

# THE COMPOST BIN

*A publication of the Travis County Master Gardeners*

JULY 2009

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### CURRENT TRENDS & IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

**D**aphne Richards comes to Austin from El Paso where she has served as the Horticultural Agent for the past nine years.

Under Daphne's leadership the El Paso Master Gardener program doubled in size to 92 volunteers, while their volunteer hours grew by 400% to almost 11,000 hours. Their increased focus on community involvement was seen by those of you who attended this year's State Master Gardener awards program. I have also been impressed with their volunteer retention rate of 86%.

Daphne was active in the media with a weekly radio program, contributions to El Paso Magazine and an online gardening newsletter. She is especially interested in environmental issues including water conservation.

Daphne received a BA in Botany from the University of Texas and a MS in Horticulture from Texas A&M (let us all now pause and genuflect toward the northeast). Her enthusiasm, training, experience and hands on knowledge of both Extension work and

leading a Master Gardener program make her a great fit for Travis County to lead our horticulture program to new levels.

Daphne will be speaking about current trends (economic, sociological, cultural, etc.) and their effects on the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and Extension agencies across the country. She will also discuss some of her ideas for the future with the Travis County Master Gardeners.

Please join me in welcoming Daphne to Travis County!

Jerry Naiser



# The President's Message

By Manda Rash, President

**W**elcome to summer, y'all! It's just plain hot. It's only the middle of June as I write this note and already I'm tired of talking about how hot it is. I guess it's going to be hot and dry again this summer as well.

It's hard for me to believe but I am halfway through my second year as president. As always, the time is just flying by. Soon it will be time to put together a nominating committee whose job it will be to put together new slate of officers for 2010.

If one (or a couple) of you is willing to serve as chair (or co-chairs) of the nominating committee, please let me know. This committee should begin its work in early August in order to have a slate of officers to present to the membership at our October meeting. During our November meeting, we will vote on the slate. Then at our holiday party in December (do I feel a chill in the air?!) our 2010 officers will be installed.

Now, I know you are probably thinking that it is too early to talk about 2010 but as the saying goes "Plant your corn early!" I'm hoping that planting the seed now and adding a little water and fertilizer over the next couple of months will help make the work of the nominating committee a little easier.

We all enjoy the benefits of the good work that the board does. Every single position on the board is essential to our organization. Without their leadership, we would just be a lot of gardeners standing around talking about gardening among ourselves. Of course, that's fun but what brings us together is our volunteer spirit and the desire to share our knowledge with urban gardeners in our community.

Think about how much you have enjoyed and gained being a member of the Travis County Master Gardeners Association. Maybe it's your year to step forward into a leadership position. Maybe you feel the need to become more involved with the organization. Maybe you have a particular expertise that could help move TCMGA forward.

When the nominating committee comes calling, I hope you will answer the call to serve.

Stay cool...if you can!



# Plant Portrait - Daylily

By Anne Van Nest

“... this plant bringeth forth in the morning his bud, which at noone is full blowne, or spred abroad, and the same day in the evening it shuts its selfe ... It is fitly called, Faire or beautifull for a day; and so we in English may rightly terme it the Day-Lilie, or Lillie for a day,” as written by John Gerard, in Gerard’s Herball published more than 400 years ago in 1597, the man who first introduced the name of the plant we now know as daylily.

**T**he lovely daylily is called *Hemerocallis* by the botanical world. It is named from the Greek words “hemera” meaning day and “kalos” meaning beautiful – beauty for a day. Originally it was a native from Europe to China, Korea and up to Japan, but now daylilies have adapted throughout most of the globe.



‘So Many Stars’ Daylily

Most daylilies are vibrant lily-like flowers that only open for about 10 hours during the day, but these plants are so showy and floriferous that the frequent succession of blooms makes up for the short duration of each individual bloom. Some species like *Hemerocallis lilioasphodelus* are night-blooming and scented. These plants start to bloom in the evening and close up the next morning.

In Central Texas, the peak bloom for daylilies is at the end of May. The choices are a bit overwhelming with singles, doubles, triples, spiders, and miniature forms to consider. Not long ago, diploid daylilies with twice the normal chromosome count were the big news. Now Triploids are almost passé and everyone is hybridizing tetraploid cultivars. These new tetraploid cultivars with four sets of chromosomes have been developed to produce large blooms with thicker petals and a sturdier flower stem. With daylilies being one of the most hybridized garden plants, new cultivars are also frequently arriving that extend their color range into vivid red, purple, lavender, greenish, near-black and near white. Other characteristics such as shorter heights, scent, frilly or glittery petals and contrasting “eyes” have been improved. New tetraploid introductions can command hundreds of dollars when they first appear. Many new varieties have also been introduced that are reblooming with a second flush of blooms in the fall for northern regions.



Daylilies grow in a clump formation with flat fans of leaves arching out from the crown. Non-clumping varieties of daylilies (like the orange “ditch

lily” (*Hemerocallis fulva*) that now grows over most of North America) are considered invasive by some people, but for others they invoke many fond memories.

The native *Hemerocallis fulva* is often called tawny daylily in polite company and was brought to North America from England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It has adapted so well and spread so widely that it is often considered a native wildflower by many. Other more picturesque common names for the ditch lily are roadside lily, railroad daylily, washhouse lily or outhouse lily because of where it was frequently planted.



Daylily blooms contain 3 petals and 3 tepals (perianth segments) on a long sturdy flower stalk. The center of the flower (throat) often has a lighter or contrasting color. Some daylilies will set seed, but the offspring will probably be a varied mixture. Remove the seed pod to keep the plant blooming.

Daylilies are easy to propagate by division. October is the best time to divide daylilies in Central Texas. Divide with a sharp spade or knife, trim the fans to 8 inches and replant the most vigorous sections at a depth that they were growing originally. Do not cover the crown with soil and just plant it at the ground level. Mulch well to conserve moisture. Divide every 3-5 years. Plant in a full sun to partial shaded garden bed that receives at least six hours of sun daily. Sandy, well-drained soil is preferred and raised beds work very well. Space daylilies at least 18 inches apart for the full-sized types and at least 16 inches for the miniatures.

The daylilies have a very wide growing area and are hardy from the arctic to Key West (zone 1 to 11) but not everyone will be happy growing in every climate region. Many of the cold hardy varieties do not grow well in the southern regions and vice versa. A key to how well they might grow in the South is in their winter growth classification. Daylilies are labeled evergreen, semi-evergreen, or dormant for their winter state. Dormant daylilies are deciduous and have foliage that dies to the ground after frost. Evergreen daylilies have leaves that stay green in the warmer hardiness zones. The Semi-evergreens are somewhere in between.

Daylilies are known for having good heat and drought resistance, but they still will grow better if they do receive at least one inch of rain or irrigation per week. Easy to grow, some old-timers have been known to say... “if you can’t grow daylilies, you can’t grow anything.” While not quite 100% foolproof, daylilies are not as challenging on most fronts as some other plants. They may still have problems with aphids or thrips on the leaves and petals, crown rot, and daylily rust (a serious and new fungus problem in many areas). Look for rust resistant daylily varieties.

The flowers of some species are edible and frequently end up in authentic Chinese dishes like hot and sour soup, daylily soup, moo shu pork or Buddha’s delight. For more fun with cooking daylilies, there’s a cute little book called *The Delightful Delicious Daylily: Recipes and More* by Peter Gail that might be of interest.

Some daylilies just don’t like the heat in our neighborhood nor the lack of cold temperatures during the winter. In Texas the evergreen or semi-evergreen types fare better than the dormant types.

So some recommended varieties for Central Texas are:



Midnight Magic -- 5.5" flower, tetraploid, evergreen.  
Victorian Collar -- 6 1/4" flower, evergreen, tetraploid.  
Moonlit Masquerade -- 5.5" flower, tetraploid, semi-evergreen  
Hunters Torch -- 6.5" flower, evergreen, tetraploid.  
Elizabeth Salter -- 5.5" flower, tetraploid, semi-evergreen.  
Barbara Mitchell -- 6" flower, semi-evergreen diploid.  
Jason Salter -- 2.75" bloom, evergreen diploid.  
Orange Velvet -- 6.5 " bloom, semi-evergreen diploid.  
Dragon's Eye -- 4 inch flower, semi-evergreen diploid.  
Olive Bailey Langdon -- 5" bloom, semi-evergreen, tetraploid.



From the Texas A&M University Aggie Horticulture website: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/flowers/daylilies/daylily.html>



# In The Vegetable Garden

By Patty Leader

**J**uliet, Juliet, where for art thou, Juliet? I planted 12 varieties of tomatoes - Arkansas Traveler, Big Beef, Brandywine, Celebrity, Cherokee Purple, Costoluto Genovese, Early Girl, German Johnson, Heatwave, Roma, Sweet Chelsea and Yellow Pear - and I just realized that I do not have a Juliet! How could I have overlooked a reliable favorite like Miss Juliet? At least my dozen varieties, though assaulted by disease and insects, are still producing delicious tomatoes. Hope you are enjoying an abundant tomato harvest as well.



Tomatoes, Tomatoes, & More Tomatoes!

I have had several inquiries from gardeners around town regarding tomato plants with

yellow and/or mottled leaves, which can be an indication of spider mites, early blight or both. Spider mites are usually found on the underside of the leaf, and though they are hard to see with the naked eye, if you look closely with a magnifying glass you may see them moving around on the leaf surface. An infected leaf will look mottled with gold specks on the surface, and often the back side will look dirty and in severe infestations you may see fine webbing. An old timer's method of checking for spider mites (and fun for the kids) is to shake a leaf over a piece of white paper. Draw a circle around all the dark spots that you see, and then wait. Come back in a few minutes and see if any of the 'dots' have moved from their circle. If so, those mobile dots are mites!

They are hard to get rid of and there are not many recommended and safe insecticides that are truly effective. Since they thrive in hot, dry conditions, the first thing I do when I see evidence of them on the leaves is to wash the leaves (concentrating on the underside) with a hard spray of water. You might even want to put on your swimsuit for this 'cause you and those spider mites are both gonna get wet. Do this again in another 4-7 days to make sure you get 'em and then inspect your plants regularly for repeat offenders. Insecticides that can offer some control of spider mites include insecticidal soap and neem oil sprays, but be sure to follow label directions.

And remember, though these products are considered organic, they do not discriminate between the good guys and the bad guys, so use them carefully and judiciously.

Early blight is a fungal disease that has also affected many of our tomato plants this season. This disease starts as small dark spots on the leaves at the base of the plant, these spots gradually grow



larger and cause the surrounding leaf tissue to turn yellow and gradually die. The yellowing moves upward from the bottom of the plant. The fungus can survive in the soil for up to a year and can be spread when water splashes soil onto the leaves - all reasons to mulch your tomato plants, leave space for air circulation, discard infected leaves, avoid overhead irrigation and rotate members of the nightshade family. It is best to treat your plants as soon as symptoms appear – once the disease takes a hold it is hard to get it under control. Some of the products recommended for control of early blight include Serenade, neem oil, copper sulfate, potassium bicarbonate and fungicides containing chlorothalonil. All are considered organic except chlorothalonil. You may not like the sound of that one, but according to Texas A&M Vegetable Extension Specialist, Dr. Joe Masabni, it is the most effective; potassium bicarbonate is the least effective. The choice is yours, but no matter what you use, read the label and apply according to the directions. If your plants are heavily infected it may be best to harvest what you can and then pull them out and consider planting fall tomatoes in another part of the garden in late July or early August.



We all know that vegetables are good for us and the American Dietetic Association and USDA recommend that we eat at least 2-4 servings of vegetables a day, which is so easy to do this time of year. Even if you don't have your own garden or if your plants have succumbed to summertime's heat, blights and pests, why not take a break, start thinking about your fall garden, and visit one of the many Farmers Markets around town where you will find an abundance of locally grown produce.

Here's to a bountiful harvest!



# The Greenhouse Bench

By Anne Van Nest, Marian Stasney and Molly Clark

**L**ots of perennial and shrub propagation has been started during June. Thanks to Holly Plotner for holding several Monday morning propagation work days to take cuttings and keep the mist system full.

Part of the early June greenhouse work day had us patching what we believe to be hail damage to about a dozen spots in the greenhouse poly roof. Since the roof is two layers of plastic with air pumped in between, it was impossible to get to all but one of the outer layer rips to repair them. So a neat slice was made in the inside poly to get access to the outer poly holes. Special greenhouse poly repair tape was used to mend the numerous holes. Thanks to Steve Reynolds for sharing his supply of repair tape and to Blake Stasney for his ladder assistance during the repair.



Becky Waak wanted to get more people trailing Crimson Carmello tomatoes since she had good success in the spring with them. She saved tomato seeds from her plants and they were sown in the greenhouse the third week of June for fall harvesting. The original plant performed so well that some Master Gardeners are going to see what the offspring of this F1-hybrid will do. Purchased true-to-type Crimson Carmello seeds are also being raised as a comparison.

Some favorite amaryllis varieties of Brent and Becky Heath of Brent and Becky's Bulbs are now in the greenhouse potted up and anxious to bloom (some have flower buds poking out of the bulb). 3 bulbs of 5 types of 'Pamela' (scarlet), 'Green Goddess' (whitish green), 'Pink Impression' (pink with a white star center), 'Benfica' (deep cranberry red) and 'San Remo' (light pink with a darker pink star) have been donated. All have been selected to do well as perennials in the garden for zones 8-11. Becky calls amaryllis "tulips of the south" and loves their vibrant colors, critter proofness and tolerance for heat and humidity. They will be brought to an upcoming Master Gardener meeting for everyone to see their blooms if they can be timed right. In any event, pictures will be submitted for a future compost bin.

In early June, the greenhouse had a visit from Rhonda Blanton, a Big Country Master Gardener from Abilene, TX (Taylor Country). Rhonda was in Austin for a week and wanted to visit the greenhouse. Through the grapevine she had heard about the greenhouse and wanted to check it out. Thanks to Marian Stasney for giving her a tour.

One of the many plant donations that the greenhouse made this year to organizations was to the 4-H group in Spicewood under the direction of Don Telge. He reported back that the 4-H people involved were extremely happy for the plants, the marvelous "design" and all of the help and equipment that got

the job done in two days. They were so happy with the results. Don said he got so many thank you's and that they will always be proud of our help.

Keep cool!

See you in the Greenhouse!



## **SPICEWOOD, SO FAR YET SO CLOSE**

By Don Telge

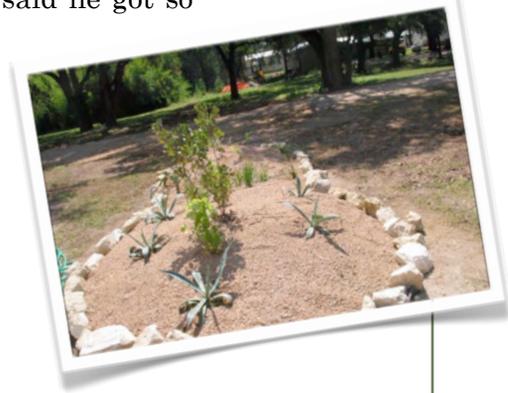
True country living with people living where they were born. With the advent of the automobile and the ease of people moving 50 miles away or even 2000 miles away from their birthplace, it is a real surprise to find such a large number of people living in the same area where they were born and grew up. Spicewood is such a place.

It all started with my two dogs, one running behind the lead dog, chasing deer across Briarcliff Drive when the dog in the rear ran into the front wheel of a car. Of course this caused a trip to the Vet where I met Dr. Matt Schuessler. Matt and I found an instant common interest, helping young boys. I spent 12 years as a Boy Scout leader and Matt is presently a leader of a 4-H club. They meet in this building at Spicewood, the former school house turned Community Center, that is well cared for by nine local residents known as the board of directors. They were interested in adding some landscaping around the building, but the funds were not available.

The Travis Master Gardeners greenhouse had numerous plants that did not sell during Zilkerfest. The Master Gardeners give these left over plants to churches, schools, and similar local needy institutions. The 4-H club was a likely recipient and won the Greenhouse Board's approval. On May 18th I met with the Spicewood board and received their approval.

The date of June 8 at 8:00 AM was set for work to begin on the landscaping of the building. Linda and David Simpson, who own a local landscaping firm, volunteered their services, and furnished the gravel, soil, and two workers. Dicky Warren volunteered his backhoe. The Simpsons gave a truckload of top soil and a load of decomposed granite. Work began at 8:00 AM on June 8 and was completed late the next day. Hand watering is happening until the irrigation system (donated by the Simpson's) is hooked to water.

Now I went over to look around on the following Saturday morning and saw a group of men sitting around some big steel objects that were smoking. Sure enough, they were cooking Bar-b-que, just a little bit of meat. They said they were cooking over 1,200 pounds of brisket, over 200 pounds of sausage and a large pot of beef stew. How big was the pot one may ask? They were using a 1x4 board to stir the pot of meat. All of this meat was being cooked for the annual cookout held each year to help finance the community center upkeep. Yes I had a taste of the meat. Ummm Good!



# Daphne's Corner

By Daphne Richards, Travis County Horticulture Agent



**H**ello everyone and welcome to summer! I can't believe how hot it is here in central Texas. If it weren't for the humidity, I'd feel like I'd never left the desert! Moving and getting settled have been taking up most of my time, so I haven't met too many of you. But I have seen a few of you around the office, and I hope to meet many more of you at the upcoming monthly meeting. I want to hear all about your upcoming projects and activities and find out how you and your gardens are holding up in this sweltering nightmare. Hopefully this heat wave will be over soon, and I can get busy building a bed for my autumn vegetable garden.

Hope to see you around town very soon!



# What's Bugging You?

By Wizzie Brown, Travis County Extension Entomologist

**W**hite grubs are creamy-white, C-shaped larvae with six legs and a brownish-orange head capsule. Grubs feed on the roots of turfgrass, causing it to lose vigor and turn brown. These insects can cause turf to have brown patchy areas. When there are heavy populations of white grubs, turf can often be rolled up like carpeting because the grubs eat all the roots leaving no attachment to the soil.

To inspect for white grubs, cut several 6 inch square blocks of turf. Make sure to include areas of suspected white grub damage. Examine grass plugs in the root zone for grubs. Treatment is justified when there are more than 5-8 white grubs per square foot. It is possible that some lawns can withstand higher numbers of grubs without noticeable damage.

White grub treatments should be applied approximately 6 weeks after the heaviest flights of May and June beetles. Due to rainfall this time period can vary from year to year, but typically in Central Texas treatment falls mid-July to early August.

Beneficial nematodes are available for managing white grubs, but need moisture to move through soil. Nematodes are small worms that attack grubs and other soil-dwelling insects. These beneficial organisms may not be the best method for treating white grubs in Central Texas since the soil tends to be very dry in July and August. If you want to try to use nematodes, turf should be well watered before and after nematode application.

Insecticidal treatments may also be used to manage white grubs. You can spot treat infested areas instead of treating your entire lawn. If soil is very dry, water about ½ inch the day before treatment to encourage grubs to move closer to the soil surface. Liquid or granular formulations are available for white grub management with active ingredients such as bifenthrin, carbaryl, imidacloprid, clothianidin or halofenozide. Do not apply pesticide treatments if rainfall is expected and sweep up any spilled material from driveways, sidewalks or streets. Always read and follow all label instructions and application rates.



# Potpourri

## **ROAD TRIP!**

By Liz Caskey and Frankie Hart

On an early spring trip to Houston, we re-visited two nurseries we love in the heart of the Heights area. It was a cold, rainy day, but we still found plenty to warm our gardening hearts.

Joshua's Native Plants & Garden Antiques

502 West 18<sup>th</sup> St

Houston, TX 77008

713-862-7444

[www.joshuasnativeplants.com](http://www.joshuasnativeplants.com)

This wonderful nursery always has a new plant discovery – this time it was the Nun's Orchid. Joshua's also has great prices as well as a large inventory. There is a lot of inventory in a small area, so look carefully. You can get great ideas on how to set up a fountain in your own garden from a beautiful selection of recirculating fountains on display. Joshua's also sells bulk recycled tumbled glass to use around your fountain. When you have finished shopping for plants, be sure to take time to browse through the huge warehouse full of antiques for your garden and home. Joshua himself always seems to be on hand to answer questions and has a very helpful staff. What a fun place to shop!

Another Place in Time

1102 Tulane

Houston, TX 77008

713-864-9717

[info@anotherplaceintime.com](mailto:info@anotherplaceintime.com)

Just a few blocks away is another interesting neighborhood nursery. I wish I lived in this neighborhood – I would shop here often! You also can find unusual plants here, such as a beautiful Shooting Star Clerodendrum. Although it is a small nursery, there is a lot of color here. You'll find excellent quality plants, as well as a beautiful garden shop. Voted the Best Small Nursery in the Houston Chronicle Ultimate Houston poll, this lovely nursery bills itself as "an uncommon garden shop" and that it is. Definitely worth a visit (or two).

## **HINTS FROM WOLF'S GARDEN**

By Becky Waak

I've long thought about getting a beehive (and bees). I knew bees were important to my garden and I have followed the reports of colony collapse disorder with great concern. But the number of bees in my garden has diminished over the last couple of years and I think it is important to do my part to save this natural resource.

You see, I grew up on a self-sustaining ranch/farm. I remember my dad working with his bees with no out-of-Africa face net or special jumpsuit. His equipment consisted of a smoker, his pocketknife, and a bucket. The bees never stung and produced more honey than we could use, a problem that neighbors and family happily helped us solve. He taught me that animals and insects could sense our calm or fear. It was an important awareness when you lived on a ranch.

After months of planning, looking at web sites, and reading resources of all kinds, I ordered my beehive. It's called a Topbar Beehive. Its claim to fame is it's scientific design, ease of use for novice beekeepers, and ability of curious gardeners to observe without disturbing the bees. If you are interested in this design you can go to [Backyardhive.com](http://Backyardhive.com).

Then how do I get bees? There are about 1,000 species of bees who will live in a communal setting (a beehive). Surely living on the edge of the Barton Creek greenbelt I could simply entice honeybees to fill my hive. I purchased pheromone and placed sugar water in the beehive. No swarms came. I called and emailed bee associations and had no response. I considered using a local bee expert who captures bees who decide to build their nests in the walls of your home or other inconvenient places. The downside is that you don't really know what you're getting. There are native bees, Italian bees, bees with mites, or numerous other issues.



Honeybees are susceptible to many diseases and parasites. Many colonies are exposed to pesticides, fungicides, fertilizers, and other agricultural chemicals and are frequently poisoned by accident. I just wanted some sweet little honeybees who co-habitat with me, my garden, my chickens and pollinate my plants.

I found Bee Weaver Apiaries on the internet. The Weavers were instrumental in beginning the first hive productions in Texas, including Burselson Honey, a famous brand in Texas. Other positive points -- their hives are in Navasota, and they live in Austin. Their queens have been bred and selected from the best All Star and Buckfast and BeeSMaRt colonies from Australia. After selecting for mite resistance, high honey production and healthy populations in their queen lines for over a decade they have colonies they guarantee to be healthy and free of disease. I provide this information with their permission and you can learn more at [www.beeweaver.com](http://www.beeweaver.com). I picked up my bees at their home last week. They seem to like their new home. So far so good.

For more information about bees, I found this site interesting: <http://www.everythingabout.net/articles/biology/animals/arthropods/insects/bees/>

## **RECIPES FROM THE GARDEN**

### Rosemary Roasted Sweet Potato and Lentil Salad

#### Ingredients

- 2 cups dried green lentils
- 1 small onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 large bay leaf
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 large unpeeled sweet potatoes
- 2 tablespoons fresh finely chopped rosemary

#### Directions:

Place lentils, onion halves, garlic cloves, and bay leaf in a pot with cold water to cover. Bring to a boil and then simmer lentils until tender, but not mushy, about 15-20 minutes. Drain and season with salt and pepper to taste. Set aside in a large bowl

While lentils are cooking, preheat oven to 375. Cut sweet potatoes into very small cubes. Place them in a bowl and add: 1 tablespoon of olive oil, 1-2 tablespoons chopped rosemary, salt and pepper to taste. Toss well to coat and spread an even layer on a baking sheet. Bake for approximately 30 minutes, or until the potato pieces are soft on the inside.

Remove potatoes from the oven and put directly into the bowl with the lentils. Toss both with remaining tablespoon of olive oil and adjust seasoning to taste. This dish is good hot or at room temperature.

### **FIREWISE/COMMUNITY/USA**

By Jane Bramlett, Master Gardener - Firewise Specialist

Has anyone heard about the Firewise Community/USA program? It is described as the most fantastic Firewise program in Texas and one of the top Firewise programs in the country. There are over 30 Firewise communities in Texas. Burnet County is working to become the first Firewise County!

The two latest communities to achieve the Firewise/USA Community status are River Place in Travis County and Bridlewood Ranches in Hays County. West Lake Hills in Travis County is also a Firewise/USA Community.

For more information about Firewise Communities/USA Recognition Program, visit [www.firewise.org/usa](http://www.firewise.org/usa).

The Texas Forest Service has reported that the prevention efforts of communities have paid off. There have been a large number of fires but they have been easier to control with prevention measures.

Prepare your home for wildfire readiness. The condition of your house and its immediate surroundings within 100 to 200 feet and other structures, such as, garages, decks, porches, or fences that come in contact with the house are what determines your home's susceptibility to ignition during a wildfire.

Eliminate as many things as you can that could lead a wildfire to your home so that it will be more likely that your home will survive a wildfire.

The Firewise Forum Blog has been launched and is at the same website as above. Click on Firewise Forum Blog tab located at the top of the page.

The state website is: <http://texasforests.tamu.edu>. Citizen Wildfire Ecology Specialist (CWES) classes are scheduled in the upcoming months around Texas. If interested, contact Lexi Maxwell, TFS WUI Specialist at 512-321-2467, ext. 2 or e-mail her at [lm Maxwell@tfs.tamu.edu](mailto:lm Maxwell@tfs.tamu.edu).

This is an urgent message from the Texas Forest Service: The drought persists. Arson is a Crime! It endangers property and lives. For STOP ARSON hotline : Call 1-800-364-3470 when you see something suspicious.

Smokey the Bear turns 65 on August 9, 2009!! Statewide celebrations are planned. Watch for announcements.

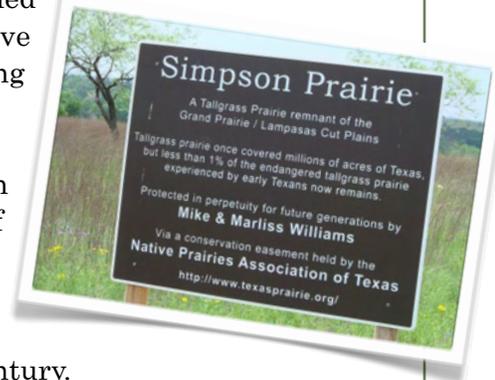
## PRAIRIE MAGIC

By Christine Powell (Williamson County Master Gardener)

As the armored gate closed behind us, our group of native plant enthusiasts knew that we had truly arrived at Prairie Chapel Ranch, the home of President and Mrs. George W. Bush near Crawford, Texas. We were there on a Saturday morning this April to tour the prairie restoration project sponsored by the former First Lady. The group included not only members of the Native Prairie Association of Texas and the Native Plant Society of Texas, but also a number of ranchers who were exploring the possibility of similar projects on their properties.

When the Bush family bought the ranch, much of it was covered with non-native grazing crops such as bermuda and rye, with a fair mixture of invasive plants such as King Ranch bluestem (which, despite the name, is a noxious exotic weed rather than useful forage). Mrs. Bush wanted to restore a significant proportion of the ranch to the condition that it had enjoyed before white settlement of the area in the mid-nineteenth century.

As she has written, "Native plant conservation is a great pastime for anyone who loves outdoor work, and it offers many environmental benefits. Native grasses are better for the soil, and they use less water than their non-native cousins. Wild prairies can include more than 100 types of grasses and forbs—and diverse prairies attract a more diverse array of wildlife" (from her article available at <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,325568,00.html>).



Fortunately, there was a nearby prairie remnant that could serve as an example and source of native seeds. This was sheer luck, as less than 1% of the tallgrass prairie that covered much of Texas two centuries ago still remains. Because Crawford was located on a major branch of the Chisholm Trail, fairly substantial stretches of the native prairie were left as pasture for the passing herds rather than being converted to farmland. By the time trail drives had been replaced by railroad trains as a means to ship cattle to market, cotton farming had already destroyed the thin native soil over most of Central Texas, but the economics of agriculture had fortunately changed sufficiently to prevent the loss of some of the remaining prairie.

One such remnant is located only a few miles from Prairie Chapel Ranch. Mike Williams, the owner of Simpson Prairie (also on our tour that Saturday), had placed his land under a conservation easement to preserve the prairie in perpetuity and had received considerable attention from the Native Prairie Association and others for his efforts in preserving and restoring the land to its native condition. The First Lady solicited his aid for her nearby prairie restoration (he was also our tour guide).

The first step was to plow under the non-native grasses on forty acres of the Bush ranch. When the vegetation reemerged after each rain, it was plowed under again. This was repeated for over two years until the land was finally clear enough to replant. Mike used hay from his own prairie and from the Burleson Prairie near Temple as well as other seed sources to cover the land with a reasonably diverse mix of grasses, wildflowers, forbs, and other prairie plants. As the "crop" came up, Mike and his wife literally went over the entire forty acres on their hands and knees examining each plant and removing the exotics by hand or with spot applications of herbicide. It took until the fifth year before the



restored prairie looked fully natural, but it is now essentially self-sustaining. Another forty acres is currently undergoing the same process. Of course, it is possible to make substantial progress in promoting native plant environments more quickly and without going to these lengths, but the President and First Lady wanted their restoration to be as authentic as possible. Even the lawn immediately surrounding the house is low-maintenance native buffalograss, rather than one of the more usual turf grasses.

Native grasslands protect water quality and supply by allowing rainfall to soak in rather than run off. Tallgrass prairie plantings are a better source of biofuel than corn while simultaneously sequestering more carbon in the soil to fight climate change than is released by their use as fuel. Nevertheless, tallgrass prairie is the most threatened large ecosystem in our country, with up to 99% of it gone in many regions. Conservation and restoration of these prairies is an important method to protect and increase habitat for the imperiled native plant communities and prairie wildlife like grassland birds, which are the most endangered group in North America. The Bush prairie restoration and associated projects—such as the restoration of wetlands near the small lake where Jenna Bush was married—have quite significantly increased diversity of wildlife on the property, including game animals. This has substantially improved its value for enjoyable human use, as well.



Often, the promotion of native plants and the conservation of the native environment are seen as liberal do-gooder causes. However, “conservation” and “conservative” are related concepts. The prairie restoration at the Bush ranch shows that preserving America to look like America and Texas to look like Texas is a bipartisan issue. The article by Mrs. Bush cited above lists some of the resources available to landowners who wish to move in that direction. (It also has links to video of the project; those of us on the field trip were forbidden from bringing cameras by the Secret Service or I could show you some lovely views.) I will let her have the last word:

“Now, our prairie includes sideoats grama (the state grass of Texas), indian grass, switchgrass, buffalo grass, and native wildflowers. The main prairie grass of Central Texas, little bluestem, ripples across our land in the wind. Our native grasses serve as habitats for ground-nesting birds, and recently we heard the first call of bobwhite quail on our property since we’ve owned it. Last August, migrating Monarch butterflies stopped to rest in our wildflowers en route to Mexico. ... Whether you live in wide-open prairie or the inner city, practicing native plant conservation is a great way to get exercise, invest in your property, and protect our natural environment. Good luck, and happy planting!”





*Improving Lives. Improving Texas.*



Travis County  
1600-B Smith Road  
Austin, TX 78721  
Phone 512.854.9600  
Fax 512.854.9611

June 9, 2009

Attn: Marian Stasney, Travis Co Master Gardeners Association

Subject: Plastic Pots - Donation

Dear Ms. Stasney,

Thank you so much for your donation of 80 one-gallon plastic pots for the Rainbow Garden Grow Box Project sponsored by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service -Youth Gardening and Master Gardeners. Your contribution, along with donations from other organizations, will be used to provide grow boxes at Joslin Elementary School this fall.

It is through the hard work and leadership of adults such as yourself that allow our youth gardening programs to flourish and reach their fullest potential. Thank you again for all you do for our program.

Sincerely,

Lisa Anhaiser  
Texas AgriLife Extension Service- Travis CO  
Youth Gardening Coordinator

Agriculture and Natural Resources • Family and Consumer Sciences • 4-H and Youth Development • Community Development  
Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin.  
The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating  
A member of The Texas A&M University System and its statewide Agriculture Program



# Out and About

## **POSSIBLE VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AT NEW AUSTIN CHILDREN'S SHELTER**

by Patty Leander

Some of you may be aware that the TCMGA has supported a vegetable garden project at the Austin Children's Shelter for the last two years. Because of security and confidentiality issues, only a handful of MGs have been involved, but all of that is about to change. The shelter will soon be moving into a larger, more public facility near the Mueller development, and they are very interested in continuing this project by incorporating vegetable, butterfly and native plant gardens on the grounds of the new facility. And no surprise, they are calling on our amazing Master Gardeners for guidance, support and help with this project at the new site. If you are



interested in coordinating this project and/or would be available to work in the gardens with the staff and children on a regular basis

please let me know. I have been a volunteer and supporter at the Shelter for several years, as an individual and a Master Gardener, but due to other commitments I am not able to dedicate as much time as I have in the past and I am hoping that there might be a team of Master Gardeners who might be interested in continuing this project. I can tell you from experience that it is a very rewarding place to work. If this sounds like something you'd like to be involved in please let me know. About a year ago they hired a director who is a MG transplant from the Valley and she is very supportive and appreciative of our help and understands our mission. Hope to hear from you - I'd love to send some enthusiastic MG volunteers her way! Contact me by phone at 301-0923 or by email at [leander@austin.rr.com](mailto:leander@austin.rr.com).



## **POND TOUR**

The Austin Pond Society will host the 2009 Pond Tour July 18 and 19. Approximately 15 ponds will be included in the tour on Saturday and another 15 on Sunday. For additional information, visit [www.austinpondsociety.org](http://www.austinpondsociety.org).

## **PUBLIC SEMINARS**

"Becoming A Garden Detective: Diagnosing Plant Problems,"

from 10 a.m. until noon, July 11, at Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Road, Austin

Just when you think you've done everything right by your plants, one of them starts to go downhill. One of the biggest challenges for gardeners is correctly diagnosing plant problems and finding effective, safe solutions. Is your plant dying because of an insect, environmental or disease problem? Join us to learn the causes of plant problems, the process for diagnosing plant problems, and

preventive garden management techniques. This class is free and open to the public. A plant clinic will run during the seminar to help you diagnose current problems so please bring samples of problem plants.

Propagation 101: Growing New Plants for Your Garden  
Saturday, Sept, 26, 2009, 11am-1pm  
Yarborough Public Library, 2200 Hancock Dr., Austin TX

Fall is the perfect time to plant perennials, but you don't have to go buy new plants. Attend this free seminar on plant propagation and learn how to grow your own plants from seeds or existing plants.

Attendees will learn multiple ways to propagate plants including cutting, layering, division, and seed propagation. In addition, learn tips on transplanting and care for your new plants to get them off to a strong start when planted.

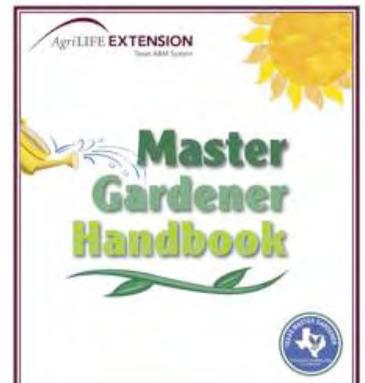
This seminar is free, open to the public and requires no reservations. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. For more details, see <http://www.tcmastergardeners.org> or call the Travis County Master Gardener's help desk at (512) 854-9600.

## **MASTER GARDENER HANDBOOK**

The Sixth Edition of the Texas Master Gardener Handbook is now available!

New features include:

- Chapter 3 Earth-Kind Landscaping
- Weeds and weed management
- Updated plant lists



Master Gardeners can purchase the latest edition through their Master Gardener Coordinators at a price of \$43.00. The 6th edition "Text Only" (no binder or tabs) can be purchased for \$28.00. Using the faculty login, you can find the book under the publication number B-6217T.



# Closing The Garden Gate

If it weren't for the heat I wouldn't believe it's almost July. When I was young I thought anyone who talked about how time flew by must be ancient. And here I am not only thinking it but saying it out loud. As another birthday approaches I guess I qualify as ancient. So we all better enjoy every day to the fullest. Since I'm sure there is not a lot you enjoy better than being in your garden, I hope you get out there and enjoy your summer. Have a picnic, run through the sprinkler, sit and have a cocktail under the oak trees or just take a nap in the hammock. I hope time stands still long enough for you to enjoy these hot summer days.

## Garden Trivia

As with many holidays, the 4th of July celebration includes food, drink and the realization of how fortunate we are as a nation.

More than 66 million - Number of Americans who said they have taken part in a barbecue during the previous year. It's probably safe to assume a large number of these events took place on the Fourth.

Although we do not have a fixed menu for the celebration of the Fourth, you can almost count on traditional favorites such as hamburgers and hot dogs, chicken, ribs, garden salads, potato salad, chips and watermelon. Following is a summary of where these foods come from:

- There's a 1-in-6 chance the beef on your backyard grill came from Texas. The Lone Star State is the leader in the production of cattle and calves.
- The chicken on your barbecue grill probably came from one of the top broiler-producing states: Georgia, Arkansas, Alabama, North Carolina and Mississippi.
- The lettuce in your salad or on your hamburger probably was grown in California, which accounts for nearly three-quarters of USA lettuce production.
- Fresh tomatoes in your salad most likely came from Florida or California, which, combined, produced more than two-thirds of U.S. tomatoes. The ketchup on your hamburger or hot dog probably came from California, which accounted for 95 percent of processed tomato production last year.
- As to potato salad or potato chips or fries, Idaho and Washington produces about one-half of the nation's spuds.
- For dessert, six states — California, Florida, Texas, Georgia, Arizona and Indiana — combined to produce about 80 percent of watermelons last year.

## In Closing

"The fair-weather gardener, who will do nothing except when the wind and weather and everything else are favorable, is never master of his craft."-- Henry Ellacombe

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