

September 2012

The Compost Bin

A Publication of the Travis County Master Gardeners
a volunteer program of Texas AgriLife Extension

In this issue ...

In the Vegetable Garden

Paper Wasps

Reflections on a Xeriscape

Coming Events

**Backyard Mammals
and Marsupials**

Blake Hendon

Inside this Issue....

- September Meeting Speaker Page 2
- In the Vegetable Garden Page 3
- Paper Wasps Page 5
- Reflections on a Xeriscape Page 7
- Coming Events Page 10
- 2012 TCMGA Board Page 11
- Credits Page 12

Cover photo: Cotton field in Hutto
Right: Cotton flower
By [KTYarbrough Photography](#)



September Meeting Speaker — Blake Hendon

Backyard Mammals and Marsupials

Part 3 of our “natural neighbors” series is continuing with “Backyard Mammals and Marsupials”; brought to us by Blake Hendon of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept. Want to know what nocturnal visitors might be digging holes, knocking over pots & plants, and doing whatever else in your yard? Join our meeting.

Blake Hendon is the lead biologist for Travis, Hays and Blanco Counties – with Texas Parks & Wildlife (Wildlife Division - Hill Country District) providing technical guidance to private landowners on wildlife and natural resource management issues. He holds BS & MS degrees from TAMU in Animal Ecology and Rangeland Ecology and Management. So, he is very knowledgeable on the topic. Don't forget to bring your questions.

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

Announcement

Start Planning for the Plant Exchange Scheduled for the October Meeting. The theme for this fall's plant exchange is “Succulents and Drought Resistant Plants.” Don't forget to start saving seeds, cuttings, garden magazines and pots that you'd like to share with other Master Gardeners.
More information coming soon.

In The Vegetable Garden

by Patty Leander

With cool weather on the way, it's time to switch gears to delicious and nutritious fall vegetables; broccoli, cauliflower, collards, cabbage, carrots, beets, peas, bok choy and more can be planted this month. Take advantage of September's cooler evenings and mornings to prepare your planting beds. Start by weeding the area, then sprinkle the soil with fertilizer, turn with a shovel or a tiller, rake smooth, water well and cover the soil with a layer of mulch. Be sure to place your drip irrigation or soaker hoses underneath the mulch to help conserve soil moisture and create a hospitable environment for future seeds or transplants. I like to use a thick layer of alfalfa hay; but compost, dried grass clippings or shredded bark mulch can also be used.



4'x10' raised bed mulched with a thick layer of alfalfa hay

to spread, and at the end of the season it can be turned in to enrich the soil. Callahan's, Tractor Supply and local feed stores usually have it in stock.

Mosquitoes and West Nile virus have been in the news this summer, especially in Dallas where the decision to spray mosquito-infested areas with insecticide from the air caused both celebration and consternation - depending on one's perspective. I guess one thing we can all agree on is that mosquitoes are a major annoyance in the garden, and each individual gardener must decide how far they want to go to combat this pest. After a recent morning spent planting seeds and waving my arms hysterically to shoo the mosquitoes, I abandoned fashion and style in favor of practicality and protection. A couple of years ago my nephew sent me a mosquito net he bought from the Trading Post at

I lost some gardening muscle last month when my husband had back surgery (no bending, twisting or lifting more than 10 pounds during his recovery), which means that he can hold a camera and snap a simple photo, but (for the next few months) he cannot help with physical labor in the garden. I'm not sure how much a bale of hay weighs, but I do know it is beyond my ability to lift or carry on my own. After struggling to transfer the first of four bales from my truck to the backyard, I soon decided it was time to

work smarter. That's when I noticed our hand truck tucked away in the garage. With the hand truck and plenty of girl power I quickly and effortlessly transported the four bales of hay to my garden. Once in place the hay is easy to spread. And it smells so good; always reminds me of feeding my cousins' horses and cows when I was a kid. One bale costs about \$15-18, which is not cheap, but it's amazing how much hay is in one compacted bale. I can cover at least three 4'x10' raised beds, plus it's easy



Transporting a bale of hay on a hand truck.

In The Vegetable Garden

Continued...



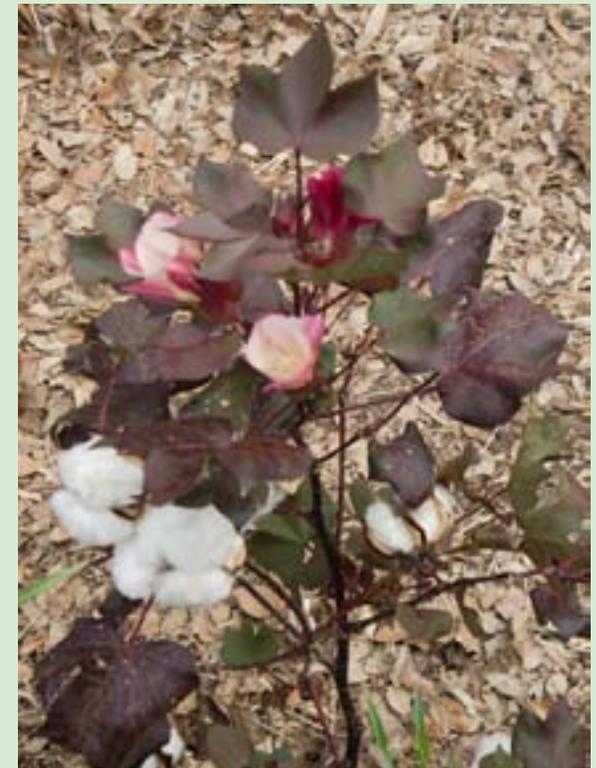
mosquito net hat

Boy Scout Camp. He told me it worked great, and he was right. Few things are more satisfying than hearing the buzzing around your ears and knowing that the little buggers cannot get to you. If you don't have access to a Trading Post, look for these nets at hunting, camping or sporting goods stores.

Be sure to plant some sugar snap peas in late September, as they are easy to grow, wonderfully delicious, and versatile in the kitchen. The vining variety called 'Super Sugar Snap' can reach six feet, and is best grown on a fence, teepee or sturdy trellis. If you prefer bush varieties, try 'Cascadia', 'Sugar Sprint' or 'Sugar Ann'. Sugar snap peas can be roasted, stir-fried, sautéed, or sliced raw and added to salads, but they are sometimes enjoyed most fully when eaten while standing in the garden - fresh off the vine.

If you made any road trips across Texas this summer I bet you noticed the many fields of cotton that can be seen from the highway. Texas is smack-dab in the middle of the Cotton Belt, which stretches all across the southern United States. Have you ever seen a cotton plant up close? If not, try growing a few plants in your backyard. It is related to hibiscus and okra, and it is able to take our summer heat. Even though it is not edible, it is a fascinating plant to grow. It can be direct seeded in April or May, blossoms appear about 8-10 weeks later, and by August the bolls will start to split, exposing the tight cotton fibers within.

Southern Exposure Seed Exchange (www.southernexposure.com) is a great source for several varieties of cotton, including an heirloom variety from East Texas called 'Erlene's Green'.



"Red Foliated White" cotton plant with blossoms

Paper Wasps

by Wizzy Brown

Paper wasps are reddish brown wasps, sometimes with yellow markings (Figure 1). The wasps are about $\frac{3}{4}$ -1 inch in length with smoky wings.

Paper wasps make a paper nest out of chewed wood fiber. The nest is open and hangs from a single filament (Figure 2). The nest is usually constructed in protected areas such as under the eaves of homes, mailboxes or fences.



Figure 1. Paper Wasp



Figure 2. Paper Wasp nest

Mated queens overwinter and emerge in spring to start a small, new nest in which to lay eggs. The colony grows in size throughout spring and summer. During this time workers forage mainly for protein - usually other insects. Colonies reach their peak size in late summer to early fall. Starting in late summer, paper wasps forage on sugars, and are drawn to human inhabited areas that may contain a food source.

Paper wasps tend to be fairly unaggressive, so if the nest is in an area where a stinging incidence is unlikely, it is best to leave it alone. If the nest is built in an area where someone may get stung (in a mailbox, on playground equipment, etc.), then it is recommended to manage wasps and the nest.

Paper Wasps

Continued...

Early in the season, when nests are just being started by founding females, it may be possible to discourage paper wasps to nest in a certain area by knocking down the nest repeatedly. This is not recommended when the nest is larger and contains multiple wasps.

Aerosol formulations, both synthetic and naturally derived, are available for paper wasp management. The nest should be treated either in the early morning or late evening. Use caution when treating paper wasps nests. Not only are you using a pesticide, but you are also dealing with insects that can sting repeatedly. After all the wasps are gone, knock down the nest and throw it away.

Reflections on a Xeriscape

by Bob Beyer

In fall of 2011, we stripped our entire yard of St. Augustine grass (mostly dead after the record heat and drought of summer), and did a completely xeriphytic landscape - front and back. BEST MOVE WE EVER MADE! It was hard work as we, nearing 70 senior citizens, did 90% of it. It took a chunk out of our budget for the materials, but the rewards we are enjoying this summer rivals that of an Olympian receiving a gold medal. That investment in time, energy, and resources (or better expressed as "the up front investment") has reaped enormous reward.

Reflecting on it now, in the middle of summer 2012, we:

1. Don't have to spend hours mowing a lawn in the hot and muggy weather.
2. Don't have to water, except in prolonged dry spells - saving water and dollars.
3. Enjoy seeing a beautiful, self-sustaining garden-type landscape from indoors.
4. Enjoy seeing the various wildlife that are attracted to a natural-type landscape.
5. Do minimal maintenance, which can be easily done within an hour in early morning.
6. Have time to enjoy other pursuits, due to less time needed for maintenance.
7. By using adaptive plants, we don't worry about losing plants due to severe heat or cold.
8. Have created a yard of interest and diversity to be enjoyed by the neighborhood.
9. Enjoy having the yard look good at all times.

Does this mean we can just sit back and forget about the yard? NO, not at all. Leaf drop in fall, weed infestation, watering plants in containers, limited edging, and trimming of shrubs as needed still remain on the maintenance chore list. But by walking the yard regularly, a list of needed chores can be made and done during the cooler part of the day. By not putting off these minor chores, maintenance becomes a less stressful and strenuous thing. Also, the very design of the xeriscape can reduce maintenance needs. There is no such thing as a

Reflections on a Xeriscape

Continued...

maintenance free yard, but the degree and amount of maintenance can be greatly reduced. This is something to appreciate in the heat of summer in central Texas.

What about changing the look of the garden occasionally? A xeriscape need not be a static or permanent thing. During appropriate times of the year, plants can be transplanted and replaced with something different without further bed preparation. Once the basic xeriscape design is created, hardscape materials can be moved or added to give a different look. Seasonal plants can always be integrated at any time.

Experience is said to be the best teacher, so now that we have had the experience of making a transition to a xeriscaped yard, we are eager to share our evaluation of this effort. We learned:

1. Planning and designing well ahead is critical to success – on paper, researched, well thought out. Check for HOA restrictions and guidelines first.
2. It is advantageous to stockpile materials (rocks and other natural items to be used) in advance to facilitate a smooth work schedule.
3. Fall and winter are the best times to do the construction. Temperatures are more comfortable, and more importantly, plants have an opportunity to become established by spring. If planting in spring, do so as early as possible.
4. Doing the project in realistic segments and time phases allows mid-stream adjustments to be made. Even the best laid plans can go astray or have faults.
5. We found stripping existing lawn with a weed eater to work very well, and the finely cut grass can be raked to create wonderful compost.
6. Do expect to lose some of your initial plantings. Even though native and xeriphytic, all plants need more water up front, and time to get their roots established.
7. Use the City of Austin's Grow Green free booklet, and other grow green free resources, for choosing appropriate native and adaptive plants. It has all the information you need to make good choices.

The only mistakes made during our experience were that some plant choices didn't work well, and required replanting with a different selection. The reason why more mistakes weren't made was that we took so much time up front to design and plan well; the old "ounce of prevention beats a pound of cure" approach.

Reflections on a Xeriscape

Continued...

Does all this seem overwhelming to you by now? Believe me, it's all worth it! We have years of relatively carefree gardening and landscape maintenance ahead, and can sit back and marvel at the benefits of a xeriphytic landscape. Life has become more enjoyable, less stressful; and to repeat, it's the BEST MOVE WE EVER MADE.

You can see the story about our xeriscape transition to be aired September 15th on KLRU-TV's Central Texas Gardener. It will also be on YouTube afterward. We hope you will consider the value and benefit of making the move to a xeriscaped yard. It makes so much sense, and is so rewarding - as we can personally testify. Now (as fall approaches) is the best time to make the commitment and take the plunge, so that your yard in spring will be water-wise ready to enjoy next year.



Our xeriscaped back yard , transformed from drought stricken St. Augustine lawn.

Coming Events

Divide and Transplant Perennials

**Thursday, September 20
10am-12pm**

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

Perennials tend to increase in density and size over the years, which diminishes the vigor of the plants. Solve this problem by learning to properly divide and transplant these plants. Learn which plants need to be periodically divided, and how to correctly perform the task. Discover what is needed to appropriately transplant the plants into new beds. Gain an understanding of how to prepare the plants to pass on to friends.

Compost Tea 101

**Saturday, September 29
10:30am-12:30pm**

Hampton Branch Library at Oakhill
5125 Convict Hill Rd.
Austin TX 78749

Compost Tea is a great fertilizer for your garden. This seminar will cover what you need to know for setting up a simple do-it-yourself compost tea brewer; what goes in it, how to avoid problems, and recipes for using compost tea in your garden!

This free class doesn't require a reservation, but if you want to ensure a seat, sign up online at <http://travis-tx.tamu.edu/horticulture>

Please note that any empty reserved seats become open seating at 9:50 am.

TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

2012 EXECUTIVE BOARD

Jackie Johnson, President

Carolyn Williams, Immediate Past
President

JaNet Booher, Vice-President for Programs

Cher Groody, Vice-President for Education

William (Bill) Woodard, Volunteer
Coordinator for Projects

Richard Moline, Co-Volunteer Coordinator
for Trainees

Pat Mokry, Co-Volunteer Coordinator for
Trainees

Susan Jung, Secretary

Tina Landers, Co-Treasurer

Van Alvarez, Co-Treasurer

Susan Goodrich, Membership Director

Chris Giaraffa, Greenhouse Manager

Rosalie Russell, Austin Area Garden
Council Representative

Margarine Beaman, State Council
Representative

Mary Kastl, State Council Representative

Past Presidents (Non-voting):

Bill Baldwin

Bill Boytim

Susan Cashin

Tommie Clayton

Susan Decker

Don Freeman

Manda Rash

Peggy Stewart

Becky Waak

Will Walker

Ex Officio Member of the Board (Non-voting):

Texas AgriLife Extension Travis County
Horticulture Agent
Daphne Richards
1600-B Smith Road, Austin, Texas 78721
512-854-9600 drichards@ag.tamu.edu

This issue of the Compost Bin has been published thanks to the contributions of the following Travis County Master Gardeners and Wizzie Brown — Texas AgriLife Extension:

Photographers:
Kim Yarbrough
Bruce Leander

Contributing Writers:
JaNet Barkely-Booher
Wizzy Brown
Bob Byers
Patty Leander

Editors and Layout:
Liath Appleton
Steve Messana

Webmaster:
Paula Middleton

© 2012 Travis County Master Gardeners Association
512-854-9600

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



The End...

Time to Get Gardening!

