The Fort Bend Gardener

Horticulture in Fort Bend County — Fall 2014

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

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Contributions from:

Fort Bend County Master Gardeners

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Fort Bend Beekeepers Assoc.

Texas Master Naturalist

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Fort Bend Master Gardeners

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Going Nuts for Pecans in 2014...continued!

By Boone Holladay,
County Extension Agent-Horticulture

We would like to spend a minute to congratulate local producers for their State awards this summer at the 2014 Texas Pecan Growers Association Conference & Trade Show in San Marcos, Texas. From Fort Bend County, Ray Mehrens placed 3rd for his Mahan variety. Bennie Hundl of Wharton County placed 2nd place for his Caddo variety and 3rd place with his Prilop variety. Great showing gentlemen!

Our pecan outlook continues to be positive. As late summer rains have brought the moisture needed to finish up the kernel fill, we can see huge pecans loaded in trees throughout the county. Some issues do still lurk in our environment that may cause a dent in production.

We are still getting calls on walnut caterpillar and if folks haven't been controlling these insects late in the season, they may lose significant value in their final product. Foliage is key to producing energy for nut production, and when these insects repeatedly remove foliage, you are losing a bunch of energy. Keep an eye out now for signs of young populations and control as necessary.

Green and brown stink bugs and leaf-footed bugs tend to sneak up at the end of the season and usually after commodity row crops in the region have been harvested. If you have fields of millet, milo, sorghum, etc. in your area, you will definitely want to scout for these pests. They can completely ruin a crop within weeks of harvest. Trap crops such as black-eye peas, millet, or okra can pull them out of trees and make it easy to apply a control product.

Squirrels, y'all! These cute little critters can wipe out a whole crop late on. We are noticing that squirrel populations are still up and overall wild food source is low. You guessed it, now they are all in your pecan trees just working you over all day long. Not just eating nuts, but the bark, too. This late in the season they are up high in the trees and hard to trap. The best option for folks in populated areas (urban/sub-urban) is noise. Air horns, cow bells, etc., anything to startle them and at least get them out of your trees for a while, maybe over to your neighbors!

If you can get all these items in check, you should be ready to send in some pretty nice entries for the 2014 Fort Bend County Pecan Show! The Pecan Show will be held on Saturday, December 6th at the Bud O'Shieles Community Center in Rosenberg. Fort Bend County will also host the East Region competition in conjunction with our county show. This event is free of charge, includes a range of pecan-themed snacks, pecan materials for sale, and a great educational program. So come out hungry and cheer on our local pecan growers as they compete to move onto State in 2015. For pecan show flier and rules, please visit http://fortbend.agrilife.org or contact Brandy Rader at (281) 342-3034.

Fall Blooming Bulbs: At the Top of the Earth-Kind Landscaping Recommendations

By Boone Holladay, County Extension Agent-Horticulture

The discussion of landscape water conservation continues throughout the State. In most situations, we are challenged with keeping our plants alive through the excruciating summer heat, applying water to them just when we should be cutting back on our landscape water consumption. Considering the nature of our growing seasons, a perfect plant would perform for us in spring and fall and go virtually dormant in summer instead of winter, resulting in drastic water savings. Sounds logical, right?

As we are seeing these selected bulbs blooming this season, let's showcase the fall bloomers. All of these blossom in fall and put on their foliage through the winter and go dormant around May. They then sleep through the summer heat and wake again once the temperatures start dropping back close to reasonable. Heavy fall rains and slightly cooler temperatures trigger them to push their delicate blooms from the ground. Here we go.

Lycoris radiata

Lycoris is a genus with many species and colors. Most common is the species radiata, which is commonly known as red spider lily, hurricane lily, and naked ladies (blooming prior to the foliage appearing). Other species include colors of white, pink, yellow, and bi-colors. Most of the lycoris prefer a heavier loam clay soil and a little shade. Plant them just below the soil surface as they do not like to be planted too deep. As well, they are a little finicky the first year or two after planting, but once established, they bloom dependably and will multiply readily.

The second of the fall showcase is Rhodophiala, commonly referred to as oxblood lilies, hurricane lilies, or schoolhouse lilies (reference to their bloom timing when school is heading back into session). These bulbs are virtually indestructible, growing well in a full range of conditions. I just wouldn't plant them in waterlogged soils, as they may rot out during dormancy. They bloom like crazy and offset a gang of new bulbs each year. They prefer to grow deeper, plant 6-10 inches deep.

Oxblood Lily

The last of the fall showcase is a lesser known bulb, but equally as impressive. Sternbergia is commonly referred to as yellow fallcrocus or autumn daffodil. As with both of the prior, this species blooms before the foliage sprouts up, sending up a surprising quaint yellow chalice tulip-like blossom. It prefers a sandy/loamy soil with good drainage and may prove happier with light shade from afternoon exposure. Plant about 4-6 inches deep.

Plant all of these bulbs in a range of situations. They can be added to perennial beds for seasonal accent, planted along sidewalks or pathways, planted within groundcovers such as Asiatic jasmine, or directly in lawn turf. Something I have wanted to experiment with is placing them is shapes in turf for some nice seasonal artwork. Wherever you put these bulbs, they are sure to please, and with virtually no care needed.

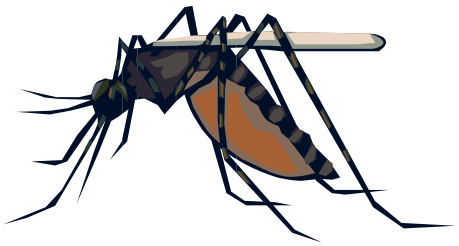
Let's Talk Water Conservation!

You are invited to a "Conserving Water in the Landscape" workshop which topics include Earth-Kind Landscaping, Irrigation Efficiency, Maintaining Water Supplies, and Rainwater Harvesting Methods. This workshop will be on Saturday, October 25, 2015 from 8:30 am – 12:30 pm at the T.E. Harman Center, 226 Matlage Way, Sugar Land, TX 77478, and is brought to you through the partnering of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, City of Sugar Land, and Fort Bend County Master Gardeners. You won't want to miss this useful information and hands-on experience making a rain barrel!

Cost is $25 (which includes a free rain barrel). Please complete the registration form found at www.fbmg.com, or http://fortbend.agrilife.org/ under "upcoming events" and mail it with your check as described on the registration. Contact Brandy Rader at 281-633-7029 or brandy.rader@ag.tamu.edu for information.

Late Season Mosquitoes

By John Gordy
Brazoria County Extension Agent – Agriculture & Natural Resources



There are 85 different species of mosquitoes in Texas. Mosquitos can be a serious nuisance and concern to public health as they can vector diseases such as West Nile Virus. Mosquito species are typically divided into those that reproduce in permanent standing water – bird baths, water troughs, ponds, lakes, etc. – and those that rely on floodwater, either following rains, or following high tides in coastal area. Floodwater mosquito eggs can survive in the soil for up to two years and only need three to four days of standing water for development to the adult stage. This can make them quite difficult to manage and can lead to major population explosions following rains like we have seen lately.

At the landscape level, there are some steps you can take to help reduce egg-laying sites. Take the approach of dump it, drain it, or fill and make sure you don't have any buckets or other unnecessary containers that hold water. For birdbaths, water troughs, small water features, and other desirable areas that hold water, you might consider stocking with mosquito fish, *Gambusia affinis*, and killfish, *Fundulus* spp, which feed on mosquito larvae. Another option is using mosquito dunks, which contain an insect specific bacterial toxin that is not harmful to fish or other animals, but kills the mosquito larvae after they eat it.

While there are some day-feeding mosquitos, most are active and feed from sunset to sunrise. If you will be spending time outdoors during this prime feeding time, there are some steps you can take to protect yourself from mosquitos. Especially now that evenings and nights are getting cooler, wear a heavy long-sleeved shirt, long pants and shoes with socks. Depending on local mosquito populations, you might also consider a head net and insect repellent containing DEET and remember to follow label instructions when applying insect repellent.

Upper Gulf Coast Citrus Show

The 2014 Upper Gulf Coast Citrus Show will be held at the Galveston County Extension Office located at 4102 B Main Street in La Marque, Texas, on Thursday, December 4th, 2014.

The Fort Bend County Extension Office at 1402 Band Road in Rosenberg will be accepting entries from Monday, November 24th, until Monday, December 1st by 4:00 p.m. We will deliver the entries to the Galveston County Extension Office free of charge.

Viewing of the Citrus Show exhibits will begin at 6:30 p.m. and the awarding of rosettes to follow at 7:00 p.m. Monte Nesbitt, Extension Program Specialist, will conduct an educational program at 7:15 p.m.

For contest rules and guidelines, please visit http://fortbend.agrilife.org. For more information, contact Brandy Rader, Administrative Assistant-Ag/NR and Hort at 281-342-3034 or brandy.rader@ag.tamu.edu

FBMG 2014 Project: Ornamental Grasses

By Cheryl Huber, Fort Bend County Master Gardener

Our team set out to find which ornamental grasses and "grass-like" plants would do best in the Southeast Texas sun and summer heat using the Earth-Kind Landscaping practices, including no additional irrigation once plants were established and a thick layer of native mulch on the surface.

The project began with deeply tilled soil beside the driveway, between the Annex building and the barn. Heat was reflecting from the building and driveway, so we made sure we planted a foot from the building and a foot from the concrete. We planted rows with 3 ornamental grasses in each row. Those that grew under a foot at the front, those that grew over a foot, but expected to stay under 4 foot, in the middle, and those that grew taller in the back, toward the Annex building. We provided a drip system, until the grasses were established, showing signs of new growth.

We checked the mulch weekly, to maintain a 3 to 4 inch layer, used to contain grasses, slow down weed growth, and moderate soil moisture. Light weeding was done as needed throughout the project. The majority of the grasses were provided by sponsoring nursery partners Greenleaf Nursery in El Campo, The Color Spot in Fulshear, and Caldwell Nursery in Rosenberg. We evaluated a total of 74 plants.

Final results for this project will be published next year, but for now, this is my simplified version of the results to date.

I will begin my evaluation with the low growing varieties. I used to believe if it had *Carex* in the name, don't bother planting this in full Texas sun. It likes damp soil. This proved true with *Carex morrowii* 'Goldband'. It didn't survive the second week. Conversely, *Carex cherokeensis*, and *Carex retroflexa*, proved me wrong. They survived the heat, show no negative symptoms, and are filling in well. Note: the genus *Carex* is not a true grass, but provides similar grass-like texture in the landscape.

Two low growing grasses caught my attention because of their beautiful seed heads. The plumes were plentiful on both of these grasses, the *Melinis nerviglumis* (Ruby Crystals Grass), and *Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hameln'(Dwarf Fountain Grass).

Also not true grasses, but included in the trial, *Liriope spp.* (Lily Turf) did not perform so well. *Liriope* leaves lost their color in the hottest part of the summer and some of the leaves burned on the tips while others completely burned. *Ophiopogon* spp. (Mondo grass) performed better, but the leaves tended to brown at the tips.

In the middle row, the *Pennisetum* 'Eaton Canyon' (a Dwarf Red Fountain Grass) tried to steal the show. *Andropogon Scoparius* 'Little Blue Stem' was nearly unnoticed, until fall and the stems took on a colorful hue. Then the upright behavior of the colorful grass begged for attention. *Panicum Virgatum*, 'Shenandoah' Switchgrass deserves mention here. It has pink, dainty seed heads that wave in the wind.

The big guys on the back wall of the annex, *Cymbopogon*, commonly known as lemongrass, *Muhlenbergia* and *Miscanthus* all did very well. *Miscanthus* took longer to get going, but bounced back and has since flourished.

Phase 2 of this project will be looking at how well each of these selections over-winter (come back in spring after the cold exposure of winter). Stay tuned for more updates on this exciting project. For more information on Earth-Kind Landscaping visit http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/.

Prairie Restoration Roundup

By Karl Baumgartner
Coastal Prairie Master Naturalist

Seabourne Creek Nature Park boasts a prairie restoration project. This project has been ongoing for several years. Coastal Prairie Chapter Texas Master Naturalists have been involved in several activities, such as prescribed burns, controlling invasive species, trapping feral hogs, and planting and seeding prairie plants.

This year, on October 16th from 9am to 3pm, the park will be the site of the Prairie Restoration Roundup, an annual event put on by Coastal Prairie Partnership (Jaime Gonzales, Flo Hannah et al.) attended by the volunteer prairie community and landowners throughout the Greater Houston area. In the morning, industry leaders will give presentations at Rosenberg Civic Center in front of the Park. Following lunch the group will move to our Prairie Restoration area for exhibitions from Jim Willis and others regarding prairie restoration technique, hands-on activities focused on practical, on-the-ground restoration of prairies on the upper Texas coast.

This will be CPTMN's first time to host an area-wide event for the volunteer community.

Two new Prairie Restoration signs will be in place prior to the Prairie Restoration Round-up, at Seabourne Creek Nature Park on Thursday, Oct. 16.

To register go to:
Prairie Restoration Roundup Registration

"It didn't occur to me that... gardening, like music, could demand practice, patience, and \a willingness to make mistakes."

— Amy Stewart

Seasonal Garden Checklist: October

By Dr. William Welch,
Professor & Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
Landscape Horticulturist

- October through November is an excellent time to purchase bulbs while you still have a good selection in the garden center. They may be planted at any time with the exception of tulips and hyacinths.

- Plant bulbs in well prepared beds so the base of the bulb is at a depth that is three times the diameter of the bulb. In sandy soil, set slightly deeper and in clay soils less deeply.

- Start collecting leaves for the compost pile. Be sure to have extra soil available so that each 6 inch layer of leaves may be covered with several inches of soil. Always wet the layer of leaves thoroughly before adding the soil. Add about one pound of a complete lawn or garden fertilizer to each layer of leaves to provide the necessary nitrogen for decomposition.

- Check nursery or garden centers for started plants of snapdragons, pinks, poppies, and calendulas in south and east Texas, they will usually provide a riot of spring color if planted now.

- If you have saved seeds of your favorite plants, allow them to become air dry, then place them in an air-tight container and store in the refrigerator. Be sure to label each packet carefully. Remember, seed from hybrid plants will seldom resemble the parent plant.

- Prepare beds for planting pansies. Well-drained soil and exposure to at least a half-day of sun is important. It is best to use started plants, rather than seeds.

- Divide and reset such perennials as phlox, violets, irises, day lilies, and shasta daisies.

- To reduce the insect and disease potential next year. Clean up the garden, removing all annuals that have completed their life cycle. Remove the tops of all herbaceous perennials that have finished flowering or as soon as frost has killed the leaves.

- Plant seeds of sweet peas in a site where there is at least a half-day of sun and protection from north winds.

Citrus Quarantine: Where "Going Green" is not a good thing

by Deborah Birge, Fort Bend County Master Gardener

Besides being hot and miserable, July held a wake-up moment for Fort Bend County citrus growers. Citrus Greening Disease or Huanglongbing, was identified in a tree growing in a Harris Country retail nursery resulting in a quarantine for the entire county. Just this week, the quarantine has been extended to include Montgomery and Fort Bend County.

But what is Citrus Greening? CG is a bacterium injected into your tree via a very small insect called the Asian Citrus Psyllid. The disease received its name because the mature fruit on infected trees fail to turn orange and stay a greenish coloration. There is no cure for this disease resulting in the death of your tree within a few years. Symptoms are varied ranging from a single limb showing yellow leaves and dieback, to lopsided and bitter fruit. Most importantly, many of the citrus greening symptoms look like the symptoms of nutritional deficiencies. Confirmation of citrus greening is only through laboratory testing. You can learn more about the signs of CG by using this website - www.texascitrusgreening.org/

Citrus Greening entered the US via Florida in 2005 causing widespread damage to the commercial citrus industry. Since then, Louisiana, California, South Carolina, Georgia and now, Texas have been added to the CG roster. Interestingly enough, our invasion did not come from Florida or California, but Mexico. The first identification was in San Juan in Hidalgo County in 2012, the second in Gonzales, then Harris County in August, 2014. CG is a fast moving disease causing immense destruction to the citrus industry. It is important that everyone, home growers as well as professional growers, work toward reducing the numbers of the Asian Citrus Psyllid. The Texas Department of Agriculture website can provide ongoing information concerning the quarantine at http://www.texasagriculture.gov.

So, what does the quarantine mean to the Fort Bend County citrus grower? Most importantly, you must not purchase citrus plants from any retail facility within Harris County, Fort Bend County, or Montgomery County with the intent to take it outside of the quarantined area. It's perfectly safe to purchase citrus from any retail facility in or out of these listed counties but, once you cross back into the quarantined area, the plant should not be moved outside the county boundaries again.

At home, be on the lookout for the CG vector, the Asian Citrus Psyllid. This psyllid is very small, averaging ¼ inch but can be found mainly on the new growth of your plant. They lay their eggs on the underside of the leaf leaving a waxy substance. Psyllid hunting is best in the early morning using a sheet of copier paper and a pencil. Angle the paper under a group of leaves then thump the branch sharply with the pencil. Any hidden psyllids will fall onto the sheet. A good website for psyllid identification is http://www.saveourcitrus.org/

No psyllids? Lucky you! Do check your trees on a regular basis, once a week or so. Remember that psyllids are not everywhere so it's okay if you don't have them. And, remember even if you do find psyllids, it doesn't mean you have CG. Not all psyllids are infected with CG. But, if you find psyllid eggs, larvae, or adult insects, it would be prudent to begin a spraying program to reduce their numbers helping to prevent your plants from being infected. Psyllids can infest a citrus tree throughout the year and may re-infest trees day, weeks or months after you have sprayed. An effective year-round control requires utilizing multiple control materials such as oils, soaps, neem products and kaolin clay products.

The following links will offer information on controlling the Asian Citrus Psyllid.

Spray Schedule
http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/fruit-nut/files/2010/10/home_psyllid_control_july_2014.pdf
Citrus greening information
http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/fruit-nut/?s=citrus+greening
http://www.saveourcitrus.org/
www.texascitrusgreening.org/

Winter Cover Crops

by Boone Holladay,
County Extension Agent-Horticulture

Planting a blend of winter grasses and legumes will prove huge benefits come spring. Grass types include barley, winter wheat, oats, and annual and perennial ryegrass. Legume types include red clover, crimson clover, white clover, and hairy and deer vetches. By blending a grass with a legume, you get dual benefits. The legume will fix atmospheric nitrogen and make it plant available. The grass will sponge up the excess nitrogen and hold it as biomass. This biomass, once shredded and incorporated into the soil in spring, will release the nitrogen and make it available for spring crops. These blends will help control cool season garden weeds as well. Once late summer crops are removed, cultivate the soil to prepare a soft seed bed. Seeding can be done with a hand held spreader. Legume inoculants are available through seed companies to assist in the nitrogen fixation and well worth the minimal additional expense. Plant as early as you can. September is prime, but you can plant up to November. These blends have two growth spikes, the first occurring in late October and the second in late February into early March. This blend will slow its growth in mid-winter. Plan to shred by March 1. Once shredded, let it sit for a week prior to cultivation. This is just in time to get your spring garden in the ground and with zero to minimal additional fertilization requirements.

Prairie Heritage Festival

by Carol Pawelek,
Coastal Prairie Master Naturalist

Prairie Heritage Festival is a fun, educational and family-oriented outdoor event that promotes an understanding of what our region of Texas looked like before the settlers came. Nature tours, horse-drawn wagon rides, live animals, performers, kids' crafts and exhibits are just some of the offerings for all age levels. The prairie and other ecosystems, featuring animals and plants, can be experienced by participating in hands-on and how-to activities that are entertaining, Kid-centric, engaging and informative.

This is a time when many migratory birds, butterflies and waterfowl can be viewed at their best in the park. Participants can also learn what they can do to preserve, restore and recreate native habitats.

The festival is a family friendly event with free parking and admission. Join the fun and spend some quality time on the great outdoors. Please call Agrilife Extension Service at 281-633-7042 if you need additional information or are interested in becoming an exhibitor.

The Texas Master Naturalists program is sponsored by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. For additional information call 281.633.7033 or email **mmcdowell@ag.tamu.edu**

Hosted by: Coastal Prairie Chapter – Texas Master Naturalists
When: Saturday, Nov. 1, 2014; 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
Where: Seabourne Creek Nature Park 3831 Highway 36, Rosenberg, Tx
Who: Open to Public – Free Family Event
Other: Call 281.633.7042 for more info

Mark Your Calendar and Save These Dates

October 16 — Small Acreage Horticultural Crops Seminar: Food Safety

October 25 — Home Landscape Workshop: Conserving Water in the Landscape – Sugar Land

November 1— First Saturday with the Master Gardeners: Fall Vegetable Gardening

December 6 — Fort Bend Co. & East Region Pecan Show

December 11 — Small Acreage Horticultural Crops Seminar: Business Planning

January 24 — Fort Bend County Master Gardeners Fruit & Citrus Tree Sale

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

TEXAS MASTER GARDENER

Backyard Basics:

Getting the Most from Your Garden

November 1— Grilling

November 8 — Jams & Jellies

For more information and to download registration forms go to www.fbmg.com.

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DATES TO REMEMBER

Saturdays with the Fort Bend Master Gardeners
First Saturday of the month 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Fort Bend Beekeepers Meeting
Second Tuesday of each month, 7:00 p.m.

Backyard Basics Education Series
March– November 2014

Coastal Prairie Master Naturalist
Programs, First Thursday of the month

For full information on events call (281) 342-3034 or visit
http://fortbend.agrilife.org
http://fbmg.com
http://txmn.org/coastal/
http://fortbendbeekeepers.org/