

The Compost Bin

December 2016

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

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Pecan Weevil

Holiday Gift Ideas

Weeds and Reads



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Cover:

A healthy winter harvest.

By Bruce Leander

Right:

By Liath Appleton



Meeting - 2016 Holiday Party

Happy Holidays! Come join the fun at the TCMGA Holiday and Recognition Party! It's a great opportunity to see old friends, eat great food, cheer for award winners, congratulate the new Board members, and introduce yourself to new interns and new members!

Please RSVP through the sign-up link sent to your email inbox. There will be 130 of us, so parking will be at a premium. There are only 65 parking slots.

Please try to carpool.

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, December 7, 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



The large family of brassicas includes these leafy greens of varying colors and textures.

Vegetable gardeners, take a break! After a full year of sowing, growing, harvesting, preparing and sharing, December is an appropriate time to sit back and rest on your laurels. Shorter days lead us to the winter solstice on December 21, and as the temperatures cool down so does the soil, making outdoor seed germination and transplant establishment a little slower and less exciting. So relax, sit back and reflect on the year that has passed. Review notes of planting and harvesting dates, varieties grown, pest issues, successes and failures, and use this information to plan for the 2017 garden season.

If you are not deterred by cold weather and shorter days, then make additional plantings of collards, kale, spinach, lettuce, radishes and tatsoi. Once established, these easy growing, cold-hardy greens will tolerate temperatures into the upper 20s, but it is best to cover them with row cover during prolonged cold spells. Blue-green brassica varieties, like 'Vates' kale and 'Blue Max' collards are especially cold hardy, and usually are not fazed by a Central Texas winter.

Every year the National Garden Bureau focuses on an edible that is widely adapted, easy-to-grow and versatile; 2017 is the year of the brassicas, so look for these vegetables to be promoted in nurseries next year. Also known as cole crops, this large family of vegetables includes broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, collards, kale, radishes, turnips, bok choy, mustard, Brussels sprouts, rutabaga and kohlrabi. Rich in vitamins, minerals and fiber, these brassicas contribute potent phytochemicals that help fight cancer, boost the immune system and contribute to vision health. Familiarize yourself with these cruciferous crops and incorporate them into your daily diet. Get started with two super simple recipes at the end of this article.



'Arcadia' broccoli.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...



Broccoli and cauliflower leaves are just as edible as collards and kale; add them to the pot when cooking leafy greens.

Here is the vegetable gardener's checklist for December:

- Continue to harvest and utilize fresh herbs when preparing meals.
- Water and fertilize cover crops just as you would for any other crop in the garden.
- Keep up with weeds; hoe, mow or deadhead so they cannot go to seed.
- Remove spent plants from the garden; if left in the ground they may harbor insects or disease that will show up in the garden next year.
- Grow your own transplants, such as broccoli, kale, cabbage and cauliflower, under indoor grow lights so you will have transplants ready to set out in late January or early February. It takes 5-6 weeks to grow a good sized transplant, so start seeding in mid December.
- Take an inventory of seeds and supplies and purchase items you will need for the 2017 season (a few things on my list - row cover, potting soil, garden gloves, watering can, new varieties of vegetables, tomato cages).
- Order seed potatoes for the best selection.
- Feed the birds and make sure they have a fresh source of water.
- Find a comfortable seat in the garden on a sunny day and revel in the mosquito-free atmosphere.
- Take a break from planting this month to enjoy the holidays along with a freshly picked salad or a pot of hearty greens.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...



Roasted Cauliflower

Roasting transforms the flavor of cauliflower and elevates it to one of my favorite vegetables.

Cut cauliflower into equal sized pieces. Toss in olive oil, sprinkle with salt and pepper and arrange in a single layer on a large baking sheet. Roast at 425° until golden and slightly charred, about 25-30 minutes.

Brussels Sprout Chips

Similar to kale chips these crispy chips are easy to make and very tasty. They will shrink up slightly as they cook so be sure to make a bunch!

Brussels sprouts, any amount, washed and patted dry
Olive oil
Salt and pepper

Trim stems and carefully separate the larger, outer leaves from each sprout (the leftover intact sprouts can be saved for another dish). Place leaves into a shallow bowl, drizzle

with olive oil and toss gently. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and spread out on a baking sheet. Place in a 350°F oven and roast for 10 minutes. Stir lightly and roast 15-20 minutes longer, until leaves are crisp and slightly charred.



Pecan Weevil

by Wizzie Brown



Adult pecan weevils are brownish beetles with a long snout. Larvae are a legless, creamy white grub with reddish heads.

Adults, male and female, cause damage by feeding and/or laying eggs in pecans. Adults typically emerge from the soil, where they have spent anywhere from 2 to 3 years, in early August. Cells are deep within the soil, usually from 4-12 inches below the surface. Drought or hardened/compacted soil can delay emergence of the beetles. Adult emergence can last over several weeks.

Once emerged from the soil, adult weevils move to pecan trees where feeding and mating begin. Females do not lay eggs until 5 days after they emerge from the soil. To lay eggs, the female chews through the shuck and shell to excavate a small area in the kernel. She then lays 3-4 eggs per nut, avoiding nuts that already have eggs. Females live about 3-4 weeks and can lay up to 75 eggs in that time.

Larvae hatch and feed within the kernel. Once larvae are fully developed, they chew a hole through the shell and shuck and drop to the ground to burrow into the soil. About a year later, the majority of the burrowed larvae pupate. Adult pecan weevils emerge from the ground after another year, resulting in a two year life cycle.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is seeking your assistance in locating possible pecan weevil infestations in Bexar, Hays, Comal and Travis counties. Pecan weevil is a serious pest of pecan and current distribution information for the four county area is only centered around the Wimberley area in Hays county. However, it is felt that other infestations could be within other counties.

An infestation of this year's pecan crop can be identified by having 2 to 4 legless, dirty white grubs within the pecan shell or by pecans that have a small round BB size hole in the shell.

If anyone finds a suspected infestation, pecans showing signs of an infestation can be taken to your local county Extension office or mailed to: Bill Ree, P.O. Box 2150, Bryan, TX 77806-2150 for conformation. This distribution information is for educational purposes. Your assistance in this search is greatly appreciated.

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



Okra (Lady's Finger/Bhindi)

by Venkappa Gani

Okra is an annual, self-pollinating plant that is very popular to grow in Texas, but the word Okra did not register to me, as I knew it as Lady's Finger in English and Bhindi in my local language in India.

Growing okra is ideal for Central Texas hot weather, and last year I tried to grow a sampling of different varieties. They did well but there was not enough production. I saved the seeds of two types, 'Spineless Green' and 'Burgundy Red,' and in April of this year I planted those seeds in three rows, 50 feet long, in well prepared soil with compost and other organic nutrients.

This year the plants grew vigorously with the sufficient rains that we had during the spring.



Left: 'Spineless Green'
Right: 'Burgundy Red'



'Spineless Green' okra are greater than six inches long and have a light yellow flower. Plant height exceeds six feet.

'Burgundy Red' okra are three inches long with a reddish flower and a plant height of around four feet. Although the red color okra is not very popular, it has a pleasant red color and has a similar taste to the green variety. The green okra produces longer fruits and has a higher yield which is preferred for marketing. Once they begin producing you will need to pick them almost every day, otherwise they will get hard. Young, soft fruits are good for eating raw, cooking and pickling. Okra flowers are edible too and add color to your salads.

Okra

Continued...



Display of freshly picked Lady's Fingers using various sized fruits with bright colors.

Preparation

Heat oil in a saucepan.
 Add cumin seeds. When seeds start spluttering add onions and stir until translucent.
 Add cut okra keep stirring until the slime disappears.
 Add chili powder, curry powder and salt.
 Stir to mix and turn off the stove
 Squeeze lemon juice on okra and cover with lid.
 Serve after a couple of minutes.

It is time to plant cool weather vegetables and fruit trees!
 Happy Gardening, Venkappa Gani

Early research suggests that okra may provide health benefits for those trying to control blood sugar levels. Okra contains potassium, vitamin B, vitamin C, folic acid, and calcium which may help maintain healthy joints, eyesight, skin and hair. It is also low in calories and high in fiber. It is often used fried or in gumbo.

Indian curry recipe:

Ingredients

½ lb fresh okra cut into ½ inch round slices
 1 small onion diced
 1 Tbsp oil
 ½ tsp cumin seeds
 ½ tsp salt
 ½ tsp chili powder
 ½ tsp curry powder
 half cut lemon



Starbucks staff members holding coffee cups with okra grown in my garden. I collect coffee grounds from Starbucks regularly to use as compost for the plants. Staff members are courteous and happy to provide coffee ground to the "Ground-to-Ground" project. My husband and I are both Life Members of the TCMGA.

Photos by Venkappa Gani

Handcrafted Holiday Gift Ideas From Your Garden

by Tara Fisher-Muñoz

The holidays are quickly approaching and handcrafted, quality botanical gifts are always much appreciated by your friends and family. I've been making handcrafted bath, body and skincare products for over 8 years as my small business. I'd love to share my knowledge with you so you can make botanical gifts for your loved ones too! Here are some easy and fun gift ideas to make:



Rosewater hydrosol (the easy way!)

¼ cup dried organic rose petals
½ cup distilled or purified water

What you do:

1. Put dried rose petals and water in a small pot on the stove.
2. Bring to a gentle boil and then simmer over low heat for 5-8 minutes.
3. Once rose petals have lost their color (usually in 5 minutes), turn off the heat.
4. Once cool, pour into a glass spray bottle and apply a label, or tie a label to it.

Rosewater has amazing benefits for your well-being, and feels great on your skin. You can use it as a facial toner, perfume, room air spray, and skin moisturizer. Use within 2 weeks, but can prolong the life up to a month by keeping it in the refrigerator. Enjoy!



Simmer dried rose petals.



Calendula Oil + Salve

1 cup dried organic calendula flowers (if you don't grow them, you can buy through [Mountain Rose Herbs](#))
¼ cup dried organic chamomile flowers (see above, but these are so easy to grow in Central Texas)
2 cup organic cold-pressed extra virgin olive oil (I buy the large container at Costco)

What you do:

1. Put calendula flowers, chamomile flowers and olive oil in a large glass container.
2. Let infuse for 3-6 months for the most benefits.
3. Pour into container using small funnel and cheesecloth to catch the flowers. Will keep for 2 years.

Calendula oil may provide relief from dry skin, eczema, psoriasis, skin rashes, skin irritations, itchiness and other skin conditions.



Infuse flowers in olive oil.

Handcrafted Holiday Gift Ideas

Continued...

**Calendula salve**

- 1 Tbsp candelilla wax (from [Mountain Rose Herbs](#))
- 4 Tbsp shea or mango butter
- 3 Tbsp infused calendula oil (see recipe above)
- 25 drops essential oil of choice (I use lavender, bergamot or thieves)
- ¼ tsp vitamin E oil

What you do:

1. Put wax, butters and oil in double-broiler and melt over very low heat.
 2. Once mixture is completely melted, put vitamin E oil and essential oils in. Mix and pour into containers.
- Makes 6 small containers (1/2 oz.) or 3 large containers (2 oz.). Keeps for 1 year.

Use for any skin ailment. I use this instead of Neosporin to heal my skin very quickly. This salve is truly amazing!



Melt oil and wax mixture.

**Anti-itch stick**

- Fill roller ball bottle half-way with carrier oil (apricot kernel oil, sweet almond oil, olive oil, or oil of choice)
- Put in small handful of dried rosemary, dried mint and dried lavender buds
- Add 5 drops each of rosemary, peppermint and lavender essential oils (optional, but recommended)
- Fill the rest of the bottle with oil of choice once you've added the dried herbs and essential oils.
- Put lid on and apply to bug bites or skin itchiness. Will keep for 1 year.

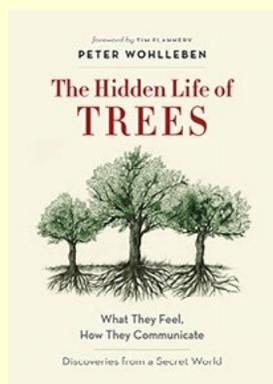
Notes: I buy most of my containers and spray bottles from [Amazon](#) or [Specialty Bottle Supply](#). I grow most of the herbs and flowers, but if I'm running low, I buy my raw ingredients from [Mountain Rose Herbs](#), including candelilla wax, butters and carrier oils. If you prefer to buy somewhere locally, you can find most of the ingredients above at Whole Foods, Natural Grocers or Wheatsville.

Have a wonderful holiday season and enjoy making these homemade botanical gifts!
Tara Fisher-Muñoz

Weeds and Reads: A Gardener's Holiday Book Guide

by Liath Appleton

There's a lot of reading material out there, and new books are being published faster than anyone could ever possibly keep up! Here are a few ideas for your 2016 gift-giving list.



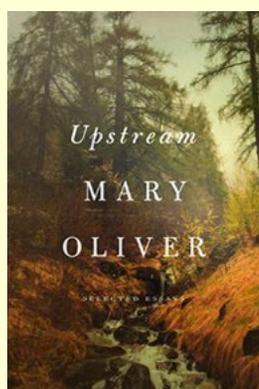
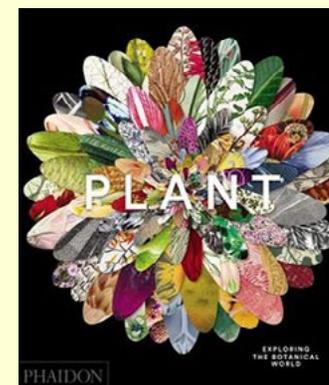
The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate—Discoveries from A Secret World - September 13, 2016
by Peter Wohlleben

In *The Hidden Life of Trees*, Peter Wohlleben shares his deep love of woods and forests and explains the amazing processes of life, death, and regeneration he has observed in the woodland and the amazing scientific processes behind the wonders of which we are blissfully unaware. [\[more\]](#)

Plant: Exploring the Botanical World - September 26, 2016
by Phaidon Press

Following in the footsteps of the international bestseller *Map: Exploring the World*, this fresh and visually stunning survey celebrates the extraordinary beauty and diversity of

plants. [\[more\]](#)

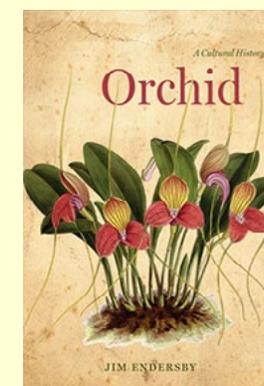


Upstream: Selected Essays - October 11, 2016
by Mary Oliver

Comprising a selection of essays, *Upstream* finds beloved poet Mary Oliver reflecting on her astonishment and admiration for the natural world and the craft of writing. [\[more\]](#)

Orchid: A Cultural History - November 7, 2016
by Jim Endersby

At once delicate, exotic, and elegant, orchids are beloved for their singular, instantly recognizable beauty. Found in nearly every climate, the many species of orchid have carried symbolic weight in countless cultures over time. [\[more\]](#)



Inside Austin Gardens Tour 2017

by Wendy Buck

This month we begin presenting to you those businesses that are Tour Sponsors of the 2017 Inside Austin Gardens Tour. These companies have given a \$500 donation to the tour. Sponsor monies are used to subsidize other activities in which the TCMGA is involved throughout the year. The funds also go to buying plants and upkeep on the greenhouse.

As a fellow Master Gardener and business owner, Jerry Naiser has given countless hours to the TCMG organization as a speaker and as a volunteer. His own garden was featured on the 2014 Inside Austin Gardens Tour. Straight from his website, in his own words, here is a glimpse of his company, Real Green Pest Control and Lawn Care.



For Over 25 Years our focus has been on plant Health Care.

We have won more awards for lawn care (in our market) than all the other Lawn Care companies combined. Drought or not, the awards keep coming. Of note, we won 'Green Thumb of the Year' for our work on the Texas Governor's Mansion.

We have built our reputation on internal training.

Unique to Real Green, I came up in the industry 'hands on and qualified,' and keep it that way to this day. Without exception, all the other companies that are of any size (in our market) came up from the sales side of the industry, working for a national company. They simply replicate what they have learned. We have found that it's easier to hire and train (our way) than to retrain and remove bad habits. Through hard-learned lessons, we prohibit the hiring of past employees of the National Lawn Care Companies.

We are licensed by the Texas Department of Agriculture and the Texas Structural Pest Control Board. We are horticulturists, arborists, and plant diagnosticians. We are members of: Independent Lawn Care Association, The Professional Lawn Care Association, The International Society of Arboriculture, The Texas Forestry Association, The National Arborist Association and The Society of Commercial Arborists.

Our service is highly cost effective because we pay attention to detail. This allows us to catch the presence of insects, weeds, or diseases in a timely fashion, thus reducing the amount of treatment needed and the cost of care.

We are successful because of you, our clientele. Our approach is simple: give good advice, based on tried and true techniques, and do what we say we are going to do, when we say we are going to do it. And above all, we respect the environment in which we live. With this approach, not only are your plants healthy, but so are you.

I truly hope you will give us the opportunity to serve you, and I hope to meet you soon.

Regards, Jerry Naiser - Owner/Arborist/Horticulturist/Agronomist

Inside Austin Gardens Tour 2017

Continued...



<http://realgreenlawns.com/>

Tour Sponsors for 2017 Inside Austin Gardens Tour:

Real Green Pest Control and Lawn Care

Vivero Growers Nursery

East Austin Succulents

Wild Birds Unlimited

Thrash Law Firm

Austin Area Garden Center

Please patronize our sponsor's businesses!

Austin Area Events

Austin 6th Annual Beekeeping Seminar

Saturday, January 21, 2017

J.J. Pickle Research Campus
10100 Burnet Road
Austin, TX

This is a daylong seminar offering six different educational presentations running concurrently in each time slot throughout the day. This will provide many beginning and advanced subjects to choose from. A separate beginner track has been formatted covering a variety of startup topics for soon to be or very new beekeepers.

Cost: \$50 early registration; \$60 normal registration.
For complete details, and to register, go to <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2017-austin-area-beekeeping-seminar-registration-28611440589>

Sponsored by The Austin Area Beekeepers Association

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The Compost Bin Submissions

We are always looking for Travis County Master Gardeners who are interested in writing for our monthly newsletter, and we would love to see your articles, photographs, book reviews and gardening ideas.

General Guidelines

- Please first email the editor to discuss potential article ideas.
- Email contributions as attachments (preferably in Word with a .doc or .rtf suffix).
- Please send images as separate attachments (preferably .jpg suffix). Don't forget to include photographer acknowledgments and captions.

Send your submissions, announcements, questions and suggestions to: editor.compostbin@gmail.com



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"Winter is the time of promise because there is so little to do - or because you can now and then permit yourself the luxury of thinking so." - Stanley Crawford