

Know It & Grow It!

Horticulture News & Notes for Nueces County

January/February 2004

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To provide quality, relevant outreach and continuing education programs and services to the people of Texas.

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POST-CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

Know When and Where to Plant for Success

Every year, individuals and offices either buy or receive poinsettias to celebrate the holiday season. Although they are often considered disposable plants come the new year, they don't have to be. Poinsettias can be a great addition to your landscape.

Contrary to popular belief, poinsettias are not poisonous so they can be safely planted in your yard. If you do have children, however, use it as a learning opportunity, teaching them not to eat plants from the landscape due to the irritation from the milky white sap.

There are two issues you must address if you want to be successful. First, you must keep it alive until you plant it in early March, and second, you must select the proper site.

Many people blessed with poinsettias often have difficulty keeping them healthy inside. Poinsettias are notorious about dropping leaves due to low light levels. They also can develop root rot if they set in water due to foil and plastic wrapping around the pot. If you haven't removed the foil or plastic wrapping, do it now.

At this point, your poinsettias probably would benefit from some fresh air. Place them on the patio until you are ready to plant them in the yard, but remember to bring them inside in case of a freeze. Continue to water them and remove

any dead leaves and cyathia, the yellow centers of the bloom.

Due to our mild winters, poinsettias can be planted outside; however, they need to be protected from the north wind. Select an area that receives full sun on the south side of the house. Planting in the shade will result in thin, weak stems. Don't be surprised if they reach 3-5 feet since poinsettia growers use chemicals for height control.

Remember that poinsettias only flower when they have long, uninterrupted nights. To ensure blooming in years to come, avoid areas that have security or porch lights nearby. Even a burst of light as short as one minute can prevent or delay flowering.

Look for an area with well-drained soil or use a raised bed. Also make sure the soil is rich in organic matter by adding soil conditioner, compost and/or peat moss for best results.



MASTER NATURALISTS GRADUATE FIRST CLASS

The South Texas Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist Program graduated its first class of volunteers on Thursday, December 11. Each certified Master Naturalist must complete a 40 hour course of classroom and field instruction, 40 hours of volunteer service, and 8 hours of continuing education. Those volunteers completing these TMN requirements from the Fall 2003 and Spring 2004 classes include Lauren Dietz, Barbara Dorf, George Gardner, Carolyn Goodloe, Sami Hirko, Chad Huckabee, Marion Joseph, Grace Lopez, and Jeanne O'Leary.

The South Texas Chapter was organized in summer 2002 to train volunteers to provide environmental education and stewardship service in Kleberg and Nueces Counties. Since then, thirty three volunteers have been trained and have donated over 1500 hours to the community. This graduation allows the chapter to officially receive its charter from the state Master Naturalist headquarters in College Station.

Jim Sinclair, one of the chapter's organizers, was recertified, having completed an additional 40 hours of service and 8 hours of continuing education in 2003.

Milestone volunteer service awards were also presented to volunteers completing 250 volunteer hours. Those honored included Carolyn Goodloe, Chad Huckabee, and Jim Sinclair.

The next Master Naturalist Class is scheduled for September. FMI: 767-5217.



Know It and Grow It! is a bimonthly educational newsletter distributed by Texas Cooperative Extension - Nueces County.

Educational programs of Texas Cooperative Extension are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.



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PRUNE WITH PURPOSE

January is prime pruning season with distinct benefits for both the tree and the trimmer.

Most trees and hardy shrubs, especially deciduous trees that drop their leaves annually, prefer pruning during this season. While dormant, most of the sap and stored carbohydrates have been relocated to the trunk and root systems. That allows the tree to redirect their resources to new growth in the spring when the releaf. There are also fewer insects to attack pruning wounds during the winter, giving the tree a chance to compartmentalize the damage.

Tree pruning is encouraged during cooler months for most species except palms which need to be pruned in mid-summer during their growing season.

For the tree trimmer, it's the perfect temperature for strenuous outdoor yard work. Furthermore, trimming on deciduous trees is much easier since the branch structure is more visible due to lack of foliage. Fewer leaves present also means less plant material has to be hauled away.

When you do prune, do not remove more than one third of the canopy in any given year.

Make sure your loppers and chainsaw are sharpened before you begin to ensure clean cuts and remember to leave the branch collar, the raised portion where it connects to the trunk. Finally, remember that pruning paints are no longer recommended except for oak in areas with oak wilt present.

Prune With A Purpose!

- Remove dead wood.
- Remove watersprouts and suckers.
- Remove crossing branches that are rubbing against each other.
- Redirect growth and shape tree.

Hold Off On Tropicals!

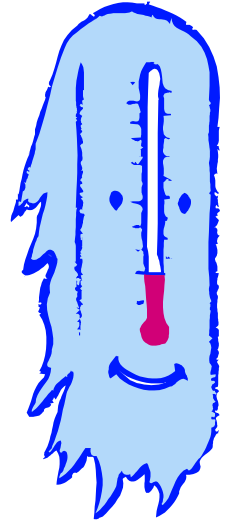
Hardy shrubs can also be pruned now, but it isn't open season for pruning roses and landscape tropicals like hibiscus and bougainvillea. These plants are typically trimmed in late February or early March, after the risk of frost passes. An easy way to remember that is to prune roses and landscape flowers after Valentines Day.

If you prune these plants too early, then you risk new growth emerging that could be damaged by a late freeze.

Freeze Protection 101

The key to protecting plants from freezing is trapping the earth's heat. Simply wrapping the trunk of a plant will give very little protection. Neither will wrapping the foliage with sheets and tying the ends around the trunk creating a "lollipop-effect." The temperature inside your sheet will quickly drop below 32°F because the plants are not producing their own heat and the earth will not be supplying warmth either. Here are some quick tips.

- Water plants before a cold front hits.
- Use cloth instead of plastic. Old blankets and sheets work great.
- Have plastic cover to ground when possible. If not, create a tent, not a lollipop.
- Add large outdoor Christmas lights or incandescent lights as a heat source.
- Protect plants from the drying effect of the wind. Temporary wind breaks my help.
- Don't use space heaters or open flames. Leaves are combustible.
- Lay large potted plants on ground and cover with blankets.
- Place potted plants under the canopy of an evergreen tree to serve as a heat umbrella.
- Apply a thick layer of mulch around the base of plants prior to a freeze. However, don't leave it piled around the stem after the threat of freezing is over.



All you have to do is keep the temperature around your tender plants above 32°F by creating a microclimate. Essentially, you are creating small warm pockets for your tender plants. Just be creative and safe!

Applying a thick layer of mulch around the base of tropical plants such as hibiscus will help keep the earth's heat around the base of the plant. The branches will likely die back, but new growth will probably reemerge next spring from the protected trunk.

HAZARD TREES FOCUS OF JANUARY TREE CONFERENCE

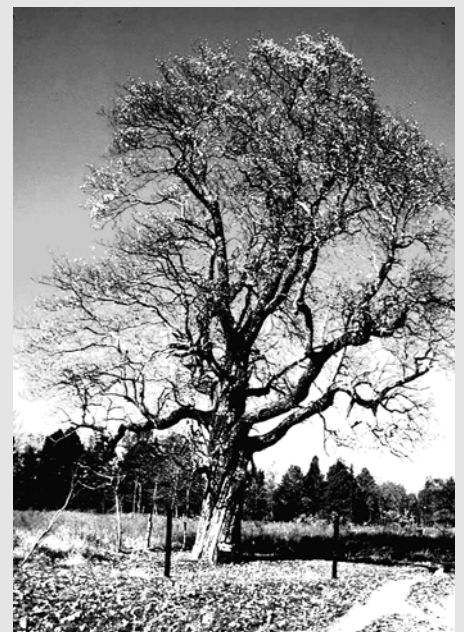
The third annual Coastal Bend Tree Health Conference is scheduled for Thursday, January 15, 2004. This annual event is co-sponsored by Texas Cooperative Extension, Texas Forest Service, and your local Tree Council to educate Coastal Bend landscape professionals and homeowners on tree health issues and proper maintenance. This year's conference has been moved to Texas A&M University Corpus Christi.

"Hazard trees are becoming more common in our urban forest," explains Texas Forest Service Regional Urban Forester Karen Woodard. "We have a large number of short-lived trees like Chinese tallow and ash that pose a lot of problems in parks, school yards, and in neighborhoods. Broken branches and improper pruning practices have resulted in the decline of these trees. Under windy conditions, they could easily fall and damage property or injure a person."

Continuing education units are available for International Society of Arboriculture certified arborists, Texas Certified Nursery Professionals, Texas Certified Pesticide Applicators, and Master Gardeners. The conference is open to everyone, but will be particularly beneficial to landscape maintenance personnel in schools and municipalities as well as commercial maintenance personnel.

The morning sessions feature talks on causes and identification of hazard trees and preventative maintenance, identification and control of common local insect pests of urban trees, facts and myths of local tree parasites and epiphytes. After lunch, maintenance and removal of hazard trees, tree trimming safety, and a hands on evaluation of hazard trees.

Pre-registration is required by calling 767-5217 by noon, Wednesday, January 14. On-site lunch is included with the \$12 registration fee.





29 New Master Gardeners Certified

The Nueces County Master Gardeners certified twenty-nine volunteers on Tuesday, December 9th. These volunteers joined the ranks of nearly eighty active members by completing 50 hours of classroom training and 50 hours of volunteer service. Of these newest members, thirteen have completed these requirements since August 13th.

Those newly certified include: Diane Baker, Anna Marie Bernsen, Paul Boyd, Valerie Grace Bullock, Aurora Cantu, Gail Cargile, Paul Carroll, Sandra Davis, Crystal Hargrove, Judy Hendricks, Kay Hines, Patsy Holland, Alpha Hunt, Karen Johnson, John Maguire, Dan McCurdy, John McElroy, Carol Moore, Sabra

Morlan, Maria Oliver, Bill Payne, Charlene Straley, Jim Strong, Ida Tackett, Bonnie Thomas, Lowell Thomas, Sarah Thomas, Kay Watson, and Janis Wood.

To be recertified each year, a Master Gardener must volunteer for twenty hours and obtain six hours of continuing education. Fifty-four Nueces County Master Gardeners met that challenge in 2003, bringing our total membership to eighty-two plus fifteen interns.

To find out more about the Nueces County Master Gardener Association or the Fall 2004 training, call 767-5217.



Jan Shannon

Shannon Elected State Second Vice-President

Nueces County Master Gardener Jan Shannon was elected second vice-president of the Texas Master Gardener Association in December. Shannon's 2004 term will result in her assuming the state presidency in 2006.

Shannon has been a Master Gardener since 1992. She is an avid rosarian winning multiple awards at local and regional rose shows as a result of her passion. Understandably, she is a highly respected local speaker on that topic. She is also trained as a Master Gardener Entomology Specialist.

Jan's leadership and initiative will be an asset to the Texas Master Gardener Association and a great tribute to the quality of our Nueces County Master Gardeners.

GOT A QUESTION?

Call the Master Gardener Hotline at 767-5250
Tuesdays & Thursdays
9-12 and 1-4.

You can also email your questions to nuecesmg@ag.tamu.edu



Master Gardener Featured Project:

CHILDREN'S GARDEN

Each spring and autumn, the Nueces County Master Gardeners invite children ages 7-12 to grow their own vegetables in our Children's Garden. Each child plants his own irrigated 4' X 12' raised bed at the Corpus Christi Botanical Gardens and Nature Center and gets to keep all of the vegetables harvested. Each Saturday morning, Master Gardeners supply instruction and all materials for a fun educational experience for the whole family. This gardening experience will teach both basic gardening, plant parts and environmental stewardship issues.

The next session begins on February 14 and runs through May. Space is limited to 40 children and parents are required to attend sessions with children. Tuition is \$19; a reduced rate of \$16 is available for CCBGNC members prior to Feb. 12. Afterward, rates increase to \$24 and \$21. To sign up, call 852-2100.



Tomato Timing Is Critical

Timing your tomato planting is critical to maximize your yield in your spring garden. Most people don't realize that most tomato varieties are heat sensitive and stop setting fruit once night temperatures rise above the middle 70's. That may occur as early as May in South Texas, so the sooner you get them in the ground and flowering the better.

Starting tomatoes from transplants is recommended so that you give your tomato crop about a three week head start over sowing seeds. If you buy transplants, look for the letters after the name that represent disease resistance. Resistance, however, is not immunity. Improper culture of a resistant variety may negate that resistance.

Plant breeders have a tough job to breed disease resistance into crops because there are so many diseases and often several strains of a given disease. What is often done is to select the disease that causes the most problems and work on breeding resistance to that disease. Seed catalogs and packets indicate what, if any, disease resistance a variety has in descriptive text or with initials following the variety name. VFN indicates the tomato variety is resistant to three types of diseases; Verticillium wilt, Fusarium wilt and nematodes. Many of the new hybrid varieties are VFN types which are highly recommended in our area.

Although selection is important, that is not all you need for success. Two other things you need to remember up front is that tomatoes need space and food. Give each plant a minimum of 3-4 feet. Also plan now to fertilize regularly to promote and maintain healthy growth.

Taking time now to think through your tomato growing cycle for the spring will help you have more tomatoes with less work, and that makes the harvest that much sweeter.



UPCOMING EVENTS:

Thursday, January 15 - Coastal Bend Tree Health Conference. 9:00-4:00 p.m. Texas A&M University Corpus Christi (6300 Ocean Drive). Cost: \$12 (lunch included). Registration Deadline: January 14, noon. FMI: 767-5217.

Saturday, January 31 - Rose Bed to Rose Bud Seminar. 10:00 a.m. - noon. Corpus Christi Botanical Gardens & Nature Center (8545 S. Staples). Master Gardener and rosarian Jan Shannon teaches you all you need to know to raise roses in South Texas.

Cost: \$6 (\$3.50 CCBGNC members). FMI: 852-2100.

Tuesday, February 3 - Texas Community Futures Forum. 6:30 - 9:30 p.m. Texas A&M Research and Extension Center, Hwy 44. Help identify key issues in our county. FMI: 767-5223.

Wednesday, February 4 - South Texas Turf Management Conference. 8:15 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Portland Community Center. Pesticide Applicator CEUs available. Cost: \$25 (lunch included) FMI: 364-6234.

Saturday, February 14 - Spring Children's Garden Begins. 9:30 - 11:00 a.m. Corpus Christi Botanical Gardens & Nature Center (8545 S. Staples). Pre-Registration Deadline, Feb. 12. Cost: \$19 (\$16 CCBGNC members). FMI: 852-2100.

Friday-Sunday, February 20-22 - Spring Home and Garden Expo. Bayfront Convention Center. Get your questions answered by Master Gardeners and attend seminars by Extension Horticulturist Michael Womack on "Turf Wars: Win-Win Solutions for Lawns and Water Conservation" and "Texas Superstars: Proven Performers for Texas Landscapes" (seminar times TBA).

Saturday, March 13 - Backyard Citrus Seminar. 10 a.m. - noon. Nueces County Master Gardener and Retired Citrus Center Professor Dr. John Fucik will tell you what's needed to have grapefruit, oranges, limes, and other fresh-picked citrus out your backdoor. Cost: \$6 (\$3.50 CCBGNC members). FMI: 852-2100.

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IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Trailing Purple Lantana

Lantana montevidensis

Trailing purple lantana is a great plant for our area. It can be used as a groundcover, providing a profusion of colorful lavender flowers in clusters from mid-spring until frost. It is one of our best plants for winter color in South Texas.

Unlike other forms of lantana, this one will stay much shorter, if it is periodically trimmed back to about 6 inches. If not, it develops new growth on top of older, dead branches and over time can appear to be 2-3 feet tall. It has outstanding heat, wind, and drought tolerance, and it is resistant to the lantana lacebug.

Texas Superstars are plants that have been tested by more than twenty Extension horticulturists throughout the state for outstanding growth and flowering in sun, and heat with minimal fertilization and not pesticides. Only those plants that thrive in all areas of the state get the Texas Superstar designation. For more information on this and other Texas Superstars, go to <http://www.texassuperstar.com>.

