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TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

THE COMPOST BIN

August 2007



Speaker for August: John Dromgoole

John Dromgoole, owner of The Natural Gardener Nursery and Lady Bug Natural Brand, has been deeply involved in the advancement of organic gardening and environmental issues for over thirty years. His nursery has been voted "Best Nursery" eight times in *The Austin Chronicle's Best of Austin Poll*, and is known for supplying organic products, native and well adapted plants, and bulk compost, soils and mulches. The gardens at the store have been featured in *Texas Highways*, *Herb Companion* and *Fine Gardening* magazines.



John's radio show, *Gardening Naturally*, has been on the air on KLBJ AM 590 for 25 years. *Gardening Naturally* is a bi-weekly (every Saturday and Sunday) question and answer program that focuses on the organic technique for homeowners and weekend gardeners. He is also the host of *Backyard Basics* on KLRU (PBS, Austin) TV's weekly show *Central Texas Gardener* and the *Weekend Gardener* on KXAN TV's *Saturday First Cast*.

John was the originator of the City of Austin's "Chemical Clean-Up Day", which has become an annual event and has now established a permanent drop-off site. He was also a co-author on the Texas Department of Agriculture's original task force to establish standards for the organic certification of farms in Texas. In 2002, John was awarded the Dennis Hobbs Individual Achievement Award by Keep Austin Beautiful for his contribution to many different Austin and surrounding area non-profit groups, schools and the general public.

John has written articles for *Texas Gardener Magazine* and *Organic Gardening Magazine* since 1983 and has been the recipient of numerous environmental conservation and gardening industry awards over the years.

Join us August 1st, 2007 at the Zilker Botanical Gardens Clubhouse, where John Dromgoole will be speaking to us on Natural Gardening and the benefits thereof.

Regards,
Jerry Naiser

Message From the President

How wet can it get? We should have run a pool this year on how much rain we would get or how long the rain would last this summer.

I am off to Colorado to go camping in even more rain, according to the forecast. The good news is the rain will keep the threat of wildfires in check.

While I'm gone, I hope you will seriously think about helping out the association the rest of this year. I still need a volunteer coordinator, a yahoo instructor, some Garden Guide Distributors, Grow Green fact sheet distributors, and a bunch of help in the Demonstration Garden if it ever stops raining. There are all sorts of things that can be done that don't require an enormous amount of time or regular commitment or organizing on your part. Let me know if you have some time to volunteer for something, and I'll hook you up with the right task.

You will all be asked this month to please consider running for a board position to help keep our operations running smoothly. There are many different kinds of tasks to choose from, and you can recruit all the help you want or need. Our nominating committee will be contacting you, so don't be shy, just plunge in and help out as best you can!

See you at the August meeting,

Susan Decker,
President

Plant Portrait: Mexican Milkweed

Mexican Milkweed (also called Bloodflower, Swallow-wort, Silkweed, Tropical Milkweed, Indian root, Butterfly Weed, Red Cottonweed, and Scarlet Milkweed) is botanically known *Asclepias curassavica*.

This tropical, herbaceous perennial (evergreen in milder areas) is hardy to zone 8, but can be grown as an annual in colder areas. Vertical and showy, this plant, with its dramatic red-orange blooms, can grow to 48 inches! The continuous supply of red-orange and yellow blooms from early summer to early fall is a visual treat for gardeners and also a food source for many winged Lepidoptera, flies and insect visitors.

Since Mexican Milkweed can reach such often unexpected heights, plant it in the middle or back of the border so that it doesn't block other shorter plants. An alternative is to pinch the plant in the spring to cause more branching and a bushier form.

This South American native prefers slightly acidic to neutral soils. It is very adaptable and is easy to grow in dry, moist and even wet soils. Full sun to partial shade conditions are ideal with the best blooms in sun. Mexican Milkweeds are somewhat difficult to



transplant as it has a deep fleshy, tap root. Better success is achieved when young plants are transplanted or container grown plants planted. They are slow to become established but become a tough plant once settled. This is an excellent xeriscape plant that should not be over-watered.

Mexican Milkweed is easy to propagate and many options are available to multiply plants. These include dividing the plant, rooting cuttings or sowing seeds. Seeds are ripe when the long, narrow pod splits open and releases the white fluffy parachutes. The plant easily self-seeds in warmer climates. Seeds are easy to germinate and can be sown immediately.

Pests include spider mites and milkweed (these are the same ones found on oleander) aphids (yellow-orange soft-bodied with black legs). Aphids are unsightly but don't cause much harm if the plant isn't under extreme stress. Leaves will turn a mottled yellow/brown color if aphids are numerous. Use a strong spray of water to wash off the aphids if desired (or let the ladybugs munch away if just a few are present). If aphids are numerous their excrement (honeydew) will produce a grayish black fungus called sooty mold. This will reduce the photosynthetic ability of the plant.



There might also be milkweed bugs on plants. These orange-red bugs have black antennae, legs and heads. They eat the seeds and tissue of the milkweed plants. They often gather as groups and are rarely numerous enough to be a problem. These bugs are one of a small group of insects that can tolerate the toxic compounds in milkweeds.

Butterflies and other nectar feeding insects are very attracted to the blooms. This is a very important butterfly host and larval food plant for the Monarch butterfly but also is host for the Queen and Soldier butterflies (Monarch relatives). While migrating north, Monarch butterflies lay eggs on this plant even though it is not native to Texas. The yellow and black striped caterpillar only feeds on *Asclepias spp.* (Milkweed relatives).

Monarchwatch.org lists Mexican Milkweed as the best plant for the garden and best for maintaining Monarch butterflies. Experiments show most female monarch butterflies, if given a choice of milkweed types, will pick Mexican Milkweed to lay her eggs. The young caterpillars love the leaves and fortunately the plant is vigorous enough to re-grow the eaten foliage.

Milkweeds have many ethnobotany uses around the world. An internet search will supply plenty of details. The sap is an irritant if contact is made with the skin. Also many parts of the plant are poisonous if eaten by humans. The plant contains a toxin called galitoxin. This is found in all vegetative parts of the plant. This human and livestock toxin though, is helpful in protecting the Monarch butterfly. Monarch caterpillars that have fed on milkweeds ingest this compound

which makes them distasteful to predators such as birds. The milkweed compound becomes more concentrated in adult butterflies thereby offering more inherent protection. Birds eating Monarch butterflies have been observed to vomit shortly after ingesting them.

Mexican Milkweed is not a native plant (and probably isn't even from Mexico)! It is from South America. There is concern in some warmer areas (central and southern Florida) where it is naturalized and has become somewhat weedy through self-seeding. Most do not consider it invasive but there are those that wonder if it will push out the native Milkweeds. Here in Texas there are about 30 species of native milkweeds and only sightings of Mexican Milkweed in areas in the far south and southwest (Houston and Brownsville).



Cultivars;

'Butterfly Red' red and orange blooms

'Silky Gold' (syn. 'Aurea') yellow and mango colored flowers

'Silky Red' (syn. 'Silky Deep Red') dark red and yellow flowers.

'Silky Scarlet' scarlet and red flowers

Anne Marie Van Nest



In the Vegetable Garden

August is a time for planning and decision making. Planning ahead for cool weather crops, yet deciding if you still want to squeeze in a second planting of warm weather vegetables. If you haven't had your fill yet, there is still time to plant fast growing, warm-season vegetables like okra, beans, cucumbers and squash. These vegetables take around 50-60 days from seed, so that means they should be ready for harvesting in October. But wait, we need to be planting our cool season crops (broccoli, cauliflower, kale, collards, carrots and the like) in late September or early October. And therein lies the dilemma. How can I have it all?!

It is hard to accept that another summer and its sunshine-filled, abundant vegetables are coming to an end, but by this time of year I find myself thinking ahead to heartier fare: collards and cornbread, chili, broccoli stir-fry, carrots and stews, roasted beets, and, the oh-so-simple cauliflower with melted Velveeta. We really try to eat "in-season" from the garden, so heck; we haven't eaten these vegetables in several months. By the time fall gets here I am ready to turn over much of the garden to these cool-season comfort foods. I usually try to clear out several planting areas in late July or early August, amend them with compost and fertilizer, top with mulch and let them rest until planting time comes around in September.

If it is really hot (as in summers past), I will cover the area with shade cloth or an umbrella in an effort to keep the soil cooler. Then when it is time for planting the bed is ready and waiting.

Potatoes can be planted mid-month and since they don't like a hot soil, use the umbrella/shade cloth idea several days before planting to help cool the soil. Also, try to use small, whole seed potatoes, but if you have to cut bigger ones into pieces, it is recommended that you dust them with sulfur and let them cure a couple of days before planting in the ground. This will help avoid problems with rotting in the hot soil.



Blushing Beauty Pepper

It has been an exceptional year for peppers, so if you have them growing in your garden, just keep them mulched, fertilized and watered (ha!) and they should produce well into the fall. Do the same for tomatoes if they have been producing all summer for you.

Squash vine borer is usually not as big a problem in the fall as it is in the spring, but do watch out for the tell-tale signs of squash mosaic virus, which seems to be more prevalent in the fall.

Often when gardeners see their yellow squash starting to turn green, they think there has been some monkey business going on between the squash and the cucumbers, but in reality squash do not cross-pollinate with cucumbers. When you see green zucchini with yellow spots or yellow squash mottled with green (see picture), that is an indication that the plants have been infected with squash mosaic virus. The squash are still fine for eating, but the plants will start to decline, so it is often best to remove affected plants to prevent the spread of the disease to healthy specimens. Controlling insects and covering your plants with floating row cover may help as the virus is transmitted by insects such as the cucumber beetle.



Butterstick squash with evidence of mosaic virus – but it's fine for eating

As you probably know, squash can grow amazingly fast, so be sure to check your plants regularly and pick your squash at their peak (they are best at 5-7 inches long).

If you have been blessed with an abundance of okra this summer and are tired of eating it fried or boiled, try the following recipe for a delicious, spiced-up version.

Spiced-up okra and potatoes

Spicy Potatoes & Okra

2 Tbsp canola oil
2 medium potatoes, chopped
1 lb okra, dried well and sliced
1 medium onion, chopped
[1, jalapeño, sliced] - *optional*
1 tsp salt
½ tsp turmeric
¼-½ tsp cayenne



Heat oil in a large, wide skillet. Add potatoes and cook until lightly browned, 5-10 minutes. Add okra and cook gently over medium low heat 10 minutes. Add onion, salt and spices, and if you like a little heat, throw in the jalapeño.

Have you tried growing your own sprouts yet? If so, here is a yummy way to utilize them, along with the cucumbers that have been growing like crazy this summer.

And guys, it may look dainty, but even the men in my family like these.

Cucumber-sprout sandwich

Cucumber-Sprout Mini Sandwiches

1 oriental cucumber, thinly sliced
2 Tbsp rice vinegar
Salt & pepper
8 oz light cream cheese
2 tsp Dijon mustard
½ cup chopped toasted pecans
8 slices bread, crusts removed
½ cup alfalfa sprouts



Sprinkle cucumber with vinegar and season with salt and pepper.
Mix cream cheese, mustard and pecans. Spread cream cheese mixture on 4 slices of bread. Top with cucumber slices, 2 Tbsp sprouts and remaining bread. Cut into triangles to serve.
4-6 appetizer servings

As I ponder the work (and all those weeds) that awaits me in the garden, I recall a quote I read recently by Thomas Edison:

“Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.”

Well, I’m puttin’ on my overalls and heading to the garden, because I sure don’t want to miss anything.

Here’s to a bountiful harvest,
Patty Leander

The Greenhouse Bench

Master Gardener greenhouse volunteers, give yourself a well-deserved pat on the back! Huge thanks are extended to Ron Ciani for donating an upright refrigerator/freezer for the greenhouse. This much newer and more efficient fridge is an enormous improvement on the previous one that needed a broom to keep the door propped closed.

The July greenhouse work day saw many different jobs underway simultaneously. A determined group was tackling the large weeds under the greenhouse benches. These weeds enjoyed the cloudy weather and excessive moisture to put on just as much growth as the plants growing above the benches. The weeds immediately outside of the greenhouse were also line trimmed to try and tame them.

Another group was busy potting up cuttings coming out of the mist system. Many of these were cuttings of tough perennials and shrubs that Holly Plotner, Becky Waak and additional members of the propagation specialist team took for future Habitat for Humanity landscapes. This will be an ongoing project as additional native or adapted plants are produced by the greenhouse.

Marian Stasney and Molly Clark ventured to the Texas A&M plant sale (and other local nurseries in that area) and brought back some new mother plants for the greenhouse. New additions include 'Orange Jubilee' yellow bells (*Tecoma stans*), Godzilla Dutchman's pipe (*Aristolochia gigantea 'Brazilensis'*), white Texas star hibiscus (*Hibiscus coccineus 'Alba'*), a peach colored Brugmansia, 'Compact Blue' butterfly flower (*Clerodendron ugandense*), 'Burgundy Thread' Jacob's coat (*Alternanthera ficoidea*) and red leaf hibiscus (*Hibiscus acetosella*).

The four rain collection tanks are still full at the greenhouse as we enjoy the excessive rainfall this month.

Brent and Becky Heath of Brent and Becky's Bulbs recently donated some of their favorite new caladiums from Thailand to the greenhouse for trial. Five bulbs each of 'King's Bridge', 'Lucky Purple', 'Madame', 'Five Primary Colors', 'Shining Red', 'Yellow Blossom', and 'Yellow Palace' were potted up and now await warmer weather to sprout. Some of the bulbs were given a different treatment before potting. The tips were broken and removed from these bulbs. Removing this one main eye is supposed to encourage the plant to send up many shoots around the top of the bulb resulting in many more colorful leaves. Brent and Becky would like our report on how they grew here in Central Texas to compare with their Virginia growing experience before they offer them to their mail order customers. The Thailand caladiums are smaller cultivars than the traditional caladiums (like those in the Zilker Botanical Gardens parking lot) but they have different leaf shapes and amazing colors.

Anne Van Nest



Our American palates usually think of salads as Iceberg lettuce and tomato wedges. Our cool season gardens are traditionally very limited in terms of fresh greens, with few venturing beyond lettuce, spinach and perhaps a bit of red cabbage to color the mix. There are a multitude of delicious greens that can be added to salad mixes to really spice up your meal.

Not everyone has the same tastes when it comes to fresh or cooked greens. Would you run me out of the south if I confessed that I can't stand cooked collards, turnip greens or mustard greens?! Likewise there are several of the fresh salad greens that are a bit too much for my palate - especially the bitter ones. There are also several that are superb. I'd be willing to bet that if you'll try out some new salad greens this winter, there will be a few that will change your salads from now on. Flavor ranges from bitter to lemony to nutty to "it's hard to describe" can be found to mix in with the standard salad according to taste.

Many years ago I discovered Arugula (also Roquette or Rocket). This tangy/peppery green grows very well during the cool fall season and makes a great ingredient in a mixed salad. Harvest it while still young or it can get too strong and overpower your salad mix. Cress provides a bite too and can be quite "hot" in a mix.



Arugula at market

Oriental greens are a wide and largely unexplored source of new textures and flavors for our salads. I love several of the Chinese Cabbages, which remind me of something between lettuce and cabbage. Chinese celery thrives here through cool and warm conditions. Unlike regular celery the petioles are very thin. Leaves and petioles can be chopped up to flavor salads and soups. Numerous other Oriental greens are also available that are well worth trying.

Greens have long been popular in Europe where gardeners have a taste for a much broader variety of flavors. Radicchio, a popular European veggie, is growing in popularity with American consumers. It can tend to be a bit too bitter for most palates but can be proportioned in a salad mix to add just the right zing.



Mache

Seed companies offer Mesclun mixes (a mixture of salad greens harvested young) for various regions that also deserve a try. These mixes of various greens are worth a try, although not all species in a mix will thrive here. My personal experience is that many of the mixes include some greens that don't grow well while others in the mix thrive and overcome the rest. I prefer to

plant my mesclun mixes as separate ingredients and then mix them later to suite my tastes. Corn Salad or Mache is a mild green that is well worth its place in the garden and sorrel provides a nice lemony tangy twist.

Herbs such as dill and basil can provide different and exciting flavors. They also make great additions to salad dressings. Chopped chives and green onion leaves add zesty flavor.

Several flowers are edible and make an interesting garnish to add color to salads. Nasturtiums, calendula petals, daylilies and pansies are among your many options. Bloom will deteriorate if washed or allowed to get wet. Wait and add them to the salad after it is mixed just before serving.



Lettuce mix: "Monet's Garden"

Try a few new greens in your plantings. Plant them in small amounts in successions so you'll always have a fresh batch ready for harvesting. Experiment to find out what grows best for you and what you like best. Remember that the salad should be balanced with strong and mild textures and flavors. Start slowly, adding one or two new ingredients at a meal.

September and October are prime time for planting many cool season greens so there's still time to purchase seed and prepare the planting beds. Try a few new varieties in your garden this fall and winter. I'll bet you'll discover a few that you really love. Your home garden salads may never be the same!

Skip Richter
Travis County Extension Horticulturist



Traviata Endive

Over the Fence: “To Refrigerate or Not to Refrigerate ”

There has been much speculation in regards to the flavor of the tomato when refrigerated compared to not refrigerated. There are those who are firm believers in the refrigeration method, and of course you have those that would protest and say that the flavor is much better when the tomato is left alone. We decided it was time to put it to the test, so to speak. A taste test was set up at a Master Gardener meeting to see if a tomato tastes better refrigerated or not. Several types of tomatoes were sliced in half with one half refrigerated and the other half left out. We tried three refrigeration techniques: all night till 1:00 p.m., all night till 6:00 p.m., and 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The fruits were allowed to warm to room temperature before the taste test began.

The tasters were given a piece of paper a scale from 1-10 to rate each one, 1 being poor and 10 being excellent. They were then asked to taste the samples which include both refrigerated and non-refrigerated slices in a blind test. The varieties that were included were Celebrity, Sun Pride, Amelia, Top Gun, First Lady, Green Zebra, Jelly Bean, and Sweet Chelsea. (The tasters were not privy to this information until after the experiment). After the data was collected the results were in... refrigerated scored 5.8850 to 5.4430 non-refrigerated. The slight difference was not statistically significant.

There are other factors to consider when deciphering the data. First and foremost, taste; this is subjective, and personal preference is difficult to simplify on a scale of 1-10. Not everyone enjoys the same flavors, and all palates are different. Another reason this data is not conclusive is the fact we tend to leave our vegetables in the refrigerator for more than 24 hours. We don't know the effect of several days of refrigeration on a tomato's flavor. The tomatoes would have to be EXACTLY the same, which is impossible, and we would need a large number of testers with the same taste. Not to mention, the fruit that was left out would ripen at a comparatively faster rate.

When it comes down to it, continue to eat what you like. No test is going to change your taste, but at least we know now that overnight refrigeration won't adversely affect a tomato's flavor.



Tomato Taste Test

2007 Tomato Refrigeration Taste Test

Plate	Tomato	Fruit ID	Avg/Fruit	Avg Score
1	Celebrity R 8pm-1pm	a	5.86	5.46
		b	5.00	
2	Celebrity N	a	6.00	5.77
		b	5.50	
3	Big Beef R 8pm-1pm	a	4.60	5.00
		b	6.00	
4	Big Beef N	a	4.50	4.86
		b	5.75	
5	Celebrity R 8pm-6pm	a	5.80	6.17
		b	8.00	
6	Celebrity N	a	4.20	4.92
		b	8.50	
7	Sun Pride R 9am-4pm	a	6.80	7.00
		b	8.00	
8	Sun Pride N	a	4.80	5.33
		b	8.00	
9	Amelia R 9am-4pm	a	6.50	7.22
		b	8.67	
10	Amelia N	a	4.83	5.44
		b	6.67	
11	Top Gun R 9am-4pm	a	3.83	5.00
		b	7.33	
12	Top Gun N	a	5.17	5.56
		b	6.33	
13	First Lady R 9am-4pm	a	6.13	6.00
		b	5.67	
14	First Lady N	a	5.38	5.55
		b	6.00	
15	Green Zebra R 9am-4pm		5.80	6.00
16	Green Zebra N		5.60	6.00
17	Unidentified R 9am-4pm			
18	Unidentified N			
19	Jelly Bean R 9am-4pm		5.94	6.00
20	Jelly Bean N		5.88	6.00
21	Sweet Chelsea R 9am-4pm		5.05	5.00
22	Sweet Chelsea N		5.45	5.00

Key:
 R- Refrigerated
 N- Non Refrigerated

8pm-6pm: (overnight)
 8pm-1pm: (overnight)
 9am-4pm: (same day)

Ramsey Adkins
 Travis County Extension Horticulture Intern

Propagation Specialist Notebook

For most folks the recent rains were a drought breaking blessing which surely has spurred a burst of verdant plant growth presenting us an opportunity to practice the art of vegetative propagation! All it takes is a little prep work, some research on your chosen plants and the gumption to give it a whirl! Think “pass-a-long plant” - share them with your friends and neighbors.

Fall may seem distant if not for the prospect of saving seeds from open pollinated vegetable and flower varieties or perhaps those not readily available in the trade, for example, Texas Hercules-club, *Zanthoxylum hirsutum*, a small to medium sized tree and member of the Rue family usually found growing along fence lines where birds plant the seed and giant swallowtail butterfly finds a home; if you like the unusual, you will love the lore of this one.

We are busy designing a new program named “The Propagator’s Toolbox” presenting homemade aids, propagation cases, hoop houses and methods for propagators – details to follow.

Members of TCMGA who have established their YAHOO login/password can find references at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TCMGA/links> or you can contact us with your questions about propagation and/or suggestions for programs.

Happy Propagating,
Tommie Clayton, Susan Jung & Becky Waak
Propagation Specialist Team also includes: Steve Reynolds, Kevin Washington, Dale McQuinn & Phyllis Vaughn

We enjoy sharing our knowledge and experiences; take a peek at the pictures from our recent Propagation Presentation to the Shady Hollow Garden Club.



Tommie gives Seed Starting tips



Becky demonstrates Simple Division



Students just love Hands On!

Gardening in Santa Fe, Gardening in Austin: What's the difference?

I recently moved to Austin from Santa Fe, New Mexico. Guess what? There's a big difference. Yes, it can get hot in Santa Fe too, but you don't feel like you are drinking the air and need gills to breathe.

Because I am into xeric gardening, I was looking forward to having a lot more water to play with. Oops. I moved here in the middle of a big drought, while Santa Fe was having floods and record snows as I left. Then this spring we were treated to downpours like I hadn't seen for a long time...since I left northeastern Oklahoma, in fact. It can rain hard in Santa Fe, but not like this.

The garden I had in Santa Fe was created from scratch, and I had three acres to do it in. It became a beautiful xeric cottage garden with fountains, a small thyme lawn, rosemary, lavender, flowers all summer long, whispering aspen trees, fragrant junipers and piñon, sheltered rock patios crowded with potted geraniums, one patio for sun and one for shade. Yes, in Santa Fe it was often nice to have a place to sit in the sun to warm up. Imagine that!



The garden I inherited here in Austin was 'established'. By established I mean it was a jungle of rampant nandina, Mustang grapes, several hundred trumpet vines, briars, poison ivy, yuccas growing wild and wildly, a lawn of straggly grasses of unknown varieties, rocks sticking up out of the ground in unexpected and sometimes unfriendly places, a rotting deck, a ramshackle metal storage building, empty and

locked with no key. And neglected roses. They are beautiful red, pink, white of several varieties, but I knew nothing about roses. And I knew little about gardening in Austin. I even thought once I had all the grape vines cut back they would stay that way. What was I thinking...they came back this spring with a vengeance!

On the plus side there are several beautiful, tall, mature crape myrtles, one more that twice the height of my house blooming like crazy now. There are: a stately pine tree, interesting rock walls, a lovely evergreen sumac more than fifteen feet tall that will bloom again this fall, lots of Texas persimmons with their pretty spotted bark with hard little green fruits. Some of those rocks that stick out of the ground in unexpected places have the potential for a nice rock garden. But where to start? Oh, where to start?



So I went to <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/homelandscape/home.html>. This is the Planning the Home Landscape site, and it was most



helpful. I am starting with the Base Plan, measuring the yard, the outlines of the house, rock walls, the storage cottage, delineating the hillside along the streets. Next I am trying to mark in the elements that are already there, the trees, shrubs, flowers—all those yuccas and nandinas and crape myrtles. That will take a while. Living in Santa Fe did not prepare me for all the kinds of trees and shrubs that can grow here. It was a while before I figured out those persimmons weren't yaupon hollies, after all.

I marked out the area I mulched under the pecan tree with weed cloth and gravel, after I nearly fell off the ladder cleaning years of pecan compost out of the gutters. Who in the world would plant a pecan right next to a house—a sadist? Under a couple of oaks in the back I scrubbed out vines and vinca major and weeds and put down more weed cloth and gravel as a home for the picnic table and bright blue umbrella—these may be just temporary until I figure out what I want that is more permanent, but I put it all on the plan, along with the compass directions so I can delineate sunny and shady spots as I figure out where the sun is in winter and summer—just like the instructions say.

Marking out the site, the hillsides, the driveways, the neighbors' houses and air-conditioner, that's the next part of the plan process. Where do I need barriers, like a sound barrier for that air-conditioner (any ideas on that one?). Do I want to open up the area between my drive and the neighbor's yard, or leave some of those yuccas for privacy? What is the soil like? Is it the same everywhere? I don't think so, but I can check it out and then mark the site plan to be sure. What are the views from the house? What are the views of the house from the street, from the neighbor's front porch or driveway?

Having what is already here marked out, I can draw a use plan. What do I need and want from my landscape? Places to sit and read. Places for flowers. Places for vegetables. Places for the grandsons to play. They love digging, and the gravel works great for that. Keeps them out of the flower beds, most of the time. Where is the best place for outdoor cooking? Where could the compost pile go? Where could I put more rainwater storage? What if I could put in a pool, or a water feature of some kind, where could that go? Do I need more covered space for shade, or protection from the rain? I love to sit outside when it is raining. It is a lot easier to use a pencil and mark all over the plan before I build than it is to build it and then say, "Why didn't I put it over there? That would have been so much better." Where does the entertaining area go, the play area, the service area for that compost pile and the wheel-barrow, the vegetable garden area, the quiet spot for reading and thinking or just sitting? When I finally put my favorite bench somewhere, what will I be looking at when I sit there?

As I design, the links on the site reminds me to consider materials and plants. This is a good sized corner lot, with big areas of scraggly grass. Do I need that much lawn? Are there alternatives? In Santa Fe I didn't have any lawn at all except for a small patch of wooly thyme. And I didn't miss it. I didn't ever have to mow. It took a long time and a lot of effort to reestablish the native grasses, but they did come back and were beautiful.

I live on a corner here, and those rocks that stick up everywhere cascade down the hill toward the street in interesting ways beneath the yuccas and nandinas and grapevines. I look forward to doing a nice rock garden there. That area is shaded by a live oak, a big cedar/juniper, and several hackberrys. There are a number of native Texas persimmons that can be trimmed up so their lovely



spotted trunks show. It is still crowded with lots of nandina that will have to go if I am to be a politically correct gardener. They are invasive. They have certainly invaded this yard, and I live only one house away from a preserve. It's a shame. I love nandinas. I think they are beautiful. Maybe I can keep one or two. A couple of them by the new carport are ten feet tall or more. There are alternatives, though, and I should think about that. Just marking down on the plan where all those nandinas are makes it clear that I have plenty and can get rid of most of them, replacing them with native plants or adapted plants that are not invasive. There are a lot of things that have grown and spread here in the thirty years since the house was built. Just because they are here, does that mean they have to stay? My site plan is looking pretty crowded.

When I started the garden in Santa Fe, I had a bare construction site, the opposite of what I have here. Doing a preliminary site plan there meant marking in a few piñon and juniper trees and where the retaining wall needed to be. Here in Austin, it will take a long time just to identify and mark down what is already here. I think I might need a plan that shows what needs to come out before I can do a plan for what I might want to put in.

The website has suggestions for landscape construction materials for walks, drives, decks. And a section on garden accessories. That one I don't need. Moving from a three acre garden to a city lot means I have lots of accessories—tables, chairs, benches, bird baths, bird feeders, a plethora of garden knick knacks to find places for, and a multitude of pots of all sizes and shapes. I have put my rain barrels in place, too, and they are full several times over.

Rain barrels are what I would consider to be essential garden accessories. In Santa Fe I had a 3000 gallon tank with special lines and pumps from the house to fill it. And I always had water for my plants. Sometimes, when it was particularly dry for long periods the water got pretty low, but only once did it empty, and that was right after it was put in and hadn't had time to fill. It was better to call someone and have non-potable water hauled in than to use the well water, or to let the landscape dry out. I had new plantings and they had cost a lot of money. \$150 for a tank full of water was a small price to pay. After that, it didn't ever go dry again. I learned to be careful and sparing with water. Now that I only have rain barrels, even though they are big ones and it rains a little more often, I will have to be even more careful. It is tempting just to grab the hose and turn on the faucet. I don't have to worry about using up the well water, but it is just as important to be diligent here in Austin, just harder because it isn't so apparent that water is not endlessly available. Plus it costs money.

I think the biggest difference between Santa Fe and Austin gardening is not the water, both places have drought issues and occasional flooding issues, but the heat. Now that July is here and the long cool spring we have enjoyed is ending (I realize that is not something I can count on every year), it is the heat strikes me as the biggest difference. It really gets uncomfortable to be outside trying to breath the hot humid air, wiping sweat out of my eyes every few minutes. Only the mornings are at all comfortable, and sometimes the evenings. No, wait, I lie. How could I forget the biggest difference of all? MOSQUITOES! Enormous swarms of giant mosquitoes that can make it impossible to even be outside at all without feeling like Kathryn Hepburn in



“African Queen” when the boat stops for the night in the swampy delta. Ugh. Back to the plan. Where can I put a screened porch?

But the third difference is a nicer difference. All that humidity and the long, long growing season means things can really grow here. I may find it too much of a good thing and a bit disorderly at times. But things do grow. And grow well when you plan well and the right choices are made. And when one remembers the words of Abraham Lincoln—paraphrased and adulterated—eternal vigilance is the price of an orderly garden free of mustang grapes and nandina invasions.

Sherrill Nilson

The Grapevine

Docents Have More Fun!!! Saturday, August 18, 9:30 a.m. Meet in the Greene Room at the Garden Center. The program will likely be on the Green Garden and water conservation. For more information, contact Hope Dyson at 394-1558 or Marion Alsup at 480-0311.

The Fifteenth Annual Texas Bamboo Festival will be held on Saturday and Sunday, August 25 and 26 at Zilker Botanical Garden, Austin. Sponsored by the Texas Bamboo Society, the event will celebrate the wonders of bamboo with presentations, demonstrations and education information, including Bamboo 101, a Bamboo Kite Making Workshop led by Greg Kono, and Bamboos of Southeast Asia presented by Harry Simmons. Bamboo plants and crafts will be for sale. For additional information, call (512) 929-9565 or visit www.bamboocentral.net.

Rainwater Harvesting

Saturday, Sept. 22
10:00 – 11:30 AM
West Rural Community Center
8656 Hwy. 71 W., Building A (west of the “Y” in Oakhill)
Austin

Rainwater Harvesting is the topic of this free seminar. The water that lands on your property is yours if you learn how to capture it. Don’t let the water run away. Retain it for your own use!

Gain the knowledge necessary to build a rainwater harvesting system. All the basics are covered by Bud Kane and Ed Parken, Master Gardeners, who have helped designed and built a number of collection systems.

This free seminar is presented by the Travis Country Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas A&M Extension Service. Seminar is free. No reservations taken. For more information call 512-854-9600 and ask for the Master Gardeners desk. <http://www.tcmastergardener.org/html/events.html>

Rosalie Russell
VP Education, Travis County Master Gardeners Association
804-2257
gisathccs@aol.com

The Purple Gate Herb Farm
Saturday, Oct. 20
7376 County Road 309
Caldwell, TX 77836

8:30 AM leave from car pool location. Return to Austin 4-5 PM

Cost: \$15 per person which includes lunch. Plus \$5.00 to car pool driver.

The Purple Gate Herb Farm is owned and operated by Bud and Mary Mills near the town of Caldwell, in south-central Texas. They grow herbs mingled with wildflowers in theme gardens bordered by native woods. They strive to provide quality plants to their customers. They provide extensive information about each plant to help customers enjoy growing and using each plant.

Field trip includes a guided tour of the theme gardens (ancient, culinary, medicinal, myth and magic and tea), a raku pottery demonstration, and an herb based lunch. There will be time to tour the grounds and shop at the gift shop.

Your \$15.00 check is your reservation. Check must be received by Oct. 12. Make check to: Rosalie Russell, 2401 Spring Creek Dr., Austin, TX 78704. Minimum of 10 people required for this trip. An email to participants about five days before the trip will include the last minute details, location of car pool and directions to the herb farm.

Let's have a great, fun day in the country!

Rosalie Russell
VP Education
804-2257
gisathccs@aol.com





Closing the Garden Gate...

The ordeal of dragging a water hose around my yard seems but a distant memory. I know this rain will stop falling eventually and I'll have to lug that contraption around again but I can't say I'm looking forward to it. It used to be every few days I would have to pull it out, untangle it, hook it up and slowly make my way around to every plant (stopping to unkink it whenever the water stopped flowing) all the while swatting hoards of mosquitoes and trying to avoid the massive spray that is coming from a hole the size of a pin about 5' from the nozzle. By the time I finished watering I was always soaked and itching. Seems no matter how careful I am curling the hose up to put away it is always tangled when I haul it back out. Not to mention always wishing I had more hose guards around my beds so the plants wouldn't get knocked flat from the hose being dragged across them.

Admittedly, it is a good way to make sure everything is growing well and not being destroyed by aphids or some other critter but I can check those things on my way to get the mail or while taking scraps to the compost pile. Chores that don't take long and allow me to head back into my air conditioned home free of blood sucking demons and the humidity. I do have soaker hoses in the beds but it still requires dragging the hose out to hook it up to each soaker hose and keeping track of the time – then repeating in another bed. I dream of a drip irrigation system with timers... However, until that dream comes true I'm hoping the rain continues to keep everything watered, and some day dragging that hose around really will be a distant memory.

Rebecca Matthews

A Little Garden (Rain) Trivia

How fast do raindrops fall? Not including wind-driven rain, raindrops fall between 7 and 18 miles per hour in still air. The range in speed depends on the size of the raindrop. Air friction breaks up raindrops when they exceed 18 miles per hour.

Can lightning strike twice in the same place? Yes! The old adage of lightning never striking twice in the same place is totally false. Lightning is not limited to a one-bolt action. Many lightning flashes are of a multiple variety and may strike repeatedly in a few seconds. Up to 22 consecutive lightning strokes have been observed in a multiple flash.

How far away is lightning? During a storm, count the number of seconds between the flash of lightning and the sound of thunder, then divide by two. The answer reveals how many miles away the lightning is.
In closing:

"I'm singing in the rain, just singing in the rain; What a wonderful feeling, I'm happy again."

Arthur Freed

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Agent:
 Skip Richter
 1600-B Smith Road
 Austin, Texas 78721
 854-9600, 854-9611
 r-richter@tamu.edu

The Compost Bin Team:

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