



McLennan County Master Gardeners

Horticulture Newsletter

Spring, 2008

www.mclennanmastergardeners.org

From the Master Gardeners:

MASTER GARDENER TRAINING

Persons interested in becoming McLennan County Master Gardeners should attend an orientation session at 1 p.m. on April 23 at the Carleen Bright Arboretum for information and application forms. Classes will be held on Wednesday afternoons from June until mid-September. \$150 fee for the class includes text, lectures and field trips. 56 hours of training and 56 hours of volunteer service will be required for certification. For more information, call 757-5180.

FLOWER POT RECYCLE

Help the environment by reducing the number of flower pots placed in the landfill. The Master Gardeners have placed a collection bin at the south rear corner of the parking lot of the Texas AgriLife Extension office at 420 North Sixth Street. Call 757-5180 for information.

PLANT SALE

The McLennan Co. Master Gardeners will hold their annual plant sale on the vacant lot at 4605 W. Waco Drive on Saturday, May 17 from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. Members will share plants from their own yards which will showcase plants that thrive and grow well in the central Texas area.

Flower pots for recycling may also be brought to the MG plant sale.

Calendar of Events

- World Hunger Relief Farm Spring Gardening Workshops:
April 1 & April 5 - "Soils"
May 3 & May 6 - "Composting"
June 3 & June 7 - "Pest Management"
Call 799-5611 for more information.
- **April 27**- Gardeners' Gathering, Carleen Bright Arboretum, 1-4 p.m.
- **May 17**- Master Gardeners PLANT SALE, 4605 W. Waco Dr, 9-3
- **May 29**- Midway JROTC Compost Sale of Birome Cotton Burr Compost, \$2/bag. Midway Middle School parking lot, begins 8 am.

Expanded Shale. Help for Clay Soils

Gardeners who must work with the heavy, sticky clay soils of Central Texas now have an amendment available for making the soil more workable.

Expanded shale is a natural blue shale, found in parts of Texas about 10-15 feet underground. After mining, it is ground into 1/2" to 1" sized particles and kiln fired, and the material expands during the heating process. As the product cools, cavities are left, leaving a porous lightweight chunk, capable of absorbing water and releasing it slowly at a later time.

Based on a two-year research study by Texas A&M and six years of field trials, expanded shale has proven to break up and aerate heavy clay soils, resulting in healthier and more extensive plant root systems than other treatments.

Dr. Steve George of Texas AgriLIFE Extension, recommends tilling a 3-inch layer of expanded shale into the planting area. He then suggests tilling in a 3-inch layer of finished, plant-based compost, which results in a 6-inch raised bed. The expanded shale opens and aerates the soil, while the compost adds vital nutrients. Conservative estimates suggest that the shale will last at least 10 years and might create a permanent physical change in the blackland soil.

The EarthKind soil management system recommends using these two amendments, followed by maintaining a 3" to 4" layer of organic mulch on top of the soil. This system has proven to grow healthy plants and reduce the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and supplemental irrigation.

What to do about WEEDS

Shakespeare and others were not necessarily talking about weeds when they said "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." But they could have been. Some people actually like weeds and use them for decorating or eating, even while others are spraying poison on them or pulling them up.

However you behold the stalks that come up seasonally where you live, know that people are responsible for supplying both the weeds and the conditions that allow them to thrive. We bring them into our lawns and gardens often without knowing we have done so. We water and fertilize them with the rest of our plants. Wildlife helps plant them by carrying the seeds from place to place. And many weeds are so tough that they can grow anywhere, even through cracks in the sidewalk.

Experts at Texas A&M University suggest three plans of action for weed control: Avoidance, control and eradication. The first of these is often the most practical, although it can be difficult. Simply put, you attempt to ensure that you are not carrying weeds into your land from seeds, transplants, feed, soil or machinery. If you see a weed, you prevent it from going to seed.

Control limits the spread of weeds. To control them, we have to consider the costs involved and the harm to plants we want to keep. This is the method growers normally use on annual weeds that compete with vegetable crops.

Eradication completely does away with all parts of the weed. Getting rid of the plant is much easier than getting rid of the seeds it leaves behind, so eradication is close to impossible. It's also expensive.

Once you know whether your bothersome weeds are annuals or perennials, you will have a better idea of what to do about them. Remember to always read labels on herbicides and follow the directions.

The methods needed for effective control or eradication of weeds are largely determined by the weed's lifetime, when it grows and how it reproduces. If you are using an herbicide, read the label to make sure you are applying the right one for the weed.

More information and helpful pictures are available at <http://aggie-turf.tamu.edu/aggieturf2/grasswee/broadlf.html>



10 Common Weeds and How to Control Them

1. **Bermuda grass.** Some people actually want this creeping perennial in their landscape. It grows well in the South and tolerates drought better than other turf-grasses, which is why it often appears in yards. If you don't want it, remember that pre-emergent weed killers work only on annuals. One of the easiest ways to control it is to let a healthy St. Augustine turf crowd it out. You can also dig it up. Remember, however, that if you leave one single root behind, you will be saying hello to it again.

2. **Crabgrass.** Many of our weeds are native, but we have Europe to thank for this annual. It sprouts from seed and frost kills it. Crabgrass is fine for grazers, and some use it to make hay. People sometimes confuse it with Bermuda.

3. **Dandelions** like this area because of the temperate weather. This tap rooted simple perennial likes meadows, yards and roadsides. Destroying it is difficult because it sends seeds airborne. The good news: People use it to make wine, medicines, and eat the leaves. Bees like the nectar. Songbirds like the seeds. The bad news: It spreads easily and many people think it's ugly.

4. **Dollar weed.** Think of a silver dollar. That's what the leaves of this water-loving perennial look like. It likes warm, temperate regions and features bright green, round, fleshy leaves on tall, upright stems. The flowers are tiny, with five star-shaped white petals. Use a broad-leafed weed killer spray containing 2, 4D, but apply it carefully so you don't do away with plants you want.

5. **Henbit,** an annual, will thrive in the rich, moist soil of your garden and will grow from a few inches to a foot or 2 tall. Its flowers are purple and shaped like a trumpet. It appears in late winter or early spring.

6. **Johnson grass.** This tall perennial can grow to 3 to 5 feet. During its early growth it is poisonous to livestock, and it can be difficult to stamp out because the herbicides used to kill it are a threat to other plants.

7. **Nutgrass.** A sedge family member, this is another creeping perennial. The plants are tubers, so even if you cut off the top, they keep growing. Once you have nutgrass, you will have a hard time with control. Do it by continuous and repeated cultivation, repeated mowing for one to two years, sterilizing the soil with chemicals, or persistent use of other herbicides.

8. **Thistle.** This perennial, which spreads by rhizomes, can color a field purple with puffy flower heads and stalky (2 to 6 feet) growth. With spines on leaves and flower heads and airborne seeds, thistles are difficult to control. Best practice: Don't allow it to reach maturity.

9 & 10. **Wild onion, wild garlic.** Many people like these perennials, but they can ruin field crops when they voluntarily spring up in their midst. They can grow from a few inches to a few feet high.

SPRING HINTS AND TIPS



- ❖ With the last average freeze date around mid-March, many flower seeds can be directly sown into the flower beds now. Among these are larkspur, coneflowers, petunias, cosmos, marigolds. Begonias, portulacas, salvias, alyssum, ageratum, and zinnias will provide dazzling color in the spring and summer beds. When purchasing transplants, the short, compact plants that are barely showing their color will provide longer, healthy growth than those larger and in full bloom.
- ❖ Start hanging baskets or plant new container gardens for the patio. Select plants for each container with the same growth requirements such as water and light. A new gardening trend is to create "pocket gardens" or pockets of color in small areas. These bright spots of color give emotional lifts to all who see them.
- ❖ Continue to apply light amounts of fertilizer to the winter pansy plantings. Follow label directions when applying the food nutrients.
- ❖ Do not plant caladium tubers until the soil warms to 70 degrees which is usually in early May.
- ❖ Before planting flowers and vegetables, prepare the beds. Clean out the debris and work in a couple of inches of organic matter such as compost, pine bark or sphagnum peat moss. This initial preparation will reward with healthy growth and color from the veggies and flowers.

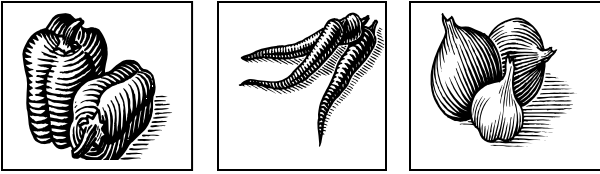
... **DO NOT TOP CRAPE MYRTLES** or any other ornamental trees. This leaves scars and wounds that last forever. One can always see where that tree limb was lopped off - especially during winter when the stumps are bare. The new shoots will be tender and flop over, especially if and when it rains. The only pruning that crape myrtles need is to thin out the trunks on young trees to allow the 4 to 7 permanent trunks. The fewer trunks you have, the prettier the shape and smooth texture of the tree. Each year around early spring, the new suckers that have appeared from the ground or main trunks can be removed. The frequently seen drastic pruning is an outdated practice that does not benefit the tree. The only beneficial practice would be to remove the dried bloom pods during the summer to promote faster re-bloom. This is a difficult task with very large specimens. Crape myrtles bloom on new wood (growth produced during the current year).

If the crape myrtle tree is too large for its spot, consider cutting it back to the ground and letting it start over or pull it out entirely and replace it with one of the desirable size. There are many smaller varieties of crape myrtles available in the 6-8 foot range, rather than using a 30 foot plant in a space designed for a 10 foot one. Check with a reputable nursery for the improved mildew resistant cultivars.

OAK WILT REMINDER:

Live oaks (*Quercus fusiformis* and *Q.virginiana*) and red oaks (*Quercus texana*) are the most susceptible to Oak Wilt. This fungus has continued to spread in the central Texas area. **Avoid pruning these oak trees between February 1 and June 1** as this is when the beetle populations are at their highest and fungal spores are available. A nitidulid beetle feeds on the fungus spores and lands on a fresh wound of the tree, implanting the disease which will move through a connective system of roots from one live oak tree to another.

Paint any and all wounds with pruning paint immediately. Spray or latex paint can be used to cover and seal any wound or cut. Avoid firewood from trees infected with oak wilt. As a precaution, store firewood under clear plastic and bury the edges to trap the insects.



PLANNING A VEGETABLE GARDEN

A successful vegetable garden is the result of a number of factors. Initial planning before establishing the garden will reap rewards at harvest time. Making a scale drawing showing location of beds and plantings is recommended before doing any planting.

Location should be the first consideration. Most vegetables require 6 to 8 hours of sunlight daily. The garden plot should be convenient, preferably near the home to receive adequate care both during the growing season and harvest times.

A water source nearby will be a necessity as rainfall does not always occur when needed by the plants. Gardens need the equivalent of one inch per week, therefore there may be a frequent need for supplemental watering. The use of drip irrigation or soaker hoses is ideal as wet foliage from the use of overhead irrigation can promote disease.

The garden should be placed away from trees and shrubs that will compete for light, water and nutrients. Locate away from nearby buildings or structures that would shade the area. Avoid windy areas and low spots which may flood or be slow to warm in the spring.

Size of the garden should be influenced by food preferences of the family, use of the vegetables grown (eaten fresh or future use after freezing or canning), available space for a garden, and especially the number of persons helping tend the garden. A large garden area can overwhelm one individual without additional help during the growing season. Plant vegetables and varieties that are preferred by the family members.

Loose, well-drained soil is of prime importance. Local clay soils will need organic matter added to have ideal crops. Organic matter such as compost, straw, leaves, peat moss, shredded bark can be tilled into the soil and will enhance both clay and sandy soils. A soil test (recommended to be done every three years) can help determine if there are deficient or excess nutrients in the soil. Fertilizers or manures can then be added if needed. Soil test bags and instructions are available at the local Texas AgriLife Extension office, 420 N. 6th, Waco. For a nominal fee, A&M will test the soil and send the results of their analysis in less than two weeks.

Seeds or transplants can be used for planting in the vegetable garden. Many vegetables can be seeded directly into the rows or scattered in the garden area. The advantage to seeds is the lower cost and many varieties available by seed. Nursery catalogs and garden centers offer numerous vegetable varieties in seed packets. Many seeds can be started early indoors, then planted outdoors when the weather warms. Others produce best by planting directly in the garden. Seed

packets will show when to plant, how deeply, length of time to germinate, how close to plant and thin once the plant is growing in the garden.

The other alternative is purchasing transplants from the nurseries and garden center. Select healthy plants with good color, strong stems, free of insects, and not too large nor too small. Plant them on a shady day or in late afternoon at the same depth they were growing in their container. Handle the tender plant carefully when transplanting. Water well and wait a couple of weeks to fertilize until the plant has time to get established in its new location.

Once the plants are growing, mulch the soil with compost, bark, grass clippings, leaves, etc. This will conserve the soil moisture, keep weeds down, and help regulate the soil temperature - especially on hot summer days. The mulch will eventually decompose and add nutrients back into the soil.

Following these guidelines, along with tender-loving care provided by you, the gardener, will go a long way in having a successful vegetable garden.

LAWN CARE

Lawns are awakening from winter. In spring, fertilize after mowing the grass twice. The grass will be actively growing then and ready for using the fertilizer. Fertilizing too early wastes nutrients on weeds. Feeding once in the spring and once in the fall is usually adequate for an acceptable lawn. If additional fertilizer is needed, apply it about 60 days after the first application. Pre-emergents should have already been applied to be effective this year as the weed seeds are already germinating.

For the first spring mowing, set the mower blade about 1/4 to 1/2 inch lower than the normal grass height to promote top growth as well as spreading. The second cutting should be at normal mower blade height setting. For St. Augustine lawns normal blade setting is around 2-1/2 to 3 inches while Bermuda grass lawns will do fine at 1-1/2 to 2 inches in height.

Turf does best with small doses of nutrients applied over time. A slow release product works best and don't over fertilize! Over fertilization promotes too much growth and increases the risk for disease. For many years, specialists recommended a 3-1-2 or 4-1-2 ratio of fertilizer on lawns. High phosphorous levels in the soil tests have prompted recommendations to change to a 1-0-1 or 1-0-0 (straight nitrogen) ratio. Apply only 1/2 to 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft. of turf area. Water in well with 1/2" of irrigation. Try not to fertilize prior to a predicted heavy rain as these nutrients can easily run off in heavy rains into storm sewers, creeks and streams and be a pollution threat to the environment.

Mowing is most important to keeping a healthy lawn. Most turfs will look their best and be healthier if mowed every four to five days. Let the clippings fall back to the turf where they will be converted to nutrients. Keep mower blades sharp for a smooth cut.

*** EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES ***

These programs are open to the public – sponsored by the McLennan County Master Gardeners in conjunction with the Intern Training Classes

July 2 – “LANDSCAPE HORTICULTURE” by Dr. Bill Welch, A&M Extension Landscape Horticulturist
1-5 pm at Carleen Bright Arboretum, \$5.00 fee

August 14 - “FRUITS AND NUTS” by Mr. Jim Kamas, Extension Fruit Specialist, Gillespie County
1-5 pm at Carleen Bright Arboretum, \$5.00 fee

Sept. 10 - “LAWN CARE” by Dr. Jim McAfee, Turfgrass Specialist, Texas AgriLife Extension
1-5 pm at Carleen Bright Arboretum, \$5.00 fee

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To receive future quarterly horticulture newsletters by e-mail, call 757-5180 or send a request to <http://mclennan@ag.tamu.edu> . Printed copies will continue to be mailed as in the past.

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NAME CHANGE



The name of Texas Cooperative Extension was changed to **Texas AgriLife Extension** in January. This reflects the emphasis of agriculture in today's lifestyle.

All services offered through the local office at 420 N. Sixth remain the same.

The local McLennan County agents are:

- Shane McLellan – Agriculture
- Sharon Amelunke -Family and Consumer Services
- Sarah Chadulla - 4-H and Youth Development
- Linda Russell - Family Resource Development
- Shannon Losak -Assistant, Better Living for Texas.

The Natural Resource agent will be named soon.

WAYS TO CONTACT US.....

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Sincerely,

**Shane McLellan
County Extension Agent-AG
McLennan County
s-mclella@ag.tamu.edu**

McLENNAN COUNTY MASTER GARDENERS

ANNUAL PLANT SALE

SATURDAY, MAY 17, 2008

9 A.M. TO 3 P.M.

4605 West Waco Drive

CALL Texas AgriLife Extension Service
McLennan County Office for more details
254-757-5180



Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating