

URBAN DIRT

Published for the Harris County Master Gardeners

January/February 1998

Vol 7, No. 1



PLANNING 'N PLANTING

by Pam Libby

There will be lots of new and exciting programs and gardens to view at

the Extension Center. All of them are the result of great planning and work by the MG's, The MG Board and Committee members and the support staff at The Extension Center. Remember the old saying, "Those who fail to plan, plan to fail?" Nothing is more true in gardening.

Perhaps this is the year, you will be planning to put in a new vegetable or flower garden, or landscaping project. It all takes preparation and planning. Last issue, we talked about the preparing the beds, this issue we will address the actual plant material. Right now many of you are poring over catalogs trying to decide which plants or seeds to start ordering for your garden.

Remember one thing! Catalogs lie! Of course, they usually don't mean to, but if you are buying from out of the area catalogs, a lot of what they say doesn't always apply to our Harris County environment. Take the phrase, 'hardy' for example, usually this means that a plant will stand up well to freezing conditions. Well, that is a problem in northern climates and we can also have a freeze, but here an ability to handle humidity and heat stress is just as important and most of the so-called 'hardy plants' just won't make it here. On the other hand, plant growers are experimenting with new plants for the Houston area, some coming from Mexico and parts of China that mimic Harris County conditions and we are looking forward these new developments.

In the meantime, what's a Houston gardener to do? Well, here's one idea, January and February is a good time to visit reputable area garden centers. It isn't as crowded this time of year and nursery people will have more time to talk. Make sure you pick an experienced gardener and ask what he or she grows. Take your new landscaping plan with you and by all means try to find out how high and how wide any permanent addition to your garden will grow. If you are living in a new development, you might want plants that grow rapidly in order to give you some shade. However, be careful with fast growing trees, many of them turn out to be shallow rooted and could pose a storm danger later on.

JANUARY: 1/20/98

Executive Board 5:30 p.m.

Dessert and Coffee 6:30 p.m.

General Meeting 7:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: "Southern Heirloom Gardens"

Speaker: Greg Grant, T.A.E.S.

FEBRUARY: 2/17/98

Executive Board 5:30 p.m.

Dessert and Coffee 6:30 p.m.

General Meeting 7:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: "The Versatility of Plants"

Speaker: Linda Gay, Mercer Arboretum

From Your President...

And winter is here. For gardeners in many parts of the country this means that gardens are sleeping. The rejuvenation of spring is months away and the only activity for them is dreams and seed catalogs. However, for us here on the Gulf Coast, we can have a different gardening experience. We can enjoy the color of many cool weather flowers that would die in the heat of our summers. Colors can be vivid with violas, toadflax, pansies, cyclamen, etc. Winter herbs and vegetables can be enjoyed. And then of course, we can also pour over the seed catalogs in preparation of our own dreams of a spring garden.

Gardening involves planning, hard physical labor, disappointments, even failures. Why do we do it? For me it is therapy. Planning inspires creativity and allows an expression of aesthetic sensibility. The physical labor helps me feel centered and alive. Even the disappointments and failures cannot last long among the garden's refuge of tranquillity. Most of all, gardening gives me a grand sense of harmony and balance. I find myself no longer able to live without it.

Because of all of these gifts gardening gives, I am coming down from my high rise apartment and back to a yard. This time I will have some skill and knowledge to offer a new yard. But, most of all, I have a wealth of friends and professionals that I can turn to for help and inspiration. In the meantime I will be reading landscape books and a few seed catalogs.

Enjoy your winter garden.

Mary Lynn Randall



HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

#2 Abercrombie Drive
Houston, Texas 77084

Phone (281) 855-5611
Fax # (281) 855-5638

SLATE OF OFFICERS:

President.....Mary Lynn Randall
(713) 621-9248
First Vice President...Joe Thompson
(713) 468-2458
Second Vice President..Barbara Shepard
(281) 493-3578
Secretary.....Debbie Mediety
(281) 855-2102
Treasurer.....David Parish
(281) 351-6703
Directors.....Margaret Mason, Barbara
Ownby, Martha Brem,
Glen Graves and Eileen
Whitwill

ANCILLARY POSITIONS

Advisor & County Extension Agent
- Horticulturist.....Tom LeRoy
(713) 855-5600
Harris County Extension Agency
Secretary.....Stephanie Gebhardt
(281) 855-5600
Editor
Urban Dirt.....Pam Libby
(713) 937-8437
Gulf Coast Fruit
Study Group.....Yvonne Gibbs
(713) 462-7052
Membership.....Tom Robb
(713) 465-5987

For a list of standing/special committee members, please see page 7.

FROM THE ORCHARD...



by Yvonne Gibbs
The Gulf Coast Fruit Study Group wishes all the master gardeners a joyful holiday season filled with family, friends, good cheer, lots of the special foods of this season, and a happy, healthy and prospers new year.

This has been a busy year for all. The year went by like a whirl wind. Some of the more difficult and unsuccessful varieties have been tested and removed. New varieties are being planted with the emphasis being on "easy to grow." This means resistance to diseases, insect depredation, and tolerance for our weather conditions. We, in other words, want varieties that will predictably bear fruit without our having to give them incredible amounts of care on a regular basis. We want to use IPM, Integrated Pest Management, and use the same discipline when dealing with bacterial and fungal type infections. This means keeping our shadows on our plants while doing the least amount of treatment for the maximum amount of good results.

This brings me to our first activity for the New Year, Saturday, January, 31, 1998, The Annual Gulf Coast Fruit Growers Symposium and Fruit Tree Sale. This is going to be an incredible event. Everyone, presently growing fruit, or wanting to grow fruit, should be there. The symposium and sale will be held at the Harris Co. Extension Office in Bear Creek Park at #2 Abercrombie Drive, off of Patterson Road and Hwy. 6. The plant sale will run from 8:30 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. and will be open to the public at no charge. This will be a great opportunity to buy hard to find varieties of fruits and berries, but they are only available this one day

There is a small registration fee at the door, for the symposium. To register contact the Extension Service at 281-855-5600. Call as early as you can. Programs will be available. The program will feature Jim Kamas, Extension Fruit Specialist from Fredericksburg, who will be discussing fruit production in Texas. Other programs will cover

grafting and budding, citrus and other topics. Other proposed speakers for the symposium include Bob Marx (pecans), Baxter Adams (marketing Texas grown produce) and George Mc Afee (easy fruits).

PROGRAM

8:30am- 9:00am —Registration and Plant Sale

9:00am-10:00am —Fruit Production in Texas
by James Kamas

10:00am-10:30am —Brunch Break and Plant Sale

10:30am-11:30am —Pecans by Bob Marx

11:30am-1:00pm --Lunch (many dining places near by) There will be great demonstrations during this lunch break including grafting demonstrations by George McAfee. There will also be a knife sharpening demo, and Bonnie Childers will conduct a "citrus budding rodeo" in the Plant Sale Area. This event will allow plant sale attendees to purchase a rootstock and have Bonnie bud your choice of citrus. You'll get to see your very own tree grafted. Bonnie can do 100 grafts an hour, easily!

1:00pm- 2:00pm— Marketing Texas Grown Produce
by Baxter Adams

2:00pm-2:30pm — Break and shop plant sale

2:30pm-3:30pm — Program to be announced

Note: Master Gardeners are being asked to help. Be a volunteer. We will have an orientation/training prior to the event. Sign up early. Call Stephanie and get on the list. This is a fun event, you will enjoy every bit of it.

Many thanks to everyone who helped with the grape pruning on the 9th of December: David Parish, Anna, Sally, William Miller, Jim Mc Cullough, Kenneth, Karl Myertons, Robert Midkiff, Bob Frederick, Carmelita and Pam Dearing (picked persimmon fruit for Bill while the rest of us kept pruning).

This was a great crew of hard workers who did a great job. You can't hire people to do what I asked these wonderful volunteers to do. The grapes were put to bed for the winter in great style.

(Continued on page 4)