

Tarrant County Master Gardeners



TEXAS A & M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

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Nature by Nature by Greg Grant

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A lot goes through my brain on a daily basis. Taking a writing class and a speaking class at SFA only add to the stimulation. Here lately, I've been pondering why I garden. It does take precious time, dwindling energy, and scarce funds. I'm sure different folks have different reasons, but for me, it boils down to the fact that I love nature. After all, gardening is just nature after a being forced into a Miss Manners class and being guided by an overly focused hand. But are manners and submission the way to go? I think not. I believe most gardeners have too many rules, set expectations too high, and often garden for the wrong reasons.

I train a new Master Gardener class each year and can tell you that many of them are more excited about being labeled a "master" gardener and improving the appearance of their plants and properties at home than they are volunteering to educate. Showing off for friends and neighbors has always been part of gardening. But these days, I think we need to look at a bigger picture and garden in a more holistic fashion. The top reasons for gardening should not be winning yard of the month, claiming a blue ribbon in the flower show, or producing the largest pumpkin in the world.

Tarrant County Master Gardeners

Nature by Nature continued



Master Gardeners



Goldenrod

We have a plethora of problems going on our planet right now, including pollinators, pesticides, pollution, and property use. Nature needs our help in the worst way, and we gardeners are best suited to help. As I sit here writing this, I'm looking out the window from my paternal great grandparent's old farmhouse onto my quarter acre pocket prairie. My dad calls it my "weed patch" and offers to mow it for me each year. I do mow it. Once a year, each January. This allows a full season's worth of growth, including summer and fall blooming perennials that don't get a chance on our ever-coiffed roadsides and right-of-ways. Right now, I'm looking at masses of goldenrod waving in the wind, fluttering with bees, butterflies, and assorted other bugs that I don't recognize. Yes, it's tall. That's why they named it *Solidago altissima*! Complaining about its height is akin to complaining about the size of an oak tree or the speed of a rabbit.

In September, I spoke at a *Small Properties, Big Ideas* program hosted by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service between Lufkin and Nacogdoches. Many of the attendees were new property owners and I can tell were approaching land use from the traditional "dominance over nature" approach passed down from our earliest European settlers.

One lady was frantic about dewberries and goldenrod taking over her property. Another was beside herself about all the limbs that fell into her forest after last winter's ice storm. Still yet, one of the speakers disagreed with my statement that all native plants were equal. He was looking at them from a wildlife/hunting aspect. I was including all animals, insects, earthworms, fungi, bacteria, etc. Every native plant is truly a cog in the wheel supporting some other form or forms of life. Most native plants are host plants for some species of butterfly or moth whose larval stage caterpillars feed baby birds, wasps, etc.

Nature by Nature continued



Buckeye larva

I'd like to thank Cheri Mills, Nancy Taylor, Theresa Thomas and Eleanor Tuck for providing content to the Newsletter.

Lorie Grandclair-Diaz

Each of these attendees was thinking of their property as a garden, farm, or park when they should be thinking about them as potentially functional parts of a larger ecosystem. Nature is a good teacher. We should listen to her more. In addition to every plant and animal being of equal importance, we also know that death is just as important as life. Without death there would be no succession and replacement plants, no primary cavity dwelling woodpeckers, and no secondary cavity dwellers like bluebirds, chickadees, titmice, and nuthatches. Without death, there would be no life.

But perhaps the most important lesson of all is that nature isn't neat. There are no lawn mowers, string trimmers, blowers, rakes, compost piles, herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, or Master Gardeners in nature. Everything balances out. Some plants and animals are living while other plants and animals are dying. Aggressive plants take up space while slower growing ones move in later, like a PBS *Nature* version of *The Tortoise and the Hair*. Limbs fall, fires take place, insects come and go, and all once-living things break down into humus to produce new living things.

The week before I wrote this, I was walking across the campus at SFA and noticed the sidewalk was covered with dismembered pinecones tossed down from ravenous squirrels. It made me smile. Yes, it was a "mess," but it was natural mess that was happening because the landscape was conducive to wildlife. A multitude of pine needles were dropping because we were in an early fall drought; but that's OK. Pine trees always drop needles at the end of the summer. Some I mow and some I rake to use as mulch; but I never fault them for falling. We shouldn't be any more upset with falling pine needles as we are with falling crape myrtle blossoms, colorful maple leaves, or bountiful pears. Stuff falls. Just ask Newton.

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Nature by Nature continued



Visiting botanists.

The day before my campus trip, I had several botanists visit from the Smithsonian to take hickory samples from my property including the somewhat rare nutmeg hickory. It made me proud to be a steward of not a garden nor a hickory orchard, but a hardwood forest where I let all native plants grow and work things out each year on their own. Live and let live. Nature drives the bus.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying gardeners need to be messy, leave limbs in their yard, or allow weeds to run amuck, but we do need to change how we garden. We need to grow. As Mrs. G says, "Be a part of the solution, not a part of the problem."

Sow diversity. Have as many native plants as possible. Create habitat. Make sure your landscape provides fruits, nuts, seeds, shelter, and water. Remember, native insects fuel the ecosystem, so try to limit pesticides. They kill stuff. Being neat and tidy is OK, but don't overdo it. It's OK to look pretty. Think of an English cottage garden. Grow natural. Bee happy!

Meet Brittney Meyer



I would like to introduce myself; my name is Brittney Meyer, and I am the new Home Horticulture Agent in Tarrant County. I am very excited to be here and can't wait to see what the future holds.

I have a Bachelors in Horticulture and Crop Science from Sam Houston State University, with a Master of Science in Plant Pathology and Microbiology from Texas A&M University. Therefore, I have the knowledge to help with not only what and how to grow a beautiful garden or landscape but help determine what is potentially wrong with your plants when they are not performing well. I have worked in the commercial landscape industry and public gardens for 6 years. Realizing the gap between consumers and industry/research I wanted to be a part of Extension to help bridge that gap.



I grew up in agriculture and have loved every minute of it. Growing up I rode horses, raised cattle and swine, and played outside in the dirt at every opportunity. I love to learn and believe learning never stops! Though my degrees are both in horticulture I have a diverse knowledge base that includes both small and large animals, as well as construction. I love to read and play board games, or any other nerdy thing. I have 3 ridiculous cats that drive me insane, but I love a ton. If there is anything you would like to know about me just ask!

I am passionate about agriculture and gardening education in both adults and youth within the county. I look forward to working with current members to improve the program and bring in new members and ideas for the future.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out via email brittnay.meyer@ag.tamu.edu or call me at 817-884-1296.

Tarrant County Master Gardeners

Beautiful Bark: Beyond Flowers, Fruit, and Foliage

by Derald Freeman
Sharecropper October 2009

As the trees lose their leaves in fall, many landscapes are left looking bare in winter with perennials having disappeared altogether. Using plants with interesting bark adds sculpture, texture and interest to a sparse winter landscape. Though often hidden during the growing season, a tree's beautiful bark finally comes to center stage in the winter. Bark characteristics range from bright colors to exfoliating texture to a quilt-like appearance and can create a dramatic impact in winter as well as adding a subtle accent to the landscape the rest of the year.

Trees with exfoliating or peeling bark include crape myrtle, Lacebark elm, river birch, paper-mulberry, shagbark hickory and paperbark maple to name a few.

Crape myrtle: Noted for exfoliating bark with color ranging from tan to gray to a cinnamon-colored bark on different species, the crape myrtle smooth bark exfoliates, flaking off in irregular patches to reveal various shades of brown to gray. This bark is especially noticeable in the winter months when the tree is leafless. The 25 foot tall 'Natchez' with exfoliating light brown bark peels in sheets and reveals the most beautiful cinnamon bark underneath. It is exceptional and has become a favorite.



Lacebark Elm: This tree produces rich green and glossy foliage with serrated edges and is accented with the exfoliating bark, which is outstandingly attractive. The bark on a Lacebark Elm peels off in a puzzle like pattern and exposes rich shades of gray, green, brown and orange. The best quality of the Lacebark Elm is its ability to withstand the harshest growing conditions by growing well in a wide range of soil types.

Other trees with interesting bark:

The American beech, which has a beautiful white-gray bark. The sycamore with bark on the upper portions of the tree and gray- brown to reddish exfoliating bark near the base.

Cucumber magnolia has an attractive gray bark which becomes ridged as it matures.

Paper Birch is the most striking species of Birch has brilliant white bark.

Yellow birch has peeling amber-gold outer bark and wintergreen-flavored inner bark.

River birch, found from the Great Lakes south to Florida and Texas, prefer shade.

Paper-bark maple turns a beautiful red-brown color as it exfoliates. The young tree has a gray-brown color that peels off like paper. River birch is well known for its beautiful bark, which can be gray-brown or red. Striped maple, a small tree, has gray, green, and tan molting bark.

Plants with interesting bark and form add character to an otherwise dull winter landscape.

The Texas-sized Cicada Killer



From Insects in the City, posted by Jeremy Farmer
Sharecropper September 2014

Over the past month or two you may have noticed dime-sized holes appearing in your yard or garden. While many insects (beetles and ants, for example) dig holes, few are so conspicuous.

Cicada killer wasps are easy to spot due to their large size; they are typically 1-1/2 to two inches in length. The female cicada killer digs homes for her young in home lawns or in any sandy, bare, well-drained soil exposed to full sun. One of the signs of summer in Texas, and throughout the eastern U.S., is the cicada killer.

Although female cicada killers can sting, they usually ignore people and are rarely aggressive. On the other hand, males are often territorial and may act aggressively. Here's the deal though. Males don't possess stingers and are completely harmless. Like some "guard dogs", their bark.

Why are they pests?

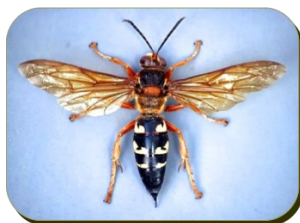
Even though they are a solitary species, females are known to nest in large numbers in sandy areas like embankments if the soil is dry and capable of holding a big enough population. The large number of nests and wasp activity can become a nuisance. Also the adult wasps, especially the males defending their territory, can be scary to both children and adults.

Why are they good?

Although their name suggests otherwise, the adults of this species are peaceful nectar feeders and occasional pollinators. The females capture cicadas, helping keep the neighborhood a little quieter during the summer. It is the immature, or larval, stage that feeds on the cicadas brought to the burrow by the adult female. After she finds and stings her cicada prey, she turns the victim on its back, straddles it, and drags it or glides with it to the burrow. One burrow may have several underground cells, each one provisioned with a paralyzed cicada (or two or three) and a single egg is laid before the cell is sealed off. This cicada will serve as a food source for the young as it develops. The typical development for a cicada killer is 10-11 months, with the offspring emerging next year.

Should they be controlled?

Generally cicada killers should be considered harmless and don't need to be controlled. If the nests cannot be tolerated, a small amount of insecticide dust, such as is sold for control of ants or ground-nesting wasps can be applied to each cicada killer burrow. In garden beds, if you are willing to wait out their summertime nesting season, consider covering the site with landscape fabric and mulch. This should prevent emergence next year and discourage adults from using the site again.



Tarrant County Master Gardeners

Interns Enjoyed a Tour of Silver Creek Materials



Input by Cheri Mills and Nancy Taylor.

Above: Dick Pafford, Cheri Mills, Judy Matlock, Nancy Taylor, Teresa Munn, Janie Dorcas, Deborah Willingham, Betty Russell, Diane Musfeldt, Ann Viola, Tamara Gorski and Faye Swindle.

The above group of interns and advisors had a tour of operations of Silver Creek Materials on September 15.

Since 1983 Silver Creek Materials has served the Greater DFW area as one of the top-producing surface mines in the region and one of the largest composting operations in the state of Texas. The family-owned organization operates as a source-separated recycling facility, accepting organic feedstocks and inert materials for land reclamation projects. Their soil, mulch, and fertilizers rival industry leaders as they integrate their compost, creating a rich and robust result. Silver Creek Materials is a service-driven organization with a mission of cultivating high-quality products and long lasting relationships that will enrich the surrounding community for years to come.

These Master Gardeners enjoyed seeing Silver Creek's composting area that includes an odor control mist system in order to be good neighbors to the surrounding housing developments by controlling any odors that may arise. While there they observed a delivery of out of date produce from a local source that was then incorporated into their composting system.

Silver Creek accepts tree trimmings from local homeowners and landscapers, screen it, and then turn it into mulch, thus keeping it out of landfills.

Meet Master Gardener Transfer Terry Anseman

I lived In Louisiana most of my life, but turned to gardening when I was in San Francisco for 3 years. The climate, flowers and my toddlers inspired me to play in the dirt and I love it.

I am a charter member (1998) of the initial MG organization in Lafayette, LA. The challenge of being involved in instituting the first master gardener group in Louisiana was invigorating. I tried growing vegetables but found I did not have the discipline to attend to them so turned to perennials and eventually to natives.

Moving to Fort Worth in January presented new challenges - mostly the heat and lack of water. I'm so happy to be close to family and join your MG group. There is so much to learn - I'm accustomed to "gumbo mud" but not the red clay - which I thought was concrete. I look forward planning a native garden and developing my yard.

Other than gardening my other passion is "pet therapy" with my 2 dogs (a cavalier and newfoundland) and have connected with a local hospice group and am visiting with clients in nursing homes.

Your group of master gardeners have been very welcoming and I look forward to volunteering with y'all for years.



Fun Bug Facts from ET. (Eleanor Tuck)



Insect/human muscle comparison: Humans have 1,647 muscles compared to insects having only 656. Now think: it takes 43 human muscles to frown and only 17 human muscles to SMILE!!

Backyard Sanctuaries

Nancy Taylor's Backyard Sanctuary in Gordon, Texas.



Photo 1 Oxblood Lilies didn't fail to bloom after being divided and moved last Spring.

Photo 2 American Beautyberries provide the perfect backdrop for my shady antique glider.

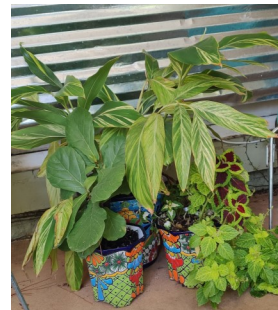
Photo 3 Inland Sea Oats contribute color, texture and movement to my fall porch pumpkin display.

Gay Larson's Backyard Sanctuary in Aledo, Texas.



Fall is the time for watching all the efforts in gardening come to a close. Sitting here on our deck and watching the fall flowers and the lake is our sanctuary every afternoon.

Lorie Grandclair-Diaz's Backyard Sanctuary in Fort Worth, Texas.



Since our backyard is also the dog yard, in ground gardening isn't an option. We have made a sanctuary with container plants, colorful pottery and funky furniture. Instead of grass we have cedar mulch. My husband loves to get the smoker going while he watches football.