

THE COMPOST BIN

A publication of the Travis County Master Gardeners

NOVEMBER 2009

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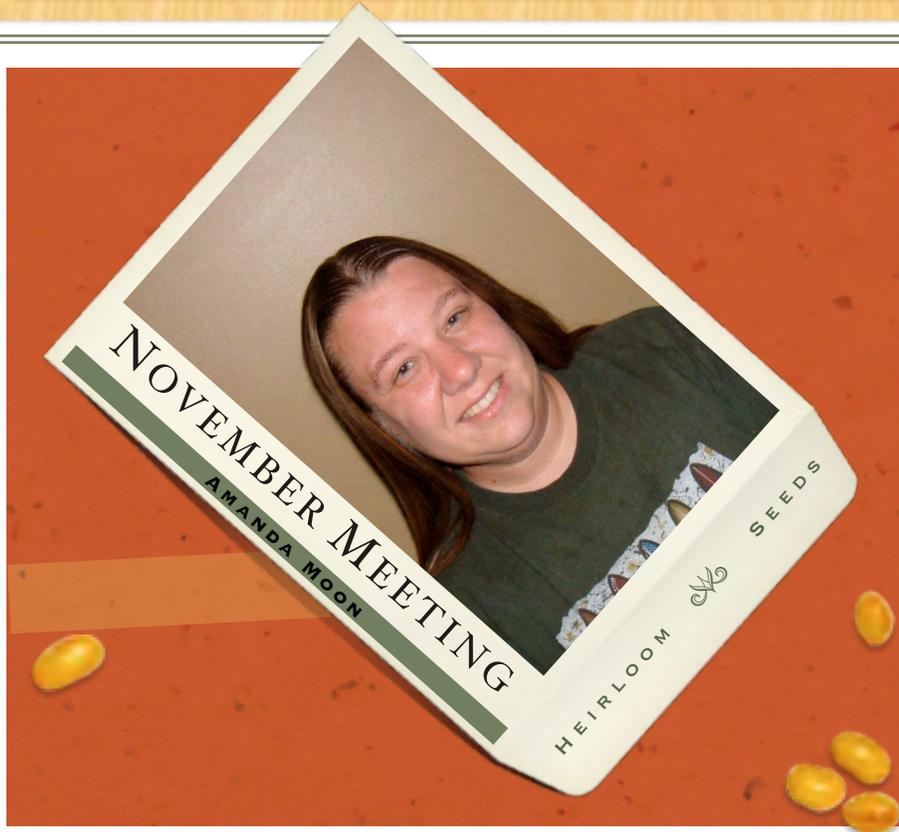
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WILD ABOUT WILDFLOWERS

Amanda has more than 15 years experience growing plants for retail and wholesale, as well as landscaping and designing using xeric principals for the Austin area.

Her horticultural career began a year out of high school in 1994 working for "Its About Thyme" in south Austin and continues to the present to assist them in their public presentations and yearly plant shows.

Amanda received a BA in Geography, with a double minor in Horticulture and English from the university formally know as Southwest Texas State University and is also a thesis short of a Master's in Physical Geography. She further received training as a Master Gardener in Hays County.

Amanda started her own mobile nursery, Trinity Gardens, in the late nineties and with her mother (and business partner) attended plant shows all over the State and Oklahoma selling plants they mostly grew themselves.

Please welcome Amanda Moon, Wednesday, November 4th at 7 PM when she will present "Wild About Wildflowers"

Jerry Naiser
Vice president Programs



The President's Message

By Manda Rash, President

There is no doubt about it. This year's "Inside Austin Gardens" was a HUGE success. Please see Loretta Fischer's article in this issue of the Compost Bin for all the wonderful details. Kudos to our gardeners and Loretta and her army of volunteers. What a great day it was to get out and learn about attracting wildlife to your garden. After all, education is what we Master Gardeners do best. Based on the number of tourists this year and attendees at our other public education seminars the residents of Travis County seem to be figuring out how much they learn via our public events.

And that is a very good thing...for us and the urban gardeners in our vicinity. But sometimes success can become a little overwhelming. More and more often we receive requests from other non-profits, schools, community service organizations, etc. for help with their gardening projects. While it is a great compliment for these groups to look to us for counsel and support, we must be mindful of the type of assistance we provide.

The Travis County Master Gardener Association's mission is "to be an educational, non-profit, service corporation which renders non-biased, sound horticultural information to the community...". Our goal is to train and teach but not necessarily to build and maintain except in our own demonstration garden areas.

Over the coming months, the Board and others in leadership roles in TCMGA will be working with Daphne to develop guidelines, procedures and a structural framework that will enable us to respond fairly to requests for assistance. This policy will help us meet our mission statement of education while staying away from manual labor projects.

As we move into the holiday season, our organization has much for which to be thankful but especially the joy of sharing and educating that is within all of us. We want to nurture and grow those attributes while providing volunteer opportunities that sustain them.

Have a happy Thanksgiving, y'all and...gobble, gobble!



Plant Portrait - Creeping Fig

By Anne Van Nest

Creeping fig is one of those plants that should come with an owner's manual. Pay attention to it regularly and it will be an elegant plant that softens the harshness of a brick wall or tones down a stone building. But ignore it for too long and the plant takes certain liberties and may waltz right into adjacent garden areas or change from the cute "sweetheart" form of the vine to a hulking shrubby adult. It all boils down to planting creeping fig in the right spot and knowing how it will act. It is this change from juvenile to adult form of the plant that is important to understand.



Creeping Fig Vine

In warmer climates (zone 8 and higher), creeping fig is a good candidate for outdoor growing as a groundcover or vine to cover a fence or wall. It forms a dense wall of living foliage and can be used to turn an ugly masonry wall into a fake hedge. In colder hardiness zones, creeping or climbing fig (*Ficus pumila*) is a great houseplant for a hanging basket or topiary.

Creeping fig climbs by using aerial roots that grow along the stems. These clustered adventitious roots have an adhesive pad that secretes a sticky substance to glue the stem to the vertical surface. If the adventitious roots don't touch anything they usually dry up or turn to into soil roots if they hit moist ground. Creeping fig does less damage to building structures than English ivy and are much easier to remove if needed. But because of this creeping fig might be blown off a vertical surface if it gets too top heavy or during high winds. Creeping fig doesn't have the superglue-like rootlets quite as strongly held that English ivy has. Nor does it have the suction cup appendages that Virginia creeper has that stay behind and look unsightly. Since it is a light weight plant in the juvenile form, some people find they have to help it stick to their building surfaces. If creeping fig won't stay on the vertical surface, try a simple horizontal wire support attached with eye hooks to secure it to the wall. Creeping fig, although it needs a sturdier support than some annual vines, doesn't need quite as strong of a support as a wisteria vine.



This versatile vine is fine in many conditions from full sun to full shade. The ideal location is a sunny southern facing wall. Just protect it from drying northern winter winds in colder zones or risk leaf damage and defoliation. Winter damage is likely to occur in zone 7.

There are many types of structures that creeping fig can be grown upon. Stone is an excellent one. In historic parts of North Carolina, many grand Victorian-era homes have creeping fig hugging the front step risers or covering the foundation. Wooden, painted walls or fences and stucco are not recommended since the dense foliage will keep excessive moisture trapped against the walls and the plant may stain the surface. Creeping fig will also grow well as a groundcover but it does need a structure to climb upon.

What happens when creeping fig reaches the top of the support? Since creeping fig can grow to 20 or 30 feet, often it is trained horizontally and can reach the top of a fence the first season after planting. When it comes to the top to the fence or support creeping fig changes the way it grows. It turns to its mature form when it doesn't have any more support. As it grows up a wall it is a soft-stemmed, small (to 1 inch), heart shape leaf, juvenile form vine that hugs the vertical surface. When the top of the pillar or wall is reached, the plant changes to have a much larger (to 4" long), oval leaf, starts fruiting, and becomes a bushier, woody, shrub-like mature form of the plant. The wall climbing, juvenile form is much more attractive and many people just keep the plant lightly sheared to keep this form. Be warned that it grows fast and requires frequent shearing though. The mature, shrubby form can also be grown into a hedge without any support.

This unique member of the fig family does produce green, insignificant flowers followed by large, somewhat lumpy, droopy, oval fruits on the shrub-like, mature, unsupported growth. The fruit is ripe when it turns purple, but is not edible for humans. The plant requires a fig wasp *Blastophaga pumilae* for flower pollination in its native habitat in order to produce viable seed. Luckily it is easily propagated from cuttings or layering. Native to Southeast Asia and Japan. Use one plant every 3-5 ft. to cover a wall. Plant the stems on a slight angle so that the plant sends up more shoots to cover a wall faster. It will root along the stem and can be divided and moved easily.

Creeping fig is invasive in some warmer areas. Think about this plant and decide where you want to plant it as if it was to stay permanently. Beware that it will climb up trees and damage trees by smothering them similarly to English ivy and Virginia creeper. Prune it anytime the mood strikes and prune frequently. It is fast growing in the juvenile form, slower growing in the shrub form. Protect your skin when pruning as allergic reactions may occur from exposure to the milky sap.

Cultivars

'Minima' a small leaf variety that stays in the small leaf form longer.

'Quercifolia' has oak shaped lobed leaves.

'Variegata' leaves with creamy white margins.



In The Vegetable Garden

By Patty Leader

Vegetable gardeners got a lucky break this fall as rain and cooler weather made an appearance in September and October - perfect for fall planting. Hopefully you got most of your cool season vegetable seeds and transplants in the ground last month, but if not there is still time to plant hardy greens like collards, kale, lettuce, spinach and arugula, as well as successive plantings of radishes and turnips. Collards and kale can grow quite large, so space them at least a foot apart. Lettuce, spinach and arugula can be spaced closer together or they can be broadcast over a 1 or 2 foot area and then harvested as needed by cutting the young leaves rather than pulling up entire plants. Be sure to thin your turnips and radishes soon after germination so they are about



Dino Kale - A great cool season vegetable!

4-6" apart. Closer spacing will result in smaller roots and slower growth. Don't let your root crops get too big. Given the opportunity, turnips and beets will grow to softball size, but the best quality and flavor comes by harvesting when they are not much bigger than a golf ball.

Most of our cool season crops will do just fine in a light freeze, especially if they are well established and mulched, but be prepared to cover them with floating row cover or bed sheets when the temperatures are predicted to dip below freezing. That first frost usually makes an appearance in mid to late November and often signals the end to our warm weather crops (be sure to harvest any tomatoes, squash, beans or other frost-tender vegetables before freezing weather arrives). The first cold snaps of the fall season are often short-lived and the mild days and cool nights that follow are ideal for cool season vegetable growth.

Shorter and often cloudy days mean less sunshine and slower growth for plants, but they will benefit from a sidedress of fertilizer every 4 weeks or so. Sprinkle 2 tablespoons of a garden fertilizer like 8-2-4 or 6-2-2 (or one tablespoon of 15-5-10 or 21-0-0) around the perimeter or outer edges of each plant to replenish nitrogen that is used up during rapid growth.

Inspect your plants often and keep an eye out for caterpillars on the underside of leaves. They start out tiny and are pros at camouflage so look closely. If you miss them you may be surprised to find big chunks of your plants missing the next morning!

Mulch your veggies with leaves, grass clippings, compost, hay, or any combination of these materials. Collect all of the leaves from your yard, and your neighbor's yard, too, as these will make excellent mulch in the months to come when leaves are nowhere to be found.

Here's to a bountiful harvest!

The Greenhouse Bench

By Anne Van Nest, Marian Stasney and Molly Clark

The Greenhouse Bench will return next month.



What's Bugging You? Scorpions

By Wizzie Brown, Travis County Extension Entomologist



My husband, who is also an entomologist, called me the other day while I was at work to tell me that he found a scorpion relaxing in our son's toy basket. I wasn't too surprised since the weather had been cooler and it's common for scorpions to move indoors when it gets cold. I asked if he did our normal thing of scooping the scorpion up and throwing it back outside. Nope, he squished it since it apparently was planning to viciously attack the boy next time he reached in for a teething ring.

Scorpions are arachnids and are closely related to spiders, ticks and mites. *Centruroides vittatus*, the striped bark scorpion (Fig. 1) is the most common scorpion found in Texas. The striped bark scorpion is yellow to tan with two broad black stripes that run the length of its back. They are approximately 2 ½ inches long. These scorpions have slender pedipalps, or pincers as well as a long tail with a stinger on the end. Scorpions have two eyes on the top of their head as well as two to five pairs of eyes along the front corner of the head. They have four pair of legs as well as the pedipalps mentioned above.

Striped bark scorpions typically have litters of 13-47 young. The young are born alive in transparent sacs. After freeing themselves from the sac, the young scorpions climb onto their mother's back. The young scorpions are capable of stinging at birth and will leave the mother's back after several days and begin to fend for themselves.



Fig 1. Striped Bark Scorpion

Scorpions typically hide during the day and are active at night. This helps them to manage their body temperature as well as water balance. They are able to hide in small cracks and crevices since their body is flattened. Striped bark scorpions are commonly found under rocks and bark as well as inside homes. They are capable of climbing trees and walls. Scorpions are predaceous upon other arthropods including insects, spiders, centipedes and even other scorpions. Once prey is captured, the scorpion will hold the prey in its pincers and draw it into its mouth.

Scorpions will sting if disturbed. Most people only have moderate reactions to the scorpions found in Texas, though allergic reactions may occur. Someone who is stung by a scorpion should be monitored closely for ill effects. If swelling or pain persists or breathing difficulties occur, they should seek medical attention. An ice pack can be applied to the sting area to help reduce swelling.

Scorpions require a control program using a variety of techniques. All debris such as trash, logs, boards, or bricks should be moved away from the home. Grass should be maintained near the home as well as pruning away branches that touch or overhang the roof. Garbage containers can be stored in a frame that allows them to rest above the ground. Firewood should not be stored in the house. Check and repair any loose fitting doors and windows as well as old weather-stripping. Window screens should be kept in good repair. Weep holes in brick veneer homes can be stuffed with steel wool,

pieces of nylon scouring pads or small squares of screening. All areas around roof eaves, pipes or other accessible areas into the home should be sealed with caulk.

Some active ingredients available for scorpion control include permethrin, cyfluthrin, cypermethrin, lambda-cyhalothrin and deltamethrin. Pesticides should be applied around the foundation of the house up to one foot above ground level on the exterior walls. They may also be applied around doors, window eaves and other potential points of entry. Make sure to read and follow all label instructions as well as use a product labeled for scorpions.

Potpourri

By Liz Caskey

ROAD TRIP!

By Frankie Hart and Liz Caskey

Tyler Texas

How about a little fall humor? When I visited the Smith County Master Gardener's IDEA Garden recently, I had to laugh out loud at the scarecrows they had created for the garden.

The IDEA Garden, located near the famous rose garden in Tyler, has as its goal to inspire the visitor to "Innovate, Demonstrate, Educate & Apply" good gardening practices. The garden features more than 600 varieties of flowers, trees, shrubs, grasses, ground covers, and bog plants.

Check out the Smith County Master Gardener web site for information about the garden and upcoming gardening events and a link to the IDEA Garden's plant database. <http://scmg.tamu.edu>



HINTS FROM WOLF'S GARDEN

By Becky Waak

Nominations for the 2010 Board of Directors

According to ARTICLE VI of the Standing Rules, the nominations for the 2010 Board of Directors were submitted by the nominating committee to the Executive Committee and were approved on September 17, 2009. This list of nominees will be submitted to the general membership through the Compost Bin, email, and at the October 7th general membership meeting. At the October 7th general membership meeting, additional nominations will be accepted. At the November 4th general membership meeting, the officers will be elected by ballot by a simple majority of members in good standing and in attendance. If you would like to place a name into nomination, please be certain the person being nominated has agreed to serve.

Thanks to all who have volunteered to serve. If you would like to contact me regarding a nomination to a position prior to the meeting, my email is Becky-Waak@austin.rr.com.

Nominations for the 2010 Board of Directors

President	Carolyn Williams
VP Programs	Rosalie Russell
VP Education	Vicki Blachman
	Bonnie Martin
VP Volunteer Coordinator – Projects	Cheryl McGrath
VP Volunteer Coordinator	Sherrill Nilson
Trainees	Pat Mokry
Secretary	Susan Jung
Treasurer	Marty Berdan
Publications Director	Vacant
Compost Bin	Anne Van Nest
Web	Paula Middleton
Membership Director	Janet Newton
Greenhouse Managers	Dorothy Akin
	Chris Giaraffa
	Vicki Olson
AAGC Rep	Joe Posern
State Council Rep	Tommie Clayton
State Council Rep	Jo Kautz (not up for election)



RECIPE FROM THE GARDEN: SWEET POTATO AND CORN SOUP

Serves: 8

Time: 30 minutes

1 large yellow onion, chopped
1 ½ T butter or olive oil
salt
2 pounds sweet potatoes
2 c water
4 c vegetable stock
3 c corn
1 red bell pepper, minced
1 fresh jalapeno, minced
1 c milk
½ lemon, juiced
cayenne pepper
2-3 T cream

Melt butter, add onion and a dash of salt, and saute, stirring often, until golden brown.

Meanwhile, peel and dice sweet potatoes, place in a pot with water and stock, and simmer until tender, about 20 minutes.

Add onion to the potatoes. Pour a bit of broth into the onion pan and then pour back into the soup, to get all the juices from the onion pan. Puree the soup with hand mixer or in batches in a blender. Return to pot.

Add corn, peppers, and milk, and simmer until tender. Add lemon juice and cayenne, taste and adjust seasoning, then stir in cream.

Serve hot, garnished with cilantro or parsley.



INSIDE AUSTIN GARDENS - GARDENING FOR WILDLIFE - A TOUR OF SELECT GARDENS

By Loretta Fischer, 2009 Tour Chairperson

The cars stretched for blocks and blocks, and the crowds of people were in the front gardens and the back gardens, and they all had smiles on their faces and information in their hands. And lots of questions. And we were ready for them.

Every Travis County Master Gardener can be proud to know we reached out to the Austin community and they reached back. Every one of the six garden locations had at least 500 visitors. Our theme this year, Sustainable Gardening for Urban Wildlife, was our gift to them.

First we have to thank the gardeners for their yearlong commitment to this tour. They had a brutal summer of heat and drought and water restrictions. They are Lindy McGinnis, Jessica Winslow, Randy Case, Cheryl Goveia, Eleanor Pratt and Gail Sapp.

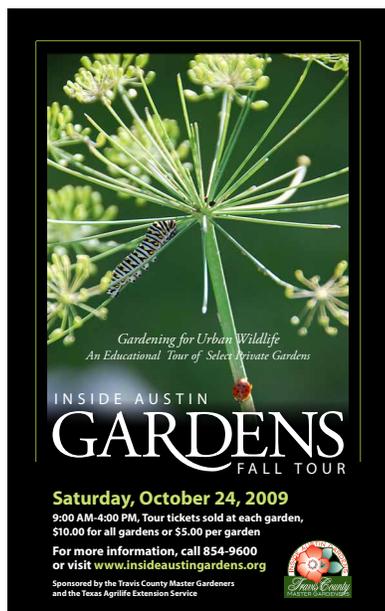
All the gardens were in pristine shape and perfect examples of a Certified Wildlife Habitat in Austin. You may all take a bow for an outstanding performance. The garden bloggers could not wait to get home and to their keyboards. Sunday morning I was reading their wonderful comments and looking at beautiful photos from the garden tour.

Check out this blog with great photos <http://www.rockrose.blogspot.com/2009/10/inside-austin-garden-tour-2009.html>

And this blog also <http://www.penick.net/digging/?cat=65>

Our TCMGA volunteers are amazing. We could not pull off a project this huge without your support. Over 100 volunteers came together to welcome hundreds of people through these gardens. We all applaud you. You are getting a great reputation for your friendliness and for all that valuable collective knowledge. You know you helped so many people that day. And the birds and the butterflies and frogs and other creatures thank you also.

Thank you, thank you to everyone involved. I had a fabulous time working on this with you. Everyone get your well-deserved rest. It's almost time to start planning the next Inside Austin Gardens Tour.



Out & About

PUBLIC SEMINARS

Friday, November 13, 9 AM – 11 AM

Demonstration Garden at Travis County AgriLife Extension Office, 1600 “B” Smith Rd, Austin, 78721

Yes, you can plant winter vegetables now! Learn how to plant seeds, which seeds need soaking, and proper transplanting methods. Planting using the 4 x 4 method and straight rows will be discussed. You can participate in this hands-on session.



Closing The Garden Gate

The holidays are upon us once again and everyone is about to be hustling and bustling to get through their to-do lists. Good thing my planting is done for the fall. I want more but I'm stopping until spring. One of my friends thinks my backyard looks like a forest. I disagree and keep planting trees back there but once they mature it probably really will look like a forest. Good thing I like forests!

I planted a few more mums this year in the front yard. I just love them but these say they are only hardy to 30 degrees so I'm hoping they will survive the two-day freeze we get every year. If I get home before the freeze hits I'll just throw a quilt over them. This has always been my strategy but one year the freeze hit while I was at work and by the time I got home it was too late for a lot of my precious plants. And after losing so many plants to the drought I sure don't want to lose any to a frost.

Since Thanksgiving is this month I just want to say how thankful I am that we have been getting rain! My yard has never looked better. It is so crazy how it can go from almost dead to full bloom in a matter of a week. Of course, I did manage to get compost on everything and liquid seaweed in all the beds and molasses on all the grass so in combination with the rain we have been having everything is on it's best behavior.

Hope you have a Happy Thanksgiving and happy gardening!

Garden Trivia

While pumpkins and winter squash have been popular in the United States since the time of the Pilgrims, the most common squash grown today has only been popular in the United States for the last 50 years. The zucchini was introduced to this country in the mid 1900's by the Italians and is now grown by more gardeners than any other squash.

Squash and pumpkins were a popular food source for the early American settlers, but it was not until the 19th century that they were accepted as such in Europe. (They were originally used as livestock feed by Europeans.)

Colonists on the Mayflower baked their pumpkins whole in the ashes of a fire. Once the pumpkins were cooked, they cut them open and served moistened with animal fat and maple syrup. Another specialty was a beer made from pumpkins, persimmons and maple sugar.

In Closing

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them. ~John Fitzgerald Kennedy

2009 TCMGA Executive Committee

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