwise Gardening

January 10, 2009, 10am- Noon, Zilker Botanic Garden

Come enjoy a free seminar on capturing rainwater and lowering water usage in your landscape. This session will cover all the basics of building a non-potable rainwater harvesting system. In addition, learn how to design beautiful gardens designed for lower water usage. Don't be misinformed, xeriscaping is not "zero-scaping"

Vendors representing tank and gutter companies will be available to answer specific questions. City of Austin representatives will be available to answer rainbarrel, permit and rebate questions.

This seminar is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas A&M and Travis County AgriLife Extension Service. For more details, see <http://www.tcmastergardeners.org>.



Closing The Garden Gate

I read that the top 10 New Year's resolutions are:

1. Spend more time with family and friends;
2. Exercise;
3. Lose weight;
4. Quit smoking;
5. Enjoy life more;
6. Quit drinking;
7. Get out of debt;
8. Learn something new (language, gardening, etc.);
9. Help others; and
10. Get organized.

I'm sure, like me, almost all of the above have been on your list at one time or another. I really do like to make resolutions. It makes me feel like there is hope for becoming a better person. However, it seems the same items appear on my list year after year which shows me I'm not living up to the dream. Since my resolutions are usually doomed from the start, I'm going to just pick one this year. Garden more. How simple and fun! I'm going to take Patty's advice and put in a veggie garden, spend more time gardening in my own yard, volunteering at gardening events and helping my friends garden. What is more therapeutic than digging in the dirt or talking about digging in the dirt with other people that love to dig in the dirt? That's it – one resolution! Maybe there is hope.

Happy New Year!

Rebecca Matthews

Garden Trivia

In ancient Egypt, New Year was celebrated at the time the River Nile flooded, which was near the end of September. The flooding of the Nile was very important because without it, the people would not have been able to grow crops in the dry desert.

In Closing

Cheers to a New Year and another chance for us to get it right.

Oprah Winfrey



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