The Fort Bend Gardener

Horticulture in Fort Bend County Winter 2016

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

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Contributions from:

Aggie Horticulture

Fort Bend County Master Gardeners

Fort Bend Beekeepers Assoc.

Texas Master Naturalist

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Fort Bend County Master Gardeners

A Bumper 2016 Fruit Tree Sale!

By Terry Harris, Past President &
FBMG Fruit Tree Sale Committee Member

The Fort Bend Master Gardener's 2016 Citrus and Fruit Tree Sale was an outstanding success, selling more than 1350 quality fruit trees to over 850 residents of Fort Bend and surrounding counties.

The plant selection team begins in April seeking out quality trees and berries that will successfully grow and produce in Fort Bend County. Our team researches what new and up and coming fruit trees are available always keeping in mind what is appropriate for our area's growing conditions. Data from the 2016 sale will be used to determine what varieties and quantities will be ordered for the 2017 sale. We use reputable nurseries/growers that specialize in regional selections.

We study and evaluate our previous sales and work to make next year's sale even better. Our priority is providing our customers with the quality and variety of selection they are seeking. We know already that the 'Meyer' Lemons were a top seller and we will endeavor to have a sufficient amount available for our customers next year. We also have plans to address the ever increasing number of customers purchasing with credit cards. Our early predictions are shorter checkout lines, reduced wait time, and more stock on popular items next year.

We thank our previous and new customers who purchased trees. The proceeds from this major fundraiser support our efforts to provide educational opportunities for Fort Bend County residents. Activities such as our Kids Kamp, scout badge workshops for Girl and Boy Scout troops, school garden programs and for our adults, our new Garden with Confidence *FUN*damentals of Successful Gardening and Water Conservation Education to name only some of our many programs. Funding also supports our demonstration gardens which are open to our community for enjoyment and education opportunities.

Keep a look out for new palm disease

By Boone Holladay,
County Extension Agent-Horticulture

While attending a Region II TNLA meeting last summer, one of the local members gave a presentation on Palm Fusarium Wilt, a fungal disease specific to a select species of palms. At that time it wasn't necessarily on the radar of potentially catastrophic landscape plant diseases. Well….it is now! This disease impacts both Queen Palms and Mexican Fan Palms, which happen to be our two most popular landscape palms in Fort Bend County. The disease has been confirmed in Harris County and is suspect throughout the region. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension has teamed up The Texas Nursery & Landscape Association to release a one page bulletin on the disease and is available for view or download at http://www.tnlaonline.org search que "Palm Fusarium Wilt".

Filling in the Blanks

Amy Jo Holdaway, Vegetable Garden Chair
Fort Bend County Master Gardeners

January can be a great time for assessing our gardens. As the weather chills and we stroll through our yards, making plans for adding new plants and removing spent ones, and preparing for the coming spring and summer, it can also be a great time to fill in the empty spaces with something beautiful and edible.

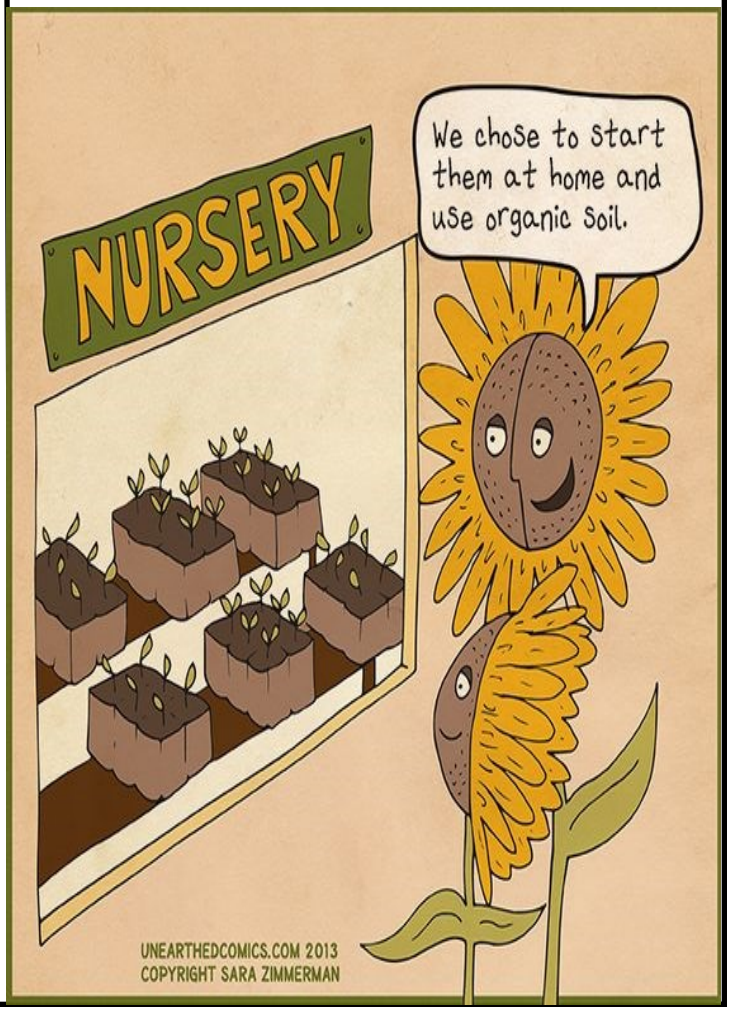
There are many vegetables that need only 30 days or less before first harvest. Lettuces like Black Seeded Simpson, Parris Island Cos, and Red Sails grow beautifully this time of year. Most Mustard greens and Asian greens also flourish in these cool temps and can be harvested as baby leaves after only 27 days. Short season root crops like radishes and turnips can also be ready in 30-40 days. Even Kohlrabi can be ready to harvest in 30-40 days if you choose an early variety.

Have you already harvested your broccoli and cauliflower? Remove those old plants, mix a little compost into the soil, and plant some lettuce seeds. Before you're ready to put your tomatoes and peppers in the ground, you'll be enjoying fresh baby-leaf salads. How about that container of over-grown and wilted annuals waiting for spring flowers? Pop in some radishes, turnips, or kohlrabi and eat the delicious results of your quick handiwork in just a few weeks. Have a bare spot in your flower garden? Mustard and Asian greens are not only delicious, they are also beautiful, with many frilled varieties that nary an HOA can detect.

The winter garden is so enjoyable and so much less work with less pests and diseases than the spring/summer garden, and with much more tolerable working temperatures. Why not round out your garden with these tasty and quick-producing vegetable varieties? Filling in the blanks can be a fun, easy, affordable way to while away the January garden while dreaming about all those tomatoes.

Not sure which you'd like to grow? Come check out the Fort Bend demonstration gardens at 1402 Band Road in Rosenberg, and see for yourself! We have examples of all the above listed vegetables growing in our multitude of gardens. Seeds are available through the many colorful seed catalogues arriving in our mailboxes now, and at most garden nurseries and big box stores. So get out there and plant some seeds! Happy gardening!

Visit http://FBMG.org for more information.



Insects in the City: Kissing Bugs

By Michael Merchant, Ph.D.,
Urban Entomologist, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Conenose, or kissing bugs (*Triatoma* sp.), are blood-feeding insects that are an occasional problem in Texas homes. Although conenose bugs bite humans and regularly transmit disease in parts of Latin America, for most U.S. victims the worst consequence is redness and itching at the site of the bite.

Identification

Conenose bugs are recognized by their elongated or "cone-shaped" head, prominent antennae, pear-shaped body, and spindly, stick-like legs. The body is black or dark brown, 1 to 3 cm (1 to 1 ½ inches) in length, with 12 orange spots ringing the outer edge of the abdomen. Long, beak-like mouthparts arise from the front of the head and are held under and against the center of the body when not in use.

Biology

Conenose bugs feed exclusively on the blood of vertebrate animals. Although generally rare, they are most common around animal nests or pet resting areas, emerging at night to search for blood meal. Their bites are gentle and painless, and usually occur while the victim is asleep. They are generally unable to bite through clothing. On humans, blood meals are sometimes taken from the tender areas of the face (hence the name "kissing bug"). Other sites of attack (in order of decreasing frequency) include the hands, arms, feet, head and trunk. Victims are frequently unaware of the bites until the following morning when unexplained reddened areas may be present on the skin of the arm or face.

Importance

Conenose bugs can be carriers of the protozoan parasite, *Trypanosoma cruzi*, that causes Chagas' disease–a serious disease of humans that occurs most commonly from Mexico to South America. For many years very few human cases of Chagas' disease were recorded in Texas (five cases since 1955); however recent attention by researchers appears to be turning up more human cases than previously thought possible (8 Texas-acquired cases in 2013, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services). Cases among dogs are more common (over 200 reported cases in 2013), especially in southern regions of Texas. While overall frequency of Chagas transmission to people in Texas is still relatively rare, people should be careful when handling bugs and should take steps to eliminate these bugs when found indoors.

Natural reservoirs of the *Trypanosoma* parasite are maintained in nature among small vertebrate animals, notably armadillo, opossums, rodents, bats, cats and dogs. Conenose bugs commonly feed on several different hosts during their development. Nymphs feed on an infected host and become infected themselves. The parasite can then be transmitted during subsequent blood meals to an un-infested host. While feeding, the insect may defecate on the skin of its victim. When a victim touches the feces, parasites may be transferred to the site of the bite, to the eye or to the mucous membranes around the mouth or nose. Transfer of the parasite may be hastened by scratching the bite. Chagas' disease is difficult to diagnose, but is sometimes indicated in the initial stage by a swelling on one side of the face.

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Insects in the City: Kissing Bugs , con't

Control

Conenose bugs are nocturnal and may be attracted to nighttime lights. In this way, solitary individuals may enter a home. A single conenose bug in the home is not necessarily cause for alarm. However the presence of nymphs (unwinged bugs) or numerous adult conenose bugs in your home suggested that a breeding population may be established nearby. Under these circumstances control may be justified.

Conenose bug infestations are likely to be more common in poorly constructed homes. Good sanitation and tight building construction tends to limit conenose bug infestations. Destroy trash piles, bird and animal nests and burrows. Control and exclude rodents and birds from the house. Seal exterior cracks and openings into buildings and keep chimney flues closed tightly. Inspect and seal any openings from crawl spaces into the house sub-flooring. Check pets for signs of feeding and examine pet houses.

Insecticides can effectively control conenose bugs. Treat room corners and edges, window and door frames, pet houses, and other suspected entry points with a pesticide labeled for these sites. Few household insecticides are labeled specifically for use against conenose bug; however products intended for indoor use against cockroaches or other indoor pests can be used. Look for products containing permethrin, bifenthrin, esfenvalerate or cyfluthrin.

Consider using a licensed pest control professional for conenose bug control. Besides their experience in treating insect problems, professionals are better suited to assist you with control of possible rodent or pest bird problems. A professional can also point out ways to pest proof your home. The most effective professional products for conenose bug control include *wettable powder* or *microencapsulated* formulations of pyrethroid insecticides such as cypermethrin, lambda-cyhalothrin, deltamethrin, or cyfluthrin.

For more information visit http://citybugs.tamu.edu/?s=Kissing+Bugs

Three species of Kissing Bugs found in Texas

One of many local lookalikes, the Squash Bug

TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

Mark Your Calendar and Save These Dates

February 13: Garden with Confidence: The Kitchen Garden

February 20: Preview Program-Vegetable-Herb Plant Sale

February 27: Vegetable-Herb Plant Sale

April 2: Fruit and Nut Grafting Clinic

March 5: Rose Pruning Clinic

Visit: http://FBMG.org or *http://fortbend.agrilife.org/horticulture/ for details*

Garden with Confidence

FUNdamentals of Gardening

- February 13—The Kitchen Garden – Raised Bed Gardening
- March 19—Landscape Plants for Fort Bend Gardens
- April 16—All About Soil - The Key to Gardening Success
- May 14—Insects in the Garden – Friend or Foe?
- June 25—Irrigation System Efficiency
- July 16—The Healthy Lawn

For more information to http://fortbend.agrilife.org/horticulture/ .

Seasonal Garden Checklist: Jan./Feb.

By Dr. William C. Welch,
Professor & Extension Landscape Specialist
Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

•Make flower and vegetable garden plans now before the rush of spring planting. Time spent in armchair gardening will pay off in improved plant selection.

•Sow seeds in flats or containers to get a jump on plant growth before hot weather arrives. Petunias, begonias, and impatiens should be sown in early January. Warm temperature plants, such as tomatoes, peppers, marigolds, and periwinkles, should be sown in late January or early February.

•Apply a light application of fertilizer to established pansy plantings. Use one-half pound of ammonium sulfate per 100 square feet of bed area. Repeat the application every 4 to 6 weeks, depending on rainfall. Dried blood meal is also an excellent source of fertilizer for pansies.

•Prepare beds and garden area for spring plants.

•Check junipers and other narrow-leaf evergreens for bagworm pouches. The insect eggs overwinter in the pouch, and start the cycle again by emerging in the spring to begin feeding on the foliage. Hand removal and burning of the pouches are ways of reducing the potential damage next spring.

•The life of the plant received as a Christmas gift can be prolonged with proper care. Keep the soil moist, but provide drainage so that excess moisture can flow from the pot. Keep the plant out of range of heating ducts and away from heating units. Keep in a cool room at night, preferably at 60 to 65 degrees F.

•Don't fertilize newly set out trees or shrubs until after they have started to grow, and then only very lightly the first year.

Visit http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/ for more in-depth seasonal updates from Dr. Welch and other Texas A&M Horticulture Department staff.

Gardening with Confidence

Peg d'Hemecourt, President
Fort Bend County Master Gardeners

Garden With Confidence – FUNdamentals of Successful Gardening will begin in February. The program of six classes will provide practical information and demonstrations that homeowners can use to achieve beautiful, low-maintenance landscapes. Whether you are in your first home, or have an established landscape that needs a makeover, or are a gardening enthusiast who wants to know more, there will something for you.

Classes will be held on Saturday mornings and be taught by Fort Bend County Master Gardener Specialists and other horticulture professionals. Instructors will teach a portion of most classes in some of the nineteen demonstration gardens including herb and vegetable gardens, a butterfly garden, and gardens that feature ideas easily adapted to the front and back yards. Participants won't just hear about plants and gardening strategies, they will get to see them in action and have their questions answered.

Class Schedule, from 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM:

- Feb. 13 The Kitchen Garden – Raised Bed Gardening
- March 19 Landscape Plants for Fort Bend Gardens
- April 16 All About Soil - The Key to Gardening Success
- May 14 Insects in the Garden – Friend or Foe?
- June 25 Irrigation System Efficiency
- July 16 The Healthy Lawn

Registration fees include instruction, handouts, and refreshments: $15 per class, $40 for 3 classes, or $75 for the 6-class series (buy 5, get 1 free). Children under 10 accompanied by parents are free.

Classes are held at the Fort Bend County Extension Office at 1402 Band Road in Rosenberg. For additional details, go to http://fortbend.agrilife.org or contact administrative assistant Brandy Rader at brandy.rader@ag.tamu.edu or (281) 342-3034. Also visit us on Facebook at Fort Bend County Extension.

FORT BEND COUNTY
Master Gardeners

Preview Program for the

Vegetable-Herb Plant Sale

Date: February 20, 2016

Time: 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Location: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, 1402 Band Rd., Rosenberg, TX 77471

Vegetable-Herb Plant Sale

- Date: February 27, 2016
- Time: 9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon (or until sold out)
- Location: In front of the greenhouse, at the Agriculture Center, 1402 Band Road, Rosenberg, Tx 77471

Visit http://FBMG.org for plant details and directions.

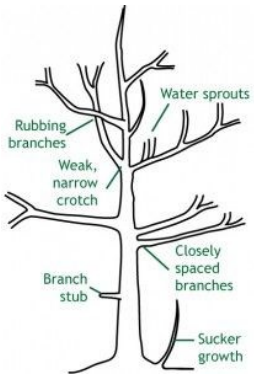
Bring your wagon, and come early for best selection!!

Beginners Fruit Tree Pruning

Deborah Birge, Fort Bend Co. Master Gardener Home Orchard Specialist

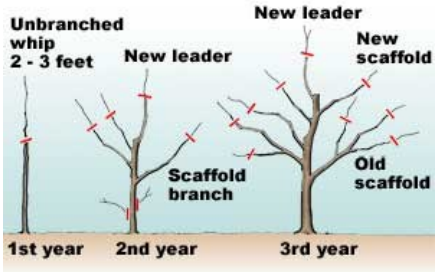
Pruning fruit trees can seem like an intimating undertaking. You might be asking yourself if you even need to prune your tree. And if you do need to prune, how to go about it? In this article, we will keep information on a basic level to help beginners understand the hows and whys of pruning.

Why Do We Prune? - Fruit trees are pruned to aid in the health of the tree, and to increase the quality of the fruit. When pruning for health, remember to remove any limb that crosses and rubs against another limb. This can create a wound inviting disease and pests. Remove all limbs growing downward or an inconvenient place. Additionally, remove any water sprouts. These are limbs that grow vertically from an existing scaffold limb. Lastly, remove any growth coming from the roots or below the graft union. This is your rootstock growing, not the variety of tree you purchased.

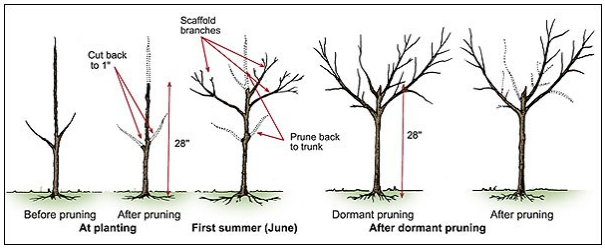


Pruning Structures—Now we will discuss your fruit tree in particular. There are numerous ways to prune and train fruit trees but most are pruned to grow in three basic structures. Central leader, open center, also called open vase or open bowl, and natural. Peaches and nectarines are most often grown with an open center. Apples, pears, and plums are most often grown in the central leader or modified central leader structure. Citrus, figs and persimmons are grown with a natural structure.

Central Leader - This image shows the cuts needed to achieve the central leader structure. Upon planting, the tree, or whip, is cut to two to three feet tall with all side limbs removed. It is allowed to grow the first year. The winter after planting, the cuts bring back chosen scaffold branches by one-third. Scaffold branches need a strong crotch, need to grow around the trunk at even intervals allowing sunlight to hit each branch and only one upward growing branch will be left as the new leader. The third year, is a repeat of the second year pruning in addition to the pruning for health as discussed earlier.



Open Center - This image describes the method used to create the open center. At planting, the tree is trimmed to 2-3 feet tall with all side limbs removed. You can begin training the tree with a summer prune or wait until it is dormant again. Either way, the central leader is removed, three or four strong branches are chosen as scaffold limbs and the tree is pruned for health, as previously discussed. Scaffold limbs should be equally spaced around the trunk to allow sunlight on all branches. Scaffold limbs need strong crotches of around 45 degree angles. You can train one tier of scaffold branches or two. If two is your choice, be sure to leave a distance of eight to twelve trunk inches between the tiers.



Natural Structure—Trees that are chosen to be grown with their natural structure need only pruning for health. This can be done when the trees are dormant or, as in the case of citrus, after the final freeze. This is usually early March in our area.

Finally, it is good to remember that your tree will live. Very few prunings result in death. Should you make a mess of it, the tree will repair itself and you can try again next year. Lastly, invest in the proper tools and keep them clean. Reduce the spread of disease by disinfecting your tools with a 10% bleach solution after pruning each tree.

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DATES TO REMEMBER

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

Garden with Confidence Education Series
Beginning February 2016

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.org
http://txmn.org/coastal/
http://fortbendbeekeepers.org/