



A publication of...

TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

THE COMPOST BIN

November 2007



Speaker for November: Sondra Crowley, Wildflower Center

Sondra is one of the great volunteers who work regularly at the Wildflower Center's plant nursery. She also works with visitors as a docent in their gallery. Sondra has given more than 400 hours of service to the Wildflower Center and is a delight to visit with. Needless to say, Wildflowers are her passion.

Although Sondra spent most of her adult life working with technology at the Texas Department of Insurance, she holds a Degree in Biological Science, with a major in Botany from the University of California, Davis.

After retirement, she returned to her roots and what she loves at the Wildflower Center.

Sondra gave us a presentation on the history of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, developments at the center, and available classes and other resources.

Regards,
Jerry Naiser

Message From the President

This month the board was able to have a meeting with Doug Welsh, Extension Horticulturist and coordinator of the Texas Master Gardener Program, and his ideas are worth sharing. I think it is important for us all to remember what we are doing here as Master Gardeners, because it is very easy to get caught up in our special projects and want to garden for ourselves. But we are here to serve the public on behalf of Extension, and that is a very important responsibility. Our role is to give research-based advice from Extension to the public about gardening, which happens to be a very fun and rewarding task. So when you tell someone you are a Master Gardener, and every time you put on your badge, remember that we are representatives of something much bigger than our association, and ask yourself what you have done for the team lately. Then ask yourself if what you have done is really helping Extension in its mission. We have let certified members count driving golf carts at Zilker Garden Festival, for example, as volunteer hours in the past, because it is something that needs to be done for AAGC, but that is not helping accomplish our mission, so when you sign up for the golf carts, I hope that you will already have done as much or more volunteering for the projects that really count for us, and if not, I hope you will promise yourself that you will devote more time the rest of the year to public outreach—we have tasks to fit everyone's interests and needs, so just ask if you need help finding something to do.

Doug's experiences with counties across the state teach us that bigger Master Gardener groups get more inwardly focused, and we are among the biggest groups. So let's all start thinking about how we can reach out again. Doug explained that having smaller classes and fewer garden projects help focus the energies of groups like ours onto a few very significant projects that have more impact on the community. We should be working on projects that we can



proudly claim in any given year have taught a significant number of citizens from all kinds of backgrounds how to garden in our community. If our projects are just teaching ourselves or giving us an outlet for our own gardening enjoyment, then that is not helping Extension. Doug explained that there is a tendency in all communities for Master Gardener groups to become exploited for free landscaping labor, and we have always tried to avoid that, but we need to continue to be vigilant about this, and focus on our educational mission. If you want to know more about our meeting with Doug, let me know.

On a very educational note, I am happy to say that our booth at the **Green City Festival** on October 13th was well-attended. The Festival drew a large crowd all day, and we even ran out of some of our publications! We were able to introduce lots of folks to our services, and gave out a good number of business cards, which I think will generate us some more business at the phone desk (so don't forget to sign up for phone duty). It was a fun day, and I thank **Kim Walker, Kevin Washington, Cheryl Barthell, and Manda Rash** for helping me at the booth, despite the blazing sun.

It has been an extreme pleasure volunteering as your president these last two years, and I appreciate all of you for your warmth and generosity. I am looking forward to spending more time on my favorite outreach projects, and hope you all will continue to join me. Keep on doing your great work, everyone!

Susan Decker,
President

Plant Portrait: American Beautyberry, French Mulberry

American Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) is a Texas native shrub that dazzles in the late summer and early fall with clusters of intense magenta or fuchsia colored fruit encircling the stems. The botanical name, *Callicarpa* literally means "beautiful fruit".

This no-fuss shrub does well in central Texas gardens under part sun to full shade conditions. It even flourishes with little moisture and a rich, organic soil, but can tolerate some drought.

In late spring and sporadically through the summer, pale pink/lavender blooms attract plenty of bees and butterflies with their nectar and pollen. Later in the fall, birds (especially the mockingbirds) and squirrels love the fruit.

American Beautyberry can grow to about 8 ft if given plentiful moisture and organic soil. This can be a bit tall (and gangly) during the summer. It is best grown as a background shrub or planted among other evergreen shrubs so that the bare branches will be hidden in the winter after the leaves fall.

Prune it by half (or more) late in winter, if desired, to reduce the height and keep it compact. Don't prune it too late in the spring as the flowering and fruiting occurs on new growth and would be lost. American Beautyberry is a quick grower and the stems, laden in full leaf and fruit, might be damaged by high winds or heavy rain.

Propagation is relatively easy with semi-hardwood cuttings taken in late summer.

Alternately, harvest the seed in fall once it achieves a brilliant, intense violet color (and before the birds move in). Remove fleshy outer coating by pureeing small batches in the blender with water. Dry well before storing. This shrub often self-seeds if soil conditions are suitable.

Many Southerners use the berries to make a delicious jelly. Fruit can be eaten raw but don't have much flavor. Apparently the fruit makes good beautyberry pancakes. The roots, leaves and branches were used by native American tribes to treat malarial fevers and rheumatism. They also used the boiled roots to treat dizziness and stomachaches. The roots and berries were boiled and used to treat colic.

American Beautyberry is native to the Southeast United States from Texas to Florida and north to Virginia. It is hardy to at least zone 5 and tolerates the heat from central to eastern Texas.

American Beautyberry is mostly pest-free and last year was scientifically proven to be a natural insect repellent (containing callicarpenal, intermedeol and spathulenol) with effectiveness against mosquitoes and ticks. The traditional folk remedy, known mainly among Mississippi's hill country people for at least a century, is to take crushed American Beautyberry leaves and rub them on the skin to repel mosquitoes, ticks and ants.

The foliage is listed as being a favorite and repellent of deer. The plant is tolerant of fire and re-sprouts easily.

Cultivars

'Dark Star' – compact plant with profuse clusters of dark purple fruit.

Var. lacteal- White berried American Beautyberry (comes true from seed)

Anne Marie Van Nest



In the Vegetable Garden

The first frost for Central Texas usually hits in mid-November, and is often followed by mild days that are perfect for cool season vegetable growth. Our goal this time of year is to help our plants make it through these cold snaps so they can keep growing strong until they are ready for harvest. Make sure your veggies are well mulched and be prepared to cover them with floating row cover or bed sheets when the temperatures are predicted to dip into the low 30's. Use bricks, heavy rocks, soil or U-shaped pins to secure the row cover so it doesn't blow off. Most of our cool season crops will do just fine in a light freeze, especially if they are well established, but when it goes from 75° to 25° overnight, I guarantee they will appreciate a little protection.



Floating Row Cover for cold protection

Broccoli and cauliflower shine in our cooler fall temperatures. For snow-white cauliflower, pull the leaves up around the head when it starts to form (I use a clothespin). Exposure to sunlight will cause the head to be an off white color - still fine for eating, just not as pretty.



Blanching cauliflower



Almost harvest size

For a really show-off head of cauliflower, try a purple variety such as 'Violet Queen' (note-it turns green when cooked). Only one head of cauliflower is produced per plant, so once you harvest it, the remaining plant can be discarded (or better yet, composted). But broccoli will produce side-shoots after harvesting the main head, so be sure to leave the plant and you will be rewarded with several delicious, tender, mini stalks.



Violet Queen'



Broccoli side-shoots

Below are a couple of recipes for your broccoli:

Broccoli Stir-Fry

1 tbsp soy sauce
1 tsp rice vinegar
1 tsp sesame oil
1 tbsp vegetable oil

¾ lb broccoli florets
½ red bell pepper, diced
2 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed
Pinch red chili flakes
Kosher salt
¼ c water

Combine liquid ingredients and set aside.

Heat large skillet or wok over high heat for 2 minutes. Pour in 2 Tbsp vegetable oil and swirl to coat pan. Add broccoli, bell pepper, and garlic. Season with salt, toss and stir until broccoli darkens to deep green color, 3-4 minutes. Reduce heat to low and carefully add water (watch out for steam!). Cover pan with lid ajar and cook until broccoli softens but is still crunchy, about 4 minutes. Drizzle soy sauce mixture over broccoli, toss well and serve.
Yield: 4 servings

Cranberry-Broccoli Salad

2 bunches broccoli florets
½ c chopped red onion
4 oz bacon, cooked and crumbled
1 c dried cranberries
½ c peanuts
½ c sunflower seeds
Dressing:
1 c mayonnaise
2-4 tbsp sugar
2 tbsp cider vinegar

Combine broccoli, onion, bacon, cranberries, peanuts and sunflower seeds in a large bowl. Stir dressing ingredients together and pour over broccoli mixture. Toss to coat and chill several hours before serving.

Yield: 4-6 servings

Cauliflower and bacon make a great flavor combination. For a simple and flavorful side dish, cook 1 or 2 slices of bacon until crisp, remove bacon and crumble. Sauté cauliflower in reserved bacon fat until crisp-tender, about 12-15 minutes (cover pan with lid for part of cooking time). Sprinkle with salt, pepper and crumbled bacon and enjoy.

Now I know bacon is not on the “good-for-you” fat list, but as my 80-year-old dad says with a wink and a grin (and fond memories of his mama’s cooking), everything tastes better with a little pig meat. Well, maybe not everything, but certainly fall vegetables, especially greens. Mind you, I am not advocating cooking with bacon fat at every meal, but on occasion and in moderation, is it really so bad?

Beets, turnips, lettuce, mustards and collards should be ready for harvesting soon, hopefully in time for Thanksgiving. And if you haven’t done so already, try to find a small patch to plant some kale, a highly nutritious and very hardy green. A small patch will provide you with small, tender leaves for salads or larger leaves for soups and sautés through the winter. Toscano kale, also known as Dino or Lacinato kale, is a popular Italian heirloom variety that often commands a premium price in the grocery store but is easy to grow yourself. And kale is loaded with vitamin A, vitamin C and lots of phytonutrients. That ought to help counteract any negative effects of that bacon.

Don’t let your root crops get too big. Given the opportunity, turnips and beets will grow to baseball size or larger, but the best quality and flavor comes when they are harvested about the size of a golf ball.



‘Toscano’ kale



‘Golden Beet’ ‘Forono’ and ‘Early Wonder’

Sautéed Early Winter Greens

2 tbsp butter
1 tbsp olive oil
1 garlic clove, minced
1 lb tender 'home-grown' turnip, chard, mustard or collard greens, picked fresh from your own garden, washed, trimmed, and chopped
1/2 tsp salt
1/4 tsp pepper
1- 2 Tbsp balsamic or cider vinegar

Melt butter and oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat; add garlic and cook 1 minute. Add chopped greens, salt and pepper; cook, stirring often, 10 to 14 minutes or until greens are tender. Sprinkle with vinegar and serve immediately.

Yield: 4 servings

Note: Any combination of winter greens may be used in this recipe and, of course, bacon fat can be used in place of butter and olive oil.



'Cascadia'

Peas should be ready this month and they are hard to resist right off the vine. Fresh peas are nothing like those mushy, olive green "peas" that come out of a can. If you have never grown them you should give them a try. It's too late to sow seed now, but mid-late January is a prime time for pea planting. Perhaps you could add it to your list of New Year's Resolutions.

Here's to a bountiful harvest,
Patty Leander

Slow Roasted Beets

1 lb small red/yellow beets, scrubbed but not peeled, with ends trimmed
1 tbsp olive oil
1/2 kosher salt
5 sprigs thyme

Toss beets in olive oil and sprinkle with salt. Place in one layer on sheet of foil.

Top with thyme and seal tightly. Roast at 450° for 1- 1½ hours.

Yield: 4 servings

Sugar Snap Peas and Mushrooms

1/2 lb sugar snap peas (remove strings, if necessary)
1 Tbsp olive oil
1/2 lb mushrooms, sliced
1 shallot, chopped

Sauté peas in olive oil 3-5 minutes. Add mushrooms and sauté 5 minutes.

Add shallot and sauté 1 minute longer. **Yield: 4 servings**

The Greenhouse Bench

Thanks to everyone who came by to lend a hand during our Greenhouse Work Day in early October (including many new students) and to those who regularly water each week.

Another group of new Master Gardener students from the Class of 2007 were introduced to the greenhouse during orientation tours and hands-on activities in October. Information was presented about the greenhouse mechanical systems (rain collection, irrigation, fertilization, heating and venting) as well as our production activities (transplanting seedlings, division, potting up, soil mixing and pot washing). It was a fun morning with to lots of learning. Thanks to the Master Gardener students for transplanting all the Mexican Milkweed seedlings into 4" pots.

The regular Greenhouse Work Day saw lots of activity at the potting bench. Many cuttings of perennials and shrubs from the mist system were transferred to 4" pots. Also some long overdue potting up took place as many plants were moved up to gallons.

Several types of woody plants were started from seed with excellent germination. Young seedlings of Texas mountain laurel, Mexican bird of paradise and Pride of Barbados were gingerly moved into 4" pots. With a little patience, they will be available for sale one day when they get bigger.

One of the biggest jobs tackled during the Greenhouse Work Day was to remove the giant tree-like ragweeds growing beside the rain collection tanks. These plants seeded themselves earlier in the year and with all the summer rains grew to about 12 feet tall. Heavy duty lopers could barely cut through some of the trunks they were so large. With good determination and to the applause of allergy sufferers, they were all brought down.

The last of our precious rain water has been used up in the greenhouse. We were very fortunate to be able to have used rain water for all our irrigation since February. Now if only it would rain again and start refilling our tanks.

Thanks to the anonymous donor who brought us a brand new square mouth shovel with a nice sturdy fiberglass handle. We have already christened it in our container mix soil pile and it worked great.

Marian, Molly and Anne



Over the Fence: Changes in our Bylaws and Standing Rules:

I would like to direct your attention to our Website at <http://www.tcmastergardener.org> where you will find a revised copy of The Travis County Master Gardener Association Bylaws and Standing Rules. Please re-view these documents, as they have recently been revised to more accurately reflect the duties of our organization, our board members, volunteers and membership. The changes are easily recognized as they are in bold. The adoption of these changes will be put forth, to the membership at our regularly scheduled December meeting to be held on December 5th at 7:00 p.m. I would encourage you to review these changes at your earliest convenience.

Jerry Naiser

The Grapevine

The TCMGA Annual Holiday Party is coming! Wednesday, December 5th at 7pm at the Zilker Garden Center. Bring your favorite dessert or hor'dourve.

The Dallas Arboretum will host a traveling botanical exhibit called the Amazing Chocolate Tree (October 6-January 6). The exhibit explores the process of chocolate-making from the cacao plant to candy factory. Visitors can enjoy chocolate tastings, candy-making demonstrations, chocolate-themed teas, and a chef's chocolate-tree competition, during which 20 chefs create their vision of a perfect tree made of chocolate. The trees will be on display in November. Call 214.515.6500: www.dallasarboretum.org

Closing the Garden Gate...

Thanksgiving is almost here. I'm glad we have a day set aside to remind us of how great our lives really are. In contemplating why I should be thankful I came up with this list (in no particular order of importance):

1. I can garden practically year-round.
2. I have friends that love to garden. Seriously, I'm thankful I have friends at all and the fact that most of them love to garden is an extra benefit!
3. My granddaughter (I'll be happy to share pictures with anyone who is interested).
4. Farmer's Markets – so I can get fresh organic veggies (since I have no sun in my yard to grow them).
5. Live music is available pretty much any time I want to hear it.
6. The screech owls are starting to nest again and one has picked my backyard again this year to call home.
7. This year is almost over and I'll be off the hook from all those New Year's resolutions I made last year and gave up on around January 5th. (I'm not making that mistake next year!)
8. The weather finally cooled off.
9. Election day is right around the corner.
10. I live in America.

I'm sure everyone has their own reasons to be thankful this holiday season. I hope I can carry it over through the year (or at least the season). Happy Thanksgiving!

Rebecca Matthews
Editor

Garden Trivia

Do all turkeys gobble? It's a guy thing. Only toms gobble. Hens make a clicking noise.

Can turkeys fly? Domesticated turkeys can't, but wild turkeys can fly up to 55 mph for short distances. They're also fast on their feet, hitting land speeds of up to 25 mph.

In Closing,

For each new morning with its light,
For rest and shelter of the night,
For health and food, for love and friends,
For everything Thy goodness sends.

~Ralph Waldo Emerson



Buddha:

Let us rise up and be thankful, for if we didn't learn a lot today, at least we learned a little, and if we didn't learn a little, at least we didn't get sick, and if we got sick, at least we didn't die; so, let us all be thankful.

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