



McLennan County Master Gardeners

Horticulture Newsletter

Summer, 2007

www.mclennanmastergardeners.org

Call 757-5180 for information on upcoming extension events.

From McLennan County Master Gardeners:

THANK YOU...to all who shopped at the Master Gardeners' Plant Sale on May 19th. May all your purchases grow – and exceed all expectations!!



You Are Invited...to stroll through the Texas Superstar garden area at the Carleen Bright Arboretum in Woodway, corner of Estates and Bosque. Check out these bright, colorful blooming plants in the demonstration garden planted by the McLennan County Master Gardeners. See some of the plants that grow well in central Texas. The area is to the right and rear of Whitehall building.

Fruit Gardening in Texas - Information on varieties which grow well in Texas, properly managing fruit crops, and controlling problems with fruit is available at:
<http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/extension/fruitgarden/fruitgarden.html>.

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 : She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand :
 : on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make :
 : you feel the goodness of planting and tending and :
 : harvesting at last. :
 : - Willa Cather :
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Growing Tips For Earth-Kind™ Roses

...from Dr. Steven George at the April Earth-Kind™ Rose Symposium in Waco

- Plant in full sun (8 hr. or more daily), away from trees
- Have good air circulation with a foot of open space around a fully-grown plant
- Use drip or leaky hose irrigation, not overhead sprinklers during the evening or night hours
- For sandy and loam soils, incorporate 3-6 inches of organic matter (compost)
- For local clay soils, incorporate 3 inches of expanded shale, then 3 inches of organic matter (compost) to create raised beds that are 6 inches above the surrounding soil. Making beds higher in the center assists drainage.
- Layer of organic mulch 3-4" thick which will act as a slow-release, all natural fertilizer and replenish as necessary
- With the above soil preparation, commercial fertilizers are not required. If fertilizer is used, apply in March and June with a slow-release nitrogen form. Soil test is recommended to determine fertilizer needs.
- Water thoroughly when the soil is dry to a depth of one inch. Once plants are established, do not water too often in heavy clay soils.
- Very little annual pruning except to remove dead, diseased or broken branches should be needed.

Prepare For Fall Garden During Late Summer

If you didn't properly prepare your garden soil last spring, late summer is the time to correct it. Adding liberal amounts of organic matter to all types of soils is highly recommended. Hay, compost, rotten grass clippings, or leaves applied to the garden surface 2 to 3 inches deep, then tilled or worked into the soil will greatly improve sandy or clay soils.

Spring fertilizer has washed out of the soil and adding fertilizer to the fall crop will be necessary. Use a slow-release fertilizer at a rate of 3 pounds per 100 square feet. Mix in well.

Seeds for fall transplants should be started in August. Among the cool season transplants are pansies, violas, calendulas, flowering cabbage and kale, broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, spinach, Swiss chard and cauliflower. One method is to use a sterile potting soil mix and foam coffee cups for good seed-starting containers. Poke 3 or 4 holes in the side at the bottom of the cup. Write the variety name being planted on the side of the cup where it will remain and not get lost. The white cups, discarded by coffee drinkers whenever they take a coffee break, will reflect heat. Most seeds should be barely covered with the soil mix, however lettuce should not be covered at all. Place the cups in pan of



water to allow the soil to soak from the bottom. Drain well and then put them in a plastic bag out of the sunlight. Within a few days the seedlings will begin to grow. As soon as this happens, take the containers out of the bags and put in a well-ventilated area. As they begin to grow, use a diluted soluble houseplant fertilizer to keep them growing vigorously.

When large enough to transplant, handle the young seedling only by the leaves. Grasping

the stem can easily damage the tender plant and the seedling will be stunted. Plants can be carefully transplanted to larger containers and eventually to the garden or flower bed as they grow to sufficient size. Morning sun and afternoon shade are recommended for tender young plants and careful attention should be given to their moisture needs until they are well established.

Disease Control

A good home gardener recognizes symptoms of plant diseases quickly and takes steps to prevent or control them. Diseased plants do not grow normally and may have one or more of these symptoms: stunted, wilted, spots on leaves, stems or fruit; decayed fruit, decayed areas on the stems, distorted leaves, rapid death of leaves, and discoloration of leaves and fruit.

Plant diseases are worst when light rain showers or heavy dews have fallen and when temperatures are mild. During these times, watch your garden closely for signs of disease.

1. Fertilize and water plants properly to keep them strong. Healthy plants do not get diseases as easily as weak ones.
2. Irrigate by running water between the rows or by trickle irrigation. Do not sprinkle leaves, this only encourages more disease problems.
3. Plant productive disease resistant varieties when available.
4. When spraying the garden, make sure the foliage is well covered with the fungicide. Spray both the top and lower foliage of the plant. In many foliage diseases, the disease symptoms first appear in the lower foliage.
5. Use the proper control for a specific disease. One of the most frequent causes of failure is using an insecticide where a disease-control product should have been used.

Hot Weather Plants

Lantana: of the vervain family Verbenaceae. Wild lantanas are hairy and often prickly-stemmed. If rubbed and bruised their leaves usually have a disagreeable odor. Verbena-like flowers are formed in stalked clusters or spikes from the leaf axils or at the ends of branches. In some regions lantanas grow wild as weeds, spread by birds that are fond of their juicy fruits.

In recent years, strains of dwarf varieties have become popular. These varieties are bushy and spreading, early blooming and free-flowering, and available in a wide color range from white through yellow, orange, to deep red, hot pink, and purple. Lantana is a great landscape plant provided it is grown in a sunny location. When established, they are very drought tolerant and continue to produce attractive, bright blooms in the hottest of weather. A tender perennial, it can also be replanted each spring as a warm season annual. It is somewhat deer-resistant.



Best varieties found at nurseries are:

New Gold - bright yellow, spreading habit, sterile flowers which never form berries that must be removed before flowering again.

Weeping Lavender and Weeping White - fragrant, lavender, sterile flowers, low spreading habit

Pinkie - pink/cream bicolor, extremely compact plant

Texas Flame (Dallas Red, New Red) - orange/yellow/red tricolor blooms which turn to deep red, compact bush...reddest lantana available.

Samantha (Lemon Swirl) - bright yellow, sterile blooms with variegated foliage. Beautiful plant even without blooms.

Firebush (*Hamelia patens*): This plant can thrive in rocky, caliche soil; can withstand

drought, once established. It blooms best when grown in full hot sun. Blooms are red which attract hummingbirds. The top of this perennial will be killed by the first hard freeze of winter, needing cut back to the ground and it will regrow the next year when soil warms in May or June. The foliage will turn red in fall. This plant is NOT deer resistant but an excellent hot weather blooming plant.

Periwinkle (*vinca rosea*): One of the most colorful and reliable summer flowering plants for Texas conditions. This shrubby plant produces an abundance of 1 to 1-1/2 inch phlox-like flowers that vary in color from pure white to pink or lavender rose. Newer dwarf varieties grow from 8 to 10 inches high and spread as much as 2 ft. Coquette (Little Pinkie) has rosy pink flowers, Bright-Eyes has lustrous white flowers with a red center, Little Blanche is an all white flower, Little Delicata (pink with a rose center) and Little Mixture is a mix of all colors above. The trailing or ground cover type is Carpet vinca with similar colors.

Few pests bother periwinkle which can be planted in full sun or partial shade. Do not plant where automatic watering systems are used as periwinkle must be planted in well-drained soils and watered infrequently.

Other Desirable Summer Sun-Loving Annuals include Portulaca (moss rose), Purslane, Gomphrena (Bachelor buttons), Salvia, Verbena and Zinnia.

Malabar Spinach - An Eye Catching Climber: (*Bassella alba* 'Rubra'), also known as climbing spinach, hot weather or vine spinach, is one of the most charming hot-weather plants to grow. It is a red-stemmed vine which can grow to 10 feet, so should be grown on a trellis. It is unrelated to true spinach, but is edible - either raw in salads, boiled, steamed, stir-fried. The leaves are rich in vitamins A and C and a good source of iron and calcium. It will thrive in summer heat when regular spinach has

succumbed to warm weather.

The thick red stems contrast with the round, highly textured, 2 to 4 inch long dark green leaves. Inconspicuous white-tinged pink flowers will develop into small, highly ornamental, single-seeded purple berries which are used as a food colorant.

Malabar spinach can be grown from seeds or cuttings, preferring a humus-rich loam and full sun. Saving the seed is easy: dry the fruit and use it for planting next summer. Seeds will also fall to the ground and new plants will spring up the following year. This is a delightful, colorful plant that will "wow" any grower and catch everyone's eye.

Okra: The best planting time for okra, which grows best in full sun, is from April to mid-July. Gardeners can begin planting two to three weeks after the last chance for spring frost. A fall crop should go in the ground three months before the first frost. Known as a moderate maturing plant, okra takes about 60 to 80 days to mature and gets to an average height of 6 feet.

Ready to plant? Here's how:

- Get the best varieties of seed that you can for this area. They include Clemson Spineless, Emerald, Lee, and Louisiana Green Velvet.
- Work your soil about 8 to 10 inches deep, then work in fertilizer before you plant, using 2 to 3 pounds for each 100 square feet. The top 3 to 4 inches of soil should get the most food.
- Plant the seed to a depth of 1 inch, and space the seeds 2 inches apart. Your rows should be at least 3 feet from each other. When the plants are growing, thin to allow about a foot of space. A family should have all the okra it needs with four or five plants, unless canning or freezing is involved.

- Central Texans are in luck as far as okra's water needs. The plant grows fine even when it's pretty dry, but you will get more okra by watering it every week to 10 days. If your soil is sandy, water more often.
- Watch for large flowers a couple of months after you plant the seed; then start picking your pods three or four days after that. The pods should be 3 or 4 inches long. Wear gloves and long sleeves to cut them, because the tiny hairs irritate bare skin. Chill immediately, but don't wash until ready to use.
- To save seeds for next year, leave a few pods on the plants, then remove and dry them. Seeds are easily removed.

Okra is not pest-free. Stinkbugs and aphids like it, and fire ants have been known to bore inside. Watch and determine your best course of action.



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Sincerely,

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