

UrbanDirt

IN COOPERATION WITH THE TEXAS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Mercer to the Rescue

The Center for Plant Conservation (CPC) announced that yet another of the more than 600 imperiled plants in the CPC National Collection of Endangered Plants has been fully sponsored, preserving America's native flora for the future. Thanks to generous donors, the Texas trailing phlox (*Phlox nivalis* ssp. *texensis*) is now fully supported, ensuring funds that help scientists bank this rare native plant's seeds, conduct research on the plant, and plan for and implement restoration to the wild.

In April of 2002, Mercer's veteran native plant volunteer **Carol Kobb** led the way towards sponsorship of the Texas trailing phlox with a gift in memory of her friend **Millie Gaudino** of Houston, Texas. Two months later The Mercer Society joined the fund-raising effort with a generous donation of \$5,775 from River Oaks Garden Club in honor of their 75th Anniversary.

Throughout 2002 and early 2003, other interested individuals contributed to the funding drive, including another of Mercer's veteran native plant volunteers and Master Gardener, **David Berkshire**, and Mercer staff members **Suzanne Chapman** in honor of her parents **Ann C. Baumer** and **Derek Chapman**, and **Anita Tiller** in memory of her parents **Ruth Lina** and **Werner Gerhard Tiller**. This October, the Mercer Memorial Trust helped the sponsorship drive with a donation of \$2,997 and on November 19 after a year-long fund-raising effort, The Mercer Society completed full sponsorship of the Texas trailing phlox with a final donation of \$678. The Mercer Society has pledged to sponsor one plant at Mercer in the National Collection each year.

Texas trailing phlox, a ground creeper with thin, needle-like leaves and pink to magenta to white flowers, is so vulnerable it was once thought extinct. A handful of remaining populations have since been found, and the species was federally listed as endangered in 1991. This Texas native is endemic to the Pineywoods region of southeastern Texas, where long-leaf pine savanna once dominated.

Researchers at **Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens**, a CPC participating institution in Humble, Texas, are working with other partners to restore this beautiful native wildflower to its original habitat. Mercer's partners include the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Nature Conservancy, Sam Houston State College, the Garden Clubs of America, and others.

Horticulturists at Stephen F. Austin Mast Arboretum supply propagated plants for on-going restoration projects at the Big Thicket National Preserve in East Texas. Mercer botanists also work with colleagues from the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, a CPC participating institution in Austin, Texas, to maintain a bank of wild-collected seeds that



photo by Suzanne Chapman

Continued on page 15

President's Thoughts

By Virginia Joiner

A New Year represents new beginnings and the rebirth of things that brought us a great deal of pleasure during past seasons in our gardens. During this time of the year I have a tendency to see only the frost bitten and the stubs that are waiting for rebirth. A friend taught me to see the beauty in my winter garden by looking at it from a different perspective. He taught me to look for the architectural shapes and forms that winter unveils.

New beginnings and rebirth are going on at the Extension Center. January 17 some of our members planted 30 Bald Cypress trees along Bear Creek Drive. **Bob White**, Master Gardener, heard about the availability of the free trees and pursued it for the association. **Carol Cammack** developed the landscape design. We are very grateful to **Gary Woods, Melissa Schmid** of ChevronTexaco and **ChevronTexaco**.

There will be a lot of new beginnings as a result of the Fruit Tree Sale that we held on January 24th. **David Parish** and **Doug McLeod** selected some of the old varieties that everyone wants and came up with some other outstanding varieties: Pong Koa-Mandarin, Honey-Mandarin, several different satsumas and two wonderful oranges, Moro Blood and Ruby Blood. These are only a few of the trees that were offered.

We graduated 69 new Master Gardeners on January 15th. This represents countless new beginnings around the city and county. They will share their new knowledge with friends, neighbors and organized groups. Their discoveries, as a result of the Master Gardener Program, are like throwing a stone into a pond. The ripples go on and on creating new beginnings.

These are only a few examples of what is going on at the Extension Center. Come and be apart our new beginnings and the rebirth of all gardens.

Wear your smile and come into the garden.

A gardener's work is never at an end. It begins with the year, and continues to the next.

- John Evelyn



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Michael's Corner

By Michael Morrison



photo by Michael Morrison

Just Daydreaming here. So many catalogs and so little time to dream about the garden this year. Gee, I still have seed packages from last year I never got around to planting. This is the time of the year when your mind overpowers your thought processes and you envision this **BIG** garden. This year I am trying to keep the list more realistic.

I wanted you to know that the State Master Gardener Conference this year is in Corpus Christi on May 6-8th, at the Bayfront Plaza and Convention Center. I know that Precinct 2 folks are talking up a storm about taking a group and would like for the Harris County Master Gardener Association to be well represented this year. We have put in for several awards again this year and want the wonderful state of Texas to know that Houston Master Gardeners are the best. Think about sun block, the smell of the ocean, the crashing of the waves on the beach, and the great friends. What else do you need? Well, how about me listing some of the activities this year at the convention:

Thursday, May 6, there is a great selection of day tours including the King Ranch Nature Tour and Saddle Shop, Port Aransas Tour, the Welder Wildlife Refuge Tour. A welcome reception follows at the Corpus Christi Botanical Gardens with a Mariachi band and refreshments. Friday, May 7th, there is a trade show at the convention center and possible tours of Anderson's bromeliads, Master Gardener Home Tours, Botanical Gardens, and Xeriscape learning center. That evening is the awards banquet and dinner. Then Saturday, the 8th of May, the trade show continues and there are breakout sessions on Insects/Photo, Landscaping, Speciality, Vegetable, Nature, to name a few. Sounds like a wonderful conference and you should think about attending this year. **Charlie Reass**, and **John Plotzki** have the information and contact them or myself about this years convention. I would like to see a great turnout for Harris County!

We had a great time on the bus tour to Moody Gardens looking at the new tree book that was passed around the bus. In this new book by **Carmine Stahl** and **Ria McElvaney** called *Trees of Texas*, I found out that Osage Orange, *Maclura pomifera*, fruit is used as a cockroach repellent. (There is something out there that repels them?) Slippery Elm, *Ulmus rubra*, is used for cough suppressant, pain reliever, and skin ointment. It is one of the four ingredients in the herbal cancer remedy Essiac. Also, Slippery Elm twigs once served as primitive toothbrushes. Next time you are in the woods for several weeks and get hungry, just take some Eastern Rebud blossoms and munch on them. They are edible and tasty and you can eat them raw and the young, pealike pods can be stir fried and eaten like snow peas. I am not yet ready to be Ewell Gibbons, but it is an interesting book, although most of the pictures are not in color.

Do not forget the **Tree Study Group** and the **Fruit Study Group** meet at Bear Creek. The next Fruit Study group meeting is February 10th at 7pm at the Bear Creek Extension office.

Anyone who is interested in providing a design of a logo for our Harris County Master Gardeners, please send them in soon. We would like to see what is out there before we make a decision.

Soon, I will not be dreaming, as the greenhouse will be full of tomatoes and peppers. Remember to tell everyone that the sale Tomato Pepper Sale is February 28th at Bear Creek, and Precinct 2 has a Fruit Tree, Tomato and Pepper Sale the same day.

Being a Master Gardener is wonderful, so smile, let everyone know and enjoy the garden!

Garden Gifts

News from our Outreach Gardens

By Kenneth Dorman

Starting to write about February in the first part of January puts a pretty good test on my psychic powers, but we had a meeting of all the gardeners to decide what we were going to do so that helps see the future. All the gardeners include a new one, **Shirley Nix**, who just finished the Master Gardener class along with **Dr. Bob Strawn** and **Walter Baker**. Rounding out the group is George Williams, immediate past president, and myself. We are pleased to have Shirley and hope she will put up with four grumpy old men.

One of the apple trees, the one from the Bahamas (Anna), has begun to bloom. I hope it continues until the one from Israel (Dorsett) starts so we can get baby apples. The trees are near the African Blue basil, which is still blooming like crazy and covered with bees so we should get super pollination. No blooms yet on the pear trees, but they have been warned and I am sure they will respond; otherwise they are bar-b-que wood. I'm afraid these experimental pear trees are going to have fruit as described in my handy gardener's dictionary - "Fruit - General term for the seed-bearing part of a plant that turns mushy, is eaten by birds or worm, drops off, rots, gets funny spots and speckles, isn't what was pictured in the catalog, tastes like a glove, or doesn't appear at all." When we cut down the surplus fig trees we uncovered some of **Bob Kish's** multiplying onions that are now flourishing in the sunlight. Very hardy plants these babies.

The Crawford Heirloom reseeded lettuce is really producing. We have cut it several times and it just keeps coming back, putting up four or five stalks with smaller leaves every time we cut it. I saved a lot of seed from the Zeebest okra again so if anyone needs any just let me know. It is the best okra I have ever eaten and one plant will feed a family. Our chard and collards have done like the lettuce and just keep growing new leaves every time we cut it. I hate to pull all that stuff up to make way for the spring and summer veggies, but it has to be done if the clients are to have tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, squash, chiles, beans, onions, potatoes, cucumbers, melons and the like.

We built two of our 16" beds up to 24" by using the blocks from another low bed and transferring the soil to the newly raised beds. Some time around the second week in February we will get our compost and cottonseed meal and rework all the beds to prepare for planting in March. This is the time of year the real work begins, plus we are going to have to redo a lot of the irrigation system.

The Bonita Street House of Hope will get compost and fertilizer at the same time as CCSC and we will fix those beds on a Saturday since that is when they get their community service folks. These beds need a lot of work this year to get them back in shape after having been moved pretty seriously. As always, the greenhouse is raising our tomatoes, eggplants and peppers and we send our most heartfelt thanks to all of them.

Love yourself and be happy, which I guess is an oxymoron!

"...hope she will put
up with four grumpy old
men."

Web Surfin'

Tech News for Master Gardeners

By Tom H Robb, Jr



Good news - on January 1, 2004 the Can-Spam act went into effect. Bad news - since January 1, 2004, no one seems to pay attention to it.. Actually, a large amount of Spam doesn't actually originate in the United States - mostly it comes from China, Russia, Romania, and the Netherlands. Funny that these countries don't respect our laws.

Actually, like so many laws passed by Congress, the bill is full of holes. After all, they wanted legitimate firms to send you mail - whether you want it or not. So if you include a valid address, truthful Subject, From, and Reply fields and a legitimate "Cease and Desist" field, then you can send Spam.

Dwight Silverman, in his January 3 Computing Column in the Houston Chronicle, made the observation that the new law only makes Spammers change their modus operandi. Who can tell if a message in your mailbox comes from someone obeying the new law or one who is flaunting it. We all know, or we should know, that sending that email to "unsubscribe" can often be only a rouse to determine if the spammer has the correct address and when you send the email, he knows that the address is good.

Although, it's a bother, most spam can be quickly deleted without taking the time to read it - simply look at the title or the address. Titles containing series of numbers or symbols should grab your interest. Porn that adds additional letters to fool the antiporn software is evident. Titles that claim a device can give you free movies, enlarge body parts, give you huge profits overnight - it's a mystery how anyone can fall for them - but some do. Don't believe email supposedly coming from Microsoft warning you of a virus - Microsoft doesn't send such email. And it's amazing how many of our members fall for the "Teddy Bear" virus which tells you that you have a virus if a certain file in Windows has a teddy bear icon which you must delete to clean up the file. Actually all Windows Operating Systems have such a file and deleting it damages your system.

Another hoax which purports to come from a bank president in Nigeria or a banker from Korea or some other country who claims he needs to remove several million dollars from the country and needs your bank account number in order to transfer the money. Who could fall for such a hoax? Someone must because they have been coming for over a year. Don't send your credit card number unless you are in a secure file and unless you know for certain who is on the other end of your line and under no circumstances give a debit card number out. The same holds true for social security numbers, passwords, and pin numbers unless you are absolutely positive who is receiving them.

Unfortunately, many of our members have become so conscious of these hoaxes and spammers that they have elected to block all email except for a selected list. And, also unfortunately, a number of these Master Gardeners are not receiving email or the eDirt publication because they have neglected to include Carol's email address ccammack@ag.tamu.edu or mine trobb@hal-pc.org.

When you change your address, email or postal, let me know so that I can get your records corrected. I have had to drop a lot of people because you have changed your address and did not let me know.

Happy Surfin'!

"On the Road..."

By Katherine Peterson

On January 7th the Master Gardeners were on the road to Galveston. Since our bus only accommodated 27, we had 12 who carpoled giving us a total of 39 attending. Our first stop was Moody Gardens where we met our tour guide, **Donita Brannon** (15 years with Moody Gardens) and her assistant **Holly**. Donita led us on a very interesting tour through the Rainforest telling us about the different plants and creatures that we saw. She also told us about different projects that Moody Gardens works on in conjunction with TAMU and UH. After touring the Rainforest, we were bussed to the Greenhouse where we were all presented with a gift plant and some were able to get starts of others that they liked. At the Greenhouse we were able to see the plants up close and ask more questions. Those of you who were unable to go on this tour may want to find time to go on your own. There is something interesting for all ages. It was nice being in a tropical atmosphere on such a cold day!

From there we journeyed to Fisherman's Wharf for lunch. It was so good and fresh! They had reserved us space in the Elissa Room so we had a view of that beautiful ship as we ate. The service was great too. Thanks to **Tom Robb** for recommending this restaurant.

After lunch we headed out to Dickinson, Texas to the Galveston Extension Office. I had emailed the Horticultural Agent, **William Johnson**, and asked if we could stop by and see what they were doing. I had also asked if someone would be able to give us a tour and tell us about their projects. He said that he would speak to us. Well, SURPRISE! When we got there Dr. Johnson, three of their Master Gardeners, and the Chairman of their Master Gardener Association eagerly met us. They had a photo album that showed what the area looked like when they started (an asphalt parking lot) and how it had progressed. The garden is on top of the asphalt parking lot and has a pond. They had done a very good job. One observation was how neat and clean everything was. They told us about their future plans to hopefully move to Carbide Park within the next couple of years. But that wasn't all; they invited us inside for something to warm us up. That sounded great! Inside we were met by other Master Gardeners and served a **warm fruit salad** (see recipe above), cake, coffee, and hot chocolate. They really went all out for our visit and with only a couple of days notice! We learned a big lesson in hospitality and we all left uplifted by their enthusiasm.

Warm Fruit Salad

1 jar (25 ounces) chunky applesauce
 1 can (21 ounces) cherry pie filling
 1 can (20 ounces) pineapple chunks, undrained
 1 can (15-1/4 ounces) sliced peaches, undrained
 1 can (15-1/4 ounces) apricot halves, undrained
 1 can (15 ounces) mandarin oranges, undrained
 ½ cup packed brown sugar
 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Place the first six ingredients in a slow cooker and stir gently. Combine brown sugar and cinnamon; sprinkle over fruit mixture. Cover and cook on low for 3-4 hours.

Yield: 16 servings.

Volunteer Opportunities

By Scott Hume

KUDOS. We have been working on submitting things our Master Gardeners have done in the past year for the State Master Gardener Association Awards. What an eye-opener!! It made me want to share with you all the truly great things that go on around here. It made me want to tell you about what many of our unsung heroes are routinely doing. So here goes...

You know about that saying, "You never miss them until they are gone?" Well, when **Dave Mason** "went missing" to care for his injured wife, **Margaret**, we suddenly realized how much that tall quiet guy with the funny accent does around here!! We are thrilled he's back with us – because his presence and assistance is invaluable, and it means that Margaret is better too!!

Do you know someone who "is around here somewhere" but you're not sure where – because he seems to do so many things? That would be **Richard Lund**. He is in the greenhouse. He's out in the orchard working on the new irrigation timers. He's repairing all the irrigation system leaks and making sure that all the gardens get enough water. He's in the Board meeting... He's always doing something and never complaining or beating his own drum.

You probably haven't noticed it yet but you will. Our Library is going uptown. Why? Because **Jane Faber** has taken it over. She is tirelessly compiling a real catalog of all our books and journals. She will then rearrange all those shelves to make some sense of them. She would love some help, particularly with any suggestions on how to make the books secure. Any ideas? Want to help her? Have at it!!

As you may be aware, we have had a major Tree Planting at the entrance to our parking lot. This is because **Robert White** would not take "no" for an answer. He labored through and over many obstacles to obtain 30 Bald Cypress with which we have planted to enhance the otherwise barren entrance to our parking area. Many thanks Robert.

WHERE ARE YOU? After all the requests we had been receiving, and the enthusiastic welcome we got at Hermann Park, I thought we would have dozens of people signing on down at Hermann Park. Know how many we have so far? One!! They need you – not as a cheap corps of weeders – as Master Gardeners with much to contribute. If any of you have any idea why this has not been met with a gaggle of volunteers, please let me know.

Next month I will start detailing some of the Award submissions we made this year so you can share our pride!! If you have ideas, comments or need more information contact me at: oshume@ag.tamu.edu or (281) 855-5635.

Ronald McDonald House in Need of Volunteers

The work is varied, some is a one time event, other event are occasional. There is always a need for folks on a regular basis to weed, water and do gardening of one sort or another. The area is lovely and the people really appreciate what we do! Please contact Hope Dyson at (713) 529-8802 or hdyson@swbell.net.

HCMGA News & Events

In Memorium

Billie Duncan

I just wanted to let you all know that my dad, **Billie Duncan**, passed away on November 25. He worked in the Extension Center greenhouse at Bear Creek for a number of years. He was diagnosed with emphysema and lung cancer early last year and fought a valiant battle against the diseases until they finally overcame him. I know he enjoyed his time as a Master Gardener and especially the work he did at the Center. His ashes are residing in our garden at our farm in Franklin. If you could pass this along to anyone who knew Daddy through the Master Gardener program at Bear Creek in Houston, I would really appreciate it.

Caroline Lawson

Bobby L. Pearce

We were saddened to learn that **Bobby L. Pearce**, graduate of the Spring Class of 1999, passed away in November of this year. Bobby maintained a continuous membership in HCMGA from graduation until the time of his death. He and his wife, Dorothy, resided in Weimar, Texas.

Bear Creek Events

Feb 3 - Hamburger Tuesday. Come early and get some of those volunteer hours in. The greenhouse is busy getting ready for the Tomato Sale so there is work to do even if the weather isn't the greatest. Then enjoy those hamburgers at 11:30 a.m. in the auditorium. Our own **Karen Breneman** will be presenting a new topic '**Facts and Folklore of Selected Texas Native Plants**'. Sounds interesting! You won't want to miss it.

Feb 17 - General Meeting. After refreshments at 6:30 p.m., we will have the privilege of hearing **Glen Olsen** with The Audubon Society and the Native Plant Society. His topic is '**Gardening for Birds in Houston**'. Want to know what plants you can plant to attract birds? What birds like which plants best? Any other questions you've had and haven't found the answer to? Bring them to the meeting. This topic is timed perfectly since you can then look for the plants you decide on at the April Plant Sale. In the meantime you can plan where you will plant them.

Feb 27 & 28 - Tomato & Pepper Sale & Setup. Once again your help will be needed. A good time for those of you who can't come on Tuesdays to get some service hours.

Bear Creek Events

Feb 3 - Hamburger Tuesday
8:00 a.m. Work up an appetite
11:30 a.m. Home cooked burgers
Noon: Karen Breneman on
'Facts and Folklore of Selected Texas Native Plants'

Feb 10 - Fruit Study Group
6:30 p.m. Refreshments.
7:00 p.m. Topic TBA.

Feb 17 - General Meeting
6:30 p.m. Refreshments. Bring a dessert or snack to share.
7:00 p.m. Glen Olsen on
'Gardening for Birds in Houston'

Feb 27 - Setup for the Tomato & Pepper Sale.

Feb 28 - Tomato & Pepper Sale.
 Bear Creek.

Mar 2 - Hamburger Tuesday
8:00 a.m. Work up an appetite
11:30 a.m. Home cooked burgers
Noon: Clyde Cannon on
'Antique Roses at HCMGA'

Mar 15 - Field Trip
10:00 a.m. A Carpooling Event to
Bayou Bend

Mar 16 - General Meeting
6:30 p.m. Refreshments. Bring a dessert or snack to share.
7:00 p.m. Diana Foss on
Invasive Plants in Houston

Mar 31 - Field Trip
10:00 a.m. A bus trip to **Stephen F. Austin State University**.

Continued on page 9

HCMGA News & Events

Continued from page 8

Mar 2 - Hamburger Tuesday. After a morning of working in the gardens and having a hamburger lunch, our own **Clyde Cannon** will be speaking on 'Antique Roses at HCMGA'.

Mar 15 - Bayou Bend Field Trip. A Carpooling Event has been planned. **Roy Woods** has made arrangements with **Bayou Bend** for a private tour of their gardens on a Monday when the gardens are otherwise closed. The tour begins promptly at 10:00 am. Our tour guide will be the curator of the gardens **Mr. Bart Bechter**. Cost of the tour is \$3.00. The tour is limited to 30 therefore – the first 30 reservations (with payment) will go!

Mar 16 - General Meeting. Refreshments at 6:30 p.m. We've had two months to lose those holiday pounds so bring an extra special treat. Our speaker this month will be **Diana Foss**. Her topic 'Invasive Plants in Houston!'

Mar 31 - SFA Field Trip. A bus trip is planned to **Stephen F. Austin State University**. This trip includes three individual tours – an Azalea Garden Tour, an Arboretum Tour, and a Piney Woods Tour. The bus will accommodate 39. We will be having a buffet lunch at The Fredonia Hotel. Cost with lunch included is \$21.00. Additional information and reservation forms will be available at the February General Meeting on February 17th.

Master Gardener Home Tour

The Program Committee is accepting applications for the Spring Master Gardener Home Tour on Saturday, May 15th. We would love to have YOUR GARDEN on the tour. We will try to select five gardens in the same general area making it convenient to attend each one. Applications are available in the Master Gardener Office.

Questions? Contact **Katherine Peterson** - (281) 497-3555.

A Carpooling Event To BAYOU BEND

Monday, March 15, 2004
10:00 a.m. - Tour Begins

Please register by completing the form below and turning it in to Becky Deasy or Katherine Peterson with **\$3.00** payment no later than Tuesday, March 9, 2004. (Refunds cannot be made after final reservation count has been submitted.)
Limited to 30 attendees.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TELEPHONE NUMBER _____ Check _____ Cash _____

Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids, services or accommodations in order to participate in this function should call (281) 855-5600 for assistance.

Letters Praise HCMGA

Lucinda Reynolds was in the Fall Class of 1989. In 1995 she moved to Mountain Home, Arkansas but has maintained her membership with HCMGA. I recently received the following email from Lucinda - I think it speaks for itself.

Hi Tom [Robb],

I thought I best explain why I sent you the information about my Arkansas MG award. I merely wanted to let someone in the Harris County MG Program know that a person who got her start with the Texas MG program in 1988/1989 continued on in another state. We left Houston in the spring of 1995.

I learned so much when I was active with the Harris County MG program--and it was partially because all I learned in Texas (from Tom LeRoy, etc.) that I was able to help build a strong program here in Mountain Home. We currently have 101 members--usually 65 members attend the monthly meetings.

We --Baxter County Master Gardeners--also have Special Interest Groups (Wildflowers/Native Plants; Vegetables; Herbs; Roses; Perennials & Annuals) which meet separately and which the membership thoroughly enjoy. The horticulture table at each meeting also is very educational and fun.

I have been fortunate to have been a member of two beginning MG Programs--and here I have been able to help the Program grow and prosper.

Just wanted to tell someone about my joy of being a Master Gardener. I am proud to have been selected as the 2003 Arkansas Master Gardener of the Year. However, when my term as president ends in October, I hope to take a 'less active' roll in both the local and state levels.

Lucinda Reynolds

This letter comes from **Phyllis Stephenson**, a graduate of the Spring 2003 Class.

Dear Carol [Cammack],

Just wanted to send a note of praise for the wonderful Master Gardener classes at Bear Creek. My husband is in the oil industry, and during a "tour of duty" in California some years back I completed a California Master Gardener program.

The one you offer is at such a higher level of learning that there is truly no way to compare the two. In California, there was no handbook given, only a few handouts. The basics of plant growth, soil, environmental issues, and a good number of other important areas were mostly absent. The instruction was mostly directed toward local topics of interest (grapes, oranges, etc.).

Thanks to you, Mike, and the Bear Creek group for your great efforts and all I feel I've (hopefully) learned.

Phyllis Stephenson

Precinct 2 News & Events

We've come back from the holidays rested and ready to start a new year. A thank you needs to go out to **Diane Bryant, Christa Kaiser** and **Angela Chandler** for taking care of the greenhouse and garden while many of us were enjoying vacations.

We came back to a great First Wednesday Program with **Odean Head** of the Bromeliad Society. We also enjoyed chili and all the fixings, thanks to all who contributed to the potluck lunch.

The construction in the office is complete, a special thanks to **Pat Stier** and her helpers, **Ginia Keen** and **Jessica Pfeiffer** for their efforts in putting it all back together.

Tuesday, January 13th we had a greenhouse workday. **Pat Stier, Jessica Pfeiffer, Marliene Oren, Pat Mitrowski,** and **Christa Kaiser** bumped up tomatoes for the spring sale, while **Ruth Touchstone, Diane Bryant** and **Angela Chandler** worked on organization and making room for all those growing tomatoes.

Wednesday, January 14th **Angela Chandler** conducted a hands on leaf propagation class attending were **Theresa Holloman, Pat Mitrowski, Janice Patrick, Barbara Morrison, Eleanor Borda, Regina Flaherty, Gloria Gibson** and **Ginia Keen**. We learned several different methods of leaf propagation. If you haven't been able to make any of Angela's propagation classes you're missing out, mark your calendar for Feb 20th when she'll show us techniques of stem propagation.

And our best news is that we have the largest number of Precinct 2 interns graduating January 15th that we've ever had! Congratulations to **Bob Beyer, Diane Bryant, Regina Flaherty, Linda Garren, Gloria Gibson, Christa Kaiser, Ginia Keen, Shirley Nash, Pat Stier, Patty Zolen,** and **J. C. Whitney**. Your contributions to the Master Gardener program and to especially to the Genoa Friendship Garden are appreciated more than you can know.

Precinct 2 Events

Feb 4 – First Wednesday

9:30 a.m. Registration

10:00 a.m. Debbie Markey of the Bromeliad Society on '**Mosaic Birdhouses**'.

11:00 a.m. Pot Luck Luncheon.

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

Feb 28 - Tomato, Pepper, Fruit Tree & Rose Sale

9:00 - 5:00 pm Sale hours

8:00 - 9:00 am Presale **Fruit Tree Seminar** featuring items available at the sale. 16335 El Camino Real Houston, TX 77062 at Clear Lake United Methodist Church. Please call (281) 991-8437 for more information and to obtain a preview inventory list.

Mar 3 – First Wednesday

9:30 a.m. Registration

10:00 a.m. Angela Chandler on "**Fern Propagation**".

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

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.

Urban Harvest Classes

Friday, Feb 6, 13, 20, 27 - Hands-On Fruit Tree Pruning by **Dr. Bob Randall**, 4 p.m. - 6 p.m., Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane; free; registration required. Winter is the season for garden maintenance critical to healthy trees and successful fruit production. Bring long sleeves and pants, eye-glasses, gloves, and shears if you have them. Dr. Bob Randall grows a wide variety of citrus at his home and at the Urban Harvest garden. Diana Liga is Urban Harvest Community Gardens and Horticulture Coordinator. For more information contact: Kara Masharani (713) 880-5540 kara@urbanharvest.org or visit www.urbanharvest.org.

Monday, Feb.9,16 - How to Start a Community or School Garden by **Gary Edmondson**, 4 p.m. – 6:30 p.m., Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane; free; 713-880-5540; 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. For more information contact: Kara Masharani (713) 880-5540 kara@urbanharvest.org or visit www.urbanharvest.org.

Nancy Stallworth Thomas Horticulture Lecture

Wednesday, Feb 11 - Nancy Stallworth Thomas Horticulture Lecture, 10:00 am. Sponsored by the Garden Club of Houston. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Brown Auditorium. Speaker: Judith D. Luk, CEO of the Brooklyn Botanical Garden. Lecture is free-of-charge

Houston Farmers Market is BACK!

Saturday January 31 - Houston Farmers Market. Hello, Friends of the **Houston Farmers Market!** We are so excited to be announcing the re-opening of the Houston Farmers Market, located behind Onion Creek Coffee House at 3106 White Oak in the Houston Heights. The Grand Re-Opening Date is Saturday January 31 - a little earlier than originally planned, because we are banking on an early spring here in Texas. On that Saturday and every Saturday thereafter, the Market vendors will be set up from 8 AM til noon.

Here is a short list of the wonderful items you can buy on the Grand Re-opening day, weather willing and the creek don't rise: Calamondins, Carrots, Beets, Mustard greens, Radishes, Sour oranges, beautiful long stalks of Delphinium in purple, blue, and some white, Foxglove, Garlic Chives, Mexican Marigold, Manzanilla, Fennel, Cilantro, Dill, Chrysanthemum, Bok Choy, Tatsoi, Pak Choy-reg, Pak Choy-Mei Quing Chi, Hon Tsai Tai, Mizuna, Michihili Napa, Savoy Cabbage, Red and Green Dandelions, Straight Mustard Greens, Curly Mustard Greens, Collard Greens, Red Russian Kale, Redbor Kale, Green Curly Kale, Dinosaur Kale, Arugula, Swiss Chard, Red Romaine, Green Romaine, Green leaf Lettuce, Red leaf Lettuce, Endive, Escarole, Turnips W/ Tops, Beets W/Tops, Red Cabbage, Green Cabbage, Spinach, Broccoli, Cauliflower, handmade soaps and body butter, handmade scrubs, Herbs, Teas.

Visit the Houston Farmers Market online at <http://www.houstonfarmersmarket.org> or contact the Market Manager **Susan Cobb** at susan@houstonfarmersmarket.org.

WaterSmart Workshop

By Angela Chandler



Reservations are now being taken for the 2004 WaterSmart Workshop! The 2004 WaterSmart Workshop will be held Saturday, March 6, 2004, at the University of Houston at Clear Lake from 7:30 am to 5:00 pm. This amazing workshop is an opportunity to hear some of the best speakers in the field of organic horticulture, watersmart landscaping methods, and watershed protection. 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.

The event fee is only \$40.00 which includes continental breakfast, lunch, a wide selection of classes, handouts, access to all exhibits and booths, admission to the landscape plant sale (presented by HCMGA Precinct 2 MG's), and a book signing. Such a Deal!!!

Pre-registration is required and the deadline is February 20. Attendance is limited, so register early. Registration forms and further information can be obtained by calling Chris LaChance at 281-218-0721. Forms will also be available at the Extension Office, at Precinct 2 MG offices, and at the city-wide fruit tree events. Attendance qualifies as CE credits for Master Gardeners, Advanced Training for Master Naturalists & SBEC credits for teachers and from www.watersmart.cc.

Even if you have attended the workshop in past years, each year new and exciting subjects and speakers are added. The 2004 events include: Keynote: Heidi Sheesley, WaterSmart Plant Selections, Keynote: Dr. David Creech, Beyond Butterflies in the Garden - Eddie Holik, Building Sensational Soil - Dr. John Jacob, Tree Selection & Care - Michael Merrit, Old Roses Revisited - Glen Schroeter Bog & Water Gardens - Mark Seaver, Natives as Cut Flowers - Dawn Parrish, Backyard Composting - Karen Overgaard, Reducing the Size of Your Lawn (Take Back Your Turf) - Cathy Nordstrum, Low Volume Irrigation - Angela Chandler. Here are some highlights for a few more speakers:

- **The Naturalistic Landscape** by **Mark Bowen** - Learn the elements required to blend native and naturalized plants for a beautiful and diverse garden. Mark will also be available to sign copies of his new book of the same title.
- **Designing For Your Site** by **Dr. Carol Cammack** - Learn to evaluate your site before you begin your landscape. You will learn how to evaluate your site before you begin a new landscape or bed. Make a maximum plan with a minimum of resources and effort.
- **Rain Gardening** by **Billy Kniffen** - Learn how to create an area in your yard to hold rainwater. Yes, hold it! Rain gardening uses plants in a shallow swale designed to hold rainwater for a few days so it will recharge our reservoirs and lessen contaminated runoff. Texas has many native plants that are well adapted to rain gardening.

Don't forget the deadline for registration is February 20th. See you there!

Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens

February Classes at Mercer

Master Gardener Registration - Monday, February 2 from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. (Harris County residents only from 8 a.m. to noon) Designed for gardening enthusiasts of all ages and backgrounds. Master Gardener training includes landscaping, vegetable gardening, lawn care, pest control, propagation and pruning, and more. The 12-week (consecutive) training session is held Thursday, March 4 thru May 27, 8:15 a.m.-3 p.m. Class size is limited to 35 with a course fee of \$150. Register in person only. For more information and a brochure, please call (281) 443-8731.

Lunch Bunch - A Year in Bulbs - Wednesday, February 11 from noon to 1 p.m., join **Greg Harmison** for a talk on the different **Bulbs for Harris County** and how to achieve year-round color from under the ground!

Saturday Workshop - Saturday, February 14 from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., join Mercer staff and The Texas Rose Rustlers as they lead a free hands-on training on the **Correct Pruning and Care of Roses** and a hands-on rose propagation demonstration. Now is the time to get those roses ready to bloom!

Saturday Program - Saturday, February 21 from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., join **Craig Nazor** of the Hartman Prehistoric Garden at Zilker Botanical Garden in Austin, Texas as he presents **Cycads and Where to Plant Them in the Modern Prehistoric Landscape**. This program features the fascinating group of plants that thrived during the age of dinosaurs and that can still thrive in your garden. Some special cycads will be available for sale after the lecture.

Ongoing

The Piney Woods Wildlife Society meets the third Tuesday of each month (December 16, January 20, February 17) 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 (December 28, January 25, February 22) 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/mercera>.

Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens

News from Mercer

Ms. Ursula Toney (pictured center) with ExxonMobil Exploration Company presented Master Gardener **Suzanne Sparks** (pictured left) of The Mercer Society with a \$500 grant check November 12, 2003, at Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens.

ExxonMobil's grant program offers employees and retirees \$500 grants for volunteering 20 hours of their time to tax-exempt organizations. As an added incentive, ExxonMobil offers spouses and children of employees the opportunity to accumulate volunteer hours towards the grants program.

The staff of Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, under the direction of Precinct 4 Commissioner **Jerry**

Eversole, appreciates the support of ExxonMobil and the volunteers who have donated time and grant funds. Many thanks to ExxonMobil volunteers **Helen** and **Gary Dowling**; **Mei** and **Jim Hoppie**; **Suzanne** and **Jere Noreager**, **Dan Podkulski**, **Ellen Alfar**, and **Helen Eichblatt**.



Mercer to the Rescue

Continued from page 1

ensures the genetic diversity of future restorations. The Texas trailing phlox is on display in Mercer's Endangered Species Garden, where visitors often enjoy blooms year-round.

By collecting and securing seeds and cuttings from the few remaining wild populations, Mercer maintains the plant in the CPC National Collection, a bank of seeds, cuttings and other plant material from more than 600 of the nation's most imperiled native plants. Botanists in the CPC network around the country gather and catalogue these plant materials according to strict standards developed by CPC's science advisory council. The materials are then stored and maintained at the participating institution, preserving options for restoration.

National Collection material is used to study the life cycle and germination requirements of these rare treasures, and plants propagated from the collection are used by botanists and researchers for private, state, and federal plant and habitat restoration projects. Sponsorship endows a fund that provides secure, regular payments to the institution caring for the at-risk plant.

Five botanical institutions care for most of the Texas imperiled plants in the national collection. Collectively, the Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, San Antonio Botanical Garden, The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, the Desert Botanical Garden and the Arboretum at Flagstaff secure material for over 40 Texas species that are at risk.

The Center for Plant Conservation is dedicated solely to preventing the extinction of America's imperiled, native flora. CPC is a network of more than 30 of America's leading botanical institutions. By conducting conservation programs in horticulture, research, awareness and information exchange, CPC's network is striving to save America's rarest plants from being lost forever. For more information about the Center for Plant Conservation's work in Texas and around the country, please visit www.centerforplantconservation.org.

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>.

February 2004

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
1	2	3 Hamburger Tues. Karen Brenneman on 'Facts and Folk- lore of Selected Texas Native Plants' page 8	4 P2 1st We. Debbie Markey on 'Mosaic Bird Houses' page 11	5	6	7
8	9	10 Fruit Study Group Meet- ing. Work Day at the Extension Office.	11	12	13	14
15 Newsletter deadline 5pm	16	17 General Meet- ing. Glen Olsen on 'Gardening for Birds in Hous- ton" page 8	18	19	20	21
22	23	24 Work Day at the Extension Office	25	26	27	28 HCMGA Toma- to Pepper Sale - Bear Creek page 8 Precint 2 - To- mato Pepper Sale page 11
29						

UrbanDirt

Mercer to the Rescue.....	1
President's Thoughts.....	2
Michael's Corner.....	3
Garden Gifts	4
Web Surfin'.....	5
On the Road	6
Volunteer Opportunities.....	7
HCMGA News & Events.....	8
Letters Praise HCMGA	10
P2 News & Events	11
Events around Town	12
WaterSmart Workshop.....	13
Mercer News & Events.....	14
Volunteer Hrs Worksheet....	16
January Calendar.....	17
Editor's Note	18

Editor's Note

By Carol Cammack



'Santa Fe Grande' Jalapeno

photo by Carol Cammack

While most of the country finds themselves of under inches of snow and subzero weather, here in Houston we're already gearing up for our spring gardens. Consequently, the February issue of UrbanDirt is packed full of what we hope you will find to be useful and informative. There is news about our upcoming Tomato Pepper Sales at Bear Creek and Precinct 2, the WaterSmart Workshop, classes at Urban Harvest and Mercer, and the Nancy Stallworth Thomas Horticulture Lecture. Plus, don't forget to check out all the upcoming Master Gardener seminars, field trips and other events happening at Bear Creek and Precinct 2.

Also, please note the 'Letters Praise HCMGA' article on page 10. Its always a treat for our readers to hear from present and past members. If you have something you would like to contribute to Urban Dirt, please send it in. We would love to hear from you. Suggestions are always appreciated as well. We do have certain 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.