



ECHO



Texas AgriLife's Community Horticultural Outreach

Revving up for '09



Dear Collin County Master Gardeners,

I hope that all of you had a merry Christmas and happy New Year. I am eagerly anticipating 2009. I have been on the job one year now. I have certainly learned a lot this past year that will be beneficial in the new year. I look forward to all the possibilities that await us.

Looking back on 2008, I am amazed at what we accomplished. We reached out to so many people, even beyond Collin County, that we're making an even greater name for ourselves. Through our speaker's bureau, online information, help desk, and information booth, we've helped teach hundreds of people through thousands of hours of volunteer time. Our expertise also helped to create beautiful and instructional landscaping at places like Heritage Farmstead Museum, various public schools in our area, Myers Park, Gabe Nesbitt Park, and more.

Every time we speak to people about gardening, whether it's just in passing with a neighbor or formally through a presentation, we're sharing our AgriLife training. We help our fellow Collin County residents learn how to tame our black clay, inconsistent moisture, pest attacks, and alkaline soils. As anyone who's moved into the area can attest, this is a challenging yet rewarding place to try to garden. And it's great knowing that we help!

2009 will be filled with more opportunities to extend our reach. Our annual plant sale will bring hardy, recommended plants straight into customers' eager wagons and carts. Our information-sharing projects are thriving, and we continuously get requests to help civic and social organizations with their earth-bound efforts. Get your notes ready, your gardening gloves out, and your enthusiasm in gear—we're off and running for the year!

Greg Church, Ph.D.
County Extension Agent - Horticulture

January—February 2009

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.

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Never Stop Gardening!

By Nancy Furth

Physical fitness has never been the main reason I garden. Nurturing living things and experiencing nature first-hand have always been vital to my well-being. Up until now the psychological benefits have outweighed the physical. As I grow older, however, I realize how important it is for me to consider my level of intensity and time spent gardening.

According to a recent study, only 30 percent of Americans aged 45-64 get regular exercise. On the other hand, the members of my generation who *do* participate in regular exercise are living longer and in better physical condition than their parents were because they are more aware of the need for exercise. We know that exercise makes it easier to do common daily tasks and decreases the likelihood of fractures.

Although anyone can get some exercise just “puttering” around the garden, most of us do more than “putter.” If you are an avid gardener, you know the anticipation that builds as the New Year begins. If we adapt a suitable and safe exercise regime now, it will help us continue gardening at our optimum level this year and, hopefully, for the rest of our lives. [*Garden Your Way to Health and Fitness*](#), a recently published book by Bunny Guinness

***“Doing the garden, digging the weeds,
Who could ask for more?
Will you still need me, will you still feed me,
When I’m sixty-four?”***

-The Beatles, 1967



and Jacqueline Knox, is a wonderful guide for those interested in developing such a regime.

GARDEN SMART

I am starting the year off right and have already begun the all-important pre-season warm up. I’m walking briskly every day for about 20 to 30 minutes, and I’m also doing some age-appropriate calisthenics three times per week. I have read that Yoga and Pilates are great exercise programs for gardeners. Always remember that it is important to check with a doctor or fitness professional before beginning any workout program.

Taking this a step further, I plan to do a ten-minute warm up, including several stretching exercises before each gardening adventure, and more to the point, I’m not going to fool



Pictures 1-4 are from the *Holistic Gardens in College Station*. The trellised raised beds in 2 and 3 are ideal for vertically growing plants and crops.

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myself into believing I'll only be "puttering" a short time.

Here are some additional suggestions that will help keep the pain out of gardening:

- Don't stay for prolonged periods doing the same thing. Instead, shift from task to task. This is a good place to be a multi-tasker! Do some weeding, switch to planting, and maybe finish up with some pruning.
- Take breaks now and then. Repeat some warm-up exercises or just lie down on the lawn and look up at the clouds. How long has it been since you've done that?

Back aches and injuries from lifting are the biggest bane to gardeners. "If you must lift, Robert Berghage, PhD, associate professor of horticulture at Penn State University says, "ask yourself first: Am I about to do this in a way that will feel good or bad after I'm done?" Probably the most important thing to remember when lifting is to lift with your legs, not your back! Keeping your back straight, use your abdominal muscles and arm and leg strength.

TOOLS FOR BACK-FRIENDLY GARDENS

Purchasing quality tools that are ergonomic will ease the stress and strain of your gardening chores. Many of us are not familiar with the plethora of therapeutic gardening tools now available. I went online to the University of Missouri AgrAbility Project site at: <http://agrability.missouri.edu/gardenweb/Tools.html> to find out more.

These are just some of their tips:

- Use tools with the right size grip. To find the right fit, make a circle with your index finger and thumb. This measurement is the size the grip of your tools should be.
- Try to find tools with a depression or ridge in the handle for your thumb to rest on. This will keep your hand in the proper alignment.
- Use tools with longer handles to cut down on the need to bend over or kneel.
- Keep tools sharp and in good condition to conserve energy.
- Use the lightest weight tool possible to complete tasks.

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Photos 5 and 7 were taken at the Buehler Enabling Garden at the Chicago Botanic Garden. Picture 5 (and 4 on previous page) illustrate a vertically planted garden using a frame with a wire grid and a soil-filled, plastic-lined core. Plants are planted through slits in the plastic and it is watered from the top. Picture 6, taken at Holistic Gardens in College Station, shows raised shallow tray gardens which can accommodate wheel chairs or other seating. In photo 7, hanging container gardens are equipped with pulleys that allow easy access for watering and maintenance.

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- Use tools with a soft, pliable handle for easier gripping.
- Use non-slip surfaces so not to waste energy gripping tools too tightly.

MAKE YOUR GARDENS ACCESSIBLE

No matter how able you are now, begin to plan and install a more back-friendly garden. I became infatuated with container gardening many years ago and find that this type of garden is very back-friendly because I don't have to bend over so far. My husband has made wood-framed bases on wheels for my large containers so that I can move them when necessary. They are great for winter salad gardens as well as warm-season tomato and pepper plants. Raised beds are the preferred way to garden here in North Texas because of our clay soil, so why not raise them to a height of 18 to 24 inches to make them even more accessible? Another trick is to never make them wider than you can comfortably reach. They are so much easier to weed!

I have taken every opportunity over the years to visit some of the finest arboreta and botanic gardens in the country. Several have created wonderful examples of accessible and/or enabling gardens. [The Sensory Garden at the Denver Botanic Gardens](#), [The Buehler Enabling Garden at The Chicago Botanic Gardens](#) and, closer to home, [The Holistic Garden on the campus of Texas A&M](#) offer wonderful



Innovative eaves make trough gardens not only accessible but also soften stockade fencing with herbs and trailing plants.

examples of gardens constructed for easy accessibility and lifelong gardening. These gardens were designed to serve people of all abilities and are major learning centers for horticulture therapy.

As a Master Gardener, I am especially proud of the Holistic Garden at A&M and its potential as a resource for both students and members of the public including Master Gardeners. Directed by Dr. Joseph Nowak, the garden's goal "is to maintain an educational garden environment designed to improve the quality of life for persons of all ages and abilities ...The Holistic Garden is a garden in which anyone who wants to garden can do so." I have had the opportunity to visit on several occasions and have watched it develop into an excellent example for Master Gardeners and others who wish to adopt the holistic theory to their gardening endeavors. There is also an on-line newsletter called "[The Whole Scoop](#)" which has lots of useful information for gardeners. 🌸



About the Author: Nancy Furth is a class of 1995 Master Gardener, former president of the organization, and dedicated, all-around gardener.

Other Online Resources

For commercially available tools:

http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston/commercially_available_tools.htm

For gardeners suffering from arthritis:

<http://arthritis.about.com/od/assistivedevicesgadgets/tp/gardentools.htm>

Book Review

By Kathleen Brooks

Malcolm Beck and his company, Gardenville Horticultural Products, support a nature based, organic approach to our environment. Mr. Beck shares a lifetime of experience in his book, [Lessons in Nature](#). His approach is to study the harmonious interactions of natural systems and work with those systems. Compost, mulch and compost tea are explained in terms of microorganisms. Corn gluten meal can be used as a fertilizer and weed inhibitor “with proper timing of application.” The proper times are explained for the desired effect.

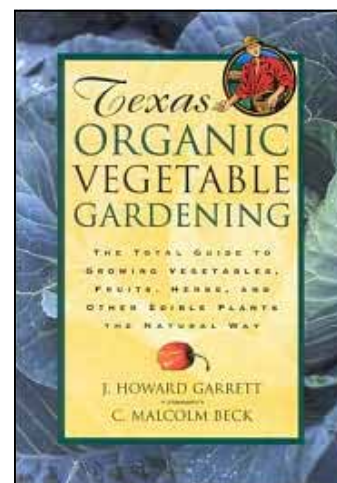
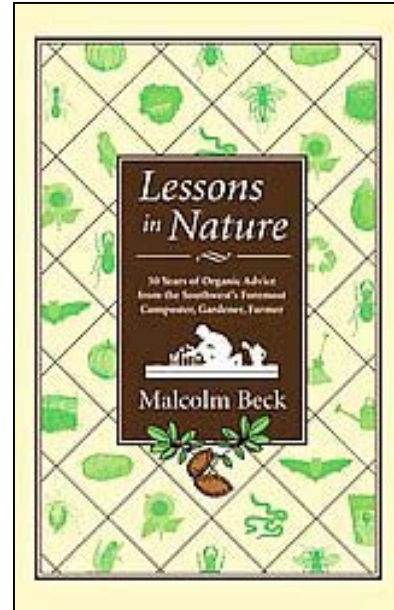
One of the better sections of this book has to do with “Critters: Friend & Foe.” Did you know the larval stage of lightning bugs is dining mostly on snails and slugs? And scientists “have not revealed its secret method of making cold light”? Paper wasps are your friend! Mr. Beck explains why aphids are beneficial--their presence alerts you to sick, weak plants. Lady beetles prefer to feed on a still healthy plant with a few aphids instead of an infested, imbalanced plant. So release the Lady beetles before the plants are over stressed and sickly!

We, as Master Gardeners, are tuned into these connections with nature’s intelligence. And Malcolm Beck’s **Lessons in Nature** will bring them into focus for us.

Jerry M. Parsons, Ph.D., Professor, Extension Horticulturist suggests other books by Howard Garrett & Malcolm Beck [Texas Bug Book](#) and [Texas Organic Vegetable Gardening](#). ⚙️



About the Author: Kathleen Brooks, Class of 2005, lives to read, research and learn.



This N That

Help the Help Desk

Remember the first time you went to the AgriLife office to answer phones? You were probably nervous and unsure. If you were lucky, you had someone there to show you the ropes, and we're lining up to help the next group of interns. Sign up to work with our newbies during their first time at the help desk. We have interns signed up starting in January, so please see the Help Desk Calendar online to choose a date and time to help an intern. Contact Sheila Nelson at the Extension Office, 972-548-4232, to be added to the schedule. You may also contact Elaine Taylor or Diane Sharp if you would like to be a mentor. Let Elaine know which days of the week you prefer. This is a good way to get an early start on your volunteer hours and help a new member. 🌸

Notes for the Calendar

January general meeting: January 22, 2009

February general meeting: February 26, 2009

March general meeting: March 26, 2009

Spring Plant Sale: April 18, 2009

Texas Master Gardener State Conference:
April 23-25, 2009 Marshall, Texas 🌸



Like to Read? Then Write, Too!

We're looking for people to write articles for both this publication, ECHO, and our new [GardenWise Gazette](#). If you've got an area of gardening/horticultural expertise, are willing to research, or have had an amazing experience with gardening, let us know. Even if you think you're not a writer, the editor is on hand to help! Contact [Katherine Ponder](#) with any ideas or thoughts on articles you'd like to contribute, and she will work with you to make you one of our published experts. 🌸

A Gardener's Journal: Leaves of Glass

By Mary Nell Jackson

Winter has arrived, no matter the official date on our calendars. Frost has taken our bounty and we are left with hopes of spring to come. Our landscape is becoming bare except for the evergreens that dot our gardens. For some gardeners who embrace the theory of being off the grid, so to speak, there is an answer for year around color in the garden.

When I was a small child, I remember my family's car trips to visit my grandparents who lived within a 50-mile radius from our home. I was small enough to just see out the car window, and when the comic books and toys became boring, I counted cows with my sister or how many white cars passed us. Most of all, however, I asked my parents questions.

There was a small farm house just off the highway and I never failed to spot the bottle tree in the mostly plant bare front yard. The tree had long since died and each branch held a blue bottle. My parents explained to me it was an old-fashioned custom to decorate the garden.

For many years after when I was grown and had my own sons, we traveled that same highway to visit my parents and passed that same tree. It stood timeless with its blue bottle leaves, and my sons asked me the same questions. I had learned more since my youth and related to them that the bottles were a Southern tradition and centered around the belief that evil spirits are trapped in the bottles at night. When the sun rises in the morning the spirits are destroyed by light.

I had also heard the tale that bottles hanging from trees prevented anyone from sneaking up in the night to bring harm to the family.

I never forgot the bottle tree of my youth and recall seeing others in my later travels. I

".....with every leaf that falls we are that much closer to winter's sleep."

- Author Unknown

thought about having one in my landscape but never got around to any research on it until I attended a state Master Gardeners meeting with Felder Rushing, horticulturist and author from Jackson, Mississippi. He was the featured speaker and showed slides of his own unusual garden and his



bottle trees. I was hooked. I was already a fan of Felder's book *Passalong Plants* that he wrote with Steve Bender.

Wow! The idea just called out to me, but I knew it couldn't look like the farm house bottle tree or my husband would move out.

So you can see where I am going with this bottle tree idea. When plants lose seasonal interest, bottles keep the color going. I will be the first to say bottle trees aren't for everyone,

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but for those who love whimsy, they are perfect!

Felder Rushing went on to become famous and is now National Director of the Garden Writer's Association. He inspired me to put bottle trees in my garden.

History

There are many versions of the history of the bottle tree. One dates the bottle trees to Africa and says that is the way the custom came to the southern states. Author Deborah Boykin wrote in *At Home in the Delta* that in Southern black folklore, the bottle tree was a means of protecting the home by trapping the evil spirits within the colorful bottles. You may recall in the movie about Ray Charles' life that showed a bottle tree by the front porch.

Bottle trees are having a resurgence in many public gardens. If you visit Festival Hill in Round Top, Texas, you will find a very large bottle tree adorned with colorful bottles. My latest discovery was at Mast Arboretum in Nacogdoches, Texas. They have a blue bottle tree with their bottles clustered very close together.

When I made my decision to put bottle trees in my garden, I carefully researched the idea. Every bit of information drove me on to put them in my landscape. I learned that bottle trees are over 2,000 years old. With that in mind, how could something that had survived in those long ago cultures be bad for the garden?

How To

Steve Orr of the *New York Times* offered this advice on garden ornamentation:

1. Don't go overboard
2. Use found objects
3. Use surprise [place objects half hidden in a leafy shrub]



4. Make ornaments focal points [remember your visitor's eye will go straight to any non-plant feature]

I could live with that advice as I hope that my bottle trees weren't considered overboard - well maybe by a few uptight gardener friends and visitors. Certainly I had collected the bottles over the years with the anticipation of this project, and I was recycling, after all. Boy would the bottle trees be a surprise to my husband! I had decided to place these ini-



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tial trees behind a grape arbor to catch the sun's path. This would ensure that they would not be the focal point of the garden unless you were sitting in the arbor. I was sure my family might not approve of bottle trees being the focal point of the garden.

I had read that many people rescued dead cedar trees for this project, but that idea didn't appeal to me. I instead chose three 6' x 6' posts. I had them concreted in the ground to the correct height behind my arbor. I found some small iron birds that I had mounted on the tops and then had holes drilled with very long screws. I marked the places I wanted the bottles, being careful to make sure the bottle would go into the screw tops. The hard work for me was the research. By the time I hired a young man to do the job, I sat back and gave directions. He went along with me as he had done work before and knew I never went by the books with any garden project.

Assembling your colorful bottles is half the battle. Look for red ones first, since they are the hardest to come by and the most colorful ones. There are no rules for this project, just fun and whimsy. Be sure to make the tree sturdy as you want it to withstand the weather and whatever animal might try to scale it. This project was completed about five years ago.

I was never content with not having a blue bottle tree. This past spring, I persuaded a local nursery to find someone who would weld bottle trees to sell. I asked the welder if he could make me three trees at different heights to place



behind a small fence connected to an arbor. I drew off the original idea I had, and he put a round, flat base on them so you could easily move them around the garden. I now have three portable blue bottle trees. I probably won't move mine, but the idea is good. I have my trees anchored with large stones and, just for safety sake, I tied them to the lower fence picket. They have withstood the winds of late and nary a bottle has crashed. I *did* learn that to have the 6 foot tall tree, the bottles have to be smaller.

Blue bottles are very easy to find. In fact my husband has drunk what he calls 'fancy bottled water' just so I could complete my last tree. My blue bottle trees became a family project after all. 🌸

Iron Bottle Trees are available at: Puckett's Nursery, 811 E. Main , Allen, TX 75013, 972-727-1145. Ask for Dianne Mathis Ogburn.



About the Author: Mary Nell Jackson, class of 1997, is a herb lover and discovered her love for writing about the garden a few years ago when she penned an article about gardening in her p.j.'s.

From the Help Desk

Some of you planned way ahead and others of us scrambled at the last minute to meet our phone hour requirements, but there were some great questions and answers flying around the office. Read on for a compilation of our FAQs from November and December.

Q: What are good trees for the Collin County area?

A: Referred them to the Aggie website's [Texas native tree database](#) for information. Also discussed [Texas Super Star](#) selections such as Shantung Maple, Lacey Oak, Chinese Pistache, and Chinkapin Oak .

Q: How do you transplant Eastern Red Cedars that have sprouted naturally but we want to move to another site?

A: Choose small trees to transplant, dig carefully and try to get as much of the root system as possible, dig a hole deep enough to accommodate the roots, make sure the base of the tree will be at the same soil level as it was previously, and backfill the hole with native soil. Mulch well.



Q: How do you winterize citrus and banana trees?

A: For the banana, wrap as much of the stalk as possible in burlap. For the citrus tree, if it is not in a pot that can be moved indoors,



wrap the trunk and major branches in burlap. Mulch the soil asap on top of the plants. The banana tree will come back in the spring, so you can cut off the dead leaves and stalks in early spring or late winter. The citrus may not survive, no matter what you do.

Q: Is it more effective to grow herbs in plastic or clay pots?

A: Referred the caller the book, *Herbs in the Garden*, by Mr. Wolman. Explained that clay and terracotta have traditionally been favored for herb gardens. They drain well and are attractive, but can dry out quickly during hot weather and may crack during a freeze. Plastic is lightweight and may not be sturdy enough to hold up a large, fully grown herb. However, it's largely a matter of preference.



Q: Is this a good time of year to remove groundcover? Also, I hate to throw away plants but don't want my ivy anymore. Any suggestions?

A: Late fall is the best time to relocate bushes, groundcovers, and more. Since you don't want the ivy anyway, you can dig it up now and offer it to friends and neighbors. Just keep it in a sheltered spot until you can off-load them. Also, you can post plant giveaways (and almost any other free giveaways) through www.freecycle.org. Master Gardeners and gardening clubs often have members that want pass-along plants. 🌱

Garden Checklist for January/February

By: Dr. William C. Welch, Professor & Landscape Horticulturist, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX. The following information was compiled from the 2008 updates available at <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/extension/newsletters/hortupdate/tamuhort.html>.

Ahhh... It's a short list at this time of year. Put your feet up and relax a little between these chores!

- Don't fertilize newly set out trees or shrubs until after they have started to grow, and then only very lightly, the first year.
- When buying plants, the biggest is not always the best, especially with bare-rooted plants. The medium to small sized (4 to 6 feet) usually become established faster and will become effective in the landscape more quickly than the large sizes.
- Complete the bare-root planting of woody landscape plants this month. Container and ball-and-burlapped plants are in good supply and can be set out most any time. Winter and early spring planting provides an opportunity for good establishment before hot weather comes.
- Prune roses during February except in the Panhandle and far North Texas, where roses are pruned in March or April. Use good shears that will make clean cuts. Remove dead, dying, and weak canes. Leave four to eight healthy canes and remove approximately one-half of the top growth along the height of the plant.
- Now is an excellent time to select and plant container-grown roses to fill in bare spots in your rose garden.
- Wait until after they finish flowering before pruning spring-flowering shrubs such as quince, azalea, forsythia and spirea.
- When pruning shrubs, follow these steps: (1) prune out any dead or damaged branches first; (2) thin out by removing about one-third of the canes or stems at ground level, removing the oldest canes only; (3) shape the rest of the plant but do not cut everything back to the same height.
- Plant dahlia tubers in late February and early March.
- Plant gladiolus corms; space planting dates at two-week intervals to extend flowering season.
- Fertilize pansies once again for continued flowering. Don't forget to water when needed.
- A potted plant, tree, shrub, or cut flowers make excellent Valentine gifts for loved ones and shut-ins. 🌸

Thanks to ECHO Newsletter contributors: The submission deadline for the March/April 2009 issue of the ECHO Newsletter is February 10, 2009. Send submissions, comments and suggestions to:

Kathleen Brooks
Greg Church
Nancy Furth
Mary Ann Hicken
Mary Nell Jackson
Katherine Ponder
Diane Sharp
Dr. William C. Welch

Editor, Katherine Ponder at:
katherineponder@yahoo.com

Or Mary Ann Hicken at:
hgmahicken@verizon.net



CCMGA
Texas AgriLife Extension
825 N. MacDonald Street
Suite 150
McKinney, TX 75069