

URBAN DIRT

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Spring is in the Air!

by Pam Libby
Although this is probably the busiest time of year for Houston gardeners, we are also looking forward to the many garden seminars and sales that are coming up. I haven't been able to include everything, but as you look through

these pages, I think you'll find plenty to see and do.

The mild winter has left us a bonus of some of the fall plants that have lingered in the garden, but if they are annuals, they won't be with us for very long. It's time to think about replacements, if this spring weather proves to be warm.

This is a good time to sow: blanket flower, castor bean, candytuft, cleome, coral vine, cosmos, dwarf dahlia, impatiens, lobelia, marigold, morning glory, nasturtium, periwinkle, petunia, phlox, salvia, scabiosa, sunflower, sweet pea, and verbenas.

You can now plant: ageratum, alyssum, bluebells, calendula, camellia, coleus, candytuft, coreopsis, daisy, dwarf dahlia, dusty miller, ferns, feverfew, gerbera, hydrangea, larkspur, petunia, phlox, plumbago, snapdragon, verbena and wallflower.

Vegetables to plant: asparagus, beans (bush, pole, snap), beets, carrots, collard sets, corn, cucumber, eggplant, lettuce, onion sets, radishes, and tomatoes.

Have a great time in your garden this spring. Remember to get your newsletter articles in by mid-March for the May-June issue, cut off date is April one. Sorry about the lateness of the last newsletter. I got the drafts in to the Extension Center in a timely manner, but there were some unexpected snafus. Some procedural changes have now been put in place that should prevent this from happening in future issues.

HAPPY SPRING GARDENING!

MEETING SCHEDULE

MARCH: 3/16/99

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

SUBJECT:

"COOKING WITH HERBS"

Speaker: Lucinda Hutson, author of *The Herb Garden Cookbook*

APRIL: 4/20/99

Executive Board	5:30 p.m.
Pot Luck Dinner	6:30 p.m.
General Meeting	7:00 p.m.

SUBJECT:

"THE JAPANESE GARDEN"

Speaker: Virginia Vargus, County Horticulturist and member of the Japanese Garden Society

PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS OUR POT LUCK DINNER – MEATS WILL BE SUPPLIED BY THE EXTENSION CENTER, YOU ARE ASKED TO BRING A CASSEROLE OR DESSERT. ENJOY!!



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

by Joe Thompson, MG President

In my last few articles we have been talking about backyard habitats. This time I want to concentrate on birds. Songbirds are seldom credited for all their help in controlling landscape pests. Although many adult songbirds eat seeds, baby birds cannot digest seeds and must be fed fresh insects. Increase your yard's bird population and you'll reduce the pest population.

Many people feed during the winter months, and that is certainly an important step toward maintaining a good sized bird population in your area. However, if you want to keep these birds around during the gardening season, don't stop feeding them when spring arrives. Put out less food, less often. This will encourage them to stay around without making them entirely dependent on the feeder.

The best backyard for birds will have plants that offer tasty berries, trees and shrubs where birds can take shelter and hide from the neighborhood cats. You should have a supply of water all year long, even in the middle of winter. Sometimes water can be more important than food. Finally, for a landscape that birds will find truly luxuriant, build bird houses and nesting platforms; then you'll be certain to have many parent birds flitting about collecting insects for their young. Some of the best pest patrollers are the house wren, the Baltimore oriole, and the chickadee, but many other birds will help you control insect pests. Even the lowly watering and the pugnacious English sparrow devour literally thousands of pest insects or insect larvae each season.

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For a list of standing/special committee members, please see page 6.



FROM THE ORCHARD . . .

by Yvonne Gibbs

During this month and last month, we started the pruning workshops out in rite orchard. Thanks to all the wonderful volunteers, we were

able to complete the grapes in two sessions. We made a great dent in one session on the stone fruits. We will be finishing up this month with the balance of the peached, and then do what ever pruning is needed on the persimmons. We will have some training to do with the jujubes to keep them on one central trunk. The figs will need some mulch and probably some thinning of canes.

The pears will be looked at to see what they need to get them in their best shape. We have been hard at work (Bob Midkiff and Bill Adams) fighting the weeds early in order to get a jump on them. Everyone should have completed their dormant sprays and now get out the spraying schedule to control plum curculio.

There will be pruning of the immature fruits soon. The early peaches are already in full bloom. There are always lots of opportunities for volunteering out in the orchard. I invite everyone in pick a fruit and to follow it through a year of care. It would be interesting to see what you all will get involved in.

The results on the Spring Fruit Tree Sale and Demos will be in the next month's news. I unfortunately had to be out of state and did not get to participate at the sale.

We had a planning committee meeting at the Urban Harvest head quarters. Bob Randall is our committee chairman, he served us a nice lunch and we had a very fruitful meeting. The Urban Harvest occupies an old school building built in 1910. It still has some of the old amenities, many that you don't see any more. There must be hundreds of outreach community programs being held in that building. It was interesting to see their test garden also.

We hope the Master Gardeners will take a peek at the issues of the Urban Harvest that are posted on the Fruit Study bulletin board each time we get an issue.

Bob Randall is the Director of Urban Harvest. They publish a newsletter. The subscription price is approximately \$25.00 per year. They develop community gardens. Bob is an author of several books on growing fruit and vegetables. There are lots of learning opportunities and classes, that you might like to investigate. See you out in the orchard!

TENDING THE GARDEN

by Yvonne Gibbs

Life is a Garden, that is tended with great care
All of it's blessing and bounty we share.

Love is the Sun which nurtures & makes us warm
It keeps us happily growing, protected from harm

Forgiveness is the Great Oak, giving Shelter & Shade
and recalls the purpose, for which we were made

Tolerance is a Rose, with fragrance so great
with thorns to remind us that we must not hate

Acceptance, is the rain which wastes anger away
and quiets our minds while we learn how to pray

Kindness is all the green grass and growing things
and all the creatures, even the little bird that sings

Good deeds, are the beautiful flowers of every hue
that lets us see God, who made me and you

Honor is the wind that carries fallen leaves to the ground
as they rustle, it plays gentle songs, a beautiful sound

What a glorious garden we have planted to share,
It prepares us for our maker, who has placed us here



DOWN THE GARDEN PATH



Thanks to all those MG's who helped with the fruit tree sale and symposium. They are:

- Gerald & Kathleen Bacus
- Diane Ballentine
- Jo Blalock
- Marla Brem
- Clyde Cannon
- Pat Cole
- John Gonzales
- Bob Midkiff
- David Parrish
- Mario Torres
- Eileen Whitwill

If I missed anyone, please let me know!



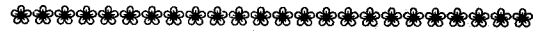
Whenever you are out at the Extension Office don't forget to sign in. We now have a new method of signing in - a computer program that is done very quickly and easy to operate. It's done on a "touch screen" and it's really going to help us keep better records of MG hours. Don't be afraid to try it. If you need any help or are just curious, Stephanie will be happy to demonstrate.



The Spring 1999 MG class started on January 28th with 52 signed up. Ken Dorman is the coordinator but had to defer the 1st couple of weeks to MG Anne O-Neil while he was called out of town. Thanks Anne!



For all of you curious minds who have asked lately about the status of filling Tom LeRoy's old position as Director of H.C. Extension Center. Here's what's happening -- Susan Russell has interviewed at least two qualified candidates. Bill Adams has also met with the applicants. We will be sure to let you know as soon as we find out anything.



We were saddened recently by the loss of one of our Master Gardeners, Martisha White. Martisha was very active in Cylinder Gardening, as well as other Extension programs. We will miss her.



We enjoyed a recent visit at the Extension office by MG Vicki Brignon in her new Volkswagen Beetle - Show off! It was so cute. Anyway, Vicki works for Hines Nurseries and is always looking for part time merchandiser help. She says Master Gardeners make the best employees. Give her a call if you are interested.



Anyone interested in helping with Team Tomato on Saturday, March 6, 1999 - may give Stephanie a call.



NEWS FLASH

The Harris County Master Gardener Association has been approved to accept Visa/MasterCard as a form of payment. This will come in very handy for plant sales, etc. and especially for people wanting to sign up to take the MG class. The Visa/MasterCard transactions can only be done in person, not over the phone!



Congratulations to Tom and Gloria Robb, they are on a cruise around South American. Wish we were there!



An encouraging Fact: "Harris County Represents 1.16 percent of the U.S. population, yet county residents contribute 11.5 percent of the volunteer hours in the U.S."

Houston Chronicle - November 11, 1998

Submitted by Debbie Mendieta