

Tarrant County Master Gardeners



TEXAS A & M AGRILIFE EXTENSION SERVICE

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Master Gardeners Have Gone to the Birds!

By Patsy Miller

The school mascot for Fitzgerald Elementary School in Arlington is the firebird, but another bird is vying for mascot of Fitzgerald's Outdoor Learning Environment.

In November, Fitzgerald Master Gardener volunteers began noticing a cute little bird hanging around as they watered and weeded. The bird had dark brown wings, edged in white and a chartreuse or yellowish tummy which I learned is its fall plumage. It was not afraid of us at all.

As I watered our shelves of potted plants and stood on a ladder to reach the very top, there was the bird on a top shelf post watching me. Later when I was back on ground watering our plant beds, the bird dive bombed me several times. Was it wanting my hair for a nest?

From then on, the bird showed up at our twice-a-week work days and Fitzgerald Lead Leeann Rosenthal started to test its friendliness. As she tried to take its photo with her phone, the bird jumped on her camera! She held out her hand and the bird went to her. The bird joined us in our prairie land and jumped on our backs as we were weeding.

So what was this bird? One guess was a junco, perhaps a vireo or flycatcher. The answer came from birder Karen Rice who many know from Citizen Forester and Grapevine Garden Club. It was an Eastern Phoebe, so named for the fee-bee sound it makes. It eats insects, which explains why it was always around as we watered. The watering wand stirred up the insects, as did the weeding. As we would watch the Phoebe and encourage it on our fingers, it would absent-mindedly snatch passing insects and moths. So maybe it wasn't just our personalities. We learned that there were many unseen insects inhabiting our plant beds.

Story continued on next page.



Close-up of Eastern Phoebe



A bird in the hand – is a good thing, says Leeann.



Leeann checks to see if the Phoebe likes herbs as well as insects .

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Master Gardeners Have Gone to the Birds continued

The next step was to give it a name – which we haven't yet settled on. We don't know what gender it is, so some call it Phoebe and others call it Fitz. Either one could work!

But we have continued to learn more about our new friend. It could hang around all year long. It is described as a "plump bird with a large head." It is typically 5.5 to 6.5 inches in length. Phoebes typically place their mud-and-grass nests in protected nooks on bridges, barns, and houses, which adds to the species' familiarity to humans. These birds favor open woods such as yards, parks, woodlands, and woodland edges, which is probably why it likes the Fitzgerald garden which is far removed from the school building. Or maybe, like humans, it just likes the attention.



Above: Eastern Phoebe visits as we work on the raised beds.

Right: Smile and say Grasshopper." Fitzgerald Lead Leeann Rosenthal tries for that perfect close-up.



A Note From Eleanor Tuck



Broken Promise. Never thought I'd have to confess to such! Some of you helped me to celebrate my 80th birthday where we were all dressed up--spiffy!! And I promised that if I lived to 90, we'd go to Billy Bob's. Well, I am sorry but that won't be feasible so my sons are planning a virtual/ZOOM get together and you are all invited to celebrate on 1/24/21.

The connection and time will be forthcoming--hope to see ya soon,
ET

Thank You to Richard Kurth by Rita Hottel



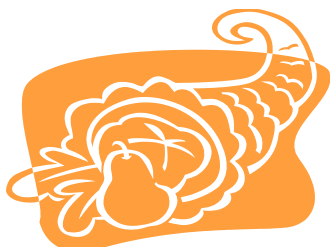
Richard Kurth put the finishing touches on the pergola in the Herb Garden at the Demonstration Garden in early December. We would like to extend a huge thank you to Richard for the lovely work of art!

Robert Faires Reports on Vegetable Donations from the Enabling Beds

Here is a list of the vegetable donations from the enabling beds for 2020. I plan on repeating these donations, (and hopefully more) in 2021.

Eastside Ministries on 5929 E. Lancaster. 25 pounds of potatoes, 25 pounds onions, 20 pounds of squash, 20 pounds of cucumbers, 5 pounds of tomatoes, and 6 plastic bags of collards and mustard greens.

Beautiful Feet Ministries on 1709 Hattie Street. 35 bags of assorted greens (collards, mustard, kale, dill, bak choi and toy choi) and 1 bag of sweet peppers.



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A Note From Dave Wilson, Coordinator of the Garden Resources Exchange

Thanks to the pandemic, we have been unable to meet face-to-face and enjoy exchanging and acquiring seeds, seedlings, bulbs, and all manner of inorganic garden resources and objects at our monthly meetings. I am anticipating a better future.

To that probability, I encourage all members to save seeds and other resources which we can share when we are again able to meet. Please save seeds that are well-dried and packaged in such a way as to discourage rot or other contamination. Please label packages with plant name and growing instructions for those of us who are challenged seed identifiers. A picture of the mature plant will be helpful for anything that is mildly exotic or unusual.

Our leadership council is working on a way to provide an exchange system that will be safe and effective should "live" meetings be precluded by continuing pandemic safety concerns.

Looking forward to sunny days and spring showers!

Remembering Esther Procter—submitted by Gay Larson

Esther Carrie Procter, 79, of Weatherford, passed away on Wednesday, December 2, 2020 at her residence. She was born December 27, 1940 in Bowie, Texas to Johnie Lawson and Marie Young Cole. Esther and her husband owned and operated Procter's Plantland and R & E Plants for over 52 years. She enjoyed supporting her children and grandchildren's sporting events. An avid gardener, Esther certified as a member of Tarrant County Master Gardener Association in 1998 with her sister Joann Glenn and was a founding/honorary member of Parker County Master Gardeners Association in 1999.

In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her infant son, Delton and her brothers, Johnie Jr. and Harry Cole.

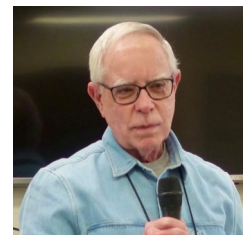
Esther is survived by her husband, Ross Procter; children, Marie Procter of Lufkin, Dina Procter of Brock, Tina Ward of Brock, Brenda Dance of Weatherford and Doug Procter and wife Melody of Aledo; grandchildren, Jacquelyn Ward and partner Charles Baker of Weatherford, Joe Ward and wife Shelby of Allen, Larissa Prim of Colorado Springs, Carrie Prim of Weatherford, John Ross Prim of Weatherford, and Adelyn Procter of Aledo; siblings, Robert Cole and Betty of Weatherford, Marty Levins and husband Jim of Pahrump, NV, Lola Tivis of Weatherford, and Joann Glenn and husband Dale of Weatherford.

Family is asking that all memorials be made in donations to The Parker County Master Gardeners Association. Please mail checks in memory of Esther Procter to Parker County Master Gardener Association, 604 N Main Street, Office 201, Weatherford, TX 76086.



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Letter from Our New President—Dick Pafford

Happy New Year everyone. I hope you have enjoyed the holidays and been able to stay safe and healthy. I know this has been a difficult year, but I am very impressed that most of you have been able to get much more than the required hours. You have accomplished the impossible by adapting to our virtual way of learning and teaching.

In 2021 we will continue to have many challenges not only with the COVID, but also with Steve Chaney's retirement. I know Laura will do a wonderful job as his replacement and I know you will continue to be supportive and help when we need you.

Please continue the guidelines that Agrilife has recommended. Wear your mask and practice social distancing and get outside when the weather permits and enjoy your gardens.

I look forward to seeing you at least virtually in 2021 and hopefully getting to work with many of you. As your new President, I will do everything I can to continue to make this one of the best Master Gardener organizations in the state.

Dick Pafford

Drive By Pictures



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Things to Do in January - From January 2007 Newsletter

January is definitely the coldest month of the year. When I was growing up I spent the better part of winters in the Midwest trouncing through snow that was up to my knees, shoveling walks and drive-ways, with earmuffs, hooded parka, and thick gloves covering every inch of my body. Now, in Texas the most I ever see is +20-degree nights and one inch of snow one time during the winter. It is still enough to ice the windows. The furnace is working overtime to warm the house and extra covers are on the bed. The coffee maker faithfully makes the coffee as usual so who wants to go outside?

Planting and Transplanting. The winter sea- son provides an excellent time to plant or transplant major trees and shrubs. The plants will adapt quickly and will be well established prior to spring growth and prior to summer heat. If you have a Japanese maple that was getting too much sun during the past summer, it can be moved in January or February while it is fully dormant. Dig a large hole and get as much of the roots as you can. Be sure to fill in around the roots with soft soil to eliminate air pock-ets which can fill up with water.

Pruning: If you prune now, just remember hollies and other berry producing plants usually produce berries on two-year-old wood; thus, if you remove current or new growth, you also eliminate the ber-ries. Do not prune azaleas as you will be removing potential spring blooms

Roses: It is too early to plant roses. Wait until March. You cannot get them now anyway. Hold off on pruning roses until February. Climbing roses should be trained but not pruned. Weave the long canes through openings in trellises or arbors and tie them with twine or plant ties. Cultivate vegetable garden areas: You might as well start cultivating garden areas and re- moving weeds and grass roots. This will save time preparing for the mid-February planting. Turn the soil and amend some compost.

Prepare for February planting of cool sea- son annuals: Loosen the ground and prepare the soil and add in peat moss or compost. Some choices include hollyhocks, coneflower, poppy, annual phlox, larkspur, gladiolus and dahlia. Some will come back on their own. There is something magical about plants that like your garden so well that they choose to come back each year for another visit. Larkspur prefers full sun to partial shade in very well drained soils.

Protect those tender plants: Be prepared to cover and protect those tender plants for a hard freeze. Have the materials on hand so you do not have to make a desperate run to the store at the last mi-nute.

Soil test for pH and P, N,K: Phosphorus, Nitro- gen and Potassium are the Big Three and you need to know your soil conditions. Get a soil test kit from the Extension Office.

Make Plans: Make flower and vegetable gar- den plans now. Work on your landscape changes and plan what you want to change, plant, and spend. January is a great time for dreaming and planning and preparing soil for a new year and a new season.

Trees & Shrubs: Remove mistletoe while it is still young. Clip small twigs down low on the tree where it is growing. That will kill the upper growth. There is no spray that will control it without harming the host tree. Be on the look- out for scale insects on camellias, euonymus, hollies, photinia, fruit and shade trees.

Evaluate winter damage: Even though you can see that foliage may be damaged, a recovery may occur come spring and the plant will leaf out. Stem areas may be damaged, yet the plant may respond from the root system, best wait until early spring to prune or eliminate.

You thought you were going to keep that large recliner chair warm all winter didn't you?

Choosing Plants for Indoors

Sharecropper January 2009

Choosing plants to enjoy in your house can result in pleasure or an endless chore. You should select only those foliage plants that appear to be insect and disease free. Remember that it is easier to purchase a plant with requirements that are the same as your residence than to alter the environment of your home or office to suit the plants.

LIGHT

When examining light levels for plants, consider 3 aspects of light: (1) intensity, (2) duration and (3) quality. Light intensity influences the manufacture of plant food, stem length, leaf color, and flowering. House plants can be classified according to their light needs, such as high, medium and low light requirements.

WATER

Over- and under-watering account for a large percentage of plant losses. The most common question home gardeners ask is, "How often should I water my plants?". There is not a good answer to this question. Differences in soil or potting medium and environment influence water needs. Watering as soon as the soil crust dries, results in over-watering. House plant roots are usually in the bottom two-thirds of the pot, so do not water until the bottom two-thirds starts to dry out. Water the pot until water runs out of the bottom which also washes out all the excess salts.

TEMPERATURE

Most house plants tolerate normal temperature fluctuations. In general, foliage house plants grow best between 70° and 80°F. during the day and from 60° to 68°F. at night. A cooler temperature at night is actually more desirable.

FERTILIZING

The majority of plant fertilizers are about 20-20-20. As a general rule, use a fertilizer recommended every 2 weeks from March to September. During the winter months fertilizer may not be added at all because reduced light and temperature result in reduced growth. Soluble salts will accumulate on top of the soil and around the pot at the soil line forming a yellow to white crust. Soluble salts result from fertilizer dissolved in water that will cause root tips to die. Be sure to wash it out.

LEAF DROP

The cause may be one or a combination of factors. In all, there are about 10 common causes of leaf drop.

Insufficient natural light.

Shock at transplanting.

Sudden change in temperature or light.

Too much fertilizer.

Drafty locations from placing them under or around air conditioning and heating vents.

Leaky space heaters or stoves using natural gas, butane or propane and carbon monoxide.

Infestations of insects and diseases

Packed soil due to infrequent repotting.

Moisture fluctuations from watering frequency.

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Choosing Plants for Indoors continued

PLANTS POISONOUS TO PETS.

Click on "Toxic Plants" on <http://www.grreatideas.com> and also check the list at <http://www.ansci.cornell.edu/plants>. Keep in mind that sources disagree on some plants. Do not rely on this list if you have pets. Always do your research and check with your veterinarian.

Plants poisonous to cats and dogs must be avoided if there are pets in your home. While in some cases, just parts of a plant (bark, leaves, seeds, berries, roots, tubers, spouts, green shells) might be poisonous, this list rules out the whole plant. If you must have any of them, keep them safely out of reach. Should your feline or canine friend eat part of a poisonous plant, rush the pet to your veterinarian as soon as possible. If you can, take the plant with you for ease of identification.

Pet Friendly Plants:

African Violet, Alyssum, Basil, Bamboo, Begonia, Buddleia (Butterfly Bush), Calendula, Canna, Cast Iron Plant, Catmint (*Nepeta faassenii*), Chamomile, Coriander, Cosmos, Cress, Dahlia, Dianthus (Pinks), Dill, Dorotheanthus (Ice plant), Fern (Boston, Ball, Feather, Sword), Forget-me-not, Heliotrope, Hens and chickens, Hollyhock, Hyssop, Impatiens, Jasmine, Lavender, Lettuce, Marum (Cat-Thyme), Miniature Rose, Mint, Pansy, Parsley, Rose, Rosemary, Shasta Daisy, Snapdragon, Spearmint, Spider plant, Sunflower, Tarragon, Thyme, Umbrella plant, Verbascum, Violet.

--by Derald Freeman

Five Steps to Your New Water Conserving Landscape By Steve Chaney, Texas Cooperative Extension, Tarrant County Sharecropper January 2008

It's that time of the year and as you're trying to decide what your New Year's resolution is going to be, why not make it a "New Landscape" that conserves water. We had lots of rain this year, and everyone has forgotten about the previous years of drought. Why not start the New Year off with some easy yet effective conservation ideas.

The first step of a successful garden is planning, and the winter is the best time to get your ideas on paper. Find a nice day and go out and really look at your yard. Find where the grass is weak, where is the shade, where is the sun. Do you have enough room for the things you want, or do you have areas that you don't like anymore? Ask yourself where your private area is, where your service area is, where your family area is? To properly plan, you must first ask all of these questions and then try and find the answers. You may have additional questions depending on your location and needs. Take a moment and write the questions and the appropriate answers down so you will remember. You will need them for the next few steps.

The second step is to take a soil sample in each of the areas that you want to improve, i.e., sod, garden, flower beds, trees, etc. You can get a soil sample kit at your local Extension Service office. Simply follow the directions, and you will receive a comprehensive analysis back in 10-12 days. The health of your soil and the type of your soil will make the difference between a successful landscape and one that struggles forever. So many of our soils are high pH clays that have very small amounts of organic material left in the soil. Lack of organic material contributes to minimal nutrient levels as well as to a minimal water holding capacity. In most cases, the simple addition of well finished plant derived compost is all our soils

Five Steps to Your New Water Conserving Landscape continued

need.

The third step is choosing the best plant material for your area, perhaps even your particular neighborhood. If you're new to an area, take some time to look at the homes in your area and see what grows well. Consult your local Extension office and Native Plant Society for plants that grow well in your soil type with minimal maintenance and water. With a little care and time you can plan a plant palette that will give you all the colors and texture you could ever want with minimal water usage. Wouldn't it be nice to have plants that bloom or have foliage color all year round and never have to water or fertilize?

The fourth step is to choose the most efficient irrigation system for your landscape. In several of our arid western states, they no longer allow any water to be sprayed in the air. We now have the drip system technology to use minimal amounts of water while maximizing efficiency in our landscape. It is increasingly easy to convert an irrigation system to a drip system with simple household skills and tools in your garage. You can find qualified help on-line or at many of your local nurseries. All you have to do is ask.

The fifth and last step is to mulch, mulch and mulch. The use of a well-chosen natural mulch has been found to be our best, slow release fertilizer. The addition of 3" of mulch to your beds will help reduce the soil temperature, reduce weed seed germination, and improve soil moisture retention as well as the slow-release fertilization we could all use in our landscapes.

As you can see it takes lots of planning and forethought to make a great water conserving landscape, the success of your garden depends on it!

Award Recipients for 2020 by Debby Stevenson

Master Gardener of the Year—Theresa Thomas

Master Gardener Extra Mile—a tie between Randy Walker and Debra Rosenthal

Master Gardener Educator of the Year—Claire Alford

Intern Master Gardener of the Year—Craig Holland

Intern Extra Mile—Andrea Curreri

Mod Squad Intern of the Year—Paula Owen

Mod Squad Extra Mile—Lance Heiskell

Rock Award—Sue Kelley

Certificate of Appreciation for devoted service to Theresa Thomas, Outgoing President

Certificate of Appreciation to Kelly Perry and Lance Heiskell for their help in filming, zoom, and going virtual.