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Cover Photo: Hover flies mimic wasps from: Wizzie Brown

Right: by Liath Appleton

June Meeting - Patricia Michael

Permaculture Design for Central Texas

Patricia Michael, MFA, is a landscape designer and permaculture consultant with 20+ years experience using a whole-systems approach to ecological design to produce systems that are ecologically sound and economically viable. In addition to her role as Principal Landscape Designer for Patricia Michael Design, she has served as a Staff Educator for the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center since 2011. She currently teaches Native Plant Gardening Landscape Design and Landscape Design Studio as part of The Wildflower Center’s Go Native U series. She has also been a Permaculture Consultant for the Universidad Albert Einstein de Mexico and a staff educator at Austin Community College.

Patricia has designed and transformed numerous residential and commercial properties through the utilization of permaculture design principles for over 20 years. She has studied Permaculture Design in Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, France, Mexico, El Salvador, and the U.S. To view her numerous awards, honors, education, and publication credits, go to www.patriciamichaeldesign.com

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, June 4, 2014 starting at 7 pm
Zilker Botanical Garden

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

The vegetable harvest reaches its peak in June, yielding tomatoes, green beans, cucumbers, corn, yellow squash, zucchini, peppers, eggplant and more. That means effortless summer meals with home-grown flavor straight from the veggie patch. Is there any other way?

If you have okra by now I salute you – my okra has been in suspended animation for several weeks due to the mild days and nights we experienced in May, but I’m sure it will take off as soon as summer truly arrives. Can’t wait! What could be easier than tossing some okra pods in a pot of boiling water and enjoying them at the dinner table just a few minutes later ...all summer long!

I’ve followed through with my pledge to grow a squash-free garden, but I don’t dare let my guard down. Tiny seedlings keep popping up everywhere which must be rogued from the garden. A few weeks ago I found one that I missed and it had at least 5 squash vine borer eggs on it. Horror! It went straight to the trash!

Here is the vegetable gardener’s checklist for June:

- Enjoy fresh tomatoes while standing in the garden, but be sure they have not been sprayed with anything that requires a waiting period.

- Spider mites like it hot and dry; watch for infestations on beans, squash, tomatoes and cucumbers. The leaves will have a stippled appearance. Organic controls for spider mites include horticultural oils and sulfur dust. Washing the underside of the leaves with a strong spray of water every few days can also help prevent mites from becoming established.

- Harvest cucumbers when they are the appropriate length; pickling cucumbers are ready at 3-4 inches, slicers are ready at 6-8 inches and oriental cucumbers may grow to 12-14 inches.

- Plant buckwheat or cowpeas as a cover crop in fallow beds.

- Make notes about favorite varieties, harvest dates, pest or disease problems, and any new varieties you want to try next year.

- Plant tomato seeds in pots early in the month so you will have transplants ready for the garden in mid-July.

Cucumbers are the first to be harvested in my garden – these are ‘Calypso’ pickling cukes.
In the Vegetable Garden

Cucumbers are affected by several fungal diseases; be sure to plant them in full sun, avoid overhead watering and treat at the first sign of disease with a fungicide labeled for cucumbers. Serenade and neem oil are two environmentally friendly organic options.

Remove and discard yellowing or diseased leaves from tomato plants.

The squash that got away: this two foot squash vine had at least 5 squash vine borer eggs on it when I found it hiding underneath some bean plants. It felt good to pull it up and chuck in the garbage. Ta ta, SVB - NIMBY. (not in MY backyard!)
In the Vegetable Garden

This is my first year to grow the German heirloom ‘Riesentraube’. It is known for small cherry tomatoes that grow in large clusters. So far the blossoms are impressive, hopefully sweet red cherries won’t be far behind.

I couldn’t resist the amazing tomato offerings from the Sunshine Community Garden plant sale so this year I am trying to pack in more tomato varieties by growing a compact determinate (in this case ‘Chico III’) in the same cage as an indeterminate (‘Black and Brown Boar’). So far so good – they seem happy together.

Photos by Bruce and Patty Leander
Hover flies, also known as syrphid flies or flower flies, are bee and wasp mimics. You can tell that they are flies because they only have two wings (bees and wasps have four wings). The flies can range in size from about ¼ to ¾ inch long. Most are black or brown with yellow markings and have wings that are held out to the side when at rest. Other flies also mimic bees and wasps, but you can tell a hover fly by the spurious vein (a vein that has a tip that is not connected to other veins) in the wing.

Hover flies are great fliers and are capable of hovering or even flying backward. Adults are considered beneficial because they help to pollinate plants. Larvae are considered to be beneficial because they feed on aphids and other insects. Hoverflies cannot sting.

Hover flies have complete metamorphosis with 4 life stages - egg, larva, pupa and adult. Females singly lay whitish-grey oblong eggs near aphids. Eggs hatch in about 3 days. Larvae are legless and carrot shaped. The larvae vary in color, but most have a stripe running the length of the back. Larvae develop for 2-3 weeks before pupating. Pupae are pear shaped, and are typically found on the plant or soil surface. Adults emerge in 2-3 weeks unless in an overwintering stage.

There can be up to 7 generations per year.

Adult flies feed on pollen and nectar, and may also be attracted to honeydew caused by sucking insects such as aphids, mealybugs and scale insects. Adults are typically found around flowers. Larvae feed on aphids and other small, soft-bodied insects. Larvae move along the plant surface looking for prey. When they find something, they grasp it, suck it dry, and discard the skin. Pupae are non-feeding.

Other species of syrphids feed on fungi, and live in decaying vegetation and wood, while some live in nests of ants, termites or bees. One group, called rattailed maggots, live in highly polluted water, and have a long breathing tube off the tip of the abdomen for breathing.

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
Powdery Mildew on Roses
by Carolyn Williams

Unfortunately, last year my roses began to experience the symptoms of powdery mildew. First it was found on only one or two roses, but even with beginning a fungicide spray program, it continued to spread through my garden. Thinking that the hard winter we experienced might help with the problem, I was, sadly, unprepared for the return of this disease.

I have had numerous other gardeners talk to me about their powdery mildew experiences. Hence, the investigation began which I will share with you in the hope that it will help you work through any such similar problems in your own garden.

Powdery mildew is a gray, talcum powder-like coating that covers the leaves and flowers of roses, and even some vegetables, perennials and shrubs. It is one of the most widespread and destructive diseases of the garden roses. As the name suggests, it forms a distinctive grayish-white powdery mat or patches on plant tissue.

Rose powdery mildew is caused by a fungal pathogen (Sphaerotheca pannosa var. rosae) which infects the outer surface cells of the host rose or plant. The fungi can infect any green tissue; so, powdery mildew may be found on leaves, green stems, and flower parts. Leaves become distorted and eventually fall prematurely. This also causes flower buds of the rose to have poor quality flower formation. Powdery mildew spores are easily spread by wind to nearby healthy plants.

Symptoms typically begin as discrete, circular, powdery white spots that often join to produce a large mat of powdery mildew. On rose leaves you may also see small, raised, blister-like distortions followed by leaf curling.

Fungal spores are spread by wind, and overwinter on plants and in plant debris. The warm days and cool nights of late summer create an ideal climate for spore growth and dispersal. Disease incidence is most severe under cloudy, humid conditions when days are warm and nights are cool.

Once hot weather conditions prevail, powdery mildew on roses usually disappears. This is especially hard on roses when we experience high humidity, but no rain occurs. Sound familiar?!?
Certainly we have some control over, and can manage powdery mildew with the following suggestions:

- Plant roses in full or as full as possible sunlight.
- Allow adequate spacing between plants to provide better air circulation.
- Provide roses adequate fertilization to maintain plant vigor.
- Avoid wetting leaves, if possible. If using a spray type watering system, water early in the morning so leaves dry before dark.
- Prune infected canes and periodically rake up infected leaves that fall from plants. Do NOT compost, but dispose with regular garbage.
- At the first sign of powdery mildew, start a protective spray program.

Information on Different Spraying Programs

There are numerous fungicides that can be used to control powdery mildew. Alternating between fungicides is sometimes recommended to reduce the development of fungicide resistance. Complete coverage spraying of the plant is needed (upper and lower leaf surfaces), plus canes, in order to thoroughly cover the infected plant.

Research and read your labels completely before spraying plants. Do NOT spray when the temperature rises during the heat of the day, but do spray as early as possible in the cooler morning hours.

A spray recommended in both “Trowel & Error” and the “Organic Rose Garden” follows:

2 teaspoons baking soda
2 quarts water
½ teaspoon liquid soap or Murphy’s Oil Soap

Shake well before each use. Spray on a regular 7-10 day schedule.

*Soap increases the moisture on plant leaves so spores are unable to germinate. Baking soda raises the pH, creating an inhospitable environment for powdery mildew.

Having beautiful, full blooming roses is such a lovely sight, and one that gives many of us pleasure. So be prepared, examine your roses for the first signs of this disease, and attack it early on for continued growing success!

photos by Carolyn Williams
When my husband and I were attending a retirement ceremony of a close friend in Washington DC, I couldn’t help myself from taking time to visit the U.S. Botanic Garden. The month was March, and like the rest of the United States, spring was late in coming. The cherry trees that encircle the Tidal Basin gave away no signs of their forthcoming blossoms. Wondering if I might find other signs of spring, I eagerly made my way to the U.S. Botanic Garden on Saturday morning. To my surprise, many of the sun-loving plants were just beginning to reveal their newly awakened buds. These moments every spring, when I am graced to witness new life, always make my heart smile.

Continuing outdoors, I joined a tour of the National Garden featuring Mid-Atlantic plants. It was interesting to discover that many were similar to those we see here in Texas, like the magnolia, red oak, and eastern redbud. Next I entered the Conservatory, where a celebration of orchids from around the world was taking place. Called the Orchid Symphony, highlights included lovingly crafted, live instrument sculptures – a piano, a cello, and a harp – made almost entirely of orchid blossoms. In addition, the Conservatory featured representative plants from a variety of climates and landscapes including deserts, jungles and tropical rainforests. Medicinal plants, as well as rare and endangered species were also featured in this living plant museum to remind us of the benefits and irreplaceable value of plants as they relate to people.

What began as a vision by George Washington more than 200 years ago and established by Congress in 1820, the U.S. Botanic Garden is one of the oldest gardens in North America. http://www.usbg.gov/
Meet the Master Gardeners: Venkappa Gani and Ratna Gani, Class of 2000
by Jean Love El Harim & Martha King

Venkappa Gani (better known as Gani) and Ratna Gani (better known as Ratna) became Master Gardeners in Montgomery County in 2000, and joined the Travis County Master Gardeners in 2002 when they came to Austin. Their home in far south Austin is a stellar example of a sustainable living space, with a rainwater collection system, a solar energy grid, and an organic garden with vegetables, herbs, fruits, and flowers.

Gani has won many gardening prizes and awards, and has often been featured in the news in Austin. In 2004, he won the City of Austin Green Garden Award, and in 2005 the Texas State Master Gardener of the Year Award. He won the Sweepstakes Award six years in a row at the Garden Club of Austin Annual Plant and Vegetable Show. In 2009, Gani and Ratna’s home was on the Travis County Master Gardener Inside Austin Gardens Tour. Gani and his garden have been featured in the Garden Corner of the Austin American Statesman, on the Central Texas Gardener program on KLRU, and on KXAN news. You can view his news features on his website: http://www.ganigarden.com.

Gani first came to the United States in 1966 to earn a Master’s in electrical engineering at the University of Colorado. He then married Ratna, who had studied economics and political science, and they lived in New York for 23 years. Gani is now retired, and he and Ratna are very active in the community. They are members, and Gani was President in 2004 and 2005, of Austin Kannada Sangha, a group for speakers of Kannada, a language spoken in Southern India. In addition to participating in many Master Gardener activities, they are active members of the Austin Garden Club and the Organic Garden Club. Gani is a life member of the Austin Garden Club and was president of the Austin Organic Garden Club. Ratna and Gani enjoy giving tours of their garden to groups of adults and school children to show them how much you can grow in a small suburban plot. They also have a new garden in Hutto at the Organic Farm and Learning Center at Green Haven Ranch Development, where they give visitors advice about gardening and promote organic gardening practices.

Gani first got interested in gardening in elementary school in Karnataka, a state in Southern India. Each class studied agriculture, had a garden plot, and fetched water from the well to irrigate it. As they grew older, the students had larger garden plots and took on more responsibilities. They kept a diary of gardening activities and sold produce every week at a local farmer’s market. They had a compost pile and grew eggplant, tomatoes, cauliflower, garlic, maize, and onions. Gani also helped his parents in the field, growing peanuts, jawar (white sorghum), grains, legumes, wheat and cotton.
Meet the Master Gardeners

Gani’s initiative and leadership have been the motivation behind several Master Gardener projects. He planned and planted the citrus trial plot behind the TCMG greenhouse at Zilker Botanical Garden to find out how well different kinds of citrus grow in Central Texas. He planned and helped install the rainwater collection system behind the Garden Center and the additional rainwater collection tanks for the TCMG greenhouse.

Gani has always enjoyed challenging his own and other people’s curiosity. When he and Ratna lived in the Woodlands, they grew a climbing hibiscus called roselle (Hibiscus sabdariffa). Seeing the long, thin, many-lobed leaves, people approached wide-eyed asking if they were growing marijuana. Gani and Ratna took the opportunity to tell them that this edible plant can be cooked as a vegetable and used to make pickles and that the strong fibers of the stem are used to make rope.

Though they are an inseparable pair, Ratna and Gani each have their own unique talents and perspectives on the garden. Ratna says her special talents include “debating, crocheting, and stitching.” Ratna’s family had a six-acre farm in Karnataka where they grew American corn, Spanish peanuts, cotton, and peppers. One day on the farm Ratna got stung by a wasp, and through the tears, she was amazed to see her mother put wet soil on her arm, because as the soil dried, it would draw out the venom of the sting. In addition to cooking their garden harvest, Ratna dries herbs, and cans and freezes the surplus produce. She also enjoys MG events such as the East Austin Garden Fair where she was in charge of the worm composting booth. She tells a story about a friend who wanted to help. “He gave me more worms for my bin, but when I started to notice that worms were disappearing from the bin, I realized that some of the worms that my friend had given me were very long and had hatchet-shaped heads,” she says. “They were in fact land planarians, and they were eating my earthworms!”

Ratna enjoys having a mix of flowers, vegetables, and some trees in the garden. She would like to have more flowering vines on walls and arches. For her, the greatest gardening challenges are squirrels and raccoons, and knowing when to bring plants in for the winter and when to put them out in the spring. “The weather changes so quickly and so much,” she says, “it’s confusing.” Gani, on the other hand, says his talents include growing tropical plants and trees, propagating plants, and demonstrating and that his greatest gardening challenges are having enough water and properly amending the soil.

Both Gani and Ratna enjoy being Master Gardeners because it gives them the opportunity to share what they know and to nourish their own curiosity. As Ratna says, “We end up learning more ourselves when we teach somebody else.”
Alternate Methods of Gardening

Thursday, June 5
10:00 am – noon

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

Feeling adventurous? Explore alternate methods of gardening during the final class in our Dealing with Drought Conditions series. If you have time, space, or physical limitations yet still have a desire to nurture your green thumb, Master Gardener Pat Mokry will teach you how to raise carefree veggies, herbs and flowers using self-sufficient grow boxes. Then, for some more ‘new’ ideas, Master Gardener Marian Stassney will describe the ancient practices of both keyhole gardening and hugelkultur, to expand your repertoire of gardening techniques.

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

Composting for the Home Garden

Saturday, June 21
10am - noon

Zilker Botanical Gardens
2220 Barton Springs Rd
Austin TX

Pat Mokry, Master Gardener and compost specialist, will teach the methods of constructing different composting systems to turn kitchen ‘trash’ into garden treasure. You’ll be both informed and entertained by Pat’s presentation on how to use this valuable soil amendment to increase your garden’s fertility and productivity.

This seminar is free with paid admission to Zilker Botanical Garden. The seminar is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. www.tcmastergardeners.org. For information, call (512) 477-8672.

20th annual Austin Pond Tour

Saturday & Sunday, June 7-8
9am - 5pm

Zilker Botanical Gardens
2220 Barton Springs Rd
Austin TX

Details at www.austinpondsociety.org
Joe Posern, President
Jackie Johnson, Immediate Past President
Denise Harrelson, Vice-President for Programs
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Rosalie Russell, Volunteer Coordinator for Projects
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This issue of the Compost Bin has been published thanks to the contributions of the following Travis County Master Gardeners and Wizzie Brown — Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

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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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“This is a wonderful day, I have never seen this one before.”
— Maya Angelou