

February 2024
Volume 22 Issue 2

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Wednesday
February 7, 2024
HCYEC

Meeting 1:00 pm
CEU 2:00 pm

Rae Raiford will
present on Herbs

See Bio on page 10



Happy valentine's day

“Texas A&M AgriLife Extension provides equal opportunities in its programs and employment to all persons, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity”.

President's Message

Sheryl Landrum

What a wonderful surprise on Christmas morning, to open the paper and see the beautiful smiling face of Anne Brown on the front page and to see the impact of all her hard work and devotion to the community acknowledged. She truly is a Texas Super Star! In fact, we have many Super Stars in our organization and I would like to acknowledge all of you here for what you do for this organization and the community as well—you are an inspiration to me, I look up to you, and make me try harder! So, what does it really mean to volunteer and to mentor? Mentor means “wise guide” and I would also add that it means caring, sharing, and getting involved with others who share a common interest and guiding them towards success. I have been a mentor, I have been mentored, and I am currently being mentored. Being a mentor was one of the best experiences I have known; the eldest daughter of three neighborhood girls began walking my dogs with me as a junior in high school. Mackenzie was a go-getter with straight A's, all honor classes, sports, school clubs, etc. Mac's parents had high expectations of her and her other two sisters. They were expected to put themselves through college and buy their own cars as well. Their parents started early bank accounts for them and all of their money gifts were deposited into same; I was Mac's first “job” as she walked my dogs with me Monday-Friday for \$5 a day. We talked about everything, but mostly school. I had a very short-lived term as a high school English teacher and I proofed her papers, scolded her for not punctuating quotes properly after telling her (at least twice!) that her college professors would mark her down for same, helped her develop her arguments in debates, challenge her thesis', wrote letters of recommendation, etc. She is a sophomore in college now; I was there for her high school graduation and I will be there for her graduation from college— as well as her sisters' graduations and weddings too! I've been adopted into a wonderful family and I love it! As for being mentored, Jackie Skinner took me under her wing and I felt blessed! As a new master gardener student, I had some unease on where I was going to “fit” within the organization; I even wondered IF I would fit!



Continued on page 9

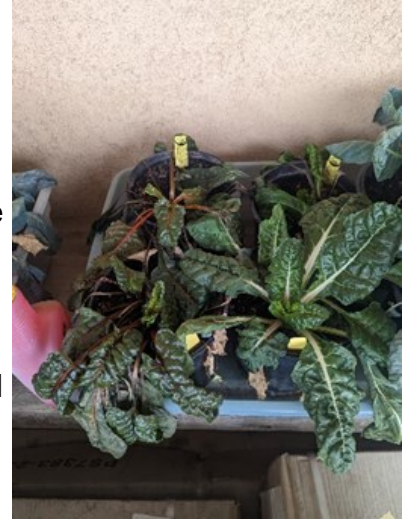


Hill Country Veggies

By Allen Mace, MG

I always enjoy this time of year. The Holydays are finally over and most family members have gone home. Now its time to look forward to and start preparing for the spring vegetable growing season. The winter season was going fairly well until we had a few days of very cold temperatures

last week. I spent the last few days playing plumber around our property. There are cold temperatures headed our way again. Winter is always a gamble. It looks as though my Swiss Chard froze back some. I've seen this before. I'll cut them back to ground level and see if some of them come back. My young cabbage plants appear to be doing fine. The Broccoli and Brussel Sprouts seem to be OK as well. These are all cold hardy plants. I saw a long-term forecast and held these plants back. I will transplant them into the garden after the next cold front goes through. I might be too late, but I'll give it a shot.



Swiss Chard



Cabbage

I have started framing in a section of my front deck to make a designated seed starting room. This will have large double pained windows, insulated walls and it's own heat source. For the past few years, I have set up my seed trays and grow lights in different areas of the house and it has been an ordeal working around them. Now is the time to be starting tomatoes and peppers. If you plan to grow your own tomatoes and peppers from seed, you should start them six to eight weeks

before you plan on putting them out, after your last freeze date. In Comfort, our last freeze date is usually the second or third week of March. I do remember we had a freeze one year on the 15th of April and that just wrecked everything that year. Young plants like the soil temperature to be above 60 degrees to promote root growth.

We should be seeing seed catalogs starting to arrive soon. I pretty much know what I want to plant, but I always enjoy browsing though these publications and seeing what this year's "Favorites" will be. It's not uncommon for me to try new varieties of tomatoes, squash or cucumbers now and then. I am also a "Gadget Geek" and love to buy new tools and gadgets. I have storage boxes full of gadgets and tools that work and those that don't.



New seed starting room



By Pam Umstead, MG

Do you have a gardener's bucket list? I do – public gardens I haven't toured, and plants I'd like to see. I just checked one of them off my list! I had heard about the amazing show Frostweed puts on, but I'd never seen it. This past summer I realized there was a large growth of it along the Kerrville River Trail, near the Lowry Park trailhead (not far from Riverside Nature Center). So, I started watching it...you might say, stalking it. I was worried by late summer when it was so hot and dry that most of the leaves shriveled up and turned crispy brown – fearing the stalks would dry up and there wouldn't be a show at first frost. But the rains came and the brown stalks grew taller with new green leaves! Then I waited... and waited...and waited for the first hard frost. Nothing happened from the little October temperature dip. Then I got a minor preview very early on Sunday morning January 7, when a few of the stems burst open. I knew there had to be more...and Saturday morning January 13 was the day! Before dawn, the temp was down to 25 degrees, and I headed to the river. At first light, the sight was amazing! The trailside was glowing with hundreds of stalks of icicles, like stalagmites on a cave floor. Upon close examination, I could see the delicate swirls of frozen sap like ice sculptures up and down each stalk...every one different and more fantastic than the last. I hope to grow some of my own next summer.

Frostweed, *Verbesina virginica*, is also known as White Crownbeard, Indian Tobacco, and Wingstem. It is a member of the Asteraceae family. I've seen it identified as both a biennial and a perennial in several sources. It grows 3-6 feet tall, and wears a crown of tiny white flowers in late summer. It has rough, grayish-green leaves, and thrives at the edge of moist woods and sunny meadows. It is found in much of the Southeast and Midwest as well as Texas. The local deer who live along the river don't seem to bother it. It is favored as an exceptional nectar source by many butterflies, including the Monarch – and is especially valuable because it blooms late in the season. And bees are very fond of its pollen. Its tall and leggy figure is perfect for the back of a natural garden. It can be trimmed by half in early summer to form a more rounded shape.

Native people used it as a diuretic and laxative, an eyewash, and to treat arthritis and kidney stones. The roots were pounded into a pulp to treat fevers and venereal disease. And the dried leaves were used as a substitute for tobacco to smoke ceremonially. As far as I'm concerned, it's the best ice show of the season!





HCMG Projects The Coming King Sculpture Prayer Garden

By Rita Aliperto, MG

Kerrville's most iconic tourist attraction, The Coming King Sculpture Prayer Garden will likely be the most sought-after, primo location to view the total eclipse on April 8th, 2024, perhaps in the whole country. This beautiful 24.5-acre park boasts spectacular views of the Texas Hill Country and, according to TripAdvisor, it ranks among the top 10% of tourist attractions worldwide, bringing in visitors from all 50 states and over 80 countries.

The garden is best known for The Empty Cross, a 77'7" steel sculpture visible from Interstate 10 and many other vantage points in Kerr County. The prayer garden, shaped like a cross, has 77 scripture verses on the walkway leading to the cross. I'm embarrassed to admit, I have been visiting Kerrville for about 15 years now, lived here for another six years, and I have never visited this attraction until last week. Walking along the 100-yard long cross-

shaped garden was an incredibly moving experience for me.

Before Master Gardeners (MGs) became involved in the project, Master Naturalist, Kathy Lyles, worked with a handful of volunteers to plant and maintain native plants throughout the park. Gardens at the Ridge designed, created and installed all the raised beds. Master Gardener, Chris Seifert, volunteered alongside Kathy in this endeavor, sharing expertise, learning about plants, irrigation, types of mulch, water-wise vegetation and volunteer management. Through trial and error, they learned which plants did well and which did not. Then Kathy moved away.... oh no, who will fill Kathy's big shoes? All the other volunteers, except Chris, knew that this project would now be passed on to her. Apparently, Chris didn't get the memo as she was the last to know.

Chris accepted the enormous responsibility, and in 2019 submitted the project to the Executive Committee for approval as a Hill Country Master Gardeners project. Chris and her team incorporated adapted plants with the natives to increase seasonal color. This also directly meshes with The Coming King Foundation's mission "to bless, inspire and educate the public through the exhibition of monumental spiritual art and Biblical scriptures". The project was approved, and Chris immediately began securing volunteers. "God's Gardeners" now include both MGs and community volunteers. She finds that the mix of experienced gardeners and those who are there to learn makes a very successful group of people. They all learn from each other and answer all kinds of questions from the public. Each year, The Coming King Foundation tries to add something new to the grounds. Last year, the Perry Walking Trail was installed. The Foundation takes great care of their volunteers as well. Currently, volunteers work either Tuesday or Friday mornings. Very soon, Chris will be looking for help with much pruning to get the plants ready for spring. If you'd like to volunteer at this project, contact Chris Seifert at (210) 478-2395 or email her at cseif654@gmail.com. Although the total eclipse in April is secondary to the awesomeness of The Coming King Sculpture Prayer Garden, if you should visit the park on that day, remember to bring your viewing glasses and your patience.

See more pictures on page 9



Kathy

Ron

Chris

HCMG Training Schedule 2024

Week/Day	Morning: 9 a.m. to Noon	Afternoon: 12:30 to 3:30 p.m.
Tuesday Feb 13 HCYEC	Class Orientation Welcome from MG President, Introduction of participants, housekeeping, schedule, books, study guides,	Garden Safety Instructor: Dave Kinneberg, MG Potting & Watering Process Green house Tour: Anne Brown
Thursday Feb 15 HCYEC	Soils of the Hill Country Instructor: Travis Waiser, USDA	Composting, Soil Amendments Instructor: Chris Seifert, MG
Tuesday Feb 20 HCYEC	Plant Biology Instructor: Brenda Fest, MG	2:30 – 1:45 Earthkind & Superstar Plants Instructor: Rae Raiford 2:00 – 3:15 Caring for Houseplants Instructor: Kay Nelson
Thursday Feb 22 HCYEC	Trees: Selection, Maintenance & Disease Management Instructors: Erin Davis, Texas A&M Forest Service	Herbs Instructors: Rae Raiford & Melayne Arnold
Tuesday Feb 27 HCYEC	Vegetable Gardening in the Hill Country Organic and Other Approaches Instructors: Pat Wolters & Beth McMahon	Entomology Instructor: Molly Keck, Entomologist, Bexar Co
Thursday Feb 29 HCYEC	Vegetable Families Instructors: Beth McMahon, Donna Bellis, Allen Mace, Connie Townsend, Rae Raiford	Vegetable Families continued Container gardening -Allen Mace Special Activity -What's that Plant?
Tuesday March 5 HCYEC	Rainwater Harvesting Instructor: Anne Brown & Karen Fuller	Vermiculture Instructor: Patty Zohlen, MG
Thursday March 7 HCYEC	Introduction to Landscaping in the Hill Country Instructor: Dennis Hale	Ornamental, Native and Turf Grasses Instructor: Dennis Hale
Tuesday March 12 HCYEC	9:00 – 10:30 Drip Irrigation - Instructor: Dan Abel 10:45 – 12:00 Chemical Safety Instructor: Mike Morris	Fire-wise Including Landscaping Plants Instructor: Anne Brown
Thursday March 14 HCYEC	Research Desk Responsibilities Instructors: Anne Brown & Melayne Arnold	Plant Pathology Instructor: Kim Cochran (TAMU)
Tuesday March 19 HCYEC	Propagation Instructors: Debra Lea & team	Propagation
Thursday March 21 RNC	Native Plants of the Hill Country Lecture and tour of Riverside Nature Center	12:30 pm UGRA Eduscape Lecture & Tour 125 Lehmann Dr, Kerrville
Tuesday March 26 Gillespie Agrilife	Fruit Trees – Everything you want to know Instructor: Beth McMahon, Horticulture Agent	Garden Tours (Divide into 3 groups) Good Samaritan Garden Lipe Garden Biblical Garden
Thursday March 28	STEAM Garden Dinah Zike Academy, Comfort	Cultivar & Herff Garden Tours in Boerne
Wednesday April 3 HCYEC	9-10 Final exam review & HCMG survey 10-11:30 HCMG Leadership, Committee Work & Volunteer Opportunities	1:00 HCMG Monthly Meeting Interns are encouraged to attend meeting & CE Program 2:00 CEU Program

Harvester Ants

Heroes, Not Headaches: Reframing the Reputation of Harvester Ants

Taken from an article in Entomology Today from Feb 1, 2022

Harvester ants are common to most arid regions of the world. The name refers collectively to ants that harvest and consume seeds, primarily those in the genera *Pogonomyrmex*, *Messor*, and *Veromessor*. These ants collect a wide range of plant seeds and often construct large nests cleared of vegetation. Some species possess powerful stings, and most are opportunistic predators and scavengers. Through sheer abundance, harvester ants dominate many habitats, having enormous effects on associated ecosystems and human activities.

Harvester ants play many important roles in ecosystems. Harvester ants harvest seeds from a variety of plants, build large nests which enhance soil nutrients, prey upon various arthropods, and is a food source for many invertebrates. The true effect of harvester ants on landscapes is best seen from above. In some cases, the nest clearings from ants account for over 15 percent of land area. Historically, this seemingly obvious reduction in vegetation did not sit well with some ranchers. In the western United States, ants were seen as enemies of range productivity. However, while ants clear vegetation on nest disks (the area immediately above and around a nest), vegetation flourishes along nest rims. Along a harvester ant colony's nest rim, plants benefit from access to increased nutrients deposited in the soil by the ants and from decreased competition thanks to the ant's diligent clearing on the disk side. Once ecologists began measuring the growth of plants along ant nest rims, it became clear that the nest-rim vegetation more than made up for the cleared vegetation. More importantly, ecologists found that, following disturbances such as fire, grazing, and drought, nest rims become points of recovery for vegetation. Nest rims often host the first plants to grow back, and those go on to recolonize the rest of the landscape. Harvester ants are now known to be beneficial for creating these "islands of fertility."

Not only are nests islands of fertility for vegetation, but they also provide a home for a wide range of organisms. "House guests" such as mites, silverfish, beetles, and springtails live alongside ants inside their nests, and soil biota such as bacteria, mycorrhizae, and protists are abundant in ant nest soils. An assortment of beetles and other arthropods scavenge from harvester ant "trash dumps," where ants pile their refuse; these often contain discarded seeds and are nutrient rich environments. Nests therefore become biodiversity hotspots, hosting dozens or even hundreds of species that all play a part in recycling nutrients and energy within the ecosystem. Harvester ants themselves play important roles in food chains as both predators and prey. Opportunistic and armed with powerful mandibles, anything the ants can overpower is a potential source of food (in addition to seeds, of course!). Meanwhile, for many other arthropods, birds, lizards, and small mammals, harvester ant workers are an abundant food source. Some species of horned lizards are entirely dependent on harvester ants as a source of food. Harvester ants are also an important food source for the endangered sage grouse—which, incidentally, also likes to climb on top of ant mounds when it dances for mates! Some species of harvester ants do possess powerful stings, which certainly have contributed to their perceived negative image. But, fortunately, harvester ant stings are relatively easy to avoid as they do not fly and rarely enter homes. Harvester ants' wide range of ecological effects are fascinating and show how small insects can help shape entire ecosystems.

Editors sad note: I was so excited to find a nest at my Airbnb. I left this article on the table so guests wouldn't be alarmed at the nest off the back porch. Unfortunately, the harvester ant nest is gone—I don't know why?



TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION

DOOR
PRIZES
DRAWN
AT THE
END!

6TH ANNUAL PLANTASTIC VEGETABLE GARDENING SEMINAR

February 23, 2024 8:30 am - 3:35 pm

LOCATION:

Gillespie County Extension Office
38 Business Court
Fredericksburg, TX 78624

PRE REGISTRATION:

Deadline: February 21, 2024

Cost: \$40 with lunch

\$30 without lunch

Paper registration form available by
request.

DAY OF PROGRAM:

Cost: \$30 without lunch.

Credit Cards not accepted.

Contact the Extension Office at
(830) 997-3452 for more information.



SCAN QR CODE
TO REGISTER



GENERAL SESSIONS

Special guest speaker Dr. Joe
Masabni will present on organic
gardening and hydroponics.



BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Growing Herbs
Raising Your Own Tomatoes
The Permaculture Ecosystem
Growing Alliums: Onions, Garlic & More!
Good Bugs & Troublemakers



LIGHTNING ROUND BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Gardening Disasters
Vegetables for Heat
Conserving Water in Vegetable Gardens



TEST YOUR VEGETABLE IDENTIFICATION KNOWLEDGE

Test your vegetable identification
knowledge at the seedling table!

**Hill Country Master Gardeners
HCYEC
January 10, 2024**

Call to Order (Please silence your cell phones)

Welcome/Opening Remarks – Sheryl Landrum welcomed the group and expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to serve as President.

Pledge of Allegiance was recited by the group.

Invocation – Patty Zohlen delivered the invocation.

Verification of Quorum – Marge Muniz verified a quorum had been met.

Approve Minutes from December 6, 2023 Meeting. Imelda Horne moved to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Kay Nelson.

Treasurer's Report – Rachel Garrison explained line items on the December Treasurer's report. She then presented the budget for 2024. Rachel explained that the cost for the background checks have increased. Dave Kinneberg also noted that the yearend fluctuations do occur from year to year with some years showing a shortfall, as in 2022, and some reflect a gain, as in 2023. Melayne Arnold moved to approve the budget as presented. The motion was seconded by Tex Lang. The motion for the 2024 Budget was approved by acclamation.

Jackie Connelly also reminded everyone that expenditures over \$1,000 from the budgeted amounts are approved by the membership. If the amount is over the budgeted amount and under \$100, the President needs to approve, and anything between \$100 and \$1,000, the Executive Committee needs to approve.

BUSINESS ITEMS

The membership welcomed 2 new transfers. Patricia O'Conner from Chesapeake, Virginia and Delayne Caesar Sykes from Tyler, TX.

Rachel Garrison asked for additional volunteers to be mentors for the new interns. It provides a great opportunity to involve the interns into HCMG, to be a sounding board to the interns and provides an additional way to get volunteer hours.

Rae Raiford also spoke about her positive and rewarding project mentoring experience with the 4-H group. She also mentioned the Science Expo Day, March 8th, at the Tom Daniels Elementary from 8 to 12:30. She noted there are many opportunities to volunteer.

Standing Committee Reports

Education – Donna Bellis stated there are 22 students for the new class. The small group initiations went well. She welcomed the transfers to audit some of the classes, particularly the ones specific to the Hill Country on Soil, Vegetables and Propagation. She noted that students will be learning about the various volunteering projects during the classes rather than at graduation day. Representatives of the projects are being asked to do a short 5-7 minute presentation.

Membership – Barbara Castillo has been working through the new background check process with the 22 applicants. The new 3 step process has been more than a bit trying to get completed. She has been working through the issues with Sterling, EVS and Agrilife, but it has been difficult, to say the least.

Demonstration Garden – Dave Kinneberg reported they were preparing for the upcoming freeze by covering the plants. Dave attended the December 9th Eagle Scout presentation for Conner Tippens who did his Eagle Scout project for the Demo Garden wall.

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Minutes continued from page 9

Greenhouse – Kay Nelson stated there are already 280 plants in the greenhouse. The watering schedule has been filled to take care of these plants. As new plants arrive the pot parties will be initiated with times to be posted on VMS and announced via email. Kay mentioned that she needed 2 to 4 tall individuals after the meeting to assist with rolling back the shade cloths.

Research Desk – In Anne's absence, Jackie Connelly noted that there are 3 interns left to complete their research desk hours but there are slots identified through VMS to work the Research Desk if members want to start earning their 2024 volunteer hours.

The meeting adjourned at 1:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Marge Muniz, Secretary



Frostweed photo taken by
Patty Zohlen's husband, Paul,
at their deer camp

President's message continued from page 1

Jackie asking me to work in the demo garden gave me a "real" master gardener job and helped me find my place and a sense of belonging to our organization. Bringing me into her landscaping design group, taught me how to do landscape designs and I learned I have a passion for that. Every project you volunteer for, and every person you work with, brings new knowledge to your tool kit as it, hopefully, does theirs as well.

Today, I am currently being mentored by Dave, Jackie, Rae, Rachael, Anne, and so many others here in my new role as President. Without them beside me, and guiding me, I would not have said yes to the position. Without helpful hands as a student, I probably wouldn't be writing this current newsletter or feel as much dedication and commitment to this organization. I truly have not met a better organization then the HCMGs. We do need mentors for our newer students and recent graduates; I hope that if you aren't mentoring now, you will consider it. I would bet money that you will not regret doing so and you will probably enjoy new friendships—some that may last for life.

Be a Texas Super Star!

Hill Country Master Gardeners 2024 Executive Committee

Sheryl Landrum
President

Rae Raiford
Vice President

Marge Muniz
Secretary

Jackie Connelly
Treasurer

Dave Kinneberg
Ex-officio Advisor

C.E.A. Advisor

Committees & Project Coordinators are listed on our website

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Gardening 101 Program at Butt-Holdsworth Library

By Patty Zohlen, MG



Rae Raiford presented a program on “Texas Superstars” to an audience of twenty people. She explained the Texas Superstars research and marketing program and how the plants acquire their status as Texas Superstars. She also shared “Earthkind” Gardening tips and answered questions from the audience. Those attending received a current Texas Superstars booklet.



I was born and raised in the military and I lived up and down the east coast (from Canada to Cuba - My dad was a Marine). I have a BS in Education from Southwest Texas State University. I moved into my grandmother’s house in Center Point when I married my husband over 30 years ago. I have four grown children. I am a retired science teacher/coach and taught for 30 years spending most of my time at the in middle school level. I taught chemistry, earth, physics, life and space sciences. I became a Hill County Master Gardener in 2022 and a Hill Country Master Naturalist in 2023. I am certified in advanced training for TX Superstar plants, Vegetable Gardening, & Junior MG. I’m working to complete my Herb certification. I volunteer time at several gardens in Kerrville and serve on the education, mentoring and executive committees in the HCMG program. I’m currently the Vice President of HCMG.