

UrbanDirt

IN COOPERATION WITH THE TEXAS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Camellias for Texas

By Dr. William Welch

Extension Specialist - Texas A&M University

Like so many of the South's cherished ornamental plants, camellias originated in China and came to North America via Europe. The genus *Camellia* includes many species, but of these, three are of special importance and interest as Southern plants: *Camellia sinensis*, *Camellia japonica*, and *Camellia sasanqua*.

Of these three, the one that evoked the most intense interest in the early days of the Southern colonies was *Camellia sinensis*, a shrub that, truth be told, is of no special ornamental value. It is a reasonably attractive evergreen plant that bears single, cream-colored flowers. The blossoms were of no concern to colonial planters. What they were interested in was the plant's foliage, which when dried and processed may be brewed into the popular beverage, tea. This was an ancient taste in China and Japan, and the cultivation of the tea plant had been carried on in those landscapes since ancient times. Tea-drinking became the fashion in England in the late sixteenth century or early in the seventeenth century, but because the leaves had to be shipped in from China, for a long time tea remained an expensive luxury.

Because of the interest in tea consumption the British took an early interest in establishing domestic tea production in the American South. The famous Trust Garden in Savannah was the first to receive seeds of tea. This occurred in 1744. Those first seeds did not grow but plants were sent in 1772 to Georgia and recorded as growing on Skidaway Island near Savannah before 1805. By 1813 a serious effort to grow tea was underway at Charleston, South Carolina. That planting did not flourish there either nor did they prosper in Texas—there is a record by the Cat Springs Agricultural Society of unsuccessful attempts at tea culture by early German settlers. Cat Springs is located near Bellville, Texas.

A successful commercial planting of tea was finally established by the Lipton Tea Company near Charleston where it is still in production although under a private label and no longer owned by Liptons. Like all camellias, *Camellia sinensis* requires an acid, well-drained, moist soil.

The tea bush has a more beautiful relative, one which did take root in the American South, and that is *Camellia japonica*. This species is best known to Southern gardeners for its handsome foliage and elegant winter and early spring flowers. A native of Korea, China, and Japan, this camellia has flower colors that range from white to turkey red, with many variegated forms. Although well-adapted to much of the south, *C. japonica* has a reputation for being difficult to grow when exposed to less than its ideal conditions. It is, however, by far the most important species of the three in relation to our Southern gardening heritage, and specimens of *Camellia japonica* mark the site of many important



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President's Thoughts

By Virginia Joiner

If you did not make it to the Tomato and Pepper Sale you missed a great experience. When I got to the Extension at 7 AM, people were already lined up. By the time the gate opened at 8 AM there were 240 people ready to go shopping. That was just the beginning. We had a perfect day for the sale.

The greenhouse was a sight to see. There were over 4000 tomato plants available for sale and we sold 3,856 of them. Everyone had a favorite they were looking for and were so eager that we had difficulty getting the tomatoes out of the greenhouse. We had wonderful slicers, delicious grape tomatoes as well as romas, both for eating and for making puree. There were red tomatoes, yellow tomatoes and even a striped green one called green zebra.

There were all types of sweet peppers, and some very hot ones as well. The one that everyone seems to come for is La Parie. **Diane Ballentine** and her crew did a wonderful job and sold everything but a few of the very, very hot ones. The greenhouse and JLL's Nursery grew the peppers for the sale.

Dave Mason made a wonderful selection of herbs. Of the ones that were left after the sale was over, **Ivana Shumberg** and **Mike Spangler** bought some for our herb garden and the Master Garden class bought the rest for the drawings that they hold on class day. It was wonderful to call **Janice Teas** and tell there was nothing for her to pick up.

Scott Hume made sure, as usual, that we had all the volunteer help we needed for both days. **Jean Gordon**, our Hospitality Chairman, and her group provided us with a wonderful lunch. **Jean Fefer** and her greenhouse gang, as always did an outstanding job of growing the tomato plants for the sale. We can never thank them and the volunteers that helped bump the tomatoes up enough. A big hand goes to **Becky Deasy** for all of the beautiful signage. Our volunteer Master Gardeners are what make these sales a success. I want to give you all a big round of applause for a job well done.

Thank you!

Wear your smile and come into the garden.

"By 8:00 am there were 240 people ready to go shopping."



Harris County Master Gardener Association

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Michael's Corner

Breakfast in the Garden.

By Michael Morrison



Good morning Texas gardeners! Did you know your morning breakfast leftovers are ideal supplements for a healthy garden? “More Coffee and Eggs Please”

The history of coffee is interesting. Coffee was originally used by the Galla tribe of Ethiopia around 1000 A.D. They used it for stamina during long walks across the desert. To prepare it, they would grind the beans and mix them with animal fat for a quick jolt of energy while on the trek.

Coffee beans originally came from Yemen, and then spread to Arabia where monks cultivated it in their gardens. They called it “qahweh,” which means “prevents sleep.” By mixing it with boiling water this drink became popular and still is today. Although it was still used for food and sometimes even medicine, the java rage of drinking coffee has stood the test of time.

Research shows that coffee protects against liver cirrhosis and that drinking three cups of coffee a day can reduce the risk of fatal liver disease by up to forty percent. But, did you know that you should be putting your coffee grounds in the garden or flower beds? Coffee grounds are considered a very good nitrogen source, and combined with brown material, such as leaves or pine straw in your compost bin; they generate heat to speed up the composting process. An easy way to fertilize your plants is to saturate coffee grinds with water and pour around the plants. This is a secret recipe for putting nutrients into the soil that will help your plants thrive.

So, do plants benefit from coffee grounds and aspirin? Well, coffee grinds usually acidify the soil and have some of the same benefits as mulch. The pH of coffee grounds varies with the bean type, type of grounds, how it is brewed, and how long they’ve been sitting around. The aspirin helps the gardener that may be having a hard time growing plants by adverting a headache, ha ha. Coffee grounds are great for gardens and you put less in the landfill, fulfilling a dual purpose and makes things beautiful to boot.

You can put your coffee grounds on plants that favor acid-rich fertilizer such as roses, camellias, evergreens, and azaleas. Most folks recommend that you dry out the coffee grounds and scattering them lightly around the plants. Used coffee grounds contain about two percent nitrogen and have many other important trace minerals.

I know one person that puts the grinds in a pot, adds water, gets it boiling and then pours it over fire ant mounds. Another friend of mine transports his fishing worms in a half-full can of moist coffee grounds. When he is finished with the fishing, he dumps it in the flower bed. Talk about another dual purpose!

The annual Coffee Cultural Festival is the oldest product festival in Hawaii, and the only coffee festival in the United States. In Louisiana where coffee is king and the appreciation is a birth right and art form, each Mardi Gras, the King of the Krewe of Coffee tosses coffee beans with his beads and doubloons on Canal Street to keep the state’s well-earned reputation of culinary finesse.

Some of the more well known coffee shops give away coffee grounds to customers, so make sure and ask them and save your grounds at home for the garden too.

Eggshells, I understand are good for your garbage disposal, but how about your garden. Eggshells consist of ninety- three percent calcium carbonate, and also contain nitrogen, phosphoric acid and other trace elements. This makes them a practical fertilizer for your garden plants and great for the compost pile too. Another way to apply eggshells is to put them in a five gallon bucket and let them soak for ten days. Then take the eggshells out and put them in the compost bin and use the liquid around the plants and you will not have the “egg look.” **Michael Bettler**, from Lucia’s Gardens suggests an ‘eggshell cocktail.’ Take the shell of two eggs and rinse them, put them in the blender with a cup of water, make into a fine slurry and pour them around the root systems of the plants. By doing this you will add calcium, phosphorus, and potassium and each time you water you are introducing these into the soil and uptake by the plant. Broken eggshells in the garden also help in the war against slugs.



So, have breakfast in the garden, laugh a lot, smile and laugh even more!

Web Surfin'

Tech News for Master Gardeners

By Tom H Robb, Jr



Computer storage has advanced a long way from the 5.25-inch floppy diskettes of the early years to today's key chain products which are the current rage.

I remember back in 1983 when IBM came out with the XT Model PC which had the most amazing component - a hard drive. And it had the amazing capacity of 10 megabytes of storage. That and its huge memory of 256 kilobytes promised all the computing power that a person could conceive. Of course, that 10 Mb drive had a price tag of \$2000, and after all, how could you possibly ever need that much storage anyway. The newest spreadsheet was Lotus 1-2-3 ver. 1 and it was contained on one 5.25-inch 360k floppy and required only 138k of memory to run. And if you found a good sale, you could get a box of 10 5.25-inch floppies for only \$20.00. The IBM PC-XT, like the earlier model ran at the blistering speed of 4.77 MHz.

Next came the smaller, but better protected 3.5 inch floppies - first with 720k, then 1.2Mb and finally a full 1.44Mb. These could be carried around in your pocket but had to be kept away from a telephone. The ringing magnet of the telephone could erase or corrupt anything that was on the disk.

Introduction of the CD made quite a stir among computer aficionados. A demonstration was given at a HAL-PC general meeting, which I attended, and we were informed that an entire bible could be entered on only one disk of about 500 megabytes. It was interesting but the price was enormous. The prices came down and the capacity of the disks went up - 650Mb and currently 700meg. The early CD drives were read only. Then came recordable CD drives and then rewritable CD drives. Next came the DVD drives, the recordable DVD drives and lately the rewritable DVD drives. Each of these drives and the disks were extremely expensive when first introduced and each has dropped in price after a comparatively short time. More on CDs and DVDs in a future column.

In the meantime, Iomega introduced the Zip-Drive with its 100mb and 250mb disks and the Jazz-Drive with its 1GB disks. Several companies produced tape drives for backup and at one time, Seagate produced a drive and program that permitted tapes to be used as a regular drive, adding or deleting programs and permitting defragmentation. These drives were very popular during the 90's but ceased being practical for the home computer when large capacity hard drives began being the standard.

Hard drives over the past 20 years have continually become larger and larger while the price has continually gone down. The minimum recommended size of hard drive is now about 40 gigabytes while drives as large as or larger than 200 gigabytes are very reasonably priced. Internal storage devices usually list EIDE (Enhanced Integrated Drive Electronics) or ATAPI (Advanced Technology Attachment Packet Interface) as their interface type. But the next wave in hard drive technology will be the SATA (Serial Advanced Technology Attachment). So when you are considering a new PC, also consider purchasing one with a SATA hard drive. The once popular, but expensive SCSI (Small Computer System Interface), is today used mostly in network servers.

An internal storage device is generally less expensive and faster than a comparable external device. On the other hand, external drives are easier to set up - you merely need to plug it into a compatible port on the back or front of your computer case.

Slowest external interfaces include parallel and USB (Universal Serial Bus) 1.1 ports. Faster options include FireWire, which transfers data at speeds up to 400Mbps (megabits per second) and USB 2.0, which transfers data as fast as 480Mbps. The older USB 1.1 ports transfer data at a mere 12Mbps.

One of the latest craze in PC and notebook storage, are portable USB storage devices, called "jump drives" which are small enough to attach to a key chain. They come as a small encased "stick" about three inches or so in length. One end terminated in a USB plug which is simply inserted into one of the USB plugs on the back or front of your computer case. No drivers are required and Windows automatically finds it and sets it up as another lettered drive. Data can be transferred to and from it in the same manner as any hard drive. The speed of transfer is somewhat slower than between hard drives but it is extremely portable and small. I received a 128mb Lexar Media Jump Drive for Christmas and use it for backing up Master Gardener files. Lexar Media and others produce Jump Drives up to 1GB in capacity.

Happy surfin'

Garden Gifts

News from our Outreach Gardens

By Kenneth Dorman

The energy for our successful spring and summer gardens in the Houston area starts in February. The work that went into getting the beds ready peaked in the last weeks of that month and culminated in the planting of most of the crops in March. It is difficult for me to describe the satisfaction that comes from adding wonderful compost and cottonseed meal to the beds, turning them over by hand and making them ready to receive the plants and seeds that will ensure a fresh source of vegetables and fruit to the clients of the Christian Community Service Center and Bonita Street House of Hope. How can you describe the feeling you get from seeing someone on the plus side of sixty up in a two foot raised bed that is made of shaky bricks, digging with a spade fork, turning in the compost and cottonseed meal. The fact that it was **Shirley Nix** makes it easier to understand since she is younger than the rest of us. This woman can work!

All the time we were spreading compost and fertilizer we had a serenade from the momma Mockingbirds. They were all around and highly approving of the work we were doing. Seems like they understood we getting ready to plant tomatoes for them. One in particular stayed atop a wild rose bush near the compost heap and sang the whole time we were there. A lesser person would probably think they were worth something more than gumbo fodder.

As usual, **George Williams** has said that the potatoes would not come up and that the 1015 onions were not growing properly. And as usual he has miscalculated. George spent his early years on a red dirt farm in Mississippi that is a bit north of Houston and did not have the advantage of the Harris County Master Gardener expertise. I'm joking about George, actually he is an excellent farmer. Joining George in his negativity, **Walter** says there is no way the pear trees will ever bloom and that we should pull them out. We have discussed these trees before and if Walter is correct they will fly away, but I personally think we will be picking pears later this year.

Dr. Bob is our resident mechanic. He must have been a surgeon before he retired and came to help us since he always has all the tools he needs to fix whatever is broken on the irrigation system. He carries a five-gallon bucket with enough stuff to fix a leak in a 5" water line. No, we don't have a 5" water line; it was just a late night figure of speech.

"...back when that
was somewhat right
of Attila the Hun"

I want to try to say something here even though I don't have much space. Politically my father was one of a now extinct breed, a conservative Democratic, back when that was somewhat right of Attila the Hun, and I kind of followed his thinking for most of my life and still do to a certain extent. However, I am beginning to wonder about what I am breathing and eating, taking into my body physically. Here in Harris County we live in constant smog brought on by unrestricted manufacturing and petroleum processing companies, eat fish and shellfish from

one of the most polluted bay systems in the world and think we are living a great life. The spin is upon us! Imagine a four-inch rain washing over all the concrete and lawns in Harris County and going down the drains and into Galveston and Trinity Bays. Want some raw oysters? Or even hard fried? Think about how much chemical fertilizer and weed killer and pesticide you use each year. Down the gutter it goes and into the bay. Please stop. And please vote to make your political representatives stop giving away our natural heritage.

A Course In Miracles says, "All that I give is given to myself". Think about that for fifteen minutes in a quiet place.

Regardless of whatever, love yourself some each day.

HCMGA News & Events

Bear Creek News & Notes

Texas State MG Newsletter Available. Texas Master Gardener Association Spring 2004 Newsletter is available at http://www.texasmastergardeners.com/spring_2004.html.

Interested in Worm Composting? It seems that when it rains it pours... We have had several offers lately of both materials for a Worm compost bed, as well as starter worm colonies. The problem is that our Master Composter, Ray Wallace, does not have the space or the time to get involved in that. If there are MGs who would like to devote the time to get such a project started here at the Extension, please contact Scott Hume ASAP at (281) 855-5635. Before the offers of materials and worms go away.

Master Gardener Table. We still need a few more volunteers to man the MG Table at the **House Beautiful Show** at Reliant Center, April 16 - 18. Remember, your participation earns you FREE Entry to the show. We also need someone to act as the Coordinator for the table for that Saturday and Sunday the 17th & 18th. Contact Scott Hume at (281) 855-5635.

Earth Day Celebration. There will be a Master Gardener Table at the **Sampson Elementary** Earth Day Celebration in Cole Crossing off Barker Cypress at 290. Master Gardeners are needed to answer gardening questions from 10 am till Noon. **Stephanie Baker** has done a fine job out there and deserves the support of a couple of us to show up and help her. Contact Scott Hume if you can help.(281) 855-5635.

Bear Creek Events

Apr 6 - Hamburger Tuesday. We will be busy in the gardens getting ready for the Spring Plant Sale. Our visitors always like to stroll our gardens at this time enjoying all the blooms, etc. So be sure to come early, bring some of your hand tools if possible, and be ready to work up an appetite for those hamburgers. Our program topic will be **"Landscape Lighting"**. **Paul Goss and Joseph Toth** are with Lumiscape and Texas Landscape Lighting Supply (a new company they are starting). They will be talking about moods/effects that we can create with landscape lighting, types of materials, new products on the market, etc. They will talk about what we as Master Gardeners can do ourselves as well as what we need to have a professional do because of codes, safety, etc. They will bring samples of some new lighting products on the market for you to see.

Apr 20 - General Meeting. Our meeting will begin promptly at 7:00 p.m. **Vince Mannino**, County Extension Agent – Horticulture from Jefferson County will be with us to share some of the best **"Goofy Garden Questions"** he's had over the years. Then try to answer some of yours.

Apr 24 - Spring Plant Sale. Set-up will be on Friday and the sale on Saturday the 24th. Sign up now to help on these days.

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HCMGA News & Events

Continued from page 6

May 1 - Plant Propagation Workshop. The recently formed Outreach Education Advisory Committee has been working on developing new workshops and seminars for the public. The committee is pleased to announce their first workshop 'Plant Propagation' will be held from 8:00 am – 5:00 pm on May 1st. Come learn to propagate your own plants through seeds, cuttings and grafting. The fee is \$45 and attendance will be limited to 40. at (281) 855-5635.

May 12 - Hamburger Tuesday. After a morning of working in the gardens followed by our Hamburger Lunch, we will have the privileged of hearing our own **Michael Morrison** speak on his favorite topic – “Palms and Other Tropicals”. Hopefully he will have some up-to-date pictures of the Palms on his property. Those of us who had the opportunity to visit his property (part of a field trip) are anxious to see how it is developing.

May 12 - HCMGA Book Sale. We also have another special treat this morning – **Anne O'Neil** will be setting up a HCMGA Book Sale table. Once we graduate, we do not seem to have as many opportunities to buy books and help out the HCMGA. I know she has several books that were not offered two years ago. So come prepared to purchase that book you've been wanting or buy a gift – Mother's Day is just a few days away!

May 6-8 - Texas State Master Gardener Convention. Registration information is now available on the web at <http://nueces-co.tamu.edu/> or you can contact **John Plotzki** or **Charles Reass**. The conference always has good speakers, great tours, and lots of good fellowship. Try to go. We'd like to be well represented at this conference.

May 15 - Master Gardener Home Garden Tour.

We have a variety of gardens this year and you will be sorry if you don't attend all of them. More information will be available in next month's newsletter. Tour guides will be available at the Extension Office for those who do not have internet access. We are planning to have the Tour Guide available on the internet like we did last year. These should be available on May 1st.

General Meeting – May 18th

A “Potluck Dinner” will be a part of this evenings events. Meat, beverage, and bread will be provided. Bring a salad, vegetable, or dessert to share with everyone. Our speaker this evening will be **Melody Mixon** on **Honey Bees**.

Bear Creek Events

Apr 6 - Hamburger Tuesday

8:00 a.m.: Work up an appetite
11:30 a.m.: Home cooked burgers
Noon: **Landscape Lighting** by **Paul Goss & Joseph Toth**

Apr 20 - General Meeting

6:30 p.m.: Refreshments
7:00 p.m.: **Vince Mannino** on **“Goofy Garden Questions”**

Apr 24 - Spring Plant Sale

May 1 - Plant Propagation

Workshop. 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. at the Extension Office. \$45.

May 4 - Hamburger Tuesday

8:00 a.m. Garden Volunteer Hours
11:30 a.m. Home Cooked Burgers
Noon: **Palms and other Tropicals** by **Michael Morrison**

May 6-8 – Texas State Master

Gardener Convention. Corpus Christi, Texas.

May 15 – Master Gardener

Home Garden Tour. Tour Guides available May 1st.

May 18 – General Meeting

6:00 p.m. POTLUCK DINNER. Come early with your dish to share.

7:00 p.m. **Honey Bees** by **Melody Mixon**

Precinct 2 News & Events

We've certainly had a busy month at Precinct 2 gearing up for two back-to-back plant sales. We're all putting our feet up and breathing a sigh of relief that it's over. A huge thank you goes out to everyone from Precinct 2 who participated, making our Spring Sale our most successful ever and increasing sales at WaterSmart over last year. Greatly missed at the sales is **Angela Chandler's** mother. **Stanlibeth** is recovering from a stroke and was unable to take her usual spot at the Community Outreach table. Get well soon Stanlibeth, we miss you! The Master Gardeners who work so hard at the sales are greatly appreciated, but when they get their families involved it really mean a lot. An extra special thanks goes to **Fred Chandler** and **Richard Oren**, who spend the whole day with us. Thanks to **Brian Corey** and **Gus Jackson** for helping with tear down, it's so good to see fresh faces and hands at the end of a long day. Also, a huge thanks to **Ginia Keen** and Mauris Mattern for providing a truck and helpers to haul supplies back to the garden.. Location is everything and **Clear Lake United Methodist Church** has been generous in providing us with a wonderful setting for our plant sales. **Laurie Mount**, event coordinator at the church, deserves thanks also; she helps us in so many ways.

Our First Wednesday Program had a great turn out, Angela Chandler taught Fern Propagation. We saw many new faces due in large part to **Kaye Corey** and **Anna Swander** promoting our programs at the Spring Sale, great job ladies!

Coming up **April 7th** our program will feature **Greg Harmison** from Mercer Arboretum. Greg will be presenting Tropical Plants for Houston at 10 am. This program is free, just be sure to bring a dish if you'd like to stay for our potluck lunch.

Wednesday, **April 14th** we will be taking a field trip out to **Tea's Herbs and Orchids** in Magnolia. We will be meeting at the garden at 8:30 am to carpool. We're planning to stop for lunch at the Whistle Stop.

First Wednesday, **May 5th - Copper Tubing Garden Art**, 10 am at the GFG Garden. In this workshop **Gloria Gibson** will lead us in making a water faucet rain gauge (like the one we fought over at our gift exchange!) to take home. **Angela Chandler** will demonstrate several other ways to create garden art using copper tubing. The class is \$20.00 and pre-registration is required. The deadline for registering is May 2nd, or until the class is full. Call (281) 991-8437 to reserve a spot or for more information. Lunch will be potluck so please bring a dish if you'd like to participate.

We're excited about the **State Master Gardener Convention** coming May 6-8. A group of us are already planning on going and have reserved rooms. If you are interested in going and need a roommate please let us know, there may be someone else looking too and we'll try to help you out. You can email **Pat Mitrowski** at Patricia.Mitrowski@sbcglobal.net or call (281) 991-8437.

Precinct 2 Events

Apr 7 – First Wednesday

9:30 a.m. Registration
10:00 a.m. **Greg Harmison** on **Tropical Plants for Houston**.
11:00 a.m. **Pot Luck Luncheon**.
Bring a dish to share. 1202 Genoa Red Bluff. For reservations call (281) 991-8437.

Apr 14 - Field Trip to Tea's Herbs and Orchids.

8:30 a.m. Meet at 1202 Genoa Red Bluff.

May 5 – First Wednesday

9:30 a.m. Registration
10:00 a.m. **Gloria Gibson & Angela Chandler** on **Copper Tubing Garden Art**. Fee is \$20.00 and the deadline for registering is May 2nd, or until the class is full. Call (281) 991-8437.
11:00 a.m. **Pot Luck Luncheon**.
Bring a dish to share. 1202 Genoa Red Bluff. For reservations call (281) 991-8437.

May 6-8 – Master Gardener's "Texas State Convention"

Corpus Christi, Texas

Events Around Town

Bulb Mart Pre-Ordering

The Garden Club of Houston is expanding their "pre-order department" for the **62nd Annual Bulb and Plant Mart** 2004 set for October 7,8, and 9. Pre-order requests should be sent to: jledbetter@houston.rr.com. Please include name, address, phone number, and e-mail address.

Kingwood Garden Club Gardenscapes Tour

The Kingwood Garden Club will hold its second Gardenscapes Tour on April 16th and 17th. Six beautiful gardens will be featured at three locations. A plant sale will take place in Town Center Park which will showcase a variety of special plants grown especially for the club and some are in decorative containers. Tickets are \$6.00 if purchased in advance or \$8.00 at the door. For more information, call (281) 358-8717.

Urban Harvest



Working with Gardens & Orchards
to Build Healthy Communities

Urban Harvest Classes

Classes are held at Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane, unless otherwise noted. For detailed class listings and more information, visit www.urbanharvest.org or contact: **Kara Masharani** (713) 880-5540 kara@urbanharvest.org.

Saturday Apr.3 - Gardening with Nature by **Karen Breneman**, 9:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. \$20; registration required. Learn how to transform a piece of land into a habitat for birds, butterflies, amphibians, insects, and mammals by using native plants, natural borders, and screens. Karen Breneman is a Harris County Master Gardener and Master Naturalist and the author of Gardening with Nature in Texas.

Monday Apr 12 - How to Start a Community or School Garden by **Gary Edmondson**, 4 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. Free. Registration required. Learn the basic ingredients for a successful community garden, including planning, coordination, finances, and garden design. Gary Edmondson is the School & Youth Gardens Coordinator for Urban Harvest.

Wednesday Apr.14 - Permaculture: Gardening & More for a Sustainable Texas; an Introduction by the **Permaculture Guild of Houston**, 7 p.m. – 9:30 p.m., 2990 Richmond, 6th floor; free. In this introduction, learn about four courses over the next year that will help you turn your yard or farm into a vibrant bird and butterfly filled space, resplendent with gourmet vegetables and fruits. Permaculture is an advanced design concept for creating sustainable gardens, ecosystems, buildings, and societies that prosper while minimizing energy and materials use.

Wednesdays beginning Apr.21 - Permaculture & the Sustainable Society by the **Permaculture Guild of Houston**, 7 p.m. – 9:30 p.m., 2990 Richmond, 6th floor; \$95. The class meets for 4 Wednesdays and 1 Saturday field trip. Learn how we can have a more sustainable society and ways to reduce our ecological impact through eco-architecture. There will be hands-on sustainable housing activities using local materials such as straw bale and renewable energy such as solar.

Monday Apr.19 - How to Start a Community or School Garden by **Dr. Bob Randall**, 1 p.m. – 3:45 p.m.; free; registration required. Have you been thinking about starting a community or school garden? Learn the basic ingredients for a successful community garden, including planning, coordination, finances, and garden design. Dr. Bob Randall has advised over 150 community garden projects since 1987.

Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens

April Classes at Mercer

Sunday, April 4 - 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. **Palms for Houston.** Join local palm expert **Gordon Hintz** for a program and tour. Gordon will talk about palms that do well in the Houston area and then lead a tour of Mercer's palm plantings.

Wednesday, April 14 from noon to 1 p.m. **Lunch Bunch: Preparing for Summer.** Are you ready for summer? You have dusted off your swimsuit and blown up the kids wading pool, but what about your garden? Join us at Mercer Arboretum and learn what you can do to have a beautiful garden to enjoy throughout the summer. Bring a sack lunch to enjoy during the program.

Saturday, April 17 from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. **Spring Garden Tour.** Join **Greg Harmison** as he leads a tour of the gardens in the spring. April is one of the best times to enjoy Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens and what better way to do it than with a guided tour.

Friday, April 23 at 10 a.m. **Endangered Species Garden Grand Opening.** Come out to Mercer Arboretum and help us celebrate the grand opening/ribbon cutting of the new expansion as well as the 10th anniversary of the endangered species garden. Garden tours will be held on the half hour and a pictorial display will be set up to give visitors information on the conservation efforts of Mercer Arboretum as a member of the Center for Plant Conservation. Learn how you can help sponsor these endangered plants and support our efforts to save them from extinction.

May Classes at Mercer

Saturday, May 1 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Join us for Family Day, a day of fun filled family activities at Mercer Arboretum. Visit "Education Stations" where kids will be able to make and take home garden crafts, and learn about plants and their uses. This is a great opportunity to make a gift for Mothers Day. Free of charge.

Saturday, May 8 from 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. **Daylily Show.** Come to Mercer to see the Cypress Creek Daylily Club's Flower Show. See 200 beautiful varieties of daylilies in all colors and sizes.

Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens

Wednesday, May 12 from noon to 1 p.m. **Lunch Bunch: Growing Cactus and Succulents as a Hobby.** Join **Greg Harmison** as he discusses growing cactus and succulents in the Houston area. Learn how to deal with wet weather and pests and how to grow these plants in containers as a fun hobby. Bring a sack lunch to enjoy during the program.

Saturday, May 22, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. **Water Smart Landscaping.** Join **Carol Cammack** of Texas Cooperative Extension as she talks about water smart landscaping. Prepare for the summer by learning which plants and landscaping techniques require less water and help preserve our natural resource.

Ongoing

The Piney Woods Wildlife Society meets the third Tuesday of each month (March 16, April 20, May 18) from 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. Piney Woods Wildlife Society is a nonprofit organization for people interested in nature and the environment. Featured speakers give presentations on nature topics. New members and visitors are welcome.

The Cypress Creek Daylily Society meets the fourth Sunday of each month (March 28, April 25) from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. The Cypress Creek Daylily Society is an organization of daylily enthusiasts that have monthly meetings with featured speakers. A sanctioned daylily show is sponsored at Mercer each year. New members and visitors are welcome.



Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens is a Harris County Precinct 4 facility, under the leadership of Commissioner Jerry Eversole, located at 22306 Aldine Westfield Road, one mile north of FM 1960. Harris County Precinct 4 programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, sex, religion, national origin, or physical ability. Anyone requiring special assistance to participate in any program, or for more information, please contact Mercer at (281) 443-8731 or by email at mercerarboretum@cp4.hctx.net. On the web at <http://www.cp4.hctx.net/mercerc>.

Germplasm Requested

Dear Fellow Master Gardeners;

I am an Ohio Master Gardener volunteer with the OSU Ornamental Plant Germplasm Center (OPGC). I am assisting with their efforts to collect germplasm of ornamental plants - specifically the heirlooms and related species.

The OPGC, established in 2001 at The Ohio State University in Columbus, OH, is the only USDA National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS) genebank specializing exclusively in herbaceous ornamental plants. The Center joins the NPGS network of some 25 other plant repositories around the United States to collect, conserve, evaluate and distribute our valuable crop germplasm. All the seed lines collected will be backed up at the state of the art long-term storage facilities of the USDA National Center for Genetic Resources Preservation in Fort Collins, CO. Currently, NPGS has 450,000 accessions (seed lines) in its genebanks and only about 3,000 of them are herbaceous ornamental species.

Without genebanks, genes that confer valuable traits such as natural resistance to insects or diseases can be lost when our heirloom plants are replaced by newer, trendier varieties or when natural habitats of the related wild species of our crops are destroyed by urban and rural development. The preservation of flower germplasm has become even more important as concentrated breeding narrows the gene pool of many popular flowers by focusing mainly on aesthetics.

The OPGC staff is responsible not only for maintaining the existing collection, but also for continuously building the collection, either through exchanges or plant-collecting expeditions, and for generating new and improved techniques for long-term conservation.

At this time, we are letting you know about our task in the hope that you will be able to assist us with our collection efforts. Please refer to our website <http://opgc.osu.edu> to learn more about this project.

We are interested in seed or, if that is not available, plant material from our targeted plants. Please click on "Priority Genera" on our website. In addition, if there other significant heirloom, "native" or non-hybrid plants for which you have seed or plant material, we would appreciate you letting me know so we may consider adding it to our collection.

If you would be interested in assisting with this important national effort, please send me an e-mail at opgc@osu.edu or call me at 614-292-1941.

Thank you.
Joanne Dole

Camellias for Texas

Continued from page 1

plantations and old homesteads throughout the South. *C. japonica*'s less popular rival in the Southern garden is *Camellia sasanqua*, a shrub of Japanese origin. Individual blossoms of Sasanqua camellias, though beautiful, are much less spectacular than those of *C. japonica*. Nevertheless, sasanquas fill an important garden niche because it is fall blooming-*C. Japonica* cultivars (known as "japonicas" in the South) bloom in late winter or early spring.

Practically speaking, camellias are best grown in the eastern third of Texas. The combination of acid soil, rainfall and temperatures are much more conducive to success with all three of the species mentioned in East Texas. Even there, camellias are likely to require considerable attention to watering, mulching and soil amendment than some gardeners are willing to provide. Sasanquas are considered to be somewhat easier to grow than japonicas and are often used as hedges as well as specimen plants and as background shrubs in borders.



Tea Plant *Camellia sinensis*

Another possibility for growing camellias is to place them in large containers. Growing camellias in my College Station soil and water is not very practical, but I have a fairly large specimen growing in a 22-inch clay pot that is thriving on an open porch where it receives morning sun and afternoon shade. I also provide water from a cistern containing rainfall runoff from the roof. Our local water has too much sodium for continued success with camellias or many other ornamental plants. The soil mix I have used is about 1/2 sphagnum peat moss, 1/4 sharp builder's sand, and 1/4 compost.

Camellias have been important to southern gardeners from the mid-1800s to present. Unlike old garden roses, that may be rooted fairly easily from cuttings and were grown in nearly every southern garden, camellias have always been favorites in upscale gardens where the relatively high cost of the plants and difficulty in propagating them were not as significant. Although japonica camellias sometimes set seeds that can be germinated, most are reproduced from cuttings or grafted onto sasanqua rootstocks.

Among the first camellias brought to America was 'Alba Plena', a beautiful, formal pure white, which is still popular today. Other Southern favorites include 'Purple Dawn', 'Pink Perfection', 'Rose Dawn', 'Professor Sargent' and 'Debutante'. With careful selection it is possible to have camellias blooming from November through April. The plants grow relatively slowly, but begin flowering at a young age. At peak bloom times the bushes can be quite colorful. Individual flowers are often picked and floated in bowls.

Volunteer Hours

See below for instructions.

Name _____

Phone Number _____

Email address _____

Period covered – from _____ to _____

Date	Facility or Garden Name	# Contacts	Hours
Total hours this worksheet			

To submit your volunteer hours, please drop off completed forms in the inbox on **Scott Hume's** desk or fax it to (281) 855-5638. Scott can be reached at (281) 855-5600 or oshume@ag.tamu.edu.

Want to fill out this form on your computer? The volunteer hours form included here is for printing out and filling in by hand. But we've posted a spiffy version on the MG website, which you can fill out on the computer in Acrobat Reader before printing to save you all that tedious handwriting. The downloadable version even prints the current date and totals your hours for you. Get it at <http://hcmga.tamu.edu/hcmga/urban.htm>.

April 2004

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6 Hamburger Tues. Paul Goss and Joseph Toth on 'Landscape Lighting' page 6	7 P2 1st Wed Greg Harmison on 'Tropical Plants for Houston' page 8	8	9	10
11	12	13 Work Day at the Extension Office.	14 P2 Field Trip to Tea's Herbs and Orchids page 8	15 Newsletter deadline 5pm	16	17
18	19	20 General Meet- ing. Vince Mannino on 'Goofy Garden Ques- tions' page 6	21	22	23	24 Spring Plant Sale at Bear Creek page 6
25	26	27 Work Day at the Extension Office.	28	29	30	

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eDIRT APRIL 2004

Hyacinths to Feed Thy Soul

If of thy Mortal Goods thou art bereft,
 And from thy slender store two loaves alone to
 thee are left,

Sell one, and with the dole
 Buy hyacinths to feed thy soul.

Attributed to the Gulistan of Moslih Eddin Saadi, a Persian poet who lived about 1184-1291



If you have something you would like to contribute to Urban Dirt, please send it in. We would love to hear from you. Suggestions and comments are welcomed and appreciated as well. We do have space limitations so try to limit your articles to 500 words or less. Submit all articles electronically by the **15th** of every month to: ccammack@ag.tamu.edu.