Keith Brown is a Board Certified Master Arborist, one of only 2 in the central Texas area. He is a member of the prestigious American Society of Consulting Arborists, Texas Oak Wilt Certified and sits on the board of directors for the Texas Chapter International Society of Arboriculture.

Keith’s 12 years of field experience began as a climber on a pruning crew and continued through every facet of the commercial sector of the business. Keith is now the owner and field manager of Austin Tree Experts and is the city arborist for the City of Rollingwood.

“I am one of the few lucky people who fell into a career they love at a young age. I have a strong back and a sincere love for both people and the environment, two requirements for this business.” — Keith Brown

Keith’s expertise covers every spectrum of tree topics. Bring all your questions about tree selection, planting, care, diagnosis, stand management, insect and disease treatment, etc...
Come join us on Wednesday March 4th, 2009. Keith will present: "Advances in Tree Pruning Techniques and The Current State of Oak Wilt in Central Texas" at the Zilker Botanical Garden Club House at 7PM.

Best Regards,
Jerry Naiser Vice President, Programs
The President’s Message

You know that sensation you feel when you’ve been ill and one morning you realize that your energy level is up and you might actually become human again? Suddenly you want to do something other than lie on the couch and watch TV and sleep. You’re hungry again and cannot stand the thought of another bowl of chicken soup. Today is that day for me...thank goodness!

And, I’m thinking that our gardens must be experiencing much the same right now. I’m seeing the first signs of spring. Bulbs are starting to emerge, wildflowers are growing quickly now, and soon we’ll see new foliage on our trees and shrubs. Everything is beginning to wake up and feel alive again...ready for rain (I’m keeping my fingers crossed on that one), food and a little tender loving care.

With the onset of spring our gardening outreach activities need a little nurturing as well. Volunteer opportunities abound. It can be a little overwhelming with so much going on but it’s time for us to come out of hibernation and get back into volunteering. Time to get out there and deliver our message, promote good gardening practices and support gardening events.

One very important event for which we still need volunteers is the East Austin Garden Fair: A Passion for Plants to be held on Saturday, March 21 at Govalle Park. This event is a marvelous collaboration among Austin non-profits including Green Corn Project, Sustainable Food Center, 4-H, Travis County Master Gardeners and others. Master Gardener booths include entomology, a plant clinic, butterfly gardening, vermiculture, fruit growing, wildlife and roses. We need volunteers to assist with our booths, help with set up and take down. And, we need greeters to tally how many people come to the fair and answer visitors’ questions.

Many of you are already engaged and are working diligently to make this our best ever Passion for Plants. If you have not previously been involved or maybe you have but just haven’t yet signed up to help this year, now is the time.

The talents and knowledge of our members are amazing. Look over the volunteer opportunities above. Pick an area where you can make a contribution. Contact Susan Decker (susan.decker@earthlink.net or 707.2325) and let her know you can help.

I look forward to seeing you there!

Manda Rash, President
The excitement builds once the Redbuds and Texas Mountain Laurels start to bloom in Central Texas. When these spring treasures are merrily blooming, our carpets of bluebonnets and Indian paintbrushes can’t be too far behind. It’s time for one blooming showcase after another and the Texas Mountain Laurel puts on quite the show.

Texas Mountain Laurel is also known as mescalbean, big drunk bean, coralbean, red-hots and frijolito (mainly for the colorful red seeds that are produced later in the year). The plant usually is grown as a multi-stem evergreen tree that will eventually reach 15-25 ft high and 5-15 ft wide. The leaves are an attractive year-round evergreen, glossy green color with a lighter underside. Each leaf is made up of 7-9 leaflets.

The real treat in the spring are the showy, pendulous, racemes of bluish-lavender/purple blooms. Each cluster of blooms has a strong fragrance that some say is similar to grape Kool-aid. The blooming starts in early spring (March) and often extends into April.

In Texas, (Calia secuniflora (formerly Sophora secundiflora)) is native to south and central areas of the State. But it grows well beyond the Lone Star State and into New Mexico and northern Mexico (Chihuahua, Coahuila, Hidalgo, Puebla and Queretaro). Texas Mountain Laurel grows well in a native habitat that is usually on limestone soils, in canyons and on slopes - perfect for the well-drained, gravelly soils on the west side of Austin and into the Hill Country. It is hardy to temperatures as low as 10 F. (zone 7).

Another attractive feature of the Texas Mountain Laurel is the seeds and seed pots. When ripe in September, the semi-woody pods split open to reveal showy red seeds. The seeds have been often used to make jewelry and crafts - but be wary because they are very poisonous.

A tough resilient plant with few pests, it tolerates full sun conditions well or a light shade location when younger. This toughness also includes a low water requirement of at least one deep irrigation per month. The native plant is often very slow growing and may sulk after transplanting for a year or two before it
has a growth spurt. Patience will be rewarded with this relatively pest-free plant. The plant has a long taproot that makes it difficult to transplant. It is best to minimize transplant shock by buying or starting your own container grown plants and carefully planting it without disrupting the root ball.

Texas mountain laurel is easy to propagate by seed if the seed is harvested at the correct time. Pick the seed when it is newly ripe and just turning pinky-red. As the seed ages, the seed coat hardens and it takes much longer to germinate. If the seed is left on the tree too long and is quite impenetrable, use a file to wear down the seed coat so moisture can get into the seed and speed up germination. Alternatively carefully soak the seed in sulfuric acid for 15 minutes to decrease the seed coat.

All parts of the plant are highly poisonous to humans - especially the seed. The seed contains a toxic alkaloid called cytosine which produces a narcotic and hallucinogenic effect similar to nicotine. In large doses it can interfere with respiration and be fatal. It is reputed that one seed, thoroughly chewed is enough to kill an adult. Remove the seeds before they mature if there is potential of human injury (ie: children nearby). Cattle are very susceptible to poisoning also while goats and sheep are more tolerant.

Cultivars:
Sophora secundiflora ‘Alba’ – white flowers
Sophora secundiflora ‘Silver Peso’ – silver-grey foliage

Anne Van Nest
So long, winter! The spring gardening season is upon us and I am giddy with anticipation. Who will be the stars of my vegetable garden this year? Will we have any spring rains? When will I bite into that first sun-kissed, juicy tomato? Will I win my yearly battle against the squash vine borer? Every year is different and every year leads to new discoveries and ‘a-ha’ moments.

Vegetable gardening would be effortless if we planted the same plant in the same place every year and just stepped back and let it grow, but it is not so easy. Our warm season plantings require careful thought and planning. We must decide what varieties to plant and how much space we want to dedicate to a particular crop. Consult the Central Texas Horticulture website at [http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/travis/](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/travis/) for information on varieties, planting dates, and cultivation requirements for various vegetables. Or check out the gardening section at your local library or bookstore for regional gardening books. Here are a few of my favorites:

“The Vegetable Book” by Dr. Sam Cotner – the original hardback is no longer available, but a revised paperback edition is available through Texas Gardener ([www.texasgardener.com](http://www.texasgardener.com)). “The Southern Kitchen Garden” by William D. Adams and Thomas R. LeRoy and “Texas Organic Vegetable Gardening” by Howard Garrett and Malcolm Beck

If your space is limited, by all means stick with the vegetables that will yield the most satisfaction and dining enjoyment for you and your family. I like to try a few new varieties each season along with some old favorites that I know are reliable producers. I also plant both heirlooms and hybrids as I believe they each have their advantages – and diversity in a garden is always a good thing. Many crops, like cucumbers, winter squash, small melons and pole beans can be grown vertically on a trellis, along a fence or at the base of a sturdy tomato cage. If you like “bean-y” beans, do try some old-fashioned pole beans, like ‘McCaslan’, ‘Rattlesnake’, ‘Kentucky Wonder’, ‘Garden of Eden’ or ‘Louisiana Purple Pod’. If you can’t find them in the seed rack of your local garden center, they can be ordered from Southern Exposure Seed Exchange or Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds.

If you are new to vegetable gardening, be sure to keep a simple diagram
of your garden plot which will help as you rotate your crop families from year to year. If you are not new to gardening, I assume you are already doing this!

With the exception of tomatoes, peppers and eggplant, our warm season veggies can be seeded directly in the garden once the soil warms and danger of frost is passed. That usually means mid-late March here in Central Texas. Use a soil thermometer to monitor the temperature — I use an inexpensive kitchen thermometer that I purchased at a restaurant supply company and keep with my garden supplies. When our soil reaches 60-65° then I know my seeds will have their best chance at germination, but seeds are cheap, so I’ll plant even when the soil is in the 50-55° range. Okra, melons, eggplant, Southern peas and super sweet corn varieties definitely prefer it warmer, so I’ll wait until the soil has warmed to at least 65°.

Of course tomatoes are an exception to this rule. They can tolerate lower temperatures but don’t like it much below 50°, so we want to get them out as early as we can, yet be ready to provide protection if/when we get a cold snap. Resist the urge to plant your tomatoes deep. Instead, remove the lower leaves and plant your transplants sideways in a shallow trench. This will keep the roots in the uppermost layer of soil where it is warmer, and new feeder roots will sprout all along the stem. Be sure to give your newly transplanted tomatoes some kind of protection from the cold and the wind. Row cover, cardboard boxes, large plastic water or milk jugs can offer some protection in our early, unpredictable spring weather.

Strawberries usually come into full production this month. Harvest your berries regularly and use them up quick as our home grown varieties, while tastier, do not store well. If you have planted an asparagus bed, do not harvest any spears until the third year, as it is important to let that foliage grow the first two years while the roots are becoming established. If you’ve passed that two year mark and you have spears to harvest, use a sharp knife to cut them just below ground level.

I came across the following quote recently — I believe it was attributed to Ruth Stout, who came to fame in the 1950’s using a no-weed, no-till method of planting that relies on heavy mulch:

“Gardening gives you back your faith in things. You can plant all the beans you want and they’ll never come up a tomato.”

The longer I garden (and the older I get!), the more I appreciate the wisdom of her method, and certainly can’t argue with her observations.

Here’s to a bountiful harvest,

Patty Leander
The greenhouse is really filling up fast thanks to the almost twice weekly workdays during the month of February as preparations continue for Zilker Garden Festival and A Passion for Plants—an East Austin Garden Fair.

The first tomato and pepper seeds (started in late January) were transplanted for the A Passion For Plants event. Over 500 seedlings of Juliet, Celebrity and Yellow Pear tomatoes were big enough to transplant into 4” pots starting in early February. Several hot chili peppers and a sweet bell pepper type as well as fennel and a dwarf sunflower were also transplanted into 4” pots for the East Austin Garden Fair. These vegetable garden staples will be given away at this family oriented annual event.

Several of our most popular tomatoes (Juliet, Celebrity, and Azoychka Russian Heirloom) have been seeded for Zilker Garden Festival and have been germinating in successive stages for several weeks. Look for these in 4” pots or gallons on March 28th and 29th at Zilker. Look for some additional varieties (such as Persimmon Orange and German Johnson) that Judy Barrett recommended for our area when she spoke at the last Central Texas Master Gardener Regional Meeting.

Huge thanks are extended to Robin Moore for her trip to San Antonio to pick up plants from Peterson Bros. wholesale greenhouse grower. These plants will supplement our own propagated plants and will be potted up and sold in planters or 4” pots at Zilker Garden Festival.

The first citrus blooms were spotted opening behind the greenhouse about the third week of February (slightly later than last year). Drop by for an olfactory sensation as more trees join in the fragrance parade.

Work is ongoing to repair the Dosatron automatic fertilizer injector that is used in the greenhouse to mix fertilizer concentrate with the irrigation water at a set rate.
Many slots are still available for certified Master Gardeners and Master Gardener Interns for the TCMGA plant sales area (as well as preparations the week prior and set up just before the event) at Zilker Garden Festival. Watch for details of the volunteer assignments at the March meeting or contact Cheryl McGrath via email at mcgmil@sbcglobal.net.

See you in the Greenhouse!...Anne Van Nest, Marian Stasney and Molly Clark
**NEW MASTER GARDENERS**

Congratulations to the following participants in the 2007 training class who successfully completed their Master Gardener certification:

- Allbright, Caitlin
- Barfoot, Cherry
- Booher, Janet
- Booher, Hubert
- Brown, Janice
- Campbell, Linda
- Case, Randy
- Cervantes, Cecilia
- Denlinger, Lynda
- Donovan, Cheryl
- Dunagan, Kathy
- Fox, John
- Fox, Joyce
- Garrett, Roslyn
- Goodrich, Midge
- Goodrich, Susan
- Goveia, Cheryl
- Harshman, Dusty
- Hart, Linda
- Jablonowski, Jane
- Kuzmich, Terry
- Lynch, Susie
- McGiffin, Mike
- Meek, Cindy
- Mizell, Ferne
- Moore, Robin
- Neely, Mary Ann
- Peterson, Mary Jude
- Pflum, Mei Yi
- Pokluda McLeroy, Melanie
- Saunders, Linda
- Skredergard, Helen
- Spinn, Lenore
- Stevens, Leslie
- Swift, Sheri
- Taylor, Maggie
- Toalson, Susan
- Toovey, Rue
- Tsai, Meei
- Warren, Dianne
- Whatley, Melissa
- Williamson, Joy

Please join us in welcoming them to the Travis County Master Gardener Association!

Michelle Butler & Carolyn Williams

**THIRD ANNUAL 2009 A PASSION FOR PLANTS: AN EAST AUSTIN GARDEN FAIR**

Saturday, March 21, 2009, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Govalle Park, 5200 Bolm Road, just East of Airport Blvd.
Call the Travis County AgriLife Extension Service at 854-9600 for more information

Govalle Park will once again be the site of A Passion for Plants: An East Austin Garden Fair on the last weekend of Spring Break. The theme of our third annual fair is Edible Landscaping for Humans and Wildlife. This FREE public gardening event will feature hands-on demonstrations of how to dig a garden bed, make compost, grow fruits and vegetables organically, create wildlife food and shelter, start plants from cuttings and seeds, and many more gardening tips that anyone can do. Come for the free advice from our on-site experts to answer all of your gardening questions, and for fun educational activities for kids, with bugs, bugs, and more bugs! Visit our booths and get a free plant! The more you
learn, the more plants you earn. Get ready for Spring with all the free information you need to start your own edible garden, whether it’s one plant in a pot or a whole yard full, and then relax with a free massage!

Hosted by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association and the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, the Sustainable Food Center, the Green Corn Project, and the Holistic Health Awareness Network.

**Public Seminars**

How to Grow a Great Lawn  
Saturday, March 14, 2009, 10am-Noon, Zilker Botanical Garden

With Spring just around the corner, it’s a great time to learn about growing a healthy lawn. Master Gardener Susan Decker teams up with Denise Delaney from the City of Austin’s GrowGreen program to give you the latest information on the care and feeding of your lawn. Topics will include choosing the right turf for your site, irrigation, fertilization, proper mowing technique, and disease diagnosis and treatment. This class is free and does not require reservations.

This seminar is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas A&M and Travis County AgriLife Extension Service. For more details, see [http://www.tcmastergardeners.org](http://www.tcmastergardeners.org).

Growing a Spring Vegetable Garden  
March 18, 2009, 7pm-9pm, Zilker Botanical Garden

Enjoy juicy tomatoes, crisp cucumbers, and delectable green beans straight from your garden. Baskets of okra and armloads of squash can be grown in your garden! Learn how to plant and maintain a spring vegetable garden from Master Gardener Patty Leander, who will share her expertise on vegetable varieties that perform well in Central Texas, recommended planting times, and composting. This seminar is loaded with basic facts and helpful ideas, useful to both new and experienced vegetable gardeners. This seminar is free, open to the public and does not require reservations. Please arrive early as this is one of our most popular seminars.

This seminar is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas A&M and Travis County AgriLife Extension Service. For more details, see [http://www.tcmastergardeners.org](http://www.tcmastergardeners.org) or call The Travis County Master Gardeners help desk at (512) 854-9600.

**Inside Austin Gardens Tour 2009**

Mark your calendar with the date for our 2009 Fall Inside Austin Gardens Tour. That date is Saturday October 24th from 9am to 4pm

We have a fabulous theme this year. All our gardens are Certified Wildlife Habitats!  
This means these gardens have Food, Water, Cover, and Places to Raise Young.

To learn more to have your own Backyard Wildlife Habitat go to [www.keepaustinwild](http://www.keepaustinwild) or nwf.org

These gardens are in Central Austin and all have interesting front yard gardens that attract hummingbirds and butterflies for the whole neighborhood to see and enjoy.

Of course we'll have lots of fun and interesting educational highlights throughout the day of the tour. We know people come to our tour for the garden demonstrations as well as the beautiful gardens.
So circle October 24th on your schedule because this is a great volunteer project for us all. We will have plants for sale too. And after the tour we will have a party with great food to celebrate our hard work.

Join us to help show the Austin community how easy it is to support our Native Wildlife.

Thanks and feel free to call me 771-4319 or email me loretta@nfainc.com.

Loretta Fischer

**Garden to Garden Plant Exchange: April 1st**

Following the April meeting, share your bounty with your gardening buddies. Bring your contributions potted, bagged, labeled (no muddy soil, please) and don't forget those magazines and catalogs along with your seeds and bulbs. The Exchange will start promptly at the conclusion of the meeting, so, in fairness, we ask no "liberating" of plants before the Exchange begins. We also ask you to retrieve your leftovers as the Garden Center has no means to handle them. And we need volunteers to help clean up after the Exchange as the Center has a prompt closing time. I'm looking forward to it!!

Roxane Smith
The serenity of my winter garden has disappeared and has turned into a garden of enchantment. My backyard seems to be a magical outdoor haven for wildlife. Every critter I see is courting another. This morning some juvenile Cardinals were competing to win one lone female's attention. The squirrels were scampering in a Live Oak mating. I had to rescue a green anole from my cats on the front porch (just in time!) My trailing lantana, coral honeysuckle, Red Bud and Mountain Laurel are all in bloom. I hope to see my bulbs popping up any day now. We are probably in for another cold snap but Spring is just around the corner and the garden will be dressed in all it's splendor like a little girl on Easter with her bonnet and shiny patent leather shoes. I can't wait!

Rebecca Matthews

Garden (SPRING) Trivia Quiz

1. On the first day of spring, the hours of daylight and of darkness are equal. T or F?
2. During the vernal equinox, around March 21st, an egg will stand on its small end. T or F?
3. The ancient Greeks celebrated Mother's Day in spring. T or F?
4. Finding a four-leaf clover is thought to bring you good luck. T or F?
5. The area along the California-Oregon border, is known as the "Easter Lily Capital of the World." T or F?
6. Baby birds must learn how to sing. T or F?
7. Arbor Day, which encourages the planting of trees and celebrates the role trees play in the environment, is traditionally celebrated on the last Monday in April. T or F?
8. Spring Fever is a real physical condition. T or F?
9. An emerald represents spring. T or F?
10. William Wordsworth wrote a famous poem about daffodils. T or F?

ANSWERS

1. True. Around March 21st, the earth's position in its orbit around the sun places its equator in line with the sun. This time period is called the "vernal equinox" and is the first day of spring in the Northern Hemisphere. "Vernal" means spring and "equinox" means equal.

2. False. Although some people would swear that an egg will stand on its small end during the vernal equinox, there's no scientific evidence to support these claims.


4. True. Four-leaf clovers are thought to bring good luck, but there's no scientific evidence to support that claim.
5. True. An area along the California and Oregon border produces 95 percent of all bulbs grown in the world for the potted Easter lily market. They produce more than 11 million bulbs annually.

6. True. Though baby birds are born with the ability to sing, they must learn the songs of their species. An isolated baby bird will learn simple songs, but not the complex songs of its species. A bird must hear in order to learn. Only a few birds can sing the songs of other species. The mockingbird seems to be the best at imitating the songs of other birds.

7. True. Arbor Day is traditionally celebrated on the last Monday in April; however, each state can select its own date, depending on weather conditions. The first Arbor Day Celebration was held on April 10, 1872 in Nebraska.

8. True. Spring Fever is a real physical condition which commonly occurs when a sudden warm spell follows a long cold period. When the temperature rises, the body has to get rid of heat; thus there's a dilation or expansion of the blood vessels so that blood can be carried to the body surface where heat can be lost quickly. Some people experience an energetic feeling when this change happens due to the body's reaction to the great amount of internal work going on.


10. True. William Wordsworth wrote the poem, "I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud," which was about yellow daffodils.

In Closing

To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better; whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition, to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
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