

The Compost Bin

November 2016

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

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Monarchs & OE

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Eat a Rainbow

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Cover:

By Liath Appleton

Right:

Add a little pizzazz to winter meals with edible flowers.

By Bruce Leander



Meeting - Dr. Kent Stewart

A Primer on GMOs as food stuffs: The latest step in a long history of the selective breeding of food stuffs.

This lecture will discuss the safety of GMO foods within the context of the history of breeding of food materials. A brief overview of the current science of developing genetically modified foods will be presented along with an overview of the current status of GMO crops. This will be followed by a discussion of the controversies surrounding these food stuffs. Finally, the genetic modification of foods will be discussed within the context of the more general area of genetic modification of biological material.

Dr. Kent Stewart was a member of the first FDA Panel on GMOs which evaluated the safety of GMO foods. He is a Fellow of the American Association for Advancement of Science, and a Fellow of the Institute of Food Technologists.

Dr. Stewart received a BA in Chemistry from the University of California at Berkeley. After serving as an officer in the USMCR, he earned a Ph.D. in Chemistry from Florida State University. He was a Postdoctoral Fellow at The Rockefeller University in New York City.

Dr. Stewart was an analytical biochemist who taught at the University of Texas at Austin, Virginia Tech, The Rockefeller University, and the University of Maryland. He is a Professor Emeritus of Biochemistry at Virginia Tech. He was also the founding Laboratory Chief of the Nutrient Composition Laboratory of the Agricultural Research Service of the USDA, and the founding editor of the Journal of Food Composition and Analysis published by Academic Press and sponsored by United Nations University.

Dr. Stewart has published multiple scientific journal articles, authored one book and edited two books.

**Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, Nov 2, 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

Cold weather usually makes its first appearance in November, along with a chance of freezing weather late in the month. That first freeze is usually short-lived and, if protected, most frost sensitive vegetables will survive; at least until sustained winter weather arrives. If you haven't planted winter greens, do it now. Spinach, collards, mustard, lettuce and kale love this weather and taste even better after frost. These are also excellent specimens for container or square foot gardening.

If you still have tomatoes, peppers or eggplant in the garden be sure to harvest them if a cold snap is predicted. Tomatoes that have started to turn from green to pink should ripen nicely indoors, but those that are green and hard are best used for chow chow, salsa, chutney or fried green tomatoes.

Cover crops can be planted in fallow beds to enrich soil for next spring's plantings. Cereal rye, hairy vetch, Austrian winter peas and crimson clover are cold hardy crops that will grow all winter and can be cut down or turned under next spring.



Blue-green rows of brassicas at Boggy Creek Farm.

Here is the vegetable gardener's checklist for November:

- Plant some flowers in and around the vegetable garden. Pansies, violas, snapdragons, nasturtiums, calendulas, alyssum, dianthus and stock add color and beauty throughout the cool season. Alyssum, dianthus and stock add delicious fragrance as well.
- Extend the lettuce harvest by planting more seeds or transplants this month.
- Continue harvesting green beans, squash, peppers and cucumbers as they mature; consider pickling any excess to extend the flavor into the winter months.
- Blanch white cauliflower when the head is about 2" in diameter. Pull the leaves up around the developing head and secure with a rubber band, string or clothespins.
- Harvest the outer leaves of kale, collards and mustard, allowing the new inner leaves to continue growing.



Plant kale, lettuce and other greens from seed or transplant.

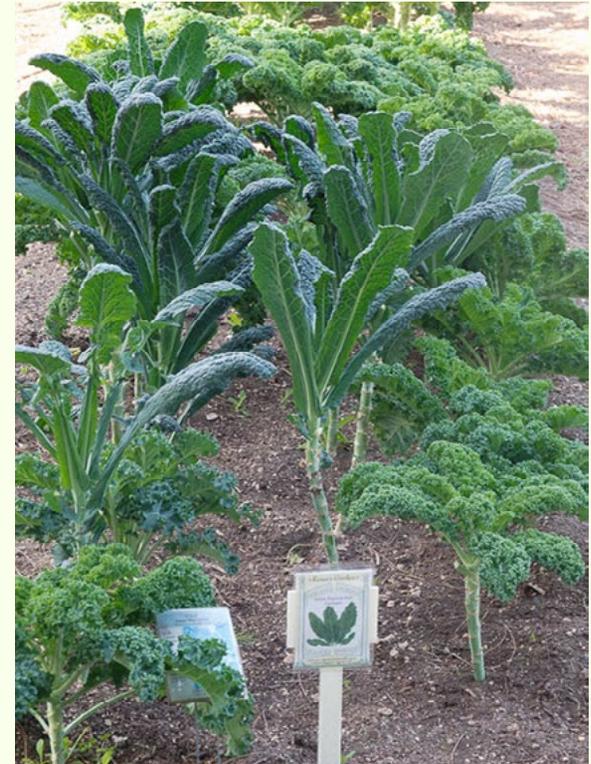
In the Vegetable Garden

- Check plants regularly for caterpillars and other cool-season pests. Treat with products containing Bt, spinosad or neem according to label directions.
- Feed fall vegetables with fertilizer that is high in nitrogen to support healthy growth and development.
- Keep vegetable beds mulched to moderate soil temperature, hold moisture and discourage weeds.
- Start a compost pile with fallen leaves and refuse from the landscape and kitchen. If you end up with an excess of browns and not much green matter add a little cottonseed meal or other high-nitrogen fertilizer along with a few shovelfuls of soil to the pile to encourage breakdown.
- Pay attention to the forecast and cover frost-sensitive vegetables with row cover if cold weather threatens. Secure the cover to the ground with bricks, stones or staples.
- Disconnect hoses and drain sprinklers before the first freeze.
- Water vegetables during dry spells and keep birdbaths filled with fresh water.



Gardeners can never have enough leaves – collect what you can for composting and mulching.

Continued...



Harvest the outer leaves from kale, mustard, lettuce and other greens, allowing the center to keep growing.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...



Row cover protects plants from hungry pests.



A tell-tale sign that a caterpillar is munching on your plants. Handpick caterpillars or treat with a product containing Bt or neem.



Wrap the outer leaves of cauliflower around the developing head to block the sun and keep it bright white.

Monarchs & OE

by Wizzie Brown



The protozoan parasite *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha* (OE) infects monarch and queen butterflies. It is an obligate parasite and requires a host to live within and to grow and multiply. It was first discovered in the 1960's infecting monarchs in Florida. Since then, it's been found in monarch populations across the world. It is thought that the parasite has co-evolved with monarchs.

There are three major populations of monarchs in the United States- one east of the Rocky Mountains that winters in Central Mexico and migrates north into the US and Canada; another west of the Rocky mountains that overwinters on the coast of California; the third population is non-migratory and can breed year round in areas such as Florida, Texas and Hawaii. All three populations are infected with OE.

Monarchs infected with OE will have spores wedged between the scales on their body, with the greatest concentration usually occurring on the abdomen. The spores are very small and require a microscope to see. The spores are lemon-shaped and are brown to black in color. To check for spores,

rub a piece of clear tape on the tip of the abdomen of the monarch and then look for spores under a microscope.

Female monarchs pass OE spores onto their offspring when they lay eggs. When the caterpillars emerge from the egg, they eat the egg shell and ingest the spores. When the spores reach the midgut of the insect, they break open and release the protozoan parasite. The protozoans move through the gut lining to the epidermis where they reproduce asexually (divides multiple times increasing the number of protozoans). In the butterfly chrysalis stage the protozoans go through sexual reproduction (again increasing the number of protozoans). Spores form so that the emerging butterfly will be covered in spores. Spores can also be scattered onto milkweed from butterflies laying eggs or feeding on nectar and then consumed by caterpillars as they eat foliage.

Once the butterflies are infected, they do not recover. OE does not grow or reproduce on the adults. The spores remain dormant until they are ingested by a caterpillar.

Infected pupae have dark blotches 2-3 days before emergence. Adults that are heavily infected often have problems emerging from the chrysalis. Some may even die before emerging. Others that do emerge may fall to the ground before their wings are expanded and die quickly. Mildly infected adults may be smaller than healthy adults. The parasites can damage the cuticle of the insect and cause the insect to lose weight faster. Many infected monarchs look healthy, so the only way to determine infection is by looking for spores.

What can you do? Check monarchs for spores and destroy any you find that are infected. I know this seems harsh, but infected monarchs further spread the protozoa and kill more butterflies in later generations. Cut down milkweed several times per year to get rid of any possible spores that may be on the plants and to encourage new, healthy growth.

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 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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzy1wIw-fwQ>

When is the best time to plant a tree?

Of course we've timed our answer to this question to the absolute perfect season for planting trees, autumn. With shorter day-lengths, cooler temperatures and maybe even a little rainfall, autumn has everything that a tree needs to keep transplant stress to a minimum. Most of the trees that we plant in Central Texas are deciduous, so they'll soon be dropping all their leaves and going dormant to avoid the damaging cold of winter. During the winter, with no growth happening above ground, trees are free to focus their resources below ground, on their roots. If planted in the fall, trees have almost half a year to establish their root systems before the temperatures get unbearably hot and they start to need more water to survive. In order to take up water, plants must release water into the environment through a process called transpiration. During the heat of summer, the air is so hot and dry that it practically sucks the water right out of leaves. Which is why during extremely hot weather, many trees drop their leaves and go dormant during the summer. Dormancy is simply a plant's way of avoiding stress. It takes a lot of water to support a canopy full of leaves, and if there isn't enough water, which is a pretty stressful situation, a good strategy is to drop those leaves and go to "sleep" until the stress passes. So if you've ever planted a tree during the spring, especially in the late spring, or if summer has arrived early, you may have noticed that your tree immediately dropped all of its leaves and struggled to survive all summer long. But I bet once the temperatures began to drop and the sun became less intense a few months later, new leaves appeared and the tree took advantage of the short autumn window to get just a little bit of growth under its belt before winter and its true dormant season arrived. The lower temperature and higher relative humidity of fall help to keep trees better hydrated. So

planting during autumn gives trees more time to acclimate to their new environment, your yard, and get established.

Pink fairy duster, *Calliandra eriophylla*

This beautiful little West Texas native shrub, with its dense branching habit and tiny leaflets, is often referred to as straggly. But in spring and summer, when it's covered with hundreds of puffy pink flowers, you'll discover why it's such a beautiful addition to your landscape. Although it may remain evergreen in areas where winters are very warm, it is deciduous in Central Texas. Pink fairy duster won't need any supplemental irrigation if we're getting even small amounts of rainfall, but if we have a particularly long dry spell during the hottest part of summer, it will benefit from a little extra water once a week or so. It does best in rocky, gravelly soil, so if you have heavy clay soil, this plant won't do as well for you. Pink fairy duster gets about 3 feet tall and wide, so give it plenty of space. It also needs the full, bright sun

Flashback Favs

Continued...

to perform well and be happy. It produces lots of seeds that are easily sown, but grows only moderately fast, so don't expect it to fill in overnight. If you want to collect the seed, you'll need to time it just right, since the pods pop open, and send the seeds flying, once the seeds are ready. There's also the Baja fairy duster, *Calliandra californica*. If you like red flowers, you might like this one better. It also gets a little taller and wider, up to 6' tall and 8' wide, so give it a little more room. Baja fairy duster is not as cold hardy as the pink, listed only to zone 9a, much warmer than we are here in Central Texas in zone 8b, so in "normal" winters, be prepared to start over with this one.

What's the difference in soil, compost, and mulch?

Well, they're all used in similar ways, and have a lot to contribute in our gardens. We could spend days discussing and defining soil, but one good way to think of it is the substrate that your plants grow in. Soil is made up of varying amounts of sand, silt and clay. If you've got a good balance of these three mineral elements, your soil is called "loam." Too much clay leads to sticky, heavy soil that inhibits plant growth, and too much sand leads to leaching and a lack of water-holding capacity. Silt is somewhere between clay and sand as far as size, texture, and effect on overall soil structure. If you're lucky, your soil also has a good amount of organic matter and a healthy microbial population. But you might be surprised to learn that a soil with only 5% organic matter is pretty fabulous, and it's hard to even get that much. Compost is pretty much all organic matter, depending on the ingredients that went into it: grass clippings, leaves, and kitchen scraps. And maybe a little bit of soil if you've added some from your garden, which would be a good thing, since your soil contains the necessary microbes to break down the organic matter in your compost pile to a size and texture that is beneficial in your soil. Compost helps to increase the water-holding capacity of your soil without over-doing it. It helps to break up heavy clay soils and helps sandy soils hold a bit more water. It builds the structure of your soil, giving it just the right balance of air and water. Compost also feeds the microbial population, helping to keep them around and contributing to your overall soil-health. Mulch is ground up plants parts that are not composted and are generally larger pieces than compost. Pruned tree limbs that have been processed with a chipper/shredder; bark pieces; and even processing byproducts, such as pecan shells and cocoa hulls, can be used as a mulch. Mulch is generally all carbon, as opposed to compost, which contains both carbon and nitrogen. Compost may also be used as a mulch, since the primary purpose of mulch is to protect the soil from the environment by covering it. Both compost and mulch eventually break down, due to the weather and the action of microbes, which is why it should be replenished at least yearly.

***Salvia greggii* cultivar known as 'Cardinal Velvet'**

This particular *Salvia greggii* cultivar behaves much the same as the species, but the flowers have a more intensely velvet look to them. The flower is a little fuzzier, which gives it a different texture and a deeper color. Although it is a low water-use plant, it will definitely perform a little better if you water it once a week during the heat of the summer. It flowers from spring right on through fall, with maybe a little break at the peak of summer heat. But once temperatures cool just a bit, the sun becomes less intense, and we get just a little bit of fall rain, 'Cardinal Velvet' comes roaring back to life. It is listed as hardy to zone 8, so if we have a particularly harsh winter, you might lose this one if you can't protect it. It's also evergreen, making it a wonderful spot of deep green color in your winter landscape. Like all *Salvia greggii*'s, 'Cardinal Velvet' will truly benefit from a harsh pruning in late winter, and even again in late summer, to get rid of that rangy growth and encourage it to bush out and become full again. Don't be fooled by this plant's small stature in the container, it can get up to 3' tall and wide, so give it plenty of space. It can take the full sun, but I've found that mine performs a bit better with some protection from the intensity of afternoon rays. 'Cardinal Velvet' looks great planted alone in an open space in your garden, but also looks fabulous when planted in masses, or as a short border around planting beds.

Flashback Favs

Continued...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKpw1ImCg_0

Why do we firm the soil around new plants? And if firming the soil is good, why are we not supposed to walk through our garden beds?

When digging a new hole for a plant, you're basically destroying the soil structure in that area, so you want to put it back as close as possible to the way it was. Tilled soil has increased fluffiness and larger pore space, which increases the space for air in the soil, which is not necessarily a bad thing, especially for a new planting. But those larger, air-filled pores are too large to hold on to water, which could very well be the kiss of death for a new transplant in a very short time. That's one reason why you should water new transplants every day, if not twice a day, for a while. This is about more than just the plant's lack of roots, it's about the soil settling and the pore-space decreasing over time. Once the soil is settled back to the way it was before you dug your hole, it will begin to get back to the natural structure and water-holding capacity that it had due to its natural texture, which is dictated by the amount of sand, silt, clay, and organic matter that makes it up. If you've heard of no-till farming, you're familiar with this concept. Disturbing the soil structure as little as possible, except, obviously, in the planting hole, is best for overall soil structure and overall health. But, there's also soil compaction to think about. If the soil is walked on extensively, or driven on, in the case of construction with heavy equipment, the pore spaces are squeezed together, leaving no space for air, and eventually, no space for water, either. Obviously, plant roots need water, but they also need oxygen to breath and be able to take up the water and life-giving nutrients that are in the soil. Compacted soil also becomes very hard, making it almost impossible for roots to push out into it. And when roots can't grow, the rest of the plant's growth is also impeded. Lack of rainfall, especially if you're unable to irrigate, also leads to soil compaction. Like a sponge when it dries out, your soil shrinks in on itself, decreasing pore space and making it very hard to re-wet without squeezing it. And I don't have to tell you that you can't squeeze your soil. During extended heat and drought, Central Texas soils become very compacted, adding yet another stresser to plants, especially in natural areas where there was no way to irrigate them and alleviate the problem. So soil compaction should be avoided at all costs.

Agarita, *Mahonia trifoliolata*, aka *Berberis trifoliolata*

This rounded shrub has leathery, spiky, holly-like foliage, only the leaves are more gray-green than the deep green of hollies. It's evergreen and has no problem surviving our winters, OR our summers here in Central Texas. This plant is as tough as it looks, and although it thrives in the full sun, it also does just fine in a bit of afternoon shade. It can get a little monstrous, up to 6' tall and wide, and even bigger, if rain is plentiful, so give it plenty of room to spread. The delicate yellow flowers of agarita appear in late winter and cover the plant from February 'til as late as April, depending on how cold our winter is and how late our last frost arrives. The flowers are followed by bright red berries, from about May through July, which are a great source of food for any wildlife and birds in the area. YOU can also harvest the berries and use them to make jelly, if you're so inclined. And agarita is a great cover plant for animals, serving as a nice, evergreen habitat for many different types of birds during the cold of winter. It does perform best in well-drained rocky soils, so if you have a very heavy clay soil, you might consider another choice, maybe a *Pyracantha*. The flowers of agarita are fragrant, so if you have a spot near your porch or a walkway where you can plant a spiky, very large shrub, you'll enjoy this plant even more.

Flashback Favs

Continued...

FERTILIZE: Fertilize strawberry beds with a 3-1-2 ratio fertilizer. Keep soil moist to promote good plant vigor and berry production next spring.

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

TRANSPLANT: Divide and replant crowded perennials throughout the winter months. Transplant chives, garlic and multiplying onions. Now is the best time to move woody ornamentals. Prepare the new site before transplanting.

PREPARE SOIL: Have landscape and garden soils tested now to determine soil balancing needs. Forms are available at the Extension Office, 1600-B Smith Road, Austin, TX, 78721 or call 512-854-9600. Check winter mulch and replenish if needed. Stockpile leaves for mulch and composting throughout spring and summer.

LAWN CARE: Bring a sample of problem turf into the Travis County AgriLife Extension Office in a labeled plastic bag for analysis. A mulching mower makes raking leaves obsolete or use grass catcher as a mulch catcher. Use shredded leaves and grass clippings as a mulch or put into the compost bin.

DISEASES / PESTS TO LOOK FOR: Watch roots of removed annuals for nematodes (knots on the roots). Check houseplants for spider mites, scale and mealy bugs.

PRUNE: After blooming, chrysanthemums should be cut back almost to the ground. Prune long, gangly shoots on shrubs. Remove dead and damaged wood from shrubs and trees.



Eat a Rainbow

by Evelyn Hootkins



At the Travis County Expo Center, Master Gardeners met with over 350 excited third and fourth graders from Title 1 AISD and Del Valle schools. Each session began with Master Gardeners asking, "Have you seen a real rainbow? Do you remember all of the different colors?" We continued the session by comparing the colors of the rainbow to different colors of fruits and vegetables that help keep specific parts of the body healthy.

With the Halloween season in mind, we introduced a skeleton poster showing the specific color of food that is most helpful to the different parts of the body. The poster covered the brain, eyes, skeleton, teeth, and heart. For example, our eyes are helped and protected by green and orange fruits and vegetables. The skeleton has one green and one orange eye. We held up real foods that help our vision, such as green foods like lettuce and green apples, and orange foods like carrots and oranges.

To reinforce the presentation, the children were given a fun activity to take home, making a bracelet using chenille stems and beads. The beads represented the specific color of the foods that help the body, such as green, orange, red, purple, blue and white. The students were asked to show the bracelet to their family and talk about the importance of eating colorful fruits and vegetables every day ...like eating a rainbow.

Other presentations covered water, dairy, corn, cotton, bees, goats, exercise and horticulture. This is a fun event for the school children!



Announcements

save the date!
May 6, 2017

INSIDE 
AUSTIN
GARDENS
TOUR 

The tour for gardeners, by gardeners!
insideaustingardens.org

Austin Area Events

Using Water Wisely – Demonstration Field Day

Saturday, November 5, 2016
9am - 1pm

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

Learn about the entire spectrum of water saving solutions from high tech to no tech at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office Demonstration Field Day in Austin. You determine the best answer for your situation and pocket book. Travis County Master Gardeners and Horticulturist Daphne Richards will be available to demonstrate and answer your questions on a one-on-one basis.

Discover various rain water catchment methods. See examples of various watering methods from a wicking bed to drip irrigation. Understand the importance of compost for water conservation and plant health. Gain knowledge about the importance of selecting the right plant for the spot. Look at ways to control heat (summer and winter) to increase vegetable garden production.

Come stroll the diverse garden and ask questions. Enjoy watching the butterflies, bees, blooming flowers, and growing vegetables. Take home lettuce seeds and how-to knowledge to accomplish your next project.

Demonstration Field Day is free and open to the public – No RSVP is required.

Preserving the Harvest

Thursday, November 10, 2016
10am - 12pm

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

Learn about the key food preservation processes; freezing, dehydration and canning. Factors related to food spoilage and the science involved in prevention will be covered along with a basic review of the tools and techniques involved. Master Gardener Jeff Peters will provide a step-by-step illustration of the hot water bath canning process—an excellent resource for those with an interest in preserving their garden produce.

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 10/31, \$15 starting 11/1 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

Austin Area Events

Hello Invasive Species, Goodbye Texas Natives

Saturday November 12, 2016

10am - 12pm

Zilker Botanical Garden
2220 Barton Springs Rd
Austin, TX

Invasive species have the potential to drastically change our Texas landscape. This presentation will cover the threats posed by invasive species, as well as responses to the threat. The Invaders of Texas citizen scientist program will be introduced, as one of several ways you can get involved in managing invasive species. As the Invasive Species Program Coordinator at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Dr. Hans Landel manages the Invaders of Texas citizen scientist program, manages the Texasinvasives.org website, and collaborates with other agencies and organizations in managing invasive species. He has performed conservation research both in the U.S. and internationally.

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

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



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www.tcmastergardeners.org
<http://travis-tx.tamu.edu>
512-854-9600

"The wind that makes music in November corn is in a hurry. The stalks hum, the loose husks whisk skyward in half-playing swirls, and the wind hurries on.... A tree tries to argue, bare limbs waving, but there is no detaining the wind." - Aldo Leopold