

The Compost Bin

December 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

Scorpions

Meet the Master Gardeners

IAGT 2015

Weeds and Reads



Inside this Issue....

- Meeting, Nov 4 Page 2
- In the Vegetable Garden Page 3
- Scorpions Page 5
- Meet the Master Gardeners Page 6
- IAGT 2015 Page 9
- Weeds and Reads Page 11
- Austin Area Events Page 13
- 2015 TCMGA Board Page 14
- Credits Page 15

Cover Photo: Lake
Georgetown.
Photo: Liath Appleton

Right: Autumn Iris.
Photo: Liath Appleton



December Meeting - Holiday Party

Happy Holidays! Come join the fun at the TCMGA Holiday and Recognition Party! It's a great opportunity to see old friends, eat great food, cheer for award winners, congratulate the new Board members, and introduce yourself to an intern who just became a member! Please RSVP through the sign-up link sent to your inbox.

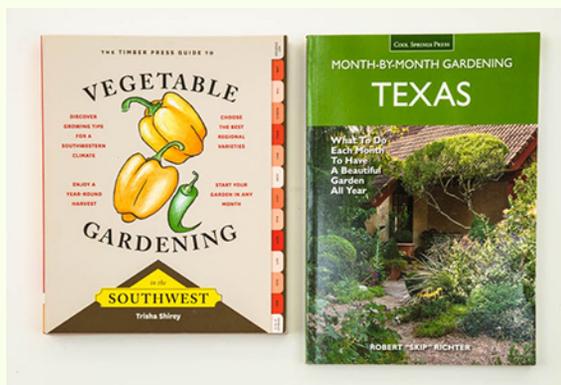
Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, Dec 2, 2015, starting at 7 pm
Zilker Botanical Garden

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

In the Vegetable Garden

by Patty Leander

With the arrival of the holiday season you may be thinking of a gift for the gardener in your life. Some of my favorite garden tools and supplies have come my way as thoughtful gifts from family and friends; below are a few ideas for giving or receiving:



In their recently published books, Texans and life-long gardeners Trisha Shirey and Skip Richter draw upon their years of garden experience and horticultural know-how to guide you through the seasons in Texas



A CobraHead weeder, Barnel B7 pruners and a moisture meter have been welcome gifts to my gardening toolbox.

Garden Related Books – new for this year Trisha Shirey's *Vegetable Gardening in the Southwest* and Skip Richter's *Gardening in Texas*, as well as my favorite reference, *The Vegetable Book*, by the late Dr. Sam Cotner. Full of wit and wisdom, this classic reference on vegetable gardening in Texas was first published in 1985 and was written by the former head of Horticultural Sciences at Texas A&M University.

Texas Tomato Cages – these well-made, 6 foot tall, folding tomato cages will last for years, made in Texas and available at www.tomatocage.com.

Large Dish Bin – available at the local restaurant supply store, these sturdy bins are great for mixing and storing potting soil, for transporting vegetable transplants from the nursery to the car or for carrying supplies to the garden.

Herb Disks – perfect for a miniature container herb garden, these 4 inch biodegradable disks are pre-seeded and ready to plant into a 6" pot, pots and disks available from Johnny's Seeds (www.johnnyseeds.com).

Gift Certificates – most local nurseries and mail order catalogs offer gift cards or certificates.

Garden Tools from Barnel – I love these lightweight, double lock pruners my husband gave me last year, manufactured in the USA by Barnel (<http://www.amazon.com/Barnel-B7-7-Inch-Lightweight-Bypass/dp/B001JJTSK4>).

CobraHead Weeder – a multi-tasking tool that can be used for weeding, loosening soil, digging a seed furrow, edging a row and more (<http://www.cobrahead.com/tools>).

Laminated Field Guides – foldout pamphlets offer quick and easy identification of snakes, birds, butterflies and more.



Texas Tomato Cages, made from 1/4" galvanized steel rod, are very sturdy and collapse flat for easy storage.

In the Vegetable Garden



White-stemmed chard, like this Fordhook Giant variety, is generally more cold hardy than the varieties with colored stems.

Here is the vegetable gardener's checklist for December:

- Plant small flats of broccoli, cauliflower, kale, mustard, collards and cabbage for transplanting in mid-January.
- Continue to feed vegetables with fish emulsion or other water soluble fertilizer every 2-3 weeks.
- Check out the selection of potatoes at potatogarden.com or woodprairiefarm.com and place your order soon for seed potatoes.
- Plant the following cold-hardy vegetables now for greens all winter – escarole, radicchio, collards, kale (try Winterbor, White Russian or Red Russian), Swiss chard (Fordhook, Rhubarb and Golden varieties are especially hardy) and turnip greens (Seven Top or All Top).
- Cover any fallow vegetable beds with a heavy layer of mulch (hay, leaves or shredded bark) or seed with an enriching cover crop such as crimson clover, hairy vetch or cereal rye. Several weeks before spring planting cut the tops with a mower or string trimmer and incorporate into the soil.
- Clean out your garage or garden shed: repair, repurpose, recycle and chunk the junk.

Continued...



Cole crops seeded in early December will be ready for transplanting to the garden in 6-8 weeks.

Scorpions

by Wizzie Brown



Scorpions are arachnids with eight legs and two body regions. Scorpions also have two pincers or claws, called pedipalps, which help them hold their prey as they eat. They also have a long tail with a stinger on the tip that is used for defense or to paralyze prey.

The most common scorpion in Central Texas is the striped bark scorpion. This scorpion is yellowish-tan with two dark stripes that run along the back. Striped bark scorpions get up to 2 ½" in length.

Scorpions can be found under rocks, logs or landscaping material as well as in woodpiles or in homes. When working outside, leather gloves should be worn to avoid being stung.

Striped bark scorpions are capable of stinging, but only cause moderate reactions for most people. Ice packs can be placed on the sting area to reduce pain and swelling. A person stung by a scorpion should be watched closely for several hours following the incident to ensure that an allergic reaction does not manifest. If breathing difficulties or hives occur, seek immediate medical attention.

To help keep scorpions from moving into the home, try the following:

- Remove debris (including firewood) away from the home.
- Prune any trees or shrubs that touch or overhang the house.
- Replace weather stripping as needed around doors or windows.
- Stuff weepholes with copper mesh.
- Seal cracks & crevices and/ or pipe penetrations with sealant.
- Treat the foundation of the home with a pesticide labeled for outside use and scorpions.

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: Mark Berthiaume, Class of 2002

by Jean Love El Harim



Mark Berthiaume in ZBG
Photo: Martha King

Mark grew up on a farm in upstate New York, spending most of his time outdoors, he says, "running through corn fields, fishing, hunting, having as much fun as a boy could possibly have." He went into the military right out of high school and was stationed at Fort Hood where he also went to college, working all day and going to school at night. When he left the military in 1981, he went back to New York. "It was dead winter," he remembers, "miserable and cold. My car got stuck in the snow bank again and again. I thought, 'I have got to get out of here. Where is it warm?'" So I came back to Austin and I've been here ever since."

In Austin, Mark has pursued various careers. "I went back to school," he says, "and got a computer programming degree that I never used. I couldn't sit still for that long period of time to work on computers. I did some corporate jobs. I was a realtor for two years. I was a loan officer. I worked for a corporate moving company--that was a stressful job, but it paid good money. In 2001 I went to the Master Gardener program. After I got out of that, I made another career change and started my own landscape business. Playing in the dirt and playing with plants changed everything! Now I have a garden maintenance business where I provide professional residential landscape service."

"I like to take a landscape, reduce all of the grass, and make it as efficient, sustainable, and drought-tolerant as possible, using the right plants, decorative stone, and drip irrigation," Mark says, explaining his approach. "Once the

landscape is established, you could walk away from it, and everything takes care of itself. Trees take two years of constant watering to get the roots established. Most yuccas and cactus take about eight months to a year. Once the roots are established, the plant will take care of itself, basically. I like getting the best plant for the best location and making everything easy."

Mark especially likes plants that do well in Central Texas. In his landscape business, he likes to work with cactus and yuccas because they are so hardy and drought-tolerant. "I just love native plants more than anything else," he elaborates, "because that's the plant of the future. We are in extreme drought in Texas right now, and it's not going to stop. Water is precious, so what better to plant in your landscape than a drought-tolerant plant that's going to survive, and once it's established, you don't really have to water it anymore-- it can pretty much rely on rainwater. That's easy. You don't need grass. You can plant a hardy cactus, yuccas, and perennial grasses that are self-sufficient."

"Grass is so unnecessary," Mark continues on the topic of sustainable and efficient landscaping. "If you've got kids or pets, you need a little bit of grass, but other than that, you don't. It's a water hog. It requires fertilizer and care. You've got to cut it and edge it. I hate that. I've gone before HOA boards and we've re-written some of the rules. I did a house in Circle C. At first the HOA said no, but after we submitted the design plans, with the grass reduced by 50%, they approved it, we did it, and everybody loved it. Crushed granite, native plants,

Meet the Master Gardeners

Continued...

yuccas, some grass, low maintenance. It looks nice. It works. In Nevada and Southern California, people are forbidden to plant grass because there's no water. If we go to stage three watering schedule, people will be able to water once a month. We are still in a severe drought, and that's not going to change."

"Right now my favorite plant in the landscape is a 10-gallon barrel cactus," Mark says. "When you see 15 or 20 of them together, planted on a mound, with the big spines and yellow blossoms, the whole texture and uniformity of the plant, it's a show-stopper. It's not easy to find, and it's a slow-grower, but it is an easy plant to grow and maintain."

Though Mark has high praise for native and xeric plants, he is also interested in tropical plants "because they are so beautiful and showy," he says. "If you have ever been to Hawaii, being in a tropical rainforest just changes your whole attitude. Lush, lovely green, ferns and palms. You're in paradise; you can pick a pineapple or a coconut and eat it. Ferns are probably the oldest plant on earth. They've been around for a couple of million years. They've been around since the dinosaurs, but they survived."

Mark takes a moment to consider what might be his unique talent. "I'm always on time," he says. "If I say I'm going to do something, I do it. I try not to let people down, especially when I'm selling something, like myself. I give people more than they paid for. A plant, free soil, free mulch. People like that. I like to give a lot. I've learned that when you give, you receive, and there's a lot of gratitude over time. It makes me feel good."

Mark's gardening tip is right in line with his strong work ethic: "You can always multi-task while you're gardening," he advises. "While you're watering you can be weeding or doing other things. You can do four or five things while you're gardening and get a lot done. I do that a lot. I have a few hours and I have to do a day's work. At the end of the day, you're going to be more tired, but you can do it. Gardening can be exhausting, but it is fun and rewarding, good exercise."

Active at work, Mark is also active at play. "I enjoy biking," he says. "It's easy on your body. My body has been trashed from years of running in triathlons. I traveled around the world and around the United States as a competitive triathlete for 15 years." Mark also enjoys kayaking, yoga and hiking.

Though Mark currently lives in South Austin, he dreams of owning land in the Fredricksburg area.

Mark says his mom was a gardener and the person who first got him interested in gardening. "She's got a beautiful garden in her backyard. When we were growing up as kids, we had about 5 acres. My mom would always grow roses and different plants. When we were younger we had a 10-acre vegetable garden and grew a lot of corn, potatoes, and other vegetables that we would give away. Growing vegetables is non-stop, constant, daily work. It's the reward of eating your own food, but it's a lot of work."

Though he grew up in a gardening environment, Mark says that taking the Master Gardener class was a turning point in his life. "There are so many people that grow unbelievable vegetables in the Master Gardener program, and you're always asking them questions. How did you do that? How did your fruit trees get so big? Everything is about the soil. If you've got good soil, you're going to have good plants and good produce. When you give a plant the perfect growing conditions, it is happy and says 'Thank you' and it's going to get huge, like the okra in the Demonstration Garden. My passion and involvement with gardening took off after I got involved in the Master Gardener program."

Mark got interested in becoming a Master Gardener when he was doing volunteer work at Zilker Botanical Garden, helping design and build the fern beds. "I basically designed the fern bed by the cedar arbor, brought in all the boulders and 30 yards of soil, and planted everything. And we built another bed by the pond along the trail. This past year we added on another 30x50 feet, made a dry creek bed coming down the hill, brought in a lot of large native boulders, some tropical plants, shade plants, and ferns." He was working with Master

Meet the Master Gardeners

Continued...

Gardeners Don Freeman and Ron Miller and expresses his admiration. "They know so much about gardening!" he says. "And Don is over there swingin' the pickaxe, and you're saying, 'Take it easy, Don. Take it easy. Get some water. Let me do it.' Those guys are just amazing people."

Mark's favorite Master Gardener activity is working in the Demo Garden. "I love Rosalie. Joe is a great guy. It's fun to work there, have a great time, and get things done. There's always stuff to do. It's a garden. It doesn't end. It's alive." The social part of gardening is what Mark finds most rewarding about the Master Gardener program. "If you're working shoulder to shoulder with someone in the greenhouse, an intern, for example, and they are trying to learn something, you can help. And you can learn too. Being friendly and sociable. We're all going to get dirty, right? That's part of the deal. It doesn't matter. For the pot luck I helped park cars and clean up afterwards. Everybody working together makes everything happen, and it gets done really quick! There are a lot of good people in that organization, and it's fun. You never stop learning. That's what it's about."

Inside Austin Gardens Tour 2015

by Rosalie Russell

The Inside Austin Gardens Tour was wildly successful! Thanks to the 115 members and interns who contributed their time and talents over the past year. You made it happen! The tour achieved our organization's mission of providing horticulture education to the public...big time. TCMGA is proud to have you as a member. Thank you!

Please join us in expressing our gratitude to the garden owners: Gregory Thomas, Kirk Walden, Lois Pesz, Martha King, Pam Penick, and Sue Nazar. We reaped the benefit of their years of toiling in their gardens. This year they endured months with overly abundant rainfall until it switched to no rain at all. They made improvements which might have been on the drawing board for five years into the future! Plants died. Insects sucked and/or chewed the life right out of some plants. It was a stressful time. But on tour day, every garden was exquisite!

Credit goes to Lori Daul and Liath Appleton for creating the fabulous tour web site. Lori also crafted the T-shirt design.

Over a thousand people came and viewed one or more gardens! Here a few quotes taken from the exit survey.

"This is my second Inside Austin Garden Tour and they are phenomenal."

"Favorite tour in Austin. It is done by gardeners. More interesting than others."

"The owners and volunteers were very knowledgeable and willing to share."

"Very impressive variety, very workable solutions...maybe there's hope for me."

"My favorite part was how well marked the plants were."

Don't think there was a single negative comment on any survey! Basically they loved the gardens, loved your enthusiasm, loved learning, and loved the plant markers!

There were two huge surprises when we tallied up the numbers. The first surprise was the number of \$5 ticket sales soared! Was this the result of cross-over traffic by people who also attended the Nature Conservancy Open Day tour? Or was it the result of several gardens being in areas where we could tap into neighborhood list serves and newsletters? Or something else?

The second big surprise was the financial success of the tour! When you add the donations from sponsors, ticket sales, and deducted our expenses, the net was a little over \$16,000!



Lois Pesz garden - Fern Mizell and Rosalie Russell talking with visitors



Visitors at Kirk Walden's with Sheryl Williams

Inside Austin Gardens Tour

Continued...



Joe Posern talks to visitors in the shade of the pergola at Demo Garden

We appreciated your creativity and humor as you modified the tour T-shirts to fit. You expect to have a glitch or two, but who would have expected it to be skin tight T-shirts!!

2015 IAGT Committee

Wendy Buck, chairwoman
Carolyn Williams
Joe Posern
Kirk Walden
Lori Daul
Rosalie Russell
Sue King



Garden owner, Sue Nazar and garden captain Cheryl Harrison

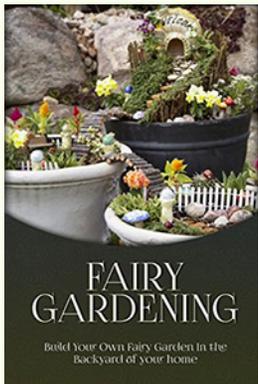
Photos by Wendy Buck

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.

December 2015:



Fairy Gardening for Beginners: Build Your Own Fairy Garden in the Backyard of Your Home (Fairy gardening, miniature gardening Book 1) - November 11, 2015

by Carmel Maher

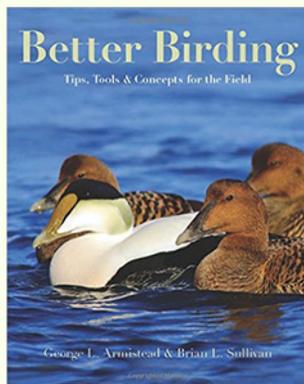
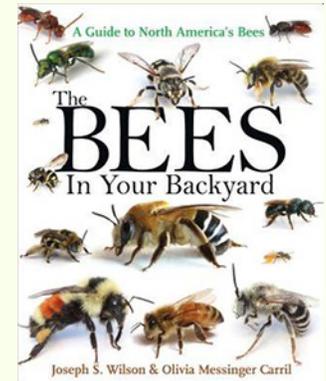
Fairy gardening is something that has been around for a while, but it isn't until recently that people have rediscovered the joys of the miniature gardens. [\[more\]](#)

The Bees in Your Backyard: A Guide to North America's Bees - November 24, 2015

by Joseph Wilson, Olivia Messinger Carril

"The Bees in Your Backyard" provides an engaging introduction to the roughly 4,000 different bee species found in the United States and Canada, dispelling common myths about bees while offering essential tips for telling them apart

in the field. [\[more\]](#)



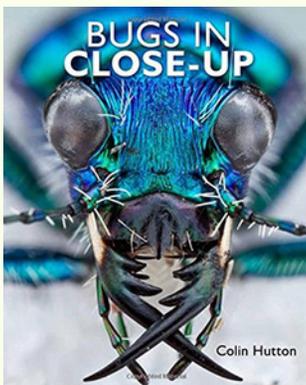
Better Birding: Tips, Tools, and Concepts for the Field - November 24, 2015

by George L. Armistead, Brian L. Sullivan

"Better Birding" reveals the techniques expert birders use to identify a wide array of bird species in the field--quickly and easily. Featuring hundreds of stunning photos and composite plates throughout, this book simplifies identification by organizing the birds you see into groupings and offering strategies specifically tailored to each group. [\[more\]](#)

Weeds and Reads

Continued...

**Bugs in Close-Up** - December 1, 2015

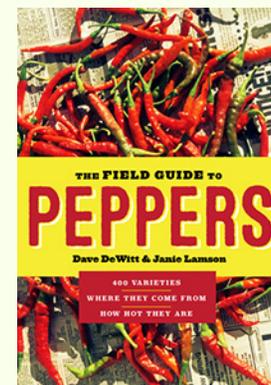
by Colin Hutton

Macro photography brings the world of bugs to life! The extreme photographic close-ups illustrate a hidden fauna of alien-looking critters from around the world. [\[more\]](#)

The Field Guide to Peppers - December 1, 2015

by Dave DeWitt, Janie Lamson

In this fiery guide, Dave DeWitt and Janie Lamson help you identify hundreds of the most popular chile pepper varieties. The 400 profiles include all the major types of peppers and are packed with information on culinary use, interesting facts, and chile nomenclature. [\[more\]](#)

**Flower Addict** - December 1, 2015

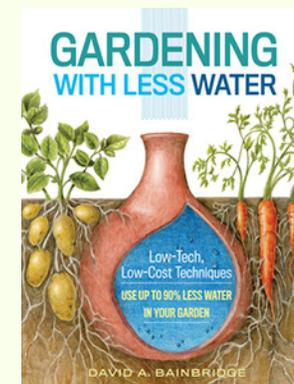
by Saskia Havekes

Immerse yourself in florist Saskia Havekes' mind-numbingly beautiful world of flowers. Grandiflora, the highly acclaimed business she started 20 years ago, is known as much for its large-scale events with cascading flowers and extravagant arrangements as for its exquisite, intimate bouquets of petal-perfect blooms [\[more\]](#)

Gardening with Less Water: Low-Tech, Low-Cost Techniques; Use up to 90% Less Water in Your Garden - December 29, 2015

by David Bainbridge

Are you facing drought or water shortages? Gardening with Less Water offers simple, inexpensive, low-tech techniques for watering your garden much more efficiently -- using up to 90% less water for the same results. [\[more\]](#)



Austin Area Events

Santa In The Garden

Saturday December 5, 2015
10am - 3pm

Zilker Botanical Gardens
2220 Barton Springs Road
Austin, TX

Please join the Austin Area Garden Center as they present Santa In The Garden 2015. Skip the long lines at the mall and bring the entire family to meet Santa and Mrs. Claus. There will be plenty of goodies to eat, fun crafts to make and Christmas Story telling all within the beautiful setting of Zilker Botanical Garden. Mom and Dad can do some shopping in our Chrysalis Gift Shop and enjoy 20% off the entire store. There are wonderful gifts for everyone on your list! So tell your friends about our 2nd Annual Santa In The Garden and make sure to bring your own camera to capture this special event!

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

Luminations

Saturday & Sunday, December 12 - 13, 2015
6pm - 9pm

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
4801 La Crosse Ave.
Austin, TX

Thousands of luminaries and twinkling lights turn the center into a holiday wonderland during Luminations, an Austin holiday tradition.

There will be a food collection for the Capital Area Food Bank. Find their most requested items here: <http://www.austinfoodbank.org/how-to-help/donate-food.html>

This is a rain or shine event.

Activities:

- Visit with Frosty the Snowman.
- Enjoy children's crafts in the Gallery.
- Try the Geography of a Holiday Tree activity in the MLC.
- Munch on warm kettle corn, available for purchase from Lone Star Kettle Corn.
- Visit the new and improved lounge in our Library, and purchase a libation!

Admission:

Adults - \$5

Seniors 65 and older - \$5

Students with college ID - \$5

Youth ages 5-17: \$3

Free for members and children 4 years and under

For complete details, go to: <http://www.wildflower.org/luminations/>

TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

2015 EXECUTIVE BOARD

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Tina Landers, Interim Treasurer

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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 Daphne Richards and Wizzie Brown — Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

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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

"At Christmas I no more desire a rose
Than wish a snow in May's new-fangled mirth;
But like of each thing that in season grows." - William Shakespeare