

December 2010
Volume 8, Issue 12

**December 1, 2010,
11:30 to 1:00
HCMG Christmas
Pot Luck Party,
Union Church**
*Check Page 2,
for details*

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President's Message - *Chris Seifert*

This is the end! November 30th ends the Hill Country Master Gardeners' year. I'm bustin' my buttons with pride over all the innovative projects, measurable successes and new ideas reported and generated at the November 3rd meeting. Thank you, Committee and Project leaders for all the updates. Thank you every-one for your spirit of teamwork and fun which makes HCMG so special.

Applause and welcome to our new **Secretary, Jackie Connelly!** Her enthusiasm and fresh perspective will be a fine addition to the Executive Committee.

Eileen Haden, our out-going 2010 Secretary, deserves our great appreciation for her dedication and timely wisdom. We wish you well, Eileen, on your next HCMG project!

I speak for myself; **Vice President, Barbara Elmore**; and Treasurer, **Roy Eliff** – "Thank you, Members, for your vote of confidence and our re-election for 2011." **Randy Simmons** will remain on the Executive Committee as the Ex-Officio Advisor.

Since our personal lives change too, if you are currently on *Leave of Absence*, or if you need to move to *Leave* status, please notify **Vice President, Barbara Elmore**. She needs your request in writing with the dates you are requesting, please. (A member returning from a *Leave of Absence* of up to two years, does not have to re-train.)

Last year we spent much time calling members who procrastinated on paying dues or reporting hours. This year, we will send a letter to every member on our roster reminding them to pay dues, renew their leaves of absence, or turn in hours if they wish to remain members. People who have forgotten, will have until the end of January to get everything in. Don't delay! Pay your dues now and make a New Year's resolution to turn in your volunteer and education hours monthly. This not only helps you keep track of the work you have done, but it saves our timekeeper and other volunteers lots of headaches.

Thank you to **Julie Bartosh** and her team for preparing our Christmas luncheon and festivities. Note! HCMG name badges, shirts and hats can be ordered at the December meeting, see details elsewhere in this newsletter.

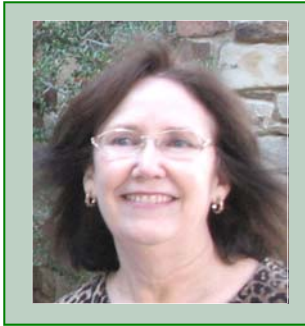
Thank you to **Jim Latham, Kathie Marlow** and **Rose Marie Mazanke** for soon updating member's biographical information and photos.

Thank you, **Tommie Airhart** and your team for reviewing, updating, and clarifying certification hours and reporting. I look forward to consistency and, hopefully, simplicity.

Thank you, **Ron Smith** and your team for creatively assessing plant sales events and Market Days. We look forward to your recommendations!

Happy Thanksgiving, and Happy New HCMG Year to all!





Betty West's "Calendar of Events" will return next month. She shares the details of the Christmas Party with us at right.



December 1 – HCMG Christmas Party and Installation of 2011 officers will be held at Union Church, 1200 Broadway at Travis (edge of Schreiner University campus) in Kerrville.

- Bring a potluck dish or dessert to share.
- Doors open at 11:30 a.m. and the luncheon buffet starts at noon.
- Name badges, shirts and hats with our new logo can be ordered at the party, so bring your check-book.

Let's all celebrate another successful year of Master Gardeners!

TOO EARLY TO PLAN FOR CHRISTMAS?



By Sherry Egloff

You might want to use holly, boxwood, nandina and rosemary for Christmas. Cuttings from my mature plants topped the mantle, clock, mirrors, picture frames and filled bowls and vases. One can make tabletop boxwood and rosemary trees, wreaths, swags and roping. I got carried away with the greens in the chandeliers. After the holidays, out went the greens leaving little to store.

These great plants enhance the native landscape, are deer proof, need no pruning except cutting holiday greens and little water - my established rosemary and nandina are never watered, boxwood rarely and holly every two weeks in drought. I highly recommend them. You can never start Christmas plans too early.




SAVE ENERGY

In cooler months, open your drapes and blinds during the day to take advantage of free solar heating. Close them as the sun sets to keep the cold out. Each degree you lower your thermostat can save up to 8 percent on your energy bills.

(According to the State of Texas Conservation Office)..

Bernadell Larson

(Follow-up to Marilyn Pease's newsletter article of November, 2009, "THE CASE OF THE MISSING BEES OR COLONY COLLAPSE DISORDER.")

A recent *New York Times* article titled "Scientists and Soldiers Solve a Bee Mystery" sheds some new light on the disappearance of honey bees or CCD. Army scientists working with entomologists have found "a fungus tag-teaming with a virus" to be a major cause of CCD. The fungus and virus are more plentiful in cool, damp weather and infect the bee's digestive system "suggesting that insect nutrition is somehow compromised." How this new information will be used to prevent further CCD spread is unknown at this time.

HCMG MEETING MINUTES, NOVEMBER 3, 2010

The meeting was called to order at 1:05 p.m. by President **Chris Seifert**. The minutes of the October meeting as reported in the newsletter were approved by general consensus. Chris Seifert announced that since we had no speaker today, this entire November meeting could be counted as "education" hours, if needed by those attending.

The treasurer's report was given by **Roy Eliff** - \$14,765 in the general account; \$57,850 in savings. Roy Eliff then made a motion that our chapter give two \$2,000 scholarships for the year 2011/2012. The motion was seconded by **Judy Fleming** and was carried.

Chris discussed with membership the amount of dollars the president and executive committee are authorized to spend. A motion was made that the president can authorize up to \$100, the executive committee \$101 up to \$1,000, and the membership \$1,001 and up. Kathy Marlow seconded the motion, and it carried. If an "emergency" should occur and time is short, the executive committee can approve a larger amount.

Eileen Haden presented again the 2011 slate of officers: **Chris Seifert, president; Barbara Elmore, VP; Roy Eliff, treasurer; and Jackie Connelly, secretary**, and asked for any other nominations from the floor. There being none, the membership voted this slate of officers be elected by acclamation.

Barbara Elmore discussed bids for new name badges and it was decided to have *Crackajack Engravers* make our badges with the new chapter logo for all members. **Rochelle Aymond** made a motion to budget up to \$800 to pay for badges; **Bernadell Larson** amended the motion to include magnetic clasps. The motion was seconded and approved. At the December Christmas luncheon, a sign-up sheet will be provided to state how you want your name on your badge.

Chris Seifert gave an update of our database project, which now includes member bio info, monthly and quarterly reports on volunteer hours for membership and for **Roy Walston**, and is still a work in progress. Regarding bio info, Chris

asked for and received volunteers for a photographer (**Jim Latham** stepped up) and an editor (**Kathie Marlow** accepted). **Rose Marie Mazanke** will work with **John LaRoche** to collect Fredericksburg member bio updates.

Announcements:

Julie Bartosh announced the December Christmas potluck luncheon will be held on Wednesday, December 1, 11:30 am – 1:00 p.m., at the Union Church, 1200 Broadway, Kerrville.

Chris Seifert reported the State MG Conference will be held in Glen Rose, TX on Apr. 27-29, 2011 and the Internat'l. MG Conference in Charleston, West Va. on Oct. 11-14, 2011.

Marilyn Pease – The greenhouse needs volunteers for annual clean up on Wednesday, November 17, 9:00 am. Bring gloves.

Chris Seifert - The Utopia Garden Club wants to bring their group to Kerrville for a garden tour of possibly three gardens in April/May. **Kathy Russell** will search membership for a tour coordinator.

Chris Seifert - MGs will continue to do Market Days, and a committee headed by **Ron Smith** will determine the criteria for MG spring and fall plant sales.

Bernadell Larson brought to our attention a "replacement appliance program." For more info, go to texaspowerfulsmart.org. She also asked if membership would be interested in trying out the *Groasis Waterbox* (article in MG November newsletter, pg. 4). See Bernadell.

Chris Seifert reviewed new, retired and pending MG projects, then called upon all committee chairs to briefly review their committee's 2010 accomplishments. At 3:00 p.m. the meeting was adjourned.

Eileen Haden
Secretary





INSECT BALANCE IN OUR GARDENS

by Bernadell Larson

Do you cringe when you see insects in your garden, especially vegetable gardens? Not to worry.

Without animals a garden cannot function. We need them, but in the right places and in the right proportions. By attracting birds, small animals, and insects into our gardens or yards, we increase biodiversity and make our gardens more balanced, disease free, and more productive. In this article and the next, we will focus on insects.

The important thing to remember is that most insects are either helpful or neutral. There is only a minority that harms plants. Insects are essential and a major factor in the web of life. Biologist E. O. Wilson calls them “the little things that run the world”.

According to the USDA, 14% of all crops are lost to insects and disease. However, fifty years ago, that number was only 7%. There are three reasons for the increase. The first is loss of soil fertility. Healthy, pest resistant plants need healthy soil and we have overworked many of our acres. The other two reasons are “fence row to fence row” clean cultivation, and heavy and ill-timed pesticide use. These two are responsible for the death of beneficial insects that used to keep the “pests” in check.

Insects that feed on plants reproduce at staggering rates, but the insects that prey on the pests reproduce more slowly. This is because there are more leaves to eat than bugs, and it takes more energy to hunt than it does to mill round and graze. As an example, aphids can get out of hand in a week or two. Ladybugs will get there quickly and attack the aphids before a gardener knows they are there. But, without a habitat for the ladybugs to shelter and breed (any rich food source will trigger ladybugs to breed), the aphids feast away. You can use pesticides to kill the aphids, but the ladybugs will be killed also. By providing an environment that

promotes the growth of beneficial insects, we can create gardens that provide a balance and what beneficial insects need.

To know how to attract beneficial insects, we need to understand the types of beneficial insects. There are four: *predators*, (they eat their prey by munching, crunching or sucking), *parasitic* (wasps and flies that lay their eggs inside or on their prey), *pollinators* (they transfer nectar between plants), and *weed feeders* (certain flea beetles eat leafy spurge that sickens cattle). If we identify what type of pest is devouring our plants, we know what type of beneficial insect we want to attract to our garden. Next month we will discuss what conditions are necessary to attract the beneficial insects to our garden.



Left: *Predatory Insect*: Ladybug larva (eats more insects than the adult) *Picture from FarmerFred.com*



Below: *Parasitic Insect*: Braconid wasp injecting eggs into a cabbage worm larva. *Illustration by Elayne Sears 2009*



Left: *Weed eating insect*: Agapeta moth larva feeding on a Knapweed root. *Illustration by Elayne Sears 2009*



THE FLIGHT OF THE MONARCH

by Marilyn Pease

As Master Gardeners, I am sure we are all aware of the amazing long-distance migration of the North American monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*). Some of us have even been lucky enough to visit their wintering spot in the El Rosario fir forests in the mountains of Mexico. However, there are some interesting facts behind this miracle of nature that need to be explored.

Here in Kerrville at 30 degrees latitude we can expect monarchs to be passing through between October 10 to October 22. The monarch can fly as much as 265 miles per day with an average of 50 miles a day. What is truly amazing is that only the last generations of monarchs born per season do the actual migration. In late summer and early fall, the third and/or fourth generations are born biologically different. They are engineered not to reproduce but to start storing fat in their abdomens (like some of us MGs) in preparation for the long journey.

There are several ongoing projects that monitor monarch migration. One is at the University of Kansas that sponsors a citizen science group that tags monarchs in the fall as they are on their way to Mexico. One of our own Master Gardeners, Tom Collins, has participated in a monarch tagging operation locally and kindly supplied the monarch tag photo. The tag itself is 9 mm in diameter and is of soft plastic with an adhesive back. It



Tagged → butterfly



lists on it a code, location, date, and sex of the butterfly. The information on the tag is relayed back to the university when and if the monarch is seen again. If you are interested in tagging monarchs in 2011 go to www.monarchwatch.org.

A second monarch monitoring project is at the University of Minnesota that concentrates more on the larval stage of the monarch and examines milkweed patches for signs of monarch eggs (the females lay one egg at a time with up to 100 eggs per plant) and larvae. Our local Texas Master Naturalist group can provide training for larval monitoring or visit www.mlmp.org for more information.

Interestingly, there is a similar species of African monarch (*Danaus chrysippus*) that does not



migrate at all. Also, our North American monarch, in 200 years of recorded observations, has colonized Hawaii, Fiji, Australia and New Zealand presumably by hitching rides on ships. These transplants have lost their migration trait as their new homes are warm all the time, alleviating the need to migrate.

Thanks again to Master Gardener **Tom Collins** for photos and additional information. He also relayed



that he would be willing to give a program on monarchs to us this coming year (and maybe point out the differences between males and females!)

Landscapes from Fredericksburg home tour and near LaGrange (at bottom) where former HCMG Harold Pieratt now lives. Harold welcomes his old HCMG friends to his all-native garden.

Fredericksburg photos by Marilyn Pease.



Applemint & autumn coleus, blue salvia, and verbena loving the weather. *Photo by former HCMG Harold Pieratt of his new yard*



Esperanza, knockouts, rock roses in full dress
Photo by Harold Pieratt



There's more to grass than turf

By Barbara Elmore

Not so many years ago, gardeners worked hard to attain the perfect carpet of turf grass.

This practice is changing. With a new emphasis on water conservation punctuated by severe shortages of water and rationing, more people are reluctant to maintain a vast outdoor carpet. The trend is toward removing St. Augustine and bermuda expanses and putting in drought-tolerant decorative grasses, cacti, and hardy blooming plants to save water, time and money.

Done thoughtfully, the replacement of turf grass can add interest to the area around a home. But taking out the lawn carpet and putting in new landscape plants does not mean going grass-free. Here are few decorative grasses that do well in this area.

Cedar sedge,

Carex

planostachys.

Although a sedge is not a true grass, this looks like a grass. Cedar sedge has thin

leaves and tolerates mowing and foot traffic.



Cedar Sedge

Purple Fountain grass,

Pennisetum setaceum 'Rubrum'. This is a favorite of many gardeners because of its color and growing ease. It will grow in sun or partial sun, and its water needs are average. It has two drawbacks, however: it can be aggressive and it is an annual unless you live in hardiness zones 9 and up, so it's a little iffy for parts of the Hill Country.



Purple Fountain Grasses

Dwarf Fountain grass, *Pennisetum alopecuroides.* This deciduous non-native gets about 3 feet tall and puts out pretty white spikes. It may not be as cold-hardy as you want it to be, and it will require a drink during prolonged dry spells. With purple fountain grass as a backdrop, it puts on a show.

Gulf muhly, *Muhlenbergia capillaris.* This Central Texas native varies from 1 to 3 feet high. It likes sun to part shade, has low to average water requirements, and attracts butterflies. Additionally, its fall colors make the air around it look pink.



Gulf Muhly

Mexican Feathergrass

(Wiregrass), *Nassella tenuissima.*

This is a low-maintenance grass that blows gracefully in the breeze. Its name is misleading; this is a native of Central Texas. Like Gulf Muhly, the height ranges from 1 foot to 3 feet. It takes very little water and likes sun or part shade. Put it in a mass planting and watch it transform your garden.

If you are looking for a tall grass, **Lindheimer's muhly,** *Muhlenbergia lindheimeri,* might be for you. Its average vertical size is about 5 feet; in some places it gets 6 feet high. This native grass requires medium water use. Plant in sun for best results.

An old garden favorite is **Monkey grass.** Commonly found in borders, monkey grass or lilyturf, *Liriope minor,* is a reliable choice because once established it is evergreen and trouble-free. Its height is generally under 6 inches, it tolerates almost any kind of light, and its water needs are average. However, do keep an eye on it. It can be aggressive.

Finally, we have to mention **Sideoats grama,** *Bouteloua curtipendula.* Unless you have a large, wild landscape this is a pretty accent grass but might be a little rough. It is a prairie grass of mid-height. But it is worth considering because since 1971, it has been the state grass of Texas.



Take a Bow!

For those of you who missed the last meeting, here's a review of 2010's projects completed and initiated. It is time to take a bow and congratulate each other! (If **Chris Seifert** missed any new or retired projects,

forgive her, and please remind her.)

2010 Retired Projects

Kerrville State Hospital – staff was hired
 Dietert Senior Center – gardener was hired
 Fredericksburg Airport - never was approved long term
 Tivy Student Garden – not approved by KISD Superintendent
 Bandera's Silver Sage Senior Center – design and implementation over

2010 New Projects/Improvements

Improvements in Horticultural Inquiry and Mentoring
 New HCMG Brochure
 Task Group began reviewing volunteer hours and reporting process
 Lipe Memorial Garden, Fredericksburg Garden Patch, Medina ISD
 Members' database development
 Harvest Partners of Kerrville
 MG Office cleaned, renovated, Office Manager position created
 Technology group created to care for equipment
 Logo developed and applications are in progress
 Harper Library garden
 Create improved sign/graphics/promotion for Demonstration Garden (approved Nov. 3)
 Evaluate Market Days and Spring Plant sales to raise educational impact (initiated Nov. 3)

Pending for 2011

- Develop research garden under Roy Walston's supervision
- B.T. Wilson 6th Grade Center youth garden, Kerrville

December Landscape Gardening Tips

by Kathie Marlow



- **December continues with clean up time in the lawn and garden.** It is also time to set out some new plantings. All classes of rose bushes can be planted during these next few weeks. Carefully protect the roots from drying before planting and then water well after planting. You should nourish the old rose bushes with some bone meal. Be sure to secure your climbing roses and other vining plants to their supports as winter winds can severely damage unprotected plants. Be careful to clean away all infested foliage from around the bush to prevent further spread next year.
- **It is also time to move and set out deciduous trees and shrubs, but it is too late for evergreens.** It is important to hydrate those evergreen plants, as they will lose moisture during the winter months.
- **When your fall chrysanthemums have lost their blooms and died back,** cut them back to within two or three inches of the ground. After the leaves fall from deciduous plants, it is time for those plants to be treated with a dormant spray. This spraying will help control overwintering insects and diseases. Be sure to continue to watch for bug or disease damage throughout the garden and take the necessary steps to control the problem now or put it on your to do list when spring rolls around, whichever time is appropriate.
- **Keep the leaves raked from the lawn.** They should be composted or you can just mow over them and turn them into mulch, which adds important nutrients back in to the lawn. After you have finished your last mowing of the year, be sure to run the mower until you run out of fuel before cleaning it off and storing it. It is also a good time to clean, sharpen and oil your garden tools to keep them from rusting and ready for storage.

Don't forget to continue to feed the birds and squirrels that you enjoy watching in your yard!

The December Vegetable Garden

By Christine Millar

Entertaining and preparations for the holidays become the priorities for this time of year. Gardening activities start to slow as the weather cools down.



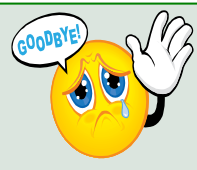
Transplants - Spinach, lettuce and cole transplants are still available early in the month however the plant nurseries will not be bringing in new supplies until spring next year. So purchase your transplants early in the month to avoid disappointment. Don't forget to harden these babies off properly for a few days. Gradually acclimate them to more exposed conditions and full sun. Prior to planting thoroughly soak the seedlings from the bottom up in sun-warmed water containing a dilute mixture of *Hasta Gro* and with a drop of *Superthrive*. Sprinkle the root ball sparingly with rock phosphate powder to stimulate root growth when you transplant them into the garden. If your transplants are in peat pots make sure to peel down the sides of the pot below the soil level of the seedling. If the top of the peat pot is above the soil line when it is transplanted into the garden it will suck the moisture out of the transplant soil. If at all possible plant your transplants just before rain is forecast. There is nothing like rainwater to boost growth and the overcast days give them time to adjust. I cover my transplanted beds with shade cloth for about a week to protect them from chilly nights and drying winds. The week after I gradually remove the shade cloth allowing the transplants to harden off, finally removing it all together.

The African Violet Nursery on I-10 brings in sturdy tomato transplants about the end of December. I share a punnet with other gardeners. Keep the tomatoes growing strongly in a south facing window and "pot on" every 3-4 weeks to keep the roots developing. Don't forget to fertilize them regularly. This is your best bet if you want to have tomatoes from your garden by

late May or early June. I usually set out these well grown transplants in late March, protected of course from sudden freezes until mid April.

Fertilizing and Watering - Water the transplants in after planting out with the diluted fertilizer and *Superthrive* mixture mentioned earlier. Keep them growing with frequent doses of diluted liquid fertilizer or side dress monthly with dry fertilizer and water in well. The liquid from the soaked rabbit droppings from a house bunny can be diluted 1 to 3 make an ideal fertilizer for the young seedlings as they grow. A *light* mulch of alfalfa hay provides protection around the transplants and small doses of a growth hormone called gibberelin. A bale of alfalfa costs \$12 but will mulch a fairly large area. The mulch layer should be thin as the soil needs to be warmed by the sun to encourage root development. Alternately a small amount of alfalfa could be soaked in water used to water the plants. I have tried feeding my plants with rabbit pellets but there was no effect. The weather can often be dry so it is important to regularly check the moisture level and water as needed. Side dress your growing plants again about one month later with rock phosphate to bring out more flavor in your harvest. Rock phosphate needs to be down a root level so make sure that you scratch it in well without harming the plant roots.

Pests - Cabbage looper eggs will continue to hatch out on sunny warm days so keep your plants under row cover or apply *Bt* preparations to the leaves. Check out the undersides of spinach and collards for burgeoning aphid populations and wash them off with a spray of soapy water. Occasionally you will come across the solitary squash and leaf-footed bugs looking to get a head start on egg-laying. Like they say in the movies, "Take the shot!" Raccoons and skunks can be a nuisance digging out young transplants looking for grubs and earthworms. I protect the young transplants with a tent of chicken wire which can be removed once they are established about a month later.



Christine Millar is sharing her last article with us this month. We will miss her expertise but her mentor, Pam Bresler, will begin writing on vegetable gardening in January.

Continues on Page 10, middle column

*Hill Country Master
Gardeners 2010 Executive
Committee*

Chris Seifert - President
Barbara Elmore - Vice President
Eileen Haden - Secretary
Roy Eliff - Treasurer
Randy Simmons - Ex-officio Advisor
Roy Walston - C.E.A. Advisor

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Archivist: Ida Luckey

*Demonstration Garden:
Dorothy & David Buchen, Chairs*

Education:

Debbie Russell, Chair

*Greenhouse: Vicki Killeen &
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*HCMG Office Manager:
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Information: Betty West

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*Market Days:
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Mentors: June Sher

Nominations: Anne Brown

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*Record Keeping & Volunteer
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Speakers Bureau: Kathy Lewis

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*Volunteer Coordination -
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Webmaster - Carol Brinkman
*Web Assistants - Anne Moss
& Julie Bartosh*

Newsletter Editor - Eleanor Baldwin
*Assistant Editors - Betty West &
Kathie Marlow*

*Columnists - Christine Millar,
Marilyn Pease, Barbara Elmore &
Judy Fleming*

*Environmental Reporter -
Bernadell Larson*

Submissions to baldwin@kctc.com

Vegetable Gardening continued:

Foraging chickens adore young cabbage and collards so keep them protected or keep your chickens locked up.

Resting beds - Sow cover crops on all beds not in use or keep them mulched to protect the soil. Hairy vetch is a good cover crop and will add nitrogen to your soil. Keep the cover crops trimmed back to about 4 inches high with hedge clippers. The shorter height is easier to dig in later a month or so before you plant and the clippings will form a protective mulch over winter. Other ways to dispose of a thick mulch just before planting is to spray the cover crop a week before with Roundup and plant your crop through the dead thatch or cover with cardboard about a month before you need the bed.

Work in a layer of compost and greensand into unused beds now to prepare for spring planting.

Slabs of limestone migrate up through the loosened topsoil from the subsoil below and winter is a good time to dig down a little and remove them.



**Website
of the
Month**

by
Carol Brinkman



I often take a photo of a plant I happen to see and then try to find out more about it.

That's not always easy when I have no idea what the plant might be. Joe, a friend at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, recommended the [University of British Columbia Botanical Forums](http://www.ubcbotanicalgarden.org/forums/) site (<http://www.ubcbotanicalgarden.org/forums/>). Though I trust Joe's knowledge of all things gardening, I was skeptical – gardening in Vancouver, British Columbia has to be very different from gardening in Texas.

The Forums site, however, is an adjunct of the UBC Plant Center for Plant Research, and thus plants worldwide are the focus. Twice now, I have submitted a photo for identification, and twice I have had an answer within the hour! If you have a photo of a plant you can't ID, go to

British Columbia for help. If one of you cannot identify this orchid, I'll go to UBC for help.

