

THE COMPOST BIN

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PENNY COOK: THE TROUBLES AND PLEASURES OF MAKING WINES IN THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

Penny became interested in agriculture and viticulture as a young child, growing up in a large farming family in Arlington, Texas. She recalls racing up and down the rows of grapevines on her grandparent's farm, then sought respite from the HOT west Texas sun under a large, marvelous grape arbor.

Penny received her B.S. in Horticulture, 1980, Texas A&M University, specialization in Pomology, and as an undergrad did a work-study co-op job in a central Texas vineyard and in 1978 became interested in a career in Viticulture.

She headed to California State University at Fresno, in 1982 she received her M.S. in Agriculture Plant Science with a specialization in Viticulture. Her Master's project: Pruning and Training Grapevines in West Texas University of Texas Vineyards.

Penny produced her first commercial wine in 1982 as co-owner and Winemaker of Cypress Valley Vineyard and Winery in Blanco County, with 25 acres of grapes under cultivation and a 10,000 gallon bonded winery and tasting room.

Invited to bring her Trebbiano wine to a Fancy Food Show at the World Trade Center in 1985, she won numerous awards for this wine and others produced, including Barbera, Primitivo and Riesling.

In 1990 Penny helped develop Hill Country Cellars in Cedar Park, Texas as Winemaker for Lucy Baines Johnson and the Donald Thomas family, initially producing the first commercial wine spritzer called Itza Spritza.

Through the years, Penny has raised two wonderful son's, both of which stay away from vineyards these days and she has worked closely with Texas A&M and the Pierce's Disease Research Program from March 2004 to October 2006.

Penny is currently working as the Hill Country Viticulture Advisor for Texas AgriLife Extension since October 2006 out of Fredericksburg Texas.

Her Special Interests include pruning, photography of plants and printing

Please join us on November the 5th at 7:00 PM, when Penny will talk to us about viticulture and the troubles and pleasures making wines in the Texas Hill Country.

Best Regards,

Jerry Naiser
Vice President Programs



The President's Message

As I write this message today, it is obvious that fall is in the air. The mornings are cool (and simply perfect for gardening) and the days are warm but not too warm. The recent rains have invigorated our gardens. Plants that were just barely able to hold on over our long, hot summer are suddenly in bloom. The garden is alive with blooms—fall aster, blue and white mistflower, brugmansia, Philippine violet, Mexican mint marigold, copper canyon daisy, hibiscus, fire bush, plumbago, ginger, passion vine, roses.

Unfortunately, the magnificent fall days will not last too much longer. Already the forecasters are talking about lows in the 30s and highs in the 50s. So for now, enjoy and treasure these days of fall before they give way to winter.

And just as the season will change, TCMGA has a couple of changes are on the horizon. This month we will vote on a new executive board that will begin its work in January. I also want I want to thank everyone who is “retiring” from the board for their dedicated service. It’s been a pleasure working with you and your dedication to TCMGA is unsurpassed. Thank you, thank you, thank you!!!!

The slate of officers presented during our October meeting is outstanding. I’m looking forward to working with this new board. Change often brings about fresh ideas and new opportunities and I’m confident this new board will continue the good work of the previous board and help move our organization forward.

As we all know, Patty Leander has headed up our telephone desk scheduling for the past several years. In fact when I became as Master Gardener in 2003, I contacted her to schedule my first telephone duty...a volunteer opportunity that I still enjoy! Patty has asked that we begin the process of finding a replacement for her. I am sorry to see her relinquish this role. And at the same time, I know this is a good decision for her, as she will have more time to devote to her other TCMGA endeavors. We will all miss Patty’s enthusiastic volunteer recruiting manner and I just know there is a person within TCMGA that will be a perfect fit for this job. If you would like to learn more about this volunteer opportunity, please feel free to contact Patty (leander@austin.rr.com; 301.0923) or me (mandarash@austin.rr.com; 918.9609).

So now I’m off to the garden to plant a very small acacia tree and sow the larkspur seeds I bought today...after I finish tweezing out the cactus spines that somehow ended up in my hand today at the nursery. All I wanted to do was check to make sure that cactus was the variety I wanted. I swear y’all, it just jumped up and grabbed me...I took it home anyway!

Happy Gardening!

Manda Rash, President



Plant Portrait - St. Joseph's Lily, Hardy Amaryllis, Johnson's Amaryllis, Bouquet Amaryllis

The stunning St. Joseph's Lily (*Hippeastrum x johnsonii*) that is so fondly associated with many Southern gardens originated as a chance cross between *Amaryllis* (*Hippeastrum*) *vittata* and *A. reginae* (both originally from South America). One of the first hybrid *Amaryllis*, it was perhaps unintentionally crossed by Arthur Johnson, a British watchmaker from Prescott in Lancashire between 1799 and 1810. First described and illustrated in 1816 by Pierre-Joseph Redoute, the plant was originally called *Amaryllis brasiliensis* and later referred to as *Amaryllis johnsonii* in 1831. The bulb could have been lost during the early days, but luckily Mr. Johnson shared his



Hippeastrum x johnsonii

new plants with the Liverpool Botanic Garden before his greenhouse was accidentally destroyed, along with everything inside. The plant made its way into cultivation in the US by the mid 1800s. And now after almost 200 years and few nursery offerings, the bulb is being propagated by Tony Avent using tissue culture and should be more readily available now.

St Joseph's Lily is a true passalong plant and garden heirloom, spreading from neighbor to neighbor or through family ties in the South. It is a plant that can often be found blooming in abandoned homesteads and older cemeteries. In *Perennial Garden Color*, Dr. Bill C. Welch calls them "living antiques because they are tangible symbols of success for generations of Southern gardeners. Many have been lovingly handed down among the families that contribute cultural diversity and richness to our gardens." Many call this bulb the finest *amaryllis* for Southern gardens.

This tough plant is one of the hardiest *amaryllis* and is hardy to zone 7 (maybe even zone 5 or 6 with heavy mulch protection). It requires little care and is a member of the "takes a licking and keeps on ticking-blooming plants". The ease that it returns to bloom each spring and multiplies (perennializing here) without much or any attention is one of the nicest attributes of this plant and makes it a great "first plant" for younger gardeners. It slowly spreads by bulb offsets without being invasive.

The leaves are thick masses of evergreen, semi-evergreen or deciduous (depending on the winter temperatures), strap-like foliage up to 30" long. In Central Texas, the leaves usually don't die back and stay evergreen. In the sun, the foliage has a coppery hue. Plant height is a dramatic 24" tall when



blooming. Some gardeners report this bulb is avoided by deer.

St. Joseph's lily blooms in late winter to early summer (usually March-April here), has a spicy fragrance and often has 5-6 blooms per stalk. The bright red tepals (undifferentiated petals and sepals) with white "stars" on the throat form large trumpet-shaped blooms. Some mature bulbs can have up to 4 stalks (~24 blooms) on one plant and many bloom for a month.

The plant has average water requirements during the year and will even go dormant in the summer if there is less water. To avoid rotting the bulb, do not overwater it. It is a good xeric plant that can survive hot, dry summers. Either irrigate this plant during the summer to keep the foliage healthy or let it go dormant. Tolerant of full sun to part shade. Soil pH is ideal when acidic to neutral (5.5-7.5) and well-drained is preferred. This bulb is more tolerant of heavy clay soils than other Amaryllis – but good drainage is needed in colder locations during the winter.



Like all amaryllis, St. Joseph's Lily can be grown indoors but it is a little more finicky than the modern types and doesn't bloom as well in a pot. The cut flowers can last a week or more in a vase.

The most popular type of propagation for gardeners is separation of the bulblets in the fall. They can be started from seed, but being a hybrid the offspring will probably be different than the mother plant. The plant rarely sets seed. Sow seed as soon as it is ripe. A wholesale tissue culture lab in Eustis, Florida called AG3 is now propagating this plant in greater quantities than previously done. At present it is rarely available in the nursery trade and can command \$18 for one very large bulb, but with tissue culture, there should be many more available at a reduced price.

It is believed that the common name St. Joseph's Lily is in reference to its blooming time which coincides in some areas with St. Joseph's Day on March 19th.

Anne Van Nest

Anne Marie Van Nest



In The Vegetable Garden

Cole crops, caterpillars and cold protection are the focus of the November vegetable garden.

Cole crops make up one of the largest vegetable families, something to take into consideration when you are laying out a plan for crop rotation. Crop rotation is one of the oldest cultural practices utilized by early civilizations, and for good reason - it helps to avoid a build-up of disease causing organisms and insect pests in the soil. Many pests and diseases attack plants from the same botanical families, and you help break the cycle when you remove their host by rotating plants from different families planting a vegetable from a different family. Arugula, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, collards, kale, kohlrabi, turnips, mustard, radish and cabbage all belong to the Brassica family, and if possible, you should avoid planting any of these crops in the same location year after year.



The Edible Estates Garden

Cool season crops from other plant families include carrots, fennel, parsley, cilantro and dill from the Umbelliferae family, lettuce from the Composite family, beets, spinach and Swiss chard from the Goosefoot family and sugar snap or English peas from the Legume family. Try to plan your garden so that you do not plant vegetables from the same family in the same spot for at least 3 years. If you garden in a small space, try to rotate families within your garden plot and be sure to add ample amounts of compost every season.

If you are growing cole crops, you've probably found caterpillars by now. Covering crops with floating row cover and applying Bt are two helpful methods to control damage. But do not delay as the caterpillars, even the ones you can hardly see, can do serious damage in a short time.

Our first frost usually comes in mid-November, but it is often followed by lovely, cool and comfortable days for our plants. If you can protect your crops through that first cold snap, often you can get a few more weeks of steady growth and production from



your garden. Depending on the size and location of your plants they can be protected with row cover, sheets, plastic or even large boxes.

A 2-3" layer of mulch (leaves, dried grass clippings, compost, hay) around all of your plants will help protect their roots and gradually feed the soil as it decomposes. My favorite mulch to use is leaves, and I have been a 'leaf thief' for many years. Most of the time the bags I collect around town contain nothing but leaves, dirt and twigs, but a few weeks ago I came across the most memorable and unusual find in all my years of leaf thievery.

I was preparing for the planting of the Edible Estates vegetable garden, and had been collecting leaves from around town so we would have enough for mulching all the vegetables. The day of the planting we were dumping leaves from the bags into small baskets so the kids could carry a basket and spread the mulch. As we poured the leaves into one of the baskets a peacock feather came flying out. One of the girls, Maggie, was smitten by it and asked her mom if she could keep it. Her mom wondered where in the world I collected bags of leaves that would contain a peacock feather. I had no idea - we were all surprised by it.



After we had finished for the day the girl was showing off her peacock feather and Elias Guerrero, a student from the current class who had been helping that day, noticed it and asked if I ever collected leaves from the Enfield area. As it turns out Elias is one of the groundskeepers at an estate near Windsor and Harris, and they have a peacock. I had never met Elias before, but when he described the property, I knew I had collected leaves from there earlier that week. Elias looked at the little girl with the feather and told her that it came from a peacock on the estate, a peacock named Paul. How's that for a small world coincidence?!

Thanks to the following Master Gardeners, interns and students who helped with the planting of the Edible Estates vegetable garden: Suzanne Hurley, Hope Dyson, Mark Berthiaume, Marian Stasney, Johnny DeMyers, Elias Guerrero, Cher Groody, Tina Landers, Shwu-Jen Wu, Jennifer Lindley and Mona McMurray.

Here's to a bountiful harvest and a Happy Thanksgiving to all, including Longhorns and Aggies,
Patty Leander



The Greenhouse Bench

The Greenhouse Roof Raising was a success! Over the course of three days, a stalwart and determined team removed the shade cloth, unlocked and removed the old double poly and reinstalled two new layers of 6 mil polyethylene in the roof of the greenhouse. It was a big team effort that progressed very smoothly and resulted in a nice new roof that hopefully will last another 6-8 years. The old roof was well beyond its life expectancy – having been in use for 8 years. Huge thanks are extended to the many people who climbed ladders, pulled the massive 100x30 feet sheets up and over the support trusses, held ladders, cut down giant ragweed from around the greenhouse, worked upgrading irrigation systems, offered their valuable knowledge and much more.



Thanks to the following Master Gardeners, Interns, Spouses and Friends who worked at the greenhouse during the three day project: Marian Stasney, Don Freeman and Don Telge. The following worked at the greenhouse for two days: Mark Berthiaume and Cecelia Cennutes. The following worked on the Greenhouse roof raising project for one day: Molly Clark, Ron Ciani, Hope Dyson (and spouse), Holly Plotner, Ron Miller, Dennis (Stasney friend), Bill Hyland, John & Joyce Fox, Linda Graham, Blake Stasney and Anne Van Nest.

Anne Van Nest, Marian Stasney and Molly Clark



More 'Raising the Roof'...



Over The Back Fence

THE GARDEN WRITERS ASSOCIATION 2008 SYMPOSIUM

Reshaping the American Garden: The Effects of Demographic Trends and Urban Renewal on Gardening

Presented by Craig Humphries, Director, Consumer Insights, The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company and Mac Hachadourian, Curator of Glasshouse Collections, The New York Botanical Garden, at the Garden Writers Association 2008 Symposium.

Five Trends Growing Like Weeds

- A rise in the small-space gardening trend is expected due to factors such as the aging baby-boomer generation, the decline of residential outdoor space and a growing number of people moving to densely populated urban areas.
- By 2025, it is estimated that the percentage of people living in smaller homes will significantly increase, while the percentage of homeowners on large lots will decrease. Following the trends of downsizing and simplification, a gradual reinvention of the American garden is predicted as people look for ways to maximize their space and turn to container, outdoor terrace, balcony and windowsill gardens.
- Today's urban gardens are rooted in the Victory Gardens first planted to support the war efforts in Europe. But the trend has evolved into the reclamation of land such as roof tops, vacant lots, and on waterfronts; for horticulture is helping unite communities and increase the amount of green space in cities.
- Ethnically diverse neighborhoods use gardens as a way to stay connected to their heritage. Community and personal gardens often reflect the owner's culture through garden styles and plant choices using vegetable or fruits they are familiar with—such as figs or grapes grown by Italians or medicinal herbs planted by Chinese gardeners.

Independent garden centers and gardening-related organizations are responding to the growing trend of small-space gardeners in cities by opening urban garden centers and providing classes for urban small-space gardeners, such as those offered at The New York Botanical Garden.

Anne Van Nest



FREE SEMINAR: PREPARING FOR WINTER AND PLANTING SPRING BULBS

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

This November is a big month. It is an election month (not just for the Nation but for the Master Gardeners as well) and Thanksgiving! But, most importantly, it is time to plant! I plan on putting in a lot of bulbs this year. It is hard to find bulbs that will grow in shade but I did find a few and can't wait until Spring to see the first blooms of the season. I also picked up a couple of tiny Texas Palm saplings from TreeFolks. In addition to the bulbs and saplings I plan on planting a Smoke Tree. That will probably be it for my Fall planting. Unfortunately, I'm running out of room. Hope you are enjoying this marvelous weather. Happy Thanksgiving and Happy Planting!!!

Rebecca Matthews

Garden (Turkey) Trivia

- Turkeys are the only breed of poultry native to the Western Hemisphere.
- Turkeys have great hearing, but no external ears. They can also see in color, and have excellent visual acuity and a wide field of vision (about 270 degrees), which makes sneaking up on them difficult. However, turkeys have a poor sense of smell (what's cooking?), but an excellent sense of taste.
- Domesticated turkeys cannot fly. Wild turkeys, however, can fly for short distances at speeds up to 55 miles per hour. They can also reach speeds of 25 miles per hour on the ground.
- Turkeys sometimes spend the night in trees.
- Turkeys can have heart attacks: turkeys in fields near the Air Force test areas over which the sound barrier was broken were known to drop dead from the shock of passing jets.

In Closing

The purpose of life is a life of purpose.

— Robert Byrne

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