Don’t Miss the Annual TCMGA Holiday Party
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December Annual Holiday Party

Wednesday, December 7th, 2011
Starting at 7:00 pm.
Zilker Botanical Garden

Drinks as well as meat and cheese will be provided for festive sandwich making.
Bring a side dish or dessert to share.
RSVP to Lisa Graybill (lisagraybill at yahoo.com). MG guests welcome.
Please try to carpool. Additional parking will be available in Zilker Park across from
the Botanical Garden.
Hello Master Gardeners:
A Message From Your President

’Tis December and the eve of the end of my presidential term and I have to say it has been extremely rewarding. A report here, a meeting there, and somehow two years have flown by — filled with community events and Master Gardener friends.

As with any organization, the President is just one of many who lead the group toward common goals. All the Executive Board (both in 2010 and 2011) have been outstanding partners, who come together each month to make sure we all moved forward in the right direction. I could not ask for any better group of men and women — who all love this association and give so freely of their expertise, their time, and their energy. Each hill they faced was climbed, each hurdle was crossed and each problem was solved. You are the best team!

For those who chaired events, who answered a volunteer request, who took an idea and made it happen . . . you are the wheels we all rely upon. For those of you who volunteer, each month or each week, answering the phone desk, responding to email queries, working in the greenhouse, advising at plant clinics, keeping the demo garden thriving, contributing to publications, doing public speaking, etc. etc. . . . you are too many to personally mention, but THANK YOU all!

Being President means you get to see the whole Travis County Master Gardener picture — the whole scope of everything that is achieved each year. What we do is no small feat. For this, it was my pleasure to serve and represent you all, both in our Travis County community and statewide. We have a wonderful organization of which I am most pleased to be part of and continue to be thrilled both with what we have achieved during the last two years and with what is planned for the upcoming years.

Thanks also to both Skip Richter and Daphne Richards, our Horticultural Agents, who have both guided and worked alongside us for so many years.

What a pleasure it is to be associated with such a community spirited group that gives so freely to others in the Austin area. In the upcoming year we can look forward to yet again more exciting volunteering events such as the Zilker Garden Festival, East Austin Garden Festival, and our 2012 MG Garden Tour. These events are great incentives to spend the winter months reading and researching to enhance your gardening knowledge. Why not plan on attending a few of our MG educational talks and presentations too. Many TMG specialist training is also available and well worth investigating. It is so rewarding to learn and be able to pass it forward!

As for me, as I write this, two new roses are on their way from The Antique Rose Emporium to find a new home in my garden. It is always fun when you enjoy what you are doing to look forward to what is coming around the gardening bend.

I love gardening with my dog, Ruby and cats, Callie and Big Bud and I love gardening with all of you! But, all good things come to an end and this will be my last President’s message. So, I close by wishing you all good health, good friends and, with best wishes....

Happy gardening to all and to all a good night!
Carolyn Williams,
TCMGA President 2010 - 2011
December brings a pleasant lull in the vegetable garden as winter weather arrives and activity above and below ground slows to a more leisurely pace. Established cool weather crops get along quite well without much fuss, but there are many chores to do in preparation for the spring season: cleaning out the shed or garage, caring for tools, purchasing seeds and supplies, and planning the layout for the spring garden. If you have an area of lawn that bit the dust in the drought consider converting it to a garden for edible landscaping. The lasagna method, using layers of newspaper, compost and organic mulch is an easy and inexpensive way to get this area ready for planting. It smothers weeds and grass while enriching the soil below. If you start now the area will be ready for planting in February or March. For more specifics on this technique consult the book *Lasagna Gardening* by Patricia Lanza.

Dixondale Farms ([www.dixondalefarms.com](http://www.dixondalefarms.com)) is a great mail-order source for onion transplants, which are usually planted in mid-January. ‘Candy’ is a very popular intermediate-day variety that can be grown quite successfully in Central Texas, and ‘Yellow Granex’, ‘1015Y’ and ‘Bermuda’ are short-day varieties that are highly recommended and proven performers. Two cherry tomatoes that I can recommend are ‘BHN-968’ and ‘Black Cherry,’ both available from Johnny’s Seeds ([www.johnnyseeds.com](http://www.johnnyseeds.com)). ‘BHN-968’ is a flavorful and highly productive determinate variety that boasts resistance to nematodes and ‘Black Cherry’ is a vigorous indeterminate type that yields an abundant harvest of round cherries that are both sweet and tart and bursting with delicious flavor.
If you still have cool weather crops growing keep an ear to the weather forecast and cover plants if a hard frost threatens. Spinach, lettuce, collards and other hardy greens can take the cold even into the upper twenties, but they will suffer minimal damage if given a little protection from the harshest conditions.

In mid-November, my husband Bruce and I enjoyed a flurry of activity happening during a Saturday morning visit to the tidy and well organized Children’s Vegetable Garden at the San Antonio Botanical Garden. This 16-week gardening program, supported by AgriLife Extension and the Bexar County Master Gardeners, provides each child with their own 3 x 30 foot plot, along with tools, plants, a plan and a section “coach” to guide them through the season. The children range from ages 8-13 and I talked to several of them as they watered, weeded and harvested their impressive plots. Their enthusiasm was palpable and I enjoyed the conversation as they shared their gardening proficiency.

Though Bexar County Horticulture Agent David Rodriguez was quick to give credit for the success of the program to the kids, the MGs, the JMG coordinators, the parents and other supporters, it was obvious that he and wife Gina have put a lot of heart and a lot of time into the program as well. And it’s wonderful to know that MGs here in Austin and in communities across Texas are sharing similar hands-on gardening opportunities with scores of children, teaching respect for farming, agriculture, conservation and environmental stewardship along the way.

Kudos to all you school garden and Junior Master Gardener volunteers out there! And thanks to Bruce who busily snapped photographs as I chatted my way up and down the rows!

Happy Christmas to all and may your 2012 gardening season be merry and bright and certainly filled with more rain than this past year!
Christmas. In the plants and materials category are useful items such as compost, soil or worms. Yes, imagine a box full of red wrigglers (wigglers) under the tree this Christmas. Wahoo! The red worms are for vermicomposting projects where worms use food scraps to produce valuable worm castings. Large compost piles may even stay warm enough during the winter for these worms to survive. Good gardening soil or a load of well-rotted manure are additional practical gifts that will keep on giving for many years to come. Other practical gifts are little-care roses that bloom the entire year. A fun gift would be to give an understanding gardener a garden gnome (St. Fiacre, the patron saint of gardeners is a more serious alternative).

One suggestion for an inspiring Christmas idea that gives more than it receives would be for gardeners to start horticultural therapy programs in their community. The benefits of gardening are numerous, how about sharing your passion? Mentally and physically, the garden is a nurturing and healing sanctuary.

Many gardeners want to improve by learning more (and to cultivate their design talent and plant combination creativity too). A gift certificate of a course from an institution that has an extensive listing of gardening or wildflower courses may be the perfect gift.

New garden features also appear on the gardeners’ wish list. A new pond, arbour to grow beautiful roses or a larger patio to do more entertaining might make great presents.

Christmas is partly about dreaming of the perfect gift. This might include having a garden that looks like it should be in a magazine. Another dream is for months of suitable gardening weather. So
wish for good soil and a winter full of showers and warm sunshine this Christmas to bring out more blooms next year.

With a little fun using a traditional Christmas song, here’s what might be good gift ideas for a gardener.

On the twelfth day of Christmas,
my true love sent to me:
twelve bags o’ mulching,
eleven packets’ seeding,
ten roses blooming,
nine grasses rustling,
eight birds a singing,
seven shrubs for pruning,
six helpers planting,
five golden bulbs,
four garden books,
three digging tools,
two long hoses,
and a stainless steel garden spade.

To all gardeners, may your plants be green and growing, wallet full and overflowing, mind dreaming of plants blooming and everyone doing enjoying more time gardening.

Best wishes to all!
Brown Marmorated Stink Bugs
by Wizzie Brown

Brown marmorated stink bugs recently were identified in Texas (Corpus Christi area). These insects are a new pest to Texas and relatively new to the United States. They are a true bug with piercing-sucking mouthparts and they have a large list of plants that they may feed upon including numerous ornamentals, vegetables and fruits.

Brown marmorated stink bugs are shield-shaped, about 5/8 inch and mottled brown in color. The last two antennal segments have alternating light and dark bands. The edges of the abdomen, which are exposed from above, also have alternating light and dark bands.

These stink bugs emerge from their overwintering sites in the spring and begin to feed on plants. The females lay clusters of pale green barrel-shaped eggs on the underside of leaves. Nymphs, or immatures, are reddish-yellow with black markings. As nymphs get older, they more closely resemble the adults but do not have fully developed wings.

These bugs also caught the media’s attention in 2010 when they were seen in very high numbers in the mid-Atlantic states. Not only can these bugs be a nuisance pest and move into homes when temperatures drop, but they also attack many high value crops.

Brown marmorated stink bugs usually cause small necrotic areas by feeding on plant tissue, but they may also cause stippling, seed loss or transmit diseases. Damage to fruit can be scarring, pitting, catfacing and sometimes changing the texture to be more mealy or grainy.

In backyard situations, stink bugs can be hand-picked from plants (wear leather gloves) and dunked into a bucket of hot, soapy water. It may also be possible to vacuum stink bug populations from plants or other surfaces.
Brown Marmorated Stink Bugs

To keep stink bugs out of the home follow these ideas:

- Install weather stripping around loose fitting doors and windows (if you can see daylight around a door during the day then the weather stripping should be replaced).
- Block weep holes in homes with a brick or stone facade with steel wool or copper mesh (use copper on light colors since steel wool will rust if it gets wet).
- Use caulk or expanding foam to fill in cracks and crevices on the outside of the home and around pipe and wire penetrations.
- Keep window screens in good repair.
- Use stainless steel mesh wire to block access points in the attic (vents, etc.).

This article is also to inspire you to participate in some citizen science and keep a close eye out for brown marmorated stink bugs in the Central Texas area. If you suspect that you have seen brown marmorated stink bugs in the Austin area, please send samples for confirmation to Wizzie Brown at the Travis County Extension Office, 1600-B Smith Road Austin, TX 78721.
Flowers of the Season

Upper Left: *Schlumbergera truncata* (Buckleyi group)
Upper Right: ‘Bristol Queen’ Christmas cactus (*Schlumbergera Reginae Group*).
Lower Right: The Christmas seasonal display in the main conservatory at Longwood Gardens, Kennett Square, Pennsylvania.
Photos from www.wikipedia.com by Jan Mehlich (Lower Left) and Nino Barbieri (Upper Right). Photo by Anne Van Nest (Lower Right).
Upcoming Meeting

Coming Next Month...

Our speaker for the January 4, 2012 TCMGA meeting is Travis County Extension Agent Daphne Richards, who will speak on “Strengthening the Master Gardener Program in Travis County: Goals for 2012.” Daphne has been the Travis County Extension Agent — Horticulture since May, 2009.

A native Central Texan (Lorena), Daphne has first-hand experience from living a lot of Texas locations. After earning a B.A. degree in botany from the University of Texas at Austin, she moved to South Texas to teach high school biology. After two years teaching ninth graders in La Joya, TX, she moved to College Station to acquire a Master of Science degree in Horticulture from Texas A&M. Upon graduation she traveled around Europe before returning to apply for a job with the Extension Service. She applied for positions in New Mexico and Utah, but, El Paso called her to the desert and a nine year role in the El Paso County Extension Office. As the El Paso County Extension Agent, Daphne built the Master Gardener program from 35 volunteers to over 100, and increased hours-volunteered from under 1,000 to over 12,000. In El Paso the Master Gardeners had very large xeriscape and vegetable demonstration gardens at the local TAMU research station, gave monthly educational presentations, and had an informational booth/farm stand at the local farmer’s market each week.

TCMGA Master Gardeners and Daphne will have an opportunity to get to know each other better at an informal reception following the presentation.
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The End…
Time to celebrate the garden!