

August 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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Cover Photo
by: Bruce
Leander



August Speaker - Patty Leander

The dry years are encouraging folks to forgo spring/summer gardens in favor of fall vegetable gardens. Patty Leander, consummate vegetable gardener and fellow Master Gardener, will speak on Fall Vegetable Gardening at our TCMGA meeting. Patty has gardened most of her life, and has learned best practices (as in most high quality product with least effort) from friends, classes, literature and trial and error. She is a wealth of information. Plus the excitement that she has in gardening transfers into her presentations.

Come learn what, when, and where to plant and how to care for fall vegetable gardens. It's a little different twist on "gardening as usual" in Travis County.

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, August 7, 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 one bites the dust: the beginning, the middle and the sad end of squash vine borer damage.

I have an announcement to make. Or call it a declaration, a resolution, a pledge: I, Patricia Marie Glenn Leander, being of sound mind and body, resolve this 1st day of August, 2013, to not grow any squash in my garden in the year 2014. And I might even extend the squash kibosh into 2015.

I don't have anything against squash. I love squash. I will sorely miss my home-grown squash, which is usually one of the first vegetables I harvest in spring. But if I grow it they will come. I'm talking about the squash vine borers. They have been a fixture in my garden for so many years I can't even remember growing squash without SVB damage. And I am tired of squishing, crushing, poking, piercing, stabbing, spraying, drowning and otherwise annihilating these larvae in my garden. I really don't derive any pleasure from killing things, even annoying insects. So I'm calling a truce with the squash vine borers and I'm giving my garden - and myself - a rest and hoping to break the SVB cycle.

If I don't grow it, they have no reason to come. The worst that can happen is that over the next year or two I 'source' my squash from the farmer's market or the grocery store (or gardening friends - hint, hint) and maybe by 2016 the SVB moths will have forgotten where my garden is. Next spring, if you hear me pining for squash, or talking about new varieties to try, or having second thoughts about a squash-less season, I might need some kindly reminders, positive reinforcement or a swift kick. Shore me up and help me through this temporary rough patch in the vegetable garden. Remind me of the pledge I made in August 2013, and don't let me backslide. I may not fully appreciate it in the moment, but perhaps I'll have you to thank for a bountiful, borer-free squash harvest in 2016.

I might as well start my squash kibosh this fall, but the rest of you can plant quick-growing summer squash or zucchini this month, along with cucumbers and bush green beans. These three vegetables are perfect candidates for fall planting. They are easy to plant from seed, and several varieties reach maturity in less than two months. Plus they grow better, look better and even taste better when grown under cooler fall conditions. They may not grow faster as the weather cools and sunlight diminishes, but the average first freeze date in Travis County is late November, so if planted in

August, these vegetables will have almost 3 months of fairly decent growing conditions. Below are a few fast-maturing varieties to look for. Seeds from Burpee, Renee's Garden, Seed Savers and Botanical Interests are often found on seed racks at local nurseries, and Callahan's also has a good selection of seeds from various sources. But it doesn't matter where the seed comes from as long as you plant varieties that have time to grow and produce before that first freeze (in general those that mature in less than 60 days).

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...

Squash:

Astia (zucchini) – 48 days

Black Beauty (zucchini) – 44-48 days

Dixie (yellow) – 40 days

Raven (zucchini) – 48 days

Bush Beans:

Contender – 50 days

Gold Rush – 54 days

Tavera – 54 days

Top Crop – 50 days

Cucumbers:

Carolina (pickling) – 50 days

General Lee – 52 days

Salad Bush – 57 days

Sweeter Yet – 50 days

While you are planting beans, squash and/or cucumbers, be sure to save room for cool season vegetables – cole crops, carrots, beets and peas - which can be planted next month. Take the time to plan out your fall garden on paper, making note of approximate planting and harvest dates. The Gardener's Supply website offers a free online garden planner that is fun to play around with:

http://www.gardeners.com/Kitchen-Garden-Planner/kgp_home,default,pg.html.



Above: Cucumbers, along with quick-growing bush beans and summer squash, can be planted in August for a fall harvest.

Left: Give spring plantings of eggplant and peppers a fertilizer boost (2-3 tablespoons of high nitrogen fertilizer scratched in around the perimeter of the plant) and a fresh layer of mulch. Keep them watered and they should produce right up to the first frost.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...

If you haven't had your soil tested in a few years now is a good time to send in a sample, as the turn-around time for test results will be shorter now than in the spring. The test results will recommend fertilizer amounts for your garden, but in lieu of a soil test, a general recommendation is to add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup commercial fertilizer (like 15-5-10) per 10' foot row. Double the amount (1 cup or $\frac{1}{2}$ pound) if you are using an organic source, such as fish meal, blood meal or cottonseed meal, or an organic formulation (like 8-2-4) since it contains less nitrogen. Nitrogen is the fuel that vegetables need for growth. Synthetic forms of nitrogen are readily available to plants and can be applied a day or two before planting, but organic sources need time to break down, so it is best to apply them now. Also spread a 1-2" layer of compost over your planting area and mix it into the top 6-12" of soil. This will help feed the soil microbes and improve growing conditions which ultimately leads to a healthy harvest!



Revive planting beds with a layer of compost and fertilizer, till lightly or turn under with a digging fork

Native Pollinators

by Wizzie Brown

Bumble bees are large (about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch long) and hairy. They are usually black with yellow or orange patterns. They are generalist foragers and do not rely on a particular type of flower for food. Bumble bees are capable of flying in cooler temperatures and lower light levels than other bees.

Fertilized queens overwinter and emerge in the spring. They choose a nesting site, often abandoned rat nests, or other dry, well-ventilated cavities, and lay eggs to start creating a nest. In the fall, all colony members tend to die off except the newly fertilized queens. Other nesting sites include clumps of dry grass, old bird nests, or occasionally in or under buildings.

Bumble bees have "buzz pollination". This type of pollination is where the bee grabs onto the flower, moves its wings rapidly and vibrates the anther which dislodges pollen. Some plants are more efficiently pollinated with buzz pollination.

For great information on Texas bumble bees go here <http://texasbumblebees.com/>

Carpenter bees look similar to Bumble bees, but they have a shiny, hairless abdomen. Carpenter bees get their name because they use their mandibles to chew galleries in wood. Galleries are rounded, and may sometimes cause damage to structures. The galleries are provisioned with pollen/ nectar loaves. An egg is laid on the loaf, and the section is portioned off with a mixture of saliva and sawdust.

Carpenter bees are similar to Bumble bees in that they are generalists and visit many types of flowers, as well as having "buzz pollination". They are long-lived, often surviving up to 3 years.

Leaf cutting bees can vary in size, but are about the size of a honey bee. They are mainly black with some light yellow hairs on the body. These bees do not have pollen baskets like honey bees;

the females carry pollen on the underside of the abdomen which is furry.

Males and females emerge in the spring to mate. Males die soon after mating, while females look for a suitable nesting site. Most leaf cutting bees are solitary (the mother takes care of her own brood), but some form small colonies. Leaf cutter bees live in cavities in wood or hollow stems.

The mother collects pollen and nectar, and mixes it with her saliva to create a bee loaf. Once the bee loaf is large enough, she will lay an egg on it. The chamber is then sealed with chewed leaves (the circular pattern cut out of rose bushes are from leaf cutter bees). She continues with the process until the entire nest cavity is full, and then creates a thicker outer wall for protection. Shortly after her task is complete, she dies. The developing bees will remain in the cavity until the following spring.

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

A Drive in Spain

One of our favorite things to do is drive off the beaten path. My husband and I love road trips, and we frequently divert from the highway and take the back roads. This is exactly what we did in Spain, opting to take the smaller roads in lieu of the *autopista* en route to the Costa Brava from Segovia, Spain. April and May in Spain is divine. Sixty degree temperatures, sunshine and rain sprinkles, and no crowds. Bliss. There are more wildflowers than people. The roadsides and fields are saturated with color – some monochromatic like the fields of red poppies, and others brightly covered in wildflowers from the rainbow: yellow, purple, red, periwinkle, and pink! When traveling the country side, the views are breathtaking, especially when discovering fields of olive orchards and grapevines, against a backdrop of snow topped mountains. Nearing the coast, the green rolling hills welcomed us with more varieties of wildflowers, daisies and wild grasses; ultimately revealing the unique flora of the seaside, where vines toppled over cliffs and flowers stretched towards the sun. Life doesn't get much better than this - driving in the sunshine, and stopping often to breathe in the air and admire the beauty with someone you love.



Tomato Tasting Trials

by Carolyn Williams



From little "poppers" to large beefsteaks.....hybrid to heirlooms.....we sampled, commented and examined them all!

For the past several years, Patty Leander and I have talked about having a tomato tasting trial with all the lip smacking good tomatoes we both enjoy growing. This year we actually achieved it!!

On June 21st, in my garden cottage, several serious tomato growers and eaters came together to taste, smell, talk and evaluate over 15 different varieties - both hybrid and heirloom. For the judging, each of us, (Jackie Johnson, Patty Leander, Pat Mokry, Marian Stassney, Renee Studerbaker and myself), brought together all the tomatoes we were currently growing.

Breaking them down into three categories, (beefsteak, mid-size and cherry), they were sliced and then given marks for taste, sweet/acid flavor, texture, appearance, size and any additional comments. To make this event extra special, Bruce Leander captured the taste trials in true "Bruce style", meaning everything was made extra pretty.

While preparing to start our tomato festival, each of us shared our personal thoughts and history on soil amendments, planting schedules, planting mediums and different ways in which we grow tomatoes.

Jackie lives where soil is sparse, so using 'Grow Boxes' has really worked well for her. Using this method, she is able to better space her plants while adding worm compost to her soil. She always makes sure not to plant tomatoes too close

together as it breaks down vital air flow and invites pest problems, ie. spider mites.

Marian recommends planting a fall tomato crop, especially if your area is under strict water restrictions, as hers is. She plants from the end of August thru the first part of September to better use the cooler nighttime temperatures. She also adds new compost to her garden area as the hot and hotter summer temperatures have stripped the soil of most nutrients.

Renee definitely believes her best tomatoes are grown using her own compost. This consists of wood chips, kitchen scrapes and lots of leaf matter. She layers large amounts over her existing soil making it lumpy with plenty of good organic matter. Many of you will remember Renee from her prior gardening columns in the Austin-American Statesman. These days she is a free lance writer and garden coach with articles that can now be read in Fine Gardening magazine.

As for me, after attending a soil amendment/biology class several years earlier, I have become a believer in planting a late fall 'cover crop'. It seems to really improve my quite poor, thin soil that sits atop lots of limestone here at the beginning of the Edwards' Plateau. There are different types of cover, but I have had success with using a clover. Then I lightly work it into the soil when planting in springtime.

This, combined with lots of fresh compost, a handful of rock phosphate to the bottom of each plant hole, at which time I sit the bottom of the

Tomato Tasting Trials

Continued...



Patty, Renee and Pat trying out a tomato variety while Bruce documents it all.

tomato's root ball directly into the material, have achieved a good start for my tomato plants. Be sure to water each plant well after planting.

I need to state here, that if you have never had your garden soil tested, please do so! It's a good lesson in learning what your particular area is made up of and, in the Austin area, there are many different types of soil.

Patty and I both planted earlier this year. I actually planted my tomatoes on Feb. 19th. Saying that, I ALWAYS have row cover stretched around my tomato cages for those early spring cold spells, extra chilly nights, and occasional heavy incoming storms. With cloth pins anchoring each cover around my plants, I can easily fold over the top to quickly enclose each tomato. I have even temporarily placed a plastic bag over the row cover to protect them from a stray ice storm like we encountered Easter Day several years earlier.

I didn't lose a plant, with several even having their first blooms! Just don't leave the plastic bags past absolutely necessary. Check your long-range forecast, but we all realize our temperatures are rising earlier in the year, making gardening schedules a bit more complex.

After planting my tomatoes, I use a strip of aluminum foil folded around the base of the plant to ward off those horrid little cut worms. I also save my extra large tomato cans (after making tomato soup), to encircle my young plants.

You all know the rule by now; water DEEPLY, but don't over-water. Depending on the temperature, once or twice a week is usually plenty. Mulch, mulch, mulch using cedar bark, leaves, alfalfa hay, etc. This keeps the soil temperature as low as possible and after the tomato season, you can incorporate the mulch into your soil. As I write this, we are into July and my tomatoes are still producing. Not as much as earlier in May and June, but still going none-the-less. I'm hoping for a few more weeks before they all start closing down. You also need to remember tomatoes are pretty heavy feeders, so every 2 - 2 1/2 weeks, I do foliar feeding using liquid seaweed and/or a "made for foliar feeding" supplement.

My raised garden beds get lots of morning plus early afternoon sun, but actually have partial late afternoon shade. Due to our rising late spring/early summer temperatures, this bit of shade has prolonged my production season by several weeks. Yes, the night time temperatures are still high, but the plant is not being totally stressed out by the relentless blistering sun. I am still picking tomatoes on a daily basis.



The different varieties are sliced, tasted, reviewed and then rated by each of us.

Tomato Tasting Trials

Continued...

So, the rewards of all this work is to have your fellow gardeners over to eat lots of delicious tomatoes while trying to decide which ones are worthy!

Here is my list of favorite tomatoes from our trial:

Beefsteak: *J.D. C-Tex Special Black* (open pollinated) with extremely good, sweet taste. Dark red/chocolate appearance ranked top of my list in this category. Texture was firm with just wonderful tomato taste. This tomato comes from J.D. Whitaker in Conroe, Tx. A real winner! 82 days

Marianna's Peace (heirloom) exceptionally rich, with good sweet/acid flavor and firm texture rated high. Great 'old fashioned' flavor with dense flesh. This would make a great sliced tomato presentation. 82 days

Black Krim (Russian heirloom) with dark red/chocolate appearance and good production was a runner up, with good, sweet flavor. You can't lose with this tomato! 69 days

Mid-Size: *Jaune Flemmee* or just Flemmee (French heirloom) with an orange appearance and "zingy" tart taste ranked best for me in the mid category. Clusters of tomatoes appear early in the season with continued bearing still going on into July. A nice surprise this year and one I will continue to grow. 80 days

Stupice (heirloom) produces clusters of orange fruit with a sweet tang that was quite intense. Good yield of 2" fruit. Ranked well. 75 days

Cherry: *Black Cherry* (heirloom) continually producing dark red, sweet & complex flavor from early in the spring until summer sun ends the season. A great little dependable tomato with no bitter, tough skin. Every garden should grow one! A real winner for a salad tomato. One that can easily be cut back for a fall return. Chefs love this one as do I!! 65 days

Sungold (hybrid) another continually producing cherry that gives you golden yellow tomatoes on a daily basis. Wonderful little package of sweet & tart flavor. Combined with Black Cherry, you have the starting of a summer salad that can't be beat! 57 days

Tomato Tasting Trials

Continued...

Others we tasted included; Better Boy, Better Girl, Cherokee Purple, German Johnson, Green Zebra, Porter, Silvery Fir Tree and Odoriko. All were good & had merit, but the above were my personal favorites. Asking a few local gardening wizards their favorites was an interesting side note.

Patty's are Better Boy, Cherokee Purple & Favorita. John Dromgoole's are Sungold and Black Krim. Trisha Shirey's are Celebrity, Tycoon, Lemon Boy & Sweet Million. Trisha has, unfortunately, experienced rootknot nematodes and has to grow resistant varieties. If you have the same problem, her 's are good ones.

For me, our tomato trials were both fun and educational. By sharing gardening information, we gleaned little helpful hints from one another that add up to a better tomato growing season to come. I hope there is something from this article that will help you as well.

Happy Tomato Growing!

Carolyn

Austin Area Garden Events

All about Texas Native Bees

**Saturday, Aug 3, 2013
9am-12pm**

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

Native bees are the most important pollinators of flowering plants in Texas. This session will focus on:

The basics of bee identification
Separating bees from other flower-visiting insects
Major native bee groups
How to conduct bee surveys and process specimens

Host: Michael D. Warriner, Invertebrate Biologist, TPWD

Cost: Free with admission to Garden, \$2/adults, \$1/children and seniors

RSVP by emailing Anjoli.Fry@austintexas.gov or by calling (512) 477-8672 X17.

[View the flyer](#)

Fall-Winter Vegetable Gardening

**Thursday, Aug 8, 2013
10am-12pm**

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

It may be hotter than blazes right now but it's time for a second round of warm season veggies, and to plan for those wonderful cool season veggies we can grow from late summer through winter. There's nothing like "home grown". Master Gardener Vegetable Garden Specialist Tommie Clayton will teach which vegetables we can grow, how to get them off to a good start and how to care for them right up to harvest! Session is excellent for new and experienced gardeners.

Register at <https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/TravisCounty> or by phone 979-845-2604. Class is limited to 40 people. \$10 preregister or \$15 on site.

Austin Area Garden Events

Rainwater Harvesting

Saturday, Aug 10, 2013

9am-12pm

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

Take advantage of a rainwater collection system to help your vegetables, landscape beds, trees and lawn survive Central Texas' drought conditions. Master Gardener Ed Parken will discuss how to plan, design, and set up a sustainable water-harvesting system for your home and landscape. New filtration and treatment technologies make rainwater harvesting relatively easy, which is why it has been growing in popularity. It's an old practice that Central Texas gardeners can take advantage of with improved and more modern materials and systems.

The event is free to the public. It 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.

Monarchs, Milkweed and You!

Saturday, Aug 10, 2013

1pm-5pm

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

The Monarch population in Mexico last winter was the lowest ever recorded, and the butterfly was added to the World Wildlife Fund's Top 10 Most Threatened Species List. Please join us for this educational workshop to learn what actions you can take to benefit this magnificent long distance flyer of the insect world. Topics will include the biology, life cycle and habitat requirements of Monarch butterflies and an overview of Monarch Watch and the Monarch Larval Monitoring Program conservation initiatives and citizen science projects.

About the presenters:

Dr. Kiphart is a Texas Master Naturalist (TMN). He has logged over 10,000 volunteer hours for TMN, presenting programs on Monarch Waystation, Bring Back the Monarch and the Monarch Larval Monitoring Program.

Cathy Downs is a TMN and the Texas chair and a certified educator for the Bring Back the Monarchs Program. She teaches Monarch biology, habitat and migration throughout Texas.

Mike Quinn has coordinated Texas Monarch Watch since 2000. Mike holds a master's degree in entomology from Texas A&M and has been active in monarch conservation for over 20 years.

Free with admission to Zilker Botanical Garden:
\$2 adult, \$1 senior, \$1 child 3-12 yrs.

For more information about this workshop, contact:

Elizabeth McVeety, CPRP

Garden Center Coordinator

512-477-1750 or 512-477-1734 fax

elizabeth.mcveety@austintexas.gov

Austin Area Garden Events

The Austin Cactus and Succulent Society's Fall 2013 Show and Sale Saturday and Sunday, Aug 31-Sept 1, 2013 10am-5pm

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

The show offers visitors a chance to see rare and beautiful cacti and succulent species from around the world. Vendors from Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico will sell native and exotic cacti and succulents, and hand-made pottery at reasonable prices. There will be a daily silent auction and hourly plant raffle of rare and collectible cacti and succulents. Educational information, literature, and expert advice will be available. Come and bring a friend. For more information about the Austin Cactus & Succulent Society and its programs, please visit www.AustinCSS.com

Free with admission to Zilker Botanical Garden:
\$2 adult, \$1 senior, \$1 child 3-12 yrs.

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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
<http://travis-tx.tamu.edu>
512-854-9600

"Bees do have a smell, you know, and if they don't they should, for their feet are dusted with spices from a million flowers."
— Ray Bradbury, Dandelion Wine