

The Compost Bin

January 2015

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

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Cover Photo: Plant snow peas and sugar snap peas this month for a delicious harvest in just 60-70 days.
By Bruce Leander

Right: Inca Doves waiting for treats
By Liath Appleton



Jan Meeting - Projects in Search of Volunteers

As Master Gardeners we know it takes a village to make TCMGA activities a success! Tonight we'll feature a selection of programs that need your continued enthusiasm and support in 2015:

- Demo Garden, presented by Richard Moline and Joe Posern.
- ZilkerFest, presented by Pat Mokry aka Greenhouse Guru.
- East Austin Garden Fair, presented by Mikala McFerren.
- Inside Austin Garden Tour, presented by Wendy Buck.
- Plant Clinics, presented by Sue King.
- Youth Programs, presented by Lisa Anhaier.
- Ground to Ground, presented by Lisa Anhaier.
- Texas A&M Gardens & Greenway project, presented by Joe Posern.

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, Jan 7, 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



Screen homemade compost to remove sticks and large chunks of material that have not broken down completely.

Happy New Year! It may be cold outside, but indoor conditions are just right for starting pots of tomatoes, eggplant and peppers under supplemental grow lights. These slow-growing seeds take 6-8 weeks to reach transplant size, and if planted by the middle of the month, they will be ready just in time for spring planting. Look online or flip through colorful seed catalogs for interesting or unusual varieties that might not be available at garden centers.

Hope you enjoyed the beautiful weather – and rain – we experienced during December. That near perfect environment for growing delicious vegetables does have a downside - a near perfect environment for caterpillars and other cool season pests. If these pests are left unchecked they can decimate a plant in short order, so it's important to take action. Depending on the number of pests and level of damage, this may be as simple as handpicking a few caterpillars and tossing them to the birds, or it may require dusting or spraying plants with Bt or neem oil to get control of a major outbreak. As more gardeners move toward organic techniques and less pesticide use, it is important to monitor plants regularly for damage, identify the culprits, research your options and apply low toxicity controls when necessary to maintain the quality of the food we are growing for the table. This year let's continue to incorporate IPM, or Integrated Pest Management, into our gardens and landscapes. IPM utilizes effective strategies such as trap crops, garden sanitation, crop rotation, row cover and early planting to avoid or minimize pest infestations. It is a flexible, proactive approach to managing pests with minimum impact to the environment and to the good guys (people, pets, birds and beneficial insects) in the garden.

Here is the vegetable gardener's checklist for January:

- Take advantage of warm, sunny days to tidy up your garden and work areas, clean and sharpen tools and inventory garden supplies.
- Inspect hoses and irrigation lines, and replace or repair as needed.
- Perform a soil test and follow fertilizer recommendations.
- Prepare beds for spring planting. Remove weeds and rocks, loosen soil and distribute about an inch of compost evenly over the surface. Add fertilizer if needed, and blend lightly into the soil.
- Cut down and turn under cover crops this month; they will gradually decompose and enrich the soil for spring planting.



Hydrate onion transplants in a shallow container of water before planting.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...

- Plant onion transplants mid-month. Plant them closely, and as the season progresses, thin to a final spacing of 4-6 inches; the thinnings can be enjoyed as green onions. Recommended varieties include 'Texas Early White', '1015Y', 'Yellow Granex' and 'White Bermuda'. These are short-day onions that bulb in response to our lengthening days in spring. 'Candy' is a popular, intermediate-day variety that also does well here.
- Seeds of turnips, radishes, carrots, arugula, beets, kohlrabi and peas can be planted directly in the garden later this month, though cool soils mean slower germination and growth. Thin to the proper spacing (as noted on the seed packet) soon after they germinate, and water if necessary to keep soil moist.
- Plant transplants of broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, Swiss chard, collards, lettuce, spinach, Asian greens and artichokes.
- Stockpile leaves over the next few months to use for spring and summer mulch. Keep vegetable beds mulched with chopped leaves, coarse compost or hay; pull back mulch for planting and fertilizing, then replace cover.
- Cut down asparagus foliage in established beds later this month, or you'll have a hard time finding those new spears that will start emerging soon. If you are planting asparagus for the first time, prepare a bed with compost-enriched soil. Be sure the area is in full sun and with good drainage. Set the crowns into a trench about 6-8 inches deep and cover with soil. Let plants grow and become well established for the next two years before harvesting spears.
- Grab your favorite hoe and go after small, green weeds before they have a chance to grow thick stems or deep roots. Rake up the soft green tops, and put them into the compost pile, or turn them right into the garden where they will decompose and enrich the soil.
- Pay attention to the vigor, taste and hardiness of the vegetable varieties you grow, and make a note of your favorites. Save seed from the healthiest, most vigorous specimens for planting next year.



Left: Monitor for pests, especially on the underside of leaves. Here on one leaf I found two hungry caterpillars and two groups of tiny harlequin bug eggs.

Center: Harlequin bugs newly hatched from their barrel shaped egg cases.

Right: Start tomatoes, eggplant and peppers early in the month and you'll have nice size transplants in time for spring planting.

Mealybugs

by Wizzie Brown



Mealybugs are a type of unarmored scale insect. They are sexually dimorphic (males and females look different). Males have wings while females remain wingless and nymph-like throughout their lives. Females are oval, soft-bodied, and covered with a white waxy powder.

Mealybugs are pests of ornamental crops both outdoors as well as indoors, in greenhouses or on houseplants. They are often active during times of warm, dry weather. Infestations usually start at the base of stems, then spread from there as populations increase.

These insects have piercing-sucking mouthparts that they use to penetrate plant tissue and suck out juices. This can lead to chlorosis (yellowing of the plant), wilting and distortion. With larger infestations, the insects may cause stunted growth, premature leaf drop or death of the plant. Mealybugs are also known for secreting honeydew, a sweet, sticky substance on which a fungus called sooty mold may grow.

Sooty mold is a fungus that grows on honeydew excretions. Sooty mold can indirectly harm the plant by covering plant surfaces and reducing the amount of sunlight that reaches plant tissues, resulting in reduction of photosynthesis.

Since only male mealybugs have wings, adult females must remain near a host plant in order to feed. They can crawl short distances to plants and the immatures can be carried to new locations by wind or water or can be transported by animals.

Tips for mealybug management:

- Conserve beneficial insects; there are many insects that will feed on mealybugs or parasitize them
- Use high pressure water sprays to dislodge the insects from the plant
- Insecticidal soap
- Horticultural oils
- Insecticides labeled for mealybug control
- For severely infested plants, it may be best to throw the plant away and buy a new one

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: Wendy Buck, Class of 2008

by Jean Love El Harim



Wendy in her back yard
Photo by Jean El Harim

Wendy was born and raised in Dallas but is now an Austinite. "I moved to Austin for school," she says, "and I never left. I've been here 34 years." Wendy has been a flight attendant for 27 years, working three days a week, and generally enjoying being at her home in east Travis County for the rest of the week. At home, she spends most of her time in the garden, tending her plants and keeping company with the cardinals, sparrows, doves, and mockingbirds that come over the fence from the greenbelt behind her house to enjoy the two bird baths in her backyard.

Apart from gardening, Wendy has a variety of talents and interests. "I have the right brain," she says with a smile, explaining her appreciation for creative activities. She likes to hang out with her girlfriends and go to the free "Concerts in the Park" at the Long Center almost every Sunday evening in the summer. Wendy has studied landscape design, and she likes to travel. "I'm thinking of where I would like to go on my next trip," she considers. "I don't know yet. The last trip I took was to Spain for a couple of weeks."

"I can dance," she says. "I was a dancer in my former life, a ballerina. I performed a little, but it was difficult to do my job and ballet at the same time." She adds, "I'm a car guy at heart. My dad and my brothers ride motorcycles, but I like cars. I have a Corvette and a Kia. The Corvette mostly stays in the garage. I have been to one of the races at the Formula One track, and I love drag racing."

On further reflection, Wendy shares more about herself. "I enjoy sewing. I actually wear things that I have made. Also, I am an excellent snow skier. I think my quirky fun fact should be that I have several gold medals from winning ski races. And I have to mention my love of the Longhorns - especially Longhorn baseball! I went to Omaha to watch them in the College World Series! What a great time!"

Wendy first got interested in gardening at her family home in Dallas. Her parents kept a beautiful, neat yard and were always getting compliments. "That's where I got the green thumb bug," she says. "Gardening was a hobby that became a passion. I joined Master Gardeners because I want to learn more about gardening and growing." Wendy has a perennial garden, with blackfoot daisy, *Plumbago*, oregano, mealy-blue sage, red salvia, butterfly bush, mountain laurel, *Lantana*, Texas redbud, red oak, live oak, yaupon holly, boxwood, Indian hawthorn, and Bradford pear. "It has to be very drought resistant," she asserts. "If it doesn't survive three days in August without water, it's out. I trim it all out in the winter, mulch it, and in the spring it's a burst of color. I like to grow flowering perennials because I can enjoy the flowers without the trouble." In the past year, Wendy removed the St. Augustine grass from her yard, put down three inches of compost, and sowed HABITURF®, a mixture of native grass species developed by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. "Once you get it established, you don't have to water or mow. It will brown in the summer, but as soon as it rains, it will green up." Her gardening tip is to "put the right plant in the right place."

Meet the Master Gardeners

Continued...

A Travis County Master Gardener since 2008, Wendy has been involved with Junior Master Gardener activities and the East Austin Garden Fair. She organized the 2014 Inside Austin Garden Tour, and she is a Firewise Specialist. She also likes to work the phone desk. "You always learn something when you do research to answer people's questions."

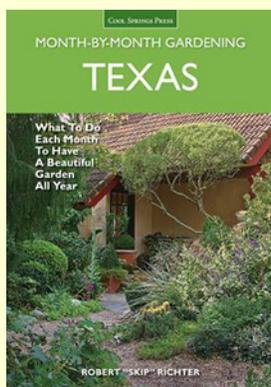
"Being a Master Gardener is very rewarding," Wendy says. "I like meeting people and making new friends. It's a great group".

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.

January 2015:



Texas Month-by-Month Gardening: What to Do Each Month to Have A Beautiful Garden All Year

- Dec 16, 2014

by Robert "Skip" Richter

If you're a home gardener, knowing what to do when can be overwhelming--that's where Texas Month-by-Month Gardening, the companion book to our Texas Getting Started Garden Guide, comes to the rescue. Inside, Houston horticulturist Robert "Skip" Richter makes it easy with a in-depth month-by-month breakdown of what to plant, when to plant, and how to take care of it in order to have a beautiful Texas garden all year round. [\[more\]](#)

Timber Press Guide to Vegetable Gardening in the Southwest - Jan 7, 2015

by Trisha Shirey

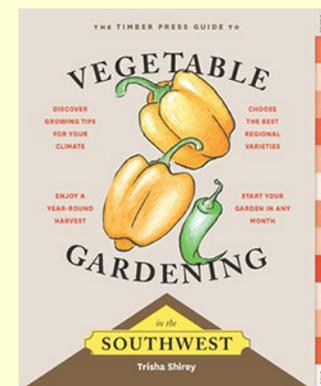
There is nothing more regionally specific than vegetable gardening—what to plant, when to plant it, and when to harvest are decisions based on climate, weather, and first frost. [\[more\]](#)

Microfarming for Profit: From Garden to Glory - Dec 10, 2014

by Dave DeWitt

With wit, expertise, and common sense, Dave DeWitt shows you how to establish a successful microfarm by choosing the most profitable plants and animals to raise and learning to market and sell what you produce.

[\[more\]](#)



Garden-Pedia: An A-To-Z Guide to Gardening Terms - Jan 15, 2015

by Maria Zampini, Pam Bennett

Quick: do you know the difference between hardpan and hardening-off? Between a native and a nativar? A cold frame and a cloche?

[\[more\]](#)

Austin Area Events

Growing Fruit in Your Home Garden

Saturday, Jan 10, 2014

10am - noon

Zilker Botanical Gardens
2220 Barton Springs Rd
Austin TX

January is a good time to plant trees. Want to learn how to grow fruit such as peaches, plums, blackberries, grapes, pears, figs and apples in your own yard? This seminar will cover the basics including how to plant a tree and which fruit varieties excel in our area. Master Gardener Joe Posern, fruit specialist, has been growing fruit in Austin since 2007 and will share his experience.

In partnership with the City of Austin-Office of Sustainability supporting a healthy and just local food system. Presented by Travis County Master Gardeners.

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

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Texas AgriLife Extension Travis County
Horticulture Agent: Daphne Richards
1600-B Smith Road, Austin, Texas 78721
512-854-9600 drichards@ag.tamu.edu

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

Photographers:
Bruce Leander

Editor and Layout:
Liath Appleton

Contributing Writers:
Liath Appleton
Wizzie Brown
Patty Leander
Jean Love El Harim

Assistant Editor:
Martha King

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

"Nature has undoubtedly mastered the art of winter gardening and even the most experienced gardener can learn from the unrestrained beauty around them." - Vincent A. Simeone