Speaker for June:

Tom Spencer is a television producer and host, freelance writer, photographer, and radio personality. He has a longtime professional association with KLRU-TV, Austin’s Public Television station.

Employed by KLRU since 1982, Spencer has served as a manager and producer of local and statewide public affairs programs, nationally distributed documentaries on art and architecture, and a wide variety of special projects. Throughout his association with KLRU he has also served as a host for the station’s local programming. Currently he serves as Executive Producer and host of the weekly cultural affairs series Austin Now.

Spencer has won many awards and honors for his work on television. A singular honor came in 1994 when he was appointed to a select task force by the President of PBS to reshape public affairs programming for the national system. More recently, his documentary, The Painted Churches of Texas: Echoes of the Homeland won the National Educational Television Association’s award for Historical Documentary of the Year (2001). In 2003 the Austin Chronicle named Austin Now as “Austin’s Best New Television Program” as a part of its annual “Best of Austin Awards” issue and in 2004 Spencer was chosen as “Best TV Moderator” by the same publication.

In addition to The Painted Churches of Texas, Spencer’s documentary projects have included: Soul of the Garden, a series of personal spiritual reflections; Las Misiones: The Missions of Texas; Rio Grande: La Frontera, on the architecture and history of the Texas-Mexico border; Austin Remember When, a series of documentaries on the history of Austin; and James Michener and the Art of Collecting, a profile of writer James Michener and his collection of 20th century American art.

Since 1983 Spencer has also produced and hosted a weekly radio program on gardening for KLBJ-AM. He is the author of numerous articles and columns on gardening and landscape design. His work has appeared in a variety of publications including: The Good Life, Domain Magazine, The Austin Chronicle, and The Austin American-Statesman. He also currently hosts the Central Texas Gardener, a weekly gardening program presented by KLRU. An accomplished photographer, his work has appeared in galleries and has been published along with his written work.

His current projects include the internationally popular website: www.soulofthegarden.com winner of the first ever “Mouse and Trowel” award as the “Gardening Website of the Year” for 2007.

Tom just returned from a trip to Japan to photograph Japanese Zen gardens and will be showing us wonderful pictures from his visit.

Jerry Naiser
Message From the President

As we enter into that part of the year when we know that soon the heat will become oppressive and we won’t want to be outside all day, unlike these cool, rainy Spring days, think about the things we can work together on inside. There are a whole lot of tasks that need to be done that aren’t gardening per se, but are important to our group by keeping things running smoothly. You won’t be alone in doing these, of course—you can always ask for help, but if you get it started, it will be easier to have the group keep it going.

I would love to have some of you tell me that you can help with some things that have been put off for too long. Please look at this list and if you can, please take it on. You even get a cool title:

Yahoo Advisor. We need a computer-literate person who can help members figure out how to get on the yahoo group to access shared files and send and receive emails as part of the group. This advisor would talk members through getting a yahoo account, responding to the invitation to join the group, and explain to them how to access files, change their email address, and so forth. This could take place over the phone, by personal email, or in person—sometimes you just need to get together in the same room. The Yahoo Advisor would coordinate with Susan Jung and Tommie Clayton, who are in charge of keeping the yahoo group list up to date with the active membership list.

Awards Committee Chairperson. Someone who likes making people feel good and awarding them for their times and efforts would be great for this position. The Awards Committee Chairperson would get together a small group of volunteers to award individual members at monthly meetings and the Holiday Party for their outstanding volunteer efforts throughout the year.

State Awards Committee. We need several folks to keep track of our projects in photos and written descriptions all year long so we will have a really good record for any projects we decide to put up for State Awards next year. I think we have a good shot at the Association of the Year Award, but I need some folks to help me pull together everything we will need for that entry. There are already many pictures from this Spring’s events, but this committee can pull it all together for us.

Association Historian. Now that we have been an association for almost 15 years, we really need someone to pull together the various records, scrapbooks, interviews documents and photos that provide a history of our group, what we have accomplished, who accomplished it, and what guidelines have been made over the years. Liz Caskey, Peggy Stewart, and the past presidents have all worked on aspects of the association history, and can provide the historian with most of what is needed.

Online Hours Reporting Guru. Who doesn’t want to be a guru? We are about to launch an online volunteer hours reporting form that will allow individual members to report their own hours directly, without having to send them to the Membership Directors. There will be forms for continuing education hours and speakers’ hours as well. The guru would help members learn to use the system, although it will be fairly self-explanatory, and will be in charge of compiling the hours at the end of the year for the state and county reports. The guru will need to know how to use Excel, and have email and internet access. The guru
will coordinate with Glenn Olson, who has created our online reporting system, with the Membership Directors, and with the board, who will provide the guidelines for hours reporting.

Of course you will earn volunteer hours by doing these tasks, and you can do them at home on your own schedule. I know there are some of you out there just perfect for these jobs, so let’s talk!

Susan Decker
President

Plant Portrait: *Ratibida columnifera* (Mexican Hat, Upright Prairie Coneflower, and Yellow Coneflower)

The roadsides are a non-stop masterpiece this year with so many wildflowers blooming in excess. One that is particularly noticeable is the Mexican Hat, a prominent plant with drooping yellow, yellow and mahogany or all mahogany blooms around an upright cone-like center. This Aster family member is a very hardy (zone 3) native perennial over most of the United States and grows from the northern parts of Mexico into Southern British Columbia and Manitoba in Canada.

One of the attractive features of this plant in Texas is the huge variation in flower petal color. Plants can be side by side and have all blooms that are entirely yellow to yellow with a small mahogany-red (some call this brown) thumbprint on the petal to mostly maroon with a thin band of yellow at the edge. The upright, center cone progresses from olive green to brown as the flower matures. Ultimately the petals drop leaving the distinctive cone. The plant starts blooming in Texas in April and can be used indoors as a long-lasting cut flower. The deeply divided, thread-like leaflets are a fine texture to complement the flowers.

The genus name *Ratibida* is to honor the wanderer-botanist Constantine Rafinesque-Schmaltz (1773-1840) who often assigned unexplained names to plants (like this one?). *Columnifera* means “column-producing” referring to the center cone.

This short lived herbaceous perennial (living 3-4 years) grows from 1 to 3 ft. tall. This year with our ample moisture the plants are uniformly tall. The plant is drought resistant and loves well-drained, neutral to slightly alkaline pH soils and full sun. It grows naturally in mixed grass prairies and the drier parts of tallgrass prairies. *Ratibida* is fast growing and early to appear in disturbed areas. It is tolerant of fires when dormant.
While it is food for deer (occasionally browsed), birds and small mammals feast on the seeds. Native Americans used the plant as a poison ivy relief and the leaves to make tea and dye from the flowers.

Ratibida can be propagated from seed in the spring and will usually bloom in the second year. Stratify the seed at 40 degrees in the refrigerator for 6-9 weeks to increase germination rates.

Cultivars
‘Buttons and Bows’ double flowers, rust colored edged with gold.
‘Red Midget’ dwarf, dark red trimmed in yellow.

Anne Van Nest
In the Vegetable Garden

It’s here! That ‘Bountiful Harvest’ that I have been anticipating since I planted those tiny tomato seeds on New Year’s Day has finally arrived. It began in early May with artichokes and new potatoes, then squash, beans and cucumbers in mid-May, followed by tomatoes and peppers in late May. Okra, corn, melons and cowpeas are on their way.

Once these vegetables start producing it is a good idea to side dress them with a complete fertilizer at the rate of ½ pound (1 cup) per 25 feet of row. I usually use an organic 8-2-4 or 6-2-2 formulation. If you are using a non-organic fertilizer (like 15-5-10) you can use half the amount recommended.

If you haven’t planted pumpkins yet and you have the space, go ahead and get those seeds planted. They usually take 100+ days, so if you can avoid powdery mildew, squash bugs, virus and squash vine borer, you just may have your very own home grown pumpkins for Halloween. Pumpkins are vining plants and require a lot of space, but you may be able to grow vertically if you choose a small variety like Baby Bear, Orange Smoothie, Small Sugar or Jack–B–Little.

If you are looking for a warm season green to grow through the summer you might want to give Molokhia a try. It is a highly nutritious, leafy plant that thrives in our hot summers. This unusual green dates back to the time of Egyptian pharaohs and is widely eaten in the Middle East.

I purchased seeds last year from Kitazawa Seed Company and found it to be easy to grow. The flavor is mild and it can be eaten raw or cooked. We tried it in stir fry, sautéed with Swiss chard and also added the raw leaves to salad. The leaves are mucilaginous when cooked and in many cultures the leaves are often simmered in broth as a way to thicken soups. Much like okra, the cellular structure of these plants causes them to be slimy, but it also helps them retain water and that allows them to stand up to our Texas heat. Last summer our Molokhia plants grew vigorously to 4-5 feet tall before producing these unusual looking seed pods in late summer:
We are testing several new varieties of pickling cucumbers this season and I will have a report in a future issue of the Compost Bin. In the meantime, for those of you who have cucumbers coming out of your ears, I offer this advice from my mother:

When you are feeling run down and worn out, put your feet up, place one cucumber slice over each eye and relax for 15-20 minutes. And when you are done . . . just pop those cucumbers into your mouth and be on your way.

Here’s to a bountiful harvest,
Patty Leander

---

**Pickling Cucumbers**

**Sweet and Sour Cucumbers**

Here is a recipe for a very quick, crunchy and refreshing cucumber salad that we enjoy every summer:

If you are concerned about sodium intake, you can skip this first step, but salting helps draw out excess water for the crunchiest cucumbers:

2 large cucumbers, sliced very thin
1 T kosher salt
Place cucumbers in a colander and sprinkle with salt. Let stand 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Drain well and pat dry.

½ cup white vinegar
¼ cup chopped dill
2-3 Tbsp sugar
½ tsp black pepper
Stir the dressing ingredients together and toss with cucumbers. Chill 30 minutes.
Have you ever tried oven roasting your tomatoes? It concentrates the flavor for a delicious treat. Here’s how to do it:

Toss whole cherry or grape tomatoes generously in olive oil, season with salt and pepper, and roast 4-6 hours at 300 °. This works well for medium size tomatoes, too – just cut them in half before tossing in olive oil and roasting. These roasted tomatoes may be stored 2-4 weeks in the refrigerator.

Here is an easy method I use for drying grape or Roma tomatoes:

Slice tomatoes very thin. Arrange in a single layer on a parchment-lined, rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle or brush slices with olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Roast at 175 ° for 1½-2 hours. Store in refrigerator up to 5 days, or cover with olive oil and store up to one month. Or keep on the counter for snacking. : = )
The Greenhouse Bench

Activity has continued in the greenhouse as we catch up on some work that was postponed from the chaotic ZilkerFest time. Aloe plants from the Passion for Plants East Austin Garden Affair were potted for future use. Basil was pinched to create fuller plants. Goodwin Creek lavender cuttings finally made it out of the mist system and into 4” pots.

Pruning the citrus trees was a big project tackled during the May work day. Many plants (especially the pink grapefruit) had overgrown their space and were encroaching on other plants and the pathways. Thanks to Marie who helped with this thorny job. The trees were thinned to increase air and light into the center of the plants. The pink grapefruits were headed back to reduce their height, lighted the branch weight (to help lessen ice damage) and contain their width. The Kaffir limes had all suffered dieback during the winter and were sending out healthy new shoots below the damaged portion. The dieback was removed from them. Fascination was found on one pink grapefruit branch from the middle plant. It was flattened and ridged unlike the other branches. This is an abnormal growth that could be caused by a bacterial infection, mite or insects, chemical or mechanical damage. There were no visible clues as to the cause of fascination on our citrus. The tree appeared healthy.

A couple of benches in the greenhouse are being used as a Habitat for Humanity plant collection area for member donated plants. These plants will be used for the first 5 Habitat for Humanity homes being landscaped in early June. Becky Waak and Holly Plotner are designing and orchestrating the landscape planting. Some of the ZilkerFest containers were dismantled and the plants potted for the Habitat landscapes. Holly Plotner and Becky Waak propagated several perennials and shrubs and put the cuttings under the mist bench for rooting. These are destined to be used in the fall for more Habitat landscapes.

The deluge of rain from March until mid May added significant quantities to the greenhouse rain collection system. We still are using rainwater to irrigate inside the greenhouse and can’t use as much water as we are collecting (so far). The rainwater collected has increased to 1800 gallons in each of the tanks.

Thanks to everyone who came out (and brought their spouses or partners) in late April to get the greenhouse shade cloth put back over the top of the structure. We had a good crew of people to pull on the ropes and haul it into place. Afterward, we relaxed while Kent (Peggy Stewart’s husband) grilled up excellent hamburgers, hot dogs and bratwurst on the barbeque. While we ate our feast, everyone had a great time catching up on news and making new friends. Thanks are also extended to Marian and Blake Stasney for the use of their home barbeque grill.
A bird’s nest was found by accident beside the greenhouse in one of our excess flats. The nest was complete with a small white egg and three fledgling birds just barely able to fly. If you are at the greenhouse the nest is in the plastic flat on the top wooden shelf.

Special thanks are extended to Holly Plotner for her time and effort to get the outdoor growing area organized and hooked up to the spaghetti system. This includes the entire gallon (and larger) roses and tomato trial containers.

Anne Van Nest
Over the Fence

Did you know …

… that you can have a beautiful yard even if you don't own a lawn mower or water sprinkler?

… that Isamu Taniguchi was 70 years old when he built the beautiful 3 acre Taniguchi Garden with only one part time assistant?

… that dinosaurs made tracks on the shore of the Sea of Tethys 99 million years ago - right here in Zilker Botanical Garden?

… that giant bamboo can grow to 100 feet in height, while dwarf bamboo only reaches two inches - and bamboo is in the grass family of plants?

… that koi can live more than 100 years?

… that butterflies taste with their feet?

… that the cactus family of plants is native to the Western Hemisphere and has been found all the way from Canada to Chile?

Our docents at Zilker Botanical Garden share these fun facts and more with hundreds of school children and adults every year. This is an important part of the stated Austin Area Garden Center mission "to promote the education of citizens, emphasizing youth, in the art of gardening". We are currently seeking volunteers to join us for future tours. Mark your calendar for docent training on June 30, July 28 and August 18. We will meet at 9:30 a.m. in the Green Room of the Garden Center. Upcoming programs include butterfly gardening, ponds & koi, green gardening and fossils & historical geology. For more information call Hope Dyson at 394-1558 or Marion Alsup at 328-4808.

PECKERWOOD GARDENS & YUCCA DO NURSERY

A field trip to the small town of Hempstead, Texas led a group of Master Gardeners to a garden treasure hidden from view even from the nearby highway. There suddenly appears a small sign with the name of Peckerwood Garden and another sign stating that Yucca Do Nursery is “open”. Little do you know that this small gem is the masterpiece of Tom Fairey, who took a piece of non descriptive land and turned it into his garden fantasy. Professor Fairey started by planting every kind of oak, pine, and magnolia tree that could be found in Mexico, South America, even China. His experimenting leads others to realize that one could “think outside of the norm”.

Plants are grouped in Agave beds, sun areas, shade areas and creek beds. They appeared as if they had been planted by nature and certainly not moved in from various
places around the world. Fairey extends your senses by the wonderful use of normal plant material but in new and different ways, e.g. a Texas Pistachio tree trimmed as a shrub. Abstract garden art appears throughout the garden and you totally enjoy a man’s personal dream to create his own Garden of Eden.

Following our personal tour of Peckerwood, we ventured next door to the Yucca Do Nursery, on one of their very rare days to be open to the general public. This nursery caters to “online” shoppers, and to browse around their large greenhouses provides the opportunity to purchase plants from various foreign excursions as well as native plants that are difficult to find.

Being “plant people” as we all are, both Peckerwood Garden and Yucca Do Nursery was a wonderful way to spend a beautiful spring day enjoying the sights with garden friends!

Carolyn Williams
Lawns are the living carpet of landscapes. They moderate soil temperatures, prevent erosion, prevent crusting, and reduce compaction by cushioning foot traffic. Like other growing plants, turfgrass requires sunlight for survival and growth. Most turf grasses need at least 60 percent of full sunlight for best results. Less sun means a progressively thinner, weaker stand of grass. In a landscape filled with trees, the light intensity the grass receives is decreased a little each year as the trees grow larger and denser. So, don’t be surprised if an area where grass once thrived begins to decline over the years.

Lawn grasses differ in their tolerance of shady conditions. St. Augustine is the most shade tolerant of our southern lawn grasses. If a spot is too shady for St. Augustine it is too shady for any warm-season lawn grass. A close second is Zoysia. Buffalo and Bermuda are the least shade tolerant of our turf species.

Once a lawn begins to thin out from lack of sunlight, other complications will likely arise. Soil structure will be lost as raindrops and foot traffic pack the surface, reducing water infiltration, aeration and root growth. Stress from lack of sunlight has also been associated with an increase in Take-All Patch infection. Weeds often become a problem in these spots, further stressing the remaining grass.

If you have a shady spot there are several steps to take in order to improve your lawn:

- Consider having some tree limbs in the upper canopy removed to allow more light through. Remove some low hanging limbs as well to allow reflected light in from the sides. In many cases this will solve the problem without significant loss of shade.
- Avoid compacting the soil. Reroute the pitty patter of little feet at until the area fills in. Severely compacted soils may benefit from mechanical aeration by a lawn care professional.
- Speed re-establishment by spot planting plugs or sod strips in bare areas.
- Set your mower higher for shady spots. The leaf blades of the grass are its solar panels. More leaf area enables them to catch more light to support new growth. Plus, it makes thin areas look thicker. It's kinda like the "comb over" trick some guys use...but more effective.
- Avoid the temptation to over-fertilize or over-water. You can’t make up for a lack of light with an excess of nutrient or water. In fact, heavily shaded areas need only half, or less, as much water and fertilizer as bright sunny areas. Over-fertilizing and over-watering can result in increased disease problems, not to mentioned pollution of surface and ground water.
The Water Garden Club of South Texas' 7th Annual Pond Tour - Saturday, June 9 at 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
13 locations
Admission: $5 per person
Info Phone #: 210-860-9093
Self driving tour of 13 ponds. Various club members open up their back yards to view their ponds. Rain or Shine. Tickets available through the club and various garden centers in San Antonio. Tickets sales also at pond locations. Brochure will be on website.

FIELD TRIPS FOR TCMGA MEMBERS AND THEIR GUESTS:

Plant Resource Center of the University of Texas
Thursday, June 14
10:15 AM meet at Room 127
10:30 AM – 12:00 Noon - Private tour lead by Tom Wendt, Curator

The Plant Resources Center is located in the Main Building (Tower) on the campus of The University of Texas. The main entrance is Room 127 located on the east hallway on the first floor (one up from ground). The collections are housed on six floors within the Main building and tower.

Informally called the “Herbarium” the Center is an archival collection of over 1,000,000 preserved plant specimens. This makes the herbarium the largest one in the Southwest. The herbarium specializes in plants from Texas and Latin America (particularly Mexico and northern Central America). The herbarium has the largest holdings of Texas plants in the world. The herbarium is also fortunate to have an Asteraceae family specimen collected during one of Captain Cook’s three voyages to Brazil in the 1770’s. Many plants collected by “the father of Texas botany,” F.J. Lindeimer from the Wild West days of the 1850’s are present.

The tour is for TCMGA members and their guests. The tour is free.

Parking: Free street parking is available west of the campus. The University's most convenient paid parking garage is between San Antonio Street (one-way north) and Nueces Street (one-way south) and between 25th Street and 24th Street.

www.biosci.utexas.edu/prc/ has information on the location of the Tower, parking garage and more information about The Plant Resource Center.

Skip Richter
Travis County Extension Horticulturist
RSVP by June 11 to Rosalie Russell, gisathccs@aol.com or 804-2257

The Purple Gate Herb Farm
Saturday, Oct. 20
7376 County Road 309
Caldwell, TX 77836

8:30 AM leave from car pool location. Return to Austin 4-5 PM
Cost: $15 per person which includes lunch. Plus $5.00 to car pool driver.
The Purple Gate Herb Farm is owned and operated by Bud and Mary Mills near
the town of Caldwell, in south-central Texas. They grow herbs mingled with
wildflowers in theme gardens bordered by native woods. They strive to provide
quality plants to their customers. They provide extensive information about
each plant to help customers enjoy growing and using each plant.

Field trip includes a guided tour of the theme gardens (ancient, culinary, medici-
nal, myth and magic and tea), a raku pottery demonstration, and an herb based
lunch. There will be time to tour the grounds and shop at the gift shop.

Your $15.00 check is your reservation. Check must be received by Oct. 12.
Make check to: Rosalie Russell, 2401 Spring Creek Dr., Austin, TX 78704.
Minimum of 10 people required for this trip. An email to participants about five
days before the trip will include the last minute details, location of car pool and
directions to the herb farm.

Let’s have a great, fun day in the country!

Rosalie Russell
VP Education
804-2257
gisathccs@aol.com

Austin Pond Tour, July 14 and 15. Austin Pond Society will have the 13th
Annual Austin Pond Tour featuring over 25 ponds.

Summer Sessions, Go Native U
Go Native U spring classes sold out fast, so register now for
these summer sessions at the Wildflower Center that will teach
you more about native plants. Go Native U is an informal educa-
tion program designed to teach adults about the use and conser-
vation of native plants. All classes are held at the Wildflower
Center’s beautiful campus. Wildflower Center members receive a
special discount. For details, prices and registration, visit
www.wildflower.utexas.edu/gnu

Supermarket Botany Prepare a multi-cultural feast and learn about the plant
parts on our plates. 9 a.m. to noon, Saturday, June 9

Snaps are Wild! Introduction to Native Plant Photography Camera tech-
niques, creative techniques, studio and field photography and more. 9 a.m. to 4
p.m. Saturday, June 16

Adventures in Native Plants Field trips teach you to identify native plants and
learn which plants are edible or useful. 9 a.m. to noon Saturdays, June 23, 30
and July 7
Keeping Your Yard Beautiful in the Heat of Summer: A Survivor's Tale
Planning and design, soils, adaptive strategies, effective watering, mulching, etc.. 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. or 2 to 5 p.m. Saturday, June 30

Not Tonight Deer: Successful Gardening In Deer Country Deer biology and behavior deer tolerant native plant species. 10 a.m. or 1 p.m. or 2 to 5 p.m. Saturday, July 14

PlantWise: Native Alternatives to Invasive Plants Some of the least wanted landscape plants in Central Texas and their native alternatives. 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. or 2 to 5 p.m. Saturday, July 28

Native Grasses for the Home Landscape Snaps are Wild! Introduction to Native Plant Photography Camera techniques, creative techniques, studio and field photography and more. 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, June 16
Closing the Garden Gate…

Last year there was an article in the newspaper about a group of women (Dirt Divas) that loved to garden, socialize and try out new recipes. Since their garden projects never seemed to get completed they decided to form a garden group to help each other. After reading the article, a few Master Gardeners got together and thought it would be great to “copy” that idea and form our own garden group. We call ourselves the “Galloping Gardeners” and accomplish amazing garden transformations each time we meet. I was lucky enough to be the recipient on our first work day when we dug up weeds and Bermuda grass and planted perennials and ornamental grasses to create a curbside garden between the sidewalk and the street. It is now a butterfly paradise and next year will be even more lush and colorful. On our work days we talk, laugh, eat and exchange ideas all while transforming each other’s yards. It is so much fun as well as educational. I am truly inspired by this amazing group of women for their untiring hard work, sense of humor and unique perspectives.

I hope you all follow suit and grab your garden buddies to help each other with projects at your own homes. With the help of a friend or two, the items on that “to-do” list may actually get checked off.

Here are pictures of the curbside garden before, during and after.

A Little Garden Trivia…

Cool as a cucumber? It’s true ... the inside of a cucumber on the vine measures as much as 20 degrees cooler than the outside air on a warm day.

In closing…

Whoever makes a garden
Has, oh so many friends!
The glory of the morning,
The dew when daylight ends.
    ...Douglas Malloch

Rebecca Matthews
TCMGA 2007 Executive Committee:

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Immediate Past President: Becky Waak
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VP Education: Rosalie Russell
VP Volunteer Coordinator for Certified Master Gardeners: Deborah Lindsey
VP Volunteer Coordinator for Master Gardeners in Training: Michelle Butler
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