



McLennan County Master Gardeners

Horticulture Newsletter

Summer, 2005

<http://mcmg.aspfreeserver.com>

On the calendar...

Vegetable Production Seminar - June

Oak Wilt Seminar - July

Call 757-5180 for more information on these and other upcoming extension events.

MASTER GARDENER PROJECT UPDATE: ROSE TRIALS at TSTC

45 Rose bushes were planted earlier this year as a trial test of 15 specific varieties. The McLennan County Master Gardeners check the roses twice a month and record the results. All 45 roses look great.

The first rose that bloomed this year was Belinda's Dream. The roses with the most buds and blooms thus far are Barn Dance, Carefree Beauty, Knock Out, and The Fairy. Barn Dance is a new rose to Texas and was hybridized by Dr. Griffith Buck in Iowa. We are testing 11 of his roses to see how far south they are "happy."

Drive out to 202 Greenway Drive on TSTC campus and look at our test garden or call the extension office for a master gardener to go with your group.

SUPERSTAR BED AT CARLEEN BRIGHT ARBORETUM

The planting of superstar plants has been completed at the Carleen Bright Arboretum at Bosque and Estates Drive. The bed is in the area to the right and rear of Whitehall building. The bed is surrounded by white rock to showcase the plants which have received "Superstar" status, an indication that they will survive Texas' climate.

Everyone is encouraged to visit this area which was planted by the Master Gardeners of McLennan County.

MIKE McGRATH TO BE IN WACO

On July 9th KWBU-FM will be celebrating its 5th year anniversary of bringing national public radio programming to the Heart of Texas. KWBU has invited Mike McGrath, host of *YOU BET YOUR GARDEN*, to help celebrate the occasion as a special guest. *YOU BET YOUR GARDEN* airs locally on KWBU, 103.3 FM each Saturday morning at 11:00. For details listen to 103.3 FM or check at www.kwbu.org

THANKS TO ALL WHO
SHOPPED AT OUR PLANT
SALE ON MAY 14 !!



SUMMER GARDENING SUGGESTIONS

.. Check for insects and diseases. Destroy badly infested plants. Select an organic or chemical control, or use insecticidal soap.

..Supplemental irrigation is essential for many ornamental plants during the hot, dry summer days. Water the lawn and garden thoroughly, but not too frequently. As a general rule, soak to a depth of 8 inches. Finish watering by early afternoon to lessen the chance of disease.

..To conserve moisture around plants, use a mulch of 2 to 6 inches. The mulch will retain moisture needed for plant growth.

..Remove faded flowers before they set seed. This will keep them growing and producing flowers. A light application of fertilizer every 4 to 6 weeks will encourage continued growth.

..Move house plants outside in a shaded area. Sink the pots in the ground to prevent drying out so quickly. Potted plants and hanging baskets will need frequent watering.

..Plant some colorful heat-tolerant summer annuals such as direct-seed zinnias, cosmos, and portulaca; purchase plants of periwinkle, salvia, marigold, and purslane. Water transplants as needed until roots become established.

..Plan for next spring by dividing crowded spring bulbs. Once the foliage has turned brown, dig and thin the bulbs. Crowded bulbs produce fewer and smaller blooms. They usually need thinning every 3 to 4 years.

..Continue to spray susceptible roses with a black-spot control such as Funginex every 7 to 10 days.

..Re-blooming salvias, such as *Salvia Greggii* and *S. Farinacea*, should be pruned back periodically during the summer. Remove only spent flowers and a few inches of stem. Also prune during the summer any fall-blooming perennials such as chrysanthemums to keep them compact and reduce the need for staking. This should be completed by Sept. 1, since flower buds will begin forming around that time.

..Take a critical look at your landscape while at the height of summer development. Make notes on how you think it could be better arranged, plants that need replaced, overgrown plants that need to be removed.

TEXAS SUPERSTAR ANNUALS

What better way to brighten your landscape than by planting colorful annuals? To get the most for your money, look for the Texas Superstar tag when shopping for your plants. These recommended Texas Superstars have been tested for durability and tolerance for the hot, dry summers of our area. Not only are they hardy, they are disease and insect tolerant, providing beauty with minimal care and minimal reliance on chemical pest control.

There is a wide variety of annuals in the Texas Superstar listing. They offer a wide variety of colors and heights for your home landscape and most will bloom from spring until frost. Additional plants will be added to the list after they have undergone several years of field testing to prove that they are deserving of the Superstar status. Current annuals on the Texas Superstar list are: Burgundy Sun Coleus, Plum Parfait Sun Coleus, Pink Bunny Bloom Larkspur, Firebush, Trailing Lantana, "New Gold" Lantana, Texas Bluebonnet, Texas Maroon Bluebonnet, Butterfly Deep Pink Pentas, Laura Bush Petunia, VIP Petunia, Large Flowered Purslane, Mexican Bush Sage, "New Wonder" Scaevola, Marimum, and Gold Star Esperanza.

One of the most impressive of this list is the Gold Star Esperanza *Tecoma stans 'Gold Star'*. This spectacular heat-tolerant Texas native has masses of golden yellow, trumpet-shaped flowers. It grows in full sun to a height of four feet and three feet wide, blooming all summer. It is a good container plant as well as in the ground and puts on quite a display of bright yellow blossoms. The popularity of Esperanza is evident by the increased number of plantings observed in yards around town. It is a popular selection for butterfly and hummingbird gardens.

The Firebush, *Hamelia patens*, is another bedding plant that thrives in our heat. It grows in full sun to a height of 18 to 30 inches and is also a favorite plant of hummingbirds. Another plus for this plant is that it grows well in our heavy clay, alkaline soils.

Additional information and pictures of the Texas Superstar annuals is available on the website: <http://www.texassuperstar.com>.

TOMATO TIPS:

Tomatoes should be grown in an area that receives sunlight for at least six hours a day. Poor soil should be improved with organic matter and proper fertilization. Select varieties that resist many of the common diseases. Look for VFN after a variety name, indicating that it has resistance to verticillium wilt, fusarium wilt, and nematodes. They should be spaced far enough apart that they are not touching when mature, to allow for good air circulation. Almost all varieties should be staked or caged for best results.

Fertilize: New hybrid types need extra nutrition to do their best. When they start to set fruit, increase fertilizing to give an extra boost. A liquid feed applied weekly or a slow-release product can increase their yield.

Insects: Worms or caterpillars will eat holes in leaves of tomatoes and other vegetables. They can be controlled by a product which contains the bacteria *Bacillus thuringiensis* that kills only caterpillars and does not harm beneficial insects. Good coverage of upper and lower leaf surfaces is necessary for best control.



Spider Mites: The least detectable pest, these mites are tiny spider like, plant chiggers that feed on undersides of the leaves. They reproduce rapidly and can damage plants in a short time. In large populations of mites, leaves appear "stippled" or dotted with yellow, and webbing is usually present on underside of leaves. Dusting sulfur will control mites (do not use on squash or vine crops) or spray plants with Kelthane or another miticide and add a teaspoon of liquid soap. Repeat spray every 4 days for four consecutive applications.

Blossom End Rot: A lack of calcium in the soil, or moisture levels that fluctuate from dry to wet, can lead to blossom end rot. Keep soil evenly moist, especially when first fruits are developing. Plants growing in sandy soil are especially prone to this problem. Calcium sprays are available to help prevent the problem but must be applied as young fruits are growing but before symptoms appear.

Early Blight: Irregular, brown spots that first appear on older foliage. With age, the spots show concentric rings forming a target pattern. A yellow, diffuse zone is formed around each spot. The more tomatoes a plant produces, the more susceptible to and disastrous are the effects of an early blight infection. This fungus is favored by high humidity and high temperatures. Spray with a fungicide containing Chlorothalonil to control the disease and keep it from spreading.

For additional help, check out the Tomato Problem Solver at: <http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/tomatoproblemsolver/index.html>

From the NATIONAL GARDENING ASSN. newsletter:

Suggestions from the *Give a Garden - - Add Beauty to Life* campaign. Give a garden and make a difference ...

- ... Share a cutting of one of your favorite plants with a neighbor.
- ... Deliver a houseplant or flowers to a nursing home or children's hospital.
- ... Help a child with a gardening project.
- ... Start a local garden club.
- ... Inventory your gardening gear (pots, seeds, etc.) and donate excess to a community garden program or school garden.
- ... Donate past issues of gardening magazines to your library, or give a gift subscription.
- ... Start a neighborhood community garden.
- ... Plant a Row for the Hungry and donate produce to your local food shelf.
- ... Organize or take part in a town beautification day.



SHARE THE JOY OF GARDENING !!!

DON'T BAG IT - LEAF MANAGEMENT PLAN

During the year, at least 20 percent of the solid waste generated by Texans comes from grass clippings, tree leaves and other landscape wastes. Bagging these materials and placing them into the curbside garbage collection system uses valuable landfill space, removes nutrients from the environment, and cost cities and the people of Texas more in increased taxes and service fees.

Of the landscape waste, approximately half is composed of tree leaves. The "Don't Bag It" Leaf Management Plan is an ecologically sound program designed to significantly reduce the volume of leaves entering landfills, thereby extending their life and saving tax dollars.

The tree leaves that accumulate in your landscape represent a valuable resource that can be used to provide a good source of organic matter and nutrients for use in your landscape. In forests and natural settings, tree leaves and other organic wastes form a natural carpet over the soil surface which conserves moisture, modifies temperatures and prevents soil erosion and crusting. In time bacteria, fungi and other natural occurring organisms decompose or compost the leaves and other organic material, supplying the existing plants with a natural, slow release form of nutrients. You can, and should, take advantage of this same concept.

Options for Managing and Using Leaves:

Leaves are a valuable natural resource! They contain 50 to 80 percent of the nutrients a plant extracts from the soil and air during the season. Therefore, leaves should be managed and used rather than bagged and placed at curbside to be hauled to the landfill. There are four basic ways in which leaves can be managed and used in the landscape.

1. **MOWING.** A light covering of leaves can be mowed, simply leaving the shredded leaves in place on the lawn. This is most effective when a mulching mower is used.

2. **MULCHING.** This simple way of recycling leaves will reduce evaporation from the soil surface, inhibit weed growth, moderate soil temperatures, keep soils from eroding and crusting, and prevent soil compaction. As organic mulches decompose, they

release valuable nutrients for use by your landscape plants. A good option to raking the leaves is to use a lawn mower with a bagging attachment to shred and collect the leaves.



The leaves that have been mowed or run through some type of shredder will decompose faster and are more likely to remain in place than unshredded leaves. Apply 3

to 6 inch layer of shredded leaves around the base of trees and shrubs. In flower beds, use a 2 to 3 inch layer around the flowers. In vegetable gardens, a thick layer of leaves placed between the rows will function as a mulch.

3. **SOIL IMPROVEMENT.** Leaves may be collected and worked directly into the garden and flower bed soils. A 6 to 8 inch layer of leaves tilled into a heavy, clay soil will improve aeration and drainage. The same amount tilled into a light, sandy soil will improve water and nutrient holding capacity. Work leaves into vegetable gardens during the fall to allow them to decompose prior to spring planting.

4. **COMPOSTING.** Leaves, grass clippings, pine needles, weeds, small or chipped prunings, and spent garden plants can be composted. Avoid composting diseased or insect-infested plant materials. Leaves can be stacked in a loose pile for composting, but using a bin is more efficient. Bins can be made from a variety of materials but the main need is for air to be able to move through the bin. The most common method is to build in layers. Mix materials high in nitrogen (such as fresh grass clippings) and those high in carbon (such as dried leaves and twigs.) A handful of general lawn fertilizer should be mixed in, then each layer moistened as it is constructed. Stir the pile weekly during the summer and monthly during the winter, providing moisture as needed but do not keep too wet! An ideal compost pile should be 3 to 5 ft. in diameter and several layers deep to encourage rapid, effective decomposition. Finished compost will smell sweet and be cool and crumbly to the touch. Use the compost to add organic matter to your garden or potted plants.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Are you tired of the same old thing, even in your landscape? Well, here are a few different plants to think about for possible use.

Dew Plant *Aptenia cordifolia* is a trailing succulent type plant that makes an excellent hanging basket for those hot dry areas where you have trouble keeping other plants alive. It is also sometimes called Ice Plant. It can be used in large planters with all day sun or light shade with equal success. There are several varieties available - three with glossy green foliage and either red, purple or yellow flowers and one with variegated foliage and purple flowers. The variegated one does better in an area that receives light shade in the afternoon. These are not winter hardy perennials in this area, though if they are protected or there is a mild winter, enough survive to re-grow.

Cypress Vine *Ipomoea quamoclit* is sometimes called Cardinal Climber. This hardy annual vine has tiny brilliant red flowers and is a big favorite of hummingbirds. The foliage is a delicate, fern-like green even in the heat of summer. Once established it is drought tolerant but flowers better with a little water to keep it going. The plant completely dies away every year and returns from seed only, and nearly all of the seeds produced in a season will sprout. It can be invasive and aggressive.

Pink Skullcap *Scutellaria drummondii* is a tough Texas native that is not overly aggressive and also thrives in difficult dry areas. This plant grows to about 12 to 15 inches in height and can spread to about 3 feet across covering with little pink flowers shaped a lot like miniature snapdragons. It needs full sun for best growth but will tolerate light shade as long as it is not too wet. Growth pattern is usually in a mound and trailing slightly.

Autumn Sage *Salvia greggii* is not a new or unusual plant, but there are some different colors now available. Favorites are "Dark Dancer", a dark wine red flower and "Red Velvet" with a brilliant red flower. The Dark Dancer is not as tidy in its growth habit as the other greggii salvias; it tends to be lank and lay on the ground, while Red Velvet grows upright. Both attract hummingbirds.

Pineapple Guava *Feijoa sellowiana* is also not a rare plant, but seldom seen in the garden. Upright growth can reach 8 to 15 feet, but it can be trimmed to keep it smaller. Foliage is a medium gray and tropical looking. The fruit is edible and does taste like pineapple.

A garden can be more of a collection than a landscape. Perhaps you won't be a cover on *Southern Living*, but you can enjoy a vibrant assortment of easy care plants with careful selection of unsung plants.

WATERING - HOW LONG IS ENOUGH?

Research tells us a lawn requires one half to one inch of water per week. But that information is useless if you don't know how long it takes your automatic sprinkler system to put out that much water. There is a simple way to find out.

Take several empty tuna cans and place randomly in a sprinkler zone. Usually four to five empty cans will be sufficient for a zone. Run that zone for 30 minutes and then measure the water in each can with a ruler. If the zone being checked has a uniform grade then you would expect each can to contain approximately the same amount of water. Assuming each can has approximately one half inch of water, then if the sprinklers in that zone are run for one hour, an inch of water will be applied. To apply three quarters of an inch, that zone would be set for 45 minutes. This process would be repeated in each zone.

If uniform water distribution is not taking place in a sprinkler zone, take corrective action. Sprinkler patterns may need adjusting. Sprinkler nozzles may need to be changed or the sprinkler itself may need to be replaced. After an even distribution is achieved within a zone, then determine the output using the above procedure.

The above methodology can also be applied for any sprinkler attached to a hose. The only new variable to be considered is how many turns of the faucet are made in turning on the water and how long to run the water.



HERB HABITS FOR HAPPY HARVESTING

Whether grown for culinary or medicinal purposes, fragrant and decorative crafts, or as companion planting in the garden, herbs are becoming more and more popular in Texas. Dozens of books on the subject can be found, festivals are devoted to them, and a Google search of the word finds 10,900,000 results.

The ornamental value of herbs enables them to be grown in flower beds, in rock gardens as borders, or as corner plantings. Annual herbs can be located in annual flower or vegetable gardens, while perennial herbs should be located at the side of a garden where they won't interfere with next year's soil preparation. Many gardeners establish a small herb garden near the home for ease in gathering. A 6- to 10-foot square, rectangular, or free-form area should be sufficient.

Care for an herb garden is similar to a vegetable or flower garden. Select a sunny, well-drained location, and prepare the soil with organic matter when possible. Balanced fertilizers are helpful, but avoid excessive use of nitrogen fertilizers.

Most herbs thrive in the Texas heat, but will need watered as necessary during dry periods and while getting young plants established. Generally, about 1 inch of water is needed per week, if not supplied by natural rainfall. Mulch helps conserve soil moisture, reduces weed growth, and regulates soil temperature as well. Some herbs, such as mints, prefer moist soil and require more frequent watering. The Mediterranean herbs, including rosemary and lavender, prefer slightly drier soils and perform well in the alkaline soils of central Texas. Some lavender varieties grow better here than others, and some Master Gardeners have had luck with the Provence, Dutch, and Grosso varieties.

Herbs can be planted from seed or as young plants. Perennial herbs can be propagated by cuttings or by dividing roots or crowns. Seeds may be harvested for next year's planting or for use in cooking. The entire seedhead should be collected after it has dried on the



plant. Let it thoroughly dry in a cool, dry location. Then the seeds can be threshed from the heads and stored in a dark, cool, dry location.

Leaves of many herbs, such as parsley, chives, and basil, can be harvested for fresh seasonings. The best time to harvest for culinary use is in the mornings, after the dew has evaporated, but before the sun has wilted the plant too much. Most herbs benefit from regular pruning (though not removing all the foliage at one time) and will look and produce better if they are well cared for.

When cooking with herbs, adding them toward the latter part of the cooking process will retain their flavor better. Herbs should be used to enhance the flavor of a dish, not overpower it, and a light hand should be used. It's much easier to add more if needed than to tone down an over seasoned dish. On the issue of fresh vs. dried, a good rule of thumb is to use 2 or 3 times the amount of fresh herbs as dried.

Herb Butter

- 1 stick butter
- 2 Tbsp. or herbs to taste - your choice of parsley, sage, rosemary, thyme - all chopped very fine.
- 1 clove garlic, crushed until pulverized.

Put butter into bowl. When soft enough to work, add herbs. Mix herbs and butter thoroughly. Add crushed garlic and mix well. Refrigerate to use on vegetables or breads.



Blue-Blooming Vitex and Plumbago: Butterflies Love 'Em, Deer Don't

For indigo blossoms, butterfly habitat and deer resistance, few plants beat Vitex and Plumbago, two adapted bloomers recently added to the Texas Superstar Plant Program.

Plumbago is a tender perennial with profuse blue flowers. It loves the heat, doesn't mind our long, humid summers, and is reasonably drought tolerant. A white-blooming version is less prolific, while blue Plumbago produces flowers non-stop from summer until frost.

Disease-, pest- and deer-resistant, Plumbago is also known as Skyflower because of the sky-blue color of its flowers. It blooms even in considerable shade.

Plumbago responds well to pruning. It will flower profusely if you cut it back after a growth-flush, since it bears flowers on new wood.



Vitex, our other Superstar, is also known as Texas Lilac or the Chaste tree. A native of China and India, it actually naturalized throughout North America as early as 1670.

For people living in the warmer parts of the South, the "Lilac Chaste Tree" has been the shrub of choice to mimic beloved lilacs that are restricted to cooler regions. It grows best in full sun and in a location that drains well. Vitex loves the heat, and is so tough that even the Texas Department of Transportation plants it in highway medians.

Vitex is a spectacular butterfly-attracting plant, hummingbirds love it, and it's deer-resistant.

So, you're probably wondering, what's not to like about Vitex and why isn't it planted in every yard in town?

That's where the Superstar horticulturists step in. The old Vitex had small spikes of flowers that were pale lilac, mauve, off-white or light pink. The blooms were small and unimpressive. Horticulturists have identified and tested improved

varieties such as 'Montrose Purple', LeCompte', and 'Shoal Creek' that have 8- to 12-inch long spikes. These varieties will all be marketed under the name 'Texas Lilac' Vitex.

The bloom spikes on these improved varieties are not only large and beautiful; they're also fragrant and provide long-lasting cut flowers.

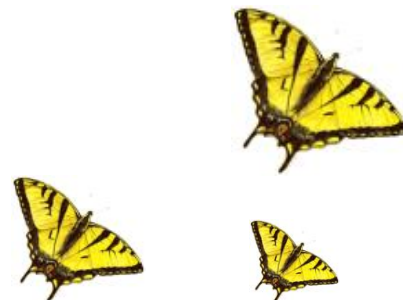
But-once the bloom spikes have provided several weeks of beauty, black and dark-brown seeds result. Not only do these seeds prevent additional bloom spikes, they may, in some regions, produce a mutant seedling population that will not be as glamorous as the parent plants.

What to do? Deadhead, of course. If you want to enjoy the full Monty of these spectacular blossoms, you must prune the spent blooms diligently. The challenge is that Vitex is extremely fast growing. It can grow into a small tree if not cut to the ground yearly.

The seed pods of 'Texas Lilac' Vitex must be removed after every bloom cycle-it will be blooming again in less than a month. The entire plant should be cut back to the ground every winter. If you live in an area with a large deer population, the deer will "prune" the Vitex plant back to the ground for you as they rub their antlers on the branches.

For images and further information on Plumbago: <http://www.plantanswers.com/plumbago>

For images and further information on Vitex: <http://www.plantanswers.com/vitex.htm>



SUMMER LAWN CARE

This is the time of year our lawns look their best. The increased sunlight of summer and the heat it brings makes our warm season turf grasses flourish. This is also the time of year our lawns require the most from us.

Proper mowing is the most important factor for maintaining a beautiful lawn. A sharp blade on the mower is the place to start. A clean cut prevents any browning on the ends of the grass blades that distracts from the beauty of your lawn. Mowing every four to five days will ensure you never put your grass under stress by removing too much foliage at any one time. Removing excessive foliage gives your lawn a scalped look with a yellowish tint as the grass struggles to replace its leaves. The excessive clippings build up and lay on top of the turf instead of falling down into the turf. Needed sunlight is blocked as the grass struggles to grow through the clippings on top of the lawn, thus the grass becomes "leggy" and stressed. This opens your lawn to weeds, insects and disease. Proper mowing will ensure your lawn is growing horizontally as well as vertically resulting in a thick healthy beautiful turf

Generally as the summer heats up in Central Texas, the rains diminish. A good watering program addresses the type of soil and the grade of the lawn. Generally the soils of our area are clay and retain water well. A healthy lawn will require one half to one inch of water per week. A good deep watering once a week will give the best results. However if the soils are sandy a more frequent watering program will be needed. Likewise clay soils with steep grades will require shorter watering cycles that are more frequent to adequately soak the soil without wasting water due to runoff.

Avoid fertilizing during the summer months. The clippings you are returning to your lawn will rapidly be broken down to provide nutrients needed by your lawn. It is better to apply fertilizer in the spring or fall.

Be on alert for insects and disease, especially if you notice stress in your lawn. Cinch bugs attack the dry areas of your lawn first. These dry areas usually occur in areas that are near concrete in the full sun. A browning of the grass in these areas is a

sure indication action is needed. Generally it is not necessary to treat your entire lawn. Limit your treatment to the immediate and closely surrounded area.

Grubs are a bit harder to determine if treatment is needed because the damage is occurring in the root zone of the turf. If you find five or more grubs in a square foot section, treatment is recommended. This treatment is most effective in July when the grubs are near the surface of the soil. The entire lawn should be treated.



"Take-all patch" is active in the summer and kills roots and runners. As the disease progresses irregular shaped areas of grass will begin to die out. These die-out areas usually begin in areas of full sunlight. There are fungicides that can help control this disease. Since this disease can be difficult to deal with, a call to your Extension Agent could be helpful.