

Urban Dirt

IN COOPERATION WITH THE TEXAS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Ornamental Grasses

By Diane Ballentine

Some of the most elegant and dependable plants in the Millennium Display Gardens are grasses. Before we planted the MDGs, I was unaware of the beauty and versatility of these wonderful garden accents. Not only have I fallen in love with ornamental grasses, I have become almost as passionate about grasses as I am about daylilies!

Ornamental grasses are a 'natural', literally. Before the Houston and Gulf Coast area was developed, it was a tall grass coastal prairie with virtually no trees, ranging from marsh wetland grasses to inland fertile prairie grasses. These large expanses of grassland were adorned with many species of wild flowers that added spring to fall beauty to the environment. What we see today is a man-made environment of planted trees, shrubs and structures. Grasses were here first - and still have a place in your garden.

Why Ornamental Grasses?

- Many species are native but others are well suited to the Gulf coastal prairie environment.
- They add a unique texture and form to the garden that is different from all other plants.
- They are pest free, heat tolerant, and low maintenance plants.
- They are adaptable to both wet and dry conditions depending on species.
- They often do well in poor soils when established, unlike many other plants.
- Their plumage and seedpods are highly decorative and can be dried for decorative use.
- They improve soil nutrient and texture by recycling decaying organic matter during life cycle.
- They come in all shapes and sizes, plus color variations to add ornamental value.



Photo by Carol Cammack

Here's a quick tour of the grasses growing in the Millennium Display Gardens:

In the Daylily Garden:

Bamboo Muhly - *Muhlenbergia dumosa*

A clump grass with fine textured foliage that looks like Bamboo, the arching stems and frothy textured foliage give this Muhly a soft effect. This perennial grass likes full sun to part shade, and well-drained soil. At 3' to 6', the fronds make great dried arrangements.

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President's Thoughts

By Virginia Joiner

There are so many people to thank for stepping forward this past month to fill vacancies that have occurred. When I approached these volunteers for help they were ready to help in any way they could. **Linda O'Keefe** will head up our Spring Sale in 2004. **Deba Cox**, our chairman for several years has started her own nursery business and will not be able to continue. I want to thank Deba for the wonderful job that she has done in the past and wish her success with her new business.

Carl Meyertons is in charge of our Vegetable Garden due to a change in **David Parish's** work schedule. As a result of David's new schedule we have a new Hamburger Tuesday chef and assistant chef, **Brian Koehl** and **Nelson Harbison**. David has done an outstanding job for the Master Gardener Association in so many areas and he will be missed in the garden on Tuesday.

Bea Patterson has been our Hospitality Chairman for a number of years and has done a wonderful job. We will still be able to enjoy her wonderful smile, as she will continue to work in the All-American Classic Garden. **Jean Gordon** from the spring 2003 Master Gardener class has stepped forward as our new Hospitality Chairman. It is especially rewarding when new graduates step right into leadership positions. Thank you Jean.

If you are at the Extension Office on Monday you will find **Jane Farber**, spring class of 2003 and **Kay Kelly**, fall Class of 2002 hard at work on our Library. They are taking an inventory and are cataloguing the books. They have found some wonderful old garden books and some books that are desperately in need of new bindings and other repairs. Jane and Kay have brought their experiences as Liberians to our association. We appreciate their spending their volunteer hours helping us in this area. We encourage everyone to use the library but please do not take the books home. They are to be used only at the Extension Office.

The idea was brought to the Board that it would be nice if we sent cards to our members when they were ill or had suffered any kind of loss. **Clarence Sapp** has taking over this responsibility. He is dependent on all of us to keep him informed of the needs of our membership.

Hope Dyson, who is in charge of the gardens at the Ronald McDonald House has received a generous donation of plants from the Houston Garden Club. They presented her with 560 bulbs and 50 plants that included assorted perennials and herbs. These donations were greatly appreciated as the group had taken over the care of some new areas that needed fresh landscaping and plants.

When you see **Tom Robb** take the time to thank him for his work on the directory. As usual he has presented us with something that we can be proud of.

The pavestone project has commenced. **Clyde Cannon, Grady Joiner, Richard Lund, Linda O'Keefe** and myself have been working in the area surrounding the rose garden. When they begin the work on the Millennium Garden pathway they will need more help. If you are interested in participating in this project, call and give **Scott Hume** your name. Your help will be greatly appreciated.

Before I finish I want to wish all of you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. My wish for you is that this season is filled with family, friends, love, hope and peace.

Wear your smiles and I will see you in the gardens.

"On the Road..."

by Katherine Peterson

On October 29th the Master Gardeners were "ON THE ROAD" to Texas A&M University where we were greeted by **Priscilla Files** at the Horticultural Gardens who guided us through the gardens describing what they were doing and answering our many questions. Priscilla is in charge of the maintenance of the garden, coordinating the work of the students, etc. The thing that made such an impression on me was how spotless the garden was. I did not see a single weed, the garden beds were neatly outlined, - they looked perfect! That is hard to accomplish in a small garden much less such a large one – even with a lot of student workers. **Dr. Don Wilkerson**, Director of the gardens, greeted us shortly after our arrival and shared some about their work there. We also met a student who explained the work he is doing in the test garden. He has almost completed work on his doctorate. I believe I can safely say that each of us learned something from this tour.

We like to say that Texas A&M University heard that we were coming and "rolled out the red carpet" for us! Shortly after our tour of the gardens began, we were treated to a "Thunderbird Fly Over". They were actually practicing for an air show commemorating the 100th Anniversary of Aviation. The skies were clear and the pilots did a superb job carrying out their maneuvers.

We then enjoyed a barbeque lunch at Rudy's BBQ before traveling to the Horticultural Building where **Dr. Joe Novak** met us. Dr. Novak gave us a tour of the Heritage & Holistic Gardens. He explained how they have combined a detention pond and bog garden thus serving two purposes. We saw the students vegetable garden which had been planted a month before (wish mine looked like that!). He talked about the assignments given to the students when they are assigned to their specific row, how they evaluate organic vs. inorganic, incentives to progress further for extra credit, etc. He showed us different gardens that are assigned to different groups such as the garden adopted by a group of medical students. Composting plays a big part in the gardens and each group has their own composting pile. Dr. Novak also explained how the gardens are going through a renovation period and what their future plans involved. His tour ended with a tour of the greenhouses. We found this tour to be very interesting and informative.

We then proceeded indoors to one of the classrooms where we met **Jim Johnson**, Director of the Benz School of Floral Design. I have a feeling that some of the men on the trip were a little skeptical thinking this would be "just for the women". I made a special point to watch them off-and-on and believe me they were enjoying this lecture/demonstration just as much as we women! Jim Johnson is a very creative person and sensitive to the fact that we would want to know what we could do with flowers and greenery from our gardens – not florist creations! Each of the arrangements was given as a door prize - an unexpected treat. We want to thank **Ann Boney** and all the others who helped us arrange this trip.

Dr. Doug Welsh, State Master Gardener Coordinator, caught up with us while we were there. He welcomed us to TAMU and handed out information about the Texas Master Gardener License Plates.

BUT our trip wasn't over! On our way back to Houston we decided that we had time to take a mini detour to see **Michael Morrison's** Property. Some of us knew that he had bought some property somewhere; some of us knew that he had done some work on the property; BUT none of us realized how much he had done. The entrance to his property definitely reflects that the owner is interested in horticulture. It stands out as you drive down the road drawing your attention to his place. The property is planted in – what else? – Palms! Talk about an energetic, dedicated person! He hand waters all those palms – carrying the water by the bucketfuls! Anyone interested in strengthening your arm muscles? I imagine he would welcome volunteers! He has promised to invite us out for a visit sometime next year.

Tune in next month for a report on our Carpooling Event to The Brookwood Community. Registrations are being accepted for our trip to Moody Gardens on January 7th.

Michael's Corner...

By Michael Morrison

Poinsettias Part 2

More on poinsettias for the holiday season. Do not forget to give that someone you love a poinsettia on December 12, **National Poinsettia Day!**

If you go out to buy one make sure you purchase it on the end of your buying spree and wrap it in paper for the trip home. On a cold day, even a slight chill can cause some leaves to drop later off. If it is in a foil wrap make sure to pierce to foil at the bottom for drainage.

When choosing a poinsettia, choose plants that are healthy, clean looking and have colorful bracts. Check underneath for critters too. It is suggested that you avoid over mature plants that are shedding yellow pollen. When you get it home and it is needing some water, use lukewarm water for the plant.

Place your poinsettia in a bright area of the room or a sunny window for at least six hours per day, but do not let the leaves touch the window pane. Move plants away from the windows at night time or place drapes between them. The best optimum temperature is 65-75 during the day and 60-65 degrees Fahrenheit at night. You also need to protect them from hot or cold air to keep them happy.

They do not like 'wet feet', so when the soil is dry to the touch, then use lukewarm water and dispose of the drainage water when you finish. Do not let the plant wilt or lose its leaves. Repotting is not necessary during the winter, and fertilize monthly with a houseplant fertilizer only after it is finished blooming. When the poinsettia is finished blooming and March rolls around, you can cut the plant back to eight inches in height. Place your plant outdoors, where they can get the warmth of spring and summer after the chances of frost have passed. In June, transplant your plant into a larger pot that is not more than four inches larger than the original pot. A generally accepted standard is the poinsettia should be 2 1/2 times taller than the diameter of the container. An indoor soil mix with organic matter is great and remember that it will need good drainage. You might want to prune during the summer months to keep the plant bushy and compact and July or August is usually a good month for that chore. Continue to fertilize once a month.

Bring the plant indoors at the beginning of September and place near a sunny window. Middle to late September, you should pinch the branches back to ensure a quality plant and it is recommended to leave about six leaves below the pinch. When the bracts come out, it is time to remove the weak ones and leave four well-spaced bracts on a plant that is in a six inch pot. If you are going to direct stick cuttings, you need to allow time to get them well-rooted before pinching. Then October first, then begins the fourteen consecutive hours of uninterrupted darkness each night, but it also needs bright light during the day. Remember, no light for fourteen hours and that means no light at all. The easiest rule of thumb is to 'follow the sun'. If it is getting dark at 6:30pm, let them have darkness at 6:30 pm. Poinsettias respond to short days. A lot of folks use cardboard boxes to do the trick, and put it over the plant at sunset each day. After the bracts show full color, the dark treatment is no longer needed and that is usually around Thanksgiving so you can enjoy the holidays again with your poinsettia and your family and friends.

I want to thank everyone at Extension and Master Gardeners for all of your hard work and dedication and making a wonderful difference in our community and have a wonderful holiday season.



photo by Carol Cammack

Upcoming HCMGA Events

Bear Creek Meetings

Hamburger Tuesday – December 2nd

Come early to work in the gardens and **decorate** the Extension **Christmas Tree**. We have many of the decorations from last year but need some fresh additions. Bring any dried flowers, seedpods, etc. that you would like to add to our 'Natural' decorations. Then enjoy those home cooked burgers around 11:30 a.m.

At noon our own **Carol Cammack** will be speaking to us on the topic “Floral Design for the Holiday Season”. To get us ready for the Holiday Season, Carol will be giving a demonstration on Holiday floral arrangements you can do yourself at home.

The Gulf Coast Fruit Study Group - December 16th

The Fruit Study Group will be meeting **December 16th** at 7:00 p.m. for a **Citrus Tasting Event**. **Bob Randall**, of Urban Harvest will be on hand to answer questions. If you are growing Citrus you can't identify, bring it along with some leaves and we'll help you figure out what it is.

Hamburger Tuesday – January 6th

We will look forward to seeing each of you in the gardens ready to work after an enjoyable time off with your families. This will be an important time with much to do, getting everything ready for the Fruit Tree Sale on January 24th. Hamburgers will be served at 11:30 a.m. as usual.

Our speaker that day will be **Steven Raddack**, County Commissioner. He will be speaking on “Matters of Importance to Harris County Master Gardeners”. What is being planned within the County? How will that affect the Master Gardener Association if at all? How will it affect you as a homeowner and gardener? We are so privileged to have the opportunity to work together with the County and have the facilities here at the Extension Office at which to work. We hope each of you will make it a point to be here to say “thank you” to Mr. Raddack and to hear what he has to share with us.

Field Trip – January 7th

We will be traveling to **Moody Gardens** where we will be treated to a 'behind the scenes' tour. Information is available at the Extension Office. Space is limited.

General Meeting – January 20th

We will have refreshments this month (starting at 6:30 p.m.) even though most of us will be on a low-cal diet after the holiday indulgences. So put on your thinking caps and bring something to share.

We are looking forward to hearing what **Michael Morrison** has to share with us about his trip to Alaska. His topic: “Flowers of Alaska”. It's hard to believe there are “flowers” in amongst all that ice!

We will be looking forward to seeing all of you back after the holidays.

Bear Creek Events

Dec 2 – Hamburger Tuesday

8:00 a.m. Work up an appetite

9:00 a.m. Decorate the Extension Christmas Tree.

11:30 a.m. Home cooked burgers.

Noon: Carol Cammack on 'Floral Design for the Holiday Season'.

Dec 16 - No General Meeting

We do not have a general meeting during the month of December. On behalf of the Program Committee we wish each of you a “**Happy Holiday Season**”.

Dec 16 - Fruit Study Group Meeting

7:00 p.m. - Citrus Tasting Event
Citrus Tasting, Identification and questions answered. **Bob Randall** of Urban Harvest will be there to assist.

Jan 6 – Hamburger Tuesday

8:00 a.m. Work up an appetite

11:30 a.m. Home cooked burgers,

Noon: Steven Radack, County Commissioner on “Matters of Importance to HCMGA”

Jan 7 – Field Trip to Moody

Gardens. Contact **Becky Deasy** to sign up or get more information. 281-855-5600.

Jan 20 – General Meeting

6:30 p.m. Refreshments. Bring a dessert or snack to share.

7:00 p.m. Michael Morrison on “Flowers of Alaska”

Precinct 2 News & Events

News from Precinct 2

Plans for the Genoa Friendship Garden are really moving along. **Janice Patrick** and **Angela Chandler** have come up with a wonderful design plan for the garden that will utilize all the land we have available. Some of the new areas to look forward to are a Medieval Rose and Herb Garden, a lily pond, a Butterfly Garden, and a Tropical Garden. More news on the expansion will follow.

The groundwork got off to a great start Saturday, with an excellent turn out of workers. Thanks to **Rita Vasak, JC Whitney, Pat Pate, Diane Bryant, Christa Kaiser, Georgia Lau, Angela Chandler** and Janice Patrick for all their hard work. The grapes and berries were dug up and potted until they can be located to their new area. The area in front of the shed was reworked and bulbs were planted. The first plot of the vegetable garden was redone with landscaping timbers to create raised beds with easier access and space between the rows that will make it more manageable. The new herb bed was topped off and is now ready for planting. The bed has been divided into sections and members of the Herb Committee will design and plant each section. Thanks to **Ruth Touchstone, Gina Keen, Pat Stier, Marlene Oren, Pat Mitrowski, Gloria Gibson** and **Christa Kaiser** for taking an area to design.

Diane Bryant will be planting one of our rings with Medicinal Herbs while **Shirley Jackson** and **Pat Mitrowski** are working on a Biblical Garden for one of the other rings.

Anyone who has not stopped by the office recently will not even recognize it. The county has begun remodeling the entire building that houses the Master Gardener Office and we are temporarily displaced. A big thank you to **Pat Stier** and **Ginia Keen** for boxing up the office for the move. Please note: our phone line is temporarily disconnected until we get moved into our new office. We are unable to receive messages at the garden, if you need to contact anyone please use your Master Gardener Directory to call them individually.

October 18th was our Herb Day and it was picture perfect. We planted our chairs outside in the garden with a great view of the air show overhead. Thank you to **Pam Harris** from the Herb Society for leading that workshop. After the craft, we had a demonstration from **Ginia Keen** on Herb Vinegars, and **Gloria Gibson** showed us how to make delicious pesto, which we got to sample. Lunch was wonderful, thanks **Marlene Oren, Gina Keen,** and **Pat Mitrowski** for cooking. After lunch **Angela Chandler** showed us how to create Dried Rose Petal Sugar and **Lana Sims** shared her expertise on growing herbs with us. We look forward to making this an annual event. Special thanks goes out to **Ruth Touchstone** for all her help on this project.

Our December First Wednesday Program, Demonstration on Making Living Wreathes with **Angela Chandler** was so enjoyable we have plans to all meet and make wreathes for the holidays together. **December First Wednesday** will be our annual Christmas Party at Precinct 2; we will be starting at 11:00 since there is no program.

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Precinct 2 News & Events

Continued from page 6

On **January 7th** we will return to our regular 10:00 a.m. time and will welcome **Odean** and **Betty Head** from the Bromeliad Society. Odean will demonstrate some of the cultural tasks associated with bromeliads, show some pictures of the genre and share some landscaping tips. Please join us for an informative program.

Our Quarterly Evening Meeting was Monday December 10th and we had a good turn out. Special thanks to **Michael Morrison** for his Alaska presentation and smoked salmon! We enjoyed many delicious goodies thanks to the First Wednesday Committee and everyone who brought something to share.

Upcoming Events:

December

December 3rd Precinct 2 will hold their annual **Christmas Party** at the Genoa Friendship Garden. Bring a dish to share and come and gather to celebrate the season. We'll start at 11:00 a.m. since there is no program that day. Hope to see everyone there!

January

January 7th we will return to our regular 10:00 a.m. time and will welcome **Odean** and **Betty Head** from the Bromeliad Society. Odean will demonstrate some of the cultural tasks associated with bromeliads, show some pictures of the genre and share some landscaping tips. Please join us for an informative program.

Precinct 2 Events

Dec 3 – Christmas Party

11:00 a.m. Pot Luck Luncheon.
Bring a dish to share and come and gather to celebrate the season. 1202 Genoa Red Bluff.

Jan 7 – First Wednesday

9:30 a.m. Registration
10:00 a.m. Odean Head of the Bromeliad Society on "**Care of Bromeliads**".
11:00 a.m. Pot Luck Luncheon.
Bring a dish to share. 1202 Genoa Red Bluff. For reservations call (281) 991-8437.

Events Around Town

Texas Pecan Board's Heart Healthy Recipe Contest

In an effort to raise public awareness of the health benefits of the Texas Pecan Nut, the Texas Pecan Board is holding a Heart Healthy Recipe contest. The contest will be divided into four categories which include Main Entrée, Vegetable Side Dish or Salads, Breads and Desserts, and Specialty Dishes, which would be anything that didn't fit into another category. The contest will culminate on **December 5th and 6th 2003** at the first annual Texas Pecan Festival, to be held in Brownwood/Early. Teams of judges will select winners in each category, and then the top winners from each division will compete for the grand prize.

First place in each division will receive a \$500 prize and the overall Grand Champion will receive an additional \$1,000 prize and the Reserve Grand Champion will receive an additional \$500 prize. Each division will pay down ten places, for a total of \$7,000 in prize money offered. Contestants are encouraged to bring completed dishes to the competition, but preparation areas will be available to anyone who needs to prepare their dish immediately prior to judging. Full contest rules and entry forms are available on the Texas Pecan Board web site at www.texaspecans.org.

Trees for Houston Giving Away Trees

Shade and swings, chimes and hammocks; neighborhood trees are an important addition to making a house a home. **Trees For Houston** is committed to making all of Houston's neighborhoods green through the NeighborWoods program. Together with the City of Houston, Trees For Houston is **providing free trees** (only when your neighborhood, church, school, or civic club/association participates in the program) and planting instructions to homeowners in neighborhoods throughout the city.

The deal is that one can get free 5 gallon trees alone, or one can get the trees and contract to have them planted and mulched for \$8.50 each. Can't beat that. The trees have to be planted on public property, but this includes the easements on residential streets. The average tree size is 5-7 feet tall with 1/2 to 3/4 inch caliper. Varies based on current availability include: Bald Cypress, Bur Oak, Chinese Pistache, Live Oak, Red Bud, Red Maple, Shumard Oak, Winged Elm.

For more information on getting involved in this program or for order forms, contact Gary Woods at 281-474-4507.

WaterSmart Workshop

The 5th Annual 2004 Water Smart Landscaping Workshop will be held on Saturday, March 6, 2004, from 7:30 am to 5:00 pm in the Bayou Building at the University of Houston, Clear Lake. The WaterSmart Landscaping Workshop is an annual event hosted by Texas Cooperative Extension. Our aim is to educate homeowners and landscapers on the need to have landscapes that are 'earth friendly' and thus neither wastes our valuable water resources nor contributes to the runoff pollution entering Galveston Bay. At no other time have these issues been more crucial. Speakers on various related topics have been scheduled throughout the day with a keynote addresses being offered in the morning and afternoon sessions. This year keynote speakers include Dr. **David Creech**, Professor of Horticulture at Stephen F. Austin State University and nationally recognized authority on native plants and **Heidi Sheesley**, local grower and nursery owner. One atrium of the Bayou Building will host a plant sale by the Harris County Master Gardeners; the other atrium will be reserved for vendors and exhibitors. The cost for attendance which includes morning snacks and lunch is \$40. More information and registration forms can be obtained from www.watersmart.cc or by calling Chris LaChance at (281) 333-5067.

Southern Region Master Gardener Cruise

The Southern Region Master Gardener Cruise leaving from New Orleans and traveling to the Caribbean is scheduled for June 24-28, 2004. Two days at sea will focus on gardening programs on board with specialists from the southern states. Gardening topics will cover the southern region with ideas on landscaping as well as maintenance, and edible gardening. A stop in Cozumel will give you options for a garden tour or you can shop, snorkel or visit the ruins. \$50 non-refundable deposit is needed to hold rooms. An additional deposit of \$200.00 is due by February 17. Prices vary from \$430 to \$610 per person. Final Payment is due by April 16. Visit <http://www.poetravel.com/corporate/trip1.html> to find out all the specifics.

Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens

December

Lunch Bunch: PLANT NOW for a Beautiful Spring

Wednesday, December 12 from noon to 1 p.m. bring a sack lunch and join Suzzanne Chapman to learn what to plant now for a beautiful spring. Don't be one of the many people who wait until it is too late to plan and plant a spring garden. This class will help ensure your yard is the envy of the neighborhood.

Battening Down the Frost Cloth: Being Prepared for the Worst Winter Ever

Saturday, December 15 from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. learn how to prepare your yard for winter. Are you ready for the first frost of the season? Will you know what to do before or after a freeze? Do you know which plants need protection and those that do not? Attend this program to be prepared for the worst winter ever, even if it doesn't happen this year.

January

Container Gardening Workshop

Saturday, January 10 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Learn how to plant a beautiful garden in your own container. Local landscape designer Norm Arnold will lead this class on preparing, planting and maintaining a container garden. Plants and soil are included, but participants must bring a container (17" diameter or less) for the workshop. Class size is limited. Reservations are guaranteed through payment on a first-come, first-served basis. Mercer Society members \$20. Non-members \$25. Make checks payable to The Mercer Society.

Lunch Bunch: Gardens in England

Wednesday, January 14 from noon to 1 p.m., join Mercer volunteer Sam Levine as he leads a tour of the gardens of the British Isles. From home landscapes to historic public gardens and castle estates we will visit some of the finest gardens England has to offer.

Arbor Day

Saturday, January 24 from 9 a.m. to noon, join tree expert John Ross as he discusses great trees for the Houston area. After the talk there will be a tree planting demonstration and a tree seedling giveaway. Celebrate Arbor Day and plant a tree for yourself!



Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens is a Harris County Precinct 4 facility 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 mercercarboretum@cp4.hctx.net. On the web at <http://www.cp4.hctx.net/mercercarboretum>.

Garden Gifts...

News from our Outreach Gardens

By Kenneth Dorman

In years past (all two and one half of them) we have taken out the spring and summer crops in late September and prepared all the beds for fall and winter plants at the same time. This year, however, we planted tomatoes and cucumbers in August and they will last until frost; we are letting the eggplants and okra and chiles do the same and left the sweet potatoes until November. So, the garden is sort of mixed up right now. We have collards, cabbage, carrots, chard, cilantro and lettuce growing in between all the summer veggies. Everything looks great, and we are harvesting more food. In December we will plant some more lettuce and the 1015 onion sets in the tomato beds and plant regular potatoes in February.

At Bonita Street House of Hope we did it the old fashioned way because **Rodney** is not yet back to supervise the intensive approach. We left the bell and chile peppers in the ground, prepared the other beds and planted collards, cauliflower, cabbage, carrots, lettuce, two kinds of mustard greens and some turnip greens. We will put onions in with the lettuce and will make a bed available for potatoes. My new helper, **Charles**, is one of the residents and he has agreed to see that the plants are cared for.

Many thanks again to **Jean Fefer**, **Jinx Hammer**, **Barbara Kish**, **Richard**, **Harold** and all the others in the greenhouse that start our transplants for us. Speaking of thanks, Thanksgiving happened after I turned this mess in, but I hope all of you have as much to be thankful for as I do. I take a little time each day to think about all the blessings I have received and am receiving and hope you find occasion to do the same. A number of celebrations of several religions are spread over the next few months and this affords those so inclined an added opportunity to reflect on what their religion has taught them about Love, Peace and Tolerance. Happy reflections to all.

Now, back to business. The sweet potato harvest was done by the book, and they turned out good. My ever-present Rodale Garden Problem Solver says they need 100-125 days to harvest, but that they taste better after a frost. We couldn't wait for the frost, but did wait 145 days from June 5 when they were planted. The bush Vardaman outperformed the dwarf Puerto Rico by a good deal in all respects and will be the potato of choice from now on. The okra grew so tall it started putting out blossoms at the bottom. I have never seen this before; I guess it began to feel sorry for **Walter** trying to cut it 9 feet up. We saved enough large pods for seed and then took them out in late November. The eggplants have had a resurgence also, inspired no doubt, by the cool weather and the foliar feeding I gave everybody in October. So far we have picked 120 pounds of fall tomatoes and have a lot more to go.

Someone pulled off a bunch of our unripe oranges. Why would anyone want green oranges? Even the mockingbirds have enough sense to wait until the tomatoes and figs get ripe. I wouldn't mind so much if the trees were big and the fruit was ripe, but we only have two small trees with not a lot of fruit. On the fruit subject we are going to take out three of the fig trees and put in some peach trees after the Fruit Tree Sale. The clients are not overly fond of the figs and the three trees we will have left will supply enough for the demand.

Walter Baker and **Bob Strawn** completed their Texas Master Gardener course in November and **George** and I expect to see a big improvement in their care for the garden now that they are educated in proper gardening methods.

Take a minute to close your eyes and say, "I love Myself", and see how good you feel about the rest of us.

Web Surfin'

Tech News for Master Gardeners

By Tom H Robb, Jr



When **Virginia Joiner** asked me to send an email about decorating the Christmas tree at the Extension Office it gave me an idea. This being the holiday season, I reasoned that perhaps some of the members would like to find the location of some holiday Clip Art - free, of course. I add this last because the web is full of Clip Art of all kinds - for a price. So I did a little searching to see what I could find.

I found a great number of Clip Art sites - most of them wanting some cash (not a surprise). But I have selected a few that are free which you might want to take a look at and even copy for a card or a decoration and some other reason. Remember, almost any image on the web can be copied simply by right clicking on the image, selecting 'Save to' and choosing a save location on your computer. I have five sites for Christmas clipart and two sites for Hanukkah. They are all copyright free and there for you to use.

A nice Christmas site has been created by the Thames Family who have put together a collection of Christmas clipart at http://www.geocities.com/~bug_hut/Christmas1997/contents.html

KidsDomain Holiday Fun maintain a Christmas Clip Art page at <http://www.kidsdomain.com/holiday/xmas/clip.html> and a Hanukkah page at <http://www.kidsdomain.com/holiday/chanukah/clip.html>

Additional Christmas clipart pages include: Clip Art of Christmas Images at <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Ranch/4842/ximage.html> Christmas Clip Art at <http://www.desktoppublishing.com/christmas-clips.html> and The Clip Art of Christmas at <http://www.bizart.com/christmas/>

An additional Hanukkah page is 'Free Hanukkah Images from Bitsela Artz' which you will find at <http://www.bitsela.com/hanukkah.htm>

To change the subject, several issues ago, in 'Urban or eDirt', I told you about Spyware and what it could do and how it loaded itself into a computer without anyone knowing about it. This morning in conducting a modest amount of searching, I picked up 10 new spyware cookies including, of course, "Gator" which is the most invasive of them all. It's almost impossible to go anywhere on the net without being invaded by "Gator" so you should use "SkyBot - Search & Destroy" often to get rid of it and other potential troublemakers.

Wishing each and every one of you Merry Holidays and a prosperous New Year.

Happy surfin'

Garden Gossip

News from Our Gardens

Pond, Bog & Dry Ditches

By Virginia Joiner

The following practical ponding tips appeared in Pond and Garden magazine July-August 2000. I think they are worthy of being passed on to those of you that have a pond.

Instead of gravel topping on your aquatic plants, use lava rock. Fish don't seem to like rooting around in the coarser lava rock.

Hopefully you do not have the following problem: but just in case you do here is a suggestion. When you net the duck weed off your pond stick it in a freezer bag and freeze it. It will stay nice and green and make a tasty treat for your aquarium fish of indoor pond fish during the winter. Fish do like their salad.

The following is general information from Grady and I about feeding your fish in the colder months. Goldfish do not have true stomachs. Their food is digested directly in the intestinal tract. Because of this water temperature is very important. Do not feed your fish when the water temperature is below fifty-five degrees. During this period you can feed high carbohydrate foods. Cheerios are a good choice for this time.

In closing, I want to draw your attention to the gypsy spirit of some of the plants in our gardens. In the ditches in front of the Shade Garden and the Heritage Garden we have several of these vagabonds. Zinnia's, begonias and basil that seeded from the Herb Garden are just a few. As I admire their tenacity, they are being left alone to achieve whatever level of growth they can. They add color and diversity to the areas.



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Ornamental Grasses

Continued from page 1

Gulf Muhly Grass, Gulf Coast Muhly - *Muhlenbergia capillaris*

Last month, Virginia Joiner called attention to this lovely accent grass which also grows in the dry bog area. At 18" to 30", this tough but beautiful plant is native to the Gulf coast. In the Daylily Garden it accents the entrance to the trellis. For sun or shade, this medium sized native clumping grass looks spectacular grouped together in a landscape. Blooms look like a purple haze in the fall, Aug. - Oct. Provides accent and mass, the soft round form is good for small gardens.

In the Color Border/ Perennial Garden:

Japanese Silver Grass - *Miscanthus sinensis*

This tall (to 7') herbaceous perennial forms clumps that spread slowly to about 2'. The fine blades have green and white stripes. The leaves are upright at the base and arching at the tip. The flowers are produced in late summer, and can be used for drying or as a dye plant. The plant will adapt to many soil types but does prefer full sun. The foliage turns brown in winter but the flowers remain effective and add interest to the winter landscape. This plant likes full sun, fertile well-drained soil, but will tolerate partial shade. Clumps can be dug and divided every three or four years to propagate or refine the plant.

Dwarf Pampas Grass - *Cortaderia selloana* 'Pumila'

Before you say "yuck, Pampas Grass..." remember this is a strong, dependable plant choice for any soil in sun. The unique dwarf variety, "Ivory Feathers" takes up half the space of the usual giant, and is suitable for smaller gardens and containers. Its handsome fall flowers of white plumes are held above the foliage on 6-foot stalks. Propagate by division every three to four years by digging and diving the clump. Our beautiful specimen anchors the southwest entrance to the Meditation Garden.

In the Color Border/ Perennial Garden:

Inland Sea Oats - *Chasmanthium litifolium*

A great grass for shady areas, this 24" – 36" native perennial likes well-drained soil. It is a clump forming grass with wide blades, and decorative seed heads that nod and sway in the breezes. In the landscape, Inland Sea Oats has use as a hedge or for erosion control, while providing food and cover for birds and small mammals, and is a larval host plant for some butterflies.

Black Seeded Fountain Grass - *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Moudry'

Noted for its striking purple/ black foxtail plumes which nestle in graceful mid-green foliage, the Black-Seeded Fountain is a great size for a small bed or garden. The plumes are darker early in the bloom season, and have a glitter effect when seen in the early morning sun. At 2 – 3' tall, this is a great grass for the smaller bed or garden venue.

In the Dry Bog:

Little Bunny Grass - *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Little Bunny'

A miniature fountain grass, Little Bunny has prolific white flowers (like bunny tails). The flower clusters (plums) appear in summer to fall and can be used in flower arrangements both fresh and dried. Most species are very frost hardy. This petite grass is ideal for rock gardens.

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://harris-cnty.tamu.edu/hcmga/urban.htm>.

December 2003

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
	1	2 Bear Creek Hamburger Tues. Carol Cammack on 'Holiday Flo- ral Design' page 5	3 Precinct 2 Christmas Party. page 7	4	5	6
7	8	9 Work Day at the Extension Office	10	11	12	13
14	15 Newsletter deadline 5pm	16 Fruit Study Group at Bear Creek page 5	17	18	19	20
21	22	23 Work Day at the Extension Office	24	25 Thanksgiv- ing Holiday Exten- sion Office Closed	26 Thanksgiv- ing Holiday Exten- sion Office Closed	27
28	29	30 Work Day at the Extension Office	31			

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Editor's Note

By Carol Cammack

As I write this, Thanksgiving is approaching and I was thinking about all the things that I'm thankful for here at the Extension Office. At the top of my list is all the wonderful Master Gardeners that I have the opportunity to work with. We don't say it often enough how privileged Extension is to have such a talented and enthusiastic group of people working to help us accomplish our goals. The other thing I happen to be thankful for at the moment is that the gardens didn't flood over this year as they did last year. The loss of plants and fish was a devastating event. I am still amazed at how hard everyone worked to restore the gardens, and a year later, you can't even tell there was a flood.

In other news, Urban Dirt continues to grow at an amazing rate. I sincerely hope everyone is finding something that interests them in every issue. If you have suggestion about other kinds of items we might include, please feel free to let us know. We're always looking for new contributions, so if you have something you would like to contribute please send it in. We do have certain space limitation 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.

I hope everyone has a great Holiday Season. I'll look forward to seeing you all at the Extension Office on December 2 for the ceremonial decorating of the Christmas Tree, Hamburgers and hopefully a pretty good talk by yours truly.



Photo by Carol Cammack