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Featured Speaker...

In 1981, Carol Ann Sayle and her husband Larry Butler began farming on weekends on their newly acquired Milam county land. In 1992 they added the Boggy Creek Farm in East Austin to their operation. This is an USDA-Certified Organic Urban Market Farm.

Carol Ann started raising chicken about 1982 and has never been without chickens since then. Be prepared to learn many valuable chicken lessons from Carol Ann and to laugh!

Quote from Carol Ann:

“I have learned a lot about chickens, and a lot from chickens, through the years. I consider them as smart as any bird. I’m not a scientific person, so I don’t consider myself a good nurse for anything other than swelled up eyes or foot injuries. Although, recently I had to glue the Starlet’s scalp back down with antibiotic globs. It worked. Any illness more serious than that has to make do with my hospice skills: comfort, sympathy and a good burial.”

Meeting information:
Wednesday, January 6th, 2010 starting at 7 pm.
Zilker Botanical Garden

Boggy Creek Farm Poultry
Left to right: six weeks old, the chicks enjoy their attached "run" (the old chicken tractor); Head hen, the bespectacled Tootie J. Tootums, pausing on the entry wire fence; Winter in the Hen House; Carol Ann with Tootie J. Tootums.
Hello Master Gardeners:
A Message From Your New President

Starting in September when the weather starts a fall cooling off, we run back to our gardens, happy to be able to enjoy the outdoors, especially after our blazing Texas summers. We labor with love planting, harvesting, transplanting and running back and forth to every nursery we can locate. Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas follow and the seasons all begin to blur together. Making busy bees of all of us! And then, suddenly, it all comes to a blessed stop.

I once thought January was such a waste of my precious time! I could not really get outside and work in the garden as I wished. Impatient me would only pace the floor mumbling about hope for an early spring. Age has changed that attitude to a great degree and I have learned not only to enjoy the peace and solitude of the month, but to embrace what Mother Nature gives us. A month or two of dormancy, a month or two to sit back and reflect on what I want to achieve with the coming of springtime. A time to read garden books, adventure books, mystery books and replenish my mind. A time to sit in my sun room and watch the birds flocking around the feeders, all the while trying to identify the flurry of feathers.

We have an owl, and the whole neighborhood has taken to “owl watching.” He or she is an Eastern Screech Owl (identified by my 5 year-old grandson, Evan with our *Birds of Texas* book and binoculars). We are hoping a second owl joins our box and little ones to appear in the spring. We will definitely have to celebrate with a neighborhood owl party.

Such are the simple pleasures! Does age give us the patience to enjoy the rites of winter? I hope so. And so, my wish for all of you is to enjoy the simple life that winter enables us to embrace. Snuggling down to watch an old favorite movie, the smells of comfort food floating from the kitchen, looking through all the seed and garden catalogs and taking time to enjoy our brief window of wintertime.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!

Carolyn Williams, President
The 2009 Travis County Master Gardener Awards

If you were not able to attend our holiday party last month, you missed out on helping us congratulate several members who received awards for their outstanding contributions to TCMGA. So below is a list of our award recipients.

**Lisa Anhaiser**, Horticulture Assistant, for her support and guidance while we were between agents. Lisa makes so many contributions to our Association. She has that “can-do” attitude that kept us going and moving along with our projects and is always there to help. I can’t remember a time she said “no” to any of our requests.

**Loretta Fischer**, 2009 Garden Tour Chairperson, for her leadership and organizational skills that lead to another outstanding garden tour. This tour was definitely our most successful fall event and that success had much to do with Loretta’s guidance.

A new award was created this year. The Garden Star Award was presented to our members who graciously offered their gardens for our Inside Austin Gardens tour in recognition of the expense and hard work that goes into preparing a garden for our tour.

The 2009 recipients are:

- Lindy McGinnis
- Gail Sapp
- Jessica Winslow
- Eleanor Pratt
- Cheryl Goveia
- Randy Case

Our out-going board members were given a great big THANKS for their commitment to TCMGA and our mission:

- **Jerry Naiser**, Vice President for Programs
- **Cheryl Harrison**, Director of Publications
- **Hope Dyson**, Secretary
- **Susan Jung**, State Representative

The Golden Gloves Award went to:

**Jackie Johnson** for her efforts to tackle the “snake pit” behind the greenhouse in preparation for a ground cover trial and for everything else she does on behalf of the greenhouse.

and

**Marian Stasney**—because the greenhouse would not work without her as she personally repairs almost everything broken from the electrical system, the rain collection pump and so much more.

And our highest recognition, the Peggy Stewart Award went to:

**Anne Van Nest** who has served our organization in many areas including Greenhouse Manager, Speakers Bureau participant, xeriscape publication editor, and now Compost Bin editor for 2010.

Congratulations to our award recipients.

Manda Rash, 2009 TCMGA President
The hard freeze that hit in early December clearly demonstrated which vegetables belong in the winter hardy category. On December 3rd I harvested green beans, butter beans, cucumbers, potatoes and peppers, along with some red and green tomatoes; the next day, after a night that dipped down to 28 degrees, all of those plants were frost-bitten and lifeless. But what an amazing contrast between those dearly departed vegetables and the sturdy kale, collards, turnips, lettuce, spinach, broccoli, carrots, beets, Swiss chard and radishes that contribute to our diets in winter. Day after day, night after night, these cool-season edibles stand up to blustery weather and tolerate cloudy days.

If you haven’t tried growing vegetables in winter, the last two weeks of January is a great time to take advantage of their hardiness and plant them in your garden. Onion transplants, available from your local nursery or feed store, can also be planted this month. Varieties that do well here include 1015Y, ‘Contessa’, White Bermuda, ‘Red Burgundy’ and Southern Belle.

As any youngster who has spent time pulling weeds or digging holes will tell you, gardening is hard work. But I prefer to look at it as a form of exercise. Reaching, bending, stretching, lifting, digging, moving from here to there; all of this activity counts as physical exercise. Do you remember Jack LaLanne? I used to love watching him on TV when I was growing up.

At age 95 he’s still out there with his can-do attitude, promoting the benefits of daily exercise. He had heart surgery in early December and before he went under he told his family, “I can’t die, it’ll wreck my image”. What a guy. I don’t know if he’s a gardener but I know that he has made fitness a priority throughout his life. He used to say “Never lie down when you can sit, never sit when you can stand, never stand when you
can move.” And I agree with him.

Anything that gets our bodies moving is beneficial. It engages our muscles, increases stamina and flexibility and helps burn calories. If you have taken a sedentary break from the garden this winter, ease yourself back into gardening activities by working for short periods to prevent soreness. Give your back a break and squat rather than bend to make use of your large leg muscles. Alternate using tools from side to side and periodically take stretch breaks.

Scientific studies show that moderate physical exercise, especially when combined with a healthy diet, helps ward off chronic diseases like hypertension, heart disease and osteoporosis. So go ahead and kick off the New Year by reaping the physical and nutritional rewards that are waiting for you right in your own backyard.

**Onion transplants.**
A blog is a shared journal or diary posted on the Internet. Garden blogs are a great source of shared thoughts and ideas from gardeners around the world.

We are very lucky in Austin to be able to garden outdoors almost year round. However, on some of these winter days when you just can’t get outside to garden, my favorite armchair gardening activity is reading the Austin-area garden blogs. With 40+ to choose from, there is a wealth of local gardening information, as well as gorgeous photos, plant identifications, even tips and tricks to deal with garden pests and problems.

If you want to know what blooms here even in the dreaded days of summer, read the monthly Bloom Days posted on the 15th of each month. Most bloggers participate and posts photos and/or list what’s blooming in their own garden on the 15th day of each month. This is a nationwide blogging activity, so it’s also fun to check out other parts of the country to see what’s blooming there.

Several of our Travis County Master Gardeners have garden blog sites and are some of my favorites. Everyone will find their own favorites and the links are too numerous to list here, but if you enter “Austin, TX garden blogs” in Google or your favorite search engine, you should be directed to several sites. Click on one of these links to get started. Most of the bloggers list links to other garden blogs in the Austin area, as well as sites across the United States and the world.

Some bloggers are experienced gardeners with beautiful photographs of their gardens, so there’s lots of design and plant information to be learned here. Others are new gardeners who excitedly track their first gardening attempts. No matter what aspect of gardening you’re interested in — flowers, vegetables, foliage, attracting wildlife, etc., you can find someone with similar interests writing about it in their blog.

Another helpful feature I enjoy is that you can post comments to the blogs and ask questions about a plant you saw in their photos or share information in response to questions asked in the blog.

Our horticulture agent, Daphne Richards, has a new garden blog, “Daphne’s Dirt” at http://daphneladean.wordpress.com. She is just getting started, but I look forward to reading about her gardening experiences here in Austin.
Hints from Wolf’s Garden - Lemons
By Becky Waak

Wintertime is tough for gardeners. Catalogs and garden magazines show glorious gardens filled with plants that wouldn’t survive our scorching summers. But there is one plant that is evergreen, has fragrant blossoms and beautiful fruit, and is -- the lemon tree.

Lemon trees are fairly easy to grow here because we have mild winters. Generally the lemon tree doesn’t like temperatures below 30 degrees. However, if frosts are not long or more severe, citrus trees will tolerate cool conditions. Covering the tree with a frost blanket and adding a string of lights will generally fend off the occasional cold night. Planting by a south wall or under the eaves of a house adds heat in winter and protects against damaging wind.

If you want to grow a citrus tree in the ground or in a container, choose a location that receives a minimum of six hours of full sun every day. This plant loves lots of water, but hates to sit in it. Good drainage is essential. Water deeply and regularly, and fertilize every 4 weeks from February to August with a citrus plant food or one high in nitrogen and phosphorous. Irregular watering (waterlogged followed with dry conditions) will result in blossom drop and yellow leaves.

The lemon tree may develop deformed fruit if exposed to unusual weather, especially cold spells. If this happens do not worry. Your lemon tree will probably be back to producing normal shaped lemons the following year. If your lemon tree seems to be too large or is not producing enough lemons prune it drastically. Saw the limbs back to stubs 2 inches in diameter. Shoots will form shortly.

For container varieties, choose the Improved Meyer lemon or choose any citrus that is grafted to ‘Flying Dragon’ (Hiryu) rootstock, as these will be significantly dwarfed, and are more likely to remain both healthy and productive in containers for several years. Container varieties will thrive if they have enough room to grow, lots of water and get repotted every few years. Of course, using a container has the advantage of being brought inside during cold snaps.

There are true lemons and lemon hybrids. The lemon hybrids are usually lemons mixed with another fruit like a lime. Hybrid varieties include the Improved Meyer, ‘Monachello’, ‘Perrine’, Ponderosa, Rough Lemon, and ‘Sungold’. True lemons are generally more tart, can grow up to 20 feet tall, and include the ‘Armstrong’, ‘Eureka’, ‘Femminello Ovale’, ‘Genova’, ‘Lisbon’, and the ‘Villa Franca’.

Lemons can be harvested green and allowed to ripen in a cool room or refrigerator. Fruit left on the tree too long will develop drier pulp and thicker skin.

And lastly, the uses for lemons fill many web sites. Here are a few: Use for freshening the air, fireplaces, the floor, refrigerators, and deodorizing your hands after cutting onions. Use to keep the color in guacamole, lettuce, and fruit. Use to whiten clothes, marble, tile, grout, and stains on most any surface. Use lemons to keep ants, roaches and fleas at bay, lighten age spots on skin, lighten nails and berry stained hands, and scrub copper pots. Sooth poison ivy rash, scrub scaly elbows, and remove warts with lemons. And of course, make lemonade, lemon pie, lemon chicken, lemon pudding, and, and, ………
In many cases this is more economical than buying larger containerized plants from a local nursery and there is less temptation to buy on impulse while shopping in person. Transportation is much less of an issue too with mail order. Vehicles don’t need to be cleaned after loading tall plants into a small car or tilting the plants on their sides to make them fit like I am prone to doing. Who knows, friends may even want to add their own items to the mail order shopping list and share the cost of shipping.

When ordering plants by mail, remember this warning: if it looks too good to be true, it probably is. If the price seems to be unrealistically low, be suspicious. No one is in the business to give their plants away. Consider the possibility that the plant will be significantly smaller than you imagined. Keep a record of what you ordered, when it was ordered and from whom it was ordered if shopping from several businesses. Also note how long they suggest you wait for your delivery and how far away it is travelling. This information might be beneficial later if problems arise.
Should you accept back orders? If the plant is so treasured that you are willing to wait for it, then call the company and ask how long the delay will be. Will the delay be a couple of weeks or until the next seed harvesting and growing season?

When ordering through the mail, it is wise to assume that your carton will be treated as if it tumbled down numerous flights of stairs or ended up with an elephant-size weight on top of it. How durable are the plants you want to order? Is it worth ordering bluebonnet plants through the mail when they have a good chance of being battered and bruised? Perhaps these should be purchased locally. It is not a pretty sight to see plants tossed out of their pots and standing on their heads like a fish out of water.

Order early to increase your chances of obtaining the plants that you want. The best selection is early in the growing season. Some mail order nurseries in the Northeast may not have plants ready to ship for our spring planting dates that may be 3 months before their local customers. It is very frustrating to spend time scouring over catalogues, selecting the ideal plants, redesigning your garden to make these fit, and then to find out that they are not available.

Most reputable mail order companies will be aware of the hardiness zones across North America and may even look into the progression of the seasons in your area before they ship to you. Ask if the plants need to be hardened off before planting them in the garden. Think about your plants, snatched from a toasty warm greenhouse, put into a dark box for several days and then arriving at your garden during cool, damp February Texas weather. Hardening off plants, by placing them in a protected site, after they arrive is a good idea no matter what state the plants are in.

Phone in or fax your order late in the week.

This will allow for some time to have it processed and shipped out at the beginning of the next week.

Shipments that are stored with the courier or post office over the weekend have a greater chance of freezing or suffering the consequences of an extended time in the darkness.

After your shipment arrives, open it immediately. Check your order to see if it is correct and the plants are in good condition. Ideally there should be no broken branches, no visible insects, and no stretched or light-colored growth. Each plant should be labelled securely. It is no fun trying to match labels to plants if they look like dormant twigs without any leaves or flowers.

Plants that have dry, shrivelled roots may be revived by soaking them in a bucket of water. They may look like they are beyond salvation when they arrive, but often there’s plenty of life inside. Companies that care about their customers and products will provide full cultural information and instructions when they ship their plants.

Some plants are packed in moistened wood shavings, peat moss, shredded paper, or soil. These materials help to keep the plant roots from drying and shrivelling. Carefully remove this material if it will not decompose. Some plants may be packed in a starch-based packing material that will dissolve if it comes in contact with water. To test your packing chips, drop one into a sink and wait a few seconds. If it becomes slimy, add the rest of them and watch them melt.

A reliable company will gain your trust by selecting the best quality plants, wrapping and packing them well and will ship them fast. Some companies will ship the same day that they receive your order. They will also honour a guarantee should anything go wrong. Ordering by mail is an excellent way to obtain plants fast, easily and economically.

In any event, catalog browsing is a great winter pastime!

"You can bury a lot of troubles digging in the dirt."
~ Author Unknown

"Gardens are a form of autobiography."
~ Sydney Eddison, Horticulture magazine, August/September 1993
Happenings in the Demonstration Garden
by Elaine Dill

The demonstration garden is in for a makeover for 2010. A new landscape plan is in the works: some existing plants will be replaced with new varieties for water conservation, wildlife habitat, or general landscape appeal. Earth-Kind roses, compost bins, and more bulbs will offer additional educational opportunities. The following schedule for January should get us off to a good start. Make it one of your New Year’s resolutions to come out to the demonstration garden and share your knowledge and skills as we make this vision a reality.

Friday, Jan. 8
11:00 AM – noon
Education
Composting 101 by David Lutz.
Learn about recycling your plant material to create compost, an ideal nourishment for plants.

Friday, Jan. 15
8:30 – 11:30 AM
Workday - General maintenance. Please bring your own gloves and hand tools.

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Do you have horticultural expertise beyond MG training?

Your Speakers Bureau Committee is once again trying to learn more about you so we can better serve our community. Recently Tommie Clayton sent an email about MG Specialist Training. Thanks for your responses to her.

Now I’m asking about other training or expertise in horticulture that you may have. Some examples that we are interested in:
degree in horticulture or related field
horticultural training program outside of the MG program
work experience in a horticultural business

Please reply to me and I’ll add your information to our list. Thanks for your help at this busy season of several holidays.

Mike McGiffin

A bounty of vegetables from Boggy Creek Farm, an USDA-certified organic urban market farm in Austin.

Pullets on a Cold Winter Night

Toasty warm under heat lamps, these pullets at Boggy Creek Farm "weather" an 18 degree night just fine.
Central Texas Gardening 101

Presented by The Travis County Master Gardeners Association

Saturday, January 30, 2010
10 am to noon

Austin Area Garden Center Building, Zilker Botanical Garden

Austin offers a unique mixture of weather, soil, and environment and the rules of gardening here are likely different from other areas you might have gardened before. This seminar is great for those establishing new roots in our area and trying to figure out how to encourage their plants to do the same or for those who need a refresher on the gardening basics of our area.

Join Daphne Richards, Horticulture Agent at the Texas Agrilife Extension Service for Travis County, to cover what you need to know to be a successful Central Texas gardener.

Included in the discussion will be our seasonal growing calendar, how to work with challenging soils, maintenance schedules for pruning and planting, tips on giving your plants the best start in your garden, and more.

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.

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Announcing ....

The Travis County Master Gardener Associations’
Garden Guide - Fourth Edition

Now back in print!

Newly updated and revised, this essential guide to gardening in Central Texas is now available at local garden centers. Featuring gardening and water conservation tips for Central Texas, soil types and recommended native and adapted plants. A month-by-month guide to what to do and plant and a valuable resource section with who to call, where to go and what to visit.

Available at:
Barton Springs Nursery
Big Red Sun
Breed & Co
Callahan’s General Store
Chrysalis gift shop at Zilker Botanical Garden
Eco-Wise
The Emerald Garden
Gaddy’s Feed, Hardware & Garden (Pflugerville)
The Great Outdoors
Green ‘n Growing (Pflugerville)
It’s A Jungle
It’s About Thyme
Lily Day Gardens (Burnet)
Natural Gardener
Ted’s Trees
Shoal Creek Nursery
Wild Basin Preserve
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

Still only $14.95
2010 TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION
EXECUTIVE BOARD

Installed as your 2010 Executive Board* at the December 2009 meeting were:

Carolyn Williams, President
Manda Rash, Immediate Past President
Rosalie Russell, Vice President for Programs
Vicki Blachman, Co-Vice President for Education
Bonnie Martin, Co-Vice President for Education
Cheryl McGrath, Volunteer Coordinator for Projects
Sherrill Nilson, Co-Volunteer Coordinator for Trainees
Pat Mokry, Co-Volunteer Coordinator for Trainees
Susan Jung, Secretary
Marty Berdan, Treasurer
Janet Newton, Membership Director
Dorothy Akin, Greenhouse Manager
Chris Giaraffa, Greenhouse Manager
Vicki Olson, Greenhouse Manager
Joe Posern, AAGC Representative
Jo Kautz, State Council Representative
Tommie Clayton, State Council Representative

*The position of Director of Publications remains open.

Congratulations to our 2010 Executive Board!

Manda Rash

Past Presidents (Non-voting):
Bill Baldwin
Bill Boytim
Susan Cashin
Tommie Clayton
Don Freeman
Peggy Stewart
Becky Waak
Will Walker

Ex Officio Member of the Board (Non-voting)
Horticulture Extension Service Director:

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This issue of the Compost Bin has been published thanks to the contributions of the following Travis County Master Gardeners...

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Visit the websites: www.tcmastergardeners.org and http://travis-tx.tamu.edu

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