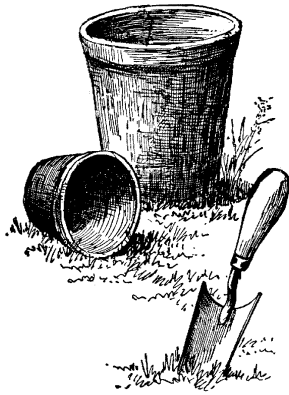


URBAN DIRT

Published for the Harris County Master Gardeners

March/April 2000

Vol. 9, No. 2



MAGIC IN THE GARDEN by Pam Libby

Imagine for a moment our earliest ancestors and their first gardening efforts. They must have greeted spring with a mixture of awe and exultation. The long winter was passing and the sun was indeed coming back to give them longer days. They knew that this meant more

life-giving light for plants to germinate. So important was the knowledge regarding the return of light that calendars were calculated and stone monuments indicated the exact moment of the vernal equinox. One can see these monuments all over the world, from ancient Egypt to Stonehenge to Maya pyramids and Peruvian altars.

Early man knew that sometimes their planting efforts paid off and sometimes something went terribly wrong and when that happened, their families or even their entire communities could starve. What was it that went on underneath the ground after they had planted their seeds? Was it evil spirits or witchcraft? Would they have to sacrifice a chicken to save their crops?

Today, we know more and more about the mysteries of the garden. We have learned about insects and diseases, sun or shade loving plants, plants that do well in humid or dry circumstances and so very much more. This knowledge is meant to be passed on. At one time, the only way you could get this type of knowledge was through trial and error and then through oral tradition. Today, with our wonderful agricultural universities, our many books and magazines about garden and our special organizations (like the Master Gardeners) this knowledge is wide spread and because of it, there is very little starvation in the civilized world. Remember, it was only a few generations ago that the potato famine drove so many people from Ireland to the U.S., so this new found knowledge and methods of passing it on are fairly new in the history of the world. With knowledge comes responsibility. Think seriously about volunteering in one of our many interesting groups and spread your light on a hungry world. You'll never know where the seeds of your knowledge may fall.

MEETING SCHEDULE

MARCH 21, 2000

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

SUBJECT:

“CAMELLIAS FOR YOUR HOUSTON GARDEN”

Speakers: Greg Davis, president Houston Camellia Society

APRIL 18, 2000

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

SUBJECT:

TROPICAL HIBISCUS

Speakers: Roswell and Pat Merritt, both Officers and past office holders of the American Hibiscus Society with Roswell currently serving as president of the Houston Lone Star Chapter and Pat is the National Secretary of the AHS.



PRESIDENT'S THOUGHTS
by Frances Robeson, MG President

As March winds blow about us, I hope they blow on new leaves on our Arbor Day tree. On January 24, we celebrated Arbor Day by planting a Mexican sycamore (*Platanus mexicana*). Our tree has a special pedigree. It was grown from seed collected in Mexico by Lynn Lowery, that great man of horticulture in whose memory the grove of trees in front of the building is dedicated and who was responsible for bringing many new plant species to the attention of Texas gardeners.

There is a gorgeous example of the Mexican sycamore growing at Treeseach Farms. This tree I was told is soon to be declared the champion of this species in the official tree registry. I was so impressed the first time I saw it, that I wanted to launch a crusade to have this tree planted all over the city. "This should be our official Houston tree," I said anytime the subject of trees came up. "You will never get people away from live oaks", I was told. True, I have to admit, but I do think live oaks are over planted. They always remind me of city halls and libraries, their branches full of shrieking black birds.

I do not know if the Mexican sycamore is attractive to roosting birds and I hope it is not, but it is a beautiful sight when its deep green leaves show silver undersides as they blown about in a breeze. It is said to be unaffected by the anthracnose that makes the leaves of our common sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) unattractive by the end of summer, instead it keeps its good looks until a hard freeze causes its leaves to drop. And a plus for us here, in this often flooded area, is that it supposedly tolerates wet feet.

If this tree thrives for us as it has for Treeseach, in twenty years time it should reach a height of 75 feet and serve as a sentinel marking the Extension Center when approached from a distance.

(Continued on page 15)

**HARRIS COUNTY MASTER
GARDENER ASSOCIATION**

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Publicity Committee Clarence Sapp
(713) 460-4414
Book Committee Patty Usnick
(281) 578-8948



FROM THE ORCHARD . . .

by Yvonne Gibbs

The Gulf Coast Fruit Study Group Annual Fruit Tree Plant sale with demos was held on Saturday, January 29, 2000. Beginning at 8:00 a.m.,

the weather was

COLD & WINDY, probably the coldest day we have had this year-so far. There was a large group of bundled up, patient, and determined shoppers waiting at the gate by 7:45 a.m. When the gate opened, those patient and determined shoppers headed to their prime choices. In about 15 minutes or less we had a run on the citrus trees. The Republic of Texas Orange, Mexican Thornless Lime, Satsuma BCI/FD, Meiwa Kumquat, had all but disappeared. Thomville Citrangequat and Calamondin Orange were still available.

The set up was beautifully done. The potted and the bare root trees were in fantastic condition, ready to go home and get planted. We want to thank TREESEARCH FARMS, INC., Heidi Scheesley and Bill Rohde, and their staff for all the work they did making these great plants available to us and providing us with great plant/price lists. Especially, for Heidi and Bill devoting their day and making their expertise available to everyone. It was a great sale. We couldn't do this without your help.

The Master Gardener, and Fruit Study Volunteers, were wonderful and stayed the course for the entire day. Their faces got red and their hands got so cold, even with gloves, everyone had to retreat inside to thaw out for a while and then go at it again. We had great volunteers to help with the set up on Friday mid-day. Friday was also a miserably cold day. A great big thank you for all the volunteers for both days. Francis greeted the public and signed up 61 new memberships (most were couples) for the fruit study. We appreciate her efforts very much.

Thank you to Fruit Study members Bob Marx (from Santa Fe, Texas) and George McAfee from Harris County for doing grafting and pruning demos through out the day. There was great interest in seeing these experienced

gentlemen share their grafting and pruning expertise through their demos.

Also, a big thanks to Bill Adams and Carl Meyertons for enduring the day and doing pruning demos out in the orchard. That is hard to do with gloves and cold hands.

There were lots of volunteers manning the checkout tables. That is hard work. The cold seeps into your bones as you sit still. We thank those hardy soles for they really felt the cold. My husband, Henry, helped me with the tree planting demo. Actually, he dug the hole, and moved the dirt back and forth as we replanted the same tree. I really appreciated his help. We had fun doing the demo. The workers and demos experts were all treated to hot coffee and donuts early in the day, and at lunch with a great hamburger with all the trimmings. David Parish did a great job on the burgers. Everyone enjoyed the hot lunch after all the work in the cold. It really tasted great. Thank you to the volunteers for doing all of that work too. Team work is wonderful and we certainly had lots of team spirit. We did very well on the plant sale, in spite of the weather. In years past, we have been so lucky, I guess sooner or later we had to get a little bit of bad weather. Maybe for a while, we'll get our good luck back.

UPDATE ON PRUNING OUT IN THE ORCHARD: We have been pretty much on schedule with our pruning of the orchard. The grape pruning was lots of fun and was finished in one session. We have completed pruning the Tex Royale row of peach trees. That was done on the Tuesday before the plant sale. The Orchard got a layer of mulch around the peach trees, the Jujubes, and the black berries this winter. The balance of the trees should be mulched soon. The mulch helps keep constant even moisture in the root area and keeps the trees roots cooler in our hot, summers. It lessens the stress our weather can wreak on them.

The balance of the pruning and training of the fruit trees will be accomplished by volunteers on regular volunteer Tuesday mornings. For the next few Tuesdays, we will work on the persimmon trees, and the figs. There is always lots to do so don't hold back, volunteers, we can use your help out in the orchard.

(Continued on p. 14)

DOWN THE GARDEN PATH



We wish a speedy recovery to MG Bob White, who underwent a triple bypass surgery. Bob was scheduled to work the Fruit Tree Sale, but had to bail out for more important reasons - his surgery.



Also, a speedy recovery is wished to former MG president, Mary Lynn Randall, who had surgery at Methodist Hospital on January 28. She hopes to be back in full form for the Tomato Sale on March 4, 2000.



The Fruit Tree Sale was highly successful even though we had inclement weather conditions. Rumor has it that some of the MG's who came to work did not wear enough layers of clothing. It was so cold! MG Pat Cole came to the rescue – she ran down to Bear Creek Assistance Ministries (BCAM), where she also volunteers, and gathered coats and gloves. She sold these items to the Master Gardeners and the money went to a good cause, BCAM.

Thanks Pat, for saving the day!!



We recently graduated another class of Master Gardeners (Spring 1999). There was a fairly small number of graduates, but we figure it's quality not quantity that counts. Congratulations to these new graduates!



First Tuesday (hamburger day) – continues to be a huge success! If you haven't tried it yet, you should come and join us on the First Tuesday of each month to work, socialize and learn new garden tid bits.



The new Spring 2000 MG Class is underway. We have a very enthusiastic group of 75 future Master Gardeners. Clarence Sapp is the lead coordinator, but he has lots of help. Our excellent group of coordinators always do a great job! Thank you, thank you, thank you!



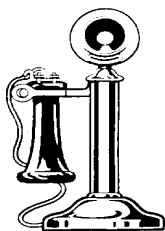
We would like to wish our sincere condolences to MG Clifford Harris on the passing of his wife. Our thoughts go out to him and his family at this difficult time.



Congratulations to Glen Graves, one of his photo slides has been published in *The Gardener*, a national magazine of The Gardeners of America and The Men's Garden Club of America. He entered their annual slide contest last spring. In December, he received a request from the national headquarters to use his slide on the back cover. If you can get a copy of the January/February 2000 issue of *The Gardener*, you will be very impressed. The photo is simply wonderful! It depicts a vibrant border consisting of magnificent waves of pansies and "floral carpet" snapdragons in beautiful, varied colors. Great job, Glen!!



Volunteers needed! The Bulk Mail Committee (the ones who do such a wonderful job of mailing out this newsletter), need volunteers who can put in about four hours every other month. These hours may be on any day of the week (in other words, not a set day). If you are interested, contact Susan Wier by phone at her home (713 461-1797) or at her work from Monday through Thursday – 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. or e-mail at buwierd@aol.com. She will train you and then coordinate with the other committee members to work out the best arrangement to get the newsletter mailed.



**MG PHONE DUTY:
January/February**

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

Mondays: Nicole Fuentes, Ann Allen, Patty Hart, Penny Bowin,

Marge Aschenback.

Tuesdays: Maria Harvey, Jami Martino, Michelle White, Mary La Borde, Janet Roberts, Carrie Cain, Janet Eschelman.

Wednesdays: Margaret Tutton, Faye Ferguson, Nancy McTeer, Doug McLeod, Roseanne Clauch, Ray Wallace.

Thursday: Cissette Kaper, Bob Kish, Steve Wood, Barbara Kish, Harvey Guion, Lee-Wen Shen.

Fridays: Beth Grunden, Bruce Grunden, Johnnie Foster Mary Jo Coselli, Shirley Eller.

A Note from the Editor...

If you would like to submit an article to the *Urban Dirt* newsletter, place the article in the editor's box, (Pamela Libby) at the Extension Center or fax it to 713 937 8203. We would love to have items about yourself or fellow Master Gardeners for publication. Call me at : (713) 937-8437.

When you send articles that you have typed, please do not add a lot of special fonts or formatting. Just use large fonts (at least 12 points). I will be glad to accent your article with special 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. Remember that 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 **May/June 2000** and **must be submitted by the cutoff date of April 1, 2000**. **If you can submit articles earlier, that would be great, but April 1, is the last possible date that we can accept your articles.**



We are trying to set up an alternate phone duty committee. These volunteers will be willing to help out on the phones when the regularly scheduled people cannot come in due to illness, etc. You will get credit for hours worked for re-certification. If any of you seasoned Master Gardeners would like to help us out by sharing your expertise, please let me know.

Mark your calendars for Saturday, May 6, 2000 for our second Home Garden Tour. We will have maps available at March and April meetings.

I want to thank all the helpers at the Fruit Tree Sale, that made it a great success: Gerald Bacus, Kate Bacus, Diane Ballentine, Pat Cole, Nikki Ehni, Shirley Eller, Jean Fefer, Bob Frederick, Brad Hendricks, Carl Meyertons, David Parish, Ray Wallace, Patti Usnick, Constance Warner, Steve Wood, Marge Chambers, Anice Bilberry, Joe Thompson, Doug McLeod, Bea Patterson.

David Parish gets the prize for dressing the most intelligently. He had on about 6 layers of clothes and was the only one who wasn't cold!

**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.

ONGOING EDUCATION COMMITTEE INFORMATION

by Mary Ann Wagner

Rob Mock made an excellent presentation in January. He showed slides of his favorite roses and gave us instructions on how to plant and care for our bushes. He also discussed Texas 2000 World of Roses, the 12th convention of the World Federation of Roses which runs April 19-24, 2000, at the JW Marriott by The Galleria. He left brochures in the library in case anyone is interested in attending this convention.

Glen Graves will be showing a film on wildflowers produced by Wildseed Farms. We will have a discussion following the film on which wildflowers will do well in the Houston area. Wildseed Farms has sent copies of their new catalog for everyone attending on February 1. Glen says the film is spectacular.

In March Linda Brandenburger will present a program on the exotic orchid. She intends to bring some of her orchids to show the different varieties. She will also discuss how to care for this beautiful plant.

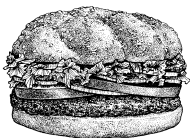
Mary Gage will be discussing the daylily in April. If you attended the Fall Symposium, you will remember Mary's demonstration on how to plant your daylilies. This will be a great time to gain additional knowledge since our Spring Symposium will be on April 29, 2000, and daylilies will be on sale. You will know exactly which varieties you will want to purchase.

We hope everyone will continue to attend our afternoon programs. If you have any ideas; if you are an expert or semi-expert on some type of gardening, please let us know. We need new topics! Please share your thoughts.

Remember the first Tuesday of the month. Join us for some gardening, a great hamburger, good companionship, and some new ideas.

Mmm, Hamburger!

**FROM THE
GARDEN -**
Continued from
The name



**HERB
COMFREY**
page 12
comfrey comes

from the Latin "conferva" meaning join together, symphytum from the Greek "Sympho" meaning to make grow together and "phyton" from plant. This refers to the herb's reputation for healing bone fractures, hence its other names "knightbone" and "boneset."

Many books state that the leaves make excellent compost, and I have always wondered why. So did many other gardeners who asked me. Now, I've found out:

- 1) The leaves are big, yet decompose quickly.
- 2) They're nitrogen rich and make a great "compost tea." To brew your own, pack a burlap bag with old comfrey leaves and tie. Then place the bag in a large tub of rainwater or chlorine-free water (let tap water stand for a few days to let the chlorine evaporate). Let stand away from sun and mosquitoes for about two weeks, stirring a few times. Use full strength as a root tonic or dilute to 1/4 strength as a foliar food. Recycle used "tea" leaves in your compost pile.

NEEDED: COORDINATOR FOR CYLINDER GARDENING PROGRAM

Since 1984, Glen Graves has worked extremely hard to create and supervise the extremely successful Cylinder Garden Program for the school children of Harris County. Glen is planning to relinquish some of his responsibilities to this program. We are looking for a Master Gardener volunteer to coordinate the Master Gardener portion of this program. This person will be responsible for overseeing:

- Obtaining fertilizer from NitrPhos Fertilizers
- Obtaining quart size zip-lock freezer bags
- Find other volunteers to help fill the bags with 3 cups of fertilizer to distribute to the teachers.
- Distribute fertilizers to the schools or their designated volunteers.
- Send out enrollment forms
- Make request of the Men's Garden Club of Houston & the MGs for volunteers to work with the schools.
- Send out notices to the participating teachers.
- Assign volunteers to work with each school.
- Plant and maintain the display Cylinder Garden at the Extension Center.

If any Master Gardener is interested in coordinating these activities please contact: Carol Cammack
Extension Agent - Horticulture, Harris County at
281 855-5613



MASTER GARDENER 2000

STANDING/SPECIAL COMMITTEES:

Audit:	Louis M. Jacobs
Bulk Mail Committee:	John Plotzki, Susan Wier
Greeting Committee	Linda Carlson, Margaret Mason
Historian:	Joyce Flott
Hospitality	Anice Bilberry and Marge Chambers
Master Gardener Handbook	Buzz Busby
Membership	Tom Robb
Newsletter	Pam Libby, Sandy Brewer
Publicity:	Clarence Sapp
Telephone Committee	Bea Patterson

EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

Cylinder Gardening	Glen Graves
Precinct 2 Office Coordinator	Donna Fay Hillard
M G Classes	Volunteer Coordinators
Ongoing Education	Mary Ann Wagner and Jan Gisler
Speakers' Bureau	Karen Breneman

FUND RAISING

April Symposium	Barbara Shepard
Book Sales	Patty Usnick
Seminars	William Adams
Tomato & Pepper Sale	Mary Lynn Randall

EXTENSION CENTER

GARDENS AND GREENHOUSE

Flower Gardens	Kapila Patel
Greenhouse	Billie Duncan
Herb Garden	Nel Barner
Orchard	Yvonne Gibbs
Rose Garden	Clyde Cannon
Vegetable Garden	David Parish

A MUST FOR BOG GARDEN FANS

by Virginia Joiner

The fifth Annual Koi Show, April 1 and 2, 2000

The Lone Star ZNA Koi Club of Houston, a non-profit organization dedicated to the appreciation of Koi and water gardens, would like to invite you to attend our 5th Annual Koi Show. It will be held at the Houston Marriott Westside, located at the corner of 1-10 and Eldridge Parkway on the north side of the I-10 freeway. Hours are 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Saturday and 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Sunday. Koi judging will take place on Saturday.

Around 1615, Japanese rice farmers began to breed carp in their ponds to supplement their diet during the cold winter months. Colored mutations from these black carp created interest in the family and they were kept as pets.

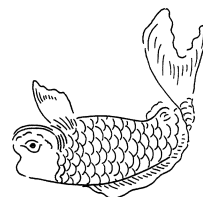
By the late 18th century, a considerable amount of carp were bred and mutations included red, yellow and tortoiseshell. It was not until the 1830's that further improvements were made when a red carp was cross-bred with a white carp. At the show you will have the opportunity to see what has been accomplished over these many years.

They are called "Living Jewels." We consider our gardens to be the framework for our Living Jewels. For this reason we are including seminars on gardening as well as seminars on Koi.

This year Katy Huber will speak on the "Diversity of Houston" (10:30 a.m.) and Toby Turner will speak on "The History of Landscaping and Gardening" (9:30 a.m.) plus "Color in the Garden" (11:30 a.m.).

We welcome all Master Gardeners and friends to come and see another dimension that can be added to their garden. For more information or a show packet call Beth Grunden (Master Gardener Intern) at 713 - 461-7159 or email at attie924@aol.com

Web Surfin'
by Tom H.



Robb, Jr.

On January 26, when I sent out the e-mail notice of Hamburger Tuesday and Program for February, the following addresses were returned for one reason or the other. If you are on the list below, e-mail me the correct address so that I can make corrections. Also, as I will often remind you, if you change your address - e-mail or snail mail - let me know so I can make the appropriate changes to your file.

Linda M. Andrews<larryandrews@compuserve.com>
 Clarence Sapp<clarence.sapp@mciworld.com>
 Neysa Blan<neyysa@aol.com>
 Leslie L. Parker<lpjp1926@aol.com>
 Joyce Lalonde<joyce_lalonde@hotmail.com>
 Gene Speller<kspeller@worldnet.att.net>
 Gail Gluckman<hdcc@ix.netcom.com>
 Gloria A. Travis<geetee@pdq.net>
 Terry Butterworth<dtbutter@flash.net>
 E. Therio Vekris<tevekris@ix.netcom.com>

Notice to the newly graduated Master Gardeners - I accidentally used an old membership form - one that did not include a space for your e-mail address. If you have such an address please send me e-mail at trobb@hal-pc.org - and I will add you to the distribution list.

My daughter is an addicted "Web Surfer" and she keeps finding great sites for me to look at. One of the best lately is "Ask Jeeves" found at <http://askjeeves.com/>. You merely state a question that you would like answered such as "Where can I find gardening sites with roses" and it will return a list of questions such as:

Where can I find a directory of information related to?
 Where can I find helpful information and tips for gardening?
 What is the meaning or history of the flower?
 Where can I find a concise encyclopedia article on?
 Where can I learn how to winterize my garden?
 Where can I buy a bouquet of?

Simply click on one of the question - such as the first in the above list and you are given a great variety of links that should give you the answer. It's really a fun thing to use and is a great way to surf the net.

We have added a "Schedule of Coming Event" Section to the Harris County Master Gardener Association Web Page and will attempt to keep it current. This includes all activities of our Master

Gardener Association - meetings, sales, symposiums, etc. Let me know of any event that should be added. The address is: harris-cnty.tamu.edu/mg/

I have also entered additional links to Master Gardener sites in the U.S. and Canada. Currently, there are entries from 46 of the 50 states and all of the four Canadian provinces offering the program - I'm trying to get them all represented and if you should run across one that I haven't listed please let me know. The address of this page is: www.hal-pc.org/~trobb/mastgar.html

If you have any particular area of the web that you would like covered, let me know and I'll try to research it and cover it in a future issue of "Urban Dirt."

Happy Surfin'

2001 International Master Gardener Conference

By Tom H. Robb, Jr.

From the Internet - Florida Master Gardener - hort.ufl.edu/mg/interconf.htm

2001 International Master Gardener Program
 Conference Theme: The Magic of Gardening

"Magic of Gardening" will be the theme as the 2001 International Master Gardener Program comes to Florida. The program will be held at the Walt Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, with conference headquarters at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort. The date for the International MG Conference is set for May 22--26, 2001.

Plan ahead to join us as we encounter the "Magic of Gardening".

(Continued on p. 14)



NEWS FROM THE SPEAKER'S BUREAU

by Karen Breneman

Did you complete the green sheet and turn it in to Debbie after your last presentation? The statistics for 1999 are considerable lower than for 1998, with only 32 presentations and tours requiring 178 hours and informing 972 people. The numbers for 1998 were 106

presentations and tours requiring 400 hours and 2000 people. I know requests for presentations were down, but I'm sure you did more work than these figures indicate. Don't be shy about counting your hours or turning in presentations given even if not scheduled through the speaker's bureau. This applies to all Master Gardeners whether or not members of the speaker's bureau. The information is important not only to meet your required number of volunteer hours each year, but also to show what the entire group is doing. The more hours we volunteer the better it is for the Extension Service and all connected with it. With the federal government continually cutting back, it is essential that we help as much as possible by providing accurate hours volunteered. This is one time it is definitely okay to "brag."

Good News! Bill Adams and Nell Barner are working on a presentation on butterfly gardening with slides of butterflies as well as the specific plants they require. We have already had several requests for this presentations and I'm sure it will be popular. With Bill's photographs and Nell's knowledge of herbs, I know this will be a fabulous presentation. Thank you in advance, Bill and Nell.

Keep up the good work and remember to turn in your hours!

THE DIRTY DOZEN

by Karen Breneman

What do you think of when you hear Chinese tallow? Fall color? Crafts? I recently heard that, somewhere in the Northeast, a small bundle of branches with berries sold for \$25. All this seems good, harmless at least, but this brilliantly colored tree with the white berries has a sinister side. Yes, sinister. It is rapidly displacing native plant species and associated wildlife at an alarming rate. The Nature Conservancy has placed tallow on its "Dirty Dozen" list of the 12 worst exotic invasive species in the United States.

The Chinese tallow (*Sapium sebiferum*), also known as popcorn tree, chicken tree or Chinese tallowberry is an exotic species introduced into the US in Charleston, South Carolina in the late 1700's and into the Texas Gulf coast between 1900 and 1910 by the Department of Agriculture. The purpose was to investigate the economic possibility of tallow production for soap industries in Houston and Jacksonville, Florida. The industry never became economically feasible, but provided the origin of the tallow expansion. Tallows have spread from North Carolina to Florida, throughout the Gulf Coast states and into Southern California. At last estimate, southeast Texas supported 234,000 acres of the trees.

In Texas, the invasion of the tallow has degraded the prairies, wetlands and habitat for many migratory and ground nesting birds. The Attwater's prairie chicken and the whooping crane, both on the federally endangered list are the most known, however, many other species of birds and other animals are affected.

Tallow trees start producing seeds after just two to three years and the rootstock may be viable for more than 100 years. Mature trees may produce up to 4,500 pounds of seeds per acre per year, allowing expansion by flooding and birds. They thrive on poorly drained, intermittently flooded, saline soils. Once germinated, the seeds and small trees are not bothered by standing water.

Chinese tallow is difficult to control. It has been shown to be toxic to cattle and is not preferred by any domestic or native herbivore.

(Continued on page 10)

Dirty Dozen – Continued from p. 11

How is the tree controlled in its native environment? One response to this question was -- by people. The



tree is native to China and with the large population of people the tree is kept in check. Since this is not a viable option for Texas, other means have to be used. Mechanical and chemical methods along with prescribed fire have been used with limited success, depending on the combination and the age of the trees.

Management is difficult. The tree grows rapidly, establishes easily, can resprout, and is a prolific seed producer. Removal of existing tree is relatively easy, but maintaining the effects of the removal is difficult and costly. Currently, the situation appears to be that the Chinese tallow forests will maintain themselves indefinitely, continually expanding and replacing native wetlands, prairies and forests unless management practices are implemented.

As Master Gardeners, I feel it is extremely important we use our knowledge and influence to help the agencies trying to control the tallow trees. This can be done by removing trees in our home landscape, encouraging members of our communities to destroy existing trees and not plant new ones. Live Oak, Southern red maple, sweet gum and other native trees are far superior landscape trees. By not planting tallow, preventing new establishment and working to reduce present tallow acreage, we can stem this bio-invasion and help save our diverse ecosystems. For tips on removing Chinese tallow, contact Texas Parks and Wildlife's Urban Wildlife Program at 512-912-7011 or The Nature Conservancy of Texas at 210-224-8774.



A Message from the Bog Garden

by Virginia Joiner

When you think of a bog garden, you need to think of the phrase "beauty is in the eye of the beholder".

This phrase really applies to me. In nature I am usually a damp, swampy and somewhat smelly place, but with some planning you can make me a beautiful, serene place to visit right-- in your own garden!

There is a place for me in every garden. I can be a low spot by natural design or you can create me all by yourself. You can dig a hole, line it, put the dirt back in and keep me very wet. Today, you can also buy preformed tubs to create your bog garden. I can be as beautiful as any other part of your garden and I require very little maintenance.

In this day and time you have so many choices of plants. They can be tall, short, feathery, rigid and trailing. Some bog plants bloom and some have multi-colored foliage.

When you come to see me you will see thalia, two varieties of sweet flag, Louisiana iris, parrots feather, saggittaria, water celery and pickerel rush. To further improve the area there will be a flowerbed behind and in front of the vegetable garden. A wonderful swamp rose will be planted at the end by the new bridge in February. My caretaker has great plans for me and she is always open for new input.

I have been created at the Extension Center in a ditch. My caretaker sought input from Rolf and Anita Nelson of Nelson's Water Garden and Nursery before she began to create me. She wants to express her thanks for all that they did.

I am still in the infant stage, but I will mature with beauty and grace. I will be a very special place on the perimeter of the new Millennium Garden. My caretaker has plans to continue beyond the bridge and on to the fence. I hope you will enjoy watching me grow.

Mercer Arboretum and Botanic Gardens
22306 Aldine-Westfield Rd.
Humble, Texas 77338
281-443-8731

MARCH 2000

MASTER GARDENER MORNING: PERENNIALS. Saturday, March 4, 8:30 a.m. to noon. Learn by doing at this educational volunteer program. Wear garden work clothes to assist staff with grooming and planting perennial color. Not just for Master Gardeners.

YOUTH PROGRAM: BOOKWORMS & BOTANISTS. Saturday, March 11, 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. The Legend of Bluebonnet, by Tomie de Paola, is a charming story of how a young girl's heroism is the stuff of legends. We will celebrate the coming of spring as we examine budding wildflowers. Fee: \$5 (Scholarships available.) Pre-registration requested.

SPECIALTY TOUR. Saturday, March 11, 10:00 a.m. Join botanist Cara Murray on a tour of the park. Discover what parts of the gardens are of particular interest at this season.

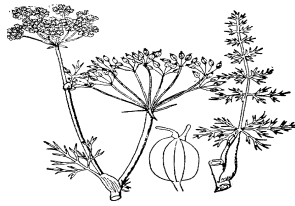
LUNCH BUNCH: FENG SHUI. Wednesday, March 15, noon to 1:00 p.m. Learn how the ancient Chinese principles of Feng Shui can promote positive energy flow in your garden. Katherine Ashby has been helping people find balance in their lives through their physical environment for over 20 years. Katherine practices traditional compass school and black hat sect Tibetan Feng Shui. Ms. Ashby will provide Ba Gua (8 triangles) maps to participants. Bring a box lunch.

GARDEN GOURMET. Thursday, March 16, 7:00p.m. Join *Gardening on the Gulf Coast* editor, Mike Peters for dinner at Dalat Bistro. Learn about the fresh ingredients used at this upscale Vietnamese restaurant. **REGISTRATION REQUIRED BY MARCH 11.** Fee \$25, (Please do not call the restaurant; make reservations through Mercer).

MARCH MART PREVIEW. Saturday, March 18, 10:00 a.m. to noon. Members and volunteers present this year's March Mart Catalog. Experts describe the choicest plants available at the annual sale.

MARCH MART PLANT SALE. Friday and Saturday, March 24 and 25, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. From antique roses to Texas natives, March Mart offers a variety of unusual and hard-to-find plants that enhance any Houston area landscape.

Mercer Arboretum and Botanic Gardens is located at 22306 Aldine-Westfield Road, one mile north of FM 4980. It is part of the Harris County Precinct 4 park system. Harris County Precinct 4 programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, national origin or disability. Anyone requiring special assistance to participate in any program should contact Mercer Arboretum and Botanic Gardens at 281 443-8731.



HERBSIDE

by Nel Barrier

A telltale sign of a garden fanatic is whether he or she develops a “Delilah Complex” with plants. It’s the overpowering impulse to prune stuff, and it often peaks during warm Januaries. A gardener can be seen flexing his clippers, pacing up and down searching for some excessive dead growth that he can clip NOW. He knows better, because the dead the growth acts as a windbreak and insulation for any new growth at the crown that may be prematurely appearing so it won’t freeze when the temperatures drop. Some really lanky dead stuff is o.k. to prune through especially if no new growth is apparent yet.

In our herb beds, we herbies had a strong case of the “complex” (maybe the Extension should hold Pruners Anonymous Meetings), so we pruned back the lanky stuff (and a little of not-yet stuff). We just couldn’t help ourselves! But by the time this article hits your eyes, we should be well-satisfied and the perennial herbs should be coming back nicely. Anything that truly died, like our poor kaffir lime and curry leaf tree, should be replaced. We will keep an eagle eye on these fast growers from now on (they grew through their pots, into the garden, so we couldn’t move them). Also, the greenhouse would not accept them because they needed room for the peppers and tomatoes. We’ll try and get them inside sooner.

In the works for spring, we will be growing dozens of herbs by seed. Some will be new varieties, such as bush basil -- to hide the waning violets and chives during the summer, Baikal skullcap, stevia Chinese yam (on a pyramidal trellis, perhaps), Chinese licorice, Tarahumara chia for the Tex-Mex bed, water pepper and “Prezemko” poppy – the white, low or no opiate one (and I promised Charlie Reass).

As for some herbs that had bitten the dust last summer, their progeny live on. The near-empty lavender bed was re-seeded by Madalene Hill’s pre-Civil War white verbena. There’s an aquilegia in the scented geranium bed and we moved a monarda citriodora that had grown in between the bricks of the Tex-Mex bed.

Our fall trip to Round Top had to be postponed because Margaret and Dave Mason were busy helping their daughter with wedding plans. Hopefully, we’ll be able to visit this spring and bring home lots of lavender cuttings. We won’t be going empty handed, though, to celebrate the new millennium, Festival Hill is inaugurating a new Medicinal herb garden with herbs from Asia, Africa and the Americas. We plan to present Madalene some of our herbs as a way of thanking her for her input, interest and support.

HERB OF THE MONTH -- COMFREY, *SYMPHYTUM OFFICINALE*

This is a large herb that you can almost set and forget in moist soil, it is partial to full shade. Once it is established (you better be sure of the location), you’ll never be able to get rid of it (unless you have a backhoe in your garage for just such purposes).

Comfrey forms a 2-3 foot rosette of pointed dark green bristly/hairy leaves and arches of lavender bell-like flowers (at the Extension Center Herb Garden, we have the white-flowering type). They bloom throughout spring through fall. Just prune the dead bottom leaves and spent flower stalks from time to time. Be sure to wear gloves when handling this plant -- the hairy prickles are made of silica. Hand washing will not do much to stop the itching and tingling from these spines (maybe sandpaper)?

(Continued on page 6)

The 2001 INTERNATIONAL MASTER GARDENER CONFERENCE -- continued from p. 8

The 2001 International Master Gardener Conference will offer a wide variety of types educational experiences to attract a variety of Master Gardeners. The conference program will be designed to allow attendees to take advantage of planned Flower and Garden Festival events in addition to the regular program offerings. Festival programs including Great American Gardeners, Disney's Garden Tips and garden workshops will provide the variety of teaching methods sought out by Master Gardeners. The "Magic of Gardening" will be evident in a blending of Epcot International Flower and Garden Festival events.

Proposed Master Gardener course topics to be offered at the conference center are as follows:

- Walt Disney World Resort welcome
- Gardening to attract butterflies
- Jurassic Plants - living fossils (cycads tree ferns horsetail, gingko)
- Porch and patio gardening
- Landscape trends for the new millennium
- Dealing with backyard nuisance wildlife
- Collecting and preserving plant specimens
- Pruning techniques
- School site gardens
- Herb gardening: from patch to plate
- New foliage plant for the home and office
- Vertical gardening (trellis and arbors)
- Tools of the trade and garden gadgets
- Do it yourself micro irrigation
- Edible landscaping (integrating fruit and vegetables in the landscape)
- Environmentally friendly pest management (soaps, oils, water blasts etc.)
- Pondscaping
- Bees in your backyard
- Vermiculture
- Crepe myrtles
- Antique roses
- Creating a horticulture learning center
- ABS of adaptive gardening
- Raised beds and square foot gardening
- Florida Yards and Neighborhoods: a Community educational program Tropical fruit
- Problems diagnosis
- Southern turfgrass
- Snakes alive What's new in termite control
- Wildflowers of the South
- Southern bats
- Ornamental grasses
- Children's gardens
- Growing citrus
- Ethnobotany
- Tissue culture
- Name that Weed

Continued on page 14

Proposed Disney workshops to be offered at the conference center are as follows:

- Disney's Animal Kingdom: plant and animal interactions
- Tropical Travels
- Behind the seeds
- Featured Pavilions
- Land pavilion
- Plants of the Animal Kingdom
- Teaching Gardens: Disney Institutes
- Gardening for tomorrow: IPM
- Composting and recycling tour of Disney

For Master Gardeners interested in learning more about horticulture in Florida optional horticultural tours:

- Nurseries of Central Florida
- Gardens of Central Florida: Part I:
 - Henry P. Leu Gardens
 - A World of Orchids
- Gardens of Central Florida: Part II:
 - Marie Selby
 - Florida House- Sustainable living
- Kennedy Space Center and Cape Canaveral Wildlife Preserve
- Cypress Gardens & Bok Tower Gardens
- Historical St. Augustine
- Historical Homes and Gardens:
 - Thomas Edison and Henry Fords Estate–

THE ORCHARD – continued from page 3

You will like doing this. You will get lots of great exercise. It is a large area we get to walk around in, located the farthest from the main building than any other endeavor. You also get lots of fresh air, stretching and bending.

Thank you. I want thank all of the members of the Board of the Master Gardeners for their help over the years, and for their generosity of spirit. I sat in on a Board meeting February 1, 2000. These officers of the Master Gardeners Association do a great deal of work for our benefit. Be sure to thank them when you can. They devote time, effort, and service to everyone. It took a lot of time for all the new, old and unfinished business to be attended to. These meetings are over and above their other prescribed duties. Keeping track of all the ends and outs and what's new is not easy. Try to serve if you can. The responsibilities need to spread out over as many of our members as possible.

I am constantly amazed at the talents our MGs have and how sharing they are with their talents.

Gardeners as a group -- are really nice people.

I spent First Tuesday (hamburger day) in the green house helping pot up tomato plants. That was a bee hive of activity, with a production line going. Volunteers were mixing potting soil watering the pots, adding fertilizer, watering again, and then delivering these pots to others planting the tomatoes and labeling them, and these same pots making it to their designated place on the tables. People were so thick in the green house you couldn't begin to stir them with a stick.

There were thousands of tomatoes and pepper plants growing in the green house. Lots of varieties. I can hardly wait to see what all there is. I only dealt with about 5 varieties of tomatoes. About half of the plants were kicked up to gallon pots on the first Tuesday. I imagine, as of this news letter, they have all been planted and are doing well.

See you in the Orchard.

PRESIDENT'S THOUGHTS – Continued from page 2

I was late with the idea of our doing something to commemorate Arbor Day. I hope that in the future we Master Gardeners will make this an annual event that will include the giving away of seedling trees to the public. This requires planning beginning months ahead of the event.

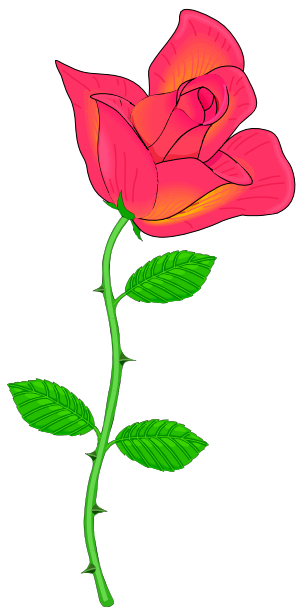
So this year we just planted a tree. Bill Adams and Carol Cammack bought the tree at Anderson Landscape & Nursery which, as you may know, is owned by Lynn Lowery's daughter and son-in-law, and where he worked during his last years, the planting was done without ceremony. Ken Dorman dug the hole, Bob Frederick brought mulch in a wheelbarrow. I got my hands dirty crumbling soil and putting it into the hole. Carol Cammack provided expert supervision, and Joyce Flott, our historian, took pictures.

Maybe next year we will have a proper ceremony with invited guests, speeches (short), and poems recited. When I mentioned memories of school day Arbor Day celebrations, Joyce reminded me of the words of a poem:

"I think that shall never see
A poem as lovely as a tree"

I am sure you remember that poem too, from Arbor Days past. It was written by Joyce Kilmer, an American who was killed in France in 1918. I am sure it has been read at many Arbor Days since.

If every year we plant another rare and wonderful tree to add to the collection we already have growing on the Extension Center grounds, it will be of great educational benefit to ourselves and to all who visit here.



TEXAS 2000 WORLD OF ROSES

The members of the American Rose society and the Houston Rose Society invite you to the 12th Triennial Convention of the World Federation of Rose Societies, in Houston, Texas April 19-24, 2000, and to join in celebrating the rose.

The American Rose Society and the Houston Rose Society are honored to host members of rose organizations from the 34 member countries of the WFRS from around the world.

Texas 2000 World of Roses Convention will include six days of knowledgeable and interesting speakers, a world class rose show, rose exhibit, a trade show tours of private, public and display gardens. Special events include a book signing "Wine & Roses" dessert party with authors of rose and gardening books from around the globe, and a "Truly Texas Evening" rodeo/barbecue with country and western dancing.

The headquarters for the 12th convention of the World Federation of Rose Societies and the American Rose Society Spring National convention is the JW Marriott Hotel in Houston's Galleria area. All convention activities will take place at the hotel, including the ARS Spring National Rose Show, rose exhibits, convention meetings, seminars, trade show, exhibits, banquets and several special events.

Please join us. Make plans today to attend **Texas 2000 World of Roses**. It will be an affair to remember.