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The Compost Bin

A Publication of the Travis County Master Gardeners - A volunteer program of Texas AgriLife Extension

The Mueller Blackland Prairie Recreated with guest presenters...

Barbara Austin, Chris Lalich and Emily Manderson

October 2011
Mueller’s Blackland Prairie

Barbara Austin and Chris Lalich from RVi and Emily Manderson from Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center will speak about the redevelopment of the former Robert Mueller Municipal Airport from a landscape architectural design point of view. RVi was selected to provide comprehensive landscape architectural design services for this 700-acre project. At the TCMGA meeting, Barbara, Chris and Emily will specifically discuss the Blackland Prairie portion which is just one segment of the total design. RVi collaborated with the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center to re-create a Blackland Prairie for the Mueller site.

The Mueller Open Space system creates a necklace of green that surrounds the 700-acre Mueller Austin site. When completed the Open Space System will include trailhead signs, maps, interpretive graphics for demonstration gardens, and an interpretive belvedere mural explaining the influences of human development on prairie grasslands.

One of the many unique stories is the creation of native plants demonstration gardens and two lakes for fishing and boating. Interpretive signs are strategically placed throughout the demonstration gardens explaining the characteristics of riparian, hillside, sensory, prairie and pollination plant species. The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center assisted RVi in the creation of these gardens and meadows.

RVi embarked on a mission in 1982 to provide the highest quality landscape architectural design and planning services available in Texas. Starting from a small core of partners RVi has grown into a major regional design firm widely recognized throughout the U.S. for its creative contributions in land use analysis, master-planned communities, design of outdoor spaces, parks and recreation design, and wayfinding graphics.

Lady Bird Johnson and actress Helen Hayes founded the National Wildflower Research Center, renamed Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, in 1982 to protect and preserve North America’s native plants and natural landscapes. Through research and the visitors center energies are focused on protecting and preserving North America’s native plants through native plant lists and image galleries, and conservation.

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, October 5th, 2011 starting at 7:00 pm.
Zilker Botanical Garden
Hello Master Gardeners:
A Message From Your President

As I venture outside early in the mornings, I can feel the cooler air awaken my senses. Oh, to be rid of this miserable summer we have been through! Goodness knows, we need something to rejuvenate our gardening spirits. And a cool, golden October could be just the season we need!

I, for one, look so forward to seeing blooms again. Roses, salvias, sages, asters, copper canyon daisy, flame leaf sumac, any and all mums are needed to lift our hopes of a decent fall in Austin. Fall gardening is well underway as I have started dill and cilantro in my herb beds while one lone pumpkin plant survived the heat and drought and is now setting a few flowers. A true celebration will be if it were to produce a little pumpkin. My garden soil has been replenished with fresh compost and new plants of chard and arugula are happily sitting in it.

It feels like it has been so long since I have wanted to venture outside and enjoy my gardening. And, many of us experienced a little rain shower, which was the first to appear over our area for many months. I had almost forgotten the smell of rain! How very delicious it was!

October is such a fabulous month and one that gardeners can truly love. I long to get back outdoors and experience the season. We have an upcoming plant sale and mini-talks planned for the SFC - Sunset Valley Farmers’ Market on Saturday, October 8th from 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. It should be lots of fun and a great way to share our knowledge with the public. Mark your calendars to either volunteer to work or just come by and hear the talks and purchase a few plants.

Last, but certainly not least, this month marks the departure of our longtime Travis County Horticulture Agent, County Extension Director and friend, Skip Richter. So many of us have enjoyed his gardening advice, watched him on television or heard him give great lectures, especially on growing organically. He will be sorely missed but we wish him well in Harris County.

I hope you each have a lovely October.

Happy Fall Gardening!

Carolyn
In The Vegetable Garden

by Patty Leander

I heard a remark on the radio last month saying that after the summer of 2011 brown is the new green. What a sad commentary, especially for gardeners. One of the primary reasons that many of us garden is to bring the beauty of color into our lives! I have nothing against shades of brown — in soil, mulch and compost — but I want to look out into my backyard and see a rainbow of colors in my vegetable garden. Pretty up your edible landscape this fall with pockets of leafy greens in brilliant hues. ‘Bright Lights’ Swiss chard, ‘Redbor’ kale and ‘Lollo Rossa’ lettuce are all outstanding varieties. Culinary herbs and cool-season annuals like violas, dianthus, snapdragons, pansies, stock and alyssum add color and fragrance to the garden. Look for colorful varieties of broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage to set out as transplants this month, along with Asian vegetables like pac choi and mizuna in shades of purple and green. Beets, turnips, collards, spinach, kohlrabi and radishes can be planted from seed this month. And if you’d like to have eye-catching specimens such as artichoke, cardoon or rhubarb in your spring garden, now is the time to establish transplants in your garden.

Harvest eggplant and pepper plants frequently to keep them in production. Sweet potatoes are usually ready for harvest this month and should be dug to make room for cool-season plants. Handle them carefully; they may seem like big, tough tubers but they bruise easily so avoid dropping or tossing them. Damage can make them susceptible to disease and rot. Cure them in a warm, dry, shady spot for about a week before storing. Be on the lookout for orange and black harlequin bugs and their egg cases and dispatch them before they have a chance to multiply.

October should bring that break we have all been waiting for, with cooler temperatures, less intense sun, and hopefully rain, rain, and more rain. However, if rainfall is sparse and water restrictions continue to limit us to just one day a week consider concentrating your vegetables to a smaller area or planting in containers to make it easier to keep up with watering demands by hand. A good source for gardening supplies is Brite Ideas Hydroponics.

Above: Beautiful ‘Red Ace’ purple cabbage (top)
Now is the time to transplant rhubarb in your garden for spring harvests. (bottom)
Left: Eye-catching artichoke needs to be transplanted into the garden now for spring harvests.
Photos by Bruce Leander.
located at 4201 South Congress, Unit 310 (512-444-2100). They offer a variety of potting soils, grow bags, containers, seeds and soil amendments and they sell to Master Gardeners at 25% over wholesale cost. Check them out and let them know we appreciate the discount.

If the grueling summer has zapped your gardening spirit completely, there’s nothing wrong with taking a seasonal break from the vegetable garden. The heat and drought has also burned up the organic matter and microbial life in the soil, and now is a great time to breathe some new life into the garden by incorporating compost or planting a cover crop to renew tired soil.

Cover crops should not be overlooked for the backyard gardener. They prevent soil erosion, reduce soil compaction, suppress weeds, are an excellent way to add green manure to a garden bed and are cheaper than hauling in a load of compost. Suitable cover crops for fall planting include winter rye, crimson clover and hairy vetch. Rye and vetch make a complementary combination. Or try fava beans. They are the winter equivalent of cowpeas — they will grow all winter, provide a crop and enrich the soil. They also fix nitrogen in the soil for subsequent crops, so think ahead and plant them in an area where you might plant corn or tomatoes in spring.

Seeds for cover crops are usually available at local nurseries or farm supply stores or can be ordered from Johnny’s (www.johnnyseeds.com) or High Mowing Seeds (www.highmowingseeds.com). Seed these crops any time over the next month and let them grow for 6 to 8 weeks, mowing or cutting them down with a string trimmer 2 or 3 times during the winter. Use the cut foliage as mulch for other plants, or leave it in place on top of the soil to gradually decompose, digging it into the soil in early spring. Cut one last time
2-4 weeks before spring planting, leaving the roots to decompose in the soil. Your future vegetable plants will thank you!

Clockwise from top left: ‘Lollo Rossa’ Lettuce, a newly planted grow box in mid-October, the same grow box just 5 weeks later ready for harvesting, harlequin bug adult, harlequin bug eggs
Photos by Bruce Leander.
Gardening In Austin Is Not For Sissies
by Becky Waak

Now that our climate has turned desert-like, what are we to do? Yes, I am grieving for my garden, as most of you are. I've lost a great many plants. I have to admit, however, most were plants I purchased because they were pretty or had a special leaf or form, not because they were drought tolerant.

I wanted to share with you some ideas that have worked for me and for some of my gardening buddies about how to make your garden more drought and heat tolerant. Hopefully you will find some ideas for reworking those areas that didn't survive very well this past summer. As the old garden adage goes, a dead plant means an opportunity for shopping for something new. I'll begin with the traditional landscape plan and then share with you some ideas for super, super tough plants for next year’s garden.

My front yard is an example of using drought-tolerant plants. A couple of years ago one of our more violent storms took out my large oaks. We replaced them with a Monterey oak and a bur oak, knowing it would take 10 years to receive any real shade. Faced with lots of sun, I knew the St Augustine grass had to go. We also have lots of deer, so the plants had to be deer-resistant too. I stripped out most of the grass and replaced it with large meandering beds filled with plants right out of the Grow Green guide — lantanas, salvias and sages, Mexican feather grass, soft leaf yucca, artemisia, skullcap, copper canyon daisy, purple heart, rosemary, mountain laurel, loropetalum, woolly stemodia and dwarf yaupon. I added two apple trees as a lark and had an abundance of apples, even this year. I watered every couple of weeks and deeply soaked the new trees when I realized they were getting stressed. I mulched over the fallen leaves in the spring and again last month. In late September, everything now is beginning to bloom and recover. So, the conclusion is, if you want a drought-tolerant garden that blooms in the spring and again in the fall, follow the recommendations in the native and adapted guide. I can testify that it really works.

If you want some ideas about super, super tough plants that thrived and even bloomed this summer, the following plants might be added to your planting list for this fall. In my back yard I have flame acanthus and turk's cap in an area that has an inch of soil on solid rock and no water. In a normal year they are somewhat aggressive, but this year not only were they well behaved, but they bloomed all summer. Other tried and true bloomers in areas of low irrigation are indigofera, esparanza, plumbago, coral bells, bulbine, and bottlebrush. I think my succulents would have done well, but I have a cottontail rabbit that keeps them nibbled to the nub. My roses performed well in the spring, but my 'Martha Gonzales' rose actually bloomed off and on all summer.

My gardening blogger pals gave me some ideas from their gardens that I am going to try and wanted to share (I removed the duplicates from my list).

Randy Case gave me his list of tough plants: Lindheimer senna, Cuban buttercup, candlestick senna, Gomphrena 'Fireworks', flame leaf sumac, pavonia, abutilon, Mexican bird of paradise and santolina.
lists of super tough plants will give you some ideas about refreshing your garden for next year.

Caroline Homer had several of the above plants, but added crystals grass, Thryallis, butterfly vine and almond verbena. (Note, my almond verbena stopped blooming.) She says she is going to plant Caesalpinia pulcherrima, santolina and Scutellaria suffrutescens this fall.

Lisa LaPaso said her coral bean and datura bloomed all summer without water.

Eleanor Pratt included several from the above list and says her Artemesia ‘Powis Castle’, four-nerve daisy, orange cosmos, shrimp plant and spiderwort all bloomed.

Robin Mayfield says her gomphrena and nolina appears to be indestructible.

Pam Penick touts her ‘Senorita Rosalita’ cleome as being bushy and blooming, but it gets half-day shade and some irrigation.

And this list from a garden blogger whose super tough plants thrived without any supplemental watering in full sun with 4” of soil over caliche included: turk's cap, white mist flower, pride of Barbados, pomegranate, rosemary, bicolored iris, mountain laurel, feathery cassia, cenizo, evergreen sumac, possumhaw holly, shrimp plant, Mexican honeysuckle, abelia, Mexican oregano, native Texas passionvine, lantana, Russian sage, cherry sage and Barbados cherry. I think we can use this as an inspiration.

Thanks so much for all the contributions of these gardeners. I think it’s a rich reward that gardeners are willing to share their experiences and knowledge. Maybe these

Plant Exchange Scheduled for October Meeting

Ok, who has plants left? Good. Now who lost everything? Well, this plant exchange is for all of you!

Our theme for this October plant exchange is “Plants That Made It!”

Please bring your favorite hardy plants to exchange. We are discouraging invasives, but if it’s really a favorite, please label it appropriately. Also, please make sure the plants are in good condition and are properly labeled or be ready to talk about it.

No muddy messes allowed!

In addition, bring those extras seeds, cuttings, garden magazines and pots that you’d like to share with other Master Gardeners.

We’ll also need help setting up and cleaning up. Please volunteer if you can.
Bug-Friendly Backyard
by Wizzie Brown

Because of the drought, people are discussing how animals are searching for water. This has brought many creatures into backyards that might not previously have ventured to that location. While most talk I have heard has focused on furry critters, insects and their relatives also require water to survive and are often drawn towards or even into homes during a period of drought.

While you may not be jazzed about the idea of sharing your home with insects or spiders, your backyard is a perfect place to welcome many of these creatures. Insects are a crucial part to food webs and many insects can provide an added benefit to your yard by helping to manage pests. The following are some tips for your backyard to help insects and their relatives:

- Be willing to have some plant damage. Many insects are herbivores and will eat your plants, so damage is to be expected if you want insects around.

- Choose pest management methods that use reduced-impact or no pesticides. When making pesticide choices, make them wisely. Think first about if there might be a way to manage pests without pesticides (vacuuming, row cover, etc.). If pesticides are necessary, choose a product that will target small groups of pests instead of broad-spectrum pesticides. Please note that broad-spectrum pesticides can be synthetic (man-made) or naturally derived (sometimes referred to as “organic”).

- Do NOT use bug zappers. Studies have found that bug zappers kill more beneficial insects than pests.

- Provide basking areas such as a small rock. Insects need to “warm up” before they can get moving, so providing areas that they can spread their wings or just hang out for a bit will help them get moving in the morning.

- Provide a water source. Make water shallow or fill a shallow dish with small
pebbles or sand so the insects do not drown. Locate water sources near flowering plants.

- Provide sheltered areas and wind breaks. Leaf litter and debris on the ground can provide great overwintering sites for insects while shrubs can help provide wind breaks for insects to rest.

- Provide a variety of nectar sources. Use a variety of colors, flower shape and blooming periods when choosing plants.

- Leave some patches of bare ground for ground nesting insects & mud daubers.

There are numerous boxes that can be purchased for the garden — ladybug houses, butterfly houses, lacewing chambers and mason bee boxes. I would encourage mason bee boxes that when constructed properly and hung in the right location are used by mason bees who are native pollinators. As for the rest, I’m sure that something will use it, but it might not be the intended critter. If you want to buy/construct the boxes to encourage wildlife in the backyard in a more general sense, I say go for it!

Mason bee boxes can be either purchased or constructed easily. Mason bees prefer holes that are slightly larger than their body, so about \( \frac{1}{4}-\frac{3}{8} \) of an inch in diameter. Boxes can be made by drilling holes into a 4” x 4” block of wood or by using sections of bamboo. There are numerous locations online that you can find instructions to make a mason bee box. Boxes should be placed about 3-5 feet off the ground, so it is sheltered from rain and wind and so it gets morning sunlight.
Coming Events

**Winter Gardening**

*Saturday, October 1, 2011,*
*10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.*

Festival Beach Community Garden,
35 Waller Street
Austin, Texas 78702

Learn about garden vegetables which only thrive in the cool temperature of the fall and winter. General gardening principles and guidelines for protecting plants from usually cool temps will be discussed. This event is outdoors. Please bring a chair.

For more information, contact the Master Gardeners Help Line at (512) 854-9600. This free seminar is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. www.tcmastergardeners.org

**Southwest Bromeliad Guild Show & Sale**

*Saturday & Sunday, October 1-2, 2011,*

**Show Saturday** 1 p.m. - 5 p.m.
**Plant Sale Saturday** 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
**Show & Sale Sunday** at 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Crowne Plaza Hotel Central
6121 North IH-35, (I-35 & Hwy 290)
Austin, Texas 78752

Hosted by the Bromeliad Society of Austin. Over 1,000 bromeliads for sale! Vendors include Michael’s Bromeliads and Eloise Beach, from Florida, Miller Tropicals from Dripping Springs (formerly of Miami) will have bromeliads for sale as well as great cedar posts/stumps/limbs for mounting. Brian Windham from New Orleans will have 100 of the latest and greatest Dyckias to sell. Plus many members will have great plants for sale too.

This is an excellent chance to see, observe and buy many unique and unusual bromeliads not commonly ever seen in Austin. Come enjoy the great plants, lots of fun, friendly people and info about growing and propagating bromeliads! We hope to see you at the Guild Show & Sale!

For information contact Steve at drsteve104@aol.com.

**All About Spiders**

*Friday, October 7, 2011,*
*10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.*

Travis County Extension Office
1600-B Smith Road,
Austin, Texas 78721

Join Wizzie Brown, Texas AgriLife Extension Service Extenion Program Specialist -IPM for a class on spiders.

This seminar is free and open to Master Gardeners. It is presented by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. For more information call Travis County Texas AgriLife Extension Service at (512) 854-9600.
**Bio-Intensive Gardening**

*Saturday, October 8, 2011, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.*

Blackshear Neighborhood Garden, 2011 East 9th Street
Austin, Texas 78702

Learn techniques to optimize planting to maximize yield in a small garden space. Good garden practices also covered. This is an outside event.

This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. For more information see www.tcmastergardeners.org or call the Master Gardener Help Desk at (512) 854-9600.

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**Central Texas Trees and Oak Wilt (FAQ)**

*Saturday, October 22, 2011, 2:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.*

Old Quarry Oaks Public Library
7051 Village Center Drive,
Austin, Texas 78731

Join us to learn all about how to do right by your trees. Learn what varieties to select for your Central Texas landscape and gain a higher level of success by choosing those that enjoy our native soils and tough climate. Learn how to care for and prune your tree for long-term health and during times of stress such as construction or drought. Master Gardener Jerry Naiser will share his expertise on all things trees!

This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. For more information see www.tcmastergardeners.org or call the Master Gardener Help Desk at (512) 854-9600.

Top: Can you see the dragon? Hint - his eyes are Echeveria. He greets visitors to the Rose Garden at the Niagara Parks Botanical Gardens and School of Horticulture. Designed and maintained by horticulture students celebrating the 75th anniversary of their school's founding in 1936.

Photo by Anne Van Nest.
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Visit the websites: www.tcmastergardeners.org and  
http://travis-tx.tamu.edu

The End...

Time for a rain dance!