



# Can You Dig It

Newsletter of the Piney Hills Louisiana Master Gardeners of Louisiana

Publisher Kathy Love

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## Piney Hills Louisiana Master Gardeners Impact on Webster Parish 4-H

100 years strong is the tradition of 4-H and whether it be showing animals, sewing buttons, building rockets, or gardening 4-H could not be successful without the help of volunteers. I have been a part of Webster Parish 4-H as a 4-Her, club sponsor and now an agent, and I see how groups such as the Piney Hills Louisiana Master Gardeners contribute to the success of programs.

Piney Hills Louisiana Master Gardeners help in such ways as giving demos at Discovering 4-H, a day for new 4-Hers to explore 4-H and what it has to offer. They also help at Fun Day, a day of educational activities for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders, used to help keep this age group interested and to build on projects offered in 4-H.

One project that I see as a being not only beneficial but very educational is the Junior Gardening Contest. This contest teaches students about growing a successful garden and all that goes into gardening. I have seen that the contest grows every year and we have repeat contestants. What a successful project for both 4-H and Piney Hills Louisiana Master Gardeners.

This year we reached out to a larger group of 4-Hers when we our Piney Hills Louisiana Master Gardeners gave a wonderful demo on the "1940's Victory Gardens." The members discussed why we needed the gardens, how we benefited and how to plant one. This one

project reached over 1500 young students from all areas. The students walked away with an understanding of how communities came together and united for a cause.

I am very honored to be a part of the 4-H program in Webster Parish and the Piney Hills Louisiana Master Gardeners. I look forward to working with such a wonderful group for years to come. Thank you for all the help your group gives and the continued support of the 4-H program.

Calvin Walker  
Assistant Extension Agent  
Webster Parish

## Saving Seeds

Seeds are literally worth more than their weight in gold and as such deserve proper care. Joan Smith, who served as the first president of the Piney Hills Louisiana Master Gardeners enjoys propagation as a hobby and recently shared an article from "Mother Earth News" on how to correctly store a collection of seeds.

First acquire a plastic storage bin with a tight-fitting snap-on lid or glass jars with tight fitting lids, the size depends on the amount of seed you intend to store. It is important to keep your collection in an environment where the temperature remains constant, preferably a basement, where winter temperatures hover around 60 degrees and summer temperatures rarely go above 75 degrees, somewhere that is cool, dry and dark. As a rule of thumb temperature and

humidity levels should not exceed 100. (Add the temperature and humidity together to reach this figure.) Silica gel can help with the humidity. You can buy silica gel at craft stores and home improvement stores. The author of the article even suggested storing your seeds where you work if it is air conditioned. You can also refrigerate or freeze your seeds in airtight containers. Just be sure seeds are thoroughly dry before you freeze them; seeds that are not completely dry or have been exposed to high humidity levels can expand and burst when placed in a freezer. In humid summer weather, place seeds you plan to freeze in an air-tight container with a packet of silica gel (now you have a reason to recycle those packets that come in shoes and purses that say “Do not eat”) for two days before you freeze them. In winter, when indoor humidity levels are usually very low, air drying seeds for a day or two before freezing them is usually sufficient.

Some people freeze all of their seeds, but unless you need to extend their normal life span, this may be a waste of energy. If you do refrigerate or freeze your seeds, be sure to allow the containers to reach room temperature before you open them – a step that keeps condensation from forming inside the containers, which the dry seeds will absorb as excess moisture.

Begin by setting aside seeds you collected last summer, which are probably floating around in a multitude of paper or plastic bags. Then divide the rest into categories that reflect each plant’s place in the garden. For example, you might start with three piles – veggies, herbs and flowers – and then divide each of those piles into cool-season and warm-season groups. As you sort, look at the packets and check them for dates. Toss seeds that are too old to germinate well, or those that you tried and didn’t like.

If you have a lot of seeds, you may want to further sort them into plant groups such as beans, salad crops or cucurbits. The main thing is to come up with a plan that suits your garden. Next, make lists of what’s in each pile so you won’t have to dig through your collection before you put together a seed order or get ready to plant (big index cards are great for this). Once you make your lists, use rubber bands to keep seed packets together by category. These can be stored in a file folder taped to the lid of the storage box.

If you have seeds you’ve collected that need cleaning, those cold days ahead would be a good time to accomplish this task. You can make or buy framed seed-sifting screens that have holes of various shapes and diameters, or you can make a homemade version with an embroidery hoop and several pieces of nylon net and tulle. To accommodate small or oddly shaped seeds, it’s easy to double up with either fabric.

Next comes a crucial task – sorting through the collected seeds to remove the small and the weak. With large seeds you can do this visually, by picking out any seeds that are small, discolored or broken. But with smaller seeds, you will get faster results by placing them in a clear drinking glass or jar with a half cup or so of water. Swirl the seeds and water for 30 seconds, then pour off the excess water along with any floaters – weak seeds will float because of poorly filled embryos or damage from insects. Dump the heavy seeds from the bottom of the glass onto a drying screen, paper towel or, in the case of seeds that develop a sticky coating when wet (as most mustard family plants do), a baking pan with a nonstick coating. Let the seeds dry for a day or two before packing them up and storing them in paper envelopes, pill bottles or airtight glass jars. Label and date each seed container.

Putting your seed box in order may take a few hours, but one immediate payoff is discovering that you need to get more seeds! There's plenty of time to buy them through a mail-order company (where you are more likely to get high-quality seeds than from racks in stores), or you can swap seeds with other gardeners.

Here's a super easy recipe to have cooking while sorting through your seeds. Please note: the black-eyed peas do not need to be presoaked.

### Suzanne's Recipe for Black-Eyed Pea Stew

1 ham hock  
1 pound dried black-eyed peas  
8 cups water  
1 large onion, chopped  
3 stalks celery, chopped  
1 medium green pepper, chopped  
1 ½ pounds cooked ham, cut into 1 ½-inch cubes  
1 bay leaf  
2 Tablespoons catsup  
1 Tablespoon Worcestershire sauce  
¼ teaspoon pepper  
¼ teaspoon hot sauce  
½ cup chopped fresh parsley (fresh only)  
1 bunch green onions, thinly sliced

Place ham hock in a small saucepan; cover with water. Bring to a boil, and cook 2 minutes. Drain.

Sort and wash peas; place in a large Dutch oven. Add ham hock, 8 cups water, and next 5 ingredients. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer, ncovered, 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in catsup and next 3 ingredients. Simmer, uncovered, 15 minutes or until tender, stirring occasionally. Stir in parsley and green onions; remove and discard bay leaf.

To Freeze: Cool; spoon desired portions into airtight containers, and freeze 1 to 2 months. To serve, thaw in refrigerator, and cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, until thoroughly heated.

Yield: 3 quarts.

## Changes to By-laws

Changes were recently made to the By-laws to help clarify the inactive status of members.

Current bylaws state  
“Article I. Membership Section A.  
Categories

3. Inactive membership may be granted to those Certified Master Gardeners who request to suspend their volunteer commitment for personal reason and are members in good standing with dues current.”

Expand #3. to read: Inactive members may be granted for a period of one year to those Certified Master Gardeners...

And add: If a 2<sup>nd</sup> year of inactive membership is requested, dues will be \$50. Two consecutive years of requested inactivity will be the limit. After that, they either become active again or will be dropped from the rolls.

Also add an item 5. to Section A  
To read:

5. For those Master Gardeners who have been dropped from our tolls, reinstatement would require a certification renewal form and dues of \$50.

“Article II. Dues Section A. Payment

1. Annual dues of \$20 shall be paid by active and inactive members.”

Expand #1. to read: Annual dues of \$20 shall be paid by active and inactive members *except that members requesting a 2<sup>nd</sup> year of inactive status will pay dues of \$50. Also those members who have been dropped from our rolls will pay reinstatement dues of \$50.*

## Looking Ahead

February 6-8 – N/W Home, Flower & Landscaping Show

February 14 – Buds & Booms

March 7 - Jonquil Jubilee in Gibsland, LA

March 14-15 Forest Hills Festival

March 28 – Spring Fling at Yellow Pine Inn

May 14 – 4H Fun Day

May 16 -Trails & Trellises Garden Tour

May 21-24 State Convention

June 2 – New Master Gardener Class