



A publication of...

TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

# THE COMPOST BIN

October 2006



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Speaker for October: Don Gardner, Consulting Arborist

“Don Gardner’s Basic Tree Care”

Discover the techniques of basic tree care in the Texas environment. Join arborist Don Gardner to learn how your trees grow and live. This presentation will include information about analyzing tree health and how to keep your trees healthy through proper tree care including root care, wound care, and feeding. Mr. Gardner will also discuss the proper way and correct time of year to prune your trees.

Mr. Gardner has been a full time consulting arborist since 1998 and is a member of the Native Plant Society of Texas, Texas Forestry Association, TreeFolks of Austin, American Forestry Association, and Texas Urban Forestry Council.

Consulting arborists are dedicated to the enhancement of the community and the protection of the environment as the preeminent authorities on matters related to tree and plant life—ensuring through their expertise and objectivity the safety, preservation, functionality and beauty of our natural surroundings.

"The public is just beginning to understand that trees have multiple values," says arborist Don Gardner. Planting a tree is a reminder that we can have a positive impact on our environment.

Dave Tovar

## **NOVEMBER SPEAKER**

Steve Windhager, Ph.D.  
Director of Landscape Restoration  
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

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## Message From the President...

This year the fresh, cool feeling of autumn is actual coinciding with the official change of the season. It's hard not to feel renewed vigor for getting out in the garden and sprucing it up after the long, hard stresses of summer. And while we're at it, we can reinvigorate ourselves and our volunteer hours by helping with our Master Gardener Fall projects.

The Inside Austin Gardens tour is coming up on October 21, and needs the help of every Master Gardener. There are many ways to help, from shuttling plants to the gardens on the Thursday before, to setting up tables and taking tickets at each garden, to roaming the gardens answering questions about our favorite conversation topic—plants. This event is a great opportunity for us as a group to educate the public on a wide range of gardening ventures, but we need a lot of volunteers to make it a success. Please sign up for whatever shift or task you can do, and if possible, sign up for more than one shift.



Anything you do to help makes the whole event run more smoothly, and this is our biggest volunteer project of the year, so we need everyone to jump in and participate. Besides, it's great fun hanging out with other gardeners, and you may even get some ideas for your own garden!

In the past few years it seems that it has been getting harder and harder to find Master Gardeners willing to serve on the Executive Committee. We have a large, committed body of members, and I know that there are very many of you who would do a great job on the board. To those who think they haven't been in the group long enough to be an officer, I say that we always need fresh ideas and the enthusiasm that comes with newly certified status. To those who have been in the group a long time and think that someone else is bound to do it, I say that you are the ones who have seen what works best and it is time for you to share your experience with the board. To those who think that serving on the board is an overwhelming burden, I say that every board member is encouraged to enlist the help of other members to get their tasks done. To those who don't see themselves as leaders, I say that you are gardeners, and you know how to usher, nurture, replace, relocate, invigorate and help others thrive. Without the board the entire membership would have to make collective decisions and coordinate all of our volunteer efforts, and we all know how well that would work. Ultimately, serving on the board is not difficult, there is no prior training or knowledge required, just a commitment for at least one year to help make our organization run smoothly, and make it better each year. That is not too much to ask for most of you. Please contact David Lutz right away to put your name on the ballot. The last chance for adding names is the October monthly meeting.

Fall is also the time for getting our garden projects pruned, cleaned, mulched, and generally looking good. Now that it is no longer too hot to work out there, expect to see more workdays in the gardens. We really need your help, so make sure you get out for at least one workday this month. The Earthkind Demonstration Garden will be having workdays that will be posted by email for building some trellises for the vines and climbing roses, pruning vigorously growing plants away from the sidewalk, and transplanting some groundcovers, among other tasks. Skip will be at the workday on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 9-1, and I hope you will all come for some ever-amusing gardening with Skip. I'm sure that the project leaders for our other garden projects will need some help soon as well, so sharpen your pruning shears, get your shovels ready, and let's get out and garden!

Susan Decker

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### Plant Portrait: Brugmansia (The Notorious Angel's Trumpet)

Brugmansia (Brug for short) is in the Nightshade family (Solanaceae) along with such "evil" relatives as tomatoes, potatoes, tobacco, and peppers, etc. As wicked as this plant may be in some situations, the huge, breathtaking blooms are sure to mesmerize (in a good way) and that's even before their scent reaches the nose.

Most Brugs are native to South America (particularly the Andes) where they grow on hillsides in damp conditions. There are 7 species of Brugmansia. Most of them are white, but a couple of beauties are coral or orange in color.

Brugs come in many sizes, forms, shapes and colors. Singles, doubles, and shredded forms. Some hang pendant, others stick out of the side and are called nodding. The flowers can be white, yellow, gold, orange, peach and pink. Some even change colors as the flowers age and some color change is possible as a result of environmental conditions. Unlike Datura's, there are no real purple Brugs yet. But, recently a red (well a so-called red!) Brug from a sanguinea hybrid called "Super Spot" arrived from Germany. Some say it is a red to rival some supermarket tomatoes.



Is it a Brug or a Dat?

Many people confuse Brugmansia with its cousin the Datura. Although both are called Angel's Trumpets, there are several easy ways to tell them apart. One general way is to look at the flowers. Brugs have the flowers that face downward, while Datura's face upward. Also, Datura seed pods are rounded and often covered in spikes. Brug seed pods resemble chili peppers, okra, eggs or fat beans in shape and don't open on their own. If they are overwintered, Brugs get woody and can grow huge and form trees. Datura don't get more than 4 feet tall and stay in shrub form.

Where'd that crazy name come from?

Brugmansia was named for Sebald Justin Brugmans (1763-1819) a little known Dutch professor of natural history associated with the University of Leiden.

Blooming

Some cultivars bloom all season while others have flushes every 6-8 weeks. A few only flower in cooler weather. Their fragrance ranges from none (*B. sanguinea*) to exotic and intoxicating (*B. suaveolens*). The scent is most prevalent on a warm summer evening.

Conditions

Brugs love humid, warm days and cool nights. Most are very tolerant of temps over 100 F. and all tolerant of low temps (above freezing). A couple of Brug species (native to higher elevations) such as *B. sanguinea* and *B. vulcanicola*, prefer moderate temps, cool nights and may not flower if temps are too hot. Plastic pots recommended for water retention and to reduce the weight when moving time comes around. Fortunately all Brugs tolerate over-wintering indoors.

Re-Potting and Soils

Simply, if you see roots growing out the bottom of the pot, then it's time for a bigger one. 5-7 gallon pots are a good size to use for a fairly mature plant. The larger the pot, the bigger the plant will grow- kind of like the bonsai effect! Many decent soils will work as long as they have good drainage (this includes having a drainage hole in the bottom of the pot). Brugs are long-lived perennial in zone 9 or 10 and can grow into a small tree outdoors in the garden. They will be slightly smaller if grown here in a container (6-15 ft.) in zone 8 and moved indoors during the winter.

They will survive zone 8 outdoors during some winters (and maybe even zone 7 with a lot of mulch), but not the unusually cold ones that will freeze the roots and kill the plant.

#### Water and more Water

Brugs need lots of water and they may even wilt during the hottest parts of the day (even if the soil is moist). Brugs grow well in morning sun and afternoon shade. If you can't keep up with the watering or it is continually wilted move it to a shadier site.



If you want a tougher Angel's Trumpet that can take full sun and less water and fertilizer—grow *Datura* instead.

#### Sharing your House with a Brug

Trim Brugs back in the fall if you want to happily co-exist inside. Root these trimmings (particularly those from the top of the plant which will bloom earlier) and use them as back up plants in case of a sudden plant death emergency. Leave at least 6 nodes on each branch to form next years flower production. Overwintering can be done in two ways, keep it cool (above freezing) and dark so that it goes semi-dormant or keep it actively growing with good water, fertilizer and bright light. The dormant plants should be watered very sparingly and not fertilized until new growth starts in the spring. Most of the leaves will drop and the plant will look almost dead-

remember it's just resting. To bring it out of dormancy, increase the temperature, water and light. The Brugs will immediately respond with vigorous growth. Gradually acclimatize them to the outdoors and away they will go.

#### Propagation

Brug cuttings are quite easy to successfully root. Semi-woody or woody (more mature growth) cuttings are the best to use. Very young shoots are prone to rotting. If your Brug is getting too tall and sparse in the lower regions, try to air layer it. *Datura* are easier to propagate from seeds (and come true from seed mostly), while Brugs are more difficult from seed (and may not come true from seed). If you want to try Brug seeds, leave the seed pods on the plant to fully ripen, remove and collect the seeds. Soak them in warm water for at least 48 hours (changing the water a few times a day). This will soften the corky seed coat and speed up germination. Sow the seeds as soon as possible as they do not store well.

#### Pests

Pests include the usual suspects... spider mites, aphids, mealy bugs, and white flies. Sometimes a caterpillar will snack on the plant but these can be easily hand picked.

Toxic if Ingested!

No plant munching allowed! All parts (roots, stems, flowers leaves and seeds) of Brugmansia (like Datura) are highly toxic. The plant contains scopolamine, hyoscyamine and atropine in varying amounts. Wash your hands after handling the plant and wear disposable gloves when harvesting the seeds or taking cuttings. Even the sap can cause harm. Headaches, confusion or vision problems could be the result of exposure to these toxic plants and death may result from ingestion. Many cats, dogs and birds have ingested the leaves without any effects or had mild symptoms. But don't take the chance- keep children and pets away. Some adults (looking for hallucinogens or aphrodisiacs) should probably heed this warning too!

Anne Marie Van Nest



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## Down the Garden Path: Ila Falvey

### Ila Falvey

As a transplanted New Yorker, Ila Falvey makes a good Texan. She's tough enough to keep a bounteous garden producing through the long, hot summers; and she's contrary enough to fight and win the battle with Bermuda grass and other weeds and pests with strictly organic methods and materials. Neither sun, nor wind, nor rain keep this motivated master gardener inside when there are garden chores to be performed.

Ila doesn't just have one garden either. Because her yard at home is much too shady with shallow soil, she rents several plots at Sunshine Community Gardens where she grows all kinds of vegetables, and beautiful, healthy ones at that. Arugula, trumpet squash, and fava beans share space with all the regular seasonal items the rest of us grow. But her favorite plant at the garden has to be the pomegranite tree. Ila is a grazer, and frequently eats her produce while she's picking it. So it's not at all unusual to find her munching on a jeweled pomegranate while she inspects her plots. That is if she can keep the two-legged and four-legged critters from making off with them first.

In addition to keeping her own plots productive, Ila is the prime mover in the chicken co-op which cares for 50 or so chickens. She and her husband John, the heavy lifter when it comes to garden chores, installed a contemplative garden complete with bamboo arbor where the other gardeners can take a break and admire the vines, roses, and other flowers and native grasses she has propagated and/or obtained from friends and neighbors. So you can see, Ila tends her fellow gardeners as well as she does her vegetable plots.

At home, Ila's creative side is definitely on display. Her collection of garden ornaments may be second to none, and you'll have to visit her garden on the tour this year to see them for yourself. But you can see her second favorite garden hat in the photo accompanying this article—ain't it a beaut? And don't mess with a Texan and her hat!

Elaine Dill



### New Feature: In the Vegetable Garden...

If you are growing summer squash in your fall garden, do not be surprised if your yellow squash begins to show streaks of green. Contrary to popular belief, your yellow squash has not crossed with your neighbor's zucchini. The mottling you observe (along with distorted leaves) is a symptom of Squash Mosaic Virus. It is a disease that is more common in the fall, often passed along by aphids or cucumber beetles. There is not much you can do once your plants are infected; the virus will cause eventual decline. Since there is no treatment many folks pull up and discard their plants right away. However the squash produced is still edible, so I let my plants continue to grow until the fruit produced becomes too distorted and, well, unappetizing. Using floating row cover may help prevent the transmission of the disease, but the row cover must be removed when the squash begins to bloom, and you can bet the aphids and cucumber beetles will be standing by to attack. As I mentioned, this virus is particularly a problem in the fall, so planting in the spring is a way to avoid it, but then there will be those squash vine borers to deal with.

It's always something . . .

Patti Leander





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## Special Feature: Firewise Urban-Wildland Interface

*On Saturday, September 9, Jan Fulkerson, from the Texas Forest Service, spoke at Westbank Library. She had some up-to-date and critical information I'd like to pass along to fellow Master Gardeners and, hopefully, you will pass the word on to your neighbors, family and friends, as well as those you are in contact with at the phone desk, plant clinics, etc.*

This is the WORST FIRE SEASON IN TEXAS HISTORY! Drought-stress and 65 mph. sustained winds created the perfect firestorm. In the panhandle 907,000 acres burned in 24 hours! Residents and livestock were displaced, and 10,000 head of cattle were lost in the fire. Three firefighters and 16 civilians have lost their lives to wildfires in Texas in 2005-2006 thus far. A grass fire was clocked at 32 feet/second spread in Poolville, TX. so please heed any warnings for evacuation!

Historically, fire has always been a part of the Ecosystem, but as urban areas move further out and interface with the wildlands, wildfires involve more homes and people. With drought predicted for the next 25-40 years, this interface becomes particularly critical. In Central Texas, homes are drying out from exterior due to drought and high temperatures, and air conditioners are drying homes from the inside out. This, along with fuel buildup around the homes creates a potentially dangerous situation.

Here are some SIMPLE STEPS homeowners can do to reduce fire threat to their property. Since the primary prevention or mitigation of wildfire damage is to reduce fuel buildup:

- Prune plants, shrubs, and trees. Do not allow foliage to touch structures. Maintain spacing between plants and trees.
- Use less dense plants, or prune to reduce thickness of shrubs.
- Choose less volatile plants. Do not have yaupons, junipers or other conifers, nor rosemary in proximity of your structure or near anything you value.
- Limb up trees to minimize ladder fuel effect.
- Keep lawn mowed and green to reduce flame length.
- Use hardscape such as gravel or rock mulch for foundation plants.
- Note: Combustible mulches are helpful to plants if actively watered! Otherwise, mulch wicks out moisture from soil. It can be a friend or foe. Mulches of plant matter smolder and take a long time to burn out.
- Isolate garden away from living structure. Use a rock, cement or other noncombustible border.
- Start (nonvolatile, low density) plants in the garden at least 3 feet from structures.
- Plan for a defensible space around your home. Emergency response vehicles need a 14 foot height clearance and a 12 foot wide clearance (8 foot wide driveway plus shoulder).

*The Texas Forest Service has a giant task--Texas is Big! It is the second most populated state in the U.S. and 97% of the land is privately owned. TFS is made up of only 380 permanent employees. The local fire departments are the first responders and call the TFS if they need help in fighting the fires. In light of this, Travis County has created a special Wildland Task Force to deal with wildfires, and Westlake has a wildfire emergency response procedure which includes evacuation routes, etc.*



*Jan Fulkerson gave much more information and also had a great Powerpoint presentation. I'm sorry more people couldn't be there. As one couple said, "We've been doing all the wrong things!"*

Jane Bramlett  
Firewise Landscape Specialist

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## News & Notes

### **DON'T FORGET! 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

### **INTERESTING SEMINAR ....PALMS OF NORTHEASTERN MEXICO AND COMPANION PLANTS**

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2006 AT 7:00PM**

*Austin Area Garden Center Zilker Botanical Garden*

Sponsored by Texas Botanical Garden Society

*Speaker—Richard Travis, editor*

The Palm Society of South Texas Journal

Mr Travis travels extensively in Northeastern Mexico and has developed an encyclopedic knowledge of the native palms of this vast and botanically interesting region. With a University of Texas BS in International Finance as well as a Masters in Horticulture from Texas A&M, he divides his time between a residence in Brownsville and his home base in San Antonio. In Brownsville, Travis grows several species of palms along with a variety of companion plants to test for hardiness and horticultural suitability for South Central Texas. At home in San Antonio, he is a faculty member at the University of Texas at San Antonio where he teaches math.

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## AAGC News...

The Austin Area Garden Council met on September 12, 2006. After a summer recess, there was lots of items to discuss.

The ten year contract between the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department and the Austin Area Garden Council was discussed by Sarah Macias of the Parks Department. The contract is basically the same as the contract signed ten years ago with a few clarifications and updates. The contract will be signed by our representative, Laura Joseph, President of the Austin Area Garden Council.

The Austin Pond Society generously donated three thousand dollars to be used for revitalization of the koi ponds at ZBG. This money was earned from their summer pond tour. If you see anyone from the Pond Society, be sure and thank them for their donation.

The third annual AAGC Holiday Bazaar will be held November 18, 2006. The Bazaar is open to the public. This year will feature a new and revised format for you to do your early Christmas shopping. Featured in the Bazaar will be garden themed crafts, collectibles, books and toys, holiday ornaments and wreaths, home baked goods and plants. Donations will be accepted prior to the event from any of the more than 35 member clubs. Call 327-0401 for more information and to make a donation.

On November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2006, the City of Austin is holding a bond election. Proposition 3 involves \$1.4 million dollars for Zilker Botanical Garden. Please review the proposal and give it your utmost consideration. Please vote Yes.

'Zilker Fest' Planning Committee is already meeting and planning the spring garden festival at Zilker Botanical Garden.

That is the news from the AAGC—

Steve Reynolds

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## Closing the Garden Gate...

The big event for all of us this month is 'Inside Austin Gardens', our fall garden tour. Check out our website, [www.tcmastergardeners.org](http://www.tcmastergardeners.org) for all the details. The gardens are looking great and the demonstrations/talks are all very well planned. The only thing missing is 'you'.

We need a few more volunteers to make everything run smoothly the days leading up to the date and on the day of the tour. Sign up sheets will be at the October meeting. If you have not signed up yet, please do so. Tickets, brochures and posters will also be available at the meeting. If you would like to volunteer, but cannot make it to the meeting, contact Manda Rash at [mandarash@austin.rr.com](mailto:mandarash@austin.rr.com) or at 918-9608.

This year, we are asking all of our members to sell advance tickets to the event. There are several reasons for this. One is, who better but Master Gardeners to sell and publicize our event.

We are the ones with the gardening knowledge and know-how, this is our chance to help spread that information. Secondly, this is a 'rain or shine' tour. If the weather turns bad, it could hurt our sales that day. Tickets will be available in groups of five to check out, or you could pay for your tickets in advance. Please take some tickets at the meeting and help make this event a huge success.

That's it for this month, see you at the meeting.

Steve Reynolds

"If you would be happy all your life — plant a garden." — unknown

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Enjoy a sneak preview of some of the gardens!



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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  
Membership Director: Rebecca Matthews  
Greenhouse Manager: Don Telge  
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  
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Anne Marie Van Nest  
Liz Caskey  
Manda Rash  
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