

The Compost Bin

February 2015

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

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Cover Photo: Winter at Lake Georgetown.
By Liath Appleton

Right: Plant potatoes in mid-February; be sure to use certified seed potatoes to guarantee that your potatoes are disease free.

By Bruce Leander



Feb Meeting - Daphne Richards

Horticulture Extension Agent, Daphne Richards, will discuss the year ahead for extension and the Travis County Master Gardeners

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, Feb 4, 2015, starting at 7 pm
Zilker Botanical Garden

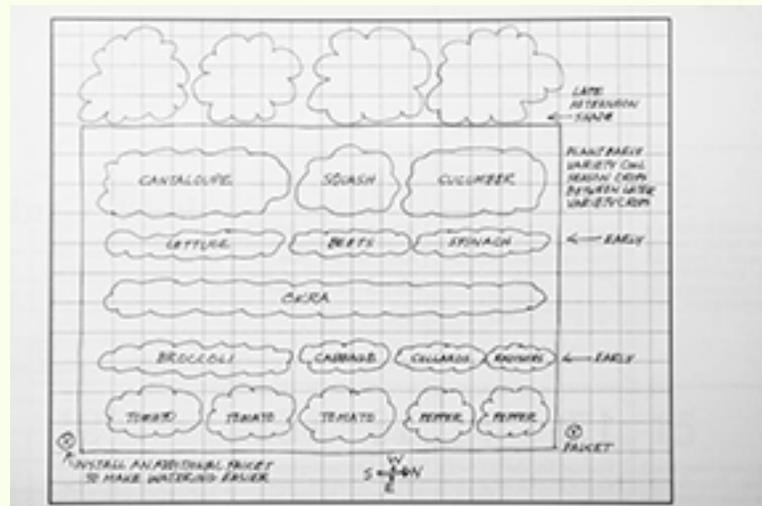
Master Gardener meetings are open to certified Master Gardeners and trainees only.

In the Vegetable Garden

by Patty Leander

With spring due to arrive next month, this is the last call for planting cole crops and root vegetables. As tempting as it is to get out there in the sunshine on a warm winter day and fill the garden with plants, it's a good idea to plan your garden on paper first, taking into account that any cool season vegetables you plant now will still be taking up space next month when it's time to plant tomatoes, beans, squash, cucumbers and other spring vegetables.

The Travis County Extension vegetable gardening publication, which includes varieties, seed sources and the planting guide, has been updated for 2015 and will be available soon at the [Central Texas Horticulture website](#) and at the MG Help Desk. The recommended vegetable varieties are based on recommendations from Extension and area garden experts; varieties that are difficult to find or no longer available have been removed, and some newer varieties have been added. Based on information from the LCRA and NOAA, the date for the average last freeze has been adjusted slightly to March 4. The average first freeze in fall remains the same at November 27. Remember that these are average dates – last fall we got a killing freeze on November 13, and in 2012 the first frost wasn't until December 11. Your individual microclimate will affect your freeze dates as well. so it's important to use these dates as a gauge for planting, but always pay attention to the local forecast.



Sketch a garden plan on paper, making note of when vegetables need to be planted as well as when they will be ready for harvest.



Feed transplants weekly with half-strength liquid fertilizer and be sure they receive plenty of light for strong, stocky growth.planting.

Here is the vegetable gardener's checklist for February:

- Fertilize onions every 3 weeks with a high nitrogen fertilizer. Scatter the fertilizer down the row a few inches away from onion plants so you don't disturb their shallow roots, mixing lightly into the soil. The experts at Dixondale Farms recommend ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) or calcium nitrate (15.5-0-0) at a rate of ½ cup per 10 foot row. Double the amount if you are using an organic fertilizer with a lower nitrogen content. Most natural fertilizers are slow release but cottonseed meal, blood meal and fish meal are relatively fast acting organic sources of nitrogen. Water lightly after fertilizing.
- Empty your old compost bins and add the contents to your planting areas for spring. Start new compost piles with kitchen waste, leaves and landscape trimmings.
- Mid-February is the time for potato planting in Central Texas. Always use certified seed potatoes from a reputable source. This is your guarantee that you are starting with disease free specimens.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...

Look for early maturing varieties such as 'Red Pontiac', 'Yukon Gold', 'Kennebec' and 'Peanut'. Cut larger potatoes into 2-3 ounce pieces, making sure each piece has an eye from which the potato will sprout, and let them cure in a warm spot for a few days before planting. This will heal the cut edge and help prevent disease once they are in the soil.

- Feed transplants every 7-10 days with a dilute fertilizer and be sure they receive plenty of light to keep them from getting leggy. As the days begin to warm, gradually expose them to the outdoors where they can soak up sunshine and get acclimated to the outside environment.
- With the exception of basil, most herbs flourish in the cool weather and are hardy into the 20s. A small investment now will provide savory flavor for your meals for the next two or three months. Look for nursery transplants of your favorite culinary herbs, including oregano, sage, dill, parsley, cilantro, chives or thyme.



Left: Oregano can be used dried or fresh. It prefers cool weather but will grow year round if given a little partial shade throughout the summer.

Center: Dill is a good choice for a container; look for compact varieties like 'Bouquet'.

Right: Fertilize onions every 3 weeks for vigorous growth.

Black Soldier Flies

by Wizzie Brown

If you have backyard chickens, then you may be familiar with black soldier flies, but what about everyone else? These flies may also be found in compost. The fly larvae are not something to worry about as they will help break down organic matter.

Black soldier fly adults are mostly black with two dusky wings. Females have a reddish to black abdomen with two translucent spots near the front of the abdomen. Males tend to have a bronze abdomen. Larvae are plump, legless, somewhat flattened and shift from a creamy white color to reddish-brown. Larvae have a tough, leathery exoskeleton and a tiny head.

The larvae are scavengers and feed on decaying organic matter including plant refuse (compost), carrion and manure. Adults do not bite or carry disease organisms and die within a few days of emergence from the pupal case.

Female soldier flies lay their eggs on exposed nitrogen-rich items. If you want them to stay out of your compost pile, cover nitrogen-rich food sources by at least 2-4 inches of brown material (leaves, grass clippings, etc.). The larvae may also be found in vermicomposting bins and may outcompete the worms for food. They are not predaceous on the earthworms, but will cause problems by using the majority of the resources.

There are people turning to black soldier flies for composting food scraps as they can eat large amounts of scraps in a short time period. Also, the larvae make a good food item for birds, including chickens.

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

Meet the Master Gardeners: Liath Appleton, Class of 2010

by Jean Love El Harim



Liath with two young Japanese Bantams

Born in Boston, Liath grew up in Austin and Orlando. She attended high school in Orlando and earned a degree in botany from the University of Florida. Interested in species interactions, Liath continued her studies in systems ecology, conservation biology, and ornithology. Her “first career,” as she says, was as a cook and baker while she was a student. “Then I got a job at the Florida Museum of Natural History,” she says, “and that’s been my career ever since.” Liath lived in Michigan for seven years and after an absence of 30 years, is back in Austin, working at the University of Texas J. J. Pickle Research Campus.

Liath started gaining website skills in the late '90s when she began managing museum collections. “You have to be a jack-of-all-trades,” she explains, “so I started learning how to do websites and work with databases and photography. I learned all of that out of necessity for my job. Learning how to work with websites was just a matter of sitting down with books and software. It all seems so simple now that I know it, but it wasn’t easy to learn. I manage six different websites now. Once a website is set up, it’s not that hard to maintain.”

Outside of work, sports and artistic activities are an ongoing theme in Liath’s busy life. “I have been studying Kung Fu and Tai Chi for 15 years. I study with a Shaolin monk here in Austin, and I got to travel to China a couple of years ago to train at Shaolin Temple where it all began. On Sundays I teach. I’m an assistant instructor at the Kung Fu school. I help teach the kids and the adults, and I hope to start a Tai Chi program there. I’m also a flamenco dancer. There’s a school just down the road, and on Saturdays I’m dancing flamenco all day. I love performing and dancing. I used to play roller derby in Michigan. I met my husband Ed when he was a roller derby referee there. I also used to play classical guitar,

and I want to get back into that. I just can’t seem to find any more hours in the day.”

Even with her very busy schedule, Liath still finds time to garden. She says her interest in gardening probably stems from the fact that both of her parents liked to garden. “My father planted a field of day lilies outside my bedroom window,” she recalls. “When I was younger, he gave me a little baby magnolia for Valentine’s Day. I planted it in the backyard at the house in Orlando, and that tree is huge now. My mom always had tons of house plants here in Austin.”

In her garden in North Central Austin, Liath likes to mix edibles with nonedibles, and to grow food as ornamentals. “I love my eggplants,” she says, “because they are so beautiful. Those plants have been growing for three years, and they are like shrubs now. I cover them in the winter and keep them warm with Christmas lights on days when we have hard freezes. Even in the winter I get eggplant.” Liath also has most every kind of herb growing in her garden, and several varieties of roses. “I have little microclimates,” she continues. “Some areas get just the right amount to sun to grow some sun things, and I have a little bit of shade so I can have shade plants, too.” Without an irrigation system, Liath’s biggest gardening challenge is getting water to where she needs it. Liath’s gardening tip is, “If they need water, give them some water, and if they need food, give them some food.”

Meet the Master Gardeners

Continued...

A Master Gardener since 2011, Liath has been the training coordinator, and she manages the TCMGA website and publishes the newsletter. Liath's favorite Master Gardener event is the East Austin Garden Fair. With her background in science, Liath says the most rewarding part of being a Master Gardener is spreading knowledge and getting people to learn things about plants and ecology.

Weeds and Reads: A Gardener's Book Guide

by Liath Appleton

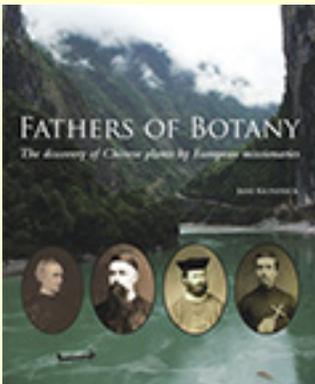
There's a lot of reading material out there, and new books are being published faster than anyone could ever possibly keep up! Hopefully these lists will help myself and others find fun and insightful new books to enjoy between the weeding and the watering.

February 2015:

Hydroponics for the Home Grower - Feb 1, 2015

by Howard M Resh

Whether grown in soil or hydroponically, plants have similar environmental needs in order to optimize yields. To do so, home gardeners face numerous challenges, such as soil structure, fertility, watering, pests, and diseases. This book addresses the proper techniques and procedures for establishing a successful hydroponic culture. [\[more\]](#)



Fathers of Botany: The Discovery of Chinese Plants by European Missionaries - Feb 11, 2015

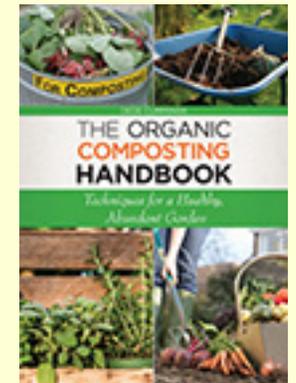
by Jane Kilpatrick

Many of the world's most renowned and exciting ornamental plants—including magnolias, roses, rhododendrons, tree peonies, lilies, and blue poppies—have their origins in China. In the mid-nineteenth century, professional plant hunters were dispatched by nurseries and botanic gardens to collect living botanical specimens from China for cultivation in Europe [\[more\]](#)

The Organic Composting Handbook: Techniques for a Healthy, Abundant Garden - Feb 10, 2015

by Dede Cummings

Great compost is one of the most important secrets of successful organic gardening. In this comprehensive guide, you'll learn everything you need to know about the various methods of composting and how to adapt them to your home and garden. [\[more\]](#)



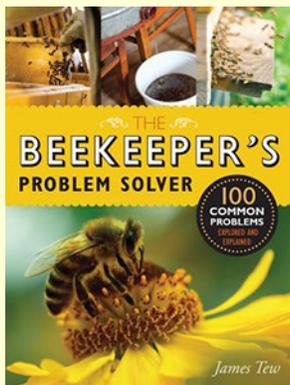
Back to the Garden: Nature and the Mediterranean World from Prehistory to the Present - Feb 10, 2015

by James H. S. McGregor

The garden was the cultural foundation of the early Mediterranean peoples; they acknowledged their reliance on and kinship to the land, and they understood nature through the lens of their diversely cultivated landscape. [\[more\]](#)

Weeds and Reads

Continued...

**Beekeeper's Problem Solver: 100 Common Problems Explored and Explained** - Feb 15, 2015

by James E. Tew

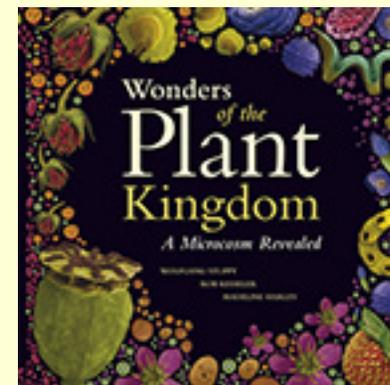
While keeping bees certainly isn't rocket science, doing it properly does involve decent levels of understanding, commitment, and attention to detail. Getting the basics right is essential, and this demands a solid appreciation of important areas such as hives management, breed choice, and health requirements. [\[more\]](#)

Wonders of the Plant Kingdom: A Microcosm Revealed - Feb 23, 2015

by Wolfgang Stuppy, Rob Kessler, Madeline Harley

Compared to the obvious complexity of animals, plants at a glance seem relatively simple in form. But that simplicity is deceptive: the plants around

us are the result of millennia of incredible evolutionary adaptations that have allowed them to survive, and thrive, under wildly changing conditions and in remarkably specific ecological niches. [\[more\]](#)

**Phytomedicines, Herbal Drugs, and Poisons** - Feb 27, 2015

by Ben-Erik van Wyk (Editor)

Plants have been used to treat disease throughout human history. On a clay slab that dates back approximately five thousand years, the Sumerians recorded medicinal recipes that made use of hundreds of plants, including poppy, henbane, and mandrake. [\[more\]](#)

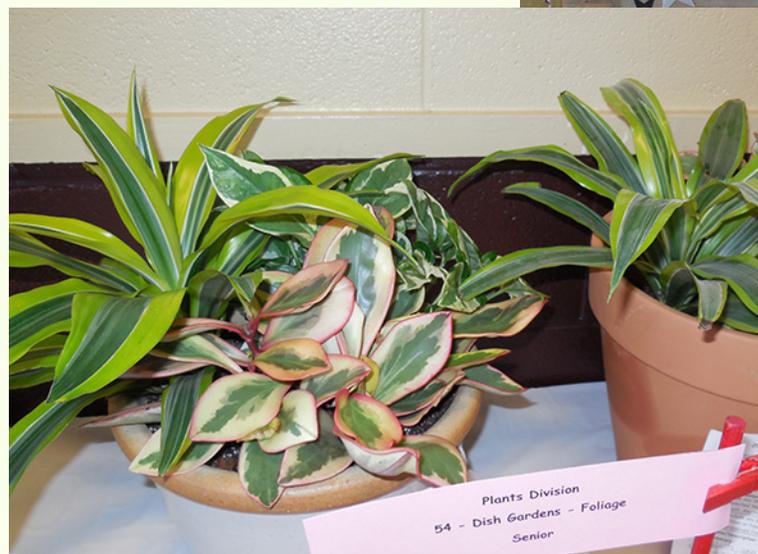
Plant Contest at the Travis County Youth Show

by Lisa Anhaiser

The mission of the annual Travis County Youth Show (TCYS) is to develop the character of our youth through competitive youth fair projects that teach them critical life skills, including personal responsibility, financial and time management, fair play, hard work and integrity.

Students, ages 8 to 18, who are enrolled in organizations such as the Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4-H clubs can enter the Plant Contest. Students purchase plants in October from a local wholesale nursery for a nominal fee and care for them until the contest in mid-January. Students are judged according to the content provided on their project worksheets, which can contain growing requirements and personal stories. The appearance, color and size of their entry are also graded. Blue and red ribbons are awarded on the basis of quality, rather than place ranking. Projects receiving blue ribbons are eligible for a Class Champion award with the option to sell in the weekend auction.

In 2015, 23 plants were entered in categories such as succulents/cacti, vines, flowering, dish gardens, foliage, and ferns. MG Mikala McFerren organized the volunteers with MG Augustin Redwine and Interns Tara Fisher-Munoz and Kimberly Maeder as judges. Lots of blue ribbons were awarded, and positive comments were provided to the students to encourage them. MG goals for 2016 are to reach out to more 4-H clubs and encourage participation in the contest.



Left: Dish Garden entry, Foliage, Senior.

Photos: Lisa Anhaiser

Right Foreground: Judge Interns Kimberly Maeder and Tara Fisher-Munoz, MG Augustin Redwine. Back: Volunteer organizer MG Mikala McFerren

Austin Area Events

All About Roses

Saturday, Feb 7, 2015
10am - noon

Zilker Botanical Gardens
2220 Barton Springs Rd
Austin TX

Incorporate user friendly roses into your new or existing garden plans! Cher Groody is a master gardener with 30 years experience in the use of roses in a landscape. She will teach you methods for proper selection of rose varieties, site prep and maintenance like pruning, pest control and fertilization. This session is excellent for newbies and experienced gardeners and questions are encouraged.

Presented by Travis Co Master Gardeners. For more information contact: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service – Travis County, 512-854-9600.

Seminar is Free, Zilker park entrance fee is \$2 per adult, \$1 per child or senior, \$3 for non-Austin residents.

Dealing with Drought – Landscaping Basics

Thursday, Feb 12, 2015
10am - noon

Travis Co AgriLife Extension Service Office
1600 Smith Road
Austin, TX

Learn basic landscape principals and become familiar with the native and adapted plants to incorporate into your garden. Carolyn Williams has been a Master Gardener for over 14 years and a gardener in Central Texas for over 40 years. She hold both Basic and Advanced Landscape Design Certification from ACC. She will share her experience of working with good Texas tough plants to use in your designs.

Registration: \$10 through 2/08, \$15 starting 2/09 and onsite
<https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/TravisCounty>

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service – Dealing with Drought series. For more information contact: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service – Travis County, 512-854-9600.

Austin Area Events

2015 Turfgrass Ecology Workshop

February 16 - 8:30 am – February 20 - 4:30 pm

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

The Turfgrass Ecology and Management Short Course is an intensive 5-day educational opportunity for anyone interested in the fundamentals of turfgrass physiology and management. It is designed for professional turfgrass managers as well as anyone else in the green industry with a desire to learn the basics of how to properly manage turfgrasses with respect to growth, fertility, pest control, water use, water quality, etc. Attendees will be exposed to the fundamentals of proper turfgrass selection, growth and maintenance as well as the latest up-to-date information from a diverse collection of Texas A&M University faculty.

Short Course directed by Dr. Casey Reynolds, Assistant Professor and Extension Turfgrass Specialist

Specific Topics Include:

- Introductory Turfgrass Physiology
- Turfgrass Species: Identification, Selection, and Establishment
- Turfgrass Management: Mowing, Fertility, and other Cultural Practices
- Turfgrass Water Use and Proper Irrigation Practices
- Soil Physical and Chemical Properties
- Water Quality: Analysis, Interpretation, and Implementation
- Pesticide Labeling and Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) Regulations
- Turfgrass Pest Management: ID and Control of Weeds, Diseases, and Insects
- Spreader and Sprayer Calibration: Classroom and Hands-on Exercises

Cost: \$495

Brochure: https://agriferegister.tamu.edu/dropinn/materials/material_512.pdf

Registration: <https://agriferegister.tamu.edu/Turf>

Texas Pollinator Powwow

Saturday, Feb 28, 2015

8am - 5:30pm

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
4801 La Crosse Avenue
Austin, TX

The Wildflower Center hosts this pollinator conservation conference on Feb 28 to empower people to conserve pollinators and their habitats across the landscape. For natural resource management professionals and volunteers and the community at large.

Featured speakers and exhibitors.

Cost \$25/person by Feb 24

[Learn more and register](#)

TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

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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

"Winter is a time of promise because there is so little to do, or because you can now and then permit yourself the luxury of thinking so."
- Stanley Crawford