



McLennan County Master Gardeners

Horticulture Newsletter

Fall, 2006

www.mclennanmastergardeners.org

Call 757-5180 for information on upcoming extension events.

From McLennan County Master Gardeners:

Coming Events:

September 12: "Central Texas Turf and PCO CEU Workshop - Industry Working with Industry", at Hewitt VFW 6008. Conducted by McLennan County Cooperative Extension and Brazos Valley Turf Grass Management Association. \$30 fee. Call Extension Office at 757-5180 for additional information.

October 6 – 14: McLennan Co. Master Gardener booth at the Heart of Texas Fair, in the Education section of the General Exhibits Building.

October 15 (Sunday), 2pm: Texas Superstar Symposium at Carleen Bright Arboretum. Speaker, Dr. Jerry Parsons, San Antonio.

There are 27 individuals enrolled in the McLennan County **Master Gardener training program**. Classes will conclude in mid-September and each member will be required to volunteer 54 hours in horticulture related projects in the area during the coming year before becoming a certified Master Gardener.

The **rose trials** continue at the test site on the TSTC campus. They continue to thrive and bloom, despite the heat and drought. The Master Gardeners will host an EarthKind Rose Symposium in April. Renowned rose specialists from around the state will give lectures.

Check out which **Texas Superstar plants** are thriving in the heat and drought at the bed at the Carleen Bright Arboretum. This area is to the right of the Whitehall Center. (See related article p 4)

Time to Plant Wildflowers

In this area of the state, USDA Zone 8, the autumn months of September through December are the most favorable to plant wildflowers. Many of the species will quickly germinate in order to allow the seedling enough time to establish a healthy root system before going dormant in the winter.

...Choose a site that receives a minimum of eight hours sunlight daily. The site should drain well.

...If there are weeds to compete with the wildflowers, they should be removed. Mow the existing vegetation very short and remove that material from the site.

...Till or rake the site to a depth of about an inch.

...Broadcast the seed as evenly as possible; maybe sow some of the seed in one direction, and then sow the balance in a perpendicular direction to get even coverage. It may be helpful to mix sand, potting soil, or some carrier to aid in the even distribution of small seed.

...Lightly walk over or roll over the newly planted area to press the seed into the soil. Most wildflower seeds should be covered only very lightly with soil.

...For best results, keep the area moist for several weeks if natural rainfall is inadequate. Once the seeds begin to germinate, do not allow the site to completely dry out, but do not over water either. Most wildflowers will not need fertilizing as it will encourage lush foliage and few blooms.

...Once they are established and are allowed to reseed, they should come back the following years.



Texas Cooperative Extension and Wildseed Farms have a cooperative website with extensive wildflower information available. The website is: <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/wildseed/tamuhort.html>.

Rainwater Harvesting

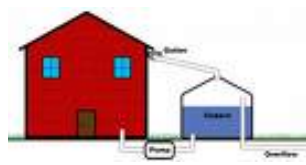
Although it seems it may never rain again, peak rainfall in Texas usually occurs in April and May, followed by a dry period from June to August, with more rain from September to October. Using an adequate rainwater harvesting system, Texans can get through the dry periods much easier.

While there are costs for rainwater-harvesting systems, they have the potential to conserve both money and water.

A simple system involves collecting runoff from rainfall and using it on-site. The roof of a building or home is frequently used as catchment. The bigger the roof, the larger the volume of water collected. Gravity then naturally directs the water to collection vessels at the edge of the roof which store it for direct landscape use. Roofing made from iron, aluminum, or cement is preferable because it absorbs little or no water.

A complex system includes catchments, but water is directed by a conveyance system to closed storage containers. Roof catchment systems use canals or gutters and downspouts as conveyance systems. Filtration removes debris from the water before it is stored. Storage containers can be above or underground.

When it is time for water use, the distribution system uses garden hoses, constructed channels, pipes, or drip systems to direct the water from the storage containers to landscape plants or other outdoor uses.



Using a rainwater harvesting system, a 1,000 square foot roof area can collect 600 gallons of water from only an inch of rain. Clearly, harvested rainwater can help

reduce the demands on surface and groundwater for urban landscape irrigation, save municipal water supplies, and lower homeowner water bills. Rainwater quality is another benefit when compared to treated water sources. Plants respond much better to natural rainwater because it lacks the chemicals that are used in processed water.

Some Texas cities offer incentives to homeowners willing to install the systems. To learn more about rainwater harvesting, download Texas Cooperative Extension Publication B-6153 available at <http://tcebookstore.org>. Billy Kniffen, Menard County Extension Agent and Rainwater Harvesting Consultant, is scheduled to be one of the speakers at the January Blackland Income Growth Conference in Waco.

Autumn ABC's

Autumn is an appropriate time to start a compost pile. Composting is Mother Nature's way of recycling, as it restores the nutrients to the soil that plants need to produce fruit and flowers.

Bulbs for spring blooming flowers are planted in the fall.



Choose varieties while there is a good selection in the garden centers. Tulip and hyacinth bulbs should be chilled in the refrigerator until late December before planting. (Do not leave bulbs in the airtight bags during refrigerated storage). Most other bulbs can be planted as soon as available in the stores.

Clean up the garden, removing all annuals that have completed their life cycle. Remove tops of perennials that have finished flowering or as soon as frost has killed the leaves. This will reduce the insect and disease potential in next year's garden.

Didn't sow your own seeds for fall transplants? Nurseries should have new fall plants of pansies, violas, pinks, snapdragons, flowering cabbage and kale for planting in September and October.

Enjoy salad and greens fresh from the garden? The cut-and-come-again greens like leaf lettuces, arugula, and mustard can be planted from seeds to keep you in salad greens all fall and well into winter. You can mix a variety of seeds together and create your own mesclun (mixed greens). Scatter thickly on bare soil, through a garden bed, or edge a sidewalk or path. The greens will come up in a colorful carpet. By the time the plants are a few inches tall, they will need thinning. Pull up plants at random for an instant salad of baby greens. There will be plenty to share with neighbors and friends when picking time comes.

Fall is a good time to plant perennials, shrubs, and trees while the soil is still warm. Plants will have time to get over transplant shock, and fall rains will get them off to a good start before cold weather arrives. Be sure to amend soil with compost before planting, and apply good mulch around the plants to hold in moisture and protect from extreme temperatures. New plantings require extra water until established - usually the first year. Fall is also the time to divide perennials - iris, shasta daisies, daylilies, violets, amaryllis and other clump-forming spring blooming perennials. Keep the healthy, newer growth and discard the older parts. Reset to the same depth that they were growing.

Highlights of Fruit/Nuts Lecture

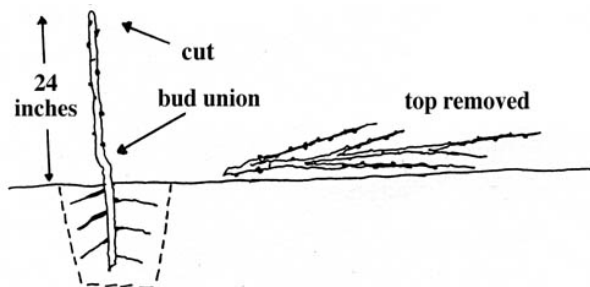
By Dr. Larry Stein, Extension Specialist from Uvalde
August 9, 2006 Intern Training Class

Important points of planting peach, pecan and fruit trees:

- Have a soil test every five years to learn if there are nutrient deficiencies in soil.
- Know soil depth and how well it holds water.
- Most important things for growing trees: drainage, nutrient content of soil, full sun. If drainage is poor, plant in a raised bed.
- Bare root trees are the best to plant. Check their roots - should be white. If roots are broken or brown, prune that area out.
- Ideal planting size of peach tree is three to four foot tall.
- Ideal planting size of pecan tree is six to eight foot tall.
- Best time to plant is during dormancy season. Fruit - mid-January. Pecan - January to March.

How to plant the bare-root tree:

- Do not let the roots dry out. Place in a bucket of water for about an hour prior to planting.
- Prune roots if needed. New roots grow easier from a clean cut than a rough damaged root.
- Dig the hole only as large as the root ball, no larger.
- Use the original soil to refill the hole once the tree is in the hole.
- Plant to the depth it was growing in nursery.
- Cut off the top of the tree, removing approximately 2/3 of the trunk. Cut peach trees to 18-24 inches tall. Cut pecans to 42 inches



tall. Remove side branches and leave a single trunk. This will force out a stronger, bushier tree.

- Water well. New trees will need one inch of water per week during their first year.

To make trees grow fast:

- Control weeds and grass. Kill weeds and grass in a three-foot area around the tree for the first few years by hoeing, hand pulling, or using a glyphosate product on weeds/grass.
- Fertilize - Trees must eat. The first year, spread

one cup of 21-0-0 fertilizer out 12-18 inches from the trunk of the tree. This is where the roots are growing.

- The following year, apply one cup of 21-0-0 in March, April, May and June. Do not fertilize after August.
- Water well to take fertilizer into the root system.

After the second year, apply fertilizer at the rate of one pound for each inch of trunk diameter. Beginning 12-18 inches from trunk, place the fertilizer at least to the canopy of the tree. Roots usually go as far as the tree is tall plus another half of its height. The majority of the roots are in the top three feet of soil.

If pests become a problem, check with the Extension Office for the "Homeowner's Fruit and Nut Spray Guide" bulletin. Good sanitation practices of keeping grass mowed, leaves cleaned, and old fruit removed from beneath trees will reduce pest problems and the need for pesticide sprays.

Peach trees only live about 15 years. If tree is declining, take it out and start anew. The fungus, cotton root rot, will kill fruit trees.

One peach tree will pollinate itself.

Recommended varieties for this area are Red Skin, Harvester, and Majestic.

Main problems with **pecan** trees are aphids, webworms, and catkins. Annual applications of dormant oil spray will suffocate over-wintering pests.

For a foliage pecan, plant seedling trees. A good homeowner pecan tree variety is Sioux. Pecans need cross pollination to produce nuts. The Desirable variety is a good pollinator. Water and fertilizer are main requirements to keep a pecan tree healthy for it to make pecans.

In the garden, autumn is, indeed, the crowning glory of the year, bringing us the fruition of months of thought and care and toil.

And at no season, save perhaps in Daffodil time, do we get such superb colour effects as from August to November.

- Rose G. Kingsley, *The Autumn Garden*, 1905

Texas Superstars Shine

Despite the extreme heat and lack of rainfall **Moy Grande Hibiscus** is a show-stopper in the Texas Superstar Bed at the Carleen Bright Arboretum. It has been in full bloom this summer with rose-pink blossoms which are 8 to 12 inches wide. This perennial grows to five feet in height and width and blooms from May to September in full sun. Removing the spent flowers and developing seed pods will promote re-bloom. It will tolerate alkaline soil, but prefers well-drained soil containing plenty of organic matter and nutrients. Near the Moy Grande is a **Flare Hibiscus** with apple green foliage and fuchsia flowers nearly as large as the Moy Grande.



Hibiscus can also be used as container plants. Individual flowers last only a day, but each plant may flaunt a number of giant flowers at once. Few garden plants provide so much enjoyment for so little care. Flowers removed from the stem are popular for table decorations. Blooms need not be placed in water to prevent wilting. If one wants flowers for the evening, blossoms should be cut as soon as they are fully open in the morning and placed in the refrigerator until just before use. Following the refrigeration period, flowers should remain open for at least four hours.

Competing for attention has been the **New Gold (TM) Lantana**. It has been extremely prolific and had to be trimmed back from the walkways and watering system. This drought tolerant, heat loving, low maintenance plant has bloomed all summer with golden yellow flowers. A plus is this plant is deer tolerant. It takes full sun while growing about two feet tall and spreading to four or more feet wide.

Another yellow attention-getter is the **Gold Star Esperanza**, *Tecoma stans 'Gold Star'*. The heat-loving, four foot shrub with golden-yellow bell shaped flowers blooms from late spring through fall. The glossy evergreen foliage is attractive and the beans that it produces after flowering should be removed to promote re-bloom.

Besides being hardy, top bloom producers, these Texas Superstars are favorites of the butterflies and hummingbirds. Put them on your spring plant shopping list to be rewarded with beautiful plants needing minimal care next year.

Webworms

Fall webworms are appearing in pecan and other trees in the area. The newly hatched larvae (the webworms) begin feeding and spinning a web over the foliage in which they feed, making a web which can cover entire branches. The caterpillars shelter in the webs in the day and venture into the tree in the evening. They eat the tender portions of the leaf, leaving the large veins and mid-rib. While the caterpillars will not normally kill a tree, they make it unsightly.

Early control methods will minimize damage from the webs. If the affected tree is small, trim out and dispose of the infested branch. If the webs are out of reach for pruning, insecticides may be needed. The environmentally safest ones are those containing *Bacillus thuringensis* (commonly called Bt) which is effective specifically against caterpillars. Insecticides labeled for leaf-feeding caterpillars can be used to spray into the open web. Mix and apply any product according to label directions. Spray at dusk when they are active.

The web must be ripped open in order for the spray to reach the caterpillars. Use a strong, high-pressure sprayer or a long pole to penetrate the web and enable the insecticide to make contact with the caterpillar. Complete coverage is needed for good control. Opening the web also allows birds, wasps, and their natural predators to enter and reduce or eliminate the pests.