

THE FORT BEND GARDENER



HORTICULTURE IN FORT BEND COUNTY

FALL 2013

TEXAS A&M AGRI LIFE EXTENSION

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Those Pesky Squirrels!

By Boone Holladay, CEA-Horticulture

We have received a load of calls this year concerning squirrel damage issues, from regular eating of fruit and nut crops, to the complete stripping of bark off trees and shrubs. The reasons why squirrels are eating your prized fruit is simple. Squirrel numbers are up, and food sources are down. They are looking for anything to eat. This would range from green nuts to unripe fruits, and some



additional food sources that are not a typical browse for squirrels, tree bark. The Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Management, a collaborative between several Land Grant Institutes, stated these reasons for why squirrels want to tear up your trees.

1. Pregnant females often don't eat just prior to giving birth. Bark stripping may be their way of responding to the pain. 2. Searching for water (although this theory has been weakened by observing that squirrels strip bark even during a wet spring). 3. Searching for food by eating the inner bark layer. Remember, just because a squirrel has access to food quantity, doesn't mean it is obtaining sufficient nutrients. 4. Squirrels may strip bark simply because they enjoy doing it. Just like some people enjoy doing less than ordinary activities, some animals may also do the same. We may never have a complete understanding of why bark-stripping occurs.

As far as control options for squirrels, you are very limited. In any incorporated municipality there are regulations concerning the use of firearms (defined as any device that is trigger activated, including slingshots!). Unless you are in a strictly rural environment, this method of "dispatchment" is off the table. This said, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, grey and brown squirrels have *no closed season and no bag limit* for hunting in Fort Bend County. If you live in areas where firearms are allowed, use safe and responsible practices in the hunting of squirrels.

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Some Like It Hot, For Others It's A Passion

By Boone Holladay, CEA-Horticulture



Being from Texas, you are supposedly born with the genetic capability of handling spicy hot food. Particularly, we are born with the love of biting into fresh or pickled jalapeño peppers along with a juicy hamburger or at a family barbeque. Despite good intentions, the final expression on most people's faces show otherwise; red faces, sweat beading up, followed by coughing and a gulp of cold drink. What shames us even further is that the mighty jalapeño is one of the milder ones in the world of hot peppers and by far not even close to the champions of heat.

To help get you started, let's define what makes a pepper or chili "hot". The heat in peppers is measured in Scoville units. The Scoville scale measures the piquance (hotness and spiciness) by the amount of Capsaicin, the active chemical responsible for "burning" our mouths. So, to quickly set the stage, here are some basics. Bell peppers-0 units, Jalapeño-2500-8000 units, Serrano-10,000-23,000 units, Cayenne-30,000-50,000 units, and the pepper that until recently was described as the hottest pepper, the Habanero, coming in at 100,000-580,000 units!

Since the year 2000, things have gotten "spicy" in the battle for the hottest chili. The big rave at this point was a chili that came out of the Indian states of Assam and Nagaland with varying names, Bhut Jolokia, red naga chili, and other variations, but most popularly around here as the Ghost Pepper. This chili was officially named the world's hottest chili pepper by

Guinness World Records in 2007, with results varying from 855,000-1,050,000 Scoville units. Variations of this cultivar, such as the Dorset Naga are showing inconsistent results of nearly 1.6 million units. Not only used readily in Indian cuisine, it is now being used by the Indian military as a weapon against terrorism, as a tool to disperse mob situations, and as a aerosol spray for women to use against attackers.

After the showing of the Ghost Pepper, things have gotten hot in what is now a month-by-month battle for the hottest chili. Soon after it gained its seat as the hottest, the Ghost Pepper got knocked off the stage by the Trinidad Scorpion "Butch T" chili, bred in Australia as an interspecies hybrid between *Capsicum chinensis* and *C. frutescens*. It now holds the world record with a recorded heat of 1,463,700 Scoville units. Though it currently holds the title, there are several breeders working to create a stable hybrid that can consistently beat its heat. The ones most promising include the Trinidad Moruga Scorpion and particularly one known as the Carolina Reaper. Though inconsistent in testing, it is reaching levels up around 3 million units. Now let's compare that back to our hot Texas jalapeño at 3 thousand units.

No doubt, these new hybrid chili peppers are hot, but that isn't the end of it. A range of testing is being done for medicinal use of peppers, in particular in cancer research, treatment, and prevention. Chili peppers are also rich in protein, carbohydrates, fiber, and complete range of vitamins and minerals, and amino acids. So whether you want to spice up a winter chili, a homemade salsa and barbeque sauces, try one of these scorchers, but start with a pinch.

References for this article can be found at <http://fortbend.agrilife.org/horticulture>



Who are Fort Bend County Master Gardeners?

By Ginny Grant, FBMG President

We are people who come together to learn about the Master Gardener program for all different reasons and from diverse backgrounds, but have a common love for plants and gardening. I grew up with parents and grandparents who were gardeners and ranchers. They loved growing things whether it was in the field, the backyard or just a flowerpot on the windowsill.

As a Master Gardener I've grown not only as a gardener, but as a person, too. I have met so many wonderful people these last ten years and although I never wanted to be a teacher, I have developed a love for teaching children about gardening and nature. We've had lots of fun times getting dirty and learning together.

I've learned that my college Geology grades would probably have been A's if my professors had related it to gardening and soils and not used just what was in a textbook. Each time we have a Master Gardener class, I try to audit the "soil" class just to learn a little more. It makes it easier to understand why some plants grow and some don't—the right plant in the right place!

Master Gardeners help the Fort Bend County Texas A & M AgriLife Extension Service better serve the home gardening public by answering questions, speaking on gardening topics such as plant selection, composting, soil improvement, pest control, vegetable and flower gardening, irrigation and pruning. As part of community educational outreach, the volunteers work with children, public and private schools, and participate in civic beautification to help educate the public in techniques and benefits of gardening and related activities.

The FBMG is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and supports its educational mission through annual fundraising plant sales. The organization includes 187 Certified Master Gardeners and 26 Associates; in 2012, this group volunteered 17,000 hours of service to Fort Bend County residents.

Master Gardeners also maintain 4 acres of demonstration and research gardens at the Agriculture Center in Rosenberg. These gardens are open to the public for viewing and provide educational resource information about plants best suited for our area. The first Saturday morning of each month is a Garden Work Day, and Master Gardeners can be found in the gardens; please join us for a relaxing stroll, for information about gardening or about the Master Gardener program. Master Gardeners love gardening, but they also love to talk about gardening even more!



The Fort Bend Master Gardeners Outdoor Classroom. This garden serves as a central focal point and meeting area and is beautifully maintained by garden co-chairs Gail Scruggs and Cheryl Merchant.

Seasonal Garden Checklist: October/November

By Dr. William C. Welch,
Professor & Extension Landscape Specialist

- This 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.
- Chill tulip and hyacinth bulbs in the refrigerator until mid or late December before planting. The lower part of the refrigerator is best. Do not leave bulbs in airtight plastic bags during refrigerated storage.
- 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.
- In addition to bulbs, check your nursery or garden center for started plants of snapdragons, pinks, sweet williams, poppies, and calendulas. Planted now in south and east Texas, they will usually provide a riot of spring color; wait until late winter or early spring to plant in north Texas.
- If you have saved seeds of your favorite plants, allow them to become air dry, then place them in an airtight 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 when they become available at the garden centers. They need a well-drained soil and exposure to at least a half-day of sun. It is best to use started plants, as seeds are difficult to handle.
- If you are planning to save caladium tubers for another year, dig them in late October, and allow to dry in a well ventilated but shady area. After 7 to 10 days, remove leaves and dirt, then pack in dry peat moss, vermiculite, or similar material for storage. Pack tubers so they do not touch each other. Dust with all-purpose fungicide as you pack. Place container in an area where temperature won't drop below 50° F.
- There is still time to divide and reset such perennials as phlox, violets, hollyhocks, irises, day lilies, and shasta daisies.
- October is a good time to reduce the insect and disease potential in next year's garden. 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.
- Holly plants with a heavy set of fruit often suffer a fertilizer deficiency. An application of complete fertilizer late this month can be helpful and provide a head start next spring.
- Plant seeds of sweet peas in south and east Texas during October/November. Select a site where there is at least a half-day of sun and protection from north winds.

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

Potential New Threats to Pecan Crop on the Horizon

By Boone Holladay , CEA –Horticulture

The Texas pecan crop is already threatened annually by a range of localized pests. Producers have been dealing with hickory shuckworm, pecan nut casebearer, fall webworms, and others for years. Now we are looking at the potential to add a few new ones to the list, the tawny crazy ant and the brown marmorated stink bug. At this point entomologists are keeping a look out for these pests and examining their habits and the economic loss potential for commercial producers. The reports that follow are an update from Bill Ree, Pecan IPM Specialist with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

Tawny (Raspberry) Crazy Ant, *Nylanderia fulva*:

As of last week, I had a report from a third orchard in Brazoria County that has Tawny Crazy Ants. At this time we are still not sure of the total impact of this ant in a pecan production system, but we are looking into it. Next season

we will be doing a season long evaluation and testing of this new pest.

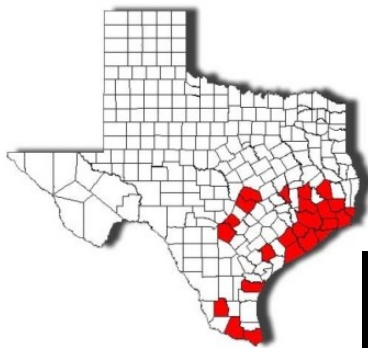


Figure 2 Counties with Tawny crazy ant detections



www.bugguide.net

Brown Marmorated Stink Bug, *Halyomorpha halys*:

This is another invasive new pest in Texas that we are still looking for. Most likely new infestation will occur or be reported from the urban sector first rather than from agricultural setting. This stink bug is a great hitchhiker in RV's, campers and probably rental moving vans and trailers. I'll keep you posted on any new finds. So far we still only have one confirmed infestation site in Texas which is from Corpus Christi. In order for an infestation to be confirmed we need voucher specimens and the Corpus Christi site is the only location with collected specimens. I have had reports from Weatherford, Katy and College Station but do not have voucher specimens to confirm the infestation.



www.bugguide.net

Mr. Bill Ree will be the guest speaker for the annual Fort Bend County Pecan Show on Saturday November 23rd at 10:30am at the Bud O'Shieles Community Center located at 1330 Band Road in Rosenberg. He will discuss these potential threats in further detail during his program. For more details on the pecan show or any other program we offer here in Fort Bend County, contact our website at <http://fortbend.agrilife.org> and/or like us on Facebook at Fort Bend County Extension.

Those Pesky Squirrels

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Many of our calls have come from suburban clientele, where firearms are prohibited and natural predators are far and few. For these situations traps are your best option. Traps, baited with corn or a corn and peanut butter combo, are effective, but will only capture one animal at a time. If you have 50 squirrels in an area, this takes time. If you capture and release, you must gain approval from the destination site owner prior to release. It is also recommended to contact your local game warden to notify them of your actions.

There are some deterrents out on the market that claim to help with squirrel pressure. These are sonar sound devices that are either battery powered or plugged in and emit a sound that humans cannot hear, but drives squirrels and other animals crazy. Other products like capsaicin (pepper concentrate) can be sprayed on plants to deter their activity. There are also some sprinkler activated devices that randomly turn on and scare squirrels and birds away from the area. There are also a range of scent deterrents, or noise makers, on the market that may be worth trying out. Results for each are at best varied. I, nor Extension researchers, have no real data to back up these claims, but may be worth a try. There are also more pest control companies showing up that specialize in small animal removal. I have seen several different companies working in the area, but have not established contact with any of them.

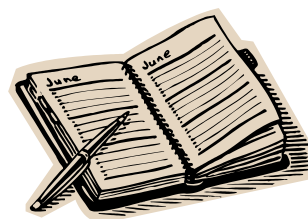
Now that we have established the fact that you utterly despise these creatures, let me throw a curve ball at you. This may sound nuts (no pun intended), but you may get results by simply feeding them and offering them a source of water. By placing dried corn, bird seed, and water out several times a week, placing them far as possible from the plants being targeted, this may pull them out of the trees and give your fruits and nuts the chance to develop. This may help get the fruits of your labor in to your kitchen, instead of a squirrel's mouth. Best of luck!

More reading can be found at

<http://theurbanrancher.tamu.edu/retiredsite/animals/l1914.pdf>

<http://icwdm.org/wildlife/Squirrels/BarkStripping.aspx>

Go Ahead and Save these 2014 Dates!



January 18 — Fruit & Citrus Pre-Sale Education Program

January 25 — Fruit and Citrus Tree sale

February 15 — Vegetable-Herb Pre-Sale Education Program

February 22 — Vegetable-Herb Sale

Details for all dates available at <http://fbmg.com>



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Spotlight: The Cottage Garden

By Jane Gray

Landscape Director

Fort Bend County Master Gardeners

Grandma knew best when she planted her garden. She planted mainly strong perennials that would withstand the Texas seasons. Plants such as irises, daylilies, old garden roses, perennial hibiscus, altheas (rose of Sharon), and salvias were some of her favorites.

In addition, she planted easy annuals that would reseed year after year such as zinnias, gomphrenas (what we Texans call bachelor buttons), and celosias, including cock's comb. This time of year she scattered poppy seeds that would greet the spring. In fall, the confederate rose (hibiscus mutabilis) would burst forth with huge, pink blooms.

At the Fort Bend County Extension gardens, one can see such a garden lovingly maintained by our Master Gardener volunteers. We call it the cottage garden, and it is located on the north-



west corner of the range building. One of the striking features of this garden is the Peggy Martin Rose, which entirely covers the lattice roof over the porch. In the spring, it is a solid heavenly carpet of pink. In addition to the plants mentioned above and more, also to be admired are the colorful handmade mosaic stones placed in the walkways. Meander through and experience the color, texture, and warmth.

As Olive E. Dana wrote in her poem,
"Our Garden"

*It is only a tiny garden, where the
commonest flowers blow,
Where tangled vines are straying,
And shrubs all wayward grow.
No trim or stately hedges
Border our garden path,
No rare and lovely blossoms
With strange, new names it hath.
They are the flower-friends most loyal,
Returning year by year,
Never from summer sowing
Comes bloom that's quite so dear.*

Garden Humor

*"The philosopher who said that work
well done never needs doing over,
never weeded a garden. - Ray D. Everson*

*A good gardener always plants 3 seeds -
one for the bugs,
one for the weather and
one for himself.
- Leo Aikman*

*Early to bed, early to rise,
Work like hell: fertilize.
- Emily Whaley*

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The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas Cooperating. Educational programs conducted by the Texas AgriLife Extension serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, handicap or national origin. Individuals with disabilities who require an auxiliary aid, service or accommodation in order to participate in any Extension activities, are encouraged to contact the County Extension Office for assistance five days prior to activity.

DATES TO REMEMBER

FBMG Monthly Educational Programs
November 21, 2013 7:00 p.m. No December Meeting

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. No December Meeting

Landscape Water Conservation Workshop—Katy
November 16, 2013

Coast Prairie Master Naturalist
Prairie Heritage Festival
November 2, 2013

Fort Bend County Pecan Show
November 23rd 10a.m.-noon

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/>