

December 2012

The Compost Bin

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Cover Photo by: Patty Leander
raised vegetable beds including a wicking bed in the left

Right: lettuce can be grown throughout the winter
Photo by Bruce Leander



December Meeting

Don't miss the Annual Holiday Party!

We will again be purchasing meat and cheese trays for sandwiches from Costco, and enjoying the delicious side dishes and desserts provided by all the MGs! Thanks so much to everyone who signed up to bring a side dish or dessert at the last two MG meetings. Volunteers may still be needed. Contact Lisa Graybill for details.

As always, MGs are welcome to bring a spouse, significant other, or friend.

There will be additional parking on the other side of Barton Springs Road, directly across from the entrance to Zilker Botanical Garden. Please park there if the Zilker lot is full, and you will then be carpooled safely to Zilker.

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

In The Vegetable Garden

by Patty Leander

You may have noticed a series of friendly email invitations from Rosalie Russell to come join the crew at the demo garden as they prepared for the Inside Austin Gardens tour. The results were nothing short of fabulous, thanks to the efforts of Rosalie, Richard Moline, Joe Posern, Linda Francescone, Sue Nazar and Manda Rash, along with several dedicated MGs and interns who took this project to heart.

Some of our newer members may not be aware, but the Extension demo garden has been transformed over the last 8-10 years, from a nondescript expanse of grass and weeds to a well-designed and attractive edible landscape, complete with an irrigation system, compost bins, cedar trellises, bamboo teepee, raised vegetable beds and a wicking bed. Numerous Master Gardeners have contributed their knowledge, talents and labor, and just as many have honed or learned new skills in the process. And as the name implies, the demo garden is also a public place for learning and teaching. If you'd like to join this effort, watch for Rosalie's email reminders and sign-up sheets, and congratulations to all for creating and maintaining this delightful oasis on Smith Road.



'Jack-B-Little' miniature pumpkins



Left: border of 'Red Sails' lettuce

In The Vegetable Garden

Continued...



Tendergreen' mustard in background with ornamental cabbage and cilantro in foreground



well-designed edible landscape

Photos: Patty Leander

Fungus Gnats

by Wizzy Brown

Fungus gnat adults are small, black, long-legged flies with long antennae. Most adults are about 1/16 of an inch, but some can get up to 1/2 inch. They are weak fliers and generally remain near potted plants, growing media, foliage or leaf litter.

Larvae, or immatures, have a black head capsule and long whitish body without legs. They feed on organic matter such as mulch, compost, grass clippings, plant roots and fungi. When conditions are very moist, fungus gnat larvae can become abundant, and may leave slime trails on media that look similar to trails left by snails or slugs.

While these gnats are a nuisance they are fairly easy to manage. In greenhouses, it is a good idea to use yellow sticky cards as a monitoring tool. Potato pieces may also be used as a monitoring tool for fungus gnats. Embed a peeled potato cube into media and inspect the underside of the potato and the media directly below it twice a week for fungus gnat larvae.

To manage fungus gnat populations, work on reducing excessively moist conditions. Avoid overwatering, and make sure that there is good drainage. The surface of container soil should be allowed to dry before watering again.

If using compost, make sure that items have been fully composted. Compost piles should be turned regularly and kept away from doors or windows. Inspect all doors, windows, vents and screens for a good seal to reduce the number of gnats that may enter a structure.

In homes, insecticides are rarely needed to manage fungus gnats. If they are needed, *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *israelensis* or the nematode *Steinernema feltiae* can be applied in containers to control larvae. Either spray on the media or apply as a soil drench. Biologicals work best when they are applied early in an infestation. If a population is already large, they may not provide the control desired.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com

Landscape Design Using MS Office

by Bob Beyer

If you want to go to the next step up from hand drawing and sketching a landscape plan, you need not buy fancy or specialized landscaping software to do so.

If you have MS Office for Windows or Mac on your computer, you already have landscape design software! After much frustration exploring various types of landscape software, none of which did all that I wanted, and involved a new learning curve to use it effectively, I discovered that everything the homeowner and average gardener needs is contained in your basic MS Office package (Excel, PowerPoint, and Word). OK, you can't create professional 3D designs, but in the planning process you can do 2D layouts with Excel, pictures of proposed plantings as a PowerPoint collage, and description of a landscape in Word.

First, you need to do some actual measuring of your garden area and sketch the dimensions on a pad, then using Excel, set column width equal to row height and you have graph paper. The size can be customized depending on the area you are designing. A front or back yard might have a general master layout with sub pages for defined areas in order to allow for more detail – a workbook containing several worksheets. So, if each box equals 1 square foot (or other designation), that provides the measurement aspect. In Excel, you can draw area borders, insert and edit shapes and lines, insert text boxes, using different line and area fills or even pictures inserted into a shape as a fill (Fig. 1). The tools are there to support your creativity. Who says Excel is only good for spreadsheets!

In PowerPoint, I like to supplement an Excel layout with pictures of the various plants proposed (Fig. 2). The same tools that are in Excel are available in PowerPoint, including direct importing of pictures onto a page to create a collage of plant materials. You can use the various shapes, edit them for color or fill to create landscape symbols that can be copied from a PowerPoint page onto the Excel layout grid, then resizing according to the plants ultimate spread and the grid. I even go as far as to put a colored border on plant shapes to reflect the color of the flower that plant will produce, or a fill that reflects the plants foliage color. Centers can be left blank for deciduous, filled to reflect evergreen or gradient to reflect semi-evergreen. Hardscape items such as fountains, containers, stepping stones, benches, vines, bordering bricks, etc. can also be developed in this manner using the drawing tools in this software. So you can develop your own landscape symbols using this common software (Fig. 3).

Finally, I use Word to provide descriptions, materials needed, work phasing, cost estimates or any other narrative that helps define or describe the landscape plan. Then I create a folder and insert the layout plan in Excel, plant and hardscape pictures in PowerPoint, and Word to describing and supporting the plan.

If you are a professional landscape designer, you can purchase landscaping 3D software costing up to \$400 to make an impressive presentation for clients, but if you are a homeowner and gardener, you can use your existing MS Office software to do the same thing (less the height and depth dimensions that 3D provides) for no additional expenditure. Another problem with professional software is that it will often contain images of plants not appropriate for central Texas, so you're paying for features that are not applicable.

In this post, I have provided a few examples. Give it a try and put your everyday software to use in a new way to design your landscape.

A Winter Garden Needn't Be Boring

Continued...

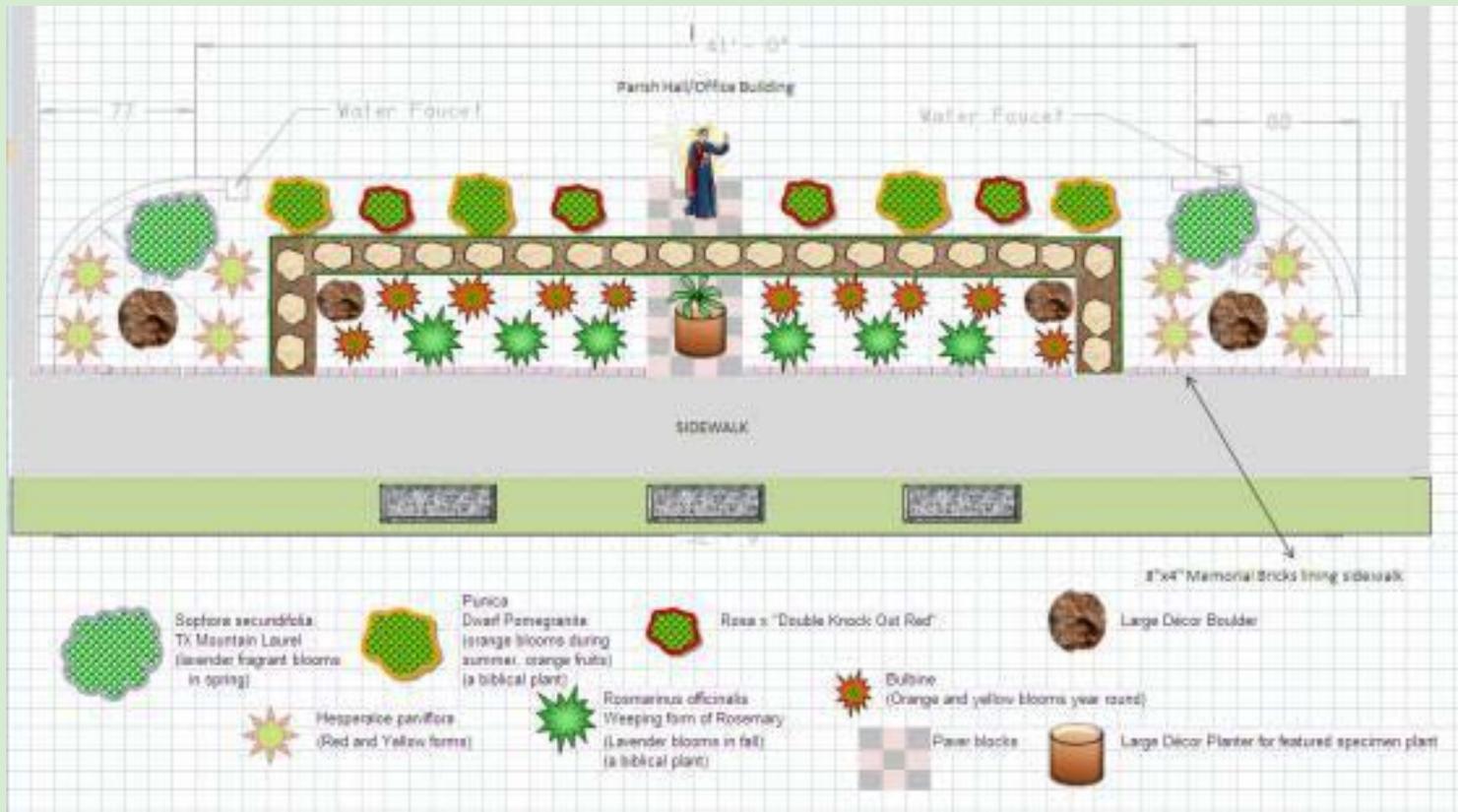


Fig. 1 Church memorial garden design in MS Excel.

A Winter Garden Needn't Be Boring

Continued...



Fig. 2 Powerpoint collage with plants selected in the design.

A Winter Garden Needn't Be Boring Continued...

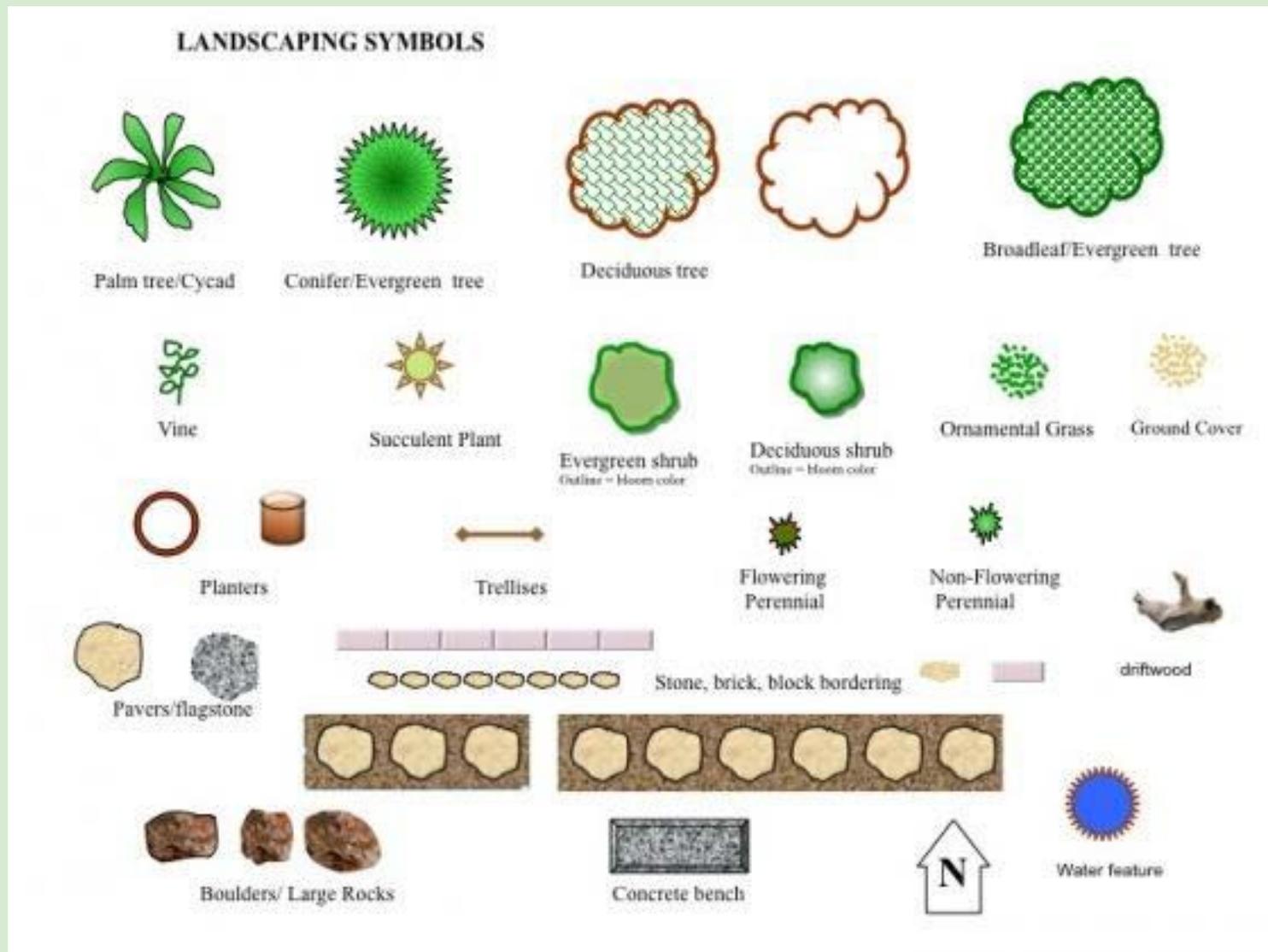


Fig. 3 Standard MS software drawing tools can be used to create landscaping symbols.

Austin Area Garden Events

Afternoon at the Garden; "Nature Art"

**Sunday, Dec 2
12pm - 4pm**

Zilker Botanical Garden
2220 Barton Springs Rd.
Austin, TX, 78746

Visit the Nature Art projects by the Zilker Botanical Garden kiosk, and make one of your own! Walk the garden on a scavenger hunt for colors and letters of the alphabet. Family fun! Admission is \$2.00 for adults and \$1.00 for children (ages 3-12) and seniors (ages 62 and older).

Luminations

**Saturday and Sunday , Dec 8 - 9
6pm - 9pm**

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
4801 La Crosse Ave.
Austin, Texas 78739

Enjoy gardens lighted with more than 3,000 luminarias and 5,000 twinkle lights, and to listen to music of the season. Admission is free with two canned food items for the Capital Area Food Bank. For details, go to <http://www.wildflower.org/luminations/>

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



The End...

Happy Holidays!

