



Brazos County Master Gardener Newsletter

Gardening News for Central Texas Brazos Valley
Volume 4, Issue 6

Contributing Editor: Donna Murray
November/December 2010

From the Editor;

The welcome rain watered the maroon blue bonnets my Granddaughter and I recently planted in our wildflower “meadow”, and hopefully it was a sign of ending the dry situation we are in again. With the cooler temperatures it’s a perfect time to apply mulch to help protect your plants from freezes, drying conditions, and sprouting weeds. As you know, all three can happen in our area within the span of a day or two.

Hope you have a safe and wonderful holiday season and look forward to gardening with you in the New Year.

The Brazos County Master Gardeners are finalizing plans for 2011. EarthKind seminars, Gardening 101 programs and on site informal “tour and talks” at the Demonstration Idea Garden are on the agenda. Check the calendar at www.brazosmg.com where details will be posted as soon as they are available.

We hope the 2010 GIG was informative and entertaining and we invite your comments and suggestions. Contact us at brazosmg@ag.tamu.edu

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This is the last installment of articles highlighting trees planted in the arboretum of the Brazos County Master Gardener Demonstration Idea Garden, D.I.G. The trees featured in this issue are **Possumhaw** and **Bur-Oak**. The information was compiled and written by Roy Vaughan, President of the Brazos County Master Gardener Association.

POSSUMHAW

Deciduous Yaupon, Deciduous Holly, Meadow holly,
Prairie Holly, Welk Holly, Bearberry, Winterberry

Ilex decidua

(EYE-lex deh-SID-you-ah)

This ornamental Texas Superstar is a native deciduous shrub or pruned to a small tree prized for its showy fruit drupes. Multiple trunks form an irregular, spreading, open crown. The average mature size of this true holly is 15 feet tall and 10 feet wide.

- Flowers on separate male and female plants (Dioecious). Fruit only on female plant. Look for berries when you buy!
- Easy to grow in any soil, even with poor drainage
- Grows in part sun, but fruits best with at least 6 hours of sun
- Earth Kind plant, drought tolerant, low maintenance and few problems

At first frost the leaves will turn yellow and drop, and the abundant fruit ripens and turns red-orange, persisting through the winter to give color and warmth to the landscape.

- Serves well as a specimen tree, even showier in a group planting 12 to 18 feet apart
- Ornamental - provides holiday decoration
- Ideal in edges of woodlands and in natural borders
- Cultivars include: Curtis, Pocahontas, Warren's Red, Council Fire and Bryer's Gold

The succulent fruit is a powerful attraction to birds - Cardinals, Mockingbirds, Blue Jays, Bobwhite quail; winter visitors; Cedar Waxwings, Thrashers and Robins. Critters come too - Raccoons and Ringtails. Because the fruit was sometimes confused with Hawthorn and was loved by Possums, it is called Possumhaw.

“If I had my way, I'd want every gardener in the south to enjoy the winter beauty of Possumhaw.” Sally Waskowski, *Gardening With Native Plants of the South*.

BUR-OAK

Quercus macrocarpa

(KWER-cus mack-row- CAR-puh)

Mossycup oak, Mossy overcup oak, Prairie oak

This native giant is considered the longest lived of the oaks and can truly live up to being called STATELY! It can grow 150 feet tall and spread nearly as wide. The average mature size is 60 feet tall and 60 feet wide.

- Oak wilt resistant
- Tolerant of drought and city smoke
- Deep tap root system
- Grows in any soil that drains well- Alkaline O.K.
- Insect and disease problems are rare
- Moderate growth rate
- Deciduous

This magnificent shade tree will transform a landscape. Plan carefully to allow for full mature growth; overhead and underground utilities, current and future structures. It can dwarf a dwelling. Its eventual deep shade may change understory plants from some sun to full shade.

- Needs generous space to grow
- Plant on west/ south side to get summer shade
- Heavy, spreading limbs form rounded crown
- Bold deep green leaves with acorns golf-ball size
- Rough corky bark and sturdy branches make impressive winter appearance

Its straight trunk and large branches make this and other white oaks ideal for hardwood lumber for furniture building.

“An outstanding tree, it should be more widely planted” Neil Sperry, *Neil Sperry’s Complete Guide to Texas Gardening*.

What's Happening at the D.I.G. Demonstration Idea Garden

Located at 2619 Highway 21, adjacent to the Texas AgriLife Extension, Brazos County office

Demonstration gardens are places to test, teach and learn. Brazos County Master Gardeners in 2007 began a renovation of their demonstration garden, the D.I.G. Funded by the Brazos County Master Gardener Association, donations and in-kind contributions, the D.I.G. will be a place to see and learn about plants that are best suited for the Brazos Valley, as well as composting, recycling, rainwater harvesting, water conservation and more.

What's Happening at the DIG: Acorns!

Andrea Fox, DIG Coordinator

It's November and temperatures have finally gotten to be somewhat fall like. The heat and drought-like conditions experienced this summer made watering in the DIG a big priority for Master Gardener volunteers. The arboretum was given extra watering attention as the trees are still in their two year establishment period. Tree roots take several years to establish an extensive water and nutrient gathering network, and the extra hand watering was done to encourage that growth and development, if only to protect them from future adverse weather fluctuations. Volunteers Frank Clark, David Burdett and Lionel Eyres were on watering detail, filling the Treegator® bags and Ooze Tubes® around the trunks at least once a week, if not more. Back in October I took a walk around to see how the trees were doing and was pleasantly surprised to see acorns forming on many of the oak trees. I counted 13 acorns on the Bur oak, *Quercus macrocarpa*; to my knowledge, it had only one acorn form last year and it was pretty small. This year the acorns are more on the *macro*, golf-ball sized scale. I'll take the increase in this tree's bounty as a sign that things are looking good in the DIG and the arboretum. Stop on by and take a look for yourself!



The raised bed vegetable garden at the DIG was planted for the fall growing season and is doing very well. The photo taken in early October shows 'Derby' green beans that will provide a fall harvest before freezing weather in late November. There will be an informal "in the garden" tour and talk on November 9th. Come see what's growing, ask questions and visit with the vegetable gardeners. Details in "Up Coming Events"

Another reason to visit the D.I.G. in the fall is the Butterfly Garden which is more than "eye candy". Although they are not as efficient as bees, butterflies pollinate a variety of flowers and add to the enjoyment factor of any garden.



Winter Weather Wither

Plant damage is caused when cell walls break down.

Information for article was researched by Roy Vaughan
Brazos County Master Gardener



On December 22 winter officially comes to Texas on winds of blustery arctic air, often known as a “blue norther.” In a short period of time temperatures can suddenly drop 50 degrees and damage unprotected plants. Knowing a bit of botany and how cold damage occurs may help us protect our plants and extend their growing season.

As you probably know, pure water freezes at 32°F. Plants are mostly water, but they contain minerals suspended in solution and can freeze at lower temperatures, much like salt water. Some trees and shrubs have evolved this super cooling strategy to remain unfrozen to temperatures of -40°F. Plants also use osmosis to protect their cell structure. Using the process of passing fluids from inside the cell to its intercellular spaces, the now dry internal cell structure remains undamaged from freeze expansion. However, when the fluid in the intercellular spaces reaches its freezing point, the membranes rupture and the plant cells soon collapse. One usually doesn't see the result of this until temperatures rise and the plant is rendered limp, mushy and lifeless. Regardless, the likelihood of plant damage increases with sudden drops in temperature, rapid cycles of freeze-warm-freeze and long durations of severe cold temperatures.

A frost is somewhat different than a freeze. Frost is a frozen layer of moisture that occurs when the plant surface is colder than the dew point of the surrounding air. The dew point is the temperature at which air is saturated with moisture. When this temperature is reached, dew or condensation forms on surfaces exposed to air. For example, if the dew point is 58°F, dew will form when the air temperature reaches 58°F. When the temperature of the plant surface and the dew point is colder than 32°F, the resulting dew will freeze and create hoar frost, the feathery white crystals commonly recognized as frost.

When the dew point is above 32°F and the air temperatures fall below freezing, the once thin layer of moisture on tree limbs can turn into a solid sheet of ice. While these are beautiful branches to look at, they are often too heavy for the plant to support and they break from the added weight, permanently damaging the plant structure.

Chill damage can also happen at temperatures above freezing. Tropical and sub-tropical ornamentals as well as many vegetables (i.e. tomatoes, peppers and eggplant) can be damaged at temperatures below 50°F. These plants are vulnerable at such moderate temperatures because their genetic makeup originated in warmer climates where cold protection was unnecessary. These plants don't produce the enzymes necessary to stimulate the strengthening and repairing of cell walls when cooler temperatures hit.

The Brazos Valley is often sheltered from the worst of winter weather by prevailing gulf winds blowing in from the south and southeast. However, cold fronts can blow in from the north and linger for several days. Learning how to properly protect plants may help to extend their growing season into the winter and earlier in the spring. Wrapping a floating row cover or an old bed sheet around and on top of plants can give a couple degrees of protection. Provide a structure for the cover to go on, such as a tomato cage, wood stakes or wire hoops to prevent the cover from touching the plant surface. Placing an outdoor rated light bulb or string of Christmas lights under the cover can increase the ambient temperature a few more degrees. Also a late fall application of nitrogen fertilizer can promote new plant growth that does not have time to harden off and is vulnerable to frost damage. If your plants are in containers, consider moving them temporarily into a cold frame, unheated garage or to a sunny window indoors.

What microclimates are on site? Microclimates are confined spaces where temperatures are influenced or moderated by surroundings. Some areas may require more frost protection than others.

- ❄ Is the location urban, suburban or rural? Temperatures can fluctuate between areas of town based on the urban heat island effect.
- ❄ What elevation and how much topography does the location offer? Cold sinks and air drainage should be considered when planting certain vegetation (i.e. grapes).
- ❄ Do any buildings or structures provide protection or harm to plantings? A south-facing wall will reflect sun onto heat loving citrus trees whereas a north-facing porch won't.
- ❄ Soil temperature and moisture levels buffer temperature fluctuations at the plant's root zone. Water the area well ahead of the storm and add mulch for even more frost protection.

When selecting plants for your garden or landscape, consider provenance, or where the plant was originally grown, for cold hardiness. A pear tree grown in Michigan may not necessarily survive winters in Texas because it is not acclimated to local conditions. Plants native or adapted to the area typically survive most cold periods.

Bryan and College Station are located in USDA Hardiness Zone 8b (20-15°F). The average first fall frost date is December 16 and the average last spring frost date is February 14-March 1. Please note these dates and temperature ranges are an average; it can unexpectedly get colder than that! Be prepared, and keep your eye on the thermometer.

To Prune or Not to Prune?

Charla Anthony
Master Gardener Coordinator at the
Brazos County office of Texas AgriLife Extension



With freezing temperatures possible soon (Nov. 28 is the average first freeze date in the Brazos Valley) gardeners wonder when to prune freeze-damaged perennials.

Generally speaking, most Central Texas gardeners should prune in late winter — January to February — or in March just before new growth begins.

But the best answer may differ for each landscape and gardener, or even for each plant. If perennials have a nice shape and no damage to their foliage after a freeze, simply leave them alone.

Folks who prefer a tidy landscape and do not want any part of their yard to appear unmanicured may prefer a fast cut.

Another reason to prune plants damaged or killed by a freeze is that many of us have more time for gardening during the holidays than in the spring. And some homeowners like to fill in empty spaces with cool-season bedding plants such as dianthus, alyssum, pansies, ornamental cabbage and snapdragons.

If you elect to prune, wait a while, because all damage may not be evident for several days.

Particular plants

The most confusing plants are semi-evergreen and cold-hardy perennials that die back some years and not others. If in doubt, gently scratch the stem or bark with a pocket knife or your thumbnail. If you see a bit of green tissue, leave it alone. If the tissue is tan or brown, you can safely prune it. Start at the top and outer branches and work your way down to see how far back the plant was killed.

You may prune herbaceous or non-woody plants such as cannas, elephant ears and gingers until you reach living tissue. This pruning is optional until spring, but may be done earlier to neaten things up.

After pruning, add 4 to 6 inches of mulch to protect the crowns, the area just a few inches above and below the soil level. This aids plants in surviving late winter or early spring “cold snaps.”

(And don't be too quick to dig up and remove plants that have been severely damaged, even if they appear to be dead. New growth may still sprout from the crown or the roots once temperatures warm.)

Want to wait?

There are equally good reasons to delay pruning.

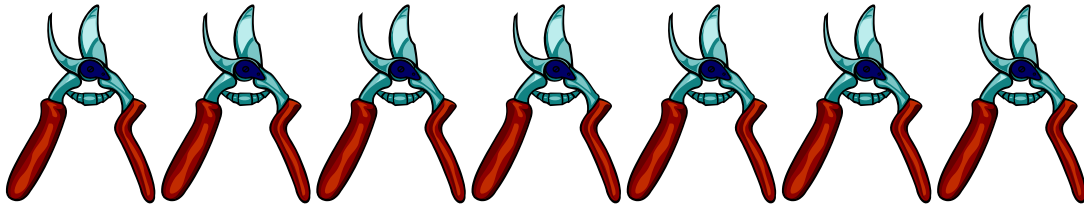
The safest approach in pruning woody plants is to wait until just before growth begins in the spring. You can more accurately determine which parts are alive. This is particularly important if you desire to have summer perennials grow to be really large, such as esperanza (*Tecoma stans*), firebush (*Hamelia patens*), or salvias such as Mexican bush sage (*Salvia leucantha*).

Perennials have extensive root systems that help them survive from year to year. Because browned foliage and browned upper stems protect stems in the interior of the plants, pruning would remove the protection, so plants are more likely to be damaged by the next freeze.

Do not prune if you wish to attract wildlife. Freeze-damaged foliage and stems are useful to songbirds, insects and other wildlife. Birds seeking food in the winter will find shelter in branches and stems.

Our winter weather is erratic. A sunny warm spell may stimulate new growth from plants that are pruned after fall and winter freezes. This new growth is then susceptible to more severe damage as winter progresses.

If a freeze is predicted, water plants well to insulate the roots. Cover tender plants with light fabric coverings - old sheets, blankets - cardboard boxes, or frost cloth. Don't use plastic sheeting. It can hold in moisture and "cook" your plants during the day when the sun is out. When daytime temperatures rise, remove the protective covering to give plants light.



You can now find us on Facebook:

www.facebook.com/brazosmg



Veggin' with Elmer

Dr. Elmer Krehbiel
Brazos County Master Gardener



Dr. Krehbiel has written a weekly article for The Eagle for over 14 years and has been a Master Gardener 18 years. He's been asked many times about growing vegetables and he's sharing tips for your vegetable garden.

The "Veggie Team" is a group of Brazos County Master Gardeners who plan, plant, cultivate, and harvest the vegetable garden in the Demonstration Idea Garden. Elmer Krehbiel and fellow team members will be conducting an informal "tour and talk" about vegetable growing in the garden. See "Up Coming Events" on page 14 for details.

Review the Vegetable Planting Guides found at <http://www.brazosmg.com/index.php/plants-for-our-region/vegetables> for additional information.

Brazos County



Master Gardener
Association

Brazos County Master Gardeners Speakers Bureau

Brazos County Master Gardeners can help you find a knowledgeable speaker on a wide range of gardening topics to give a program to your club or organization. Whether the purpose of your program is to inspire or inform, our Speaker's Bureau is a great starting point to find speakers who can educate, motivate, and keep your organization on the right 'garden path'. Our clients trust us to present environmentally sound horticultural principles and practices. We offer presentations on many topics, including those listed below. For further information, call 979-823-0129, email brazosmg@ag.tamu.edu.

Texas Superstars
Home Landscaping
Poisonous Plants
Container Gardening
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Pests you can Conquer
Color in the Landscape

Gourds
Butterfly Gardening
Rainwater Harvesting
Composting
Turf Management
Propagation



'Cherry Belle' Radishes growing in the D.I.G.

The Noble Radish

Ryan Rychetsky
Brazos County Master Gardener

For the new or experienced gardener the radish is a hard crop to beat. It is a cool season root vegetable that is easy to grow, requires little room and matures quickly. Radishes grow well in small gardens, flowerbeds and containers. They are often the first vegetable harvested in spring gardens, but they can also be harvested in fall or winter gardens.

There are two types of radishes: the common round garden radish and the winter radish. The common round radish is pungent and matures quickly. The winter radish has a large white, red or black root that requires a longer growing season to mature.

For good root expansion, prepare a loose, well-drained soil. Remove stones, sticks, and any debris that may interfere with root growth. Work the soil deeply and top dress with compost. Plant seeds ½ inch deep furrows and 1 inch apart. Lightly cover seeds with soil and water. Keep area weeded and watered during dry periods. Plants will emerge in four to six days. When the crowns of the roots begin to expand, thin radishes to every other plant. This will allow the roots to expand and develop without overcrowding. For a steady supply, plant seeds eight to 10 days apart. Radishes will be ready to harvest four to five weeks after planting.

Pull radishes when they are young and tender. Radishes kept in the soil too long can become pithy, cracked and have a hot, bitter flavor. This hot bitter flavor may also occur due to poor soil fertility, low moisture or wrong planting time. A family of four may/could benefit from 10 feet of row. Healthy radishes will keep 2-3 weeks in the refrigerator.

Common radish pests include aphids, flea beetles and cabbage maggots. Since radishes mature quickly diseases are often not a problem. Scab, a soil borne disease, is a black, crusty growth that can appear on the globe. Practice crop rotation to reduce soil-borne diseases.

Several radish varieties are locally available including 'Plum Purple' (a round, purple skinned heirloom), 'Cherry Belle', 'Early Scarlet Globe', 'Icicle' and 'Round White' (both white varieties). Typical fall planting dates for our area are 9/1 to 11/30; spring planting dates are 1/25 to 5/5.

See <http://www.brazosmg.com/plants-for-our-region/vegetables> for additional varieties of vegetables and their planting times.



Mexican Mint Marigold in Butterfly Garden at the D.I.G.

Herbal Highlights

Mexican Mint Marigold
Texas Tarragon
Tagetes lucida

Donna Murray
Brazos County Master Gardener

The other day I was taking photos at the DIG's Butterfly Garden and I noticed an interesting plant. It was a 2-3' tall, narrow-leaved plant topped with fragrant yellow flowers. When I found the plant label I mused, "**This** is Mexican Mint Marigold," as it was not what I expected.

As with many herbs, Mexican Mint Marigold is a traveler. From Central America where the Aztecs used it medicinally and in rituals, it journeyed to Europe in the 1800's. Europeans treasured it enough that they brought it back to America under the alias "false tarragon."

This herb has a mild licorice flavor similar to French tarragon, which can be difficult to grow in the high summer heat of the Brazos Valley. Both leaves and flowers are edible. Mexican Mint Marigold can be directly substituted (1 tsp = 1 tsp) for tarragon in recipes. Use it in herbal butter and vinegar, brew it as a tea or add to regular tea for a slight root beer flavor. The flowers can be used fresh in salads or as a garnish to entree.

Plant this perennial herb in full sun or partial shade in well-drained soil. Mulch the roots over winter to encourage regrowth in spring. You could incorporate it as a summer vertical "filler plant" in a flower or herb bed with the bonus of fall flowers for cheerful arrangements. I'm looking forward to exploring all the uses of this "new to me" herb because, once seen, smelled and tasted, I've already acquired it for my garden.

HINTS and TIPS

Protection for Hands

Tony Scanapico
Brazos County Master gardener




When gardening, protect your hands from effects of water and cold weather by "double gloving". Put on a pair of thin surgical type gloves before putting on regular gardening/work gloves. Protection X 2 to eliminate rough dry hands and cuticles.


Bird Feeding


Ryan Rychetsky
Brazos County Master Gardener





Bird feeding can be an entertaining, educational and year-round hobby for the entire family. Here are a few tips to encourage (or entice) our feathered friends to visit your yards and gardens.


 Place feeders in an area where birds can easily find them. A new feeder may make some birds cautious, so allow a few weeks for them to gain confidence.


 Consider location. Place the feeder where you can enjoy watching the birds from a safe distance, but where it is convenient to fill and maintain the feeder. If you have highly reflective windows nearby, you may need to add decals to its surface to prevent birds from flying into it (trust me, it happens!)

 Discourage competition. If allowed, squirrels can hog a feeder, preventing birds from benefiting from the food source and sending them elsewhere. You may need to experiment to with baffles, poles and distance to trees and roofs to minimize or stop such four-legged intrusions.

 Maintain an adequate level of seed to keep a good population of birds around, especially during the winter.

 Keep a water source nearby such as a filled birdbath. Birds benefit from water all year long, and are attracted to it if they can hear it. Add a bubbler or fountain so you can enjoy the sounds as well.

 Place a grit source near the feeder. Birds use grit to break up seed in their stomachs, or gizzard. Don't mix the grit with the feed.

 Keep a written journal with photographs of the bird species attracted to your feeder. Knowing the names and behaviors of your feathered friends makes bird watching more enjoyable.

Gardenline: Your Garden Questions Answered

Each Wednesday when you call Texas AgriLife Extension, Brazos County at (979)823-0129, a Master Gardener will research your question and give you an answer based on the unique garden challenges we face in our county. Master Gardeners have gone through extensive training on various horticultural topics and are certified to distribute information supported by Extension and research of Texas A&M University. It is our mission as Master Gardeners to bring you quality, relevant, and accurate information on your gardening concerns. So, write down the number and keep it handy so when a pesky insect invades or something is not quite right with your garden, you can pick up the phone and give us a call.

Gardenline: Wednesdays 9-1

979-823-0129, email: brazosmg@ag.tamu.edu

Gardenline will not be available November 24th or the month of December.

We look forward to answering your questions in 2011.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Vegetable Gardening

Tour and talk in the garden!

Hosted by

Brazos County-Texas AgriLife Extension

Elmer Krehbiel, Master Gardener

Tuesday, November 09, 2010, at Noon

In the Demonstration Idea Garden-‘the DIG’

2619 Highway 21 West

Bryan, TX 77803

Get tips from one of the area’s best known gardeners-Elmer Krehbiel, Master Gardener and author of the Eagle’s Homegrown news column. Whether you are a novice or long time gardener, come to this informal “in the garden” tour and talk to see what’s growing, ask questions and visit with the vegetable gardeners.

EarthKind Practices Seminar

January 29, 2011

Watch for information to be posted on the calendar at brazosmg.org, or subscribe to the Brazos County Master Gardener Event Notices (Newsletter Subscription tab on the website) to receive email notification of upcoming events.

Gardening 101

Plans are being finalized for 2011. Beginning in January the Brazos County Master Gardeners will host monthly classes that will cover timely basic gardening practices. Watch for information to be posted on the calendar at brazosmg.org, or subscribe to the Brazos County Master Gardener Event Notices (Newsletter Subscription tab on the website) to receive email notification of upcoming events.

“In the Garden” Informal tours and talks are being planned for the Demonstration Idea Garden-‘the DIG’ for 2011.

Watch for information to be posted on the calendar at brazosmg.org, or subscribe to the Brazos County Master Gardener Event Notices (Newsletter Subscription tab on the website) to receive email notification of upcoming events.

For additional information visit our website: brazosmg.org
or email to: brazosmg@ag.tamu.edu or
call the Brazos County Extension office: 979-823-0129

Brazos County 2011 Master Gardener Training Course

Applications will be accepted September 1 to December 1, 2010

Classes will meet on Thursdays from January 13 to May 12, 2011

The Master Gardener program is a volunteer development program of Texas AgriLife Extension and is designed to provide educational programs to the public in the areas of horticulture and gardening.

We seek “experienced” gardeners with basic knowledge in horticulture. Applicants should have a desire to volunteer, to obtain advanced training and to share their gardening knowledge with others in the community.

Training is presented by Texas AgriLife Extension Specialists, Master Gardeners, and local horticulturists.

Applications Available September 1, 2010

at <http://www.brazosmg.com/>.

Brazos County



Master Gardener
Association

2010 Brazos County Master Gardener Association



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Brazos County Master Gardeners is a program of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service. Extension educational programs are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.