

The Compost Bin

July 2012

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Cover: Photo of Greg Grant's garden taken by Bruce Leander

July Meeting Speaker — Jane Tillman

Gardening for Backyard Birds

Who is that perched on your birdbath? Jane Tillman, Master Naturalist, Chairperson of the Travis Audubon Urban Habitat Committee and a National Wildlife Federation Habitat Steward Host, will help you get acquainted with common backyard birds and visitors. Basic bird identification will be covered along with ways to make your yard/greenbelt more attractive to these feathered creatures. Jane is very knowledgeable and an excellent presenter. Should be a fun and informative evening for all.

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Thursday, July 5, 2012 starting at 7 pm.
Zilker Botanical Garden

In The Vegetable Garden

by Patty Leander



An admiring glance from Otie

A few weeks ago Bruce and I took advantage of the summer 'dormant season' to travel to the East Texas community of Arcadia (population 57). The purpose of our trip was to interview and photograph horticulturist Greg Grant and his gardens for an upcoming Texas Gardener article. In case you are not yet familiar with Greg, he has a long history with plants and gardening in Texas and the South. He is a former Extension Agent (first in Cherokee County and then in Bexar County under the tutelage of the irascible Jerry Parsons), an educator (currently at Stephen F. Austin State University), an author (most recently Heirloom Gardening in the South – Yesterday's Plants for Today's Gardens written with friend and mentor, Bill Welch, along with a regular column in Texas Gardener magazine and a blog at www.arborgate.com), a plant breeder ('Blue Princess' verbena, 'Laura Bush' petunia, 'Marie Daly' rose, 'John Fanick' phlox, to name a few), a farmer (he grows okra, sugar cane, cowpeas, cucumbers, tomatoes and recently harvested 1000 ears of 'Sweet G-90' corn) and a charming Aggie (I heard "yes ma'am" multiple times during our visit). I'm not sure if Greg was ever in 4-H, but he has undoubtedly pledged his head, heart, hands and health to the flora, fauna and people of Texas.

Along with Southern heirloom plants, old houses, family heritage and birds, Greg loves terriers. After losing his beloved terrier, Rosie, to an unexpected and unexplained illness in January, Greg currently shares his time with two rescue terrier s named Otie and Molly. No dog will ever replace his Rosie, but he tolerates these two and one day, he hopes, they will make decent farm dogs. For now all they know is they love him and they want to follow him wherever



Greg Grant's restored dogtrot house originally belonged to his maternal grandparents

he goes, settle into his arms whenever possible and slurp his face any chance they are close enough. Those two little dogs loved the camera, too, and as Greg jokingly exclaimed, it is his curse "to have my photo always taken with dogs I don't even like". Despite his protests, they looked reasonably well-liked to me and Bruce couldn't resist the photo op.

It was an enjoyable and inspirational trip, to say the least, and thanks to Greg I left Arcadia with a renewed sense of optimism and joy about gardening. I highly recommend his new book, *Texas Fruit and Vegetable Gardening*, available from the Texas Gardener website (www.texasgardener.com) or amazon.com. With Greg's permission I am including a poem he composed in 2007 that even the most ardent cat lover will appreciate.

In The Vegetable Garden

Continued...

A Poem by Greg Grant

*You can take my mule and sell my cow.
You can have my goats and scrap my plow.
You can shear my sheep and butcher my hog.
But please dear Lord, don't take my dog.*

*You can have my house and all my money.
Rob my hives and take the honey.
You can burn my crib, every log.
But please dear Lord, don't take my dog.*

*Block out the sun and cover the moon.
Hush the birds, each their tune.
Stop the rain and hide the fog.
But please dear Lord, don't take my dog.*

*Drown the ducks and then the fish.
Harvest the lilies if that's your wish.
Take the turtles and then the frogs.
But please dear Lord, don't take my dogs.*



Greg and Molly in the corn rows

Greg shares the tender and heartrending story of sweet Rosie on his blog at <http://arborgate.com/blog/goodbye-sweet-rosie-i-will-always-love-you/>.
(Do not attempt to read without a box of Kleenex nearby)

Whiteflies

by Wizzy Brown



Figure 1. Adult whitefly resting on the underside of a leaf.

Whiteflies are small, soft bodied insects with piercing-sucking mouthparts. They are creamy white, and adults have a mealy wax that coats the body and wings (Figure 1). Many adult species look similar, so it is often easier to identify the insects when they are in the last nymphal instar. Immatures, also called nymphs, are very small, oval, flattened and wingless (Figure 2).

Whitefly populations can grow large quickly when temperatures increase. They hang out on the underside of leaves, often in clusters. Common species of whiteflies have a wide host range and will switch host plants.

Whiteflies suck plant juices, and large populations can cause foliage to turn yellow, appear to be dry, or even fall off the plant. Some whiteflies cause plant distortion or foliage to turn silver in color. These insects are honeydew producers. Honeydew is a sticky substance secreted by some insects that causes foliage to become shiny in appearance. Honeydew can attract a fungus, called sooty mold, which will cause further damage to the plant. Also, some whiteflies are capable of transmitting plant viruses.

Try to encourage natural enemies to help manage whitefly populations in your garden. To do this, make wise pesticide choices. Try to choose pesticides that target specific pests and specific areas. Also, you may need to manage ants that tend the whiteflies for honeydew. The ants protect whiteflies from natural enemies that would normally keep the pest population at manageable levels.

In vegetable gardens, you may want to try reflective mulches (or similar, aluminum foil) to make the underside of the leaf where whiteflies hide less habitable.

Whiteflies

Continued...



Figure 2. Immature whiteflies (nymphs).

As for treatment, you can use high pressure water sprays, insecticidal soap, azadirachtin, d-limonene, botanicals or a synthetic product. Make sure that you are targeting the pesticide to the area with whiteflies in order to avoid also getting beneficials. More specifically, target the underside of the leaves where the whiteflies rest.

Cost Saving Strategies for Gardeners

by Bob Beyer

Gardening can be very expensive – or not. For those who have limited budgets, there are some ways to save costs by thinking “out of the box”. Here are a few ideas that I have discovered.

Tired of replacing clay pots that crack, and plastic pots that break when weathered? Try using simple galvanized buckets. Spray paint the exterior sides, drill holes in the bottom, and you have a virtually indestructible 5 gal pot. This works for water gardens also, by using a wash tub with no drainage holes. With the cost of decorative looking plant containers being what they are, this is a much cheaper, yet still attractive way to display your potted plants. There is a rustic appeal to it as well.

Can't remember plant names? Tired of plastic name plant tags breaking or names fading? Try using old aluminum blinds. Merely cut them into strips, and label with a #2 pencil. They are weatherproof, and the name will not wash off. It's a good way to recycle as well. Another helpful way to remember plant names is to create a [plant data base](#) that you can refer to as necessary – no labels needed.

You can spend a small fortune on brand name potting soils, but I find the best way is to buy the cheaper soil ingredients at a local garden center and blend your own potting soil. I often use a 40 lb. bag of compost and an equal amount of topsoil. Do check the relative quality of each of these ingredients before buying. Once blended, if you can hold a handful, squeeze and it doesn't compact, it will drain well, yet retain moisture, and grow most any plant well in a container.

Nursery plant prices have been increasing to where it costs a lot more to replace plants. Look into [propagating](#) some of your own plants, trading or swapping plants with other gardeners (e.g. at a Plant Swap, or through garden clubs, or with other garden acquaintances). We all end up with surplus plants that we can divide or otherwise share with others. Don't overbuy for instant effect when buying a perennial that can be divided into multiple plants after one growing season. Often, commercial growers propagate and pot two rooted plants per container to ensure at least one survives. When buying a potted plant at a retail outlet, look for multiples that can be divided into two or more separate plants.



Galvanized buckets make great decorative plant containers.

Cost Saving Strategies for Gardeners

Continued...

Organic gardeners save a lot of money by not purchasing and using toxic chemicals and fertilizers, but by focusing on composting and enriching garden soil naturally, and dealing with insect and pesky weeds using many of the environmentally friendly methods. Texas AgriLife Extension calls it Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

Recycle pots. Reuse your pots until they can no longer be used. Nursery containers are not currently accepted for plastic recycling, so offer them to a nursery – most of which will gladly accept them as it saves them money. Vice versa, if you need pots, ask your local nursery if they have a surplus of used pots they would like to get rid of. I did this with potting plants I propagated for a charitable plant sale. Wash out all used pots to reduce risk of transmitting disease organisms. Recycle your old potted plant soil back into your yard and garden .

Hand water everything. This way you can concentrate your watering to the root system and zone of each plant without wasting water. Automated systems can be wasteful, and wasted water is costly both environmentally and pocket book wise. Another cost saving, water wise thing to do is mulch your garden beds each spring with a fresh layer of ground hardwood mulch. Native plants may not require mulching as they are already adaptive to our climatic conditions.

Don't buy or grow tender plants or non-adaptive plants unless you have a means to protect and grow them successfully year round. This requires researching and learning about plants before buying, rather than impulse buying at a local garden place. As a plant buyer, you should be knowledgeable of what you are getting, as many sellers aren't that knowledgeable about what they are selling. Know what a plant requires to grow well before purchasing it. Use of native plants always saves you money, as they are durable and rarely need to be replaced.

Buy or grow perennials for seasonal color rather than annuals. Annuals are indeed beautiful, but are less adaptive to our climate extremes, and are costly to buy and replace every season. Many plants sold at Nurseries are perennials in certain areas of the country but can only be grown as annuals in central Texas.

For garden décor, nothing looks more natural than native stone or artistic pieces of dead cedar wood. Without violating private property, there are many opportunities to gather these natural accents for your garden at no cost.

Try growing clusters of plants in a single container. A good example might be a small cactus garden in a shallow and wide container where many different and compatible plants are used and displayed artistically. Another method is to make colorful arrangements of thrillers, fillers, and spillers. This technique used one upright "showoff" plant surrounded by smaller fill-in plants and bordered with cascading plants. This saves money on pots and soil.



Use native stone or cedar wood for a natural look.

Cost Saving Strategies for Gardeners

Continued...



Growing clusters of plants in a single container.

About now, you are probably thinking I'm out to put every horticultural enterprise out of business. Not at all! I shop for and buy new plants and supplies regularly. I am merely pointing out some common sense ideas that can save the average gardener with limited resources, time and money, as well as help our environment. I know there are many unique ideas that other gardeners have implemented that haven't crossed my mind. As gardeners, we might want to look for new and innovative cost and labor saving ideas that require unconventional thinking.

Extracted from [Central Texas Gardening Blog](#)

Coming Events

Identifying Good and Bad Bugs

Saturday, July 14
10am-12pm

Zilker Botanical Garden
2220 Barton Springs Rd
Austin, TX 78745

Wizzie Brown, integrated pest management specialist for AgriLife Extension in Texas, will lecture about how to manage pests in your yard through IPM. IPM is an environmentally responsible and minimal use of chemicals that may also kill beneficial insects, harm pets or possibly enter the water table. She will teach how to identify good bugs vs. bad bugs and the thoughtful, careful use of pesticides for control in our gardens and landscapes.

This seminar is free and open to the public, but seating is limited. Reservations are not required, but are recommended.

Signup at: <http://travis-tx.tamu.edu/horticulture/>
and click on seminar registration.

Empty, reserved seats will become open seating at 9:50 am. This seminar is free and open to the public.

How to Plan and Install Home Drip Irrigation

Thursday, July 19
10am-12pm

Travis County AgriLife Extension Office
1600-B Smith Road
Austin, TX, 78721

Conserve water and reduce water stress to potted plants, landscaping or vegetable garden by using a drip irrigation system. Learn about the two most common drip systems available and how to utilize one or the other or combination of the systems. Discover how to test the water pressure to determine the length of the run. Gain knowledge by watching how the pieces are assembled. Take away the knowledge necessary to create your own system.

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Visit the websites: www.tcmastergardeners.org and
<http://travis-tx.tamu.edu>



The End...

Time to Get Gardening!

