Speaker for August: Melinda Kneese

“WHAT IS COMPOST TEA AND WHY WOULD I WANT IT IN MY GARDEN?”

Melinda Kneese is co-owner of ‘Oma’s Hause and Garten’ and MK Lab in Fredericksburg. She will be giving a talk on compost tea and why we want it in our gardens.

Melinda is the owner and researcher for MK Labs, a Soil Foodweb affiliated lab with Dr. Elaine Ingham of Corvallis, Oregon. She tests the biological activity of soils, composts and compost teas.

Ms. Kneese taught Biology, Anatomy and Physiology at the high school level for 12 years. She has a Masters in Microbiology from the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

Melinda will also talk about the soil web and how to increase the number of desirable microbes in the soil. Her talk will definitely be informative and something every gardener can apply in their own home gardens.

UPCOMING SPEAKERS

September
Chris Wiesinger
“Southern Heirloom Bulbs”
Southern Bulb Company

October
Don Gardner
“Don Gardner’s Basic Tree Care”

November
Steve Windhager, Ph.D.
Director of Landscape Restoration
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
“The Process of Ecological Restoration and its Philosophical Implications”

Dave R. Tovar

Message From the President...

No matter how hot it gets in the garden, there are still lots of great ways to help out with our projects indoors. We are especially in demand as speakers, and Debra Mischel has offered some wonderful opportunities for us to get out there and talk to folks. You don’t need to be an expert to take on these speaking engagements—you just have to like talking to people about gardening, which pretty much describes all of you. You can talk to these groups whether or not you have a slide show or power point presentation, and they are always appreciative of any information you have to share with them. We now have some stock power point shows you can use, and we have volunteers who can help you put your digital photos into an easy to use power point format, which you can use with the association’s laptop and power point projector. And you can
always get copies of Extension and Grow Green publications to use as hand outs. Please have another look at Debra’s requests for speakers and consider trying one out. Many of the requests are for talks about plants you all have in your gardens, so you already know a good deal about them, and you can ask other Master Gardeners for help filling out your talk if you think you need it.

As Machelle Dunlop gets more and more JMG projects rolling, there are many chances for you to help out with small-scale school gardening programs. There are tasks for those who like to assemble materials for the kids to use, there are chances to share some of your extra veggies and flowering plants, and ways for you to use your creative talents in developing ideas that teachers can put into practice. As more schools start implementing the Junior Master Gardener program, we have a greater need for volunteers who can be gardening mentors for the teachers. These mentors would give planting and maintenance advice as the teacher needs it, and does not involve a huge amount of time or effort, but that advice can really help the teacher get more out of each lesson. Talk to Machelle at the Extension office if you would like to help out, even if just for a one-time work day to get materials together. Not all of the tasks require working with kids, either—there are lots of behind-the-scenes jobs to do. She can find a task suited to you, and would love to have your assistance.

Thanks for all of your hard work so far this year, and see if you can find some fun way to volunteer your time somewhere that is not too terribly hot. There’s the greenhouse, some of the shadier garden projects, and of course there’s always the cool, cool phone desk!

Susan Decker, President

**Plant Portrait: Bougainvillea**

The one and only Bougainvillea!

Ancient History
It was an around the world voyage (in 28 months) that brought French Navy Admiral Louis-Antoine de Bougainville to South America in 1768. Bougainville would be six days behind his sister ship in getting to Rio de Janeiro and this delay gave botanist Philibert Commerson, time to explore the local flora. Among the new and wonderful discoverers was an attractive violet flowered climber. Commerson would later name it “Bougainvillea” after Admiral de Bougainville, French soldier, mathematician, statesman and the expedition’s leader.

And Now The Star Attraction…
Bougainvillea, the plant, has a native habitat in South America and originally could be found from Brazil to Peru and down to southern Argentina. They are somewhat woody climbers (but without tendrils or suction cups to secure themselves) that support themselves by growing through other plants. In the garden they are great for containers, patio pots, hanging baskets, window boxes or as a decorative, low, shrub-like ground cover in more tropical areas. In a container, they are often trained up a supporting stake and can even be grown as a standard form. Their tough and durable, drought tolerant nature makes them well suited for the summer extremes of the Texas climate.
Fake “Flowers”
The vibrant “flowers” are really just colorful, papery bracts that surround the real flower. Looking closely at a newly opened flower, there are small white disks poking out from the three large papery bracts. This is the true flower. As with many other plants that have showy bracts, bougainvillea has a colorful display for an impressively long time.

Encouraging More Blooms...
Bougainvillea without blooms is just another ho-hum green vine. So, the secret to flowering bliss is to keep encouraging more blooms. Keep branches cut back to about 18-20 inches. Keep the plant slightly pot bound. Only repot if absolutely necessary and then only increase to the next larger pot size. Bougainvillea are heavy feeders and love to slurp up weekly elixirs of half strength 20-20-20, flowering plant fertilizer or Miracle-Gro. With good sunlight and regular feeding Bougainvillea will bloom repeatedly almost year round. Decrease the frequency of feeding during the winter if the plants are dormant. Others like to encourage Bougainvillea to bloom by giving them “tough love”. Keep them somewhat dry and restrict their roots.

Bougainvilleas often have two growing phases (vegetative and blooming). During the vegetative growth period the plant concentrates on producing new leaves and stems. This could last for several weeks and often does not involve any new blooms. During the blooming period, no vegetative growth occurs and the plant produces rewarding colorful bracts. The length of the blooming period can be influenced by the environment, plant health and the day to night ratio. The best blooming times are when night hours and day hours are almost equal (spring and fall). Long days and short nights (July) may disrupt blooming.

The Best Growing Conditions
Bougainvilleas thrive in full sun (with a minimum of 5 hours of afternoon sun being the best situation)! Outdoor locations are the best sites (although bougainvillea can be grown successfully in a bright indoor spot too). These plants thrive in areas of low rainfall and intense sun and heat. How much more accurate can you describe Central Texas?

Don’t place a Bougainvillea container directly on the soil or else risk the plant rooting out the bottom and creating quite a surprise when the plant is moved. Containers should sit above the soil and have plenty of drainage.
The one draw-back is that they are sillies when it gets cold (hardiness zone
10). The Bougainvillea tough guy image only applies to the warm weather.
The bottom line is that they must be protected from frost or treat them as an
annual. Bougainvillea will be damaged or die if subjected to below freezing
temperatures for more than 4 hours. Short, light frosts may not kill the plant
but the leaves and flowers will all drop.

Bougainvillea Offspring
Bougainvillea propagates easily from cut-
tings. Use softwood cuttings in late spring or
early summer. Hardwood cuttings also root
well when taken during the fall or winter.
Discard the soft terminal growth when taking
cuttings and use the semi-mature growth just
below it. Rooting hormone helps too.

Haircut Time
Prune Bougainvilleas at any time of the year.
Blooming does not appear to be triggered by
hard pruning. Lightly pinch the growing tip
of young plants to encourage them to be-
come bushier at the sides. The more they
are pinched the better their ultimate form.

Hard prune your plants when they are get-
ing out of control and need to have their
growth checked or if they are being moved
indoors.

The Bougainvillea Family
Bougainvilleas can be found with green or variegated (green and cream or
green and gold) leaves and with several flower colors.

Green leaved varieties:
‘Barbara Karst’ – bright red to bluish crimson
‘California Gold’- golden yellow
‘Jamaica White’- white veined with green
‘Juanita Hatten’ - dark pink
‘Sundown’ – apricot
‘Texas Dawn’ – smaller pink
‘Surprise’ clear pink/white bicolor

Variegated leaves:
‘Vickie’ pink and white blooms, green with a yellow center leaves.
‘Raspberry Ice’ Magenta blooms with green and white leaves

Doubles
‘Double Pink’ clear pink, compact plant.
‘Klong Fire’ (syn. Mahara double red) brilliant pink, compact plant

Tough and beautiful- who could ask for anything more from the Bougainvillea.

Anne Marie Van Nest
In The Garden...

For Julie Bonnin, gardening is full of “So many dreams!” With a journalism background and lots of experience writing about gardens, Julie shares what’s happening in the gardening world of Central Texas through her well-written, well-researched articles in the Austin American Statesman. Many of us remember the desert days when all we saw in our local rag were articles about plants and techniques that had little to do with soil and weather conditions in our part of the world. Julie says she benefited from the uprising of local experts who worked to change the lifestyle section focus to locally relevant topics.

Julie insists the most impressive element in her own suburban garden is compost. She took Skip’s advice and doesn’t let any of her leaves and grass clippings stay on the yard. Instead she creates piles that decompose on their own over time in areas where she would like to have new beds anyway. No digging up the grass and hauling in soil amendments when nature can do it for you for free. Julie likes to experiment with natives, herbs, and other well-adapted plants which help to establish a home for bugs and butterflies which her kids can investigate. Like many of us, her biggest challenge is coming up with a coherent plan which ties together her eclectic interests with appropriate design elements.

One of Julie’s dreams is to realize the landscaping potential of a local elementary school located on an old homestead with remnant footprints of the original settlement. With donations of elbow grease and some hardy plants like our ancestors grew around their farms, the schoolyard has potential to become a useful educational tool as well as an attractive addition of greenspace to the campus. Any master gardeners want to help tackle new project?

Always on the lookout for new and interesting subject matter, Julie asks that you contact her with any burning needs or topics you would like her to investigate. Let’s take advantage of her offer and make sure the Statesman has plenty of good gardening articles for the future.

Elaine Dill
Special Feature: Wasps Reconsidered

I remember summers growing up in south central Texas. Climbing trees, playing outdoor games, running barefooted...there are a lot of good memories. There are also some not so great ones. At the top of that list are paper wasps. It was inevitable that every summer I was destined to get stung at least once by these dive bombing six legged terrorists who clearly had it out for me. The fact that I owned a slingshot and found their nests a challenging target probably contributed to the problem.

I recall one August day when it occurred to me that I had not been stung once all summer! Later that day while retrieving a ball from beneath a Ligustrum bush the wasps insured their perfect record was still intact. I have plenty more great and exciting stories about my youthful encounters with wasps but that is not the purpose of this article. The basic point is that I hated those things and could find no reason whatsoever for their existence.

Now as a gardener and a student of nature's interrelated balancing act I have gained a new perspective on these insects. Wasps are predators, feeding on insects such as caterpillars, flies and beetle larvae. I have on many occasions seen one in the garden perched on a leaf or tomato cage chomping up a caterpillar to take back to their nest to feed to their larvae.

Webworms are a common problem in our southern landscapes. Wasps fly around looking for a way into the nest. The caterpillars build the webbing around branches of leaves so they can spend the day feeding on the leaves, protected from predators by the webbing. Go out and break up the webbing with a stick. Then check back in about 15 - 30 minutes and you'll most likely see wasps flying in to haul away the bounty.

I did this with one of my daughters once and we had a fascinating show. That brings me to another point. Wasps are not out to sting us just for the fun (or meanness) of it. They sting when threatened and especially to protect their nest. We watched the webworm carnage with wasps flying around us giving no thought to our presence.

It has been estimated that a large paper wasp nest will consume 2000 caterpillars in a season. Not bad.

If you are interested in learning more about paper wasps in your landscape and garden the following website from North Carolina State University provides helpful information on them and their beneficial role:

“Using Paper Wasps for Caterpillar Management in the Landscape”
http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/Other/note121/note121.html
There are many more relatives of paper wasps that also serve a beneficial function. Among these are the dirt daubers which include the potter wasps that make the marble sized round mud balls on your screens. I once broke open a couple of potter wasp mud balls to find almost a dozen looper type caterpillars inside. Thank you very much!

Then there are the tiny encarsia wasps that parasitize insect eggs, the braconid wasps that produce those white elongated pupal cases on tomato hornworms, the aphid parasitoids that turn a green or yellow aphid into a tan puffy dry shell before emerging as an adult to continue the entomological horror movie. Way cool! This brief listing doesn't begin to give justice to the long list of beneficial wasp species in our gardens.

Oh sure, I still cringe at the thought of a wasp sting. Nests being constructed near the front or back door or in any location where the family will be still have to go. But those "out back" or in an out of the way spot get to stay.

I should add that none in my family is allergic to wasp stings or I would not tolerate them on the property because allergic reactions can represents a life threatening situation. Nevertheless we now share our place with a number of wasp nests. They do their part in helping to manage caterpillars around the landscape and garden, and I keep my slingshot pointed in another direction.

Skip Richter

**Down the Garden Path**

Roadtrip? Too Hot To Travel! Let’s Go Online to www.Daves Garden.com

Whenever I feel disconnected from the gardening world, especially in the heat of the summer or dead of winter, I visit www.davesgarden.com. It is a complete gardening community on-line and more! With gardeners from around the world, it’s easy to get questions answered, find out about new plants, talk to other gardeners or just look at pretty pictures.

My favorite part of this site is to trade e-mail (cleverly called d-mail) with other gardeners. I’ve “met” others who live down the street, along with a few surprises from people I already knew, but whose identity was hidden by a screen name. I once asked about brugmansias, since I’ve only seen two colors in the Austin area. Soon afterwards I received a big package of cuttings from someone in South Carolina! She even wrote a full page of instructions. I frequently will email a member in the town I’m traveling to see what garden centers or botanical gardens are recommended.

Davesgarden.com also sponsors nursery tours. Most recently, they toured several Austin nurseries and ended up in our own Sandi Schmidt’s gorgeous yard. As a bonus, most of the activities are documented on line with pictures. I also enjoy the bulletin boards, not only for information, but also for the pictures of beautiful plants posted by other members. It’s amazing what other people in cooler regions can grow. There are pictures of huge begonias planted in the ground that will hardly grow at all here. A picture of an outstanding escargot begonia continues to get comments, months after it was posted. If you are in the mood to discuss other things besides gardens, you are sure to find the topic! One of the most interesting topics is plant trading.
Trading can be across the country or they also have regional round ups, where you can meet members in person.

This site began back in August of 2000 and has over 200,000 members from all over the world. There are two levels in davesgarden.com: free and paid membership. There is lots to see if you decide to occasionally visit the site. But for a low yearly fee, you’ll get access to more of the forums and other features. In fact, in working on this article, I discovered many features that I hadn’t noticed in the year that I’ve been a subscriber. These include the huge plant database, a database of garden-related mail order, a “plantscout,” to help find that plant or bulb you’ve been wanting and many more features. So, when it’s too hot to garden, stay in the cool and visit www.davesgarden.com.

Liz Caskey

News & Notes

Venkappa Gani was presented the Master Gardener of the Year Award by Susan Decker and Machelle Dunlop during the June Meeting. Gani won this prestigious honor at the Texas State Master Gardener Convention in May. His hard work and dedication are an inspiration to us all. Congratulations, Gani!
Growing on Our Success—
Don’t miss the Travis County Master Gardener Volunteer Appreciation Party!

When: Thursday, August 10, 2006
6:00-7:30 p.m.
Where: Hirshfeld-Moore House
(corner of 9th & Lavaca—parking meters are free after 5:30 p.m.

Please join Jeff Ripley, Extension Director and Skip Richter, Extension Horticulturist as they thank you, Travis County Master Gardeners, for your accomplishments.

A sandwich and salad buffet will be served outdoors, on the grounds of the Hirshfeld-Moore house.
Eat and visit from 6:00-7:00 p.m.
Announcements and door prizes and 7:00 p.m.

RSVP to Machelle, 854-4797 by Friday, August 4, 2006

TCMGA Fall Garden Tour
Our Garden Tour will be held this year in the fall, October 21, from 9:00 until 4:00. The gardens who will be on the tour are—

--Bannockburn Baptist Church, Jack Campbell
--Ron Ciani
--Ila Falvey
--Loretta Fischer
--Laura Joseph
--Patty Leander
--Sue Nazar
--Clay Speer

All of the gardeners have been busy this spring and summer getting their gardens in prime shape for the tour. They can use some help if anyone would like to assist them in the preparations for the tour. It is a huge undertaking to open your own garden to the public and they would love your help. Just give them a call and offer your assistance!

Volunteers are also needed for the Publicity Committee. If you are interested in helping, contact Janice Morgan at 927-9179 or Janice.Morgan@gmail.com.

Please mark the date. As we get closer, more volunteers will be recruited!
**Master Gardener Mentors**

As many of you know our youth gardening programs are well underway. We have had some great success already with the Grow Boxes developed by Master Gardeners Ron Miller and Don Freeman. See the pictures below!

Some teachers I've talked with have already asked for a Master Gardener mentor. **What is a Master Gardener Mentor?**

As a mentor you will:
1. Be the primary contact for the teacher when he or she has garden-related questions.
2. Advise the teacher on gardening projects. Different schools have different needs - a few have grants for developing a wildlife habitat, some are doing vegetable gardens, one has a nice greenhouse on-site, some are doing butterfly gardens, some are doing school beautification.
3. Commit only for 1 school year, starting this fall.

That's it! It's a great way to know that you are making a difference in kid's lives.

If you are interested and would like specifics on schools in your area, please email me or call my desk at 854-4797. Please leave a message if I'm out. I'll get back with you ASAP.

Thanks!
Machelle Dunlop
MG Education Events

Basic Landscaping Class

Sign-up now! A Basic Landscaping Class is being offered exclusively to Travis County Master Gardeners. There will be time for hands-on learning and your personal questions because the class size is limited to 15 people.

Course Description:
This is a very basic course that covers the design process; landscape elements and principles; drafting skills-scaled drawings, basic graphic techniques; public and private spaces; a practical design problem. Course offers a broad overview.

Dates, times, and location:
Sept. 12, 14, 19, 26, 28
6:00 pm-8:30 pm.
Mary Lee Foundation, 1339 Lamar Square Dr. (just off S. Lamar about 5 blocks south of Barton Springs Rd)

Cost:
$50* covers instructor's fee and handouts. There will be an additional expense for drawing equipment which class members will purchase individually. First class will include needed equipment.
*Cost based on 15 students and cost will be adjusted slightly upward if fewer students. Minimum of 12 students required for class to occur.

Reserve your spot:
Make $50. check payable to TCMGA and mail check to: Rosalie Russell, 2401 Spring Creek Dr., Austin, TX. 78704.

Instructor is Kim Fuller, horticulturist
Kim holds a M.S. in horticulture from Texas A&M University. Kim served as County Extension Horticulturist for Nueces County in Corpus Christi, Texas where she enjoyed offering educational programs and services to the public, master gardeners and schools. Time spent at the Texas Department of Agriculture as director for Horticultural Marketing, afforded knowledge and experience of the green industry, statewide. As a technical sales representative for Floralife, Inc., Kim traveled throughout the Southwest providing detailed information and educational programs for florists and floral wholesalers.

Kim recently instructed landscape design courses at Austin Community college and currently writes a column for Texas Nursery and Landscape Association magazine. She lives in Austin and cares for her family.

Can't come to this class? This exact class will be repeated on January 6, 13, 20 and 27 from 9:00 am-12:00 noon at the United Way facility in Round Rock. Mark your calendar and send your check to reserve your spot.

Rosalie Russell
Closing the Garden Gate...

We definitely are in the “dog days of summer.” I know everyone is busy watering, trying to keep all our plants/friends alive till the next rain.

This is a wonderful time to stay inside and catch up on some continuing education. We have several opportunities to do just that—landscaping classes, learning about weeds (not growing them), and fire ants. These are just a few of the things we can expand our knowledge about. Please take advantage of some of the wonderful educational opportunities, Rosalie Russell, has lined up for us. She has been doing a wonderful job this year and deserves our thanks. The biggest thanks we can give her is by attending some of these educational workshops.

Take care—and try to stay cool!

Steve Reynolds

In closing—

“There’s little risk in becoming overly proud of one’s garden because gardening by its very nature is humbling. It has a way of keeping you on your knees.” — JoAnn R. Barwick
TCMGA 2006 Executive Committee:

President: Susan Decker
Immediate Past President: Becky Waak
VP Programs: Dave Tovar
VP Education: Rosalie Russell
VP Volunteer Coordinator for Certified Master Gardeners: Judy Lawson
VP Volunteer Coordinator for Master Gardeners in Training: Manda Rash
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Ex Officio Member of the Board (Non-voting) Horticulture Extension Service Agent:
  Skip Richter
  1600-B Smith Road
  Austin, Texas 78721
  854-9600, 854-9611
  r-richter@tamu.edu

The Compost Bin Team:

Steve Reynolds
Cheryl Harrison
Elaine Dill
Rebecca Mathews
Anne Marie Van Nest
Liz Caskey
Manda Rash
Paula Middleton