

The Compost Bin

August 2015

A Publication of the Travis County Master Gardeners
a volunteer program of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

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In the Vegetable Garden

Stink Bugs

Meet the Master Gardeners

Weeds and Reads

IAGT Shady Natives



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Cover Photo: A backyard summer bouquet: 'Zowie' zinnias, 'Strawberry Fields' gomphrena and wax myrtle.
By Bruce Leander

Right: Ten year old 'Celeste' fig tree having its best year yet.
By Bruce Leander



August Meeting - Scott Ayers, LCRA

Get the Facts About the Central Texas: Did the Spring Rains End the Drought?

Hear directly from the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) about the most recent drought experienced in Central Texas, which was the most severe in the region's history. The discussion will include a look at:

- The recent rainfall's impact on the Highland Lakes.
- The Highland Lakes and how LCRA manages them through both droughts and floods in Central Texas.
- What LCRA is doing to preserve and expand the region's water supply.
- Simple ways everyone can help conserve water.

Scott Ayers is a senior communications specialist at LCRA, where he writes and edits materials for internal and external communication. Scott joined LCRA in spring of 2013. He was previously a marketing project manager for SPIE, a nonprofit scientific organization. He worked 19 years as a reporter and editor at The Bellingham Herald in Bellingham, Washington. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree

in journalism, with a minor in economics, from Western Washington University. His son is a senior at Washington State University.

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, Aug 5, 2015, starting at 7 pm
Zilker Botanical Garden

**Master Gardener meetings are open to certified
Master Gardeners and trainees only.**

In the Vegetable Garden

by Patty Leander



Allow cowpeas and butter beans to dry on the vine, then shell and save for winter eating.

Don't tell the kids, but summer is almost over. August will fly by, and in no time the fall gardening season will be staring us square in the face. Are you ready? No more lazing around and telling yourself it is too hot outside. This is the month to be earnest about your preparations for a fall vegetable garden, especially if you want to grow frost sensitive crops that will need to be harvested before cold weather arrives. Green beans, cucumbers and squash germinate quickly in warm soil, and take about 60 days to start producing (maybe a little longer as the days get shorter). So if you plant them in mid-August they should start producing in mid-October, and you'll be able to harvest and enjoy right up to the first frost.

As plants sprout and grow, it's important to protect them during the early stages of growth from sizzling sunshine and afternoon heat. Suspend row cover or burlap over the row, or use some type of shade structure to protect young, tender plants.

Fig trees have really responded to the earlier rains, and seem to be showing their gratitude with lots

and lots of sweet, luscious fruit. Hope you have a fig tree or know someone who does – or plant one this fall and you'll be harvesting oodles of figs in a just a few short years.

This is a good time to take note of ornamental plants that are blooming around town, and consider adding them to your landscape for summer color next year: Lantana, of course, Pride of Barbados, esperanza, *Gomphrena*, zinnias, *Plumbago*, turk's cap and Russian sage are just a few that stand up to a Texas-style summer. Four o'clocks have a thick taproot that helps them tolerate dry conditions; they stay green and bloom almost all summer without supplemental water, especially if they are in filtered shade. They can be very aggressive about spreading, but if they get out of hand I cut them back and add the green leaves and stems to my compost pile; they don't seem to mind.



Ten year old 'Celeste' fig tree having its best year yet.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...

Here is the vegetable gardener's checklist for August:

- Plant seed of bush beans, cucumbers, summer squash or zucchini; look for varieties that mature in less than 60 days.
- Protect young, tender plants from sizzling afternoon sun.
- Keep vegetable transplants growing strong; maintain even soil moisture, and water with a half strength soluble fertilizer once a week.
- Pull or hoe weeds around the vegetable garden – they compete with young plants for water and nutrients.
- Use dried grass clippings and leaves for mulch or add them to the compost pile.
- Remove any spent or diseased plants in preparation for fall planting.
- Cover the garden with a layer of mulch to protect the soil, inhibit weed germination and conserve moisture.
- Let cowpeas and butter beans dry completely on the vine, then harvest, shell and store for winter consumption.
- If you are storing onions, potatoes or winter squash, inspect occasionally for signs of decay, and discard any rotting specimens.



Heat-tolerant four o'clocks, also known as Marvel of Peru, bloom in the late afternoon and evening.



A piece of bamboo fencing protects young cucumber plants from hot afternoon sun.

Stink Bugs

by Wizzie Brown



Various stink bugs can be found on landscape plants, but they are similar in the way they look, and damage caused. Commonly seen stink bugs in Central Texas can be brown, green, mottled grey and black, or sometimes red and black.

Stink bugs are shield-shaped with adults having a triangle on their back. Adults have fully developed wings and are capable of flying. The wings are hardened at the base and membranous at the tip. Nymphs, or immature stink bugs, do not have fully developed wings. They may appear to have a different color than the adults, but often this is because the wings cover the body color in the adult stage.

Stink bugs have piercing-sucking mouthparts that they use to puncture plant tissue and suck out plant juices. Damage on foliage can appear as yellowing or curling, and may stunt plant growth. On fruit, damage will appear as pinprick spots surrounded by a discolored area. Stink bugs can also carry pathogens on their mouthparts that can cause fruit to decay after it is punctured. Stink bugs cause damage in both the adult and immature stages.

To avoid stink bugs, reduce the amount of weeds in landscape areas. There are predators and parasites that attack stink bugs in all life stages. Try to use management practices that help to conserve beneficials. Depending on the number of stink bugs, hand picking may be an option. Use gloves, and do it early in the morning before the stink bugs get moving. Remove stink bugs from the plants and put into a bucket of soapy water. Vacuuming may be another non-chemical option. Try to choose a vacuum that is powerful enough to suck up the bugs, but not so powerful that it will cause damage to the plants.

Stink bugs are usually easier to manage when they are immature, or nymphs, due to the fact that they are smaller and do not have fully developed wings which would allow them to fly away from the treated area. For less toxic solutions, you can try insecticidal soaps or botanical products with active ingredients such as pyrethrins or azadirachtin. Synthetic active ingredients include bifenthrin or permethrin.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600.

Meet the Master Gardeners: Gregory Thomas, Class of 2010

by Jean Love El Harim



Got pie? photo credit: Phoebe Thomas

Although he was born in Los Alamos, New Mexico, Gregory's family moved to the Austin area in 1964 when he was 4 years old, and except for the few years he was in Philadelphia, he has lived here ever since. "We lived in the sticks," he says. "We had to drive five miles to go to the nearest grocery store in Austin, and there was nothing in between. Now it is completely built up. The city has really changed."

Gregory's interest in gardening, landscaping, and design began when he was very young. "When I was five years old," he says, "we moved to a house that was on a couple of acres of raw land, and we needed to landscape it. We would gather rocks from the lot and build retaining walls, fill them with soil and plant trees and plants. My dad was a back-to-earth kind of guy, and he wanted to raise his own vegetables and fruit. He grew everything - landscape plants, vegetables, roses, bulbs, native trees, and lawns. I was steeped in gardening and landscaping because of that. My dad was my introduction into all things gardening. Even when I was in college I was always growing something in the windows. I've never not been gardening."

As a student at U.T. Austin, he earned dual degrees in architectural engineering and architecture. Later in life - in his early 30s, married and working - he went back to school part time for several years, and got a BFA in Visual Art Studies (Art Education). "I love teaching," he says, "but we decided that starting this late, it just wasn't going to pay enough. My art education has been a blessing. I love having had that training, and I'm so happy I did it. I always thought I was an artist inside, and that education proved it to me. So I decided, I'll be an architect and I'll make art. I've been exploring all the corners of my brain for a long time. I'm taking a workshop in landscape painting now. I'd love to become a better landscape painter."

As an architect, Gregory loves creating buildings that are "put together with expressive structure," he says, "that are tied to the land, where the inside and the outside are blurred."

When asked about his unique talents, Gregory answers, "My super power, if I have one, is to be able to visualize things. Three-dimensional thinking. That's what makes me a natural architect. As an architect, I get to bring what I visualize into physical being. It is so cool to conceive something and then have it built and be able to walk through it. People live in it, and they thank you for creating it. It's a real head trip. It's powerful and fun to be able to do that over and over again."

When his friend Jill Nokes asked him to do some landscape design with her, Gregory began to apply his architectural skills to the garden. "A landscape design is similar to an architectural design in many ways," he explains. "It's all about making places. I had done plenty of thinking about how you define and make a place with what tools you have in your toolkit. With garden design it's much the same as architecture - you have edges and movement, focal points and scale. All the same architectural principles apply to landscape, but it's different in that you are using plants or stone, outside. Jill paid me in plants," he continues. "We had a new house and wanted native

Meet the Master Gardeners

Continued...

plants for that landscape. That was the perk for me to go into garden design!”

And word of Gregory’s talent spread. “Someone asked me to design a Texas Teahouse. I told him I could do that, but would have to design the garden surrounding it too, so that it sat properly on the land. I perched the tea house on the edge of the garden and a drop off to a creek, added fountains and pathways cascading down the hill, and organized the garden beds. It was built, and it started getting attention immediately. Linda Lehmusvirta put that garden on her show (Central Texas Gardener) and interviewed me, and that got me out there as a designer of the landscape. They have filmed four of my landscape designs, and once had me on as a studio guest. I got to show more design work and talk about garden design. I don’t always know Latin names of plants, but I know the native and adapted palette really well. Since then I became a Master Gardener.”

In addition to working full time as an architect, Gregory enjoys yoga and cooking, as well as gardening and Master Gardener activities. “We mostly cook vegetarian food,” he says. “For a long time I was making bunches of curries. And every year we try to have a tamalada at our house before Christmas. We misspell as a play on our name: Thomalada. We invite family and friends over and make tamales from scratch. For that, I stray from vegetarian cooking and make a green chile pork posole stew.”

A fun fact that Gregory shares is his passion for pie! “I’m doing a Year of Pie,” he elaborates, showing me his Instagram pictures (@gtarchitect) of pies he has made: paprika peach with a lattice crust, pistachio coconut cream, a bubbling hot skillet pluot pie, and a salted honey pie. “Once a week I make a pie from scratch. It started because I had been pining for a blackberry pie, so I made an apple blackberry pie with a lattice crust; I had never made a lattice crust before. It was so good! I took a picture of it, and then I took a picture of my daughter Phoebe eating it. And I thought, pie makes people happy. I need more pie in my life, and started this project to assure that happened. Since I’ve been married, I’ve almost always made pies for holidays. My family makes very traditional pies, and I wanted more variety, so I started rattling the cage. I made mocha pecan pie, a savory green chile apple pie with a cheddar crust, and a brown butter walnut pie.” Now he and a few friends have a club they call Pie Therapy. They will soon be having their first meeting at his home to share pie, wine, salad, and pie-making war stories in the garden.

Gregory lives in southwest Austin where he grows blooming plants, wildflowers, and low water plantings. “I like to think of flower gardening as fireworks,” he explains. “How do you keep that going all year long?” Along one street in a south-facing bed he calls his “heaven strip,” he has larkspur, Fire Wheels (*Delosperma*), button roses, prairie fleabane (*Erigeron modestus*), Spanish lavender, poppies, Texas Star (*Lindheimera texana*), winecup (*Callirhoe involucreta*) and bluebonnets, among others. In the front yard inside a stone wall, he has Thunderturf, and outside the wall along the street are roses, prairie fleabane, blackfoot daisies, salvias, succulents, Russian sage, *Verbena*, feathergrass and native trees. “I think of gardening and landscaping in a suburban context as a way to both give pleasure to passersby and also to engage with them,” he says. “We water to get more flowers and to get the trees established, but other than that, we don’t really water much.” In the back yard there is a 22-foot circle of lawn surrounded by planting beds for vegetables and herbs, with flowers and trees everywhere else. Plants include Wendy’s Wish salvias, majestic sage and *Datura*. “I specialize in plants that thrive on neglect!” Gregory replies when asked about his main gardening interest. His biggest gardening challenge, he says, has been “keeping things blooming all the time, getting shapes and textures to work like fireworks that are going off over time, for as long as possible. It’s like painting in time, in the calendar, knowing when the fireworks are going to go off, being able to time that with your plants and seeds.” His favorite plant is the red poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*). “They flutter in the wind, they get backlit, and they are so delicate and beautiful,” he says. “Every spring we have a ‘poppy happening’ in our yard. But in one way they can be tough to grow,” he notes. “They seem to only germinate with rainfall. Even if you put out your seeds at the right time in the fall, from October to January there might not be a rain, and you don’t get your poppies.” Consequently, his gardening tip is to throw out your poppy seeds at Halloween and pray for rain.

Meet the Master Gardeners

Continued...

In addition to gardening, Gregory loves going on garden tours and looking at garden blogs. He would like to go on Garden Conservancy tours in other cities.

Gregory became a Master Gardener in 2011 because he wanted to give talks in garden education, and because he wanted to volunteer while he is still physically able to do it, not just after retirement. "I'm a member of the Speakers Bureau," he says, "and I give a talk on drought-resistant plants. I think that we have this looming crisis of water shortage in Austin. My main focus is to educate the public about that. Some people get it. A lot of people aren't even aware of the problem. At several of these talks I show Lake Travis over time. The last time it was as low as it is now was when I moved here in 1964. The lake goes up and down; rains come and go; we can all accept that. Then I show Austin's population curve, and that graph looks like this," he says, moving his hand to show a curve that starts low and then climbs almost vertically. "Then I show Austin area population projections. In twenty years, we are supposed to be at four or six million. It's crazy. There ain't no more water! As a city, we're not going to be landscaping in twenty years like we landscape today. We cannot continue to nurture unlimited lush lawns and water-guzzling plants. Some of my lectures are about what you can do besides have a lush landscape, how you can grow more responsibly or sustainably."

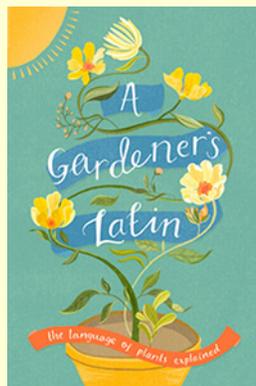
Gregory also enjoys doing Plant Clinics, working at the Master Gardener phone desk, and helping out at the MG greenhouse. "I am often too busy to do Plant Clinics," he says, "but when I can, I just love it. I like meeting and engaging with the public. You've got a willing audience who have stepped up to you to ask questions. With all our years of gardening experience, we often do have the answers to people's questions. Sometimes people just need encouragement to come on in, the water is fine. But when we don't have the answers there, we give them our card and tell them they can call in or email their question to the help desk. The biggest secret in Austin gardening is that if we don't have the answer, we crowd-source it among the Master Gardeners, and you might have four or five people helping with this one question. How amazing is that? The brain trust inside the Master Gardeners is huge." Gregory says he also likes the people and community at the greenhouse. What Gregory finds most rewarding is participating in the Master Gardener Association's mission of public education, and what he likes most is being a member of the gardening community. "I've never been part of a gardening community before," he says. "There are some awesome gardeners out there. Tommie Clayton? She is the most modest person, and it's crazy how much she knows and how generous she is in sharing that knowledge. Being able to rub elbows with people like Daphne, Patty, Sheryl--that is just wonderful!"

Weeds and Reads: A Gardener's Book Guide

by Liath Appleton

There's a lot of reading material out there, and new books are being published faster than anyone could ever possibly keep up! Hopefully these lists will help myself and others find fun and insightful new books to enjoy between the weeding and the watering.

August 2015:



A Gardener's Latin: The Language of Plants Explained - August 1st 2015

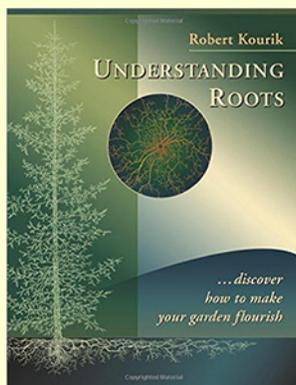
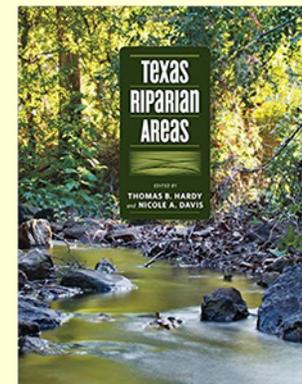
by Richard Bird

An exquisitely illustrated, lively exploration of Latin plant names explaining the meanings behind hundreds of names, from vulgaris ("common") to mirabilis ("extraordinary") [\[more\]](#)

Texas Riparian Areas - August 13, 2015 (first published April 30, 2015)

by Nicole A. Davis (Editor), Thomas B. Hardy (Editor), Mark Wentzel (Contributor), Jonathan Phillips (Contributor), John Jacob (Contributor), Jacquelyn Duke (Contributor), Stephan A. Nelle (Contributor)

Riparian areas—transitional zones between the aquatic environments of streams, rivers, and lakes and the terrestrial environments on and alongside their banks—are special places. They provide almost two hundred thousand miles of connections through which the waters of Texas flow. [\[more\]](#)



Understanding Roots: Discover How to Make Your Garden Flourish

Paperback – August 24, 2015

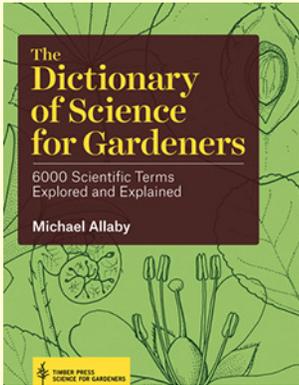
by Robert Kourik

Understanding Roots uncovers one of the greatest mysteries underground?the secret lives and magical workings of the roots that move and grow invisibly beneath our feet.

Roots, it seems, do more than just keep a plant from falling over: they gather water and nutrients, exude wondrous elixirs to create good soil, make friends with microbes and fungi, communicate with other roots, and adapt themselves to all manner of soils, winds, and climates, nourishing and sustaining our gardens, lawns, and woodlands. [\[more\]](#)

Weeds and Reads

Continued...

**The Dictionary of Science for Gardeners: 6000 Scientific Terms Explored and Explained -**
August 26, 2015

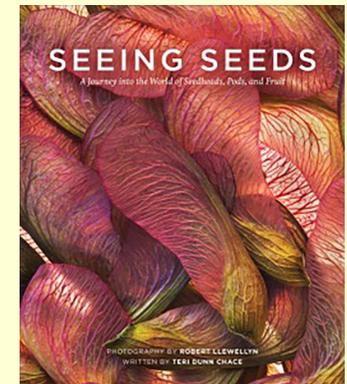
by Michael Allaby

This must-have reference will help you navigate the complex world of science. It defines more than 6,000 words from 16 branches of science that are of particular interest to gardeners, from abscission (a plant's rejection of an organ) to zoochory (the dispersal of seeds by animals). Hundreds of illustrations clarify key definitions and help explain abstract concepts. [\[more\]](#)

Seeing Seeds: A Journey into the World of Seedheads, Pods, and Fruit
- August 26, 2015

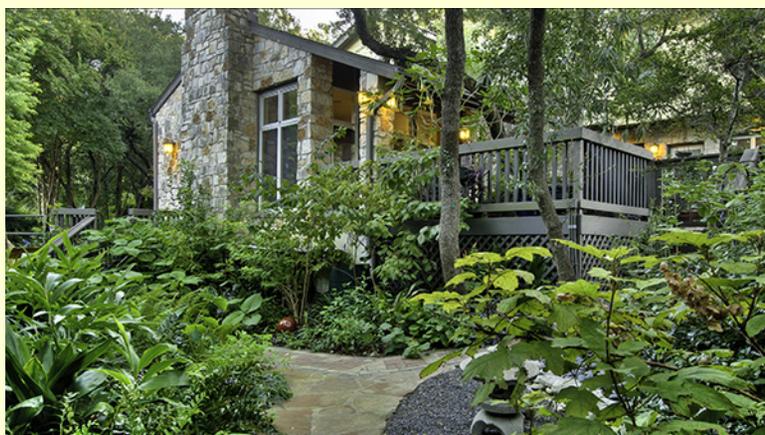
by Teri Dunn Chace, Robert Llewellyn

A centuries-old saying goes, "Great oaks from little acorns grow." But as Seeing Seeds reveals, there is much more to a seed than the plant it will someday become: seeds, seedheads, pods, and fruits have their own astounding beauty that rivals, and sometimes even surpasses, the beauty of flowers.

[\[more\]](#)

Announcements - Rosalie Russell

TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS SELECT SUE NAZAR'S "SHADY NATIVES!" FOR INSIDE AUSTIN GARDENS TOUR



Strolled through by many a friend, neighbor, Master Gardener and garden design client, the Nazar's garden, on a half-acre of a sloped Northwest Hills landscape, is lush with an array of garden spaces surrounding their meandering two-story home.

Sue, a Master Gardener and a Garden Designer, is an unapologetically enthusiastic plant collector who has, over years of working in nurseries and visiting a number of gardens within the Texas area and beyond, experimented with many plant combinations to analyze their response to weather, water and soil conditions.

When approaching the cul-de-sac, the street scape—better known as the Hell strip—contains an array of deer resistant, drought tolerant natives of all shapes and sizes. This Hell strip is a very sunny area, where deer graze in the shade of the neighbor's live oaks on their St Augustine lawn, so Sue has planted an

array of flowering natives such as Blackfoot Daisies, Santolina, Four Nerve Daisies, different varieties of Yucca, Salvia, assorted grasses and cacti, where contrasting colors and contrasting textures push "Texas-lush" to a new level.

Trees of all shapes and size abound in the front yard, which create challenges for planting a diverse sampling of native sedges and adapted shade tolerant ground covers. Sue has tucked in many species of partial-sun shrubs along their driveway, including several varieties of Mahonia, Japanese Maple, Mexican Buckeye, Texas Sotol, Viburnum, shrub Yews, Jerusalem Sages, Loropetalum, and the list goes on and on. Pots are used as focal points in their gardens, bringing color and bold interest throughout each planted area.

Native limestone terraces of garden beds line the bricked path on the side of their house, along the way to their backyard. These tree-covered terraced areas slow rain runoff on this steep slope. Sue has consistently composted the soil over the years in this area, allowing for a diverse planting of shade-tolerant (and somewhat thirsty) tropicals, such as butterfly and variegated gingers, Brugmansia, Crinum, and hardy (drought tolerant) perennials.



The bricked path of lush side yard plantings ends at a small Zen space which prepares the garden stroller to either choose left, to their

Announcements



multi-level deck and pool, or right, through a mortared limestone path to their lushly planted shady backyard.

As one enters the backyard, the multi-level deck and patio around the rock-lined pool is covered in large colorful plants expertly arranged in multiple colored pots in pleasing texture/color combinations. Here, Sue enjoys playing with plants around the pool that deer cannot browse – Earth-kind roses, pool-side palms, colorful Canna, a variety of ferns, along with a wide array of other flowering plants she has collected from her numerous visits to nurseries.

If you think this is everything in their yard, think again. Follow another mortared limestone path, passing under the trellis heavily laden with Purple Passion Vine, Confederate Star Jasmine, and Autumn Clematis. There is a tiny lawn which opens to a surprisingly pleasant vista to yet more beds of shady natives, with a garden shed popping with splashes of color. Look left and there is

a small raised bed for veggies and herbs.

Sue is unabashedly plant-obsessed, so she loves to try plants in different light, water and climate conditions to experiment with how hardy they are. She sometimes practices gardening on the edge, with less and less water, in a highly unpredictable Austin climate.



Austin Area Events

Backyard Basics – Backyard Chickens

Thursday August 6, 2015
10am - noon

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
1600-B Smith Road
Austin, TX

Are you ready for the fun and rewarding experience of keeping your own backyard chickens? Learn about the various breeds, caring for chicks, ideas to beat boredom, diets for delicious eggs and keeping the coop clean. Master Gardener Ally Stresing will help you get started with this informative talk on raising the home flock.

Ally is an accomplished vegetable gardener who decided that no backyard garden is complete without chickens.

Cost: \$10 thru 7/27, \$15 starting 7/28 and onsite,
NO cash accepted – checks and credit cards only.

Register: <https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/TravisCounty>

Register by Phone: 979-845-2604

Contact: Sue Carrasco, 512-854-9610 or
sacarrasco@ag.tamu.edu

Space is limited so register on-line early to reserve your seat!
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service – Backyard Basics Series

Photography in the Garden

Saturday August 8, 2015
10am - noon

Zilker Botanical Gardens
2220 Barton Springs Road
Austin, TX

Learn how to take plant pictures with impact –namely composition and lighting. This seminar will begin with an overview of cameras (film & digital), lenses and composition. Course prerequisites: study the owner’s manual on your camera.

Sam is a long time photographer and Master Gardener specializing in presentations on Beneficial Insects and Plant Photography. In 2009, he was selected as “Photographer of the Year” in the Travis County Master Gardener photo contest.

FREE admission with paid admission to Zilker Botanical Garden (\$2 adults, \$1 children & seniors, \$3 for non-Austin Residents)

For more information contact: Texas A&M AgriLife
Extension Service – Travis County, 512-854-9600

TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

2015 EXECUTIVE BOARD

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This issue of the Compost Bin has been published thanks to the contributions of the following Travis County Master Gardeners and Wizzie Brown — Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

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Liath Appleton

Assistant Editor:
Martha King

The Compost Bin Submissions

We are always looking for Travis County Master Gardeners who are interested in writing for our monthly newsletter, and we would love to see your articles, photographs, book reviews and gardening ideas.

General Guidelines

- Please first email the editor to discuss potential article ideas.
- Email contributions as attachments (preferably in Word with a .doc or .rtf suffix).
- Please send images as separate attachments (preferably .jpg suffix). Don't forget to include photographer acknowledgments and captions.

Send your submissions, announcements, questions and suggestions to: editor.compostbin@gmail.com



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www.tcmastergardeners.org
<http://travis-tx.tamu.edu>
512-854-9600

"August creates as she slumbers, replete and satisfied."
- Joseph Wood Krutch