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Cacti & Succulents for Central Texas
Tired of watering? Looking for unique garden textures? Can’t keep the deer out? Cacti and succulents fit the bill. Jeff Pavlat is the current president of the Austin Cactus and Succulent Society and member of the Horticulture Committee at Zilker Botanical Garden. He works part time at Oracle Gorge, a small cactus and succulent nursery in Austin.

Jeff has always had a fascination with cacti and succulents but became more interested about 10 years ago when trying to stabilize the steep hillside of his Westlake home. His garden has been featured on several garden tours and the Central Texas Garden show. Check out his garden at www.klru.org/ctg/garden/name/Jeff_Pavlat/.

Meeting information: Wednesday, May 5th, 2010 starting at 7 pm. Zilker Botanical Garden
Hello Master Gardeners:  
A Message From Your President

Bursting With Blooms

May is here and bursting with blooms! And pure happiness is that we have not experienced record breaking hot temperatures...yet! The riot of color I am experiencing in my own back garden brings such joy I am eager to grab my hoe, trowel and gloves and step into the work zone!

A MG friend, Elaine Dill, and I have been exchanging garden related books back and forth and the current one she has lent me has a wonderful passage that pretty much sums up my garden thoughts. It goes:

"Gardeners all share a love of natural beauty and a passion to create order, however briefly, from chaos. Whether organic or high-tech, they share a dark secret, as well. Despite their sensitivity to beauty and respect for nature, they all resort to murder and mayhem with steel-willed cunning.

Patience, hard work, and a clever plan usually lead to success: private worlds of color, scent, and astonishing beauty. Small wonder a gardener plans her garden as she wishes she could plan her life."

So, off to my own little garden I go each day to resort to murder and mayhem as I create my own little world of beauty! Such is a gardener’s job. I plant, weed, ripe out little Live Oak seedlings, break up rocks and then step back and see my results. Then I limp off to start again....but, my roses are absolutely amazing with blooms opening up to cheer my backache away. The veggies are growing well with these spring showers. Little tomatoes are increasing daily, squash and cucumbers are blooming abundantly and my new herb plants are off and running. To top off my good fortune, our lovely 1.5” of rain was perfectly measured on my new high-tech CoCoRAH gauge. Yuppers...this is all good stuff!!

I can hardly wait to begin bringing in my harvest of Roma green beans, juicy fresh tomatoes, cucumbers, etc. etc. Fresh veggies make a favorite dinner with, of course, wonderful fragrant roses in a vase to enjoy. Let’s hope our mild spring continues and gives us a year’s reprieve from the scalding hot summers of past years. At least our lakes, creeks and aquifers are full and the land has been replenished!

Volunteer work continues in the greenhouse, plant clinics, demonstration garden and many other areas. Please share your gardening talent with any of the many
worthwhile efforts we sponsor. Be active and give back as much as you are able! I love being involved with this organization and I know you feel the same….we are connected by our love of gardening and community!

Enjoy this lovely time of year!

Carolyn

A reblooming, almost thornless, disease resistant, antique polyantha rose called ‘La Marne’ (1915). Semi-double blush pink cupped blooms with a white eye. An Earthkind rose.

Image courtesy of Carolyn Williams
And now we wait. The hustle and muscle that went into preparing and planting the garden in March and April begins to pay off this month as plants increase in size and vigor, blossoms give way to small fruit and we reap that first gratifying harvest. Mother Nature was generous with the rain and mild days during April, perfect weather for planting, puttering . . . and weeding! Be sure to stay after any weeds that pop up in your vegetable garden because they clearly believe they have as much right to water and nutrients as your precious vegetables. One of my favorite tools for weeding is called a scuffle or stirrup hoe. It is very easy to use and quickly and effortlessly beheads young weeds before they get a chance to take hold. And these ‘cuttings’ make perfect green matter for your compost pile, a crucial component of a sustainable landscape.

If you haven’t mulched your garden yet, do so now and make sure you have some kind of watering system in place before the heat hits. Drip irrigation or soaker hoses allow for the most efficient application of water. I like to cover the hoses with a light layer of mulch to ensure that every drop of water goes down into the soil where it is needed. Wetting the leaves of some vegetables, such as beans and squash, makes them more susceptible to certain fungal diseases; if you must water with a sprinkler or by hand do it in the early morning so the leaves have a chance to dry out before nightfall.

As vegetables grow they are quickly using up nitrogen, so the plants will benefit from a sidedress application of nitrogen fertilizer when they start to set fruit and again after the first harvest. A general recommendation is to scratch in about 1 cup of organic garden fertilizer for a 25 foot row; use half that amount if using a synthetic fertilizer that has a higher percentage of nitrogen. Sprinkle the fertilizer along the outer edges of the row since the roots have grown out from the center of the plant. Watch for aphids and spider mites early in the season and treat before these prolific producers have a chance to increase. They are easy to
control by washing the underside of affected leaves with a strong blast of water. Because they are so quick to reproduce, you may need to repeat every 3-5 days until their numbers are suppressed.

Also keep an eye out for the orange and black squash vine borer moth that lays her small eggs on the stems of squash; when they hatch the creamy white larva will burrow its way into the squash stem and destroy it from the inside out. Prevention is the best medicine – protect your plants with row cover until they start to bloom, then uncover so the bees have access to the flowers for pollination. I keep a ‘moth-swatter’ (it doubles as a ‘leaf-footed bug swatter’) in the garden and inspect my plants frequently and if I see the round, brownish eggs on my squash stems I scrape them off.

May is a good time to plant heat-lovers like sweet potato slips, Malabar spinach, okra or any member of the Southern pea family such as blackeye, purplehull or crowder peas. Yard long beans, a relative of the Southern pea, can also take the heat of a Central Texas summer and produce unique, slender pods that can grow 15” or longer. The entire pod is edible and makes an excellent addition to stir-fries. ‘Red Noodle’ produces lovely, burgundy colored beans.

Onions let you know they are ready for harvest when their tops fall over, usually late May or early June, but any that have begun to send up a seed stalk should be harvested and used as the bulbs will not grow larger and they do not store well once flowering is initiated. Potatoes should be putting on some size this month and if you grub around the base of your plants undoubtedly you will find some tasty new potatoes. Harvest a few from the outer edge (without pulling out the plants) for eating now and leave the plant to grow and nourish the remaining potatoes for harvest later at a larger size. And enjoy!
Rasberry Crazy Ant
By Wizzie Brown

In 2002, the Rasberry crazy ant, *Nylanderia sp*. near pubens, was found in the Houston area. It began to spread and can now be located in 14 counties, mostly around the Houston coastal area. The ants have been positively identified as close as Bexar County (San Antonio) (See Fig 1.).

![Fig 1. Distribution of the Rasberry crazy ant (image from TAMU).](image)

Rasberry crazy ants are reddish-brown, but color darkness may vary. Workers have long legs and long antennae and bodies that are about 1/8 an inch long. The ants have long hairs on their body and 12 segmented antennae (See Fig 2.).

![Fig 2. Rasberry crazy ant worker tending eggs (photo by Tom Rasberry).](image)

Colonies of these ants are massive (millions of ants). The colonies are polygyne and contain multiple queens, workers and brood (eggs, larvae, pupae). Colonies, or nests, can be found under or within almost any object (See Fig 3.) Examples include tree stumps, soil, potted plants, mulch, concrete, etc. Nests are primarily found outside, but the ants often forage indoors looking for food and water.
Raspberry Crazy Ant

Fig 3. Colony found in a flower pot tray (image from TAMU).

These ants form loose foraging trails and scurry randomly along the trail, hence the name “crazy” ant. Foraging ants typically follow structural lines- foundations, sidewalks, etc.- but large trails can also be found over open areas. They do not form mounds or emerge from the ground from a centralized opening.

Raspberry crazy ants are omnivores and eat almost anything. The workers, in addition to foraging for food, will “tend” honeydew-producing insects such as aphids, scale insect and mealybugs. Workers are also attracted to sweet-producing parts of plants such as nectaries or over-ripened fruit.

Since Raspberry crazy ants can nest within in numerous materials and objects it is possible that they can be transported to new locations through gardening material- mulch, soil, potted plants, etc. Before transporting gardening material, it is very important to thoroughly inspect the item(s) for infestation.

Raspberry crazy ants are sometimes confused with the crazy ant, Nylanderia longicornis. The crazy ant looks similar, but has longer antennae and legs (See Fig 4) than the Raspberry crazy ant. The crazy ant also tends to be darker in color than the Raspberry crazy ant (blackish vs. reddish-brown).

Fig 4. Crazy ant, Nylanderia longicornis
(photo by Drees)

Samples sent to Travis County for identification have been either crazy ants, Nylanderia longicornis, or argentine ants, Linepithema humile. Argentine ants may
be mistaken for Rasberry crazy ants because both can have extremely large colonies. Argentine ant colonies can be comprised of numerous mounds with hundreds of queens and hundreds of thousands of workers.

Treatment for Rasberry crazy ants can become a problem based on the considerable number of ants. Buffer zones can be created using pesticides and the “buffer zones” may last about 2-3 months. Products for management of Rasberry crazy ants are not available over the counter, so a pest management professional should be contacted. Dead ants should be removed from the area after treatment otherwise a “carpet” of ants may form over the lawn (See Fig 5).

Fig 5. Rasberry crazy ants covering a lawn (photo by Tom Rasberry)
Book Review

Sustainable Landscapes & Gardens: Good Science - Practical Application

By Anne Van Nest

After four years in development, Sustainable Landscapes & Gardens: good science – practical applications recently was self-published by author and editor, Dr. Linda Chalker-Scott, an Associate Professor in the Horticulture and Landscape Architecture department of Washington State University and an Extension Urban Horticulturist. This book was initially conceived to be a textbook for the Washington Master Gardener program (and other non-academic readers) and provide the current, accurate and relevant science behind urban horticulture and arboriculture. Linda draws upon her background in horticulture and arboriculture to write and edit this book with chapter contributions from 20 additional faculty members of Oregon State University, University of Washington and Washington State University.

At the beginning of the book Linda writes, “I’ve been a plant person all my life. I started out eating wild berries, pressing flowers, and making May baskets for my neighbors. Later I became curious about how plants respond to their environment, especially those species we use in our gardens and landscapes. Through the twists and turns of my career, one thing became clear; I enjoyed making plant science practical and understandable to everyone, especially people who care passionately about their plants. That’s why I’m excited about this book. Now all gardeners – novices and experts alike – have access to a common source of reliable, lab- and field-tested information. If you are a gardener with a curiosity about how things work, and a personal ethic about treading lightly on the earth, this book is for you. Let’s get our hands dirty!”

The “book” is really a sturdy bind with 5 bound and removable sections: Armchair Science, Before You Plant, Planting-Taking the Plunge, What’s Wrong with my Plant?, and Bugs, Varmints and Weeds. It was designed so readers can take one section out into the garden without needing to have the entire book with them. The binder allows for the ability to customize the book by adding forthcoming supplemental units based on your interests.

Throughout the 5 sections are excellent detailed photos and informative illustrations to build on the ideas and explanations in the text. An extensive glossary and literature cited reference
Sustainable Landscapes and Gardens

is located at the back of each section.

The Before You Plant section has a great decision tree that is used for predicting the invasiveness of woody plants, great step-by-step photos of grafting (t-budding, cleft grafting, chip budding, bark grafting, whip grafting and patch budding) and layering.

In the Planting- Taking the Plunge section are at least 26 photos of what to look for when selecting plants at the nursery- damaged trunks, topping, acutely angled branches, multiple leaders, no root flare, trunk rot, girdled trunks, root bound, suckers and more.

The What’s Wrong With My Plant section has excellent photos of environmental, nutrient deficiencies, insects, etc. to help with plant problem diagnosis. This section also includes an extensive step-by-step method of diagnosing plant problems.

The Bugs, Varmints and Weeds section is very broad in its scope and is written for a nation-wide audience.

Sustainable Landscapes & Gardens: good Science – practical application has over 300 pages and hundreds of full color photos and illustrations. The list price is $49 + $5 shipping = $54.00 for the binder and all five sections. All the components are available a la carte and can be ordered separately.

For more information or to order contact: Great Scott Enterprises, Inc. 9120 Matthews Ave NE, Seattle, WA 98115-3941 email: lindachalkerscott@gmail.com or visit the website: www.sustainablelandscapesandgardens.com

Linda Chalker-Scott and her colleagues at Washington State University Extension also have a very informative blog called The Garden Professor which features interesting plants, amusing facts, cool research and more. Visit the blog: The garden professors https://sharepoint.cahnrs.wsu.edu/blogs/urbanhort/default.aspx. For even more interesting reading visit Linda’s Horticultural Myths webpage at http://www.puyallup.wsu.edu/~Linda%20Chalker-Scott/Horticultural%20Myths_files/index.html with discussions about Bt (marvel or mistake?), arborist wood chip mulches (landscape boon or bane?), coffee grounds (will they perk up plants?), milk sprayed on rose leaves (will prevent fungal and bacterial diseases?), Xeriscaping (drought-tolerant plants reduce water consumption?), and more.
Diagnosing Plant Problems
By Linda Chalker-Scott

A step-by-step method to diagnose plant problems

1. **Examine the plant to determine that a problem exists.**
   
   A. Identify the plant. Establish what a “normal” plant would look like at this time of year. Learn about the type of care and environmental conditions that the plant requires to thrive.
   
   B. Describe the abnormality (symptoms and signs).
   
   C. Examine the entire plant and its environment.
   
   D. Determine site history – significant excavations, soil amendments, fertilizer/pesticide usage, etc.
   
   E. Determine installation practices used.

2. **Define the problem and develop a hypothesis about the origin of damage.**

   **Locate the primary problem and the plant part where the initial damage occurred.**

   **Look for patterns. Is the damage on more than one plant or plant species?**

   A. A uniform damage pattern (e.g., damage on all leaves of a certain age or all plants in an area) usually indicates nonliving factors (physical or chemical).

   B. An irregular or random damage pattern can be indicative of living factors (pathogens, insects, mites, or other animals). However, many non-living environmental factors are not experienced uniformly by the plant and therefore damage will not be uniform.

   **Delineate development of damage over time.**

   A. Damage that does not spread to other parts of the affected plant or to other plants, along with a clear line between damaged and undamaged tissues, indicates damage caused by nonliving factors.
Diagnosing Plant Problems

B. Progressive spread of the damage on a plant or onto other plants indicates damage caused by living organisms.

Gather information to identify and distinguish among possible causes of damage.

A. Distinguish among nonliving factors.
   1. Symptoms of physical damage
      i. Temperature extremes
      ii. Light extremes
      iii. Moisture extremes
      iv. Lack of soil oxygen
      v. Mechanical damage
   2. Symptoms of chemical damage
      i. Pesticides
      ii. Pollutants
      iii. Nutritional deficiencies
         iv. Mineral toxicities, including salinity
         v. Soil pH

B. Distinguish among living factors.
   1. Symptoms and signs of pathogens
   2. Symptoms and signs of animals

C. Use references. You may need laboratory analyses to narrow the range of probable causes.

3. Determine evidence needed to prove probable causes.

4. Synthesize information and evaluate the validity of diagnostic conclusions.

Disease Rubric courtesy of Dr. Linda Chalker-Scott, WSU Extension Horticulture
In Carolyn’s Garden

Above: ‘Maggie’ rose (background), white shasta daisies and squash.
‘Maggie’ is a rose found by Dr. William C. Welch in Louisiana. Rich carmine blooms with a spicy scent.
Below: Shasta Daisies and “Mrs. B. R. Cant (an antique tea rose introduced in 1901), squash and Roma II bush green beans.
Photos courtesy of Carolyn Williams
East Austin Garden Fair 2010
By Lisa Anhaiser

East Austin Garden Fair shows Travis County residents ways to be ‘Earth-Kind’

The fourth annual “A Passion for Plants: An East Austin Garden Fair” was held on March 20 at Govalle Park. Despite the rain that fell Saturday morning and the cold windy temperatures that followed, there was a great turn out at the garden fair by volunteers and fair goers and there was nothing but smiles!

The fair was presented by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Travis County Master Gardeners Association, Sustainable Food Center, Green Corn Project, and Holistic Education and Health Network. Additional partner organizations included the City of Austin-Solid Waste Services, Westcave Preserve, International Society of Arboriculture and the Central Texas Young Birders Club. Sponsors included KAZI Radio, Evercare, Shoal Creek Nursery, H.E.B, Home Depot, Whole Foods and Natural Gardeners.

About 200 people attended the event, which was free and open to the public. It featured more than 30 hands-on booths and displays for novice to experienced gardeners, and included a variety of youth activities. More than 75 Travis County Master Gardeners assisted in the planning, marketing and instruction/demonstration aspects of the event, and helped grow more than 800 plants (tomatoes, peppers, herbs. etc.) to give away to fair attendees.

Earth-Kind gardening was the theme of this year’s fair, said Daphne Richards, AgriLife Extension Agent for Horticulture in Travis County. “Earth-Kind is a registered trademark of AgriLife Extension and Earth-Kind landscaping uses research-proven techniques from both traditional and organic gardening for environmentally friendly landscaping,” Richards said. “At the fair we demonstrated useful and practical gardening and landscaping methods through which people can both beautify and protect the environment.”

Fair presentations emphasized landscaping for water and energy conservation, proper fertilizer and pesticide use, and reducing waste. Hands-on demonstrations included how to dig a garden bed, composting, rainwater harvesting, organic gardening, plant propagation and more. Attendees received free gardening advice and starter plants, and were introduced to volunteer opportunities in the community.

After the fair ended, a native & adapted landscape bed was installed by Master Gardener Susan Decker and Lisa Anhaiser using donated plants. Each year the East Austin Garden Fair Sponsors install a new landscaped bed at Govalle Park.

Comments from the more than 120 fair attendees who completed a post-event survey included: “This was a really awesome learning experience.” “Really friendly and helpful.” “I will teach my students to be EarthKind. This was great. Thank you.” “Everything was covered. Great! I love this event!”
A comment MG Cher Groody received when she told a fairgoer that a rain garden was defined as a depression in the landscape that stayed full of water for 24 to 48 hrs. after a rain event. The fairgoer exclaimed... “My front yard has been a rain garden for years and I didn’t even know it!”

Hi everyone,

Those of you who came out on Saturday to Govalle Park and put all those beautiful smiles on your faces despite the weather are truly awesome! I am so proud to know all of you, because you showed how deep is your commitment to the community and how tough you really are. I am especially in awe of those of you who had such upbeat attitudes the whole day, even in the morning rain.

It was a pleasure to see you all helping the brave souls who came to learn. And believe me, they will go and tell others what they learned, so you will ultimately reach a lot more people than you think. They will also tell others that the East Austin Garden Fair is something they can rely on no matter what to be there for them.

Thank you so much for putting on the best fair that could possibly be put on that day, and for being flexible when the plans didn’t turn out as expected, and thanks to those who stuck around to take things back to Extension at the end of the day. This couldn’t happen without every one of you.

Thanks from all my heart,

Susan Decker  
East Austin Garden Fair Coordinator

Succulents at Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania
Lots of great gardening learning happened at the East Austin Garden Fair. Thanks to Terri Rodgers, TCMGA Intern for these great photos of MG and visitors in action.
Pruning Citrus
By Anne Van Nest

Many gardeners are somewhat reluctant to prune their citrus (or any other shrubs or trees for that matter too). Why do people put off pruning their citrus? Is it difficult to do? Will they damage the plant? It’s a big job – well, yes it is because it was left too long. Don’t know how to prune? Well, here is some information to overcome pruning shyness and get your citrus under control again!

**Pruning neglected trees**? Citrus will fruit better, the tree will be healthier and be easier to pick if they are pruned regularly. Don’t let them fend for themselves.

Tools needed: secateurs (hand pruners), loppers, pruning saw, ladder, tarp, garden cart, long sleeves, safety glasses (or sunglasses) and heavy gloves.

**How often?** Every 2 years (except lemons and grapefruits which should be pruned each year because of their vigor). Note that winter damage will have to be pruned each year for some marginally hardy plants in our area, and an annual inspection done for dead, diseased or damaged branches and suckers

**When?** February–April. The best time to do regular pruning is during February/March before the new growth and blooms start. Emergency pruning can take place at any time. Extensive pruning from November through January is not recommended because this could trigger tender new growth that may be damaged by freezes.

**How?** Stand back and look over the plant to identify the graft union (about 1-2 ft above the soil). This is where the desired citrus has been grafted to a hardier, disease and insect resistant or dwarfing rootstock. In Texas the standard commercial rootstocks are sour orange, Cleopatra mandarin or a trifoliate orange hybrid. Suckers arising from below the graft union will not produce desirable fruit. Remove these as soon as they are spotted. They are often extra thorny, grow vigorously, have a different leaf shape and don’t produce any fruit. The main objectives of pruning citrus are to position the branches so that the maximum
photosynthesis can be achieved. This means the most leaf area exposed to the sun. So try to prune so that lower side branches are not shaded out by the upper ones if possible. But citrus can produce fruit in all but the most shaded parts of the tree, so some interior branches are fine.

Open up the center of the tree to allow sun and air to enter. It is better to thin out the branches instead of heading back them. Thinning out removes a portion or entire branch from the tree. Heading back just removes the ends of branches (like hedge trimming) and has serious negative consequences in the future. Don’t worry about making thinning cuts too deep into the plant where you don’t see any new shoots. These will be made by the plant as a result of the pruning cut. Prune out any branches that cross through the center. Prune tall, upright-growing branches to keep the plant at a pickable height.

Prune out any thin and weak branches (particularly with lemons and grapefruits) so that the large fruit won’t damage the plant.

Citrus blooms (if they are not damaged by unusually cold temperatures like the winter of 2010) are formed on current new sprouts off last years’ mature wood. Mature wood is usually thorn free while the juvenile growth has thorns.

During mild winters citrus will be evergreen, or just get a little leaf burn. Cold winters in Austin will cause the leaves to drop in late winter and new leaves will flush out.

Some references say never to remove more than 15% of the total branch volume. This is debatable. If rejuvenating a long-neglected plant, you might consider taking out no more than 25% each year – but do prune it every year.

Pruning paint or wound dressing is not necessary for citrus.

Prune larger branches (1” or larger) with a pruning saw and use the 3 cut procedure. First prune ¼ of the distance from the bottom of the branch upward. Make this first “undercut” about 5” out from your final pruning spot. This first cut will stop any tearing of the bark.
Pruning Citrus

Second prune from the top “the jump cut” down, 8” out from your final pruning spot. This cut will drop most of the branch straight down to the ground. The third cut is the final cut at the branch collar. Make sure the cut is smooth. Since citrus don’t have very pronounced branch collars, the cut will have to follow where this would normally be on a tree.

If major emergency pruning is being done during the summer months, it might be beneficial to print the exposed wood with white latex paint if sun damage might occur.

Pruning to reduce the crop load or improve the fruit size (ie thinning the fruit) is usually not necessary, except for mandarins.

Skirting is the removal of the bottom foot of canopy so the tree looks tidy and is easier to maintain.

Some sprouts or suckers can be removed by hand if they are small enough.

Prune small branches with hand pruners. Position the blade so that it is as close to the trunk or branch collar as possible.

**Pruning marginally hardy trees and for freeze rehabilitation** (kaffir limes): Wait until some new growth starts to appear so that the full extent of the damage can be accessed. Branches may look healthy and alive (except for some fallen leaves) right after the freezing weather but later no new growth appears. Part of a branch, a whole branch or the entire top of the tree may have been killed by cold temperatures. Watch for cases where the desirable cultivar has been killed to the graft union and only the rootstock regrows. Remove the plant and replant with a hardier cultivar. Prune the winter damaged branch back to live wood. Citrus blooms are the first part to be damaged by cold weather (then the new twig and leaf growth, older mature growth, smaller branches and lastly larger branches and trunk. Citrus generally freeze from the top to the bottom and from the outside to the inside. Citrus flowers will freeze at 28 degrees.

**Pruning containerized trees?** Pinch new growth when trees are small to encourage
Pruning Citrus

bushiness.

There are many different citrus species with different growth habits and shapes. Study your plant from all four sides before pruning.

Above: ‘Rêve d’Or’ an Earthkind climbing Noisette rose introduced in 1869 (with the garden cottage that my husband is building in the new garden area)

Photo courtesy of Carolyn Williams
Weeds - A Dreaded Part of Gardening
by Bob Beyer

People garden in order to make something grow; to interact with nature; to share, to find sanctuary, to heal, to honor the earth, to leave a mark. Through gardening, we feel whole as we create our personal work of art upon our land – BUT nothing compares to what the Creator has already given us in nature. Unfortunately – that includes weeds!

The old saying that nothing is certain except “death and taxes” should add “weeds” to the list! So what is the difference between a native plant and a weed? Actually none, except the definition we give it which has everything to do with the location and proliferation and little to do with the actual plant. The difference is sometimes in the eyes of the beholder. In England, dandelion greens are savored in salads and the dandelion was declared an endangered wildflower! Here, we would gladly export every one we have to England.

A weed by our definition is a plant that grows where it is not wanted. Furthermore, it reproduces and spreads, competes with other plants for light, nutrition, and space;, can harbor pests and diseases, and detracts from the desired aesthetic of the landscape. Actually, all of the above characteristics apply to native plants as well.

OK, enough doodling with definitions. There are plants out there that we just don’t want in our gardens or lawns. They produce seed which may lie dormant until soil is disturbed, are exposed to light, or await the correct temperature or moisture to germinate. They are windblown, spread by birds, or introduced by imported soil. The survival mechanisms of plants we call weeds are pretty impressive and nature has given them the means to survive even our greatest assault upon them. So, realistically, we can’t win – it’s a losing battle if your goal is to eradicate every weed in your garden or yard. We can only minimize the impact and continually do battle with these unwanted garden pests.

The goal of any gardener should be to disrupt the life cycle of weed plants without damaging the environment. That last part is very important. It means, no use of chemicals that are harmful to other living things (plant and animal) or can be absorbed into our water resources and food supplies. Weed and Feed products are a commercial deception and should be taken off the market because the best time to treat weeds is not the best time to fertilize. Spreading weed killer over an entire lawn is overkill and increases the chance of dangerous toxic substance runoff. An example of this danger is the fact that the weed killer Atrazine has been detected in 70% of Austin’s springs. Let’s focus on non-toxic and environmentally friendly ways to deal with weeds.

“When weeding, the best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant.”
Author Unknown
First, you must accept the fact that weeds are a fact of life and not get so upset every time you see one. After all, having a few weeds among grass is better than grass with bare spots as any plant with a root system helps prevent erosion by their very presence, and any bare spot will only provide fertile ground for more weeds to germinate. On a purely cost/benefit basis, the expenditure you would make on chemical weed killers and fertilizers to get a perfect looking lawn far exceeds the non-financial benefit you get from it, so why waste your money? Here in Central Texas, we have a lawn turf problem as there is no ideal grass suited for our particular environment. They all allow weed intrusion. In fact, one of the turf grasses commonly used, Bermuda, is an intruder and becomes a weed when it invades our garden beds. But there is one way to minimize and combat lawn weeds. I begin mowing my lawn at a low setting as soon as spring weeds and grass begin to grow in March. This prevents the weed plants from reaching seeding maturity until the warm weather turf grass begins actively growing. Once that occurs, the turf grass will normally choke out weeds naturally so at that time, I raise the mower to the prescribed height for the type of grass (e.g. 3” for St. Augustine) plus fertilize ONLY with an organic fertilizer to encourage the conquering turf grass to smother the weeds. It really works!

Another way is the physical removal of weeds from the lawn as they appear – hand pulling weeds regularly to keep them from getting out of control. It is best to do this following a rain or when the ground is soft. Some weeds have shallow fibrous roots and are easily pulled by hand, while others form tap roots (e.g. dandelion), for which the entire root must be removed, otherwise it will regenerate from the remaining root. I dispose all weeds that have flower heads or that have gone to seed and underground structures that could regenerate, placing them in the trash and avoid putting them in compost piles. It is OK to place them in lawn clipping bags for recycling into Dillo Dirt. Of course, another environmentally friendly method of reducing weed control maintenance is to reduce your lawn area and replace it with xeriphytic landscaping.

Now for the garden beds. The best method to control weeds is a good cover to prevent their growth such as a layer of hardwood mulch, decomposed granite or other inorganic ground covers, or use ground cover plants that will smother them out. Regular tilling of your soil disrupts weed growth cycles and helps reduce weed infestation when mulching is not possible. Anything that is created must be maintained which means any landscaped or garden beds need periodic weeding. Taking care to keep landscape plants healthy also helps them compete better against weeds. So, every time you go out to stroll through and admire your garden, be prepared to pull a weed or as many as you see along the way. Actually, it takes a village to fight weed infestation. If you keep your area relatively weed free and your neighbors don’t, they will be back in your turf soon. Vice versa, by controlling weeds, you are helping your
neighbors as well.

The City of Austin and Texas AgriLife Extension have produced an excellent brochure with much more detailed information about common weeds found in Central Texas entitled, “Grow Green Earth Wise Guide to Weeds.” It can’t cover every kind of weed we find in our yards so further identification can be made by contacting the local AgriLife Extension office in your county. Knowing what the weed is and it’s characteristics helps in combatting them. Quite frankly, I find weeds fascinating. They are as tenacious at surviving as desert plants clinging to life in the dry, hot hostile regions of our country.

Reprinted with permission from the Gardening In Central Texas blog www.centraltexasgardening.blogspot.com
How to Create a Wildlife Habitat

Saturday, May 22nd, 9:00-11:00 am

AgriLife Extension Office of Travis County
1600 B Smith Road, Austin, TX 78721 (512) 854-9600

Learn how to attract butterflies, birds, insects, toads, etc. by utilizing plants which create food, cover, places to raise young and water. A Master Naturalist volunteer will lead the discussion. This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. For information, see www.tcmastergardeners.org or call the Travis County Master Gardener’s help desk at (512) 854-9600.

Beetles of Texas

Monday, May 24th, 7:00 p.m.

Zilker Botanical Garden
2220 Barton Springs Road, Austin, TX 78746 (512) 477-8672

Presented by the Austin Butterfly Forum, featuring Mike Quinn, an entomologist and the club’s President. Mike will share his enthusiasm about the beetles of Central and South Texas. For details on this event and upcoming meetings and field trips, see http://www.austinbutterflies.org/Calendar.

Become a Garden Detective

Saturday, May 29th, 10:00 am - noon

Zilker Botanical Garden
2220 Barton Springs Road, Austin, TX 78746 (512) 477-8672

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. This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. For information, see http://www.tcmastergardeners.org or call the Travis County Master Gardener’s help desk at (512) 854-9600.
Coming Events

Basic Landscape Design Principles

Saturday, June 19th, 10:00 am - noon
Zilker Botanical Garden
2220 Barton Springs Road, Austin, TX 78746 (512) 477-8672

Does your garden need a remodel? Or do you need a landscape design but don’t know where to start? This seminar is the first in a two-part series to teach how to design your garden. Attend one or both to explore the basics of landscape design. The first seminar, Basic Landscape Design Principles, will help get your creative juices flowing by exploring ways to use your space and by looking at various garden styles. We will learn about basic design principles such as texture, color, and function that will help you to create a pleasing environment.

Rainwater Harvesting

Saturday, June 26th, 10:00 am - noon
Zilker Botanical Garden
2220 Barton Springs Road, Austin, TX 78746 (512) 477-8672

Come enjoy a free seminar concentrating on capturing rainwater and lowering water usage in your landscape. This session will teach you all the basics on building a non-potable rainwater harvesting system. In addition, lower your water usage by learning about rain gardens which capture valuable rainwater in your landscape. Vendors representing tank and gutter companies will be available to answer specific questions. City of Austin representatives will be available to answer permit and rebate questions.

This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. www.tcmastergardeners.org or call the Travis County Master Gardener’s help desk at (512) 854-9600.
Coming Events

**Finding Butterflies in Austin**

**Monday, June 28th, 7:00 p.m.**

Zilker Botanical Garden

2220 Barton Springs Road, Austin, TX 78746 (512) 477-8672

Where do you go in Austin to find Butterflies and how do you find them? Join Dan Hardy, Programs Chairman for this presentation where he will share his favorite areas close to Austin, when to visit them and what to look for. For details on this event and upcoming meetings and field trips, see http://www.austinbutterflies.org/Calendar.

**Designing Your Landscape**

**Saturday, July 10th, 10:00 am - noon**

Zilker Botanical Garden

2220 Barton Springs Road, Austin, TX 78746 (512) 477-8672

Does your garden need a remodel? Or do you need a landscape design but don’t know where to start?

In this second landscape design seminar, we will explore the step-by-step process of creating a landscape plan. We will discuss the creation of drawings from site analysis through concept to a final planting plan. Learn how to measure your yard and draw a base plan to scale. This seminar will introduce the tools you need to create the garden you have always wanted.

This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. www.tcmastergardeners.org or call the Travis County Master Gardeners’ help desk at (512) 854-9600.
Better Photography in the Garden

Saturday, July 24th, 10:00 am - noon

Zilker Botanical Garden

2220 Barton Springs Road, Austin, TX 78746 (512) 477-8672

This class will help you capture the beauty of nature with your camera. Learn tips on capturing plants and insects in the garden to get the most impact. Discussion will include how lighting, focal length and aperture interact in composing photographs and how to use your camera's programs (landscape, portrait, etc.) effectively. After the presentation, we’ll go out into the Botanical Garden to practice our new skills. Participants must bring their own camera, and have an understanding of how to work it. All types of cameras welcome.

Prerequisite: Study the owner’s manual of your camera. Bring your camera for some practical exercises.

This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. www.tcmastergardeners.org or call the Travis County Master Gardeners’ help desk at (512) 854-9600.

"Gardening is a kind of disease. It infects you, you cannot escape it. When you go visiting, your eyes rove about the garden; you interrupt the serious cocktail drinking because of an irresistible impulse to get up and pull a weed."

Lewis Gannit
TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION
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*The position of Director of Publications remains open
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Visit the websites: www.tcmastergardeners.org and 
http://travis-tx.tamu.edu

The End...

Time to Get Gardening!