

A close-up photograph of a woven wicker basket filled with numerous harvested garlic bulbs. The bulbs are white with some yellowing at the base, and their papery skins are partially peeling. The basket's texture is visible in the background.

October 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: Save a few cloves of garlic from this year's earlier harvest for fall planting.
by: Bruce Leander

Right: Oxbloods and Rain Lilies
by: Mary Sue King (MG Trainee)



October Speaker - Sheryl Williams

Building Bug Condos

Dr. Seuss created a Dog Party – a BIG Dog Party – in his book, Go Dog, Go! Our October 2, 2013 TCMGA speaker, Sheryl Williams has created a BIG Bug Party in her yard. Is she nuts, or has she found an ingenious approach to organic gardening? Come find out.

Sheryl Williams has been in the garden her entire life - first as a child in her family garden, and later as an outspoken gardening advocate. Her extended family grew and preserved much of their own food, so of course Sheryl concentrated her efforts on growing nothing but flowers. When the first concerns about the safety of the food supply began to surface in the late 1990s, she responded by composting her English border garden, and concentrated on edible landscaping.

Sheryl moved to Austin in 2009, and became a Travis County Master Gardener in 2010. She says that gardening in Texas has brought out her "A" game, and she is always trying to figure out how to keep her garden thriving under the constant onslaught of every insect plague in the book. She realized the key is to attract even MORE bugs. So in pure Austin style, she constructed a condo tower for them, which is the subject of tonight's talk.

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, October 2, 2013 starting at 7 pm
Zilker Botanical Garden

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

Announcements

Fall Plant Exchange Master Gardener Meeting - Oct 2

The theme for this fall's plant exchange is "Plants that Flower!" It doesn't have to be begonias or iris or daylilies...although that would be great. It can be skullcap, or yellow bells or anything that blooms. Of course it can be anything, but please no highly invasive plants. Please plan to bring a few extras, since Pat Mokry needs some for a propagation class.

How does the plant exchange work?

Members bring extras of their favorite plants, preferable in pots. Please be sure that the plants are in good condition and are properly labeled, or be ready to talk about the care of the plants. And remember, no muddy messes! We can scout out our favorites before the meeting, but we have to wait until AFTER the meeting, for the "ready, set, go!" and the real fun begins! Once again, please don't bring invasive plants, and for those plants that spread rapidly, please label them appropriately. Don't forget to bring extra seeds, cuttings, garden magazines, pots and other garden related items that you'd like to share with other Master Gardeners. We'll also need help setting up and cleaning up, so plan to stay to get the room cleaned up. And please take home any of your extra plants.

Creating a Drought-Resistant Garden in Central Texas and Garden Guide for Austin & Vicinity Now available for purchase online!

As you already know, our book, *Creating a Drought-Resistant Garden in Central Texas*, and our award-winning *Garden Guide for Austin and Vicinity* are available at many local nurseries and gardening stores, but did you know that the books are also available for purchase online?

Central Texas is a wonderful place to live and garden. It also can be a challenge to keep plants healthy and happy when the weather turns hot and dry. The Travis County Master Gardeners Association has harvested a bounty of advice, facts, lists and tips specifically for gardeners who are dealing with the challenges of gardening in the Austin area.

To purchase online, go to our website at
<http://www.tcmastergardeners.org/what/bookDrought.html>
and
<http://www.tcmastergardeners.org/what/gardenguide.html>

In the Vegetable Garden

by Patty Leander

By October the fall garden should be rocking and rolling! With less heat and more rain garden chores become less laborious and more fun. Here is a quick glance at the vegetable gardener's to-do list for this month:

- Monitor cole crops for small green cabbage loopers and cabbage worms. Not only do they love cabbage, but they will eat up your broccoli, cauliflower and kale, too. Remove the ravenous culprits by hand, or treat with insecticides that contain Bt or spinosad.
- Thin root crops such as carrots, beets, radishes and turnips. Space 4-6" apart so they have room to develop, and so they will not need to compete for water and nutrients.
- If you have room, sow a succession crop of turnips, radishes, beets or kohlrabi.
- Plant garlic: separate cloves and plant each one pointy side up, 2" deep and 6" apart. 'Texas White' and 'California Early' are softneck varieties that do well in Central Texas.
- Plant lettuce, spinach, arugula, Swiss chard and other cool season greens.
- Plant strawberries if you can find transplants (if not, ask your local nursery to carry them in the fall). They do best when grown as an annual, planted in the fall, and harvested in the spring.
- Don't forget annual herbs like cilantro, dill and parsley; they are happy to grow in the cool season.
- Keep plants growing vigorously by feeding with a water soluble fertilizer every 2 weeks, or sidedress with a granular type every 3-4 weeks. Use a nitrogen-rich fertilizer that is readily available to the plants, such as blood meal, cottonseed meal or ammonium sulfate.
- Harvest sweet potatoes, and place them in a warm, humid place to cure and set their skins before storing. Handle carefully, as they bruise easily, and damaged potatoes will not store well.
- Save grass clippings and fallen leaves for mulching and composting.
- Mulch planting beds.
- Plant a cover crop of Elbon rye or clover in fallow beds to improve the condition of your soil. Cut it down and turn it under next spring.



After a long, hot summer, fall is the ideal time to grow hardy greens and cole crops

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...



Top Left: all those leafy weeds that pop up after a good rain are ideal "green" matter for the compost pile.

Top Right: thin beets and other root crops leaving at least 4-6" between individual plants.

Left: feed broccoli and cauliflower with a nitrogen rich fertilizer (1-2 tablespoons per plant) when the heads begin to form.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...



If you don't have loose, deep, soil, try growing carrots in a large pot.



Harvest sweet potatoes before the first frost; handle carefully to avoid bruising.

Leaf Cutting Ants

by Wizzie Brown

Leaf cutting ants are reddish-brown, with three pairs of spines on the thorax, and one pair of spines on the back of the head (Fig 1). Workers come in various sizes, but can be up to ½ an inch long. Mounds can become large, and are sometimes mistaken for fire ant mounds. Leaf cutter ant mounds have a central opening, and often have a crater shape at the top (Fig 2).



Figure 1. Leaf cutting ants.



Figure 2. Leaf cutting ant mound.

Cut ants typically forage when the temperatures are cooler, such as at night or in the morning. They can sometimes cause complete defoliation of plants or small trees overnight. Leaf cutting ants remove leaves and buds from plants in the landscape. The ants do not eat the plant pieces, but take it back to the colony where it is fed to a fungus garden. They tend a species of particular fungus, and weed out any other fungus from the garden.

Colonies may exist for years, and can exceed over two million ants. It is not unusual for a single colony to cover an acre of land. Colonies are usually found in well drained, sandy or loamy soils. Plants can be temporarily protected by using spray adhesives around the base of the plant. These would need to be refreshed often when dirt or debris accumulates on the adhesive.

Leaf Cutting Ants

by Wizzie Brown

Temporary protection can also be provided with contact insecticidal spray or dusts. If mounds are located in an area, the bait product labeled for leaf cutter ants, Amdro Ant Block, can be broadcast with a hand-held spreader around the mound area.

If no mounds are seen, then residual sprays and dusts can be used along foraging trails and around openings.

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

San Antonio Botanical Garden

Sometimes the sweetest surprises are in our own backyards and close to home. For the longest time, I wanted to visit the San Antonio Botanical Garden. What a surprise! Being so close to Austin, much of the garden was relevant to our backyard gardening here at home. Still, there seemed to be many flowers I was seeing for the first time; and I was a sponge. This was personal. What other treasures might I find that could flourish in my own yard, in our neighborhood, and in Austin? Upon entering, I spotted an amazing ball of beauty. Not quite an inch, this bud took my breath away. I gazed at its perfection. The stem stood tall, lean and strong; the bud ready to burst. Everywhere I wandered, my eyes took in a rainbow of colors. Then, what a delight to walk along Watersaver Lane: six tiny cottages with equally tiny plots of land, and each landscaped to demonstrate alternatives to traditional landscaping in central Texas. Walking further, I escaped to the Hill Country garden path and the East Texas Pineywoods path, surrounding a pond lined with giant bald cypresses. The San Antonio Botanical Garden impressed me, and took me in, hook, line and sinker. I enjoyed this garden for hours, inspired by our own Texas treasures. We are so fortunate to have these public assets nearby, including many of our own right here in Austin.



Austin Area Garden Events

Water Wise Open House

Saturday, October 5, 2013

9am-1pm

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

Come learn water wise practices for your home landscape at the Texas A&M Travis County AgriLife Extension Office Open House! Travis County Master Gardeners are available for one-on-one discussion on installing drip irrigation, composting, vegetable gardening, raising chickens, and identifying good/bad bugs.

Free event for the entire family with hands-on kid's activities. Stroll the demonstration garden and ask questions. Great gardening publications available.

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center Fall Plant Sale & Gardening Festival

Saturday, October 5-6, 2013

9am-5pm

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
4801 La Crosse Ave.
Austin TX

Fall Plant Sale provides more than 300 species of native plants for the garden, the largest sale of its kind in Central Texas. Drought-tolerant native trees, decorative wildflowers and other options will be for sale, including hard-to-find plants. Experts will be on hand to give tips and help with selections. Guided tours of the gardens will also be available both days.

Admission: \$9 adults, \$7 seniors and students, \$4 UT faculty, staff or students with identification, \$3 children 5 through 12, members and children under 5 free.

Details at <http://www.wildflower.org/plantsale/>

Austin Area Garden Events

Selecting and Planting the Best Trees for Austin

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

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

There are many factors that help insure the health of your landscape trees. Come hear about how to select the right tree and location to get the most from your landscape trees. Jerry Naiser, ISA Certified Arborist, Texas Forest Service – Certified Oak Wilt Specialist, and Travis County Master Gardener, will walk you through how to evaluate for all the right criteria including soil, purpose of the planting, fit in landscape, selection of good specimen and planting. He will also address ongoing tree care to keep your new tree in top shape.

Registration is required:
<https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/TravisCounty>
or call 979-845-2604.

How to Grow Your Own Fruit

**Saturday, October 19, 2013
10am - 1pm**

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

Learn the basics of sustainable fruit production: site selection, site preparation, variety selection, and the specific needs of various fruit crops including citrus, olives, pomegranates and ju-jubes. Mr. Monte Nesbitt, Program Specialist – Pecans/Fruit/Citrus at Texas A&M University, will help you understand how fruit crops respond to our ever-changing weather conditions in Central Texas. Tips will be given on how to enhance sustainable production using Earth Kind principles with conventional crops such as peaches and berries. Explore newly emerging fruit choices that can be grown with minimal inputs.

Registration is required \$25 per attendee for early registration, \$35 after 10/5.
Register at <https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/TravisCounty> or call (979)845-2604.

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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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"There is no season when such pleasant and sunny spots may be lighted on, and produce so pleasant an effect on the feelings, as now in October." - Nathaniel Hawthorne