

UrbanDirt

IN COOPERATION WITH THE TEXAS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

The Virtuous Tree

By Michael Morrison



Chinese Fringe Tree

photo by Michael Morrison

Happy New Year everyone! Since the dawn of history, all civilizations and religions have believed trees to be of great significance. Pillars of the temples of Egypt were stylized trees, holding at the base of their spines the vital Life Force, which provided for strength and durability. Many legends exist about the various creatures that live in and off the tree. The eagle that nests on top is said to lend his eyes

to those would see the mind of God. In Christianity, the Tree of Life is said to stand in the center of the Garden of Eden uniting heaven and earth, and opening a path to God. As early as 600 BC, the Celts planted trees in the names of their children to insure a connection between the divine and earthbound aspects of the soul. It is said that the planting allowed the child's imagination to live in the earth and the wind. If you have a newborn coming soon, you might want to share the ancient tradition of planting a tree when the child is born to ensure long life, prosperity, and an eternal bond with nature. According to one ancient wisdom, birds and animals moving through the branches of a tree planted for a child bring that child special insight into the accumulated wisdom of human life.

According to Dr. Roger S. Ulrich of Texas A&M University, laboratory research shows that "visual exposure to settings with trees has produced significant recovery from stress within five minutes, as indicated by changes in blood pressure and muscle tension." *I need to go to the forest myself!* Did you know that planting trees means improved water quality, less runoff, less pollution and allow the recharging of the ground water system? Did you know that the USDA says that healthy, mature trees add an average of ten percent to a property's value? Did you know that shade just from trees can save you up to \$175.00 per year (per structure) in air conditioning costs according to Dr. Lowell Ponte. The net cooling effect of a young, healthy tree is equivalent to ten room-size air conditioners operating twenty hours a day!

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President's Thoughts

By Virginia Joiner

Charles Dickens wrote "Nature gives to every time and season some beauty of its own". Grady and I enjoyed a trip to Green Valley, Arizona over the Thanksgiving Holidays. We have now seen the Sonoran Desert in every month but January, February and December. November can be a very colorless and bland time in that part of the Sonoran desert and the mountains to the east and west. In order to enjoy the sights you must be able to appreciate the stark architecture of the desert and the mountains as old man winter is setting in.

The desert is all shades of green in November. More colors of green than I could imagine. It is preparing for the show that will appear April through June of the next year. In April the Ocotillo produces its spectacular spikes of red. Prickly Pear and the giant Saguaro follow in early May. Did you know that the Saguaro cacti are 75 years old before they put on an arm? The buds of the Pincushion cacti are produced the previous season. The following year, 5 days after any summer rain they will bloom. The fishhook cacti will brighten the months of August and September. These are but a few cacti that make the Sonoran Desert a beautiful place to visit and enjoy.

The beautiful fall grasses on the mountainsides along the old Ruby Mine road ripple, weave and bob in the breeze. It looks like a sea of honey. The gnarled skeleton remains of trees are a beautiful contrast on this sea of honey. It is difficult to comprehend the forces of nature that pushed the rock formations up to the magnificent pentacles that frame the beautiful view. Nature has created many unbelievable balancing acts along this drive as well as fields of enormous boulders haphazardly tossed about. Seedpods from previous blooms add beauty to the edge of the road and the overall scene.

November allowed us to see, for the first time one species of the banded grasshopper. We stop in the little artist community of Amado every year. A very natural koi pond and a beautiful stream flow through the park and around the shops. It is a very peaceful and serene place to spend time. We walked past the pond towards the area where a nursery had been in past years. With each step we took the grasshoppers were flying and jumping in all directions. They were the banded-red species. They were the color of the earth but when they flew you were able to see the beautiful red wing. This surprise made the stop more exciting memorable.

We will never be disappointed if we take the time to look for the beauty in each season. HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL OF YOU. Wear your smiles and I will see you in the garden.



Saguaro Cacti

The Virtuous Tree

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture states that one acre of forest absorbs six tons of carbon dioxide and puts out four tons of oxygen. This is enough to meet the annual needs of eighteen people. OK, breathe....trees do a lot of work for us and the environment. We also know that landscaping, especially with trees, can increase the value of your home and save on heating costs as well. Forty percent of prescription drugs dispensed in the U.S. have active ingredients derived from plants, animals or microorganisms, many of them from forests. Trees filter dust and toxic pollutants from the atmosphere and capture a wide range of smog-producing compounds such as ozone and carbon monoxide. They are good noise barriers, making a city and neighborhood quieter. Trees are the longest living and largest living organisms on Earth and you have a chance to plant one! By planting thirty trees per person, it would remove that person's carbon dioxide debt for the year. OK, here is one for you....why do they call a live oak a live oak? Not all hardwood trees are deciduous. During the winter while most other hardwoods are dead looking, the live oaks looks, well, alive. Are you convinced now to go out and plant a tree?

Houston's Arbor Day is always the third Friday in January. This month is also a great time to fertilize and mulch all trees and shrubs except camelias and azaleas, and do that when they finish blooming. So, let's bring in the new year by planting a tree from the upcoming Fruit Tree Sale here at Bear Creek Extension on January 24th.

Trees are so wonderful and graceful and do so much for us. Plant a tree, smile, laugh and laugh some more, and see you at the tree sale!

Address Change!

Texas Cooperative Extension
Harris County
3033 Bear Creek Dr
Houston, TX 77084



Harris County Master Gardener Association

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2003–2004 Board of Directors

President	Virginia Joiner (281) 469-2766
1st Vice President	Neal Murray (281) 488-5783
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Horticulture Secretary	Becky Deasy (281) 855-5600
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Hospitality Committee	Bea Patterson
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Publicity	Linda Carlson (281) 955-8013
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"On the Road..."

by Katherine Peterson

On November 20th a total of forty-one (41) Master Gardeners were "ON THE ROAD...Again" to The Brookwood Community in Brookshire, Texas. This was a carpooling event and it was exciting to see that many of you did organize your own carpools for this event.

A volunteer tour guide met us at the Worship Center. She gave a brief history of Brookwood and showed us some of the facilities before we met horticulturalist Mr. Ging for a behind-the-scenes tour of the greenhouses.

Have you ever seen over a thousand Poinsettias all at once? Well we did! That's how many were in each of three greenhouses. If I heard correctly Brookwood has a total of 38 greenhouses. We saw several different varieties of Poinsettias and were educated on the care, problems, etc. of growing them. Many of our questions were answered.

It is wonderful to see how the teachers and staff work with the functionally disabled residents of Brookwood. They are doing a great job and the residents are excelling at their jobs.

After the tour, we enjoyed a delicious meal served by the residents in the Café at Brookwood. Those of you who weren't able to go really missed a "good" meal.

Following lunch we got some additional exercise touring the Gift Shop, buying some items for our holiday gift list, and taking home some plants for our own gardens.

I want to thank our own **Heidi Vaughn** and Brookwood's **Kelly Thurmman** for making this trip such a success. Tune in next month for a report on our Bus Trip to Moody Gardens.

Mark your calendar for the next scheduled trips:

- (1) A Carpooling Event on March 15th to Bayou Bend Gardens – a Private Tour
- (2) A Bus Trip on March 30th to Stephen F. Austin State University – Azalea Tour, Arboretum Tour, and Piney Woods Tour

Special Announcement

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.

Upcoming HCMGA Events

Bear Creek Meetings

Hamburger Tuesday – January 6th

Come early to work in the gardens. We will be cleaning up things after the holidays and getting ready for the Tree Sale on the 24th. Following those delicious hamburgers we will be hearing from **Steven Raddack**, our 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? You won't want to miss this very important and informative meeting. See you there.

Field Trip – January 7th - Moody Gardens

By now the deadline will have passed but if you really want to go you can add your name to a list in case there are last minute cancellations. Let Becky (281-855-5600) or Katherine (281-497-3555) know.

General Meeting – January 20th

Refreshments will be served at 6:30 p.m. (be sure to bring something) – maybe something low-cal? Have you ever wished you could go to Alaska? Well, next best thing is to go there free via a slide presentation. Are there flowers in Alaska? Are there any plants at all? **Michael Morrison** who had the opportunity to take that dream vacation will answer your questions! His topic: 'Flowers of Alaska'.

Tree Sale and Setup – Jan 23rd & 24th

Your help will be needed on both days so sign up now!!!!

Hamburger Tuesday – Feb 3rd

The greenhouse will need your help getting ready for the Tomato Sale so be sure to come prepared to work. The gardens will also need to be readied for the sale. We want to look our best! 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.

General Meeting – Feb 17th

After refreshments at 6:30 p.m., we will have the privilege of hearing **Mary Ann Webber** with The Audubon Society. Her 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.

Tomato & Pepper Sale & Setup – Feb 27th & 28th

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.

Jan 6 – Hamburger Tuesday

8:00 a.m. Work up an appetite
11:30 a.m. Home cooked burgers,
Noon: Steven Raddack, 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'

Jan 23 – Setup For the Fruit Tree Sale

Jan 24 – Fruit Tree Sale. Bear Creek.

8 to 9 am Heidi Sheesley will be giving a power point presentation on fruit trees, citrus, and other trees available at the sale.

9 am to 2 pm Fruit Tree Sale Open

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 17 – General Meeting

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

7:00 p.m. Mary Ann Webber (with The Audubon Society) on 'Gardening for Birds in Houston'

Feb 28 – Tomato & Pepper Sale.

Precinct 2 News & Events

News from Precinct 2

As the holidays and New Year approach it's a perfect time to look back at all that's been accomplished at the Genoa Friendship Garden this year. We have made great strides in our garden and a special thanks needs to be given to those who devote almost all of their volunteer hours working in the garden. So thank you to all the regulars in the garden, **Barbara Morrison, Christa Kaiser, Balram Ramsoondar, Jim Crabb, Angela Chandler, Janice Patrick, Diane Bryant, Pat Pate** and **Paul Schultz** we really appreciate how hard you work!

We had a great Christmas party. The food was wonderful as always. Thanks to the First Wednesday Committee, **Pat Mitrowski, Marlene Oren, Ginia Keen, Linda Garren, Gloria Gibson** and **Pat Stier** for all the planning. Everyone especially enjoyed the Gift Scramble organized by Ginia Keen. That is sure to become an annual tradition. I just wish I could have stolen the copper tube rain gauge from **Michael Morrison**! We ended the day by making living wreaths. Thanks to **Angela Chandler** for leading that activity. Everyone really enjoyed themselves; it was a wonderful way to spend the day together.

Plans for the spring sale are well underway. We planted the first of the tomatoes December 9th and had a lot of Master Gardeners turn out to work in the greenhouse. **Ruth Touchstone, Shirley Jackson, Barbara Morrison, Christa Kaiser, Eleanor Borda, Diane Bryant, Theresa Holloman, Greg Zindler, Pat Mitrowski, Angela Chandler** and **Janice Patrick** all pitched in to get things started. It was a full day starting with Seed Propagation Training in the morning and running well into the afternoon. While we were planting in the greenhouse **Fred Chandler** and **Michael Morrison** were busy working on the greenhouse heater.

Progress has been made in the Master Gardener Office, we actually have walls, a desk, and a working phone!

Precinct 2 News & Events

Our **First Wednesday Programs** this year have added a new dimension to our garden activities. We have had some wonderful programs on garden techniques, specialized plant groups, and garden art. **Pat Mitrowski** has organized the day to include a pot-luck lunch after the program, welcomed by those who work in the gardens before the event. We have had the chance to taste and share some great recipes, many of which have included vegetables and herbs from the gardeners' garden.

Upcoming Events

Jan 7 - First Wednesday Program

The next **First Wednesday Program** will be **January 7th at 10 am**, and we welcome **Odean 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.

Feb 4 - First Wednesday Program

Upcoming on **February 4th Debbie Markey** will give a demonstration on Mosaic Birdhouses. As always programs begin at 10 am and we have our potluck lunch immediately after so bring a dish and join us!

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.

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.

Garden Gifts

News from our Outreach Gardens

By Kenneth Dorman

Well, we took a little over 200 pounds of prime fall tomatoes to the Christian Community Service Center Pantry for distribution to their clients. Additionally, we tossed about the same amount of tomatoes on the compost heap, ruined by stinkbugs, so we had a pretty big harvest from twelve plants. We had four plants each of Celebrity, Early Girl and Better Boy. They produced about equally and were equally appealing to the stinkbugs. The Better Boy produced the largest fruit.

I pruned the apple trees and pear trees to the shape recommended by the Extension publications and reminded all the pear trees that they either produce this season or they will not cast a shadow come fall. This is their third year and it is time to pay for their keep. The apples produced the first year and I expect they will continue this season. We ended up getting 72 Satsuma oranges from two small trees. I tasted two of them and they were excellent, good sized, easy to peel, no seeds and sweet.

I am not comfortable about what we have grown this fall and winter. I guess I am old fashioned in my thinking that we should grow mostly cabbages, collards, broccoli, cauliflower, greens of various types, carrots, sugar snap peas and so forth instead of tomatoes, squash, peppers, eggplants and cucumbers. We did grow cabbage, collards, greens, lettuce and carrots, but not as much as before and we didn't devote the time we usually do because of the summer vegetables, but the produce mix was better for the client mix. Tradition is a hard thing to overcome, especially for some of the older folks among us, and we are going to have to study on our next plant choices. Bed choice is going to be another item this spring, as we need to move the melons and cucumbers from the bed along the fence where they have been for the last two years. That bed is the ideal place for them, but they take too much from the soil so move they must. We can put them in the raised beds with trellises if we can build something that will hold them. Then, we will put bush snap beans along the fence and could also plant some pole beans where the fence is highest.

Walter went to see the Christmas windows at Harrods, and apparently they were just as spectacular as ever. He didn't miss anything of any consequence in the garden because we waited until he was back to get six yards of Nature's Way compost to spread, along with several hundred pounds of cottonseed meal.

Total production from the garden in 2003 amounted to a little less than 2,700 pounds, or about 500 pounds less than last year. With the good compost we hope to make that up next year. We are now on the insect pest circuit so I guess we are going to have to start using some organically acceptable insecticides. We made it two years without much in the way of insect damage, but they really made up

They produced about equally well and were equally appealing to the stinkbugs.

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Garden Gossip

News from the Extension Office Gardens

Pond, Bog & Dry Ditches

By Virginia Joiner

I hope that you have noticed the beautiful Canna, Cleopatra. She is outstanding with her multi colored leaves (maroon and green). When they first came up the foliage showed no sign of being two colored. I called Horn Canna and was told that only 18-20% of the Cleopatras will display the multiple colored foliage. I feel fortunate that the one I planted has presented us with two multiple colored plants. Cleopatra blooms are solid red and speckled-red blooms as well as solid yellow, red and red-speckled blooms.

The water in the pond is crystal clear this time of the year due to the cooler temperatures. The seeds of next years string algae bloom are setting and waiting for warmer water. We are going to try salt in the pond in the spring to control the string (filamentacious) algae. We can use a 3% salt saturation in the pond with out hurting the vegetation or the fish. We will be using the type of salt that you use in your water softener. It needs to be 99% pure and free of iodine. It has worked beautifully in the water garden ponds of some of our friends.

Garden Gifts

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for it this fall.

I did some pretty good fishing in September and October, but the past few weeks I haven't been able to make my schedule coincide with the weather. **George Williams**, on the other hand, has been bringing in the flounder. George is a specialist on flounder and if he had his druthers that is all he would fish for; however, Master Gardener orchard boss **Doug McLeod** makes him get up at 3:00 AM several times a year to fish in various peace officer tournaments.

The gardens at Bonita Street House of Hope look surprisingly good; considering they are without any really knowledgeable gardeners. A lot of weeds came up in the redone beds and we didn't have any cottonseed meal to add before planting, but we are working on both problems and the residents are beginning to harvest lettuce, mustard greens and turnip greens.

The New Year is upon us, ready or not, so it is time to start being nice for Santa and Christmas 2004. Just think how many presents you will get by being good for a whole year! Love yourself.

Web Surfin'

Tech News for Master Gardeners

By Tom H Robb, Jr



At one time in the distant past, computer software was accompanied by manuals that actually taught you how to run the program. Over the years these manuals became thinner, giving only hints of how to run the program. And today, the software manual, such as it is, is usually found only on the CD disk containing the program itself. And its hard to learn how to use a program from a 300 page book that you can read only on a computer screen.

So how do you learn how to use a software program. There are a number of ways that you might try, each with its own plus and minus features. Many school districts or computer organizations have adult education courses for many popular computer programs where you learn hands-on with a skilled instructor to guide you. This works well in many cases but the cost can sometimes be quite high.

There are books that you can buy, literally hundreds, but how do you know which one tells you what you want to know. The best way I know is to read what others say about it. Go to Amazon.com at www.amazon.com, select "Books" and enter the name of the book that you want to evaluate, select "editorial reviews" and, if present, "customer reviews".

If you don't have the name of a book, check those available. For example if you want to learn about Microsoft Word 2000, again go to Amazon.com, select "Books" and enter what you're looking for. Here your search is limited to what you enter. For example, if you enter only "Microsoft Word", Amazon will furnish you with 12,268 possibilities. If you narrow the entry to "Microsoft Word Tutorial" the choices are lowered to 3,082 and further entry of "Microsoft Word 2000 Tutorial" will give you 2,829. Since these choices are more or less in order of popularity you don't have to look at all to make a choice. Don't necessarily be influenced by the overall 1-5 star rating. One three star rating that I looked at was based on one single star review from a disgruntled rater who obviously didn't know how to use the CD disk accompanying the book. Rather than copying the files from the disk into his computer, he was unhappy when the tutorial told him to change a file and the CD was "read only" and he couldn't change it. The other raters all gave the tutorial a five star rating.

In addition to looking at the reviews, consider the method of instruction. Perhaps the best choice would be through the use of a CD accompanying the instruction manual because needed files such as graphics will be included, and a step by step method of learning can be used.

Another quick and often much less expensive method of securing instruction is through online tutorials on the Web. Go to www.google.com, select "Advanced Search" and in the top "with all the words" box enter "Software Microsoft Word 2000 Tutorial". Since this search requires that all of the words only be present and not necessarily in the order listed, the results will not all be Word 2000 but enough will be in order to evaluate a tutorial that you can use. Add the word "Free" in front of the word "Software" and you will list only the free offerings. Without the word "Free" you will also find tutorials for which there is a charge. It should not be a surprise that some of the free tutorials are not as intensive as the ones for which a fee is charged, but good ones can be found in both categories.

As a matter of note and to give HAL-PC a free bit of advertising, HAL-PC is currently offering its members a full year's access to over 300 on-line courses for only \$199.95. Included are all of the Microsoft Office programs and Web Development courses such as Photoshop, Dreamweaver, Flash and Cold Fusion. I intend upon trying some of these myself and will give you my impressions after I do.

Events Around Town

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 **Precint 2 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.

14th Annual Sadie Gwin Blackburn Environmental Seminar

On January 15, 2004, the River Oaks Garden Club presents 'Saving Endangered Species from Extinction' by **Bill Konstant** of Conservation International. The seminar will begin with coffee at 9:00 am and the program will start at 9:30 am in the Houston Museum of Natural Science Imax Theater. Admission and parking are free and open to the public

Bill will speak about biodiversity "hotspot" and wilderness areas, where many unique plants and animals could be lost despite current efforts to save them. By analyzing the global distributions of rare and unique plants, Conservation International has identified 25 hotspots and five high-diversity wilderness areas that account for less than 10% of Earth's land surface but harbor two-thirds or more of all known plant and animal species. His presentation helps explain what conservation strategies are needed to save critical habitats, who can be counted on to tackle the job, and how the people and institutions of the Houston area factor into the global equation for saving biodiversity.

Bill presently serves as Special Director for Conservation International, a Washington, D.C. based non-profit organization, and is a consultant to Houston Zoo's Naturally Wild conservation program. Bill has helped develop dozens of species survival projects in Central and South America, Africa and Asia, and points out that "On land, locating areas of high plant diversity is key to deciding where wildlife conservation action is most urgently needed."

Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens

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!

February

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.



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 merceraarboretum@cp4.hctx.net. On the web at <http://www.cp4.hctx.net/mercera>.

Urban Harvest Classes & Events

January 2004

Thursday Jan. 8 - Care Of Fruit Trees by **Dr. Bob Randall**, 6:15 p.m. – 8:15 p.m., Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane; \$20; 713-880-5540; registration required. Dispel the myth that fruit trees require too much work. Learn basic organic techniques to plant, water, mulch, and prune the many kinds of fruit trees.

Friday Jan. 9 - Hands-On Fruit Tree Pruning by **Dr. Bob Randall**, 4 p.m. – 6 p.m., Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane; free; 713-880-5540; registration required. This class is available every Friday for 8 weeks. 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.

Saturday Jan. 10 - Peaches, Plums, Pomegranates & Other Fruit by **Ethan Natelson, MD**, 9:30 a.m. – 12 p.m., Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane; \$20; 713-880-5540; registration required. This class also covers apricots, mayhaws, jujubes and feijoas. These are some of the best tasting fruits you can grow, and many are beautiful ornamentals too. Ethan Natelson, MD is President of the North American Fruit Explorers.

Wednesday Jan. 14 - An Introduction to Permaculture by the **Permaculture Guild of Houston**, 7 p.m. – 9:30 p.m., Richmond/Kirby area; free; 713-880-5540; call for location and to register. In this orientation, learn about four permaculture courses that will be offered over the next year. Permacultural concepts help create sustainable environments in urban and rural settings.

Starting **Thursday Jan. 15 - Organic Vegetable Specialty Series** 6:15 p.m. – 8:45 p.m., Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane; \$100 plus \$50 deposit, \$30 membership and \$23.50 textbook; 713-880-5540; registration required. This is the first class in a 10 class series. This class includes the best varieties of common vegetables and their care, as well as lesser-known vegetables particularly suited for Gulf Coast gardens.

Starting **Wednesday Jan. 21 - Permaculture Series - The Ecological Foundations of Design** by the **Permaculture Guild of Houston**, 7 p.m. – 9:30 p.m., Richmond/Kirby area; \$135; 713-880-5540; call for location and to register. This is the first class in an 8 class series. This course explains the permaculture of world and local eco-systems, and ties this information to techniques you can use to build sustainable communities.

Saturday Jan. 24 - Apples, Pears & Persimmons by **Ethan Natelson, MD**, 9:30 a.m. – 12 p.m., Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane; \$20; 713-880-5540; registration required. This class will focus on the best varieties both for flavor and adaptation to our climate, as well as grafting techniques so you can learn how to get hard-to-purchase varieties. Ethan Natelson, MD is President of the North American Fruit Explorers.

Tuesday Jan. 27 - Terrific Tomatoes by **Mark Cotham**, 6:15 p.m. – 8:15 p.m., Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane; \$20; 713-880-5540; registration required. Tips on dealing with pests, diseases, caging, fertilizers, soils, and plant rotation will be shared. Mark Cotham coauthored Growing Tomatoes in Greater Houston: the Community Garden Experience.

Saturday Jan. 31 - Berries, Figs & Grapes by **Dr. Bob Randall** and **Jim Mullins**, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane; free; 713-880-5540; registration required. Includes growing strawberries, thornless blackberries, boysenberries, youngberries, figs, grapes, and even blueberries for the Houston climate. Jim Mullins owns Orchard Creek Farm and Vineyard.

For more information contact:

Kara Masharani (713) 880-5540 kara@urbanharvest.org or visit www.urbanharvest.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>.

January 2004

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6 Hamburger Tues. Steve Radack on 'Matters of Import to HCMGA' page 5	7 P2 1st We. Odean Head on 'Care of Bromeliads' page 6 & 'Carpooling Event" to Moody Gardens. page 5	8	9	10
11	12	13 Work Day at the Extension Office	14	15 Newsletter deadline 5pm	16	17
18	19	20 General Meeting. Michael Morrison on 'Flowers of Alaska' page 5	21	22	23	24 HCMGA Fruit Tree Sale - Bear Creek page 5
25	26	27 Work Day at the Extension Office	28	29	30	31

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Editor's Note

By Carol Cammack



photo by Carol Cammack

I would like to take this opportunity to offer a sincere and heart-felt thank you to the **Bulk Mail Committee** and particularly **Susan Wier** for their work in getting Urban Dirt to our mail boxes every month. Susan has worked very hard each month preparing the database for the mailing as well as rounding up a team to come to the office and prepare the mailing. Susan has stepped down from her position as Chair of the Bulk Mail Committee. I wish her all the best in her new pursuits. Thank you again, Susan.

If you are interested in chairing this committee or working as part of their team, please contact myself or **Scott Hume**.

We will be glad to talk to you about the requirements of the

position. It doesn't require a lot of time and we're willing to train. We can be reached at 281-855-5600 or ccammack@ag.tamu.edu or oshume@ag.tamu.edu.

We're always looking for new contributions to Urban Dirt, so if you have something you would like to contribute please send it in. Suggestions are always appreciated as well. 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.