Bruce Leander on Garden Photography

Bruce Leander photographs nature, primarily close-ups and intimate landscapes of plants, insects and vegetable gardens. His objective is to capture small elements of nature and create fine art images that are interesting and pleasing to view. He currently has a relationship with the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center where he almost daily, creates fine art nature images for use by the Wildflower Center. Bruce attended Springfield College, Texas Tech and the University of Wisconsin and worked in the biotechnology industry for 27 years. His business card reads: Biotechnology, Art, Photography, Golf.

Please join us Wednesday September 2nd, 2009 at 7:00 PM when Bruce will teach us some of the finer points of garden photography.

Jerry Naiser
Vice president Programs
Writer’s block is a curious thing. Not that I consider myself a writer by any means but you’d think that I could just sit down at my computer and compose a note for the Compost Bin without much effort. Wrong...at least not this month.

Any second I expect to receive a message from the publication group reminding me ever so gently that my article is due. Okay well, it’s really late. So I’ve told myself that I will sit here until I get it written.

I could blame this circumstance on a number of issues. It’s too hot (which, of course, it is) for any brain activity other than trying to figure out how I can get from one air-conditioned place to another without suffering heat stroke. Or, here’s a good one...I’ve been helping take care of a friend who is in the hospital. This is also true but is it really a good excuse for not sitting down to write. I don’t think so. I could go on but the truth is simply that I just couldn’t think of a single topic that seemed interesting enough to write about and that you might enjoy reading. Until now, that is.

I’m beginning to feel like fall might be in the air. Yes, I know it's still 100+ degrees everyday but once the kids are back in school I begin to get a little excited about the possibility of cooler weather. And I start thinking about all the work I want to do in my garden.

But more importantly, things are really picking up for the Master Gardeners. This weekend we participated in a very successful Home and Garden Show at the Convention Center. Thanks to everyone who volunteered for the youth activities booth, to present gardening talks, to work the plant clinic and to help with set-up and take down!

The new class is well underway and we have a great group of new students. Some of our new students attended our August meeting. If you were there, I hope you had an opportunity to interact with them. Look for more students at the September meeting.

Gardening talks are going on all over town. Bonnie Martin and Vicki Blachman reported that they had over 100 attendees this past Saturday for a talk on rainwater harvesting!

Now that Daphne Richards is on board as our horticulture agent, we’ve been having some discussion about training opportunities and other activities for TCMGA members. You’ll be learning more about this in the coming weeks.

And, Becky Waak reported to the board last week that nominations for our 2010 slate of officers are going well. Thank you to everyone who has stepped forward so far!

At the September meeting, I’ll be soliciting volunteers for our October 24 garden tour. I’ll have more information at the meeting but we have six outstanding gardens this year. I can’t wait for you to see them. Remember, if you volunteer to work on tour day you will be able to view the gardens the day before when they will be open for volunteers only!

Ordinarily, I’d close with happy gardening but today I’ll just close with the hope that all of you can stay cool and that one of our rain dances will actually produce some rain!
Plant Portrait - Madagascar Periwinkle
By Anne Van Nest

There is often a lot of confusion about what plant Madagascar periwinkle really is until a picture of the glossy leaves and bright rosy pink or white phlox-like flowers is seen. The confusion stems from the common names of Madagascar periwinkle, rose periwinkle, and vinca. The periwinkle and vinca names are shared by other very different dogbane family members botanically known as Vinca minor and Vinca major, both a shiny leaved groundcover with a bluish purple flowers.

The Madagascar periwinkle, discussed here is Catharanthus roseus. It is native to Madagascar and India, but has naturalized in many tropical areas, including parts of Florida. The botanical name Catharanthus is from the Greek word Katharos for pure and anthus meaning flower. Roseus is Latin for rose colored.

An old fashioned plant, Madagascar periwinkle often gets overlooked by gardeners wanting a “newer” plant or more modern flower color. It has been around since the 19th century in North America, having first been introduced to England around 1757 when seeds collected in Madagascar were sent to Philip Miller for the Chelsea Physic Garden.

The glossy, medium or dark green leaves and succulent stems are very distinctive on this plant. Add to this the attractive single, phlox-like flowers in bright rose, pink and white (often with a contrasting “eye” in the center of the bloom) colors and the plant is a showy one for the garden. It is also long blooming through most of the summer until frosty weather arrives. Madagascar periwinkle really is a warm weather plant and sulks when cool, wet weather hits. In fact this plant does poorly when pampered with plentiful water too. Do not overwater it. It grows best in poor, lean soil that is well-drained. Zilker Botanical Garden has an excellent specimen growing in a one foot wide “how can any plant grow there” median strip in their parking lot. It is very drought tolerant once established and will wilt under extremely sunny and dry conditions but bounces back easily. It grows well during our hot, dry summers and you can’t knock that when many plants give up under our marathon of over 50 above 100 degrees F. days.

Madagascar periwinkle is mostly pest free and is reputed to be deer resistant. Pinch plants when they are young if some of the taller varieties aren’t bushy enough. No deadheading of the flowers needed - Catharanthus sheds the finished blooms by itself. A perennial in zone 8, (annual in colder regions) Catharanthus can grow to two feet tall.

Early on, many cultures around the equator used this plant for numerous folk medicines such as for treatment of wasp stings, an astringent, cough remedy, and especially for treating diabetes. In the 1950s scientists found 70 alkaloids in the plant, several of which lowered blood sugar levels and confirmed to help with diabetes symptoms. Further research showed that two alkaloids found in the sap, reserpine and serpentine are powerful tranquilizers. In addition two others, vinblastine and vincristine have been identified as anti-cancer agents. Vinblastine is used to treat patients with Hodgkin’s disease and vincristine has been very successful in treating children for leukemia. Catharanthus is grown commercially in Australia, Africa, India and southern Europe. Many of the Catharanthus alkaloids have serious side effects such as nausea and hair loss, so do not attempt to self-medicate without professional advice.

Madagascar periwinkle can be propagated from seed and cuttings. It is slow growing from seed and needs a period of about 15-20 days in total darkness to germinate.

Beware, all parts of Madagascar periwinkle are poisonous to humans, pets and livestock if ingested or inhaled in large amounts.

Madagascar Periwinkle Series and Cultivars

‘Apricot Delight’- growing to 12 inches, pink tinged orange with an ivory base and red eye.
Berriwinkle: very heat tolerant in red, lavender, purplish-red and red colors with a large white eye.
‘Blue Pearl’ - bluish-lavender with a white eye, more stress tolerant. Early blooming from seed.
Carpet: dwarf plants that spread and can be used as groundcovers.
‘Cascade Appleblossom’ - semi-trailing, light pink with white eye, fade resistant.
Cooler: low growing (3-4”), rounded overlapping petals in many pastel colors. More tolerant of wet soils.
First: 12 inches tall, large rounded, overlapping petals in 13 colors.
Heatwave: 12 inches tall, large flowers in many colors, earlier from seed than older varieties. Good heat resistance.
Jaio : large, vivid and unique colored blooms with a white star-like eye.
Little: compact to dwarf sized in five colors.
Lipstick: 12 inches tall in pink and red.
‘Merry Go Round’ - 24 inches tall with dark glossy leaves. Very heat tolerant. Various colors, some with a white eye.
Mediterranean: low, trailing plant suitable for flower beds or hanging baskets.
Merlot: 14 inches tall in burgundy, orchid, rose and white colors.
‘Morning Mist’ - large white flowers with rose eyes
Pacifica: 14 inches tall, compact, large flowers in numerous colors.
‘Parasol’ - huge white flowers with pink centers on 2 ft tall plants
‘Patricia’ pure white
Pretty: compact plants to 12 inches.
Pretty: compact to about 12 inches, multiflowering in pink, red, rose and white colors.
‘Santa Fe’ - very compact, dark salmon, early blooming from seed.
Stardust: to 20 inches, burgundy, orchid pink, pink and white with dusted centers, dark green foliage. More tolerant of wet soils than older varieties.
‘Sun Goddess’ - huge lavender color flower with a large white halo center.
Sunsplash: magenta red and dark lavender with a contrasting eye.
Sunstorm: pink and white with a contrasting eye. Narrow obovate petals create a pinwheel effect.
‘Terrace Vermillion’ - tall, reddish orange with large white zone in center. Dark green glossy foliage.
Tropicana: early blooming from seed. Large, rounded flowers in rose and white.
Tutti Fruitti: to 12 inches, mixed colors with a red or white eye.
Victory: dwarf to 8 inches, large blooms, early blooming from seed. More heat tolerant than some older varieties.
September is here and though the days are still hot, the nights have started to cool off ever so slightly, which makes early morning garden chores much more enjoyable. And this month we have plenty of garden chores! September in the fall is the equivalent of March in the spring – a flurry of activity as the weather begins to change, the temperature drops a little, and hopefully precipitation comes with more regularity.

Take advantage of those early mornings to amend your soil before planting. If you had a soil test done after the summer harvest, add the nutrients in the amounts indicated. If you didn’t perform a soil test, a general recommendation is to mix in \( \frac{1}{2} - 1 \) cup of high nitrogen fertilizer (like 21-0-0 or 15-5-10) for fall crops. If you are using an organic fertilizer, like 8-2-4, you need to use 2-3 times the amount. Many of the crucifers that we grow in the fall, like broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage are heavy feeders. You want to get them off to a healthy start and keep them growing fast and vigorously. If their growth is stressed by lack of water, lack of fertility or even too much heat you will end up with puny, unimpressive heads. Transplants of these crops can go into the garden in mid-Sept and plantings can be staggered through October. Look for healthy, vigorous transplants. More than likely they have been babied under greenhouse conditions and have received copious amounts of water and fertilizer during their short lives, so you will want to take them through a withdrawal process, acclimating them gradually (a few hours a day) to the intense heat and sun before transplanting them outside. In exchange for this TLC they will reward you with a bigger, better, and earlier harvest.

Give those broccoli transplants some TLC!

Our first frost usually comes sometime in late November or early December, so there may still be time to plant seeds of green beans, cucumber or summer squash, but do not delay. Most take 60-65 days to reach maturity, so if planted in early September they should be ready for harvest before Thanksgiving. It is too late to plant peppers or tomatoes, but if you carried them over from spring or planted transplants last month, keep them watered and fertilized and they should produce well once the days and nights cool off a bit.

If rain does not fall from the sky soon, the Stage 2 water restrictions may prove to be a dilemma for vegetable gardeners. I contacted the City of Austin Water Conservation department for clarification on
the restrictions, and according to the city of Austin representative that I spoke to, it doesn't matter if you are growing vegetables to eat or grass to mow, all City of Austin water customers are restricted to watering one day per week with sprinklers, drip or soaker hoses. If the heat and drought continue, our only saving grace is that any time of the week we can water with a hose, watering can or buckets. That may mean that we have to give up some of our free time to water our vegetables. We may have to get up early and water before we leave for work or take time after we get home from work – or maybe we send the kids out with a hose and teach them to water and care for our thirsty plants. If you are not able to hand water your vegetable garden during the week, it might be a good idea to delay planting until the temperature decreases a bit and/or we get some much needed precipitation. Weather forecasts indicate that rain is in our future, so let’s hope they are right!

Here’s to a bountiful harvest!
A lively and spirited group of Master Gardeners and interns braved the heat in early August to tackle several major tasks. Several flats of cuttings were taken out of the mist bench and potted into 4 inch pots. These were cuttings that were stuck between last March and May. Since they were well rooted, it was time to get them out so that more cuttings could take their place. Once we got our potting underway, another group started making cuttings of Texas star hibiscus, Persian shield, scented geranium, variegated Turk's cap, variegated Philippine violet, Cuban oregano, walking iris, and others. The cuttings were dipped in rooting hormone powder and placed into propagating trays filled with 2:1 perlite and vermiculite mixture.

Several of us went around the back of the greenhouse to look at the citrus collection, after turning on the water and giving them a good soak, we spotted the fruit forming on the kaffir lime. This plant has distinctively hourglass shaped leaves with one small lobe near the petiole and a larger lobe at the apex. The leaves are frequently used in southeastern Asian cooking and have a nice strong citrus scent. The plant is Citrus hystrix. What caught our attention were the rough, bumpy green fruits at the top of the newest growth. During our normal winters, cold temperatures usually kill the top portion of this plant and it fails to flower and fruit. So it was with considerable excitement that we admired about a dozen green fruit that had formed this year. A few minutes on the computer reveals that the fruit does turn yellow when mature and the rind is used in Thai curry paste. The juice from the fruit (and the rinds) are used in traditional Indonesian medicine. The juice is generally looked upon as being too acidic to use in foods, but is used as a cleanser for clothing and hair in Thailand. The zest from the rind is widely used in Creole cuisine. The oil from the rind has strong insecticidal properties. Smirnoff makes a mojito vodka flavored with kaffir lime liqueur. Kaffir lime is hardy to zone 9 and grows well in a large container but must be cross pollinated with another citrus to produce fruit.

See you in the Greenhouse!
Large wasps flying low over the lawn can be a common, and sometimes frightening, sight at this time of year. Things can get alarming when those wasps become territorial and fly around your head until you leave the area. These wasps are usually accompanied by holes in the yard or flower beds that are surrounded by small piles of dirt (Fig. 1). The wasps are cicada killers and aren't anything to panic over.

Cicada killers (Fig. 2) are about 1 ½ inches long with a reddish-brown head and thorax and an abdomen that is black with yellow markings. Wings have a rusty tinge. The males can be aggressive and buzz near people, but males are unable to sting. Females are capable of stinging but are rarely aggressive towards humans or animals.

Females dig burrows in the ground and use these burrows as nesting areas. Females will sting and paralyze cicadas, take them back to the burrow and then lay an egg upon it. When the egg hatches, the larvae feed upon the cicada provided.

Cicada killers usually do not warrant any control methods. They are actually beneficial insects that help to reduce populations of cicadas. If you feel that you must do something to manage them, you can sprinkle insecticidal dust around the opening of the burrow.
BUCHANAN'S NATIVE PLANTS, 611 E. 11th Street, Houston, TX 77008, 713-861-5702

Buchanan's is the 3rd “must see” garden center in the historic Houston Heights neighborhood. In business since 1986, Buchanan's is known even outside of the Houston area, due to write-ups in magazines such as Southern Living.

Buchanan's is beautifully maintained and has a great variety of plants, specializing in native Texas plants, herbs, heirloom vegetables, organic gardening supplies, and more. There's a lot to see here, but everything is well organized with great signage.

When we visited in early spring, there was a large supply of Japanese maples for sale. However, Buchanan's is really known for its great selection of native and well adapted trees and shrubs. They also have hard-to-find and rare varieties of citrus.

This is a popular garden center, so it can be crowded at times, but it is definitely worth a visit when you are in the Houston area.

Sorry, no photos to share of this really beautiful garden center – it was pouring down rain on our last trip. (Don’t worry – we still shopped!!) You can view the nursery on Buchanan's website: www.buchanansplants.com
(MBT) and polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs); these chemicals are health hazards for humans and the environment.

It’s destructive. Many vegetables and ornamentals mulched with rubber can accumulate high levels of zinc, sometimes to the point of death. Other metals found in decomposing rubber also can accumulate in plant roots, leaves, or fruit, depending on the species. Acidic soils are particularly sensitive because heavy metals are more available for plant uptake. Decomposing rubber mulches provide a constant stream of toxic leachates into adjacent aquatic systems. Research also has shown that entire aquatic communities are injured or killed when exposed to these chemicals.

Thanks goes to Fine Gardening magazine for this important information.

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**Recipe From the Garden: Thai Cucumber Tomato Salad**

**Ingredients**
- 1 large cucumber
- 2 tomatoes, seeded and cut into wedges
- 1/4 red onion, thinly sliced
- 1/4 cup rice vinegar
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 teaspoon white sugar, or to taste
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
- 3 tablespoons chopped peanuts (optional)

**Directions**
1. Peel the cucumber in strips lengthwise with a vegetable peeler, alternating skinned strips with peel for a decorative effect. Slice the cucumber in half lengthwise, and then thinly slice. Place the cucumber in a salad bowl with the tomato and red onion, and mix together.
2. Pour the rice vinegar and lime juice into a separate bowl, and stir in the sugar until dissolved. Pour the dressing over the salad; mix, cover, and refrigerate until chilled, at least 30 minutes. Just before serving, stir in the cilantro and sprinkle with chopped peanuts.
GARDEN TO GARDEN PLANT EXCHANGE - OCTOBER 7

Roxane Smith

Following the October meeting, share your summer survivors 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. We also ask you to retrieve your leftovers as the Garden Center has no means to handle them.

We welcome volunteers to help clean up after the Exchange as the Center has a prompt closing time. Liz Caskey will be hosting this year's Exchange. Bring stuff - It'll be great!!

PUBLIC SEMINARS

Redesigning Your Gardens
Saturday, September 12, 1-3pm
Old Quarry Branch, Austin Public Library, 7051 Village Center Dr. (off Far West Blvd.)
(512) 345-4435

Does your garden need a remodel, but you're just not sure where to start? Attend this seminar to learn basic landscape design and gain the confidence to go from analysis through concept to a final planting plan. Using design principles such as texture, color and function, this seminar will teach you how to create a landscape plan for the garden you've always wanted.

This seminar is free, open to the public and requires no reservations. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. For more details, see http://www.tcmastergardeners.org or call the Travis County Master Gardener's help desk at (512) 854-9600.

DIY Pond Building
Saturday, September 19, 2009, 10am-Noon
American Botanical Council, 6200 Manor Rd
Call 512-854-9600 to reserve a space

Always dreamed of a little pond in your yard? Not only can you have one but you can build it yourself. Come attend this free seminar and learn step by step lessons on the basics of building a pond yourself. This seminar will help you determine the supplies and equipment needed for the job, gather information about pond plants, and determine which fish will do well in your pond. In addition, hear instructions on general pond maintenance, installing pond lighting and how to prevent unwanted critters in your pond. There is no charge for the seminar, but seating is limited so please call 512-854-9600 to reserve a space.
Propagation 101: Growing New Plants for Your Garden  
Saturday, Sept. 26, 2009, 11am-1pm  
Yarborough Public Library, 2200 Hancock Dr., Austin TX

Fall is the perfect time to plant perennials, but you don’t have to go buy new plants. Attend this free seminar on plant propagation and learn how to grow your own plants from seeds or existing plants.

Attendees will learn multiple ways to propagate plants including cutting, layering, division, and seed propagation. In addition, learn tips on transplanting and care for your new plants to get them off to a strong start when planted.

This seminar is free, open to the public and requires no reservations. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. For more details, see http://www.tcmastergardeners.org or call the Travis County Master Gardener’s help desk at (512) 854-9600.

For the Love of Trees  
Saturday, October 10, 1-3pm  
Old Quarry Branch, Austin Public Library, 7051 Village Center Dr (off Far West Blvd.)

Join us to learn all about how to do right by your trees. Learn the right trees to choose for your Central Texas landscape by choosing those that enjoy our native soils and tough climate. Understand how to select the right tree for the right location by considering mature height, longevity, light needs, and leaf coverage. Hear how to correctly plant a tree to give it a strong start and secure location for its lifespan. Finally, learn how to care for and prune your tree for long-term health and during times of stress such as construction or drought.

Friday, September 11, 9 AM – 11 AM  
Demonstration Garden at Travis County AgriLife Extension Office, 1600 “B” Smith Rd, Austin, 78721

It is a free, hands-on demonstration of solarizing soil. Learn how to solarize and the benefits of high heat in vegetable garden soil. Bermuda grass eradication will also be discussed.

Friday, September 25, 9 AM – 11 AM  
Demonstration Garden at Travis County AgriLife Extension Office, 1600 “B” Smith Rd, Austin, 78721

Grow your own vegetables! Double digging and constructing a raised bed are the two methods being presented to prepare a spot for a garden. Hands-on so you can help dig and/or help with construction or just watch.

Friday, October 16, 9 AM – 11 AM  
Demonstration Garden at Travis County AgriLife Extension Office, 1600 “B” Smith Rd, Austin, 78721
Now is the time to plan an irrigation system for your vegetable and/or flower beds. Learn how to install one type of drip irrigation system. System has very little evaporation so less water is required. The leaves stay dry reducing fungus and disease problems. Hands-on so you can help with construction or just watch.

Friday, October 30, 9 AM – 11 AM
Demonstration Garden at Travis County AgriLife Extension Office, 1600 “B” Smith Rd, Austin, 78721

This free event discusses bulb varieties that excel in the Austin area. Discover bulb requirements and planting methods to enhance your success. Learn by doing as this is hands-on session.

Friday, November 13, 9 AM – 11 AM
Demonstration Garden at Travis County AgriLife Extension Office, 1600 “B” Smith Rd, Austin, 78721

Yes, you can plant winter vegetables now! Learn how to plant seeds, which seeds need soaking, and proper transplanting methods. Planting using the 4 x 4 method and straight rows will be discussed. You can participate in this hands-on session.
Closing The Garden Gate

This drought is really testing my gardening mettle. I am losing more plants than I care to admit and now that more severe water restrictions went into effect as of August 24 I’m afraid I will lose some dearly loved specimens that have been with me for years. It has definitely forced me to rethink my garden. I’ve noticed several of my plants are surviving this heat, not thriving in it but definitely surviving. Some of the plants that are doing fine despite VERY little supplemental water are yuccas, agaves, yellow bells (esperanza), rock penstamon, bamboo muhly, lavender, pretty much all the lantanas, rock rose (pavonia) and Brazilian rock rose. Not that I want a yard with nothing but agaves and yuccas, this drought has been a wake up call. I need to rearrange a lot of what I have and redo the entire yard.

Why is it so easy to go to someone’s else’s yard and be filled with ideas as to what they could do to make their yard look better, but in your own yard your creativity is stifled? I am going to have to attend the Redesigning Your Gardens seminar on September 12 for some much needed inspiration and encouragement. There are so many great MG seminars coming up. I hope you can all take advantage of them.

Garden Trivia

The phrase Dog Days or "the dog days of summer", Latin: Caniculae, Caniculares dies, refers to the hottest, most sultry days of summer. In the northern hemisphere they usually fall between early July and early September whilst in the Southern hemisphere they are usually between January and early March. The actual dates vary greatly from region to region, depending on latitude and climate. Dog Days can also define a time period or event that is very hot or stagnant, or marked by dull lack of progress.

In Closing

“There are no green thumbs or black thumbs. There are only gardeners and non-gardeners. Gardeners are the ones who ruin after ruin get on with the high defiance of nature herself, creating, in the very face of her chaos and tornado, the bower of roses and the pride of irises. It sounds very well to garden a ‘natural way’. You may see the natural way in any desert, any swamp, any leech-filled laurel hell. Defiance, on the other hand, is what makes gardeners.” —Henry Mitchell
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