



Aransas/San Patricio

The President's Corner

January 2010

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Ellen Reisinger

The Christmas Catalogs have stopped stuffing our mailboxes to the gills. Here comes the onslaught of the seed catalogs. Gardeners everywhere are planning and dreaming about their next year's garden. These coming months are a time of hope, growth and renewal.

Likewise for the Aransas/San Patricio Master Gardeners as we are planning for the coming year. We are blessed to have a wonderful group with diverse knowledge and many talents. At this point, we are beginning our new year with a great slate of officers and committee heads. We have been renewed with a wonderful class of 2009 that has stepped up to the plate and volunteered right from the beginning. Everything is in place to provide a great year of public education and functions such as the Hidden Gardens Tour and Plant Sales.

This year we will see many changes with a new agent coming onboard and hopefully a new building. Perhaps we all should all take a moment and think about our role and mission as Master Gardeners and what goals we would like to have for the future. With all the activities and functions that we perform it is easy to get bogged down and lose sight of our mission and future goals. Volunteer for activities that you love and attend the general meetings. Let your voice be heard. Most of all have fun. Here's to a happy, healthy and productive New Year!
Ellen

GA Garden Days
January 8th & 20th
8:00 - 11:00 am

January
Master Gardener
Meeting
Tuesday, January 5th
9-10 am
Green Acres

Introducing new
Extension Agent
Virginia Smith

Honoring long-time
members Lulu Harris
and Harold Henley

Seeking Serious Plant Lovers

Texas Master Gardeners are a team of volunteer horticulture educators who are under the auspices of:



Green Acres is our award winning demonstration garden located at 611 E. Mimosa, Rockport, Texas. The gardens showcase plants and landscape schemes suitable for the Coastal Bend. For help with plant problems, or for class information, please call (361) 790-0103, or email aransas-tx@tamu.edu

Editors

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January Brown Bag

Tuesday, January 19 12:00-1:00 pm

Basics of Garden & Irrigation Design

By Richard Snyder, Master Gardener

Aransas County Library, 701 E. Mimosa, Rockport

Happy Birthday !

Lou Harris, 3rd

Susan Hedrick, 6th

Carol Spangler, 7th

Monica Morris 11th

Jon Rappard, 13th

Heather Bywater, 14th

Mary Ann Davis, 15th

Jean Beck 15th

Ernie Edmundson, 19th

Frances Frizzell, 23rd

Barbara Caldwell, 24th

Educational programs of Texas AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin. Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating.

Our Mission: *Improving the lives of people, businesses, and communities across Texas and beyond through high-quality, relevant education.*

Advice for the Winter

Helping Your Garden Survive a Frost

We have already had one early frost this winter, so we may be in for more. Here are some recommendations for preparing your frost-sensitive plants:

- Water the garden thoroughly before nightfall. The soil will release moisture into the air around your plants during the night, keeping the air somewhat warmer. (Sprinkling the foliage and branches of plants prior to a freeze does NOT help protect them, contrary to some folk's opinions. In fact it can do more harm than good.)
- Even a slight breeze will prevent cold air from settling near the ground during the night. You can help keep frost from forming by providing this breeze artificially with an electric fan. **Be sure to protect the fan and all electrical connections from water and the elements.**
- Cover up before dusk! By the time it gets dark much of the stored heat in the garden has already been lost.
- If you have time, build a simple frame around the plant, or row of plants. (Even a single stake can



be used in many cases.) Then drape a cover of newspaper, cardboard, plastic tarps, bed sheeting or any other lightweight material over the frame to create a tent. If you

don't have time to create a frame, lay the protective cover directly onto the plant. This will help to slow the loss of heat rising from the foliage and the ground. However, if you use plastic, it can burn any leaves it touches on a cold night. Remove the covers in the morning, once the frost has thawed, to let the light and fresh air back in, and to prevent overheating by the sun.

- Blankets keep us warm because they help contain the heat that our bodies produce. Plants do not produce heat for the cover to hold in. The heat we are trying to contain is in the soil. Therefore the covers should go over the plants and to the ground, rather than be wrapped around the plant

and tied around the trunk. Those "landscape lollipops" don't get much, if any, protection.

- Use leaves to mulch perennial plants. A thick blanket of leaves can help protect marginal perennials such as ginger, esperanza, and firebush.
- For smaller individual plants you can use glass jars, milk jugs with the bottom removed, paper cups upside down flower pots as heat traps. **Don't forget to remove these covers in the morning.**
- Two other handy items are a mechanic's light or string of outdoor Christmas lights. These can be placed under the covers to give added heat. Just take the obvious precautions to avoid fire hazards and electric shorts. Also take care not to allow a hot light bulb to contact and damage plant tissues such as the trunk or branches. Use lights beneath a cover to protect valuable but marginally hardy plants like a Satsuma orange tree or a kumquat bush. They can also make the difference for an in-ground bougainvillea on a really cold night.
- You can collect heat during the day by painting plastic milk jugs black and filling them with water. Place them around your plants where they will collect heat during the day. Water loses heat more slowly than either soil or air. This collected heat will radiate out throughout the night.



Potted plants are particularly susceptible to frosts because their roots are also unprotected. If you are unable to move your container plants indoors or under cover, group them closely together in a protected location up against the home and cover with a blanket.

If your efforts were too late, or too little to protect your plants from a frost, resist the urge to cut off the damaged parts of the plants. To a certain extent, these dead leaves and stems will provide limited insulation from further frost damage.

Information taken from www.gardenhelper.com & "Protecting Plants from Frosts and Freezes" by Skip Richter, Travis County Extension Horticulturist

From Our Writers

The Spring Garden

By Todd L. Cutting—Master Gardener

The spring Vegetable garden starts in the winter, where ever one lives. Here in Aransas/San Patricio counties, winter comes in mid-December and ends in mid-February. Spring lasts from mid-February to April when summer starts with its heat and humidity. The garden starts in winter because transplants of tender vegetables must be started so they are large enough to go outside into the ground as soon as the weather allows. The earlier one gets tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, and okra started, the sooner production will start and the higher the yield before summer heat ends the season. We have no reason to wait for the soil to thaw. With all the rain we've received in the fall, we may have to find dry days to work.

Here in the Coastal Bend, the garden should be ready to sow cool season crops such as radish, lettuce, turnips, spinach and peas any time from mid-January to March depending on your soil and general weather conditions. These crops should be seeded in succession every two weeks through March depending on your needs. As the soil is cool during this period and these crops require rapid growth to reach optimum quality, fertilization is necessary. When preparing the land, apply 3 to 5 pounds of a granular garden fertilizer with a nutrient rating of 10-10-10 or 13-13-13 per 100 square feet. A large coffee can holds approximately 5 pounds. Work this into the soil a few days before seeding.

Transplants of broccoli, cabbage, kohlrabi and other cole crops can be set out at the same time that you are seeding the above. They require the same land preparation. For the spring garden, these crops should have been started at Thanksgiving. This means they have to be given some cold protection. They can tolerate slight, short freezes if they are well watered and protected from the wind. A cold frame should be adequate if a hard freeze is predicted. Transplant into the garden when they have four to six leaves. Because they are going into relatively cool soil, which reduces nutrient



availability, fertilize every two to three week with a water soluble fertilizer such as Miracle-Gro according to label instructions.

The only serious insect problem I've had on these Brassica crops is stink bugs late in the season. A few aren't an issue but when you start getting 10 to 20 per plant it's time to spray. One or two sprays of labeled insecticide are all that should be needed.

When Coastal Bend gardeners think of the spring garden, the first crops that come to mind are tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and okra. Tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant are Solanaceous crops. Okra is in the Malvaceae family but can essentially be treated the same as the Solanaceous crops. When you are reading this in mid-January, you are already at least month behind in getting seeds of these crops sown for transplants. If we all had heated greenhouses, we'd start transplants of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, and okra in late November and be able to protect them from the occasional freezing night. Few of us have neither greenhouses nor enough room with good light in the house so we have to wait until mid-January to get started. These crops require eight to twelve weeks to reach a size suitable to set out.

The advantage of starting your own plants is you get to choose the variety. This can be especially true for tomatoes because with our sandy soils and long, hot growing season nematodes can be a limiting factor to production. There are nematode resistant tomato varieties, especially to root-knot nematode. Varieties with an "N" in the letters behind their name in the seed catalog have some level of root-knot nematode resistance. Celebrity VFNT, Big Beef VFNT, and Better Boy VFN. Big Beef and Celebrity are All-America award winners. These three varieties are available from mail-order houses, seed packet displays, and as transplants in garden centers and nurseries.

Other varieties with nematode resistance are Ultra Boy II, Ultra Girl (early), Crista, Mountain Fresh Plus, and Marianna (plum) from Stokes Seeds. Primetime (late) and Park's Early Challenge are available from Park Seed Company. Sweet Million and Chelsea are two cherry tomatoes with nematode

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resistance available from several sources. Lemon Boy is a yellow tomato with nematode resistance.

There are no nematode resistant varieties of peppers, eggplant, and okra so choose varieties of these crops by other traits. I've grown good, long lasting crops of all these crops in heavily nematode infested soil by planting early and using large transplants in soil heavily amended with organic compost. Buy the plants in 6 inch pots as soon as they are available at the garden center. Or buy smaller ones and transplant into 6 inch pots and grow for four weeks then set them out. Dig a large hole, using a spade or shovel, not a trowel, and fill with bagged or bulk compost. Add a tablespoon of slow release fertilizer such as Osmocote. Place plant in hole and back-fill with compost. Water well. Fertilize with liquid fertilizer according to product label every two weeks so plants grow rapidly.

Eggplant Black Beauty is an open-pollinated variety that is readily available from local seed sellers, in packets, and mail-order. It is an egg-shaped (oval), large fruited variety with a dark purple color. Hybrids are available by mail order in both oval and elongated types ranging in color from white through pink to purple and even black. Megal is a dark purple, elongated oval Italian type. Millionaire is a shiny black elongated Japanese type.

Open-pollinated peppers are readily available as seed and plants but hybrids will out-perform them in early yield, total yield, and consistency of performance. They come in many shapes, colors, and pungency. Jalapenos and chilies are more stable to environmental variation. That is, they will produce under more variable conditions than will bell type peppers.

Just as with the Solanaceous crops of tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant, okra comes in open-pollinated and hybrid forms. The old stand-by, Clemson Spineless, is open-pollinated, makes a large bush and is variable in performance.

The available hybrids have to be mail-ordered. They have shorter internodes, so the plants are smaller, and



there are more nodes for flowering to occur at. Thus they yield more and more consistently set fruit.

There are two potentially big insect problems with Solanaceous crops and okra: Leaf-footed bugs and white flies. Both of these get worse later in the season as temperature and humidity increase and the plants age. Leaf-footed bugs damage the fruit visually and taste wise. They must be killed by insecticide sprays. Any insecticide that has Solanaceous crops and stink bugs on the label may be used according to labeling instructions. These large black bugs have little effect on the foliage and tend to move around and under the leaves when you try to spot them. The immatures look sort of like large, orange ants and occur in gangs. If you need help identifying them, contact Green Acres at 361-790-0103 or better yet, bring us specimens.

A few eggplants or okra plants can support a larger population of white flies than there are pennies in the national debt. Unlike the national debt, if left alone, the white fly population crashes in four to six weeks, with little effect on the host but having been a real nuisance to the gardener. They are easily killed with labeled insecticide. You have to spray every three days, thoroughly covering the under side of the foliage. Unless you are really compulsive, don't spray. Instead, let the predators and natural diseases of white fly control the population. It takes longer but the results are surer. The same goes for aphids. Lady bird beetles, larva and adults will do the job in a matter of a couple of weeks.

Two physiological problems must be mentioned: blossom end rot (BER) and pollen clumping caused by high night temperatures. Blossom end rot is a rot at the blossom end of the tomato, pepper or eggplant end of the fruit. Its occurrence is an indication of poor water management; not enough water or irregular watering. Other factors can exacerbate the problem.

Pollen clumping occurs inside the flower when night temperatures are above 86 degrees F. This is a problem for all Solanaceous crops and varies by variety. At temperatures above 86 degrees the pollen clumps together and doesn't shed on to the flower pistil as it grows through the anthers. When

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pollination doesn't occur there will be no fruit set and the blossoms just fall off. The plant continues to grow well, but without tomatoes, etc., who wants to maintain it. Cherry, grape, and plum tomato varieties and the small fruited, hot pepper types are less affected and will produce longer than large fruited tomatoes and bell peppers. This problem usually ends the spring season in the Coastal Bend.

Cucurbit crops such as cucumbers, zucchini, summer squash, and melons are very cold sensitive.

In the Coastal Bend they can be directly sown in the garden in late February or early March. Or you can start transplants four weeks prior to your setting out date to get a head start on the season. You will need to keep them above 55 degrees.

There is a lot of information available on growing vegetables but very little specifically directed at the Coastal Bend. Adams and LeRoy's book, *The Southern Kitchen Garden* is the exception. Both writers were Texas AgriLife Extension horticulture agents in the Houston area.

Sharon Watkins

Sharon Adair Watkins, age 66, passed away on December 18, 2009. Sharon and her husband, Michael moved to Rockport in 1998. She is a graduate of the 1998 Master Gardening Class and was instrumental in creating the Children's Discovery Garden at the Master Gardener's Green Acres demonstration gardens. The Texas Master Gardeners Association selected her Children's Discovery Garden as 1st place project in 2000 and in 2003. She was awarded second place as the Texas Master Gardener Individual Master Gardener in 2002. She also taught gardening to the Rockport Elementary Schools after-school Odyssey program. A special memorial service was held at Charlie Marshall Funeral Home in Rockport on Wednesday, December 23, 2009.

The family has requested that donations in lieu of flowers be made to the Children's Discovery Garden. The Aransas Master Gardeners will place a dedication sign re-naming the CDG the *Sharon Watkins Children's Discovery Garden*.



Congratulations 2009 Master Gardener Class Graduates!



December 1, 2009 - Class of 2009 Graduates at celebration dinner

Left to right: Pat Stanton, Joyce Scott, Mary Ann Porcher, Barbara Morran, Janie Moon, Allen Ray Moers, Marthanne Mitchell, Judy Goodner, Teresa Cipra.

Not pictured: Jean Beck, Chris Kelly and Gilbert Tamez

Around the State

Botanical Gardens extends hours benefiting birders, photographers, nature buffs effective January 1

The South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center will extend its open hours beginning January 1, 2010, to accommodate birders, photographers and nature buffs in general. Open 9 am to 5 pm daily now, the new hours will be 7:30 am to 5:30 pm.

With the new Butterfly House and Anderson Bromeliad Conservatory now open, general admission prices also will increase \$1 in all categories. Adults (13-59) will be \$6; seniors (60), active military (ID) and college students (ID) will be \$5; children (5-12) will be \$3. Under age 5 and members will continue to be admitted free.

2010 Winter Lecture Series at Botanical Gardens & Nature Center

The South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center offers its fourth WINTER LECTURE SERIES for Texas winter visitors and area residents. Guest speakers will present unique perspectives on regional environmental, agricultural and horticultural topics from 10 to 11:30 a.m., **Wednesdays, in January and February**, in the Visitors Center, 8545 S. Staples. Lecture Topics are:

Jan. 6 Rainwater Harvesting—Get your Feet Wet!

Celia Rae Hawkins, Nueces Master Gardener

Jan. 13 How Organic do you Want to Be?

Deanna Baumgartner, Gill Landscape Nursery

Jan. 20 Reptiles of South Texas

Michael Allen, Coastal Bend Reptile Rescue

Jan. 27 Butterflies of the World—See the New Butterfly House

Jack & Betty Prentiss, Collectors

Feb. 3 Ethnobotany—Historic Uses of Texas Plants

Sibyl Deacon, Master Naturalist

Feb. 10 Orchid Fever—Catch It!

Sam Jones, STBGNC Orchid Curator

Feb. 17 Herbs: Flower Pot to Cook Pot

Carol Krank, Master Gardener Herb Team

Feb. 24 Turtle Watch—the Kemp's Ridley Story

Cynthia Rubio, Padre Island National Seashore

Orchid Novice Class Meets at Botanical Gardens & Nature Center January 7

The *Orchid Novice Class* meets at 7 p.m., in the Visitors Center. Meeting the first Thursday of each month on a continuing basis, the orchid class series—taught by Orchid Curator Sam Jones—covers varieties, culture, care, climate, and acquisition. Jones' book, *Orchid Culture for the Novice*, as well as a selection of orchids, may be purchased at the class. No reservations necessary. For more information, call 361/854-7624.

Growing Iris in the Texas Coastal Bend Seminar at Botanical Gardens & Nature Center February 6

Local Iris and Amaryllis specialist and Master Gardener John Gilbreath will lecture on which iris can be grown in the Corpus Christi area and how to plant and care for them, from 10 am to noon, in the Visitors Center. The class will include a tour of the new Amaryllis Garden, which Gilbreath designed and planted. Seminar fee is \$7 per person, \$3.50 members, and includes Gardens & Nature Center admission. For reservations, call 361.852.2100.

Rose Bed to Rose Bud Seminar/Workshop at Botanical Gardens & Nature Center January 30

The South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center and Corpus Christi Rose Society present the annual "Rose Bed to Rose Bud," seminar/workshop from 10 a.m. to noon, beginning in the Visitors Center meeting room, 8545 S. Staples.

Rosarians from the Rose Society will discuss plant selection, bed preparation, planting, feeding and disease control for the South Texas region. A pruning workshop, with the Rose Society in the STBGNC Rose Garden will follow the seminar.

Participants are asked to bring gloves and hand pruners. Workshop fee, which includes handouts and Gardens & Nature Center admission, is \$7, \$3.50 members. For reservations, call 361/852-2100.

January 2010

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 County Holiday	2
3	4 4:30pm Odyssey After-School Garden Program	5 9am MG Monthly Meeting	6	7	8 8-11am Green Acres Garden Day 10:30 am Landscape Committee	9
10	11 4:30pm Odyssey After-School Garden Program	12	13	14	15	16
17	18 County Holiday	19 12-1 pm Brown Bag 1:30pm Board Meeting	20 8-11am Green Acres Garden Day 10am MG Tree Team Visits	21	22	23
24 <i>MG Hours Due Dec. 15- Jan. 31</i>	25 4:30pm Odyssey After- School Garden Program 4-6 A&H Cultural Arts Entries	26 11-12 A&H Food Entries	27 A&H Show	28 A&H Show	29 A&H Show	30 A&H Show 4-5 pm Check out entries