TARRANT COUNTY

Master Gardeners

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

VOL. 1, ISSUE 1 FEBRUARY 2023

Master Gardeners receive 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

THE DEMO GARDEN

A place for inspiration

MORE

WINTER GARDEN PRUNING

A trim or a haircut

MORE

GREAT GARDEN SOIL

Where do I start?

MORE

SPRING VEGETABLES

Seeds or Transplants?

MORE

GARDENING QUESTIONS

Ask a Master Gardener

MORE

ROSE ROSETTE DISEASE

A Treatment or Cure?

MORE

DEMONSTRATION GARDEN

At all times of the year, the Demonstration Garden stands as a testament to hard work, volunteerism and a community working together to create beautiful and inspiring spaces. Located at 2300 Circle Drive in Fort Worth, the garden welcomes visitors at any time, but especially when master gardeners are there to answer questions.

Upon entering the garden through an arched iron sculptural gate, visitors can meander through the herb garden, perennial garden and the enabling garden, designed for individuals who have difficulty kneeling and bending down to a ground-level garden bed. The elevated beds show that gardening can be done by anyone, no matter their physical abilities. The rose garden, Earth Kind gardens, and compost areas inspire and educate, while the grasses in the back of the garden show that movement and texture can be added into both a prairie landscape and a home garden. Each of the 20 garden areas has a QR code posted so visitors can learn more.

Vegetable beds can be rented for $30 a year, with the soil and water supplied by the Demo Garden. Bursting with life in the peak growing seasons, the vegetable beds are full of loofah squashes, eggplants, melons, collards, oriental beans and amaranth grains, many of them planted by Burmese gardeners who have been growing delicious food for many years in the vegetable beds.

In 2006, Tarrant County Master Gardeners joined with the Resource Connection and

transformed a 2-acre plot of grass into the beauty it is today. Within only a few months, a greenhouse and red storage barn were donated and other materials were gathered. Soil, compost, manure, tools, seeds, plants, fencing, watering supplies, paving stones and more, were found to create a working garden. Today, 20 distinct garden areas are brimming with hundreds of varieties of flowers, grasses, herbs, fruit trees, and berries. At all times of the year, the colors are vibrant and robust, and the plants support a variety of insects, butterflies and other pollinators.

Garden groups often hold meetings in the demo garden, and visitors can enjoy lunch at the picnic tables under the shade trees. Anyone can volunteer too, but don't start clipping without one of the garden area heads giving you the OK. Sign in at the greenhouse so we know who you are. More than 400 master gardeners in the Tarrant County chapter volunteer at least four hours per year, and the 20 project leaders of each garden area put in many more, adding up to thousands of hours of volunteer service. Stop by the garden and leave relaxed and inspired.

BACK

TIME TO PRUNE

by Toni Moorehead TCMG, TCLP

To prune, or not to prune...that is the question. And the answer is...YES! Generally speaking, ***mid-February*** *is* ***the*** *ideal time for pruning most* shrubs, perennials, groundcovers and ornamental grasses, but some plants are pruned later in the spring. So before you go Edward Scissorhands on your landscape, let's go over some specifics.

The reason mid-February is the best time for major pruning is because the average last freeze date in North Texas is mid-March. Three to four weeks prior to that time is the best time for pruning. Your plants have been storing energy all winter long. Pruning will stimulate new growth, so by the time the new growth comes, chances are the deep freezes will be a distant memory. Prune too early, and new growth could get burned by a late freeze.

Speaking of freezes, North Texas experienced a deep freeze in late December and an ice storm in late January. Just as we learned in the freeze of February 2021, patience is in order to determine the full extent of any damage to some shrubs and trees. For shrubs with freeze damage, when the new growth starts to emerge in March and April, cut away any dead stems above the new growth. For trees, a certified arborist may need to be called in to determine the extent of any damage and do any pruning needed.

For shrubs that need general size control, some respond well to formal shearing, such as **Yaupon Holly**. Cut them in a more natural “dome” shape, though, and do not cut in at the bottom, creating the “meatball” look. For shrubs with a looser form, such as **Abelias**, it is best to prune by hand, selectively pruning branches toward the interior of the shrub to keep them full and compact, but with a more natural growth habit. If you only shear the tops of the shrubs, where the new growth will come, the interior and lower branches will become bare over time because they are not getting enough light.

Nandinas are pruned differently than most shrubs. Never shear the sides or tops. Take the tallest canes, follow them down to the ground, and prune them near the ground. New growth will come out at the point of pruning, keeping the plant full and compact. Try not to prune more than a third of the shrub at once.

If shrubs have gotten very overgrown or have been poorly pruned in the past, drastic rejuvenation pruning can be done in this February time frame. Ideally, we want to plant the “right plant in the right place.” Choose shrubs based on the mature size of the shrub and the available bed space. Applying the “right plant/right place” philosophy will keep your pruning chores to a minimum each year.

Ornamental grasses need to be cut down to about 3-6 inches to remove the old growth before new growth starts. One tip is to use rope or bungie cords to tie up the grass before pruning. This keeps the trimmings in a neat bundle for easier cleanup. Prune **roses** back by about half their size in mid-February. Prune out all dead wood and any stems pointing toward the center of the rose. As I mentioned before, some

plants are pruned later in the spring. Wait to prune spring-blooming shrubs, such as **Forsythia, Flowering Quince, and Azaleas,** until *after* they bloom.

“Stop the Chop” -- Please DO NOT prune the tops of **crape myrtles** - a/k/a "Crape Murder.” Prune only dead or crossing branches overhead, as well as any suckers that have grown at the bottom. **Groundcovers** like Asian Jasmine and Purple Wintercreeper, as well as Liriope and Mondograss will benefit from a late winter prune. Mow or weed-eat down low before new growth emerges in March.

Perennials can be pruned after the first freeze in the fall or early winter, or you can leave perennials standing that have wildlife benefit (for instance, seedheads for birds). If you did not prune your perennials last fall, mid-February is the time to prune them to get ready for spring growth.

See my “Late Winter Pruning” newsletter at www.signaturegardens.blogspot.com for additional pruning tips for specific shrubs and perennials. Also see more tips on my Facebook “Signature Gardens” and Instagram @tonisignaturegardens. Also, check out http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/landscape/proper-pruning-techniques/ for even more information on proper pruning techniques.

So grab those pruners and get busy (be sure to use clean and sharp tools to make the job easier). As an added bonus, did you know that most gardening activities burn about 300 calories per hour? Now you can work off those holiday goodies and get ready for all of the spring treats in your garden. Remember: A day without dirt under your nails is like a day without sunshine. Happy Gardening.

BACK

GREAT GARDEN SOIL

Soil preparation is the Holy Grail of gardening, but many of us don't know how to get beautiful rich soil so plants can thrive. The first step is to take a soil sample to find out what nutrients are available to your plants. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service then will help you discover the appropriate treatments you can take to improve your soil. Visit: https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/assets/environment-natural-resources/soil/soil-testing/

How to take a soil sample:
First, using a trowel, scrape away any non-decomposed plant tissue and materials. Cut a core or divot six inches deep into the soil and place it in a clean plastic container. Repeat this step 8-10 times. Mix all the collected soil thoroughly, removing roots or other plant materials and place 2-3 cups of soil in a quart-sized resealable heavy gauge plastic bag. Air dry the soil if it feels wet to the touch.

If you want to test several areas of your property, repeat that process and place the soil in separate plastic bags and label each bag with a permanent marker, using simple key words to indicate the specific area to be tested. For instance, your labels might be: Front lawn, vegetable garden, perennial bed, etc.

Mail your soil sample via USPS to:
Soil, Water and Forage Testing Laboratory
2478 TAMU
College Station, TX 77843-2478

All other couriers (FedEx, UPS, etc.), send to:
Soil, Water and Forage Testing Laboratory
2610 F&B Road
College Station, TX 77845

Payment must be included with the sample(s). Send a check or money order, payable to Soil Testing Laboratory. Also, email the laboratory at soiltesting@ag.tamu.edu to confirm your email address so they can send the results to the correct email.

You may want to start with the Routine Analysis (the base test for basic fertilizer recommendations) which will indicate pH, sodium, nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and more. Cost: $12 per sample. Don't send cash. More advanced tests will analyze for micronutrients, organic matter, texture, etc. and range from $19-91. A $3 mail fee will be charged for results mailed back to you via USPS. You can get results for free via email.

What to do with the results:
The results will indicate where your soil tests high, normal or low in specific categories, and will make basic recommendations for fertilizer or organic matter additions. Nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium are the Big Three to pay attention to. Whether you decide to use natural or organic fertilizers, building healthy soil with compost, mulch and amendments will provide the basis for a healthy and productive garden. Remember: The best fertilizer to use is the one based on a soil test. Utilize Soiltesting.tamu.edu/webpages/calculator.html to figure out proper amounts to apply.

For additional help, you will find many articles about soil health at http://publications.tamu.edu/.

BACK

SPRING VEGETABLE GARDENING

By Harold Annis

Growing tasty and nutritious vegetables in North Texas can be a fun and rewarding experience. To be successful you will need to follow a few simple rules and make sensible decisions. The following is a brief summary of my experience gardening seriously in Tarrant County since 1990.

Garden Site: You can be successful whether you plant in the ground, in raised beds or in pots. If you plant in the ground, soil prep is important. Add plenty of compost (at least 3 inches) on top and till or spade it in as deep as the tiller or the shovel will go. If you are starting new raised beds, put a layer of newspaper or cardboard on top of the soil and build your beds on top of that. If you are planting in pots, the bigger the better. Smaller pots take daily watering and restrict root development.

Soil: A soil test obtained from Texas A&M will be informative as to what fertilizer you should use to improve your soil. http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/ The easiest and best soil amendment that you can use is compost. You can make your own, buy it by the bag or by the truckload from one of the many garden material companies.

Crop Selection: Plant what you or your family likes to eat. Some vegetables do not do well in the North Texas climate and soil. However, choosing the right variety of the vegetable you want to grow will make a big difference in your success. There is a complete listing of vegetable varieties that do well in North Central Texas at https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/publications/veg_variety/.You will have better luck finding these varieties at local garden centers. The key to success is to pick varieties that suit your plant location and provide high quality soil. Vegetables that do well from plants that you purchase include tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and cold crops, such as broccoli and cabbage. Plants that do well from seed include corn, peas, beans, lettuce, spinach and squash.

Planting Time: Plant your garden as early as possible in the Spring and Fall so the vegetables will grow and mature in ideal conditions. On page 8 of the following guide, there is a table of planting dates for most vegetables. In North Central Texas, the average last frost happens on March 16. THE GUIDE also will expand on the summary that I have presented in this article. Plant onions in mid-January, potatoes and broccoli in mid-February, most others in mid-March, and southern peas and okra in early April.

Sun: If your garden does not receive full or nearly full sunlight, try growing leafy crops, such as leaf lettuce, mustard and spinach, or root crops, such as beets, radishes or turnips.

Water: If your garden is close to a water source you will have better success. Drip irrigation with mulch over the water lines is a great way to water. If you can water at the base of the plant and do not spray the foliage, you will reduce diseases such as mildew and blight.

Garden Plan: Map out your garden plot so you know where you will plant each vegetable type. Place crops according to their mature size; don't crowd the plants. By doing a plan you will save space for the vegetables that are planted later such as southern peas and okra. If you are gardening in a raised bed where you do not have defined rows, it is best to place the tall vegetables on the north side of the garden.

Summary: To improve your chances of success in vegetable gardening, provide as much sun as possible, improve the soil, choose recommended varieties and plant as early in the season as possible and in accordance with the planting guide. You will find a wealth of information in the Aggie website: https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/

BACK

GARDENING QUESTIONS

Gardening can be a complex endeavor, even for experienced gardeners. So how can you get reliable information about gardening, composting, caring for landscapes and more in north Texas? Contact the master gardening help line, by calling 817-884-1944 or by emailing tarrantmg@ag.tamu.edu.

All questions are welcomed, whether simple or complicated, and one of the 400-plus Tarrant County Master Gardeners will respond with a science-based answer. Because we can't know everything, the MG will usually say to the caller "Let me research that and get back to you with an answer." We research the answers by adding .tamu.edu to searches, i.e. how do I get rid of weeds in my St. Augustine grass.tamu.edu. That technique will bring up researched-based educational sites, instead of .com resources which we do not typically use.

Our Help Line is supposed to be staffed Monday - Saturday from 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., but we are all volunteers, so some shifts are not always covered. Therefore, if your call is not answered by a live person, the calls will go to voicemail, which are converted to an email and will land in our Inbox. The caller should get a response within a day or two, either with a return call or an email if callers leave their phone number and email address.

Some frequently asked questions and typical answers:

- How can I get my soil tested? Go to http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/files/urbansoil.pdf. Also read more information in this newsletter.
- How can I become a Master Gardener? Visit our website http://www.tarrantmg.org/about_us.html for detailed information about the excellent training and volunteer program.
- How do I care for my ailing tree? Do I need an arborist? We might suggest you go to https://www.treesaregood.org/
- What is wrong with my grass? I have weeds, insect damage, fungal damage, etc. Go to https://aggieturf.tamu.edu/.

Is any question too odd to ask? Of course not. Usually, we will know who to call to find the answer or we will locate resources so you can do more research. One interesting example from Nora Coalson:

Just after the freeze of February 2021, a woman called from California. She and her husband had bought replacement shrubs to bring back to Texas. She didn't want the plants confiscated at the Texas border when they drove back home. What should she do? The master gardener knew that only 18-wheeler truckers are stopped at the state borders, but she told her "First, don't bring any citrus plants or trees back to Texas because the citrus greening disease can impact the Texas citrus industry." The master gardener then called the Texas Department of Agriculture, who transferred her to the person who handles that very thing. He said the caller should contact the California Department of Agriculture, which would send someone out to inspect her plants and issue a "phytosanitary certificate" indicating the plants are safe to transport. The master gardener delivered that information to a grateful caller.

BACK

ROSE DISEASE

Rose rosette disease has devastated the commercial U.S. rose industry in recent years, and the damage has been severe in both public and private gardens in Texas. Rose rosette disease is caused by the eriophyid mite which spreads the virus. According to plant pathology scientist Madalyn Shires, the disease affects all common roses, and no cure or successful treatment is yet in sight. Gardeners may notice an abnormal maroon-colored “witches broom” appearance with many stems emerging from one node, thorny stems and misshapen leaves. They have no option other than to remove their rose bushes, including the roots, when the plants first show symptoms.

In Texas, the rose rosette disease (RRD) has spread as far south as Houston, as far west as Odessa, and is present in most counties in the central and eastern parts of Texas. High humidity and high temperatures encourage the growth of the mite population, leading to increased spread from plant to plant. More RRD symptoms are seen in the summer and fall in Texas than other times of the year and may be seen all year in areas such as College Station and Houston, where warm temperatures and high humidity occur much of the year. Rose breeders at Texas A&M have been working hard to identify genes in rose varieties that might be resistant or immune to the rose rosette virus (RRV). When crossing the rose varieties Brite Eyes and Stormy Weather, some potential resistant genes have been identified, but more research is needed to determine long-term resistance.

Some other roses have been identified as resistant to RRD, meaning the rose can still be infected with the disease, but is very slow to develop symptoms. These roses do still host the virus and can cause infection in other roses if mites feed and acquire the virus. However, in areas such as North Texas, it is possible that these roses could enable rose lovers to enjoy symptom-free roses for a longer period of time. Some of those varieties are Caldwell Pink, Bayse's Purple, Chuckles, Cherokee Rose, and Repeating Swamp Rose.

While rose rosette disease research has been slow the last few years, new funding should have it moving forward again.

Madalyn Shires is a SDSU Extension Plant Pathology Specialist

BACK