

The Compost Bin August 2010

A Publication of the Travis County Master Gardeners - a volunteer program of Texas AgriLife Extension



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with

**Patty Leander &
Vicki Blachman**

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August Meeting Speakers — Patty Leander and Vicki Blachman

Going Vertical with Vining Veggies

Is your garden short on space? Are you tired of all the bending and stooping at harvest time? If so, come join Master Gardener Vegetable Specialists Patty Leander and Vicki Blachman as they share ideas for going vertical in the vegetable garden. View a variety of structures which can be used, from dirt cheap to high class and everything in between. Let your imagination soar as you visualize your own vegetables growing up, up and away.

Meeting information: Wednesday, August 4th, 2010 starting at 7 pm.
Zilker Botanical Garden

Hello Master Gardeners: A Message From Your President

August!

August is upon us ... literally with its brutal heat. This is the peak month of Texas' summer and survival of the fittest for our plants. This is the time of year I manage to "hack" back my fall blooming plants, such as salvias, sages, Mexican Mint Marigold, Copper Canyon Daisy and roses. Anything I want to produce good fall blooms when cooler night temperatures and football weather arrive. It is rather hard to conjure up autumn thoughts when you walk outside and that blast of heat hits you full on! But, as gardeners, we know to always be planning ahead for that upcoming cooler season. I have even pulled out some of my spent spring vegetables to make room for a fall veggie crop.

I have no complaints against this year's summertime as during two recent trips, one to West Texas and one to the coast of Texas, we encountered lush green grass and full flowing rivers. Such a difference from our past two summers when rainfall was scarce and our land was parched. But, this does bring to mind how in these times of rain, it is so important to conserve our resources, especially water. Be mindful of watering schedules and try to water as early as possible in the morning. Small measures from all of us make a big difference in the environment! Our upcoming MG Garden Tour will feature gardens that are in tune to water conservation and should provide valuable information on rain water collecting and plants that are adaptable to less water.

Speaking of rain, as most of you know, our Travis County Extension Office received extensive damage when the roof collapsed during a rainstorm. Luckily no one was injured, but the office remains closed until we are notified otherwise.

Hopefully, all of you are mindful of gardening in this heat and closely read last month's article by Bob Beyer. Be careful of overdoing it, garden smart in the heat by taking several breaks, drinking lots of fluid and wear your sunscreen plus gardening hat!

Enjoy the last of summer and if you are taking a trip ... safe travels!

Carolyn



Above: A convenient reminder at the Fort Mason Community Garden in San Francisco.

In The Vegetable Garden

By Patty Leander

You've heard of two-a-days, right? In preparation for the Friday Night Football season, team members divide their workouts, practicing in the early morning and late afternoon to avoid the scorching heat. I'm quite sure that most high school football players would not appreciate this comparison, but gardeners face the same challenges. There is much to do this month in preparation for the fall vegetable season, and we have to pace ourselves, too. Whether I work in the morning or the late afternoon, or simply walk out to harvest vegetables, cut some herbs or empty the compost bucket, most of my excursions to the vegetable garden are followed by a shower; sometimes one-a-day, sometimes two-a-day, sometimes even three.

Nitrogen and organic matter are used up quickly in the heat of summer, so August is a good time to mix in a 2-3" layer of compost and a moderate amount of granular fertilizer in preparation for the fall vegetable garden. A general recommendation for fertilizer is to add 1 cup (1/2 pound) of high nitrogen, low phosphorus fertilizer, like 15-5-10, per 20' foot row. Most organic formulations have a lower percentage of nitrogen, so if you use something like 8-2-4, apply double the amount.

Transplants for fall tomatoes should go in the ground ASAP if not planted already. They need 2-3 months to mature, and growth is slower in the cooler, shorter days of fall. Quick-maturing, warm weather vegetables like cucumbers, green beans and summer squash can be planted from seed almost anytime this month as long as you have some kind of watering system in place. This could be a drip system on a timer or you with a watering can, but tender seedlings cannot be left to fend for themselves in the

dry heat of August. Most varieties start producing in 50-60 days, so if planted in August they can be enjoyed right up to the first frost, which usually makes an appearance in mid to late November. A list of recommended varieties can be found on the handout "Vegetables Varieties for Travis County", which is posted on the Central Texas Horticulture website (<http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/travis/index.htm>) under the "Gardens and Orchards" tab. If you have had success growing vegetables varieties that are not listed here, please let me know as we are always looking for new varieties to recommend.

Keep your peppers and eggplant growing strong with a regular supply of moisture and a dose of water-soluble fertilizer every week or two and they will reward you with a lovely harvest over the next few months. Early maturing corn, such as 'Sugar Buns', 'Trinity', 'Ambrosia', or 'Bodacious' (all are available from Willhite, www.willhiteseed.com) can also be planted now. Use fresh seed for the most reliable germination and plant in a block



Above: Fast growing squash — perfect to plant now for fall harvesting.

Left: Plant now for a prolific bean harvest in the fall too.

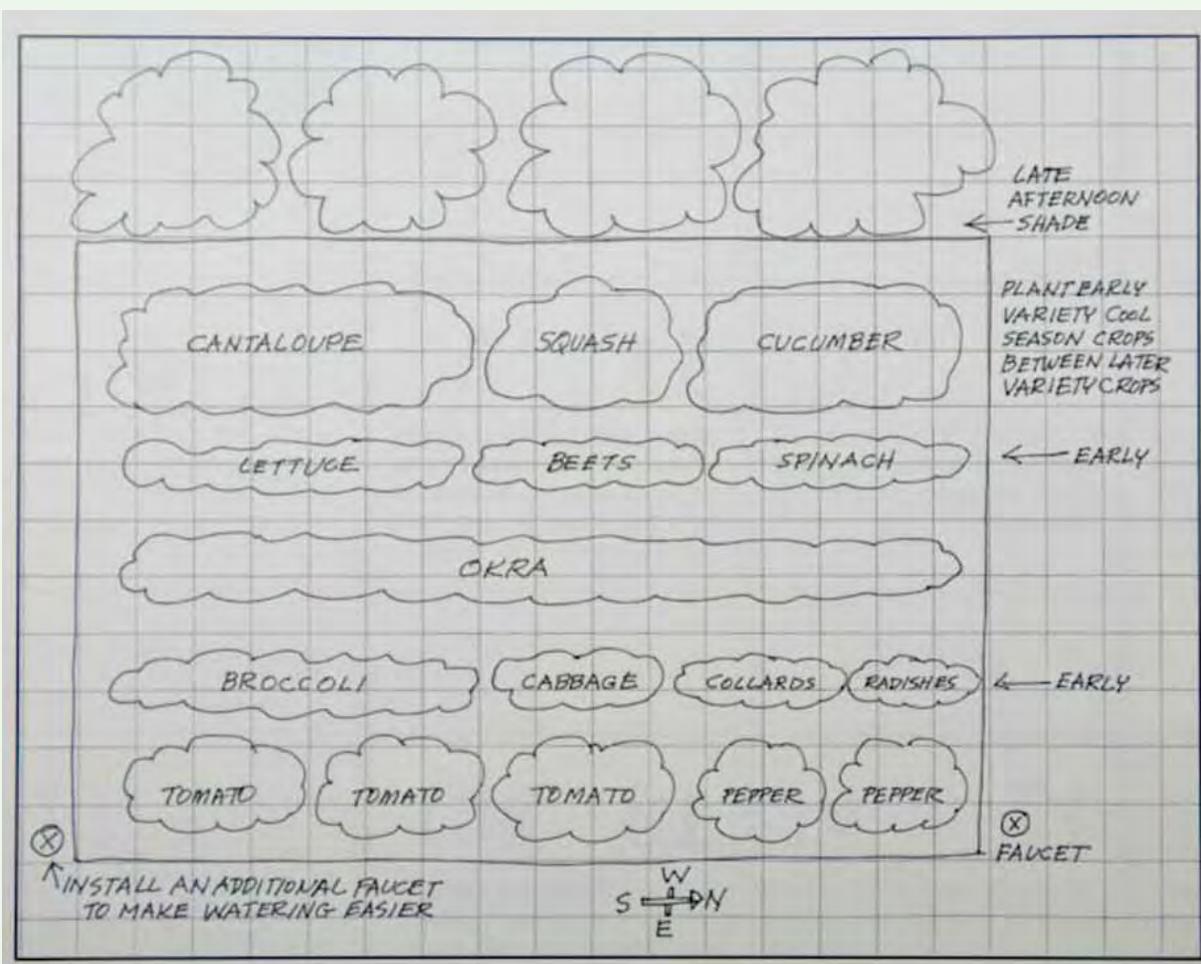


In The Vegetable Garden

Continued...

of 4-6 short rows (rather than one long row) to insure adequate pollination. Corn should be thinned to be 12" apart and thus lends itself well to a square-foot garden – one plant per square. Keep a watchful eye out for corn earworms. Of course Bt can be dusted or sprayed onto the silks and will kill any worms that ingest it, but the best control I have ever had on my fall corn (on any corn for that matter) involved a visit to my corn patch every day, handpicking the corn earworms and depositing them into a bucket of water. Only took about 5 minutes a day walking down the rows and checking the ears. A rather satisfying exercise, I must say – ultimately it meant more corn for me and less for them. I hope one day they will get the message that they are not welcome to feast on my corn!

Seeds of cool season vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower, kale and cabbage can be started under grow lights in a cool part of the house. Plan your late summer plantings carefully to be sure you leave room for cool season veggies which are planted in September and October, often while squash, beans, cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers are still producing. It is a good idea to put your garden plan on paper to help visualize the best way to utilize your garden space.



Above: A vegetable garden plan sketched out on paper before planting.

Mosquitos

By Wizzie Brown

Mosquitoes can be very irritating and disrupt outdoor activities. They also are able to transmit various diseases to humans and animals. Mosquitoes are known to transmit heartworm in dogs and they can spread encephalitis (including West Nile Virus), dengue, yellow fever, malaria and filariasis among humans.

Most female mosquitoes (Fig 1.) require a blood meal for egg production whereas males feed on nectar and do not bite. Eggs can be laid on the surface of water or in dry locations that are occasionally flooded by water. Some eggs are able to remain dormant under dry conditions for several months. Eggs hatch into larvae (Fig 2.), or wigglers. Mosquito larvae live in water and feed on organic debris or microscopic plants and animals. Larvae molt into pupae (Fig 2.) which do not feed. Mosquito pupae spend the majority of their time at the surface of the water, only moving when disturbed.



Figure 1. A female adult mosquito (left)
Figure 2. Mosquito larvae and pupae. (right)



Many things can help to reduce mosquito problems around the home. Eliminate all sources of standing water. Containers such as watering cans, buckets (Fig 3.) and bottles can turn into mosquito breeding grounds. Water should be drained from birdbaths, rain barrels, gutters, flowerpots and pet dishes at least once a week. Children's wading pools should be emptied of water at least once a week and stored indoors when not in use. Tree holes should be filled in with sand or mortar, or drained after each rain. Leaky faucets and pipes located outside should be repaired.

Areas that cannot be drained, such as ponds, can be stocked with mosquito fish that eat mosquito larvae. Dunks can also be used in these areas. Dunks are a small, donut-shaped product that contains *Bacillus thuringiensis israeliensis*. The donut disrupts the life cycle of the mosquito and is non-toxic to humans, amphibians and fish. Dunks are not for use in drinking water sources.

Mosquitos

Continued ...

Avoiding peak hours when mosquitoes are active is probably the best method to avoid being bitten. When outside, wear loose-fitting, light colored clothing with long sleeves & long pants. Repellents containing active ingredients such as DEET, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus can be effective to keep mosquitoes from biting when evening activities cannot be rescheduled. Other products such as citronella candles will also repel mosquitoes, but work best in enclosed areas.



Figure 3. Standing water source for mosquitoes.



Left: Male mosquito feeding on marigold nectar.

Beyond the Digging

By Bob Beyer

There's More To Gardening Enjoyment than Growing

You are going to think I am either crazy or weird but I propose to you that your enjoyment of growing plants can go much deeper than the actual growing process. Here are a few of my suggestions to broaden your gardening experience.

Getting to know your plants in a more intimate way can be a fascinating thing. If you have and use a computer, I am suggesting keeping a real time database on the plants you grow and study up on them through internet research. I can go through my collection of over 400 different plants and tell a story about each one based on not only experience growing them but information I discovered by researching them on the internet. Every time a plant is eliminated or added, the database is adjusted accordingly. Any new plant acquired is immediately researched to learn more about it. I recommend using the botanical name for internet research for best results. Learning is fun!

My plant database uses MS Excel (a standard software that is part of MS Office) which I can sort by botanical name, plant family, plant category and other self defined features. Instead of using plant labels to remember their names, I use a booklet containing this database information. I can associate stories with a plant when I can't remember the name itself. In the case of plants such as orchids, where so many hybrids have been created over time, you can trace the plant's ancestry and derivation using a plant database. The type and amount of information you keep is up to you. My own plant database can be seen at the following internet website address: www.centraltexasgardening.info/plantlist.pdf Trying to remember the botanical names and other information about a plant is a daunting task, made easy by having this resource. Also, having such an up to date list helps facilitate plant trading with others.

Plant Inventory and Botanical Database Example

Classification	Botanical Name (Genus/species etc.)	Plant Family	Floral Color	Variegated	Light	Put in the Greenhouse?	Type? (Evergreen, deciduous, semi-evergreen or tender/tropical)	Descriptive comments
Aquatic/bog	Colocasia antiquorum 'Illustris'	Araceae	yellow spadix	yes	shade	no	T	black centered leaved, aka Imperial Taro

Beyond the Digging

Continued ...

Aquatic/bog	Nymphaea x 'Charles Choice'	Liliaceae	red/apricot	no	sun	no	D	a dwarf hardy water lily
Aquatic/bog	Nymphaea x 'Helvoia'	Liliaceae	pale yellow	no	sun	no	D	a dwarf hardy water lily
Bamboo	Hibanobambusa tranquilans 'Shiroshima'	Poaceae	none	yes	sun/sh	no	E	grows to 4', very ornamental
Bonsai	Schefflera arboricola	Araliaceae	unknown	no	shade	yes	T	aka dwarf Schefflera
Bonsai	Schefflera arboricola 'Variegata'	Araliaceae	unknown	yes	sun/sh	yes	T	aka dwarf Schefflera
Bromeliad	Aechmea chantinii 'Tropiflora'	Bromeliaceae	unknown	no	shade	yes	T	a black form of A. chantinii
Bromeliad	Aechmea chantinii 'Samurai'	Bromeliaceae	unknown	yes	shade	yes	T	
Bromeliad	Aechmea chantinii 'Shogun'	Bromeliaceae	yellow/red	yes	shade	yes	T	yellow marginal (Samurai is yellow centered)

Beyond the Digging

Continued...

Bromeliad	Aechmea fasciata 'Albo-marginata'	Bromeliaceae	pink	yes	shade	yes	T	marginal variegation
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The satisfaction and enjoyment of knowing not only a plant name, but other information about it is hard to describe. If you know that a plant is from a particular part of the world, then you will know its natural growing environment. This alone helps you to create a similar growing environment that will help that plant thrive in your garden or greenhouse. Starting a database may be time consuming but once done, maintaining it is so easy.



Another benefit to growing plant that is equally fascinating, is photographing in your garden. Nature begs to have its picture taken from a broad garden bed perspective showing the blend of texture, color and form to detailed close-up pictures of the individual bloom details or leaf patterns. This is another way of sharing your garden and growing experience with others while enhancing your personal enjoyment of the plants you grow. The camera often catches things the eye doesn't see. Some of my garden closeup photographs can be found on my blog at http://centraltexasgardening.blogspot.com/2009_01_01_archive.html. You can use your digital camera to keep a photo log of your plants to go along with your plant database.

I hope these suggestions help you to enjoy your gardening and growing experiences more than ever before. They have certainly done this for me. I have learned so much in the process, that my gardening friends think I'm an expert. Have I ever got them fooled!

You can never know enough about the plants you grow or about the many plants you haven't tried yet. Make your growing experience a learning experience as well.

Above: Bob's favorite photo of his garden.

What Makes A Good Gardener?

By Anne Van Nest

The qualities of a good gardener are a bit like getting ready to make a fruitcake recipe. The type that takes half the grocery store and involves days to make it from scratch. By mixing many small ingredients together an entirely different product is achieved. Gardeners are like this too. Their personalities are made up of lots of smaller positive qualities that when combined form the essence of a gardener. Like good fruitcake, sometimes it just takes some time to "cure" (and a little seasoning helps too) before a gardener really becomes a great gardener.

Whatever the skill level, gardening often changes a person into something better. Gardening does have a positive effect on people. Many studies have shown that being around plants lowers the blood pressure and calms the nerves. Except for dealing with something like a wisteria that refuses to bloom after seven years of vigorous growth, the physical activity and emotional healing experienced while gardening will have a positive effect.

What are the qualities that make a good gardener? A love of plants is expected but often a love of all living things prevails. Gardeners often have a kind heart for birds, animals, and small children in addition to their love of plants. Gardeners by nature seem to be nurturers and caring people. Accepting the responsibility of caring for plants (animals and birds) makes us nurturers at heart. How can we help not being this way?

One of the most important qualities needed to be a good gardener, and what sets our pastime apart from many others, is a good old-fashioned dose of patience. Patience is a fleeting virtue among the "need it now", instant gratification world. Luckily patience is not a vanishing quality among gardeners. Gardeners have shown lots of patience when they spend two years looking at an algae covered pot of soil while hoping that the cold and heat treatments would get the finicky seed to grow. Even growing relatively fast crops like tomatoes are an undertaking often of four to six weeks before they can be put outside in the garden. The anticipation of biting into that first ripe tomato teaches patience.

Connected with patience is a strong determination among gardeners to see a project through to the end or at least until the plant flowered. Orchid growers are especially determined gardeners. They buy the tiniest plants and through sheer determination, raise them to flowering stage years later. Luckily a lot of orchids bloom for weeks so that these gardeners can savor their achievement for a long time.

Along with the sheer determination needed to train plants in an espalier form against a wall or trim bonsai with mini-shears, gardeners often have stamina. Stamina is different than determination. Determination and perseverance requires will power and drive. Stamina takes both of this plus physical endurance. Stamina is spending an afternoon edging the entire driveway with a manual lawn edger (without many complaints) and then digging out the weeds from the lawn.



Above: Sweet Basil, one of my favorite plants in the garden this summer.

What Makes A Good Gardener?

Continued ...

A gardener with a sense of purpose is one with a vision. Having a vision and being able to picture the anticipated end result is a valuable quality that will eliminate lots of unnecessary frustration. A vision is the road map to follow when creating the garden. Gardeners should have a clear vision when they set out to create their botanical statement. This anticipated picture may change somewhat between the start and finish but it is key to success.

Being creative is the fun part of creating the vision. Gardeners are continually showing their creativity with new plant combinations and innovative accessories for the garden. Letting the creative ideas flow freely brings out some amazing results. Ingenuity is frequently linked with creativity. This ability to make do with whatever is nearby is also a trait that is particularly strong in gardeners. There are always makeshift trellises for the climbing beans, temporary compost piles or a new way to stake tomatoes (with rebar?) showing this ingenuity in gardeners.

Gardeners are a very reliable and dedicated group given the unforgiving nature of their charges. Anyone growing seedlings, bonsai, or hanging baskets is destined to be reliable when plant care is involved (or they won't be growing for long). Getting water to a parched plant is crucial or they cease to exist. The more reliable the gardener the better gardener they will be. Wouldn't this be a great way to teach this skill to young children?

Given the unpredictability of the weather, gardeners had better have a good sense of humor. Marble size hail dropping from the sky and shredding the leaves of cannas or bananas is not a sight for the uptight. Mother nature likes to play tricks so gardeners have to learn to live with it. For other challenges, like the dog rolling over a prized coneflower and snapping it off at the ground, the healthiest response is the grin-and-bear-it one. Even if this plant was the one that was started from seeds that were given to you by a dear gardening friend.

Being forgiving goes along with having a sense of humor. When a treasured plant dies, the garden does not cease to exist. Good gardeners have a forgiving nature that allows them to look at the opportunities present and start anew. Plant life and death situations in the garden are a frequent occurrence that cannot be avoided.

Gardeners always have intimate knowledge of everyone's favorite subject. Gardeners are keenly aware of the weather because it affects their gardening life. This interest in weather allows gardeners to strike up a conversation anywhere with other gardeners. Sometimes a conversation with a new gardener friend will even result in plants exchanging hands. Gardeners are also very willing to share their plants with others. Sending a part of ones garden home with an admirer is a tradition that goes back to pioneer days. Gardeners are a generous lot.

Lastly, gardeners have a love for plants, flower and nature that gives them an appreciation for the finer things in life.



Above: Coneflower in glorious bloom.

Coming Events

Fall Vegetable Gardening **Saturday, August 7th, 10:00 am - noon**

Southwest Hills Community Church

7416 W Highway 71, Austin, TX 78735

Cooler weather is just around the corner and now is the time to prepare your vegetable garden for the fall and winter season. Join Master Gardener Vegetable Specialist Patty Leander to learn the basics of vegetable gardening with an emphasis on varieties that flourish in the fall and winter months. Broccoli, lettuce, Swiss chard, radishes and spinach are among the fantastic crops that grow well in our cooler season. Vegetable gardens don't end in fall, so come learn how to keep yours going year round.

This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. www.tcmastergardeners.org or call the Travis County Master Gardener's help desk at (512) 854-9600.



How to Manage Garden Insects **Saturday, August 21st, 10:00 am - noon**

LCRA Redbud Center, Room 108N

3601 Lake Austin Blvd., Austin, TX 78703

Insects can be one of the biggest challenges for gardeners. But you can deal with pests effectively without spraying general insecticides all over your plants. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) can teach you how to protect your garden without harming the environment or your plants. Learn to distinguish beneficial insects in your backyard from harmful insects. Basic IPM strategies will be described that can help manage insect pests throughout the landscape, in vegetable gardens, even in the home.

This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. www.tcmastergardeners.org or call the Travis County Master Gardener's help desk at (512) 854-9600.

Coming Events

Continued ...

Crickets and Kin: The Orthopterans

Monday, August 23rd, 7:00 pm

Zilker Botanical Garden

2220 Barton Springs Road, Austin, TX 78746 (512) 477-8672

Best known for their song and dance (think "Jiminy Cricket"), the real-life counterparts of the cartoon are actually fascinating creatures. The katydids and crickets are true singing insects and, along with the related grasshoppers, are distinguished by an ability to jump. Sharing a common ancestor with walkingsticks, mantises, earwigs, cockroaches and termites, the orthopterans display a wide variety of dietary adaptations, courting and territorial displays, camouflage and coloration, and, in some cases, parental dedication to their young. This program will explore the many facets of this group of insects through photos, and will cover basic identification, emphasizing our central Texas fauna.

Presented by Val Bugh, an Austin Butterfly Forum club member and local naturalist. She recently authored and provided photos for the book *Butterflies of Central Texas: A Guide to Common and Notable Species*, which is available at local bookstores and at the Zilker Botanical Garden shop. www.austinbutterflies.org/Calendar.



Farmer's Market Garden Talks

Saturday, September 11th, 9:00 am - noon

Republic Square Farmer's Market

400 West Guadalupe Street between 4th and 5th Streets, Austin, TX 78701

Take a moment out of shopping for fresh vegetables and dynamic local foods to learn about your garden. With fall weather comes the perfect season to get your vegetables and perennial plants in top shape. Join us for short talks on timely garden topics, including fall vegetable gardening, herb gardening, best fall bloomers for the Austin area, and how to build your own grow box container. After the talk, buy some of the very same plant varieties that you heard about at our plant sale.

These talks are free and open to the public. They are presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. www.tcmastergardeners.org or call the Travis County Master Gardener's help desk at (512) 854-9600.

Coming Events

Continued ...

Growing a Great Lawn

Saturday, September 18th, 10:00 am - noon

Zilker Botanical Garden

2220 Barton Springs Road, Austin, TX 78746 (512) 477-8672

Knowing how to grow a great lawn can help you save money, water and have a wonderful area to complement your house. Come learn the best information on the care and feeding of your lawn. Topics will include choosing the right turf for your site, irrigation, fertilization, proper mowing technique, and disease diagnosis and treatment. This class is free and does not require reservations.

This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. www.tcmastergardeners.org or call the Travis County Master Gardener's help desk at (512) 854-9600.

Endangered American Burying Beetle in Texas

Monday, September 27th, 7:00 pm

Zilker Botanical Garden

2220 Barton Springs Road, Austin, TX 78746 (512) 477-8672

Presented by the Austin Butterfly Forum. For more details visit their website at www.austinbutterflies.org.

Coming Events

Continued ...



4th Central Texas Master Gardeners Conference

Urban Farming – The Ultimate Backyard Experience

Saturday, October 9th, 8:00 am - 4:15 pm

Schertz Civic Center

1400 Schertz Parkway, Building 5, Schertz, Texas

Urban farming, edible landscapes, whatever you call it, is “growing” in popularity; converts flock to talks and demonstrations given by AgriLife Extension and Master Gardeners!

Now it’s your turn, join us for an educational fun filled day learning about the concept of Urban Farming from the microbes in the soil to the fruit, flowers and vegetables perfect for your home grown edible landscapes. Our esteemed speakers are: Dr. Larry Stein, Dr. Diane Boellstorff, Dr. David Reed and Dr. Joe Novak.

In addition to our educational talks, vendors will offer books, plants, fruit trees, and goodies for your gardening pleasure. Visit our educational displays on honey bees, backyard poultry, beneficial nematodes, compost tea and more!

Our objective is to offer Master Gardeners who usually don’t attend the State MG Conference an opportunity to participate in a quality one day event located in Central Texas. Master Gardeners attending this conference will be granted 6 continuing education hours.

Early registration will ensure your place – the conference is limited to 250 attendees!

Registration information www.tcmastergardeners.org/what/conference/CTGCregform.pdf
and agenda details www.tcmastergardeners.org/what/conference/agenda.html

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Visit the websites: www.tcmastergardeners.org and
<http://travis-tx.tamu.edu>



The End...

Time to Get Gardening!

