

The Seedling

Newsletter of the Northwest Louisiana Master Gardeners Association

An Affiliate of LSU Ag Center

www.nwlamg.org

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MG ACTIVITIES

FALL GARDEN DAYS

More than 130 people attended at least one of the four community garden days in the fall, including children, Master Gardeners and neighborhood participants, according to coordinator Grace Peterson. Each day had a theme: Community in Action at Mooretown Community Faith Garden, Fellowship in the Garden at Allendale Garden of Hope and Love, Breakfast in the Garden at Cedar Grove Garden of Love, and Meet and Greet at Highland Community Garden.



Highland Garden (Noel Memorial Methodist Church in background)

Gardening was not the only activity on Oct. 18 at the Mooretown site, 3811 Crosby: firemen checked people's blood pressure, professional drummer Ron Hardy led a drumming circle, and children painted a garden bench donated by the Montessori School of Shreveport.

Gardeners planted mustard, turnips, broccoli, garlic, pansies and snapdragons at each garden. Seeds and plants were donated by Lex Plant Farms, Akins Nursery and Feed Sales, LLC.

At Allendale, at North Allen and Buena Vista streets, the following Saturday, there were blood-pressure checks and bench-painting again, plus Ruby Small teaching crocheting. Community Renewal International provided a pizza lunch. MG Marie Toles helped children carve a jack o'lantern. And kids bobbed for apples.

On the first Saturday of November at the Cedar Grove site, Line Avenue at 73rd Street, Margaret Myles, garden coordinator, cooked a breakfast of sausage, potatoes, grits, eggs and fruit for the 40 who came. Children painted another garden bench donated by the Montessori school.

The Highland Community Garden, at Herndon and Stephens streets, has several rows of mustard greens that will be given to Noel Memorial United Methodist Church's Food Pantry. Caddo Magnet High School's Greens Club and the Young Adult Class of First Presbyterian Church also participated.

(More photos of garden activities are on p. 7.)

ADVANCED MG CLASS STARTING SOON

Grace Peterson will offer a course in Youth and Community Gardening Volunteer Training at SPAR's Valencia Recreation Center from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. on five Tuesday evenings: Jan. 27, Feb. 3, 10, 17 and 24. The center is at 1800 Viking Drive, next to Caddo Magnet High School.

Training will be intensive, with 10 hours of education and 10 to 12 hours of hands-on training. Those who enroll must commit to 18 hours of volunteer time in youth and community garden programs. Deadline for registration is Jan. 16, and class size is limited. There is a \$10 fee for resource materials. To register, email Peterson at gpeterson@agcenter.lsu.edu or call her at 741-7430, Ext. 1503.

The course is advanced Master Gardener training as well as a stand-alone program for those who are not MGs but want to work with youth and community gardeners.

DONATION FOR 4-H CAMPERS

The Northwest Louisiana Master Gardeners have donated \$1,000 to the 4-H Foundation for scholarships to summer camp in 2009. The money will be split between Caddo and Bossier parishes and matched by the LSU AgCenter's Chancellor's Scholarship, allowing 16 children to attend camp, said Karen Martin, northeast and north central regional 4-H coordinator for the LSU AgCenter.

Denyse Cummins said the donation arose from a desire to expand our goals by bringing children to nature and providing that opportunity to children who normally have little access.

4-H camp is open to 4th through 6th graders. About 4,000 kids attend each summer. The camp starts on a Monday afternoon and the campers go home Friday morning. Although all campers share activities such as sports, swimming, crafts and games, each camper also selects an educational track in which he or she will spend each morning. The track subjects are outdoor adventures, health and nutrition, wetlands and dramatic arts, science, and engineering and technology.

Camping helps boys and girls appreciate the outdoors, live together as a group, get along with others and appreciate people with different interests and back-grounds. While participating in activities, campers develop teamwork skills and learn life skills that help them become more self-sufficient and responsible, Martin said. Each camper is required to earn \$15 to attend.

2008 is the 100th anniversary of Louisiana 4-H and the 86th anniversary of 4-H Camp Grant Walker, one of the oldest 4-H camps in the country. The 80-acre campsite is near Pollock.

Thanks to everyone who participated in projects this year and made this donation possible!

- **Mary Catherine Googe**

MOLASSES AND MULCH



BECK

Malcolm Beck makes gardening sound easy: Forget chemical fertilizer, forget Miracle-Gro, forget deep tilling. Pile on the compost and mulch, then sit back and watch the growth.

“We need to study nature. She has got a lot to teach us,” he told an audience of more than 80 persons in early November at the last World of Gardening presentation of 2008. The dumbest thing a gardener can do is to rake up leaves and carry them away. Leaf compost may take a long time, but it supplies carbon to plants, something chemical fertilizer does not do. Put compost, about half an inch, on grass in the fall, so that it has time to break down before growing season.

Beck described using soil from a former cowpen to nourish the first garden he and his wife planted. After they went into business, they discovered they could earn more by selling compost than by selling vegetables. He recommends enriching soil with compost before planting in it. “Once you get the soil built up, that soil will continue to get better. You can do that without chemical fertilizer.”

Manure has unforeseen advantages. Beck recommended it for the turf on a high school athletic field in central Texas, and the grass was so abundant that it protected the players – the soccer coach told him that for the first season his team had suffered no knee injury or shin splints. Someone asked what kind of manure to get, and he answered, “the one you can get the easiest and cheapest.”

Another of Beck’s recommendations is molasses: mix two or three tablespoons with a gallon of water, and sprinkle it on plants for the iron content. An audience member worried that molasses would attract ants, but he assured her that “it chases ants.” In fact, pouring the mixture down a fire ant hole will get rid of them. (Feed-grade molasses is available at cattle feed stores and some garden centers.)

But be careful – when Beck destroyed the fire ant mounds around an office, he discovered that fleas and ticks, formerly controlled by fire ants, then flourished.

GREEN THINGS

POINSETTIA CARE

Poinsettias (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) remain one of the most popular holiday flowers. Hybridizers have expanded the range of colors from the familiar red to pastel yellow and vibrant bi-colors. One of the most common questions after Christmas is, “How can I care for my poinsettia so that it will bloom again next Christmas?” While this can be done, it’s a very fussy, exacting process and since the plants are not that expensive, you might just choose to start fresh next year.

For those of you who are undaunted, the process for saving your poinsettia and getting it to rebloom begins with the care you give it the first season.

Light - Place it near a sunny window. South-, east- or west-facing windows are preferable to a north-facing window. Poinsettias are tropicals and will appreciate as much direct sunlight as you can provide.

Heat - To keep the poinsettia in bloom as long as possible, maintain a temperature of 65 - 75 degrees F. during the day. Dropping the temperature to about 60 degrees F. at night will not hurt the plant. However, cold drafts or allowing the leaves to touch a cold window can injure the leaves and cause premature leaf drop. If you’ve ever seen a gangly poinsettia in bloom, with only a couple of sad leaves hanging on, it was probably exposed to temperatures that were too cool or extreme shifts in temperature.

Water - Water the plant whenever the surface feels dry to the touch. Water until it drains out the bottom, but don’t let the plant sit in water. Wilting is another common cause of leaf drop. A wilted plant can be revived and salvaged, but it will take another season to improve its appearance.

Humidity - Lack of humidity during dry seasons, in particular winter, is an ongoing houseplant problem. If your home tends to be dry and your poinsettia is in direct light, you will find yourself watering frequently, possibly every day.



From January to March, keep watering the poinsettia whenever the surface is dry. Starting April 1, gradually decrease water, allowing the soil to get dry between waterings. Be careful the stem does not begin to shrivel. This is a sign the plant is too stressed and is dying. In a week or two, when the plant has acclimated to this drying process, move it to a cool spot like

the basement or a heated garage. You want to keep it at about 60 degrees F. In mid-May, cut the stems back to about 4 inches and repot in a slightly larger container, with new potting soil. Water it well. Place the newly potted plant back into the brightest window you have and once again keep it at a temperature of 65 - 75 degrees. Continue watering whenever the surface of the soil feels dry.

Watch for new growth. Once new growth appears, begin fertilizing every two weeks with a complete fertilizer. Follow fertilizer label recommendations. In June, move the poinsettia outside, pot and all. Keep it in a partially shaded location and maintain your watering and fertilizing schedule. In early July, pinch back each stem by about one inch. This is to encourage a stout, well branched plant. If left unpinched, the poinsettia will grow tall and spindly. By mid-August, the stems should have branched and leafed out. Once again, pinch or cut the new stems, leaving 3-4 leaves on each shoot. Bring the plant back indoors and back into your brightest window. Continue watering and fertilizing.

In early fall, continue regular watering and fertilizing. Make sure the temperature stays above 65 degrees. Poinsettias are short-day plants, meaning their bud set is affected by the length of daylight. To re-bloom, poinsettias need about 10 weeks with 12 hours or less of sunlight per day. You will have to artificially create these conditions and it's crucial that you be diligent. Beginning Oct. 1, keep your plant in complete darkness from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. Any exposure to light will delay blooming. Use an opaque box or material to block out light. Many people place their plants in a closet, but if light gets in through the cracks or if you open and use the closet, it will affect the bud set. Move the plant back to the sunny window during the daytime and continue watering and fertilizing. Around the last week of November, you can stop the darkness treatment and allow the plant to remain in the window. You should see flower buds at this point

Stop fertilizing about Dec. 15. Keep watering and treat your plant the way you did when you first brought it home in bloom. If all has gone well, it should be back in bloom and ready to begin the process all over again.

- Marie Ianotti, www.about.com

A BAD GREEN THING

Poison ivy is a problem year-round in Louisiana. It gets us in the spring and summer when it's out in full glory and also in the winter because we do so much yard work outside once the days cool off. The vine is deciduous (drops its leaves in winter) so it's unfortunately easy to yank up a handful of bare vine and end up with every inch of bare skin covered with the itchiest, ugliest rash ever seen.

Identification of poison ivy is simple if you learn the little verse that goes with it: "Leaves of three, leave it be." Lots of people confuse poison ivy with Virginia creeper, another deciduous vine that's common all over the state. The main difference between these two shade-loving, tree-climbing vines is that the non poisonous Virginia creeper has five leaves, not the three leaves of the rhyme. The bare vine of poison ivy can also be distinguished, even without the leaves. Poison ivy vines are covered with little root hairs that help it cling to trees. The non poisonous similar vine just has a little bit of root here and there, not covering the whole stem like poison ivy. Old, mature poison ivy vines can be as big around as your wrist, have huge leaves and produce flowers and berries (birds love them), but they still have "leaves of three."

Poison oak looks just like poison ivy except that the ends of the leaves are rounded instead of pointed. The awful dermatitis is the same, so, for practical purposes, don't touch anything that you think looks like the three-leaved poison ivy.

There's always some smart aleck in every group of woods-trompers who swears that he isn't allergic to poison ivy. My advice is: DON'T TOUCH IT ANYWAY. People become sensitized to allergic materials after they've contacted it enough times. If our smart-aleck friend doesn't get the rash now, he probably will become sensitive in the future.

Complete avoidance is the ticket. The best method of eradication is the repeated use of a herbicide like Round-up or a brush killer containing triclopyr. Be sure that you understand that the herbicides will kill anything you spray them on, and be careful when spraying around your garden plants. If the dreaded ivy is growing into an azalea, you are, unfortunately, going to have to pull it out by hand. Choose a cool day because you should be dressed head to toe in long

sleeves and pants and wearing disposable plastic gloves and rubber boots. Tape your sleeve wrists to the gloves to be sure that no skin is exposed. If you accidentally touch the poison ivy with bare skin (including your face and neck), stop and wash the area with water.

When you've grubbed out every piece and sealed it in a plastic trash bag, go directly to the trash can and strip off your gloves, then to the water hose to hose off your boots. Finally, walk to the washing machine and strip off your clothes and head for the shower. All parts of the poison ivy plant contain the oil urushiol, which causes the rash. If clothing is not disposed of or washed well, the oil will be waiting for you the next time you touch those clothes.

What to do with the vines you've pulled? Send them to the landfill, where they will wait like a toxic time bomb till the end of time. Whatever you do, don't burn them, even if burning is still legal in your neck of the woods. Smoke can carry the tiny droplets of oil. Don't even let your non-allergic smart aleck friend burn the vines. Inhalation of poison ivy smoke can be fatal.

- **Denyse Cummins**

POTPOURRI

MY MOTHER'S DAHLIAS



I took piano lessons for a few years back in the fifties. Piano recitals required the girls to wear long formals and the boys to wear a suit and tie. My formal was usually one that had been worn by an older relative in the previous year.

DAHLIA (no photo of Mary available)

My mother had a very large bed of beautiful purple dahlias. Recital time each year seemed to coincide with the dahlias' being at their peak. My mother would help me carefully arrange the skirt of my formal as I sat on the grass in front of the dahlia bed. She would take several pictures with the Kodak to make sure we would have a good one for history.

After the pictures were developed, my mother would proudly show them around saying, "Here is a picture of Mary in her piano recital dress *and just look at my dahlias!*" Alas, because of my lack of practice the piano lessons were dropped, and Mama then didn't have what she considered an acceptable way to show off pictures of her dahlias.

- **Mary Lipsey**

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

MMIX IS OURS TO ENGAGE

MMIX is not a compost or fertilizer; it is the Roman numeral for 2009. This New Year brings us extra-ordinary opportunity to transform our dreams into reality and our efforts into great achievement. As Northwest Louisiana Master Gardeners, we continue to imprint our community with our garden tools of life. We share our love of the terra, enjoying nature's ever-changing patina as the seasons of our lives unfold. Members come and go, others remain ever-committed, but everyone does what they can to form the foundation of our organization's landscape. I appreciate whatever level of support you can afford to give. Each and every one of us should be proud of our accomplishments to date and of the organization we belong to.

Our community expresses their appreciation to us in a variety of ways...sometimes heard, sometimes seen, but most of the time it is expressed through improved attitudes and character. The overwhelmingly positive therapeutic effects of gardening are well documented. Imagine the number of smiles, deep breaths, and positive thoughts that so many motorists and pedestrians experience as they pass by one of our many projects, such as the Randle T. Moore Center on their daily commute, or the Pioneer Heritage Center on a visit to study local history, or our garden in Betty Virginia Park as they take a weekend stroll...our list of contributions to Northwest Louisiana is growing annually.

Our organization fertilizes a renewed sense of optimism across our community landscape. We cultivate social growth with our camaraderie and provide patient nurturing of garden projects that build community esteem and grow community pride. We do this to share the gardening experience; no monetary payment or reward is necessary. Although the love of sore hands and tired feet adds to the physical satisfaction and health benefits of our sport, we necessarily adjust to the varied needs of the young and old, tall and short, weak and strong. We enjoy spreading the love and joy of gardening, no matter what it takes. That's what makes us so special.

Yes, MMIX is ours to engage, and we will. On behalf of the Board of Directors, and as a fellow gardener, I want to thank you for your continued membership and the vital support you give through participation; you are the essence of our success.

May all your perennials come back to life, may your annuals bring smiles of admiration to others, and may your trees provide the shade to allow comforting reflection on the wisdoms of time. You have all of nature to be ever thankful for.

Happy New Year!

- **Scotty Rogers**

2009 Board Members: Vice president, Michele Wiener; secretary, Linda Anderson; treasurer, Marsha Townsend; parliamentarian/historian, Lou Osburn; program coordinator, Denyse Cummins; members, Curtis Williams, Don Toppett, Margie Caplis, Patti Brannan and Cookie Duet.

Special thanks for the enormous contributions of our two outgoing board members: Jane Drake and Theresa Kruse. Your dedication and commitment have helped us to reach new heights, and we are greatly appreciative. A hearty welcome to our new board members, Patti Brannan and Cookie Duet.

KITCHEN SINK

CHICKEN-BARLEY SOUP

Chicken broth – 14 oz. can + 49 oz. can
2 or 3 cups cooked chicken, cut up
3 carrots, sliced
Potato, sliced ½ cup chopped onion
1 cup chopped celery ½ cup barley
½ cup barley ½ lb. Velveeta, cubed

Bring to a boil the broth, carrots, celery, potato and onion; simmer 5 minutes. Add chicken, barley and rice, and simmer 30 minutes. Add cubed cheese; simmer 5 minutes. Salt and pepper to taste (tsp. pepper is good).

This recipe is from Virginia Crossno of Natchitoches, who uses a roasted chicken from the grocery. I used two chicken breasts cooked in a cup of water 8 hours in a crockery cooker. Either way, it's great comfort food.

- **Sara Burroughs**



GRACE PETERSON TEACHES CHILDREN AT MOORETOWN GARDEN



CHILDREN PAINT A BENCH AT ALLENDALE GARDEN