



McLennan County Master Gardeners

Horticulture Newsletter

Winter, 2005

<http://mcmg.aspfreeserver.com>

Calendar of events:

Jan. 17-18 - Horticulture session, Blackland Income Growth Conference (BIG), Waco Convention Center

May 20 - McLennan County Master Gardeners' Plant Sale

Call 757-5180 for information on upcoming extension events.

From McLennan County Master Gardeners:

Master Gardener Training, which requires 60 hours of classroom training and 60 hours of volunteer service, is tentatively scheduled for mid-2006. Interested students may call the Extension Office at 757-5180 to put their name on the contact list.

Plant Sale - May 20 will feature plants propagated and shared from the yards of the local Master Gardeners. Watch for more information in next newsletter.

Superstar Bed at Carleen Bright Arboretum:

The lantanas have thrived during the summer and fall. Spring plans are to move several of them to the back of the bed behind the roses and hibiscus plants which have had a difficult time surviving the constant nibbling of the regular visits of the deer. The wildlife seem to dislike and avoid the lantana. Other new Superstar plants will also be added to the bed this Spring. See related article by Sandy Back elsewhere in this newsletter.

Rose Test Demonstration on TSTC campus:

Check out the 45 roses being grown as a trial for EarthKind rose status at the test plot at Horticulture/Turf area at 202 Greenway Drive. Master Gardeners regularly document their growth and bloom progress to determine which varieties are suitable candidates for EarthKind designation.

Horticulture Programs at BIG Conference



The 44th Annual Blackland Income Growth Conference will be held January 17th and 18th at the Waco Convention Center. The

horticultural session this year will be offering three outstanding speakers. The session kicks off on January 17th at 9:00 a.m. with Roger Havlak, Extension Program Specialist. Havlak's topic will be *Controlling Fungal Diseases in Lawns*. At 10:00 a.m. Dr. Cynthia McKenney, Associate Professor of Horticulture at Texas A&M University, will discuss the *Texas Super Star Collection*. At 11:00 a.m. Dr. Tommy Thompson, United States Department of Agriculture Research Geneticist for Pecan Development, will speak on *Pecan Grafting and Pecan Variety Selection*.

The Blackland Income Growth Conference is held annually in Waco and open to the public. The registration fee is \$12 and the fee entitles you to hear all three speakers at the horticulture session as well as attend the barbeque luncheon at noon. This year's special speaker at the luncheon will be professional humorist Dr. James "Doc" Blakely. The BIG Conference is sponsored by the Texas Cooperative Extension and the Greater Waco Chamber of Commerce. Registration begins at 8:00 a.m. on the 17th.

Brown Patch Fungus Active in St. Augustine Grass Lawns – November 2005!

The day/night temperatures the past few weeks (early November 2005) have favored development of the turfgrass fungal disease called "Brown Patch". This disease of lawns is caused by a fungal pathogen, which has the scientific name of *Rhizoctonia solani*. Turfgrass affected by brown patch generally will exhibit circular or irregular patches of light brown, thinned grass. Under conditions that favor this disease, these patches can coalesce increasing the size of the affected area. Understanding this disease, which is all too common in the fall on St. Augustine grass, includes the following.

How it looks (symptoms) and conditions that encourage development.

- Patches form up to several yards in diameter commonly develop in the fall, winter and spring when lawns are approaching (fall) or emerging (spring) from winter dormancy.
- Evening temperatures are typically below 68 degrees, rainfall usually increases, the lawn is over-watered and/or heavy morning dew formation is common.
- Active infections are noticeable by yellow leaves at the edges of patches.
- Leaf sheaths become rotted, and a gentle tug on the leaf blade easily separates the leaf from the runner (stolon). This can be used for early detection of this disease, before patches become severe, allowing time to treat before there is much damage.
- Brown patch usually does not discolor roots, as would Take-All Patch. Take-All Patch (a different disease) is more of a problem late spring to summer, with different symptoms.
- Brown Patch fungus develops most rapidly when air temperatures are between 75 and 85 °F and moist/wet conditions are present.
- Brown Patch activity generally subsides when air temperatures rise above 90 °F or with chilling late fall and winter-like temperature.

What can be done to minimize Brown Patch?

- Water infrequently, only as necessary to prevent wilt. Water early in the day to

remove dew and allow the grass to dry quickly.

- Avoid over fertilization in spring and fall.
- Improve the lawn health and correct poorly drained areas to reduce damage caused by brown patch.
- Fungicides to control Brown Patch are available to the home consumer at most garden centers. These products are most effective when used on a preventive basis (when the disease might be expected based on grass type and weather condition). Multiple applications may be necessary. Always follow pesticide label directions.

What to expect this fall, winter and next spring?

- St. Augustine grass lawns typically recover from this disease; however, Brown Patch activity has occurred late this year due to high temperatures and dry conditions extending into early fall.
- If fungicides are applied effectively now, it can protect the unaffected lawn areas and stop the fungal activity in the diseased areas.
- There is very little growing season left for St. Augustine grass to make a full recovery this fall as chilling temperatures will slow its growth before it goes dormant at the first frost.
- With the onset of chilling temperatures the fungus activity will decline.
- For improved lawn quality, be prepared to treat the areas with a fungicide next spring if the patches are slow to green-up or the weather conditions favor prolonged disease activity. Encourage spring re-growth with appropriate application of fertilizer.



David Chalmers, State Extension Turfgrass Specialist
Texas Cooperative Extension

For additional information regarding turf/lawn topics, go to the Aggie-Turf web site at <http://aggie-turf.tamu.edu>.

Winter Gardening Tips

For color in the yard: Plant pansies, violas, dianthus, snapdragons, cabbage and kale, ornamental chard, stocks, alysium, petunias.

If you have chilled your tulip and hyacinth bulbs, they should be planted now so that they will bloom when it is still cool.

Divide spring-flowering perennials before the ground freezes or when they are dormant and just before a new growth season. Most perennials that have been left in the same place for three or more years are likely to be overcrowded. Select the vigorous side shoots and discard the center of the clump. To insure a good display of flowers each year, stagger plant divisions so that the whole flower bed will not be redone at the same time. Don't put all the divisions back into the same space where the original plant was. This will probably be too many plants in one area. Share with friends and neighbors, and then toss excess into the compost bin. Mulch carefully to protect the newly separated plants, but do not apply so much mulch that the crowns will rot.

Shred fallen leaves with the mower and put them as mulch under your shrubs and perennials or add them to your compost bin.



Trim the dead stalks, spent blooms and seed heads off the perennials. Clean up and remove debris from the flower bed. Work compost into the flower beds. A thick layer of mulch (3-4 inches) will help keep the winter weeds in check.

If you want to plant seeds for spring plants and get a jump on plant growth before hot weather, January and early February is the best time to sow the seeds. Among those that can be home-grown from seeds are tomatoes, peppers, marigolds, periwinkles, petunias, begonias, and impatiens.

Prepare beds and garden area for spring planting. Do maintenance and cleaning on your garden implements to be ready for spring usage.

Mature or established trees and shrubs can be transplanted now while they are dormant.

Prune hybrid tea and ever-blooming roses around Valentine's Day. Remove dead and weak canes, leave 4-8 healthy canes, and remove approximately one half of the top growth and height of the plant. Do not prune climbing roses until after they have bloomed.

When buying plants, especially bare root, the medium to small sizes are usually faster to become established than the bigger plants and are more effective in the landscape than the larger sizes.

Apply a light application of fertilizer to pansy plantings. Repeat every 4 to 6 weeks, depending upon rainfall. Dried blood meal is an excellent source of fertilizer for pansies.

To control scale on hollies, fruit and shade trees, evergreen shrubs - apply a dormant oil spray during the winter.

Remove mistletoe from tree limbs as soon as you see it. It begins by forming on small limbs and a second season of growth will be much more difficult to prune away.

Don't fertilize newly set out trees or shrubs until after they have started to grow, and then only very lightly the first year.



Watch for loopers on cole crops in the garden and on ornamental cabbage and kale. When first seen, treat them with a product containing Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*)

Bare root pecan trees (our official state tree) should be planted from December through mid-March. Container grown trees can be planted anytime, but fall or winter planting is best, to give time for the trees to adjust to their new environment before hot weather. Trees packed in plastic sleeves should be handled as bare root trees. Complete information on pecan tree varieties, planting, and their maintenance is available from the Texas Cooperative Extension or on their website:

<http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/homefruit/pecan/pecan.html>

Rotate Crops to Fight Disease

As gardeners prepare for the new growing season they need to give particular attention to disease control practices. One of the best and least expensive ways to fight diseases is crop rotation. This practice prevents the continuous development of disease organisms that would otherwise build up in the soil and attack one plant species. Crop rotation breaks the cycle of organism development and thus helps limit the damage potential when the susceptible crop is grown again.

A three-year rotation is the most practical assuming that you have at least three crops that can fit into your gardening plan. This allows you to practice disease control simultaneously on all three crops. The chart below shows the vegetable "families".

<u>Family</u>	<u>Varieties</u>
Legume	Peas and beans of all types
Goosefoot	Spinach, beets and chard
Mustard	Cabbage, collards, Brussels sprouts, kale, cauliflower, broccoli, kohlrabi, turnip, radish
Parsley	Carrots, parsley, celery, parsnip
Nightshade	Tomato, potato, eggplant, pepper
Squash	Squash, pumpkin, watermelon, gourd, cantaloupe, cucumber,
Composite	Lettuce, chicory, endive, escarole, Jerusalem artichoke
Lily	Onions, garlic, leek, chive, asparagus
Grass	Corn

Try not to plant related vegetables in the same location in the garden more often than once in three years. If you are unable to rotate, then consider implementing other types of disease control measures. Some of these practices would include:

- . . . planting a more disease resistant variety
- . . . using a fungicide
- . . . adjusting fertilizer rates
- . . . planting on raised beds
- . . . improving the soil

Texas Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab in College Station can assist with any type of disease problem. Lab tests are available for most plant pathogens. For more information on Texas Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab, go to <http://plantpathology.tamu.edu/extension/tpddl/services.asp>

Making "Garden Babies"

Children, assisted by local Master Gardeners, made "Garden Babies" at the Arts Fest in November at Heritage Square. Instructions for making the plant creatures are below:

Materials:

- Knee-high stocking
- 1 tablespoon perennial rye grass seed
- 1-2 cups potting soil
- glue
- 2 craft eyes, craft pom-poms for nose, or scrap felt to cut shapes for eyes, nose, mouth
- ribbon to make hair bows or bow ties

Pour seed into the stocking and shake down to toe. Pour the potting soil on top of the seed. Tie the stocking tightly into a knot or with a ribbon to keep the soil into a ball.

Lay soil-filled stocking on flat surface, shape into a face and add eyes, nose, and mouth by gluing on cut-out shapes or pom-poms.

If desired, add ears and ribbon for hair bows or bow ties. Water to keep entire ball moist (sit in a saucer) and place in bright window. Seed should sprout in 7-14 days, making hair (or beard, depending upon which direction the face was placed). As grass grows, the "garden baby" may be given a haircut periodically.



How to Care For Poinsettias at Home

Location and Temperature:

The poinsettia thrives on indirect, natural daylight, and exposure to at least six hours daily is recommended. If direct sun cannot be avoided, diffuse with a light shade or sheer curtain. To prolong the bright color of the poinsettia bracts, daytime temperatures should not exceed 70 degrees F. Avoid placing the plants near drafts, excess heat, or the dry air from appliances, fireplaces, or ventilating ducts.

Water and Fertilizer:

Poinsettias require moderately moist soil. Water the plants thoroughly when the soil surface feels dry to the touch. Remove the plant from decorative pots or covers, and water enough to completely saturate the soil. Do not allow it to sit in any standing water; root rot could result which could kill the plant. It is not necessary to fertilize the poinsettia when it is in bloom.

Outside Placement:

Since poinsettias are sensitive to cold weather, frost, and rain, outside placement during the winter months should be avoided. However, in mild climates, an enclosed patio or entry way may be suitable, provided the night temperatures do not drop below 55 degrees F. Make certain the delicate bracts are well protected from wind and cold rain.

After the Holidays:

Keep the plants in indirect sun and water regularly. Place your plants outdoors, where they can bask in the warmth of spring and summer, after outside night temperatures average 55 degrees F. or above. When the bracts age and lose their aesthetic appeal, usually by late March or early April, cut the poinsettia back to about 8 inches in height. By the end of May you should see vigorous new growth. Continue regular watering during the growth period. Fertilize every 2 to 3 weeks throughout the spring, summer, and fall months with a well-balanced, complete fertilizer.



Around June 1, you may transplant your poinsettia into a large pot. Select a pot no more than 4 inches larger than the original inner pot. A soil mix with a considerable amount of organic matter, such as peat moss, is highly recommended. If you wish, you may transplant the poinsettias into a well-prepared garden bed. Be sure the planting bed is rich in organic matter and has good drainage. Pruning may be required during the summer to keep plants bushy and compact. Do not prune after September 1.

Re-flowering:

The poinsettia is a photoperiodic plant, meaning that it sets bud and produces flowers as the autumn nights lengthen. The plants will naturally come into full bloom during November or December, depending upon the flowering response-time of the individual cultivar. Timing the bloom to coincide closely with the Christmas holiday can be difficult without the controlled environment of a greenhouse. Stray light of any kind, such as from outside street lights or household lamps, could delay or entirely halt the re-flowering process.

Starting October 1, the plants must be kept in complete darkness for 14 continuous hours each night. Accomplish this by moving the plants to a totally dark room, or by covering them with a large box overnight. During October, November, and early December, the plants require 6 to 8 hours of bright sunlight daily, with nighttime temperatures between 60 and 70 degrees F. Temperatures outside this range may delay flowering. Continue the normal watering and fertilizer program. Following this regime for 8 to 10 weeks should result in a colorful display of blooms for the holiday season.

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 Q. What if it's already early winter and I still haven't planted my bulbs?

A. Just plant the bulbs as soon as you can, even if you have to chip into the ground. Bulbs are not dormant, they're alive – and they won't last much longer if left unplanted. If you can get them into the ground (pots or garden), chances are good that they'll grow. If you don't plant them soon, you may as well toss them out. Bulbs that get less than 10-14 weeks of sustained cold temperatures will come up, but may be shorter than usual. They'll come back normally in future years if their foliage is left to die back after bloom in spring.

Constructing the Texas Superstar Bed

The desire to educate the public about the Texas Superstar plants led the McLennan Co. Master Gardeners to establish a new planting bed at the Carleen Bright Arboretum in Woodway this year.

The area chosen was in full sun but on an incline where water ran down and caused serious erosion. This site presented several challenges which required research and consideration before beginning construction.

Several applications of Round-Up were applied to kill the existing vegetation on the site. Heavy equipment was brought in to change the shape of the slope and create a dry creek bed which would divert the water and lessen the runoff. The creek bed captures the run-off water after a hard rain rather than causing further erosion. A small bridge was also created with drain pipes underneath for mowing equipment to drive over.

Next the planting site was cleared - removing debris and existing plants. Several trailer loads of trash and rocks were hauled away. Rain delays were numerous in the spring but finally dirt work was begun. Several loads of compost and rich soil were brought in to combine with the existing thick clay soil. One entire day was spent tilling and adding the soil amendments.

A major challenge was locating the Austin stone in large brick cuts for the retaining wall around the planting bed. Many people were consulted on proper building of the stone wall. The wall was built from the lowest stone layer with the foundation dug into the ground and each stone carefully placed into a layer of crushed granite footing, then leveled. After the bottom of the wall was level, the remaining walls were constructed - - going up the hill, one stone at a time to make a level horizontal planting bed.

The bed is constructed with three tiers inside of it: upper area containing taller plants, middle area with plants that spill over the edge, and a lower area. A walkway with steps on steeper inclines winds through the bed to allow a closer look at the plants and their growth characteristics.

Once the wall was completed, weed block was

placed inside the edges of the stone so that the soil could not wash through. Several loads of landscaper's mix containing mulch and compost were brought in, shoveled and raked into place. Crushed granite gave the walkway a natural look.

Finally, the day arrived that planting could begin! It was early spring with chilly nights so some plants could not be put out, but roses and a few other hardy perennial Superstar plants were planted. A thick layer of mulch and a good watering settled them in. Once the weather warmed up, the remaining plants were located and a final planting day completed the bed.

The bed is monitored by the Master Gardeners on a regular basis for weeding, pruning and deadheading that may be needed. Some blood meal and root stimulator have been applied and the plants are growing well. As new plants are introduced to the Superstar status, additional plantings will be made in the bed.

This area will always be a work in progress that illustrates the use of carefree, yet beautiful plants in the home landscape. The public is encouraged to visit the Texas Superstar bed at the Carleen Bright Arboretum to check out how these plants fare in our area of Texas.

Sandy Back
MCMG

Note: See the Superstar bed under construction and when finished with plants in full bloom on the McLennan County master Gardener website: <http://mcmg.aspfreeserver.com/superstarbed.html>.