

URBAN DIRT

Published for the Harris County Master Gardeners

July/August 2000

Vol. 9, No. 4



CELEBRATE YOUR INDEPENDENCE

by Pam Libby

While you are not independent of the constraints of your homeowner's covenants, you may find that after giving them a careful review, there's a legal and satisfying way for you to create something a little different in your garden (at least in the backyard). More and more, we are seeing gardens that reflect a personal sense of style. Some people are incorporating things that they have seen in their travels, while others maybe looking for a spiritual retreat and many others want a place that is a backdrop for their art collection (perhaps a little "yard art?").

What ever you are looking for, there never has been as much available as there is today, whether it's the mystique of a Zen garden, the busyness and "buzziness" of an aromatic garden, the gentle sounds of a water garden, or gardens based on Celtic, Biblical, or herbal themes, every bookstore and library has something there to guide you. There are even Feng Shui gardens.

One type of garden that I just began to hear about, and therefore thought it was new, is the labyrinth garden. In actuality, this design turns out to be at least 3500 years old. The labyrinth was evident during the Minoan civilization in ancient Crete. This type of garden design consists of a number of pathways that wind into a center place of meditation and then wind back out again. It differs from a maze in that, there are no dead ends. The purpose, aside from being very beautiful and intricate, is to create a secure rounded form in which to walk and to contemplate spiritual issues within the safety of a given construct. Of course, that wasn't strictly the case with the Minoan Labyrinth (see an ancient history book for details on this one). However, it is an amazingly cross-cultural form. According to *Spiritual Gardening* by Peg Streep, Time-Life, 1999, a labyrinth symbol was used among the North American Hopi people as well as in Ireland and Scotland and on the floors of Christian cathedrals during the middle ages. Here in America, they have recently been showing up in colleges, such as Harvard and Radcliffe and in many churches and private gardens across the country.

Whatever type of garden you decide on, make sure you give plenty of thought about the upkeep required to maintain it, especially if you are thinking of a tranquility garden. With this type of garden, the intent is to get away from stress, not add to it. Plan a quiet place, away from busy family activities and fill it with either the serenity of native grasses or other easy to keep, and easy on the eye, plantings. What ever type of garden you are planning, I'm sure you'll find the advice and guidance here among your fellow Master Gardeners!

MEETING SCHEDULE

JULY 18, 2000

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

SUBJECT:

"Construction of Gardens, including Bog Gardens."

Speaker: Anita Nelson, Co-Founder of Nelson Water Gardens and Nursery, Inc. a specialty garden center in Katy, Texas.

AUGUST 15, 2000

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

SUBJECT:TBA



PRESIDENT'S THOUGHTS
by Frances Robeson, MG President

*"Everything I have ever done in my life
has been beyond what I was able to do"*
Elsa Roseborough

She was a famous Houston fashion model, and a woman successful in many things. When I read this quote in a newspaper article celebrating her life, I understood completely what she meant, so I filed it away among my favorite quotations.

When Joe Thompson called me in May of last year to tell me that the Nominating Committee wanted to nominate me for president, I knew they were making a mistake in thinking I could do this job. Still I was so excited to have such an honor that I wanted to try anyway. I remembered what Elsa Roseborough had said, and I thought that maybe I could do it with a little help from my friends! I knew I could count on my fellow Master Gardeners. You did give me your help, not a little, but a lot of help. And I thank you. I do not have space to name you all, but you know who you are. You gave me constant encouragement and enthusiasm, especially when I began to doubt that some new project was such a good idea after all. You worked hard, but you still made it fun.

Master Gardeners do so many things to fulfill our purpose of educating about gardening, and with it spreading the joy that gardening brings. I am proud to be one of you. You have conducted sales that brought to the community the opportunity to buy uncommon perennials, shrubs, and vines; locally adapted fruit trees; and tomatoes and peppers not available anywhere else. At the same time standing ready with cultural advice, and offering books for sale, books written for our climate.

(Continued on page 13)

**HARRIS COUNTY MASTER
GARDENER ASSOCIATION**

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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

President
Frances Robeson (281) 890-4259
First Vice President
Patti Usnick (281) 578-8948
Second Vice President
Theron McLaren (713)622-7633
Past President
A. Joe Thompson (713)468-2458
Secretary
Kapila Patel (281) 855-1740
Treasurer
Diane Ballentine (281) 373-1205
Directors
Ken Dorman, Nancy Kuykendall, Glen
Graves, Dave Mason, Charlie Reass,
Clarence Sapp

ANCILLARY POSITIONS

**Advisor & County Extension Agent -
Horticulturist**
William D. Adams (281) 855-5600
**Harris County Extension Service
Horticulture Secretary**
Stephanie Gebhardt (281) 855-5600
Volunteer Coordinator
Debbie Mendieta (281) 855-5600
Urban Dirt Editor
Pam Libby (713) 937-8437
Gulf Coast Fruit Study Group
Yvonne Gibbs (713) 462-7052
Membership
Tom Robb (713) 465-5987
Greeting Committee
Linda Carlson.
Hospitality Committee
Anice Bilberry, Margie Chambers.
Publicity Committee
Clarence Sapp (713) 460-4414
Book Committee
Patty Usnick (281) 578-8948



FROM THE ORCHARD . . .

by Yvonne Gibbs

The Orchard needs regular volunteers ... we hope the Master Gardeners .. not yet committed to other areas

of the gardens, will donate some of their hours in the orchard. This is a large area with lots of learning opportunities on how to grow any and all of the varieties of fruits suitable for this gulf coast region. This includes vines, like grapes and black berries, figs , stone fruits like peaches and pears nectarines, jujubes, may haws, some apples, hardy citrus, pawpaws and pecans. You will learn about different types of grafts; you will learn we use different rootstocks for each variety of fruits. There are types of bed preparation with fruit trees, irrigation methods, times of fertilization, and the year around IPM (integrated pest management) using the most environmentally safe methods. There is also the training and pruning of all the various types of fruit trees and vines. So if you have a yearning to grow fruit, come out on Tuesdays mornings and try. You don't have to know a lot about fruit, you just need a willingness to help. Hope to see some new faces out in the orchard.

Congratulations to all the newly graduated Master Gardeners. We are all proud of your efforts.

The figs are all full of ripe fruit. I love to cook with figs, if any of you have any good fig recipes, forward them to me and we will try a few on a Hamburger Tuesday.

The last tour of the Master Gardeners was great. (As usual). We had a good driver who took the direct route (freeways) and got us to The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center by 11:15 am. We left at 7:15 am. We had a brand new bus with new rules. We were told they wanted to take better care of their buses and no food or eating would be allowed on the bus. But since we had not been told beforehand, they allowed us to have our usual cold drinks and breakfast muffins. The driver took I-10 to Columbus and turned onto 71 and shortly after Bastrop, we were at the center.

Our members were divided into two groups. One went one way and the other another. My group was guided by Bridget, who first gave us the history of the Center and the difficulties they had getting the current location. This was the second home for the center. It is truly beautiful. The land is both native prairie and woodlands in a rolling landscape. There were lots of volunteers maintaining the plantings and doing weeding in the buffalo grass. The first thing we saw was one of the cisterns they use for harvesting rainwater. They collect the runoff rain water off the roofs of the three buildings. The largest cistern held 10,000 gallons of water.

The three buildings had three distinct types of architecture representing the history of the region. The austere German, the ranch style, and the hacienda type with arches and patios. The use of native stone was very beautiful. They have an auditorium for meetings, a gift shop, and a nice café, where we ate mostly salads and sandwiches, they were really good too.

The display area had lots of pictures of Lady Bird Johnson and a lot of material about the center. The largest water cistern tower had winding stairs all the way to the top. Halfway up there was a very nice balcony with tables and chairs for diners and up on top you got a good view of the surrounding area. There were patios with fountains and many beautiful plantings of natives of both the sun and the shade persuasion. Our tour lasted an hour and it kept moving so that we could see everything. They have a short film on the history of the Center. Our group did not see the film because many in the group were eating in the café and needed the time to order and to eat. After lunch several of us, took one of the trails. It was warming up by then so we elected to take the wooded trail. There was a constant cooling wind and the humidity was less than here in Houston. As soon as you got out of the sun you were cool. We left on schedule and were back at the Extension building by 5:15 p.m.

On Tuesday Hamburger Day we were treated to a discussion on Gesneriads. We were told what they were, how to grow them, and to keep them alive. All the plants and cuttings our speaker brought were given out as door prizes. This group included African violets, streps, episcias.

(Continued on page 13)