



A publication of...

TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

THE COMPOST BIN

September 2006



Speaker for September: Chris Wiesinger

"SOUTHERN HEIRLOOM BULBS"

Chris is a 2004 Horticulture graduate of Texas A&M University, where he was a member of the Corps of Cadets and a Ross Volunteer. While in college, Chris worked under the direction of Dr. Terri Starman on the use of vegetative annuals and bulbs in container gardens. Chris founded the Southern Bulb Co. from a college project upon graduation. Chris will speak on "The Adventures of Flowerbulbs: Texas Tough Bulbs for Their Introduction to Your Austin Garden".

Chris and the Southern Bulb Company will also have bulbs for sale at the meeting with 5% of the sales going back to the TCMGA.

UPCOMING SPEAKERS

October

Don Gardner

"Don Gardner's Basic Tree Care"

November

Steve Windhager, Ph.D.

Director of Landscape Restoration

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

"The Process of Ecological Restoration and its Philosophical Implications"

Dave R. Tovar

Message From the President...

Despite the heat my plants are surviving well enough, although my watering day keeps coming around before I know it, and I keep thinking it couldn't possibly have been five days since the last one, but there you are. Then I feel bad about not having watered my potted plants for five whole days in this heat, but that's my test for them, really, because if they can't survive five days in the summer, then they can't viably make a home in my garden.

Despite the heat we had a wonderful time at the Volunteer Party put on by Extension at the lovely Hirschfeld-Moore House downtown. The food was light and cool, the company light-hearted and relaxed, and the door prizes made us all light-headed and appropriately silly. Apparently there is only so much luck per table in these events.... I thank Skip for thinking highly enough of us to put on this event on our behalf, Mabelle for so enthusiastically and successfully bringing it to pass, and Jeff for acknowledging our worth to the community and to his office. It was a most pleasant evening, and I'm sure those who attended sallied homeward with more than a full belly, a door prize and a plant, which were all very welcome—but also with the pride that comes with recognition of our personal sacrifices and selfless commitment to the projects that we care about.



Despite the heat Skip and I are going to be making cedar trellises for plants in the Demonstration Garden, which are growing so vigorously that they won't stop flowing into the sidewalks. What IS in that soil there? If anyone knows about building such things, and doesn't mind working outside these days, we'd appreciate the help. Speaking of vigorously growing, it is interesting to note which plants love this heat and which ones don't. The Nierembergia is doing great through this summer, while the purple Supertunia petunia, which did better in July, has now failed, although Skip says his potted one at home is still blooming. The Pride of Barbados is acting as if the heat is just one of those things it likes about moving here to Texas, and you should see what a beauty the Golden Thryallis has become. If you don't have this plant yet, then you'll want to get one. As for groundcovers the new Myoporum we planted is looking fantastic. In the shade our Turk's Caps and coralberry have a terrible powdery mildew problem, but we are testing a new product called Green Cure, and so far it has been reducing the mildew problem on the Turk's Caps. And as for the nutsedge, we have it only in a few areas now, and we have a new nutsedge trial that we are working on. We have covered one irrigated area with Weed Barrier cloth, laid loosely enough to let the nutsedge expend its energy in growing leaves, which then should die from lack of light. We are experimenting to see how long it takes for the cloth to kill all of the nutsedge nuts. We'll let you know what we find out.

Despite the heat I find my mind is always on the garden, and I keep thinking of more projects and experiments and ways to link up the public with Master Gardeners. I have more ideas than I can possibly put into practice, but if I take one idea at a time, and follow it through, then every year I can make something new happen. And when we all do that, then together we make lots of good things happen, despite the heat.

Susan Decker
President

Special Feature: Domino Effect and Wildfires

What can plants and dominos have in common?

Answer: Planned or unplanned space. The amount of space between dominos determines if one knocks the next domino over when it falls touching the next domino, etc. This is how fire spreads from plant to plant, but the length of the flame also will determine if it can reach nearby plants.

The Native and Adapted Landscape Plants grow green guide for Central Texas has 'Height' and 'Spread' columns which give the expected mature size of each plant or tree. This is invaluable in planning for new landscapes or additions or changes in the landscape. The optimum space assures adequate air circulation, reduces stress and disease potential, allows for optimum sunlight, rainfall, and soil nutrients, but also can prevent the potential spread of fire.

Virtually all plants and trees are combustible. Some are more volatile because of their chemical content and/or density of their foliage. Dry, dead plant matter will burn more rapidly than similar living, well-watered plants. (Keep this in mind as compost and organic mulches are at various stages of dead, decaying plant matter.) It's an added reason to keep the compost moist to reduce fire potential.



In central Texas we now have crispy-dry air, landscapes and grounds. Firebreaks can break up the Domino Effect. Hardscapes are noncombustible materials like rock terraces, stone or brick edging around flower or shrub beds, ponds, pools, as well as, sidewalks, streets, driveways and stone or sand paths. Planning for 'pockets' of flowers or shrubs surrounded by stone edging is a good firebreak plan.

The most important space for the landowner to assess for fire prevention is indoors and within 30 to 50 feet of the living structure. This space needs to be watered deeply and infrequently, kept free of debris, has shrubs and trees well-maintained, pruned judiciously, has lawn mowed regularly to a height of about 3 inches.

Fire can spread up as well as out. The term used by the forest service is 'ladder fuel'. This is when the fire spreads from low grasses, flowers, or weeds to small shrubs or tall grasses to underbrush or vines up to the tree canopies. The forest service recommends keeping a 10-15 foot space between the tree canopies.

I hope that you have questions and will bring them to the September 9 (Saturday) free seminar at Westbank Library on 1309 Westbank at 10:30 a.m. to 12 noon. Jan Fulkerson from the Texas Forest Service Wildfire Preparedness Program will provide a lot of valuable information and can answer any questions you may have.

Jane Bramlett
Firewise Specialist

Down the Garden Path

Roadtrip! The Gardens at Opryland Hotel Nashville, Tennessee

I was fortunate this summer to vacation at the beautiful Opryland Hotel, situated among nine acres of indoor tropical gardens. Each of the three garden areas: Garden Conservatory, Cascades, and the Delta are housed under soaring, glass covered atriums. It's rumored that there are over 50,000 tropical plants!

The Cascade is water-oriented, with a "dancing waters," laser and colored light show every night. The Cascade Restaurant is nestled among lushly landscaped cliffs, with a view of a waterfall. It was my favorite place to escape to view the scenery and besides, the food is excellent.

The Garden Conservatory covers 2 acres, including winding walkways along a lushly landscaped stream.

The newest area is the 4.5 acre Delta, which includes a quarter-mile long flat bottom boat ride which explores the richly planted landscape. A wedding gazebo is tucked into the back of the Delta and is framed by a large black olive tree. I happened by just as a wedding was starting...what a thrill!

Many of the hotel rooms face the beautiful atriums. In fact, I remember years ago when Mike McGrath, then editor of Organic Gardener magazine, visited the Opryland Hotel. He was so impressed with the lush landscaping that he wanted to sleep out on the balcony so that he wouldn't miss a minute in the garden.

I got a lot of ideas from these gardens, from combinations in container plantings to interesting garden bed arrangements. One area featured a garden wedding dinner theme, complete with plants, flower arrangements and fine china. In addition, this summer, they featured a sand sculpture contest in the gardens. These were not your ordinary sand castles, but huge elaborate designs.



If you do go, always carry your camera and be alert to the flowers that are blooming. I found a blooming brugmansia that I wanted to document with a picture, since I couldn't believe that it was blooming indoors. Unfortunately, I didn't have my camera and when I found a break in my schedule in the next few days, the flowers had faded by the time I had found it again.

If you can't make it to the Opryland Hotel, you can still tour the gardens on their web site : <http://www.gaylordhotels.com/gaylordopryland/> under Brochures and Tour Gaylord Opryland.

Liz Caskey



More Photos from Opryland...



Youth Gardening...

Boys and Girls Clubs Plant Grow Box Gardens

The South and East campuses of Boys and Girls Clubs of Austin are the first sites to use grow box container gardens in their youth gardening efforts. These boxes, adapted by master gardeners Ron Miller and Don Freeman, are self-watering, weed-free and easy to maintain. A prototype of these boxes is in use at the master gardener greenhouse.



Patty Leander teaches at South Austin Boys and Girls Club

Two-day events were held at each Boys and Girls Club location. On the first day students learned about the importance of vegetables in a healthy diet. WIC nutritionist, Yvonne Martinez, taught kids about vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals while playing “Vegetable Jeopardy”. Everyone had the opportunity to try new vegetables prepared in different ways. Garbanzo beans, hummus and creamy cucumber dip were unexpectedly popular with the kids.

On the second day, Mabelle Dunlop, TCE Youth Gardening Program Specialist, divided students into groups. Each group planted their own grow box. Master gardener volunteers were on hand to teach, help and supervise.

Tomatoes, basil, cucumbers, squash and bell peppers were planted, and boxes were decorated with stickers advertising event sponsors.

After planting, the kids signed the watering tube, marking the box as their own.

The final component was vegetable “shopping”. Mabelle and Yvonne set up a mock farmer’s market, where kids shopped for fresh vegetables and a mock supermarket aisle, where canned vegetables were offered. Each student took home at least two bags of vegetables to their family.



Don Freeman and Elaine Dill help at East Austin Boys and Girls Club

The event was an enormous success. Forty children participated, all from limited-resource families. Pre and post evaluations showed that student desire to consume vegetables increased. Many kids tried vegetables they had never even seen before. A majority of these students have never visited a garden of any kind, making these grow boxes a literal introduction to gardening.

More Photos of Youth Gardening...

For information about future youth gardening projects, contact Machel Dunlop at the Extension Office. 854-9600 or madunlop@ag.tamu.edu



Grow box decorated with sponsor stickers

Planted box without plastic weed barrier



Seedling coming up through weed barrier



Kids with bags getting ready to shop



Dirty hands!



News & Notes

BIG THANKS TO MASTER GARDENERS

Thanks to all the master gardeners who donated time and money to our Boys and Girls Clubs grow box events. Individual donation receipts and thank you notes will be sent out later this month. Your generosity allowed 40 at-risk youth from limited-resource families to:

- learn about the importance of vegetables in their diets
- taste vegetables many had never even seen
- plant vegetables in grow box containers
- take a variety of fresh vegetables and canned vegetables home to their family
- and start gardening groups in their neighborhood that will last throughout the school year.

Machelle Dunlop

“INSIDE AUSTIN GARDENS”

The Master Gardeners that are presenting their gardens for our Fall Garden Tour are all so busy trying to keep everything looking nice during this terribly hot weather. I have visited several this month and they are doing a very admirable job. If it will just rain...

Now is the time for you to step forward to help make this Tour a success. We will have sign up sheets at the September Meeting for volunteers at all the gardens. You can sign up for morning or afternoon shifts, or if you need the volunteer hours, all day. We will again have the private showing of the gardens on the Tour the day before so all the volunteers can visit these outstanding gardens.

We also need volunteers for our Publicity/Plant Nursery Committee. Their responsibilities will include delivering posters and brochures to all the area nurseries from Georgetown to San Marcos, Bastrop to far West Austin and all areas in between.

OCTOBER PLANT EXCHANGE

It will cool off and rain again. As we get back to working outside this month, remember your gardening buddies and bring those extra goodies to the Fall Plant Exchange to be held at the conclusion of our October meeting.

Bring those summer survivors to share and take something new to try. Everything should be boxed, bagged and labeled. Remember: no sneaking plants before the end of the meeting and be willing to take your unclaimed goodies back home as the garden center does not have the facilities to take orphan plants.

Roxanne Smith

TCMGA OFFICERS--2007 — PLEASE HELP!

We are at the time of year when we need to nominate officers for our Executive Committee for 2007. We need your suggestions for the following positions:

President

Vice President, Programs

Vice President, Education

Vice President, Volunteer Coordinator for Certified Master Gardeners

Vice President, Volunteer Coordinator for Master Gardeners-in-Training

Secretary

Treasurer

Director, Publications

Director, Membership

Manager, Greenhouse

AAGC Representative

State Council Delegates (2)

Please send your suggestions to dlutz@austin.rr.com no later than September 15. Do not be bashful. You can nominate your self.

I look forward to hearing from each TCMGA member.

David Lutz, Chair — TCMGA Nominating Committee

Closing the Garden Gate...

August has come to an end. We can only hope that the 'heat wave' may be subsiding as you read this. But whatever the outcome, I know we all will be fine. We and our plants will survive for the most part. I know we will, some of our plants may not. Some may have to be replanted or replaced with other varieties. It is one of the things that makes gardening challenging but also makes it so interesting and fun. Gardening is always filled with variables we cannot control. We will survive.

Everyone that made it to the August meeting was quite taken with Melinda Kneese's lecture on Compost Tea. For those interested in further information, one of her mentors, Dr. Elaine Ingham has a book, [The Compost Tea Brewing Manual](#). The book is normally priced at \$40.00, but in bulk we can obtain the book for \$26.00. I will have a sign up sheet at the September meeting for anyone that wishes to order a copy. You can find out more information about the book at Dr Ingham's website, soilfoodweb.com. If you cannot make it to the meeting, email me if you would like to order a copy. You may pay when the books come in.

Come to the September MG meeting. Chris Wiesinger is a very good speaker, very educated, and a recent graduate of [Texas A&M University](#). As a reminder, do not forget to bring your money! Chris will have 'Texas Tough' bulbs for sale after the meeting with 5% of the sales donated back to the TCMGA.

See you at the meeting! Take care—

Steve Reynolds

In closing— "Look deep, deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better." — Albert Einstein

TCMGA 2006 Executive Committee:

President: Susan Decker
Immediate Past President: Becky Waak
VP Programs: Dave Tovar
VP Education: Rosalie Russell
VP Volunteer Coordinator for Certified Master Gardeners: Judy Lawson
VP Volunteer Coordinator for Master Gardeners in Training: Manda Rash
Secretary: Cheryl Harrison
Treasurer: Lindy McGinnis
Publications Director: Jennifer Brown
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AAGC Representative: Steve Reynolds
State Council Representatives: Jacqueline Johnson, Susan Jung
Past Presidents (Non-voting): Tommie Clayton
Susan Cashin
Peggy Stewart
Bill Boytim
Don Freeman
Will Walker
Ex Officio Member of the Board (Non-voting) Horticulture Extension Service
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The Compost Bin Team:

Steve Reynolds
Cheryl Harrison
Elaine Dill
Rebecca Mathews
Anne Marie Van Nest
Liz Caskey
Manda Rash
Paula Middleton

