

The Latest Dirt

December 2012

McLennan County Master Gardener Association

“Find your spot and get passionate about it”

When Sandy Back agreed to a second term as McLennan County Master Gardeners’ president, she did it with her eyes wide open. A fellow MG member convinced her she had much to offer and it was too soon to quit.

“We are completely dependent on volunteers,” she said. “I want to make our people feel loved, needed and worthwhile.” We sat in the Cedar Ridge School garden, a beloved place by many MG volunteers who have worked there over the past seven years. “I recognize the value of volunteers – their needs and wants, their talents and gifts.” She also knows how to give back.

The sun shone this late November morning on still blooming esperanzas, fall asters, cigar plants and roses as grasses leaned in the breeze and rows of raised beds sprouted carrots, peas, mustard greens, onions. All planted by the students.

Salt and Pepper, the African pygmy goats, begged for treats and two tutors sat in the gazebo helping students with reading lessons. The garden setting with its colorful art work looked as though planned for a purpose. And it was – by Sandy.

After retiring in 2003 from 30 years of teaching elementary level students, she met Andrea Nolan, principal of Cedar Ridge who was looking for tutors for at-risk kids. Sandy joined the staff part time for a year. Then she managed a science lab for all grades (PK - 4) for three years. In 2007 she retired again. But then came back as a volun-

teer after a MG member asked her to “take on” the garden. “Do I have ‘sucker’ written on my forehead?” she laughed. She did her research and created a garden within four walls.

The garden – once a weedy eyesore – was built with help from a grant and Sandy’s desire to create a setting that would become a basis for learning. “These kids needed exposure to a place that would teach them how things grow. Many don’t get that in their lives.”

The grant provided concrete paths and berms, plants, trees, outdoor seating and even the goats. MG volunteers have done

the rest. Mrs. Nolan has given her a free hand to develop 45 minute sessions in the garden with 15 minutes at each learning station. A learning station can be under a huge oak sitting on a little curb to listen and observe.

Sandy has left her mark on many MG projects. She designed the SuperStar bed at the Arboretum and enlisted help from fellow interns in the 2004 class to showcase the plants receiving super star designation from Texas A&M.

Next, Jene Herring asked her to design a garden at the busy intersection of Routes 84 and 317 in McGregor. This led to the five point star of Texas design with a circular pathway. She and Barbara Vance and some 2012 interns were involved in the recent design of the shade bed in front of the McLennan County Extension office on 6th St. Sandy also does private landscape design. Word of mouth is her only form of advertising.

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**Our annual MG Christmas dinner is
Tuesday, December 11, 2012**

**at the Arboretum
Pavilion, 6:30 p.m.**

Reservations due 12/3



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from
Sandy Back
to you



Let me take this opportunity to say to each of you what a pleasure it has been to be your leader this year. Needless to say, I took each step with the counsel of many and to those people, I am grateful. Our wonderful group of McLennan County Master Gardeners has much to be proud of as I think over the past 12 months of our organization. I would not even pretend to list all the amazing things that have taken place for fear of leaving something important out. I can say, with perfect certainty, that we have touched the lives of thousands of people by providing valuable horticulture education. Those lives range from babies all the way through senior citizens. Your work has not gone unnoticed and you have made a tremendous impact on our county.

It is my sincere hope that you plan to attend our annual Christmas dinner and meeting on Tuesday, December 11 at 6:30 pm. This special evening will take place in the new Pavilion at the Carleen Bright Arboretum. You are invited to bring a guest or come on your own. The meat will be provided by our organization and the side dishes will be provided by each of you. Please, please make sure that you have sent Kris Ford your reservation so that we will have enough food for all. I will tell Santa to bring you ashes and sticks in your stocking if you don't show up!

During the winter months, we get a slight break from worrying about the heat and lack of growing conditions. • The one plant that you may be purchasing right now is a **poinsettia** for either your home or to give as a gift. They are the most popular holiday flower. Hybridizers have expanded the range of colors from the familiar red to a wide range of choices. A common question after Christmas is how to care for this plant and possibly even get it to bloom once again the next holiday. This can prove to be a fussy and exacting process. You may want to consider just purchasing a new



plant next year they have become inexpensive. Just bringing your plant this season, here are a few tips to keep it happy and healthy through the holiday time.

since quite after home

Light – Place it near a sunny window, preferably not a north facing window since poinsettias are actually a tropical plant.

Heat – To keep your plant in bloom, maintain a temperature of 65–75 degrees during the day. When the temperature drops too low, or leaves touch an especially cold window, it can cause the leaves to drop.

Water – Water the plant whenever the surface feels dry to the touch. Water until it drains out the bottom, but don't let the plant sit in water. You may want to remove the foil often wrapped around the plant to keep it from just sitting in drained water.

Humidity – Lack of humidity during dry seasons, in particular winter, is an ongoing houseplant problem. If your home tends to be dry and your poinsettia is in direct light, you will need to water frequently.

As you probably know, the poinsettia is native to Mexico as it thrives in the tropical weather there. It has long become a symbol of Christmas due to its star shaped leaf said to symbolize the Star of Bethlehem. It is a common misconception that the plant leaves are actually toxic. The poison control center reports that it would take 50 leaves to make a 50 pound child ill. Mostly, the digestion of the plant would cause someone to have a stomach ache. The red leaves, of course, are not the flower of the plant. The actual flowers are quite unassuming and do not attract pollinators. The flowers can be found in groups of small yellow structures found in the center of each leaf bunch.

I want to wish you and your family a blessed holiday season and warm Merry Christmas surrounded by those you love!

See you on December 11 at 6:30 p.m.

Sandy



(Continued from page 1)

A graduate of Longwood University in Virginia, Sandy majored in education and minored in music. The music remains part of her life as she has taught piano for 35 years, currently to 34 students from kindergarten to high school. In summer her backyard pool becomes a classroom – this year to 362 kids. And she is a docent with Cameron Park Zoo and teaches Sunday School for children with special needs at First Baptist Church in Woodway.

Sandy was born in Waco, but her father's work in government led the family to many places - Kansas City, Memphis, Falls Church, Va. and Kerrville. They eventually migrated back to Waco where her grandparents lived. The loss of her husband a year ago made this a difficult year, but she takes comfort in her volunteer activities and her two shih tzus, Macey and Cooper. She has a son and two grandchildren who live in McGregor.

With our MG organization now approaching 130 members, she is committed to specific goals. She wants to see every member committed to at least one project plus our two major projects, the plant sale and the Children's Garden Fair. "I want them to say 'my passion is' and then really support that project plus our big ones."

She sees MG members as the pegs for a board or the pieces of a puzzle that are plugged into the board or fit into the puzzle. "And once we are all plugged in we will become a really successful organization." ■



MG intern Taddie Kelly awarded scholarship to TSTC Landscape Design program

Taddie Kelly, an MG intern with the 2012 class, is a retired teacher with several degrees. She will receive another on Dec. 7 when she graduates from the TSTC Landscape Design program.

Taddie is also the McLennan County Master Gardeners Scholarship recipient for two semesters.

But there is more. Taddie was the winning designer for the new garden installed this spring along the south side of Whitehall Center at the Arboretum. Her design for the new bed was selected among all the entries from fellow TSTC landscape design students.

The garden features plants to attract butterflies such as Blue Plumbago, the host plant for Cassius Blue butterflies. Her intent for the new garden which did beautifully this summer is to "create enthusiasm about gardening among children."



Taddie Kelly, center, receives the MG scholarship for the TSTC Landscape Design program at the fall scholarship donor event. Pictured with her are Terry Ehrhardt, right, Golf Course & Landscape Management department chair, and Ila Jean Carothers, scholarship coordinator.

Left: Taddie designed the new perennial garden at the Arboretum to attract children and butterflies.

Thank you

The best part of editing *The Latest Dirt* is watching our organization grow and portraying that growth through the features and facts that we send to you each month. Since we are part of this cyber thing, we can't show off with artsy covers, sexy layouts and slick paper. We can, however, tell the story of Master Gardeners by sharing with you their talents, hard work and wonderful contributions through these email reports.

I hope you have enjoyed them as much as I have doing them. Through this volunteer job I have had the pleasure of working with my side-kick and loyal writer/editor Barry Vokes who surprised me each month with his carefully researched copy - exactly 750 words. By writing about you, we got to meet your llamas, donkeys and chickens, tour your gardens, admire your hobbies and share your enthusiasm for working with kids or digging weeds.

To you – Brenda Golubski, Julia Khoury, Nelda Cooper, Barbara Vance – it's been so nice to get your monthly reports tracking the happenings and progress of our MG. To Janet Schaffer, Eva FitzGerald, Penny Gifford and Jeanette Kelly, writers/reporters/photographers, you never failed to make my day with just the right blend of news, information and images.

Neva Dobbins runs the fastest copy machine in town. She took pity on me and made copies of our mailed editions so office volunteers could stuff and label them – and I didn't have to go downtown.

Finally, to Sandy Back. Hey, it doesn't get much better than this. She gave me free rein to do my thing and I got to benefit from her leadership.

To Melody Fitzgerald and Linda Deal Kruse I forward to you the warm feelings that come with this job.

Sonia Warriner

October 2012 Volunteer Hours

Volunteer hours - members		433
	interns	381
Education hours		
	members	54
	interns	6
Contacts	members	26,953
Media contacts	members	32,544
	interns	13,627

November 14, 2012, Meeting Attendance Members: 48 • Interns: 17 • Guests: 2

Back, Sandy; Barnes, B.L.; Belanger, Bonnie; Belanger, Dick; Bonner, Grady; Burchfield, Linda; Carothers, Ila Jean; Chapman, Merle; Clafferty, JoAnn; Crawford, Susan; Cunningham, Jean; Davidson, Emily; Dawson, Anita; DeMuynck, Lynn; Dougherty, Elwell, Zack; FitzGerald, Eva; FitzGerald, Melody; Ford, Kris; Geletzke, Penny; Goaley, Patricia; Golubski, Brenda; Hering, Jene; Kelly, Jeanette; Kemp, Rachelle; Lindsey, Donna; Mabry, Cindy; Matthews, Sherry; Mersinger, Barbara; Milam, Elizabeth; Milnor, Gerry; Moore, Linda; Prause, James; Plasek, Anne; Powers, Robert; Reinking, Art; Rich Jennifer; Richardson, Sharon; Schillaci, Valerie; Schmeltekopf, Judy; Seale, James; Serface, Jan; Smith, Edrena; Vance, Barbara; Vokes, Barry; vonRosenberg, Jo; Waldrop, Melba; Wilhite, Amber; Wood, Carol.

Interns: 17 - Burr, Tom, Burchfield, Bill; Daily, Lisa; Daily, Scott; Diehl, Marietta; Dossey, Jane; Haller, Judy; Harmon, Joann; Holcomb, Peggy; Hughes, Carolyn; Kinnison, Denise; Kruse, Linda Deal; Krzywonski, Cynthia; Marks, Monika; Sefcik, Ann; Waatson, Ramona.

Guests: 2 - Daniel, David; March, Anita.
Total: 67

Speakers' Bureau Report - Nelda Cooper

Nov. 6 - Jan Serface spoke to the Sun City Questers on Heirloom roses; 21 attended.

Nov. 13 - Jo vonRosenberg presented her program, Cultivating the Mind and Spirit While Gardening, to the Liberty Hill Garden Club. 37 members and guests attended.

Nov. 13 - Elizabeth Milam gave a tour of her rose and perennial garden to 13 members of the Garden Patch Garden Club.

Nov. 14 - Barbara Vance took the Mexia Garden Club on a docent tour of the Arboretum. 12 members enjoyed the tour.

There were 31 speaking engagements in 2012 with a total of 1,084 contacts recorded.

Minutes: November 14, 2012

Whitehall Center, Carleen Bright Arboretum

President Sandy Back called the regular meeting to order at 12:12 p.m. Guests and interns were welcomed.

The October 10, 2012 meeting minutes were published in *The Latest Dirt* and stand approved as published after President Back asked for corrections or additions from the membership.

The budget and benevolence fund reports were distributed to the membership by email. No one reported they were unable to view the reports. The reports were accepted as sent.

All members were reminded to pay the \$12 dues for 2013 to Barry Vokes, treasurer. President Back announced the dues were a bargain at only \$1 a month. Some of the \$12 is forwarded to the state to support state level activities.

James Bays' letter of resignation was received. James was recognized for his outstanding service he has given to the association.

Robert Powers of the nomination committee read the following slate of officers for 2013 as presented in October. The nominations are Sandy Back, president; Jeanette Kelly, vice-president; Elizabeth Milam, secretary; and Sherry Matthews, treasurer. Robert Powers made the motion to elect the slate as presented. Jene Hering seconded the motion. The motion carried by a show of hands.

Hours will be reported to the extension office via the internet on computer software now available to the organization according to Shane McLellan, County Extension Agent, as reported by President Back.

An update on the intern landscaping project at the extension office was given by President Back. The yard area has been transformed from a grassy hill under a large shade tree with drainage problems to an aesthetically pleasing area featuring various plantings and bed divisions.

Barbara Vance and Jennifer Rich presented the volunteer opportunities for November and December 2012 on the back of the meeting agenda.

Eva FitzGerald circulated a sign up list for dishes for the pot luck to be held on Tuesday, Dec. 11 at the Pavilion for the association's end of year celebration for members and guests. The association will provide the turkey and ham. Judy Schmeltekopf is organizing the decorating of the tables. A list was circulated for members to decorate one of the 16 tables

with natural items from their yards. Anonymous judges may select outstanding arrangements for special recognition.

Guests were introduced. Judy Schmeltekopf introduced Anita March who is enrolled as an intern in Longview. She lives in Gregg County, but attends Master Gardeners in Harrison County. Ila Jean Carothers introduced David Daniel, formerly of Cherokee County Master Gardeners, who has recently moved to Waco and intends to transfer his membership to McLennan County.

Peggy Holcomb was introduced as our newest member. A member of the intern class of 2012, she is the first intern to complete her required volunteer hours and become eligible for membership.

Needs and concerns given by the members were:

Lynn DeMuyneck stated donated books were in the office and needed to know the source.

Ila Jean Carothers announced next week will be the last time for Ask A Master Gardener telephone line for 2012. The telephone line will be reopened in mid-February and volunteers will be needed at that time.

Ila Jean also announced there are 5 11"x14" frames available for 8"x10" photos of plants to be hung in the office. Members are asked to submit glossy prints for consideration.

Kris Ford is taking reservations for the December dinner by email. She would like an email stating yes or no so she can determine an accurate count.

Emily Davidson was selling keep you cool neck bands for the McGregor Garden Club.

Rachelle Kemp announced Taddie Kelly will be graduating on Dec. 7 from TSTC with a degree in Landscape Design. Taddie was the recipient of one of the scholarships offered by the McLennan County Master Gardeners.

President Back announced members will receive 1.0 hours of education hours if they stay for the presentation, "Gardening in Small Places," given by Barry Vokes today after the meeting.

President Back adjourned the meeting at 12:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Brenda Golubski, recording secretary

McLennan County Master Gardeners Association Officers 2012

President - Sandy Back • Vice President - Jeanette Kelly • Secretary - Brenda Golubski
Treasurer - Barry Vokes



AgriLife Sponsor - Shane McLellan, County Agent
Newsletter - Sonia Warriner jwarriner@hotmail.com
Our web site: www.mclennanmastergardeners.org

Send volunteer hours to Julia Khoury, 8512 Bosque Blvd., Waco 76712 or tkhoury@hotmail.com

Educational programs of Texas AgriLife Extension Service 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

AT THE OFFICE



Peggy Holcomb, right, is the first in the 2012 intern class to receive certification as a Master Gardener. Sandy Back, president, gave her the certification documents at the November business meeting. Peggy has completed her 60 hours of education training and 60 hours of volunteer work on approved MG projects.

Photos Needed: We have five empty photo frames that could be used on the office walls says Ila Jean Carothers, coordinator. She suggests glossy 8 x 10 close-ups of colorful blooms including a rose

Library: Lynn DeMunych has catalogued 164 garden books including reference volumes. All except the reference books may be taken out. They cover many gardening topics; the list is on the office computer.

Free copies of older garden magazines have been donated by a MG member and are free to anyone who wants them.

71 members and interns worked at the office in 2012.

Plug Into These Volunteer "Opps"

Volunteer Opportunities December 2012



Date	Activity	Contact
Dec. 4	Habitat Home planting 1908 McKenzie, 8:30 a.m.	Melba Waldrop
Dec. 11	Christmas Party Pavilion at the Arboretum TUESDAY, 6:30 p.m.	Sandy Back
Dec. 16	Cedar Ridge Clean-Up 9 a.m.	Sandy Back

NOTICE:

The MG office will be closed in December and January and will re-open in mid-February along with our Ask A Master Gardener Help Line.



A CHRISTMAS POEM FOR GARDENERS

BY PETE FROM IOWA

T'was the weekend before Christmas and all through
the yard,

Not a gift was being given, not even a card.

The tools were all hung, in the garage with care,
With hopes that St. Nicholas soon would repair.

The shovel with blade all rusty and cracked,
The pitchfork still shiny, but handle it lacked.

When out on my lawn, (it's brown and abused)
I could see poor old Santa, looking confused.

No list had been left for Santa to see,
No gardening gifts were under the tree.

But wait there's still time, it's not Christmas yet,
And gardening gifts are the quickest to get.

You can forget the silk tie, the fluffy new sweater,
Give something to make the garden grow better.

If she wants a gift shiny, then don't be a fool,
It's not a dumb diamond, but a sparkling new tool.

If fragrance is listed you can forget French perfume,
It's a pile of manure that'll make gardeners swoon.

Give night crawlers, not nightgowns, a hose that
sprays water.
(Anything for the kitchen is not worth the bother.)

Give a great gift that can dig in the dirt,
It's better than any designer-brand shirt.

Now look quick at Santa, this guy's not so dumb,
Under his glove, he hides a green thumb.

His knees are so dirty, his back how it aches,
His boots stomp on slugs, (he gives them no breaks).

The guy works only winter, you can surely see why,
For the rest of the year it's as easy as pie.

He has elves plant through spring, pull weeds in the sum-
mer,
In fall they all harvest, but winter's a bummer

And so Christmas gives Santa a part-time employment,
'Till spring when the blooms are his real enjoyment.

So ask the big guy for garden gifts this year,
Seeds, plants and tools, Santa holds them all dear.

You see, malls may be crowded, vendors hawking their
wares,
But visit a nursery, stress-free shopping is there.

Now Santa's flown off, to the nursery he goes,
And his voice fills the night with a loud

Hoe! Hoe! Hoe!

*Merry Christmas from all the
Arboretum staff -
Janet, Taylor, Bobby, Dolores
and Domingo*



One section of the new shade garden at the
Extension office. Plants include gingers,
nandinas, variegated dianthe, Asian jasmine,
and acuba.

The organic way to rid garden of pests

This year the grasshoppers were simply awful. In many cases they ate the plants right down to the stems. The grasshopper cycle peaks about every seven years, so maybe next year won't be as bad. Fortunately, there is a way to discourage grasshoppers without resorting to toxic chemicals, but you must start early in the growing season. NoLo Bait is made from flakes of wheat bran sprayed with a mix of distilled water, *Nosema locustae* spores and a sticky agent. It's not toxic except to grasshoppers and related insect species.



That said, NoLo Bait does not work quickly and you must apply it properly. Some patience is required. It will generally kill newly hatched grasshoppers within a week of consuming it. But you must continue applying NoLo Bait during the growing season. Many people try it and think it is not effective because they did not know the proper way to apply the bait. It takes time for NoLo Bait to work. Healthy grasshoppers will cannibalize the sick, infected insects and will themselves become infected. They become lethargic and eventually die.

Another effective grasshopper control method is guinea hens. They love to eat grasshoppers and they generally will not scratch up your garden as much as chickens do (chickens also find grasshoppers tasty). Sandra and Johnny Killough at Bonnie's Greenhouse keep guineas at their nursery for good reason.

When we were training to become Texas Master Gardeners, we learned a little about Neem Oil. It's remarkable stuff and considered suitable for organic gardening. It's a vegetable oil that is produced by pressing the seeds of the evergreen neem tree, found in India and some other tropical zones. It's a solution to which a liquid surfactant is added to keep it in suspension. Neem Oil is an effective biopesticide, for it repels mealy bugs, beet armyworms, aphids, cabbage worms, thrips, whiteflies, mites, fungus gnats, beetles, moth larvae, mushroom flies, leafminers, caterpillars, locusts, nematodes and Japanese beetles. It's not toxic to honeybees, ladybugs or other useful species.

Neem Oil has other uses, such as a household pesticide to control ants, bedbugs, cockroaches, houseflies, snails, termites and mosquitos. It works as a repellent and a larvacide. We're

not done yet: it also controls black spot, powdery mildew, anthracnose and rust caused by fungus. To get the benefit of Neem Oil, you must (a) be patient, for it takes time to work, and (b) apply it on a regular schedule. Be sure to coat the underside of the leaves as well as the top.

Another effective pesticide is Spinosad, which is also considered suitable for organic growing. It's highly effective and it works on the central nervous system of insects. Immediately following application of Spinosad, the insect pests begin irreversible tremors, prostrate trembling and paralysis, followed by death. It controls above ground worms, caterpillars, borers, leafminers, beetles and thrips. It is said to control fire ants, but some of us who have tried it on fire ants have been disappointed in the results. Perhaps repeated applications would be more effective. Maybe we need to be more patient, but that's tough when your plants are screaming for mercy.

Yet another pesticide that is considered environmentally friendly is *Bacillus thuringiensis*, commonly known as Bt, used to control flies and mosquitoes, beetles, wasps, bees, ants, sawflies and nematodes. The toxin in Bt also affects moths and butterflies, though there is some controversy over that. If honeybees frequent your garden, you might want to avoid using Bt. Scientists are not entirely certain how Bt works, though research continues.

And then there is diatomaceous earth, known as DE. Among other uses, DE is an insecticide. It's a silicate sedimentary rock that is ground into fine particles and used in many ways. As an insecticide, DE absorbs moisture from the outer layers of insect exoskeletons, which in turn creates a water pressure deficiency and makes them dehydrate and die. DE is pretty good for controlling cockroaches and fleas. Food grade DE is used in storing grains. You might try it on fire ant beds, but you'll need repeated applications and some patience. It definitely bothers the fire ants – they don't like it – and you can make them move if you're patient.

Of course, if all your organic gardening attempts fail, you can take comfort in the knowledge that there are chemicals that will likely resolve your pest problems. At least one very knowledgeable MCMG member did just that recently when faced with a serious grasshopper problem – and it worked. BV

