

THE COMPOST BIN

A publication of the Travis County Master Gardeners

JANUARY 2008

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SEEDS
HEIRLOOM

JANUARY SPEAKER

RICK MCNABB OF EWING IRRIGATION

“With a little instruction, anyone can obtain professional results with landscape lighting.”

PRINCIPLES OF LANDSCAPE LIGHTING

The guest for our first meeting of 2008, Rick McNabb, teaches Landscape Lighting Design and installation for Ewing Irrigation Supplies.

Ewing Irrigation Products traces its beginnings to 1922, when Atlas Lawn Sprinkler was founded in San Francisco, CA. In 1938, King W. Ewing joined Atlas, participating in sales and installation. King acquired the design and supply division in 1948, renaming it Ewing Turf Products, laying the foundation for what has developed into one of the largest wholesale providers of professional quality landscape and irrigation materials, serving 22 states, from over 170 locations.

This month's speaker lives and offices in Houston, and teaches this class to landscape and irrigation professionals in the Southern United States. With a little instruction, anyone can obtain professional results with landscape lighting. - Jerry Naiser



The President's Message

As I sat down to write my first President's Note, I asked myself what I could possibly say that had not been said by our many past presidents. They, like me, know what terrific, dedicated folks Travis County Master Gardeners are, what talents they bring to our group, how dedicated they are to the mission of our organization and how fortunate we have been to have Skip Richter as Travis County Horticulture Agent. Collectively, we have accomplished much and there is so much more to do!

We have many exciting events ahead of us this year. Some already scheduled are the East Austin Garden Festival, Inside Austin Gardens, and a growing slate of education outreach and internal education programs. The Master Gardeners leading these efforts are already hard at work. It's shaping up to be an exciting year for TCMGA!

And, we have some new opportunities this year as well. As you all know, Skip is no longer our horticulture agent and has moved on to be director of Travis County Extension. He leaves with our best wishes and extreme gratitude for his guidance and support over the years. Skip will be truly missed but I suspect he will be around in the horticulture world for many years to come. Besides, we know where his office is so he can't get too far away!

Of course, when one door is closed a window is opened. So this year we will welcome a new horticulture agent. The application process has already begun and I know that Skip will find us someone who will appreciate and embrace Master Gardeners. I look forward to working closely with whomever is chosen to fill this important position. I'm hopeful (but not as hopeful as Skip!) that someone will be in place very soon.

We also are very excited that Lisa Anhaiser has joined the staff at Travis County Extension. We officially welcomed her during our holiday party last month. For those of you who could not attend and did not have an opportunity to meet her, Lisa's focus will be on JMG and working with anyone interested in youth gardening. Welcome Lisa!

Speaking of new people, we are blessed with a terrific group of new Master Gardeners from the 2006 training class. Karen Banks has already stepped up to a board position as our Coordinator for Certified Master Gardeners. So you can see why I have great expectations for these newest members.

I am honored to have been chosen as your president for 2008 and look forward to volunteering along side you this year.

Happy New Year!
Manda Rash, President



Plant Portrait - The Pansy: *Viola x wittrockiana*

It is instant color time in the garden with the addition of pansies, Johnny jump-up (*Viola tricolor*), or violas! These short-lived perennials are excellent autumn and winter grown plants for the garden. They are usually treated as winter annuals and enjoyed while the tropical plants spend the winter inside or dormant.

The cheerful, round blooms of pansies are clear, penciling lines or with blotched faces.

Many pansies are faintly scented with early morning or dusk being the best time to give them a sniff test. The yellow or blue pansies are reputed to have the strongest scent. Plant many together to concentrate their fragrance or plant them in containers close to a main door.



Pansies provide instant color to our winter gardens.

Great for containers, garden beds, window boxes, etc. with a huge range of colors to coordinate for your designing pleasure.

Pansies love the cool & cold weather. Snow and ice may temporarily slow down their blooms but it won't stop these tough winter wonders. Many series are hardy to 10 degrees F. Plants were totally encased in ice during



Cultivars:

Accord Series (large) 8 colors
Crown Series (medium) 9 colors
Crystal Bowl Series (multiflora) 11 colors
Imperial Series (medium) 5 color mixes
Joker Series (medium) 4 colors
Lyric Series (large) 5 colors
Majestic Giants Series (large) 6 colors
Maxim Series (multiflora) 14 colors
Medallion Series (large) 6 colors
Padparadja (multiflora) 1 color
Roc Series (medium) 9 colors
Springtime Series (medium) 17 colors
Swiss Giants (large) old fashioned 5 colors
Universal Series (multiflora) 13 colors

our last ice storm and they bounced right back in my garden. Some pansies may exhibit a purple coloration on their leaves during cold weather. Pansies will thrive until the weather turns hot. Most pansies do not tolerate hot and dry weather conditions.

The best conditions to grow pansies are in full sun to part shade with well-drained, organic, compost rich soil. Plant them in the garden anytime from late November (whenever it starts to cool down) through early spring.

Pansies are usually trouble-free but sometimes are attacked by downy or powdery mildew, crown or root rot. Slugs, snails and aphids are potential pests if pansies are grown in shady and moist conditions.

Water them well after planting and mulch to conserve moisture. Fertilize once a month with an all-purpose flowering plant food. Deadhead the finished blooms to keep the plant blooming.

Did you know that there is a town called Pansy in Texas? It is in Crosby County and is named for the attractive flower. Did you also know that pansy flowers are edible (use the ones grown organically)? - Anne Van Nest



In The Vegetable Garden

Do you know what I love about a vegetable garden, well, besides the vegetables? Every year there is the opportunity to start over and try something new. Even when planting something common, like squash, tomatoes or green beans, there are always varieties I haven't tried, new hybrids, and old heirlooms just waiting to delight me in the garden. And so a new year and a new season begin in the garden, and what comes forth is always a surprise.

January is a good time to peruse the seed catalogs that start showing up in the mail. Many of them offer specials or discounts if you order early. There are lots of seed companies out there, but below are a few of my favorites for vegetables with websites so you can check them out:



Onions: one of the many vegetables for a winter garden in Central Texas.

Willhite Seed: www.willhiteseed.com – a Texas company known for its selection of watermelons; they also carry many vegetable varieties that are proven performers.

Pinetree Garden Seeds: www.superseeds.com – the company has great prices and an interesting selection of vegetables from around the globe.

Southern Exposure: www.southernexposure.com – lots of good information on the culture and history of vegetables commonly grown in the South; committed to the preservation of open-pollinated varieties known for flavor and disease resistance.

Territorial Seed: www.territorialseed.com – another catalog I like because of all the information provided and they often carry varieties that I am looking for, plus they sell all their seeds in small 'sampler packets' so you can try just a few.

Johnny's Seeds: www.johnnyseeds.com – a quality catalog that has been around for more than 30 years under the leadership of founder, Rob Johnston; they carry all the newest varieties, and even though they are based in Maine, the catalog provides lots of helpful information on cultivation.

This is by no means a complete list. I'd love to hear about your favorite seed catalogs – just send me an e-mail and tell me what you like about them. I will use the information as I update our Vegetable Seed Source publication.



Asparagus crowns can be planted in the garden in late January. It takes a few years to get established, but if you are an asparagus lover and have room for a small bed, it is well worth the effort. Asparagus is a perennial vegetable and can grow several years in the same spot, so choose a well drained, sunny spot and spend some time preparing the planting area. A soil test is highly recommended since you only have one shot at preparing the soil before planting.



Amend the bed by loosening the soil 6-8" (or more if possible) and mixing in 2-3" of organic matter. Then add the amount of fertilizer recommended on your soil analysis. If you do not have a test done, then a sound recommendation is to mix in about 2 pounds of a 10-20-10 fertilizer per 20 foot row.

Plant your crowns in a furrow about 4" wide and 6" deep on top of little hills made out of soil. Spread the roots of the crown out over the soil. Cover the roots with about 4" of soil or compost and water well. Every few weeks add a few more inches of soil until the furrow is filled.



That's all there is to getting started. Keep your plants mulched and watered, especially through the summer when it's easy to forget about them. Be patient, don't cut any spears the first two years, and hopefully you will have asparagus by the third year. Look for asparagus crowns at your local nursery.



January is also planting time for onions. Purchase bundles of transplants at the nursery (they are cheap!) and plant as many as you can. Make sure they are short-day onions, as they grow best in our climate.

It is best to plant transplants that are about the size of a pencil. Those big, fat ones may look robust but they are apt to send up a flower stalk before the bulbs have reached a good size.



Amend your soil by mixing in compost and ½ c of a 10-20-10 fertilizer per 10" of row then plant your transplants about 1" deep and 6-8" apart. They won't look like much there in the dirt, but once they get their roots established they will take off.

Onions are heavy feeders so every 2-3 weeks scratch in ½ c of a nitrogen fertilizer down the row. Again patience is a virtue – you will have to wait about 4 months before they are ready for harvest. We'll talk about harvesting in the May newsletter (but I can tell you right now that it is well worth the effort now!).



If you do end up with some great looking onions, why don't you consider entering them (or any other great looking vegetables you have) in the Zilker Vegetable and Flower Show? It takes place twice a year – the first week-end of June and the first week-end of November. Just letting you know about it now so you can plan ahead!

Here's to a bountiful harvest! - Patty Leander



The Greenhouse Bench

Thanks to everyone who came by to lend a hand during our Greenhouse Work Day in December (including many new interns). It was a very productive morning with a smaller group of people present but everyone worked steady and a lot was accomplished.

As usual the 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. And many flats of 4" pots, long overdue for transplanting were put into gallons. Many large, hardy plants were moved outside the greenhouse to make more room inside for newly propagated plants for Zilker Garden Festival and the TCMGA garden tour.

The Greenhouse Technician training is continuing thanks to

Holly Plotner and the guest presenters (Ron Ciani- rose propagation). More sessions are being planned for 2008.

The greenhouse has a beautiful new cement path down the center walkway. Thanks are extended to Marian Stasney for searching out contractor quotes and supervising the work. The path is heavily striated to allow the ever-present moisture to run off the walk and not encourage algae growth. The greenhouse path presented a unique challenge to the workers. After they moved the cement in place by wheel barrow, they had to crawl under the benches for the length of the greenhouse to put all the finishing touches on the path.

Congratulations are extended to several greenhouse regulars that received awards at the December Master Gardener Christmas party. First, to Don Freeman, Ron Miller and Vicki Blachman for the creation, maintenance and training of the Grow Boxes. Second, a certificate of appreciation to Marian Stasney, Molly Clark and Anne Van Nest. Third, a "Great Ideas" award to Holly Plotner and Don Telge for the Greenhouse Technician program. Also, the Golden Gloves award to Molly Clark for her plant transportation and greenhouse path shoveling.

All the best for the New Year from...Marian, Molly and Anne



The new cement path in the TCMGA greenhouse.



Over The Back Fence

FREE PUBLIC SEMINAR

Saturday, February 2, 10:00 AM – Noon
West Rural Community Center, 8656 Hwy. 71 W, Build. A, Austin

Spring Vegetable Gardening and How to Sharpen your Tools

Enjoy juicy ripe tomatoes, crisp cucumbers, mouth watering cantaloupe...straight from your own garden. Learn how to plant and maintain a spring vegetable garden in this free seminar. Patty Leander will share her gardening knowledge which will include composting, vegetable varieties that perform well in Central Texas and recommended planting times. Her seminar is loaded with the basic facts and helpful ideas. Inexperienced and experienced gardeners are welcome.



Make the job easier and faster with a sharp tool. Learn basic tool sharpening methods from this demonstration given by Bill Boytim. Go home with the knowledge needed to do this project yourself.

The facility is located 1 mile west of the “Y” in Oak Hill. It is across the highway from the street named Covered Bridge. This FREE seminar is sponsored by the Travis County Master Gardener Association in partnership with the Texas Cooperative Extension. For more information call 512-854-9600 and ask for the Master Gardener’s desk. <http://www.tcmastergardener.org/html/events.html>



FREE PUBLIC SEMINAR

Saturday, February 9, 10:00 AM – Noon
Sunset Valley City Hall, 3206 Jones Road, Sunset Valley

The Right Plant in the Right Place!

Want to have gardening success? Increase your odds by learning more about your plants and what the plants needs at this free seminar.

Plants for the Shade Garden will provide examples of plants preferring to living under the old oak tree or in other shady spots.

Learn about Sun Worshipping Plants. Specific varieties will be discussed so you know what will work in your situation.

Love to entice butterflies and hummingbirds to add a new visual dimension and personal enjoyment to your garden? Discover Plants that Attract Butterflies and Hummingbirds. Details about specific plants that act like magnets for these creatures will be talked about.

This FREE seminar is sponsored by the Travis County Master Gardener Association in partnership with the Texas Cooperative Extension. For more information call 512-854-9600 and ask for the Master Gardeners desk. <http://www.tcmastergardener.org/html/events.html>



FREE PUBLIC SEMINAR

Wednesday, February 20, 7:00 PM – 9 PM
Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Rd., Austin

Everything Is Coming Up Roses!

Earth Kind Roses

Earth Kind is an important designation given to select roses by the Texas A&M University Agriculture program. Earth Kind Roses have been through rigorous statewide testing and evaluation by a team of horticultural experts and found to possess the high level of landscape performance and outstanding disease and insect tolerance/ resistance. Talk will include illustrations of a number of Earth Kind Roses plus information on site selection, soil amendments, and bed preparations.



Pruning and Rose Care

Pruning rose bushes is intimidating to many gardeners, but actually very good for the plants. Becoming an accomplished rose pruner takes time and practice. Learn about properly pruning plus the basics of rose care.

This FREE seminar is sponsored by the Travis County Master Gardener Association in partnership with the Texas Cooperative Extension. For more information call 512-854-9600 and ask for the Master Gardeners desk. <http://www.tcmastergardener.org/html/events.html>



FREE PUBLIC SEMINAR

Saturday, June 7, 10:00 AM - Noon
Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Rd., Austin

Always dreamed of a little pond in your yard? Learn how you can personally make your dream come true. This free seminar is a step by step lesson on the basics of building a pond yourself. Related pond topics are incorporated in the seminar.

Be trained with visuals on Small Pond Construction. Determine the supplies and equipment needed for the job. Learn how easy it is to do it a by yourself.

Gather information about Pond Plants. Find out which plants do well in a small pond and the growing requirements. Examples of a number of varieties will be illustrated.

Which fish is ideal for the small pond? Study the choices. Hear about the care essentials to grow healthy fish.

Other Things You Need to Know provides instruction on general pond maintenance. Enhance the night time ascetics of the pond with information on pond lighting. Raccoons, birds and other critters love ponds. Understand methods to help prevent unwanted guest.

Bring samples of diseased, bug eaten, sick plants to the Plant Clinic. Experts will diagnose the problem and offer possible remedies.

Austin Parks Department charges a \$3. fee for parking. The seminar is sponsored by the Travis County Master Gardener Association in partnership with the Texas Cooperative Extension. For more information call 512-854-9600 and ask for the Master Gardener's desk. <http://www.tcmastergardener.org/html/events.html>



2007 Travis County Master Gardener Awards

At this year's Holiday Party we honored some of our members who have gone above and beyond the requirements for service to bring our message to the community. Here are this year's Awards.

The Peggy Stewart Award was presented to Sam and Leslie Myers for their willingness to help out anytime, anywhere, their enthusiasm in teaching kids about entomology with their Good Bug, Bad Bug interactive program, and their excellence in training other Master Gardeners about entomology and photography.

The Golden Gloves Award was given to Molly Clark for her work in excavating the greenhouse walkway and for hauling plants to many with great effort and care for the plants.

A Great Idea Award was granted to Holly Plotner and Don Telge for their excellent Greenhouse Technician Training Program that has been giving Master Gardeners a high level of detailed instruction in greenhouse management.

A Certificate of Excellence was given to Vicki Blachman, Ron Miller, and Don Freeman for the Grow Box Project which trained Master Gardeners to build and test Grow Boxes and has been making a big impact on the community with numerous displays and demonstrations on growing plants in small spaces with minimal maintenance.

A Certificate of Excellence was presented to Anne Van Nest, Marian Stasney, and Molly Clark for their outstanding management of the greenhouse this year, which continues to supply our projects with much-needed plants and trained Master Gardeners.

An Award of Special Merit was granted to Mary Copeland for coordinating the huge task of preparing and distributing the Master Gardener Class handouts diligently and effectively.

An Award of Special Merit was given to Kevin Washington for expanding our public outreach at new events and locations this year, for developing a new educational program for seniors, and for his willingness to help with any task that needs to be done.

An Award of Special Merit was presented to Carolyn Williams for her educational and inspiring work mentoring students in gardening at the School for the Deaf.

A Special Award for Service was presented by Manda Rash to Susan Decker for her service as President for 2006 and 2007 and her devotion to the mission of our organization.

Singled out for special verbal mention at the Holiday Party were Wayne and Kathie King for coordinating our popular Plant Clinics, Ron Ciani for handling the BWI Coop, Becky Waak and Holly Plotner for their work landscaping Habitat for Humanity houses, and the reliable Phone Desk regulars: Sam & Leslie Myers, Manda Rash, Cheryl McGrath, Rosalie Russell, Bob & Virginia Tagtow, Tommie Clayton, Ashley Gibson, Joyce Cooper, Holly Plotner, Wayne & Kathie King, Maggie Walsh, David Lutz, Jackie Johnson, Patti Kubala, Cheryl Barthell.

Thanks to all of you for an amazing year of volunteering! -- Susan Decker



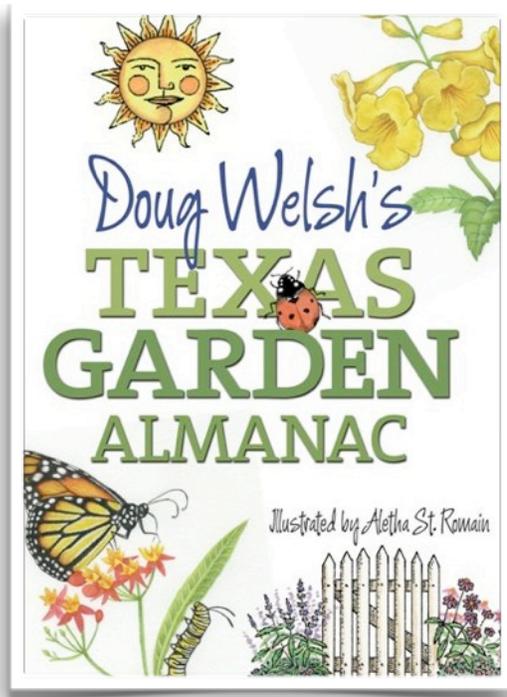
Book Review: Doug Welsh's *Texas Garden Almanac*

The Texas Garden Almanac is a giant monthly calendar (in book form) full of helpful tips about what to do in the garden based on our unique Texas environment. Very easy to use, the Texas Garden Almanac is set up so that all you have to do is open the book to the appropriate month and Doug's excellent advice is laid out in an easy to understand strategy for gardeners of all expertise levels to use. It is written in an engaging conversational style and covers all the essential topics of growing trees, shrubs, vines, lawn, vegetables, herbs and fruit. Design themes are also included as well as key plant growing topics focusing on soil, mulch, water, dealing with pests and plant maintenance. The Texas Garden Almanac tells how to create beautiful gardens and have fun doing it.



Dr. Doug Welsh

At the end of every chapter is a Timely Tips section with important points relating to flowering plants, garden design, soil & mulch, watering, plant care, trees, shrubs & vines, lawns, vegetables, fruits & herbs, houseplants and even a few points for butterflies, birds and squirrels.



Many diagrams have been added to illustrate key techniques, including many in the February chapter on pruning. Texas maps for the first and last average freeze dates, chilling hours, hardiness zones, and rainfall are very beneficial as an “at-a-glance” reference.

Many other handy charts and lists are included in The Texas Garden Almanac such as Bermudagrass cultivar comparisons (April chapter), deer-resistant plant lists (July chapter), when to plant fall vegetables (July chapter), and top trees for Austin recommended by Skip Richter (August chapter).

The book also contains design ideas on form, color and tips for the do-it-yourself landscaper in the September and October chapters.

Doug doesn't balk at having a little fun while offering his sage advice. He lists the top 10 mistakes of Texas gardeners in the November chapter and has the top 10 New Year's Resolutions for gardeners and gardeners in the December chapter.

Even though most gardeners agree about the importance of soils for a successful garden, having a discussion about soil is most often not met

with much enthusiasm. Soils 101, 201 and 301 in the January chapter do focus on the importance of good soil preparation, but Doug has written them in easy to understand terms with nothing harder to say or spell than alluvial (defined as river-deposited), sodic (salty) or microorganism. With a caution of “Don’t monkey with the soil too much”, Doug has again succeeded in making his soil lesson fun and educational.

One of the most unique pieces of advice that Doug gives is to encourage readers to think like a plant. In the January chapter he writes “Perhaps the greatest ability you can achieve in gardening is to think like a plant. If you can do so, then you can understand a plant’s needs, anticipate and respond to them, and most important, avoid problems associated with not meeting the plant’s needs.” Doug goes on to say that he knows that plants don’t actually think. But it is helpful for him to think like a plant- hopefully for readers too.

Doug Welsh’s Texas Garden Almanac is \$24.95 with 512 pages, 6 color maps, more than 170 color illustrations and 50 black & white drawings. It is published by Texas A&M University Press and is available online at HYPERLINK "<http://www.tamu.edu/upress>" www.tamu.edu/upress. The book is illustrated by Aletha St. Romain (it has a wonderful Old Blush China Rose illustration for the January chapter among many other wonderful illustrations).

Doug Welsh is a professor and extension horticulturist at Texas A&M University and statewide coordinator for the Texas Master Gardener Program. He teaches the Xeriscape class for the Travis County Master Gardener training course. Doug also hosts a gardening call-in radio show and provides gardening tips on television each week. He is appearing at the Austin Home and Garden Show on January 12, 2008. -- Anne Van Nest



Closing The Garden Gate

The holidays are behind us for another year and I'm ready to plan some garden activities. My biggest goal this year is to put in a pond. I can't decide between a disappearing spring or a real pond or a disappearing spring that runs into a pond. There are a million other things I'd like to do with my yard but the water feature is top of the list. Plus I have to figure out what all I can plant to replace what the armadillo dug up. I need shade tolerant plants and would like to attract as many hummingbirds as humanly possible. Then there is the patio I'd like to put in which I believe I will install using pea gravel since I want it to be permeable and inexpensive. Plus my oak trees need to be trimmed again. A gardener's work is never done – thank goodness!

Happy Gardening in the New Year! -- Rebecca Matthews

Garden Trivia

Garden related phobias:

Anthophobia - the fear of flowers

Apiphobia - the fear of bees

Arachnophobia - is the fear of spiders

Insectophobia and/or Entomophobia - the fear of insects

Lachanophobia - the fear of vegetables

Rupophobia - is the fear of dirt

Scoleciphobia - the fear of worms

Seplophobia - the fear of decaying matter (Watch out for that compost pile!!)

In Closing:

Top Ten Signs You Have Gone Over the Garden Edge.....

10. Your favorite poem is "Roses are Red, Violets are Blue."
9. Your kids are named Rose, Violet, Daisy and Zucchini.
8. You have 8 X 10 family pictures of your Tomatoes and Peppers on your office shelf.
7. Your idea of Saturday Date Night is going out in the garden and hand pollinating the plants.
6. You think a cocktail is liquid fertilizer.
5. You rush home from work and go straight to the garden and hug your roses. (Ouch!) Then, you go in to your house and see you family.
4. On Christmas Eve, visions of "Sugar Peas" dance in your head.
3. After the first frost, you are seen holding funeral services in your garden.
2. You take your kids multiple vitamins from them to use as a supplement to your plants fertilizer.
1. Every Spring your family files a "Missing Person's" report. You remain missing all summer, and mysteriously re-appear in the fall.



2008 TCMGA Executive Committee

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Immediate Past President- Susan Decker
VP Programs - Jerry Naiser
VP Education - Rosalie Russell and William Hyland
VP Volunteer Coordinator for Certified Master Gardener - Karen Banks
VP Volunteer Coordinator for Master Gardeners in Training - Michelle Butler and Carolyn Williams
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Membership Director - Marty and Cindy Berdan
Greenhouse Manager - Anne Van Nest
AAGC Representative - Angie Dixon
State Council Representative - Susan Jung 2008 and 2009
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Susan Cashin
Peggy Stewart
Bill Boytim
Don Freeman
Becky Waak
Will Walker

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