

UrbanDirt

IN COOPERATION WITH THE TEXAS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Growing Food for Space Travelers

By David Morgan

Reprinted Courtesy of www.PlantFind.com

No one said space travel would be easy. President Bush, who is boldly proposing Mars exploration, recognizes that costs will amount to the billions of dollars in research before an astronaut can climb into space gear.

Among the more perplexing problems is how spacemen can generate food for travel that may last three years, too long a period of time for storage. Simply put, tomorrow's space explorers will have to be self-sustaining farmers, producing enough "salad bar" items - fresh greens and vegetables - to nourish themselves during travel time and exploration.



Photo by Fred Davies

Consider the obstacles to growing plants for food:

- Atmospheric pressure: Moon = 0; Mars = one hundredth that of the Earth's.
- Gravity: Moon = one-sixth of the Earth's; Mars = two-fifths.
- Mars' atmosphere is 95 percent carbon dioxide and receives only half as much light as the Earth.
- There is no carbon on the moon for photosynthesis
- Poor soil, no water, heat and cold extremes

Plant scientists have learned that they can grow almost anything in growth rooms that supply the correct amounts of light, heat, water and nutrients, but the expense of carrying such equipment into space is prohibitive, as much as \$15,000 a pound.

Dr. Fred Davies and his colleagues at Texas A&M University, College Station, have determined that by growing plants in modified growth rooms under lower atmospheric pressures they can attack some of these problems. Growing under low pressure means that:

- Less structural material for housing and growing plants needs to be shipped into space
- There is less leakage of oxygen, nitrogen and carbon dioxide gases from a low-pressure crop production atmosphere into the vacuum of the moon or Mars
- Lower total levels of nitrogen, oxygen and carbon dioxide would be required, which otherwise would have to be transported or produced artificially in space
- With an external oxygen supply, astronauts could tend crops down to a third of normal atmospheric pressure without having to suit up into cumbersome space suits.

Davies and his co-workers designed six low-pressure chambers to control atmospheric pressure from ambient to very low pressures, and can also control the partial pressures of nitrogen, oxygen and carbon dioxide. In these chambers, they have been able to germinate seeds and grow seedlings of lettuce and wheat.

Interestingly, plant growth under low-pressure conditions has been better than ambient conditions, because in a tightly

**Dr. Fred Davies will be
speaking to the HCMGA
on August 17
see [Page 6](#) for more details**

Continued on Page 13

President's Thoughts

By Doug McLeod

We are starting a new calendar year with a new board. They are all very knowledgeable and hard working Master Gardeners. I know most of them well and will be a privilege to serve with them. It will be lots of fun working with the staff at the Extension Office as they are always happy to work with us.

On a serious note, some of the tools have left the tool shed and have not returned. We (**Brian Koehl**) are going to paint the ends of the tools a bright color in order to ID them when they are misplaced. We have been losing tools for years and hopefully this might slow down the disappearance of them in the future.

The committees are in full swing and I know that we are trying to get some outstanding speakers for the upcoming year. Bonnie Morrow has already lined up **Kathy Huber** and **Brenda Smith** of the Houston Chronicle to speak. **Ray Miller** of the 'Eyes of Texas' fame will be hosting one of our field trips as well.

I hope this will be a productive year for the Harris County Master Gardeners. I know how much work goes into our gardens here at the Extension Office and the gardens outside and at Precinct 2. We need to work together in harmony in order for our organization to continue to flourish. We have always worked well together in the past and that is the reason why we have been so successful.

Happy Gardening.



FREE KITTENS!

6 Weeks Old

Need a good home.

Contact: Becky Deasy
(281) 855-5600



Harris County Master Gardener Association

3033 Bear Creek Drive (281) 855-5600
Houston, TX 77084 FAX (281) 855-5638

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Michael's Corner

By Michael Morrison, CEA Horticulture

Moringa oleifera, Moringaceae Drumstick-tree, Horseradish-tree, Ben-oil tree.

Master Gardener intern **Brian Toranto** was working the phone room a few weeks back and brought in a plant that is truly unique to me. His daughter brought back seeds from Africa for him to germinate and he gave me a seedling. This tree could change a lot of things in this world of ours. It is called *Moringa oleifera*. *Moringa* leaves could practically wipe out malnutrition on Earth.

Almost every part of this plant is of value for food. This short, slender, deciduous, perennial tree is not that tall and rather skinny with drooping branches and flowers that are fragrant in a white to creamy-white color. The bark of this tree yields a coarse fiber used for many purposes. The seed of the *Moringa* in some countries is eaten like a peanut, and the root used as a substitute for horseradish. The foliage is used to make salads and eaten as greens, made into curries, and other types of seasonings.

In Africa and other countries, the tree is used as a living fence and the branches and leaves are eaten by cattle. In India, the leaves are ground up and used as a scrub for cleaning walls and utensils. The seeds can be refined into a non-drying oil which is used for lubricating everything from watches to industrial machinery. Talk about a tree that does a lot!

In folk medicine, the flowers, leaves, and roots are used for tumors, and the root decoction is used in Nicaragua for dropsy. The oil from the tree is used for external problems with skin diseases. The roots are bitter, and they act as a tonic to the body and lungs.

This plant is native to India, Arabia, Africa, and the East Indies, and is tolerant of most diseases, drought and sandy conditions. It is a slender tree with corky bark, feathery, pale green, compound leaves and fragrant flowers. It thrives in subtropical climates and is propagated by planting limb cuttings. I am trying one at the ranch in Waller on south side of a building to see how it does. So far this summer it has grown 6 inches in only two months. This extremely fast growing woody species doesn't look like much, but can be called a 'vegetable tree'. The long pods that the *Moringa* produces have the appearance of giant beans and taste like chicken. Not really, they taste like asparagus!

It is said that the *Moringa* tree yields seeds that clarify turbid water. The compounds in the seeds themselves make silt and clay settle out as effectively as the alum our water departments use. In rural areas, *Moringa* seeds could make water safer for drinking and cooking.

This species is one of the world's most useful plants and could do a lot for the planet.

It has seven times the vitamin C in oranges, four times the calcium in milk, four times the vitamin A in carrots, two times the protein in milk, and three times the potassium in bananas.

I am sure it should grow on the south side away from the harsh north winds south of the Houston area. This tree truly has a lot of potential and hope that you see some products in the near future in the store. Trees are truly magnificent and fruitful to us all.

Don't forget that Master Gardener classes begin at the Houston Arboretum on August 4th and the Bear Creek class starts on August 26th.

Make sure you drink plenty of water this summer, and laugh a lot in the garden!



Photo by Michael Morrison

HCMGA News & Events

Bulk Mail Committee Volunteers Needed

Volunteers are needed to assist with preparing the newsletter and other mailings each month. The actual date the newsletter is prepared varies each month and come up on very short notice. A sizeable number of people are needed for the committee to ensure that at least a few will be available to assist. If you are interested in participating on this committee, please contact David Pena at (281) 373-9748.

Fire Ant Volunteers Needed

Enjoy being stung by fire ants? Fight back!!! Free your yard and your neighborhood of fire ants for next spring by treating for fire ants this fall. Help cut down on their population by volunteering to work a booth at your choice of two shows. Or volunteer for both, and get into both shows for Free.

First show: August 27 - 29, 2004. Houston Home & Interior Design Show at the Reliant Center (Hall A & B). Booth hours will be: Friday - 2:00 to 9:00 P.M., Saturday - 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 P.M. and Sunday - 11:00 a.m. to 6:30 P.M.

Second show: October 15 - 17, 2004. 9th Annual Fall Texas Home & Garden Show at Reliant Center (Hall A). Booth hours will be: Friday - 2:00 to 8:00 P.M., Saturday - 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 P.M. and Sunday - 11:00 a.m. to 6:30 P.M.

Those who volunteer will work in shifts, receive free admission to the shows and be given credit toward their Master Gardener or Master Naturalist volunteer hours! What would you do? Hand out literature and answer questions. No previous experience needed. Information on fire ants and the Fire Ant Project will be provided prior to the show. Come join the fun!!! We kick fire ant ___!

If you want to volunteer, have any questions or would like further information, please call Terrie Lenert at 281-855-5650 (W).



HCMGA News & Events

Upcoming Events

Aug 3 - Hamburger Tuesday

Volunteer in the garden in the morning then gather around for a homemade hamburger lunch around 11:30 a.m. At noon, **Skip Richter**, County Extension Agent - Horticulture from Travis County will be speaking on **Home Garden Composting**.

Aug 17 - General Meeting

Come at 6:30 p.m. with a desert to share. **Dr. Fred Davies, Jr.**, a professor with the Texas A&M Department of Horticultural Sciences will be speaking on **Gardening in Space**. Yes, as in Outer Space - space stations, the moon and Mars (see article on Page 1).

Aug 24 - Fruit Study Group

The next **Fruit Study Group** meeting will be held in the auditorium at the Extension Office on Tuesday, August 24, 2004, from 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.. **Dr. Ethan Natelson** will present a program on **Root Stock, Disease Resistant Varieties and Pomegranates**. There will also be a **Pear Tasting**. All participants are invited to bring fruit from your own gardens to share in the tasting.

Sep 7 - Hamburger Tuesday

Work up an appetite in the Extension Gardens then enjoy a home cooked burger with us. The program will begin at noon with **Dr Douglas Welsh** giving us a **Texas Master Gardener Update: Future Plans**. It will be an interactive talk with opportunity for questions and answers.

Sep 21 - Monthly Meeting

Join us for desserts and fellowship at 6:30 p.m. followed at 7:00 p.m. by the always entertaining **Dr. Sam Cotner**. His topic has not been announced, but as a retired Texas A&M Extension Horticulture Specialist and Department Head he always gives a great lecture.

HCMGA Events

All events listed will be at the Harris County Extension Office 3033 Bear Creek Dr, 77084 unless otherwise noted.

Aug 3 - Hamburger Tuesday

8:00 a.m. Garden Volunteer Hours
11:30 a.m. Home Cooked Burgers
Noon: **Skip Richter** on **Home Garden Composting**.

Aug 17 - Monthly Meeting

6:30 p.m. Desserts
7:00 p.m. **Dr. Fred Davies, Jr.** on **Gardening in Space**.

Aug 24 - Fruit Study Group

6:30 p.m. **Pear Tasting** then **Dr. Ethan Natelson** on **Root Stock, Disease Resistant Varieties and Pomegranates**.

Sep 7 - Hamburger Tuesday

8:00 a.m. Garden Volunteer Hours
11:30 a.m. Home Cooked Burgers
Noon: **Dr Douglas Welsh** with **Texas Master Gardener Update: Future Plans**. An interactive talk.

Sep 21 - Monthly Meeting

6:30 p.m. Desserts
7:00 p.m. **Dr. Sam Cotner** Topic to be announced.

Precinct 2 News & Events

The Genoa Friendship Garden has really taken shape after several months of planning and hard work. The first portion of the walkway has been installed thanks to **Christa Kaiser** and her crew. It was great to see **Johnny Jones** back out in the garden consulting on laying the pavers. The next installment of pathways will extend around the lily pond and rings and will continue on through the vegetable garden.

The building of the lily pond is complete thanks to the hard work of **J.C. Whitney**, **Rita Vasak**, along with interns **Suzy Crabtree**, **Gloria Tome**, **Amy Adams** and **Isabel Laudio**. The plants will be put in next and then the fish added to complete the project.

Preliminary work has begun on the tropical garden, led by **Ruth Touchstone**. With help from **Barbara Morrison** and **Pat Mitrowski** the design has been laid out and work will continue through the summer.

The vegetable garden is looking fantastic and production has really taken off thanks to the continuous hard work of **Angela Chandler** and **Barbara Morrison**. Interns **Isabel Laudio**, **Gloria Tome**, **Ron Barbee** and **Mary Dell Rogan** have pitched in to help. We gave a large donation of cantaloupe for the homeless shelter this week. Fall vegetable planting is being done in stages so we can continue provide produce to feed the hungry.

We have the good fortune to have been adopted as a community service project by Starbucks on Fairmont Parkway. Thanks to the efforts of Master Gardener **Diane Bryant** and Starbucks manager **Barb Hampton**. Once a month employees from Starbucks will come and work with us in the garden to complete various projects. Their first project was building us a new storage shed. Along with the Starbucks crew, **Dylan Gomez**, **Tara Bates**, **Jenna Ortiz**, and **Charlie Vercher**, we need to thank **Fred Chandler**, **Ron Barbee**, **Barbara Morrison**, **Suzy Crabtree**, **Lindsey Stone**, **Amy Adams** and **Isabel Laudio** for pitching in and getting this building up. We will be storing our plant sale items, including our 30 new red wagons, in the new shed. This will make getting ready for a sale so much easier.

If you haven't been out to the Genoa Friendship Garden in a while you need to stop by and see all the progress we've made, it's great to see the changes underway.

Precinct 2 News & Events



P2 Master Gardener of the Month

We are starting a new feature in our News from Precinct 2, Master Gardener of the Month.

This month we would like to recognize **Diane Bryant** for her contributions. Diane took the Master Gardener class in the summer of 2003 and graduated in January of 2004 with over 100 hours of volunteer time. She jumped in the garden with both feet, she maintains the worm farm, is

chairperson of the north quadrant of the perennial garden, holds a position as a member at large on the steering committee and is on the herb committee. You'll find her many mornings feeding the worms with coffee grounds she's picked up from Starbucks. It's through her efforts that we now have volunteers from Starbucks helping us in the garden. When she's not busy in the garden Diane also writes poetry and has been published. She enjoys spending time with her best friend and husband, **Bob** and her two dogs.

Upcoming Events

We'll be back with First Wednesday, August 4th at 10:00 a.m. and will welcome **Ceil Dow** from Mercer Arboretum. Ceil will present "Gingers for the Garden", an overview of the different genus in the ginger family available to the home gardener. Each ginger is described by photos, examples and guides to growing and propagation. A synopsis of the lecture is given to each participant as a handout. The program is free, open to the public and is held at 1202 Genoa Red Bluff. Please call (281) 991-8437 for more information.

The GFG General Store will be offering a variety of gingers for sale before and after the program. Also available will be t-shirts, aprons, books and an assortment of soil amendments.

September 1st at 10:00 a.m. **Angela Chandler** will teach us tips on Fall Vegetable Gardening. Come and learn how to keep your garden producing through the fall.

Don't forget to bring a dish for our potluck lunch immediately following the program.

Precinct 2 Events

Aug 4 – First Wednesday

9:30 a.m. Registration

10:00 a.m. **Ceil Dow** on **Gingers.**

11:00 a.m. **Pot Luck Luncheon.**

Bring a dish to share. 1202 Genoa Red Bluff. For reservations call (281) 991-8437.

Sept 1 – First Wednesday

9:30 a.m. Registration

10:00 a.m. **Angela Chandler** on **Fall Vegetable Gardening.**

11:00 a.m. **Pot Luck Luncheon.**

Bring a dish to share. 1202 Genoa Red Bluff. For reservations call (281) 991-8437.

Garden Gifts

News from our Outreach Gardens

By Kenneth Dorman

The rains and lack of sunshine in June caused some strange behavior in the gardens. The last of the fruit on the tomato plants would not ripen; the peppers quit producing, as did the cucumbers, yet the eggplants kept right on going. The pink eye purple hull and black eyed peas are fantastic and the okra plants are unbelievable. They look tropical, which I guess they are, with leaves eighteen inches across and a beautiful dark green color. Then come the bright yellow flowers and soft green fruit; what a nice plant. Speaking of tropical, the baby papaya trees are beginning to bloom so they had better get on with the growing or the fruit will bend them over.

We are planting seeds of broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower in the greenhouse to set out in mid-September. Jean Fefer was nice to make room for us along with all the great stuff she and the other women there have growing for the Fall Plant Sale; which comes up the end of September. We are going to have a more traditional fall and winter garden this year, using the aforementioned plants, sugar snap peas, potatoes, lettuce, cilantro, arugula, pole beans, strawberries, winter squash, onions and carrots. We hope to keep the peppers and eggplants going until frost, if we have one this year. We have passed the one-ton mark on harvest of fruit and produce, but will not make the 3,200 pounds of year before last. It will be a good year anyway.

The Bonita Street garden has kind of gone to pot; actually that is not a good word to use for a drug and alcohol rehab center, but we don't have anyone there to help anymore so the garden suffers. The resident that was most recently helping me with the watering and harvesting violated one of the more serious rules and was confined to quarters for several weeks except for going to meetings. While he was on lock down no one took his place and none of the ears of corn got picked, the beans and tomatoes were left to rot, cucumbers got big as watermelons and my enthusiasm took a big hit. They did pick the peaches and the melons. I am going to have to do some soul searching and praying to find a solution. I can't make them want the garden, no matter how I feel about it. I am open to suggestions, especially if someone with more time and patience wants to take the project over.

We have another new volunteer, **Barbara Sheppard**. She is not a Master Gardener yet, but is a welcome addition. She, like **George Williams**, spent time on a farm in their youth, so they are our farm-raised experts. Barbara came along just in time because Wandering **Walter Baker** has gone off to Santa Fe with four grandchildren and their mothers for a few weeks. I asked him if he was going fly-fishing and he said he was afraid he would be too busy reaching for his wallet to do anything else. I suggested he leave his wallet on the table and go on fishing, but he was not warm to that idea.

I found out the other day that Master Gardeners could be "fired". Boy, if I had known that while I was president I would have had this organization in a lot better shape.

Folks, this group is getting really big and we have a lot of diverse ideas about what it takes to make it successful. I think we need to remember that we do this for enjoyment. Paul Goodman said, "Enjoyment is not a goal, it is a feeling that accompanies important ongoing activity." Let's get going on the important activity and stop the bickering.

Love yourself, which is also an important activity.



CCSC Gardens

Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens

August Classes at Mercer

Saturday, August 21. Ginger Workshop. 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Enjoy a day of learning about gingers. This all-day workshop includes guest speakers who present information on a variety of ginger-related topics including culture, propagation, and which species are best for your yard. Class size is limited to 50, and lunch is provided. Reservations guaranteed through payment on a first-come, first-served basis. The Mercer Society members' fee is \$40 and non-members fee is \$50. Make checks payable to The Mercer Society. Please contact Greg Harmison, (281) 443-8731 or gharmison@hcp4.net, for more information or visit <http://www.cp4.hctx.net/mercermprogram.htm> for a downloadable registration form.

Texas Bamboo Society

Texas Bamboo Society Monthly Meetings. The meetings will be set up where demonstration or slide programs will run from 10:00 a.m. to noon; lunch (brown bag, byob) then garden work from 12:30-2:00p.m.. For more information contact Linda Gay at lgay@hcp4.net, (281) 443-8731 or visit www.bamboocentral.com.
August 28th-29. Bamboo Festival. Held at Zilker Garden in Austin, TX, the festival will include the show and sale of bamboo. No Mercer meeting this month.

The Piney Woods Wildlife Society

The Piney Woods Wildlife Society meets the third Tuesday of each month. June 15, July 20, and August 17, 7:30 to 9 p.m. The 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.



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/mercerm>.

Web Surfin'

Tech news for Master Gardeners

By Tom H. Robb, Jr



Backup Your Hard Drive - or You'll be Sorry

Last month we started talking about data backup and evidently it stirred up some interest as evidenced by several email replies. So I thought that we might carry a little further in this issue and discuss what it is that we want to backup and perhaps what types of backup are available.

What do we backup in our computer, how often do we back it up? Do we backup the entire hard drive or just the data from some of the programs? Needless to say, the latter - only the data - takes less time and less space, and many so-called experts advocate this approach.

This method might work fine if you have only a few programs on your computer and you have the diskettes containing the program. If you have a hard drive crash, you lose everything - program and data. If you have many programs installed, you have to install them all again. Do you have the original program disk of every program on your computer? Do you also have all of the upgrades and patches - on disk? If not, are they still available on the 'net? If not, you may have lost them forever.

Back in the days of DOS, all parts of most programs were filed together so if you had a program called "Checkers", by copying "Checkers" to disk you could be fairly certain that you had the full program. With Windows there is a difference. Although the bulk of the program usually can be found in the folder with the program's name, parts of the program can be found in other folders in other locations. Entries are made in the Register, certain files - usually .dll - may be shared with other programs, some files are found in Windows System, or a different folder.

Backing up the entire drive or drives relieves the time and difficulty of restoration following a crash. There are some negatives to this way also. Your backup space has to be as large as the space being copied and the time for performing the backup can be quite long.

There are two main types of backup - Full and incremental.

Full Backup also can have two different meanings. One means exactly what it says - making a Full copy of everything on the disk being backed up. The other meaning is that all items that have been selected for backup are run each time full backup is done.

Incremental Backup will copy only those files that show changes or modifications since the last backup. There are also two types of Incremental backup - Differential backup and Cumulative backup.

Differential backup copies only the data that has been modified since the last backup, regardless of whether it was a full backup, a Cumulative backup or an earlier differential.

Cumulative Backup copies all files that have changed since the last full backup disregarding any differential backups.

Which is best? Full or incremental backup. If incremental which is best? Differential or Cumulative

Choice is not necessarily an either/or proposition. Actually a combination of methods is the rule of many experienced users. What do I use? I'll try to talk about that in the next issue.

Happy Computin'

Events Around Town

Southeast Texas Gourds Galore Show and Sale

Saturday, Sep 18th. 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. at the Houston Garden Center in Hermann Park, 1500 Hermann Drive. You will find Gourds in a variety of arts and crafts styles; also you may purchase raw gourds if you want to try your hand at decorating this autumn. Whether you are looking for gourds for your home or as gifts for the upcoming holiday season you will find a great selection from which to choose. You might be interested in growing your own gourds or in joining the Texas Gourd Society and we will be giving out information. We will have speakers and children's activities scheduled for the morning and the afternoon. Admission is \$2 for adults and children are free.

Think Autumn!! Mark your calendar for this most enjoyable Gourd Show and Sale. For more information, contact **Linda Carlson** at (281) 955-8013.

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 call (713) 880-5540.

Tuesday, Aug 3. Teaching in the Outdoor Classroom by **Gary Edmondson**.
9 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Briscoe Elementary School (contact Urban Harvest for more information). \$20. Registration required. This workshop provides six State Board Education Credits. Learn about starting a school garden, developing a curriculum for TEKS objectives, resources for teachers and managing student behavior outdoors.

Monday, Aug 9. How to Start a Community or School Garden by **Gary Edmondson**.

4 p.m. – 6:30 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.

Gary Edmondson is the School & Youth Gardens Coordinator for Urban Harvest.

Monday, Aug 16. 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.

Wednesday, August 25. Introduction to Permaculture by the Permaculture Guild of Houston.

7:00-9:30 p.m.. Greenway Plaza Building, 2990 Richmond, Free. Registration required. 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 with gourmet vegetables and fruits. Study design concepts for gardens, landscapes, sustainable buildings and societies. Complete four courses to receive your Permaculture Designer's Certification.

Urban Harvest



Working with Gardens & Orchards
to Build Healthy Communities

A Thank You Letter

To the Harris County Master Gardeners:

For the past four years a group of friends and I have maintained and expanded on a project begun many years ago by **Nancy Kuykendall** and **Ann Robinson**. Ann and Nancy had been asked by **Bill Adams'** father-in-law to establish an herb garden at **The Ronald McDonald House** (RMH), in the Houston Medical Center.

As many of you will know, RMH is a home away from home for children receiving treatment for life-threatening illnesses in the medical center hospitals, and their families. The families come from all parts of the USA and some from a long list of foreign countries in the hope of finding a cure; many do. Some of the illnesses are rare and typically very sophisticated medical intervention is required of the kind available only in a few places. Occasionally we are informed by a parent of the nature of the child's condition. About a week ago I saw a group of young adolescents playing with a ball outside. Assuming them to be siblings of sick children I was amazed to learn that one of them had only a few weeks previously undergone multiple organ transplantation and heart surgery simultaneously. The child was learning what it feels like to be normal for the first time in her life.

The board and staff at RMH raise money and organize volunteers to support the house and families with the help of many, many organizations here in Houston and do a most amazing job. Groups of individuals from corporations, religious charities and others bring meals and games to the families, HISD has a school at the house and also schools in several hospitals. Individuals often donate spare tickets to Houston events; the Houston Zoo provides free passes; there is van service to the hospitals and shopping trips provided by another organization. Many positive contributions are made by volunteers that I see from time to time without knowing who they are or what exactly they are doing, except that all volunteers are trying to make lives of the visitors to the house a little more pleasant.

The Master Gardeners contribution to RMH is caring for the herbs, many flower pots, and several flower beds. RMH hires a firm to cut the grass and trim the bushes and trees, and some beds are maintained by a benefactor at her expense. We have the fun job of taking care of our collection of flowers and herbs. Many of the residents express their appreciation for what we are doing; some recognize the plants as the same as the ones they have at home but don't know the names in English. We have shared gardening experiences as well as cuttings with several of the adults and children, and some of the residents have assisted us with watering, planting and weeding from time to time.

We have just commissioned an 8' by 10' metal-sheathed gardening shed which was erected by **Edward Biegert** as his Eagle Scout Project, with the assistance of his cohorts in **Scout Troop 11**, their scout leaders and others, notably **Bill Moore** of The Nature Conservancy. This will permit handy storage of gardening equipment and supplies. Edward held a garage sale and raised not only enough money to pay for the shed but had enough left over to make a handsome donation to RMH.

Bill Adams and **Clyde Cannon** were kind enough to scope out an area in front of the back fence of the RMH property that adjoins the Southern bank of the bayou, as a suitable location for climbing antique roses. Some initial design and planning is called for; once the plan has been sketched out for example by a master gardener with interest in landscaping, that person could reasonably coordinate with the RMH Board and an organization of energetic young people such as the BSA to see the project along, starting next fall perhaps.

Without the extensive and dedicated help of **Master Gardeners Cindy Appleman, Brian** and **Lorraine**



Continued on Page 13

A Thank You Letter

Continued from Page 12

Koehl, E. J. and **Mary Lee Lanik, Judy Lano, Ernie Spillard, Agnes Stanley, Joanne Storm, James** and **Mardy Thomas** and **Robert White**, as well as **The Garden Club of Houston, The Southampton Garden Club, St. Phillips United Methodist Church, Boy Scout Troop 11** and their families, (and many other individuals that I meet in the check-out line at the grocery store among other locations!) this project would just not be so much fun.

Without the kindness and generosity of the **Harris County Master Gardener Association** for emotional, financial and advice sought and freely given the project would not have happened and been the success it is today. With your help we were able to establish several new beds and do some soil erosion abatement making a muddy swale into a beautiful rock garden. The Board and Staff of Ronald McDonald House and all of the garden gremlins thank you for your never-ending support.

If any of you readers are interested in participating in this project please feel free to call me at 713-529-8802 or e-mail at hdyson@swbell.net. There are challenges for gardeners; there are irrigated and non-irrigated areas, well-drained and low-lying areas, and areas with varying degrees of sun. You may well be surprised at what a beautiful home away from home RMH is and how much of a difference a few pretty flowers and smiling gardeners make in the lives of people who are enduring life altering-experiences, that very few of us have to deal with.

Hope Dyson

Growing Food for Space Travelers

Continued from Page 1

sealed environment ethylene gas levels build up, causing abnormal plant growth and sterility, whereas ethylene production is generally reduced under low-pressure conditions.

In addition to growing lettuce and wheat, Davies and his associates have shown that:

- Plant gas exchange is not adversely affected; that is, photosynthesis and stomatal conductance are similar to ambient pressure conditions.
- Dark respiration, which occurs at night, is reduced in a low-pressure system. This means there is more overall plant "dry mass" accumulation, since not as much carbohydrates and other compounds are consumed during the night. In other words, there is greater plant yield.

Psychological Importance of Plants in Space

Davies recognized that beside their obvious food use, plants play an important psychological role in human health and well-being.

"It is known that some of the favorite experiments of the Russian cosmonauts were with plants and seedlings that they could nurture, harvest and eat," he said. "Just biting into something with some turgor to it, and not having a diet limited to reconstituted foods has important psychological benefits. In the Antarctic, which is one of the most desolate places on Earth, there is a small

g□ crew members will retreat from the cold, white, barren, snow-capped landscape to recharge, rest and nap in hammocks stretched across the green visual of live, growing, green plants. It is those bright, light colors, aroma, texture and flavor of plants that attract [us] humans.

"Small wonder that the greatest pastime in the U.S. is gardening. It will also be an important activity as humankind colonizes space during the 21st Century."

Davies' research is supported in part by NASA grants. His co-workers include Chunajiu He, Ronald E. Lacey and Que Ngo.

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			

Submitting your volunteer hours Please drop off completed forms in the inbox on **Scott Hume's** desk. 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>

August 2004

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1	2	3 Hamburger Tuesday at Extension Office page 5	4 Precinct 2 1st Wednesday page 7	5	6	7
8	9	10 Work Day at the Extension Office	11	12	13	14
15 Newsletter deadline 5p.m.	16	17 Work Day at the Extension Office	18 P2 Master Gardener Workday P2 Rose Committee Workday	19	20	21 Ginger Workshop at Mercer Arboretum page 9
22	23	24 General Meet- ing — Bear Creek page 5	25	26	27	28
29	30					

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Editor's Note

By Carol Cammack, CEA- Horticulture

Occasionally mistakes are made in Urban Dirt and as editor it is my responsibility to provide the correct information. In this case an omission has been made in the directory of Board Members and Ancillary Positions. For many months, there has been no information about Speaker's Bureau in the listing. I'm sure this has been a source of frustration for many as they have had to call 2 or 3 numbers before finally reaching the able chair of the committee, **Beth Grunden**. Beth is a tireless worker for this committee, and has done an excellent job scheduling speakers and often speaking herself. My apologies to the readers and to Beth for not giving this committee the recognition it deserves in the listing. It was a terrible oversight on my part, although certainly not intentional. The Speakers' Bureau serves the the most fundamental aspect of Extension's and therefore, the Master Gardeners' mission - to bring good horticulture information to the public. We appreciate all they do. If you are interested in delivering presentations to other members of the community, please contact Beth. Her number is now listed on **Page 2**.

Please continue to do the great job you've been doing as readers and contributors by submitting all articles and comments electronically by the 15th of every month to: **Carol Cammack, c-cammack@tamu.edu**. Please limit your articles to 500 words or less, as we do have space limitations.



Photo by Carol Cammack