

UrbanDirt

IN COOPERATION WITH THE TEXAS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Volunteer Opportunities

By Scott Hume

Being unprepared. If there is one lesson I learned from the events of the past few months it is that not being prepared seems to be a recurring problem.

There are a lot of clichés that arise when you have to deal with the loss of a parent. When the process is long and drawn out the cliché that is most often used is that, “Well, at least you were prepared for it.” For those of you who are yet to face this part of life I must warn you... You’re still not “prepared” when it comes.

I was also not prepared for how important it became to get a simple e-mail of concern from all of you back here. You were struggling to find the “right words.” Meanwhile I was in the midst of trying to keep my feet on the ground and found that “any of your words” were enough to remind me that I was not alone. For that support I cannot thank you enough.

Finally I was not prepared for the overwhelming and humbling welcome I got from y’all when I got back. Again I could sense the struggle you had to use the “right words” as you came up to express your concern. But what I could see in your eyes was so much more important. You let me know that my concern that I “still had a job to come back to” was trivial. You let me know that I was being welcomed back to a home filled with countless friends. How do you prepare for that??!!

Now, on a slightly lighter note but still discussing not being prepared...

When the waters were rising rapidly and it became obvious that things here at the Extension would have to close down we decided we had to quickly get the word out to a lot of people – those who were planning to come to volunteer and attend the Hamburger Tuesday activities, the HCMGA Board meeting, the on-going Master Gardener Class, etc. How were we going to do this on such short notice? Why that’s what the **Telephone Committee** is for, right? And that’s when we found that we were not prepared. Because it hadn’t been called upon in so long the Telephone Committee had (unofficially) disbanded.

It’s one thing to volunteer to be a “Minute Man” when the call to duty is clearly in the near future. It’s another when the need for your assistance may come – if at all – in 6 or 8 or 12 months! Just picture the call... “Hi Judy, remember when you said back in April that you could help out calling people? Well, we need you now...” and you are just about to go out the door to take the visiting grandchildren to the Space Center!!

My point? **Pat Rode** (Chair of the Telephone Committee) needs a cadre (a fancy word for 20 or so volunteers) who would agree that if the need arises in the future they would each make the time to call about 10 to 15 people. Please call her and sign up. (281) 568-7970 or prode@pdq.net.

Again, thanks for all your concern and support.

President's Thoughts

By George Williams

By the time you read this, the year 2002 will be history, and we will be making our plans for 2003. As I write this, we are in the middle of the Christmas season filled with all of the activities of preparing for the upcoming holidays. I hope that yours were "merry and bright" and that your New Year will be the best ever.

The most spectacular event at the Extension Center this past year was the flood that covered practically all of our Millennium Garden. If you haven't seen it recently, you should see the results of all of the work that has been done by numerous Master Gardeners. The beds have been reworked and new plants are in the ground. It really looks good.

As mentioned last month, our annual **Fruit Tree Sale** will be held on **Saturday, January 25**, at the Extension Center. This is always one of our most popular sales in that we have trees that are sometimes difficult to find. Many of you have signed up to help on Friday and Saturday, but if anyone else is interested in assisting, just let us know. Our **Spring Master Gardener Class** begins **January 30**. If you know someone who is interested in enrolling, have them call the Extension Center for an application. We have a waiting list from last fall's class, but there are still spaces available. We have a great lineup of speakers, so anyone who is interested in learning more about gardening in the Houston area has an excellent opportunity to do so by enrolling in this 12 weeks course.

In December, **Ken Dorman**, **Theron McLaren** and I attended a meeting at the Upper Kirby District office at their request. Community gardens are being constructed there, and we have been invited to participate. Another meeting is scheduled for January. Afterward this meeting, we should have more information concerning how specifically we might become involved.

Thanks to all of you who have devoted your time to our association this past year. It really has made a difference. If you are not involved, I invite you to join us each Tuesday at the Extension Center for work in the gardens, hamburgers on the first Tuesday of each month, and always, good fellowship. Hope to see you there next Tuesday.



Harris County Master Gardener Association
#2 Abercrombie Drive (281) 855-5600
Houston, TX 77084 FAX (281) 855-5638

Board of Directors

President George Williams
(713) 783-4231

1st Vice President Virginia Joiner
(281) 469-2766

2nd Vice President Katherine Peterson
(281) 497-3555

Past President Jean Fefer
(713) 467-0231

Secretary Marge Chambers
(281) 347-5508

Treasurer Mary Lynn Randall
(713) 263-9634

Directors: Grady Joiner, Neal Murray,
Douglas McLeod, Anne O'Neil, Clyde Cannon,
Jinks Hammer

Ancillary Positions

MG Advisors:

CEA - Horticulture Carol Cammack
(281) 855-5600

CEA - Horticulture Michael Morrison
(281) 855-5600

Horticulture Secretary Becky Deasy
(281) 855-5600

Volunteer Coordinator Scott Hume
(281) 855-5600

Gulf Coast Fruit Study Gp... Yvonne Gibbs
(713) 462-7052

Membership Tom Robb
(713) 465-5987

Greeting Committee Margaret Mason
Gloria Robb

Hospitality Committee Bea Patterson

Book Committee Anne O'Neil
(713) 744-0945

Urban Dirt Layout Tami Pipkin
UrbanDirt@houston.rr.com

Upcoming Events

Coming up at Precinct 2

January 8th Wednesday Program

The Harris County Master Gardeners at Precinct 2 will hold their monthly educational program the second Wednesday of January due to the holidays. At 10:00 am on the 8th Master Gardener **Josie Watts** will share tips on caring for houseplants. Please join us at our **new meeting location**: The East Harris County Senior Center located at 7340 Spencer Hwy, Pasadena TX 77505. The program is free and open to the public. Please call (281) 991-8437 and leave a message for more information or to reserve a spot.

February 5th we'll be back on our regular First Wednesday schedule and look forward to welcoming **Dick McEuen** from the Houston Cactus and Succulent Society. There are over 1,500 species of cacti. Come and learn about some of these beautiful and unusual plants.

It's not too early to start planning for the **Master Gardener Summer Classes at Precinct 2**. Classes run **June 3rd through July 3rd**, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30 am-2:30 pm. Please call (281) 991-8437 and leave a message to receive more information.



Precinct 2

January 8 – Second Wednesday

9:30 am Registration

10:00 am Josie Watts, *Caring for Houseplants*.

Noonish Join us for lunch, \$3.00

February 5 – First Wednesday

9:30 am Registration

10:00 am Dick McEuen, *Cactus & Succulents*

Noonish Join us for lunch, \$3.00

March 5 – First Wednesday

9:30 am Registration

10:00 am Barry Schlueter, *Hibiscus*

Noonish Join us for lunch, \$3.00

Precinct 2 programs are now held at the East Harris County Senior Center, located at 7340 Spencer Highway, Pasadena TX 77505.

Please call to reserve a spot (281) 991-8437. Stay and enjoy lunch with us for \$3.00.

Bear Creek

January 7 – Hamburger Tuesday

8:00 am Work up an appetite

Noonish Home cooked burgers, then Tom Robb on his *Costa Rica Adventure*.

January 20 – General Meeting

6:30 pm Coffee

7:00 pm Sally McQueen Squire on *Glorious Bulbs and Rhizomes for Houston*.

February 4 – Hamburger Tuesday

8:00 am Work up an appetite

Noonish Home cooked burgers, then a Panel Discussion on *Problem Solving*.

February 18 – General Meeting

6:30 pm Coffee

7:00 pm Speaker TBD for a planned discussion on *Compost*.

March 4 – Hamburger Tuesday

8:00 am Work up an appetite

Noonish Home cooked burgers, then a Michael Bettler on *Edible Flowers and Herbs*.

March 18 – General Meeting

6:30 pm Coffee

7:00 pm Anita Nelson on *Ponds and Fountains*.

New Precinct 2 Meeting Location

**East Harris County Senior Center
7340 Spencer Highway
Pasadena TX 77505**

Call (281) 991-8437 for more information.

Michael's Corner

By Michael Morrison, CEA Horticulture

Happy New Year to you and your family! Each year around this time I hear rumblings about Arbor Day, and am always confused on the date we celebrate this wonderful event in America.

Well, sit back in the Laz-Y-Boy near the fireplace and indulge me for a moment about Arbor Day.

In the fifth century, Swiss villagers planted groves of oak trees and turned the event into a festival and children were given treats as a reward for helping plant the oak trees. In America a man named J. Sterling Morton moved to the Nebraska Territory from Detroit in the 1850's. When they settled down in their home, they established the surrounding area with various trees, and other plants and flowers. As a journalist, he was an avid promoter of tree planting by individuals and stressed to the public that they were needed for keeping the soil from eroding, shade from the burning sun in the summertime and also for fuel on those cold winter nights. He became secretary of the Nebraska Territory, and his 'roots' spread about his enthusiasm for trees, encouraging civic groups and others to join in the planting of trees.

In 1872 Morton proposed a tree-planting holiday to be called "Arbor Day," and over a million trees were planted in Nebraska on the first Arbor Day. In 1885, Arbor Day was named a legal holiday celebrated on April 22 (Morton's birthday) and chosen as its permanent observance on that day of the year.

During the 1870's, many other states passed legislation to begin observing Arbor Day, and it began in schools nationwide in 1882. In an excerpt of Morton's address in 1887 he spoke of "each generation takes the Earth as trustees. We ought to bequeath to posterity as many forests and orchards as we have exhausted and consumed."

President Theodore Roosevelt was a strong supporter of Arbor Day. He sent a letter to the children of the United States in which he wrote, "A people without children would face a hopeless future; a country without trees is almost as hopeless." John Muir wrote that, "The clearest way into the universe is through a forest wilderness."

So when is Arbor Day? Are you planning on planting a tree this year?

According to the National Arbor Day Foundation the most common date for the state observances is the last Friday in April. However, in a number of states, Arbor Day is timed to coincide with the best tree planting weather.

In Texas, Arbor Day first appeared in Temple on February 22, 1889. One year later, the first statewide observance of Arbor Day was held in Austin. In 1919, the state legislature officially designated the pecan tree as the State Tree of Texas. It was chosen for its adaptability anywhere in Texas. Governor James Hogg said of the pecan tree, "*I want no monument of stone or marble, but plant at my head a pecan tree...and when these trees shall bear, let the pecans be given out among the plain people of Texas so they may plant them and make Texas a land of trees.*"

Due to the size of our great state, Arbor Day is celebrated in Texas from November through April. In Dallas it is mid-November and in south Texas they celebrate Arbor Day during Arbor Week, the second week in February. For us Houstonians, we observe Arbor Day on the third Friday in January, the 17th this year.

The **Houston Arboretum and Nature Center** will celebrate Houston's Arbor Day on Saturday, January 18th from 10am to 4pm with an open house including tree tours, puppet shows, and a tree planting demonstration. Free tree seedlings will be given away while they last and Johnny Applesseed and Smokey the Bear will be there. It is free and open to the public.

The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago, the second best time is now.

So remember to be here at the extension office at 8am sharp when we have our **fruit tree sale on January 25th**, if you want to plant a fruit tree to celebrate Arbor Day. The same day at **Mercer Arboretum** they will be celebrating Arbor Day from 9am to noon, with demonstrations and other activities as well as free seedlings while they last.

Arbor Day is for all of us to strengthen the bond between all generations by planting trees together and stewardship of our natural resources and our environment. Helping our children plant and nurture for trees that their own children and grandchildren will enjoy and a promise for a future filled with trees.

"A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in."

Web Surfin'

Tech news for Master Gardeners

By Tom H. Robb, Jr.

Does your computer run as fast today as when you first bought it or when you last brought it home from the shop? Or does it act like us – as we get older we get slower? I've been asked what can be done to pick up some of the computer's former speed.

Most computers do tend to get slower with use, for a number of reasons. We begin to pick up and keep files that we no longer need or can even use. Parts of files become placed in different locations, taking it longer to put them together again. Irrelevant directions are left in the registry because of faulty deleting of files or programs. Too many programs begin running that we don't want to use at the moment – and so on and so on.

File fragmentation explained

One of the many things that will slow your computer down is fragmentation of files. Files are laid out on the hard drive like tracks on a phonograph record. When we add new files they are added to the first open spaces along the track available. If we only had one program and never deleted any files created by it this would be no problem. But this is not what happens.

Suppose we install an "Office" program, which can include several related programs. We are given the option of adding all of the programs at once or adding only the ones that we want to use at first. We choose the database program and the word processor and they are installed in the order selected. The database program spread out along the track followed by the word processor. We then add more software programs, which in their turn are laid out following the programs already on the disk.

We use the word processor and write an article for "Urban Dirt" and save it. There is no room left next to the word processor program on the disk so the saved article is added to the first empty space, which in this case follows the last program, installed.

Then we decide that we like another database program better than the one we installed so we delete the database program that we installed. That now leaves a gap in the track where it was installed. So when we install the new database it starts in the first open space that it can find which is in this gap created. If the new program is larger than the gap, it fills the space and then skips down the track until it finds an opening. If the program is smaller, it cannot completely fill

the gap and leaves part of it as a smaller gap. Then the next letter saved will fall into this gap, etc.

Over time, your hard drive can become very disorganized, and the computer works slower because it has to move backward and forward to present the program in the required order.

Defrag your hard drive

By using the **Disk Defragmenter**, which is included in Windows, you can overcome this problem and have all of your programs reorganized in the proper order. This will allow your computer to run more efficiently.

To use this program, close all open programs and any programs that may be scheduled to come on. Also disable any screen saver that you might have installed. And most importantly, don't use the computer while defragmentation is going on. Click your Start menu, then Programs (All Programs if you use WinXP), Accessories, System Tools, and Disk Defragmenter.

Then, in WinMe or Win98SE, click Settings and select "Rearrange Program Files So My Computer Starts Faster" and "Check The Drive For Errors". Select the drive you want to defrag (short for defragment) and click OK. In WinXP, you need only select the drive and click "Defragment".

If you use your computer a lot, defrag at least weekly. If you use it only occasionally, defragging monthly will probably be all right.

Fragmentation is only one of many things that can slow your computer down. Maybe we can cover some of the other problems in future issues.

If you are not receiving email from me, let me know by emailing me at trobbs@hal-pc.org.

Happy surfin'

Garden Gifts

News from our Outreach Gardens

By Kenneth Dorman

A garden is a wonderful thing, so they say, to give peace of mind, relaxation, a feeling of accomplishment, and a return to nature. Digging in the dirt and chopping weeds can be a means of taking out frustrations, they say. Oscar Wilde said, *“The Book of Life begins with a man and a woman in a garden.”* And so it is with our home gardens and the ones we share with friends at Bear Creek and the Genoa Friendship Garden. But a garden built on a parking lot—between a school for mentally challenged young males and a broken down apartment complex with a leaky sewer system, plagued by mockingbirds and aphids—can be a lonely place on a cold, cloudy winter day. Do I sound like I’m feeling sorry for myself? Well, I am. For the past few weeks I have had the garden to myself and it certainly is not the fun it is when we have several people around. I know they will all be back, but they better hurry. I’m not catching many fish either. The garden does look good though.

We are harvesting a lot later this year than last. We planted later by two weeks and the weather has been cooler this year. I made the mistake of reading the literature on when best to plant this time and so we are late. This wouldn’t make any difference since most of the stuff will grow through the winter, but we must make room for next years crop before the winter plants are finished. Actually, we left some of the summer plants a little longer than we should have. Next year I will read our records.

The collards recommended by Urban Harvest, **Green Glaze** or **Greasy Leaf** as they are commonly known, is the best I have grown. It is a reliable producer and tastes really good. The carrots are getting some size to them; the sugar snap peas are climbing their netting, broccoli is branching, cabbage and cauliflower are making heads and the chili peppers are still producing. The **Crawford Heirloom** lettuce that I let go to seed has reproduced itself all over the garden and we transplanted it into neat rows in the fruit tree bed beside some wonderful cilantro and arugula. We have three other kinds of lettuce growing in the raised beds.

Each year we learn a little more about what to plant and how to grow it in our particular situation. This winter we are going to plant more onions because they grow good and the clients like them, but fewer potatoes because they are a little more difficult due to the winter rains. Next month we will have a meeting to go over our notes and decide what

will produce the most of what the clients want the most so we can get seeds for the spring and summer gardens. We’ll look at all the pretty catalogs, but buy most of our supply from Urban Harvest.

As you know we turn these articles in on the 15th of the month preceding their appearance. I usually write mine in bits and pieces throughout the month using the notes I make after each trip to the gardens. As of the 14th of December we have harvested 3,032 pounds, a little over a ton and a half, of good, fresh organic produce and delivered it to the CCSC Pantry for distribution to the needy on their side of Houston. This is up from a little over 1,300 pounds last year, thanks entirely to the addition of **Walter Baker, Sharon** and our President, **George Williams**. Good friends and wonderful workers in the garden. The Bonita Street House of Hope garden is smaller, but is very fruitful. Their production per square foot is fully as good as CCSC and while we did not keep the weights because the residents harvest on a need-to-eat basis I am sure they were over 2,000 pounds for the year. **Rodney** is what makes this garden grow and I regularly thank God for his help.

Well, I know Christmas was good for all of you and so will the New Year be. Remember, you get what you give so give a lot of love and buy yourself a nice present for being good!

Herb Garden News

By Heidi Vaughan

Just as the waters were starting to rise at the Extension Office, we herb enthusiasts took off for Round Top, home of Madalene Hill and her amazing herb garden. We were so lucky to have a gorgeous day to take cuttings from Madalene's many gardens. We put the cuttings into trays of soil prepared by **Dave and Margaret Mason** as soon as we took them. Then we headed home and put the cuttings in the greenhouse.

How lucky we were to be the high spot in the Extension Office gardens. We didn't suffer from all the flooding like the other gardens. Also, nearly all our cuttings survived—even some **rosemary**, which we haven't propagated successfully from cuttings before.

Speaking of rosemary, you've probably noticed it around the garden centers as a fragrant option for a live Christmas tree. It can be clipped into topiary form and it really looks just like a little Christmas tree. I've got one at home that is about four feet tall and I use it all year. I have never brought it in during a freeze. In our garden at the Extension Office, you can see a few different varieties of rosemary, in prostrate form. They look so lovely falling over the wall of the highest bed. Of course you may take cuttings for cooking or crafts any time you like.

Rosemary is an excellent culinary herb. It is very strong, but goes with everything, including beef, pork, lamb, poultry, eggs, cheese, potatoes and other vegetables. My husband is always happy when he comes home and gets a fragrant blast of rosemary roasting with a tenderloin for dinner. If you surround the meat with root vegetables, brush butter over everything and add lots of rosemary, you'll have the simplest meal anyone would love. It also works well with a whole chicken.

Rosemary lends itself to crafts well, and is quite flexible if you bend it shortly after cutting it. It makes a cute, fragrant wreath. It's also quite useful in potpourris and peps up a bath.

Rosemary is best grown from plants. To dry it, strip the needle leaves off the stem and dry on a paper towel. Then store in a jar in your pantry. Or freeze the branches whole. To mince rosemary, or any other culinary herb, I find the best tool is a mezzaluna. It is one of the "c" shaped knives with handles on either end. Put the herbs on a cutting board, then rock the mezzaluna across them. You may have seen one of these handy knives in Williams Sonoma, or on many of the cooking shows. **Nigella Lawson**, I've noticed, uses hers regularly on her show, **Nigella Bites**. I use mine every day and find the process of mincing herbs very soothing.

As the year closes, I want to thank everyone again who has helped out in the Herb Garden. And to all the Master Gardeners, happy holidays and best wishes in 2003!



Madalene Hill and Head Round Top Groundskeeper Henry.



Pictured from left, Jeanette Powell, Margaret Mason, Becky Kern, Dave Mason, Dee Oelfke, Heidi Vaughan and Lee Ann Van Den Bold. Not pictured, Toulia Hagidimitriou.

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@taexgw.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>.

January/February 2003

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
Jan 12	13	14	15	16	17 Newsletter deadline 5pm	18 Arbor Day — Houston Arbo- retum & Nature Center page 4
19	20	21 Monthly meeting at Bear Creek — Glorious Bulbs and Rhizomes for Houston page 3	22	23	24	25 Fruit & Tree Sale — Bear Creek page 2 Arbor Day — Mercer page 2
26	27	28	29	30 Spring MG Class starts — Bear Creek page 2	31	Feb 1 Rose Workshop — Mercer page 10
2	3 MG Class Regis- tration — Mercer page 10	4 Hamburger Tues. at Bear Creek — Problem Solving page 3	5 First Wednesday at Precinct 2 — Cactus & Suc- culents page 3 Note: new meet- ing location!	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14 Newsletter deadline 5pm	15

UrbanDirt

Volunteer Opportunities.....	1
President's Thoughts	2
Upcoming Events	3
Michael's Corner	4
Web Surfin'	5
Garden Gifts.....	6
Herb Garden News.....	7
Volunteer Hours Wksht.....	8
Jan/Feb Calendar.....	9
Mercer Arboretum Events ..	10

Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens

Arbor Day Celebration

Saturday, January 25, from 9 a.m. to noon, join Mercer for an early Arbor Day celebration. Winter is the ideal time to plant trees in Texas. Learn the best trees for Houston and enjoy demonstrations on planting and caring for trees in your landscape. A limited supply of free tree seedlings will be given away.

Master Gardener Morning: Rose Workshop

Saturday February 1, from 8 a.m. to noon, join Mercer staff as they lead a free hands-on training on the correct pruning and care of roses. The **Texas Rose Rustlers** will be on there to give hands on a rose propagation demonstration. Master Gardener interns earn four hours of work credit, but Master Gardener training is not required and novices are welcome.

Master Gardener Class Registration

Registration for the 2003 Master Gardener Program at Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens is **Monday, February 3**, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. (Harris County residents only from 8 a.m. to noon) at Mercer, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd., Humble. You must apply in person. Class size is limited to 35. Fee is \$150. Designed to train gardening enthusiasts of all ages and backgrounds, experienced instructors cover landscaping, vegetables, lawn care,

pest control, water gardening and more. The class is offered for 12 consecutive weeks, 8:45 a.m. to 3 p.m., beginning Thursday, March 6, and continuing every Thursday through May 29. For more information and a brochure, please call (281) 443-8731.

Garden Tour

Saturday, February 8 at 10 a.m. Join Mercer staff for a guided tour of Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens.

Garden Program: Roses

Wednesday, February 15, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., join Mercer horticulturist **Greg Grant** to learn about "Easy Roses in a Tough Climate". Find out which roses are best for the Houston area and why you should have them in your garden.

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 mercerarboretum@cp4.hctx.net. On the web at <http://www.cp4.hctx.net/mercer>.