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**Shade Tolerant and Drought Tolerant Perennials**

Reeve Hobbie will share his award-winning presentations on shade-tolerant perennials and drought-tolerant perennials. We’re blessed with over 200 sunny days in Austin, so we usually think sun, sun, sun in our landscapes. Many people have at least a little pocket of shade, so it will be a treat to hear Reeve talk about best bets for both the sun and shade.

Reeve Hobbie was born and raised in New Jersey where he began gardening in his early teens and has been doing so ever since. After college and spending two years in England and three years in Minnesota, he and his family moved to northwest Austin where they have lived for the past 30 years. When he retired from the 3M Company six years ago, he pursued and received his Master Gardener certification. He particularly enjoys perennial gardening with daylilies and bearded iris—among his favorites. His newest challenge is shade gardening, having moved into a new home with a backyard woods in the summer of 2012.

Reeve’s TCMGA presentations have received recognition from the Texas Master Gardeners Association two years in a row: second place for graphics in 2011 for "Month-to-Month Gardening" and first place for graphics in 2012 for his modular program on “Perennials” (the latter recognized at the recent state convention).

**Master Gardener Meeting information:**

Thursday, January 9, 2013 starting at 7 pm

Zilker Botanical Garden

Master Gardener meetings are open to certified Master Gardeners and trainees.
In the Vegetable Garden
by Patty Leander

In a nod to the ubiquitous cell phone, and the trend of sharing one’s life in pictures, The Oxford Dictionary’s Word of the Year for 2013 was “selfie”. But there’s another word that has crept into our vocabulary that may have more relevance to gardeners: “blandscaping”. What image does that one word bring to mind; a cookie cutter landscape, a rectangle of grass? Uniformly trimmed hedges lined up in a single row? I bet it doesn’t make you think of a vegetable garden! A vegetable garden is vibrant, dynamic and engaging. It is full of sights, sounds and creatures and best of all an edible harvest!
If your landscaping has become a little too bland, try incorporating a few edibles or a small vegetable garden this year. Be sure to include crops that grow well in central Texas, and start with vegetables your family likes to eat. Broccoli, sugar snap peas, radishes, lettuce and spinach can all be planted in January.

If you are a beginning gardener, here are five common pitfalls to avoid:

**STARTING TOO BIG**
Vegetables are living things; they may not need as much time as a pet, but they do require regular attention. A garden that is too big means plants will not receive the care that is required to bring them to fruition.

**PLANTING IN SHADE**
Vegetables growing in the Texas heat may appreciate a little dappled shade at the height of summer, but vegetables growing in the cool season need lots of sunlight to counter the cloudy and chilly days in early spring.

**PLANTING AT THE WRONG TIME**
Consult a planting calendar for your area, or ask an experienced gardener about planting dates. When planting in the cool season months, use a soil thermometer to monitor temperature before planting. Different vegetables thrive at different temperatures, and most cool season plants will do best when the soil temperature is in the 40-50° degree range.

**PLANTING TOO CLOSE**
Give your plants plenty of growing room so they don’t have to compete for nutrients and water. Follow spacing recommendations for transplants, and if sowing from seed, be sure to thin to the proper spacing after seeds have germinated.

**IGNORING PLANTS**
Create a checklist, or purchase a gardening to-do guide, and stick to it. Allow time for weeding, watering, fertilizing, inspecting and grooming plants. Remove diseased leaves; keep an eye out for harmful insects, and hand-pick or spray to keep populations in check.
In the Vegetable Garden

Remember, for most gardeners, growing vegetables is an enjoyable and productive hobby ...but when all else fails, visit your local farmers market for a healthy dose of locally grown produce.

GARDEN CHECKLIST FOR JANUARY

- Cut down asparagus foliage before new shoots begin to emerge. The foliage can be placed on top of the bed as mulch, and then later added to the compost.

- Plant onion transplants mid-month. The ideal transplants are pencil thin; the thicker ones with a swollen bulb are more likely to bolt in the spring. To avoid this dilemma, plant the larger seedlings in a separate area, and harvest them as green onions as needed throughout the spring. “Short Day” onions are recommended for areas with mild winters and hot summers. These varieties will initiate bulbing when there are only 10-12 hours of daylight, and can be harvested before the intense summer heat arrives.

- If you are looking for something new, give these All-America Selections winners a try: ‘Mama Mia Giallo’ pepper, ‘Fantastico’ tomato, ‘Chef’s Choice Orange’ tomato and ‘Mascotte’ French filet green beans (all are available from www.parkseed.com). All varieties are hybrids, and have shown superior performance and/or taste when trialed in test gardens across the U.S.

- Plant tomato seeds in potting soil, cover with a dome or plastic wrap to maintain a humid environment and place in a warm area. After they germinate, remove the cover and move them to a very, very, very, very bright window ...or even better, place them under grow lights.

- A full list of recommended varieties and planting dates can be found on the Central Texas Horticulture website sponsored by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension – Travis County: http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/travis/home-landscape/edible-gardens/growing-vegetables/
In the Vegetable Garden

Remove cover from seed tray as soon as seeds sprout to decrease risk of fungal diseases.

Larger onion transplants that are starting to swell are often prone to bolting. It’s a good idea to plant them in a separate bed and harvest at the immature green onion stage.
Invasive Ladybugs
by Wizzie Brown

Ladybugs are considered beneficial insects by many people, but when you have them invading your home by the thousands, you may change your mind.

A particular ladybug, the Asian ladybird beetle, can cause problems when they mass by the thousands on the side of homes looking for overwintering sites that can lead them indoors. When indoors, they can stain walls and fabrics, bite and leave a stinky smell.

Adults are oval in shape and about ¼ of an inch long. Color can vary from red to tan with some having spots, but others without. Most adults also have an “M” shape behind the head. Eggs are yellow and laid in clusters, usually on the underside of leaves. Larvae have elongated bodies that are black and orange.

During spring and summer, these insects are beneficial when they are in the landscape feeding on aphids. In late autumn, when temperatures cool down, they begin to search for overwintering locations. This overwintering search can often lead them into homes and other structures.

Flights tend to be heavy during the afternoon on sunny days that follow a cold period. The beetles tend to gather on areas that are warmed by the afternoon sun - unshaded southwest sides of structures. They seem to be drawn to areas with contrasting colors, such as dark shutters on a light house.

Once the beetles land on the structure, they will search for cracks, crevices and other sheltered areas to spend the winter. This often will lead them to areas around doors and windows, fascia boards, soffit areas, etc., as well as sometimes moving indoors.

While the beetles are mainly a nuisance, they can cause some problems by being indoors. Some people can develop allergies, and the beetles can stain surfaces with the fluid they release when startled. The beetles may sometimes bite, which can feel like a pinching sensation on the skin.

Some people recommend using a vacuum cleaner to suck the beetles up and remove them from the structure. While this can certainly work, you may want to have a vacuum specifically for this purpose, as it can begin to smell from the fluid the beetles secrete. Exclusion on the outside of the structure will play a big part in keeping the beetles outside. Seal all cracks and crevices with sealant; larger holes can be sealed with expanding foam. Make sure that weather stripping around doors and windows is in good repair (if you can see daylight around the door when it is closed, bugs can get in!). Check screens for holes, and repair or replace as needed.

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
A few weeks ago I ran across some funny advice in a book I was reading. A young girl had gotten a sword, and she asked her older brother how to use it. "Poke with the sharp end," he told her. This is extremely basic advice, of course, but nonetheless clear and true.

I am guided by something similar when it comes to houseplants: "Cut off the brown." When a leaf's been damaged, I don't wait until it's screaming for the coup de grace. I go ahead and cut it off. It's never going to look better, after all. And sometimes that's all it needs, just a trimming off of the dead stuff. Spent blossoms, sunburned tips, off they go. Of course if there are lots of leaves looking sad and awful, I check for problems with the plant. Has it been getting enough light? Too much water? Are there bugs on it? I look at it closely, and try to remember what I've done to it, not just yesterday, but for awhile. Plants don't always change fast, as we all know. And sometimes what's been wrong is already fixed; it's just a matter of cleaning up the damage that was done - cutting off the brown.

There's actually another reason for taking the time to groom a plant like that. It's what your mind and eye do when you look at a plant. If almost all the leaves are green and healthy, but two of them are brown, your eye only sees those brown leaves. It's how our brain works—we look for patterns, even when we're not aware of it. Those brown or yellow leaves are what your mind notices. It's why we notice one single flower on a plant. Just as it doesn't take many blooms to get a great sense of color, it doesn't take much distress for it to register in your mind. Of course cutting them off helps the plant too, but the whole plant simply looks better.

The plant looks better; I enjoy looking at it more. After all, isn't that really one of the main reasons we have houseplants?
Announcements and Events

Volunteer with Zilker Docents

Christa McAuliffe said “I touch the future, I teach.” The Docents of Zilker Botanical Garden have a wonderful opportunity to touch the future with every school tour. We got some insight into what the kids are learning from us when a group of first and second graders sent these thank you notes.

I learned that trees can help people and that some flowers don’t need lots of water.
I learned that you saw dinosaur prints And I learned that you saw a dinosaur.
I learned some roses don’t smell some do smell.
I learned about a root beer plant.
I learned there is such a thing as a lamb ear plant.
I learned in the old days they blacksmithed.
I learned that a plant smells like lime.
I learned how to read Japanese.
I saw a snake and turtles.
I learned there are many kinds of plants.
I learned a cowboy walked over the same bridge about 100 years ago.
I learned that bamboo can grow to 100 feet tall and the names of trees.
I learned that a 70 year old man built the garden.

Now it’s YOUR turn to see snakes and turtles, with kids who think you’re as old as a dinosaur! Master Gardeners are an integral part of the Zilker Docent program and earn hours that count toward our annual volunteer commitment.

Join us for the next docent training in the Garden Center auditorium on January 25 at 10:00. Weather permitting, we’ll go on a tour of the garden. If the weather is bad, we’ll stay inside and train via powerpoint. ZBG is a large garden with a lot of teaching opportunities, but the script is easy to learn. There will be several more learning tours in February.

For more information, contact Marion Alsop at 512-970-3405 or zilkerdocents@aol.com

Worm Composting

Saturday, Jan 11
10am-Noon

Zilker Botanical Gardens
2220 Barton Springs Rd
Austin TX

The lowly worm is one of your soil’s best friends! Learn how worm composting can help recycle kitchen and paper waste in your home, providing you with castings and ‘tea’ to boost garden productivity. Patrick Van Haren, owner of Microbial Earth, will detail the value and management of earthworms.

This class is presented by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County.
The Compost Bin January 2014

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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

“So that’s my wish for you, and all of us, and my wish for myself. Make New Mistakes. Make glorious, amazing mistakes. Make mistakes nobody’s ever made before. Don’t freeze, don’t stop, don’t worry that it isn’t good enough, or it isn’t perfect, whatever it is: art, or love, or work or family or life. Whatever it is you’re scared of doing, Do it. Make your mistakes, next year and forever.” - Neil Gaiman