

THE COMPOST BIN

A publication of the Travis County Master Gardeners



SEEDS



HEIRLOOM



"BUTTERFLIES & BUTTERFLY GARDENING"

Mike is Texas Parks & Wildlife's state-wide Invertebrate Biologist where his duties are divided between conservation and outreach. A large component of his conservation-oriented duties involve the karst invertebrates (a.k.a. "cave bugs") that occur along the Balcones Fault Zone.

Mike grew up chasing snakes around New Orleans and after that, chasing birds across Texas for a number of years, he later started chasing butterflies and other insects in 1989.

Mike has a bachelor's degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences and a master's in Entomology, both at Texas A&M University.

Mike coordinates the TPW's Texas Monarch Watch program and co-authored "Milkweed, Monarchs and More: A Field Guide to the Invertebrate Community in the Milkweed Patch".

Mike also maintains a personal Texas Entomology website that gets around a 1000 page views per day and is co-owner of the TX-Butterfly and

MARCH 2008

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Special Feature:
Roadtrip! Join Liz and Frankie on a tour of two notable nurseries.



TX-Ento listservers hosted by the University of Houston. You can visit mike's website at: <http://TexasEnto.net>.

He and his wife live on two and a half acres in south Austin.

Come join us on Wednesday March 5th, 2008, Mike Quinn will present: "Butterflies and Butterfly Gardening" at the Zilker Botanical Garden Club House at seven PM.

Jerry Naiser
TCMGA, Director of Programs



The President's Message

Last month my husband Dan and I welcomed our first grandson into the world. We were so fortunate to be in Houston on the day Zachary was born and to hold him in our arms when he was just minutes old. It was a very exciting day for his parents and grandparents.

Now begins the awesome responsibility and fun of helping mold Zachary into a person. Dan can hardly wait to get him his first set of golf clubs but I on the other hand, can't wait to get him out in the garden. I already have a plan for his first vegetable garden! Gardening skills are something I have to give and I am eager to share all that I know with Zachary because that is what Master Gardeners do.

All of us will have opportunities this spring to share knowledge, introduce gardening to a child, and teach people about sustainable gardening and so much more. On March 15th we will host our second annual Passion for Plants at Govalle Park followed by Zilker Garden Festival on March 29th-30th and then by Inside Austin Gardens on April 19th. We will introduce new long-term projects as well.

If you haven't already done so, sign up for a shift during Passion for Plants. Requests will soon be out for volunteers for our plant sale booth and plant clinic during Zilker Garden Festival followed shortly by Inside Austin Gardens. Calls to the Help Desk at the Extension Office are picking up so also consider signing up for a few hours at the phone desk. Requests for speakers will increase as well both from the Speakers' Bureau and our Education Directors.

In addition to thinking about what you will be doing in your own gardens this spring (and I know you are because I certainly am!), I hope you will also make a note of the opportunities above and think about how you can participate.

Just as important as sharing our knowledge is gaining new knowledge. I hope that some of you are planning to attend this year's State Master Gardener Conference in Montgomery County (Conroe), April 24-26. The agenda has something to offer for everyone. Visit the Montgomery County Master Gardener website to see the schedule and for registration information (www.montgomerycountymastergardeners.org).

Don't forget about specialist training. Propagation, Junior Master Gardening and Rainwater Harvesting are scheduled for 2008. Go to www.texasmastergardeners.org for information about training dates and registration forms. I am personally planning to take advantage of this continuing education opportunity this year.

I look forward to volunteering and learning along side you!

Manda Rash, President



Plant Portrait - Snapdragon

March is the best time to see the full glory of snapdragon blooms. The snapdragon is known botanically as *Antirrhinum majus*, and is native to North Africa, Spain and along the Mediterranean to Italy. It was first described by Carl von Linné in 1753. Snapdragons were also known as Calvessnout (as described in the 1828 Noah Webster American Dictionary or the English Language) so called because of the form of its blossom.

Whether it is called snapdragon or calvessnout, this showy flower is in the Scrophulariaceae (Figwort) family. In Texas, these winter annuals start off sparingly with a hint of color and then flourish with masses of showy blooms several months later when March appears.

Who, young or old, doesn't like to play with snapdragon flowers and make the dragon's two-lipped floral mouth open and close when the throat is squeezed on the sides? The tall, vertical spikes of blossoms in bright spring-inspired colors are often slightly fragrant as well. Look for lavender, orange, pink, red, yellow, white, near black and bi-colors (almost every flower color except true blue and green) for the garden. Beyond the traditional snapdragon form, there are also doubles or open-faced flowers that don't "snap" as butterfly or azalea types (Bright Butterflies, Double Azalea Bronze). Looking for doubles? Check out the doubles; Madam Butterfly, Double Azalea Apricot, and Double Sweetheart.

The blooms are great as cut flowers (the taller varieties are better for cutting, but they need to be staked). Pinch taller cultivars when young for a shorter garden plant.



Snapdragons bloom best if grown in full sun during the winter months. They don't like hot, dry conditions, so consider planting them under a deciduous tree or shrub where they can get part sun during the fall and again in late spring. Snapdragons are very tolerant of cool, moist and frosty weather. Cover them with mulch if a hard freeze is expected here in zone 8 (or the plants are not hardened off). Average, slightly moist and well-drained soils are preferred in the garden.

Add smaller transplants to the garden in the fall for winter and spring flowering or wait until February and plant larger plants from the nursery. Pick healthy, full, sturdy, tall (for the type) plants to give the best show. Deadhead early in winter to encourage more blooms before the heat knocks out this plant. The majority of snapdragons do not tolerate summer heat at all.

Snapdragons are easy to grow from seed. Start them indoors in late summer or early fall. Freeze the seeds for 48 hours before sowing. Do not cover seeds with soil. Germination is best at 70 deg. F. soil temperature. Snapdragons can also be propagated by cuttings.

There are hundreds of snapdragon cultivars in five broad groups. Here are a few examples.

Tall 2-3 feet – Rocket, Bright Butterflies, Supreme Double, Madame Butterfly, Appleblossom, Cinnamon Bronze, and Tall Deluxe

Intermediate 1-2 feet – Monarch, Pixie, Vanity Fair, White Wonder, Black Prince, Rembrandt, Coronette, Lipstick, Dancing Flame, Solstice, and Sonnet

Short 9-12 inches – Tom Thumb, Floral Carpet, Peaches and Cream, and Little Darling,

Dwarf 4-9 inches – Magic Carpet, Little Gem, Pixie, and Floral Carpet

Trailing for window boxes and hanging baskets- Lampion, Luminaire, Chandelier, Avalanche, and Chinese Lanterns

Anne Marie Van Nest



In The Vegetable Garden

Toad, Toad," shouted Frog, "wake up. It is spring!"

Though my children have long outgrown Arnold Lobel's Frog and Toad books, the mom in me has always loved the simplicity and the tenderness of their message, and the gardener in me has always related to Frog's excitement and enthusiasm about spring. As we say this time of year, spring is just around the corner. And that means our gardens are about to come alive with activity - bird, critter, insect . . . I bet even the microbes are starting to tingle.

So, with all of this activity, where do we humans start? If you haven't prepared your planting beds yet, now is a good time to turn the soil and mix in a 3-4" layer of compost, removing weeds as you go. And if you don't have any beds for vegetables, by all means, dig up

some grass in a sunny spot and put one in! Just think of the benefits: exercise, fresh air, the opportunity to learn more about plants, insects and diseases, and as Manda Rash suggested recently – a chance to grow your own vitamins, minerals, fiber and anti-oxidants. What could be better!

If you haven't gardened before, it's a good idea to start with a small garden that you can keep an eye on. It's very easy this time of year to be lulled by these perfect, mosquito-free days, with warm sunshine and vigorous plant growth. But we know these 'Garden of Edens' are short-lived, and we will soon be sweating in the heat, cursing the bugs that have taken up residence, praying for rain and expending plenty of time and energy to make sure our plants stay healthy and productive.



Our last average frost is mid-March, and the following warm season vegetables can be planted around that time: beans (bush and pole), squash, cucumbers, eggplant, peppers, and tomatoes. But there is not a 'magical' date, we've been known to have a freeze in April, so wait until the soil temperature reaches at least 60° and be prepared to protect your plants with row cover fabric if (or when) we get that late cold blast. If you are a gambler and choose to plant your tomatoes early in the month, take steps to protect them in the event of a cold snap. A plastic milk jug filled with water and placed right next to a tomato plant will absorb heat during the day and give it off at night. Wrap the cage and tie it closed at the top and it just might generate enough warmth to keep your plant from freezing.

There are many wonderful varieties of beans, cucumbers, tomatoes and squash available in seed catalogs and at garden centers. I look for varieties that are recommended for disease resistance, vigor and taste, yet I'm always tempted by varieties that are beautifully photographed or those that have fun names. A few bush bean favorites of many long time gardeners include Derby, Contender, Provider and Roma II. A couple of pole beans recommended for Central Texas include Kentucky Wonder and McCaslan, both available from Southern



Isar and Maxibel Green Beans

Exposure Seed Exchange (www.southernexposure.com). If you like those little gourmet French filet beans, try Maxibel or Isar, both available from Johnny's Selected Seeds (www.johnnyseeds.com).

When it comes to cucumbers, I don't go a summer without growing a couple of Suyo plants. They are my all time fave. I also like Tasty Jade, Eureka and Diva. All are very productive and great tasting. And by the way, if you don't have a big garden, these can be grown successfully in a Grow Box or a big (5 gallon) pot. And just for fun, try one of the easy-to-grow novelty squash varieties, like Sunburst, Eight Ball, Starship, Peter Pan, or Flying Saucer. I like to harvest them small and grill or roast them. But be on the lookout for squash bug eggs. Search and destroy before they have a chance to hatch - you'll save yourself a lot of headache.



Sunburst Squash



Squash Bug Eggs

Are you a fan of soybeans or edamame? If so, this spring I am conducting a trial to see how they perform in our Central Texas gardens. Let me know if you are interested in growing a small patch and reporting back to me. I will bring some seeds to the March meeting.

Here's to a bountiful harvest,
Patty Leander



Suyo Cucumber



cucumbers in a Grow Box



Green Beans



The Greenhouse Bench

It has been a busy time in the greenhouse during February with workdays scheduled for many Saturday mornings as preparations continue for Zilker Garden Festival, Inside Austin Gardens and A Passion for Plants-an East Austin Garden Fair.

The first tomato and pepper seeds (started in late January) were transplanted for the A Passion For Plants event. Over 500 seedlings of Sweet 100, Better Boy, Mexicana Hybrid, and Yellow Pear tomatoes were finally big enough to transplant into 4" pots on February 16th. Interestingly, this batch of tomatoes took almost two weeks to germinate while the ones sown in late February were up within a week thanks to our recent bright sunshine and warm temperatures. Several hot chili peppers and a sweet bell type were also transplanted into 4" pots for the East Austin Garden Fair. These vegetable garden staples will be given away at this 2nd annual event.



Several of our most popular tomatoes (Juliet, Celebrity, and Azoychka Russian Heirloom) have been seeded for Zilker Garden Festival and are just starting to germinate in late February. Look for these in 4" pots or gallons on March 29th and 30th at Zilker.

The first citrus blooms were spotted opening behind the greenhouse on Valentines Day. Drop by for an olfactory sensation as more trees join in the fragrance parade.

The usual potting up of cuttings to 4" pots occurred and also a subsequent moving up of other 4" pots to gallons. Zilker Garden Festival will have many larger sized plants for sale this year.

Many slots are still available for certified Master Gardeners and Master Gardener Interns for the TCMGA plant sales area (as well as preparations the week prior and set up just before the event) at Zilker Garden Festival. Watch for details of the volunteer assignments at the March meeting or via email.

Anne Van Nest, Marian Stasney and Molly Clark



Over The Back Fence

BROMELIAD LECTURE

The Bromeliad Society of Austin March meeting will feature Carole Richtmyer, internationally known bromeliad expert. The meeting begins at 7:30pm on March 11 in the Green Room at Zilker Botanical Garden. Carole's talk will focus on "Cryptanthus—The Earthstars". Carole is a long time grower and hybridizer of Cryptanthus. She serves as the Secretary of the Cryptanthus Society International and has won numerous awards for her species and cultivars she has grown and shown. Please join us for what promises to be a wonderful presentation on Earthstars.

For more information, contact Steve Reynolds at drsteve104@aol.com.



A PASSION FOR PLANTS: AN EAST AUSTIN GARDEN FAIR

Saturday, March 15, 2008, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Govalle Park, 5200 Bolm Road, just East of Airport Blvd.

Govalle Park will be the site of the second annual A Passion for Plants: An East Austin Garden Fair on the last weekend of Spring Break. This free public gardening event will feature hands-on demonstrations of how to double dig a garden bed, make compost, plant a tree, make a self-watering container garden, grow plants from cuttings, and many more gardening tips that anyone can do. Come for the free advice from our on-site experts to answer all of your gardening questions, and fun educational activities for kids, with bugs, bugs, and more bugs! Visit our booths and get a free plant! The more you learn, the more plants you earn. See our local Gardener of the Year receive the annual award, and get ready for Spring with all the free information you need to start your own garden, whether it's one plant in a pot or a whole yard full.

Hosted by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, the Sustainable Foods Center, the Green Corn Project, and the Holistic Health Awareness Network. For more information call 512-854-9600 and ask for the Master Gardener's desk. <http://www.tcmastergardener.org/html/events.html>



ZILKER DOCENT TRAINING

Mark your calendars for upcoming Zilker docent training sessions March 22 & April 26. Meet in the Green Room at the Garden Center at 9:30 am. For more information, contact Marion Alsup at 480-0311.



GARDEN TO GARDEN PLANT EXCHANGE

Wednesday, April 2

Set to take place after the April meeting. As you work in the garden, keep your gardening buddies in mind. Bring your bounty and take home something new!!!

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 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 guests.

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>



MARK YOUR CALENDAR:

Saturday, July 12, 10 AM - Noon

Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Rd.

"What is Wrong with this Plant?"

Saturday, September 6, 10 AM - Noon

West Rural Community Center, 8656 Hwy. 71 W., Building A

"Rain Water Harvesting Systems and Low Water Usage Landscaping"

Wednesday, September 17, 7-9 PM

Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Rd.

"Fall Vegetable Gardening"

Wednesday, October 22, 7-9 PM

Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Rd.

"Plant Photography"

Saturday, November 15, 10 AM - Noon

Sunset Valley City Hall, 3206 Jones Rd.

"Preparing for Winter and Spring Bulbs"



Special Feature: Roadtrip! Notable Nurseries on the Way to State Convention

MARTHA'S BLOOMERS NURSERY

This nursery was covered in detail in June 2006 in the Compost Bin, but we thought it was worth a reminder that if you have extra time on the way to the Master Gardener Convention, it's a fun place to stop. They have tons of bedding plants, garden related gifts and lots of display beds. And don't forget the tea room. Its casual elegance and "oh so good" food makes it a favorite stopping place for many travelers. When we were there in the fall, they were also having an estate sale in the parking lot, with tons of deals.

Martha's Bloomers, P.O. Box 999, 8101 Highway 6 Bypass, Navasota, TX 77868,
<http://www.marthasbloomers.com>, phone: (936) 825-7400.



THE BROOKWOOD COMMUNITY

The Brookwood Community is a "must see" nursery, located in Brookshire, just west of Houston, off I-10. It was started in 1985 to serve functionally disabled adults. Today there are over 100 citizens in the community and 39 greenhouses (which are discretely hidden from the customer's view.) The plants are grown and nurtured by the citizens with disabilities. Programs for citizens include "hortitherapy," which uses plants and planting in therapeutic activities.



The facilities have grown from a small shop to a very large campus, which also includes a large gift shop and a café. The Café at Brookwood serves lunch and is open 7 days a week from 11am to 2pm. Reservations are recommended.

The variety of plants offered at Brookwood isn't as large as some nurseries because their main focus is to offer seasonal flowers grown by the Brookwood citizens. During a visit in early February, the large retail greenhouse was full of cyclamens, as well as a nice selection of houseplants and tropicals. Beautiful variegated hibiscus in large hanging baskets seemed to be the "plant of the day" judging by the numbers leaving on customers' carts. In addition to the plants in the greenhouse, there are plants for sale in sections along the outdoor landscaped areas. This makes for a nice shopping experience as all the plants are well cared for and in good condition. The outdoor area is beautifully landscaped – very serene and peaceful with meandering walkways and water features. You can also get great ideas on how to use the plants you just purchased as there are always beautiful container plantings in the outdoor areas.

The Brookwood Community, 1752 FM 1489, Brookshire, Tx 77423
www.brookwoodcommunity.org, phone: 281-375-2160.



We will continue next month with several more notable nurseries on the way to convention.

By Liz Caskey and Frankie Hart



Closing The Garden Gate

My mind is overloaded from thinking about all the things I want to do in my yard after touring the Ogden's garden. It made me realize I do not have enough texture or evergreen plants in my garden and that I can put a LOT more plants in! Yep, it's time to get outside and get to work. I've noticed little green tips are popping up in my flower beds and I saw a Mountain Laurel blooming the other day (not mine). This beautiful weather makes me long to be outside instead of at my desk working – I think I have Spring Fever already. I've got to start buying those lottery tickets! Happy St. Patrick's Day – don't forget to wear green on the 17th!

Rebecca Matthews

Garden Trivia

The flower for March is daffodil. Your grandmother may have called them jonquils, your mother named them daffodils, but the horticultural texts all call them narcissus.

The daffodil, also known as the jonquil or narcissus, is believed to have been brought to Britain by the Romans, who mistakenly believed that its sap could heal wounds. (In fact, daffodil sap contains sharp crystals that prevent animals from eating the flower. While it did little to heal the Romans' wounds, it succeeded in further irritating their skin).

Today, people associate the bright, yellow daffodil as a symbol of rebirth - a sign of the new beginnings that come with spring. Indeed, the daffodil is the birthday flower for March, the month in which the spring equinox begins. Daffodils are said to bring good fortune to the person who avoids trampling on them. Lest they bring unhappy vanity to the bride, daffodils should never be present at a wedding.

While daffodils can be taken to say, "my fond hopes have been dashed by your behavior," they mostly say, "the sun is always shining when I'm with you." For the most part, daffodils signify unrequited love.

In Closing

The flowers of late winter and early spring occupy places in our hearts well out of proportion to their size.
~Gertrude S. Wister



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