The Compost Bin

February 2011

A Publication of the Travis County Master Gardeners - a volunteer program of Texas AgriLife Extension

The Mueller Blackland Prairie Recreated with guest presenters...

Barbara Austin, Chris Lalich and Emily Manderson

In this issue...

In the Vegetable Garden
Ants or Termites?
Celebrating the Holiday Cactus
Cost-Saving Strategies for Gardeners
TCMGA 2011 Board
President’s Message
and more!
Inside this Issue....

- February Meeting Speakers — Barbara Austin, Chris Lalich and Emily Manderson  
- The President’s Message  
- In the Vegetable Garden  
- Celebrating The Holiday Cactus  
- Cost-Saving Strategies for Gardeners  
- Ants or Termites?  
- Educational Opportunities  
- Coming Events  
- 2011 TCMGA Board  
- Credits

February Meeting Speakers — Barbara Austin, Chris Lalich and Emily Manderson

Mueller’s Blackland Prairie

Barbara Austin and Chris Lalich from RVi and Emily Manderson from Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center will speak about the redevelop-ment of the former Robert Mueller Municipal Airport from a landscape architectural design point of view. RVi was selected to provide comprehensive landscape architectural design services for this 700-acre project. At the TCMGA meeting, Barbara, Chris and Emily will specifically discuss the Blackland Prairie portion which is just one segment of the total design. RVi collaborated with the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center to re-create a Blackland Prairie for the Mueller site.

The Mueller Open Space system creates a necklace of green that surrounds the 700-acre Mueller Austin site. When completed the Open Space System will include trailhead signs, maps, interpretive graphics for demonstration gardens, and an interpretive belvedere mural explaining the influences of human development on prairie grasslands.

One of the many unique stories is the creation of native plants demonstration gardens and two lakes for fishing and boating. Interpretive signs are strategically placed throughout the demonstration gardens explaining the characteristics of riparian, hillside, sensory, prairie and pollination plant species. The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center assisted RVi in the creation of these gardens and meadows.

RVi embarked on a mission in 1982 to provide the highest quality landscape architectural design and planning services available in Texas. Starting from a small core of partners RVi has grown into a major regional design firm widely recognized throughout the U.S. for its creative contributions in land use analysis, master-planned communities, design of outdoor spaces, parks and recreation design, and wayfinding graphics.

Lady Bird Johnson and actress Helen Hayes founded the National Wildflower Research Center, renamed Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, in 1982 to protect and preserve North America’s native plants and natural landscapes. Through research and the visitors center energies are focused on protecting and preserving North America’s native plants through native plant lists and image galleries, and conservation.

Master Gardener Meeting information:  
Wednesday, February 2nd, 2011 starting at 7 pm.  
Zilker Botanical Garden
Hello Master Gardeners:
A Message From Your President

The holidays have come and gone for another year and outside the land goes quiet as our brief winter appears. To me it seems a time of repose, of collecting my thoughts, of relaxing before gearing up to welcome spring and all its associated “hurry.”

At this time of the year I enjoy walking through the garden to see what ideas come to mind, what plants worked well and will be allowed to stay and which ones did not live up to my expectations, and will be pulled out. Sometimes during walks at this time of year I can really view my structure and it becomes clear where a plant needs to be added or subtracted. Yesterday I decided the Firebush had grown too large for its spot and will be wrestled from the ground. Also the Turks Cap has crept forward, thinking I had not noticed, and will be yanked back to its designated area. Being a gardener sometimes means taking strong measures in your own Eden!

In the vegetable area February means I start adding some amendments and turning over the soil getting it prepared for March planting. I need to look for onion transplants and get them into the soil. February also means that Michael, my husband and I start our annual debate over which tomato variety we feel deserves a spot in our raised beds. Such is the life of a February gardener in Central Texas!

Other thoughts start gathering in my head and I realize it is the “start of the rose season.” A favorite gardening delight is to prune, fertilize, mulch and talk to my roses. Last year’s spring and summer rains created a lush heaven of rose blooms and I am hopeful of a repeat this year. Valentine’s Day is a perfect time to be outside tending to your roses and, if you do not have any roses, it is the perfect time to purchase one or two to add to the garden. I am sure there is a spot in your garden for at least one beautiful rose!

Roses are one of my garden passions and I enjoy sharing that passion with others. Whatever your gardening passion is, give thought to joining the Speakers Bureau and helping us give back to our community by sharing your sound horticulture advice.

While everyone is still enjoying the slowness of February, please mark these important upcoming dates on your calendars:

- Passion for Plants Garden Fair — Saturday, March 19th, Reagan High School
- Zilker Garden Festival — Saturday, March 26th & Sunday, March 27th, Zilker Botanical Garden
- Inside Austin Gardens Tour — Saturday, May 14th

Soon you will be receiving additional information about how to volunteer for each of these exciting events.

Enjoy your rest because spring fever begins soon and we look forward to you volunteering with these events. Share your time and talent with us!

Happy Gardening.

Carolyn Williams
There are many reasons to love Texas, and one of them, for me, is our short and relatively mild winter. No doubt there are still some cold days ahead, but this is the month that our gardens gradually begin their reawakening. Microbial activity practically comes to a standstill when soil temperatures drop below 40º, but as temperatures gradually warm up life in the soil will start to tingle.

This is a good time to start a compost pile, if you haven’t already, by collecting leaves, garden clippings and kitchen waste. Grass clippings provide an excellent nitrogen source which helps the pile to heat up, but since grass is not easy to come by in February try sprinkling your pile with a little organic fertilizer and a few shovelfuls of soil as you build the pile. Cottonseed meal, blood meal, fish meal, bat guano or any general garden fertilizer will work. If dogs or critters frequent your compost area it is best to avoid blood and fish meal, as they will surely sniff it out.

Yard waste is a renewable resource, and shredding and composting it is an excellent way to “reduce, reuse and recycle.” A chipper/shredder makes quick work of it, but it’s an expensive piece of equipment (most I’ve seen are $600-800). If your budget and storage space allows, it is a long-term investment that will get used time and again. And it might just be that perfect Valentine’s Day gift you’ve been looking for!

A soil test is a good idea if you haven’t done one in the last 3 or 4 years and you can beat the spring rush by sending in a sample now. The A&M soil lab offers a routine soil test for $10 and for an additional $10 you can add the test for organic matter. Our native soils are very low (1-2%) in organic matter, and the long hot summers can quickly burn up what we add. A level of 5% is a good amount to strive for. Download a soil test form with instructions from the Texas AgriLife Extension Soil Testing Lab at http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/files/soilwebform.pdf.
Take advantage of February’s milder days to prepare your planting areas for spring. Do not work the soil if it is wet or you will end up with hard clods when it dries. Add a $\frac{1}{2} - 1”$ layer of compost and approximately $\frac{1}{2}$-1 cup of organic garden fertilizer per 10 foot row and lightly mix your amendments into the soil with a spade or a digging fork. There is a movement away from heavy tilling as it is not really necessary in an established garden – it disturbs all those microbial layers and channels that are formed underground and also brings weed seeds to the surface. If you have a large area to work or just like the feel of using a tiller, try the technique that Carol Ann Sayle utilizes at Boggy Creek Farm. She calls it “tickle-tilling,” and she just barely runs the tiller over the top few inches of soil without disturbing the layers below. Once the soil is loose and the planting area is formed, do not compact the soil by stepping in it.

The cool weather is conducive to all sorts of greens — lettuce, spinach, collards, kale, kohlrabi, mustard and Swiss chard. Get an early spring harvest by using transplants. There is still time to grow broccoli from transplants, and carrots, beets, radishes, turnips and sugar snap peas can all be planted from seed.

Potatoes can be planted mid-month; ‘Kennebec’, ‘Yukon Gold’ and ‘Red Lasoda’ are excellent varieties for Texas gardens. Plan your garden space carefully to be sure you have room to transition to warm-season vegetables next month!

Transplants of peppers and eggplant are easy to grow if you start now. All you need is a warm spot in the house, seed, light and potting soil. Special grow lights are sold for this purpose, but fluorescent lights (one warm, one cool) provide sufficient light and are cheaper. Multi-tiered seed starting carts can be purchased at garden centers or from mail order garden catalogs but it is easy to make your own with metal shelving purchased from a home improvement store or Container Store. This allows you to choose the width and height of your shelves. Place your seed flats on one shelf and suspend the lights with a chain and an S-hook from the shelf above. Keep the lights an inch or so above the developing seedlings, adjusting them with the chain as the plants grow.

Top: Be careful about compacting soil with heavy foot-steps.
Left: There are an exciting array of potatoes for the Central Texas vegetable garden.
Bottom Right: It’s seed starting time. Grow those hard to find varieties from seed.
Photos by Bruce Leander
Celebrating the Thanksgiving/Christmas/Easter (Holiday!) Cactus
by Anne Van Nest

The Christmas cactus is a pleasant diversion from the boldness of the poinsettia and much nicer to see after the holidays are over. To me Christmas cactus will always remind me of memories of cuttings and plants passed down through the generations of the Van Nest family.

That old-fashioned plant that my great grandma grew with the bright reddish-pink flowers, blooming in late winter, has seen a lot of improvements over the years. The Christmas cactus offered in stores today has just a few similarities to the plant of yesteryear. Many new colors and forms have been developed. Now there’s a choice to grow the many varied colors of Christmas, Thanksgiving, or Easter cactus. All of these plants are from a group of epiphytic cactus native to the tropical rain forests of south-eastern Brazil. They are grown for their attractive flowers cascading at the ends of green-fleshy branches. When not in bloom these plants are somewhat ratty looking, but when they are blooming they are spectacular.

What’s the difference between Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter cactus? Each of these are slightly different plants with different blooming schedules. Christmas and Thanksgiving cactus are closely related because they belong to the Schlumbergera genus. The Easter cactus (Hatiora gaertneri) is a totally different plant with stems that are somewhat similar to Schlumbergera, but the flower has many more petals and is funnel-shaped instead of being trumpet-shaped. The Easter cactus is from eastern Brazil and has the same cultural requirements as the Christmas cactus.

All of these plants are quite easy to grow indoors and will bloom reliably if minimal attention is given to cultural requirements. Many great colors have been created to expand the Christmas cactus palette which now includes yellow, salmon, pink, fuchsia and white.

There is a lot of confusion about the differences between the Thanksgiving and Christmas cactus groups. To make matters worse, plant taxonomists have decided that the Thanksgiving cactus which used to be called Zygocactus truncatus is now Schlumbergera truncata. This plant (also known as crab cactus) has dark green stem segments that have prominent teeth-like margins. This group is believed to be earlier blooming, although blooming times can easily be altered by controlling the plant environment.

The other group is the Christmas cactus which botanically is called Schlumbergera buckleyi (formerly Schlumbergera bridgessii). A broad description of this group includes a scalloped edge.
and medium green stem segments. This is a very popular group of plants with over 200 cultivars. The two groups are often very hard to tell apart. To avoid confusion, it might be easier to call all these plants Holiday cactus.

The secret to making all Christmas cactus flower is to understand what triggers the flower buds to form. For all types, the trick is to reduce the amount of water, night temperatures and daylight. In the fall, the natural shortening of the light length activates the formation of flower buds. Any extra light in the evening (beyond the natural sunlight) will delay or stop this process. A cool evening temperature also helps to trigger flower bud formation. Keeping the soil slightly moist also contributes to flower production. When small, round flower buds form at the ends of the leaves, increase humidity and light around the plant. The key to flower bud formation is cool temperatures (around 55 degrees) or long nights with over 13 hours of uninterrupted darkness. If both the temperature and light requirements can be met then chances are good for forthcoming blooms. Flower bud formation can be pre-programmed in advance. To program your Christmas cactus to bloom for the holiday season next year, start these requirements in late September and continue until flower buds are formed. Altering the day length is an easy task. Simply place the plant in a room that is not used at night and do not turn on the light. Alternatively, you can place the plant in a closet or cupboard each night. A dark cloth or cardboard box also works to block the light.

One of the most disheartening sights is a Christmas cactus with unopened flower buds dropping to the table. The most common cause of flower bud drop is stress. This could be caused by over or under watering or a sudden change in air temperature. A cold draft or hot air blast will cause the plant to go into stress and drop buds or flowers. Keep your plant happy with a little extra tender loving care during this time.

While the Christmas cactus can grow indoors in low light, more abundant blooms are produced on plants that have been growing in brighter light levels. Bright, indirect light is the best because it most closely resembles its native growing environment. An indoor location set back from a sunny window is fine, but do not expose plants to the full, strong sun outdoors. The sun is too strong during the summer and this may burn or bleach their leaves. A shaded outdoor location under a porch or a protected spot in the garden under an overhanging shrub or tree is better. Christmas cactus must also be protected outdoors from excessive rain and strong winds.

Watering is the most critical part of the care of Christmas cactus. This plant is not a true cactus and not as tough and drought tolerant as its name implies. It is a succulent plant that can store a limited amount of water in its fleshy leaves. To achieve the correct balance of moisture, allow the soil to dry slightly between waterings. Water thoroughly when the top half of the soil feels dry to the touch. The time of year and growing conditions will affect the frequency of watering. During the summer, when the plant is actively growing, keep the soil evenly moist. During the fall, water the plant just frequent enough to keep the plant from wilting. During bud set in October, the plant should have almost no water. Benign neglect is the best advice. Cautiously resume watering more frequently in November, but do not overwater the plant. When the plant is in bud it is critical to watch the frequency of watering so that the flower buds do not fall off prematurely because of watering.
The Holiday Cactus

stress. When the plant has finished blooming, let it rest for six weeks and withhold water during this time. When new growth starts, re-pot if necessary or top dress with fresh soil.

Christmas cactus prefer warm temperatures during the day and cooler temperatures at night when they are forming buds. Avoid hot drafts from furnace vents or fireplaces. Ideally, day temperatures should be between 50 and 60 degrees (particularly during bud initiation time). A drop in night time temperatures to 55 degrees will help initiate bud formation (along with reduced daylight). The bud formation time should take about six weeks.

It is interesting that lighter colored Christmas cactus flowers such as the whites, yellows, and apricots can turn a pink or purple color if the temperatures drop below 50 degrees within a few days of the buds opening.

Re-potting is done very infrequently. If the pot is filled with roots and the soil looks like it is depleted of nutrients, move Christmas cactus plants up to the next sized pot. This is ideally done in the spring about every three to four years. Choose a well-drained potting soil because Christmas cactus do not like wet feet. The ideal soil is composed of equal parts sterilized garden loam, leaf mould (or compost), and coarse sand. The soil and compost components add nutrients and hold moisture while the sand provides the drainage necessary for good plant health.

Fertilizer is not needed in large quantities because Christmas cactus are not heavy feeders. Top dress plants with a slow release fertilizer that will last 6-9 months or use a weak solution (one-half strength) liquid fertilizer regularly (monthly) once growth begins. Continue this until a month before buds are set in the early fall.

A Recap of the Central Texas Gardening 101 Seminar

A big thank you goes out to Daphne Richards, Texas AgriLife Extension Horticulture Agent for Travis County, for presenting a talk on the basics of gardening in Central Texas! There were over 50 public attendees despite a cold and drizzly day on Saturday, January the 15th. Feedback from the participant surveys showed that the group especially appreciated the question and answer portions of the program.

Cher Groody
Cost-Saving Strategies For Gardeners

by Bob Beyer

Gardening can be very expensive — or not. For those who have limited budgets, there are some ways to save costs by thinking “out of the box.” Here are a few ideas that I have discovered.

Tired of replacing clay pots that crack and plastic pots that break when weathered, try using simple galvanized buckets, spray paint the exterior sides, drill holes in the bottom, and you have a virtually indestructible 5 gal pot. This works for water gardens also, using a wash tub but with no drainage holes. With the cost of decorative looking plant containers being what they are, this is a much cheaper, yet still attractive way to display your potted plants. There is a rustic appeal to it as well.

Can’t remember plant names. Tired of plastic name plant tags breaking or names fading, try using old aluminum blinds — merely cut them into strips and label with a #2 pencil. They are weatherproof and the name will not wash off. It’s a good way to recycle as well. Another helpful way to remember plant names is to create a plant data base that you can refer to as necessary – no labels needed.

You can spend a small fortune on brand name potting soils, but I find the best way is to buy the cheaper soil ingredients at a local garden center and blend your own potting soil. I often use a 40 lb. bag of compost and an equal amount of topsoil. Do check the relative quality of each of these ingredients before buying. Once blended, if you can hold a handful, squeeze and it doesn’t compact, it will drain well, yet retain moisture, and grow most any plant well in a container.

Nursery plant prices have been increasing to where it costs a lot more to replace plants. Look into propagating some of your own plants, trading or swapping plants with other gardeners (e.g. at a Plant Swap or through garden clubs or with other garden acquaintances). We all end up with surplus plants that we can divide or otherwise share with others. Don’t overbuy for instant effect when buying a perennial that can be divided into multiple plants after one growing season. Often, commercial growers propagate and pot two rooted plants per container to ensure at least one survives. When buying a potted plant at a retail outlet, look for multiples that can be divided into two or more separate plants.

Organic gardeners save a lot of money by not purchasing and using toxic chemicals and fertilizers, but by focusing on composting and enriching garden soil naturally and dealing with insect and pesky weeds using many of the environmentally friendly methods. Texas AgriLife Extension calls it Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

Recycle pots: Reuse your pots until they can no longer be used. Nursery containers are not currently accepted for plastic recycling so offer them to a nursery – most of which will gladly accept them as it saves them money. Vice versa, if you need pots, ask your local nursery if they have a surplus of used pots they would like to get rid of. I did this for potting plants I propagated for a charitable plant sale. Wash out all used pots to reduce risk of transmitting disease organisms. Recycle your old potted plant soil back into your yard and garden.

Hand water everything. This way you can concentrate your watering to the root system and zone of each plant without wasting water. Automated systems are wasteful and wasted water is costly both environmentally and pocket book wise. Another cost saving, water-wise thing to do is mulch your garden beds each spring with a fresh layer of ground hardwood mulch. Native plants may not require mulching as they are already adaptive to our climatic conditions.
Cost-Saving Strategies For Gardeners

Don’t buy or grow tender plants or non-adaptive plants unless you have a means to protect and grow them successfully year round. This requires researching and learning about plants before buying, rather than impulse buying at a local garden place. As a plant buyer, you must be knowledgeable of what you are getting as many sellers aren’t that knowledgeable about what they are selling. Know what a plant requires to grow well before purchasing it. Use of native plants always saves you money as they are durable and rarely need to be replaced.

Buy or grow perennials for seasonal color rather than annuals. Annuals are indeed beautiful but are less adaptive to our climate extremes, and are costly to buy and replace every season. Many plants sold at nurseries are perennials in certain areas of the country but can only be grown as annuals in central Texas.

For garden décor, nothing looks more natural than native stone or artistic pieces of dead cedar wood. Without violating private property, there are many opportunities to gather these natural accents for your garden at no cost.

Try growing clusters of plants in a single container. A good example might be a small cactus garden in a shallow and wide container where many different and compatible plants are used and displayed artistically. Another method is to make colorful arrangements of thrillers, fillers, and spillers. This technique used one upright “showoff” plant surrounded by smaller fill-in plants and bordered with cascading plants. This saves money on pots and soil.

About now, you are probably thinking I’m out to put every horticultural enterprise out of business. Not at all! I shop for and buy new plants and supplies regularly, but I am merely pointing out some commonsense ideas that can save the average gardener with limited resources, time and money as well as help our environment. I know there are many unique ideas that other gardeners have implemented that haven’t crossed my mind. As gardeners, we might want to look for new and innovative cost and labor saving ideas which require unconventional thinking.

Used with permission from the Gardening In Central Texas blog www.centraltexascgardening.blogspot.com
Ants or Termites?

by Wizzie Brown

Spring is just around the corner and while to most of you that means getting out in the yard and digging in; to me it means inundation of phone calls and e-mails. Many of the phone calls and e-mails will be people wanting to know if they have termites or ants flying around. Are you able to tell the difference?

Swarmer is another term used to describe the reproductive stage of ants and termites. These insects have wings when they initially leave the colony, but the wings are either shed or chewed off before forming a nest. With a few key characteristics, you can learn to tell swarming ants from swarming termites.

Ant swarmers have elbowed antennae and a narrow, or constricted, waist. The wings of ants are not similar in size or shape and have few veins. If the wings are missing from the ant swarmer, there will not be a wing stub left on the thorax where the wing was attached.

Termite swarmers have antennae that are not elbowed and a waist that is not narrowed. The wings on termites are of similar size and shape and have many veins. Termite swarmers have a wing stub left on the thorax once the wing detaches from the body.

Termite swarmers (right)

Ant swarmers (left)
Announcing ... Two Educational Opportunities

**Soil Biology and Fertility Management – Advanced Education Class**

Travis County Master Gardeners will have an opportunity to receive advanced training in soil biology and fertility management. The class is Saturday, February 26, 9 am – noon at Austin Community Campus, South, 1820 W. Stassney Lane, Room 1130. The speaker, Steve Diver, is a former Extension Horticulturist with Oklahoma State University.

Mr. Diver’s lectures will feature an (1) Introduction to Soil Biology: Ten Principles of the Soil Foodweb, (2) Practical Ways to Manage Soil Organic Matter and Improve Soil Biological Activity, and (3) Soil Fertility for Organic Gardeners. Steve has years of experience to share and will include slides from farms and gardens that are using these methods.

Steve Diver earned B.S. (1981) and M.S. (1984) degrees in Horticulture from Oklahoma State University. He currently operates a horticultural and organic consulting service in Central Texas. Previously he was Research & Development Scientist for Sustainable Growth Texas, Agricultural Specialist with the National Center for Appropriate Technology’s ATTRA program in Arkansas, organic farmer in Missouri, and Extension Horticulturist in Oklahoma.

Steve serves on the Texas Organic Farming Research Center board, the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance board, and The Organic Center’s Science and Technical Advisory Committee.

There is a fee of $10 to attend the Advance Education class. Make check payable to TCMGA and mail it to Rosalie Russell, 2401 Spring Creek Drive, Austin, TX 78704. Your check will hold your spot in the class and must arrive prior to the class. Twenty or more students must attend or the class will be cancelled. Classroom with hold a maximum of 60 students. Attendees will receive 3 hours of Continuing Education Units toward 2011 TCMGA recertification.

**An Afternoon with Felder**

Wednesday, April 6th, 2011
2:00 p.m. - 3:30 (maybe 4:00 p.m.)
Austin Community College,
South Campus, 1820 West Stassney Lane, Room 1130
Cost: $25/person by April 1st.
Class limited to 50 TCMG members and garden bloggers.
CEU based on time of lecture rounded to nearest half hour.

It is guaranteed! You will laugh a lot and learn as Felder Rushing discusses how to write books & articles/give presentations/talk on the radio/etc. He is very experienced. Rushing is author or co-author of 15 gardening books (including several national award winners) and is formerly an Extension Service urban horticulture specialist. He has written thousands of gardening columns in syndicated newspapers, and has had hundreds of articles and photographs published in regional and national garden magazines. He has hosted a television program that was shown across the South, and appeared many times on other TV garden programs. Felder currently co-hosts a call-in garden program on NPR affiliate stations called Gestalt Gardener.

Make $25 check to TCMGA and mail to Rosalie Russell, 2401 Spring Creek Dr, Austin, TX 78704. Please write your e-mail address on check. You will be notified when check arrives. Check must arrive on or before April 1st. Attendees will be e-mailed full details several days prior to April 6. Questions? Call Rosalie at 804-2257 or e-mail GISatHCCS@aol.com

Felder Rushing will also be the program speaker at the regular TCMGA meeting April 6th at 7 p.m. at Zilker Botanical Garden.
Felder’s Rushing’s FAQ...

Q: Don’t you care what your neighbors think?

A: **Of course I do** - in the big scheme of things, it just doesn’t matter a whole lot!
**Coming Events**

**Everything’s Coming Up Roses**

Saturday, February 5, 2011, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Zilker Botanical Garden

2220 Barton Springs Road, Austin, Texas 78746

(512) 477-8672

Roses add color and wonderful scent to your garden year round! Join us for this free seminar and you will learn how to select, plant, prune and care for these wonderful plants in your garden or landscape. We will discuss Earth-Kind and Antique roses which are known for their high performance, disease resistance and insect tolerance. Travis County Master Gardeners Carolyn Williams and Holly Plotner will arm you with the tools you need to explore this fascinating area of horticulture!

This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. www.tcmastergardeners.org

**Planning and Planting the Spring Vegetable Garden**

Saturday, February 12, 2011, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Sunshine Community Garden

4814 Sunshine Drive

Austin, Texas 78756

Free! Hands on seminar gives you knowledge on plant & seed selection, tips for increased germination, spacing and other techniques to ensure gardening success. Street parking available only.

This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. www.tcmastergardeners.org

**Termite Training for Homeowners**

Thursday, February 17, 2011, 9:30 am - 10:30 am

Travis County Agrilife Extension Office

1600-B Smith Road, Austin, Texas 78721

(512) 854-9600

There’s an old saying in the pest control industry... “there are two types of homes in Texas- those with termites and those that will have them within seven years.” Which category do you fit into? This class will arm homeowners with information so they feel comfortable discussing management options for termites with pest professionals.

Do you know how termites look for food? Can you tell the difference between ants and termites? Come to learn how to identify the types of termites found in Central Texas and their management options.
### Taking Care of the Lawn

**Saturday, February 19, 2011, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm**

Sunset Valley City Hall  
3205 Jones Road  
Sunset Valley, Texas 78745

Two incredible sessions on lawn care. Join us for one or both. “It’s Dead! How to Establish a New Lawn” from 10-11 am; “How to Promote Lawn Health” from 11 am - 12 pm. Learn what to do to start a new lawn or replace a lawn, including grass varieties, soil preparation, and watering. Discover easy mowing, irrigating, and fertilizing tips for maintaining your lawn. Parking in Tony Burger Center across the street from Sunset Valley City Hall

This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. [www.tcmastergardeners.org](http://www.tcmastergardeners.org)

### Soil Biology and Fertility Management

**Saturday, Feb. 26, 2011, 9:00 am - 12:00 p.m.**

Austin Community College, South Campus,  
1820 West Stassney Lane, Room 1130  
Austin, Texas

Travis County Master Gardeners have an opportunity to receive advanced training in soil biology and fertility management during this morning workshop. The speaker, Steve Diver, is a former Extension Horticulturist with Oklahoma State University.

Mr. Diver’s lectures will feature an introduction to soil biology: ten principles of the soil food-web, practical ways to manage soil organic matter and improve soil biological activity, and soil fertility for organic gardeners. Steve has years of experience to share and will include slides from farms and gardens that are using these methods.

Cost: $10/person paid in advance. Check to TCMGA mailed to Rosalie Russell, 2401 Spring Creek Drive, Austin, Texas 78704 must be received prior to class. Minimum of 20 student required for class, max of 60 students. Act now! Send your check to hold your spot. More details: GISatHCCS@aol.com

### Chickens in the Garden

**Saturday, March 12, 2011, 10:00 am - 12:00 pm**

Zilker Botanical Gardens  
2220 Barton Springs Road  
Austin, Texas 78746  
(512) 477-8672

Most any size garden can benefit from a few chickens. They root out persistent perennial weeds, eat insects, fertilize the soil, and provide eggs in the bargain! All it takes is a little planning and a small investment in fencing and shelter. Master Gardener Joy Williamson will explain how to select breeds, raise chicks, build and maintain a coop and how to protect these garden mascots from predators. Join us for this free seminar to explore the fascinating world of chickens in the garden!

This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. [www.tcmastergardeners.org](http://www.tcmastergardeners.org)
Coming Events

Spring Vegetable Gardening

Wednesday, March 30, 2011,
6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Old Quarry Branch Library
7051 Village Center Drive,
Austin, Texas 78731

Enjoy the pleasures of fresh homegrown vegetables. Imagine baskets of okra, tomatoes, squash and green beans from your own garden! Learn how to plant and maintain this garden from Master Gardener and Vegetable Specialist, Patty Leander.

Patty will share popular varieties for Central Texas, recommended planting dates and tips for organic gardening and insect control. This free seminar, packed with information and color photographs, will benefit both new and experienced gardeners, so don't miss this great kick-off to spring gardening! Arrive early to ensure a seat as this is one of our most popular seminars.

This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. For more information see www.tcmastergardeners.org or call the Master Gardener Public Gardening Help Desk at (512)854-9600.

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1820 West Stassney Lane, Room 1130
Austin, Texas

It is guaranteed! You will laugh a lot and learn as Felder Rushing discusses how to write books & articles, give presentations, talk on the radio and generally communicate about gardening. And is he ever experienced! Rushing is the author or co-author of 15 gardening books (including several national award winners) and former Extension Service urban horticulture specialist writing thousands of gardening columns in syndicated newspapers, and has had hundreds of articles and photographs published in regional and national garden magazines. He has hosted a television program that was shown across the South, and appeared many times on other TV garden programs. Felder currently co-hosts a call-in garden program on NPR affiliate stations called The Gestalt Gardener.

Cost: $25/person received by April 1st. Class limited to 50 TCMG members, Interns and garden bloggers. Earn CEU based on time of lecture rounded to nearest half hour.

Checks payable to TCMGA and mailed to Rosalie Russell, 2401 Spring Creek Drive, Austin, TX 78704. Please write your e-mail address on check. You will be notified when your check arrives. Check must arrive on or before April 1st. Attendees will be e-mailed full details several days prior session. Questions? e-mail: GISatHCCS@aol.com
Comming Events

**What’s Bugging my Vegetables?**

*Saturday, April 9, 2011, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.*

Homewood Heights Community Garden

2606 Sol Wilson Avenue, Austin, Texas 78702

Learn about the most common garden insects ... good and bad. Knowledge is power and you’ll walk away knowing you can identify the eggs, nymphs and adults. Discover Integrated Pest Management (IPM), an effective and environmentally sensitive approach to pest management that relies on a combination of common-sense practices. IPM programs use current, comprehensive information on the life cycles of pests and their interaction with the environment. This information, in combination with available pest control methods, is used to manage pest damage by the most economical means and with the least possible hazard to people, property, and the environment.

Park in the neighborhood. The garden is on the north side of street west of Sol Wilson/Ridgeway intersection. This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. For more information see www.tcmastergardeners.org or call the Master Gardener Help Desk at (512) 854-9600.

**Funky Chicken Coop Tour**

*Saturday, April 23, 2011, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.*

Throughout Austin, Texas

Come join us for the third annual Austin Texas Funky Chicken Coop Tour! Have you been thinking about keeping urban chickens? Do you need coop design ideas? Then this is the tour for you! Hey, this is even for those of you that already have backyard chickens and are thinking about changing your coop design (there’s always room for improvement, right?). Also, feel free to come peck (oops, meant pick ;-) our brains on raising chickens.

Tour will go on rain or shine.

Where: All around Austin city limits. Carpooling or other green alternatives highly recommended!

This free event features coop design ideas and community fellowship.

For more details visit the http://fccooptour.blogspot.com website. Watch for a map closer to the tour on our website.
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This issue of the Compost Bin has been published thanks to the contributions of the following Travis County Master Gardeners and Wizzie Brown — Texas AgriLife Extension:

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

The End...

Time to Get Gardening!