

The Compost Bin

September 2013

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

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Cover Photo: Sugar Snap Peas
by: Bruce Leander

Right: Late Bloomer Squash
by: Liath Appleton



September Speaker - Susan Decker

Fall Lawn Care and Spring Weed Control

Susan Decker, an avid observer of nature, and a keen plant enthusiast, is a former president of the Travis County Master Gardeners Association. As a Master Gardener she helped develop the Demonstration Garden at Extension, and managed the Phone Desk for many years. She recently moved to Wimberley where she spins her own llama wool, raises seramas, makes raccoon-proof bird feeders, and enjoys the seasonal cycles of the 170 native plant species she has identified so far.

This is a timely lawn and weed talk to help Master Gardeners answer some of those questions, and in helping us prevent more of those weeds in our own gardens.

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, September 4, 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



Colorful Swiss chard is easy to grow from seed

if you don't have the time or inclination to start seeds indoors, most garden centers will have a good selection of broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage, as well as an array of lettuces, kale, collards and Swiss chard.

A couple of weeks before planting, prepare the soil by mixing in fertilizer (about 1 cup of 8-2-4 or 6-2-2 per 10 feet of row) and shade the garden bed with mulch, leaves, newspaper, shade cloth, umbrellas or row cover to moderate the soil temperature. Once your transplants are in the ground, keep them well-watered, and feed them with a dilute fertilizer once a week. And unless you want to harvest all of your broccoli and cauliflower heads at once, it is a good idea to stagger your plantings over the course of two to three weeks.

September brings that much anticipated break in the weather, and this year it even happened in mid-August, when several Central Texas residents woke up to temperatures in the 60s. Those cooler nighttime temperatures are rejuvenating for both gardens and gardener, and help make the fall garden season one of the best times to grow vegetables.

Cooler weather means fewer bugs, more rain, and less heat stress on plants. Take advantage of this wonderful season to grow nutrient packed cole crops, root crops and leafy greens. Heading crops like broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage take a long time to develop, so they should go in as transplants; root crops don't like to be transplanted, so it's always best to seed them directly into the garden. It's easy and more economical to grow leafy greens from seed, but they can also be transplanted for a slightly earlier harvest. Resourceful gardeners can grow their own transplants, but



Shade cloth protects young transplants from intense heat and sun

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...



Sweet and crunchy sugar snap peas.

Don't miss out on the candy of the fall season – sugar snap peas. And with sugar snaps priced at \$3.99/pound at the neighborhood grocery store, our home-grown peas are a bargain! Most varieties take 60-65 days to produce, so plant in mid September to get a good harvest before that first frost that usually arrives in late November. Start with fresh seeds. Soak them for a few hours to plump them up, and they will sprout in less than a week. Recommended varieties include 'Sugar Ann' (52 days), 'Sugar Sprint' (58 days), 'Cascadia' (60 days) and 'Sugar Bon' (56 days). All grow on 24-30" upright vines but I like to give them a little support when they grow to make harvesting easier. A tomato cage, a pea fence or twine strung between two posts will help keep them orderly and in bounds.



A flexible pea fence helps sugar snap peas grow upright and orderly.



Swiss chard makes a colorful statement in the edible landscape.

Spider Mites

by Wizzie Brown

Spider mites are common plant pests that are found on the underside of leaves. Their feeding can cause leaves to discolor, resulting in a speckled appearance. With severe infestations, the plant leaves discolor to a silver or bronze color which may result in the leaves dropping from the plant.



Figure 1. Spider mites on the underside of a leaf.

Spider mites are arachnids, closely related to spiders and ticks. Similar to spiders, spider mites can produce silk, and often cover leaves with webbing, especially when there are large populations. The webbing helps to protect the mites and their eggs from natural enemies and harsh environmental conditions.

Spider mites lay their eggs along the leaf vein during the growing season. Eggs are round and large in size when compared to the adult mite. Some species of spider mites peak during warmer months of the year, while others become more active in the cooler months of the year. The mites are able to develop more quickly when temperatures are warmer, so populations can grow very quickly. Spider mites thrive in dry conditions. Their natural enemies require more humid



Figure 2. Webbing covering a plant infested with spider mites.

conditions, so dry conditions allow spider mite populations to grow with little predation or parasitism that would keep the population at an acceptable level.

There are many predatory arthropods that feed on spider mites. Some of these include predatory mites, spider mite destroyers (a type of ladybug), minute pirate bugs, big-eyed bugs and predatory thrips. Proper watering of plants may also help to reduce spider mite outbreaks, as watering plants can help reduce stress brought on by drought. Using strong jets of water to hose plants can also help to dislodge spider mites on infested plants. Miticides or acaricides can be used to manage spider mite outbreaks. Look for active ingredients such as horticultural oils, insecticidal soaps, abamectin, bifenthrin, dimethoate or acephate.

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

Washington State University Discovery Garden – Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners

My husband and I love to go off the beaten path, driving county roads and exploring the regional flora. On our way to the San Juan Islands, we took the unfamiliar side roads in Skagit County. We dropped in on a few farmers markets and local honey stands, tasting the sweetness of honey cultivated by the bees and wildflowers of the Pacific Northwest. The season was early fall, and the markets held an abundance of fresh flowers, fruits, and vegetables. Our most surprising discovery was coming upon the [Washington State University Discovery Garden](#) in Skagit County. It is situated along a quiet road in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains, surrounded by family farms.



Beautifully cared for by the Skagit County Master Gardeners, this garden was Alice in Wonderland and the Garden of Eden. Every turn

was a surprise. Acres of fruit trees and paths that take you from one garden to another, each one cared for and thriving in its own way. There was a cottage garden and vegetable garden; a rose garden, an herb garden, and a Nature-scape of native and non-native plants inviting a bounty of birds, butterflies, and bunnies. My husband and I followed one cotton-tail throughout the garden as if I was Alice herself. Then there were the gardens especially suited for the Pacific Northwest: an evergreen corner, Japanese garden, a winter, summer, and shade garden, an easy-care garden, ornamental grass garden, and a more formal and welcoming entrance garden. It was a wondrous place to explore, rest, and breathe in the beauty.



Austin Area Garden Events

Iris Society of Austin Plant Sale

**Saturday, Sep 7, 2013
9am**

Norris Conference Center
2525 W Anderson Ln.
Austin TX

The Iris Society of Austin is excited about bringing new iris rhizomes to the public. Members from Austin will be present in the room during the sale to provide growing tips, to explain how to plant the rhizomes, and to answer any questions.

Drought Tolerant Plants in Your Landscape

**Thursday, Sep 12, 2013
10am-12pm**

Travis County AgriLife Extension Office
2220 Barton Springs Rd.
Austin TX

Bob Beyer, Travis County Master Gardener, will address the challenges of gardening in the extreme temperatures and drought conditions which frequent Central Texas. Learn how low water use plants can make a big impact in your landscape. Hear recommendations on native and adapted plants which embrace the local environment.

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

21st Annual Texas Bamboo Festival

**Saturday, Sept 14, 2013 - 10am-6pm
Sunday, Sept 15, 2013 - 10am-5pm**

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

Plants and Crafts for Sale * Talk to Experts & Local Growers *
Live and Silent Auction
Details at: www.bamboocentral.net/festival21.html
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

Zilker Botanical Garden Open House

Saturday, Sept. 21, 2013

10am - 1pm

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

Austin Area Garden Council's 30 member garden clubs give numerous programs every month, most of which are free and open to the public. Some of this year's topics include rainwater harvesting, composting and growing earth kind roses. If you have questions such as which plants will attract butterflies, how do I prune this bonsai, or what is eating my plant, you can find help at the Garden Center.

Come to the Open House to learn more about Austin area clubs. Featured events include:

- Garden Tours
- Plant Clinic - free advice about that sick plant, bring a cutting!
- Flower Arranging Demonstrations
- Growing Culinary Herbs

Participating clubs include the Creative Designers, Master Gardeners, Organic Gardeners, Iris Society, Herb Society, Butterfly Forum, Daylily Society, Pond Society, Violet Crown Garden Club, Bonsai Society, Bamboo Society, Yaupon Garden Club, Ikebana Study Group, Cactus & Succulent Society, Zilker Garden Club, African Violet Society, Begonia Society, East Austin Garden Club, Orchid Society, Western Trails Garden Club, Porcelain Arts Club, Rose Society and Zilker Docents.

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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

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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

"By all these lovely tokens, September days are here, with summer's best of weather, and autumn's best of cheer."
-- Helen Hunt Jackson, *September*