



## McLennan County Master Gardeners

Horticulture Newsletter

Summer, 2008

[www.mclennanmastergardeners.org](http://www.mclennanmastergardeners.org)

Call 757-5180 for information on upcoming extension events.

### From the McLennan County Master Gardeners

Check out the website:

[www.mclennanmastergardeners.org](http://www.mclennanmastergardeners.org)

The McLennan Co. Master Gardeners received the "Volunteers of the Year" award at the Keep Waco Beautiful awards ceremony recently. See it on the website's homepage.

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**MASTER GARDENER CLASS:** A new class of Master Gardener Interns began in June. Educational training is one afternoon a week until mid-September with 56 hours of classroom attendance required. Upon completion of the classroom hours, the interns will be required to give at least 56 hours of volunteer service in horticulture projects before becoming a certified McLennan County Master Gardener.

### THANKS TO ALL WHO SHOPPED AT THE PLANT SALE ON MAY 17.

May all the plants that you purchased grow and exceed all expectations!

*McLennan County Master Gardeners*

THANKS TO ALL WHO ARE RECYCLING FLOWER POTS at the Master Gardeners Pot Recycle Bin at 420 N. 6th Street, rear of parking lot. Help our environment by Recycling! If you need extra pots, check the bin and help yourself.

### EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES:

**July 2** - "Landscape Horticulture" Lecture by Dr. Bill Welch, A&M Landscape/Extension Horticulturist

**Aug. 13** - "Fruit and Nuts" Lecture by Jim Kamas, A&M Horticulture Professor

**Sept. 10** - "Lawn Care" Lecture by Dr. Jim McAfee, Extension Turfgrass Specialist

These programs are open to the public for \$5 fee for each session. Lectures are from 1 to 5 p.m. at the Carleen Bright Arboretum, 9001 Estates in Woodway. No reservations are required. Sponsored by the McLennan Co. Master Gardeners in conjunction with the Intern Training Classes. 1 general CEU per lecture.

**EXCESS VEGGIES FROM THE GARDEN THIS SUMMER?** Don't let them ruin!! Share them with a local food bank or Caritas at 300 S. 15th. Caritas receives food donations (fresh or canned) from 8 until 12 and 1 until 4 p.m. on Monday through Fridays.



To receive this quarterly horticulture newsletter via e-mail, contact the McLennan Co. AgriLife Extension Office at 757-5180 or [mclennan@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:mclennan@ag.tamu.edu).



# "Summer Tips"

- ❖ Check for insects and diseases. Destroy badly infected plants. Spider mites can be especially troublesome at this time. Select a chemical or organic control, or use insecticidal soap. Follow label directions to apply.
- ❖ Soil moisture is essential for good plant production. Conserve the moisture by mulching. A good mulch will retain valuable moisture needed for plant growth and improve overall gardening success. Mulches are usually applied 2 to 6 inches deep, depending upon the material used. In general, the coarser the material, the deeper the mulch. For example, a 2 inch layer of cottonseed hulls will have about the same mulching effect as 6 inches of oat straw or 4 inches of hay.
- ❖ There is still time to plant colorful, heat-tolerant summer annuals. Direct-seed zinnias and portulaca, and purchase plants of periwinkle, salvia, marigold, and purslane. Be sure to water transplants as needed until roots become established. These should reward with color through late fall.
- ❖ Removing faded flowers from plants before they set seed will keep them growing and producing flowers. A light application of fertilizer every 4 to 6 weeks will also be helpful.
- ❖ Re-blooming salvias (*Salvia greggii* and *S. Farinacea*) should be pruned periodically during the summer. It is easy to use hedge shears, removing only the spent flowers and a few inches of stem below.
- ❖ Plan for next spring. Divide any crowded spring bulbs. Once the bulbs have matured and the foliage has turned brown, it is time to spade them up and thin them. Crowded bulbs produce fewer and smaller blooms. Most need thinning every 3 to 4 years.
- ❖ Continue pruning fall blooming perennials through August. Mums, Mexican Bush Sage, Copper Canyon daisies, autumn asters and cigar plant cuphea all benefit from light pruning (remove top growth of 4-6") at this time. Flower buds begin forming about Sept. 1 for fall bloom.
- ❖ A late summer pruning of rose bushes can be beneficial. Prune out dead canes and weak growth. After pruning (to about 30 inches), apply a complete fertilizer and water thoroughly.
- ❖ Prune out dead or diseased wood from trees and shrubs, but hold off on major pruning until mid-winter. Severe pruning now will stimulate tender new growth prior to frost.
- ❖ Establish a new compost pile to accommodate the fall leaf accumulation. Don't send the fall leaves to the landfill. Make your own compost and enrich your garden soil with it.
- ❖ Plant bluebonnet seeds in August. This winter annual must germinate in late summer or early fall, develop a good root system, and be ready to grow in spring when the weather warms. Plant the seeds in well prepared soil, 1/2 inch deep, and water thoroughly.

## ACCENT THE FALL LANDSCAPE WITH VEGETABLES AND HERBS

Midsummer and early fall offer a good 'second season' for growing vegetables and herbs if gardeners can motivate themselves to provide a little extra care during the long, hot days of late summer. Vegetables and herbs can be used in imaginative ways to add beauty, interest, and utility to the landscape and to your fall garden.

Hanging containers of parsley, mint, thyme, rosemary and tomatoes can all be started now. These plants may be available at local nurseries, but with a little extra effort they can be grown from seed. Each has a drooping growth habit which makes it especially appropriate for hanging-container use.



An even larger variety of herbs and vegetables may be grown in the more 'down-to-earth' containers, such as clay pots and wooden tubs. Tomatoes, peppers, lettuce, eggplants, carrots, and radishes are just a few of the many available. Even small porches and decks of apartments can be made more attractive and interesting with groupings of containers filled with herbs and vegetables.

Two important points to consider in growing container plants are the media and the container selection. Most vegetables require excellent drainage, so select a container with a hole in the bottom. Plain clay pottery is attractive and versatile, as are many of the cedar and redwood tubs.

Small containers dry out very quickly, and sometimes require daily or twice-daily irrigation. A minimum size for containers is 10 to 12 inches, with 16 to 18 inches being more appropriate for large plants such as tomatoes or eggplants. The media must also drain well for most plants to thrive and yet still hold an adequate amount of water.

Some gardeners prefer soilless mixes, such as half peat moss and half vermiculite. Others prefer 1/3 each of garden loam, peat moss, and sharp sand. Many different media can be used successfully. The important factor is for the gardener to learn how to manage the media selected, since water and fertilizer requirements vary considerably.

## "...Bug Talk..."

**SPITTLEBUG:** The spittlebug appears around the buds and tender shoots of plants as masses of frothy, white foam that looks like a mass of human spit. Often this is mistaken for a fungus or disease. Actually, inside this mass of white foam is a tiny light green insect known as the spittlebug. The frothy mass produced by the spittlebug presumably protects the young insect from other parasitic-type insects, and maintains an artificial high humidity required for the insect's development.

The adult resembles a leafhopper and flies actively during the summer. The spittlebug has not been known to cause any significant injury and control measures are not generally recommended from the economic standpoint. Heavy infestations can slow plant growth, but they can be washed off with a strong blast of water.

**WEBWORMS:** The webworm, *Hyphantria cunea*, is a common pest of trees. Webworms are known for the large, unsightly webs they produce. Heavy infestations are rarely fatal or prevent a crop on a pecan tree. The pupae overwinter in the soil or tree bark and adults emerge in summer to lay eggs on the undersides of leaves. Eggs hatch in a few days and the larvae eat the tender foliage of trees, especially pecans.

Early control methods will minimize the damage. The webworms can often be controlled without insecticides by removing and destroying any leaves that contain egg masses. Larvae may be knocked out of low-hanging webs, with a stick or broom, and into a box or garbage bag for disposal. Or, webs can be pruned from smaller branches. Many beneficial insects such as wasps, and also birds, attack the egg and larval stages of fall webworm. You can help these predators and parasites get to their fall webworm prey by tearing open the webs. If webs are too numerous or too high in a tree to deal with individually, insecticides can be used to prevent damage. Hose-end sprayers or commercial high-pressure sprayers are best for reaching upper portions of tall trees. Because webworm larvae remain inside their webbing, insecticide sprays must penetrate the web to be effective. The environmentally safest ones are those containing *Bacillus thuringiensis* (BT). 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. Complete coverage is needed for good control.

## SHADY LAWNS

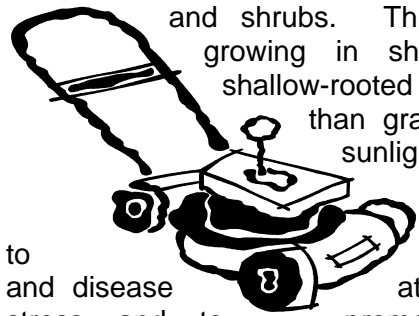
Shaded lawns require special care to maintain satisfactory grass cover. This means mowing higher and more frequently, watering more often, giving particular attention to controlling leaf diseases and removing fallen tree leaves.

Shaded turf is weakened by lack of sunlight and competition for water nutrients from roots of trees and shrubs.

Thus, grass that is growing in shade generally is shallow-rooted and less hardy than grass growing in full sunlight. As a result, the

shaded grass is more susceptible to drought stress and disease attacks. To reduce stress and to promote healthy turf,

mow the grass 1/2 to 1 inch higher than grasses growing in full sunlight. Mow shaded lawns frequently enough so that only 1/3 of the foliage is removed at each mowing. Thus, grass mowed at a height of 2 inches should be mowed when it reaches 3 inches.



Because the shaded turf is shallow-rooted and tree roots are competing for available moisture, water more frequently during drought stress periods. As grass growing in the shade is not able to utilize fertilizer as readily as grass in full sunlight, fertilizer is best applied only in early spring and fall. It is not a good idea to use chemicals for weed control on St. Augustine grass in heavy shade because they may further weaken the grass and increase its susceptibility to disease. Trees and shrubs may also be damaged by some weed killers. Fungicides containing chlorothalonil may be applied to treat for leaf diseases on weakened turf during the growing season. Follow directions on the labels of any disease control product.

Removing tree leaves that accumulate in the fall will also help shaded grass. Thin out crowns of existing trees to allow more light to penetrate. Prune tree limbs to a height of 8-10 feet to permit more sunlight to reach the grass. Shade tolerant grasses such as St. Augustine or Zoysia varieties are recommended.

In many home landscapes, shade develops to such a degree that grass cannot be maintained. Even St. Augustine grass, the most shade-tolerant

of turfs, requires at least 30% direct sunlight to maintain satisfactory growth. Consider replacing shaded grass areas with bark mulch or a ground cover. Ground cover plants range from woody vines to dwarf shrubs, depending upon individual needs. Ground covers will cover bare areas of ground, prevent erosion of soil, add variety to the garden/yard, regulate foot traffic in the yard as well as tie together unrelated shrubs and flower beds in the landscape. They are frequently used under or around trees where grass grows poorly or where exposed tree roots make mowing a hazard. Ground cover plants eliminate the need for mowing as well as concealing the exposed tree roots.

Many possibilities for living ground covers are available. For shade or partial shade, consider vinca, English ivy, mondo grass, Liriope. Asian Jasmine, creeping junipers, or Liriope, santolina and confederate jasmine are choices for sun locations. Ground covers can be planted any time in the growing season and will be slower than grass in covering bare ground. A mulch of bark, compost or other organic material will control most of the weeds as well as retain the soil moisture while the plants are getting established. Water on a regular schedule throughout the growing season, particularly during dry weather. Ground covers usually need pruning only to remove dead wood and keep the plantings where desired.

"Gardeners are optimists. We cope with fickle weather, too much rain then too little, heavy snow and ice storms, torrid winds and hurricanes but expect our gardens to survive.

Who else plants a sapling tree and expects to see it to maturity?"

"Perennial - Any plant that, had it lived, would have bloomed year after year."

Henry Beard

\*\*\*HOT & DRY WEATHER ANNUAL\*\*\*

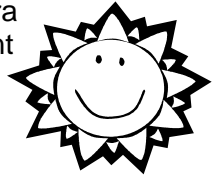
One of the easy to grow plants that thrive in the hot, dry conditions of summer is the *Gomphrena globosa* (Globe Amaranth), commonly called Bachelor Buttons. They are readily available and easily grown from seed. Bachelor Buttons were popular with our ancestors for their use as "everlastings." Cut stems of flowers hung upside down in a dark, dry area and allowed to dry hold their color for a year or more and can be used in a variety of ways.

Colors range from purple, lavender, pink and white with papery, cloverlike flowers about 1 inch across. Dozens of individual flowers occur on each plant which are mounds about 2 in. tall and wide. This plant will not thrive until hot weather arrives. June and July are good times to plant the seeds. The blooms are normally attractive in the garden until late fall. Few insects seem to bother *Gomphrena*, neither do deer. Good drainage is essential but little water or fertilizer is necessary to produce a massive display. Plants started in July or early August will have time to make a beautiful fall display and provide lots of dried material for winter decoration. 'Strawberry Fields' has showy hot red flowers. There are also dwarf varieties useful for edging plants. Experienced gardeners save a few flower heads from their favorite plants to use for the next year's seed.



**GREENROOF AT NEW WACO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE BUILDING**

The new Waco Chamber of Commerce building was featured at an open house in early June. Incorporated in the construction is a greenroof. The living roof is 1,750 square feet, and reduces the urban heat island, absorbs air pollution, collects airborne pollutants and stores carbon. The living roof also provides extra insulation that reduces the amount of heating and cooling needed inside the building.



It is planted with varieties of sedums that require little water and maintenance. Rainwater that would otherwise run off the site irrigates plants. Excess rainwater is retained in a cistern, and solar-powered pumps return the water during dry periods.

The design is called "A River Runs Through It". GGO Architects produced the final design and incorporated plant recommendations from Texas State Technical College landscape student projects. A dark band of sedums in the shape of a flowing river is surrounded by a variety of green sedums on the bank. The design plays on the heritage of the Brazos and Bosque Rivers.

The "dark" sedum that is the river is *Sedum palmerii*. The "green" sedum for the banks is *Sedum sexangulare*. Others interspersed are *Sedum reflexum* "grey creeper", *Sedum spectabile* "brilliant" and *Sedum kamschaticum*. Planting medium is a light-weight premium potting soil.

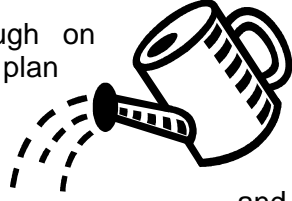
This part of the roof for the new building is considered an extensive Greenroof. This means that the soil is 3-5 inches deep. (A roof with over 6 inches of soil is called an intensive Greenroof).

See photos of the roof on [www.waco-texas.com/photogallery.htm](http://www.waco-texas.com/photogallery.htm), photos #42 and #43, from the grand opening celebration of the Chamber headquarters.

For more information on greenroofs check out [www.greenroofs.com](http://www.greenroofs.com)

## A Vacation Plan for Plants

Summer heat can be tough on plants, so wise travelers will plan for their care before leaving on vacation. A few advance thoughts about lawns, gardens and houseplants can save the gardener from plant anxiety or returning home to black stems and fallen leaves.



**Vegetable gardens.** If the produce is ripe or almost ripe, pick it before leaving and either store it or give it away. Don't abandon it to rot on the vine, as that will increase the chances of disease and lure insects.

- Weed and mulch
- Water deeply, 3 inches at least.
- Ask a trusted friend or neighbor to pick the produce, if the vacation lasts for more than a week or so.

**Houseplants.** If no trustworthy friends with green thumbs are available to take them as "boarders," find someone who will visit regularly. List each plant's watering and other needs on index cards and tape this on the pot. This will save them from overwatering, a common killer of houseplants.

Don't fertilize before leaving.

- Move plants out of windowsills or other locations that get direct sunlight and heat.
- Water them thoroughly before you leave.
- Set the pots in water-filled saucers. Absorbing the water through their roots should keep your plants happy for about a week.
- If the trip lasts longer than a week, drape clear plastic bags over the plants, but leave some breathing room. The plastic provides humidity to thirsty plants.
- Don't turn off the air-conditioning. A good compromise is to turn it up to around 80 degrees.

**Lawns, flowerbeds and container plants.** About a week before departure, turn on the sprinkler system and make sure nothing is broken or clogged. Test the timer. Even if all is working, have someone check on it and make sure he or she knows how to turn the system on and off at the valve, in case of a malfunctioning switch.

Water the lawn deeply right before the scheduled departure. When the grass is dry, mow it, but not too low. Leave it at 2 ½ inches or longer, and if the vacation lasts for an extended period, arrange to have it cut once a week to keep it healthy.

In the beds, weed, mulch and deadhead. Make sure the watering system is working here, too, or put a soaker hose in the beds. Ask a friend to check this once a week and turn on the hose if necessary.

- Don't fertilize before leaving.
- Move container plants out of direct sunlight, even the sun-lovers. They will be all right for a week or two. Longer than that, have a friend or neighbor check on them regularly.
- A shallow container like a child's swimming pool can be used to water plants from the bottom for about two weeks. Move it to a shady or semi-shady location and put 1 or 2 inches of water in it. Skip Richter, Travis County Extension director, recommends throwing a BT product in the water to keep mosquitoes away.
- If an actual person is unavailable to see to the plants, check out the plant watering devices at the local garden supply store.

### WAYS TO CONTACT US.....

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**Sincerely,**

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