

The Compost Bin

January 2016

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



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Cover Photo: 2016 -
The Year of the Carrot.
By Bruce Leander

Right: By
Liath Appleton



January Meeting - Daphne Richards

Don't miss Horticulture Extension Agent Daphne Richards' annual state of the union address where she'll provide insights into the MG program direction and priorities for 2016.

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, Jan 6, 2016, 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



Lettuce and other salad greens are easy crops for a cool season container garden.

Happy 2016, Master Gardeners!

“Hyper-local” is the new buzzword in the food and restaurant industry but this concept is nothing new to vegetable gardeners – when it comes to fresh, organic and locally sourced, we have been trendsetters since before trends were even tracked. Now a new year lies ahead, and for vegetable gardeners that means a year of health-promoting, disease-preventing, taste bud-stimulating home-grown edibles. Enjoying the harvest is only one of the many benefits of growing food; cultivating a vegetable garden is guaranteed to increase your activity level, improve your strength and agility, deepen your connection with nature and boost your sense of accomplishment. If you are new to gardening, ease into it with a small garden plot of easy-to-grow vegetables, a container of salad greens or even a flat of microgreens – the most important step is simply getting started and letting the practice of tending vegetables become a part of your normal routine.

Spring may be a couple of months away but the preparation starts now. Evaluate the time and space you

want to dedicate to growing vegetables, decide which vegetables you want to grow and then put a plan to paper. Take into account the number of days it takes for various vegetables to mature. If you fill your garden in January with broccoli and cabbage that take 8 weeks to reach maturity, they may still be taking up valuable space when the time comes for planting tomatoes, beans or cucumbers in March. Look for quick-maturing varieties and hope for lots of sunshine to keep them growing vigorously. Also think about grouping vegetables by plant family (for example squash, cucumbers and melons or tomatoes, peppers and eggplant) so you can incorporate a simple annual rotation plan to break pest and disease cycles.

The National Gardening Bureau has declared 2016 as “The Year of the Carrot,” so be sure to plant some later this month. Carrots require rich, loose soil with good drainage. Moisten the soil thoroughly before planting, sow seeds sparingly and cover lightly with screened compost, potting soil or vermiculite.



Most carrot seed packages contain more seeds than most of us have room to grow; try growing carrot microgreens with the excess..

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...

Keep the soil moist until seeds germinate, which may take up to 2 weeks. After germination thin seedlings to 2" apart and sidedress with a nitrogen rich fertilizer when they reach 6 inches in height. A few varieties that perform well in Central Texas include Nelson, Mokum, New Kuroda and Scarlet Nantes.



Sow two or three tomato seeds per container and thin to the strongest seedling after they germinate.

Here is the vegetable gardener's checklist for January:

- Prepare for indoor seed planting. Suspend a set of fluorescent grow lights from a rack, ceiling or shelf. Moisten potting soil and fill seed flats or other planting containers. If working outdoors allow soil and containers to reach room temperature before planting seed.
- Take advantage of nature's free compost by collecting and stockpiling leaves; use them as mulch around your plants, add them to the compost pile as a carbon source or just pile them up, keep them moist, and let them gradually decompose. Remember that the microbial activity in healthy soil is dependent on organic matter – feed the microbes and they will feed your soil.
- Invest in good soil preparation before planting seeds or transplants. Remove weeds and rocks, loosen soil and lightly mix in a layer of homemade or store bought compost. If you are not planting right away cover the soil with leaves, shredded bark mulch or black plastic to protect and warm the soil.
- Set onions transplants into the garden in mid January, planting 1 inch deep and 2 inches apart. After a few weeks thin to 4 inches and eat the thinnings as green onions. For optimum growth and development sidedress plants every 3 weeks with ½ cup of a nitrogen-rich fertilizer per 10 feet of row
- Carefully cut back asparagus foliage before the first spears emerge.
- Embrace your mistakes and failures – we've all had them and that is how we learn!

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...



Top left: Cut back asparagus foliage before the first spears emerge in spring.

Top right: A lesson learned: be sure to thin carrot seedlings as overcrowding will cause deformed roots.

Bottom right: Microgreens of sorrel (left) and broccoli (right) add a punch of flavor to soups, salads, omelets and sandwiches.



Photos by Bruce Leander

Fungus Gnats

by Wizzie Brown



Photo: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Fungus gnat adults are small, black, long-legged flies with long antennae. Most adults are about 1/16 an inch but some can get up to 1/2 an inch. They are weak fliers and generally remain near potted plants, growing media, foliage or leaf litter.

Larvae, or immatures, have a black head capsule and long whitish body without legs. They feed on organic matter such as mulch, compost, grass clippings, plant roots and fungi. When conditions are very moist, fungus gnat larvae can become abundant and may leave slime trails on media that look similar to trails left by snails or slugs.

While these gnats are a nuisance they are fairly easy to manage. Indoors it is a good idea to use yellow sticky cards as a monitoring tool. Potato pieces may also be used as a monitoring tool for fungus gnats. Imbed a peeled potato cube into media and inspect the underside of the potato and the media directly below it twice a week for fungus gnat larvae.

To manage fungus gnat populations, work on reducing excessively moist conditions. Avoid overwatering and make sure that there is good drainage. The surface of container soil should be allowed to dry before watering again.

If using compost, make sure that items have been fully composted. Compost piles should be turned regularly and kept away from doors or windows. Inspect all doors, windows, vents and screens for a good seal to reduce the number of gnats that may enter a structure.

In homes, insecticides are rarely needed to manage fungus gnats. If they are needed, *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *israelensis* or the nematode *Steinernema feltiae* can be applied in containers to control larvae. Either spray on the media or apply as a soil drench. Biologicals work best when they are applied early in an infestation. If a population is already large, they may not provide the control desired.

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: Jo and Ron Kautz

by Jean Love El Harim



Ron and Jo Kautz
Photo: Jean Love El Harim

On a hot afternoon in July, having invited me to their home in the Travis Heights neighborhood of Central Austin, Jo and Ron Kautz shared the story of how they came together from different walks of life, and now enjoy a mutual love of the garden and an appreciation for the Master Gardener program.

Jo is a native Austinite and has lived in Austin most of her life. Growing up, she played softball and tennis and was on the swim team. "I was a real tomboy," Jo admits. "I had an older and a younger brother who got to do, I thought, all the fun stuff. I worked until I could retire," she says, "and then I took care of my first grandson for four years." This grandson, she proudly relates, just graduated from high school and will be going to Richmond University on a baseball scholarship.

Ron grew up in the upper mid-west and was a pilot in the U.S. Air Force, flying B-57 and F-4 airplanes. After retiring from the Air Force, he put his accounting skills to work for the University of Texas at Austin, and is now the treasurer for the church that he and Jo attend.

Jo and Ron met and married 30 years ago. At the moment, and likely for the next several weeks, their days are filled with "puppy-caring," Jo says. They are members of Gold Ribbon Rescue, the golden retriever rescue society for Central Texas, and have taken on the task of nursing a momma dog and her puppies back to health. Jo says she likes animals and "pretty much any craft that is organic." She gardens, sews and enjoys making quilts, baskets, and bobbin lace.

Ron says he got interested in gardening when he and Jo got married and started their garden in the backyard. "Ron did all the digging and heavy work," says Jo. "Jo is much more knowledgeable than I am," says Ron. "I follow along and ask questions and try to do what she says." Jo loves perennials, such as roses, vines, and native plants. "I especially love coral vine (*Antigonon leptopus*)," she says. "It goes up into the oak trees and the blooms attract bees. It dies back in the winter and comes back in the spring. I'll give a plant care for the first year," she says, "and after that, if it doesn't survive, I don't replace it." Ron is partial to trees. "We lost five big trees in a storm, and getting rid of all that wood made me realize that's thousands of pounds of wood that was standing in the air."

Their biggest gardening challenges have been squirrels and pecan trees, as well as the drought and heat. The squirrels run off with their tomatoes. Thousands of pecans have sprouted because of the recent rains, and have to be dug out of the yard. The large pecan trees just keep growing and making the garden shadier. "The rain was great," Ron says, "but now the ground seems even drier than it was. The ground cracks faster."

Jo became a Master Gardener in 2002 and Ron in 2010. Jo got interested in the program when her neighbor told her about it. "I had always loved gardening," she says, "and thought to take it one step further and actually do it with other people. I like the volunteer aspect of

Meet the Master Gardeners

Continued...

it, giving information to other people. For a number of years now I have been working with the new classes. I also enjoy working in the greenhouse. People see my Master Gardener license plate and ask me questions all the time. It's nice to have an answer for them."

"I never really thought about becoming a Master Gardener until I started going with Jo to Master Gardener meetings and got to know a lot of interesting people," Ron says. "It's a neat group of people to be around." Jo and Ron have participated in the East Austin Garden Fair for several years, and both say their favorite MG program is the Inside Austin Gardens Tour. "It's neat to see other people's gardens and get ideas," Ron says.

Our visit ends with a stroll through their garden. Eight happy hens are in their enclosure now, but sometimes are allowed out into the garden where they scratch in the compost pile and sneak into the vegetable garden area to get the low-hanging tomatoes, Jo says. The fences are all decorated with staghorn ferns, passion vine, and coral vine. In addition to the towering pecan trees and live oaks that shade much of their acre of land, there is a wafer ash, a kumquat, an olive, a pomegranate, and an Anacacho Orchid, all growing strong and healthy in the deep, rich, spring-fed soil. How lucky they are!

December 2015 Awards Ceremony

by Jean Love El Harim

Our annual awards ceremony on Wednesday, December 2 was a great success, thanks to the MGs who organized the event, Carol Craft, Pat Mokry, Jackie Johnson, Dorothy Akin, Carolyn Williams, Tami Newlett, Sarah Hilgers and Rosalie Russell. The garlands decorating the dining tables were all from the bay laurel tree in Joe Posern's yard, and there was a wide array of delicious potluck dishes on the serving tables.



New interns, back row: Jill Fry, Heidi Reasor, Aaron Cleaver, Elisabeth Noelting, Heather Johnson, Laura Collamer, Jessica Dixon. Front row: Joan Clark, Laura Wills, Madelyn Burgess, Daphne, Elisa Boyd, Nancy Homsher.
Photo courtesy of Daphne Richards.

After Daphne introduced the new interns and MGs, Joe expressed appreciation for the people and projects that help fulfill our purpose of educating the public on scientifically proven gardening techniques, including the East Austin Garden Fair, Zilker Fest, the Speaker's Bureau, and the Inside Austin Gardens Tour (IAGT). He thanked the 2015 IAGT gardeners: Martha King, Gregory Thomas, Lois Pesz, Sue Nazar, Kirk Walden, Pam Penick, and the MGs who maintain the Demo Garden. He also recognized the members of the 2015 IAGT committee: Wendy Buck, Rosalie Russell, Lori Daul, Sue King, Kirk Walden, and Carolyn Williams.

Joe then presented the following awards:

- Interns with over 100 hours: Sallie Sharp and Suzanne Lucignani
- MGs with over 100 hours: Rafael Paonessa, Toi Powell, Lori Daul, Sheryl Williams, and Lois Pesz
- MGs with over 150 hours: Wendy Buck, Tommie Clayton, Carolyn Williams, Jackie Johnson, Richard Moline, Sheryl Williams, Jean Love El Harim, and Ken Schroeder
- MGs with over 200 hours: Pat Mokry, Sue King, and Mikala McFerren

December 2015 Awards Ceremony

Continued...

- MG with over 300 hours: Augustin Redwine
- MG with over 400 hours: Rosalie Russell
- MGs awarded lifetime membership: Tommie Clayton, Ratna and Venkappa Gani, Patty Leander, Leslie and Sam Myers, and Carolyn Williams
- Certificate of Excellence: Liz Caskey
- Golden Glove Award: Ken Schroeder
- Peggy Steward Award: Ed Parken
- MG awarded emeritus status: Frankie Hart



New MGs, left to right: Wendy Linehan, Sherilyn Beal, Teresa Garcia, Holly Gardovsky, Nita Watson, Leah Baker, Suzanne Lucignani, Jane Adams, Marcus Pridgeon, Daphne, Richard Wendrock, Jennifer Bengston, Jane Hall, Michael Lattier, Kristi Hibler-Luton, Ann Roe.
Photo courtesy of Daphne Richards.

Joe recognized the outgoing board members: Tommie Clayton, Christina Landers and Mikala McFerren.

He then named the members of the 2016 board: Pat Mokry, President; Denise Harrelson, VP Programs; Sue King, VP Public Education and Volunteer Coordinator for Trainees; Jo Anne Hargraves, Volunteer Coordinator for Projects; Sue Colbath, Secretary; Ila Falvey, Treasurer; Toi Powell, Membership Director; Joe Posern, Greenhouse Manager; Sally Dickson, AAGC Representative; Susan Jung and Rosalie Russell, State Council Representatives.

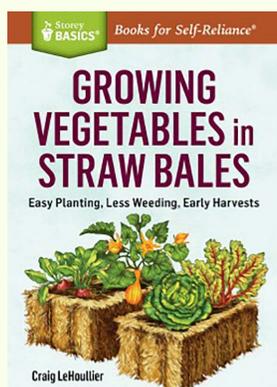
Daphne spoke for all of us when she expressed our appreciation for Joe's three years of service as TCMGA President, and Joe passed the presidential torch to Pat Mokry. Here's a toast to a fine year in 2015, and best wishes for 2016!

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.

January 2016:



Growing Vegetables in Straw Bales: Easy Planting, Less Weeding, Early Harvests - December 29, 2015

by Craig LeHoullier

This innovative technique is an inexpensive, low-maintenance way to grow a bounty of food in a small space. All you need is a bale of straw, some fertilizer, and your favorite vegetable seeds! Craig LeHoullier's step-by-step instructions show you how to do everything from sourcing the straw and setting up your bale to planting, dealing with weeds and pests, and harvesting. [\[more\]](#)

The Urban Farmer: Growing Food for Profit on Leased and Borrowed Land - December 29, 2015

by Curtis Allen Stone

There are twenty million acres of lawns in North America. In their current form, these unproductive expanses of grass represent a significant financial and environmental cost. However, viewed through a different lens, they can also be seen as a tremendous source of opportunity. [\[more\]](#)

The Cabaret of Plants: Forty Thousand Years of Plant Life and the Human Imagination

- January 11, 2016

by Richard Mabey

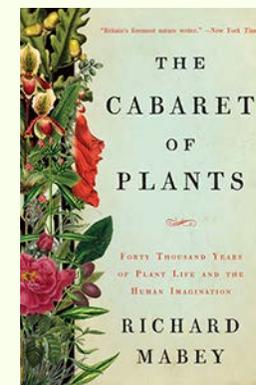
The Cabaret of Plants is a masterful, globe-trotting exploration of the relationship between humans and the kingdom of plants by the renowned naturalist Richard Mabey. [\[more\]](#)

Pollinator Friendly Gardening: Gardening for Bees, Butterflies, and Other Pollinators - January

15, 2016

by Rhonda Fleming Hayes

Are you interested in growing a naturally healthy garden? How about making sure your local environment helps bees, butterflies, and birds survive and thrive? If you are a beekeeper, are you looking for the ideal plants to keep your colony happy? [\[more\]](#)



Flashback Favs

by Daphne Richards

As a contributor to **Central Texas Gardener** (CTG), I love to answer your questions and share knowledge on new and tried & true plants for our area. Here are some Flashback Favs!



Daphne and Augie. Daphne Richards is the county extension agent for horticulture at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office for Travis County

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_Oo45V788E (CTG 2012)

What does root hardy mean?

If the plant tag says that it's hardy to 32 degrees, is that air temperature or soil temperature? Well, hardiness does refer to how well a plant tolerates cold temperatures. This is most often discussed in terms of hardiness zones, developed by the USDA. The smaller the zone number, the colder the temperatures in that region. For example, Central Texas a zone 8 area, and the coldest parts of Alaska are zone 1. When describing a plant's hardiness, the soil temperature is very important, but the air temperature is what is used for reference. Most people don't have soil thermometers, but we can all check the weather to see what our area's low temperature for the night is going to be, so the air temperature is more useful to us in practice. And we know that if the air is a certain temperature, then the soil will be a comparable temperature, but not as cold. And even if the air is below freezing, the soil probably won't be. When night time temperatures reach mid 20's, the temperature of the soil may still be at 40 degrees. Because the air is colder than the soil, many temperate zone plants have developed the strategy of dropping their tender leaves, or even sacrificing their entire body, to hunker down into the soil, where it's relatively warmer. Plants that have this strategy are called perennials if they're relatively herbaceous, like our native Echinaceas and Gazanias, and root hardy if they're woody, like Lantana and Esperanza. And if a plant is listed as "hardy" to a certain temperature, it is likely to be killed if temperatures drop below that number. To protect your perennial and root hardy plants in the winter, be sure to mulch very well before the first freeze, piling the mulch up much higher around the root zone than you normally might.

Christmas poinsettia.

After the holidays, what should we do with our beautiful plants? Can we put them in the ground? Well, although you can put them in the ground, I wouldn't recommend it. But, once we're past freezing weather, you can keep your poinsettia in a pot outdoors, but be sure to protect it from the full sun, especially harsh afternoon light, and mulch it well, to keep the air around the plant moist. It will need to be cut back and fertilized through the summer. But to get it to bloom again, you'll need to provide at least 14 hours of darkness starting in September. Even then, the colorful bracts may not be as rewarding as those on a new plant would be. But here's a success story from our friend in Leander. Last Easter, he planted his two Christmas poinsettias in the ground. They're in well-prepared and well-mulched soil near a live oak tree, so they get shade about 50 percent of the time. He watered them twice a week this summer. In November, they bloomed again! Although they're much smaller than his original plants, his experiment just goes to show that gardeners can do anything. And, for a poinsettia that will return for you, without much effort at all, remember our Texas native, *Euphorbia cyathophora*. It goes dormant in winter, but will give you Christmas color all summer long.

Flashback Favs

Continued...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIPPFi7Fn_0 (CTG 2012)

When can I prune perennials?

If you have perennials that have browned or are dead on top, you can cut them to the ground now. Those above-ground plant parts, which may have looked completely lifeless, had sugars and other plant nutrients in them that may take a while to make their way down into the roots. They also serve as a small amount of protection to the soil around the roots of the plant, and those are two reasons why it's really best to leave those unsightly "sticks" alone until we are into late winter. Another reason is that pruning stimulates growth. And when a plant is trying to "go to sleep" for the winter, you need to go ahead and let it do that. But then, when the plant is truly dormant, many plants do need to be pruned, to clear out all the dead growth and make way for the growth. How to prune trees may be a little more obvious than it will be on shrubs and smaller woody plants, both those that have gone dormant, and those that have stayed evergreen, but stopped growing in the winter. To renew evergreen *Salvia greggii*, this is the time to cut them back several inches to encourage compact, fuller growth. If left unpruned, they'll continue to grow, but will get leggy and just look unkempt. You should remove back to the source (the main trunk or the ground) any woody stems that are obviously dead. As many of you know, it's also a great time to prune trees, especially trees that are susceptible to oak wilt. We want to prune them by mid-February at the absolute latest. But one group of plants we should hold off on are the evergreen shrubs, at least until we're closer to the last freeze date. Pruning now will encourage tender new growth that can be damaged by a late winter freeze, or even a frost. Also, wait until mid-February to prune your roses. You can go ahead and cut back ornamental grasses now, or you could leave them another month, since they provide habitat for overwintering butterflies and other garden creatures.

Pineapple guava, *Acca sellowiana*.

This evergreen shrub is listed as hardy to 10 degrees Fahrenheit, and has very attractive light, slightly bluish green foliage. It can take full sun, but also does fine in light shade, although it will likely be less bushy if it's not getting enough light. It has really nice, large blooms in late spring, which emerge as white to light pink buds, opening to reveal showy deep red centers with lots of red stamens with bright white tips. This is a great wildlife plant that attracts bees, birds and butterflies. Pineapple guava needs about an average amount of water, about once a week after establishment but be careful not to overwater it, especially in heavy clay soils. If given too much water, it will respond with yellowing leaves that drop off pretty quickly. You can either leave this plant bushy, as a small shrub, or you can train it, with selective pruning, to be a small tree. It makes a nice addition in areas where you may have perennials or other plants that die back during the winter, since it has that nice blue-green sheen all through the dreary cold months.

THINGS TO DO THIS MONTH:

FERTILIZE: Fertilize asparagus, strawberries, daylilies, iris, pansies and roses. Use compost, manure or a complete fertilizer.

WATER: Water everything well before a freeze, but avoid overwatering.

TRANSPLANT: Plant bare root and container grown roses, shrubs, trees, groundcovers and vines.

Move hardy seedlings outdoors. Divide and transplant perennial herbs and summer and fall blooming perennial flowers. Donate extras to a plant sale.

PREPARE SOIL: Add compost and/or fertilizer. Till deeply. Test soil. Check winter mulch and replenish, if needed. Stockpile leaves for mulch and composting throughout spring and summer.

LAWN CARE: If lawn has a history of brown patch problems, treat with a labeled fungicide late in the month. Repeat treatment in three to four weeks, if needed.

DISEASES/PESTS TO LOOK FOR: Check for mealy bugs and for scale on houseplants.

Austin Area Events

Compost for Beginners

Saturday, January 9, 2016
10am - 12pm

Zilker Botanical Gardens
2220 Barton Springs Road
Austin, TX

Compost isn't just a pile of dead leaves! It's a vital community of microorganisms that work to add vital nutrients, moisture, and structure to your soil. Travis County Master Gardener Sheryl Williams will explain the basic science of how compost is created, what materials you can use to make compost, types of compost containers and which to choose, plus what type of compost is best for your garden. Join the tour of the Zilker Botanical Garden Compost Demonstration area to compare different types of compost systems - please dress appropriately.

Seminar is free
Zilker park entrance fee is \$2 per adult, \$1 per child (ages 3-12) or seniors (age 62 & over), \$3 for non-Austin Residents.

Austin 5th Annual Beekeeping Seminar

Saturday, January 16, 2015

J.J. Pickle Research Campus
10100 Burnet Rd
Austin, TX

This is a day-long seminar offering 4 different educational presentations running concurrently throughout the day. There will be a full-day track of beginning classes for people with little or no experience keeping bees who want a solid foundation of beekeeping essentials. There will also be 15 hour-long classes for intermediate and advanced beekeepers to choose from. All proceeds for this event will be used to promote sustainable beekeeping practices and provide support to our much appreciated Texas A&M Honey Bee Lab.

Registration starts at 8:00am with the first class starting at 9:00am.
Cost is \$50. For complete details, and to register online, go to <http://www.eventbrite.com/e/2016-austin-area-beekeeping-seminar-registration-18800731494>

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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>
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"Nature has undoubtedly mastered the art of winter gardening and even the most experienced gardener can learn from the unrestrained beauty around them." - Vincent A. Simeone