



Of Leaf & Limb

Hill Country Master Gardeners Association

"Promoting education on horticulture and the environment"

October 2008
Volume 6, Issue 10

HCMG Monthly Meeting, 1:00 p.m. October 1, 2008 at the Extension Office

Speaker is Bill Carr of The Nature Conservancy of Texas on "Rare Plants of the Hill Country" with a focus on plants in the Kerr-Bandera area

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President's Message



Randy Simmons

As I am sitting at the computer writing this for the October newsletter, it is a classic late summer day in the Hill Country, sunny and a little breezy. With the butterflies and migrating hummingbirds in the garden, there is not a hint of anything out of the ordinary. However, just south and east of us, Hurricane Ike has been reeking havoc on anyone and anything in its path. Along with so many of our Master Gardeners, many whom have lived in and/or have ties to those in the areas in the hurricane's path, I have been glued to the Weather Channel as this catastrophe has unfolded. Although our area has been unaffected, our thoughts and prayers will continue to be with everyone who has to deal with the devastation in the after math of this storm.

On a lighter note, how 'bout our US Postal Service representatives, *Marilyn Pease* and *Keith Frantom!* They helped expand planting beds at the main post office in Kerrville and, true to being Master Gardeners, they educated other employees as to drought-resistant plant selection and care within a landscape. Way to go! Also, as of this writing, we are glad to have our newly certified Master Gardeners on board: *Cindy Anderson*, *Kathleen Lewis*, *June Sher*, and *Paul Rector-Scott*. They already have been and continue to be a real plus within our organization.

In this very political year, time is at hand once again for the election of officers within HCMG. At this upcoming meeting our Nominating Chair, *Eileen Haden*, will present the names of those who have agreed to serve if elected. If you are willing to hold any of the four officer positions of President, Vice-President, Secretary or Treasurer, or know of any certified member that would, please call *Eileen*, (830) 460-7807 ASAP.

As we all know, we have got a special group of people with this organization who take on a task with dedication, tenacity and sacrifice at times. One prime example is our Program Chair, *Kathie Marlow*, who came home to Fredericksburg from a trip last month two days prior to the regular HCMG meeting to find no air conditioning in her house. In the midst of trying to resolve this 'hot' issue, she indicated that she still planned to come to Kerrville in order to set up for the meeting but probably would not be able to stay for the program. Even though, I said that her AC was first priority, she did not need to come, she came anyway and, fortunately, was able to stay. And then, what can you say about our Newsletter Chair, *Eleanor Baldwin* who strategically scheduled two major surgeries this summer so that they wouldn't affect the monthly newsletter deadlines. Many, many thanks to you both and let's all keep praying for *Eleanor's* continued recovery.

Randy





Betty West

Calendar of Events: Attendance at events other than Master Gardener meetings is optional; events are listed for those wishing to attend other educational offerings. Be sure to call and confirm event. **Betty West**

September 20 – 3rd annual Wildscapes Workshop “From Dirt to Design: Plotting Your Native Garden” hosted by Fredericksburg NPSOT.

Lectures begin promptly at 9:00 a.m. thru 3:00 p.m. Garden tours (optional) will follow. Be sure to review your confirmation so you have all the supplies needed for this course.

September 20 - Club Ed class on “Rainwater Harvesting System” presented by John Kight at Auld Ctr., Rm, 1, Kerrville. 10 a.m. - noon. Register thru Club Ed. Cost \$24.

September 24 - Club Ed class on “Fall Gardening, Getting Ready for ... with Emphasis on Low-Water Use Plants” presented by Dr. Tom Harris at Auld Center, Room 1, Kerrville. 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. Pre-registration thru Club Ed. Cost \$19.

September 27 - Hill Country Master Gardeners will host a booth at Market Days on the grounds of Kerr County Court House from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. Get there early to choose your favorite fall plants.

September 30 - Fredericksburg NPSOT meets at 7:00 p.m. at Gillespie County Historical Society Bldg.

October 1 - Hill Country Master Gardeners monthly meeting at 1:00 p.m. Bill Carr of Texas Nature Conservancy is our speaker.

October 4 – “Down by the Riverside” event/native plant sale will be at Riverside Nature Center, Kerrville. 8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

October 7 - Club Ed class on “Oak Wilt - Theory, Treatment and Prevention” presented by Anne Brown, Certified Master Gardener, Auld Center, Rm. 4, Kerrville. 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Register at Club Ed. \$10

October 8 - Fredericksburg Garden Club meets at 2:00 p.m. at Central Texas Electric Co-Op Bldg. Members bring flower arrangements for the “Garden Show.”

October 8 - Club Ed class on “Propagation with

Emphasis on Xeric and Native Plants - Magic? Seeds? Cuttings?” presented by Dr. Tom Harris, Auld Center, Rm. , Kerrville. 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. Register thru Club Ed. \$19.

October 10 - Club Ed class on “Rainwater Harvesting, 4,000 Years in the Making” by Barry Wall of Texas Rainwater Systems. Auld Center, Rm.1, Kerrville. 2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. Pre-registration thru Club Ed. Cost \$39.

October 11 - Club Ed class on “Native Plants, Trees, Shrubs and Flowers - Gardening and Landscaping” presented by David Winningham and Pablo Cruses of Natives of Texas Nursery. Class location is their nursery at 4256 Medina Hwy, Kerrville. 9 a.m. - noon. Pre-registration thru Club Ed. Cost \$25.

October 15 - Club Ed class on “Pruning to Protect Your Investment - Your Plants Are Gonna Love Ya” presented by Dr. Tom Harris at Auld Center, Room 1, Kerrville. 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. Pre-registration thru Club Ed. Cost \$19.

October 16/17 – Texas Master Gardener Specialist Training in Vegetable Gardening, Georgetown, TX. Fee \$250. For Certified Master Gardeners only. Class limited to 30 applicants, maximum 2 per county association. <http://grovesite.com/page.asp?o=mg&s=mga&p=276310>

October 18/19 - The Texas Gourd Society presents the 13th annual “2008 Lone Star Gourd Festival” at the Gillespie County Fairgrounds, off Hwy 16 S of Fredericksburg. Sat. hours 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Sun. hours 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Adm. \$5 for adults; kids under 12 free. 806/523-9092 or www.texasgourdsociety.org

October 18/19 - Wildseed Farms hosts the 5th annual “Monarch Butterfly Celebration.” Tagging and release demonstrations at 11:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. both days.

October 21 - Hunt Garden Club meets at Hunt United Methodist Church. 9:30 a.m. for brunch; 10:00 a.m. monthly meeting. Visitors welcome. Peni Foster will demonstrate “Cement Leaves.”

October 21 - Kerr Cactus and Succulent Society meets at 7:00 p.m. at Butt-Holdsworth Library.



HCMG OCTOBER SPEAKER, BILL CARR

Bill Carr has been a botanist with The Nature Conservancy of Texas for twelve years, and before that he worked at the Texas Natural Heritage Program at Texas Parks and Wildlife for about seven years. Both jobs allowed him to do field work with native plants all over the state of Texas, one of the most botanically diverse second only to California and Florida) and interesting states in the country.

He is the author of *An Annotated List of the Flora of Travis County, Texas* (which was used to develop the Williamson County endemic plant list in the February/March 2007 Grapevine) and a co-author of a book on the rare plants of Texas to be published by Texas A&M University Press in fall 2007.

His talk at the October HCMG meeting will be about the rare plants of the Hill Country, with a focus on those in the Kerrville-Bandera Area.

GARDENING TIPS FROM OUR MEMBERS

Kathy Lewis

When watering potted plants, always water until it drips out the bottom of the pot. This will help prevent the build up of root-damaging salts in the pot

DO NOT over water!!! Over watering has killed many more plants than lack of water! If you can, stick your finger in the pot to test dampness or lift the pot to test its weight. If that's not possible, wait until the leaves just begin to look dull, then water.

Almost all plants benefit from about two inches of organic mulch – compost, leaves, straw, shredded bark, etc. It improves the soil, conserves moisture, cools the roots, helps to prevent the growth of weeds and the weeds that do grow will be easier to pull out.

Plants benefit from frequent but light fertilization. A constant supply of nutrients is more easily maintained with several light applications of fertilizer, rather than one heavy one

Orient rows of vegetable plants on a north-south axis so they receive both morning and afternoon sun.

GARDENING TIPS FROM OUR MEMBERS

Connie Townsend

It's definitely time to be thinking about fall vegetable planting. One crop that can still be planted is carrots. They should germinate well even in the heat and will continue to grow and get established during the month of October and even November. If we are threatened with a really hard frost, cover them with row cover, although they will be fine unless the temperature goes into the teens and stays there. In the spring, you will find deliciously sweet carrots. Some will probably be pulled and used before then, but they will keep perfectly well right in the ground.

Another crop to plant in late October or even November is garlic. You can order specialty garlics off the internet, plant cloves of the heads you grew this past year, or even just plant the cloves of some you buy at the grocery store. Plant the garlic cloves pointy-end up about 4" apart. They will like some water to get going, and some sunshine will also make them happy. Then just leave them growing until spring. Harvest when at least 6, better yet, about 2/3, of the leaves have shriveled and died back.

YOU ARE WANTED...as a MENTOR!

Great opportunity to get to know and encourage a new member-to-be and get service hours for doing so! They need you and HCMG needs you!

If you are now a certified Master Gardener or will be certified by January, you are qualified to be a mentor for the upcoming 2009 class.

You can sign up at the October meeting or contact Judy Simmons: 367-5454
or rjsimmons@cebridge.net



Bernadell Larson

Editor's note: 2006 HCMG Bernadell continues helping us understand the landscaping details of a sustainable home.

AN ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY HOME AND LANDSCAPE

Sustainable (Green) Building is a growing industry and catching on with homeowners as they look for ways to conserve energy and to recycle waste. In 2008, the expected share of the housing market attributed to green building is 6%, up from just 2% in 2005. There have been an estimated 332,900 sustainable / green homes built since 2005, at an average price of \$296,000. (The source for these statistics is the McGraw-Hill Construction Research & Analytics survey prepared for the U. S. Green Building Council.)

The U S Green Building Council (USGBC) developed the LEED For Homes project, which requires an independent third party rating system to ensure consistent application of the green building principles. The rating system is intended to be an effective tool for introducing green/sustainable practices to a significant portion of the new home building marketplace. Initially, LEED for Homes is targeting the top 25% of homes with best practice of environmental features. Once the new home process is streamlined, the USGBC would like to extend the program to the rest of the marketplace, and also home remodeling projects.

There are several specialized areas of green home design and planning that are required to be certified as a LEED Home. The third party doing the rating collects in-field data about the

LEED Home and prepares a project documentation file. The file includes the completed LEED for Homes Checklist, Performance Test reports and the Completed Accountability Form. All this information is used to determine if the home qualifies for one of the 4 LEED ratings (Certified, Silver, Gold and Platinum, in that order).

Of the 8 areas of Accountability (Innovation and Design Process, Location, Sustainable Sites, Water Efficiency, Indoor Environmental Quality, Materials and Resources, Energy and Atmosphere, and Awareness and Education) we will focus on Sustainable Sites and Water Efficiency.

The selection of the location of the home's footprint on the building lot has a large impact on the natural drainage flows and may have adverse effects on the neighboring land. The home should be located to complement, not interfere with, the existing site features.
...Focusing on native plants, mulch not sods, rain harvest and drip irrigation will help achieve a better balance for everyone.

In the Sustainable Sites category, there are 5 major areas where points can be earned and documented on the Accountability Form. In each area there are requirements that may be mandatory or optional measures that, if followed, will earn additional points in the rating process.

Site Stewardship

The intent is to design and construct the building with minimal impact on the building lot. The mandatory measures are 1) Minimize disturbed areas of site if the site is greater than 1/3 acre, by developing a tree and plant preservation plan, and leave at least 40% of the previously undeveloped lot area undisturbed; 2) Design and install erosion controls during construction by stockpiling and protecting existing topsoil from erosion for reuse, stabilize

soils that have been disturbed, control the path and velocity of runoff with silt fencing or comparable measures, provide swales to divert surface water from hillsides, and protect on-site storm sewer inlets with straw bales, silt fencing, silt sacks, or rock filters.

Landscaping

The intent is to design and install landscape features that minimize demand for water and synthetic chemicals. The mandatory measures are: 1) A basic landscape design, which includes installing drought tolerant turf in sunny areas only, no turf in densely shaded areas, areas planted with turf should not exceed a slope of 25 % (i.e. a 4 to 1 slope), do not use invasive or exotic plant species (as identified by local AgriLife offices). Lots less than 1/10 of acre are exempt.

The optional measures are:

1. Apply mulch that will improve soil structure and provide nutrients as it decomposes.
2. Limit turf as noted in LEED-H documentation. The amount of recommended turf depends on the annual precipitation the region receives.
3. Design plantings to minimize landscape water demand as specified in LEED-H documentation. Points are awarded based upon a combination of percentage of drought tolerant plants used and annual precipitation for the region.

The remaining three major areas in the Sustainable Sites category are: 3) Shading of Hardscapes, 4) Surface Water Management, and 5) non-Toxic Pest Control. We will cover these areas in next month's newsletter.

Remember, the placement of the building on the lot and the landscape plan is extremely important in minimizing our disturbance of nature's design. Focusing on native plants, mulch not sod, rain harvest and drip irrigation will help achieve a better balance for everyone.



Hydroponics means "water working." It is a method of raising plants without relying on soil for food, water and anchorage.

HYDROPONICS

By B. B. Browning

Nutrient minerals in the form of soluble salts are dissolved in water and fed to the plants by means of pumps and timers. This solution drains back into a tank for reuse over and over. You would think that things could be controlled with such precision that it would be tantamount to simply manufacturing food by the clever use of science (especially chemistry), and to some extent that is true, but like most manufacturing processes this requires almost total control. So, unless you are willing to invest in costly energy and equipment, including greenhouses that can be cooled as well as heated, water heaters and chillers, carbon dioxide pumps, air pumps to supply oxygen to the solution, strong grow lights (for winter use), computer that decide when to inject nutrients into the solution when needed, humidity control, and a means to exclude airborne pests, then you are ready for some real challenges.

I decided to try to grow hydroponically without most of this fancy stuff by growing only during the season that was normal for the particular plant I was trying to grow. These are some of the things I have learned the hard way:

During hot and windy periods, plants need lots of moisture in

relation to nutrients in order to cool themselves. If the chemicals are mixed into the water at too rich a blend, plants will be shocked and begin to wilt. If you correct the mixture in time, fine, but the effort is more art than science.

In order to reduce the risk of the fertilizer solution getting out of balance, I simply discharge the old solution and replace it with fresh every 10 days or so. I am not sure the fertilizer salts I buy are correct anyway except for the assurance by the manufacturer. The lack of a tiny amount of one necessary trace mineral can make the plant fail. It is recommended that the fertilizer formula be adjusted between the initial growth stage and the blooming/fruiting stage. If you compound your own mixtures you can do this, but I have not reached that stage yet.



NASA researcher checking hydroponic onions with Bibb lettuce to his left and radishes to the right

Most vegetables like to grow in slightly acid conditions. I catch and use rain water which is naturally 5.8 PH and is relatively mineral free. Our raw ground water is slightly alkaline. The PH can be adjusted by adding acid to lower it or baking soda to raise it. It is simple to measure the PH with litmus paper.

Electrical conductivity, which can

be measured with a small instrument, indicates ionization of elements and tells you parts per million of the total elements dissolved in water. The EC of our raw rain water is 75. The EC of our raw ground water is 575. I have no way of telling what mix of minerals they contain because it would take very sophisticated and expensive equipment to determine that. The total recommended EC varies with different plants, and ranges from 1000 to 3500. It is easy to mix the solution to suite the plant's EC needs simply by adding more or less fertilizer salts. Getting the EC right does not guarantee that the mix of elements is right. Each element in the fertilizer ionizes at a different rate, but the plants will take what they need. Of course, too much of one element can tie up other elements and make them unavailable to the plant.

I like to experiment. Needless to say this leads to a lot of failures, but they are, at least educational failures. Thomas Edison once said of his failures that he had discovered many things that did not work, but even that was useful knowledge. My best efforts so far have been with tomatoes, eggplants and basil.



One of several hydroponic appliances B.B. Browning employs.



Barbara Elmore

Four Fruit Trees for Hill Country Gardeners

By Barbara Elmore

Editor's Note: Barbara has joined the Hill Country Master Gardeners as a transferee from McLennan County where she was a gardening writer for Waco Today, a monthly magazine published by the Waco Tribune-Herald

Anyone searching for good trees to plant might try these:

PEACHES

We have many good varieties, says the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. Peaches are a major commercial crop in the Hill Country and a good tree for the home garden. Three good varieties, which will produce at different times, are Harvester, Majestic and Redskin. All are freestone, which means the flesh separates easily from the seed

Big pest problem: Stinkbugs, which cause misshapen fruit.

General advice: "Peach trees are not necessarily long-lived trees," says Dr. Larry Stein of Texas Cooperative Extension. If you can get 15 years from a peach tree, you are doing well. Take care of peach trees with water and fertilizer and don't baby along a sick old tree. Get rid of it and start over.

PLUMS

Plant at least two varieties to guarantee pollination. Two good varieties are Morris and Ozark Premier. Both ripen in mid to late June.

Biggest disease/pest problem: Plums are susceptible to disease, so when you prune them, disinfect pruning shears in a solution of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water before you move to another tree. Alcohol also works well.

General advice: Plums trees have white blooms that some people use in the landscape.

APPLES

Although Texas apples don't get as red as their counterparts from other states because of high summertime temperatures, two varieties with high eating quality can be grown here. Mollies Delicious and Gala. Two apples of different varieties are required to pollinate the tree.

Best root stock for this area: Dwarf root stock varieties, which produce smaller trees but regular-sized fruit, are M9 Mollies and Gala. The roots of dwarf trees are not deep, so anchor these varieties against a wall, like the side of a house, so they will grow without leaning over. They will produce fruit in three to four years.

Biggest disease/pest problem: Cotton root rot, which causes the tree to die suddenly, usually in July through September.

General advice: Cotton root rot is a fungus in the ground, and there's no control for it. Both apples and grapes are sensitive to it, and pecans, while resistant, can also be susceptible. If you have cotton root rot throughout your

planting area, you may have to grow your fruit in containers.

PEARS

These are long-lived, upright trees. Good varieties are Warren, which produces small but high-quality pears, as well as Orient and Garber. Some varieties of pears that ripen on the tree are also good, but you may have to fight the birds for them. These varieties include Asian or 20th Century pears. A fire blight-resistant pear with a good flavor is Hosui.

Disease/pest problem: Fire blight, spread by bees. You can cut it out, but be sure to disinfect your shears after pruning. Fire blight will affect other landscape plants, including photinias, apples and roses.

General advice: Pear trees grow upright, but you can fool a little tree into thinking it's an old tree by bending the limbs and tying them down to make them force shoots. This will keep the limbs smaller.

If you are looking for specific fruit trees to grow in the Hill Country, try these: peaches, plums, apples and pears. Now through winter is a good time to plant, although you can plant container-grown trees anytime.



HCMG September 3, 2008
Monthly Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 pm by Randy Simmons, President. Four newly certified Master Gardeners from the 2008 class were recognized.

The minutes as posted in the newsletter were approved with the correction of one error. AgriLife Extension Agent, Roy Walston, not Vice President Roy Eliff, went with Randy Simmons to meet with David Lipscomb regarding the upcoming community landscape competition project.

Treasurer's Report was given by the President. The Chapter has \$12,724.00 in the bank currently with multiple obligations on record for it's use.

AgriLife Extension Agent, Roy Walston, addressed the chapter members about a new initiative called, "Earth Kind, An Environmental Stewardship Program for the Urban Landscape." There is a quiz on the website, 'aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/EKchallenge' to help members and the public determine if their landscape is contributing to a healthy and sustainable environment. The quiz will help collect data for counties to use in future educational efforts and projects.

Also addressed by the AgriLife Extension Agent was the advantage of addressing the Master Gardener Program and all of it's facets and projects as belonging to the Kerr County AgriLife Extension Center instead of belonging to Texas A&M. Although closely related to the university, the new leader of the state MG program, Jayla Fry, voiced her preference that MGs use the AgriLife connection on correspondence, speaker introductions, and when giving out information on the MG program.

The President announced:

1. We will have a table at the Riverside Nature Center Event on October 4, 2008 and anyone interested in manning the display is welcome to participate. Excellent opportunity for interns to get non-phone volunteer hours and promote MG program.

2. We will have a display at the Kerr County Fair, 24-26 October, this year as in past years.

Anyone wanting to man that booth is asked to contact Randy. Anyone willing to organize this event is also asked to contact Randy.

3. Applications will be available this week on the website for the 2009 MG class, so contact your friends and anyone you know who may be interested in attending.

Committee Chairs and members announced:

Lee Fry, Market Days Chair, announced that the last Market days will be on September 27th and workers are still needed. If you have signed up, recheck your time on the sign-up sheet in the office as the shifts have changed. Members gave verbal Kudos to Lee for heading the Market Days this year and bringing in money.

Judy Simmons, Mentoring Chair, asked members to think about being a mentor this year. Reminded all of the satisfaction and worthy contribution mentoring brings.

Eileen Haden was introduced as the new Nominating Committee Chair. She asked that if anyone is interested or knows of anyone who might be interested in holding office or doing one of the many jobs of committee chairs, please contact her. Several of the committee chairs have requested co-chairs or assistants to stand in when help is needed.

Cindy Anderson addressed the group about her ideas for promoting Market Days. Her career had this focus, and she recommended a large "Plant Sale" sign or banner that can be seen across the square; identifying plants on their pots; and posting a price sign. All of her ideas met with verbal approval from the group and she was encouraged to proceed.

Carol Brinkman, Webmaster, reported to the group that the new website had 389 visits last month from 179 visitors to 2048 pages. She reported 9 new links and is soliciting for more. Thirty-eight percent of the visits were from direct traffic, 39% from search engines, and 22% from referring sites. These stats will be given to the AgriLife Extension Agent monthly for inclusion in the reported contacts for MGs.

Anne Brown, Greenhouse Chair reported that the greenhouse will be closed October 1st for refurbishing and plants are on sale to MG's for cost to clear out the inventory. Members are asked to consider housing some of the

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2009 Hill Country Master Gardeners Class Application

Remind your interested friends that applications for the 2009 Master Gardener class are available on our website. To

download, click:

<http://www.hillcountrymastergardeners.org/pdfs/2009%20Application.pdf>

Be sure to tell them about the classes and let them know they must return the completed form by **October 31, 2008** to:

**Hill Country Master Gardeners Assoc.
Attn: Education Dept.
3655 Highway 27 South
Kerrville, TX 78028**

Here's the link on our website that will explain the Texas Master Gardener Program and answer many questions they might have http://www.hillcountrymastergardeners.org/training_certification.htm

You Know You're A Master Gardener When...



1. You rejoice in rain...even after 10 straight days of it.
2. You have pride in how bad your hands look.
3. You have a decorative compost container on your kitchen counter.
4. You can give away plants easily, but compost is another thing.
5. Soil test results actually mean something.
6. You'd rather go to a nursery to shop than a clothes store.
7. You look for gardens open to the public whenever you go on vacation.
8. Your non-gardening spouse is actually getting involved with your garden endeavors...digging ponds, building bird houses, watering, pruning, turning compost piles, planting...
9. And you definitely know you are a Master Gardener when...
10. You are surrounded by terrific people who share your passion!

Kudos to ...

Our newest "Certified" Master Gardeners ... **Cindy Anderson, Kathleen Lewis, Paula Rector-Scott** and **June Sher**. Way to go, ladies!

Master Gardener **Marilyn Pease** teamed up with co-worker and 2008 Intern **Keith Frantom** to install new planting beds at the Kerrville Post Office. They demonstrated to co-workers that it's possible to have pleasing landscapes in spite of our drought condition and water restrictions ... choose plantings wisely and use lots of mulch!

Carol Brinkman for spreading the word about our organization far and wide. She has contacted other gardening related sites and asked if they'd include our website address. We're now listed on the "Texas Gardener" website, among others.



October Vegetable Garden

Compiled by Christine Millar

Let's talk about recycling. Some of these I have mentioned before in previous articles but life can get busy and I often find myself thinking "I have heard this before. Why aren't I doing that".

Worm composting I have been using worms to deal with kitchen waste for some years now. When my sister moved to Texas my housewarming gift to her was a homebuilt worm composter box. There is a delightful book that you can pick up on Amazon.com secondhand called "Worms Eat My Garbage" by Mary Appelhof. Certainly there are other publications out there as well but I like her breezy style and easy-going attitude.

My first batch of red worms were obtained from another Master Gardener. They are also available commercially. Occasionally I have needed a fresh batch when the worms died out due to more to my mismanagement than anything else. There are more worms in the box in the cooler months. The summer heat drives them deeper into the box. The best location for a worm box is in the shade under a big tree. Just make sure that it is convenient to the house so that you can empty your "compost bucket" daily into the box. Otherwise you will get fruit flies hatching inside the house especially in the summer months.

To start the worms off in the box I used aged horse manure (what else!) as the "nest material". The book recommends shredded paper and that works too. Make sure to age the horse manure for a couple of weeks if you gather it fresh. It needs some time to heat up and cool down so the worms don't get baked. Other than the feeding there really isn't a lot you have to do with them. No turning the compost and the box keeps the varmints out. This year I am going to move some of the worms to an old iron bathtub that was replaced during our renovations. The bathtub is under a summer shade tree and holds a lot more material than the box. A metal or plywood top will keep out the scavengers.

Human Urine I know. Yuck, right? Nice people don't even think about this subject let alone mention it. Lately I have seen references to it even in respectable publications such as *Texas Gardener*. Mind you, no

one is game enough to advocate it, but we could be seeing a quiet revolution coming about. Many civilizations such as the Chinese use human by-products for crop fertilization.

Recently I found an interesting book on the subject called *Liquid Gold* by Carol Steinfeld at a used book store. The book discusses collection, dilution and usage of human urine. I did try it over the past winter. It certainly didn't hurt as no plants died this summer in the areas where the diluted urine was spread. In fact the peach tree did look healthier this summer. I would definitely dilute and water it in soon after collection as there is a certain "aroma" to day old urine that you may not appreciate. But the "aroma" does go away within a couple of hours. Urine, like most organic fertilizers, needs to be processed by the soil microbes before it becomes useable to plants.

Urine contains 6-180 g of urea, which contains nitrogen, 0.7-1.6 g of phosphate and 1.5-2.0 g of potassium. I have no idea of the NPK ratio, but it would appear that this is a high nitrogen manure which is exactly what we need around here. The recommended dilution rate is 1 part urine to 10 parts water.

If you are concerned about conserving our water resources think about how many times you flush perfectly good water in the toilet to dispose of just urine. This manure is locally made and available and requires no extra gas to transport. If you are concerned about the health aspects, urine from healthy humans is generally sterile. You may not feel comfortable applying it directly onto vegetables; however, the manures that we put on the surrounding soil are no less dangerous than urine. The UV radiation from our strong sunlight kills off a lot of harmful and beneficial organisms. Nobody is suggesting that it be used on vegetables for sale to the public only for produce consumed within your own family. It can be poured over your compost pile instead. Salt buildup could be a problem if applied too frequently to the same area.

My next article will not appear until December as I will be conducting research on hard shell squash varieties developed in Provence, France. Although the pumpkin, or squash as it is called in the USA, originates from the Americas, many different varieties have been developed in other parts of the world. Provençal markets display some remarkable varieties that you do not see in this area.

I wish you and yours a happy and safe Thanksgiving!



Hill Country Master Gardener Association
2008 Executive Committee

- Randy Simmons - President
- Roy Eliff - Vice President
- Cheri Bolden - Secretary
- Pat Moore - Treasurer
- Anne Brown - Ex-officio Advisor
- Roy Walston - C.E.A. Advisor

Committees

Archivist:
Anne Moss

Demonstration Garden:

Dorothy & David Buchen,
Chairs

Education:

Debbie Russell, Chair

Greenhouse:

Anne Brown, Chair

Horticultural Inquiry:

Diane Whitney

Information:

Betty West

Jr. Master Gardener Program:

Fay Drozd, Chair

Market Days:

Lee Fry & Roy Eliff, Co-Chairs

Mentors:

Judy Simmons

Nominating Committee:

Eileen Haden

Programs:

Kathie Marlow

Public Relations:

Carol Seminara

Record Keeping &

Volunteer Hours:

Ida Luckey

Speaker's Bureau:

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& Kathie Marlow

Columnists - Christine Millar
& Barbara Elmore

Photographers - Roy Eliff
& Marilyn Pease

Webmaster - Carol Brinkman
Assistant Webmaster -
Anne Moss

The Pease/Frantom Post Office Xeriscape Project

The project started when the outdoor custodian asked MG Marilyn Pease what he could put in an area that receives no water via the sprinkler system. He said he can't get the grass to grow there and is tired of dealing with it. So since Marilyn was Keith Frantom's mentor and both work at the Post Office, she thought it would be a good project for them to tackle.



Marilyn and Keith ready to go!

They solicited donations of plants from the employees and the Post Office paid for the mulch. They report that they have received a lot of questions from the employees and customers driving by so it will be a little bit educational, too. Also, they won't have to maintain it, as Dan, the outdoor man, is a great gardener himself.

Marilyn and Keith put in agaves, prickly pear, *Salvia greggii* in pink and some cholla. Their hope is that the deer will leave all alone.



New on our website this month:

<http://www.hillcountrymastergardeners.org>

As reported at the last meeting, website traffic is increasing, and Anne Moss and Carol Brinkman are hoping this is because their efforts to simplify online searches for information relative to gardening here in central Texas are proving helpful.

They are always "Googleing" to find sites to add to the list. Commercial sites are usually avoided, but once in a while they find one that offers good information along with the sales pitch. Rather than include these businesses on our website, they thought they might use the newsletter occasionally to say, "Hey, check out this one."

This is a New Mexico mail-order nursery that features drought-tolerant plants, including plants native to the Southwest US.

So, their recommendation for our Website of the Month is:

High Country Gardens in Santa Fe, New Mexico

<http://www.highcountrygardens.com>

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plants over the winter for the greenhouse and if interested in doing this, please contact Anne. The shade house will stay open till frost.

The meeting adjourned at 1:40 pm to hear Kevin Pillow from Wild Birds Unlimited speak. The next meeting will be held at 1:00 pm on October 1, 2008.

Respectfully submitted,
Secretary

Cheri Bolden

