



Of Leaf & Limb

Hill Country Master Gardeners Association

"Promoting education on horticulture and the environment"

August, 2005

Volume 3, Issue 9

Meeting
Wednesday,
August 3, 2005
1:00 p.m.
at the extension office.

Karen Smith of the Plant
Haus II will focus on
perennials.

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President's Message:

This is a banner month! Seven interns have completed their volunteer hours and are now Master Gardeners. Please welcome Jean Anderson, Carol Johnson, Carol Seminara, Judy Simmons, Randy Simmons, Connie Townsend and Beverly Weidenfeller.

Laurinda Boyd, Four-H Coordinator, and I held the first Junior Master Gardener training session for teachers. There were nine attending. We were pleased to have them, since the announcement did not go out until after school was out for the summer. We

will repeat it again at a later date. We will also have a session for Master Gardeners sometime in September. We need to organize a corps of volunteers to help teachers with the school gardens.

I spent the last week at A&M attending the Entomology Training for Master Gardeners. I never knew there were so many bugs in the whole universe! We came away with three books and four power point CDs containing all the information covered in class. We had two collecting trips to gather insects for our

"collection".. We also visited the Horticulture Gardens. It was very intense, but lots of fun. There will be another session in 2006 if anyone would like to attend. I highly recommend it.

The 2007 Convention plans are moving along on schedule. We will be presenting our proposal to the State Board in late August. There will be more to report at that time. Stay cool and come to the meeting on August 3.
by Fay Drozd

Bigger Savings on the 2006 Garden Planner

Everyone knows the 2006 edition of the Hill Country Master Gardeners (HCMG) planner is a good buy at the advance-sale price of \$7.50. But if you're willing to pick up your copies at the Extension Office once they're printed in September you can save the \$2 per copy shipping and handling fees.

That's right, for those willing to pick up their copies, the total cost is a mere \$7.50 each, but you'll have to get your orders in as soon as possible. The deadline for this special price ends Aug. 31; that's just four weeks away!

Christine Millar, the project's coordinator, took the completed planner to the printer in mid-July. "This new edition specifically addresses Kerr County and its surrounding area, making it a great gift for us Hill Country gardeners," Millar said.

The new garden planner is being sponsored by local businesses and contains relevant articles on such topics as edible landscaping, planting to attract beneficial insects, a section on cultivating roses in our challenging environment, plus recipes, resource lists and other interesting and useful information.

If you want to take advantage of this special offer, you can send a check or money order for the total amount of your purchase payable to Hill Country Master Gardeners. Mail your orders and payment to Christine Millar, 2006 Garden Planner, P.O. Box, 1479, Center Point, TX 78010. The total cost for each planner that is picked up is \$7.50. Planner that will be mailed cost \$9.50 per copy, which includes the \$2 shipping and handling fees.

Advance-sale copies will be available in September when published. This special discount, however, is only available through the end of August.



Some Things About Tomatoes

Home-grown tomatoes rank up there with true love as being the only two things that money can't buy, so sings Guy Clark. And, if calls to the Extension Office are any indication, then numerous Hill Country gardeners invest an awful lot of time, sweat and greenbacks every year trying to cultivate this controversial fruit.

Why controversial? Because for hundreds of years after it was introduced to Europe from South America in the 16th century, early botanists thought tomatoes were inedible and poisonous. One of the few foods native to the Western Hemisphere, archaeological evidence suggests tomatoes were domesticated in Mexico and Central America. A member of the nightshade family (Solanaceae), tomatoes weren't eaten in the U.S. until the 1800s, but their delicious flavor and culinary versatility soon won out and by the 1900s, tomatoes were considered a staple of American cookery.

Botanically speaking, tomatoes are technically fruits because they are seed-bearing formations that develop from the ripened ovaries of flowers. Since they are generally eaten in salads or as an ingredient

in main dishes, they are usually called vegetables, and in 1893, the U.S. Supreme Court made it official ruling the tomato was a "vegetable."

Today, tomatoes are considered the third most widely consumed vegetable in the U.S., behind only potatoes and lettuce, and it is estimated that more than 85 per cent of home gardeners include the "love-apple" in their backyard plots.

For many Hill Country gardeners, it's been a challenging year for tomato cultivation. My own plants were flourishing -- verdant and covered with fruit -- when suddenly, the leaves began to wilt and die. I tried spraying the plants with Neem oil, since my problem appeared to be fungal, and pruning ahead of the dying vegetation but I only succeeded in exposing a lot of my fruit to sun scald. Fortunately, I was still able to harvest about 50 pounds, but it was a quick education in how not to grow tomatoes in Texas.

Thankfully, the wise folks at Texas A&M have a couple of Web sites -- Part 1 and Part 2 -- that can answer almost any question about cultivating tomatoes. Arranged in a Q&A format, the info covers a broad

spectrum of information such as criteria for selecting varieties, caging vs. staking tomatoes, coping with bird damage, and many, many detailed descriptions of problems, both disease and insect, and their cures.

Here are the URLs to these invaluable Web sites, which were suggested by the always-helpful Jamie:

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/vegetables/tomato.html>

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/vegetables/tomat2.html>

It appears my own crop was the victim of early blight (question 42 on Part 2), which was a big nuisance for lots of other folks. I guess there's comfort in numbers, but I haven't thrown in the trowel. I'm planting some fall tomatoes, albeit in a different bed, and hoping for the best because nothing's better than a juicy, ripe, home-grown tomato, except maybe true love.

by Carol Seminara

Kudos:

Jean Anderson, Ingrid Herzog Davison, Carol Johnson, Carol Seminara, Judy Simmons, Randy Simmons, Connie Townsend and Beverly Weidenfeller our latest Interns to have completed their volunteer hours and become "certified" Master Gardeners.

Judy Simmons for designing our "HCMG Phone Inquiry Worksheet." This form contains questions to ask the caller, which will help MGs diagnose the problem and is another tool to make phone desk duty easier.

Ron Richerson for generously sharing free crape myrtles with members who were willing to pick them up at his greenhouse. These were big (5-gallon), beautiful plants in gorgeous colors. Did you know the crape myrtle is the official state shrub of Texas? Thanks. again. Ron.

Horticultural Inquiry Committee

We've had a really busy summer with so many Interns completing their phone desk hours. We sent out a survey and the comments received helped us design a new system for next year's Interns. For more info on the new system, see the separate article on "Survey" results.

Judy Simmons has joined our committee and is in charge of the new Phone Desk Mentoring Project for future classes. If any of our members enjoy phone desk duty and would like to serve as a "Mentor" for future Interns, please contact Judy.

We had a "refresher class" for seasoned Master Gardeners on Phone Desk duty and were very pleased to have so many attending the class. We now have a written handout for phone desk training so if any of you missed the July 6 training class but wish to have a copy, the original is posted on the side of the file cabinet and marked "MASTER GARDENER OFFICE TRAINING." Feel free to make copies from the "master." Sure hope to see some of our members volunteering for future phone desk dates.

The infamous "blue binder" is showing lots of open dates for the remainder of the year. If you have some free time--M/W/F, please sign up for phone desk duty. Remember, this is our primary responsibility as Master Gardeners. If you're still timid about working alone, why not make plans to work alongside a fellow MG? If you'd like to sign up for any open dates, please e-mail Betty West @ dwest@omniglobal.net and let her know which dates you'd like to work.

Carol Johnson is currently working on enlarging our database and making it more user friendly, so when an inquiry comes in, we can easily find an answer. Together we're working to make phone duty more valuable and much less intimidating.

by Pam Bresler, Chair

Volunteer Hours Record Keeping Program

Interns turn in their volunteer hours at the end of each month or as soon as they complete their entire 50 volunteer hours, which includes 25 phone desk hours and 25 volunteer hours. My deadline is the 20th of the month, so if any of you have completed your hours, be sure you've placed your final Intern timesheet in my tray by the 20th. Otherwise, you won't be recognized until 45 days later. After you've completed your Intern volunteer hours, you'll record your additional hours on the MG timesheets and be able to claim mileage (maximum 1 hour per round trip.)

For those Interns who have recently become certified, you may now report your "Contacts" to me via e-mail at tla@omniglobal.net by the 4th of the following month after your actual contact. In other words, if you speak to a group on Sept. 18, you would report to me how many were in the audience by Oct. 4. If your neighbor asks you a gardening question on Nov. 24, then you would notify me of that contact by Dec. 4. If you talk to someone about enrolling in the Master Gardener Program, please be sure to get their name, address, phone number and e-mail address so we can contact them when we're ready to send out applications for the '06 class. These also count as Contacts. When you e-mail me with your contacts, make certain I acknowledge receipt by return e-mail.

by Tommie Airhart, Chair

*All
the flowers
of
tomorrow
are
in
the
seeds
of
today*



Calendar of Events: (Attendance at events other than Master Gardener Meetings is optional; events are listed for those wishing to attend other educational offerings)

August 3 – HCMG monthly meeting at the Kerr County Extension Office at 1:00 p.m. This month's program focuses on perennials and is presented by Karen Smith of Plant Haus II.

August 11 – Riverside Nature Center's Brown Bag Luncheon, 150 Francisco Lemos St., Kerrville, Noon-1:00 pm. This month's program is on "Bats and Their Behavior." Bring a sack lunch and learn something new. Fee is \$5 for non-members, \$3 for RNC members. Beverages & desserts provided by RNC.

August 16 – Kerr Cactus and Succulent Society meets at 7:00 p.m. at Butt-Holdsworth Library, Kerrville.

August 20 – Deadline for HCMG newsletter articles (send to Martha at hnews@kctc.com).

August 30 – Native Plant Society of Texas, Fredericksburg Chapter, meets at 7:00 p.m. at the Gillespie County Historical Society Bldg. 312 W. San Antonio St., Fredericksburg.

Committees

Education:

Judy Schaefer, Chair
Greenhouse/Market

Days:

Tony Pacini, Chair
Horticultural Inquiry:

Pam Bresler-chair
Carol Johnson, Betty West

Newsletter:

Martha Stevens-editor
Carol Seminara-
assistant editor

Contributors: Betty West, Pam Bresler, Tommie Airhart

Nominating:

Tommie Airhart-chair
Otis Fox, Betty West

Program:

Eileen Haden-Chair

Volunteer

Hours/Record

Keeping:

Tommie Airhart, Chair

Mentoring:

Naoma Peacock,
Chair

H/C Garden Book

Publication:

Christine Millar, Chair

Results from Phone Desk Duty Survey

Our Horticultural Inquiry Committee recently sent a survey to the 2005 Interns requesting their opinions about their phone desk duty impressions. Following are the questions and a summary of the responses received. If any Interns would like to respond anonymously, leave your comments in the Horticultural Inquiry Committee tray.

Question 1: Was your training adequate? How could it be improved? Most felt it was adequate. One suggested simulating an actual phone call during the phone desk training class so Interns would know how to respond to a caller, what types of questions to ask, where to go for research and how to complete the paperwork.

Question 2: Did you benefit from the Mentors being there with you on your first day? The Interns that had Mentors appreciated the opportunity. Unfortunately, a few didn't get mentored and it was a bit unsettling for them.

Question 3: What was your greatest frustration? Most complaints were about not having a Mentor there on their first phone duty. Others felt follow-up should be done in a more timely manner ... it seemed to take too many days to complete the process. Some were frustrated by the callers needing help but not being able to describe (or leaving out) particulars about the plant condition.

Question 4: What was your favorite part of desk duty? Reading the research material available; discussing plant diagnosis and remedies for those people who brought plants to the office; or simply answering the phone and finding answers for people. Least favorite part? Discovering old phone calls that had not been followed up in a prompt manner. Some were two weeks old and the caller was still waiting for an answer and none too happy either. And the most often mentioned annoyance: waiting for the phone to ring!

Question 5: Once you were trained, would you have felt comfortable working alone? Most did feel comfortable working alone. In fact, one Intern didn't have a Mentor on her first day and the following work date she was there alone and she lived to tell about it!

Question 6: Other comments, both positive and negative. Consider combining greenhouse watering on same day as phone duty. Wasting volunteer time by doubling up on shifts. Fewer workers per day would mean more dates covered later in the year.

The two issues most commented on related to sitting there the entire shift with no phone calls to answer and being overstaffed on the days when they worked. We tried to offer as many choices for scheduling as we could. Little did we know this class would be motivated to finish so quickly. Many of our Interns completed their phone duty by the end of June. Unfortunately that presented a problem: we don't have much phone coverage for the remaining eight months.

We will continue providing phone desk coverage on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, but we are going to limit the number of Interns to two per day. Based on the feedback we've received from this year's Interns, we realized a Phone Desk Mentoring Program was a much-needed addition. Answering the phones is our primary responsibility so training our Interns to feel comfortable with this duty is of utmost importance. Judy Simmons has agreed to assume control of this program. What we'll do in the future is set aside the month of April for mentoring and hands-on training. A Mentor will be assigned two Interns for a 3-hour training session. Each Intern should complete one 3-hour mentoring session during April.

After the Interns have received their 3-hour mentoring/training in April, they will begin serving their remaining 22 phone desk hours. They may choose M/W/F; maximum of two Interns per workday; 3 hours per Intern. They may choose to work the same shift (either a.m. or p.m.), or one Intern may work the 3-hour morning shift and a different Intern may work the 3-hour afternoon shift. An Intern may not work both shifts on a given day. By limiting the number of Interns to two per workday, that will provide phone desk coverage for more months.

As our Interns become accustomed to working phone duty, we're hoping they'll feel comfortable enough to work alone. During the fall and winter months, only one Intern per day will be sufficient.

Again, our thanks to the 2005 Interns for providing so much feedback. Future Interns will benefit greatly from your suggestions.

compiled by Betty West

**Hill Country Master
Gardener Association
2005 Executive Committee**

Fay Drozd - President
Tony Pacini - Vice President
Diane Whitney - Secretary
Barbara Robbins - Treasurer
Kristi Gebauer - Ex-officio Advisor
Roy Walston - C. E. O. Advisor

**Of Leaf & Limb
Newsletter
Committee**

Editor - Martha Stevens
Assistant Editor - Carol Seminara
Contributors – Fay Drozd, Betty West, Pam Bresler, Tommie Airhart

**Comments,
Submissions...**

We welcome and encourage any comments or suggestions regarding this newsletter. Also, if you would like to submit an article for an upcoming edition, please send to: hnews@kctc.com. Indicate "Editor HCMG Newsletter" in the subject line.

Minutes of the Monthly Meeting July 6, 2005

The meeting was called to order by President Fay Drozd.

The program was presented by Sandy Winokur of the Sandy Oaks Olive Orchard.

Following the program, the President called for approval of the minutes as presented in the newsletter. Hearing no corrections, the minutes were approved.

Barbara Robbins then presented the Treasurers report. HCMG has total assets of \$10,355.82, with \$1500 due back to the interns as they finish their programs.

Fay reminded everyone that we were participating in Market Days in September and October, and volunteers were needed. The sign up sheet is in the office.

We have three new Master Gardeners – Ingrid Davison, Shirley Vangsnes, and Sandy Martin. Congratulations. Fay announced that she is instituting a cutoff for certification of new Master Gardeners. Those that have their hours in to Tommie by the 20th will be recognized at the next meeting. Anyone completing their hours after that will have to wait until the following meeting.

The 2006 garden planner is available at pre-publication prices. The information on this planner is available in the newsletter.

Fay announced that we handled fifty-six phone calls in June, up from single digits in April. Thus, we may need to institute required phone hours for re-certification of MG's. Our primary purpose is to man the phones to enable the Extension Agent to perform other activities.

Pam Bresler gave the Horticulture Inquiry Committee update. She reported that the committee was divided into areas which the members enjoy. She handles the training, Betty West the telephone calendar/scheduling and notifications, Carol Johnson the data-base, and Judy Simmons is going to be undertaking the intern training and mentoring. Pam also mentioned that a survey had been sent to all interns about how to improve the phone duty. She reminded all interns to return the forms as soon as possible.

Tommie Airhart then reminded the MG's to put their time sheets in her box, not Tony's, and that she picks them up at the end of the month. Any intern finishing their hours should e-mail her so she can get their time sheets. She also reminded all members to put their hours in the correct columns, i.e. volunteer, education, travel, etc.

Fay then gave an update on the convention. We will be getting help from the Kerrville Visitor and Convention Bureau, in the form of money and manpower. Also, we will be going to the State Board Meeting on August 27, 2005 to make our presentation. After that, we will know if we have the meeting. She also stated that she would be sending out a survey requesting information on what committees everyone wants to work on, and how many hours everyone will be able to spend on the convention. This will be mailed out shortly. Everyone please complete it and return as soon as possible. It is going to take everyone in the organization to help in the organization and presentation of the State Meeting.

Fay announced that Ron Richardson has some crepe myrtles that he is willing to give away if anyone is interested. Contact Fay and she will arrange for you to pick them up.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Anne Brown, Secretary Pro-tem