

# The Compost Bin

November 2015

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

In this issue ...

In the Vegetable Garden

Tawny Crazy Ants

Meet the Master Gardeners

Color Your Burger!

Daphne's Horticulture Corner

## Inside this Issue....

- Meeting, Nov 4 ..... Page 2
- In the Vegetable Garden ..... Page 3
- Tawny Crazy Ants ..... Page 5
- Meet the Master Gardeners ..... Page 6
- Color Your Burger! ..... Page 8
- Horticulture Corner ..... Page 9
- Austin Area Events ..... Page 11
- 2015 TCMGA Board ..... Page 12
- Credits ..... Page 13

Cover Photo: The fall harvest is a rich tapestry of colors and flavors.  
By Bruce Leander

Right: By Liath Appleton



## November Meeting - Lara Schuman

This month's meeting will focus on trees, with Lara Schuman, the Program Manager for the Urban Forestry Program at the City of Austin's Parks and Recreation Department.

[www.austinurbanforestry.org](http://www.austinurbanforestry.org)

Master Gardener Meeting information:  
Wednesday, Nov 4, 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



The mild flavor of cauliflower couscous gets a boost from dates, almonds, turmeric and cilantro.

grate the cauliflower into soups, pasta dishes or casseroles – it's very versatile.

Here is the vegetable gardener's checklist for November:

- Check cole crops regularly for caterpillar damage and treat with products containing Bt or spinosad as needed. Regular applications may be needed to avoid serious damage; follow label instructions for application rate and frequency.

It's important to consider the "fall factor" when planning and planting in November. We can continue planting cool season vegetables this month but keep in mind that shorter days and cooler temperatures means that everything will take a little longer to mature.

Our first threat of freezing temperatures usually arrives in late November or early December. The first freeze of winter is often (but not always!) short in duration and followed by mild temperatures. If protected, tender plants, such as green beans, cucumbers or squash will survive a brief cold spell and will continue to produce as long as the weather cooperates. Cut row cover ahead of time, label it for different sized beds, if necessary, and store it in a bin or plastic garbage bag for quick and easy access.

Why not make room for your favorite winter squash at the Thanksgiving table this year? If you can't decide let me suggest you give Delicata a try. Sometimes called sweet potato squash, this ivory colored squash with green stripes has creamy orange flesh reminiscent of sweet potato. As the name implies, its delicate skin is edible and makes preparation a cinch, whether baking, stuffing or roasting. To roast, cut in half lengthwise and scoop out seeds. Cut into 1/2" slices (see photo), toss with olive oil, salt and pepper, and roast in a 425° oven for 25-30 minutes, turning once halfway through.

Have you tried cauliflower "couscous" yet? Nothing could be easier! Grate a head of cauliflower with a grater or a food processor, then sauté in butter or olive oil for a just few minutes. Add in your favorite seasonings, herbs, nuts, dried fruit or even cheese for a quick and savory side dish. Or



Roasted delicata squash – a tasty appetizer or tasty side dish for the Thanksgiving table.

## In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...



Top: Monitor brassicas for caterpillars and treat before damage gets out of hand.

Bottom: Stockpile leaves now to use for mulch throughout the winter.

Photos by Bruce Leander

- Watch for snail and pill bug damage around young plants; control with baits that contain iron phosphate.
- Plant spinach and other leafy greens from seed or transplants.
- Feed vegetables with fish emulsion or other water soluble fertilizer every 2-3 weeks.
- Stockpile your leaves (and your neighbor's leaves if they don't want them), and add them to your compost pile or use them as mulch over the winter. They will gradually break down and can be incorporated into the soil before the spring season.
- Pay attention to the forecast and be prepared for the first freeze: disconnect battery-operated irrigation timers, drain hoses, insulate exposed faucets and install and secure row cover over tender plants.
- Pull weeds throughout the winter and add them to the compost. They are a valuable source of green during the winter months.
- Plant cool-weather annual flowers and herbs among your vegetable beds for color and fragrance. These include alyssum, stock, calendulas, dianthus, snapdragons, dill, cilantro, oregano and chives.



## Tawny Crazy Ants

by Wizzie Brown



The Tawny crazy ant, formerly known as the Raspberry crazy ant, was originally found in Harris County in 2002. It is currently confirmed in 27 Texas counties.

Tawny crazy ants have a cyclical population level throughout the year with populations peaking in late summer, decreasing in the late fall, and then increasing again in the spring. Tawny crazy ants are capable of biting, but do NOT sting like fire ants. They are mostly nuisance pests, but can reach extraordinary population levels (in the millions) and can become a problem when getting into electrical equipment. Tawny crazy ants do not have nests or mounds like fire ants; they tend to nest under things - rocks, landscape timbers, flowerpots, etc.

For more information on this particular ant species go to <http://urbanentomology.tamu.edu/ants/raspberry.html>

### Treatment Options

- Removing harborage areas - fallen limbs, rocks, leaf litter, etc. These ants will nest under pretty much anything on the ground, so you may want to remove anything that is not necessary.
- Alter moisture conditions (crazy ants prefer moist, humid conditions): reduce watering, repair any leaks, improve drainage.
- Eliminate honeydew producers from the area. Crazy ants tend honeydew producers such as aphids, whiteflies, hoppers, mealybugs and scale insects.
- Use pesticide sprays to treat infested areas under rocks, along landscape edging, etc. Pesticide sprays can also be used to create a barrier around the outside of the home. Piles of dead ants may build up in treated areas, so they must be removed to keep the barrier maintained.
- Hire a pest management professional (PMP). PMPs have access to pesticides that are unavailable to homeowners, and they also have experience dealing with pest problems regularly.

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: Rodney Macias, Class of 2011

by Jean Love El Harim



Rodney Macias at Highclere Castle in Hampshire England, summer 2014

Born and raised in San Antonio, Rodney moved to Austin 32 years ago and has made Austin his home ever since. "In elementary school, we would come up to visit the capitol. I never thought I'd live in Austin, and now I can't imagine living anywhere else. It's a wonderful town. My wife Sarah was park manager at Zilker for 25 years, and for 11 years we lived in the Park in a small stone cottage that was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps back in the '30s. Currently we live out on 183 near Oak Knoll."

Rodney is now enjoying his time in retirement, doing what he likes to do. In addition to being a Master Gardener, Rodney is a Good Water Master Naturalist with Williamson County and is the Operations Chairman on his church council. "I'm busy with things that are important to me," he says. Rodney is also an avid golfer and a member of the Astronomical Society. "I am fascinated with the heavens and everything that's up above us," he says.

Before he retired, Rodney worked as a clinical assistant and particularly enjoyed one-on-one time with the children he was helping. "I'm a relational kind of fellow," he says. "I have always gravitated toward children, in Sunday school and having two of my own."

A quirky fun fact about Rodney is that during his 39 months in the military, he was a demolitions specialist. "I had big firecrackers that would blow things up and I found that fascinating. It was a blast! Of course, there wasn't a whole lot of application in the private sector that a demolitions specialist could make a

living at, but that was my job in the military."

Though Rodney's family was not into gardening when he was growing up, he got interested in gardening when he moved to Austin. "With all the CSAs that are available and all the farms that are around here, all the folks that grow their own food, it peaked my interest in trying vegetable gardening. Now we have three 4'x8' raised beds in our back yard, and we are in our fourth growing season. I've had great success. It's so easy. I like going out to the garden and picking tomatoes and making a salad with the lettuce. We've got kale, collards, broccoli, carrots, and spinach in the garden right now. We go to farmers' markets more now. It's nice to know where my food comes from, and that's what you get when you grow your own food or meet the farmer who grew the vegetables that you are going to eat. When you garden, you know the work that's involved in tilling and caring for the plant. I like that. I like to grow what I eat."

He especially likes all plants that attract wildlife. "Our backyard is a certified wildlife habitat. We have a water feature and low bushes. One year we had a ton of passion vine. The Gulf Fritillaries would strip that vine, and then there would be chrysalises all along the eave of the house. Then there would be butterflies all over the back yard. That was wonderful."

Rodney's gardening tip is to never give up. "Not everybody has a green thumb," he says, "but that shouldn't prevent you from getting out in the garden and trying new things."

## Meet the Master Gardeners

Continued...

Rodney is also organizing the Third Day Community Garden, which is on the grounds of the Sanctuary on Exposition. "The Third Day Community Garden is a joint effort between three congregations," he explains, "the Sanctuary, the University Baptist Church, and Journey Imperfect Faith Community. We are going into our second season now. There are 16 beds and we have plans to put in 16 more. We are on city water, and we are hoping at some point to get our own meter. We just have to come up with the money. I know that there is interest for people to grow their own food, and the people who have beds here now enjoy working together in the garden and having family time. We are on private land, so we don't get the benefits from the city that community gardens on city land receive. We are raising our own money. The biggest challenge is that interest has waned, and we are trying to rethink how we get the word out and get the neighborhood more involved."

Rodney and Sarah have a dream of one day owning their own acreage to create a retreat. "My wife is currently in the Austin Presbyterian Seminary and will graduate in May. We have always had a dream of buying some land and having a retreat center with some animals out in the country, growing food, having cooking classes - a place for people to go to get away. With Sarah's theological background, we would offer a spiritual connection to the land, to creation, and talk about our role as stewards of creation. That would be a lovely thing to create for other people."

When asked what got him interested in becoming a Master Gardener, Rodney replies: "Retirement. I had time," he continues. "I was interested in learning more about plants, wanting to start gardening on my own, gathering more knowledge, wanting to educate others and give back to the community."

A Master Gardener since 2012, Rodney helps at the phone desk. "I enjoy helping people answer their questions about gardening," he says. "And I like the research that's involved. It's a learning experience as well as helping the community. People are grateful for the help that the Master Gardeners and the county agents give. There's so much more that we can do as individuals to help others, and the Master Gardener program is just another way to reach out to people in the community who want to grow things."

Rodney's unique superpower, he says, is "getting kids excited about nature, trying to re-instill the sense of wonder in creation, whether here on earth or up in the heavens. That's the niche I tend to gravitate toward with the Master Gardener program, the education aspect. When I participated in the "Eat a Rainbow" activity at Crowe's Nest Farm, it was amazing to me that some of the kids didn't even know what the fruit and vegetables were. I think we need to get our young people re-engaged with the outdoors. They seem to spend so much time in front of a screen, or their time is so programmed and compartmentalized. I wish I could get the kids out of the house to be outside and play, get their hands in the dirt, plant food and see it grow, know that their food comes from the ground, and foster the sense of wonder in all of that. I wish for the days when we can slow down and make eating a spiritual thing. I think that's important."

Considering the Master Gardener program, Rodney comments that "Daphne is a wonderful agent. She's very helpful. There are a lot of Master Gardeners," he continues, "and the people in leadership roles are very committed. What I have found most rewarding about the Master Gardener program is the monthly meetings, the topics, and meeting and networking with other Master Gardeners."

## Color Your Burger!

by Mary Allaway

Imagine your favorite burger. What kind of fruits and vegetables are on it? What parts of the plant do they come from? That's what Master Gardeners taught to 275 third and fourth graders from Title 1 Schools in AISD and Del Valley. The activity was about encouraging the students to eat a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables to make their bodies healthy.

When envisioning a colorful burger, beef, turkey and vegetable patties were all mentioned as possibilities. The kids also discovered how everything we eat starts with plants, from the wheat (on the bun) to the meat (cows eat plants!) and even the amazing veggie burger (based on beans, rice and vegetables). After the presentation the children played a bean bag toss game to help reinforce fruit and vegetable identification and eating a balanced diet based on the [choosemyplate.gov](http://choosemyplate.gov) guidelines. Quite a few of the kids were future ball player all stars. A great time was had by all!

At other stations the children learned about exercise, bee pollination and how much sugar is in various drinks. This all took place at the Science of Agriculture Day organized by the Travis County 4-H Agent and held at the Travis County Expo Center in east Austin at the end of September.



Left: JaNet Booher, Intern Wendy Linehan.



Right: Lynne Williams, Carolyn Turman, Janet Newton.

Photos: Mikala McFerren

## Horticulture Corner

by Daphne Richards



Travis County Horticulture Extension Agent, Daphne Richards answers your questions, and keeps you up-to-date on gardening in Central Texas.

**Garden mushrooms and dogs - should you remove the mushrooms?** In cool weather rains, mushrooms pop up everywhere. And though your initial reaction might be terror, most fungi are actually beneficial and a sign of healthy soil. Are they harmful? I consulted Dr. T.J. Palvino at Austin Vet Hospital for the answer. He reports that many are poisonous to dogs, as they are for us. Since most of us are not experts about mushrooms, he recommends removing them if your dog is inclined to eat them. He also notes that compost piles are very dangerous to dogs. Neurotoxins from bacteria and fungi in decomposing matter, which are good for the compost pile, can result in seizures in dogs if they scavenge it. So, if your dog wants to forage, restrict or cover your compost pile and remove the mushrooms. And the good news from Dr. Kevin Ong at Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's plant diseases diagnostic lab (<http://plantclinic.tamu.edu/>) is that pulling up the mushrooms won't destroy the mycelial network in the soil.

**When is the best time to plant a tree?** Of course we've timed our answer to this question to the absolute perfect season for planting trees, autumn. With shorter day lengths, cooler temperatures and maybe even a little rainfall, autumn has everything that a tree needs to keep transplant stress to a minimum. Most of the trees that we plant in Central Texas are

deciduous, so they'll soon be dropping all their leaves and going dormant to avoid the damaging cold of winter. During the winter, with no growth happening above ground, trees are free to focus their resources below ground, on their roots. If planted in the fall, trees have almost half a year to establish their root systems before the temperatures get unbearably hot and they start to need more water to survive. In order to take up water, plants must release water into the environment through a process called transpiration. During the heat of summer, the air is so hot and dry that it practically sucks the water right out of leaves. It takes a lot of water to support a canopy full of leaves, and if there isn't enough water, which is a pretty stressful situation, a good strategy is to drop those leaves and go to "sleep" until the stress passes. So if you've ever planted a tree during the spring, especially in the late spring or if summer has arrived early, you may have noticed that your tree immediately dropped all of its leaves and struggled to survive all summer long. But I bet once the temperatures began to drop and the sun became less intense a few months later, new leaves appeared and the tree took advantage of the short autumn window to get just a little bit of growth under its belt before winter and its true dormant season arrived. The lower temperature and higher relative humidity of fall help to keep trees better hydrated. So planting during autumn gives trees more time to acclimate to their new environment, your yard, and get established.

For more information on planting trees, see the Texas A&M Forest Service "Texas Tree Planting Guide" at <http://texastreeplanting.tamu.edu/TreePlantingTools.html>

## Horticulture Corner

Continued...

### To-Do This Month

- **FERTILIZE:** Fertilize strawberry beds with a 3-1-2 ratio fertilizer. Keep soil moist to promote good plant vigor and berry production next spring.
- **WATER:** Water everything well before a freeze, but avoid overwatering.
- **TRANSPLANT:** Divide and replant crowded perennials throughout the winter months. Transplant chives, garlic and multiplying onions. Now is the best time to move woody ornamentals. Prepare the new site before transplanting.
- **PREPARE SOIL:** Have landscape and garden soils tested now to determine soil balancing needs. Forms are available at the Extension Office, 1600-B Smith Road, Austin, TX, 78721 or call 512-854-9600. Check winter mulch and replenish if needed. Stockpile leaves for mulch and composting throughout spring and summer.
- **LAWN CARE:** A mulching mower makes raking leaves obsolete. Use shredded leaves and grass clippings as a mulch or put into the compost bin.
- **DISEASES/PESTS TO LOOK FOR:** Watch roots of removed annuals for nematodes (knots on the roots). Check houseplants for spider mites, scale and mealy bugs.
- **PRUNE:** After blooming, chrysanthemums should be cut back almost to the ground. Prune long, gangly shoots on shrubs. Remove dead and damaged wood from shrubs and trees.

For more information or help with your horticultural questions, go to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension's Central Texas Horticulture website at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/travis/> or call the Travis County Extension Office at 512.854.9600.

## Austin Area Events

### **Backyard Basics – Bold and Beautiful Edibles**

Saturday November 7, 2015

10am - noon

Zilker Botanical Gardens  
2220 Barton Springs Road  
Austin, TX

Come join us to learn about edible plants with ornamental potential for Central Texas landscapes. We're talking artichokes, asparagus, rhubarb, strawberries, herbs and more. Some are perennials, some are annuals, but all will beautify your landscape and satisfy your appetite.

Master Gardener Patty Leander is a writer for Texas Gardener magazine and grows vegetables year round in her Oak Hill garden.

Part of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service – Backyard Basics series.

Cost: \$10 thru 11/02, \$15 starting 11/03 and onsite, NO cash accepted – checks and credit cards only.

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

Register by Phone: 979-845-2604

## TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

### 2015 EXECUTIVE BOARD

---

Joe Posern, President

Jackie Johnson, Immediate Past President

Denise Harrelson, Vice-President for Programs

Sue King, Vice-President for Education

Rosalie Russell, Volunteer Coordinator for Projects

Mikala McFerren, Volunteer Coordinator for Trainees

Tina Landers, Secretary

Tina Landers, Interim Treasurer

Toi Powell, Membership Director

Pat Mokry, Greenhouse Manager

Sally Dickson, Austin Area Garden Council Representative

Tommie Clayton, State Council Representative

Susan Jung, State Council Representative

#### **Past Presidents (Non-voting):**

Bill Baldwin

Bill Boytim

Susan Cashin

Tommie Clayton

Susan Decker

Don Freeman

Manda Rash

Peggy Stewart

Becky Waak

Will Walker

Carolyn Williams

#### **Ex Officio Member of the Board (Non-voting):**

Texas AgriLife Extension Travis County  
Horticulture Agent: Daphne Richards  
1600-B Smith Road, Austin, Texas 78721  
512-854-9600 drichards@ag.tamu.edu

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

**Photographers:**  
Bruce Leander

**Contributing Writers:**  
Mary Allway  
Wizzie Brown  
Patty Leander  
Jean Love El Harim  
Daphne Richards  
Rosalie Russell

**Editor and Layout:**  
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](mailto:editor.compostbin@gmail.com)



© 2015 Travis County Master Gardeners Association  
[www.tcmastergardeners.org](http://www.tcmastergardeners.org)  
<http://travis-tx.tamu.edu>  
512-854-9600

"Delicious autumn! My very soul is wedded to it, and if I were a bird I would fly about the earth seeking the successive autumns." - George Eliot