

THE COMPOST BIN

A publication of the Travis County Master Gardeners

DECEMBER 2009

Features

page 2

A Message from the President
The changing of the guard...

page 3

Plant Portrait
Prairie Sumac

page 5

In The Vegetable Garden
Broccoli is about ready to harvest!

page 7

The Greenhouse Bench
Raising the roof!

page 8

What's Bugging You?
Moving plants indoors for the winter.

page 9

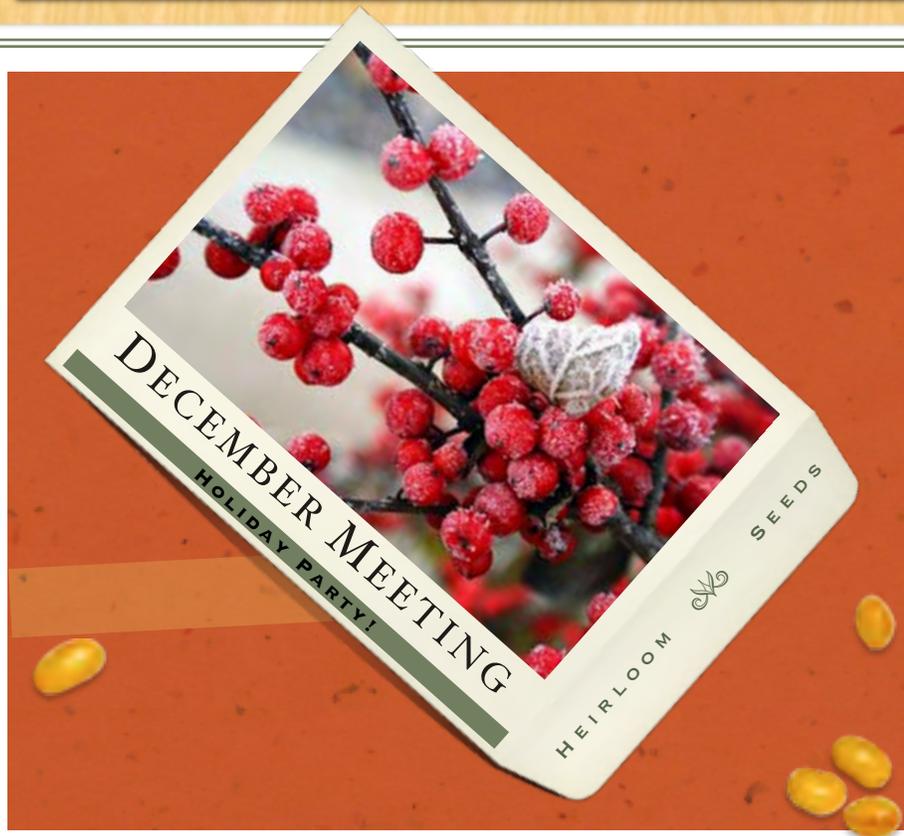
Potpourri
Road Trips, Recipes, Tips & More

page 13

Out and About
What's going on around town...

page 14

Closing the Garden Gate
Musings from Rebecca & A note from Cheryl



COME CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAYS WITH TCMGA

Mark your calendars! The TCMGA holiday party is Wednesday, December 2 at 7 pm and we hope you'll be there! Please come and celebrate all the hard work and terrific success we've had this year.

Please email me: mcgmil@sbcglobal.net

--to RSVP

--to let me know if you can bring a side dish or a dessert

--to sign up to help with set up or clean up--we can use the help and the more the merrier!

Thank you so much for all you've done this year. Please come share the food and fun!

Cheers,
Cheryl McGrath
636-5835



The President's Message

By Manda Rash, President

Well, this is it...my swan song. Where have the last two years gone?! Just proves that time really does fly when you're having fun. And, I have had a lot of fun serving as president.

Who wouldn't with this group? You have never disappointed me or turned me down when I called asking you to do a job. I feel strongly about involving as many people as possible in the process and believe it helps nurture that sense of family that we already have in TCMGA.

It's been a rough couple of years for me personally culminating in the death of my mother in April. But you have been there for me when I needed propping up and taken on tasks when asked and made sure that our organization continued to run smoothly. For that and more, I owe you all so much. I would not have taken on this job two years ago had I not believed that we were all in this together.

We've weathered a few changes. The biggest of those was saying good-bye to our long time horticultural agent, Skip Richter. But this year we had the very good fortune to welcome Daphne Richards as our horticulture agent and leader. I'm convinced that she values Master Gardeners and the contributions we can make to AgriLife Extension and to the citizens of Travis County. As you all begin to get to know her a little better, I know you will feel the same way.

I had the pleasure of working with two tremendous executive boards...all visionary Master Gardeners who have spurred us on to become a greater force every year by thinking out of the box and putting ideas to work. But that is true of all of our members as well. Great ideas come from great people so together we continue to move forward reaching more and more urban gardeners every year. Not every Master Gardener association can say that but the Travis County Master Gardener Association can!!

I'm going to miss being a part of the leadership team but its time for a bit of a break. Now that doesn't mean you won't be seeing me around. I talked with Daphne about organizing a few field trips for us over the next year. So I'll be planning excursions that involve camaraderie and learning opportunities. If you have any suggestions for field trips, let me know!

And, I'm hoping there will be more time for the TCMGA projects I so enjoy...like the Help Desk, plant clinics, greenhouse workdays, and the demonstration garden.

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your president. It has been a tremendous pleasure.

So now, I leave you in good hands and I'm looking forward to simply being...

Manda Rash, Travis County Master Gardener



Plant Portrait - Prairie Sumac

By Anne Van Nest

A stalwart native shrub for Texas, *Rhus lanceolata* is known by many names; prairie flameleaf sumac, prairie sumac, lance-leaf sumac, Texan sumac, tree sumac, limestone sumac, mountain sumac, black sumac, or shining sumac. Even though this plant has many names, there's no mistaking the value this plant brings to a water conserving or native plant garden. Prairie sumac is a shrub or small tree that is very much at home in our rocky limestone soils of central Texas. It can survive just about the worst droughts that occur in Texas and tough out the blazing heat and below freezing cold temperature drops.



Flameleaf Sumac

Sumac joins mango, pistachio and poison ivy as a member of the Anacardiaceae (cashew) family, a family producing much economic benefit and human discomfort.

Prairie sumac is a shrub that can grow to 20 to 30 ft. and achieve the same width, although it seldom grows this big in the wild. Sometimes it will grow more upright and can be trained as a small tree with a single trunk. Like many other *Rhus*, this plant may send up suckers from the base of the plant and form a thicket, but it is not nearly as aggressive as other sumacs in doing this.

The attractive, finely textured, shiny, dark green, pinnately compound leaves make this plant a good foil in the garden to contrast more coarse textured plants. Small greenish white blooms form at the ends of branches in July and August which immediately start forming into drupe type fruits on the female plants. The fruit evolve from a yellowish green into loose clusters of vivid red, fuzzy fruit.



Prairie sumac is an ideal shrub for many situations because it thrives on the poorest hill country soils and loves the limestone and calcareous soils that frequent the Edwards Plateau and north central Texas. It also tolerates copious amounts of heat, drought and cold. It is hardy from zone 6b to 8 and is found growing indigenously on rocky hillsides in an area through parts of New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

Tolerant of full sun, prairie sumac also grows well in part shade

– forming a more dense habit. In the shade though, the foliage is not as colorful in the fall and the fruit are not a plentiful. If grown in full sun and given some drought stress and a little cooler temperature, the leaves turn bright orange, yellow and red colors in November before dropping during the winter.



The shrub is usually a medium to fast growing plant if given supplemental water. It is generally pest free. Do not give it too much TLC or the plant may perish. No extra fertilizer and only supplemental watering during extreme droughts are needed once established. In fact too much fertilizer and irrigation can cause the tree to die.

This terrific native plant adds value to the garden by providing texture, fall color and habitat for wildlife. Many birds feed on the fruit during winter and the deer browse on the foliage.

For humans, the fuzzy red berries are somewhat edible. Make sure that identification is 100% certain before consuming any part of this plant. Many members of the Rhus genus are very poisonous. When soaked in water, the fruit of prairie sumac (as well as some relatives) forms a tart, tasty, drink high in vitamin C. The fruit can also be used to make a natural black dye. And of course, the fruit can be left on the plant for the delight and feeding of many birds.

If any root suckers emerge, prairie sumac can be propagated by root pruning these shoots. In addition, it can be started from seeds, but the seeds germinate poorly unless they are scarified with acid or hot water before sowing.

No cultivars are available of *Rhus lanceolata* but several nurseries in Texas are selling the native species.



In The Vegetable Garden

By Patty Leader

December is here, the summer heat is finally behind us and freezing weather becomes more of a threat, so keep a supply of floating row cover on hand to protect your vegetables when temperatures drop into the low 30's. This row cover is light enough to be left on all winter and will also help protect your leafy greens from cabbage loopers, one of the few pests of a cool season garden. Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) is the recommended control for this pest, and can be dusted on the plants or applied as a liquid spray before putting the row cover in place. Anchor the row cover with u-shaped pins, bricks, stones, or 4-6 foot lengths of rebar, t-posts or boards. This makes it easy to lift a section of row cover periodically so you can check the progress of your plants. Caterpillars can do severe damage in a short time so even with the row cover in place I inspect my plants several times a week and hand pick any caterpillars I find. Sometimes they blend right into the color of the leaf, so look carefully.



Broccoli doesn't mind the cold!

Broccoli and cauliflower that were planted earlier in fall should be ready to harvest this month. After harvesting broccoli from the main stem leave the plant in the ground and it will produce delicious side shoots for several weeks. Lettuce, kale, turnips, mustard, bok choy and collard greens withstand our cold temperatures quite well and can be harvested one leaf at a time or by pulling up an entire plant, depending on your intended use. Winter weather can change on a dime, and if your plants get caught under a blanket of unexpected freezing precipitation do not panic. Just leave them in the garden and let them thaw out naturally before harvesting and in most cases they'll be as good as ever. In fact kale takes on a milder, almost sweeter, flavor after going through a few cold snaps.

Radishes, lettuce, spinach and all of the cool season greens can be



planted this month, though germination and growth will be slow due to cold soils and decreased intensity of sunlight. If it's too cold to get outside but your green thumb is itchy, try planting lettuce, collards, turnips or kale seeds indoors under grow lights and you will be harvesting nutritious 'micro-greens' or baby greens in just a few short weeks. While your little seedlings are growing, take inventory of your seed collection and peruse the latest seed catalogs for new varieties and place your seed order early to avoid any delay in delivery. And be sure to save ALL the leaves from your property (and your neighbor's) as these will come in handy for mulching in spring.

If you are a new gardener and are interested in growing vegetables in spring, now is a good time to prepare the soil for a veggie patch or raised bed garden by removing any grass, weeds and rocks, loosening the soil 8-10" and adding compost or rotted manure. Let it mellow over the next couple of months and it will be ready for planting in spring.

Perhaps you have dried or frozen black-eyed peas from your own garden, but if not consider setting aside a row for black-eyed peas next year. They take the heat and are easy to grow in the summer, and since they are a legume they enrich the soil at the same time. And it takes very little effort to dry or freeze them for future use. Home grown beats store bought any day – especially as we kick off a new gardening year. A hearty bowl of black-eyed peas and cornbread (or cornpone as my Dad liked to call it) is the perfect meal for New Year's Day and a surefire recipe for good luck and prosperity in 2010!

Home-Style Black Eyed Peas

3 cups dried black-eyed peas, sorted and rinsed
4 slices of bacon or 1 meaty ham bone
6 cups of water
1 tbsp sugar
1 tbsp white vinegar
1 tsp salt
½ tsp black pepper

Cover dried peas with water to cover by 1" and soak 8 hours. Drain.

Place ham bone or bacon in 6 cups water and simmer one hour. Add drained peas and remaining ingredients. Bring to boil then lower heat and simmer 1½ - 2 hours, until peas are tender but not mushy. Serve with cornbread, diced onion and hot sauce.

Feel free to experiment with this basic recipe. I like to add some thinly sliced collards, kale or turnip greens towards the end of cooking time, my brother likes to add link sausage to the peas, vegetarians may want to skip the pork and sauté some onion and celery in olive oil to add to the peas.

(If using frozen black-eyed peas skip the soaking and add the frozen peas to simmering liquid with other ingredients and cook 45-60 minutes, or until tender)

Here's to a bountiful harvest!



The Greenhouse Bench

By Anne Van Nest, Marian Stasney and Molly Clark

The greenhouse roof raising was a success! Over the course of three days, a stalwart and determined team removed the shade cloth, unlocked and removed the old double poly and reinstalled two new layers of 6 mil polyethylene in the roof of the greenhouse. Despite the weather playing havoc on our plans for the middle day, we focused our attention on the plants when the rain and wind kept us inside. The roof raising delay meant that what was originally planned for two days had to happen in one day - Saturday. So with lots of gritty resolve and a great picnic lunch to keep us going, the new roof was securely in place by the end of the afternoon on Saturday. It was a big team effort that progressed very smoothly and resulted in a nice new

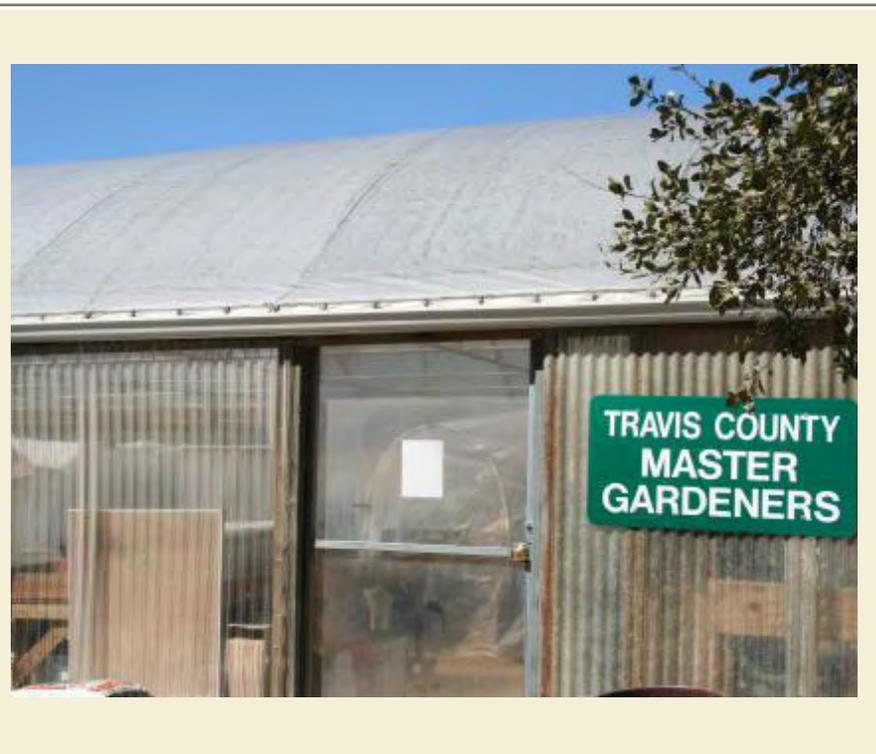
roof that hopefully will last. Huge thanks are extended to the many people who climbed up and down ladders, pulled the massive 100x30 feet sheets up and over the support trusses, folded the shade cloth and plastic, held ladders, offered their valuable knowledge and so much more.

Thanks to the many Master Gardeners, Interns, and Spouses who worked at the greenhouse during the three day project. In particular, much appreciation is extended to Jackie Johnson and Marian Stasney for their many contributions during all three days. Thanks also to Staci Osburn, Dorothy Akin, Linda Drga and Holly Plotner for their assistance over two days. And special mention is made to Don Freeman for his invaluable advice and participation in every task of removing and reinstalling the poly roof during seven hours of demanding work on Saturday – including numerous trips up the ladder to the tallest point of the greenhouse. Thanks to everyone who lent a hand to make the project a success.

As the time approaches for a new greenhouse management team to take the lead, Marian, Molly and I would like to thank everyone who supported the greenhouse during the last three years either by spending time working with the plants, purchasing plants for the garden, or just stopping by to chat during work days. Your support brought the greenhouse to life in so many ways!

And for 2010, here's wishing a great year in the greenhouse with continuing support from so many members, this time for the new management team of Chris, Dorothy and Vicki. Best wishes and thanks.

Anne, Marian and Molly



What's Bugging You? Moving Plants Indoors

By Wizzie Brown, Travis County Extension Entomologist

Potted plants are often moved indoors to keep them safe from near-freezing temperatures. Do you know what you might also be bringing indoors with your plants? Insect pests such as aphids, scale insects, mealybug and whiteflies can hitchhike to a cozier habitat along with your plants.

Ants will sometimes create their nest inside potted plants. A pesticide can be used to drench the soil to kill the ant colony before you move the plant indoors.

Inspect all plants thoroughly before moving them inside. Any plants found with insects should remain outside until pest-free. Prune areas of the plants that are heavily infested. Clippings should be double bagged and thrown away in an outside garbage container. Plants can also be treated using insecticidal soap, horticultural oils, botanicals and synthetics.



Potpourri

By Liz Caskey

ROAD TRIP!

By Frankie Hart and Liz Caskey

Texas Specialty Cut Flowers, Arnosky Flower Farm, Near Blanco, Tx

If you are ever in the Blanco area, the Arnosky Flower Farm is a “must stop.” Sure, I like the gorgeous flowers, but I really love that Pamela Arnosky greets me by name and treats me like a part of her family. She fills me in on all of the happenings and always offers to let me tour the farm. She frequently remembers my favorite flowers and has even indicated that she thought of me when they were planting the beautiful hot pink zinnias that I love. Now that’s personalized service!

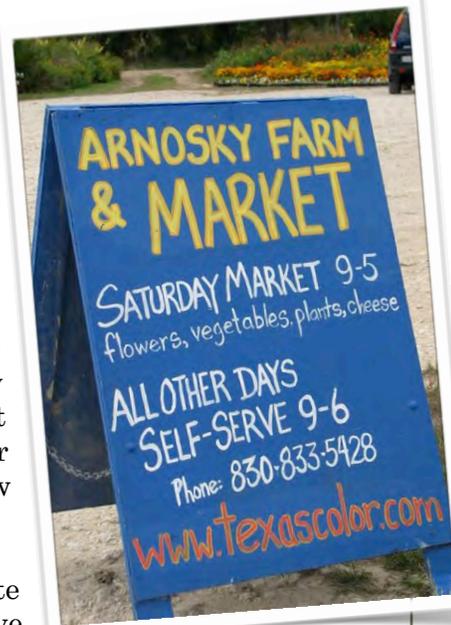
In 1990, Frank and Pamela Arnosky purchased 12 cedar covered acres near Blanco. They actual had to cut a road into the land, where they pitched a tent and started clearing for a flower farm. They started out with just roses, carnations and mums, but after many years of experimenting, they now grow over 60 varieties of flowers on 40 acres.

The flowers are grown in the field from late March to early November, when they move production to greenhouses. In addition to flowers, they now include vegetables at the Big Blue Barn farm stand, along with cheese from Full Quiver Farms and Pure Luck Dairy. They also have a wide selection of Texas-hardy plants, including annuals, perennials, herbs, Blanco lavender plants and a selection of heirloom and specialty vegetable plants.

When I visited recently, they had an “ofrenda” or offering decorated for Dias de los Muertos (see picture.) The ofrenda included lots of marigolds, the traditional flower for the celebration. They invited visitors to bring pictures of their departed loved ones to add to the display. It was quite touching and beautiful.

Their bouquets are very reasonably priced, especially when you consider that they can last around two weeks. The trick is to use flower preserver in the water, to change the water every few days, and to cut the stems a bit at each water change.

Pamela indicated that this has been a good year for poinsettias, which filled six greenhouses. As such, they will have 6-7 varieties of poinsettias in many sizes. On December 5th, the farm will be full of Christmas cheer, not only with poinsettias, but white lilies, too. Pamela plans to make New Orleans French Market Beignets and coffee. If you can’t make it to the farm



stand, the poinsettias will also be available at Central Market, Whole Foods and selected HEBs (ones with Blooms program.)

Sign up for their weekly emails at the farm's web site: www.texascolor.com. The emails include a list of the flowers and vegetables that are available for sale for that week, along with current events. Special events at the farm have included basil picking day, the Blanco Lavender festival, gardening seminars and an annual community pot luck. You will also be notified of any sales through the email. They are located at the intersection of Ranch Road 165 and RR 2325, 8 miles east of Blanco or 15 miles west of Wimberley. The address is 13977 RR 2325, Blanco, TX 78606. See web site for days of operation and hours.



HINTS FROM WOLF'S GARDEN

By Becky Waak

If you have roses that sport lovely rose hips, do not deadhead your last crop of blooms. You will not only have rose hips to use for teas and preserves, those left on your bushes will provide food for such birds as the cedar waxwing and mockingbird.

The seed pod that forms on rose canes after it blossoms is the rose hip. Some roses, especially Rugosa roses, form rose hips that are as big as crab apples -- about the size of a quarter! And, in the fall they turn brilliant colors of red and orange, and sometimes even purple.

And, being a true member of the apple family, rose hips are edible. There are tons of recipes for using rose hips. Rose hips are also very high in vitamin C, and you'll often see them listed as the main source for vitamin C in many commercially available Vitamins.

You can also eat rose petals. Sprinkle them on salads, use them as garnish, or make them into wonderful rose-petal jelly.

Preparation for using rose hips is pretty straightforward. Pick ripe rose hips after the first frost in the fall when they've turned bright orange or red. The frost helps sweeten the flavor. Trim off the stem and blossom ends, cut the hips in half and remove the seeds, then wash well.

Here are a few recipes to try.

Rose Hip Jam

(this recipe has been around since the 1700s)

1 pound prepared rose hips (about 4 quarts)

1 cup of water

Sugar

In a large pan, add the rose hips and water. Bring to a boil, then cover and simmer until very soft--about 20 minutes (add more water if necessary). Press or strain the mixture through a sieve to remove any seeds and to reduce large chunks of hips. Add one pound of sugar (about 3 1/2 cups) to one pound of pulp and simmer. Check the taste and add more sugar if desired. Cook until the mixture has thickened to jam-like consistency. Pour into sterilized jars and seal. This is good to eat when you have a sore throat.



Rose Hip Puree

(This is from an old 16th century recipe used to make rose hip tart)

1 1/2 cup prepared rose hips
3/4 cup water
2 T sugar
1/2 t cinnamon
1/2 t ginger
1 T lemon juice

Simmer the prepared rose hips in water until soft -- about 10-15 minutes. Stir in sugar, spices and lemon juice and simmer for 5 minutes. Use puree for tarts, ice cream toppings or to eat as a sauce.

Rose Hip Tea

Prepare the rose hips as described above and place in a single layer on a drying screen. Allow to completely dry, then store in an air-tight jar in a cool, dark place. Hips may be used whole or slightly broken. Pour boiling water over the hips and allow to steep for 2 minutes. Strain

Experiment with your own ideas for using roses in recipes. You may discover a whole new way to use your roses.



RECIPE FROM THE GARDEN: SWEET POTATOES WITH APPLES AND WALNUTS

Ingredients:

2 large or 4 smaller sweet potatoes, peeled and diced
2 Granny Smith apples, peeled and diced
1 cup chopped walnuts
1 cup sweetener (I use maple syrup, but can use 1 cup brown sugar)
1/2 cup margarine
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ginger
1/4 teaspoon cloves
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg

Directions:

Steam the sweet potatoes for 10 minutes or until slightly tender, but not cooked through. Rinse with cold water and drain thoroughly. Place the sweet potatoes in a large mixing bowl with the apples.

In a frying pan, combine remaining ingredients, except walnuts. Boil for at least one minute, then add walnuts. Boil for at least another minute. Pour mixture over potatoes and apples and mix well.

Bake at 350 degrees Fahrenheit for 45 minutes uncovered.

UPDATE ON THE EXTENSION DEMONSTRATION GARDEN

By Elaine Dill

If you haven't been out to the Extension Office lately, you have missed out on the renovation taking place at the demonstration garden. As all gardeners know, gardens are not static; change is integral to the challenge and the reward of gardening. So as we modify the demonstration garden concept, we sincerely want to acknowledge all the design and maintenance work previously done by Susan Decker and other master gardeners, without whose foresight and hard work the gardens would not exist.

In order to meet the challenges of on-going maintenance and keeping the plantings appropriate to updated horticultural recommendations, a small steering committee was formed early in 2009. As a result, many hours of planning, planting, digging, weeding, and mulching have begun to transform the flower beds.

Spring saw the installation of the hummingbird and butterfly garden: Gregg's blue mist flower is now submerged under hordes of butterflies, the passion vine has been decimated several times as it sustains the Fritillary larvae, the Patrick's abutilon decorates the garden with its stunning red bells, and many other plants supply nectar or leaves for butterfly larvae and adult food. A small pond now provides the water source that was sorely lacking. And shelter and nesting places are readily available, making this a true wildlife habitat garden.

Summer was a challenge for humans, plants, and wildlife alike, but our dedicated team weeded, watered, repaired the irrigation system, and prepared for fall. Many wheelbarrows of mulch were spread throughout the gardens after extending the metal border between the Zoysia grass lawn and the flower beds. The building foundation was cleared of plant growth and mulch in order to reduce moisture seepage into the building. Four new vegetable garden beds were installed at the southeast corner of the building: 3 raised beds and 1 double-dug bed. A drip irrigation system was installed to fit each bed and the new walkways were mulched.

Fall, blessed fall, brought the rains, renewed the spirits of the committee members, and resurrected plants which went dormant during the summer from hell. Our crew tidied up the shade beds and planted spring-flowering bulbs. We sowed vegetable seeds and tucked fall garden transplants into one of the raised beds. Renovation of the rose beds will soon bring in more Earth Kind varieties.

We are coordinating closely with Daphne to make sure that the garden serves the educational and outreach goals set by Extension. Our well-attended workshops have included demonstrations of solarization, drip irrigation, raised bed construction, bulb planting, and fall vegetable gardening. We visited most of the weekly sessions for the new Master Gardener class to recruit volunteers.

Future plans include a landscape plan, plant labels, planting of more species from the Grow Green Guide, renovation of the irrigation system, and, of course, more educational sessions. We welcome volunteers for any of our workdays and for suggestions on projects or workshops. We'll be keeping you updated with regular articles in the Compost Bin. Now come on out and see what's happening at the demonstration garden!



Out & About

PUBLIC SEMINARS

Public seminars for 2009 are complete. Look for more great offerings in 2010!



Closing The Garden Gate

This was a banner year for the MGs. I am so proud to be part of such a wonderful organization. I'm sure 2010 will be even better. I wish everyone great happiness and success in the coming new year.

Here are some Irish toasts to use during the holidays:

Here's to health, peace and prosperity. May the flower of love never be nipped by the frost of disappointment, nor shadow of grief fall among your family and friends.

May you be poor in misfortune, rich in blessings, slow to make enemies and quick to make friends. And may you know nothing but happiness from this day forward.

May your home always be too small to hold all your friends.

May I see you grey and combing your grandchildren's hair.

May you live as long as you want and never want as long as you live.

May your heart be light and happy,
May your smile be big and wide,
And may your pockets always have
a coin or two inside!

Always remember to forget
The troubles that passed away.
But never forget to remember
The blessings that come each day.

May the face of every good news and the back of every bad news be towards us.

May you have the hindsight to know where you've been,
The foresight to know where you are going,
And the insight to know when you have gone too far.

May the saddest day of your future be no worse than the happiest day of your past.

May misfortune follow you the rest of your life, and never catch up.

Happy Holidays!!

Garden Trivia

The White House led the way to trees for the holidays. The first American President to show-off his White House tree was Franklin Pierce. Benjamin Harrison declared his White House tree to be part of

an old-fashioned American tradition in 1889. By the 1880's the Christmas tree market was large. In the following decades large numbers of wild trees were harvested from the native forests. Theodore Roosevelt decided for the sake of forest conservation that the White House would not have a tree. His two sons snuck a small tree into their room and were caught, to the embarrassment of their father.

In Closing

From "The Grinch Who Stole Christmas"

Narrator: All the Whos down in Whoville liked Christmas a lot, but the Grinch, who lived just north of Whoville, did not. The Grinch hated Christmas -- the whole Christmas season. Oh, please don't ask why, no one quite knows the reason. It could be, perhaps, that his shoes were too tight. Or maybe his head wasn't screwed on just right. But I think that the best reason of all may have been that his heart was two sizes too small.



Grinch: Blast this Christmas music! It's joyful and triumphant.

Grinch: Are you having a holly, jolly Christmas?

Lou Lou Who: I'm glad he took our presents. You can't hurt Christmas, Mr. Mayor, because it isn't about the... the gifts or the contest or the fancy lights. That's what Cindy's been trying to tell everyone... and me. I don't need anything more for Christmas than this right here: my family.

And the Grinch, with his Grinch-feet ice cold in the snow, stood puzzling and puzzling, how could it be so? It came without ribbons. It came without tags. It came without packages, boxes or bags. And he puzzled and puzzled 'till his puzzler was sore. Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before. What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store? What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit more? - Dr. Seuss

A NOTE FROM CHERYL HARRISON, PUBLICATIONS DIRECTOR

This is my final Compost Bin as Layout Editor and Publications Director, and I want to tell you all that it has been a pleasure putting this together for the past almost three years. Rebecca Matthews will also be "retiring" as the Editor, and she has done an incredible job of organizing everyone's articles and photos and sending them on for me to do the artwork. Thanks Rebecca!

We are both very happy to welcome Anne Van Nest into the driver's seat as Editor in January! I'm really looking forward to seeing the new Compost Bin under Anne's direction. She has been a faithful contributor to the Compost Bin, so you all know the quality of her work.

In addition, I want to thank our other regular contributors for their fine articles and photos: Wizzie Brown, Liz Caskey, Molly Clark, Frankie Hart, Patty Leander, Marian Stasney, and Becky Waak. Also, thanks to our all special guest contributors. Keep up the good work everyone!

So now I'm looking forward to spending less time in front of the computer and more time with my hands in the dirt, working along side the members of TCMGA!

Best,
Cheryl



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