

# THE COMPOST BIN

*A publication of the Travis County Master Gardeners*

APRIL 2008

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Roadtrip, Part II! Join Liz and Frankie on a tour of two more notable nurseries.



### "OAK WORMS, BALL MOSS AND OTHER PROBLEMS"

**K**eith Brown is a Board Certified Master Arborist, one of only 2 in the central Texas area. He is a member of the prestigious American Society of Consulting Arborists, Texas Oak Wilt Certified and sits on the board of directors for the Texas Chapter International Society of Arboriculture.

Keith's 12 years of field experience began as a climber on a pruning crew and continued through every facet of the commercial sector of the business. Keith is now the owner and field manager of Austin Tree Experts and is the city arborist for the City of Rollingwood.

"I am one of the few lucky people who fell into a career they love at a young age. I have a strong back and a sincere love for both people and the environment, two requirements for this business." — Keith Brown

On Wednesday April 2nd, 2008, Keith presented: "Oak Worms, Ball Moss and Other Problems Facing Our Urban Forests" at the Zilker Botanical Garden Club House.

Jerry Naiser

# The President's Message

**T**hank you, thank you, thank you Master Gardeners and Interns, for helping to make the HEB/JMG promotion and "A Passion for Plants" so successful!

I have talked with the HEB coordinator for the JMG benefit and she was so thrilled with the number of Travis County Master Gardeners who turned out to help. Apparently, not all of the Master Gardener programs were as involved as we were. As of this writing, I do not have a final report on the amount of funds raised but will report on that as soon as I know.

You all read Susan Decker's note regarding "A Passion for Plants." It was truly a wonderful day...perfect weather, terrific location, hundreds of visitors and again, many Master Gardeners and other volunteers helped make it a very special event. The numbers are still being tallied but I know I counted at least 100 visitors during the first hour. Attendance was definitely up this year and I believe "A Passion for Plants" will continue to grow every year. Good work, everyone!

As of this writing, we are still two weeks away from Zilker Garden Festival followed three weeks later by "Inside Austin Gardens." In May, I'll report on Zilker Garden Festival and "Inside Austin Gardens." I'm confident that both of these events will be successful as well...thanks to all of you. Four events within six weeks...it's a lot of work and it takes a lot of volunteers. It simply couldn't be done without dedicated Master Gardeners like you!

But don't forget to take a little time for yourself. Get out in your own garden and enjoy the miracle of spring. You deserve it!

Manda Rash, President



# Plant Portrait - *Persicaria (Polygonum) capitata*

**P**ersicaria capitata is a distinctive groundcover plant with loads of marble-size pink blooms that seem to float above the burgundy and green carpeting plant. Known by a huge variety of common names (many referring to the flowers), this attractive plant is called Pink Knotweed, Magic Carpet, Creeping Fleeceflower, Carpet Polygonum, Pinkhead Smartweed, Pink Bubbles Persicaria, Afghan Carpet, Pink Pinheads, Punch Balls, and Tou Hua Liao to list a few. This fast grower from the Himalayan foothills is best known for its pink bloom-small marble size clusters of flowers like a compact clover.

The green and maroon foliage, which deepens with more sun or drought, has darker maroon chevrons on the leaf.



Pink Knotweed

Pink Knotweed is a low growing, mat forming groundcover that reaches 4-6" tall when in bloom. It is dense enough to keep out most summer weeds. Spreads by rooting at the nodes, growing 12-18" in diameter in one season. It can become invasive and outgrow a small area fast but it pulls up easy.

This plant is an evergreen perennial in zone 9, but is not hardy in colder areas less than zone 7 (where it is best grown as a summer annual). Here in zone 8 it probably will die back to the ground during most winters. It is not a cold weather plant.

Pink Knotweed is excellent for shady or part shade garden sites, but will tolerate a sunnier location if watered enough and if it is planted on well-drained soils. It does not tolerate soggy soils. Once settled, this groundcover even tolerates dry shade. Requiring average water needs, do not over water it.



In wetter, frost-free parts of the country, it tends to self-seed, become invasive and might outgrow its designated space, jumping to new areas. In this situation, watch that it doesn't overgrow smaller, more fragile plants. If it gets rambunctious, it is easy to pull out where it is not wanted. Be sure that the flowers are placed in a very hot, active compost pile that will kill all the seeds. If you think that the compost pile isn't actively "cooking" enough, send the compost to an alternate compost site.

In warm areas, Pink Knotweed can be used as a spreading groundcover. Individual plants can be used in rock garden sites. And in colder regions, the trailing plant is a great annual for containers and hanging baskets.

Propagate from stem cuttings or transplant wayward seedlings when young.

Cultivars; (note: the differences between all the following cultivars are subtle. They may indeed be the same plant)

'Magic Carpet'

'Pink Bubbles'

'Afghan'

Anne Marie Van Nest



# In The Vegetable Garden

I love to see a garden  
A-growin' in the spring  
With crisp new leaves of tender plants  
As green as anything.

See how they stand so bravely  
Bedecked with morning dew;  
What had been old and lifeless  
Is now so bright and new!

Seeds locked within their prisons  
Broke their bonds at night,  
Pushed upward through the blackness  
To life, and day, and light.

The dry dead seeds were buried  
In the darkness of the earth  
But God has made them live again  
The wonder of rebirth!

Mary MacDonald Stewart

This poem, written by my garden friend and mentor, captures the miracle of the spring garden. Tiny vegetable seeds hold such amazing potential. And if we take the time and energy to nurture the seed, we will be rewarded with vegetables that will, in turn, nourish our bodies. What a great trade-off!



Tomato blossoms

My onions, potatoes and dried beans from last summer's harvest are long gone and I've about used up all my frozen and canned tomatoes from last year, and that leaves me longing for the taste of a home-grown tomato. I have become sort of a tomato snob over the years - I go out of my way to avoid "fresh" supermarket and restaurant tomatoes during the winter. They don't taste like any fresh tomato I've ever grown. And where do they come from anyway? And how long did it take them to get here from wherever they were growing "fresh"? I'm happy to postpone my tomato eating - it makes those first tomatoes of the season so much better! And speaking of first tomatoes of the season, I always try to plant a couple of varieties that are considered early producers. First Lady (66 days from transplanting), Early Girl (57 days), New Girl (62 days) and Juliet (62 days) are all good bets. The folks at Natural Gardener are selling an early tomato variety this year called Moskvich (60 days). I have not tried it yet but they say it got good reviews last year.

Use row cover to protect your tomatoes and other transplants from cold snaps, insects and windy days, and if possible, water from below using drip irrigation or soaker hoses. Watch for signs of early blight on tomatoes - yellowing leaves with black spots that start at the base of the plant. Remove infected leaves and try using a fungicide called Serenade. And if you get tomatoes by Mother's Day, please share your secret with me!

Onions are heavy feeders and will benefit from a sidedressing of nitrogen fertilizer as the bulbs begin to swell. Two cups of organic fertilizer per 10 feet of a double row is recommended.

Strawberries will benefit from an application of a balanced fertilizer as they start production. One teaspoon of 12-12-12 per plant should be sufficient. Spray your plants weekly with a water soluble fertilizer or fish emulsion



and do watch out for pill bugs – they really like to nibble on red, ripe strawberries. Black plastic seems to help keep them off the berries, but you could also try laying a piece of wood or newspaper around your plants overnight and then turning it over the next morning and disposing of any critters that have accumulated. Strawberry plants are best treated like annuals here, pulling up the plants in late May or June after harvest time has passed, and then starting with new plants in the fall.

If you planted potatoes, hill them up with soil or mulch as they grow. Do the same with corn to help stabilize it and keep it from blowing over. If you planted corn and every single seed germinated, be sure to thin it to about 12" between plants. I know it's hard to pull out those little baby seedlings, but they will be a great addition to your compost pile. And you will have more success, and more delicious corn to eat, by giving your remaining corn plants more space, air and nutrients.

Mid-April is a good time to plant okra, Southern peas, and melons, as well as a second planting of bush beans. All of these can be direct seeded and will appreciate the warmer soil temperature. Once your seeds are up and growing, take the time to mulch around all of your vegetable plants. The mulch will help retain moisture, regulate soil temperature and over time it will decompose, releasing nutrients into the soil.

By the end of the month the hard work should be about over, most of our warm weather crops should be up and growing, and we can all take a well-deserved break - keeping an eye out for those aphids, spider mites and leaf-footed bugs, of course. Oh, and watch out for that squash vine borer, too!

Here's to a bountiful harvest,  
Patty Leander



# The Greenhouse Bench

**M**arch is the busiest month in the greenhouse with lots of activities focused on the Passion for Plants - An East Austin Garden Fair, Zilker Garden Festival and the Inside Austin Garden Tour. But in addition to these big events, there's been more exciting news.

Taylor Sultan Quedensley, Ph.D candidate in plant biology at UT at Austin brought his Advanced Placement Environmental Biology Class of Austin High School students to tour the TCMGA greenhouse and Zilker Botanical Garden. The students are learning about native plants to help restoring a hillside at the Austin High campus.

Becky Waak, Propagation Specialist, used the greenhouse as the location to give a propagation class for the Westlake Hills Garden Club. Seventeen people attended this very successful event.

The first installment of greenhouse plants for this year has been given to Liz McVeety, Garden Supervisor for Zilker Botanical Garden. Initially about 40 tomatoes and peppers (some of each type) were donated for the Zilker vegetable garden and 5 gallon pots of red leaf hibiscus for the parking lot area. Additional donations will be arranged after Zilker Garden Festival.

An article featuring five native plants written by Anne Van Nest and Marian Stasney was published in the Austin American Statesman on March 29th as a promotion for Zilker Garden Festival, Master Gardener plant sale and the TCMGA.

Best wishes are extended to Don E. Telge for a speedy recovery from a bout of pneumonia this winter that has meant two hospital visits and recuperation time at home. The greenhouse just isn't the same. Hurry back Don.

Anne Van Nest, Marian Stasney and Molly Clark



# Over The Back Fence

## **BWI CO-OP ANNOUNCEMENT**

Dear Master Gardeners,

After many years of dedicated service above and beyond, Ron Ciani is retiring as purchaser for the buyer's co-op. We all want to thank Ron for his efforts (applause! applause!). Molly Clark and Marian Stasney will be sharing those duties for a while and would like you to know the following:

1. Molly will be the primary contact for requests to purchase. Molly prefers that requests are emailed to [mjc\\_ckt@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mjc_ckt@sbcglobal.net) but can also be reached at 924-7401 for those that don't have email access. Complete descriptions with part numbers, if possible, and a contact phone number are greatly appreciated and will speed up the process. The BWI catalogs can be found at <http://bwicatalog.bwicompanies.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/PrintedCatalogView?langId=-1&storeId=10051&catalogId=10001>.

2. Orders will be placed every other week. Reminders will be sent out in advance. Please email your requests by Saturday midnight to Molly. So, the next cutoff date is March 15 midnight. Following date is March 29, etc. Again, we will accept requests at any time and we will remind everyone before the bi-weekly cutoff date. However, we will be ordering every other week if we meet the minimum order. Orders can be picked up at the greenhouse.

3. Sometimes a great deal of inventory builds up in the greenhouse and especially at Zilkerfest time, when every inch of space is needed, your cooperation in picking up your purchases quickly is greatly appreciated. Again, we will notify everyone when orders are received and processed.

Thank you!

Molly Clark and Marian Stasney



## **INSIDE AUSTIN GARDENS 2008**

Plans and work continue on our spring tour scheduled for Saturday, April 19. The garden tour wouldn't be possible without your help. If you have already volunteered your time for the day of the tour, great; if not, please let us know how you want to help.

I would like to take this time to point out that our tour this year is a different approach than we have taken in the past. This year a conscious decision was made to present gardens and garden practices that demonstrate the principles of sustainable gardening. Our gardeners have beautiful gardens, but more than that, these gardens are life long projects devoted to the principals of natural gardening. At the end of the day, our gardeners sit in their gardens and listen to the birds; or they begin their day with a cup of coffee or tea in their garden, listening and watching as their gardens come alive. Combined with their love of nature, has also been their appreciation of the value of adding food production to their garden center. All of our gardeners have combined vegetable, fruit, and citrus or nut production in their garden spaces. Herbs, vegetables, fruit trees, and flowers mix and thrive.

It is the goal of the tour this year to increase awareness for the need to create livable spaces in the garden setting rather than using the traditional installation of grass and foundation plantings. Many Austinites are striving to make this happen, but have a hard time visualizing exactly what to do. We would like to help by demonstrating what is possible in limited spaces, using proper resources.



In addition, it should be pointed out that the natural gardening practices being promoted are not new. Rainwater harvesting, natural soil conditioners, and the promotion of beneficial insects, are all actually a return to the gardening practices used prior to World War II. We've come full circle. In promoting organic, we are actually promoting a return to the methods of the past. Somewhere along the way, the home backyard garden was abandoned for the big farm food production centers. As we go forward, it appears that the necessity of going back to that home backyard garden will become a big factor in many lives, perhaps even a necessary factor. There are many benefits to this, from improving our environmental quality to producing fresh vegetables that are both good and good for you!

Thanks to our gardeners for all the hard work involved in getting their gardens in show condition and thanks to the rest of you for helping. We couldn't do the tour with out your full support. Pass the word and sign up to help! If you can't help, then come by and visit with our gardeners and see what these special people have been up to. For full details, check out the web site at [www.insideaustingardens.org](http://www.insideaustingardens.org).

Joyce Cooper

### **FREE PUBLIC SEMINAR: PLANTS FOR SMALL SPACES**

Saturday, April 12: 10:00 AM – Noon, North Rural Community Center, 15822 Foothill farms Loop, Build. D, Pflugerville

#### Plants for Small Spaces

This free seminar will increase your knowledge of working with plants in containers. It is an ideal learning experience for anyone wanting to know more



about growing flowers or vegetables on a patio, an apartment balcony or in other locations.

Creating a Container Garden presentation covers type of containers, soil, fertilizer, and watering. Watch a Master Gardener construct the container and discuss use of color and texture.

Ideal Plants for the Patio talk offers education on plant selection. Which plants grow well in containers? What about sun or shade requirements?

Gardening in a Grow Box will be a new idea for many. It is intense gardening, vegetables or flowers, in a plastic storage box! No weeding, high yields, infrequent watering are some of the benefits of this concept.

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

The seminar is sponsored by the Travis County Master Gardener Association in partnership with the AgriLife Extension, Travis County. For more information call 512-854-9600 and ask for the Master Gardener's desk. <http://www.tcmastergardeners.org>

Master Gardeners earn Continuing Education Units by attending this seminar. No reservations, just come!



## **FIELD TRIP! TEXAS SPECIALTY CUT FLOWERS**

Bring your family and friends to the next TCMGA field trip! Everyone is welcome to attend.

Saturday, April 26

8:45 AM: Leave from car pool locations (locations & drivers established the week of the event)

10:00 AM - Noon: Tour of facility by an Arnosky family member and time to explore and purchase items. Noon - till??: Stop in Wimberley for lunch or return directly to car pool location.

Visit: [www.texascolor.com](http://www.texascolor.com) for more information. Cost: Car pool money, anything you purchase and lunch.

RSVP: Rosalie Russell, [gisathccs@aol.com](mailto:gisathccs@aol.com), 804-2257

Here is some of what you will find at the Arnosky Family Farms.

- Fresh Cut Flowers--Lilies, snapdragons, sunflowers, zinnias and many more.
- Pamela's fabulous hand made bouquets.
- Fresh-picked vegetables- Tomatoes, peppers, squash, lettuces and greens, new potatoes, Frank's special Romano green beans and so much more.
- Fresh herbs-- Basil (3 kinds), cilantro, parsley, peppermint, spearmint and of course lavender!
- Cut flower plants--Grow your own cut flower garden with our exclusive varieties, or plant these Texas hardy plants just to enjoy in the landscape.

Herb plants--Lavenders, basil, mints and other culinary herbs for your Texas garden. At our market you can tour our 20 acres of flower production fields, hike our 100 Hill Country farm, or relax with a cool refreshment. Children can enjoy our "Kid's cutting garden" where they can cut their own bouquets and hide in the sunflower fort!



## **FREE PUBLIC SEMINAR: SMALL POND CONSTRUCTION**

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 aesthetics 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>



### **FREE SEMINAR: WHAT IS WRONG WITH THIS PLANT?**

Saturday, July 12, 10 AM - Noon  
Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Rd.

"What is Wrong with this Plant?"

The biggest challenge for gardeners is correctly diagnosing plant problems and prescribing effective, safe solutions. The purpose of this seminar is to help the gardener understand the causes of plant problems; the process for diagnosing plant problems; and general management techniques and strategies to employ to help plants overcome problems. The first step is to understand who or what is the culprit: insect, disease or environmental factor.

A Plant Clinic will be open during the entire seminar in an adjoining room. Bring samples in a plastic bag of your diseased or bug eaten plants to the Plant Clinic. Get expert guidance on possible solutions to restoring the plant's health

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



### **MARK YOUR CALENDAR:**

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! More Notable Nurseries on the Way to State Convention

These three nurseries are located southwest of Houston in the Richmond/Rosenberg area.

## ENCHANTED FOREST & ENCHANTED GARDENS

These two nurseries are a family affair, with family and friends working to make the dream of owning a nursery come alive. Plants at both nurseries are well maintained and displayed and it's always a pleasure to have knowledgeable staff, willing to help you with your selections. Both stores also feature garden gifts and pottery.

Enchanted Gardens, opened in 1995, is a little more rustic, with lots of ideas in the display beds, including a lovely waterfall and pond area. One display features a huge variegated tapioca plant towering overhead. This garden center has a large inventory of plants and I never visit here without taking something home.

Enchanted Forest opened a few years later and is a beautiful nursery with cottage gardens, lots of seasonal displays and creative container plantings. You're sure to find many ideas here. It is a large, busy nursery, but still very calming and peaceful in its wooded setting. We also found several unusual plants here (have you ever heard of a Taffeta plant?)

Be sure to sign up for their newsletter by email (<http://myenchanted.com/>), which includes discount coupons.

Enchanted Forest, 10611 FM 2759, Richmond, TX 77469, 281-937-9449

Enchanted Gardens, 6420 FM 359, Richmond, TX 77469, 281-341-1206



## CALDWELL NURSERY

Caldwell is another family owned nursery in the Houston area. If you like exploring flea markets, you'll love this nursery -- there are treasures around every corner. Most of the greenhouses were packed full of unusual plants that would satisfy the avid collector. Their web site (<http://caldwellhort.com/index.html>) even has a section for the collector. I enjoyed their selection of begonias and was amazed at the number of gingers and plumerias they carried. There really is a little (or a lot) of everything here – daylilies, roses, native plants, succulents, as well as many, many tropicals. A really fun nursery to visit when you have time to look for that unusual specimen plant you just must have.

Caldwell Nursery, 2436 Band Road - Rosenberg, Texas 77471 281-342-4016

Liz Caskey and Frankie Hart



# Closing The Garden Gate

Ah, Spring! Everything is growing again. Just in time for the Live Oaks to cover them with their leaves. Those leaves are so precious I just do not understand it when I see those yard bags by the curb that people leave out like trash to be picked up. They have so many uses. I use mine on the sides of my house as a path. I love the sound it makes when I walk on them. I know a lot of people use them as mulch or just put them in the compost pile. It's like throwing away money.

I hope you are enjoying this wonderful time of year for as we all know it will soon be hot and humid and the mosquitoes will make their debut. I recently had my porch screened in and hung a porch swing so I finally have a refuge from the marauders. Now if I could just figure out a way to hang a ceiling fan I could escape the heat as well. Happy Spring!!!

Rebecca Matthews

## Garden Trivia

On the first day of spring, the hours of daylight and of darkness are equal. Around March 21st, the earth's position in its orbit around the sun places its equator in line with the sun. This time period is called the "vernal equinox" and is the first day of spring in the Northern Hemisphere. "Vernal" means spring and "equinox" means equal.

## In Closing

I think that no matter how old or infirm I may become, I will always plant a large garden in the spring. Who can resist the feelings of hope and joy that one gets from participating in nature's rebirth? ~Edward Giobbi



# 2008 TCMGA Executive Committee

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VP Volunteer Coordinator for Master Gardeners in Training - Michelle Butler and Carolyn Williams  
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