In this issue ...

In the Vegetable Garden
Carpenter Ants
How To: Compost Screener
Traveling Gardenista
Meet the Master Gardeners
The Compost Bin May 2014

Inside this Issue....

• Meeting, May 7 ..... Page 2
• In the Vegetable Garden ..... Page 3
• Carpenter Ants ..... Page 6
• How To: Compost Screener ..... Page 7
• Traveling Gardenista ..... Page 9
• Meet the Master Gardeners ..... Page 10
• Austin Area Events ..... Page 12
• 2014 TCMGA Board ..... Page 14
• Credits ..... Page 15

May Meeting - Ed Parken

How to Plan & Construct a Rainwater Harvesting System

After a good drenching rain, one could easily get lulled into thinking the dreaded drought is a thing of the past. Unfortunately, this most unwelcome visitor is not ready to leave Texas any time soon. We all have to make the most of our rainwater—and many people in our community are exploring ways to do this. If you want to get prepared for questions that homeowners/gardeners may have about Rainwater Harvesting, or if you’re considering installing a system at your home, you’ll want to attend this very informative session.

Ed Parken has been a Master Gardener since 2003 and became a Rainwater Harvesting specialist in 2011. He is a retired businessman and mechanical engineer with BS and MS degrees from Ohio State University – Go Buckeyes (aka Aesculus glabra)!

Ed has been involved in the planning and construction of a number of rainwater harvesting systems, including two systems at Zilker Botanical Garden. He is currently serving on the Austin Area Garden Council and Zilker Botanical Garden Horticulture Committee.

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, May 7, 2014 starting at 7 pm
Zilker Botanical Garden

Master Gardener meetings are open to certified Master Gardeners and trainees.

Cover Photo: check for new potatoes a few weeks after plants start blooming
by: Bruce Leander
Right: by Liath Appleton
By now, the spring vegetable garden should be well established and growing strong, which is good, since May can be a busy month with Mother’s Day, graduations, weddings and showers – the wet kind, and the bride kind. Historically May is our wettest month, averaging just over 4 inches. We’ve fared pretty well the last couple of years, at or above average, but who knows what 2014 will bring? Most vegetables need ½-1 inch of water a week in the early stages of growth, so keep track of the rainfall your garden gets, and irrigate to make up any difference. Consistent soil moisture is preferable for all vegetable plants, but it is especially important to meet your vegetable plants’ water needs during flowering and pollination, and during fruit set and development. Try to avoid drastic fluctuations in soil moisture, and cut back on irrigation slightly as plants reach maturity - too much water at this stage can reduce the sugar content of plants such as tomatoes and melons, and can negatively affect flavor. When it comes to watering, if you can keep your tomatoes happy, the rest of your vegetables will be happy too.

Here is the vegetable gardener’s checklist for May:

- Plant heat-lovers like sweet potato, Malabar spinach, okra or Southern peas such as black-eye, purple hull or crowder peas. Yard long beans, a tasty cousin of the Southern pea, is fun to grow, good to eat, and can take the heat of a Central Texas summer.
- Potatoes planted in February should be large and vigorous by now. Check the base of the plants for new potatoes a few weeks after flowering – if they are big enough to eat carefully, harvest a few individual tubers without disturbing the plant. The remaining tubers will continue to grow in size and can be harvested in late May or early June when the tops begin to yellow.
- It is normal for large leaves of squash to wilt during the heat of the afternoon. If they don’t recover by the next morning, check for squash vine borer damage at the base of the plant or along the stems. If the damage is not severe, slit the stem to remove the borer then bury the stem and hope that it recovers.
- Harvest onions when the tops begin to fall over, which usually happens near the end of this month. Pull up the plants and spread them out to cure in a dry, shady spot for about a week. After curing, cut the tops off and store the onions to use as needed.
- Weed your garden regularly. Weeds divert water and nutrients from your vegetables, resulting in decreased yields. They are easier to pull or hoe when they are young, and all that green matter can be added to the compost pile.
- Avoid sprinkling plants from above – this is not an efficient way to get water to the roots where it is needed. If you must water by hand, do it slowly and deliberately, and avoid wetting the foliage.
In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...

Late May harvest of Russian Banana fingerling potatoes that were planted in February.

It’s normal for large squash leaves to wilt in the heat of the day as long as they perk up by the next morning.
In the Vegetable Garden

Note the proper spacing of these black-eyed peas; planting them on the perimeter of a raised bed allows easier access.

Lay onions out in a warm, shady location to cure.

Photos: Bruce Leander
Carpenter Ants
by Wizzie Brown

Carpenter ants nest outdoors in dead wood (tree stumps or dead limbs, fences, firewood, etc.). They can also be found in wood siding, beams, joists, fascia boards or trim on structures. Damage is usually limited, since carpenter ants tunnel and nest within wood; they do not eat wood. However, wood can become weakened by carpenter ant excavation.

Carpenter ants are large ants that can vary in color from all black to reddish to yellowish, or a combination of colors. These ants have one node, no stinger, and a circle of hairs at the tip of their abdomen.

Galleries in the nest are excavated following the grain of the wood, and have clean, smooth walls. Nest locations may be discovered by searching for piles of sawdust-looking material under exit holes. Sawdust is coarse and may also contain soil or sand and uneaten insects, as well as dead ants from the colony.

Carpenter ants have mating flights, or swarms, to begin new colonies. After mating, males die while females find a suitable nesting site. Females then lay 15-20 eggs which develop into worker ants in about two months. The queen cares for the first batch of brood and feeds them secretions from her body. Once the brood has emerged as adult workers, they take over care of the colony, expand the nest, provide food for the queen, and care for new brood.

Carpenter ants are able to enter homes from tree branches or utility lines touching the home, through cracks and crevices around windows and doors, cracks in foundation walls, ventilation openings or heating and air conditioning ducts.

**Here are some tips for a carpenter ant infestation:**

- Remove dead trees and/or limbs, and remove tree stumps from the landscape. Many times you can remove the (possible) nesting sites and get rid of the ants without using pesticides.
- Prune trees and shrubs that touch the home. Carpenter ants will often use these areas as a bridge to enter the home.
- Replace wood that is water damaged. Carpenter ants are drawn to moisture damaged wood, so make sure to repair any water leaks and replace damaged wood.
- Remove wood debris and firewood that is near the home. Carpenter ants may nest in firewood, and when it is stacked right next to the home, it allows the ants to enter more easily.

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)
Make-it-yourself Compost Screener

by Jean Love El Harim

Nothing is better for the garden than compost from your own backyard, but homemade compost generally needs to be sifted before it goes into the garden beds. Hardware cloth nailed to a wooden frame can be unwieldy, slide off the container, and leave you with scratched arms and torn gloves from the sharp wire ends. Here is a practical, inexpensive way to make a light, smooth-edged compost sifter, no carpentry tools or skills required.

**Materials needed:**
- an 18- or 30-gallon plastic bin with a snap-on lid.
- another lid, the same size
- wire cutters
- a piece of hardware cloth, cut to the size of the lids. Use 1/4” hardware cloth if your compost is dry and well aged, or 1/2” if your compost is wet and you don’t mind that the end product will be slightly coarser.
- 8” long zip ties, 8 for an 18-gallon bin, and 10 for a 30-gallon bin
- a sharp kitchen knife with a pointed tip

**How to make the screener lid:**
- Cut out the top of both lids, inside the ridge around the rim.
- With the lids together, at one corner, using the pointed kitchen knife, twist and turn the knife to carve two smooth holes about one and a half inches apart, down through both lids.
- Continue making pairs of holes at each corner and at the ends and sides of the lids. Make two pairs of holes for the long sides if you have a 30-gallon bin.
- Sandwich the hardware cloth between the two lids.
- For each pair of holes, thread a zip tie up through one hole and down through the other, and zip the two lids together as if you were sewing a button on a shirt.
- Cut off the extra tails of the zip ties.

Enjoy!
Snap the screener lid onto the bin and shovel compost onto the top of the screen. Now you can sit down on an upturned bucket and bring the bin within comfortable reach as you screen the compost. When the bin is full, you can snap off the lid and empty the bin or snap the screener lid onto another bin of the same size, and start again.
Make-it-yourself Compost Screener

Top left: wire mesh cut to the size of the lid
Top right: the two lids and the mesh zip-tied together
Bottom: finished compost screener
The Traveling Gardenista
by Heidi Roure

Casa Velas Botanic Garden, Puerto Vallarta, Mexico

In celebration of my mother’s birthday, we took a trip north of Puerto Vallarta. Imagine a mother-daughter trip full of laughter, long conversations, and healthy doses of fresh guacamole and mango margaritas. Then imagine one where both mother and daughter are master gardeners enjoying a stay at the boutique hotel Casa Velas with its very own tropical and organic herb gardens.

Blessed with an average 322 days of sunshine and tropical breezes, it seems everything grows at this special place. The entire property is one giant botanical garden. From the flowering bougainvillea draped over balconies to the towering palms more than four stories high, the gardens of Casa Velas welcome you to a botanical paradise. Simply strolling the paths makes you feel worlds away as you discover koi ponds topped with colorful lilies, and wandering peacocks taking cover beneath fifteen foot-high hibiscus. What stands out most is the special organic garden which contributes to the daily source of herbs, fruits and vegetables for the chefs and spa. Guests are welcome to explore the garden, and my mother and I made sure to experience it. There, you see rows of mint, basil, and cilantro, as well as dill, thyme and rosemary. Fruit trees, aloe and agave make their home in this lovingly tended garden too. Upon arrival, we were served fresh hibiscus tea. Our mornings included fresh baked sweet rolls served with local melons and papaya. Afternoons always included fresh guacamole made from hand-picked avocados and margaritas made with Mexican mangos. Dinners surprised us with the deliciousness and simplicity of herb-seasoned dishes. This mother-daughter trip was a celebration of a life and a celebration of living local.
Meet the Master Gardeners: Rosalie Russell, class of 2004
by Jean Love El Harim & Martha King

Rosalie has been gardening since she was a child growing up on a farm in Iowa. She was in 4-H, and one of her projects was gardening. "We had a big vegetable garden," she says, "to feed our family of six kids and two adults." She got married in Iowa, and moved to Oregon where she studied at Oregon State University, earning a degree in Home Economics Education. She and her husband moved to Princeton, New Jersey, where she lived and taught for two years in the late 1960s, and then to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where she began a 34-year career in real estate, which she continued in Houston. As an office manager, she "developed skills in advertising, tracking, budgeting, handling people, and solving problems" - skills she puts to good use today as a Travis County Master Gardener.

When she was working, she had very little time for a garden. "I worked part time," she teases, "from 8:00 in the morning until 8:00 in the evening, and sometimes 10:00." Now she lives in South Central Austin, next door to her daughter and her family, and spends her days working in the garden or on TCMG projects. When she first came to Austin, she was very active in the Newcomer's Club. She also took a pottery class, but says she didn't like it as much as she thought she would. She used to do a lot of kayaking, and still hikes a lot. She "enjoys being outdoors." Every time she has moved, she has had to adapt to different kinds of plants in a different climate and accept the fact that "you can't plant on Houston time in Austin." In fact, her favorite gardening tip is, "Try to do what they always say: put the right plant in the right place."

She has a vegetable garden, but like TCMG vegetable gardening expert Patty Leander, Rosalie is "sick and tired of the squash vine borer." She enjoys landscaping her garden and changing the way it looks, "trying to get it to look like it does in the pictures." She would like to have "a clipped, manicured garden with straight lines" and will be planting Berkley Sedge and Twist-leaf Yucca in the rectangular garden beds she is building in her front yard. Paradoxically, her favorite plant is Sugar-Snap Peas. "I ate some from the garden just a little while ago," she says with an appreciative nod of the head.

"This is what people say about me," Rosalie responds when asked about her unique talents, "that I have the ability to organize. And I make killer desserts." A quirky fact about this lithe, 5'2" slip of a lady is that she was an all-conference basketball guard in high school. "I was fast and sneaky," she confides.
Meet the Master Gardeners

Putting her energy and organizational skills to work for TCMG, Rosalie serves on the steering committees for the Demonstration Garden and the Inside Austin Gardens Tour. As TCMG Vice President for Projects, she is the one who sends us Sign-Up Genius invitations to recruit volunteers for all the various projects. Rosalie is a frequent sight at many TCMG activities, helping out whenever she has time and if there is a need.

The one question that had Rosalie stumped was about her favorite MG activity. “Hmm,” is her answer, after a moment of thought, “Don’t know that I have a favorite.” What she likes most about the TCMG program is “the people. They are smart, willing, and dependable.”
INSIDE
AUSTIN GARDENS
TOUR

Gardens Eclectic
Saturday, May 3rd, 2014
9:00 am-4:00pm

Tickets available at each garden & online
$15 for all gardens - $5 per garden
Demo garden free – 16 & younger Free

InsideAustinGardens.org
Maintaining a Healthy Lawn

Thursday, May 1
10:00 am – noon

Travis County East Service Center
6011 Blue Bluff Rd, Austin TX

As the heat of summer arrives, your garden will need more water to continue to produce those beautiful flowers and delicious homegrown veggies we all appreciate. Reduce the amount of wasted water in your garden this year with irrigation targeted for your plants’ specific needs. Learn how to install an effective water-wise drip irrigation system from Joe Posern, current president of the Travis County Master Gardeners Association. Joe will describe the key factors involved in a system and how to gauge and monitor its efficiency.

Part of the Texas AgriLife Extension Water Conservation Series
Register at https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/TravisCounty or by phone 979-845-2604
Click Here for Directions to Blue Bluff

Inside Austin Gardens Tour: “Gardens Eclectic ATX”

Saturday, May 3
9:30am - 4pm

Austin Area Gardens

Tickets for the tour are $15 - at the gardens (individual garden tours - $5 at each garden. There is no admission charge for age 16 and under.

Details at http://www.insideaustingardens.org/

Butterfly Forum Workshop

Saturday, May 3
10am - 4pm

Zilker Botanical Gardens
2220 Barton Springs Rd
Austin TX

Details at www.austinbutterflies.org

Austin Bonsai Society Show and Sale

Saturday & Sunday, May 17 & 18
10am - 5pm

Zilker Botanical Gardens
2220 Barton Springs Rd
Austin TX

Details at www.austinbonsaisociety.com

Austin Daylily Society Show

Saturday, May 24
1 - 4pm

Zilker Botanical Gardens
2220 Barton Springs Rd
Austin TX

Details at www.austindaylily.org
TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

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The Compost Bin May 2014

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Liath Appleton

**Webmaster:**
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**The Compost Bin Submissions**
We are always looking for Travis County 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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"The air is like a butterfly
With frail blue wings.
The happy earth looks at the sky ....And sings.” - Joyce Kilmer, Spring