

The Compost Bin

July 2016

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



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Cover:
 Garden-fresh okra is a sure sign that summer has arrived.
 By Bruce Leander

Right:
 By Martha King



Meeting Jenny Perez

Join Jenny Perez, Education Coordinator for the American Botanical Council, to learn about seasonally relevant plants to help keep us cool and hydrated as well as soothe sun-kissed and bug-bitten skin.

Learn more about growing, harvesting and utilizing plants like hibiscus, lemon verbena, lemongrass and lemon balm to prepare as herbal infusions. Become familiar with key plants for summertime first aid including aloe, plantain, Echinacea and calendula. We will also discuss the pros and cons of utilizing certain plants as natural insect repellents. This presentation will present practical information on how to make the most of summer with the help of our herbal allies.

Bio

Jenny Perez is the Education Coordinator for the American Botanical Council (ABC) located in east Austin. Jenny directs ABC’s internship program for dietetic and pharmacy students and assists with member research, as well as community outreach. With over 8 years of experience in herbal education and sustainable horticulture, she utilizes gardens as an ex-

tension of the classroom in an effort to connect people with plants that provide both food and medicine to enhance the health and wellbeing of ourselves and our communities.

Master Gardener Meeting information:
 Wednesday, July 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

July is clean-up month; time to remove non-productive crops that have succumbed to heat, pests or disease. Be ruthless about this task – vegetables that have lost their vigor are not likely to recover as the weather gets hotter and drier, no matter how much water or fertilizer you provide. Once you have removed spent plants you can focus your energy and resources on more heat tolerant stars of the summer garden, including okra, southern peas, peppers, eggplant and Malabar spinach.

But there's nothing wrong with taking a break this time of year either. If you are not interested in hard-core summer gardening, this is a good time to rest and rejuvenate the soil by leaving it fallow. Remove all plant material, spread a layer of compost over the soil and then cover with a generous layer of mulch. The mulch reduces weeds, protects soil, conserves moisture and gives the garden a tidy look for the summer. Continue to water the soil to encourage microbial life.



Give Malabar spinach a sturdy fence or trellis to climb and it will reward you with nutritious greens all summer.

Even though it is the middle of summer, gardeners must always be thinking ahead, so grab a cold drink and some seed catalogs and start thinking about the cool season vegetables you will plant in fall. Summer always flies by, and cool weather will be back before you know it.

Here is the vegetable gardener's checklist for July:

- The rains brought the weeds – pull or hoe and add them to the compost bin. And don't let them go to seed!
- Check okra plants daily and harvest pods when they are 3-5" long; wear gloves and long sleeves to protect skin from tiny spines that cause itchy skin.
- Monitor plants for spider mites - they love hot, dry, dusty conditions and their populations can quickly get out of hand. Spray the underside of the plants with water weekly (or more often if needed) to discourage build up.
- Plant nitrogen-fixing southern peas as a food crop; at the end of the season leave the roots in the ground to decompose and enrich the soil.



Nitrogen-fixing southern peas yield numerous pods for shelling or drying.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...



Put your diseased and dying tomatoes out of their misery – no amount of water or TLC will save them at this point in the season.

- Plant pumpkins early this month in order to harvest before Halloween. If you are more interested in growing pumpkins for seed try hullless varieties like 'Lady Godiva' (www.rareseeds.com or www.groworganic.com) or 'Kakai' (www.johnnyseeds.com or www.superseeds.com).
- Continue to water and feed spring-planted peppers and eggplant; they may not produce much in the heat of summer but they will bear heavily once cooler temperatures return.
- Water early in the day and remember that soaking the soil deeply and infrequently is preferable to sprinkling the surface daily. As summer heats up try to provide 1½-2" of water per week, especially for plants that are in production.
- Inspect plants regularly for disease and insect problems and treat before they get out of control.
- Plan your fall garden and order seeds and supplies.



'Mississippi Silver' is known as a crowder because the plump peas are crowded into the pod.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...

Below are two recipes for utilizing cucumbers and tomatoes from the garden.

Tabbouleh

- 1 cup bulgur wheat
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 ½ c boiling water
- ¼ c lemon juice
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 cup flat-leaf parsley, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 tsp black pepper

Combine boiling water with salt and pour over bulgur, cover and let sit 30 minutes. Stir gently and add remaining ingredients. Chill 2-3 hours or overnight. About 30 minutes before serving, stir in the following ingredients:

- 2 tomatoes, diced
- 2 cucumbers, peeled and diced
- 2-4 Tbsp fresh mint, chopped

Garnish with feta cheese, kalamata olives and chickpeas; serve with pita bread and hummus.



Tabbouleh, a healthy Mediterranean salad, makes good use of home-grown cucumbers, tomatoes and mint.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...

Sweet-and-Sour Cucumbers

4 cucumbers, thinly sliced

1 tablespoon coarse salt

1 onion, thinly sliced

1 cup white vinegar

1/3 cup sugar

1/4 cup chopped fresh dill (add more if you really like dill)

1 teaspoon pepper

Place cucumbers in a colander and sprinkle with salt. Toss to coat and let stand 15 minutes. Drain well and pat dry. Combine cucumbers with remaining ingredients and chill at least two hours before serving.



Cold and crisp refrigerator pickles make a refreshing treat after working in the garden.

Emerald Ash Borer Found in Texas

by Wizzie Brown

Emerald ash borer, often referred to as EAB, is an exotic pest from Asia. This beetle is a serious threat to ash trees. Emerald ash borer was accidentally introduced into the United States and was found in Michigan in 2002.

Four beetles were found in a trap located in NE Texas (Harrison County) in late April 2016. There are currently no confirmed cases of infested ash trees. The beetles will continue to be monitored throughout the state.

Larvae bore into trees under the bark and cut off the water and nutrient conducting vessels. Larvae are creamy white, legless with a flattened body. Larvae are 1- 1 ½ inches in length when fully developed.

As an adult, the beetle is elongated and cylindrical with the pronotum (a part of the thorax) extended back as a lobe towards the abdomen. Most notably, these beetles are bright, metallic green with reddish hues. Adults are about 1/2 inch in size. If the wings are removed or lifted, the upper side of the abdomen is bright coppery-red which can help differentiate this beetle from closely related species in Texas. Please note that there can be varying coloration - more blue or reddish instead of green.

In infested trees, canopy die back is often seen in the top one third of the canopy and then moves down until the tree is bare. Epicormic shoots (leafy shoots coming off the trunk of the tree) may also be seen. Vertical fissures may appear on the bark and galleries may be able to be seen through openings. If bark is peeled off, serpentine galleries packed with frass may be seen. Adult beetles produce a d-shaped exit hole (1/8 inch diameter). Woodpeckers may cause damage to trees infested with EAB. Look for flaking bark and uneven holes caused by the woodpeckers feeding on larvae and pupae.

If EAB activity is confirmed within an area, it is recommended that a systemic insecticide treatment is given to ash trees of high value. If more than 50% of an infested ash tree crown remains, then treatment with a systemic insecticide may slow the attack. If less than 50% of an infested ash tree crown remains, the tree should be removed.

For great information on emerald ash borer within Texas see the following site: <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/eab/>

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

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=Qch8SoFnX8s> (CTG 2012)

How close to oak trees can you add rock hardscaping to reduce lawn space and water?

I'm sure that you are not alone in wanting to reduce some lawn area so that you can reduce irrigation and mowing, but when removing turf and replacing with hardscaping around trees, you should be very careful. First, you want to leave some space around the trunk, about 2 feet on each side should be sufficient, and use bark mulch in that area, if possible. You want to limit soil compaction over the larger roots of an older tree. When removing the turf, be very careful not to damage any of the tree roots, which are hopefully deeper in the soil. Using rocks as mulch around the tree is fine, since there is space between the rocks for water and air to penetrate the soil. But be careful if using pavers or other hardscaping around a tree. You can use pebbles or sand between the pavers, which would allow for some water and air to work their way into the soil, but not as much as rocks or other mulch. So the soil underneath pavers will become more compacted and when the roots grow, the pavers will buckle and be unattractive and are also a potential tripping hazard. The smaller roots, which have root hairs, occur out at the dripline of the tree, at and beyond the furthest branches, and are where the tree takes up water, so you want to be sure that any construction that you do leaves this area permeable for air and water to get down to the root zone.

Jimsonweed, *Datura wrightii*, also known as moonflower or angel trumpet

This lovey plant has large, gorgeous trumpet-shaped white flowers that open at night. The most common way to get this plant is by having a friend share some seed with you. Once the flower has been pollinated, a very large, spiky seed head forms, containing hundreds of seeds. If you don't collect those seed heads before they burst, you'll find lots of *Datura* seedlings coming up all over the place next year, although the plant really isn't invasive and the seedlings shouldn't escape too far. *Datura* is listed as hardy to zone 9 and so it may be perennial in your garden. But most likely it will reestablish from seed, so be sure to collect and save some so that you can plant them where you want them next year, and give some to jealous friends. *Datura* only gets about 2 feet tall, but may spread very wide, up to 10 feet, especially if it's getting plenty of water. It doesn't need much water at all and prefers well-drained, coarse soil, but if given a little supplemental irrigation, it will get a bit larger and flower more prolifically. *Datura* needs full sun to grow and produce those gorgeous white blooms, which usually start to show in late May or early June and cover the plant all summer long. Be very careful when handling this plant. All parts of it are poisonous if ingested and some people are allergic and have a reaction when touching its fuzzy gray-green foliage. *Datura* is a great plant for xeriscaped areas in your garden, and requires very little care or attention to be beautiful all summer long, even in the extreme heat.

Flashback Favs

Continued...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dH0uQOvELJ8> (CTG 2012)

Can plants actually sun scald?

And the answer is yes, they can. The sun can damage plants in several ways; the most obvious is when you see actual brown, burned spots on the leaves. The intense heat of the sun simply bakes the leaf tissue, killing it. You may also see sun scald on the fruit of peppers and tomatoes, if the fruit is exposed to the intense light of the late afternoon sun. Another common sun injury is on the southwest side of the trunk of young trees. When trees are young, their bark is not very thick and can be easily damaged by the intense rays of the sun. The bad news is there's nothing to be done for sun scald once it's occurred. Dead plant tissue cannot be repaired. But the good news is, sun scald can easily be avoided. First, you should know whether or not your plant can take full sun. The label that accompanied the plant when you bought it may or may not be correct on this issue, so do a little extra research. Also, even plants that can take the full sun need to be acclimated to it if they haven't ever experienced it. A plant that has been on your porch for several weeks, out of the direct sun, will no longer be able to handle those bright rays, so start by moving the plant into the full sun for a few hours in the morning, slowly lengthening the time to all day before you actually put it in the ground.

Ruby crystals grass, *Melinis nerviglumis* 'Pink Crystals'

My friend Jenny first introduced me to this lovely little ornamental grass, which makes a wonderful addition to very dry areas the landscape, especially in xeric gardens with decomposed granite beds. It stays small, getting only about 18 to 24 inches tall and a little less wide. The delicate, light green foliage clumps from a single base, the same as other ornamental grasses. But the real show-stopper on this plant is the rosy pink, softly textured seed heads that sway gently in the breeze. Ruby crystals grass prefers the full, intense sun, takes very little water, even during establishment, and looks great from spring all the way through summer. The seed heads detach and blow away once they've dried, and the plant reseeds easily around the garden, so keep an eye out for it in areas where you might not want it to grow and simply pull the seedlings before they get very big.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGAMzDUCr0A> (CTG 2013)

Is mulch safe to use in a garden bed that has been stored outside and now has mold growing in the bag?

You should separate out the moldy portion and toss it in your compost pile, and the rest is safe to use. The moist environment in the bag with all that yummy, dead organic matter is the perfect place for mold and other fungal spores to take root. You don't want to use the moldy mulch in your garden, simply because it would serve as a source of spores for the colony to spread. But the mold is feeding on dead tissue, not living, so unless the bed was kept far too wet, the mold wouldn't damage your plants. In fact, there are dormant mold spores just about everywhere, just waiting for the situation to be right, so they can germinate and grow. But take away the environmental problems, such as too much moisture, and the colony will quickly die out. Soil is actually teeming with many different species of microbes, most of which pose no threat to normal plant life, and even help improve it by breaking down dead organic matter and converting it to life-giving nutrients. So when you toss the moldy mulch into your compost pile, other microbes get involved in the process and continue the job of breaking those wood chips down into smaller and smaller pieces, until you have rich, humic compost to add back to your soil. So, if you find that the mold is wide-spread throughout the bag of mulch, or if you just want to err on the side of caution, you could simply empty the whole bag into your compost pile, and let nature run its course.

Flashback Favs

Continued...

Okra

Okra thrives in the heat and is actually quite beautiful, so consider using it as a specimen plant in the landscape. Like most of our warm-season vegetables, okra may be planted as both a spring and fall crop. But "fall" here doesn't equate to what most of us think of as fall. Here in Central Texas, we must plant our "fall" gardens in late July or August, since you'll need to plant in summer in order to reap a HARVEST in the fall. There are many great cultivars of okra to choose from, but one of my favorites is 'Burgundy', which, as its name implies, has deep burgundy fruits, and even quite a bit of burgundy color in the leaves and stems. Okra requires full sun and minimal, and will do just fine with very little supplemental irrigation, but if you water at least once a week, you'll get a lot better harvest. An area with well-drained soil is best, and if you're preparing a new area, it's a good idea to incorporate about an inch of compost to the bed. As the compost breaks down over time, it improves the structure of the soil, and adds a small amount of nutrients slowly. Okra will also benefit from a little fertilizer, which you can add after the first harvest to ensure that the plant has plenty of nutrients to produce more fruit. Okra plants get very tall, so they need plenty of soil depth to anchor themselves. In shallow, rocky soils, they may fall over. Give each plant about a foot on each side to fill in. This fairly narrow width and taller height make okra a nice addition to a spot where you may have had winter annuals that have now died back.

THINGS TO DO IN JULY

FERTILIZE: Give annuals a complete fertilizer. Water well before and after application. Deadhead and fertilize roses. Fertilize young fruit trees (except pears) with a 3-1-2 ratio product at 1-2 cups per inch of trunk diameter.

WATER: Water all planted areas deeply but infrequently during dry periods. Outdoor container plants need daily watering. Consider landscaping with drought resistant native plants in the future.

SOIL: Mulch all bare soil. Turn compost pile and add new ingredients. Clean up spring vegetable gardens and replenish with compost.

LAWN CARE: Mow every 5-7 days and leave the clippings on the lawn. Watch for take-all patch. Set mower higher in shady areas to promote denser turf.

DISEASES / PESTS TO LOOK FOR: spider mites, leaf rollers, lacebugs and aphids on plants; chinch bugs, fleas, ticks, chiggers and grubs in lawns; scale insects on euonymus, hollies, peaches and plums; webworms in pecans and persimmons; powdery mildew on crape myrtles and roses; aphids on crape myrtle, roses and Mexican milkweed; scale on peaches and plums. Remove any diseased leaves from beds; do not add to compost.

PRUNE: Remove vigorous growth from center of peach and plum trees to prevent shading of fruiting shoots. Tip new blackberry canes at 4' to force side branches. Prune dead and damaged wood from trees and shrubs as needed.



Austin Area Events

Easy Composting with Worms!

Saturday, July 16, 2016

10am - 12pm

Zilker Botanical Garden
2220 Barton Springs Rd
Austin, TX

Let these "little composters" save landfill space while turning your kitchen vegetable and fruit waste into black gold! Even if you live in an apartment you can host a small bin under the kitchen sink. Worm castings are useful in many ways: compost tea, potting soils, top dressing for house plants and seedlings, to name a few. Tommie Clayton, Master Gardener Compost Specialist, will show you how worm bins work, demonstrate how to construct your own worm bin and get it started, methods for harvesting castings plus brewing your own compost tea.

Seminar is free and open to the public. No RSVP is required. Zilker park entrance fee is \$2 per adult, \$1 per child (ages 3-12) or seniors (age 62 & over), \$3 for non-Austin Residents. Cash or check accepted.

For more information contact: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service – Travis County, 512-854-9600

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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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"I drifted into a summer-nap under the hot shade of July, serenaded by a cicadae lullaby, to drowsy-warm dreams of distant thunder."
- Terri Guillemets