



By Barbara Elmore, HCMG

## Gardening Made Simple

A friend with a beautiful garden near Waco observes some simple rules that are worthy of passing on in this information age where life seems to get more complicated by the hour. The friend, James Bays, works hard at his gardening but makes it look like play. That's likely because to him it is play. "When it starts warming up, I get the itch to go out and dig in the garden," he told an interviewer from the televised "Texas Gardener" program last spring.



Several plants surround James' caladiums

Here is his advice:

- Look at plants to get a feel of whether they will work.
- Grow them right.
- Keep them groomed.
- Get rid of what does not work.

James Bays' hostas



James lives his life pretty much the same way as he grows his plants, facing challenges as they come. When he moved to his property years ago, he found himself with an unfamiliar gardening dilemma: coaxing plants to grow in shade. So he went to work. He has no snobbery about what kinds of plants to grow; he just looks for green. From begonias to coleus to caladiums to hostas to passion vines and roses, he puts his plants in the ground and moves them around as needed. "Blooms are a bonus," he told the interviewer.

To get started, he built up his planting beds to get around the obstacle of tree roots. Using rich compost he makes from the tree leaves, he rarely needs to fertilize. His propagation is so successful that he contributes scores of plants each year to his group's plant fund-raiser.



Impatiens in Asian jasmine groundcover

He manages his rustic garden on a low budget, recycling everything – plant cuttings, the bricks used in his paths, the pots he transplants in, and the precious rainfall that trickles from his custom irrigation system. He also built a large gazebo in his back yard from juniper posts that he milled. James's advice and practice seem worthy of passing on during a time of economic challenges. Although gardening is not for everyone – James noted in the television program that his late wife Peggy was not a "hands-on" gardener although she enjoyed his efforts – it is an inexpensive hobby that nourishes the mind and body. Or as James said about his advice, if you do these things, your garden will "look right."