

Urban Dirt

IN COOPERATION WITH THE TEXAS COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

As American as Tomatoes

By Carol Cammack



Fig. 16g. — Tomato rouge grosse.
(*Lycopersicon esculentum*, var.)

The tomato has traveled great distances over many centuries to enjoy the popularity it experiences today. The tomato is native to the Andes of Peru where it first grew as a bright red, marble sized, cherry-type tomato. From Peru, the tomato migrated through South America north to Mexico. In Mexico, the tomatl, as it was called, was domesticated through selection for larger and more diverse fruits. The wanderings of the tomato ceased for many centuries after its Pre-Columbian arrival in Mexico. There is no evidence the Native American Indians were acquainted with the tomato until after the arrival of the early Spanish explorers.

In the mid-sixteenth century, the tomato traveled to Europe with the Spanish explorers. The Spanish were the first Europeans to cultivate the tomato, but as it traveled north and east through Europe the tomato was greeted with mixed emotions. The French called it the “Apple of Love”, the Germans proclaimed it to be the “Apple of Paradise” and upon arrival in Italy, it was dubbed “Pomodoro” or the apple of love. The Italians even believed heart-shaped tomatoes to be an aphrodisiac. The English, however, were certain the tomato was poisonous in spite of its beautiful red color. Their reasoning included many factors from its membership in the nightshade family, to the pungency of its leaves to plain superstition. The fear of the tomato persisted for many years, even among the American Colonists.

By the late 1700’s some home gardens like Thomas Jefferson were raising tomatoes in their gardens, but most people still ignored them or regarded them with fear. By 1812 the tomatoes had become a common enhancement in the Creole gumbos and jambalayas of the south. In other areas of the country, people like colonel Robert Johnson were trying to persuade the wary public that the tomato would not kill them. In 1820, Colonel Johnson stood on the steps of the Salem, New Jersey courthouse and ate a raw tomato! Reportedly, the crowd was shocked when the Colonel didn’t drop dead on the spot. By 1850, the tomato had made its way into most urban markets. Farmers and home gardeners alike were growing tomatoes. Still, many cookbooks proclaimed that the tomato should be cooked for at least three hours or else it would “not lose its raw taste”.

The tomato and botany alike suffered a minor set back in the late 1800s. The Tariff Act of 1883 placed a 10% tax on “vegetables in their natural state” but allowed fruits “green, ripened or dried” to enter the country tax-free. The Collector of Customs at the Port of New York declared the tomato to be a vegetable and therefore subject to taxation. The importers sued, arguing correctly that the tomato is botanically a fruit. In 1893, the Supreme Court ruled that regardless of its botanical nature the tomato is a vegetable.

Late into the 19th Century, both English and American scientist believed the tomato caused cancer. Eventually the theory was disproved and recently the cancer fighting properties of the tomato have become more widely known. Studies show that increased levels of lycopene, an antioxidant found in tomatoes, are correlated with a decreased risk for cancer in the digestive tract, cervix, prostate and pancreas of humans. The tomato is nature’s richest source of lycopene, but it is also found in watermelons and pink grapefruits.

After traveling for over 1000 years and through three continents, the tomato has come to be the most important processed vegetable in America. The average American consumes over 23 pounds of processed tomatoes each year. Vine ripened and processed tomatoes are highest in potassium, vitamins A and C, fiber, lycopene and even protein. After the potato, tomatoes contribute the greatest amount of nutrients to the American diet.

President's Thoughts

By Virginia Joiner

The saying "if you build it and they will come" really applies to January 27 and the fruit tree sale. Based on the weatherman's report for the 26 and 27, I did not feel secure about the outcome for the day of the sale. "O ye of little faith" that was me.

It was wonderful to walk into the auditorium that Saturday morning and see the people listening intently to **Heidi Sheesley's** lecture. It was standing room only. At 9:00 a.m. when the gate and the back door at the Extension Center opened it was pouring down rain. The shoppers didn't blink an eye. Most of them were not prepared for the weather but they poured forth and went looking for that very special something as though the sky was blue and the day sunny.

They were a truly amazing group of people. They shopped, asked questions, visited with other shoppers, and waited in the rain to check out. They were polite, orderly and nary a grumble was heard.

There was one little boy, probably about 5, shopping for a pecan tree with his father. The father told the little boy he could pick out the new pecan tree.

This little boy took a great deal of time to make up his mind. He walked up and down in front of the trees. He finally picked one out. His father told him it was wonderful and the best in the group. The little boy gave his dad a great big smile. Every time that little boy looks at that tree he will remember that his father shared that special moment with him.

A special thanks to **David Parish** and **Doug McLeod** for all their work

and the choices they made for the sale. The help and support from our volunteer Master Gardeners make these events possible. Thank you to all the volunteers that took part in the sale. I want to thank **Heidi Sheesley** of Tree Search Farms. Her dedication to the horticulture industry and support for the Master Gardener programs is a valuable asset.

Wear your smile and come into the garden.



Harris County Master Gardener Association

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Michael's Corner

By Michael Morrison



photo by Michael Morrison

Hoorah !!! We had a great Fruit tree sale at Bear Creek last month and wanted to thank all the volunteers that braved the rainy start, and then a wonderful finish to the sale as the sun came out. **Heidi Sheesley** from TreeSearch Farms along with **David Parish** did a nice presentation before the sale and **Doug McCloud** made sure outside was ready. Great teamwork was displayed and I want to thank all that made it happen.

WOW, eighty-four new Master Gardener interns here at Bear Creek and the enthusiasm that is being shown by them is very impressive. They are showing up for phone duty already, the planting day of the tomatoes and peppers in the greenhouse,

and the first Tuesday lecture at Bear Creek recently. It is nice to see such dedication right out of the gate! So, Hoorah to the new class and hope they will make it the best class group ever.

I would also like to thank "**Ace**" **Edward Hanna** for his computer mapping of the orchard and the success to date on that project. Soon the orchard will have a timer system for watering and new varieties are being introduced.

Thanks go out to **Mike Spangler** as the new assistant in the herb garden and to **Susan White** for the color garden areas. It is so wonderful to have a great crew and I also want to thank the many folks that I have not mentioned for their help and sweat too!

Thanks also go out to **Jean Fefer** for taking on the greenhouse responsibilities along with **Jinks Hammer, Richard Lund, Barbara Kish, Margaret Hamburg**, and the other wonderful folks. I was watching them plant the tomatoes and peppers in the greenhouse today, and it was a blur. Our President, **Virginia Joiner** was applying the fertilizer to them, stating that she wished her arms were longer to reach them all. Others on hand for the planting session were **Brian Toranto, Ken Dorman, Mary Cessat, Francis Ellsworth, Marie Robinson, Sheila Vickers, Liz Cash, Audrey Robertson**, and **Ellen Mc Dougal**.

How about those folks on the east side of Houston!!! The atmosphere at Precinct two is contagious. Those folks are doing great things on that side of town and want them to know that too! They always seem to be full of energy, great smiles, doing so many programs, and great food! (I had to mention that too).



photo by Michael Morrison

Make sure to laugh and enjoy the fruits of the garden, and smile!

Garden Gifts

News from our Outreach Gardens

By Kenneth Dorman

I'm sure I say this every year, but this winter seems to be more like the winters I remember from earlier eons in South Texas. Winters then were cold, damp, and cloudy and lasted a long time. Just like this winter. Back then I used to wonder what in the world I was doing playing football in weather like this and now this weather makes me wonder what in the world I was doing playing football back then. Every stretched joint and cracked bone hurts. I was looking back at some of the notes I keep on the gardens and here is what one entry in February said: "**Bob, Shirley** and I continued Monday's work, finishing the second trellis and fixing more of the irrigation system. The weather is awful, cold, overcast, and misting rain with a miserable wind from the northeast." But, as "House and Garden" magazine says, "The wise gardener anticipates June in January", and so we do.

We had a visit from the Urban Harvest Board one Saturday morning and the garden looked good. **George, Dr. Bob, Wandering Walter, Shirley** and I had just finished putting in the cottonseed meal and compost so all the vacant beds looked nice and fresh and ready for plants and the ones with plants were bright and green and healthy. I wish the apple trees they gave us had been blooming.

March is the big month in the Christian Community Service Center and Bonita Street House of Hope gardens. This is the major month of planting and I feel like we should have some kind of ceremony. Maybe the four of us will gather at the Central Market coffee shop and kill some sweet rolls or a Danish or two and incant some wild predictions of production totals. At CCSC we are planting three beds of tomatoes, one of hot peppers, one of sweet peppers, one of green eggplants, two of French orange hybrid melons, one of squash and a world of cucumbers, bush beans and pole beans to go with the two beds each of potatoes and onions. After the onions and potatoes finish we will plant field peas (cream, purple hull, black-eye, etc.) in four beds and then plant okra after the squash finishes. At BSHOH we will change the mix a little, going heavier on the tomatoes, field peas, melons, okra, beans, cucumbers and some corn and lighter on the eggplants and peppers. We expect to produce about the same as the last two years, which have averaged almost 3,000 pounds at CCSC and a smaller amount at BSHOH where we have less space and fewer people to feed.

The plants raised by the greenhouse group look especially good this year. They have good, strong stems, good roots and a bright color. All the improvements in the equipment and the dedication of the regulars and their helpers are paying off in a much better product. **Jean Fefer** even went so far as to have her daughter in Switzerland send seeds for the Montfavet tomato that are unavailable in the US, but which has become a favorite seller here. The Tomato and Pepper Sale and the Fall Plant Sale will reap great benefit, as have all the gardens they supply.

A lot of other things besides the greenhouse seem to me to be going very smoothly at the Master Gardener part of the Extension Center. I think the Boss, **Virginia Joiner**, her Board and staff have got this operation in overdrive and going someplace. A lot of projects are being completed and a lot of new and necessary ones started. As a past president I feel good about what they are accomplishing. Anyone else?

A famous yogi once said, "A humanity at peace will know the endless fruits of victory, sweeter to the taste than any nurtured on the soil of blood."

Love yourself and know peace.

"The wise gardener
anticipates June
and
January."

Web Surfin'

Tech News for Master Gardeners

By Tom H Robb, Jr



By the time you read this, the MyDoom Worm should have stopped burrowing into computer files throughout the Internet. I am told that the code includes a cease and desist mode after March 1, 2004. We'll see if it is so. It's a shame that these brilliant kids can't use their intelligence for more meaningful endeavors - they could become new **Bill Gates** or **Michael Dells**.

It's that time of year again when **Uncle Sammy** reaches his hand into your pocket book. The stores all seem to have software displays of TurboTax and Tax Cut and the reviewers have been coming out with their choices of the two. Of course, there are other programs available, but TaxCut and TurboTax are the unquestioned leaders. Both seem to do excellent jobs. Last year Intuit tried to pull a Microsoft by forcing one machine registration of TurboTax but the hue and cry was so great they relented this year and took that requirement off.

The IRS claims that 53 million people filled electronically last year. At least that many were filed, although I'm sure that a good number were filed by tax preparers. Tax software has become so inexpensive and so easy to use that I am amazed at how many people who own and use computers still pay big sums to have someone else do their returns.

And I am also surprised at the number of individuals, who have only their personal returns to do, purchase the higher priced Deluxe or Premier versions of the program rather than the inexpensive (\$19.95) Basic version. In most States, the Deluxe Version is understandable because it includes the price of a State tax program. But, to my way of thinking, in Texas, with no State income tax, the additional differences are not worth the extra cost.

I, personally, use TurboTax - have used it for about 20 years - but many people I know swear by Tax Cut. Both are exceptionally easy to use, even for first time users. The program asks you questions and then plugs your answers into the right place. And the beauty of it really comes in the next year, because it remembers the answers you gave the first time. Unless something has changed all the basic data is already in place, even if you used TaxCut last year. It even thinks to ask you about deductions that you might have forgotten and does a complete audit of the finished report.

The IRS is highly promoting the use of electronic filing. Their literature cites the advantages of Accuracy, Security, Electronic Signatures, Proof of Acceptance and Fast Refunds. And by taking advantage of the mail-in rebate, electronic filing is free.

This year Intuit, the software producer of TurboTax and Quicken, has come out with a new product called "Its Deductible". This software imports directly into TurboTax and determines and assigns the actual fair market value to thousands of commonly donated items - clothing, furniture, appliances, etc. These valuations are determined in accordance with IRS guidelines - keeping you compliant with IRS regulations. Intuit guarantees that "ItsDeductible" will save \$300.00 or more in tax savings or your money back. It's priced at \$19.99 and I'm going to give it a try.

Happy Surfin'!

HCMGA News & Events

In Memorium

Patrician H. Robinson

We were saddened to hear that one of our Master Gardeners, **Patricia H. Robinson**, lost her fight with cancer and passed away on December 24, 2003. Pat was a member of, and graduated with, the Mercer 2002 Class.

Bear Creek News & Notes

Bring Your Own: Since so many small garden tools “go walking” **Virginia** and **Brian** have asked that you “Bring Your Own” small hand tools (pruners, trowels, weeding claws, etc.) when you come to the Tuesday work sessions. And, if you do borrow a small tool from the sheds, please Put It Back - Do NOT leave it out in the garden where you were using it. Thanks!!

Plants for Sale: Some of you have been asking about many of the “orphan plants” in pots along the side of the greenhouse - under the Loquat trees. Many of these are left-overs from the greenhouse or from sales and will be available for you to buy at nominal prices. If you wish to “adopt” any of these orphans please see **Brian (the ToolMan)** who will act as the salesperson for these.

Bear Creek Events

Mar 2 - Hamburger Tuesday. After a morning of working in the gardens and having a hamburger lunch, our own **Clyde Cannon** will be speaking on '**Antique Roses at HCMGA**'. There's still time to plant roses and we will have some for sale at our Spring Plant Sale. So, be sure to come, learn how to care for them, and decide which ones you would like to add to your garden.

Mar 15 – Carpooling Event to Bayou Bend. The TOUR LIMIT HAS BEEN REACHED. For those of you signed up for the Carpooling Event, our tour will begin at 10:00am and our guide will be the curator of the gardens **Mr. Bart Bechter**.

Mar 16 - General Meeting. Refreshments at 6:30 p.m. We've had two months to lose those holiday pounds so bring an extra special treat. Our speaker this month will be **Diana Foss**. Her topic '**Invasive Plants in Houston!**' There are many plants available in the Houston area that are now considered to be invasive so you will want to find out the latest so you can select other plants and help control an invasion!

Mar 31 - Field Trip. A bus trip is planned to **Stephen F. Austin State University**. This trip includes **three individual tours** – an Azalea Garden Tour, an Arboretum Tour, and a Piney Woods Tour. The bus will accommodate 39. Be sure to check Tom's email messages – we will announce when the limit of 39 has been reached. After that, anyone interested would have to carpool – registration still required. We will be having a buffet lunch at The Fredonia Hotel. Cost with lunch included is \$21.00.

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HCMGA News & Events

Continued from page 6

Apr 6 - Hamburger Tuesday. We will be busy in the gardens getting ready for the Spring Plant Sale. Our visitors always like to stroll our gardens at this time enjoying all the blooms, etc. So be sure to come early, bring some of your hand tools if possible, and be ready to work up an appetite for those hamburgers. Our program topic will be **"Landscape Lighting"**. **Paul Goss and Joseph Toth** are with Lumiscape and Texas Landscape Lighting Supply (a new company they are starting). They will be talking about moods/effects that we can create with landscape lighting, types of materials, new products on the market, etc. They will talk about what we as Master Gardeners can do ourselves as well as what we need to have a professional do because of codes, safety, etc. They will bring samples of some new lighting products on the market for you to see.

Apr 20 - General Meeting. Our meeting will begin promptly at 7:00 p.m. **Vince Mannino**, County Extension Agent – Horticulture from Jefferson County will be with us to discuss **"Goofy Garden Questions"** and will then try to answer some of yours.

Apr 24 - Spring Plant Sale. Set-up will be on Friday and the sale on Saturday the 24th. Sign up now to help on these days.

May 6-8 - Texas State Master Gardener Convention.

Registration information is now available on the web at <http://nueces-co.tamu.edu/> or at the Harris County Extension Office. The conference schedule this year is an exciting one with excellent speakers including writers Andy Wasowski and Malcom Beck. There will also be numerous tours to choose from including the King Ranch, Welder Wildlife Refuge, Port Aransas, Rockport-Fulton Gardens, Corpus Christi Master Gardener Home Gardens, Xeriscape Design Garden & Learning Center and the Corpus Christi Botanical Gardens & Nature Center. Don't forget the great food and fellowship to be had by all. You won't be disappointed. We'd like to be well represented at this conference, so get your registration information and sign up!

May 15 - Master Gardener Home Garden Tour. I want to say a big "THANK YOU" to all who have volunteered to host our garden tour this year. More information will be available in next month's newsletter.

Mar 2 - Hamburger Tuesday
8:00 a.m.: Learning as you Work
11:30 a.m.: Home cooked burgers
Noon: Clyde Cannon on
'Antique Roses at HCMGA'

Mar 15 - Field Trip
10:00 a.m.: A Carpooling Event to
Bayou Bend

Mar 16 - General Meeting
6:30 p.m.: Refreshments. Bring a
 dessert or snack to share.
7:00 p.m.: **Diana Foss** on
Invasive Plants in Houston

Mar 31 - Field Trip
10:00 a.m.: A bus trip to **Stephen
 F. Austin State University.**

Apr 6 - Hamburger Tuesday
8:00 a.m.: Work up an appetite
11:30 a.m.: Home cooked burgers
Noon: Paul Goss & Joseph Toth
 on **"Landscape Lighting"**

Apr 20 - General Meeting
6:30 p.m.: Refreshments
7:00 p.m.: **Vince Mannino** on
"Goofy Garden Questions"

Apr 24 - Spring Plant Sale

**May 6-8 - Master Gardener's
 "Texas State Convention"**
 Corpus Christi, Texas

**May 15 - Master Gardener
 Home Garden Tour**

Precinct 2 News & Events

Garden News

Our Spring Sale is certainly keeping us busy this past month, but by no means is it the only project going on. We had a great workday in the garden, Saturday, the 19th. **Eleanor Borda, Diane Bryant** and **Patty Zolen** worked in the Rose Garden adding compost and anchoring it in place with landscape cloth to help hold the soil in place better. It appears to be working well as it's holding up after the days and days of rain we've had. **Christa Kaiser** and **J. C. Whitney** did prep work on the herb bed. They relocated the coral vine to its new home. J. C. and **Rita Whitney** cleaned and hung the remainder of the tools in the tool shed. They also bedded a large donation of variegated monkey grass in a temporary location-it will be used for the Rose Garden expansion. **Marleine Oren, Georgia Lau, Theresa Holloman, Pat Mitrowski, Linda Garren** and **Angela Chandler** all bumped up tomatoes for the sale. **Ginia Keen** and **Pat Mitrowski** have taken over as co-chairs of the Herb Garden. The Herb Garden has been divided up into 6 plots and each will have a different design theme. **Ruth Touchstone** will be planting plots 1 & 2 with a Tea Garden in one and Asian herbs in the other. Marleine Oren and Pat Mitrowski are doing a Mediterranean theme. They wish to extend a special thanks to Tazz's on Hwy 146 in Baytown for donating the urn that will be the focal point of their plot. **Gloria Gibson** and **Christa Kaiser** are planning a Shakespearean Garden. **Pat Stier** and **Ginia Keen** will be planting Mexican culinary herbs. **Barbara Morrison** and **Ginia Keen's** area will have edible flowers. Diane Bryant is incorporating one of our rings into the herb garden with medicinal herbs. Thanks to J. C. Whitney, and **Fred** and Angela Chandler for all their hard work on renovating the Vegetable Garden and it's almost done! Pat Mitrowski has joined Angela as co-chair in the Vegetable Garden.

We are very pleased to announce that Gloria Gibson will be taking over as Program Director. She did a wonderful job organizing First Wednesday this month. **Debbie Markey** inspired us all with her Mosaic Birdhouses, we're excited that she has agreed to help us in a workshop in the near future. Gloria was really put to the test in her new position since we had our Quarterly Evening Meeting Monday the 9th. The food was great and a huge thanks to Angel Chandler for previewing the Fruit Tree Program that will be presented at our sale.

Wednesday we had a fruitful workday packaging up product for the sale. Thanks to Janice Patrick and Linda Garren for organizing everything. It made it easy to get the work done. Thanks to Eleanor Borda, Theresa Holloman, **Hazel Potvie**, **Ginia Keen**, Diane Bryant and Gloria Gibson for pitching in to get the products ready.

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Precinct 2 News & Events

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Upcoming Events

Mar 3 - First Wednesday. **Angela Chandler** will teach us **Fern Propagation** at 10:00 am followed by our potluck lunch.

Mar 6 - WaterSmart Workshop & Plant Sale. The **WaterSmart Workshop & Plant Sale** will be held at U of H Clear Lake. Don't forget the plant sale is open to the public from 1:00-5:00 p.m.

Mar 25 - Field Trip to the Antique Rose Emporium. We'll meet at the garden at 8:00 a.m. and carpool. We are planning a stop at **Ellison's Greenhouse** and we'll be having lunch at the Southern Flyer Diner. You can sign up in the office, call and leave a message (281) 991-8437 or email Gloria Gibson at glogib@msn.com.

May 6-8 - Texas State Master Gardener Convention. Registration information is now available on the web at <http://nueces-co.tamu.edu/> or at the Harris County Extension Office. The conference schedule this year is an exciting one with excellent speakers including writers Andy Wasowski and Malcom Beck. There will also be numerous tours to choose from including the King Ranch, Welder Wildlife Refuge, Port Aransas, Rockport-Fulton Gardens, Corpus Christi Master Gardener Home Gardens, Xeriscape Design Garden & Learning Center and the Corpus Christi Botanical Gardens & Nature Center. Don't forget the great food and fellowship to be had by all. You won't be disappointed. We'd like to be well represented at this conference, so get your registration information and sign up!

Mar 3 – First Wednesday

9:30 a.m. Registration

10:00 a.m. Angela Chandler on **"Fern Propagation"**.

11:00 a.m. Pot Luck Luncheon.

Bring a dish to share. 1202 Genoa Red Bluff. For reservations call (281) 991-8437.

Mar 6 – WaterSmart Workshop & Plant Sale

1:00 - 5:00 pm Plant Sale open to the public. EIH Building U of H Clear Lake. For information call (281) 991-8437.

Mar 25 – Field Trip to the Antique Rose Emporium.

8:00 a.m. Meet at 1202 Genoa Red Bluff. For reservations call (281) 991-8437 or email Gloria Gibson at glogib@msn.com.

May 6-8 – Master Gardener's "Texas State Convention"

Corpus Christi, Texas

Volunteer Opportunities

Fire Ant Booth at Home Shows

Enjoy being stung by fire ants? Fight back!!! Free your yard and neighborhood of fire ants for this summer by treating for fire ants this spring. Help cut down on their population by volunteering to work a booth at your choice of two shows. Or volunteer for both, and get into both shows for Free.

First show: March 19 - 21, 2004. 23rd Annual Houston Home Show at the George R. Brown Convention Center (Hall D). Booth hours will be: Friday - 2:00 to 8:00 P.M., Saturday - 10:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M. and Sunday - 11:00 A.M. to 6:30 P.M.

Second show: April 16 - 18, 2004. Houston House Beautiful Show at Reliant Center. Booth hours will be: Friday - 2:00 to 9:00 P.M., Saturday - 10:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. and Sunday - 11:00 A.M. to 6:30 P.M.

Those who volunteer will work in shifts, receive free admission to the shows and be given credit toward their Master Gardener or Master Naturalist volunteer hours! What would you do? Hand out literature and answer questions. No previous experience needed. Information on fire ants and the Fire Ant Project will be provided prior to the shows. Come join the fun!!! We kick fire ant ___! If you want to volunteer, have any questions or would like further information, please call **Terrie Lenert** at 281-855-5650.

Assistant Coordinators Needed

We have a need for an Assistant Coordinator for Composting to help **Ray Wallace**, for the Water Smart Garden to assist **Bob Midkiff**, and for the Entry Way Beds to assist **Anne Ashworth**. Please let **Scott Hume** (281) 855-5600 know if you are interested in any of these areas.

Table Committee Chair Needed

As you may know, HCMGA mans a table with handouts, flyers, picture boards of Master Gardener activities, etc. at several public functions during the year - Mercer March Mart, the House Beautiful Show in Reliant Center each Spring, the Bulb Mart each Fall, etc. We need several people to step up to act as a committee to organize these tables - schedule the volunteers, transport the materials, interact with the various show organizers, etc. - so that we can continue to do this worthwhile activity. The content of what we display on these tables would also be part of the responsibility of this committee. Please contact Scott to join up.

Ronald McDonald House in Need of Volunteers

The work is varied, some is a one time event, other event are occasional. There is always a need for folks on a regular basis to weed, water and do gardening of one sort or another. The area is lovely and the people really appreciate what we do! Please contact **Hope Dyson** at (713) 529-8802 or hdyson@swbell.net.

Events Around Town

Urban Harvest Classes

Contact: **Kara Masharani** (713) 880-5540
kara@urbanharvest.org. For detailed class listings and more information, visit www.urbanharvest.org.

Monday Mar 8 - How to Start a Community or School Garden by **Gary Edmondson**, 4 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. Free. Registration required. Learn the basic ingredients for a successful community garden, including planning, coordination, finances, and garden design.

Tuesday Mar 9 - Organic Landscaping Using Ecology Series by **Mark Bowen**, 6:15 p.m. – 8:45 p.m. \$180. Registration required. This nine week series teaches you to develop the organic landscape you desire with hardy, resourceful plants and features that offer habitat for wildlife, food for people and recreational enjoyment.

Saturday Mar 27 - Propagation: Starting Your Own Plants in Containers by **Jean Fefer, Ph.D.**, 9:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. \$20. Registration required. Learn to start plants from seeds, cuttings, divisions, and layering. This hands-on class includes proper storage of seeds, seed dormancy, and methods of sprouting hard-to-sprout seeds. Bring a pair of small pruning shears.

Monday Mar 15 - How to Start a Community or School Garden by **Dr. Bob Randall**, 1 p.m. – 3:45 p.m. Free. Registration required. Learn the basic ingredients for a successful community garden, including planning, coordination, finances, and garden design.

Houston Arboretum & Nature Center Classes

Tadpole Troopers - Tadpole Troopers Classes are nature investigations for 3, 4, and 5 year olds, accompanied by an adult. Fee: \$6.00 members; \$12.00 non-members. Registration required.

Nature's Clocks: Day-Night Rhythms - **Monday, Mar 1**. 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. OR 1:00 – 2:30 p.m. **Monday, Mar 8**. 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. (This class taught in **Spanish**). **Nature's Clocks: Migration** - **Friday, Mar 26**. 1:30 – 3:00 p.m. Ages 3 - 5. **Saturday, Mar 27** 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. OR 2:00 – 3:30 p.m. Ages 3 – 5. **Monday, Mar 29** 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. OR 1:00 – 2:30 p.m.

Guided Nature Tours - **Mar 6, 7, 13, 14, 20, 21, 27, 28**. 2:00 & 3:00 p.m. Volunteer-led nature tours; get acquainted with the Houston Arboretum & Nature Center. Fee: \$4.00 adults, \$2.00 children, Children under 3 free.

2004 Summer Book Kickoff - **Sunday, Mar 7**. Noon - 4:00 p.m. The Summer Book is an annual directory of summer day camps and classes in Houston for children 5 to 12 years. Books will be available for sale (\$9.95 plus tax) and proceeds will benefit the non-profit Nature Center. From 2 to 4 p.m., the Gulf Coast Turtle & Tortoise Society will answer questions about turtles and turtle care and have live animals for demonstration.

Naturalist Certification Class – Tree Basics - **Tuesday, Mar 9**. 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. Instructor: **Mickey Merritt**, Texas Forest Service. Class will explore the natural history of trees in general and local species in particular; the crucial role they play in providing food, shelter, and oxygen to many different creatures. \$15 members; \$20 non-members. Registration required.

Naturalist Explorers– Calling All Frogs - **Saturday, Mar 20**. 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. Ages 5 to 12 accompanied by parent. Students will take an evening walk in the Nature Center to listen and look for these interesting amphibians. Cost is \$9.00 members; \$15 non-members. Registration and pre-payment required.

Naturalist Certification Class – Mammals of Texas - **Tuesday, Mar 23**. 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. Instructor: Dr. Dan Brooks, Museum of Natural Science. Students will gain an overall knowledge of Texas' mammals, including a general survey of mammalian innovations that allow the phylum to thrive and spread to widely varied environments. Fee: \$15 for members; \$20 for non-members. Pre-registration required.

The Houston Arboretum & Nature Center is a 155-acre non-profit nature preserve with a mission to provide nature education and act as a sanctuary for native plants and animals. It is located 4 miles west of downtown Houston at 4501 Woodway Drive. Open daily from 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. The Discovery Room inside the Nature Center is open every day except Mondays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free. For information, call **713-681-8433** or visit www.HoustonNatureCenter.org or www.HoustonArboretum.org.

Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens

March Classes at Mercer

March Mart Previews. Wednesday, March 10 from noon to 1 p.m. & **Saturday, March 20** from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Get a sneak preview of the plants available at March Mart this year. This slide program will show you the plants you should add to your shopping list and add to your garden. No plants will be available for sale.

March Mart Training. Wednesday, March 17 & Saturday March 20 from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Are you interested working the 30th anniversary March Mart plant sale? Join us for training and learn what you can do to be part of the March Mart experience.

Authors' Booth at March Mart 2004

March Mart 2004 is scheduled for Friday and Saturday, March 26 and 27, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. This year's sale features an authors' booth where authors of gardening books specifically written for the Gulf Coast gardener will be on hand to answer gardening questions and to sign their books, which will be available for purchase. So come out and meet with these wonderful garden authors and go home with signed books full of useful garden information. Authors and their books will include:

Friday, March 26

Karen Breneman - "Gardening With Nature in Texas"

John Foster - "All About Trees : In and Around Houston"

Kathy Huber - "The Texas Flowerscaper"

Dr. Bob Randall - "Year-Round Vegetables, Fruits and Flowers for Houston"

Brenda Beust Smith - "The Lazy Gardener's Guide" (2nd edition), "The 2004 Lazy Gardener's Companion" and "Gardening with Dogs"

Sally McQueen Squire - "A Gardener's Guide to Growing Bulbs on the Gulf Coast" (2nd edition)

Carmine Stahl - "Trees of Texas: An Easy Guide to Leaf Identification"

Saturday, March 27

Bill Adams - "Lone Star Gardener's Book of Lists"

Mark Bowen - "Naturalistic Landscaping for the Gulf Coast", "Habitat Gardening for Houston and Southeast Texas" and "Bayou Planting Guide"

Karen Breneman - "Gardening With Nature in Texas"

John Foster - "All About Trees: In and Around Houston"

Kathy Huber - "The Texas Flowerscaper"

Joe and Ann Liggio - "Wild Orchids of Texas"

Roz and Pat Merritt - "The Tropical Hibiscus Handbook"

Dr. Bob Randall - "Year-Round Vegetables, Fruits and Flowers for Houston"

Mike Shoup - "Roses in the Landscape" - A Primer on Garden Design"

Brenda Beust Smith - "The Lazy Gardener's Guide" (2nd edition), "The 2004 Lazy Gardener's Companion" and "Gardening with Dogs"

Sally McQueen Squire - "A Gardener's Guide to Growing Bulbs on the Gulf Coast" (2nd edition) Sally will be available on Friday and possibly on Saturday.

Carmine Stahl - "Trees of Texas: An Easy Guide to Leaf Identification"



Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens is a Harris County Precinct 4 facility, under the leadership of Commissioner Jerry Eversole, 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>.

March Mart 2004



photo by Suzzanne Chapman

In 1974, less than one year after the opening of Mercer Arboretum & Botanic Gardens, a group of volunteers, including many local garden clubs, organized the first annual “Mercer Park Bazaar” to raise funds for improvements on the property. It is now 30 years later and that “bazaar” has grown into March Mart, one of the Texas Gulf Coast’s largest horticultural events and plant sales. March Mart 2004 is Friday and Saturday, March 26 and 27 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

March Mart is an annual fund-raising event sponsored by The Mercer Society, a nonprofit {501(c) 3} volunteer organization in support of special projects at Mercer. Dozens of volunteers labor through the year to select the plants to be sold the following year. Volunteers raise many of the plants from seeds, plugs or cuttings, often from Mercer’s plant collections, and regional specialty growers provide desired selections.

The result of the volunteers efforts is a huge selection of quality plants rarely found at local retail nurseries including annuals, perennials, gingers, natives, roses, shade tolerant plants, trees, shrubs, vegetables, herbs and vines. March Mart also features difficult to find plants, reasonable prices, and knowledgeable sales people. Anyone purchasing plants at the sale can choose a packet of free seeds collected by Mercer volunteers for the Gus Chadoir Free Seed Giveaway. All this, plus gardening booths, exhibits, and a new authors booth, where garden books can be purchased and signed by the authors, add to March Mart’s reputation as a great plant sale and gardening event.

Each year March Mart growers select special plants as the March Mart “plant picks”. All “plant picks” must meet the same criteria: they must be unique or special in some way and they must be ideally suited for growing in this area. They also must be available in sufficient quantities at March Mart. Asking the growers to pick a favorite has proved to be an impossible task. Most growers simply can’t make up their minds—like their children, they love all their plants too much to play favorites.

This year’s March Mart Previews are Wednesday, March 10, from noon to 1 p.m. and Saturday, March 20 from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. The program includes a slide presentation of many of the plants offered at March Mart and the unveiling of the 2004 March Mart Plant Guide, which lists the plants offered this year. The plant guide is an excellent reference for Houston gardeners since it also lists cultural requirements of all the plants available at the sale.

Special arrangements, such as shuttle bus transportation to and from parking areas, wagons for shoppers’ convenience, etc., make the event as convenient and enjoyable as possible for the large number of plant lovers that attend March Mart each year. A valid driver’s license is required to secure a wagon, which is available on a first-come, first-served basis. (Due to the limited number of wagons, The Mercer Society suggests bringing your own wagon. Just be sure to identify it in some way as belonging to you.) There are multiple check-out lines and credit cards (Visa, MasterCard, and American Express only) are accepted.



photo by Suzzanne Chapman

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>.

March 2004

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
	1	2 Hamburger Tues. Clyde Cannon on 'Antique Ros- es at HCMGA' page 6	3 P2 1st Wed Angela Chan- dler on 'Fern Propagation' page 8	4	5	6 WaterSmart Workshop - UH Clear Lake page 8
7	8	9 Work Day at the Extension Office.	10	11	12	13
14	15 Newsletter deadline 5pm Field Trip to Bayou Bend page 6	16 General Meet- ing. Diana Foss on 'In- vasive Plants in Houston' page 6	17	18	19	20
21	22	23 Work Day at the Extension Office	24	25 P2 Field Trip to the An- tique Rose Emporium page 8	26	27
28	29	30 Work Day at the Extension Office.	31 Field Trip to Stephen F. Austin State University page 6			

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Editor's Note

By Carol Cammack

The Harris County Master Gardener Association is dedicated to assisting Texas Cooperative Extension in providing useful and appropriate horticultural information to the public. Master Gardeners strive to achieve this goal through continuing education, hands-on learning and partnerships with other horticultural organizations. In this newsletter, you will find avenues to help broaden your knowledge and then put it into action through volunteer opportunities.

As American as Tomatoes on page 1 is a fun educational tidbit about the history of the tomato. Garden Gifts on page 4 is a monthly update on our outreach gardens and a great place to hear about the fruits of Master Gardener labor and enthusiasm. There is news about March Mart, Mercer Arboretum's GIANT annual plant sale with proceeds going to benefit the Mercer Foundation. There is information about upcoming classes at Urban Harvest, Mercer Arboretum, and the Houston Arboretum & Nature Center. Plus, don't forget to check out all the upcoming Master Gardener seminars, field trips, events and volunteer opportunities at Bear Creek and Precinct 2.

If you have something you would like to contribute to Urban Dirt, please send it in. We would love to hear from you. Suggestions and comments are welcomed and appreciated as well. We do have space limitations 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.



photo by Suzanne Chapman