The July speaker is George Altgelt, owner of Geo Growers. Geo Growers has been in business since 1995 and provides the Austin area with custom soil blends for a variety of applications. Each of the blends are analyzed regularly by the Texas Plant and Soil Lab in Edinburg, Texas to ensure they are balanced. George will talk to us about soil biology.

Best Regards,

Jerry Naiser
Vice President of Programs
So...I was sitting at home in front of my computer a few weeks ago when Wizzie’s report on bees appeared in my e-mail in-box. As it turned out, it was a timely message.

The very next day, I was outside watering trying to keep my precious little plants alive when I just happened to look up at my owl house. It was covered with bees! I’m not even sure how long they had been there. Dan had mowed the grass a few days earlier and if they were there then, the lawn mower had not disturbed them. Thus began my education about bees.

I immediately called the bee rescuer Wizzie had mentioned in her article. After a little telephone tag, we finally talked. Turns out he had had so many requests for bee rescues that he had to go out of town to pick up more bee boxes...just my luck!

It was about a week before he could get here. I kept watching the swarm grow. Then slowly the mass began to shrink and finally there were no bees on the outside of the box. They had moved in and had begun making their hive.

Bee removal day finally arrived. It was a good thing too as I had banned any grass mowing until they were gone and our yard was beginning to look like a hay field.

The process was quite interesting. First, one lucky fellow put on a sweatshirt over his long-sleeve shirt and then put on the bee suit and hood. Keep in mind it was 95 degrees. He then climbed up an extension ladder in order to reach the owl box that was fastened to an 18-foot tall pole. He covered the hole to the house with duct tape (another good use for that product!), unscrewed the box from the pole and climbed down with the box.

Then they used a shop-vac to suction the bees into the bee box, cleaned the hive out of the owl box, and put the box back on its pole...talk about customer service!

I learned a lot about bee behavior that day. I learned that you should just turn and walk away slowly with your head down if you encounter bees (unless of course, the bees are Africanized, then you should run as fast as you can). Fortunately, our bees were docile. I also learned that bees cannot detect engine noise that is more than 8-10 feet away so I guess Dan could have mowed after all. I learned that bees forage during the day and return to the hive at night. Since the queen bee had been relocated and the hive removed, our bees would simply go searching for another hive. I guess the bee rescuer was right about that, as I have not seen a bee since then.

I also learned that not everyone who calls himself or herself a bee rescuer actually relocates the bees. So before you call for a bee removal make sure that the bees will not be killed.

I hope that your gardens are hanging on through this terribly hot summer and that you do not encounter angry bees.

Manda Rash, President
A n exciting new offering from Yoder Brothers, the poinsettia and garden mum breeders, and Blooms of Bressingham is the Cordial series of hardy hibiscus. This group of compact hybrid Hibiscus have huge 8-10 inch diameter flowers on well branched plants. These plants love the heat and have done very well on my back garden patio without much attention and fussing. The entire Cordial series contains ‘Brandy Punch’, ‘Cherry Brandy’, ‘Peppermint Schnapps’ and ‘Cinnamon Grappa’ (pictured here).

‘Cinnamon Grappa’, with its large, brilliant cherry red blooms has bloomed the earliest in my Central Texas garden. There has been a nice succession of large dinner plate size blooms from late May onward. The plant is very ornamental and resulted from a cross made by Yoder breeder Mark Smith in Alva, Florida between an unnamed red hibiscus and rosy pink Hibiscus ‘Fantasia’. He selected the ‘Cinnamon Grappa’ plant for its good branching, uniform growth, good flower size, flower color, foliage color and foliage shape. ‘Cinnamon Grappa’ has attractive maple-leaf incised foliage with red highlights and stems.

This somewhat woody shrub grows to 3-4 ft. and loves a hot, sunny, well-drained location! An ideal Texas heat-loving plant. It is slow to start growing in the spring and gardeners will have to be extra patient waiting for the first new shoots to start growing. Cut back the dormant plant in early spring or late fall. The hibiscus is hardy from zones 5-9. ‘Cinnamon Grappa’ is the shortest of the Cordial series.

A great middle or front of the border plant, the Cordial series is also suitable for large containers. Under the stress of direct hot afternoon sun, it does wilt, but recovers overnight or if given water.

The others in this series include ‘Cherry Brandy’, reddish-pink and slightly later blooming, ‘Brandy Punch’, hot pink, and ‘Peppermint Schnapps’, pink with red veining and the tallest in the group.

All are guaranteed to be showstoppers in the garden. Cheers!

Anne Marie Van Nest
Well, is it hot enough for ya? The sweet corn ain’t so sweet anymore, the spider mites have set up camp on the underside of my beans, the squash vine borer has attacked my squash, and the mockingbirds keep beating me to the tomatoes. It’s a jungle out there and usually by late June or early July I’m ready to pull out these spring plantings and give the garden (and the gardener) a well deserved rest. Soon enough it will be time to prepare the garden for fall plantings. I know you know this, but it is worth repeating: if you do work in the garden this summer, wear sunscreen, take breaks and drink plenty of fluids. It is so easy to fall victim to heat exhaustion this time of year. If you are going to spend some time working outside, try this tip: wet some wash cloths, roll them up and put them in a cooler with ice or a couple of ice packs. Then when you take a break, you’ll have a nice, cold cloth to wipe down your face and neck or drape over your head.

Whether you are a native Texan or a transplanted Texan, I hope you have learned to love okra. Okra is the King of the summer vegetable garden – it not only survives but it thrives in our heat and it is not too late to plant now. Most varieties produce in 60-65 days, so that means you could be harvesting okra in September if you plant seed directly in the garden now. You can eat it crispy and fried, slimy and boiled, crunchy and pickled or sliced and stewed. And if you have a bumper crop in late summer, it can even be frozen. Just blanch whole pods in boiling water for 1-2 minutes, then plunge into a large bowl of ice water to stop the cooking, drain and pack pods into freezer bags. Be sure to label the bags with the contents and date. Once my okra is producing strong, I always try to set aside a day for gumbo making. I make a big ole’ pot so I have enough for dinner plus plenty to freeze for winter enjoyment.

Have you seen many stink bugs or leaf footed bugs in your vegetable garden this summer? I don’t want to jinx it, but I haven’t seen many at all. So my tomatoes don’t have the stinkbug damage this year, but those birds sure enjoy pecking on them. I’m thinking that the leaf-footed bugs might have been keeping the birds at bay last year . . .

I did find some little, teeny tiny stink bug babies under a cucumber leaf so Bruce took a picture. Keep your eyes open for these little guys and get rid of...
them before they get big!

If you are having a bumper crop of cucumbers you might enjoy the following recipe for no-cook pickles. They have a sweet-tart flavor and keep for several weeks in the refrigerator.

No Cook Pickles

6 cucumbers, thinly sliced
1 onion, sliced
1 ½ cups sugar
1 cup white vinegar
1 tsp celery seed
1 Tbsp coarse salt

Mix all ingredients and let stand 1-2 hours. Spoon into jars with lids. Store in refrigerator.

Tabbouleh is a favorite dish in my family when we have a surplus of home-grown tomatoes and cucumbers. It’s high fiber, low fat and makes a delicious meal when served with hummus and pita bread. You can make your own hummus from canned chickpeas and tahini, or you can buy it premade. A great place to purchase hummus and pita bread is at Phoenecia Bakery on Burnet or South Lamar. If you’d like to try making your own hummus, send me an e-mail and I will send you a delicious recipe.

Tabbouleh

1 cup bulgur wheat
1 tsp salt
1 ½ c boiling water
¼ c lemon juice
2 Tbsp olive oil
1 cup flat-leaf parsley, chopped
2 cloves garlic, crushed
1 tsp black pepper

Pour boiling water over bulgur, cover and let sit 30 minutes. Stir gently and add remaining ingredients. Chill 2-3 hours or overnight. About 30 minutes before serving, stir in the following ingredients:

2 tomatoes, diced
2 cucumbers, peeled and diced
2-4 Tbsp fresh mint, chopped

Garnish with feta cheese and kalamata olives and serve with pita bread and hummus.

Here’s to a bountiful harvest,
Patty Leander
The June greenhouse workday was a busy one with lots of catch-up activities. Thanks are extended to Marian, Molly and Holly for their supervision of the many projects undertaken during the workday morning session. Lots of potting up and propagation occurred as the focus of the workday was to start producing plants for the 2009 Zilker Garden Festival – 9 months away! Purple buddleija, ‘Old Blush’ and ‘Prairie Harvest’ roses, grapes Gomphrena and blue Plumbago were all propagated and the cuttings placed in the mist system.

Many other 4” plants were moved up into gallons so that they will be full, robust plants for our next big plant sale too.

Marian Stasney and Holly Plotner are conducting an experiment on growing rhubarb from seed indoors through the summer. The experiment is to see if rhubarb, which is a definite cool season crop can be started indoors (the only place consistently cool enough) and then grown to a big enough size where the TCMG’s can give them away to interested gardeners who will be attending Patty Leander’s September 17th vegetable gardening seminar. Rhubarb is a perennial in colder climates. In central Texas, it is grown as a winter annual. With tempting memories of the sweet scent of rhubarb pie cooling just out of the oven, it’s an inspiring experiment. More details to follow.

The greenhouse needed a couple of repairs recently and thanks are extended to Don Freeman and Ron Miller for replacing the inflation fan that keeps the two layers of poly separated. Also thanks go to Marian Stasney for replacing the large fan belt on one of the oversized fans that pulls hot air out of the greenhouse.

Anne Van Nest, Marian Stasney and Molly Clark
Over The Back Fence

**Oak Wilt Seminar Re-Cap**

In June, Eric Becker and Jim Houser of the Texas Forest Service presented a day-long seminar on oak wilt. The training included tree and disease biology, Texas Suppression Project, trenching & injection practices, diagnosis of oak wilt and other problems in oaks. The class also included a field trip to view an oak wilt disease center in Travis Heights.

Congratulations to the following master gardeners for completing the training: Jim Ammermann, Janet Church, Link Davidson, Dennis Ellison, Roslyn Garrett, Charlotte Grim, Susan Jung, Cheryl McGrath and Anne Van Nest.

In addition to oak wilt specialists Jackie Johnson and Liz Caskey, these master gardeners are available to help you with oak wilt questions. The foresters also reviewed and updated our oak wilt handouts, which are available at the MG telephone desk.

Special thanks go out to the TCMGA board for approving the training and Lisa Anhaiser for all the hard work putting the class details together.

Oak Wilt Tip for July: If you need to prune your oaks, July is an ideal time. However, make sure to seal the wound immediately.

Liz Caskey

**Free Seminar: What is Wrong with this Plant?**

Saturday, July 12, 10 AM - Noon
Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Rd.

"What is Wrong with this Plant?"
The biggest challenge for gardeners is correctly diagnosing plant problems and prescribing effective, safe solutions. The purpose of this seminar is to help the gardener understand the causes of plant problems; the process for diagnosing plant problems; and general management techniques and strategies to employ to help plants overcome problems. The first step is to understand who or what is the culprit: insect, disease or environmental factor.

A Plant Clinic will be open during the entire seminar in an adjoining room. Bring samples in a plastic bag of your diseased or bug eaten plants to the Plant Clinic. Get expert guidance on possible solutions to restoring the plant's health.

This FREE seminar is sponsored by the Travis County Master Gardener Association in partnership with the Travis County AgriLife Extension. For more information call 512-854-9600 and ask for the Master Gardeners desk. [http://www.tcmastergardeners.org](http://www.tcmastergardeners.org)
**Free Seminar: Using Water Wisely**

Saturday, September 6, 10 AM - Noon  
West Rural Community Center, 8656 Hwy. 71 W., Building A

Rain, free but at times a scarce commodity! This free seminar concentrates on capturing rainwater and landscaping with plants requiring little water.

Confine rainwater and save it for your own use! Gain the knowledge necessary to build a rainwater harvesting system. All the basics are covered to build a non potable water harvesting system.

Not ready for a full blown rainwater harvesting system? Think small. A demonstration will show how to make a simple, inexpensive rain barrel collection system.

Lower your water usage by utilizing native and adapted landscape plants that look great and need a minimal amount of water to thrive. This method of gardening is called xeriscaping. If desired, a green, lush looking landscape can be achieved.

Bring samples of diseased, bug eaten, sick plants to the Plant Clinic. Experts will diagnose the problem and offer possible remedies.

This free seminar is presented by the Travis Country Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas A&M and Travis County AgriLife Extension Service. Seminar is free. No reservations taken. For more information call 512-854-9600 and ask for the Master Gardeners desk. [http://www.tcmastergardeners.org](http://www.tcmastergardeners.org)

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**Free Seminar: Vegetables for Cooler Times**

Wednesday, September 17, 7-9 PM  
Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Rd.

The free seasonal seminar, Vegetables for Cooler Times, covers multiple topics pertinent to fall gardening activities. The Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Travis County AgriLife Extension Service, presents the fact filled, educational experience.

In spite of the heat, it is time to be in the vegetable garden. “Fall Vegetable Gardening” by Patty Leander will include the basics of vegetable gardening with the emphasis on plants and varieties that flourish in the fall and winter months.

Leaves, leaves everywhere! Don't rake, bag and send it to the landfill. Learn how to convert leaves and other material into plant food. It is called compost. Plants adore it. Learn how to make this magic act happen.

Thought only Yankees could grow rhubarb? Wrong! With a little thinking outside the box, you can grow rhubarb, and strawberries too, right in your own backyard. Learn how these two favorites can be successfully in Central Texas.

A Plant Clinic will be held during the entire seminar. Bring your diseased/bug eaten plant, roots and all, in a plastic bag. Gain knowledge from expert Master Gardeners on action you can take to remedy the situation.
Seminar is free. No reservations taken. For more information call 512-854-9600 and ask for the Master Gardeners desk. Or check web site http://www.tcmastergardeners.org

Free Seminar: Plant Photography

Wednesday, October 22, 7-9 PM
Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Rd.

Plant Photography class will be taught by Sam Myers, a photo expert. The class will concentrate on developing the ability to take photos with impact. There will be an overview of cameras, film and digital. Discussion will include how lighting, focal length and aperture interact in composing photographs. Guidelines of composition will be covered along with "posing" plants.

Prerequisite: study the owner's manual on your camera. Not necessary to bring a camera but may be helpful.

The class is sponsored by the Travis County Master Gardener Association in partnership with the AgriLife Extension, Travis County. For more information call 512-854-9600 and ask for the Master Gardener’s desk. http://www.tcmastergardeners.org

Free Seminar: Preparing for Winter and Spring

Saturday, November 15, 10 AM - Noon
Sunset Valley City Hall, 3206 Jones Rd., Sunset Valley, TX 78745

“Preparing for Winter and Spring” is the theme of this free seminar. Learn how to put the equivalent of a winter coat on plants. Discover bulbs that thrive in Central Texas and will bloom in the winter and/or spring.

Gain an overview of what needs to be done to prepare your landscaping for the stresses of winter. “Preparing for Winter” will give you confidence and the knowledge necessary for plant survival during the few winter months.

Bulb expert Danny Fowler, owner of Texas Tulips, will present many bulb varieties which excel in Central Texas. Learn about native and adapted bulbs. Bulbs will be available for purchase.

Educate yourself on the necessary planting steps to increase bulbs success. Learn when to fertilize, mulch, and divide for more productive, healthier plants.

The seminar is sponsored by The Travis County Master Gardeners, the volunteer arm of Travis County AgriLife Extension Service. For more information call 512-854-9600 and ask for the Master Gardener’s desk. http://www.tcmastergardeners.org
Since the weather has heated up I'm spending more afternoons indoors. This has lead me to find activities that can keep me from cleaning. (Just about anything can do that!) So, I created a “Life List.” You know a list of things you want to do in your life before it’s too late. I broke it down into sections: Accomplish, Visit and Dive In (as in scuba dive). Mainly it consists of things like run a marathon without dying, learn to play the flute, etc. One of the items on the list is learn the Latin names of plants. Sure I know some but I am never one to call anything by it’s Latin name. So I started by pulling out the Grow Green guide and am trying to memorize two or three a day. I know that doesn’t sound like much but at my age if I can learn two Latin names a day and actually retain the previous ones it will be a miracle. Hopefully, I’ll get through that book and start on other plants before I can’t see to read any longer. I thought I would start with the plants I actually have in my garden -- which is most of the book. The important thing is I started on my list. Think about doing your list – you just might discover some interesting things about yourself.

Rebecca Matthews

Garden Trivia

Even as a child, George Washington Carver was known for his ability to heal sick plants and to discover what plants could heal sick animals. He said, "All flowers talk to me and so do hundreds of little living things in the woods. I learn what I know by watching and loving everything." Carver created hundreds of products from the peanut and the sweet potato, including peanut butter, axle grease, cosmetics, and printer's ink. He said, "If you love it enough, anything will talk to you."

In Closing

The happiest people don't necessarily have the best of everything; they just make the best of everything they have. - unknown
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