

# The Compost Bin



June 2016

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

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**Daphne's Flashback Favs**

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### Cover:

Tomato season has finally arrived!

By Bruce Leander

### Right:

By Liath Appleton



## Meeting Lisa Anhaizer, Bonnie Martin and Cindy Haynie

### Youth Gardening Projects/Programs

Presenter: MG Lisa Anhaizer (we share her with Agrilife, but she's still ours!)

There are a variety of youth gardening projects you can get involved with to share your knowledge and nurture gardening/nutrition interests in our local youth. Lisa will provide an overview of some of those opportunities.

### TX Sprouts Program

Presenters: MG Bonnie Martin and MG Cindy Haynie

Calling all Travis County Master Gardeners! The TX Sprouts Program needs you!

Get involved in cutting-edge research on school gardens and earn your MG hours in the process!

Bonnie Martin and Cindy Haynie will give an overview of the TX Sprouts program, which is recruiting Master Gardeners to join the project.

Agrilife Extension is partnering with the University of Texas on the TX Sprouts program - a 4-year research study that will assess the effects of school gardens and nutrition pro-

grams on obesity in elementary students. This project will involve 16 schools in the Austin area. The project team will work with the schools to construct a school garden and then teach a garden and nutrition curriculum over an academic year, measuring changes in students at the beginning and end. The project will also involve parent classes on nutrition and gardening as well as sustainability training to help the school continue forward with the school garden in future years. Master Gardeners will be fully trained on the program and be paired with a school as an advisor for their garden program. Come be involved in cutting-edge research on school gardens and get your MG hours in the process!

Master Gardener Meeting information:  
Wednesday, June 1, 2016, starting at 7 pm  
Zilker Botanical Garden

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

## Compost Bin Survey Results

by Liath Appleton

The results of Compost Bin survey are in! Thanks to all the participants. Your answers will help us improve our monthly newsletter for both Master Gardeners and the public.

We received a total of 67 responses:

55 Travis County Master Gardeners

10 MG Interns

2 Public

### How often do you read the Compost Bin Newsletter?

I read it every month.

34 Total, 51.52%

I read it every-so-often.

24 Total, 36.36%

I never read the newsletter.

8 Total, 12.12%

### Have you ever contributed to the newsletter?

Yes: 17

No: 50

### How do you obtain the newsletter?

Website: 27

VMS: 40

Print: 1



## Survey Results

Continued...

### **Would you prefer some other method of obtaining the newsletter?**

No: 24

Linked to Facebook: 1

MailChimp or other via email: 5

Most of you are happy with the current method, but I did receive a few requests for either a direct link to the pdf via email, or an email version of the newsletter using Mailchimp or some other newsletter application. A couple of people have difficulty using the VMS to read the newsletter as well.

Unfortunately I cannot send a direct link to the pdf via the VMS subscription email, but I am looking into an option for subscribing via the website using MailChimp. This would give people the option of receiving a version of the newsletter directly in an email format.

And yes, a link on Facebook is a great idea. I will ask our Facebook manager to post the links each month.

### **Are you happy with the current content? What would you like to see added or changed in terms of content? Please describe.**

[I think it is well done and very interesting. I like the "Meet the MGs" feature as well as the vegetable garden recommendations.](#)

Most of you seem happy with the current content, and a few of you mentioned "Meet the MGs" as being a favorite. I love it too! It seems most of you are a bit shy however, and the author, Jean Love El Harim, has been unable to continue writing her articles for lack of volunteers. This issue of the Compost Bin sadly contains the last. Perhaps she can be convinced to write more if you nominate each other. I am hoping to figure out a way to continue this fantastic regular feature.

[Since I'm still in learning mode, I love all the content.](#)

May you always be in learning mode. Perhaps I'll have a reader for life.

[The organization and flow of it is too chaotic and content heavy for me. It needs to be easily digestible for people with little time. After all, I would rather be gardening than reading about gardening.](#)

Maybe a MailChimp version of the newsletter would help here as well.

[Scarcity of water is a big issue. The newsletter should include articles about more efficient water use \(efficient irrigation\) in vegetable gardens and lawns.](#)

I received a few requests for articles on xeriscaping and drought tolerant gardens. Anyone interested in writing a regular feature on this topic?

## Survey Results

Continued...

I would like more transparency on the board's activities -- what issues is it considering and when, and exact instructions on how members can give their input on relevant issues. The President has invited members to give their input but I've never heard her explain how to do that.

This is one of the most common requests I receive throughout the year. I would love to have regular reports from the committee heads, and we do occasionally publish updates. The newsletter was created for this purpose, and I encourage all of you to help out your committees whenever possible to promote the various activities in which you are involved. Many of you have pointed out that a newsletter write-up of the meeting minutes is required by the TCMGA Bylaws. The Executive Committee last year made the decision to post the minutes to the VMS instead. If you would like to know about discussions and the decisions made during these meetings, I suggest that you to contact the members of the committee directly.

Would like to see a monthly report on total volunteer hours.

Interesting idea. Although it may be difficult to do this on a monthly basis, perhaps I can obtain some numbers quarterly or annually.

I'd love to see more content! Some follow-up stories on MG activities; stories about what projects TCMGs are currently involved in; maybe feature a plant each month

All great ideas! I received many requests like this one. I know that many of you consider writing from time-to-time, but I also know that as a volunteer, making the time to do the actual writing can be difficult. I highly encourage all of you to write, photograph, take notes, and submit your articles. The website blog is also a great place for follow-ups on MG events. I am hoping to bring the newsletter and the TCMGA website (<http://www.tcmastergardeners.org/>) together more frequently in the future, but I need writers. You can always submit your ideas to [editor.compostbin@gmail.com](mailto:editor.compostbin@gmail.com)

Other article ideas:

I would like more articles about people who convert their yards and gardens from traditional grass lawns to native plants. More articles about eradication of invasive plant species and how to control them, why they are not healthy for the ecosystem in which we live, etc.

I enjoy the stories on MG's. I appreciate articles on vegetable gardening and what to plant now (rather than a pic at harvest time). Also pictures of prominent pests to watch out for are helpful.

The design principles of Xeriscaping do not include crushed granite and cacti in every yard.

Maybe more info on fruit and nut trees. Planting, pruning, care, diseases. How to's on raised beds, ollas, permaculture.

All great ideas!

I think it could be more compelling. I like the "things to do this month" articles and perhaps it would be educational to include some of the more interesting questions and answers we see and hear through the help desk and email responders. What are the topics that the public needs addressed most often? Plant identification articles are always helpful as is plant pathology. There is a blog from an entomologist

## Survey Results

Continued...

out of North Texas called Insects in the City which always has current and relevant information. I read every one of his blogs, which I get through email. From him, I knew about the zika virus before mainstream media picked up the story. Perhaps we could ask for permission to reprint with citation.

Maybe incorporate some contributions from non-Master Gardeners. (i.e. Garden bloggers, landscape professionals etc) on seasonal topics. I received a couple of requests for contributions from outside the TCMGA. Although I do like the magazine quality of our newsletter, and I love that the public can also enjoy reading the articles (I read them myself before becoming a MG), I do think it is important to remember that this is the newsletter for the TCMGA, and should probably be written by the Travis County Master Gardeners specifically. Articles from Extension, like Wizzie's monthly insect guide, are definitely welcome as well. Am I incorrect in this line of thought? Tell me what you think at [editor.compostbin@gmail.com](mailto:editor.compostbin@gmail.com)

### **Any other suggestions?**

Include more surveys! I don't think we have an ongoing mechanism to anonymously gather information from our membership.

Agreed. Perhaps a regular feature of "Letters to the Editor" and/or a "Question of the Month" would be useful. I will promote the concept and see if people are willing to participate.

Would be interesting to have write-ups about activities of other clubs/groups/things going on around Austin that would be interesting to MGs. Wouldn't it be great to have news of what other MG groups are doing?

I love this idea! I have published articles about MGs who visit gardens from around the world, but never anything about visits to other events, meetings, etc.

Have anything to say? Send me an email at [editor.compostbin@gmail.com](mailto:editor.compostbin@gmail.com)

## In the Vegetable Garden

by Patty Leander

Not only is June the start of hurricane and mosquito season, it is also peak harvest season for many of our spring planted vegetables, including cucumbers, beans, peppers, okra and, of course, tomatoes!

The rainy days of May and vigorous plant growth may promote cracking of tomatoes, which occurs when the fruit enlarges so quickly that it outgrows its skin. Some varieties may be more susceptible to cracking (I've noticed it repeatedly on Sun Gold and Mariana's Peace), but some, especially hybrids with thicker skin, including Early Girl, Juliet, Celebrity, Jaune Flamme and Valley Girl, seem to be more resistant. Harvesting fruit a little early, with the first blush of pink, may help avoid the problem of cracking. If you do experience cracked or split tomatoes, they are usually still edible if the cracked or exposed flesh can be cut away.

Tender new growth on vegetable (and ornamental) plants is very attractive to aphids, so be on the lookout for these tiny, soft-bodied insects that feed by sucking the plant juices from leaves, buds

and fruit. They show up in droves, multiply exponentially and are fairly easy to spot, often on the underside of leaves or along the stems of plants. They can be green, yellow, black or red and are a favorite snack for ladybug and lacewing larvae. Ideally we want to encourage beneficials to take care of pests, but if aphids get out of hand their populations can be effectively diminished with targeted sprays of insecticidal soap or by simply washing them off with a strong spray of water. They are a persistent pest and may require repeated spraying to get them under control.

Spider mites tend to show up as the days get hotter and drier. They can also be controlled with a strong spray of water to the underside of the leaves, repeated every 3-5 days. Alternatively neem oil can be used to combat both spider mites and aphids; be sure to follow directions on the product label.

Take precautions this summer to protect yourself from both mosquitoes and



Dark green and succulent, Malabar spinach is nutrient rich; add fresh, tender leaves to sandwiches and salads or chop and sauté with squash, peppers or okra.



Plant heat-loving butter beans for a delicious summer harvest that will last until frost.

## In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...



Left: Harvest potatoes when the tops turn yellow and begin to die down.

Right: Bush beans (left to right Derby, Roc D'or and Provider) generally produce a few rounds of pickings before succumbing to summer heat, disease or pests; once production has slowed it's best to pull them up and plant again in August for fall production.

exposure to summer's intense sun. Wear sunscreen, a hat, long sleeves, pants and sunglasses along with mosquito repellent, such as products with DEET, lemon oil or eucalyptus. Eliminate all sources of standing water – even the ones you don't think about or see, like shallow plant saucers, gutters, depressions in plastic tarps or folds in lawn bags that might hold even a small amount of water. Cover rainwater containers and/or treat with dunks or granules containing BTI (*Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis*). Refer to the May 2016 Compost Bin newsletter for Wizzie Brown's informative article on mosquitoes and the Zika virus.

Here is the vegetable gardener's checklist for June:

- Plant okra and sweet potatoes if you haven't done so already.
- Plant some butter beans such as Jackson Wonder, Henderson or Dixie Butterpea.
- Stake peppers and eggplant to provide support as they go into production.
- Harvest vegetables frequently to insure peak quality and encourage continual production.
- Dig potatoes when the tops turn yellow and start to die back; handle carefully to avoid bruising. Cure in a warm, humid spot for 1-2 weeks then store in a single layer in a cool, dark location. Washing may encourage disease so wash just before eating.
- If cracking is a problem with tomatoes, harvest at first blush and let them ripen off the vine.
- Grow some nutritious greens that don't mind the heat of summer such as Malabar spinach, vegetable amaranth or purslane (available online from Johnny's Seeds or Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds). Harvest before they go to seed or they will spread all over the garden.
- Plant quick-growing buckwheat as a cover crop and cut it down after it starts to bloom. Add the leafy growth to the compost pile and let the roots decompose in place to enrich the soil for the following season.



## In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...

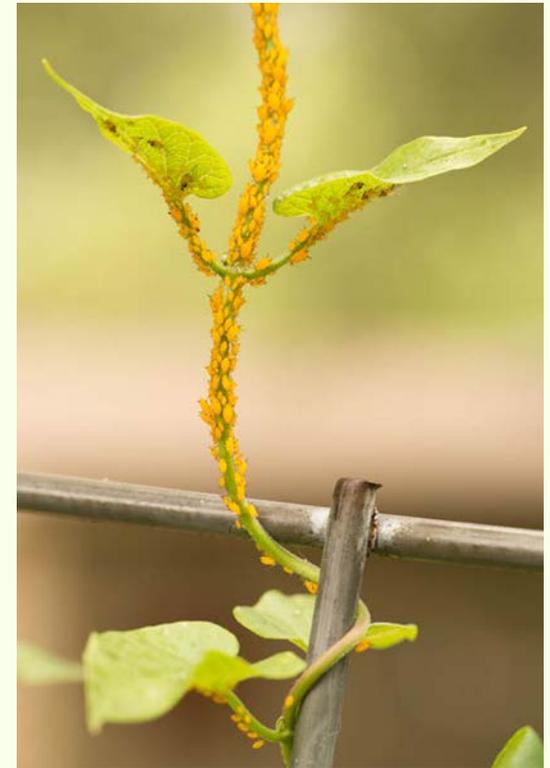
- Start tomatoes in pots this month for fall transplanting.
- Use a sunscreen that provides protection against UVA and UVB rays, with an SPF of 15 or greater. Cover up with a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses and use mosquito repellent whenever possible.
- Enjoy and share your summer bounty!



Left: Thin-skinned tomatoes, like these, Marianna's Peace, are more susceptible to cracking during wet weather.

Middle: Peppers can be harvested when fruit is green and has reached an adequate size, or leave fruit on the vine to ripen fully to its final color.

Right: Knock down soft-bodied aphids with a strong spray of water or insecticidal soap.



# Aphids

by Wizzie Brown



Aphids feed on a wide variety of plants in Texas. They have high reproductive capabilities, so their populations can grow to large numbers quickly.

Aphids are small, soft-bodied insects that come in a variety of colors. Some have wings while others may not, but all have cornicles, or "tailpipes" that come off the tip of the abdomen.

Aphids have piercing-sucking mouthparts which they use to pierce plant tissue and suck out the juices. Damage often appears as yellowing or curling of foliage. Aphids also secrete a sweet, sticky substance called honeydew. Honeydew often appears on the plant as a shiny spots or sometimes the honeydew may have sooty mold growing on it. Sooty mold is a black fungus that can block sunlight from reaching the plant leading to a decrease of photosynthesis.

A hint that you may have aphids is that you see ants trailing on the plant. Many species of ants will tend aphids for the honeydew.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at [www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com](http://www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com)

## Zilker Garden Faerie Trail

by Mary Allaway



Left: MG's display on the Zilker Garden Faerie Trail. Photo: Mary Allaway

Right: Faerie house workday with MGs Sharon White, Mary Allaway, Nita Watson and project leader, Sally Dickson. Photo: Bill Allaway

If you wish to give your imagination a boost, venture down the newly installed Faerie Trail in Zilker Garden. Tiny houses and other miniature structures perfect for these imaginary creatures have been created by members of the Austin community including some of our own members. This is the 4th year of the exhibit and there are 47 entries, 10 more than last year.

Of course the display by Master Gardeners reflects their gardening interests. You'll be proud to see it includes a compost bin, rainwater harvesting tank, Mason bee hive, chicken coop, xeriscape and other gardens. The house which is covered in natural materials like tree bark, moss and pecan shells, sits atop a repurposed crepe myrtle trunk.

Delight your children and grandchildren (or the child within yourself) with these little creations and teach gardening concepts at the same time! Visit the Faerie Trail through June 24. You'll find it west of the Dinosaur garden near the Butterfly Trail.



## La Crosse Cave Tour

by Martha King



Within site of La Crosse Avenue, entry to the La Crosse Cave is steep but includes handrails and steps down to the iron gate at its entrance, improvements courtesy of the Texas Cave Management Association.  
Photo: by Martha King

One of the perks for Master Gardeners who volunteer to assist with continuing education events is, of course, the continuing education itself. The best part is that not all of this education takes place in a classroom. As one of the registration table volunteers for the City of Austin's annual Landscape Professional Training series, I was lucky enough to be invited recently for a private tour of the La Crosse Cave on the property of the [Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#). Environmental Program Coordinator Denise Delaney of the city's Watershed Protection Department is the series organizer and was our host for the tour. Joining her as our guides were Watershed's Conservation Education Coordinator Susan Wall and Austin landscape architect and caver extraordinaire Vivian Loftin, as well as Denise's trusty sidekick and all-around indispensable helper Stefanie Lane, who has since moved to the Environmental Resource team working on riparian restoration. [Sidenote: In my research, I discovered that Vivian actually has a species of millipede named for her. The *Taiyutyla loftinae*, n. sp. or [Loftin's Cave Millipede](#), named in 2011, can be found in marble caves in Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks.]

The tour of the La Crosse Cave was offered as one of the culminating events of the series. As Susan Wall explained, being in a cave just feet below the surface of a pathway at the Wildflower Center is an excellent demonstration of how shallow the filter is for water traveling from the surface into the aquifers below. Her hope with the tour was to impress upon landscapers the potential impact their influence could have on the behavior of their clients in and around the Austin area. Master Gardeners well know that much of the geology in the area west of Austin includes shallow soils above porous limestone that channel runoff and groundwater back into our aquifers. The choice of plants, as well as the conscious and judicious use of supplements by residents and commercial landscape operations, can have a direct impact on the quality of water that enters these recharge zones.

La Crosse Cave is located within sight of La Crosse Avenue near the entrance to the Wildflower Center. Like many caves in the area, the undeveloped cave was originally littered with the bones of unfortunate goats, many found still wearing their goat bells, which had fallen into the opening. There is some speculation that goats infected by a certain ailment (parasitic or bacterial, I cannot recall) would seek out tight spaces as a result of their condition and as a result would fall into these caves and perish. These caves also contained a good deal of trash thrown in by ranchers in an effort to seal the crevices so that livestock would not fall to their death in them. In 2003, the Texas Cave Management Association (TCMA) undertook a cleanup

of the La Crosse cave, which remains under the conservatorship of TCMA.

Entrance to the cave, as Vivian pointed out, has been well groomed for visitors and the entry boulders have been reinforced with

## La Crosse Cave Tour

Continued...



Left: In spite of her knee issues, JaNet Booher (2008) was game enough to enter the cave and serve as sentry while the rest ventured deeper into the cave.

Photo: by Martha King

Right: First year Master Gardener Suzanne Lucignani has previous caving experience, which showed in her confident exploration of the cave.

Photo: Martha King

embedded rebar to protect against shifting from traversing water on its way down into the aquifer. The first small chamber, which is easily accessible on all fours opposite the entrance, provides an good example of how close the surface can be to the water's pathway into the aquifer. Looking up from this chamber, you can see the sky through a low point in the pathway above. Climbing down further into the cave, you can look beyond the cave pathway into an opening and feel a steady updraft from the aquifer below. To the right of this pathway is an opening that requires visitors to lie flat and crawl "army style" into a small chamber. Several in our party braved the mud to experience this challenge, though I opted to wait at the exit after hearing one of the cavers in front of me ask if there was "more room over there." The tightening of my chest at that remark convinced me that there was not enough room for me no matter what the answer was!

Everyone slithered back out of the chamber unscathed and we all emerged back into the sunlight, some muddier than others but all with smiles. I was sorry that not more of Austin's landscapers could have participated in this exercise, and I remain impacted by the thought of all of the caves known and as yet unknown below the surface in this area. For anyone interested in additional information on caving activities in this area, I encourage you to contact the [Texas Cave Management Association](http://www.tcmacaves.org).

Resources: Lady Bird Johnson  
Wildflower Center ([www.wildflower.org](http://www.wildflower.org))  
Texas Cave Management  
Association ([www.tcmacaves.org](http://www.tcmacaves.org))



## La Crosse Cave Tour

Continued...



Top Left: Recent rains made the rock passage ways a bit slippery in the cave. To the right, Suzanne Lucignani can be seen just emerging from a tight passageway. Photo: Martha King



Top Right: Guides for the caving expedition were Stefanie Lane, Vivian Loftin, Denise Delaney, and Susan Wall. Photo: Martha King

Right: Joining in the caving experience were Stefanie Lane, WFC Director of Horticulture Andrea DeLong-Amaya, Denise Delaney, Martha King (2014), JaNet Booher (2008), Zilker Botanical Garden Culture and Arts Education Specialist Chris Sanchez, Vivian Loftin, and Suzanne Lucignani (2015). Photo: Susan Wall



## Meet the Master Gardeners: Carolyn Williams

by Jean Love El Harim



Carolyn in her garden cottage.

Framing the gravel path into Carolyn's front yard are a Mexican mint marigold, a yellow-blooming thryallis, and a *Calicarpa americana* (American beautyberry) with long, purple-berried fronds waving a welcome. Carolyn greets me at the front door and we stroll around to the back garden, past the medicine wheel herb garden, under an arbor of roses, and along a path through oak trees to the cottage that Michael built for her. One of the cedar pillars on the porch has a heart carved with their initials. Sitting in the cool, quiet, bright cottage, with the soothing tones of the wind chimes in the background, Carolyn graciously answers my questions. Here is her story, in her own, uninterrupted voice.

"I come from fifth-generation Texans. We have Texas Rangers and ranchers in our background. I grew up in Johnson City, where my dad was a game warden. My grandparents were from San Saba, and I learned to garden with them, staying up there in the summer.

"[At the time of this writing] I'm working with the Inside Austin Gardens Tour committee. We're doing a lot of work trying to get everything under control. I have four little grandkids here in Austin, from 10 to one and a half years of age. I love to play with them. They come and swim with me, and we do things together, gardening, cooking. I am fortunate to have several M.G. friends, and after I retired it was fun to get to do more gardening with them, helping some of the gardeners get their gardens ready for that particular year's tour.

"I love to travel, and we've been lucky enough to travel to different countries, but home has always been here in the Texas Hill Country. Last year, my daughter and two little grandsons and I traveled in Northern Europe. We visited England, Ireland, Scotland, Sweden, and Denmark. We followed the Harry Potter path with a ride on the Hogwarts train through the Scottish Highlands to where J.K. Rowling actually wrote her first Harry Potter story, while sitting in the Elephant Tea Room in Edinburgh. We stayed in a castle or two and walked several lochs looking for treasures or sea monsters. It was a trip of a lifetime shared with my adorable little boys!

"Being the office manager and travel coordinator for the Longhorn Band for 15 years allowed me to travel a lot through the United States. It was fun and crazy and tons of work, and I felt like I raised about 9,000 kids, but on the whole, very rewarding. Prior to that, I worked with Governor Mark White during his tenure as Attorney General and then Governor. Later on, when I got the opportunity to retire, I was ready.

"For fun, I play bridge with a group of wonderful women. We have played bridge together for probably 35+ years. We raised all of our children together. They are a fabulous support group. When I broke my right femur, they were here for me every day, watching over me and bringing us food. It's an incredible thing to have such longtime friends! I also help Michael with the office tasks associated with our masonry construction business. And then, of course, I'm a grandmother (or 'Toto,' as I'm called) for my grandchildren. I love to cook. I got a kick out of Gregory talking about pies, as I love to bake and eat pies, as well. I'm waiting for the lemons on my Myer lemon to finish

## Meet the Master Gardeners

Continued...

turning yellow.

"Some quirky fun facts? The latest was when the grandsons and I were riding trains on our trip and I taught them how to play poker. The youngest one has phenomenal luck. We now enjoy getting together for poker parties, where the object is to beat me!

"My grandparents were fabulous gardeners. I spent a lot of time in the summers with them (Carolyn stands up to get a pink-and-white checked cloth bonnet from its place by the door of the cottage.). This is the bonnet that my grandmother made for me when I was a teenager, and the deal was, she didn't care what I wore, but I had to have the bonnet on when I was in the garden. I would have this bonnet on, and a bathing suit, and I used to wonder why I never had any teenage boys interested. I think I figured it out! I do believe many of us who garden have someone really quite special in their life and feel like they are with you in the garden. I have that with both my grandmother and my mother. Mom and I would go to the garden centers, where I bagged my own soil and compost. Some young man would always come over and help us get the bags into the car. The first time I went after my mom passed away, I had bagged my soil and was looking around for the young man to come over, and there was none. I smiled up at heaven and said, 'Mom, I hope you're seeing this and get a big laugh. Obviously we know why the young men were coming over to help, and I had nothing to do with it!' I got a big kick out of that. She would have, too.

"This garden was my dream when I started it. All the years that I worked, I could just do one little part, here and there. After I retired I decided to take on this area of totally neglected space. All these years my children had played in it, their fort, their secret hiding place. It was just such a jumbled up mess, so when I made it into what it is now, it was a definite thrill

"You have to know your place and know that you can't fight Mother Nature. Any of us that have been gardeners for a long time have killed a lot of plants that we thought would look gorgeous and then realized that they were not going to grow in our area. When you finally realize, 'Hello! This is what I need to do,' then it all starts to fall into place.

"There are a lot of plants that can take this heat and crazy swings in the weather. It's so much better when you have a garden that sings to you rather than one that moans to you. Don't you love just sitting here and watching the birds and the butterflies and hearing the wind chimes in the background? It all fits into place.

"My main gardening interests...everyone knows that I love roses. I come by that naturally through my grandmother and mom. In the springtime when they're all in bloom, I make everybody—Michael, my kids, grandkids-- come see Toto's place because it is gorgeous when everything is in bloom. I also love growing tomatoes, especially heirloom varieties. This year I had a Black Krim that measured 14 and a half inches. It was massive, and it tasted fabulous. There is something great about getting tomatoes from your garden, slicing them up with mozzarella, basil, and olive oil—doesn't it make your heart swell with pride that you have brought this meal to the table? I do a little happy dance every time.

"There is a problem with squirrels. It's a stab in your heart when you see a tomato running off. So, I can't let the tomatoes get totally ripe on the vine. I bring them inside when they start turning pink. I also feed the birds on the other side of the garden to keep them occupied and well fed.

"The biggest gardening challenge has been the soil out here, or lack of it! I've pretty much killed my back because of the rocks that I dig up with a pick and rock buster. I take one little section at time, and just work away.

"Apart from the rocks, most of the soil is composted leaves that fall over the years. It's good rich soil, it's just half an inch deep. Every year I add compost, both in spring and fall. I make my own compost and buy compost. I also pile up the oak leaves, wait a few years for them to start to decompose, and then wheel them back into the garden.

## Meet the Master Gardeners

Continued...

"My favorite plant changes with the seasons. The roses are always there; that's a constant. But walking out in October and seeing all of the salvias, the blues, the purples, and that fabulous mustard color from the Mexican Marigold Mint, I just love it. I reflected that in my garden. Usually the turk's cap is still blooming. The autumn sage has got the reds, along with the pomegranates and the Virginia creeper vine. All of those fabulous fall colors that I love all through my garden. Pots of marigolds and chrysanthemums in bronzes and oranges everywhere—blissful!

"I became a Master Gardener in 2000. I read an article in Southern Living magazine about the organization in San Antonio. I called the Travis County Extension Office and asked, 'Does Travis County have anything like this?' The president at that time, Susan Cashin, said yes, but that the class was already full. She offered to get me into the next fall class. I said, 'No, you don't understand the job I have. I have no time in the fall.' I begged and pleaded, so she put me through to Skip Richter, the agent at that time. As it turned out, if you remember, there had been a horrible accident with the A&M bonfire, and tragically, a few students were killed. The Longhorn Band members did a halftime show honoring them. For the first time ever in the more-than-100-year history of the band, they lowered all the flags but held the A&M flag high. They took off their Stetsons and put them over their hearts. They got a standing ovation, and I don't think there was a dry eye at Kyle Stadium. Skip, being from A&M, said 'So, you're involved in all of that.' And when I said, yes, he said, 'OK. Here's the deal. I'll let you in the class if you'll promise me that you won't just take the class and then just disappear.' I said, 'I promise.' That was 15 years ago.

"Since then, I have held several offices in the TCMGA. I've been privileged to do a couple of things that just stand out. I got involved with the school for the Deaf where I helped the students put in two gardens, a butterfly garden, and a veggie garden. They gave me a name. They signed it: C with a smile. I was also involved with helping to put in a garden at the shelter for abused women and children. With that, Michael and his masonry business came in and gave all the stone and brought crew members to put in the hardscape. These are things that just stick with you.

"I have gotten out of it much more than I have given. I thought I knew so much about gardening, and it didn't take but one or two classes for me to realize, 'Oh, my, I know so little about gardening!' The knowledge that you gain that you are able to pass forward. It's all so rewarding.

"I think it's neat to be with an organization where you are always picking up little bits of knowledge and doing it with a lot of friends that you really enjoy being with. If you have a combination of loving what you do and loving the people you are associated with, then that's just your way of life forever."

## 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=jIMeWLZmYgw> (CTG 2012)

### Fire ants and other insects in the compost pile

If you're an active composter, you'll definitely have insect larvae in your pile, and that's a good thing. These creatures are helping the microbes to break down the food waste in your pile and turn it into rich compost. Large, off-white grubs are very commonly found in compost piles, and people often mistake them for the same grub that damages our lawns. But the grubs in your pile are from a different species of insect, not the June beetle larvae that eat the roots of your turfgrass and other plants. You might also find black soldier fly larvae in your compost pile, which are also good. The insect species that are attracted to lay eggs in your pile will be influenced by what you put in it. If you have more kitchen scraps and food waste, you'll likely have more insect larvae. If you're only composting yard waste, you may not see as many creepy crawlies. But fire ants are another matter. Fire ants are actually building their mounds in the nice, soft organic matter of your compost pile. Although they're doing some aeration and technically aren't hurting anything in the pile, you most likely still don't want them living there, since they'll see the pile as theirs, not yours. If you have a mound of fire ants in your pile, it indicates that you need to turn and moisten the pile more often. If you're regularly turning the pile, the ants will have no time to build a home. During a hot summer, I didn't turn my pile as much as I should have and I came out one day to discover that a very large colony of fire ants had moved in. I got stung a few times when turning it and it took a few turns to get the ants to move away, but they eventually did. So there's no need to use any chemical fire ant treatments in this situation.

### Caesalpinia

There are two very common species of *Caesalpinia* in the nursery trade: *pulcherrima* and *gillesii*, and both are quite beautiful. *Caesalpinia pulcherrima* is most commonly known as Pride of Barbados or red bird of paradise. It has orange-yellow flowers and is a little bushier than *Caesalpinia gillesii*, which is most commonly known as yellow bird of paradise, because it has all yellow flowers. Both plants love the heat, need full sun, and prefer very well-drained soil. These plants will bloom all summer long with very little supplemental irrigation, so be careful not to overwater them. Both plants may freeze to the ground in winter, but not always. If you notice leaves reemerging on the plant in the spring, the plant was not damaged by the cold and may be left alone. But as temperatures warm up, if you notice growth at the base of the plant, from the roots, and not from the branches, go ahead and prune off all the top growth and allow the plant to reemerge from the roots. Pride of Barbados, the orange flowered one, is more frost tender, and does freeze to the ground in our winters more often than not. Both plants can get up to about 8 feet tall, but Pride of Barbados is generally a little shorter and bushier, mostly due to the fact that it freezes to the ground most years. And both plants get about 4 to 6 feet wide, so give them plenty of room.

## Flashback Favs

Continued...

Both plants attract hummingbirds and butterflies and are considered to be deer resistant.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQUIdNbXX-I> (CTG 2012)

### **Tomatoes with mushy black or brown rot on the bottom**

This is blossom end rot. Thanks to viewer Russell for sending a picture. Blossom end rot is a common disorder in tomatoes, but may also be found in peppers and eggplant. It's caused by a calcium deficiency in the fruit, but adding calcium to the soil won't solve the problem. As plant cells are developing, they require a lot of calcium. And tomato fruit develops quite rapidly, sometimes depleting the plant's available calcium supply. There are many reasons why your tomato fruit may develop faster than it can replenish its calcium, but usually the reason is irregular watering. Soil that is very wet, when you irrigate, then very dry, between waterings, leads to irregular water-uptake and fruit that develops in fits and starts. Usually blossom-end rot is only a problem for the first harvest of the season, then plant growth kind of evens out, and water-use by the plant evens out a bit too. When growth and water uptake occur at a steady rate, the fruit develops in a more even manner as well and cells in the fruit receive enough calcium to develop properly. Certain cultivars and varieties of tomatoes are more prone to blossom-end rot, so you may want to choose different varieties next year, if you have a large problem with a particular variety this year. If you continue to have issues, you might try using sulfur to acidify the soil a bit and using a fertilizer with nitrogen in the nitrate form, not the ammoniacal form. Calcium sprays to the plant don't remedy the situation much, since not much of the calcium applied to the leaves gets into the fruit, where it's needed.

### **Manfreda**

There are many different species in the genus *Manfreda*. You may also find hybrid Agave/Manfreda crosses, called Mangaves. All are native to the southern US, Mexico and Central America and are great succulents for your garden. One species of Manfreda is known as Texas tuberose. As with most succulents, Manfredas require loose, airy soil with excellent drainage. Gardener Brent Henry has clay soil so he mixes in decomposed granite to improve drainage. His Manfredas get partial sun with most of the sun in the afternoon, but shaded by a bur oak. He gives them practically no water, and all have survived hard freezes and tough droughts just fine. They bloom reliably every spring with a 4 foot spike. Manfredas have a low-growing, rosette habit and don't take up much space in the garden. With their long, sometimes curly leaves, they also look great in containers, especially when the container color plays off the spots on the leaves.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLGgYtkIJ94> (CTG 2013)

### **All about ferns**

Viewer Heidi noticed one day that the bottoms of the leaves on her ferns were covered in strange black spots. We were happily able to soothe Heidi's frayed nerves, since these are nothing to worry about at all. The splotches are actually very natural, and indicate a very happy plant indeed. Ferns are ancient plants that still reproduce from spores, rather than going to all the trouble of producing flowers to attract those pesky, unreliable pollinators. Ferns are native to areas with high relative humidity, which is important in their reproductive cycle. Here in Central Texas, we have a beautiful little native fern, which can easily be seen while hiking along our many creeks and green belts. I first discovered the southern maidenhair fern, *Adiantum capillus-veneris*, while out on hikes with my plant systematics 101 class here at UT Austin. Dr. Billie Turner would be proud that I remembered that tongue-tier of a species name! Okay, back to Heidi's fern.

## Flashback Favs

Continued...

Is there anything special she should do with it now that it's producing spores? No, not really. You might notice a bit of a mess as the spores dry up and fall off, but the plant will happily go about its own life, whether any offspring result or not. Just keep on doing whatever you're doing Heidi; you're fern sounds like it's very happy in your care.

### **Brazilian rock rose, *Pavonia hastate*, also known as pink Pavonia**

Like our native rock rose, this species is a relative of the more tropical Hibiscus, but with more drought and cold tolerance. Plant Brazilian rock rose in full sun and give it plenty of space, since it can get up to 3 feet tall and 4 feet wide. In a bit of shade it will stay smaller, but will still flower prolifically. The petals of pink Pavonia flowers are pale-pink, almost white, with a deep magenta center, attracting a crowd of butterflies and hummingbirds to your garden all summer long. As its name implies, rock rose will do just fine in rocky soils, making it a great choice for rocky Hill Country gardens, and also in xeriscaped areas of the garden with decomposed granite or other gravelly substrate. In mild winters, Brazilian rock rose may be evergreen, but will be deciduous in colder winters. There's no need to shear to the ground in winter, but a light pruning in very early spring will encourage bushier, less leggy growth. If you have the time, lightly shearing during the growing season will also encourage more of those gorgeous little flowers. Plant Brazilian rock rose along walkways and paths, where it will have space to spread out gracefully, and soften surrounding hardscapes.

### THINGS TO DO IN JUNE

**FERTILIZE:** Fertilize annuals with 1 cup of balanced fertilizer per 100 sq. ft. Rich compost, manure tea and fish emulsion are some organic options. Yellowing leaves near the tip of plant shoots indicate a lack of iron. Check soil pH and treat with an iron supplement, if needed. Feed roses and young fruit trees with a nitrogen fertilizer. Feed established annuals and perennials with a high nitrogen/low phosphorus fertilizer such as 15-5-10, 8-2-4 or 9 - 1 - 1.

**WATER:** Water all planted areas deeply but infrequently during dry periods. Water outdoor potted plants daily.

**LAWN CARE:** Mow every 5-7 days, leaving the clippings on the lawn. Raise mower setting to reduce stress to turf in summer. Water during the cool of early morning. Avoid weed killers now that temperatures are above 85 degrees.

**DISEASES /PESTS TO LOOK FOR:** Watch for chinch bugs in the sunny areas of your lawn, especially near streets and driveways. Webworms and other caterpillars can be treated with *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) . For scale insects, mealy bugs and spidermites, use summer oil or horticultural oil.

**PRUNE:** Remove spent flowers from daisies, daylilies, cannas and other summer flowers. Remove fruiting canes from blackberries after harvest. Tip prune new canes at 4' to promote branching. Prune dead and damaged wood from trees and shrubs as needed. Cut geraniums back and place in light shade. Do not prune oak trees at this time since the beetle that carries oak wilt is active now and may be attracted to any cuts you make.

### OTHER THINGS TO DO

Prepare fall garden beds. Remove old winter vegetables and strawberry plants from beds. Replenish mulch.



## Announcements

Congratulations to the Travis County Master Gardener Association for your recent recognition at the Texas Master Gardeners Association Conference.

2nd Place in Written Education for the Compost Bin Newsletter

3rd Place in Educational Programs for the 2015 Inside Austin Gardens Tour



## Austin Area Events

### **22nd Annual Austin Pond and Garden Tour "Ponds and Picnics"** Saturday and Sunday, Jun 4-5, 2016

Saturday, June 4 - South and Central Austin (9am to 5pm)  
Saturday Night - Two ponds - South Austin (8pm to 10:00pm)  
Sunday, June 5 - North Austin (9am to 5pm)

This year's tour will feature twenty-five beautiful private gardens in North, Central and South Austin. Ponds of every size and description will be included along with streams, fountains and waterfalls. Some gardens are Certified Wildlife Habitats, most have native plants, some have rainwater harvesting systems.

The tour will benefit The Zilker Botanical Garden Conservancy

[View Flyer](#) or go to [AustinPondSociety.org](http://AustinPondSociety.org)

### **Texas Tough Plants** Thursday, Jun 9, 2016 10am - 12pm

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

Are you looking for colorful, low-maintenance plants for your garden? Join us to learn about some terrific Texas native plants that can bring beauty and function to your garden while being well adapted to handle Texas' blazing summers and other weather extremes. In addition to being water-wise, native plants provide great benefits to pollinators and birds. 4-H CAPITAL's gardening specialist and Texas Master Naturalist Meredith O'Reilly will guide you in choosing the right natives for your garden goals.

Part of the Dealing with Drought Series  
Cost: \$10 through 5/30; \$15 starting 5/31 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

## TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

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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](mailto:editor.compostbin@gmail.com)



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[www.tcmastergardeners.org](http://www.tcmastergardeners.org)  
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"In June, as many as a dozen species may burst their buds on a single day. No man can heed all of these anniversaries; no man can ignore all of them." - Aldo Leopold