

The Compost Bin

December 2010

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

Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

In this issue ...

*In the Vegetable
Garden
Poinsettias -
Symbols of the
Holiday Season
Bagworms
President's
Message*



Inside this Issue ...

- The President's Message Page 3
- In the Vegetable Garden Page 6
- Bagworms Page 9
- Poinsettias —Symbols of the Holiday Season Page 10
- 2010 TCMGA Board Page 13

To the following Executive Board members who are stepping down, I just wish to say "Thank You" for all your hard work and continued support this past year. Your dedication to TCMGA is much appreciated! Carolyn

Thank you to:

Marty Berdan
Vicki Blachman
Jo Kautz
Bonnie Martin
Sherrill Nilson
Becky Waak



Master Gardener Christmas Party:

Wednesday, December 1st, 2010

starting at 7 pm.

Lilker Botanical Garden

Please try to car pool.



Hello Master Gardeners: A Message From Your President

A Gardener's Wish List for Santa

Instead of trying to come up with my own gardening gift ideas for the upcoming holiday season, I decided to let many of you savvy gardeners give me some "helper hints" regarding your favorite gardening tool, book and blog. Hopefully, this will help all of you with some ideas about what to give a fellow gardener or what to hint to your own Santa about what might be nice to find under your tree! And, if you find yourself with some free time, the following gardening blogs are really good. Perfect for winter reading with a cup of coffee or hot chocolate!

Tool Suggestions to Put Under the Christmas Tree

Titanium coated ratchet-style pruners
Felco pruners (several votes for these)
Trowels
Japanese pull saws for pruning
All-purpose mixing tub (flat, rectangular and plastic)
Fireman's hose nozzle
Green handled ergonomic trowel
Garden fork with metal shaft and "D" handle (short and tough enough for tight spaces)
Short handled 26" shovel with metal shaft & "D" handle
Floating row cover
Atlas, Sun Grip or leather gardening gloves
Sturdy wheelbarrow
Joyce Chen scissors
Lightweight, loose-fitting pair of men's pajama pants w/pockets
Handheld bug zapper
Garden bench with soft padding
Sharpshooter spade
Radius Pro stainless steel transplanter & weeder



A Message From Your President

Continued...

A Wish List of Gardening Books

The Passion for Gardening — Ken Druse

Plant-Driven Design: Creating Gardens That Honor Plants, Place, and Spirit — Scott Ogden & Lauren Springer Ogden (several votes)

Designing with Succulents — Debra Lee Baldwin

The Education of a Gardener — Russell Page

Gardening Success with Difficult Soils: Limestone, Alkaline Clay and Caliche Soils — Scott Ogden

Garden Bulbs for the South — Scott Ogden

TCMGA Garden Guide

Texas Gardener's Annual Planting Guide & Calendar

Ortho Problem Solver

Remarkable Plants of Texas — Matt Turner

What's Wrong with My Plant — David Dearorff & Kathryn Wadsworth

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle — Barbara Kingsolver

Elements of Garden Design — Joe Eck

Men and Gardens: A Delightful Tour through Gardens & Garden Writing Of The Past — Nan Fairbrother

A Gentle Plea for Chaos: Reflections from an English Garden — Mirabel Osler

Park's Success with Seeds — Ann Reilly

The Complete Compost Gardening Guide — Barbara Pleasant & Deborah Martin

Favorite Gardening Blogs to Visit Frequently

Vert — Suzanne Hurley (<http://vertaustin.blogspot.com>)

East Side Patch — Philip Leveridge (www.eastsidepatch.com)

Great Stems — Meredith (www.greatstems.com)

Garden Austin — Marc Opperman (<http://gardenaustin.com>)

Central Texas Gardener — Linda Lehmusvirta (www.klru.org/ctg/blog)

Renee's Roots — Renee Studebaker (www.statesman.com/blogs/content/shared-gen/blogs/austin/gardening/index.html)

Playin' Outside — Vicki Blachman (<http://playinoutside.blogspot.com>)

Digging — Pam Penick (www.penick.net/digging)

Conscious Gardening — Cheryl Goveia (<http://consciousgardening.blogspot.com>)



A Message From Your President

Continued...



As for myself, I really like my own Felco pruners, but my all time favorite helper is my little Radio Flyer 9A wagon. Just the right size to maneuver in and out of small places and still carry a hefty load. It is now considered "vintage", but then again, so am I. We belong together!!

My favorite gardening books are:

The Organic Rose Garden — Liz Druitt

The Southern Heirloom Garden — William C. Welch & Greg Grant

Native Texas Gardens: Maximum Beauty Minimum Upkeep — Sally & Andy Wasowski

and (an old favorite), *Mrs. Whaley and her Charleston Garden* — Emily Whaley & William Baldwin.

Of course, I use my TCMGA Garden Guide constantly!

Hope you find some enjoyment out of what your fellow gardeners find useful and entertaining. Hope each and every one of you will always continue your love of gardening and....

Hope you have a wonderful Holiday Season!!

Hoe . . . Hoe . . .
Hoe!!

Carolyn



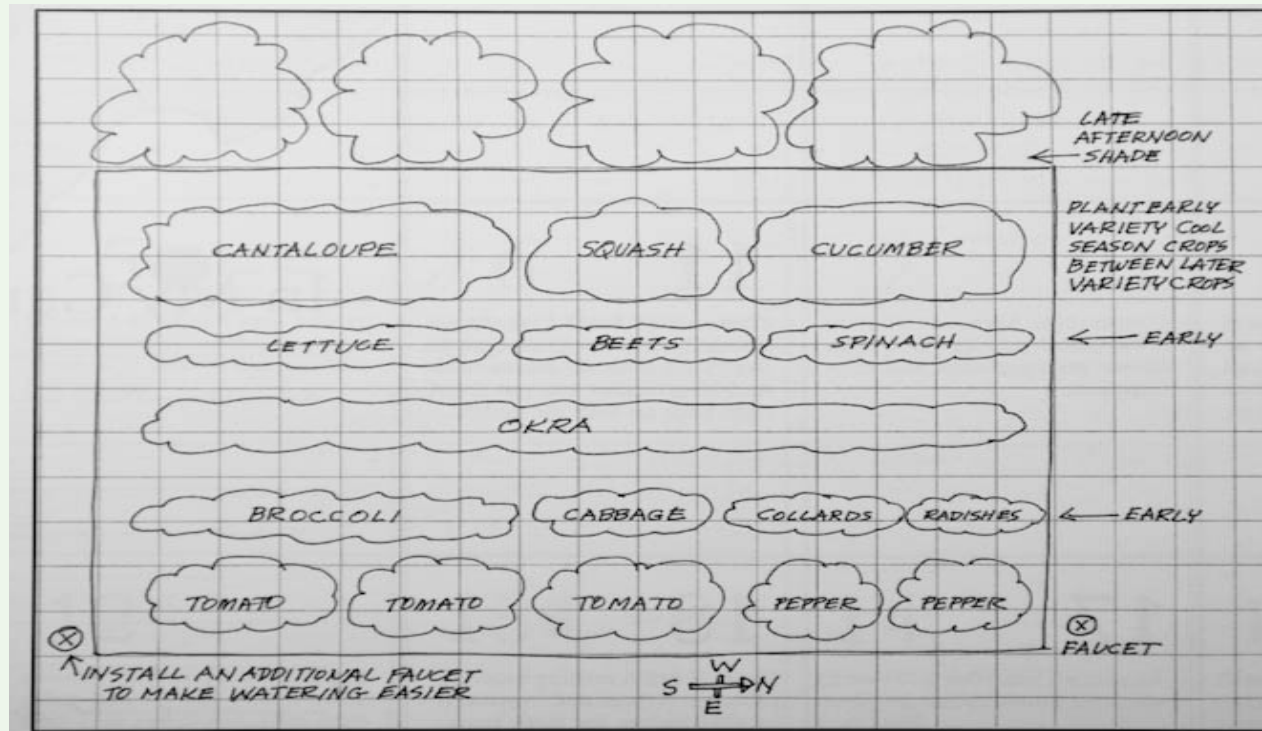
In The Vegetable Garden

By Patty Leander

It may be December but I am already thinking about tomatoes and which varieties to start in January for transplanting in spring. New to my list this year are 'Pineapple,' a large, yellow heirloom that was popular at the Austin Farmers' Market this past summer, 'JTO-99197,' a red hybrid from Johnny's Seed, boasting resistance to early blight and 'Black Cherry,' a dark, sweet cherry with an heirloom taste. Returning for a repeat performance are 'Viva Italia,' a determinate paste tomato, and 'Juane Flammé,' an orange French heirloom with a sweet taste. Check out Johnny's Seed (www.johnnyseed.com), Territorial Seed (www.territorialseed.com) and Tomato Grower's Supply Company (www.tomatogrowers.com) for these and other selections.

Making a simple sketch of your garden beds will help you visualize your space and determine how many plants you can accommodate. Seed catalogs, such as Johnny's (www.johnnyseeds.com) and Southern Exposure (www.southernexposure.com) are good sources of information on plant spacing and growth requirements. Another good source of vegetable garden information is the Easy Gardening series from Aggie Horticulture:

http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/publications/guides/E-502_home_vegetable_guide.pdf.



Above: 'Viva Italia' Tomatoes
 Left: Patty's Vegetable Garden Plan
 Photos by Bruce Leander

In The Vegetable Garden

Continued...

And since we are talking about vegetables, I have a fun web link for you. It's a short video that introduces you to the Vegetable Orchestra, a remarkable group of creative musicians from Vienna who make music out of, you guessed it — vegetables! Entertaining to watch, even if you aren't a vegetable aficionado: www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpFYt7vRHuY

Repetitive gardening tasks present a perfect opportunity for contemplation, and that often leads me to reflect upon gardens and gardeners in my life, past, present and future. I am by no means a poet, but rhymes are easy to come up with as I toil in the vegetable garden, and one day I put my rhymes to paper. I hope you enjoy this "poetic interlude," and that you find inspiration from your own garden experiences and recollections. Best wishes for a bountiful 2011!

Trials and Treasures in a Vegetable Garden

Patty Glenn Leander (aka "Veggie Woman")

The season's first freeze marched toward this great state,
Gardeners were hustling, before it got late;
Crops must be protected, they cannot withstand
The Texas Blue Norther to soon be at hand.

We knew cold was coming, why did we delay?
Could have done all this work on a bright, sunny day
Instead we wear coats as we cover our crops
Battling darkness and wind as the temperature drops.

The row cover has holes and I don't have enough,
The wind gusts are fierce, it's gonna be rough.
Temps in the twenties not good for my peas
Let's hope it's enough to kill the mites and the fleas.

Goodbye mighty okra, my king of the row,
No need to be brave, it's time to let go,

'Juane Flammé' Tomatoes
Photo by Bruce Leander



In The Vegetable Garden

But come back next summer for another great show
On the grill, dipped in cornmeal and in the gumbo.

Adios cucumbers, squash, green beans, and potatoes
We'll see you next year, along with tomatoes.
Peppers and melons will add to the fun
A home-grown harvest to please everyone.

Thank goodness for collards, turnips and beets,
They scoff at cold weather; make mighty good eats.
Broccoli, cauliflower, spinach, lettuce and peas,
For these cold hardy plants I give thanks on my knees.

They keep us going through winter, and nourish our bones
As they cook on the stovetop they warm up our homes.
My Grandma and PopPop loved greens with pot likker
You should eat these, they said, they're good for the ticker.

True enough, I was taught it's a Southerner's treat
To fortify veggies with a little pig meat
And to eat black-eyed peas on each New Year's Day
For they have the power to bring favor our way.

The love of a garden passed down year to year
The essence of culture and food we hold dear.
One day my gardening on earth will be done
But the treasures remain, in the hearts of the young.

Continued...

There'll be music and joy as I enter the gate,
Come in, He will say; do not hesitate.
Your kinfolk are here, your dad's in the chair readin',
The rest are out back, in the Garden of Eden.



Veggie Woman
Photo by Bruce
Leander

Bagworms

by Wizzie Brown

Tis the season....for bagworms? I thought this topic might be appropriate since some of you may venture out to get a Christmas tree soon.

Bagworms are a type of moth. They form small cases that hold larvae, pupae or female adults and eggs. These cases are often found on evergreen trees and shrubs such as cedar, juniper, cypress or pine. The bags may also be found on broad leafed trees such as elm, apple, boxelder, maple, persimmon, sycamore, willow and others.

The cases are constructed from silk and plant material. Plant material is generally laid down similar to shingles on a house, overlapping plant material in layers. Different species of bagworms utilize different plant material to create the bag.

Newly hatched larvae spin a silken thread and either are carried to a new plant by wind or attach themselves to the plant they are on and begin to build their own silken bag. The bags become longer as the larvae inside grows. Bags are transportable; the larvae will carry them along with them as they move along the plant.

A simple way to manage bagworms is to handpick the bags off the tree, double bag and dispose of them. If this method is impractical due to tree size, insecticide can be used. Choose a product labeled for trees. Possible active ingredients include things such as *Bacillus thuringiensis var. kurstaki*, spinosad, insecticidal soap, neem (azadirachtin), pyrethrins, pyrethroids or carbaryl. If the tree is too large for you to treat with insecticides, hire a professional with proper equipment.

Here is a link to more information or images:
http://landscapeipm.tamu.edu/ornamentals/trees_shrubs/bagworms.html



Top Bagworm emerging from its case
Bottom Bagworm attached to plant
Photos courtesy of Wikipedia.



Poinsettias — Symbols of the Holiday Season

By Anne Van Nest

It just wouldn't be Christmas without the poinsettia. And in case you have forgotten your poinsettia facts since last year here's a refresher on what you need to know about this festive plant.

Whether poinsettias are in the traditional velvety red color or any of the new streaked, spotted or dyed forms of plum, peach, blueberry, orange or cranberry colors, these plants help set the stage for a great holiday celebration.

For all the cheer that poinsettias bring, there are still some people that look upon this festive plant as poison. Stop, let it be said up front — poinsettias are not poisonous! This myth started almost ninety years ago in Hawaii and amazingly still continues to this day. Apparently an Army officer's two-year-old child died after supposedly eating a poinsettia leaf. The Physician who made the diagnosis later realized he had identified the wrong plant. He had planned to return to the mainland to correct his error when he suddenly died (unrelated to poinsettias) and the story spread and spread. Although it was later determined to be a case of incorrect plant identification, many people still believed that poinsettias are poisonous.

As recently as 1995, sixty-six percent of people surveyed by the Society of American Florists believed that poinsettias were poisonous even though there was a lot of evidence to disprove this myth. Researchers at Ohio State University tested the effects of ingesting high doses of leaves, stems and sap and found the plant non-toxic.



Right Top: Strawberries N' Cream
 Middle: Winter Rose
 Right Bottom: Visions of Grandeur
 Left Top: Red Glitter (NEW)
 Left Bottom: Jubilee Red (NEW)
 Photos courtesy of Ecke Plants.

Poinsettias — Symbols of the Holiday Season

Continued ...

In the United States, the POISINDEX database has extrapolated evidence from experiments done on animals that suggest that a fifty-pound child could eat 500 or more poinsettia leaves with no ill effects. This was the limit of their testing. A survey of United States poison control centers in 1995 resulted in no reports of toxic reactions involving poinsettias. This seems like an overwhelming amount of evidence to support the non-toxic nature of the poinsettia.

Many families with small children still shun this plant because of the advice passed down through the generations from friends or relatives. Perhaps it is because the name "poinsettia" sounds a lot like "poison". The plant is not entirely harmless, though. Some people develop a rash if the milky sap comes in contact with their skin. On the positive side, poinsettias have been included on a list of plants that clean indoor air.

Even with the myth about poisonous poinsettias, they are a \$200 million per year business in the United States. Of the millions of plants sold, red is the most favorite poinsettia color. A whopping seventy-four percent of poinsettias are sold in this traditional holiday color. This figure has actually gone up recently (but is still down from a high of 80%). Trailing at a very distant second is the color white. It is followed by pink, marble and then jingle bells (pink with white splashes).

Poinsettias are named after Joel Roberts Poinsett, who was an avid botanist and also the first United States Ambassador to Mexico in the late 1820's. Most people believe

that Poinsett discovered the poinsettia when travelling on Christmas Day near the Southern Mexico city of Taxco. The bright red plant was believed to be decorating the nativity scene in a church he visited.



In 1828, Ambassador Poinsett exported the bright red holiday plant to his own greenhouses in Greenville, South Carolina where they were propagated and distributed to his horticultural friends. The plant steadily gained popularity. Today, over fifty-two million poinsettia plants (of 100 different types) are sold in the United States. This exceeds the annual sales of all other flowering potted plants combined. Poinsettias make a very good landscape plant in frost-free areas and can be used as an interesting cut flower.

The poinsettia was first called *Euphorbia pulcherrima* in the botanical world. It was named by a German taxonomist in 1833. Literally, the botanical name means "the most beautiful Euphorbia." In Florida this plant grows up to five feet tall and naturally blooms every December. It is hardy to zone 9 and will only grow outside year-round in the most southern regions of the United States.

Interestingly, it is not the poinsettia flower that is so colorful. The flowers are the small yellow "buds" at the very center of the plant. A young plant still has these flowers intact. The famous poinsettia color is really from petal-like bracts that are beneath the flowers. Bracts are modified leaves that are associated with a plant's flower. The bracts change from green to the brilliant colors in response to temperature and day length.

What does a healthy poinsettia look like? It should have healthy leaves down the stem to the soil. Poinsettias drop their leaves when they have been shocked by a cold draft. A thick, sturdy stem is another sign of a well-grown plant. The bracts should be a deep, rich, intense color that is not greenish or faded. Finally, look under the leaves for white flies. These small insects are a prevalent problem and are attracted to poinsettias (among other plants) like a magnet.

The number one tip to care for poinsettias is to avoid extremes! This includes providing



Poinsettias — Symbols of the Holiday Season

Continued...



protection when taking your plant home. Once home, keep your plants away from extremes of hot and cold temperatures. The right temperature for a poinsettia is also a comfortable one for humans including a humidity level that is about 30%. Bright, indirect sunlight is best because a strong sun on the bracts could fade their color. When watering, keep the soil moist but not too wet or too dry. Let the soil dry out between watering so that it feels slightly dry to the touch. The newer varieties of poinsettias are much more durable and are far less finicky. Prestige is a deep red poinsettia that is reputed to be the toughest poinsettia offered by North America's largest poinsettia grower. This one will probably be around long past the holidays.

What's available beside red, white and pink poinsettias? If you are not a traditional poinsettia lover or want to try a different color this year, look for cream (plus rose and pink colors), peach, striped, marbled, purple, variegated foliage, peppermint twist, eggnog and winter rose (twisted bracts now in marble, pink, deep pink and dark red colors) or spotted (such as Shimmer or Jingle Bells) plants. New is the Polar Bear poinsettia from the Ecke people who are donating 5% of the net sales revenue to Polar Bear International. The light creamy white color of the poinsettia matches the majestic

polar bear. And if you like your poinsettias shockingly non-traditional, try the dyed and glittered blue, orange, purple or pink. The advantage of having non-red poinsettias in the house is that they don't look quite so out of place at Easter.

What's new for next year? With growers making plans for next year's crops, the news is out that your poinsettia future might include Red Glitter (deep red bracts with white streaks and glitter).

December 12th is a special day for poinsettia fanciers. It has been declared National Poinsettia Day. This day is to honor Joel Roberts Poinsett, the man who started it all. Decorate your house with color this holiday season and bring home poinsettias.

My favorite? I have long had a fondness for Monet Twilight (below). It is a unique multi-colored poinsettia with cream, rose and pink bracts.



Above: Christmas Tree photo courtesy of Wikipedia.

Left: Monet Twilight photo courtesy of Ecke Plants.

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

