



The Compost Bin

May 2017

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

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Cover: Delicious 'Roma II' is a bush form of the Italian Romano pole bean, maturing in less than 60 days. By Bruce Leander

Right: Don't miss the Demo Garden at IAGT, May 6, 2017. By Lori Daul



Meeting - Joseph Johnson

Joseph Johnson - Director of the building and maintenance of The Gardens at Texas A&M University

"Tucked away on West Campus is a 40-acre plot that will become home to The Gardens at Texas A&M University. The Gardens will serve as an outdoor classroom for faculty and staff to teach students and the public valuable concepts about food production, landscape beauty and the natural environment. The Gardens will also become a peaceful sanctuary on campus, a place where everyone at Texas A&M and the surrounding community can relax, enjoy and learn." <https://gardens.tamu.edu/>

The Travis County Master Gardener Association is one of many donors supporting this project. See the complete list at <https://gardens.tamu.edu/about/thank-you-donors/>

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, May 3, 2017, 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

Our “summer harvest” actually begins in May, as squash and beans begin to ripen and tomatoes taunt us with their s-l-o-w transition to red. Everything grows a little faster as the weather warms up, so monitor the progress of your well-tended vegetables and harvest as they reach their prime for flavor and quality. Mature fruit that is left on the plant will also reduce overall production.



'Texas Rose' is an early softneck variety, originally known as Hallettsville garlic.

Last fall I planted a variety of garlic called 'Texas Rose,' purchased from Forever Yong Farms in Arizona. With Texas in its name I figured it had to be worth a try. Upon further investigation I learned this garlic has been grown for many years in South Texas and was originally known as Hallettsville garlic. Forever Yong farms says they obtained the garlic from a fellow in Seguin named Ray Reininger. It's an early artichoke type; I planted my cloves in September and harvested most of it by early May. Forever Yong Farms sold out of their garlic last fall, but they should have fresh stock later this year. Check their website (<http://www.foreveryongfarms.com/products.html>) for availability and ordering information.

Here is the vegetable gardener's checklist for May:

- Check irrigation lines and sprinklers occasionally for leaks and drips. Remember to water the soil rather than the foliage to help limit fungal diseases.
- Melons and winter squash can still be planted this month. Most varieties need about 90-100 days to mature, and 3-4 feet in each direction to vine. Small-fruited varieties can be grown vertically; try 'Delicata,' 'Sweet Dumpling' or 'Carnival.'
- Watch for fruit rot on summer squash. It usually begins with a whisker-like fungus that develops on the blossom end of immature squash fruit. The fungus, *Choanephora cucurbitarum*, is spread by wind, insects, and splashing water, especially during high humidity and high moisture conditions (one reason that proper spacing and air circulation is important). Remove and discard infected fruit as soon as you notice signs of rotting.



Waiting for tomatoes to ripen is a popular past time during the month of May.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...



'Early Prolific Straightneck' summer squash is both early AND prolific!

- Another common squash disease is cucumber mosaic virus which often manifests as zucchini mottled with yellow, or yellow squash mottled with green. Many gardeners attribute this coloring to cross pollination between summer squash and zucchini but it is actually a virus transmitted by insects such as aphids and beetles. There is no treatment, but try to keep the insects under control since they are vectors for the disease.
- Plant herbs such as basil, oregano, lemon balm, rosemary and borage.
- Plant okra and Southern peas if you didn't plant seeds last month.
- Consider planting any fallow areas with a cover crop of buckwheat. Let it grow for a couple of months then cut it down just after it starts blooming, leaving the roots to decompose and enrich the soil.
- Southern peas also make a great summer cover crop, and you get peas to eat as a bonus. 'Iron and Clay' is a drought tolerant, fast-growing variety that is often recommended as a cover crop.



Onions begin to bulb in response to increasing day length and should be ready to harvest in June.

Cycad Scale

by Wizzie Brown

The cycad scale is a little known pest in Texas that can cause major problems for cycad lovers. It has been identified in South Texas up to Central Texas. Heavy infestations of this scale insect can quickly cause mortality.

Mature females are about 1-1.5 mm long (~1/16"). They are pear-shaped but will conform to the shape of the plant. Adult females have a white cap that when flipped over reveal an orange insect. Males are smaller than females, 0.5 mm long, but also create a white cap.



Females lay over 100 orange eggs that hatch usually in 8-12 days depending on environmental conditions. Cycad scales have overlapping generations, so populations can build very quickly.

Damage first appears as chlorotic spots, but left untreated the fronds will turn brown from desiccation. Cycads with large populations often appear white from the covering of scales. Dead scales do not readily drop off the plant, so the scales must physically be removed by using high pressure water sprays.

Check all plant material before purchasing/trading to make sure it is not infested. Look over the whole plant and especially the underside of fronds, as the scales like to settle there to feed. You may need to use a hand lens since the insects are very small. High population levels of cycad scale will cover the entire surface of the plant, including the roots.

If an infestation is found, dispose of heavily infested plants by double bagging. If plants do not yet have high numbers of insects, prune heavily infested areas and discard in sealed bags. Pruning tools should be thoroughly cleaned before pruning other plants.

Treatments of cycad scale include horticultural oils, insecticidal soap, systemic pesticides or contact pesticides. Oils and soaps should have multiple applications. Oils should be applied in the morning or evening when temperatures are cooler. Systemic pesticides, active ingredients such as acephate or dimethoate, should be applied as a soil drench so that the chemical

is taken into the plant from the root system. Contact pesticides include active ingredients such as carbaryl or pyrethrin. When using contacts, care must be taken to thoroughly cover the plant so that all insects are treated.

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



East Austin Garden Fair 2017

by Jenive Isaacs and Mikala McFerren

That's a wrap!

Another wonderful East Austin Garden Fair has come and gone, another year of gathering volunteers and community partners, lining up pertinent topics, and smiling all day! This year, the attendees came in a steady stream throughout the day—a total of just barely over 800 folks enjoyed the festive atmosphere inside the Parque Zaragoza Recreation Center. Hundreds of plants were given away (thank you, Greenhouse team!), over 50 topics covering horticulture, health, edibles, and animals educated the attendees (thank you, MGs and community partners!), and 20+ tables kept the younger crowd entertained and occupied (thank you, Youth Gardening team!). The behind-the-scenes folks did a fabulous job, hauling all the tables and display items to the rec center, getting the handouts printed, feeding the volunteers, directing traffic and being the parking police, welcoming visitors, taking tons of photos, and counting the attendees as they entered the fair. So many moving parts and such a wonderful team effort!

Congrats to the winners of the 'best booth' awards—Backyard Chickens, Beekeeping, and Tool Sharpening & Care!

I have asked Jenive Isaacs, the intern who bravely worked in a leadership position and helped implement the plans, to give her impressions of the event:

As I finished my internship classes last fall, I was amazed at all I had learned about horticulture in just a few short months. But, if I'm being totally honest, there was another lesson I learned in that time. It turns out the things I DON'T know about gardening could fill a LOT of books. It was this self-awareness that caused me to be quite hesitant and skeptical that I might have anything to add to the East Austin Garden Fair team. Mikala and Lisa listened to my hesitations and assured me they would support me every step of the way on this (admittedly steep) learning curve. I accepted on a leap of faith and learned so much watching these ladies in action! I'm grateful they took a chance on this bewildered newbie.

One area of improvement they have been working on is documenting and streamlining the event, for two main reasons: 1) It would help them be more efficient in their own planning. 2) It would make the EAGF an event that can be passed on to future leaders. It was in this area that I quickly realized I might have something to offer. I'm not (YET!) able to plan and run a booth, but I can SURE help get your documents and communication onto platforms that will make them more helpful to you and everyone you work with! [Ah-Ha! Finally, I can put to use the skills I have gained having been a PTA mom since the turn of the century!] Together we have worked to move the EAGF planning guide from a 3-ring binder to living digital files that are easy to update and share.



Tool Care Award (Sheryl Williams with/Daphne Richards) - First Place Booth Award. By Roberta Sherfy.



Feed the Birds (MG Sara Hilgers). By Meredith O'Reilly.

East Austin Garden Fair

Continued...

As I busied myself in Sign Up Genius and Google Docs, they went on with the business of planning this event. They explained along the way, but it was more than once that one or all of us thought, "This will make MUCH more sense when you've actually GONE to the EAGF!" Even with their explanations and my reading through all of the files, I was NOT prepared for the awesomeness of this event. As a teacher and a parent, I can honestly say it was the best fair/conference type of event I have ever attended. It was amazing to see so many community partners and Master Gardeners all working together toward one important goal ...educating and empowering a community. I felt lucky to be a part of it. I was impressed to see all of the work that so many Master Gardeners put in to this event. I was touched by your kind, supportive words that day, and am humbled to be included in such an amazing group.

There are still many books full of things I don't know, but I take comfort in knowing this one thing for sure: as I work toward learning and "mastering" in the garden, I'll have the patient support of so many people! Thank you, Mikala and Lisa, for believing in me and letting me stumble along as you lead the way!

- Jenive

Folks, it just doesn't get much more fun and fulfilling than this! We all encourage you to join the EAGF team in any capacity you can, and enjoy the journey of learning and growing!



Free Plants (Intern Charles Hopkins). By Roberta Sherfy



Eat A Rainbow (MG Kate McAfee and Intern Linda Elliott). By Roberta Sherfy

Citrus Booth at the East Austin Garden Fair by Venkappa Gani



The East Austin Garden Fair was initiated by the Travis county Master Gardeners Association (TCMGA) ten years ago to educate and promote gardening in the East Austin community. My wife, Ratna, and I began participating at this fair at it's inception with booths showing various gardening activities. During the last few years we have been focusing on growing fruit trees, including citrus in the Central Texas area, and this year I was asked by the East Austin Garden Fair committee to have a special citrus booth based on public interest in home citrus trees. The booth was titled "Can you grow citrus in Austin?"

In April prior to the fair, Ratna and I did a talk radio show on Austin radio station KAZI (88.7). I talked about organic growing of edibles and their health benefits. Ratna spoke about rainbow color food for balanced nutrition and health.

Here is some background on the citrus project. From 2003 to 2004, I worked on a feasibility study with the TCMGA on growing citrus in the Austin area. The selection of grapefruit, satsuma orange, kumquat, Mexican lime and kaffir lime was made, and land was prepared behind the TCMGA greenhouse. The area was divided into three sections: 1) open area; 2) partially protected from cold weather; and 3) fully protected from cold weather. We added Meyer lemon to the selection based on input from local experienced gardeners. We also planted

citrus in our own backyard without any protection from the winter cold weather. Due to heavy wind, it was difficult to protect the plants, but they all made it through the first year, protected or not.

Very cold weather (below freezing for an extended period) can damage these trees. However, although they may look like they're dead, if they are well established and have a strong root system, they will come back. I have citrus trees that have lived 15 years. The last two years have had plenty of rain, and everything has done well, especially the Meyer lemon. The grapefruit has also done very well, and has produced hundreds of fruits. The tree is now 10 feet tall!

I was so happy this year, as all my citrus trees produced abundant fruit, but the deep freeze in November almost killed my trees with fruit still hanging. Luckily my patience prevailed, and in the spring new healthy shoots began to show up. I pruned all the dead limbs, and all the trees are doing well. I am hopeful that they will produce again this year.

As part of the citrus themed booth, the Agrilife Extension office asked if I could plant a tree at the Parque Zaragoza Recreation Center. I chose to donate a cold hardy, Improved Meyer lemon, and suggested a location in front of the building, next to the raised vegetable beds, making it visible to the public. The suggestion was accepted and we decided to plant the tree during the garden fair. In preparation, we dug a hole for the tree on the Thursday before the fair.

The booth on Saturday morning had two large Meyer lemon trees, one on each end of the table, and two small citrus trees on top of the table. At the center, we arranged fresh citrus fruits with labels. Literature and handouts were also available to visitors.

Citrus Booth at the East Austin Garden Fair

Continued...

The following fruits were displayed:

- 1) Meyer lemons
- 2) Texas grapefruit, large size and cut view
- 3) Gold Nugget tangerines
- 4) Key limes
- 5) Small limes
- 6) Organic lemons
- 7) Mandarin oranges
- 8) Cara Cara navel oranges
- 9) Blood oranges
- 10) Big pummelo

The table was small but it was very attractive with the eye-catching Meyer lemon trees and fruits hanging from their branches. A lot of visitors were surprised to see all the various types of citrus fruit. A pickled-lemon recipe was posted on the poster board, and that attracted some people who were curious to know about various lemon uses.

There was a continuous flow of people, including kids of all ages, asking many questions about lemons.

At around 11 am, we gathered the public together outside of the building, took one of the Improved Meyer lemon trees from our display, and had a planting ceremony hosted by Travis County Agrilife Extension Agent, Daphne Richards.

We mixed some compost and soil with an amendment of coco coir for easy drainage and water conservation. We filled the hole with water, watered the tree in the pot, removed the tree from the pot and loosened the roots. We then placed the tree in the center of the hole, and back-filled the hole with amended and original soil. Daphne, and fellow Master Gardener, Mark, helped during the process. Finally, we watered enough to soak through, and placed molded plastic in place of mulch around the tree trunk.

We all enjoyed the process. We had nice weather, and everything went without a hitch.

I spent the rest of the time until closing enjoying the other events inside the building.

With more than ten years of experience in growing citrus in Travis County, I believe we now have an answer to the question, "Can you grow citrus in Austin?" **YES YOU CAN!!** Just be patient, and watch out for freezing temperatures.



Zilker Garden Festival 2017

by Wendy Buck and Kirk Walden

Another great year at the Zilker Garden Festival! It takes a lot of planning and effort to make this event a success. Thank you for all your hard work! Here are just a few photos from the day.



Austin Area Events

Inside Austin Gardens Tour

Saturday, May 6, 2017

9 am - 4 pm

Austin, TX

A rare, behind-the-scenes look at gardens that demonstrate realistic, sustainable practices for Central Texas.

Garden Themes:

- Earth-Kind Landscaping – environmentally friendly principles and a secret garden
- Wildlife Restoration & Preservation – 23 acres of fruits, veggies, beehives and miniature horses
- Birds, Butterflies, and Zen – natives, natural attractors along with meditation space
- Sun & Shade – sunny daylilies to die for; shady umbrellas and gingers to soothe the soul
- A Journey Through Fairyland – whimsical design, a plethora of plants and a garden piano
- AgriLife Testing Ground – rainwater collection, new varieties and proven winners

\$20 advance purchase

\$25 on tour day, \$5 on tour day for single-garden ticket

Information, map and tickets at www.INSIDEaustingardens.org

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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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"Flickering in tall grass
Stars melt into the landscape
Fireflies and spring rain" - Liath Appleton