

# THE COMPOST BIN

*A publication of the Travis County Master Gardeners*

MAY 2008

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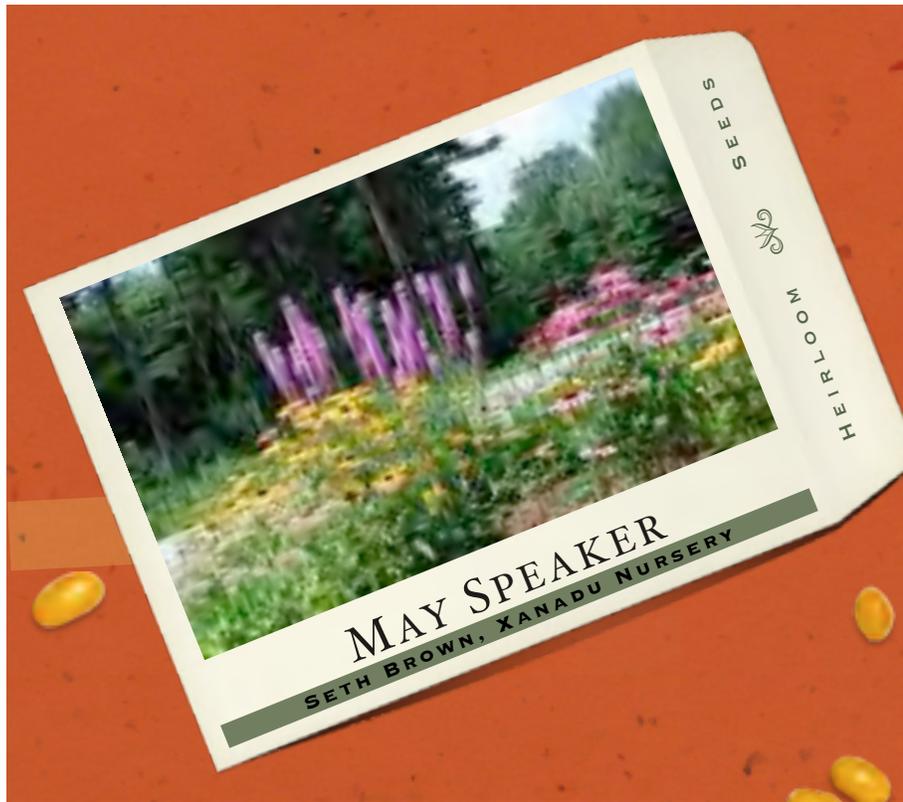
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Roadtrip: Chihuahuan Desert Center and Botanical Gardens.



### “OAK WORMS, BALL MOSS AND OTHER PROBLEMS”

**T**hrough the years whenever the word “xeriscaping” came up in a professional group, most likely it included Seth Brown’s name.

Seth, a native of Houston, graduated from Bellaire High School in 1973. From there, he backpacked across Western Europe and Asia from 1973 until 1976, when he arrived in Austin.

As Seth says; “I got here as fast as I could, just had a little detour.”

Upon settling in, Seth founded Xanadu Nurseries in 1977, located then, as it is now 32 years later, in Dripping Springs.

Seth is one of the true pioneers in native landscapes and xeriscaping in Texas, if not the entire country. He started doing “it” in 1977, before there was a name for xeriscaping, and before others realized the value of planting natives. During the first 15 years, Xanadu was unique, actually growing their own native material, at their commercial greenhouses out in Dripping Springs. “This was done out of pure necessity,” Seth explained, “as there was no place in the market that sold native and/or plants that conserved our natural resources.” Seth operated his retail greenhouse

facility and nursery until the early nineties, when xeriscaping, finally had a name and others saw the value of growing native plant material. From that time until present, Seth and Xanadu Nurseries have continued as one of the state's most well-known designers, installers and overall resources on natives and xeriscaping, winning many awards along the way.

I welcome my old friend Seth Brown, and hope that you will join us on Wednesday, May 7th at 7:00 p.m. Seth will be talking to us about the benefits of natives, xeriscaping, and incorporating both, into a beautiful, deer-resistant environment. He will also answer most any question you can throw at him, and you will never hear the words "Well I think" or "I have heard" as Seth really knows from his own experience what works and what doesn't.

Also, please note that we will be voting on the adoption of our revised standing rules and bylaws at our general meeting in June, so I would encourage you to review these. A copy can be found on the Travis County Master Gardeners Website.

Jerry Naiser



# The President's Message

**W**hew...it's finally May! I say that with some enthusiasm because that means that we have made it through an extremely busy March and April.

As you have already heard, "Inside Austin Gardens" was a tremendous success. Beautiful weather and beautiful gardens made for a winning combination. Kudos goes to Joyce Cooper, tour chairperson and her team of planners for a job well done. Approximately 1,000 people toured this year. When I drove up to the first garden and saw cars parked up and down the street and around the corner, I knew we were in for a fabulous day. It was reported that several of the gardens had a waiting line outside when the gates opened at 9 am. Some homeowners were still allowing visitors after the official end at 4 pm.

Attendance at our educational events was just as impressive. At Bannockburn Church, 50 people attended each of their sessions and at Link Davidson's garden they had 25 or more at each session. Many of our speakers talked with people throughout the day. Education opportunities abounded. It is evident that our tours are gaining in popularity. I believe that can be directly attributed to our educational component. At every stop I heard at least one person say, "I could do that in my garden"...music to my ears!

Congratulations to everyone who participated and made our 3<sup>rd</sup> tour our most successful one yet!

Shortly after the tour, I was off with about 15 other Travis County Master Gardeners to the State Conference that was hosted by the Montgomery County Master Gardeners. Tom LeRoy and his team of Master Gardeners did an outstanding job. They crossed all the t's and dotted all the i's. It was a wonderful 3 days of education and fun with outstanding speakers and events. I wish you all could have been there.

But the highlight of the conference for me was the awards banquet. Travis County Master Gardeners received two awards in the medium large category—second place for Master Gardener Association of the Year and first place to Patty Leander for Master Gardener of the Year! I still smile when I think about it.

I'm so proud of our organization and its volunteer spirit. Keep up your good work!

Manda Rash, President



# Plant Portrait - Jerusalem Sage

**J**erusalem Sage is known botanically as *Phlomis fruticosa* and is in the Mint family (yes, it does have a square stem). The plant is originally from the Mediterranean region of Cyprus, Greece, Turkey and Syria. Attractive for its shrubby, mound of sage-like, aromatic, woolly silver gray leaves; the plant really attracts attention when the buttery yellow tiers of tall spikes start blooming in late spring. Periodically there are sporadic blooms in late summer. In Central Texas, the plant is a woody evergreen. While in colder areas (where it is hardy to zone 6) it will die back to the ground during the winter. Prune it back hard in the spring as needed.

This hard working staple of the garden is drought tolerant once established and thrives in full sun with average to dry soil (good drainage is essential). Moderate to little summer watering is needed. If too rich a soil or conditions are shady, plants tend to stretch, get leggy and flop unattractively.

Growing to 45 inches tall and 35 inches wide, this dramatic plant needs a little space to grow to its full potential.

Jerusalem sage is great for attracting bees and butterflies. Resist the urge to tidy up during the fall; just leave the seed heads in place and they become food for the birds in winter. Tidy up the plant in late winter by removing the spent flower stalks. This plant has some deer resistance.

Did you know that the essential oils of Jerusalem sage have antibacterial and anti-fungal properties?



*Phlomis fruticosa*



## Cultivars

*Phlomis fruticosa* 'Miss Grace' (aka P. f. 'Compact Grey'): 3' tall x 6' wide.  
*Phlomis* 'Edward Bowles': 3' x 3' size. Bicolor yellow blooms.

Anne Marie Van Nest

# In The Vegetable Garden

**W**e have flirted with summer-like temperatures in March and April but by the time May gets here there is no turning back - that warm weather is here to stay. If you haven't planted those heat lovers like okra, sweet potatoes and Southern peas, now is the time.

Sweet potatoes are fun to grow if you have the space. The tubers are formed underground, but the trailing vines will quickly cover the top of the soil, so give them plenty of room to roam. I like to plant mine in a raised, 10' x 4' bed, and let them take over. The plants are started from "slips" (which are pieces of rooted vine) and are available for purchase at local nurseries like Natural Gardener or Callahan's, or can be ordered from Willhite seed. ([www.willhiteseed.com](http://www.willhiteseed.com)). A few of the varieties that are recommended for here include Centennial, Jewel, Beauregard and Vardeman. Keep the

roots moist by wrapping in damp paper towels or gently separate and place in moist soil until ready to plant. Sweet potatoes like a loose, well-drained soil, so dig in plenty of compost and a low nitrogen fertilizer before planting. Use of high nitrogen fertilizer will result in lush, leafy growth at the expense of root development. Plant the roots 12" apart in full sun and water in with a dilute fertilizer. Be patient, it takes all summer for the roots to form - at least 100-120 days from planting. But the roots are edible at any time, so I usually start poking around in the soil in late August or September to see if I can find any of usable size. The longer they are allowed to grow the larger the roots will be. Just be sure to harvest them before that first frost.

Southern peas include black-eyed peas, crowder peas, cowpeas, and cream peas and they are wonderful crops for our Texas summers. When it comes to Southern peas and okra, I've never met a variety I did not like. Willhite seed is a Texas company and a great source for varieties that perform well here.



Sweet Potatoes

Harvest onions when the tops begin to fall over, which usually happens this month. Pull up the plants and spread them out to cure in a dry, shady place for 2-3 days. After curing, you may cut the tops off and store the onions in a cool, dry place, and use them as needed.

Be sure to mulch everything growing in your garden to help conserve moisture and regulate soil temperature. Over the summer, the mulch will gradually break down and enrich the soil. Most fruiting vegetables are heavy feeders, so fertilize lightly when the first fruit appear and again 3-4 weeks later. A general recommendation is 1 cup of organic fertilizer per 10' of row. If you have a small garden with only a few plants, work in 1-2 Tbsp of fertilizer per plant.



Harvest your home-grown bounty frequently and you will be rewarded with flavorful, fresh vegetables that will be a healthy and nutritious accompaniment to your summer meals – better than anything you will find at the grocery store!

Here's to a bountiful harvest,  
Patty Leander



# The Greenhouse Bench

**Z**ilker Garden Festival was a big success at the TCMGA plant sale booth thanks to enthusiastic plant-loving crowds on Saturday and Sunday and a huge team of Master Gardeners and Interns who helped in numerous ways. Thanks to everyone who helped before, during and after the Garden Festival. Special mention should be given to Holly Plotner, who once again researched and printed several thousand labels that were attached to each plant destined for the plant sale booth. Thanks Holly for your dedication to the proper naming of our plants and ensuring that new owners were well informed about their new garden additions.

Thanks are also extended to Molly Clark and Marian Stasney who repainted and added new trim to the plant selling display racks. The racks were much improved with a

nice, new coat of moss green paint. Marian is also thanked for her creativity (with Jo her neighbor) in bringing back Charlie the Pot Man to grace our booth display. Charlie (shown in picture) was a very calming influence at the booth reminding everyone to take a minute (or two) to relax and enjoy the plants and flowers.

Two valued Master Gardeners, Wayne King and Don Telge helped keep the plant growing production rolling by picking up Garden-Ville container mix soil and dropping it off at the greenhouse.

There were many, many people who helped propagate, pot up, groom and label plants for the sale. Everyone deserves our gratitude for their assistance. In addition, three people should be

recognized for their "above and beyond" work in the greenhouse and at the Zilker Garden Festival. Vicki Olsen and Marilyn Finnegan spent days helping prepare for and selling at the Garden Festival. Thanks are also well deserved for Cecelia, Master Gardener Intern who enthusiastically transported plants from the greenhouse to the plant sale booth using a cart.

The next big project for the greenhouse will be the replacement of the two layers of polyethylene plastic that makes up the roof. Watch your email for the details of this event.



Anne Van Nest, Marian Stasney and Molly Clark



# Over The Back Fence

## **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>



**UPCOMING SEMINARS:**

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! Chihuahuan Desert Center and Botanical Gardens, Fort Davis, TX

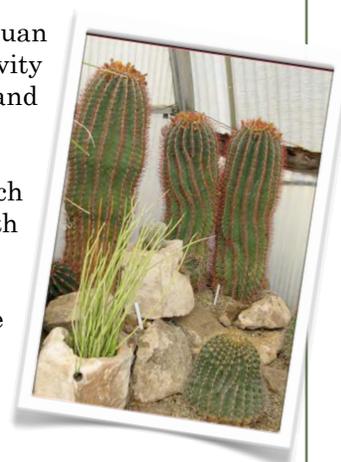
If you are ever in the Fort Davis area, it's worth the trip to spend some time in the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Center & Botanical Gardens, located 4 miles south of Fort Davis. It is situated on a 507-acre landsite with a 20-acre botanical garden, featuring plants of the Chihuahuan Desert region.

Although there are over 165 species of trees, shrubs, and perennials of the Chihuahuan Desert region featured in the gardens, it was early in the season, so there was limited activity in the botanical gardens. The highlight of our trip in early April was the cactus and succulent greenhouse, which contains over 200 species of Chihuahuan Desert cacti.

If we had more time, I would have liked to have explored the center's hiking trails, which are open to visitors year-round. The Visitor's Center houses an excellent gift shop with many education items.

Hours of operations are Monday through Saturday from 9 to 5, however, the Nature Center is closed on major holidays. An admission fee is charged. <https://cdri.org>

Liz Caskey



# Closing The Garden Gate

**H**aving just visited all the inspiring gardens on the TCMGA garden tour I am left pondering how my own garden can be more sustainable. Which leads me to wonder what is sustainable gardening? It can't mean not doing anything to the garden and letting it sustain itself because in my yard I would have nothing but weeds and Bermuda grass. I realize that sustainable gardening does not mean no, or even low, maintenance gardening. So as I ponder I come to the realization that it must mean to just minimize the resources used to sustain your garden. Use your own muscles to pull weeds and haul rocks and dig new beds. Implement rainwater collection, use water thrifty plants, mulch, compost, use organic methods of fertilizing and pest control. I believe as gardeners we love the earth and the wildlife that inhabit it. In sustainable gardening we garden with nature, not against it. We know the joy of watching our seeds grow and getting our hands dirty. Basically, we have a passion for plants! With those thoughts in mind I'm off to the backyard to plant all the new additions I purchased on the tour and to introduce them to their new sustainable home.

Rebecca Matthews

## Garden Trivia

Trees create 99 percent of their living parts from scratch each year.

Water going up tree trunks travels at 150 feet per hour.

## In Closing

Let no one think that real gardening is a bucolic and meditative occupation. It is an insatiable passion, like everything else to which a man gives his heart.

-Karel Capek



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