



July 2013

The Compost Bin

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

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The Traveling Gardenista

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Cover Photo by: Patty & Bruce Leander - Mini pumpkins can be grown on a teepee or trellis

Right: Nellie and Cocoa enjoying the shade.

Photo by: Liath Appleton



July Speaker - Nevin Durish

Bats in Our Backyard

A consulting ecologist with a major focus of assessing potential impacts to bats and birds associated with wind farm development, Nevin Durish was a recent speaker at the San Antonio Bat Fest. During his undergraduate research at Texas Tech University he researched bat and rodent diversity and evolution in Texas, Mexico, and Central America. In addition, Nevin is an avid ornithologist, and regularly conducts bird surveys around the state for numerous species, including our local favorite, the golden-cheeked warbler.

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, July 3, 2013 starting at 7 pm
Zilker Botanical Garden

Master Gardener meetings are open to certified Master Gardeners and trainees.

In the Vegetable Garden

by Patty Leander

Another Texas spring has come and gone, but just think of all those folks living in the Northeast and Midwest, still watching the corn grow, and waiting for their tomatoes to ripen. Gotta love Texas! I'd much rather suffer through a few months of "warmth" than a long, lingering winter. How about you?

Just as vegetable gardens and gardeners in the north go dormant for the winter, our summer vegetable gardens here in the South might appreciate the same consideration. After all, we ask a lot of our soils during the busy and productive fall, winter and spring seasons. If you do allow your garden to go dormant, give it a good layer of mulch and water it occasionally to keep the earthworms and soil microbes happy. If you want to take it up a notch, plant a cover crop of cowpeas; 'Iron and Clay' is a fast-growing heirloom variety available from Johnny's (www.johnnyseeds.com) or Heavenly Seed (www.heavenlyseed.net). A few weeks before fall planting, turn the plants under and allow them to break down. Doing this will enrich the soil with nitrogen and organic matter. It's an easy task if you have a tractor or a heavy-duty tiller, but since I have neither, I take the no-till route. I cut down the tops and add them to the compost pile, leaving the roots in place to decompose. As an added benefit, 'Iron and Clay' also produces a small, dark pea that is fine for fresh eating.

If you want pumpkins for October or November, be sure to plant your seed in early July and look for varieties, such as 'Orange Smoothie', 'Chucky', 'Casperita', 'Hooligan' and 'Wee-B-Little' (all available from www.johnnyseeds.com), that mature in 90-100 days. Because pumpkins grow on long vines, they should be planted in hills or rows that are 4-6 feet apart. Smaller varieties, like 'Wee-B-Little', 'Casperita' and 'Hooligan' can be grown on a trellis or fence, but the larger varieties grow vigorous vines and heavy fruit, so give them plenty of room to roam.

This is also a good time to peruse the seed catalogs and place your order for fall planting. If you are planning to grow your own transplants of broccoli, cauliflower or other cool season vegetables, the seeds should be started in late July or early August.



'Iron and Clay' cowpeas can be grown as a summer cover crop; leaves and roots add nutrients and organic matter when turned into the soil and allowed to decompose before fall planting.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...

Below are a couple of sure-to-please recipes for using your summer bounty:

Vegetable Quesadillas

- 1 mild pepper, diced
- 2 zucchini or yellow squash, diced
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 cup fresh corn kernels
- 2 small tomatoes, diced
- ¼ cup cilantro
- 1 Tbsp lime juice
- 4 flour tortillas
- 1 cup cheddar cheese, shredded



Heat oil in skillet and sauté peppers and squash 3-4 minutes. Add corn and cook 2 more minutes. Stir in tomatoes, cilantro and lime juice, season with salt and pepper and set aside. Heat one tortilla in a non-stick skillet until lightly browned. Flip tortilla, and top with ½ cup vegetable mixture, then sprinkle with ½ cup cheese. Top with second tortilla, and carefully flip over. Heat 2-3 minutes, remove from pan, cut into wedges and serve. Repeat with remaining tortillas.

Yield: 4-6 servings

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...

isalsa!

This is the recipe I've been using for years – it's just a starting point, so feel free to tweak it to suit your personal taste. Thank goodness someone, somewhere, is growing cilantro, because it sure doesn't like our summer heat!

4 fresh tomatoes, chopped (peeled and seeded if desired, but I usually don't)

2-3 jalapenos, chopped

1 onion, chopped

1-2 cloves garlic, smashed

1/4 cup cilantro

1-2 tsp salt

1/2 tsp pepper

1/2 tsp cumin

2-4 Tbsp lime juice

1/2 tsp sugar



Chop the onion, jalapenos, garlic and one tomato in a blender or food processor. Add the seasonings and the remaining tomatoes, and blend till it seems right. This is personal taste. You can leave it chunky, but I usually blend out most of the chunks. Then I taste, and usually end up adding more tomatoes, lime juice, and sometimes, another jalapeno. I let it sit a bit, and then go back and taste and adjust seasonings if necessary. It gets a little redder, and a little spicier as it sits.

** You do not have to use a blender/food processor. If you prefer, finely chop the first five ingredients by hand, then stir in the seasonings and adjust to your taste.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...

Grilled Vegetables

1/3 cup balsamic vinegar

2 tbsp olive oil

2 cloves garlic, minced

1-2 tsp Italian seasoning (or favorite fresh herbs)

1-2 tsp salt

1/2 tsp pepper

1 1/2 tsp molasses

1 onion, quartered

12 mushrooms, quartered

1 red or yellow pepper, cut into rectangles

1 green pepper, cut into rectangles

1 small zucchini, cut into 1/2" slices

1 small yellow squash, cut into 1/2" slices

1 small eggplant, cut into 1/2" slices

Combine marinade ingredients. Place vegetables in a bowl and toss with marinade. Let stand 30 minutes. Remove vegetables from marinade and skewer, or place in a grill basket. Grill, covered, for 15-20 minutes.

Photos: Bruce and Patty Leander

Cactus Bugs

by Wizzy Brown

Cactus bugs, *Chelinidea vittiger*, are shield-shaped insects with piercing-sucking mouthparts. They can vary in color from greens to reds, and have antennae that are triangular in cross-section. Immatures, or nymphs, do not have fully developed wings, and sometimes are mistaken for weevils (Figure 1). These insects feed in colonies on prickly pear. Often the first indication of damage is round, yellowish spots on the cactus pads (Figure 2). If left unchecked, the feeding areas will increase in size until they cover entire pads, causing a yellow, pitted appearance.



Figure 1. Immature cactus bugs.

You can try high pressure water sprays, hand-picking/ squishing them, or vacuuming them off the plants.

Insecticidal soap may help against the smaller nymphs, but may not work as well on larger nymphs and adults.

You can also use a contact pesticide, either naturally derived or synthetic.

If you eat the fruits or pads, then you may want to avoid using systemic products.



Figure 2. Damage caused by cactus bugs.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600.

The Traveling Gardenista: Discovering public gardens by Heidi Roure

Since last fall, my husband and I have been taking a long sojourn traveling around the world and the United States. One of the sweetest pleasures has been discovering and exploring public gardens on our journey. I wanted to share with you some of the special places so that you too might appreciate a new place or add it to your travel wish list. Warmly, Heidi Roure

Butchart Gardens, Vancouver Island

Butchart Gardens is the legacy of a couple who transformed a limestone quarry into a magnificent Sunken Garden, along with an Italian garden, a rose garden, Japanese garden, begonias and more. We visited Butchart Gardens in the summer, twice. A Christmas present from my husband, I was looking forward to this trip for months! We planned our visit to coincide with the seasonal fireworks that take place just a few times in the summer; reason alone to make the trip. Following a long and lazy afternoon walking the gardens, guests can stay for the evening, until after dark, where more beauty and magic unfolds. Before dusk, we found our spot on a gentle hill leading down to Star Pond, and laid down our blanket. We enjoyed a summer picnic and some wine while watching the sunset, and shared a mug of hot chocolate as darkness arrived. Then the music began....classical pops and show tunes, as one of the most magnificent fireworks show lit up the sky over the water, their lights in sync with the music. Reveling in the most perfect ending to a lovely day, I was surprised again as Butchart Gardens was transformed at night by the Mid-Summer Night Illuminations! We lingered on our way back, as the gardens, paths, trees, and fountains were all softly and magically lit in all kinds of colorful lights. It was dreamy, as if we wandered into the forest of Avatar. A single day blessed with many magical experiences, and two trips we will never forget!



Austin Area Garden Events

Loveable Daylilies **Thursday, July 11, 2013** **10am-12pm**

Travis County AgriLife Extension Office
1600 B Smith Rd.
Austin TX

Daylilies are rugged, adaptable, vigorous perennials that endure in a garden for many years with little or no care. They can add soft or powerful splashes of color to the garden. Velia Sanchez-Ruiz, a daylily expert, will cover daylily planting topics including planting, fertilizer, controlling pest, and propagation. Learn about evergreen and dormant varieties and repeat bloomers.

This talk is free to the public and is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners, a volunteer arm of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County.

www.tcmastergardeners.org.

For information, call (512)854-9600.

Setting Up and Using Drip Irrigation **Saturday, July 13, 2013** **10am-12pm**

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

Did you know that drip irrigation is one of the most effective and efficient ways to water your garden and landscape beds, trees, vines and bushes? Drip irrigation is exempt from Austin's stage one, two and three water restriction schedules, due to its increased efficiency. The City of Austin has been under Stage Two Water Restrictions since September 2012, so take advantage of drip irrigation to help your landscape survive Central Texas' current and forecast drought conditions. This class will show you how to plan a system, where to buy supplies, and how to maintain your drip irrigation system to get the most out of it. Find out how a traditional water sprinkler system can be converted into a drip irrigation system to reduce consumption – and lower your water bill.

This talk is free to the public and is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners, a volunteer arm of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County.

www.tcmastergardeners.org.

For information, call (512)854-9600.

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The Compost Bin Submissions

We are always looking for Master Gardeners who are interested in writing for our monthly newsletter, and we would love to see your articles, photographs, book reviews and gardening ideas.

General Guidelines

- Please first email the editor to discuss potential article ideas.
- Email contributions as attachments (preferably in Word with a .doc or .rtf suffix).
- Please send images as separate attachments (preferably .jpg suffix). Don't forget to include photographer acknowledgments and captions.

Send your submissions, announcements, questions and suggestions to: editor.compostbin@gmail.com



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www.tcmastergardeners.org
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"Summer is the time when one sheds one's tensions with one's clothes, and the right kind of day is jeweled balm for the battered spirit. A few of those days and you can become drunk with the belief that all's right with the world." — Ada Louise Huxtable