



A publication of...

TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

THE COMPOST BIN

July 2006



Speaker for July: Owls of Central Texas

Cliff Shackelford, will be the July TCMGA guest speaker. His presentation entitled, "Owls of Central Texas" will discuss the natural history of our area's owls (including recordings of their vocalizations) and how they are great pest control agents, even in urban backyards.

Mr. Shackelford is 4th generation Texan and was born in Dallas. He started bird watching there in the late 70's at the early age of nine.

He holds both a B.S. and an M.S. degree in biology with an emphasis in avian ecology from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches. His Master's thesis dealt with the habitat characteristics of five species of eastern Texas woodpeckers.

He is the Nongame Ornithologist for the Wildlife Diversity Program at Texas Parks and Wildlife where he's been employed since 1997. One of his many duties is the coordination of the state Partners in Flight Program.



Cliff is the first author of the book "Hummingbirds of Texas" that was published in September 2005 by Texas A&M University Press. Thus far, it has been that Press' biggest seller for their fiscal year. He was also first author of the Red-bellied Woodpecker Species Account published in 2000 for the Birds of North America Project.

Due to his interest and contributions to our knowledge of woodpecker ecology, he was appointed to the National Recovery Team on the Ivory-billed Woodpecker by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in 2005. He has authored over 50 publications on birds and birding. Over a dozen of these are peer-reviewed papers mainly on woodpeckers, raptors, and migratory land birds in journals like The Wilson Bulletin, The Journal of Raptor Research, The Southwestern Naturalist, the Bulletin of the Texas Ornithological Society, and more.

His travels have taken him throughout the Western Hemisphere where collectively he has spent almost six months birding in seven different Latin American countries.

He and his wife, Julie, and son, Alex, currently live in Austin. They have a busy "garage hobby" of building screech owl boxes known as *Owl Shacks*. They have built and distributed hundreds of these Owl Shacks across Texas and beyond over the last several years.

Immediately after the meeting, he will be selling Owl Shacks (\$38 ea) and signing copies of his new book "Hummingbirds of Texas" (\$25 ea). Checks are accepted. For details on Owl Shacks, please visit www.owlshack.com. And for details on the hummingbird book, please visit <http://www.tamu.edu/upress/BOOKS/2005/shackelford.htm>.

Dave Tovar

Message From the President...

Hats off to everyone for doing so much this year to expand our efforts in the community! Our seminar series is going very well, and more and more people are attending our events. On Saturday the 24th, about 50 people ventured out in the rain to come to the Garden Center at Ziiker and hear our Summer Plant Doctor lectures and to bring samples to our plant clinic. I am really pleased about this, because initially we weren't really sure if this sort of event would be worth the effort. Thanks go especially to Rosalie Russell for doing such a great job organizing and advertising the event, and to Skip for getting the news folks to come down and film us. Wizzie Brown, Bud Kane, Carolyn Williams, Don Telge and I all had fun giving our talks and answering all sorts of questions (on and off camera), and Kathie and Wayne King did a great job fielding questions and diagnosing plant samples at the plant clinic, with Holly Plotner pitching in to help. I got to diagnose several lawn samples with Skip's microscope (they all had Take All Root Rot) and at least one person brought a sample because of the TV spot. I hope all of you Master Gardeners who attended found it useful and will pass on any things you may have learned.

I think that this is the sort of event that we could do more of in different locations, bringing our expertise out into the public and getting them informed about our free Extension services. I think more of you would enjoy getting involved with these events, either giving lectures or helping at the plant clinic tables, and generally just connecting with people who need gardening advice and support. I want to start planning some more for next year, so please let me know if there is a topic you would feel comfortable talking about, or a demonstration you would like to do.

Machelle is going ahead full steam with expanding the JMG program, with the help of a lot of you Master Gardeners. Ideas that you have, such as Ron Miller and Don Freeman's tomato grow box plan for schools, can really make a difference. Thanks to Don and Ron for not just having the idea, but for making it a reality.

Their grow box program is going to be filmed by A&M, which could expand the reach of this idea. The Landscape Design Group has been instrumental in school gardening programs already, and will be helping a variety of non-profit groups with their design expertise. Thanks to all of you who are volunteering your creativity, your time and your enthusiasm to this cause. All of you Master Gardeners out there have great ideas, and I encourage you to follow through with your best ones and make them happen. These kinds of efforts can become the most satisfying things you will do all year.

Skip and I are working on having some new resources at the phone desk that will make it even easier to answer the calls that come in, and so please plan on signing up for some time slots—even once a month would be a big help.

Of course, it is still important that we continue to support Extension in all of our other ways as well, and I do hope that all of you will continue to volunteer for our ongoing projects. You are all doing a great job—let's keep it up!

Susan Decker,
President

Plant Portrait: Caladium /Elephant Ears (*Caladium x hortulanum*)

Looking for a plant to give a tropical effect in the garden? Try the Caladium or Elephant's Ear for an authentic touch! This plant is a real tropical native having originally resided in the Amazon River region among the jungles of Brazil, Peru and Columbia.

Caladiums, with their exotic rice-paper thin leaves, are easy to grow and ideally suited for shady porch containers or as a landscape plant under the canopy of mature trees. There are two main types available from garden retailers. The taller, fancy-leaved type is more upright growing with broad heart-shaped leaves and the hardier, lance-leaved one which has narrower, lanceolate leaves.

Here are some named cultivars:

Codes= (F)= Fancy-leaved, (L)= Lance shaped leaves, (S)=Some sun tolerance with adequate moisture.

White: 'White Christmas' (F), 'Candidium' (F) and 'Aaron' (F)
White marbled with green: 'Sea Gull' (L)(S)
White with pink: 'White Wing' (L)
Pink: 'Pink Beauty' (F), 'Carolyn Wharton' (F)(S), 'Fannie Munson' (F)
Pink and Green: 'Pink Cloud' (F)
Red: 'Rosalie' (L) and 'Red Frill' (L)(S)
Red and Green: 'Florida Cardinal' (F) and 'Postman Joyner' (F)



Where to grow Caladiums?

Caladiums are well suited to shade or semi-shade locations and are excellent for shady patio containers. Many attractive plants can presently be seen at Zilker Botanical Gardens in the parking area and among ferns and groundcovers along the path leading down the hill to the rose garden.



Caladiums have better leaf color in partially shady sites but they must have an adequate amount of water. They do not like dry conditions (particularly if they are fighting with trees roots to get a drink). Do not let them wilt. The leaves will be damaged and the foliar color will deteriorate. Plant Caladiums in soils that are high in organic matter, have good water-holding capacity, and good drainage. Caladiums are only hardy to zone 10 (Miami anyone?). So, plant them outside or protect them until temperatures are above 70 deg. F. Irreversible cold damage occurs if temperatures fall below 65 deg. F.

Which side is up?

Caladiums grow from knobby, dark brown underground tubers used to store food. The tubers have rounded growing points containing "eyes" where the leaves emerge. Tubers range from 1 inch to over 4" (mammoth sized!) and are an easy way to start new plants. Many retailers sell Caladium tubers. Look at the tuber size before buying and plan ahead for your planting requirements.

Here's an interesting tip...tubers that have had the terminal or dominant bud removed (de-eyed) produce more leaves and are more uniform. Also, another tip is to plant the tubers upside down for faster sprouting. Plant the tubers 1 inch deep and 6-12 inches apart depending on their size.



To harvest your own tubers in the fall, dig up the entire clump with the soil intact and place it in a cool, dry location such as a shed or garage. After a few weeks the foliage will die down. At this time the tubers can be gently cleaned with a fine brush to remove the soil. Inspect the tubers and discard any with soft spots. Cut the leaf petioles ½ inch above the tuber and leave a small section attached. Removing the petiole entirely might damage the tuber eyes. Store the tubers indoors at 70-80 deg. F. in a bed of wood shavings or dry sphagnum peat moss for at least 6 weeks. In the spring pot up the tubers 1 inch deep using good quality houseplant soil, water and place in a bright (not sunny) location.

What's in the Future?

Wade Roitsch, Plant Propagator at Yucca Do Nursery (and recent TCMG speaker) showed some exceptional new caladiums from a plant hunting expedition that had smaller, rounded, or spade shaped leaves.

Some caladiums are now produced through tissue culture.

They do flower! Caladiums have an arum flower with a curved, hooded spathe. Not very showy but quite intriguing. Perhaps this is a breeding challenge for the future?

Anne Marie Van Nest



In The Garden...

Michelle and Paul Butler moved into their new home a couple of years ago, so their "starter" garden is still a work in progress. Situated between a large, breezy patio and the sculpted rock wall dividing the lot from the subdivision's main thoroughfare, the garden is a raised bed extending the length of the yard. Michelle planted some trees for eventual shade, but has included lots of sun lovers in the meantime, with agaves, rosemary, bulbs, and a broad palette of other tough but colorful natives and adapted plants.



A small waterfall and recirculating stream provide the water feature for Michelle's certified backyard habitat garden. It obviously attracts the wildlife—a goldfinch proceeded to take a bath while we were talking on the patio; the hummingbirds stop for a quick drink in between meals at the many colorful feeders throughout the garden; and the dog ignores her water bowl in favor of the tastier stuff in the pond. The goldfinches throng to the thistle socks and a pair of mockingbirds nest in a nearby live oak tree.

Michelle's goal is to have the garden "full of plants", but she is careful about selecting new ones and wants to avoid having lots of little pots to take care of. In the meantime, the stone and ceramic frogs, cats, and dancing figurines add a whimsical touch throughout the garden. Before she adds more plants Michelle wants to get the ever necessary deadheading and pruning under control. Michelle and her mom spread 182 bags of bark mulch to help retain moisture and retard weed growth. She persistently uses Skip's nutgrass eradication formula and hopes for eventual victory over her current enemy.



More Garden Pix...

As promised from last month, here are some photos of the beautiful garden of John Papich. Thanks to John for sharing his garden and to Elaine Dill for providing us with these lovely photos!



News & Notes

GREENHOUSE UPDATE:

The Greenhouse Technician Training had a bang-up beginning on May 20th with a Class of twelve Master Gardeners receiving the required propagation training for Greenhouse Technician Interns, presented by Tommie Clayton, a propagation specialist. Holly Plotner developed the curriculum for greenhouse technician training which she has labeled the training subjects as units. The units are propagation, potting, irrigation, pest control, record keeping, and greenhouse maintenance and systems. Upon completion the technicians will receive a name badge labeled with "greenhouse technician" and logo. The interns are given an Activity Detail Sheet to record their training completion which must be signed off by a supervisor. The Master Gardeners desiring to enroll for the training only need only to come to a training class.

The next training dates are: Saturday July 22nd and Monday July 24th and Saturday August 26th and Monday August 28th. The classes will be held at the Greenhouse starting at 9:00 am and ending at 12:00 noon.

Call Holly Plotner (441-8165) or Don Telge (264-1713) for more information.

MG Education Events

HABITAT STEWARDS PROGRAM

The idea behind the Habitat Stewards program is to train volunteers who will then help others create habitat in their own backyards, community sites, etc. Also, volunteer hours can be earned by helping with projects like invasive species removal, plant rescue and outreach to the public at events like the Zilker Garden Festival.

In total, Habitat Stewards will receive at least 24 hours of training, which will focus on native plants, site inventory and design, gardening basics for our Austin soils, and butterfly, bird and pollinator friendly gardening. Participants will get hands-on practice, creating a native garden. Habitat Stewards will be expected to "pay back" 50 hours of volunteer time to reach out to the community and help transform our landscaping practices to benefit wildlife. Training is \$40 and volunteers will receive a Habitat Stewards "tool kit" to help them learn, and teach others, about the importance of saving a place for wildlife in our own backyards and communities. Another benefit is that you will get to network with a group of like-minded individuals. The flyer about the training program is on the next page.



Help Make the Austin Area a Wildlife Friendly Zone!

Join National Wildlife Federation's nationwide team of volunteers who serve our communities as Habitat Stewards™! At our workshop, the National Wildlife Federation will teach you how to help people create and restore wildlife habitat in backyards, schoolyards and other private and public areas. NWF will provide the training – no prior experience is necessary. You will work with a group of like-minded people, using your creative skills, regional botanical knowledge and gardening know-how.

Habitat Stewards receive:

A comprehensive, practical training manual including regional resources
Advice and practical training from local conservation professionals
Field trips and hands-on educational sessions with other community members
After one year of "active" service, you are eligible to receive recognition from the National Wildlife Federation including a free subscription to one of the magazines

Who: Anyone interested in volunteering to help wildlife, but interest in gardening is a plus

When and Where in Fall 2006:

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|--------------------|---------------------|--|
| Thursday, Sept. 7 | 6:00-9:00 p.m. | First Unitarian Universalist Church in central Austin |
| Saturday, Sept. 9 | 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. | Hornsby Bend Center for Environmental Research in east Austin |
| Thursday, Sept. 14 | 6:00-9:00 p.m. | First Unitarian Universalist Church |
| Saturday, Sept. 16 | 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. | Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve and optional field trip to local certified wildlife habitat |
| Thursday, Sept. 21 | 6:00-9:00 p.m. | First Unitarian Universalist Church |
| Saturday, Sept. 23 | 9:00 a.m.-? p.m. | Habitat Installation and optional field trip to local certified wildlife habitat |
| Thursday, Sept. 28 | 6:00-8:00 p.m. | Location TBA – Potluck and Graduation |

Speakers include: John Dromgoole from the Natural Gardener; Bill Stout and Jennifer Ellis from NWF; Kelly Bender, Urban Wildlife Biologist at Texas Parks and Wildlife; Mike Quinn, Invertebrate Biologist at TPWD, Kevin Anderson of the Hornsby Bend Center for Environmental Research; Lynn Osgood, Visiting Professor of Landscape Architecture at UT Austin, and representatives from Travis Audubon and Austin Pond Societies.

Training fee: \$40

Around Town

At the Natural Gardener, Saturday, July 15 at 10 a.m.– Mark Klym, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department "Here Come the Hummingbirds!" Get ready for fall in your hummingbird garden (which often doubles as your butterfly garden). Mark Klym is the Coordinator of the Texas Hummingbird Roundup, and coauthor of the recently published, beautiful book, Hummingbirds of Texas. Learn how to attract these jewels to your yard.



Closing the Garden Gate...

Summer has definitely been here. It seems the gardening events are slowing down some for the summer, due to the heat, and all of our well deserved vacations. The rain definitely helped to extend our growing season for a little while and cool things off. Hopefully, we will see more.

On a more somber note, Howard's Nursery closed after more than 90 years of being the 'go to' nursery here in Austin. It is always disheartening to see a local family business close, even more so for one that has been here for so long. Let this be a gentle reminder to all of us. There are several outstanding locally owned nurseries in our city. If you do not have a couple favorites, it is time to have a local nursery buying tour. We need to support our 'local men and women' in their business endeavors, so we will have more options for our always needed and 'got to have' plants and nursery supplies.

See you Wednesday! The program this month will be outstanding.

Take care—

Steve Reynolds

In closing—

"All gardeners live in beautiful places because they make them so." — Joseph Joubert

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