

URBAN DIRT



Tomato 101

In honor of our recent Tomato/Pepper Sale, here is some handy tomato Q & A's from our Aggie Horticulturists.

Q. How often should my tomatoes be fertilized?

A. It is necessary to fertilize the garden before planting tomatoes. Apply the fertilizer again when fruit first sets. From that point on, an additional fertilization (sidedress) every week to 10 days is recommended. Plants grown on sandy soils should be fertilized more frequently than those grown on heavy, clay soils. A general sidedress fertilizer recommendation is one to two tablespoons of a complete fertilizer scattered around the plant and worked into the soil. If using a fertilizer high in nitrogen such as ammonium nitrate or sulfate, reduce the rate to one tablespoon per plant.

Q. Should tomato plants be staked, caged or left unsupported?

A. Tomatoes should be supported. Whether you cage or stake them is personal preference. Regardless of the method, plants with foliage and fruit supported off the ground will produce more than unsupported plants. Caging has several advantages. It involves less work than staking. Once the cage is placed over the plant there is no further manipulation of the plant - - no pruning, no tying. The fruit are simply harvested as they ripen. In many areas, staking and pruning of the plant to a single or multiple stem results in sunburn when the developing fruit is exposed to excessive sunlight. Other advantages of caging over staking include protection of fruit from bird damage by more vigorous foliage cover and less fruit rot. Caged tomato vines produce more fruit of a smaller size, but staked and tied plants produce less fruit which mature earlier yet are larger.

Q. My tomato plants look great. They are dark green, vigorous and healthy. However, flowers are not forming any fruit. What is the problem?

A. Several conditions can cause tomatoes to not set fruit. Too much nitrogen fertilizer, nighttime temperatures over 70 degrees, temperatures below 50 degrees, irregular watering, insects such as thrips or planting the wrong variety may result in poor fruit set. Any of these conditions can cause poor fruit set, but combinations can cause failures. If Extension recommended varieties are used, the main reason tomato plants do not set fruit is because they are not planted where they can receive 8-10 hours of direct sunlight daily. Any less direct sunlight will result in a spindly growing, nonproductive plant with healthy foliage.

Q. When caging tomatoes, how large should the cage be?

A. The diameter of the cage should be at least 18 to 20 inches. Smaller cages often restrict plant growth and reduce yields. Height of the cage will vary but generally 2 feet is sufficient for the recommended varieties. However, if vining types such as Better Boy, Homestead or Terrific, are used a cage 5 feet in height is preferred. Regardless of variety, the 2 foot tall cage is sufficient for most fall garden tomatoes.

Q. About the time my tomatoes ripen and turn red, I lose at least half my crop to bird damage. What can prevent this?

A. Bird damage is common in all areas. One control method which works quite well is to take old nylon stockings and cut them into pieces 10 to 12 inches long. Tie a knot in one end of the stocking and slip the open end over the entire cluster of tomatoes. Secure the end above the tomato cluster with a rubber band or twist-tie. Birds will not be able to peck through the nylon. Slip the stocking off the cluster and harvest the ripe fruit and replace it to protect later-ripening fruit. Also, birds damage fully mature fruit more readily than breaker or pink fruit. Harvest in breaker or green-wrap stage. Gardeners have tried many ways to reduce bird damage. Scarecrows, aluminum strips, tin foil plates and noisemakers will work until the local birds become accustomed to seeing or hearing them. Fabric covering materials such as Grow-Web and Reemay can also be used as a barrier mechanism.

For more tomato FAQ's go to: <http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/vegetables/tomato.html>



President's Thoughts



Well, spring is right around the corner. We've had our Tomato/Pepper sale and gardening expo at Bear Creek and our Spring Treasurers plant sale at Clear Lake. A tremendous amount of hard work and planning went into these sales. We've started thinking 'outside the box' and I am really proud of our leaders for coming up with new ideas used to better inform the public. Our thanks to the coordinators and all the volunteers that assisted in making these events successful.

The **Ask A Master Gardener** booths are very busy at the sales and the various shows around the area. The various speakers from our **Speakers Bureau** are doing a wonderful job as well as passing on valuable information to the general public. I attended the **Memorial Oaks Garden Club** meeting in February to thank them for their donation to our Habitat project and was fortunate to listen to **Lynn and Ron Brown** give a very informative presentation on container gardens. These two are a good team. Great job! I've said it before and I'll continue to praise our wonderful volunteers for getting out there and representing our wonderful association of Master Gardeners.

The State Master Gardener convention is coming up in April. I hope many of our members will drive up to Conroe to participate in these activities **Montgomery County Master Gardeners** are very resourceful and I'm sure these 3 days will be filled with interesting and well-planned events. If you'd like to carpool, notify **David Parish** and we'll try to match you up with someone in your area.

Our Habitat gardens project is still in progress. We finished constructing the final four gardens and planted some additional plants on March 1st. We will install the last of the plants in April. We will inform you of a date when these plans are set. Thank you for your continued support of this project.

If you have a copy of the March Texas Highways, you should definitely read the article about Stephen F. Austin University's gardens in Nacogdoches. Our **David Parish** has a close connection to those gardens through his daughter **Dawn**. It's a wonderful article about the Mize azalea gardens and the Mast Arboretum. Definitely worth a trip to East Texas this spring!

David would love to tell you about Dawn's gardens (and also about his grandson).

Several of our members need our special prayers. Ginny Duffy lost her sister recently. Dorothy Blankenship recently suffered a heart attack, but is recovering nicely. Please let these wonderful ladies know how much they are loved and how much we care for them.

As always, I am very proud to be your president and please do not hesitate to notify me if there is any way that I can be of assistance to you.

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3033 Bear Creek Drive 281.855.5600
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Hope to see you in the gardens and at the sales.
Peace and love,

Carolyn Cannon





Master Gardener Events Extension Office

March 4th

8:00 AM
11:30 AM
Program

Hamburger Tuesday

Work Day
Hamburger Lunch (\$3 donation)
"Year Round Color"

Gudrun Opperman

March 18th

6:30 PM
7:00 PM

General Meeting

Dessert
"The Gardens of Scotland"

Martha Burg

April 1st

8:00 AM
11:30 AM
Program

Hamburger Tuesday

Work Day
Hamburger Lunch (\$3 donation)
"Herbal Delights"

Ginia Keen

April 15th

General Meeting

6:30 PM
7:00 PM

Dessert
"Caring for Your Trees"

Kris Bitner



March Mart



March Mart Preview:

Sat., March 15 from 10 a.m. to noon. What new and exciting plants will be available at March Mart this year? Attend this slide show preview to find out. **Plants will not be available for purchase at this time.** Please call ahead for reservations.

March Mart:

Fri. and Sat., March 28 and 29 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Come out and enjoy the regions largest plant sale. Plants from almost a dozen categories will be available for purchase and experts will be on hand to give advice if needed.

February Hours Are Due Now!!



Carol's Comments

Congratulations to all of the Master Gardeners that helped make both February sales great successes. I appreciate how hard you work to make sure that the sales serve the public as sources of great plant material suited to our area and provide educational opportunities to learn about gardening well in Harris County. Precinct 2 had record breaking sales and excellent turnout at their workshops. The sale at the Extension Office was amazing as well. Most everything was sold out by noon and the new 'Expo' was a great success.

I would specifically like to thank the volunteers that worked at the 'Expo' There were booths set up in the auditorium to provide information on herbs, tomatoes, pests, low volume irrigation, soils, spring pruning and rain water harvesting. People attending the were given a card to have punched at each booth. If they visited every booth they were rewarded with a free packet of basil seeds. Over a 135 people turned in completed cards and many more visited some but not all of the booths. Visitors to the expo expressed a great deal of appreciate and excitement about the information they received.

When the education committee and I began planning the expo we were not sure if we would have a very good response. One of our goals was to provided people the opportunity to learn something that we wanted them to know without asking them to sit through an hour lecture. The other goal was to find a way to get them from the sale into the auditorium—a geographic difficulty given the layout of the Extension Center. We hoped that the tag sale and free seeds would do the trick. These goals were met in a big way. We couldn't have been more pleased with outcome. Thanks so much to everyone that helped make this new idea a success. I'm sure we will be doing variations on this theme at future events. Ideas and comments are always appreciated.



Cylinder Gardening begins in March and we still need help with deliveries and school assistance. We have an unprecedented enrollment this year of 9605 students as we roll out the new butterfly curriculum. The curriculum was written by Master Gardener **Glen Graves** and provides students with the opportunity to grow plants that attract butterflies so they can see them in their natural state while learning about them in the class room. We are also continuing our popular vegetable gardening program where students can grow and eat vegetables they grow themselves.

Please consider assisting with this important program. You can find out what schools are in need of delivery or assistance by visiting <http://cylindergardening.tamu.edu/volunteersneeded.htm>. If you do not have access to the internet, contact Becky Deasy at 281.855.5600.

Have a wonderful spring and thank you for volunteering for Extension. Your support of programs is invaluable!





Precinct 2 Treasures

The 2008 Garden Treasures Seminar and Sale was a great success. Yes, Precinct 2 Master Gardeners broke their previous spring sale proceeds record, but we think our success was measured in other ways.

The spring sale starts months ahead of the event. Fruit trees, citrus, berries and tropical fruits are selected in the fall. Research is done on new varieties and descriptions and images are gathered to better help the public with their selections. Tomato and pepper seeds are ordered, and a calendar for propagation and crop management is developed and executed.

Seminar subjects are decided. Subjects are often selected from feedback from our clients in previous years. Speakers are selected and their programs are developed. The subjects are designed to assist the public with successful fruit and vegetable growing in our challenging climate and conditions.

Hundreds of hours go into preparation. Many of these hours are put into making sure that the plants we make available to the public are the very best selections for our area and climate and that we know all we can possibly know about them so we can assist our clients in their selections. Master Gardeners are willing to work very hard to put on a first class event.

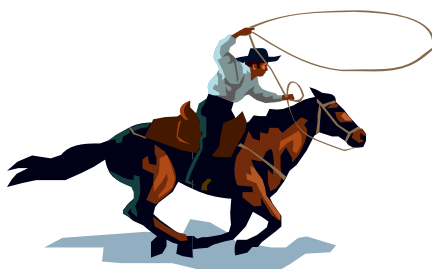
All things come together in February. The excitement of the setup and sale is not lost on sale veterans or new Master Gardeners alike. Every hour spent in planning, research, education, preparation, and growing is worth it when we see an eager public happily pulling wagons loaded with fruits and veggies. The energy of a sale is contagious.

Whole families come with their children to help select their favorite tomato varieties or a new peach tree. So many of us can name the moment we fell in love with gardening. It was often at the hand of a parent or grandparent inspiring an interest that was to last the rest of our lives. It's easy to imagine that we are seeing this happen before our eyes when we see a smiling nine-year old hugging a potted Satsuma and tagging along with his dad. Kinda' makes it all worth it.

Congratulations on a job well done are due to our new plant sale committee and all of their volunteers. They tried a few new things, improved on some old standards, and did an admirable job in the face of all challenges.

Spring is here everyone; we can feel it in the air. Let's all go out and enjoy this beautiful world and all of its green and growing splendor!

See you in the garden!



It's Rodeo time!!

Continuing Education Opportunities



March 3rd Monday "How to Start a Community or School Garden", **Mark Bowen** 1-1:30 PM Free

March 12, Wednesday "How To Start...Class 2-Design", **Mark Bowen**, 2-4:30 PM Free

Urban Harvest

March 24th, Monday "Sell What You Grow at Farmer's Mkt.", **Jim Bundscho**, 4-6 PM

\$30 (\$20 members)

March 26th, Wed. "How to Start...Class 3 Implementation" Gary Edmondson 2-4:30 PM Free

March 29th, Sat. Propagation: Container Plants" **Jean Fefer** 9:30 AM-12:30 PM \$30 (\$10 members)



Tuesday, March 11th "Great Plants for Houston Area" 6:30 9 PM, Foundry United Methodist Church,

Tuesday, March 25th "Growing Plants from Seeds & Cuttings". 6:30-9 PM Southeast Church of Christ



Sunday, March 2nd , "Mushroom Walk", **Teri McArthur**, 10-1:30 PM. Call for reservations.



March 22nd Saturday "Jump Start Your Pond for Spring", **Anita Nelson** 11 AM

March 29th Saturday "Disappearing Fountains & Container Gardening" 11 AM



Saturday, March 1st "Growing Success with Favorite Herbs" **Ann Wheeler** 11AM

Saturday, March 8th "Colorful Containers for Spring" **Gay Houston & Karen Weir** 11 AM

Saturday, March 15th "Texas Wildflowers" **Dennis Markwardt** 11 AM

Saturday, March 29th "A Pocket Full of Posies" **Tricia Barksdale** 11 AM



Saturday, March 1st "Container Garden Workshop" **David Schlosberg** 10-11:30 AM
\$20



Wednesday, March 5th "Welding 1C" **Charlie Strack** 10 AM \$195 (due at registration)

Saturday, March 8th "3rd Annual Rose Festival" **Dr. Steve George.** &

Gaye Hammond 10-3 PM

Saturday, March 15th "Herbs 101" **Ann Wheeler** 10 AM

Tuesday, March 18th "Herbs Unplugged" **Ann Wheeler & Chris Crowder**

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Thursday, March 22 **Randy Lemmon** 10 AM

From David's Desk . . .



This last month has really been a busy one for the volunteers. With the Fruit Tree sale over, the Tomato and Pepper sale got off the ground like the navy rocket after the satellite. Tomatoes everywhere. It is a time to start thinking of getting your garden ready for the coming season. The interns have really been great on phone duty. Except for illness, very few have not shown up. Since it was a little slow with the weather we have counted seeds till we are counting them in our sleep.

It looks like the Cylinder Garden Program is going to really be a humdinger this year. Last count we had orders for 1300 cylinders and that was just getting started. We would like for someone to head up the bucket brigade and take charge of organizing getting the buckets and getting them cut. If anyone would like to do this please let me know. My e-mail is dwparish@ag.tamu.edu and my phone is 281-855-5635.

I have been trying to post all of the opportunities that come up in my weekly e-mails. I also know that a lot of you are not getting them as SBC, AT&T, and Bell South people are not getting them for whatever reason I don't know. If you are one of these lucky people, an alternative is to get a free account with g-mail, Yahoo, or Juno. and get the e-mails that way. Just let me know your new address if you do.

There are several CEU opportunities that are coming into the office. If you are not getting them in the e-mail, please contact me and I will get them to you.

David Parish
Program Assistant
Harris County Master Gardener Association
281-855-5635

Don't Miss North America's Jewel!!

Master Gardener Field Trip To Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Austin

Thursday, April 3, 2008. Rain or Shine!

45-60 minute docent guided Tour With ample time to explore things of interest.

Visit Website www.wildflower.org for a preview



Cost \$ 8 adult, \$ 7 senior (60+) Plus catered box Lunch \$10

Registration Deadline, Monday March 24

Return: Approximately 5:30 – 6:00 pm

Questions? Call Kristina Baldwin 713.204.2987

Look for registration Flyer in the Master Gardener Office

Sign in: 7:00 a. m. Extension Parking Lot Depart by Bus: 7:15 a.m.

Garden Gifts



Our Christian Community Service Center garden behind the Central Presbyterian Church on Richmond Avenue is under a dark cloud and we are a little bit concerned. The membership of the church has declined over the years and the remaining parishioners are thinking about selling part or all of the area and building a smaller church better suited to their needs. This is some prime property and would sell in a heartbeat. The management council of CCSC has asked us for recommendations for moving the garden which we have supplied, but our most urgent recommendation was that the thirty-five churches that make up this council pray that we keep the garden where it is. The nine volunteers that work the garden have already started their program. We are an open prayer group and accept prayers from everyone.

Meanwhile, back at the garden life goes on. We have nine volunteers working in this venue and we need every one of them. **Elizabeth** has gone again to Rockport; this time to see the Whooping Cranes, big whoop, the last time was for the hummingbirds. While she is gone, **Walter** is in Aspen watching the ski patrol bring the broken bodies down. He and I discovered long ago the best part of skiing was to sit on the porch of the lodge and sip a cognac. **Jerry** took his family to Orlando to see Disney, **Celeste** went someplace I forget and **Kathryn** went to Portland. Winter time ranching requires **Bob** to be at his place outside Navasota a lot and so it goes. **Sonya, George** and I managed to overcome all this and produce a record winter crop anyway. This paragraph will undoubtedly generate a good bit of comment from the six travelers. Actually, everyone worked really hard to bring the garden back to where it was before and to get the production up.

We are making some other moves with hopes of increasing production on our melons and cucumbers. We have always grown both of these crops in the bed along the fence, but declining harvests make us believe we need to move them to the raised beds. This move is good from the farming standpoint, but causes some problems because we are going to have vines everywhere instead of on the fence. We are big believers in rotating crops and strive to make sure we don't put the same thing in the same bed two years in a row, but when you have only fourteen beds and grow tomatoes in three, peppers in three, eggplants in one and potatoes in two, all of which are in the same family, it is hard not to overlap. We hope that adding compost and cottonseed meal twice a year helps overcome this problem.

We have begun an organic spray program for our apple, plum and peach trees that we hope will solve the black spot problem we had with our apples last year. The peaches have never had a problem, but we plan to forestall any potential. At the same time we are spraying organic fungicides and insecticides on the weeded area between our garden and the apartments next door. We are also actively engaged in killing the weeds there and preventing their seeds from germinating. The attack on the weeds is definitely not organic. We tried that once and the weeds won big time. We don't have many insect pests, but do have some fungus and virus attacks and blame it all on the neighbor's weeds.

Not blaming anyone for anything brings on total peace of mind. Mostly this is not possible, but it is certainly worth trying for. Love yourself.

Go Texan !!





Behind This Face

Angela Chandler



Angela Chandler is a lifelong hobby gardener. She began gardening at the apron skirts of her grandmother and great-grandmother in her early childhood in New Mexico. Angela moved to Texas from California shortly after the San Fernando earthquake of 1971. The move was more of a return to her roots than it was a new adventure – her family had been early pioneers in Texas and New Mexico and she still has extended family in both states.

Angela set gardening aside for several years as she built her family and career. Her son Vic was born in 1973 and her daughter Jennifer in 1977. The family home included rabbit hutches, fruit trees, a vegetable garden and a large rose garden.

Angela's career eventually took her to South Korea as a consultant for Hyundai Heavy Industries. The family spent their weekends exploring the historical and natural points of interest and family farms. After her tour in Korea, the family spent some time in central East Texas managing a family farm. She later opened a drafting and design company from which she recently retired.

Angela met the love of her life, Fred Chandler, in 1991. Determined mutual friends played matchmaker until the two were a couple. Angela and Fred enjoy many activities together. After gardening for several years on a tiny patch in front of their condo, they purchased the Chandler family home when Fred's father retired. They began planting even as remodeling was taking place. Fruit trees and a rose garden were among the first efforts with tomato beds soon to follow.

Angela became a Master Gardener in 2000. She took the first class offered at Precinct 2 and has spent many of her MG hours volunteering in the Genoa Friendship Garden – a donation and teaching garden located at the county camp where classes were held. Angela has always loved teaching and found many opportunities to pass on her love of gardening. She has developed many classes and workshops over the years and continues to write programs as new interests arise.

"I have really enjoyed the specialist training programs that have been offered over the last few years. They have opened up opportunities to acquire intermediate level skills and knowledge needed to develop better programs", Angela says. She holds specialist certifications in propagation, rainwater harvesting, entomology and greenhouse management. Angela was recognized as the Texas Master Gardener of the Year for 2004. She has served as coordinator of the Precinct 2 Satellite, as a director on the HCMGA board, and as president of the association. She writes a monthly gardening article, sponsored by Urban Harvest, for the Houston Chronicle.

"I have grown many things as a Master Gardener, but none so important as the relationships with fellow Master Gardeners. I count among them friends, mentors, trusted advisors, pleasant acquaintances and really great garden buddies".

Fred is a serious Pepper-Head. He grows the hottest peppers he can find and makes some of the best hot-pepper vinegars around. Friends drop hints when their supplies are getting short. He experiments with adding different herbs to his hot-pepper vinegars with rosemary being the current favorite. The couple intends to focus the next few seasons on building some dedicated pepper beds and exploring the worlds' peppers, adding to their collection.

If you see smoke rising from Highlands, it just might be those pepper-loving Chandlers!



February Hours Are Due NOW!



Harris County Master Gardener Activity Report Form

Name _____

Phone Number _____ Email Address _____

The Texas AgriLife Extension Service collects information on the number of hours volunteers spend working in the community and the number of people they come in contact with while volunteering. The hours are also used to determine if you have met your Master Gardener recertification requirements and for awards purposes. Please take the time to report your work monthly. Complete this form and return it to David Parish by dropping it off in his inbox, faxing it to (281) 855-5638 or mailing it to 3033 Bear Creek Dr, Houston, TX 77084. If you prefer to email the information, simply send an email including the following information to dwparish@ag.tamu.edu.

This form is available online and can be filled out electronically at <http://hcmga.tamu.edu/mgdir/index.htm>

Volunteer Service Hours

Date	Facility or Garden Name	# Contacts*	Hours**
*Number of people you educated during volunteer activity			Total Hours
**Time spent volunteering.			

Volunteer Continuing Education Hours

Date	Lecture Topic or Event Title	Speaker	Sponsor*	Hours
*Entity that put on the lecture, seminar or event such as Texas Cooperative Extension, Mercer Arboretum, Urban Harvest, etc.				Total Hours
10				



20 March 08



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4 Hamburger Tuesday 	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 G	12	13	14	15
16	17 	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25 G	26	27	28	29
30	31					11



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Spring Plant Sale



8:00 a.m.—8:55 a.m.: Sale Preview
9:00 a.m—2:00 p.m.: Sale
10:00 a.m.: Gardening in Houston by Kathy Huber
Garden Editor, Houston Chronicle

Texas AgriLife Extension Service
3033 Bear Creek Dr, Houston, TX 77084

Free and open to the public.