Psycho Lighting
with
Linda Lehmusvirta

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Psycho Lighting

Psycho lighting in the garden is not about having dedicated sun or shade plant beds. Psycho lighting describes that awkward situation where a single garden bed has blasting sun for a few hours of the day and bright light or even the extreme situation of deep shade for the rest of the day. In this common environment, plants that are full-sun lovers languish while semi-shady fans scream for mercy.

How do you connect your garden design with the plants that can handle such madness? You can connect everything in a cohesive design by using similar colors, textures and structures and through using different plants. Or you can create a cohesive design by using yard art or containers that tie the spaces together with the same or accenting colors. Linda Lehmusvirta will show us how to deal with the psycho lighting situations in our garden.

Linda Lehmusvirta is the producer, writer and editor of KLRU-TV's Central Texas Gardener. How she got to Central Texas Gardener is a fluke. She started as a production manager and producer at KLRU, including being a production manager for Austin City Limits. While doing this she spent her free time writing gardening stories and salvaging a yard of weeds, while dealing with unsuitable plants, deep clay cracks, and fire ants. With little money, but lots of hard work, she created an organic wildlife haven.

Since she often got tapped to work on many new projects or ideas, one that came her way was a monthly garden TV program at KLRU. Its success led to it becoming a weekly program, now broadcast on PBS stations throughout the country, and online to the world.

Every week, her goal on the show is to spare new gardeners her mistakes and help them achieve waterwise, organic, and wildlife-friendly gardens. She relies on local experts, including Daphne Richards and the Travis County Master Gardeners, along with viewer emails, to guide program content to what matters right here, right now.

Linda has also produced the documentaries, Backyard Butterflies and Backyard Bugs, along with the recent Wildflowers|Seeds of History, which all continue to air nationally on PBS.

Backyard Butterflies was inspired by viewers wanting to know how to attract butterflies and identify their caterpillars in their garden. Backyard Bugs was triggered when Linda saw a fish kill on the San Antonio River Walk where thousands of fish were gasping for air and dying. A Park Ranger told her that it happened after every rain when
pesticides and fertilizers from gardens leached into the water. When she got home, she wrote for a grant to produce Backyard Bugs to help spread a be friends to wildlife message. Since then, Linda has worked to educate gardeners about our impact on the earth and effects on living creatures.

Her latest documentary, Wildflowers|Seeds of History explains wildflower heritage, connectivity to our essential world, and how seeds operate in good years and bad years.

For six years or so, Linda was the volunteer publicist for Zilker Botanical Garden. She also assists The Garden Conservancy and Mayfield Park during its Trowel and Error spring symposium.

Linda has received two writing awards from the Garden Writers Association. Central Texas Gardener has received several Lone Star Emmy awards. Her garden stories have been published in Garden Design, Organic Gardening, Neil Sperry, Austin Home & Living, Texas Home & Living, the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center’s magazine, and the Austin American-Statesman.

But Linda says the best reward comes every day from viewers who email and say, “Thank you. You helped us out so much. You made a difference.”

Contact information:

Central Texas Gardener online at www.klru.org/ctg
CTG’s blog at www.klru.org/ctg
Facebook (Come like! And comment) www.facebook.com/Central-TexasGardener
Twitter: @LindaCTG
Wildflowers|Seeds of History: www.klru.org/wildflowers
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Master Gardener Meeting information:

Wednesday, November 2nd, 2011 starting at 7:00 pm.
Zilker Botanical Garden
Hello Master Gardeners:
A Message From Your President

Autumn is upon us:
the changing colors,
the shorter days,
the brisk chill in the air.

A flannel shirt is a welcome addition to combat the early morning and late afternoon temperatures of late. Yes, we all welcome this season with open arms. My mums, salvias, sages and Mexican mint marigolds are all open and giving me blooms that make walking through the garden delightful! The chard, lettuce and spinach are sharing their bounty with us and make for some good fall eating. I’m making a frittata with sausage, mushrooms and my own fresh chard this evening for dinner.

Something this country is starting to embrace and that touches my heart is the movement to teach our young children where their food comes from and how to grow and harvest a garden. When I first read several years ago about Alice Waters’ crusade to connect the food on our plates with where it comes from and to teach the younger generation about this, I realized just how many people don’t make this connection and how much is needed to be taught.

Yesterday I had a delightful meeting with a lady from Whole Foods Market who told me about what they are attempting to achieve in schools. They are offering to bring salad bar equipment (cost-free) into schools in order to provide more salads as an option for our school children to eat at lunch. This is a simple, straightforward program to give children the opportunity to eat healthier food.

This is a part of a great movement that we, as gardeners and teachers, are helping promote each time we share our gardening knowledge with others.

November is the month to give thanks for our many blessings. Although our area has had much devastation in the way of drought and fires, I still give thanks that none of you lost your home or your life. I give thanks that I am blessed with so many lovely spirited gardening friends who give so freely to others. I am thankful that our Master Gardener association is strong in community spirit. I came across this quote recently from Henry David Thoreau, “I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself, than be crowded on a velvet cushion.”

And so, I am going outside to sit on my pumpkin and look over the garden. I hope you are able to enjoy the season in a likewise matter!

Happy fall gardening,
Carolyn Williams

Top and right: Callie the calico cat is a perfect complement on this fall-themed porch. Photo by Carolyn Williams.
Now I know why man invented the pickaxe... so that women could use it to break up the ground of their vegetable gardens after months of extreme drought conditions and severe water restrictions!

I have used a variety of tools in my garden over the years — shovel, digging fork, sharpshooter, Mantis tiller, four-tine cultivator, hoe and a Garden Weasel, and after the summer of 2011 nothing did the job of loosening the parched soil as well as a pickaxe with a little body weight and leverage behind it.

Fortunately I only had to "pick" two fallow raised beds that had received minimal care (and zero supplemental water) during the summer. In an effort to coax these beds back to life I took advantage of the 2 inches of rain we had in early October and continued to deeply hand-water the parched soil over the course of a week. I then added a layer of homemade compost and planted a green manure crop (a mixture of hairy vetch and cereal rye) to invigorate the lifeless soil over the winter. When spring arrives, these beds will be ready to sustain a fresh planting of vegetable seeds or transplants.

One silver lining about the extreme heat of the summer is that it probably helped eliminate nematodes, which need moist soil conditions to survive. Early in the summer I covered sections of my garden with clear plastic to solarize the soil. Nematodes had been a problem in these areas for a couple of years, but I’m pretty sure that with the constant 100+ degree days they fried underneath the clear plastic. Sweet.

This is the first fall in a long, long time that I did not plant a second season of warm weather crops. It was just too darn dry and hot during August and September. The okra, eggplant, peppers and cowpeas which I had planted last spring had adapted quite well to the summer temperatures and the once-a-week watering regimen, so I thought it best to leave well enough alone. And then the daytime temperatures dropped below 100 degrees, the nights cooled off, we had a sprinkling of rain, and practically overnight everything perked up, including my gardening spirit. And so I planted. I know it was late to be planting beans and cucumbers and squash on September 29th, but I couldn’t help myself. What good is faith if you don’t test it every once and a while? And then it rained again in October — almost 2 inches! My moonflowers were so ecstatic I swear they stayed open all day and all night for days after the rain.

Left: The severe drought of 2011 left parched soil that required a pickaxe and muscle power to loosen.
Right: Of all the soil loosening tools, for the toughest situations, the pickaxe is the best solution.
Photos by Bruce Leander.
In The Vegetable Garden

So fall has arrived and who knows what the weather will bring. Maybe our first freeze won’t come until late December this year. Maybe I’ll have fresh beans and squash for Thanksgiving after all. And if it doesn’t work out that way one thing I will have is plant material for the compost heap, so it’s a win:win situation no matter what kind of weather lies ahead.

November is a good time to plant spinach and other greens like collards, mustard, lettuce and Swiss chard. These are also excellent specimens for container or “square foot” gardening sites. Feed fall vegetables with monthly applications of granular fertilizer that is high in nitrogen to support healthy growth and development.

If you still have tomatoes on the vine be sure to harvest them if a cold snap is predicted this month. If they are hard and green you might want to use them for salsa or fried green tomatoes, but if they have a hint of pink on them they should ripen nicely indoors. Wrap them in tissue paper or newspaper, being careful not to bruise them, and store them in a cool, dark spot indoors. Check frequently for ripeness and discard any that show signs of decay.

Left Top: Moonflowers, Ipomoea alba, a night-blooming morning glory often stay open during the day if overcast and cloudy.
Left Bottom: November is planting time for a winter crop of spinach, either as transplants or from seed. Photos by Bruce Leander.
Gut Check Time for Central Texas Landscapes

by Bob Beyer

Biting the bullet and endorsing a need for change is a tough thing for a gardener, or any other person in a situation where traditional and favored ways aren’t working anymore. As gardeners how far will we go before we are convinced that change is the best alternative? Will the dead St. Augustine lawns, or dying shrubs, trees and garden perennials be enough evidence to make us change? Will water restrictions and fruitless efforts to save our favorite non-drought adaptable plants be enough?

This is Central Texas and we have been taught a lesson this past summer that should hit upon many gardeners’ and homeowners’ nerves. Ninety days of 100+ temperatures, a 23 inch shortfall of rain over the past year, lake reservoir water levels that have dropped at least 50 feet below capacity, severe water rationing, and dire predictions of even more drought have provided overwhelming evidence that our landscapes must change in order to survive.

I have reached a turning point and have committed to make a change. Have you? This fall, all water thirsty (and now dead) St. Augustine grass will be removed and replaced with a combination of Buffalo grass and hardwood mulch with native shrubs and perennials blended in. I have thought about the changes a lot and come up with a plan and design for re-designing my front yard — all on a limited budget. It will mean my wife and I will be doing most of the work ourselves with some contracted help for the tasks that are beyond our capability, such as the drought-dead grass removal. This dead grass will be added to our compost pile. Overall we are looking at this process, not as a negative but as a very positive experience in several ways.

We have been studying, researching, and learning about native and adaptive plants over many years but now here is an opportunity (and compelling reason) to creatively design a natural and visually appealing landscape using these tough and enduring plants. We have taken a systematic approach to planning our new front yard and have defined which areas will be turfed with Buffalo grass vs. mulch covering. We have identified microclimatic environmental factors affecting plant choice, defined plants by type, height and desired characteristics (with the help of the wonderful City of Austin Grow Green book), and finally defined materials needed to implement the plan. In any DIY project, tasks must be planned appropriately within higher to lower priority work and grouped into manageable sizes. Before we broke ground, we had to break pencil leads first and document our plan thoroughly. We drove around to view and take pictures of what others have done to see what we liked and disliked. This helped in our conceptualization of the project.

Some of the other benefits of redoing the garden are that we won’t have to spend money on lawn care or have to mow our lawn in the heat of summer. Our lawnmower will become a surplus item. We will save money on our water bills and know we are helping our environment. The up-front effort and hard work will pay off many times in years to come.
Facing changing realities and taking proactive steps to get ahead of the game is beneficial. In 2001, we foresaw gas prices skyrocketing and fuel shortages lingering in the future, so we converted to a hybrid vehicle which we still drive 10 years later. Today we see climate warming proving to be a reality and are thinking a decade down the road and are planning and implementing a landscape that will meet this future challenge. Waiting for a crisis to hit before acting will be much more painful than taking preventive measures today.

Let me share some ideas that might be helpful for others contemplating redesigning their gardens. If you have a spreadsheet software like Excel, making your row heights equal to a column width and you have created graph paper, with each square being 1 square foot. A good area diagram can be computer- or hand-drawn (in pencil with a good eraser). For planning purposes first define what’s there, what will remain, and what will be added or changed. Start with defining the turf or groundcover before considering the plant alternatives. When choosing new plants, always base your decision on the maximum growth size, although initial plantings will be considerably smaller. Consider the placement of non-living objects that can be used to accent the landscape. Consider the number of hours of sun vs. shade are present or if shade-casting trees are nearby. Consider the house architecture and general theme of the existing landscape plantings when selecting new plants or hard materials, so everything is compatible with each other.

Finally, on a positive thought, our southwest environment in Central Texas is unique, like no other place in the country. Let’s embrace that and see the beauty in a dry climate landscape that folks in other parts of the country can’t have. The days of lush green lawns in Central Texas never really existed and definitely are not part of today’s reality, so use your creative imagination, design skills, and this opportunity to create something new and enduring, and reduce your gardening stress level by embracing xeriphytic landscaping and gardening. Xeriphytic does not mean desert-looking — it means water saving, so you can still have green and colorful landscapes that say “welcome to Central Texas.”

This has been a very painful and distressing summer for most of us, but fall is the time to make the changes we need to do to ensure that our yards and gardens will survive and thrive during the predicted continued long-term drought for Austin. Enjoy the cooler weather to prepare your landscape and garden for next summer.

Photos by Bob Beyer.
Used with permission from the Gardening In Central Texas blog www.centraltexashgardening.wordpress.com
Mealybugs

by Wizzie Brown

Mealybugs are a type of unarmored scale insect. They are sexually dimorphic (meaning males and females look different). Males have wings while females remain wingless and “nymph-like” throughout their life. The females are oval, soft-bodied and covered with a white waxy powder.

Mealybugs are pests of ornamental crops both outdoors as well as indoors in greenhouses or on houseplants. They are often active during times of warm, dry weather. Infestations usually start at the base of stems and then spread from there as populations increase.

Mealybugs have piercing-sucking mouthparts which they use to penetrate plant tissue and suck out juices. This can lead to chlorosis (yellowing of the plant), wilting and distortion. With larger infestations, these insects may cause stunted growth, premature leaf drop or death of the plant.

Mealybugs are also known for secreting honeydew, a sweet, sticky substance on which a fungus called sooty mold may grow.

Sooty mold is a fungus that grows on honeydew excretions. Sooty mold can indirectly harm the plant by covering leaves and plant surfaces and reducing the amount of sunlight that reaches plant tissues, resulting in a reduction of photosynthesis. Since all but the male mealybugs are wingless, adult females have to be placed near a host plant for them to infest it. They can only crawl short distances to infest plants. Immatures though can be blown to new locations by the wind, move with water or be transported by animals.

Tips for mealybug management:

• Conserve beneficial insects; there are many insects that will feed on mealybugs or parasitize them.
• Use high pressure water sprays to dislodge the insects from the plant.
• Wipe infested areas with a cottonball dipped in rubbing alcohol (may want to dilute alcohol solution 25-50%).
• Use insecticidal soap.
• Use horticultural oils.
• Use unisecticides labeled for mealybug control.
• For severely infested plants, it may be best to throw the plant away and buy a new one.
American Beautyberry

By Anne Van Nest

American Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) is a native Texas shrub that dazzles in the late summer and early fall with clusters of intense magenta or fuchsia colored fruit encircling the stems. The botanical name, *Callicarpa* literally means “beautiful fruit.”

This no-fuss shrub does well in central Texas gardens under part sun to full shade conditions. It even flourishes with little moisture and a rich, organic soil, but can tolerate some drought.

In late spring and sporadically through the summer, pale pink/lavender blooms attract plenty of bees and butterflies with their nectar and pollen. Later in the fall, birds (especially the mockingbirds) and squirrels love the fruit.

American Beautyberry can grow to about 8 feet if given plentiful moisture and organic soil. This is can be a bit tall (and gangly) during the summer. It is best grown as a background shrub or planted among other evergreen shrubs so that the bare branches will be hidden in the winter after the leaves fall.

Prune it by half (or more) late in winter, if desired, to reduce the height and keep it compact. Don’t prune it too late in the spring as the flowering and fruiting occurs on new growth and would be lost. American Beautyberry is a quick grower and the stems, laden in full leaf and fruit, might be damaged by high winds or heavy rain.

Propagation is relatively easy with semi-hardwood cuttings taken in late summer. Alternately, harvest the seed in fall once it achieves a brilliant, intense violet color (and before the birds move in). Remove fleshy outer coating by pureeing small batches in the blender with water. Dry well before storing. This shrub often self-seeds if soil conditions are suitable.

Many Southerners use the berries to make a delicious jelly. Fruit can be eaten raw but don’t have much flavor. Apparently the fruit makes good beautyberry pancakes. The roots, leaves and branches were used by native American tribes to treat malarial fevers and rheumatism. They also used the boiled roots to treat dizziness and stomachaches. The roots and berries were boiled and used to treat colic.

American Beautyberry is native to the Southeast United States from Texas to Florida and north to Virginia. It is hardy to at least zone 5 and tolerates the heat from central to eastern Texas.

American Beautyberry is mostly pest-free and has been scientifically proven to be a natural insect repellent (containing callicarpenal, intermedeol and spathulenol) with effectiveness against mosquitoes and ticks. The traditional folk remedy, known mainly among Mississippi’s hill country people for at least a century, is to take crushed American Beautyberry leaves and rub them on the skin to repel mosquitoes, ticks and ants. A very useful tip!

The foliage is a listed as being a favorite and repellant of deer. The plant is tolerant of fire and re-sprouts easily.
Fruits and Berries — Planning, Pruning & Care

Saturday, November 5, 2011, 10:00 am - Noon

Deep Eddy Community Garden,
300 ½ Atlanta Dr., Austin, Texas 78703

Want to grow your own apples, peaches, and berries? Learn varieties which excel in this area. Discover how large the hole for planting should be and if amendments are required. Basic pruning techniques and general fruit and berry care included in talk.

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

Note New Entrance Fees:

Starting October 31, 2011, Zilker Botanical Garden will charge entrance fees for visitors coming into the garden.

They are as follows:

- $2.00 — adults
- $1.00 — seniors 62 and older
- $1.00 — children, ages 3 - 12

Children under 3 are free.

This does NOT apply to anyone attending either an organizational meeting, such as our monthly Master Gardener meetings OR an educational event. Please make sure you let the person collecting fees know this, if you are attending for these reasons.

If you are visiting Zilker Botanical Garden for pleasure to see the gardens, MGs are responsible for the admission fees as stated above.
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The End...

Time to get out in the garden!