

The Compost Bin

February 2016

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

Seed Potatoes & Seed Starters

Leaf Cutting Ants

Latest in MG Events

Daphne's Flashback Favs



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Cover Photo: 'Mr. Big'
English peas – plant now
for a late spring harvest.
By Bruce Leander

Right: Enjoy the blooms
of cool-season edible
flowers such as violas,
nasturtium or calendula
as a garnish or an ad-
dition to salads or herb
butters.
By Bruce Leander



February Meeting - Reeve Hobbie and Sue King

Texas Superstar Program

The "Dynamic Duo" of King and Hobbie will be sharing their newly acquired knowledge and excitement about the Texas Superstar program - its origin, purpose, plant criteria, people, governance, marketing - and will then provide a sampling of some of the plants included. If it will grow in Booker, Beaumont, Brownsville and Butterfield (check those towns out on Google Maps if you don't know where they are), it might be in the program. Then again, maybe it won't. You'll just have to hear and see Sue and Reeve's flashy Texas Superstar program to find out.

Reeve Hobbie was born in New Jersey when he was very, very young. Naturally he fell in love with gardening because he grew up in the "Garden" state. Actually, he worked as one on a large estate (picture "Downton Abbey," only a wee bit smaller) during his teenage years. For awhile he hung around some other places (Ohio, England and Minnesota) before seeing the light - the bright sun over Texas. Thirty-one years now in NW Austin and he continues to enjoy the challenges of perennial gardening where he deals with dense shade in his backyard and dense deer in the front.

Sue King has been gardening nearly her whole life, but refuses to learn any way other than the hard way, usually more than once. If she likes you the least little bit, she will try to feed you soup sooner or later. She reads way too much but nearly all fiction. She's usually not hard to spot, and she doesn't do the Goldilocks thing well at all. "Go big or go home" sounds like great advice to her. A former children's librarian, she once had over 800 rubber stamps, all cataloged and indexed.

**Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, Feb 3, 2016, starting at 7 pm
Zilker Botanical Garden**

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

Correction: In the January 2016 issue "December 2015 Awards Ceremony," the members of the Awards Committee were listed incorrectly. The actual members of the 2015 Awards Committee were Wendy Buck, Jo Anne Hargraves, Laura Holland, Kristin Moody, Pat Mokry and Rosalie Russell.

In the Vegetable Garden

by Patty Leander



Cut potatoes into small pieces and allow the cut surface to heal before planting.

Red hearts may represent the arrival of Valentine's Day, but for vegetable gardeners February means it's 'tater time! Potatoes take 3-4 months to reach maturity and should be planted in mid to late February so they have time to produce sizeable tubers before the arrival of summer's heat. Dependable varieties for Central Texas include Red La Soda, Yukon Gold, Pontiac Red and Kennebec, but don't overlook gourmet-type fingerlings such as Austrian Crescent, Rose Finn Apple and Russian Banana. Purchase seed potatoes from local nurseries, feed stores or mail order sources such as Potato Garden (www.potatogarden.com).

If rainfall is minimal be sure to water the garden every 7-10 days and give vegetables a dose of liquid fertilizer every two weeks to keep plants growing vigorously.

Here is the vegetable gardener's checklist for February:

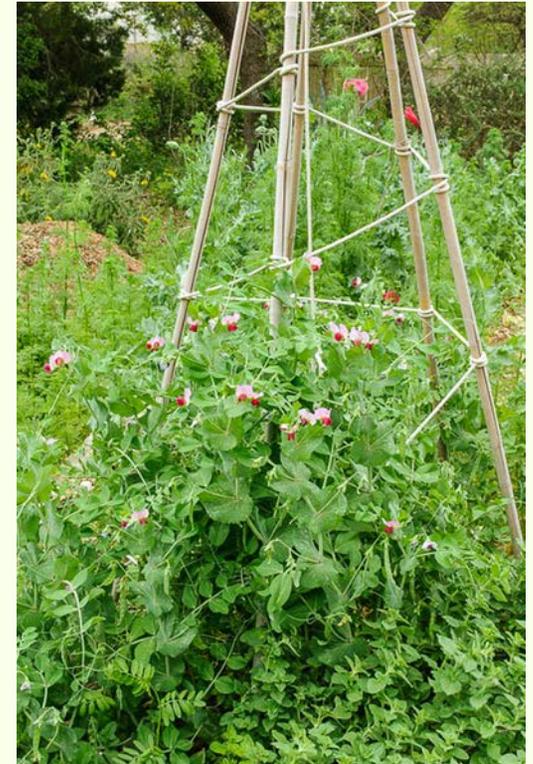
- Fertilize onions that were planted last month; thin if necessary and eat the thinnings as scallions.
- If you can't resist one last planting of carrots, radishes, lettuce or broccoli consider planting in a large container or pot so they won't be taking up valuable garden space when it's time to plant warm season crops outside.
- Cut seed potatoes into individual pieces, about the size of an egg, making sure that each piece has at least one "eye". Allow the cut surface to cure in a warm, well-ventilated area for a couple of days before planting.
- Be prepared to protect young, tender vegetable seedlings with hot caps or row cover in the event of a hard freeze.
- Consider getting your soil tested if you haven't done so in the last 3-4 years.
- Check out Sunshine Community Garden's annual plant sale on March 5. Gates open at 9 AM with over 100 varieties of tomato transplants (peppers, eggplants and herbs, too!). Get there early for the best selection.
- Harvest cool-season vegetables as they reach maturity and enjoy the fruits of your labor!



Fertilize onions every 3-4 weeks for vigorous growth.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...



Left: Use mild winter days to prepare soil for spring planting and protect with hay or mulch until time to plant.

Center: Visit the annual Sunshine Community Garden Spring Plant Sale on March 5 – over 100 varieties of tomatoes!

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

Time for Seed Potatoes!

by Caroline Homer



This was about a third of the potatoes I harvested in 2014.

I love fresh potatoes dug out of my backyard, with their silky smooth, slightly sweet flesh and baby-soft skins. Baked, pan-fried, mashed, au gratin, deep-fried - it's all good! Mid-February is potato-planting time in Central Texas, which means mid-January is seed-potato-ordering time. If I wait too long, my favorite varieties from my favorite vendor will be sold out, or they won't arrive in time to prep them for planting, or I'll get stuck with the wrinkly bruised dregs.

I always order from [Potato Garden](#) in Colorado. I like Potato Garden the best, because they sell certified disease-free seed potatoes to reduce the risk of pathogens that could wipe out the whole crop, and they will ship in January to Texas. Most certified potato growers are located up North and can't ship until March due to freezing conditions, but sadly, March is too late for planting potatoes here. Potato Garden also has a very informative catalog and growing guide in free downloadable PDF format.

I usually order 3 to 5 pounds of white Kennebec seed potatoes and 3 to 5 pounds of Red Pontiac seed potatoes. Kennebec is a mid-season potato that matures in 80-100 days; Red Pontiac is an early-season potato that matures in 60-80 days. Both are reliable varieties for Central Texas soils and climate, and have a good flavor and texture any way they're cooked. Late-season potatoes like Russet don't do well at all in Central Texas; they take 100-130 days to mature, and it gets too hot here too quickly for those to do well.

If Potato Garden runs out of Red Pontiac, Red LaSoda is a good second choice; if they run out of Kennebec, I get Yukon Gold. If I wait too long and Potato Garden sells out of these four varieties, I can usually find a few seed potatoes at Callahan's, Natural Gardener or Buck Moore Feed Store in late January. I've tried other potato varieties, including Austrian Crescent and All Blue, but Kennebec and Red Pontiac produce the best in my garden. I'm having trouble finding red potatoes this year, so I might be forced to try a different variety if the local nurseries don't come through.

I ask the grower to ship the potatoes to arrive the last week of January or first week of February.

I do my best to time my shipment so the box won't sit on the porch too long in January; if the potatoes freeze, they'll be ruined. As soon as UPS or FedEx delivers the potatoes to my house, I open the box up right away to check for damage and get them in fresh air; they can rot if kept in the shipping box too long. I put the potatoes, single-layer, in flat cardboard boxes (the lids from office paper boxes works great), and put them under the bed in the dark.

About 10 to 14 days before I'm going to plant the potatoes, I pull them out of the dark to green them up and get the eyes sprouting; this helps promote higher yields. Anything bigger than a jumbo chicken egg gets cut in half, making sure there is at least one eye on each piece. I dip the cut ends in dusting sulfur to prevent them from rotting, if I have some. Then the cardboard flats of potatoes go next to my sunniest south-facing window to sprout. If they don't sprout, I plant them anyway. The Aggies say February is the ideal time to plant Irish potatoes in Central Texas; I aim for anytime between Valentine's Day and President's Day.

Six to ten pounds of seed potatoes is enough to plant a raised bed 4 feet wide by 8 feet long by 8 inches deep, which is all I have room for in my small backyard garden. If you have known problems with nematodes or wireworms in your soil, or just want to plant more potatoes

Time for Seed Potatoes!

Continued...



Potato leaves emerging in potato grow bag.

than you have room for in your raised beds, you can plant potatoes in grow bags or bushel baskets in purchased garden soil. In my experience, I get lower yields from potatoes planted in containers versus in the ground, but some potatoes is better than no potatoes at all.

On planting day, I dig almost all of the soil out of the bed into wheelbarrows. As I dig, I work some homemade compost into the soil, if I have any, or a 5-gallon bucket or two of coffee grounds from Austin Ground to Ground, or a nitrogen source like cottonseed meal. I plant the potatoes right on top of my clay soil in the empty bed, spaced about six to ten inches apart. I add just enough amended soil from the wheelbarrows to cover the tops of the potatoes completely, but I don't fill the bed to the top - not yet! I water everything well, and unless we get rain, I water the potato bed every 7 to 10 days to keep the soil evenly moist, but not soggy. Soggy soil will rot the tubers.

Then I wait for the potatoes to sprout leaves, which takes about two weeks, but feels like an eternity.

Like tomatoes, potatoes are nightshade-family plants and the leaves are frost-tender. If we get a frost or freeze anytime after the leaves emerge, I have to run out and lay

down more soil and pine mulch over the potato plants and cover them up with frost cloth. As soon as things warm up, I take the covers off so the plants can get sunlight.

In 2014, a early March freeze zapped some newly emerged potato leaves and they started to turn black, even though I'd covered them. I thought they had a fungus before I remembered the cold snap. But within 10 days, the plants had sprouted so many new leaves that no one could tell they ever suffered freeze damage. Still, I might be inclined to put a heat lamp under the frost cloth if this happens again.

Once the plants get about six to eight inches tall, I "hill" the potatoes - I fill the bed with amended soil from the wheelbarrows, taking care not to break the stems, covering the plants up except for the top leaves just above the raised bed frame. And that's all the hilling I do. Kennebec and Red Pontiac are early to mid-season determinate potatoes, so they aren't going to form stems two yards long, and they won't produce potatoes the full length of the stalk like an indeterminate, late-season Russet; it's not their habit. The potatoes are going to form in the lowermost eight to ten inches of the stalk just above the seed potato. In fact, shorter season varieties actually produce fewer potatoes if they're hilled up too high. So I don't waste my time building potato towers or high raised beds.

Once temperatures really warm up in mid-March and April, the plants should really take off and create a dense thicket of leaves that keep the soil shady, cool and weed-free. If we don't get rain, I drip-irrigate deeply once every week to keep the



Raised beds covered with frost cloth over PVC hoops

Time for Seed Potatoes!

Continued...

soil evenly moist - not too wet, not too dry - so the potatoes will be nice and round and big and plump. Around this time, the bugs will show up: leaf-footed bugs, whiteflies, maybe some ladybugs if we're lucky. I haven't ever needed to use insecticides. I pick the leaf-footed bugs off by hand and drop them in a pail of soapy water to kill them. Usually the grackles will stop by and eat some of the bugs.

With any luck, the plants will bloom between 60 and 80 days. The white potatoes will have a white flower and the red potatoes will have a purple flower. Some years the plants don't flower at all - no matter, the plants will produce potatoes either way. If we get a lot of wind, the stalks will fall over. I just leave them alone; they'll be fine. It doesn't hurt them to be lying down or flopping over. Sure, it looks messy, but who cares? It's not like Garden Design magazine is coming to photograph my potato bed. Plus, if I try to stake them up, I risk breaking off the stalk.

By the end of April or first few days in May, I start rummaging around the edge of the bed looking for new potatoes. Red Pontiac matures before Kennebec, so I start digging on the edges of the red potato side of the bed with my fingers. I try to leave the Kennebecs alone for another 2 or 3 weeks, or as long as I can stand it. If we're lucky, the snap peas will still be producing and we can have spring peas and new potatoes.

As the plants reach the end of their lifecycle, they will gradually turn yellow and start to die back. I stop watering at this point, because digging potatoes out of mud is a sloppy mess. The potatoes will keep in the ground for a couple more weeks, unless it's super hot, super wet, or the wireworms are running roughshod over the bed. By mid-May, I'm ready to dig all the potatoes up in one big sweaty fit, so I can plant something else. I use a garden fork to dig instead of a shovel to keep from damaging the potatoes too much, but I always manage to nick a few; those get eaten first.

So far, my best harvest (2014) yielded about 5 pounds for each 1 pound I planted; in more hospitable climates, or in bigger plots with more widely spaced plants, you might get two or three times that. I don't wash the potatoes until I'm ready to eat them. I just brush off the dirt with a towel and store them in single layers in brown paper or cloth bags in the closet of the coolest room of the house; they keep just fine for several weeks. If we're slow to eat them and it's really warming up, I will move them to the fridge. Potato Garden says 40 degrees is just fine for storing potatoes; below 40 and some of the starches will turn to sugar, making them sweeter, but once they warm up, the sugars turn back to starch in a week or two. Potatoes can dry out and shrivel over time, though they never last that long at our house. I've tried saving a few spring potatoes to replant in August for a fall crop, with no luck at all; I can't get them to break dormancy in two months' time, and they just rot in the ground, so we eat them all. I haven't found any suppliers that can ship seed potatoes in August, so I've given up on trying to plant a fall crop.



Freshly harvested potatoes. The potatoes are all near the bottom of the stems.

You can follow Caroline on her blog at <https://shovelreadygarden.blogspot.com/>

Leaf Cutting Ants

by Wizzie Brown



Leaf cutting ants are reddish-brown with three pairs of spines on the thorax and one pair of spines on the back of the head. Workers come in various sizes, and some can be up to ½ inch long. Mounds can become large and are sometimes clustered together with other mounds giving this ant the nickname of “town ant”. Leaf cutter ant mounds have a central opening and often a crater shape at the top.

Cut ants typically forage when temperatures are cooler, and often become active in cooler periods of the year. During the summer, they may forage at night or in the morning. They can sometimes cause complete defoliation of plants or small trees overnight. Leaf cutting ants remove leaves and buds from plants in the landscape. The ants do not eat the plant pieces, but instead, take it back to the colony and feed the vegetation to a fungus garden. They tend a species of particular fungus and weed out any other fungus from the garden. The fungus is the food source of the ants, and mated females carry a piece of the fungus with them when they leave to start a new colony.

Colonies exist for years and can exceed to over two million ants. It is not unusual for a single colony to cover an acre of land. Colonies are usually found in well drained, sandy or loamy soils.

Plants can be temporarily protected by using spray adhesives around the base of the plant. Adhesives should be refreshed often when dirt or debris accumulates. Temporary protection can also be provided with contact insecticidal spray or dusts. If mounds are located in an area, the bait product labeled for leaf cutter ants, Amdro Ant Block, can be broadcast with a hand-held spreader around the mound area. If no mounds are seen, then residual sprays and dusts can be used along foraging trails and around openings.

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



Top: Leaf Cutting Ant
Bottom: Leaf Cutting Ant mound.

A Mini Windowsill Seed-starting Set-up

by Jean Love El Harim

You want to start vegetable and herb seeds indoors so they don't get eaten by birds, dug up by squirrels, washed away in a heavy rain, dried out, frozen, baked, or devoured by pill bugs, but you are not interested in shelling out big bucks for an indoor seed-starting set-up. Here's a quirky and effective way to start seeds indoors using recycled and inexpensive materials.

1. Recycle a clear, round or rectangular plastic cake dome (with tray) that is 6 inches tall, or get one at a store that sells cakes.
2. Get a clamp lamp or a gooseneck lamp.
3. Get a 23-watt daylight compact fluorescent bulb.
4. Put as many 4" pots as will fit under the dome on the tray of the cake dome.
5. Fill the pots $\frac{3}{4}$ full of potting soil.
6. Plant seeds in the pots, water them, cover them with the dome, and put the whole contraption on the windowsill.
7. Arrange the lamp so that the lamp shade is an inch or so above the top of the dome.
8. Turn the lamp on at dawn and off at dusk.

If your sill is not wide enough for the cake dome, you can use a table or cardboard box that comes to the height of the sill in order to extend the width of the sill.

A 23-watt compact fluorescent bulb, plus any light that comes in through the window, gives enough light to sprout seedlings and get them started. The bulb provides some warmth, but will not overheat the mini-greenhouse or burn the seedlings.

The temperature of your air-conditioned or heated house, plus a bit of warmth from the lamp, is a workable temperature range for sprouting most vegetable and herb seeds. The dome helps keep the seeds uniformly moist for better germination.

After the seedlings have sprouted and grown some real leaves, and before they outgrow the cake dome, they can be moved to a protected area outside. In January, I put 4" pots of lettuce, coriander, and parsley seedlings on top of a large water barrel in an unheated greenhouse in the yard where they could get full sun until I can plant them in the garden. I'm going to try starting lettuce seeds indoors in August and put the seedlings under a shade cloth in the garden until the weather cools enough for them to go in a vegetable bed. I wonder if this system would work to start tomato, eggplant, and pepper seeds in June to transplant into the garden in August as well, or cabbage and broccoli in July to transplant in September.



Cake domes with 4" pots of seedlings. A clamp lamp and a gooseneck lamp, each with a 23-watt daylight compact fluorescent bulb. A cardboard box and shelf to widen the sill.

A Mini Windowsill Seed-starting Set-up

Continued...

If anyone asks what that contraption is in your window sill, you can tell them it's a veggie cake. Just don't let your grandkids eat it!



Lettuce seedlings hardening off on a barrel of water in a sunny greenhouse.

Digging in the Demo Garden

by Pam Jordahl and Rosalie Russell



Table laden with supplies for Sheryl Williams' Tool Sharpening session.

Purge! That is exactly what happened to the storage shed at the Demonstration Garden in January. Unused items and expired chemicals were eliminated from the storage shed. One great discovery was a storage container filled with trowels, weed poppers, and claw diggers! Everything was organized, inventoried and a tool bar was added to control "tool drift". Even the area surrounding the shed was slicked up. (We really think 98% of the outside "junk" was left by someone else, but we were asked to remove it, so we did!) The dumpster was half full when the clean-up was finished. Love clean and organized!

Forty-nine people signed up for the January 16th combo workday/tool sharpening session!

Since the interns are required to volunteer 15 hours in the demo garden, we took advantage of their high attendance rate. They were introduced to sign-in procedures, what plant materials goes into the compost pile and what goes into the city garden waste recycle bags, and hose management. Wish we would have had colorful stickers stating "Certified Hose Manager" to all who learned the tricky details of unwinding and rewinding the 100', heavy duty garden hoses from the storage boxes!

Rain drops prompted the first official use of the rainwater harvest pergola. The pergola roof overhangs the sidewalk making a perfect location for a group to collect and stay dry! This is where TCMGA member Sheryl Williams gave her tool sharpening sessions. Members and interns crowded around her table loaded down with examples of useful cleaning and sharpening supplies. Enthralled by Sheryl's wisdom and

humor laden instructions, everyone was eager to sharpen their own tool(s)!

If you missed the tool sharpening session, this is a brief summary of how to do it:

Clean first:

Clean with a putty knife to remove as much material as possible. Follow with steel wool to remove remaining dirt or resin. Use an oily rag to wipe down entire the tool before storing. Alternatively, you can create a tool-cleaning bucket with a mixture of sand and either



Linda Draga works at sharpening a tool.

Digging in the Demo Garden

Continued...



Above: Tool masters Wendy Linehan & Karin Bonicoro install tool rack in Demo Garden storage shed.

Right: Compost screeners at work.

motor oil (inexpensive but harsh to the skin) or boiled linseed oil (better product but expensive). Use the sandy grit and rag instead of steel wool for final polishing.

Sharpen second:

Hand tools or pruners can be sharpened with a whetstone and sharpening steel (http://www.lowes.com/pd_70443-46916-61676_0__?productId=3309214). Large tools like shovels, hoes, and rakes are sharpened with a bastard file (http://www.lowes.com/pd_294680-86580-SF2481263_0__?productId=1242607).

Sharpen with single, one direction motion, holding the sharpening tool at a 45 degree angle. Remember to not use a sawing motion, and "don't stress, just sharpen". Remove any divots in the cutting edge of the blade. The blade should be smooth with no burrs. Use the sharpening steel to maintain the edge on pruners and loppers.

If you are going to take your pruners or loppers apart for sharpening, lubricate with white lithium grease wherever metal meets metal while reassembling.

If you would like to have more gardening friends, increase your gardening knowledge, and earn volunteer hours, sign up to receive Demonstration

Garden information. On the VMS home page, look at the box on the left hand side and click on Projects. On the Project's page, scroll down to Demonstration Garden at Extension office, and click on the title. On the Demonstration Garden page, scroll to the bottom of the page to the area where you can add your name to the project.

If your name is on the list you will be sent an invitation to sign-up on SignUp Genius. The number of spaces available is limited by the number of people needed to perform the various tasks scheduled for that workday. Usually the available spots are filled within a few hours, so act quickly.

Hope to see you in the garden!



Plant Contest at the Travis County Youth Show

by Lisa Anhaiser



Intern Laura Wills, MGs Linda Burch and JaNet Booher

The mission of the annual Travis County Youth Show (TCYS) is to develop the character of our youth through competitive youth fair projects which teach them critical life skills, including personal responsibility, financial and time management, fair play, hard work and integrity.

Students, ages 8 to 18, who are enrolled in organizations such as Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4-H clubs can enter the Plant Contest. Students purchase plants in October from a local wholesale nursery for a nominal fee and care for them until the contest in mid-January. Students are judged on the content provided on their project worksheets, which can contain growing requirements and personal stories. The appearance, color and size of their entry are also graded. Blue and red ribbons are awarded on the basis of quality rather than place ranking. Projects receiving blue ribbons are eligible for a Class Champion award with the option to sell in the weekend auction.

In 2016, 42 plants were entered in categories such as succulents/cacti, vines, flowering, dish gardens, foliage, and ferns. MG Mikala McFerren organized the volunteers with MGs Linda Burch and JaNet Booher, and Intern Laura Wills as judges. Lots of blue ribbons were awarded, and positive comments were provided to the students to encourage them. MG goals for 2017 are to reach out to more 4-H clubs and encourage participation in the contest.



Kalanchoe (top) and other succulents were among the entries.

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 and 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=vDHHU9vIgQ8> (CTG 2012)

When to fertilize our shrubs, trees and perennials?

After extreme heat, your landscape definitely needs a little help before the summer arrives. Although fertilization is not necessary for every plant, every year, I would suggest fertilizing to give your plants a nutrient boost during the spring growing season to help prepare them for the stress of summer. With plant nutrients, a little bit goes a long way and more is definitely not better. If you give your plants too much fertilizer, they'll put on a lot of new growth and may look great in the spring, but then when summer arrives, they won't have enough water to support all that new growth, and they'll be even more stressed. With perennials and flower beds, consider using a layer of compost as your initial mulch. Compost will provide a very small amount of nutrients, which is likely all your perennials will need. For trees and shrubs, use an actual fertilizer product and choose one that is slow-release, meaning that the nutrients will be released slowly over time. No matter which type of fertilizer you choose, be sure to follow the label directions and don't over-apply. Also be sure to water your trees, shrubs, and all your plants very well this spring. All the care that you give them now will help tremendously during the heat of summer, when you really won't be able to provide your plants as much water as they truly need. And as for your lawn, you should wait until full green-up, most likely late-April or early May, to fertilize.

Maroon bluebonnet, *Lupinus texensis* 'Texas Maroon' a Texas Super Star

Although you may never see them, maroon bluebonnets actually ARE found in nature, along with a spectrum from white, to pink, to deep blue. The reason we see so many blue bluebonnets, is because of genetics. The blue flower color is dominant and the other colors are recessive. Like our other native wildflowers, maroon bluebonnet seeds should be planted in the fall. But now is the perfect time to plant transplants. And be forewarned: since bluebonnets are annuals, with the parent plant dying after seed-production, the maroon color will be lost in your population if there are any blue bluebonnets in the area to pollinate them. Bluebonnets perform best in full sun and prefer well-drained soil. The crown of this plant remains at soil level, with only the leaves and flower-stalks elongating, so if the soil is too heavy or stays too wet, your bluebonnets will rot quite quickly. If you'd like, you can allow the seeds to naturalize in your garden, or you can collect them once the pods have dried on the plant. Bluebonnet seeds have a very hard seed-coat and require some physical scarring to soften and imbibe water. In nature, scarification occurs in varying ways, but if you collect seed for resowing, you could use a file to slough away some of the seed coat before planting.

Flashback Favs

Continued...

THINGS TO DO THIS MONTH:

FERTILIZE: Feed winter bloomers such as alyssum, dianthus and especially pansies. Fertilize maidenhair fern with bone meal.

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. Send in soil samples (forms available at <http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/>). 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: Apply pre-emergent weed killer to lawn. Spray fruit trees with dormant oil just prior to bud break. Call the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office in Travis County at 512-854-9600 for fruit and nut tree spray schedules.



Herbs de Texas

by Carolyn Williams

For Christmas this year my son-in-law commented he would enjoy having some fresh from the garden, Herbs de Provence. Both my son and son-in-law enjoy grilling different items, and I thought it would be a rather special gift to give them each my version of fresh herbs.

Gathering what I grow in my herb garden produced the following recipe of what I call "Herbs de Texas". I thought some of you, with similar herbs, might enjoy making this as well. Just realize from the get go that it is rather time consuming and you benefit from being organized.

1. Water your herbs the day before you start so they are clean and succulent.
2. After cutting and bringing herbs inside, check to make sure they are clean both front and under the leaves.
3. Do not use too many "strong" herbs, ie., rosemary, sage, oregano, etc. Use your sense of smell to determine what combination you feel works best.
4. Remove the stems of woody herbs like rosemary, but leave the stems on during the baking process of thinner leafed herbs like thyme and parsley.
5. Bake herbs on your oven's lowest temp. (mine was set to 170 degrees) and cook with the oven door ajar – 1 hr. (30 minutes on each side). Also turn the cooking sheet around in the oven so that each side receives the same amount of heat.
6. Cook herbs on a muslin covered cookie sheet. This keeps herbs from sliding around on cooking sheets when you are handling them. Leave them in the oven a few minutes to cool down after their cooking time. I cooked each herb separately in order to remember which one I was working with.
7. Remove stems. Put each variety in their own labeled space. Believe me, after they bake, many of them look like the same brown "blobs". By labeling, you will be able to measure each herb and know exactly what you are mixing together.
8. I put each cooked batch in folded waxed paper, and using a rolling pin, found they crumbled well. Then they went back into their labeled space. Others, like bay leaf, had to be either torn apart or cut with a knife. Bay leaf and parsley kept a bit of green color, but for the most part, many baked to the same shade of brown.
9. Measure each herb before blending to keep accurate records of taste and mixture.



Below is my recipe for Herbs de Texas. I found that approximately 1 ½ of this recipe produced about 1 cup or 2 small containers, rubber sealed for longer freshness. You can find these small containers in several places such as kitchen stores or home specialty stores, ie., World Market, Pier 1, etc.

Herbs de Texas

Continued...

Herbs de Texas

2 Tbsp dried Thyme	2 Tbsp dried Rosemary
2 Tbsp dried Oregano	2 Tbsp dried Basil
2 Tbsp dried Fennel Seed	1 Tbsp dried Parsley
1 Tbsp dried Bay Leaf	2 Tbsp dried Savory
1 tsp dried Mexican Mint Marigold	

Come springtime when basil is again growing, I hope you will give this a try. Use your own recipe and experiment with different combinations. It proved to be a big hit with my family and, certainly something a bit different to give as gifts – straight from my garden!

Happy Gardening,
Carolyn Williams

Austin Area Events

Texas First Detector

Saturday, February 6, 2016
10am - 12pm

Zilker Botanical Gardens
2220 Barton Springs Road
Austin, TX

"See something, say something"...a program that gardeners can use to improve observation skills detecting invasive pest (insects) and diseases such as the brown marmorated stink bug and rose rosette (see picture) that may appear and cause problems in our gardens and landscapes. Susan Jung and Tommie Clayton, Travis County Master Gardeners, will introduce you to the National Plant Diagnostic Network program, review "wanted posters" so you'll know what to look for, web based resources, and where to report sightings for confirmation.

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.

Effects on Insect Ecology: How You Can Help

Thursday, February 11, 2015
10am - 12pm

Travis Co AgriLife Extension Service Office
1600 Smith Road
Austin, TX

The talk covers why insects and other arthropods are important to humans and other animals, how drought impacts various insect groups and how people can help attract and keep insects in their yard even in times of drought.

Wizzie Brown serves as Program Specialist – IPM in the Austin metroplex encompassing Travis County and surrounding counties. Visit her blog at <http://urban-ipm.blogspot.com/>

Part of the Dealing with Drought Series
Cost: \$10 through 2/1; \$15 starting 2/2 and on-site
NO cash accepted – checks and credit cards only.

Space is limited so register on-line early to reserve your seat!
Register: <https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/TravisCounty>
Register by Phone: 979-845-2604

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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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"Winter dies into the spring, to be born again in the autumn."
- Marche Blumenberg