Do you love passing on gardening knowledge, but don't quite feel ready to step in front of a crowd? Intrigued about how to finally take the plunge to speak to interested groups? Public speaking is one of the most commonly feared activities, but it is one of the TCMGA's greatest tools to spread gardening knowledge and help people get to know what our organization offers.

You're not the only one who has ever had these fears! Join us at the TCMGA May meeting and hear our MG speaker's panel talk about how they got started public speaking, divulge some of their secrets to successful presentations, and even laugh at some of their mistakes. Come and hear helpful tips and funny stories that will help you see that you CAN be a TCMGA speaker, and have a great time doing it! Interns, we would love for you to join us if you can.

The panel will consist of: Sam Myers, Vicki Blachman and Susan Jung. Moderating the panel will be Bonnie Martin.

Jerry Naiser
Vice president Programs
It’s hard to believe that’s already May. This year is just flying by. Much has been accomplished but there is much more to do.

Our major spring events are behind us and our focus will be on our public education programs, Speaker’s Bureau, JMG activities, Extension Help Desk, the forthcoming Xeriscape publication, revision of the Garden Guide for Austin and Vicinity, and summer survival for the greenhouse and Demonstration Garden. All the while we are planning for the 2009 Training Class that begins in early August and the fall garden tour (October 24). I’m sure these activities will keep us hopping right through the summer and into the fall.

And, we’re anticipating that we’ll have a new Horticulture Agent in the very near future. I’m sure he/she will have great ideas on other ways that we can move our organization forward.

The rest of the year promises to be as busy as the first few months!

Because of family matters, I was unable to attend the State Master Gardener Conference that was held in Marshall in late April. From all accounts, it was a wonderful event.

But the highlight had to be the awards banquet. Travis County Master Gardeners received two awards in the medium large category—second place for Master Gardener of the Year went to Susan Decker and third place for our newsletter, “The Compost Bin.”

Congratulations to Susan and to Cheryl Harrison and her team for jobs well done!

I’m so proud of our organization and its volunteer spirit. Keep up your good work!

Manda Rash, President
Columbines are showy, spring-blooming perennials that offer a dramatic display for a partly shaded spot under live oaks in central Texas.

These attractive plants are known by their botanical name Aquilegia which comes from the Latin word Aquila meaning eagle. This is in reference to their spur-like petals which resemble an eagle’s beak or talons. Some people think that the unusual columbine flower shape looks like a bunch of pigeons with long tail feathers. The common name for this flower before it was columbine was culverwort, from the Saxon word “culfre” meaning a pigeon. To bring it even closer, the Latin word “Columba” means like a dove or dove colored.

There are over 70 species of columbines with many native to the meadows and woodlands of North America. From these, hundreds of cultivars have been created with small to large white, pink, orange, yellow, blue, red, purple and almost black (dark purple) flowers. The distinctive flowers have both petals and sepals and often are present in two different colors. Each petal is modified into an elongated nectar spur. Several native columbines have adapted to meet the needs of a specific pollinator, the hawk moths. Other columbines are pollinated by long tongued insects and hummingbirds adept at reaching the sweet nectar in this long narrow tube (spur). The inner flower structures are sepals and can be single or double in number. Columbine flowers are mainly bell shaped and vary in their width. Many flowers are present in exciting color combinations (pink and yellow, purple and white, blue and white, orange and yellow) as well as all one color. Double flowered plants have an added interest as they look like many layered petticoats. Some call the double columbines, granny’s bonnets.

A couple of varieties even add the additional interest of having variegated foliage. ‘Lime Frost’ has purple blue flowers and yellow mottled variegation. ‘Leprechaun Gold’ has large violet flowers and golden marbled leaves. ‘Woodside Strain’ has golden foliage and pink, red, blue or white double flowers.

Columbines are cool season plants that bloom in Texas in mid-spring for about four weeks. They are great plants for a partly shaded site in Texas but can grow in full sun in more northern locations where a sunny meadow or garden bed on
the edge of forest is ideal. Some species are even right at home in full sun high up on a mountaintop in the Rockies. For Central Texas, pick columbine cultivars or species that have ancestors in native Texas plants will tolerate the heat and drought better. Some of the best suggestions are listed below and are tough enough to survive the Texas summers (with a dormancy) and may be a perennial in the garden. Other types will succumb to the heat and should be treated as annuals (but with the possibility of some self-seeding happening).

Columbines are easily propagated from seed. Many seeds are produced and they ripen fast in the multi-section capsule. Since the seedpod doesn’t split open (it just opens at the top), the seed often stays in the capsule until a strong wind tips it out, it can be easily collected when ripe. Sow the seed in the fall and lightly scratch it into the soil. Many, but not all hybrid columbines do not reproduce true from seed, so columbine seedlings will often bring flower color surprises to the garden. Simply rogue out the colors that don’t work.

Columbines are very hardy, depending on the species some may be hardy to at least zone 5. They come in a range of heights also – from dwarfs at less than 12” to giants over 3’ tall.

The seeds and roots are poisonous and contain cardiogenic (heart) toxins if ingested.

Noted Columbines:

Naturalized and native in Central Texas...

Aquilegia canadensis (Canada Wild Columbine) is growing as a rogue colony in central Texas. It grows here in carved out pockets of limestone rock in the shade. The red, pink and yellow blooms appear from Feb-June. This plant crosses with the Southwestern yellow columbine (A. chrysantha) to produce interesting yellow and red and peach colors. A native plant that has been fondly cultivated since the mid-17th century.

Aquilegia chrysantha (Southwestern Yellow Columbine) is native to the southwest. The showy yellow flower is its main highlight.

Bred from Texas Natives...

‘Texas Gold’ Columbine (Aquilegia chrysantha var. hickleyana ‘Texas Gold’) Texas Gold has good heat tolerance as its parents are native to the shady areas of Big Bend. It has primrose yellow petals with lighter yellow sepals on upward facing blooms. It may self-seed. This is a columbine that is specially adapted to Texas! Texas Gold is a perennial that goes dormant in the summer and reawakens when the cool weather and rains begin in the fall. It must have some shade. Plant it beneath deciduous trees such as cedar elm, bald cypress or Arizona Ash. Interplant with a shade-loving plant to fill in the empty spot once the foliage is cut down in early summer after seed drop.

Anne Van Nest
In The Vegetable Garden

With April’s hail and winds behind us and May’s sunshine and consistently warm temperatures ahead, our vegetable gardens will begin to grow by leaps and bounds. If you planted in March your harvest will soon begin with bush beans, cucumbers, summer squash and, of course, that first highly-prized tomato of the season. I can’t resist the urge to start digging around the potato patch in mid-May in search of a few new potatoes. I’ll steal a few for supper and leave the plants in the ground until the tops start to die down before digging the entire crop. Do not wash potatoes after harvest; just wipe the dirt off and store them in a single layer in a wide, flat box or tray. Exposure to light will cause them to turn green, so keep them covered or keep them in a dark place. A root cellar would be ideal, but then if you had a root cellar you probably wouldn’t be in a place where you could enjoy the South’s delicious bounty!

Be sure to keep your crops growing strong with regular watering and light applications of water soluble fertilizer every 2-3 weeks and make it a point to harvest regularly so that your plants will continue to produce.

Texans love their pinto beans and cornbread - two delicious foods that compliment each other beautifully. At the last MG meeting, Manda mentioned that she had visited with a long time gardener at the East Austin Garden Fair who shared that she would buy pinto beans at the grocery store, plant them in her garden and eat them in the green ‘snap’ stage. They may not be the best tasting green bean on the planet, in fact they go from tender to tough pretty fast, but pinto beans start out as green beans, and when left to grow on the plant they plump up slightly and then dry to that familiar pinky-brown bean that we know and love. The shell turns yellow then dries to beige at which point the beans can be harvested and stored for eating at a later date. I like to store mine in a Mason jar, but they can be stored in a plastic bag or other container. The standard variety grown for pinto beans is called ‘Dwarf Horticultural’, also known as ‘Improved Pinto’, and can be purchased from Willhite Seed. Callahan’s and other feed stores often sell pintos in bulk. I do not
recommend planting pinto beans from the grocery store as you will not know how long they have been on the shelf, under what conditions they have been stored, how viable they are as seed or what variety they are. Of course some of you have such a green thumb that you can beat these odds, and you have my complete admiration. But the safer route to success is to purchase seed from a reputable supplier. If you decide to grow your own pintos, do let me know which route you take and if you are successful. As always, this is an opportunity to learn from each other.

Don’t forget about the Flower and Vegetable Show held to be held at Zilker on June 6 and 7. See the Garden Club of Austin’s website at www.austingardeners.org for more information. This is your chance to win a well-deserved blue ribbon and show off your awesome green thumb!

Be sure to mulch everything this month and do your best to water consistently so that plants are not allowed to dry out to the point of wilting. If you haven’t planted okra yet, it’s not too late. Sweet potato slips, Southern peas, melons and Malabar spinach can also take the heat and can still be planted in the garden this month. They will continue to grow strong through the heat of summer even when our less heat tolerant crops begin to falter. And speaking of faltering, I will be taking a break from writing for the Compost Bin in June. My family will be celebrating the graduation of my daughter (Hook ‘Em!) and three of her cousins, and I’m afraid I may be distracted from thinking about vegetables, but only for a short time. In the meantime, I leave you with a wonderful recipe for using your bumper crop of tomatoes. These delicious roasted tomatoes can be used in salads, pasta, pizza, casseroles, grilled cheese - anywhere you’d enjoy that rich, slightly sweet, yet savory, flavor of a tomato. See you in July.

Oven Roasted Tomatoes
This works great with plum type tomatoes, like Roma or Juliet. Standard size tomatoes may take 2 or even 3 hours longer to collapse and concentrate the flavor.

- 24 plum tomatoes
- 6 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 clove of garlic, minced
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Minced herbs (I like to use oregano or thyme)

Cut tomatoes in half vertically (through the stem). Use fingers to gently remove most of seeds and pulp. Lay tomatoes cut side up on a large foil-lined tray.

Mix garlic and olive oil. Drizzle over tomatoes. Sprinkle with salt, pepper, and minced herbs and roast in a 275° oven for 1 ½ - 2 hours. Roasted tomatoes can be stored in refrigerator up to a week.

Here’s to a bountiful harvest,

Patty Leander
April was a bonanza month for TCMGA greenhouse plants to be donated to several Austin area gardens. It was great to see these plants go to such deserving recipients – to the care of wonderful garden project coordinators and to so many good locations. Plants were donated to the City of Austin for Mayfield Park and Preserve in preparation for the annual spring Trowel and Error Garden Symposium. Surplus tomatoes, peppers and basil were donated to Zilker Botanical Garden for the vegetable growing area. Container appropriate plants (and some gallon tomatoes) were donated for a public giveaway at the TCMGA Gardening Above the Ground seminar in Mid-April. Gallon pots of perennials were selected for the Bannockburn Baptist Church garden. Herbs, tomatoes, shrubs, perennials and roses were donated to the Hudson Bend Middle School and showy perennials and annuals were donated to the South Austin Senior Activity Center.

A determined group tackled putting the greenhouse shade cloth on the roof at the April greenhouse work day. After one false start, the shade cloth was firmly secured during a somewhat gusty Saturday morning and the job was done. The shade cloth will now provide at least a 50% reduction from the sun for the plants.

The grow boxes, on permanent display in front of the greenhouse are looking great right now. Be sure to take a look next time you visit the greenhouse to see the tomatoes, chard, cauliflower and other veggies growing in them. Also note the herbs that were started from seeds in the south-most boxes.

See you in the Greenhouse!...Anne Van Nest, Marian Stasney and Molly Clark
Over The Back Fence

A Passion for Plants – An East Austin Garden Fair - Recap
Saturday, March 21, 2009 – Govalle Park

The third annual “A Passion for Plants” was a great success because of all the wonderful volunteers who worked to put this event together. More than 700 people attended the fair on Saturday, March 21 at Govalle Park. The theme was Edible Landscaping for Humans and Wildlife and fairgoers learned about gardening from 29 hands-on exhibits while the kids participated in more than a dozen fun, interactive activities. Fifty-nine Travis County Master Gardeners and Interns helped with planning, preparing, marketing, greeting and sponsoring a booth along with 18 Texas AgriLife Extension Service and 4-H CAPITAL/Americorp staff members. In addition, many family members and friends volunteered.

The MG greenhouse team grew more than 820 plants for the give-away. These plants included pepper, tomato, fennel, parsley and sunflower. Many other exhibits offered free plants and/or seeds.

In addition to Master Gardener exhibits, eight community partners helped make the fair great. These partners included Green Corn Project, Sustainable Food Center, Holistic Education and Health Network, City of Austin, LBJ Wildflower Center, Substance Distributing, Urban Roots and Fancy Feathers 4-H club.

Eighteen sponsors provided free items such as snacks, plants, bags, media publicity and awards. The sponsors not previously mentioned include Shoal Creek Nursery, Evercare, Geo Growers, Natural Gardener, National Wildlife Federation, H-E-B, Whole Foods, KAZI Radio and East Side Café.

25% of the people surveyed heard about the fair from a friend, while 21% heard about it from the Radio/TV/Newspaper and 17% found information on websites/blogs.

Some of the comments from fairgoers included:

• “Came here last year, knew nothing, took home the free tomatoes...now have 50 feet of veggie beds, multiple herbs, fruit trees, bushes, etc. IMMENSELY LIFE CHANGING event! Thanks!! “
• “The whole fair was very informative. It was nice that there is so much printed literature & free plants. “
• “Fabulous! Great info & volunteers! “
• “I really enjoyed the friendly, encouraging atmosphere....welcoming!! “

Many THANKS to everyone who helped with the fair!!

Exhibits
Rainwater Collecting: Jackie Johnson, Liz Caskey
Good Bug Bad Bug: Sam and Leslie Myers
Entomology for Kids and Adults: Link Davidson
Plant Clinic: Haidar and Ashley Khazen, Jonathon Ramirez, Alicia Nelson, Rosalie Russell
Propagation: Susan Jung, Tommie Clayton, Velia Sanchez-Ruiz
Butterfly Gardening: Leslie Ernst, Wayne and Kathy King, Marty Berdan, Shirley Koeller, Chris Giaraffa
Vermiculture: Joy Ruth
Fruit Growing: Susan Decker, Glenn Olson
Herbs for Eating and For Health: Tahira Malik, Extension
EarthKind Roses: Eleanor Pratt, Holly Plotner
Tools and Techniques: Janet Newton, Marty Berdan, Cheryl Harrison
Grow Boxes: Terry Huth, Lisa Anhaiser, Charlotte Grim
Smelly Plants: Ratna and Venkappa Gani
Native Wildlife Plants: Jo Kautz, Marty Berdan
Gardening for Wildlife: Ramona Urbanek, Lindy McGinnis, Rebecca Matthews, Cheryl Harrison, Manda Rash
Organic Gardening: Ila Falvey, Kevin Washington
Plant Giveaway: Frankie Hart, Hope Dyson, Margarine Beaman, Liz Caskey and the Greenhouse team: Anne Van Nest, Molly Clark, Marian Stasney
Snacks and Water: Jackie Johnson
Double Digging: Suzanne Hurley, Green Corn Project
Health and Massage: Vernon Bailey, HEHN
Eco-Pots: Julie Krosley, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
Urban Roots: Max Elliott
City of Austin-Recycling: Joan Ivy
Substance Distributing-Community Gardening: Greg Klein
Vegetable Gardening/Seed Saving/Spread the Harvest: Sari Albornoz, Jess Guffy, Sustainable Food Center
Composting and Mulching: Sari Albornoz, Sustainable Food Center
Nutrition/Healthy Habits: Healthy Kitchen, Sustainable Food Center
Feathers and Fiber: Fancy Feathers 4-H club

Kids Activities
Bird Feeders, Seed Dispersal, Eat a Rainbow/Draw Food Ingredients, Where Does Your Food Come From, Matching Games, Water Cycle, Seed Balls, Plant Tag, etc: Patrice Mallard, Jonathan Richter and 4-H CAPITAL & Americorp staff: Stephanie Marsh, Sarah Hammontree, Douglas Doneson, Ash Bell, Alex Campbell, Kellie Hall, Tara Mathers, Anne Bormann, Deborah Turner-Mac, Laura Fry, Jennifer Gilbert, Elissa Mallory

Transportation, Set up/Take Down
Molly Clark, Marian Stasney, Johnny DeMyers, Wendy Buck, Nina Bryant, Joette Pelliccia, Susan Sanders, Frankie Hart, Susan Decker, Lisa Anhaiser, Chris Giaraffa, Leslie Ernst
Greeters/Translators/Photography
Cher Groody, Melaine McLeRoy, Marianna Felsmann, Katherine Strickland, Shwi-Jen Wu, Maria Mayer, Wendy Buck, Sam Meyer Skip Richter, Sarah Richter, Elida Urtado, Cecilia Rocha

Flyer Creation, Reproduction, Distribution
Leslie Ernst, Shannon Kloesel, Lisa Anhaiser, Susan Decker, Crystal Wiltz, Angie Dickenson, Elida Urtado, Johnny DeMeyers, Sam & Leslie Myers, Tahira Malik, 4-H CAPITAL-Americorp, Sustainable Food Center, etc.

Donations/Awards/Volunteer Coordination
Eleanor Pratt, Cheryl McGrath

Radio/TV
Susan Decker, Lisa Anhaiser, Link Davidson, Vernon Bailey
Public Seminars

Rainwater Harvesting and Waterwise Gardening
June 13, 2009  10am- Noon, Riverplace Country Club, 4207 River Place Blvd.
Come enjoy a free seminar on capturing rainwater and lowering water usage in your landscape. This session will cover all the basics of building a non-potable rainwater harvesting system. In addition, learn how to design beautiful gardens designed for lower water usage. Don't be misinformed, xeriscaping is not "zero-scaping".

Vendors representing tank and gutter companies will be available to answer specific questions. City of Austin representatives will be available to answer rainbarrel, permit and rebate questions.

Becoming a Garden Detective: Diagnosing Plant Problems
June 16, 2009  7-9pm, Steiner Ranch Towne Square Community Center, 12550 Country Trails Lane
Just when you think you've done everything right by your plants, one of them starts to go downhill. One of the biggest challenges for gardeners is correctly diagnosing plant problems and finding effective, safe solutions. Is your plant dying because of an insect, environmental or disease problem? Join us to learn the causes of plant problems, the process for diagnosing plant problems, and preventive garden management techniques.

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 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
What are you doing in your garden? What gardens or nurseries have you visited lately? What new plants have you tried? Do you have any great veggie recipes? Please consider writing an article to share with your fellow MGs. Even if you just have a picture of a hummingbird or butterfly or bird you saw in your garden, we would love to see it. Let’s start sharing our garden experiences! Please submit your entries for the newsletter to me monthly so we can enjoy each others experiences and maybe learn a thing or two.

Rebecca Matthews

Garden Trivia

1. Which holiday was made official on May 9th, 1914?
   - Arbor Day
   - Groundhog Day
   - Mother’s Day
   - Father’s Day
   - Mardi Gras

2. Which two signs of the zodiac share the month of May?
   - Capricorn and Gemini
   - Aires and Taurus
   - Taurus and Libra
   - Gemini and Cancer
   - Taurus and Gemini

3. Why are infants born in May unique?
   - More female infants are born in May than in any other month
   - More male infants are born in May than in any other month
   - More Caesarian Sections are performed in May than in any other month
   - They are an average of 200 grams heavier at birth than children born in any other month
   - They have an adult IQ an average of 5 points higher than children born in any other month

4. What is the origin of the name given to the fifth calendar month?
   - To honor "Maiesta", the Roman goddess of honor and reverence
   - To honor "May of Teck", a German princess who became Queen after marrying George II of England
   - The name comes from "maius," Swedish for "five"
   - To honor "Caesar Maiorius", an early Roman emperor
   - The name comes from a French prayer, "Dieu m’aide" (God help me)
ANSWERS:
1. Mother's Day
2. Taurus and Gemini
3. They are an average of 200 grams heavier at birth than children born in any other month
4. To honor "Maiesta", the Roman goddess of honor and revere

In Closing

"A swarm of bees in May
Is worth a load of hay;
A swarm of bees in June
Is worth a silver spoon;
A swarm of bees in July
Is not worth a fly."
- Rhyme from England
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Skip Richter
1600-B Smith Road
Austin, Texas 78721
854-9600 854-9611
r richter@tamu.edu

The Compost Bin Team

Editor · Rebecca Matthews
Layout and Design · Cheryl Harrison
Contributing Editor · Anne Van Nest
Contributing Editor · Patty Leander
Webmaster · Paula Middleton