

The Compost Bin

April 2014

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

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Cover Photo: Spring Bluebonnets
by: Bruce Leander

Right: Small ears of ornamental corn make great decorations for fall.
by: Bruce Leander



April Meeting - Todd & Susana Miller

Back to Basics: The Art of Growing Orchids in Central Texas

The mysterious Orchid is one of the most intoxicatingly beautiful flowers on Earth! No wonder it has been so revered by people in the Greek Ages and throughout history. It has also been used as an herbal remedy since the Middle Ages. There are over 35,000 Orchid species and 100,000+ hybrids in existence today.

Proprietors of Miller's Tropicals in Dripping Springs, the Millers have been growing and cultivating orchids and other tropicals on a professional basis for 25+ years. They have a 3,000 square foot greenhouse in Dripping Springs devoted to Orchid species and Hybrids, as well as select rare and unusual Tropical and Desert plants. They water their Orchids exclusively with rainwater collected through their rainwater harvesting system.

In this presentation, we'll get practical advice on how to grow Orchids in Central Texas from local growing experts, including:

- what orchids need, and why they need what they need!
- common mistakes (lessons learned from professional growers!)
- repotting demonstration

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, April 2, 2014 starting at 7 pm
Zilker Botanical Garden

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

Announcements

MG Plant Exchange

Wednesday, April 2

It's our favorite time of the year, and one of our favorite events- the MG Plant Exchange. The theme for this spring's plant exchange is "Grandma's Favorites and Drought Tolerant Plants". Members should bring extras of their favorite plants, preferably 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!". 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 also need help setting up and cleaning up, so plan to help. And please take home any of your extra plants.

In the Vegetable Garden

by Patty Leander

Gardeners, put down those carrot, broccoli and spinach seeds and step away. You may be tempted by mild days and nights, but it is officially too late to plant any cool weather crops. Despite winter's Arctic blasts, icy sleet, and frigid temperatures, the upcoming forecast hasn't changed much - Texas summer is on its way, and it will be long and hot. Anything planted now will have no choice but to mature as the days and nights get progressively warmer, negatively affecting the growth, development and flavor of cool weather vegetables. But there is always okra and southern peas, butter beans and melons. These vegetables can be planted this month, and will appreciate our warming days and nights.

And since my garden is a squash-free zone this year, I have more room for all of them! (In case you missed my post from last August. I finally got so fed up with the squash vine borer damage year after year that I am rotating squash right out of my garden in an effort to break the moth-egg-larva-dead squash cycle) The space formerly occupied by squash is now home to more beans, peppers, cucumbers and corn, including small ornamental corn that is easy to grow, pretty to look at, and perfect for grow-your-own Thanksgiving decorations. And as far as I can tell it is not attractive to raccoons. A few varieties to try include 'Miniature Colored Popcorn', 'Tom Thumb' and 'Two Inch Strawberry'.

Here is the vegetable gardener's checklist for April:

- Plant pole beans, butter beans and a second planting of bush green beans if you have the space.
- Hill corn and potatoes by pulling soil up around the base of plants with a hoe.
- Apply a 3-4" layer of mulch to deter weeds, hold moisture and moderate soil temperature as summer approaches. As mulch breaks down it adds valuable organic matter to the soil.
- Fertilize tomatoes with a water soluble fertilizer every 3 weeks to encourage strong growth and water frequently to avoid stress.
- Watch for aphids - they love tender leafy growth but it's not necessary to eliminate them completely because they also attract beneficials, which won't come to your yard if there's nothing there to eat. Young vigorous plants often outgrow insect damage but if numbers do get out of hand they're easy to knock down with a strong spray of water.
- Hot days, cool nights and a dry environment can encourage spread of powdery mildew on cucurbits - squash, cucumbers and melons. Adequate plant spacing is important to provide plenty of air circulation. Spray at the first sign of infection with an approved fungicide following label directions (more than one application may be required to keep it from spreading). Organic controls include neem oil,



'Miniature Colored Popcorn' available from [Johnny's Seeds](#). It produces 3-4" ears with colorful kernels that dry on the stalk in about 100 days.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...



Above: Home-grown butter beans are the best. Some people call them limas but no matter what you call them sow seed now and enjoy the harvest in about 65-75 days. 'Bush Henderson', 'Jackson Wonder' and 'Dixie Speckled Butterpea' are dependable varieties for Central Texas.

Center: Hill potatoes by pulling soil up around the plants, burying stems and lower leaves. Tubers will develop beneath the soil.

Right: Monitor squash, cucumber and melon leaves for signs of powdery mildew and treat with an approved fungicide.

Photos: Bruce Leander

potassium bicarbonate and Serenade fungicide. Baking soda and hydrogen peroxide are often recommended but results are often erratic.

- Stage 2 water restrictions (one day per week) that were implemented by the city of Austin in 2012 remain in effect, however, watering a vegetable garden with soaker hoses or drip irrigation is exempt from the schedule. Even so we still must conserve for the sake of Texas and all her residents. In early spring young vegetable plants require about an inch of water every 5-7 days but needs increase as growth progresses. A general recommendation for drip irrigation is to water 1½ -2 hours per week, increasing time and frequency as plants begin to fruit and flower and temperatures start to heat up.
- Take some time to admire and appreciate Texas' beautiful wildflowers and whisper a little thank you to Lady Bird.



Bug-Friendly Backyard

by Wizzie Brown

Sharing your space with insects or spiders may not be something that you aspire to, but you should. The backyard is a perfect place to welcome many of these creatures. Insects and other arthropods are a crucial part of food webs, and many can provide an added benefit to your yard by helping to manage pests. Remember, less than 5% of all insect species are considered pests.

The following are some tips for your backyard to help insects and their relatives:

- Plant damage will happen. Many insects are herbivores and eat plants, so damage is to be expected when insects are around. You need to ask yourself, can I withstand a little damage?
 - Choose pest management methods that use reduced-impact or no pesticides. When making pesticide choices, make them wisely. Think first about if there might be a way to manage pests without pesticides (high pressure water sprays, vacuuming, row cover, etc.). If pesticides are necessary, choose a product to target small groups of pests instead of *broad-spectrum pesticides.
- *Please note that broad-spectrum pesticides can be synthetic (man-made) or naturally-derived (sometimes referred to as "organic")
- Do NOT use bug zappers. Studies have found that bug zappers kill more beneficial insects than pests.
 - Provide basking areas (rocks, logs, etc.). Insects need to "warm up" before they can get moving, so providing areas where they can spread their wings or just hang out for a bit will help them get going in the morning.
 - Provide a water source. Make sure that the water is shallow, or fill a shallow dish with small pebbles or sand so the insects do not drown. Locate water sources throughout the landscape near flowering plants.
 - Provide sheltered areas and wind breaks. Leaf litter and debris on the ground can provide great overwintering sites for insects, and shrubs can help provide wind breaks for insects to rest.
 - Provide a variety of nectar sources. When planting new things, try to use a variety of colors, flower shape and blooming periods.
 - Leave some patches of bare ground for ground nesting insects and mud daubers.

There are numerous boxes that can be purchased for the garden- ladybug houses, butterfly houses, lacewing chambers and mason bee boxes. While the particular species of insect may not necessarily nest in the box, something will take advantage of the shelter.

Mason bee boxes are easy to make on your own (you can do an internet search to find specific instructions). Mason bees prefer holes that are slightly larger than their body, so about 1/4-3/8 of an inch in diameter. Boxes can be made by drilling holes into a 4" x 4" block of wood or by using sections of bamboo. There are numerous locations online that you can find instructions to make a mason bee box. Boxes should be placed about 3-5 feet off the ground, so it is sheltered from rain and wind and so it gets morning sunlight.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com

Demo Garden Tales: March Madness AKA Working In The Rain

by Rosalie Russell



The Inside Austin Gardens Tour is rapidly approaching! The Demo Garden has been pushing for months to have the planned major projects completed by mid-March, and I am delighted to convey the goal has been accomplished! This was an especially noteworthy accomplishment, because drizzle and light rain affected two of the work days. Workers left wet and muddy, but happy, maybe because they were leaving!

PVC irrigation lines have been run into the new trial bed section. The drip irrigation have been lines designed, assembled and installed on the large trial beds. Thanks to the crews and Joe Posern, the leader, who worked three consecutive workdays to accomplish this task!

All woody plants have been trimmed back. Freezes wiped out the *Duranta*, Fire Bush, Chile Pequin, and *Buddleja*. All the dead branches are gone, and we expect (hope) these established bushes will send up new growth from the roots. The results, some bushes in the garden are now beautifully manicured while others are scalped almost to ground level!

Sue Nazar, Linda Francescone, and Tommie Clayton have been meeting, planning, and developing the restoration plans for the Butterfly Garden (BG) and Herb Garden (HG) since January. They deserve a round of applause in appreciation for their hours of dedication to this project.

The BG revamp is extensive. Some plants have been removed, others repositioned, and some selected plants continue to live in the same spot. New plants have been added to create a wider range of host and nectar plants. A larger variety of butterflies, eggs, caterpillars, and chrysalis will enjoy this spot starting this spring.

Culinary herbs additions are taking root in the HG. A classic cross walkway, lined with native rocks, dissects the garden, making it easier to feel, smell, and harvest the leaves. We expect to expand this garden next year.

March 15 was planting day. Hundreds of plants found new homes. The vegetable garden beds and trial beds were planted. Now we just need warm days, no more cold fronts, and gentle rain (maybe from the garden hose), and everything will be beautiful by tour day!

Thanks to everyone who helped make this possible!



Photos: Rosalie Russell

Austin Area Events

Zilker Garden Festival

Saturday and Sunday, Mar 29-30
10am - 5pm

Zilker Botanical Gardens
2220 Barton Springs Rd
Austin TX

<http://www.zilker garden.org/about/events/ZGF2014/zgf.html>

Maintaining a Healthy Lawn

Thursday, Apr 3
10:00 am – noon

Travis County East Service Center
6011 Blue Bluff Rd, Austin TX

You may have considered reducing the size of your lawn and replacing it with hardscaping or native and adapted plants to conserve water. Although those are both viable options, Daphne Richards, Travis County Extension Agent, will show you how to properly water and care for your lawn so you can still have a beautiful carpet of grass for your family, friends, and pets to enjoy. Learn the proper techniques for watering, feeding and maintaining healthy grasses in this next class on Dealing with Drought Conditions.

Part of the Texas AgriLife Extension Water Conservation Series Register at <https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/TravisCounty> or by phone 979-845-2604

[Click Here for Directions to Blue Bluff](#)

Mayfield Park Annual Trowel and Error Gardening Symposium

Saturday, Apr 5
9:30am - 1pm

Mayfield Park
3505 West 35th St
(next to Laguna Gloria)
Austin, TX

Mayfield Park will host Trowel & Error, the Spring event that annually attracts gardeners from all over Central Texas to hear experts give time-tested tips for beautiful gardens. Although lectures begin at 10:00, the event "opens" at 9:30 for those early birds who want to purchase Mayfield's hard-to-find heirloom bulbs and perennials for their April gardens and to stroll the garden paths in the early morning peacefulness.

Sponsored by Friends of the Parks of Austin, Trowel & Error will feature three dynamic and knowledgeable garden experts.
10am: Heat and Drought Tolerant Plants You May Not Have Heard Of - Amanda Moon, Horticulturist, Landscape Designer
11am: Fence Me In - Selecting the Proper Support for Tomatoes - Jay White, Texas Gardener Writer
12 noon: Go Vertical in the Garden with Climbing Vining and Twining Vegetables - Patty Leander, Master Gardener Vegetable Specialist

Other events include: Gardener's Dream Raffle, Pass Along Plant Sale and House & Garden Tours.

For more information contact (512) 453-7074
neenok@aol.com or mayfieldpark.org

Austin Area Events

East Austin Garden Fair – A Passion for Plants

Saturday, Apr 12
9am - 2pm

Zaragoza Park and Community Center
2608 Gonzales Street
Austin, TX

Free and open to the public, this fun, hands-on fair involves community members in creative, low-cost ways to grow vegetables, herbs and fruit to improve their family diet as well as information about Earth-Kind landscaping. Get expert advice from Master Gardeners on all aspects of gardening and composting, as well as backyard chickens and beekeeping. The fair will feature an assortment of DIY and demonstration activities, including garden planning, kids' activities and container garden building. FREE vegetable, herb and ornamental plants offered to participants while supplies last.

Presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. www.tcmastergardeners.org. For information, call 512-854-9600.

Veterans Memorial Park Community Garden Grand Opening

Saturday, Apr 19
10am - 2pm

2525 W New Hope Dr
Cedar Park, TX

The Williamson County Master Gardeners are pleased to announce the grand opening of their Veterans Memorial Park Community Garden

For information please contact Helene at 512-401-5500
<http://www.cedarparktexas.gov/index.aspx?page=444>

TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

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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 A&M AgriLife Extension

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The Compost Bin Submissions

We are always looking for Travis County 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

"It is spring again. The earth is like a child that knows poems by heart."
— Rainer Maria Rilke