

URBAN DIRT

Published for the Harris County Master Gardeners

January/February 1999

Vol 8, No. 1

HAPPY 1999

by Pam Libby



This is the time of year that we consider what we've done in the past and what changes we need to make. My mother always bought a new broom for the new year. I guess she was trying to make a "clean sweep." That's what many of us do after

reviewing the past year in the garden. This picture of a fresh young baby symbolizes our commitment to make that fresh start.

The long period of drought this year, followed by periods of flooding, put an enormous stress on the garden, but with challenges come opportunities. This is a good time to survey your garden for the successes that you have had. Part of our commitment as Master Gardeners is to provide information to the public about

the plants that do well here in Houston. The only way we can legitimately do this is to rely on the feedback of people who actually work in the gardens, both in the Extension Center and in the home garden.

Actually, the Extension Center Gardens really do provide the most data, but still there is no substitute for hands on experience in your own microclimate (backyard). That's why all of the Master Gardens are so important. Laurels to the many that dig in the dirt so that the gardening public can benefit.

You can sow: Those of you who wish to start seedlings would be wise to start them indoors under a glow light or a sunny window within a glass or plastic covering. However, alyssum, baby's breath, bluebonnet, candytuft, cleome, cosmos, feverfew, larkspur, marigold, nasturtium, salvia, scabiosa, snapdragon, stock, sweet pea, sweet William and verbenas can be sown in open ground.

You can now plant:

Bluebonnet, calendula, columbine, candytuft, coreopsis, daisy, hollyhock, honeysuckle, larkspur, pansy, petunia, pinks, snapdragon, trees (remember Arbor Day -- the 3rd Friday in January), verbena and violets.

"Veggies" you can plant: Asparagus, cabbage, mustard, spinach and other leafy vegetables, peas, and radishes.

MEETING SCHEDULE

JAN: 1/19/99

Executive Board	5:30 p.m.
Dessert and Coffee	6:30 p.m.
General Meeting	7:00 p.m.

SUBJECT:

"PLANTING TREES FOR HOUSTON"

Speakers: Glenda Barrett and Mickey Merritt -- The Park People

FEB: 2/16/99

SUBJECT:

"HOUSTON HARDY NATIVES"

Speaker: Glen Olsen, The Native Plant Society



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by Joe Thompson, MG President

Enjoy Your Creation

Your plans have been executed and the wildlife has decided your yard is the place to be. Now it's time to enjoy the fruits of your labor. Sit back, look out your window, and enjoy the show.

Watching the passing parade is a satisfying and well-deserved reward. But be forewarned, wildlife watching can be addictive. About 79 million Americans watch, photograph, and feed wildlife at or very close to home. They love watching the entertaining antics of wild creatures in the yards. For many of them, words like "courtship display," territoriality," "camouflage," and "preening" have taken on new meaning.

There is no better place to understand something than to see it for yourself. Some people are so fascinated by what they see in their yards that they keep logs of the observations.

While birds may be the easiest types of wildlife to attract to your yard, and the most visible, they are only one kind of wild creature you can observe and get to know close to home. There is a fascinating world of insects among your plants and maybe some frogs, turtles, and salamanders in and around your garden pool. Also, there may be visiting squirrels, and other mammals that can make their homes in your yard.

The more you know about your yard's visitors and residents, the more rewarding sharing your world with them will be.

Joe Thompson

HARRIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

#2 Abercrombie Drive
Houston, Texas 77084
Phone (281) 855-5600
Fax # (281) 855-5638

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

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ANCILLARY POSITIONS

Advisor & County Extension Agent
- Horticulturist.....TBA
(281) 855-5600
Harris County Extension Agency
Secretary.....Stephanie Gebhardt
(281) 855-5600
Volunteer
Coordinator.....Debbie Mendieta
(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 6.



FROM THE ORCHARD . . .

by Yvonne Gibbs

With our list of new years resolutions, fresh on our minds, good luck to everyone. I hope all our readers and their families have had a

blessed Christmas and I wish each a Happy New Year!

PRUNING WORKSHOPS

The fruit trees are losing their leaves, and soon will be dormant. This signals the next learning opportunity for the Master Gardeners. All the fruit trees will need a dormant oil spray. This is the greatest barrier to insects. It smothers the overwintering eggs and prevents the first generation of insects. This is followed by the start of the YEARLY PRUNING of all the fruits (with the exception of citrus and a few others). We will divide this into three pruning workshops:

1. GRAPES.
- 2 STONE FRUITS (peaches and nectarines).
- 3 PERSIMMONS

Times and days for the pruning will be on the regular Tuesday morning volunteer days during Jan. and Feb. We will give you instructions on the proper pruning techniques, and answer your questions or find the answers for you. Hopefully, we will have enough interested volunteers each time to be able to complete the workshop on a single morning. The only requirements are a warm body, a willing spirit, good sharp shears, and a desire to prune until the job is done. We ask you wear old clothes. We use a dilute solution of bleach to disinfect the shears. Shears are disinfected after the pruning is completed on one tree and before we begin pruning the next tree. We have been doing this for 10 years and the job always gets done, thanks to all the great volunteers. So, come lend a helping hand on the fruit pruning.

ANNUAL ALL DAY SPRING FRUIT FESTIVAL PLANT SALE AND SYMPOSIUM – JANUARY 30,1999 (THE LAST SATURDAY IN JANUARY YOU'ALL COME!

The Gulf Coast Fruit Study Group will have as the first activity of the new year this annual fund raiser. The plant sale and the symposium are open to one and all --no charge. The symposium traditionally has been, and remains, a very reasonable \$10 at the door on the day of -- or a discounted price of \$7.50 if paid on or before Friday. We will have the fruit trees you can use for this area, along with other offerings. TreeSearch Farms will be our provider for the trees. We usually have a very enticing sale. So come and get your favorites before they disappear. Our programs are great too. So don't miss out on the fun or the fund raising. Your support is appreciated.

A BRIEF REPORT ON THE NAFEX EVENT

I can say this was a first class event. The all day technical programs were excellent and very well attended. They were videoed by a NAFEX member. We are working on getting a copy for a future program. The meals were some of the best ever. The bus tour began somewhat late, but we made all our stops and arrived back on time. We didn't lose or leave anyone somewhere. So that was a Success. You can always expect some little bobbles with the bus. We thank Bill Rhode and Heide Sheesley of TreeSearch Farms for their hospitality, the tour of their facility and the wonderful lunch they prepared for us. We thank The Kings Orchard and The Matt Family Orchard for their hospitality and their tours. We completed all of this between 9:30a.m. and 3:30 p.m. This included our leisurely lunch at TreeSearch, with citrus grafting demos by master grafter, Bonnie Childers. A number of participants were given free plants by TreeSearch for sharing. I have a small banana fig. I will be sharing cuttings with you as soon as early spring (just a couple - it is small).

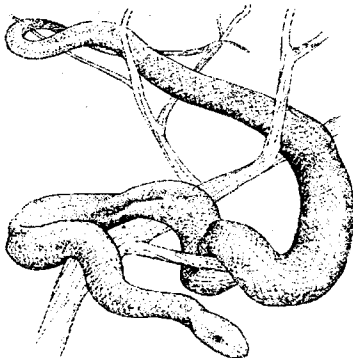
All hats off to Dr. Ethan Natelson for orchestrating this wonderful event. This was not a small task. It covered every phase and every detail. It only took one year of his life. We'll never know all the behind the scenes work necessary to create an event this involved. Only he knows. We thank him for caring enough to do the work for us.

(Continued on p. 13)

DOWN THE GARDEN PATH



What an exciting day we had in the herb garden on Tuesday, December 8th. One of the Master Gardeners discovered a huge albino snake. The authorities were called in -- three county constables and a representative from the Office of Steve Radack's Precinct #3.



After gathering a lot of attention, the snake became somewhat nervous and agitated. A representative from the Zoo showed up to

rescue what appeared to be someone's former, eight foot pet Albino Burmese Python. The Zoo keepers were prepared to take the snake to a veterinarian and the Animal Rescue Rehab. Unit with hopes of finding a home for it.

Wow, what an exciting day that was. Bill Adams was there to catch it all on film, so he should have some neat pictures to share with us in the near future.



Pam and Len Libby celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary (on December 1) by taking a long drive to North Carolina and Virginia to visit relatives there. They passed through some beautiful country. Still it was nice to get home in time to enjoy some balmy fall weather, here in Houston.



That about all that's doing at this time of year. Have a very Happy New Year!



Top Ten Reasons to Volunteer

10. When you stay home you get too many telemarketing calls.
9. Your family could use a break from you.
8. You might need help yourself some day.
7. It's hard to win a game of solitaire.
6. Soap operas all sound alike.
5. If you don't go out each day, you get old.
4. Why let your boss have all the fun in life?
3. The car needs a workout.
2. Your mom would be proud of you.
1. Who cares about money?

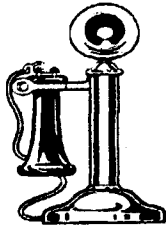
Submitted by and Source: Debbie Mendieta
Baldwinsville Volunteer Center: Baldwinsville, NY



DID YOU KNOW?

By Kapila Patel
from *Signs and Symbols*

Poppy:
An opiate, it symbolizes the ultimate sleep of death. Popular lore has it that the red poppies that sprung up after the Battle of Waterloo grew from the blood of the dead.



**MG PHONE DUTY:
November/December**

*"A thank you for those
who served on the line of
duty."*

Mondays: Laura DeBow Platt, Marjorie Chambers .

Tuesdays: Gail Wholey.

Wednesdays: Susan Spinelli, Jetti Fahle, Cherryll Walzel and Lera Wong.

Thursday: Pat Lowrie Pat Reed, H. Dickman Pfann and Joyce Senior.

Fridays: n/a

.A Note from the Editor...

If you would like to submit an article to the *Urban Dirt* newsletter, please contact the editor, Pamela Libby, by placing the article in her box at the Extension Center. We would love to have items about yourself or fellow Master Gardeners for publication. You can me at home: (713) 937-8437.

When you send articles that you have typed, please do not add a lot of special fonts or formatting. I will be glad to accent your article with these additions, if you include a separate note with your preferences. Also, don't add pen or pencil marks to your typed copy, just a sticky note I scan the typed copies and these marks interfere with reproduction of the text.

Another problem is tinted background paper. White paper always turns out crisper. Of course, all of the above does not apply to hand written articles, which I always retype. All articles are welcome, but typed articles are greatly appreciated.

The next issue will be for **March-April 1999** and **must be submitted by Feb. 1, 1999**. All articles submitted after that date, will not be included in the newsletter!



**COORDINATOR'S
CORNER**

As most of you know, every Tuesday morning is a garden work day here at the Extension office. We have the vegetable garden, herb garden, greenhouse, rose garden, orchard, and flower garden. These are areas that we keep up. We would like to see some new faces, and old ones that haven't been out in a while. If you are a new Master Gardener and don't know what area to go to, or where the help is needed, come find me. I'm always working outside on Tuesdays. This is a great opportunity to meet fellow Master Gardener's, have some fun and get involved in the garden activities.

On the first Tuesday of each month, we will be grilling hamburgers at lunchtime for the morning work bunch. Everyone is welcome. We will be asking for a \$ 2.00 donation to cover the cost of the burgers, buns, chips and condiments.

Hope to see you!!

Debbie Mendieta,

Volunteer Coordinator

My regular work days are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. My phone number is 281-855-5635. Feel free to call me, if I can be of any help to you.



PUBLICITY CHAIRPERSONS

Want to make sure *your* article gets published? Brenda Smith, Lazy Gardener Columnist, has published a neat little booklet that explains how it's done. You can order it for \$3.00 from Publicity Booklet, 14011 Greenranch, Houston, TX 70039 Please include a 32 cent stamp and self-addressed, legal sized envelope. (Ed. note: this may help get our events published. I've read the booklet and think it's great. P.L.)



NEW COMPUTER SIGN IN SYSTEM

We have our new sign in, sign out touch screen computer up and running. No more signing on the clipboard at the reception desk. See the new computer in the Master Gardener room.

You will be signing in and out with a number, not a name. There is a black binder near the computer with an alphabetical listing of all Master Gardeners with a number next to your name. You key in that number and it will confirm your name.

The system has an internal clock that will automatically register the time. Don't forget to sign out, too!!

Please use this computer. It is very important that we track all of the hours that you work. This is a very easy system. There is no keyboard to use, you just touch the screen. If you volunteer at Mercer Arboretum, you will be familiar with how to use it. It works in exactly the same way.

Please see Debbie or Stephanie for help the first time, if needed.



MASTER GARDENER 1999 STANDING/SPECIAL COMMITTEES:

Bulk Mail Committee:	John Plotzki, Karen Barry, Susan Wier
Membership	Tom Robb
Telephone Committee	Patty Rode
Hospitality	Diane Ballentine
Greeting Committee	Kapila Patel
Newsletter	Pam Libby, Sandy Brewer and Terry Sidwell

EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

Speakers' Bureau	Karen Breneman Anne Brown
Cylinder Gardening	Glen Graves
M G Classes	Volunteer Coordinators

FUND RAISING

Book Sales	Patty Usnick
Tomato & Pepper Sale	Mary Lynn Randall
Seminars	William Adams

EXTENSION CENTER GARDENS AND GREENHOUSE

Greenhouse	Billie Duncan
Vegetable Garden	David Parish
Flower Gardens	Frances Robeson
Herb Garden	Nel Barner
Orchard	Yvonne Gibbs
Rose Garden	Clyde Cannon
AUDIT	Louis M. Jacobs

NAME BADGES

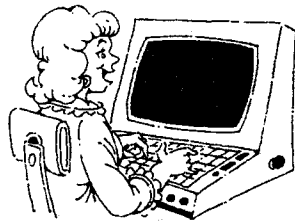
There are quite a few name badges that we have printed for you that have not been picked up. Could the following people please stop by the extension office to pick up their badge:

E.R. Sauermilch Jerry Mc Innis Suzanne Kee
 Elizabeth Nimmo Paul Adamoli Gay Rogers
 Caroline Winkler Marilyn Hully Robyn Lindsay
 Cynthia Johnston Pam Shindeldecker Jane Gilley
 Faith Baechtel Babbette Harding Marta Hiegel
 Margaret Thomas Suzanne Walton Tod Harding
 Barbara Oliver Gary Edmondson Cynthia Ramon
 Gene Speller Phoebe Lake Rose Mary Nichols
 Colleen Mckee Winnie Sheets Christina Thaller
 James Byron Thomas Clarence Johnson, Jr.
 Elizabeth Carruth Debbie Mueller Cheryl Sevin
 Aloma Marquis Jeniver Laurant Terry Ayers
 Hernan Franco Pat Robinson Christopher
 McBrayer

THANKS SO MUCH !!

Web Surfin'

by Tom H. Robb, Jr.
 The Internet with its "World-Wide-Web" reminds me of the Universe, which, if we are to believe Albert Einstein is constantly expanding. And even if we consider only the horticultural aspect of the "Web", the number of sites is mind boggling. It is my intent, in this column, to share with you some of my favorite pages. Most will pertain to some aspect of gardening - after all this is the gardening publication of a gardening association - but I will probably throw in a few other goodies from time to time.



NOTE: Be sure to begin all of the listed addresses with **http://**

In the last issue of Urban Dirt, I told you about the beginning of a Harris County Master Gardener Web Page on the server at the Harris County Extension Office. Its address is: harris-cnty.tamu.edu/mg/ I've converted it to frames format - hope you like it. The primary addition is the on-line version of the Sept/Oct and the Nov/Dec issues of Urban Dirt. Remember, this is only a crude start, something to put On-Line - I promise it will get better.

For this issue I'm highlighting sites connected with Texas A&M and/or The Agricultural Extension Service. Even this is only a partial listing - the A&M and Extension Sites go on and on and on.

One of the early sites on the web was "Aggie Horticulture" with Dr. Dan Lineberger as its originator and promoter. Aggie Horticulture, located at: aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu contains links to almost anything that you ever wanted to know about horticulture and just didn't know who to ask or where to look.

A new feature is Aggie Horticulture Just for Kids, at: aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/kindergarden/index.html is devoted to young people and ways that they can relate to horticulture.

"Agropolis" is a friendly A&M site that promises family farmers and gardeners science-based information that is Aggie reliable. Look for it at: agcomwww.tamu.edu/agcom/agrotex/agcommmap.html

Many times we may know what we're looking for, but aren't sure where to find it. There are a number of good search engines available to you on the web - I may even devote a future issue to the topic of web searching - but for now, there are a couple of good search locations at Aggie Horticulture. One, the "plant answer Machine" searches all the files in Aggie Horticulture, the Texas Plant Disease Handbook, and the TAMU Entomology web site simultaneously.

It's at: horticulture.tamu.edu:8080/search.html

(Continued on p.8)