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Cover Photo: Peppers have really enjoyed our milder summer rains and milder temperatures, rewarding us with multiple pickings.
By Bruce Leander

Aug Meeting - Master Gardener Panel

Master Gardeners on a panel sharing tips and best practices for planning, organizing and documenting your garden beds, crops and performance, and providing tips on preparing for fall.

Master Gardener Meeting information:
Wednesday, Aug 6, 2014 starting at 7 pm
Zilker Botanical Garden

Master Gardener meetings are open to certified Master Gardeners and trainees only.
Don’t you just love it when you get a good soaking rain, and the next day you wake up to temperatures in the high 60s, and throughout the day it never even gets into the 80s?! In July! In Texas! And then you check the drought monitor to find that less than 4% of the state is in the Extreme Drought category and Travis County has been downgraded to the **Moderate Drought category**. Doesn’t that bring a smile to your face and a spring to your step?! As usual, this weather is keeping us on our toes, but the rain, the cloudy skies and the milder than normal temperatures in July gave Texans and their gardens a much needed and much appreciated respite from our string of oppressively hot and dry summers.

August marks the transition to the fall gardening season. Even though temperatures are still hot, now is the time to plant a second round of warm-season vegetables. Look for varieties of cucumbers, summer squash and bush green beans that mature in less than 60 days. If planted this month these vegetables will reach maturity by the end of October and will continue to produce as long as the daytime temperature stays above 55-60°F.

Here is the vegetable gardener’s checklist for August:

- Stay on top of weeds that have been revived with recent rains – their succulent green growth is an excellent nitrogen source for the compost bin.
- Mulch tomatoes and peppers and keep them watered and fertilized for a bountiful fall harvest.
- Warm season crops that are planted this month will still be taking up valuable garden space in September and October. Plan carefully and be sure to leave room in your garden for easy-to-grow cool-season crops like kale, sugar snap peas, radishes, Swiss chard, beets and lettuce. These are generally planted in mid to late September, after nighttime temperatures have begun to cool off.
- It’s been a good year for eggplant and peppers – pick eggplant while the skin is shiny and bright; once the skin turns dull it will be seedy and tough. Peppers that are left on the plant will continue to mature to red, orange, purple or yellow, depending on variety.
- Sweet corn can be planted in early August, but keep an eye out for the corn earworm. Use fresh seed and Look for early maturing varieties that produce in 75-80 days.
- Fall is the best time for planting strawberries, which should be grown as annuals in central Texas. The plants establish strong roots over the winter and by February they will be blooming. The first berries appear about 30 days later and plants continue to produce through April and sometimes into May. In Poteet, the strawberry capital of Texas, growers set out bare root plants over Labor Day but home gardeners can plant anytime in September or early October. It is sometimes hard to find strawberry plants in early fall but ask for them at your local nursery – the more we demand fall transplants the more likely they will make them available for us. **Bob Wells Nursery** carries many of the varieties recommended for our area, including Chandler, Sequoia, Honeoye and Sweet Charlie. They will ship bare root strawberry plants starting September 1, so order soon before they sell out.
In the Vegetable Garden

Left: Use clippers or small scissors to harvest eggplant, using caution around the spiny calyx. Fruit should be firm with dark, glossy skin.

Middle: Seed cucumbers and squash later this month for harvest in October and November.

Right: Fall is the best time for planting strawberries. If your local nursery doesn’t carry plugs or transplants - ask them to! They won’t do it unless there is a demand for it.
Left and Middle: 'Sunburst' and 'Multipik' summer squash are quick growing varieties suitable to fall planting.

Right: 'Calypso', 'Carolina' and 'Homemade Pickles' are quick-growing pickling cucumbers that reach harvest size in approximately 50 days.

Photos by Bruce and Patty Leander
Pillbugs, or roly-polys, are crustaceans, closely related to crayfish and shrimp. Although terrestrial, these creatures must live in moist environments to be able to survive. They may sometimes invade homes in large numbers, but they are a nuisance pest and do not bite, sting, transmit diseases or cause physical damage to the home or its contents.

Pillbugs are ¼- ½” with dark grey coloring. Their oval bodies are convex above and either flat or concave underneath. Pillbugs have seven pairs of legs and two pairs of antennae and roll up into a ball when disturbed.

Pillbugs are scavengers, feeding mainly on decaying organic matter. They may occasionally feed on young, tender plants, but damage is typically not significant. They can be found under mulch, flower pots, compost, stones or other items resting on the ground.

They often invade crawl spaces and homes at ground level with common points of entry being door thresholds and expansion joints. When these pests are seen indoors, there is usually a large population breeding on the outside of the home near the foundation. Since pillbugs require moisture, they do not survive indoors for more than a few days unless there are very moist or damp conditions.

To manage infestations inside the home, rely on sanitation and exclusion techniques. Repair or replace door thresholds and seal expansion joints where pillbugs may be entering the structure. Pesticides are not usually needed indoors to manage these occasional invaders. They soon die on their own from lack of moisture and can be swept up using a broom and dustpan, or a vacuum, and disposed of.

Outdoors, move any piles of debris away from the foundation of the home. If there are high numbers in and around landscape beds, turn the mulch to allow it dry out to make the area uninhabitable. Any leaky faucets or irrigation lines as well as leaking air conditioning units should be repaired to eliminate moisture buildup. You may choose a pesticide to treat mulched areas, or other areas that are harboring large pillbug populations. Look for products labeled for pillbugs, sowbugs or isopods.

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
Meet the Master Gardeners: Ally Stressing, Class of 2011
by Jean Love El Harim

Born in Massachusetts and raised in New Hampshire, Ally joined the U.S. Air Force in 1983 as an administrative specialist. She met and married her husband at Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio where she and her husband were assigned to the Electronic Security Command. She went on to work for Martin Marietta (now Lockheed Martin) as a computer programmer trainee, and after that worked as a computer programmer and database administrator for several state agencies, most recently the Texas Medical Board. She retired in early 2014 to work in her garden and greenhouse at her home in Cedar Creek, and to discover whatever else she might enjoy. Ally has been featured twice in Central Texas Gardener and has a garden blog, http://gardenally.blogspot.com/.

When she is not gardening or tending to her hens, she likes to travel and has many hobbies. She and her husband have visited Europe, the Caribbean, and Alaska. She enjoys wine tastings in Napa Valley and Central Texas, as well as knitting, cross stitch, “anything crafty.” “I would like to learn how to weld,” she says, “and I am developing my skills in photography. If you want to do a garden blog, you need to be good at taking pictures.” She enjoys hiking and backpacking with family and friends. Ally tells of one time when she and her family and friends were backpacking in Glacier National Park in Montana. “We came across a mama brown bear and her three cubs. We were scared to death, but we controlled our fear and made our ourselves walk away, not run, while the cubs went up a tree.”

Ally is no stranger to snow. On the same camping trip, after they were all settled in for the night in their tents, the park ranger came to tell them of a bear threat. Rather than hike the five miles back to the ranger station, they opted to stay the night while the ranger stood guard with his shotgun. “It was still snowing in June,” she says. “That was the most restful night of the trip, and when we woke up the next morning, snow had covered the whole landscape. It was beautiful.” When asked to share a quirky fact, Ally confides, “I was skiing when I was seven years old. Our high school didn’t have a football team, but we had a ski team. When we were teenagers, my grandparents would buy us a season pass and we would take the bus to the ski slopes after school. We enjoyed winter sports. We often went skating across Lake Winnipesaukee.”

What is her unique talent? “I have a super good memory,” she says, “though I’m not sure how that helps in the garden. I can always remember where I left my tools, and where my husband left his. I might have other talents,” she laughs, “but I can’t remember what they are.”

Ally got interested in gardening at a very early age. “As long as I can remember,” she says, “my grandparents had a big vegetable garden. It was a whole different kind of gardening. It was a short growing season and they had to add lime to the soil. I still love the look of tomatoes ripening on the windowsill.”
Ally enjoys having a garden that is “diverse and incorporates all the areas of gardening that interest me,” she says. “Water gardening, vegetables, shade gardening, sunnier beds, and cactus. Never thought I would grow cactus,” she comments with a grimace and a grin. “They’re really prickly! Then the drought happened. Some of my friends had cactus in their gardens. The cactus plants were structural elements that really stand out. They were the only green thing you’d see.” “When I thought of cactus before,” she says, “I thought of prickly pear. I didn’t realize there were so many colors,” thinking of favorites like Whales Tongue, Sharkskin Agave, and Color Guard Yucca. She likes Bronze Dyckia, as well. “It’s one of the thorniest darn things I’ve ever come in contact with. It has these barbs that get you coming and going. They are mean plants. They are most challenging to plant and care for, and they are most forgiving. They look good in a pot with Silver Ponyfoot.” Her main garden interests are vegetables, ornamentals, and natives. She is still trying to figure out what’s going to grow best here, and thinks “the answer to that question is natives. They demand less care.”

Her biggest garden challenge is water. “Not the lack of it,” she says, “but proper drainage.” She has made a wildflower meadow out of one natural clearing that has poor drainage and may have a seep spring, and she grows fruit trees on other parts of her land that have better drainage: fig, apple, peach, plum, pomegranate, pineapple guava, olive, and loquat. She would also like to have more room for crop rotation and has a goal of planting more cover crops.

Her favorite plants are “all the ones that require little effort.” “Right now,” she says, “purple coneflower is my favorite. I planted purple coneflower and it died, so I kept planting it again in different spots. Now I have a purple coneflower that has thrived and has so many pups. It self seeds.” And this leads right to her favorite gardening tip: “If you really want to grow something, keep at it.”

Ally admits, “I love garden junk, metal roadrunners, things that hang and sparkle from the trees, balancing owls, fairy gardens with furniture and cute things. I love it, but I call it what it is: garden junk.”

In the TCMGA, Ally works the poultry booth at East Austin Garden Fair. She has volunteered for the Speaker’s Bureau and is going to go to the vegetable specialist training in May of 2014. Her favorite Master Gardener activity is going on garden tours. “I love looking at other people’s yards,” she says. “I like to see the gardens of real people who use inexpensive materials creatively. It gives me ideas of attainable things to do.”

What she likes most about the Master Gardener Program is that “We educate. It’s more and more important to get people to grow food locally, to help people see that your grocery store is your back yard. Everybody can do it. The Master Gardener Program is a forum for that.”
## Austin Area Events

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<th>Insect Visitors in Your Garden</th>
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<td><strong>Saturday, Aug 7</strong></td>
<td><strong>Saturday, Aug 16</strong></td>
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<td>10am - noon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travis County AgriLife Extension</td>
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<tr>
<td>1600 Smith Road</td>
<td>Zilker Botanical Gardens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austin, TX</td>
<td>2220 Barton Springs Rd</td>
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Whether you want to get ready for a fabulous fall garden, or just improve the health of your lawn and landscape, compost is an easy and inexpensive amendment, safe to use, and beneficial for the environment. Cathy Wood, Master Gardener and compost specialist, will teach the ingredients needed for quality compost, how to build an effective compost pile, and how to use its contents to increase the fertility of your soil and productivity of your garden. This first course in our series on Backyard Basics will include a tour of the compost methods used on site at the AgriLife Demonstration Garden, weather permitting.

Part of the Texas AgriLife Extension Backyard Basics Series. Register at [https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/TravisCounty](https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/TravisCounty) or by phone 979-845-2604

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Update your understanding of good bugs and bad, with Master Gardeners Pat Mokry and Sheryl Williams. Pat, an entomology specialist, will describe the common insect visitors to your garden, and help you determine if and how you should treat for them. Following identification of beneficial insects, Sheryl will then share a fascinating project she has constructed to attract insects into her garden for observation, pollination and just plain fun. Don’t miss these two lively, informative ladies!

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](http://www.tcmastergardeners.org). For information, call (512) 477-8672.
Austin Area Events

**Austin Cactus and Succulent Society Show and Sale**

Saturday and Sunday, Aug 30 and 31
10am - 5pm

Zilker Botanical Gardens
2220 Barton Springs Rd
Austin TX

FREE admission with paid admission to Zilker Botanical Garden ($2 adults, $1 children & seniors)

- Plant show with specimen cacti and succulent plants from around the world
- Plant sales with vendors from Texas, New Mexico, and Oklahoma
- Handcrafted pottery by Austin artist Rick Van Dyke
- Daily silent auction and hourly plant raffles
- Expert advice and free literature available

Details at [http://austincss.com](http://austincss.com)
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Texas AgriLife Extension Travis County Horticulture Agent: Daphne Richards
1600-B Smith Road, Austin, Texas 78721
512-854-9600 drichards@ag.tamu.edu
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

**Photographers:**
Bruce Leander
Richard Stressing

**Contributing Writers:**
Wizzie Brown
Patty Leander
Jean Love El Harim
Martha King (editor)

**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

“Knowing trees, I understand the meaning of patience.
Knowing grass, I can appreciate persistence.”
- Hal Borland