



# The Compost Bin

August 2016

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

In this issue ...

In the Vegetable Garden

Fleas

Fall Gardening in Central Texas

## Inside this Issue....

- Meeting, August 3 ..... Page 2
- In the Vegetable Garden ..... Page 3
- Fleas ..... Page 6
- Fall Gardening in Central TX ..... Page 7
- Daphne's Flashback Favs ..... Page 9
- Events ..... Page 10
- 2016 TCMGA Board ..... Page 11
- Credits ..... Page 12

### Cover:

The colorful stems and bold leaves of Swiss chard are both ornamental and edible.

By Bruce Leander

### Right:

Dwarf 'Baby Bubba' okra and portulaca looking pretty good for the middle of summer. By Bruce Leander



## Meeting - Joe Posern

### Poisonous Plants of Central Texas

Unfortunately Mother Nature doesn't mark poisonous plants with a big red "Danger" sign. While some parts of some plants can cause mild skin irritation, others can cause digestive upset or even coma. Some of the most beautiful plants can be the deadliest. Armed with knowledge gained in AgriLife Extension training, and from his lifelong career as a veterinarian, Joe will share information about common plants to be careful around, or to avoid altogether, in order to keep your people and pets safe.

### Bio

Joe first became a Master Gardener in Houston in 2007 and was extensively involved with the Speakers Bureau. In 2008 he came to Austin where he re-qualified and continued to work on community outreach as an official speaker. In addition to educating people on rainwater harvesting practices and poisonous plants, he is a certified specialist in Vegetable Gardening, Irrigation, Home Fruit Production, Entomology,

and Fire-Wise Landscapes. He was our TCMGA President from 2013-2015 and is currently serving as Greenhouse Manager. In his spare time he enjoys....oh wait...he doesn't have any spare time anymore!

Master Gardener Meeting information:  
Wednesday, Aug 3, 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



Left: 'Trombetta' squash can be prepared as a summer squash when harvested at this immature stage.

Right: My mature 'Trombetta' squash all strapped in and ready for a field trip to Zilker for vegetable show and tell.

Are you ready to rumble?! Even though it is still scorching outside, August is the month that fall gardening gets underway, especially if you want to get a bountiful harvest of warm season plants before the frost.

Our average first frost arrives in late November or early December, so if you want to plant a cucumber or bean variety that takes 60 days to start producing, count back 60 days from late November and that puts you at late September. However, you don't want to just harvest once, so add 3-4 more weeks and that puts you at early September. And though it's hard to imagine this right now, temperatures are going to cool off soon, especially at night, and that means that plant growth is going to slow down, so add another week or so. And there you are, planting seeds at the middle or end of this month. Tomatoes take longer so if you didn't plant them already get them in at the beginning of the month.

Be careful not to overplant your garden. Have a planting plan and save room for cool season plants. Take a look at the Vegetable Garden Planting Guide (<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/travis/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/VegPlantingGuideJan2015.pdf>) and you'll see that there is plenty

to plant in September so plan your fall garden accordingly.

If you missed the July meeting you also missed my 'Trombetta' squash show and tell. 'Trombetta' is a climbing Italian heirloom that can be harvested as a pale green summer squash (10-15" long) or as a tan winter squash (over 36" long – no kidding!). My seeds came from Renee's Seeds, a variety called 'Trombetta di Albenga', but it is also sold as 'Tromboncino' squash. I planted seeds in mid-March and started harvesting squash in late May. Even though some of the vines did get squash vine borer they seemed to outgrow or resist the damage; I'm sure the spring rains encouraged its vigorous growth. If you like squash give this climber a try. It grows so fast you could plant seeds now and have it for Thanksgiving or wait to plant it next March.



## In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...

Here is the vegetable gardener's checklist for August:

- Inspect the garden on a regular basis, keeping an eye out for insect pests, pulling stray weeds and hand watering when necessary.
- Add a layer of compost to your vegetable beds, water well then top off with a blanket of leaves, hay or bark mulch in anticipation of fall planting.
- Check established compost piles to see if they have finished breaking down – if compost is dark brown, crumbly, smells like earth and you can't recognize any of the "ingredients" it is ready to use in the garden.
- As tomatoes, eggplants and peppers begin to form fruit give them a fertilizer boost; spread 1-2 tablespoons of garden fertilizer around the base of each plant, scratch it in lightly and water well.
- If you have room for fall potatoes plant them mid-month.
- Plant seeds of summer squash, green beans and cucumbers the last half of the month. Provide shade and keep the soil moist the first few weeks. Most varieties will start producing in approximately 60 days which means you'll be harvesting in the {hopefully} cooler weather of October.
- Fall is a good time to plant in containers. Look for compact or dwarf varieties of vegetables and locate containers in an area where they will be protected from the hot afternoon sun; they can be moved into full sun next month after temperatures moderate slightly. A few variety recommendations include 'Astia' zucchini, 'Mascotte' filet green bean and 'Spacemaster' cucumber. Any space-saving variety will do.
- Purchase carrot, radish and beet seeds for planting next month.
- Plant seeds or transplants of Swiss chard for a colorful display that will last all winter long.
- Grow your own transplants of broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kale and other cool season vegetables; plant seeds indoors now and you will have suitable transplants in about 6 weeks.



Plant seeds of broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and kale now and you will have garden-ready transplants in about 6 weeks.

## In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...



Left: One 'Trombetta' squash yields lots of tender slices for sautés, stir fries, fresh salad and more.

Right: Mature 'Trombetta' squash is delicious roasted – tastes like a cross between butternut and delicata squash.



# Fleas

by Wizzie Brown



Photo by Roger Meola.

Fleas are ectoparasites, and females require a blood meal to produce eggs. After feeding on a host, females can produce about 30-50 eggs per day that fall off the host animal and into carpeting or other areas of the home, or outside in areas where the animal frequents. Larvae feed on organic matter as well as partially digested blood excreted by the adult fleas. After fleas pupate, they hatch out of the cocoon in about 2 weeks, but pupae can remain dormant for up to 5 months waiting for a host.

A proper flea management program has multiple parts. Fleas should be managed on the pets as well as in the environment. Grooming the animal with a flea comb and/or regular bathing can help reduce flea numbers. A veterinarian should be consulted about flea control products for pets; there are numerous products on the market that work well when used according to label instructions. When you find fleas on a pet you need to treat the pet and any areas where the pets frequent, both inside and outside the home. Treatment should be targeted to areas where the pet likes to hang out.

Fleas found around or in homes that do not have pets may be coming from wildlife. Attic and crawl spaces should be inspected for wildlife activity. Wildlife should be removed with traps, and after removal, the area should be treated with an insecticide labeled for fleas and sealed off so that wildlife cannot move in again.

New homeowners may also have problems with fleas shortly after moving in if the previous owners had pets with fleas. Fleas can remain dormant for several months and become active again when they sense vibrations from hosts.

Inside, vacuum thoroughly and regularly, getting under furniture and along baseboards to reduce flea eggs, larvae and pupae. Place the used vacuum bag in a sealed plastic bag and throw away in an outdoor garbage can at least once a week so fleas do not hatch out and re-infest the home. Target pesticides to areas where the pets frequent.

Wash pet bedding in hot water. Bathe pets regularly and use a flea comb to remove fleas. Avoid walking pets in known flea infested areas.

Outside, pesticide treatments should target areas where pets frequent. Full sun areas do not need to be treated as fleas will not remain in these areas.

When treating for fleas, you need to treat at least two times. The second treatment should occur 10-14 days after the initial treatment.

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)



Flea debris - hair and fecal material.

## Fall Gardening in Central Texas

by Carolyn Williams



Fall crop of Zinnias.

Yikes, it's hot!! I do believe I forget (thankfully) from summer to summer how truly HOT Texas can be in July and August. I also regret that we do not have a beautiful little cabin high in the Rockies that I can escape to each year. Instead of complaining, about this time of summer, I grab my gardening pruners, hat, gloves, etc. and head out to cut back all my upcoming fall bloomers. Water and sun screen are a constant companion.

Once I actually get started it slowly begins to take shape, and I find myself realizing that about the time I finish all the needed pruning, the American Beautyberries start putting on their show. Somehow, in all the nasty, dreary heat of August, their amazing magenta-colored berries herald the upcoming fall weather with a much needed, "hang in there, it's coming" message! In order to always have a beautiful show, trim these shrubs back in February or March. They grow rather fast, so some work is usually needed to keep them to the height/width you want.

While August is definitely one of our dormant months, it leads to our wonderful autumn weather that generally is long and mild. This is what I remember when heading out to prune all the salvias, sages, roses and even some of my herbs, such as Mexican Mint Marigold (a fall favorite). This past spring's higher than average rains meant my fall bloomers had grown to unusual heights, and therefore needed more trimming. Usually I prune about  $\frac{1}{3}$  back, but this year some were pruned to almost  $\frac{1}{2}$  their size. You can judge by what their normal fall height should be. Do NOT prune back so far that their average fall growth cannot be realized before autumn appears. And yes, I know sometimes you are pruning off flower spikes! Just remember they will reappear and give



Marigolds, Mexican Mint Marigolds and Blue Mistflower.

a better show a little later in the cooler season.

After pruning water them well, and with their smaller size they can better withstand the heat. About a once weekly watering will maintain them until cooler night time temperatures arrive. Around the first part of September I throw a shovel full of compost around the root system. There are other good products that work well to stimulate growth and blooms, like alfalfa meal, blood meal and seaweed. These can be combined and diluted as instructed for a good boost. You may have other products you like, which is fine, but make sure it has a good nitrogen amount and follow instructions.

## Fall Gardening in Central Texas

Continued...



Asters, Mexican Mint Marigolds and Ruby Crystal Grasses.

Then, along with cooler nights and (hopefully) some fall rain showers, our fall plants will give us a lovely show-stopping display of blues, purples, reds and mustard yellows. Remember, anytime you fertilize with either compost or other product, you need to water well afterwards. Mulching also is a welcome treat this time of year, and certainly helps to maintain the moisture around your plants.

This time of year is also a good time to start seeds like marigolds, zinnias and cosmos that make wonderful fall companions for our taller shrub bloomers. Setting in pots beside mums, they are quite striking and look lovely grouped with pumpkins and gourds on front porches. If you already have some growing that look rather "leggy," cut back and fertilize.

Cooler weather is the perfect time to plant a fall herb bed. Several herbs, like dill and cilantro, only grow in our cooler months, and do well in pots. Those seeds can be started in late August as well. Don't forget that basil is a warm season herb, so late summer start cutting the leaves off and putting them in freezer trays. Top off each section with olive oil. After freezing, I pop them into freezer bags to enjoy with my soups and Italian meals all fall and winter. Other herbs, like oregano and thyme, can be added to your basil as well.

Grasses are a wonderful addition to fall gardens. With their tassels and/or fall color, their swaying blades add such lovely interest to any garden area. If you

have none in your garden, think about adding a few like Gulf Muhly, Mexican Feather grass, Big Muhly, Pine Muhly and Pink Flamingo. We have an amazing array of grasses that do extra well in our area.

So, between lovely bloomers like Autumn Sage, Mexican Bush Sage, Indigo Spires' Salvia, Copper Canyon Daisy, Asters, Amistad Salvia, herbs like Mexican Mint Marigold, annuals like cosmos, marigolds and zinnias, grasses that we have in abundance, your garden can be spectacular!

Happy Fall Gardening!

## Flashback Favs - To Do This Month

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 gardening tips for this month.



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

### THINGS TO DO IN AUGUST:

**FERTILIZE:** Fertilize fruiting vegetables after first fruit set for higher productivity. Feed chrysanthemums every 2-3 weeks until buds appear, then weekly until buds show color. Fertilize roses for fall bloom. Feed berries and fruit showing poor color/vigor.

**WATER:** Water all planted areas deeply but infrequently during dry periods. Outdoor container plants need daily watering. Keep azaleas and fruit trees watered well because spring blooms are developing.

**SOIL:** Discard faded annuals and refurbish soil as needed. Prepare loose, well-drained beds for fall bulb planting. Clean up established garden beds. Turn compost pile.

**LAWN CARE:** Mow every 5-7 days and leave the clippings on the lawn. Set mower higher in shady areas to promote denser turf. Avoid weed killers whenever temperatures are above 85°.

**Note:** Avoid using weed killers containing atrazine, as this chemical leaches into our groundwater.

**DISEASES / PESTS TO LOOK FOR:** Watch for cutworms on new tomato transplants; protect with paper collars around base 1" above and below ground. Watch for grub worms, chinch bugs and fire ants in lawns. Check for borers in peaches, plums and other trees. Look for aphids and powdery mildew on crape myrtles.

**PRUNE:** Prune roses back by 1/3. Deadhead spent blooms and seed pods from crape myrtles for continued blooms. Trim photinias for red fall color. Remove dead and damaged wood from shrubs and trees. Pinch chrysanthemums for the last time.

## Austin Area Events

### **Growing Green in Austin**

Saturday, August 6, 2016  
10am - 12pm

Zilker Botanical Garden  
2220 Barton Springs Rd  
Austin, TX

Grow Green is an education program that promotes sustainable landscaping practices. It addresses water quality and conservation, recycling, and an Integrated Pest Management philosophy, which encourages the least toxic way to address pest issues. Get ready for fall planting. Attend this class to discover tips and all of the FREE resources available to help you create and maintain a beautiful Central Texas landscape that is good for your pocket book and the environment. Denise Delaney coordinates the Grow Green program for the City of Austin's Watershed Protection Department; has a Bachelor of Science degree in Horticulture and over 25 years of professional experience in Central Texas.

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

### **Garden to Kitchen – Tips for a Fresh and Tasty Harvest**

Thursday, August 11, 2016  
10am - 12pm

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

The best part of vegetable gardening is the harvest! Give your homegrown vegetables the attention they deserve with proper harvesting and handling techniques. Master Gardener Patty Leander shares tips on when to harvest produce at its prime along with proper storage conditions for peak quality and flavor.

Backyard Basics, offered by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County, will provide consumers, backyard gardeners, homemakers, educators and farmers a "do-it-yourself" learning opportunity on tips for harvesting and preserving your garden produce, caring for bees and raising chickens for home egg production.

Cost: \$10 thru 8/1, \$15 starting 8/2 and onsite  
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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512-854-9600

"Summer is delicious, rain is refreshing, wind braces up, snow is exhilarating; there is no such thing as bad weather, only different kinds of good weather." - John Ruskin