March 2013

The Compost Bin

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

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Wizzy Brown
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Cover Photo by: Bruce Leander
The fruit and blossoms of eggplant are pretty enough to be used in an ornamental garden.

Right: Cabbage butterfly
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

### March Meeting Speaker — Wizzy Brown

**Spring Insects: How to Encourage the Good Ones, Discourage the Bad Ones, and How to tell the Difference**

Wizzie Brown, Extension Program Specialist with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is our speaker for the Wednesday, March 6, 2013 TCMGA meeting. Her topic is the timely: “Spring Insects: How to Encourage the Good Ones, Discourage the Bad Ones, and How to tell the Difference.” Wizzie has a long history with Travis County AgriLife Extension, has helped master gardeners answer Help Desk questions numerous times, and regularly updates her “Urban IPM” blog. So, join us March 6th to learn more about what’s bugging your plants!

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, Mar 6, 2013 starting at 7 pm
Zilker Botanical Garden

Master Gardener meetings are open to certified Master Gardeners and trainees.
March has arrived and spring vegetable gardening begins in earnest this month. If you haven’t prepared your soil, bought seeds or purchased tomato transplants, you better kick it into high gear! Though the chance of cold weather lingers, the air temperature has been mild, and the soil temperature has been hovering around 60°; just warm enough to support germination of green beans, cucumbers and squash seeds. These plants take about 60 days to reach harvest size, and with a hot and dry summer looming, our window for gardening pleasure – and the opportunity for healthy, vigorous plant growth – is narrow. It’s a bit of a gamble to plant early. If we win, we’ll be enjoying fresh vegetables sooner, but if tender plants succumb to a late freeze, we’ll have to replant. If you’re not the gambling type, then it’s best to watch the long-term forecast and wait until the chance of freezing weather has passed; generally by around March 12 it is safe to plant. Tomato transplants can go in any time now, but be sure to protect them from the wind and cold by wrapping the cages with row cover or plastic (a plastic garbage bag makes a convenient wrapper). Give transplants a boost by mixing a small amount of organic fertilizer into the planting hole and watering them in with a dilute mixture of liquid fertilizer.

Growing vertical with cucumbers, pole beans or tomatoes makes the most of valuable space, no matter how big or small your garden is.

Southern peas, butterbeans, okra, peppers and eggplant really prefer consistently warm weather so it’s best to wait and plant them a little later in the month.

Maximize planting area and yields by incorporating wide rows and fewer paths in your garden which allows more plants to fit in the allotted space. If you are growing in raised beds or a square foot garden, look for plants with a smaller footprint, such as dwarf or determinate tomatoes, bush cucumbers or pole beans. Peppers are good candidates for small space gardens, and if grown in tight quarters, most varieties will stay in bounds. Eggplant is pretty enough to be an ornamental vegetable with its dainty purple flowers and striking fruit in hues of lavender or purple; ‘Fairy Tale’, ‘Hansel’ and ‘Little Fingers’ produce stocky, compact plants that would be happy in a square foot garden, or tucked into a flower bed or container. Even okra doesn’t have to be a space hog; ‘Lee’, ‘Millionaire’ and ‘Annie Oakley’ are space-saving varieties that top out at around 4 feet.
The mild days of March are conducive to weed growth, so keep a hoe handy, and cut down weeds before they have a chance to set seed (add them to the compost pile). Mulching too early will keep the soil from warming up, so it’s best to postpone that task until later in the month.

Immediately after transplanting wrap tomato plants with row cover to protect from the elements, especially harsh winds. Close the top if temperatures drop below 40 degrees and wrap the row cover in plastic if a late freeze should come our way. Be sure that plastic does not touch the leaves.

‘Hansel’ is a compact eggplant that is suitable for containers and small gardens. The ideal companion for ‘Hansel’ is ‘Gretel’, a miniature, solid white eggplant. Both are All America Selection winners and produce small, tender fruit no bigger than 3-4” inches in length.

Photos: Bruce Leander
Attracting Butterflies
by Wizzy Brown

Attracting butterflies to your garden can be a fun thing to brighten the yard. If you choose to invite butterflies in, be aware that it may lead to plant damage. When attracting butterflies, it is important to plant items for various life stages. The caterpillar stage can cause damage to plants by feeding on foliage. Don’t mistakenly treat damaged plants and destroy your butterfly population.

Adults feed on nectar, so utilize plants that provide a variety of color as well as providing blooms throughout the seasons. Larvae eat foliage, but some are very particular about what plants they will eat. Try grouping the same plant to allow butterflies to find them more easily. You can find some ideas of plants you can use at the bottom of the article.

There are also non-plant additions you can make to your garden to help butterflies. Provide open areas to allow butterflies to bask in the sun. Shaded or protected areas can allow them protection from the elements. Using a shallow dish filled with pebbles or sand to hold water allows butterflies to drink without the problem of drowning.

Be careful about using pesticides around your butterfly garden. Remember, butterflies are insects and can be killed by many common insecticides that are used to manage insect pests, including many natural or “organic” pesticides. Also, be aware of pesticide drift that may occur when applying pesticide to other areas of your yard.

Gulf fritillary butterflies
Gulf fritillary caterpillar
Some larvae feed only on particular plants. The following is a list to help you with your plant selection:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Butterfly</th>
<th>Plant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monarch butterfly</td>
<td>milkweed, butterfly weed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen butterfly</td>
<td>milkweed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viceroy</td>
<td>cottonwood, poplar, willow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black swallowtail</td>
<td>parsley, dill, fennel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spicebush swallowtail</td>
<td>spicebush, sweet bay, sassafras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pipevine swallowtail</td>
<td>Dutchman’s pipevine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giant swallowtail</td>
<td>citrus, Hercules club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazilian skipper</td>
<td>canna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brush-footed butterflies</td>
<td>nettles, thistles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairstreak butterflies</td>
<td>pecans, walnuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf fritillary</td>
<td>passionflower vines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giant purple hairstreak</td>
<td>mistletoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray hairstreak</td>
<td>legumes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question mark</td>
<td>hackberry, elm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas crescent</td>
<td>shrimp plant, Dicliptera, Ruellia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painted lady</td>
<td>hollyhock, thistles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckeye</td>
<td>plantain, snapdragon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attracting Butterflies

Continued...
**Attracting Butterflies**

Adult butterflies need a source of nectar in the garden. The following is a list of plants they might like:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plant name</th>
<th>Flower color</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aster</td>
<td>lavender, pink, purple, white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blazing star</td>
<td>lavender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butterfly bush</td>
<td>lavender, purple, white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butterfly weed</td>
<td>orange, yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cone flower</td>
<td>fuchsia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flame bush</td>
<td>red-orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldenrod</td>
<td>yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregg’s mist flower</td>
<td>blue-purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ironweed</td>
<td>pink, purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lantana</td>
<td>combinations, lavender, orange, pink, white, yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loosestrife</td>
<td>lavender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican heather</td>
<td>lavender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican milkweed</td>
<td>red-orange, yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican mint marigold</td>
<td>yellow-orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mist flower</td>
<td>blue, white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phlox</td>
<td>pink, purple, red, white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvia</td>
<td>blue, lavender, pink, red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunflower</td>
<td>yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbena</td>
<td>blue, lavender, pink, purple, red, white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinnia</td>
<td>orange, pink, red, white</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can find more complete plant listings from on the Austin Butterfly Forum’s website: [http://www.austinbutterflies.org/gardening](http://www.austinbutterflies.org/gardening)

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at [www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com](http://www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com)
**Understanding Soil and Soil Amendments**

**Thursday, Mar 14**  
**10am - 12pm**

Travis County AgriLife Extension Office  
1600 B Smith Rd.  
Austin TX

Get to know your soil so you can improve its ability to retain moisture and improve plant growth. Your soil may be blocking vital elements your plants need to grow. Ascertain how and when to add missing elements to improve plant health and production. Learn the type of soil on your property and its corresponding strengths and weakness. (Bring a cup of your soil in a plastic bag and a glass jar with lid.) Discover changes you can make to improve the soil structure and water storage capacity. Organic matter, cover crops, soil microorganism and mulching will be discussed.

This class is part of The Green Thumb series.
Registration required at [https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu](https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu) or by phone 979-845-2604. Keyword Search: Green Thumb. One class is $15, with price discounts for signing up for 3 or more classes at the same time. Class is limited to 40 people.

**Gardening in a Drought**

**Saturday, Mar 23**  
**9am - 4pm**

New Braunfels Convention Center  
375 South Castell Ave  
New Braunfels, TX

Central Texas is still in the midst of one of the most severe droughts on record. This seminar investigates the phenomenon and how it affects the urban (and suburban) landscape. It presents constructive suggestions for the homeowner to implement in order to maintain their landscape while minimizing the impact of that landscape on the water supply. Come join us for a day of lectures and demonstrations. We even include lunch so that you don’t miss any of the exciting discussion.

Presented by the Comal Master Gardener Association.  
Space is limited.  
Registration Fee of $49 includes a sack lunch  
**6 CEUs for Certified Master Gardeners**  
For Registration information go to  
Website: [http://comalmastergardeners.org/seminar](http://comalmastergardeners.org/seminar)  
E-mail: [seminar@comalmastergardeners.org](mailto:seminar@comalmastergardeners.org)  
Telephone: 830-620-3440

Care of Ornamental Trees

Saturday, Mar 30
9am-1pm

Austin Community College, South Campus, rm 1130
1820 W Stassney Ln.
Austin TX

Oak wilt, one of the most destructive tree diseases in the United States, is killing oak trees in central Texas at epidemic proportions. Dr. David Appel, professor in the Department of Plant Pathology at Texas A&M, will teach which trees are affected by oak wilt, how to identify the disease, how it is spread, and how it can be managed. We will discuss preventative measures that can help you avoid this devastating disease.

Please register at https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu or by phone 979-845-2604. Keyword Search: Trees
Class fee is $25 (water and snacks provided). Free parking available. Sign-in at the security desk with your vehicle license number. This class is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County.
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**Webmaster:**
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**The Compost Bin Submissions**

We are always looking for Master Gardeners who are interested in writing for our monthly newsletter, and we would love to see your articles, photographs, book reviews and gardening ideas.

**General Guidelines**

- Please first email the editor to discuss potential article ideas.
- Email contributions as attachments (preferably in Word with a .doc or .rtf suffix).
- Please send images as separate attachments (preferably .jpg suffix). Don’t forget to include photographer acknowledgments and captions.

Send your submissions, announcements, questions and suggestions to: editor.compostbin@gmail.com

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He who hopes for spring with upturned eye never sees so small a thing as Draba. He who despairs of spring with downcast eye steps on it, unknowing. He who searches for spring with his knees in the mud finds it, in abundance.

--Aldo Leopold