

# THE COMPOST BIN

*A publication of the Travis County Master Gardeners*

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**RICHARD COOK ON GREENHOUSES**

**R**ichard was born and raised in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. He attended Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, England, where he received a BS in Agriculture in 1978. In 1979, he received a BS in Agriculture from Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, followed by an MS in Agriculture from Cornell University, Ithaca, NY in 1986.

In 1986-1987 he joined Exaco USA Ltd., New York City in the position of Sales Manager.

From 1988-1999, he was president of Exaco USA and De Van Koek. De Van Koek created a product line of 1,000 high-end lawn & garden tools and accessories (like Smith & Hawken) and a customer base of 3,000 independent garden centers and 50 catalogs. Including many local stores. In 1998 he sold De Van Koek to Tierra International, Jasper, Ind.

From 1999-2000 he served as National Sales Manager at Tierra International.

In 2001, he started Exaco Trading to represent European manufacturers marketing their products in the USA, where he was National Sales Manager for five product lines from Europe and a greenhouse line from Israel.

From 2002-2005 he was the National Sales Manager at System Trading Corporation, New York City, where he generated \$9 million in new revenues (from nothing) for two new product lines: greenhouses from Israel and promotional “mini coolers” from China.

Since 2005, he has been the VP sales and marketing at Exaco Trading.

Richard manages the day-to-day operations of Exaco Trading where he works with his wife who owns both companies. This is the company which specializes in hobby greenhouses. They currently sell 3 lines: one each from Germany, Belgium and China. In addition, they also sell compost bins. Their expertise is in higher-end greenhouses.

Although their primary business is nationwide distribution to websites, they also sell direct through their own website: [www.europeangarden.com](http://www.europeangarden.com).

Richard will talk about hobby greenhouses in general and educate our members to the significant differences between the lines offered around the country. He will be bringing with him samples of different glazing materials as well as pieces of aluminum framing. He will talk about accessories, and will also talk about recycling organic waste.

Some members might remember Richard from Zilker Fest during the nineties as he regularly participated with his De Van Koek business with a booth full with high-end European garden tools.

Best Regards,

Jerry Naiser  
Vice President of Programs



# The President's Message

**A**s we welcome the fall season and cooler temperatures, we also welcome our new Horticulture Agent Logan Respass. Logan has much experience with and appreciation for Master Gardeners as evidenced by his work in Aransas Pass. He brings with him many great ideas for TCMGA and I am looking forward to working with Logan over the next months and years.

This month a new slate of officers for 2009 will be presented during our general meeting and voted on in November. You will see some of the same names and faces but several will change. As a result, I'm certain that we will see terrific new ideas and opportunities for TCMGA in 2009. I personally want to thank everyone for stepping up and agreeing to serve. Our nominating committee deserves a big pat on the back for a job well done.

I write this note only six days following the devastation caused by hurricane Ike and cannot help but think about all those who lost everything. While we are planning for the next year so many are just trying to get from one day to the next. I know that several of you, as I was, were involved with housing and care for Ike evacuees. Perhaps one of our goals for 2009 should be to develop a project or projects to help some of these ravaged areas renovate or develop a community garden or other garden space or help get their youth gardening programs back on track when they can begin to think about these issues. If any of you have ideas about how TCMGA might offer assistance, please let me know.

The president's note this month is short as I still have a house full of family (son, daughter-in-law, precious grandson and their sweet dog) that I want and need to spend time with. Next month, you might not be so lucky!!!

Manda Rash, President



# Plant Portrait - Growing Bananas

A favorite plant to portray a tropical look and theme, bananas with their long wide leaves and fast growth are a fun addition to the garden (especially if they produce fruit).

Most bananas in the grocery store are Cavendish varieties of *Musa acuminata*, while gardeners with a little searching can find some alternatives to grow.

Bananas grow best in above-freezing temperatures. Frost will seriously damage the leaves and leave them very ugly during the winter. For this reason, many cut their bananas down to the ground before this happens in Central Texas. Temperatures in the high 20s can kill a plant to

the ground, although there are a few bananas that can survive this. Locate your bananas in an appropriately protected spot. The south or southeast side of the house is usually the most protected in the winter. Wind protection is also important so that the leaves don't get shredded.

Fruit are most often produced after a frost-free winter on mature plants (10-15 months in age). Bananas flowers have a beauty all their own. They appear in groups (called hands) in the spring and summer covered by purple bracts which roll up as the fruit develops and is exposed. The first hands to appear have female flowers that develop into seedless edible fruit. There may be as many as 10 hands of female flowers on one flower stalk. Sterile and male flowers are next to appear and they will eventually drop off. Under ideal conditions, a new hand can emerge from the bracts almost daily. In commercial production, a banana fruiting stem can weigh up to 100 lbs. The more exotic and smaller fruiting bananas have a fruiting stem that may weigh 40 lbs. Propping may be needed to keep the plant from tipping over. Harvest bananas by removing the entire stem, when the fruit are fully formed and rounded but still green in color. The unripe fruit should be hung in a cool, shaded place to ripen. Once ripening starts in the oldest hand, the rest will follow in a few days. After fruiting the mother plant

should be cut off near ground level, as it won't produce again and will eventually die.

Bananas are happy growing in full sun in soils that are deep and have good drainage. Bananas are not tolerant of flooding or poor drainage.

In preparation for winter, bank soil around the trunk or dig out the entire plant, remove the leaves and store in a dry, heated area. Another



Banana Bloom



overwintering option is to dig small suckers and pot them up for overwintering indoors. If outdoor plants do get hit by below freezing temperatures and all the top growth is killed, cut off the plants at ground level soon after the freeze or trim off the damaged leaves in spring.

Some Texas nurseries offer several options to purchase banana plants as one year offsets, 3 gallon mature, 7 gallon fruiting size or 15 gallon mature with offsets. No waiting for fruiting necessary.

*Ensete ventricosum*, the false banana (red Abyssinian banana) are more compact, equally as fast growing. They look like a nicer form of banana that has a stronger midrib on the leaves.

Consider the height of the cultivar you are considering, some full size banana cultivars can reach 25' in Houston. Many dwarf varieties are available.



Cultivars to consider:

'Dwarf Cavendish' reaches 6 ft and has attractive mottled red leaves. Better for windy sites. Typical fruit. Also 'Super Dwarf Cavendish' grows to 4 ft tall. Sweet dessert fruit.

'Orinoco' (horse banana) to 10 ft, have large fruit and are primarily used for cooking. Also 'Dwarf Orinoco'. Hardy to zone 7b. Good tasting fruit, growing to 8 ft. tall.

'Lady Finger' thin skinned fruit, medium-small size. Superior flavor.

'Apple' ('Manzana') similar to Lady Finger except the fruit has an apple aftertaste. Hardy to zone 8. 14 ft. tall.

'Cavendish' hardy to zone 8. The grocery store banana. Reaches 8 ft. tall.

'Ice Cream' hardy to zone 8. Small bluish colored fruit. To 15 ft. One of the best tasting bananas.

'Texas Star' medium size fruit, sweet flavor. Hardy to 16 deg. F. To 8 ft tall.

*Musa basjoo* (Japanese fibre banana) only ornamental. Very hardy to zone 5. To 18 ft. tall.

'Raja Puri' very tasty. Hardy to zone 8. Cold and wind tolerant. Grows to 10 ft.

'California Gold' good cold hardiness to 20 deg F. Grows to 6 ft.

'Siam Ruby' new, red leaf, edible fruit. Hardy to zone 9. Grows to 8 ft tall.

'Red Iholene' cold hardy to zone 8, bright pink markings on the stems, and bracts. To 14 ft tall. Older leaves have red splotches. Tasty fruit. Also 'White Iholene' Hardy to zone 9. To 16 ft. Whitish leaf color.

'Mysore' cold hardy to zone 8. Wind resistant, growing to 16 ft. Very ornamental and excellent fruit quality.

Anne Marie Van Nest



# In The Vegetable Garden

If the heat has driven you from your vegetable garden the last couple of months, relief is on the way. The arrival of fall in Central Texas brings a gradual drop in temperatures and the potential for more dependable precipitation, both of which revive the pleasure of vegetable gardening. If the cooler weather beckons you outdoors, I hope you have a sunny spot to grow a few (or many) of your own delicious vegetables. Try to find room for broccoli and kale, two nutrient dense 'super foods'. And imagine how much more super they will be if they only have to travel from your backyard to your kitchen before they end up on the dinner table!



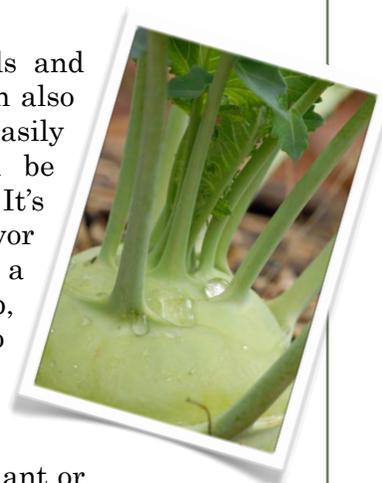
Lettuce: a favorite cool season plant

Transplants or packets of seed

can be purchased at most garden centers for just a dollar or two. Look for strong, healthy plants, but resist the temptation to purchase broccoli or cauliflower that has already formed a little tiny bud. You may think that little bud will mean an earlier broccoli harvest, but in reality it means that the plant is probably stunted and its growth will never catch up enough to support the formation of a large head of broccoli.

Broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, collards and kale can still go in as transplants. Collards and kale can also be planted from seed as they are quick growing and can easily withstand our winter temperatures. The leaves can be harvested at any size. And be sure to give kohlrabi a try. It's an interesting looking vegetable and has an interesting flavor – the name means 'cabbage-turnip', so that should give you a clue. It's also versatile and can be eaten raw with dip, shredded into salad, or chopped up for a vegetable stir-fry. Do plant more than one, as only one kohlrabi bulb forms per plant.

Get your lettuce and spinach planted this month – either transplant or seed. There are many, many varieties of lettuce out there – Johnny's ([www.johnnyseeds.com](http://www.johnnyseeds.com)) is one of my favorite sources for seed. 'Firecracker' and 'Galactic' are red leaf varieties and 'Red Cross' and 'Ermosa' are lovely butterhead types. If you like romaine give 'Winter



Density' or 'Jericho' a try. Lettuce seed can be scattered lightly over the soil and then barely covered. Keep the soil moist until germination takes place. Spinach seed can be soaked overnight for better germination and it can either be broadcast in a wide row or seeded 4-6" apart for individual plants.

Though we often sing the praises of the fall vegetable garden, there is a downside, at least in my garden. Can you guess what it is? Yes, it's those dang caterpillars. And the aphids. And the harlequin bugs. They love our fall temperatures and they thrive on our fall vegetables. Row cover will help, as will regular applications of Bt. But keep an eye out for them as they can easily decimate a plant if not kept under control. Some folks I know derive pleasure from squishing these little boogers bare-handed, but I prefer to drop them into a bucket of soapy water. They are not good swimmers.

Here's to a bountiful harvest,  
Patty Leander



## The Greenhouse Bench

There was a non-stop propagating session in the greenhouse during the September work day. After rescheduling the work day for the DinoLand opening in Zilker Botanical Gardens and wondering if Hurricane Ike would dash our attempts to work in the greenhouse the following week, a determined group of 2007 interns and certified MG's descended on the greenhouse to get to work. Cuttings were taken mostly from shrubs that need a longer rooting time. Cuttings were taken of red leaf and variegated hibiscus, 'Orange Jubilee' Tecoma stans, purple and white cats whiskers, batface Cuphea, purple and white butterfly bush, Texas star hibiscus, cenizo, and others. A few non-woody plants of Texas betony and coleus were also propagated. It is our hope that these will be of gallon size for the Zilker Garden Festival next March.



Thanks to everyone who either shopped for plants and buyers Co-Op supplies or helped with the cutting brigade, moved gallon pots or watered and groomed.

In preparation for Hurricane Ike, Marian Stasney fastened a tarp over the donated pots rack at the front of the greenhouse to keep them from blowing around. Thanks Marian for another great idea to improve the greenhouse. The tarp also does a great job of hiding the unsightly pots too.

As mentioned in the September Compost Bin, two irrigation projects are underway in the greenhouse. There's been great progress on both tying in the outside growing area to the interior irrigation controller. The other project is to repair our mist bench valve. Well, thanks to Don Telge and Don Freeman, the mist bench is now better than ever. The solenoid valve was replaced and the Telge/Freeman team upgraded our nozzles too. The mist bench now has 4-way nozzles that have a much better coverage of the entire area and the nozzles can be changed from mist to spray if desired. They are working so well, there's discussion of changing other benches to this nozzle type. Thanks Don and Don!

Just a note as well, a couple of the upcoming greenhouse work days (October and November) will not be scheduled on their traditional days (the first Saturday after the first Wednesday) because of the Central Texas Region Master Gardener Conference and the Garden Conservancy Open Gardens Day. Watch for announcements about the rescheduled dates.

Anne Van Nest, Marian Stasney and Molly Clark

# Road Trip - Disney

For some Fall inspiration, here are a few photos recently taken at Disney World. Hope you enjoy!

Liz Caskey



# Master Gardeners: by Olin D. Briggs, Ph.D.;

## Aransas / San Patricio counties

Master Gardener class coming soon.

From time-to-time we make a discovery we neither anticipated nor expected. As someone once said, "Even a blind hog finds an acorn sometime." This blind hog found one almost a year ago here in Aransas County - the Master Gardener program. I learned, it had the potential to be a life-changing discovery. Or so it was for me.

When it began in August, I had no real idea of what I was getting into or what the program truly consisted of, but I quickly was disabused of that ignorance for our first class dispelled any ideas of what it wasn't and told us what it was.

Oh I guessed it had something to do with plants, growing them, fertilizing them, planting them, nurturing them and hoping they would live and bear fruit, flowers or some such. That suited me fine for I love to dig in the dirt, but I really launched myself into the program little knowing what to expect. That little note I saw in the newspaper opened a batch of new portals for me to step through and every one has provided an endless series of paths which matched my original plan to learn as much as I could about anything I could before I check out of this wonderful life.

What a trip it was while the classes went on four months, but it has not stopped there. Every notice, every question has opened new vistas, all of which excite an old country boy such as myself. Yes, I learned some common names for plants and some quirky Latin names, which the experts and pros love to toss about, but I also discovered something I totally did not expect - a community of kindred souls who, like me, love to dig in the dirt and talk about and to the plants.

Dr. Doolittle talked to the animals, but we talked to plants and each other. So did all of my newfound colleagues. They actually conversed with plants. Wow. These people who suddenly appeared in my life shared my love for nature and natural things. Our mission is to carry that interest and commitment to learning about horticulture out into our community - answering the questions of others, sponsoring seminars and brown bags, maintaining a demonstration garden for the public to learn about the best local plants. We even learned many tidbits which proved helpful in our own gardens. For example, I was trying to replant a willow tree by my pond, a willow tree, a friend suggested had already tried to dies three times. My Master Gardener experience taught me how to use root stimulator. It worked.

My dear, late Granny gave me my first training in growing things and none of her knowledge turned out to be wrong, but now I have so much more to layer onto the gifts she gave. In all fairness she did not live on the coast in South Texas.

One of the toughest ideas to get across to newcomers is everything does not grow here in the heat. Just because some plant or tree did well in Fon Du Lac, WI does not mean we can duplicate those results here.

There was lots of data and lots of facts, but the most important thing I found was a bunch of really nice people, the ones in my class as well as the "older" Master Gardeners. There was not competition and everyone was delighted to share whatever area of expertise and interest he or she had.

The key word is play. There was no long hours of pouring over textbooks to memorize stuff for tests, it was all practical and mostly about plants we were growing at home. The computer sites we learned

about taught us how to do better computer searches. Most of us were not geeks. We had mostly just muddled along before our leaders gave us the directions of where to find the answers we sought. We were astounded at the amount of information given.

Not only did we swap information about plants, but also we shared information about our lives. We became friends of the heart and mind despite our dirty fingernails. We took delight in each other and our relationships. In short, we deepened our life experiences. I and the other members of the Master Gardeners Intern Class of 2007 would not trade our experiences.

Submitted by J. Logan Respess, Texas AgriLife Extension Service



# Over The Back Fence

## **GARDEN TO GARDEN PLANT EXCHANGE - OCTOBER MEETING**

Following the October meeting, share your bounty with your gardening buddies and take home something new. This is a great way to add to your gardening knowledge. Please have your contributions potted, bagged and labeled (no muddy soil please), and don't forget those extra magazines and catalogs along with your seeds and bulbs.

The exchange will start directly at the conclusion of the meeting, so we ask in fairness, no liberating of plants before the exchange begins. We also ask you to retrieve your leftovers as the Garden Center has no means to handle them. And we need volunteers to help clean up as the center has a prompt closing time.

Roxane Smith

## **DINOLAND EXHIBIT AT ZILKER BOTANICAL GARDEN**

September 6th- November 30<sup>th</sup>

Ninety-nine million years ago, an ornithomimid dinosaur made tracks on the muddy shore of the Sea of Tethys, which were discovered in ZBG in what is now the Hartman Prehistoric Garden.

The exciting news is that 30 dinosaurs are returning to Zilker in September - or rather, 30 lifelike dinosaur models are coming for an exhibit along the new Escarpment Trail! You can read more about



this exhibit at <http://www.zilker garden.org/about/events/dinoland/index.html>

School Program exhibit training:

September 9, 11, 12th, 9:30 am to 12:30 pm or September 10, 12, 15th, 9:30 am to 12:30 pm

There will be many roles for docents with the Dinoland Exhibit, and it is not necessary to attend all of the training sessions! We still need you to volunteer!

Other volunteer opportunities include Garden Greeters, Ticket Takers & Festival Assistants. More information to come!

Contact Information: Marion Alsup 480-0311, [zilkerdocents@aol.com](mailto:zilkerdocents@aol.com) or [malsup@aol.com](mailto:malsup@aol.com)

Marion Alsup



## **FREE SEMINAR: PLANT PHOTOGRAPHY**

Wednesday, October 22, 7-9 PM  
Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Rd.



Plant Photography class will be taught by Sam Myers, a photo expert. The class will concentrate on developing the ability to take photos with impact. There will be an overview of cameras, film and digital. Discussion will include how lighting, focal length and aperture interact in composing photographs. Guidelines of composition will be covered along with "posing" plants.

Prerequisite: study the owner's manual on your camera. Not necessary to bring a camera but may be helpful.

The class 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>

## **FREE SEMINAR: PREPARING FOR WINTER AND SPRING**

Saturday, November 15, 10 AM - Noon  
Sunset Valley City Hall, 3206 Jones Rd., Sunset Valley, TX 78745



"Preparing for Winter and Spring" is the theme of this free seminar. Learn how to put the equivalent of a winter coat on plants. Discover bulbs that thrive in Central Texas and will bloom in the winter and/or spring.

Gain an overview of what needs to be done to prepare your landscaping for the stresses of winter. "Preparing for Winter" will give you confidence and the knowledge necessary for plant survival during the few winter months.

Bulb expert Danny Fowler, owner of Texas Tulips, will present many bulb varieties which excel in Central Texas. Learn about native and adapted bulbs. Bulbs will be available for purchase.

Educate yourself on the necessary planting steps to increase bulbs success. Learn when to fertilize, mulch, and divide for more productive, healthier plants.

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



# Closing The Garden Gate

I wanted to share my latest project -- a small cactus garden. I say small not only because the space dedicated to it is small but the plants themselves are also small. Hopefully, they won't all stay that way. I'll add to it as time goes by (maybe there will be some different succulents at the plant exchange this month) but I still think it's pretty in it's newness. It could use a metal piece and a couple of rocks to add some interest. But, like the rest of my yard, it's a work in progress.

Rebecca Matthews

## Garden Trivia

The age of a saguaro cactus (the largest American cactus) is determined by its height. They take up to 75 years to develop a side arm. The arms themselves are grown to increase the plants reproductive capacity.

Female cochineal insects are found and collected from the pads of a cactus. The 'bugs' belong to the order Homoptera and are related to aphids, scale insects and mealy bugs. The collected insects are dried and the bright red pigments are extracted from the insect bodies. This brilliant red dye is still used by some traditional weavers in the Southwest. One pound of dye represents about 70,000 insect bodies.

## In Closing

My garden will never make me famous, I'm a horticultural ignoramus.

Ogden Nash



# 2008 TCMGA Executive Committee

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