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TARRANT COUNTY

Master Gardeners

A community of gardeners, learning and sharing best practices in north Texas.

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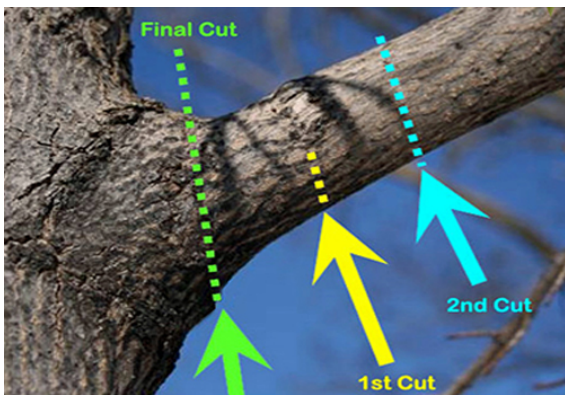
Master Gardeners receive many hours of specialized training in horticulture through the Texas AgriLife Extension Service. The trained volunteers then contribute time in their communities on special projects and community gardens. To learn more about becoming a Master Gardener, visit www.tarrantmg.org



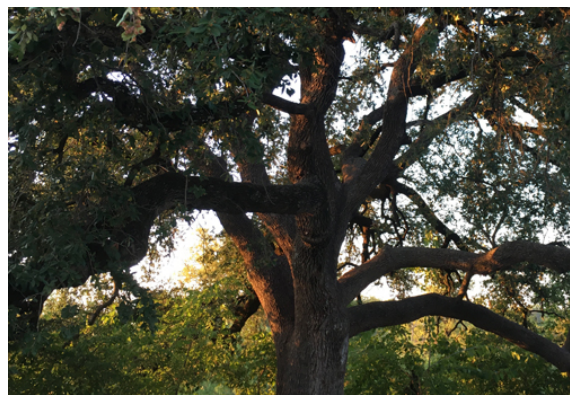
FROM THE PRESIDENT
A Review of the Year
[MORE](#)



HISTORIC PROPERTIES
Gardening at Thistle Hill
[MORE](#)



DO IT YOURSELF PRUNING
When and How
[MORE](#)



PROFESSIONAL PRUNING
Hire an Expert
[MORE](#)



DEM BONES
Creating Your Landscape
MORE



THE GARDEN IS SPENT
Giving Thanks
MORE

FROM THE PRESIDENT



President Ray Morrell (left) works with students at Heritage Elementary.

A Review of the Year 2023

By Ray Morrell

As President this past year, I had the pleasure of working with extremely dedicated Master Gardeners. It has been fun to work side by side with friends who have like interests and a willingness to help and share their skills with the public wherever needed.

The mission of the Tarrant County Master Gardener Association (TCMGA) is to educate the public in all areas dealing with gardening, trees and home landscaping.

As a key part of the Texas A&M Extension Service, we accomplished this mission by holding more than 120 classes and workshops throughout Tarrant County, provided information at 33 events, such as Mayfest and home and garden shows, and helped almost 300 citizens construct their own rain barrels. We also managed and maintained 24 gardens throughout Tarrant County, which helps to educate residents. This year, for example, we had 1,700 youth involved in the Annual Monarch Butterfly Festival at Bob Jones Park in Southlake, and at many of our gardens we held regular gardening education classes for more than 1,000 students. We also are responsible for five gardens at the Fort Worth Botanic Gardens.

TCMGA held its first Arbor Day event on Nov. 4 at our Demonstration Garden, as a collaborative effort between TCMGA, Tarrant Regional Water District, Citizen Foresters, and the Fort Worth Garden Club. Participants listened to presentations, including How to Plant a Tree, Pruning 101, Heat Stress, and Common Pests and Diseases. Attendees received a free tree in honor of Arbor Day.

Since 2019 we have worked with the North Texas Rodeo Foundation/Donna Snow and local veteran organizations to improve the landscape of a veteran in our area each year. This year, TCMGA provided the plants, soil amendments, and expertise, while the North Texas Rodeo Foundation and Donna Snow provided the labor.

Here are a few details about the many Master Gardener accomplishments this year:

Schools

Durham Elementary School – Visited classrooms four times this year to educate 350 fifth graders. Students planted trial potatoes from Texas A&M in February and harvested in May.

Meadowbrook Elementary – Held onsite education for the students working in the garden.

Heritage Elementary – Held a garden club meeting each month with 30 kids; taught a short program about soil, snakes, butterflies, propagation, etc. The kids worked in the garden planting and harvesting vegetables.

Fitzgerald Elementary School – Mathoween (previously the Fall Festival) provided an opportunity for students and parents to access educational tables with garden-related prizes. Two Master Gardeners and one parent taught the weekly Garden Club.

Public Spaces

Bob Jones Nature Center – Around 1,700 youth participated in the annual Monarch Festival in September; 80 seventh graders planted daffodils and spread mulch in March; 25 third graders planted cosmos seed and spread mulch in March;

preschools visited every day, and Master Gardeners taught mini lessons.

Common Ground NRH Community Garden – Assisted with the Spring and Fall seminars, with at least 100-150 in attendance each time. Sign up for a newsletter at <https://www.nrhcommunitygarden.com/>.

Tarrant County SW Courthouse and SW Regional Library – Planted and maintained native plants that can be used in an urban landscape.

Teen Challenge – Taught weekly lessons on plants, the environment and gardening practices.

Fort Worth Botanic Garden

Japanese Garden – Held docent tours on request and opened tours on weekends in spring and fall.

Begonia Greenhouse – Taught classes and gave tours, through BRIT, to garden clubs on begonia care and building terrariums.

Compost Outpost – Educated non-Master Gardener volunteers who often go on to become Master Gardeners.

Perennial Garden – Educated public volunteers as they work with Master Gardeners.

The TCMGA with its 300+ members continues to seek out those who would like to learn more about gardening in Tarrant County and are willing to share their knowledge with the public. To learn more about becoming a Master Gardener contact the Master Gardener Desk at 817-884-1944 or email at tarrantmg@ag.tamu.edu.

[BACK](#)

HISTORIC PROPERTIES



Gardening at Thistle Hill

By Keith D. Olmsted

Tarrant County Master Gardener

Thistle Hill, which holds so much important history for the city of Fort Worth Texas, was built in 1904 for Electra Waggoner, the daughter of a wealthy cattle baron. In 2006, Historic Fort Worth (HFW) accepted as a gift the property at 1509 Pennsylvania Avenue. It then completed several critical restoration projects and secured a protective, perpetual easement held by the Texas Historical Commission. I was a Master Gardener volunteer and project lead at this historic property from 2015-2021 when it provided rich opportunities for Master Gardener intern projects.

The neighborhood was originally called Quality Hill and extended from 7th Street south to Pennsylvania Street, during the wealthy cattle baron years of the latter part of the 19th century and into the 20th century. In 2022, HFW gifted Thistle Hill to neighboring Cook Children's Medical Center.

When I took on this great project, I could not help myself from constantly fixing

everything over and over in my mind. I looked at the challenge as if it were my own property and tried to create the very best of everything going forward. The approximately one acre was an aging landscape with many mature hackberry trees, as well as pecans and cedars. A spirea and holly bed across the front of the house, a tear drop bed in the back by the carriage house and the long bed along the west wall fence was primarily what the master gardeners maintained when I arrived. There was no lawn on the east side of the home, and the back yard to the south was just dirt.

Aside from removing a huge pecan tree and restoring the nice lawn in back of the house, we also planted and maintained 15 large planter pots with seasonal flora and created three new, beautiful beds, set up as intern projects:

- An herb bed just outside the kitchen door, where tours exited after viewing the inside of the house. This area was only weeds that was mowed weekly
- A certified monarch way station bed in front of the famous Carriage House
- A large bed around the grand pergola on the west side of the home

These three beds added so many opportunities to educate the public, including tour groups who came through regularly and students from Fort Worth ISD and Crowley ISD. I personally gave tours to ladies' garden clubs in Fort Worth, school groups and the state organization of Landscapers and Nurserymen. We also had a movie scene filmed here with Robert Redford, and the History Channel created a special on Thistle Hill.

Where does Thistle Hill go from here? To date, the structures are undergoing a \$3.4 million renovation of the Carriage House, the main house and the brick fence. Cook will create offices inside the house and continue to restore the areas of the home as they go forward. The sad part of this story is Cook only has to open Thistle Hill to the general public one week a year, as is required by the Historic Society. They have strict guidelines on these designated properties that are tied into many state and federal grants.

Tarrant County Master Gardeners now will turn its attention to the historic McFarland House on Penn St. We are presently designing and doing a complete overhaul of existing beds. We also have just received a special \$5,000 grant from the Tarrant Regional Water District which will afford us some nice amendments to the gardens there. Also, with the Director of Historic Fort Worth Jerre Tracey, I'm in the planning phase and developing the back acre of the property. This effort will include restoring the terrace beds in back, planting some of the heirloom plants from Thistle Hill, and creating walking trails and a beautiful green space for the general public. This project will allow for many teaching opportunities for school groups and other organizations.

It's a very exciting time for us!

I invite you to the McFarland House to see our work when we gather on Wednesdays, 8 a.m. summer hours and 9 a.m. winter hours. The McFarland House is owned by Historic Fort Worth and houses their offices on the second floor. Like Thistle Hill, it has tours and is available for private gatherings when scheduled. It also leases for major films, the last being a scene from the popular series "Yellowstone."

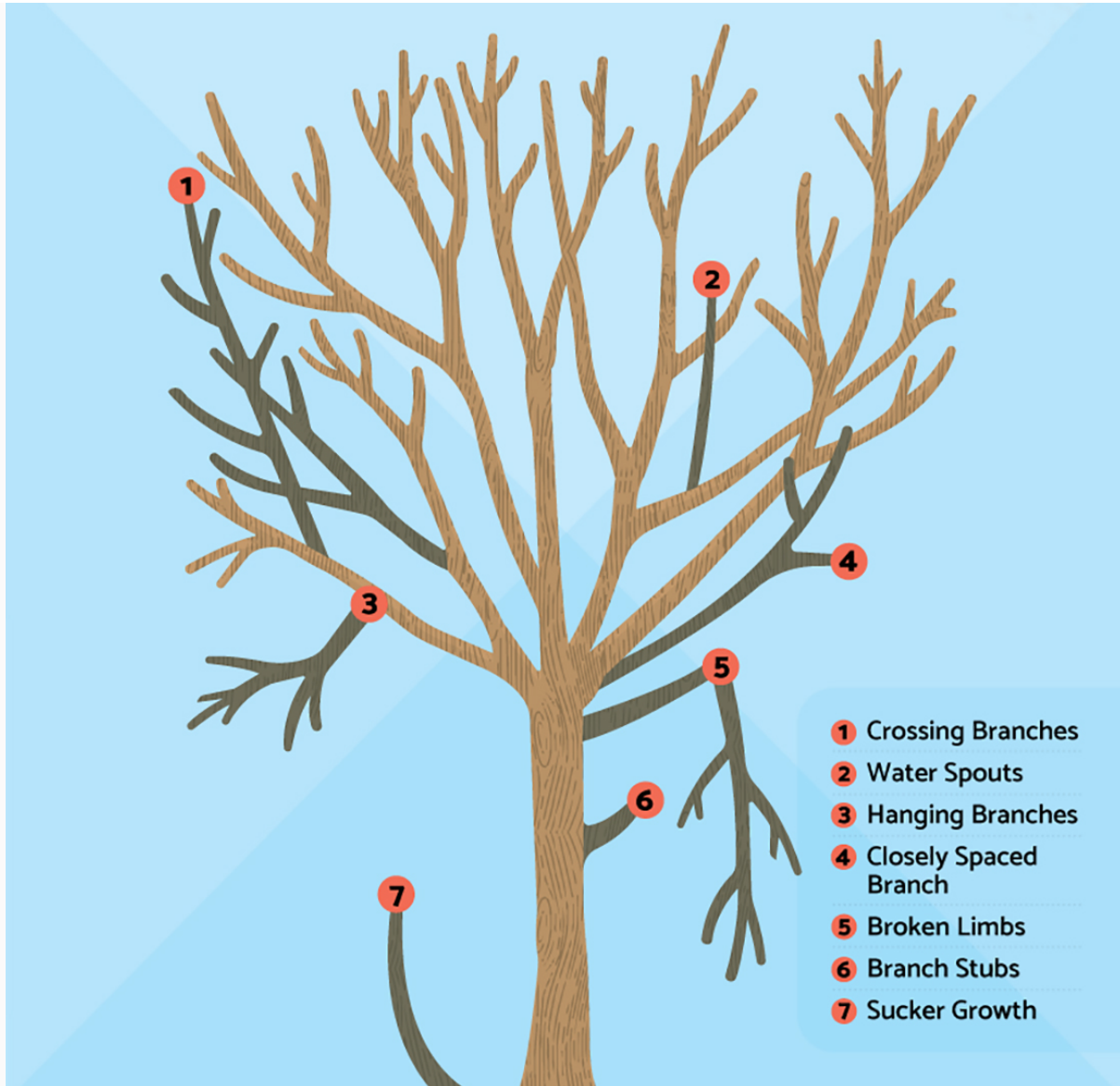
In closing, the interns and master gardeners, as well as Junior League volunteers, who helped me on all these projects will forever hold a special place in my heart. Without them, none of what was accomplished would have ever come to fruition.



Keith Olmsted (standing center) with his team of volunteers.

[BACK](#)

DO IT YOURSELF PRUNING



Tree Pruning

By Patsy Miller

This time of year, many of our plants and gardeners go dormant. But it is a good time to look at our trees and see what needs pruning.

Pruning is year-round, depending on the type of work and the species of trees. The best time for pruning oaks, particularly those in the red oak subgenus which are more susceptible to oak wilt (live oak, Shumard, Texas Oak, blackjack, pin oak, swamp oak, northern and southern oak, cherrybark, willow and black oak) is between mid-July and mid-February. According to the Texas Forest Service, "Avoid pruning or wounding oaks between February 1 and July 1. This is the time of year when oak wilt fungal mats are most likely to form and nitidulid beetles are active. If a nitidulid beetle

carries oak wilt spores from a fungal mat to a fresh wound on an uninfected oak tree, the fungus could become established in the disease-free tree. The least hazardous periods for pruning are during the coldest days of midwinter or extended periods of hot weather in mid- to late summer." Pruning in spring and early summer is not recommended.

Traditionally shade trees are pruned during the dormant season during the winter before bud break. This time of year it is easy to see the branches that need to be removed.

Just because you have a tree, it doesn't mean you need to prune it. Reasons to prune include:

- Remove dead, broken or damaged limbs
- Remove competing, crossing or rubbing branches, limbs creating a hazard or causing damage
- Low limbs in area requiring proper clearance
- Young trees needing corrective action
- To help induce more flowers or fruit
- Special circumstances, such as HOA request or construction around the tree

Ideally, you should try to limit the removal of existing foliage to less than 30 percent of the existing canopy. Young trees are generally more tolerant of extensive pruning. Removing larger limbs creates larger wounds, and larger wounds take longer to close.

Types of pruning include:

- Cleaning — removing dead, broken, diseased or dying limbs
- Raising — removing lower branches to create clearance for objects or activities
- Thinning — selective removal of branches to allow for more air or light
- Reduction — reducing the overall size of a tree or branch. This is not topping, which should never be done
- Structural — corrective pruning performed on young trees to achieve proper form
- Special effects, such as espalier

Assess your ability or desire to do the pruning yourself. And the size of the tree. It is much easier for the homeowner to prune a smaller tree. There are different kinds of pruning cuts for the effect you want to achieve — reduction cut, heading cut, removal cut. If done incorrectly, it can affect the health of a tree or its shape in the future.

Planning the cuts you want to make and in what order reduces the number of cuts

you need to make.

If tackling the job yourself, review tree pruning guidelines. Neil Sperry has directions in his latest book “Lone Star Gardening,” available at <http://www.neilsperry.com>.

You can review pruning at the A&M site <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/landscape/proper-pruning-techniques>. And there are YouTube instructions to help. Remember, the information is best if the source is a certified arborist.

One way to help cut down on some of the pruning chores is to select the right tree for your space. Live oaks and Southern Magnolia are too large for most of today’s yards. Remember that trees grow. Consider the tree’s surroundings, power lines, gas lines, easements and property boundaries. What is the area used for? If it is the children’s playground, a big tree might not be desirable. Likewise, if you love a lush lawn, turf and trees aren’t good friends. Constant pruning to keep a tree to fit your space is not the answer.

Do some research on a tree’s habits. Does it drop limbs easily or produce volunteer sprouts? Select a variety that meets the maintenance you want to do.

[More Pruning Tips](#)

Thinking about getting a professional? Check the accompanying story.

[BACK](#)

PROFESSIONAL PRUNING



How to Hire an Expert

by Patsy Miller

If you don't feel equipped to do your own pruning, and especially if it is a large tree or a valuable, mature tree, you can always look to the professional for an opinion and an estimate.

Craig Fox, forester with Fort Worth's Parks and Recreation Department, offers these suggestions for choosing the professional.

Look for a Certified Arborist

Look for an individual or business with International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Certified Arborists on staff or is a member of the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA). That's not a guarantee that everyone will be an expert capable to teach a college course on arboriculture, but it shows a dedication to continuous learning and a devotion to the profession. There are some excellent arborists that don't have certification or do side jobs outside of their company, but those aren't easy to find. The ISA has a tool for locating certified arborists:

<https://www.treesaregood.org/findanarborist/arboristsearch> and TCIA has a lookup tool: <https://www.tcia.org/TCIA/TCIA/Directories/TreeCareCompanyDirectory.aspx>.

Educate yourself first

Refresh your brain on stub cuts and flush cuts. Too many people pay far too much money for poor tree work. Most people seem to judge the quality of work based on how well the crew cleaned up afterwards because they have no idea what proper tree work looks like.

Ask the right questions

- Ask what kind of trees you have in your yard, especially if you already know the correct answer.
- Ask what kind of work they'll be doing and what equipment will be used—a pro will use terms like pruning, crown or canopy reduction, canopy raising and have specific goals. “Chuck in a truck” services will usually say something very generic like “cut your trees.”
- Ask what the plan is for the limbs/debris that is being pruned or removed. Unless you're hiring someone doing a side job and saving you a bunch of money, pros will haul off everything and most will use chippers for all but the largest logs.
- Ask how long they've been in business or performing tree work.
- Ask about their company's insurance and what it covers.

Check for good equipment

“Chuck in a truck” will usually have a load of ladders to do tree work. Ladders can be appropriately used for tree work in certain situations, but it's increasingly rare. Most outfits will use climbers with ropes and saddles (never boot spikes unless the tree is being cut down), lifts and/or bucket trucks.

Get an estimate

Most companies will charge based on an hourly rate and may have a minimum number of hours (removals may be based on the size of the tree and complexity). Pros are really good at estimating how long the job will take. Fox says he hasn't kept up with hourly rates, but expect something in the \$200-\$350/hour range (maybe more depending on the situation).

[BACK](#)

DEM BONES



Creating Your Landscape

By Toni Moorehead, TCLP

When Jack Frost stops by for a visit and renders your perennials brown, crispy remnants of their former glory or when Old Man Winter drops buckets of the white stuff all over your garden, what is left?

Dem bones. Garden bones, that is. Garden bones get to shine when the blooms have faded. Garden bones consist of those things in our gardens that give structure and strength, height and depth, bringing interest whether our gardens are a riot of color or there's not a single bloom in sight.

Just as our bodies would be a lifeless pile of skin, so our gardens would look dead without

bones. So just what are these bones that I speak of? They are the permanent structures in our gardens that add interest no matter the season, such as trees, evergreen shrubs, walkways and paths, ponds, fountains, statuary, arbors, trellises, gazebos and benches.

Just as “the leg bone is connected to the knee bone and the knee bone is connected to the thigh bone,” so garden bones connect different areas of our gardens, tying them all together. Garden paths, whether made of stone, gravel, mulch or grass, allow the visitor to meander throughout the garden. Well-placed seating invites visitors to sit a spell.

Even the layout of garden beds, whether in long sweeping curves or formal straight lines, constitutes this skeleton of the garden. Good bones give your garden visual appeal even before a single plant has gone in the ground, as well as after the plants have gone dormant. The sweeping lines of garden beds stand out when the blooms have taken a back seat. Ornamental grasses can provide winter interest.

When there is no competition from foliage, the beauty of tree bark comes to the forefront, as well. What once went unnoticed in our gardens now captures our attention. Large boulders seem to pop out of the landscape once again when the surrounding plants have gone dormant.

Evergreen trees or large shrubs have good form as well as function. Not only do evergreens anchor a garden design and give it structure, they can serve as a screen from the neighbors, as a windbreak from harsh northern winds, or just as a backdrop for deciduous shrubs and/or perennials. Shrubs with berries, such as hollies or Mahonia, provide food for birds in the winter.

Trellises and other garden ornaments add interest to our gardens whether they are dusted with snow or accompanied by foliage or blooms.

During this time when our gardens are dormant, look around at those blank spaces that are left behind, and see where you can incorporate some garden bones. It just might breathe a little life into your garden, even in the dead of winter.

Instagram: @tonisignaturegardens

FaceBook: Signature Gardens

<http://signaturegardens.blogspot.com>

[BACK](#)

THE GARDEN IS SPENT



Fall Garden

By Ruth Haley Barton

In fall
the garden is spent
having given its all.

Cucumber vines lie exhausted on the ground
Tomato plants list to one side
Cornstalks stand dignified and empty
Sunflower faces droop earthward,
shades of their former selves.

All that has not been claimed lies moldering in the dirt—

a bruised tomato, a forsaken pepper...
a misshapen pumpkin, a trampled stalk of beans.
What came from the earth is returning
to the place from whence it came.

There is an intimacy here,
in the fall garden,
gazing at living things in their demise.
I want to avert my eyes, avoid this tender grief.
Is this life or is this death? I cannot tell.

Ah, but there is beauty here
amid all this death and dying.
To have given one's self fully
at least once
that is the thing.

To have spent oneself in an explosion of color
to have offered one's body for food,
one's very soul for nourishment...
It is an unseemly generosity,
beauty of another kind.

In fall
the garden says, "This is my life, given for you."
And we are fed.

©Ruth Haley Barton, 2012.

This poem was borrowed from the Transforming Center Beyond Words blog.

<https://transformingcenter.org/>

[BACK](#)



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