



As the Garden Grows



A Publication of the Gonzales Master Gardeners

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We Will Soon Say Good Bye to 2015

As the holidays approach, it's a time to reflect upon the year that has once again flown by. It has been a great year for Gonzales Master Gardeners. The board wishes to thank each one of you who have participated in making our many programs and projects a great success. We can not do all we do without your support.

The First Graders had a great time with their spring gardens as we tried a new format for the gardens under the exceptionally great leadership of Arline Sachacherl. Teaching the second graders about the parts of the plant under the leadership of Gail Johnson in the spring and Dee Sengelmann in the fall has been great. The third graders are learning about resource conservation this December as they plant their walnut seeds soon under the leadership of Gail Johnson. Behind the scenes preparing for these school programs allows us all to learn and figure out how best to work with the children of Gonzales.

We had a great Spring Plant Sale even though the weather didn't cooperate. It's always fun seeing what each of us can grow for the sale. For me, I love working with everyone in the Greenhouse and seeing it full of plants. It's so rewarding to interact with the public at the sale and to share our knowledge and love for gardening.

In June, we had our first Garden Tour for the Master Gardeners. It was a lot of fun and we will do this again. Are you willing to let us visit your gardens and landscapes in the new year?

Our new website is almost completed and just waiting for each of you to enjoy and keep up with what we are doing for the community. Thank you Jo Swiger and Gail Johnson. I hope that you are all reading the newsletter that is published each month. Many people help with this endeavor to bring educational information and news about our great organization.

We graduated Class #5 in May with eight students graduating as Certified Master Gardeners. They have been very active in joining in on all the programs and projects. Class #6 is off to a very good start with eight enthusiastic students. Thank you David DeMent and class assistants for making the classes so informative and fun.

Our noon lunch meetings once a month has been a great success. There was a lot of good food and so many door prizes as we learned about new plants and shared ideas. We look forward to another great year.

Thanks to all of you for your continued support of Gonzales Master Gardeners Programs. We can not do it without a lot of team work. Each of you have something to contribute, so step up to the bat and show us what you can do for the team.

*Merry Christmas and Happy New Year
Fran Saliger*

Will Left Over Charcoal Change the World?

(Submitted by Gail Johnson)

What if I told you that a newly discovered soil additive could

1. Make clay drain better
2. Make sand hold water better
3. Hold nutrients better in the soil
4. Cause plants to grown both tops and roots faster, and
5. Sequester carbon in the soil thereby reducing greenhouse gases

Would you want some? Several years ago, I was mesmerized by an article in a popular science magazine about a group of archaeologists who had identified a man-made soil amendment that was over 2,000 years old in the Amazon. It was dark and rich and the scientists noted that farmers who were farming on this substance were having much better results than those that weren't. The farmers told them that the soil came from the ancient ones and pottery shards mixed in the soil were dated to several thousand years. The archeologists couldn't figure it out and since, in those days, the US lagged far behind Europe in soil science, they sent samples to Europe for examination.

The substance they found has been called a number of different things—Columbia black earth, ancient black soil—and most recently—biochar. Tests had proven that it was, in fact, the remains of organic matter that had been burned. Probably underground. Probably at very high temperatures. Studies showed that it has some amazing properties. It increases the nutrient holding capacity of soil and it makes clay drain and sand hold water. Further, it sequesters carbon in the soil reducing greenhouse gases. Soon the popular press kicked in and biochar was being touted as the solution to everything that is wrong with our air and soil. Organic farmers were digging trenches and burning any left-over organic matter they could find. There was an International Biochar Initiative and commercial businesses sprang up selling charcoal amendments for soil.

So what's the truth about this stuff? What do we need to know? What's the current science?

The current science is this: *samples of the ancient earth increase the nutrient holding capacity of soil and it makes clay drain better and helps sand hold more water. It may well sequester carbon the soil as well.*

The first problem is that biochar is not that easy to make and that the quality of the biochar and the characteristics of the soil it is added to determine its action in the soil. Plus how beneficial it is depends how why you have added it. It boils down to how well this stuff works depends on what it was made from, the temperature at which it was made, the environment in which it was made and what the characteristics are of your soil. There is no doubt that if you could get your hands on some

the actual ancient biochar, it might work wonders for your garden if your soil is similar to the soil the ancients were amending. The second problem is that no one really knows how the ancients made it.

The American universities are now into the hunt and a particularly interesting study I saw done at Rice University demonstrated that the water holding and releasing properties claimed for modern produced biochar are apparently true. In addition, it does seem to have nutrient holding capacity. It's ability to sequester carbon, though, has still not been proven. Further, a recent study at the University of Southampton found that while biochar stimulated more plant growth by stimulating the plant to produce more natural growth hormones, it also seemed to suppress the plants immune system making it more susceptible to pests and disease.

So stay tuned as science unravels this potentially beneficial substance. I find it fascinating that something from such an ancient culture in South America has the potential to do so much. Kinda' makes you want to hug an archaeologist, doesn't it?

Black Walnut Project

(Submitted by Gail Johnson)



By the time you read this, we will have planted a bunch of walnuts with the 3rd graders! We are in our third year of this program. As you know, last year we didn't have such good results from our nuts—a problem we are working with this year by gathering nuts from several different trees. We were able to gather nuts from three different trees in Waelder in November with help from Arline, Thomas, Jackie, Carolyn P, Gail, Nancy F (and I know I have left someone out.) We now have nuts from at least four trees. We hope to track the success rates of specific trees by marking the pots to identify the tree it came from.

We had a successful pot party last Tuesday and prepped 260 pots to receive nuts. With the help of Fran, Nancy F, Barbara, Carolyn P, Carolyn W, Lynette, Jackie and Gail, we did it all in about an hour and a half including emptying the old pots and unloading the milk cartons Nancy had arranged for us to borrow from HEB. Wow, you should have seen those milk cartons on the back of that truck. They towered over the cab.

We'll be doing a little different program this year, including a skit for the kids on natural resource conservation and we will let you know how it goes. We are also going to double seed the pots to try to endure that we get a larger number of trees. I've also heard some interest from the community this fall in our efforts to restore black walnuts in Gonzales. It's great to know that folks out there are paying attention and appreciate the effort.

Learning about Seeds in the New Year

(submitted by Arline Schacherl)

With the end of 2015 in plain sight, it's time to introduce seeds to first graders at East Avenue Primary. This will be the second year to plant only in the spring with students at the Children's Garden. This year there are only eleven first grade classes. That means that not all the raised beds will be planted by students. The row of beds closest to the Eggleston House probably will be planted with something different by Master Gardener volunteers.

There are five different sessions with the first graders; all sessions are scheduled on Thursdays. Volunteers will be needed for classroom sessions and garden sessions. In addition to the scheduled dates there are alternate dates provided in case there should be bad weather or an unexpected change in schedule of other school activities.



Mark your calendars now!

The **first classroom session is on January 7 beginning at 9 a.m.** (Alternate date is January 14.) The Tiny Seed, written and illustrated by Eric Carle, will be read to the students by the MG volunteer. Students will write their names on wooden egg-shaped markers to be placed at the end of each raised bed. Following this session teachers are encouraged to help their students create plant markers for the seeds they will plant.

The **second classroom session is January 21 beginning at 9 a.m.** (Alternate date is January 28.) Using the overhead projector, the MG volunteer will show the students what the inside of a seed looks like. A

lima bean experiment jar will be left with each class so students can see the development of the seeds. Each teacher will be given a master copy of "Inside a Seed" booklet for students to use as they explore the seeds' development. The student-designed plant markers will be picked up by the MG volunteer.

Session #3 is planting seeds at the Children's Garden on February 4 beginning at noon. (Alternate date is February 11.) Two classes will arrive every twenty minutes to plant seeds for 2 root crops (radishes, carrots) and 2 leaf crops (lettuce, spinach). Each of the four teams in a class will work with one MG volunteer to plant on one-half of a raised bed which will be designated with the student names on the egg-shaped marker.

Session #4 is a visit to the garden on March 3. (Alternate date is March 10.) Beginning at noon two classes arrive every twenty minutes to check the progress/growth of the different crops, notice the difference in the leaves, and observe any variations between the beds.

Session #5 is harvesting the produce from the garden on April 28. (Alternate date is May 5.) Beginning at noon two classes arrive every twenty minutes to harvest the vegetables. Each team of students will work with one MG volunteer. Produce will be divided among students at the garden to take home.

To get the garden ready for planting there will be a **work day on Saturday, January 16** at the Children's Garden to weed, add compost and clean up around the raised beds, put in the string grid for square-foot gardening, and perhaps add another layer of mulch around the beds. We'll probably start around 10 a.m. Please bring your garden tools. Alternate date for work day is Saturday, January 23.

The students are always very excited to learn about seeds and then to plant and watch the changes that take place. To volunteer please contact Arline by email (ajrinehart@gvtc.com) or phone 830-857-0134. Please indicate which date(s) you will be available. If you plan to participate for all five sessions and the work day, just indicate with "all." If at all possible, please notify Arline by the end of December.

Tree Sale Update

(Submitted by Gail Johnson)



There will be a **Tree Sale Meeting January 5 at 1:30 pm** at PACE. This is an important meeting where we will be discussing the latest developments in seed gathering, growing, and seed and tree sources. We will be mapping out our strategy for the year and hopefully finalizing our seed gathering plans.

Members have been busy this fall gathering nuts and seeds. At the next **members meeting on January 7, 2016**, let's swap whatever extras we have so we can get these in the pots. I am starting more seeds and nuts than I can grow on my own so I will be looking for members who want to foster some of these trees. Remember, the goal is to sell 250 trees, so let me know if you can foster trees.

Spring Plant Sale News



Mark your Calendars! April 2, 2016 is the date for the 2016 Spring Plant Sale. As you know this is the big fundraiser for GMG. Everyone's participation is needed whether it is growing plants, setting up the event, being on the SPS committee or just being there for the sale. The committee met on Nov. 17 to set up sub-committees for the event. We still need someone to head up the Children's Activity Booth, Food Booth, and MG Information Booth. The grow teams are already busy growing vegetables, herbs, perennials/native plants and houseplants. Grow Team sign-up sheets or on the bulletin boards at PACE. Our next **meeting will be January 19, 2016 at 1:30 pm**. Contact Fran Saliger, SPS Chairman, for more information.

Annual Membership Deadline



Annual Membership dues of \$20.00 are due by December 31, 2015 for the year 2016. Mail checks to Pam St. John, P.O. Box 1651, Gonzales, Tx. 78629. Checks can be made out to Gonzales Master Gardeners. All certified MG's should earn 20 Volunteer Hours and 6 Continuing Education Hours by the end of December 2015 to maintain your status as a Certified Master Gardener along with paying annual dues. Those MG's from Class 5 do not need to earn additional hours until the year 2016 but dues should be paid. If you have any questions about your hours, please contact Fran Saliger at: fsaliger@gvec.net

Plant of the Month

(Submitted by Brenda Thompson)

Curly Spider Plant

Common Name: 'Bonnie' aka Spider Plant or Airplane plant

Botanical Name: *Chlorophytum comosum*

Family: Antheriaceae formerly Liliaceae.

Cold Hardiness: Root hardy in USDA zones 9 (8b) to 11

Curved cascading plant with green leaves that have white stripes along the edges. It produces numerous plantlets that are easily potted to produce new plants. The variety I have is Bonnie (pictured) which has curly leaves. Can be grown in filtered sun in pots, hanging baskets or in the ground although foliage will freeze (it will usually come back in the spring). It can also be grown as a houseplant. This plant has high heat tolerance and medium water requirements.





Area Events

(Submitted by Brenda Thompson)

San Antonio: Holidays in Bloom. November 27, 2015 – December 31, 2015

Beginning November 27 you're invited to experience Holidays in Bloom at the San Antonio Botanical Garden. 'Tis the season — celebrate holiday horticulture throughout our 38 acres. It's your chance to step away from the holiday whirlwind of traffic and malls and enjoy this colorful season in nature: Japanese Maples, Cypress Trees, Magnolias, Violas, Swiss Chard, Yaupon Holly, Bromeliads, Orchids, and (of course) Poinsettias! Capture holiday memories at the Garden, with picturesque backgrounds for family photographs.

McKinney: The Collin County Master Gardeners Association will host, "Spring into Vegetable Gardening" on **January 23**, from 9 a.m. until noon at the Landing at Myers Park and Event Center in McKinney, Texas. The focus of the program will be basic vegetable gardening in Collin County. Vegetable garden experts will discuss the specifics of when and what to plant in Collin County, with month-to-month guidelines for January through May planting. Attendees will learn about the importance of soil and soil preparation, how to propagate seeds, and which varieties of plants grow well in the area. Demonstration tables will be manned by Master Gardeners who have expertise in raised bed construction, vertical gardens, row covers, water conservation, rain barrels and drip irrigation, propagation, vegetable container gardening, and more. Representatives from Texas Pure Products will be on hand with examples of various soil amendments and mulches. Spend the morning with Collin County Master Gardeners learning how to grow delicious, nutritious veggies. Tour the potager and vegetable trial gardens at the end of the program with the volunteers who work in these gardens. This ambitious project began in the fall of 2013 with 16 raised beds, including two wheelchair accessible beds, and utilizes the principles and practices of Earth-Kind Environmental Stewardship. Registration will open online January 1, 2016 at the CCMGA website, www.ccmgatx.org. There is a \$10 per person fee to attend. The fee is payable at the door with cash, check or credit card. Registration is required to guarantee handouts and goodie bags. Contact 972-548-4219, or visit www.ccmgatx.org for more information. Doors open at 8:30 a.m. on January 23 at the Landing at Myers Park.

Dallas: "Master Gardener - Water Efficient Landscape Design" will be presented Wednesday-Friday, **February 17-19** at Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center, Building C Classroom & Large Hall, 17360 Coit Road, Dallas. Do you have a demonstration garden or school garden project that needs help to be water efficient? The Water Efficient Landscape Design Program for Master Gardeners provides you the skills to be your own landscape designer. You bring the project and we provide the guidance. You will learn basic landscape design techniques, native/adaptive plant selection, rainwater harvesting and efficient irrigation to help your project become the envy of water efficient landscapes. This is a three-day program with Wednesday and Thursday evening optional design workshops. This workshop is only open to current Master Gardener volunteers. One registration is good for two club members to attend with design materials to share. Additional design materials available for purchase. Registration: Only 20 Master Gardener participant spots are available for this training (10 groups). Registration is first come/first served basis. Cost: \$300.00: (includes lunch, dinner and design materials). For additional information please email Karen Sanders

at karen.sanders@tamu.edu. To pay by credit card please contact Clint Wolfe at 972-952-9635. [Registration Dallas.tamu.edu/courses](http://Registration.Dallas.tamu.edu/courses).

New Braunfels: The Comal Master Gardeners and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service will present their Spring Seminar featuring "Plants For All Seasons, Magnificent Monocots, A to Z" at McKenna Events Center, 801 West San Antonio Street, New Braunfels, on **Friday, February 19, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.** Registration is \$55 and includes lunch, snacks, and seminar handout. Dr. Flo Oxley, Professor of Biology at Austin Community College, will give an introduction to Monocots; Joanne Hall, owner of South Texas Growers of Bulverde, will give an overview of ornamental grasses in the landscape; Velia Sanchez-Ruiz, a member of the American Hemerocallis Society and a Region 6 Daylily Judge, will cover Daylilies; David Will, Texas Certified Landscape Professional and owner of Landscape Details, will speak on bulbs; Dotty Woodson an AgriLife Extension Specialist, will provide instruction on how to make a rain garden. Seating is limited, so register early. Registration forms are available at <http://txmg.org/comal/event/seminar/>. For additional information, call 830-620

2016 Texas MG State Conference.

Myers Park and Event Center, 7117 County Road 166, **McKinney, TX 75071**

May 17, 2016 @ 8:00 am - May 19, 2016 @ 5:00 pm.

<http://www.ccmgatx.org/txmg2016>

More information coming soon!



Austin Area Events-for more events in the Austin Area, go to <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/travis/>

San Antonio, Texas- for events in the San Antonio area got to <http://www.bexarcounymastergardeners.org>

DATES TO REMEMBER: (Check elsewhere in newsletter for details)

Unless otherwise noted, all meetings/classes are at

623 N. Fair Street (Plantarium: A Center for Exploration-(aka PACE)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
December 13	14 3 rd grade Walnut Program	15 MG Class- Rainwater Harvesting 8:30- 12:30 pm	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24		25
27	28	29	30	31	 January 1	2
3	4	5 MG Class Landscape Design-Wendy Lovejoy 8:30- 12:30pm Tree Sale Mtg. 1:30 pm	6	7 Noon MG Lunch/Mtg 1 ST grade Class #1 Session 9-11 am	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16 Workday at Childrens Garden 10 am
17	18	19 MG Class Plant Pathology 8:30-12:30 pm SPS mtg. 1:30 pm	20	21 1 st grade Class #2 Session 9-11 am	22	23
24	25	26 MG Class Vegetable Gardens with <u>Jerry Parsons</u> 8:30-12:30pm	27	28	29	30

PACE: 623 N. Fair Street-next to Gonzales Elementary School

Children's Garden: Corner of Moore and St. Louis St.-next to Eggleston House

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