



## McLennan County Master Gardeners

Horticulture Newsletter

Fall, 2005

<http://mcmg.aspfreeserver.com>

### Calendar of events:

**Sept. 24-25** - Arts Fest, Heritage Square, Waco

**Jan. 17** - Horticulture session, Blackland Income Growth Conference (BIG), Waco Convention Center

Call 757-5180 for information on upcoming extension events.

### Fall Annuals for Color

#### From McLennan County Master Gardeners:

**Master Gardener Training**, which requires 60 hours of classroom training and 60 hours of volunteer service, is tentatively scheduled for mid-2006. Interested students may call the Extension Office at 757-5180 to put their name on the contact list.

**Arts Fest:** The Master Gardeners will assist children in making "garden baby plant pals" on Sept. 24-25. Come watch the children make a hairy plant pal. Instructions for making them will be in the winter horticulture newsletter.

**Superstar Bed At Carleen Bright Arboretum:** The superstar plants have thrived with recent rains. Stop by to see which plants are "shining" like the stars they are. The rabbits and deer are fond of the hibiscus and roses!

**Rose Trials At TSTC:** Dr. George from Dallas recently visited the trials to check on progress of the roses which Master Gardeners planted and are monitoring. All have doubled in size since their early spring planting and are in full bloom. Check them out at 202 Greenway Drive on the TSTC campus.

Fall planted annuals can provide a needed boost of color beginning in mid-October and lasting through spring. These are winter hardy and not usually damaged by low temperatures. The most commonly used annuals are pansies, violas, dianthus, snapdragons and flowering kale and cabbage. All these plants prefer full sun.



Pansies are winter hardy into the teens and provide an outstanding show of color in early spring. Their close relatives are violas or Johnny

Jump Ups which look like miniature pansies and have the same hardiness and good color display. Dianthus or Pinks are also cold hardy to the teens. They come in a wide range of colors and reach 6 to 10 inches in height. Periodic pruning often keeps them blooming year around. Snapdragons have grown in usage the past few years. A dwarf variety is preferable to the older variety that grew tall and fell over from the bloom's weight. They, too, are available in a wide range of colors and perform well into the spring. The flowering kale and cabbage plants are popular when creating a focal point in the landscape. Light green and purple are the most common of the many available colors. Massed plantings of these annuals reward with striking displays of color.

## Garden Checklist for Fall

- Fall is just around the corner. If you have an open area to be planted, now is the time to clean it and get it ready to go. If weeds have moved in, treat with an appropriate herbicide to kill them. Select one that will not contaminate the soil or damage the new plants you want to put in after the weeds are dead. Ask before purchasing, read the label, and follow any special instructions. Once the weeds are dead, remove, then add compost to the area, tilling or digging it into the soil. You can also add a supplement of plant food –organic or standard - and till it in with the compost for extra benefit.

- Purchase spring flowering bulbs while there is a good selection. All may be planted as soon as purchased except tulips and hyacinths. Chill tulip and hyacinth bulbs in the lower part of the refrigerator until late December before planting. Do not leave the bulbs in airtight bags during refrigerated storage. Plant bulbs in well prepared beds so that the base of the bulb is at a depth three times the diameter of the bulb.

- Roses can be trimmed and fed to encourage new growth.

- If you plan to save caladium bulbs, dig them in late October and allow to dry. Pack in dry peat moss, vermiculite or similar material and store in an area where temperature will be 55 to 60 degrees.

- Divide and reset perennials such as Shasta daisies, phlox, iris, daylilies, and violets. Then dig clump and separate or cut into sections. Reset the plants at the same depth level in their new location. Firm soil around them and water well. They will establish roots over winter and be ready for spring growth.

- Clean up the garden, removing annuals that have completed their life cycle. Remove spent

blooms and tops of plants when frost has killed the leaves. This will reduce the insect and disease potential for next year's garden. Cut back perennials that have finished flowering.

- Replenish mulch materials where needed. Ask the neighbors if you can have their fallen leaves to use for mulch or compost. Turn their discards into "brown gold" for your yard.



- Plant cool season vegetables: cabbage, onions, spinach, turnips, radishes, lettuce, Swiss chard. Set out transplants or grow your own from seeds. Perennial herbs can be planted now. Keep all transplants, vegetable or flowers, well watered. Monthly feedings of a nitrogen fertilizer will keep them vigorous and productive.

- Plant bluebonnets and other spring wildflowers in early fall so they can germinate and develop good root systems. When weather warms in spring, they will be ready to grow and bloom. Prepare your spot by lightly tilling the soil to loosen before planting the seeds. Most require full sun and good



drainage.

- If your red-tipped photinias and Indian hawthorns have bright, red spots on the foliage, these are caused by the fungus called Entomosporium. Apply a fungicide such as Daconil three or four times from mid-October to late November if wet weather prevails. *No fungicides should be applied during hot, dry periods.* If possible, remove the fallen diseased leaves from around the plants. Severe infections can cause heavy defoliation, greatly reducing the landscape screening value. If watering is necessary, do it in the morning so that leaves can dry quickly. Extended leaf wetness encourages disease development.

## Fall Lawn Care

### 1) *A Time for Fungus in Lawns*

In Central Texas, fall is the season for fungal diseases in lawns. The cool nights and warm days are the ideal conditions. The two most common fungal diseases occurring in Central Texas lawns are Brown Patch and Take-All Root Rot.

Brown Patch is found mostly in St. Augustine lawns but it can also be found in Zoysia and Bermuda lawns. Brown Patch becomes active when night time temperatures drop below 70 and day time temperatures are in the low to mid 80's. Brown Patch is also associated with over watering and/or heavy rainfall. Applications of herbicide can increase activity of the disease. Also, over application of soluble nitrogen can increase the activity of the fungus. Brown Patch doesn't kill turf but rots the leaves at the runners resulting in symmetrical brown patches in the lawn. Brown Spot can be treated with a fungicide spray. Read the label to make sure the product you buy will work on this particular disease.

Take-All Root Rot, while found in all warm season turf grasses, is largely a problem in St. Augustine lawns. While the visual symptoms for this particular disease show up in the late spring to summer period, the disease is actually active in the soil in the fall and spring months when temperatures are at 60 to 65 degrees. The signs are brown spots irregularly shaped spreading over a lawn. This disease



feeds on the root system of the grass and can destroy a lawn. If you wait until summer months when the symptoms first appear, it is usually too late to treat. The

best time to treat for this disease is fall and spring when the disease starts actively feeding on the root system. At this time researchers have had very little success with fungicide treatments for Take-All Root Rot. There are

several Take-All control studies being conducted at this time and hopefully there will be a control discovered for this disease.

### 2) *Is Over Seeding a Warm Season Lawn Really a Good Idea?*

Today homeowners often try to maintain a cool season lawn on top of a warm season lawn. This practice is not recommended. Over seeding is very hard on warm season turf grasses. The problem occurs in early spring when warm weather grasses are trying to reestablish themselves. The cool season turfs are still thriving and competition becomes intense for survival. The more thriving winter grasses will weaken the warm weather grasses.



Thus the warm weather grasses are late in getting established and continue to struggle throughout the growing season. A struggling warm weather lawn is susceptible to weeds and diseases. Each year that the over seeding practice continues, the impact on the summer turfs takes a greater toll. The summer lawn continues to thin out and more weeds appear.

### 3) *Fall and Winter Weed Control in Lawns*

Pre-emergent herbicides are the most effective means for control of annual grassy weeds in turf grass. September is the time to apply fall pre-emergent. Poor weed control with the fall pre-emergent applications is usually because the individuals wait too late to make their treatment. Once the weed seed has germinated and the plant is growing, a pre-emergent will not kill the weed. Another reason for failure is not watering the herbicide thoroughly. For these products to be effective, they need to be watered down into the top layer of soil where most of the weed seed are germinating. Also many of these herbicides are broken down by sunlight and if left on top of the turf grass, they will lose strength.

## Fall Ideal for Planting Trees and Shrubs

Fall will soon be here and weather will become cooler. This is the perfect time to add a new tree or grouping of shrubs to the landscape. Fall may be a better time of year to plant than spring!

Many people prefer January through March for planting, but the fall months of September through December have distinct advantages. Fall planting follows the heat of summer, and precedes a cool winter season. Newly planted trees and shrubs use this to good advantage. Plant roots grow anytime the soil temperature is 40 degrees or higher, which may occur all winter in Texas. The root systems of fall-planted specimens develop and become established. When spring arrives, this expanded root system can support and take advantage of the full surge of spring growth.

Fall is the optimum time to plant balled and burlapped trees and shrubs. They will have ample time to recover from transplanting before spring growth begins. **All bare root plants, including roses and pecan and fruit trees should be planted in late winter while completely dormant.**



Buy healthy, well-grown plants from a reputable dealer. Those in the plant-selling business year round depend upon repeat customers and sell quality plants to assure future business. Beware of plant bargains!

Think about the plant's needs before investing. Is it adapted to local soil? Will it grow in sun or shade? Does it need a wet or dry location? This information is often on tags attached to the plant. If not, ask a nursery professional or the County Extension Agent.

"Plan before planting" - It is easier to move plants on paper than to dig them after planting in the wrong place.

Every plant in the landscape should serve a purpose. Is the plant for screening, for beauty, for shade? How large will the plant be five years from now? A small one-gallon size plant will look entirely different after a few years of growth in your landscape.



Suggested guidelines for proper planting:

1. Dig a hole large enough for the root system to have at least six inches of clearance on all sides. The root ball should rest on a solid soil foundation, so don't dig the hole much deeper than the ball.
2. Plant the tree or shrub slightly above the level of the surrounding soil, to allow for settling and increased soil drainage.
3. Carefully place the tree or shrub in the hole. Handle the plant by the root ball, not by the trunk. A broken ball of earth can mean a dead plant. Always remove any container before planting.
4. Backfill the hole, using only the native soil removed from the hole; do not use soil amendments. Fill the hole and firm the soil around the plant. Water thoroughly, to settle soil around the roots and eliminate air pockets.
5. Do not fertilize after planting. Wait until early in the spring to do this, and then, go lightly. Heavy applications of fertilizer may burn and injure the root system and possibly kill the plant.
6. Watering remains paramount in transplanting. At the time of transplanting, soak the root ball and surrounding soil. A thorough watering every 7 to 10 days dramatically increases the success ratio. More frequent watering may encourage root rot. More plants fail from *over* watering than from *under* watering.
7. As a final procedure, add 4 to 6 inches of mulch around the base. This keeps down weeds and conserves soil moisture. Use pine bark, compost, grass clippings or leaves.

## Fall Beans Are Best

Green beans are a 'winner' in Texas fall vegetable gardens. They are easy to grow and produce a high-yielding, high quality crop. Most people will agree that the flavor of the fall-grown green beans far exceeds that of those produced in the spring.

There are many different types of beans grown in Texas gardens, but the most common are green snap beans, lima beans, and the various types of horticultural beans. Green snap beans

are usually of two types - bush or pole. However, bush beans are preferred due to the fact that they are earlier and produce a higher yield before the first killing frost.



Bush beans generally require about 60 to 70 days of good growing conditions to produce a crop. Often, fall beans are a little slower to make than spring beans, as they are maturing during cooler conditions and shorter days. For a steady supply of beans to the kitchen, you might try making small plantings every 10 days, keeping in mind the number of days remaining before the average date of the first killing frost. Some of the more popular fall bush bean varieties are *TopCrop*, *Tendercrop*, and *Contender*. The varieties *Greencrop* and *Romano* are bush forms of the popular pole beans.

Many Texas home gardeners like to raise horticultural beans such as the *Improved Pinto*. These are large-seeded beans used in the green-shell stage. The fiber of the bean pod is often too tough for these beans to be cooked as snap beans unless they are picked at a relatively immature stage. These types can usually be recognized by their colorful striped or mottled pods.

As with the spring crop, many of the problems associated with garden beans begin at planting time. In the spring, many home gardeners plant the seed too deep. However, when planting in

the fall, the seed should be planted a little deeper to compensate for the hotter soil temperatures. Covering the seed to a depth of about 1 to 1 and 1/2 inches when planting in the heat of summer or early fall is generally recommended. After planting, never allow the soil to crust, as this will result in poor germination and emergence. A light mulch over the seed row will help prevent crusting and often helps cool the soil slightly. If a crust does form at or near emergence time, water the soil lightly.



As the crop grows, you must be on a constant lookout for insects and diseases. Many of these problems are much more severe for the fall crop than the spring crop. Applications of recommended insecticides and fungicides will greatly increase fall bean yields.

For top yield of quality pods, pick the beans before the seed fully develops. A few pods left to mature on the plant will greatly reduce the set of new beans and reduce harvestable yield. Snap beans should always be picked in a young, succulent stage. To keep fall beans producing, side-dress the plants after the first picking at the rate of 4 to 5 teaspoons of ammonium sulfate, or 2 to 3 teaspoons of ammonium nitrate, for each 10 feet of garden row. Scratch the fertilizer into the soil, but avoid placing it too close to the plant, as damage can occur. Watering of the green beans is extremely important, especially near or at bloom time. Never allow the soil to dry out, especially during this period.



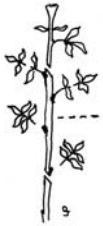


## Soda Bottle Propagator

Want to increase your supply of some of your plants? Want to share some with friends? Try taking cuttings of the plants and rooting them in a Soda Bottle Propagator. Success is fairly certain with this easy method for plants that can be propagated by cuttings.

Materials needed are: 2 or 3-liter plastic soda bottle, 4 to 6 inch round plastic pot, sterile potting soil (can use perlite or vermiculite instead of soil), rooting hormone (optional).

Fill the plastic pot with potting soil. Cut and remove the curved bottom area from the soda bottle. Leave the cap on bottle.



Select the plant or plants to make cuttings from. Remove 4 to 6 inches of a stem by making a sharp cut just below a node (the place on the stem where the leaf comes out). Remove the lower leaves and any blooms from the stem, leaving only 4 to 6 leaves at the tip. Trim large leaves by removing about 1/2 of the leaf.

You may dip the cut end of the stem into a rooting hormone such as Rootone, but many plants root easily without this step. Make a small hole in the potting soil with a stick or pencil and carefully insert the stem into that hole. Several cuttings can be placed in the same pot. Firm the soil around the stems. Once the cuttings are in the potting soil, water well and let the excess water drain from the pot. The last step is placing the soda bottle over the plants in the pot. (The bottle should fit snugly in the top of the pot.) This makes a miniature greenhouse.



Should excessive moisture build up in your miniature greenhouse, either remove the cap for a while or lift the soda bottle so that it can dry out some. However, the soil should never

dry out during rooting. This method helps keep the needed high humidity for propagation.

In a few weeks, the cuttings should begin to show evidence of new growth. A slight tug on the cutting will also confirm that rooting is taking place. Once a cutting has a good supply of roots approximately 1 inch long, it can be carefully lifted from the rooting medium and placed in its own pot of potting soil.

Among easy plants to propagate are begonias, coleus, mint, rosemary, sweet potato vine, roses, wandering jew, ivy, basil, and plants that vine and have leaves at joints down their stems. The new plants will have the same characteristics as the parent plant. This is a simple and inexpensive method of multiplying your plants.

## Gardening Q&A

**Q.** My crepe myrtle has lots of suckers growing around the base. I'd like to remove them so that it will be a tree. When can I do this and also remove low hanging limbs?

**A.** You can remove suckers and trim limbs at any time. The spent bloom seed pods can also be trimmed off to encourage a new flush of blooms. Do not trim over half of the tree top at any time. Horticulturists do not recommend the severe topping that some do in early spring. It distorts the natural shape of the tree and does not make for larger blooms.

**Q.** How often should I fertilize my plants after I bring them inside for the winter?

**A.** Do not fertilize potted plants during the winter, but wait for spring when they can go back outside. Water only as needed to keep the soil moist. Do Not Overwater! Give them bright light and keep away from hot air, drafts, or extreme cold air. They deserve a winter rest.

**Q.** How do I get rid of webworms in the pecan trees?

**A.** These tent caterpillars will mainly do cosmetic damage to a tree, defoliating branches. If you can reach the area, prune it out and destroy it to eliminate the webworms. If you can poke a hole in the web, wasps and birds as natural predators will eat the worms. The biological pesticide *bacillus thuringiensis*, known as BT and found where garden chemicals are sold, will control the webworms. Spray it directly on the leaves inside the web.



See the Master Gardener  
Rose Test Garden at  
TSTC Horticulture Area,  
202 Greenway Drive.  
View photos at

<http://www.mcmg.aspfreeserver.com/rosetrials.html>

### ***Variegated Tapioca* Added to Texas Superstars**

For showy color that doesn't fade with the heat, *Variegated Tapioca* has joined the Texas Superstar program, its spectacular yellow-and-red leafstalks "blooming" all summer.

Unlike most variegated species, *Tapioca* will not flinch in intense Texas sunlight. The foliage diva works beautifully as the bull's eye for circular plantings or as background for lower annual bedding plants. Another common use is as a patio container specimen where it thrives despite the reflected heat from concrete or pavement.

*Tapioca* grows fast. A handsome four- or six-foot tree can result in a single season, thus young plants should be spaced four-to-six feet apart. Plants are initially upright, becoming wider as the season progresses. Bold, rubbery, lobed leaves can reach up to eight inches. New growth is a charming reddish pink and the lobes mature into white, creamy white, or yellow-green variegated patches that follow the main veins.

More good news: *Variegated Tapioca* grows well in alkaline and acidic soils alike. They even tolerate some foliar salt exposure in the Coastal Bend area. Full sun brings out the best color, but plants will tolerate partial shade. *Tapioca* hates over-watering as it is NOT a swamp plant.

Known botanically as "Manihot esculenta 'Variegata'", *Tapioca* is a cold-tender tropical which freezes to the ground by the first hard frost. Consider it an annual in most parts of Texas and replace in spring after all danger of frost has passed.