Making A Difference

Dear Master Gardeners,

The spring of 2012 has been the busiest on record for the Collin County Master Gardeners. Our volunteers have conducted many great programs and reached large numbers of the people. Through our efforts we are able to make a difference in lives of the citizens of Collin County and beyond. The Extension Service and I appreciate all that you do to help our agency fulfill the mission of “Improving Lives, Improving Texas.”

Although it has been hard work developing, planning, preparing, and conducting educational events and projects, we have fun doing it. The friendships that we develop and the help we provide our fellow volunteers and the public makes it all worth it. The difference we make in the lives of people around us is the reward we take home at the end of a hard day of work. I am always impressed at the generosity of each and every master gardener volunteer. You give your time and energy freely toward the accomplishment of our goals.

As the spring comes to an end, and the dry, hot summer returns, we should remember the lessons we learn from the drought of 2011. As the time since our last rain gets longer, we should be vigilant about our efforts to conserve water in our homes and landscapes. As highly trained master gardeners, we need to be good examples to our neighbors and use every opportunity to educate our friends and neighbors about conserving water. As the population grows, the amount of water available to irrigate our landscapes and lawns will decrease. The likelihood of obtaining additional sources of surface water is slim, so conservation is the key to sustaining growth in Collin County now and in the future. The droughts of 2006 and 2011 and the loss of water from Lake Texoma have taught us that implementation of water restrictions and conservation efforts are important to the sustainability of our water supply.

As the year progresses, I encourage you to stay active in our associations efforts. We need your help to educate the public, complete and maintain projects at Myers Park, and develop projects that benefit our communities. We encourage you to contact project leaders, board members, and the volunteer coordinator to see how you can help. There are lots of opportunities to get involved in a variety of ways, which meet your own personal interests.

Thank you for your continued service. I hope to see you at the next volunteer opportunity and association meeting.

Sincerely,

Dr. Greg Church
Collin County Master Gardener Coordinator.
Spring in North Texas will soon turn into summer bringing hot days and nights to the garden. Water is an important element for our plants survival but with current water restrictions many gardeners are finding new and inventive ways to give thirsty plants a drink.

The Oxford English Dictionary records the first mention of a ‘watering kan’ in 1692. Before the invention of the watering can, buckets and earthen-ware watering pots were used, often cumbersome and not practical. The dictionary describes the term watering pan (instead of can) ‘as more accurately imitating the genial rains.’ This quote was also included in Sir Henry Steuart’s The Planter’s Guide (1827).

In his 1997 book The Tool Book, William Bryant Logan says ‘the watering can is as indispensable as a trowel; it’s a masterpiece of appropriate technology.’

Many present day gardeners use vintage watering cans as decorative pieces in the garden but I am guessing those practical cans will be called into service this summer. Many of us will find filling and carrying a watering can full of heavy water a task indeed but if the can is designed in such a way that the handle is balanced using the can to water will be much easier. The design element of the watering can was developed by Englishman John Haws about 1886. He had a hobby of growing vanilla plants while he was a civil servant in Mauritius. (located off the coast of Africa) He used the French style of watering can with what he called their continuous front to back handles and felt them very difficult to use. On his return to England he was determined to make a better watering can.

He applied for a patent with his overall claim, ‘this new invention forms a Watering Pot that is much easier to carry, and tip and at the same time being much cleaner, and more adapted for use than any other pot before the public.’

His initial introduction of his watering can was not a success until some of the top gardeners began to use it in the gardens and greenhouses of the wealthy and in 1894 the National Chrysanthemum Society awarded Mr. Haws a Gold Medal for his improved water cans. He never compromised his design or way of manufacturing and in 1911 the Haws can was awarded the Royal Horticultural Society’s Banksian Medal, an award that had been reserved for flowers. The following year the Company was invited to exhibit at the first Chelsea Flower Show. He continues to be remembered as ‘King of Cans’.

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Watering Wisdom from the Past

The only change over the years to the watering can has been shrinking the size; 2-gallons instead of the heavy 3-gallon original can.

The parts to a watering can are important to the success of water flow. The ‘rose’ on a watering can is the ‘most important part of a watering can and distinguishes quality from the inferior’, this is the claim by Haws Co. as well as other high quality companies that manufacture watering cans. 

What is a rose?

The rose is located on the end of the spout of the watering can. It is the device that allows water to gently spray on the area you want for water delivery. It is perfect for seedlings if you allow a steady hand. Some roses are detachable while others are welded in place. If the rose can be moved pointing up or down you will benefit from this attachment. Some companies sell replacement roses which saves you money, if your rose fails to attach properly or breaks.

Other forms of hand watering include the Thumb-Pot. You can see from the examples that the thumb pot is hollow; by placing it in a tub of water then holding it with your thumb you can easily carry a small amount of water to a pot or an area of your garden; release your thumb and the water trickles out to allow the water to flow. It has also been called a hedgehog. 

Most of the modern day watering cans are designed in the English style with large roses that screw on, off and can be turned up or down.

If you plan on using your watering can this summer you need to remember that a gallon of water weighs 8.35 pounds. If you fill two 1-gallon watering cans you will be totting 16 pounds to your destination. This exercise could possibly replace the gym! Check out antique stores for old watering cans, farm stores and garden centers for new ones. Be careful about buying cheap watering cans that aren’t welded properly with roses that fall of easily. I am always in search of old watering cans and can only imagine the gardeners long ago that hefted these great garden tools. That would be the best story yet!


Phone 1-800-773-4146
A remarkable transition has occurred at Myers Park in McKinney Texas this past year. 2011 has seen the completion of the first "Earth-Kind Perennial Research Garden" in the U.S. The garden which began with a planting of 69 perennial varieties last year, was completed when an additional 42 variety of native and adaptive perennials were planted in March and May of 2011; bringing the total number of perennial varieties in the research garden to 111.

While the newly planted perennials in the second phase of the garden were watered regularly during their establishment period, the first phase which was planted on May 29, 2010 has only been watered once in 2011. With adequate rainfall during the first 6 months of the year, it was not necessary to use any supplemental irrigation until the middle of August.

The last measureable rainfall at Myers Park was on June 6st when the area received about 2 1/2 inches of rain. However! While one of the primary research protocol is to test the plants for drought tolerance, we did not want to risk losing them to a lack of water. Given the record temperatures and lack of rainfall after June 6st, the first phase was irrigated using supplemental water for the first and only time in 2011 on August 14th.

During that extremely hot and dry spell and before the plants were watered, most of the plants in the first phase either lost or were in the process of losing their flowers even though their foliage was very healthy. However! Following the supplemental watering in August and cooler weather, all of the plants are again in full bloom.

Last year, the Monarch butterflies that normally visit our area for a few weeks in early September during their annual migration to central Mexico, enjoyed the abundance of nectar found in the garden and remained here well into October.

If you haven't visited the Perennial Research Garden as yet, but want to see and hear about the magnificent plants that not only survived the 2011 heat and drought but actually thrived; the park is open for guided tours from 9:00 AM till 12:00 Noon on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday and 2nd and 4th Saturday of each month through October 2012. Members of the Collin County Master Gardeners Association will be on hand to answer your questions.

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Be sure you bring your camera to capture your favorite perennials and a pad and pen to create a list of plants you will want in your landscape. The garden is alive with wonderful pollinators such as hummingbirds, butterflies, dragonflies, bumble bees and honey bees, busy gathering nectar from their favorite plants.

Crape Myrtle Research Garden:
In the fall of 2010, it was decided that an Earth-Kind research garden consisting of a variety of both medium and large crape myrtle trees should be added to the Myers Park research program. A site was selected and a plan was prepared by a member of the Collin County Master Gardener's Association, and approved. The garden layout allowed for 25 variety of crape myrtles to be replicated 4 times for a total of 100 trees. After the selection process was completed and the resources identified, members of the CCMGA and Myers Park maintenance personnel worked together to plant the trees in early May of 2011.

After reviewing various options for irrigating the trees, members of the CCMGA installed a subsurface drip irrigation system. The trees have since been watered on a regular basis to insure they are properly established this year.

The research trial period will be completed after 3 years.

Kordes Rose Research Garden:
During the time that the Crape Myrtle Research Garden was being planned, the designer also provided a plan for incorporating a rose garden for Kordes roses. The Kordes rose comes from W. Kordes' Sohne [a world renowned company] with a tradition of more than 120 years of hybridization of new rose varieties and in the production of rose plants.

Several varieties of Kordes roses have been under-going research study in both Wisconsin and Minnesota, and while favorable research results were expected in these Northern region since their climates are similar to that of Germany, the question was raised, "How will the Kordes rose do in a much warmer and dryer climate"?

In May of 2011, a rose garden was prepared next to the crape myrtle garden and 18 Kordes rose varieties were selected and planted. Along with the Kordes roses, a negative control rose [Lagerfeld] and positive control rose [Carefree Beauty] were also planted in each of the 4 beds.

Belinda’s Dream [an Earth-Kind rose] was planted at the ends of each bed to complete the research protocol bringing the total number of plants in each bed to 25 for a total of 100 roses throughout the research garden.

The same irrigation system installed for the Crape Myrtle Research Garden was extended to include the Kordes Rose Research Garden and utilized in accordance with an established schedule during the establishment stage.

The research trial period will be completed after 3 years.

While Myers Park was a destination that had much to offer the general public before the AgrilIFE Extension Service and CCMGA began the Earth-Kind Research Program in 2009, the demonstration and research gardens have since added another level of interest that will serve to educate the citizens of Collin County for years to come.
“The Texas Tomato Lover’s Handbook” by William D. Adams

A Book Review

by Mary Means
Collin County Master Gardener

The hardest thing about reading this book is not being able to see and taste the tomatoes; to hold them; to smell them; not being able to walk through a garden and look at the varieties. Lucky are the Master Gardeners involved in the taste testing trials. The latest of several books by Dr. Adams about kitchen gardens, this one is all about tomatoes. His passion for tomatoes comes through on every page.

Well illustrated with photographs by the author and his wife, this is a book about growing tomatoes by a Texas expert on growing tomatoes. Dr. Adams was an AgriLIFE Extension agent for over 30 years until he retired. He now continues his testing at his home in Central Texas. While stating that hundreds of new varieties are introduced each year, he hints that a follow-up to this book may be in his future.

“Texas Tomato Lover’s Handbook” contains all the basic information for growing tomatoes plus many facts that even a seasoned gardener may not realize. For example, cut off the lowest branches of the tomato vine to slow the onset of early blight. The first third of the book covers topics such as soil preparation, compost preparation, and lighting requirements. There is a section naming tools that should be used. There is a detailed section on setting up an irrigation system. Also, the author describes how to build a cold frame and a hot house; he describes how to make tomato cages. He is very clear that each cage requires at least two sturdy stakes to withstand Texas winds. The author talks about how to present your tomatoes at a farmer’s market.

The middle part of the book names tomato varieties that have succeeded in his trial gardens. This is where the reading gets tough as each variety sounds more luscious than the last. In this section, the author explains why each of the varieties is included in this book. Most are illustrated with photographs.

The next section of the book discusses tomato problems such as insects, diseases and critters. Each bug or disease is clearly photographed. There is a chapter on plants related to the tomato. These include peppers, potatoes, and eggplants. A final chapter lists sources for tomato plants and seeds.

At just under 200 pages, “Texas Tomato Lover’s Handbook” was copyrighted in 2011. It is published by Texas A&M University Press as part of its AgriLIFE Research and Extension Service Series. This book is featured in a recent issue of a popular Texas gardening magazine.
**Are You a Culture Vulture?**

by March Davenport

If you’re a fan of paintings – famous and not so famous – here’s a brain-teaser for you. Can you name the artist who painted this picture?

I’ll give you a hint or two. It’s an oil painting, not at all recent, and combines both art and horticulture. All of the “items” in the painting that make up the man and his cloak are horticulturally-related: fruits, plants, limbs, even the cloak of wheat. This painting was one of a series of four and now hangs in a museum in….. well, that’s just too big a hint.

So, the first person who can identify (1) the artist, (2) when the “portrait” was painted, and (3) where the picture is now located will win a prize of negligible value. A bonus prize will be awarded if you can also identify the person who this picture was believed to satirize. Email your entries to me at uptexas@yahoo.com. The answer(s) will be posted in the May 11th issue of eMinders if there’s a winning entry, otherwise I’ll provide the answers in the May 18th issue.

**The Largest Flower in the World**

by March Davenport and Joanne Pospisil

One of nature’s jewels that so many may never see. The largest flower in the world was blooming in Blanco, Veracruz, Mexico. At 6 and a half feet tall and weighing just over 165 lbs, it has the peculiarity of blooming for only 3 days once every 40 years.
Photographic "Cheating"

The photo shown (right), taken by Linda St. Romain, was used in the Photography for Gardeners class taught by the Communications Team to demonstrate a technique to doctor a problem photo.

In the photo below, I matched the sign color to cover it and added new text. (I hope I'm not the only one old enough to remember that Wile E. Coyote chases the Roadrunner.) In the photo below right, I copied areas of grass and concrete to cover the sign.

It is really a lot easier than you might think.

Rewording the sign with "Wile E. Coyote" is a cute option.
Water Conservation
A Few Notes from our April Program

The North Texas Municipal Water District (NTMWD) provides water to 1.6 Million people in 60 cities, towns, special utility districts, and water supply corporations in North Texas. The population is expected to reach 3.8 Million people by the year 2060.

It takes a lot of planning to expand our supply to cover that kind of population growth. To add to the problem, we can't expect regular rains. The chart below shows the annual rainfall since 1900. Note the highs and lows. The average rainfall is almost 35", but the long term average is dropping about 0.5" per century. The drought that lasted almost the entire decade of the 1950, includes the record low annual rainfall of about 16", but 2011 almost matched it at about 17".

The lack of rainfall in 2011 combined with the zebra mussel problem that shut down pumping from Lake Texoma to force us into Stage 3 water restrictions last year. However, with the anticipated growth, some form of water restrictions might be expected for years to come.

Water conservation will continue to grow in importance. Inspect your irrigation system for needed repairs, miss-directed or broken sprinkler heads. Install or ensure your rain censor is operating properly. Turn irrigation systems off until needed. Learn how to properly maintain a healthy lawn, water trees and foundations.

If each person would save just 1 gallon of water each day, we could save 584,000,000 gallons/year (1,825 acre-feet/year).

Water is a Finite Resource
We must shift our thinking from "How much can I have?" to "How much do I need?"
**Transferring Member**

Welcome to our newest member, Dana Crawford! Dana transferred to us from Denton County. She was an active intern there last year and hopes to make many new gardening friends in CCMGA. Please join me in welcoming Dana to our organization. We look forward to working with her.

Renee Ferguson

**Answer to “What’s This?”**

Did you recognize it as a potato blossom?

Here are a few more photos of Maxine on vacation with us a few years ago.

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Educational programs of Texas AgriLIFE Extension serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability, or national origin. The Texas A&M University System, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts of Texas cooperating.