

NEWSLETTER OF THE SAN ANTONIO HERB SOCIETY

EDIBLE LANDSCAPING

David Nelson II and his wife Brenda know a lot about gardening and landscaping. Often tricky for homeowners, as installation of a tree or raised beds can be fairly permanent. If you are new to South Texas, or not aware of the soil type in your yard and garden area, it can affect your success. Da-



vid and Brenda are here to help you think about landscaping: the sun availability, fruit and vegetable options and even herbs to scatter through your yard and garden.

There are plenty of places to grow different fruits and vegetables, and to make them look natural and in place. So with an eye to art, food growing and even some economics come learn about edible landscaping from the experts.

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Culinary Contributions

SOIL TEMPERATURE

raganandmassey.com form "Before planting anything, take the topsoil temperature"



With spring firmly entrenched, the outside temperatures are rapidly rising. But that doesn't necessarily mean that your soil is quite done hibernating. To ensure the success of anything you plant, we recommend getting out in the dirt and taking its temperature. It's easier than you think!

Optimum soil temperatures are a vital part of the plant germination process and serve as a lifeline to the plant through full maturity. The temperature measured in the first four inches below ground level is called the *topsoil temperature*. This is the critical temperature to know before planting, and measuring topsoil temperature is not as complicated as you might think. In fact, you might have what you need in the kitchen right now in the form of a simple meat or candy thermometer. Just make sure your meat thermometer can measure temps as low as 40 degrees. (We put this one in ice water

to see if it measured low temperatures. It is not an ideal measurer because the probe is only 3 inches.) Here's how to use your handy kitchen option. Push the thermometer into the ground so that at least four inches of the probe is below ground. Keep it in the ground for at least five minutes and then read the temperature gauge. If the soil is below 45 degrees, it's too cold for planting. Most forage seeds require the topsoil temperature to be 45 degrees or higher to germinate. Turf grass and row crops need the topsoil temperature in the 50- to 55-degree range.



For the southern U.S., four-inch soil temperatures typically reach an average of 50 degrees or higher in February or March. For example, Oklahoma has an average four-inch soil temperature of 50 degrees by early March. By mid-April, soil temperatures typically reach the low 60s. Around mid-May, temps climb to the upper 70s to low 80s.

You can go to their website to see a map of soil temperatures right now at raganandmassey.com (Well, not exactly, you can spend a lot of time looking around websites and almanacs and never see a map). Or you could go outside with a thermometer and measure.

Now, you may be thinking "Robin, this is supposed to be the culinary part of the newletter. What happened?" Culinary has to do with assembling ingredients, mixing, measuring temperature and then eating a final product. We are just taking the final product back to its inception, putting the seeds in the ground, and measuring the temperature is an important part.

Someone printed a Linzer Cookies recipe, left lovely copies on the table, which will be published, as soon as it can be found. Hint to those contributing, it takes the editor time to type the recipes that go into the newsletter. If you have a typed copy, could you send it by email to the editor? That would make sure it landed in the Yerba. Thank you.

UPCOMING EVENTS

WEED AND GLOAT FOR MARCH Monday March 25 EARTHWISE LIVING DAY is tomorrow March 2

Come join the throng who want to save the planet. This even is annual and a wonderful experience. 9 to 1 at 6427 Evers Road Leon Valley Community Center

SAWS SPRING BLOOM MARCH 9 from 9-1

2800 Hwy 281 at Mulberry 78212

There will be free plant give-away, plants for sale, lots of in-

formative lectures and answers to all of your garden questions. Bring a friend, expect beautiful breezy weather. Parking available, they will direct you to a large parking area, but expect a little delay as there are other events in the area.

NEXT GENERAL MEETING THURSDAY MARCH 14



EARTHDAY AT WOODLAWN LAKE PARK. April 20

Earthday is more of a Public Relations event. We set up early in the morning and just visit with people, letting them know that there is an Herb Society and it is open to the public. It is a good time to tell people our "Why." We will have a seed planting event for kids, information about herbs and presentations on Ollas and how they can help conserve water. Sign up sheets at March meeting.

HOW ARE YOUR YARROW SEEDLINGS COMING ALONG?



FROM THE PREZ SALAD DAYS

It has occurred to me that something is misnamed. Beautiful summer days are called Salad Days. I guess it is because people like to eat light food and salads come to mind. This is a misnomer. The best lettuces grow in the winter. We have found a number of varieties that come through light frost with no problem; through a freeze if covered with a blanket.

There is no need to have a huge garden row of lettuce- bowls will do nicely. We put them near the door, so we remember to water, weed and harvest them on a regular basis. You can harvest by taking the outer leaves off and letting the whole plant continue to grow. Alternately, sow a lot of seeds and pull the smallest, allowing the larger ones to fill the pot.

The most colorful blend is Farmer's Market Blend of Mesclun: Tango, Royal Oak Leaf, Black Seeded Simpson, Red Salad Bowl, Grand Rapids, and Red Sails. The packet is from Botanical Interests and sells 500 mg for \$2.69. We can get about five sowings out of this one packet.

We did not realize that romaine lettuce can grow here in South Texas. The one in the picture is Little Gem, classified as a mini-romaine. That is fine for our table, as a whole romaine is more than we usually eat in a week.

Marvel of Four Seasons looks like fall oak leaves, a lovely rich burgundy color. It is also a heading lettuce called Butterhead. Another butterhead is Butter crunch. This makes small heads to harvest whole.



The other thing we did not know about was using a salad spinner. Rather than just rinse leaves under flowing water (this step could be done in an outdoor sink if the plumbing is piped from the house), rinse the leaves and pull any inedibles off (putting them into the compost bucket). In the house sink fill the spinner bowl with lettuce. Add water up to the brim of the bowl, THEN plunge the inner sieve up and down in the water. Pour the water out and repeat, until the rinse water is clear.

Finally, shake the wet lettuce sieve, and spin the lettuce. Dry the lettuce on a cloth towel, or just transfer to a bag for storage until dinner. We try hard to pick only as much

as we will eat in a day, as it keeps the lettuce fresher, and allows the lettuce in the garden to keep growing. That is sort of the opposite of

our grocery store mentality, where we shop for the whole week and expect things to stay fresh or end up tossing wilted lettuce in the compost bin.

So, this leads us to remind you that our program this month is on edible landscaping. I am picturing the beautiful garden that Thomas Jefferson had. But, then again he had lots of people helping him and most of us are the only crew available.

We have done a little landscaping that is edible. A tangerine tree that bears fra-

grant fruit that makes for great marmalade. A plum, yet to bear fruit, A very large artichoke instead of a very large cactus. A border of onions. Tomato plants hidden behind big purple spires bushes (the HOA has a thing about vegetable gardens in the front of the house). Herbs inter mixed with flowering plants. We hope to learn more about Edible Gardening from the Nelsons, March 14.







REASONS WE SHOULD NOT PLANT AN HERB GARDEN

Do you watch YouTube videos for gardening information? I find them so helpful but take them with a grain of salt. People from Oregon are always telling you these plants they have just grow on their own without any care. Yes, as long as it rains every other day!

So, I am shamelessly stealing some excellent ideas from the Millennial Gardener, Marcus Chia, out of costal North Carolina, southwest of Wilmington in humid subtropical Zone 8a. Basically, he suggest interplanting your herbs in a variety of places where they make the most sense and where they have the best microclimate to live.

First, herbs have a lot of repulsive qualities- they repel insects- especially using scents. Basil interplanted with tomatoes helps form a barrier to prevent pests on your tomatoes. (also good to pick and use together) Cilantro, oregano, mint, dill, parsley, chives, garlic, fennel, and green onions all have insect repelling qualities. They are often used with companion planting with specific garden vegetables. The concentrated oils of many of these have been used in 'natural' insect repellents.

Second, many herbs are invasive. For example, mint is very invasive in south Texas. He lists thyme, oregano, rosemary sage and lavender. He is writing from the east coast. We in Texas would love to stand by and be invaded by, say, lavender. However, oregano, rosemary and sage do get larger than their four-inch pots once placed in the ground. We have just come to appreciate that they have spread out. The suggestion is to place them in locations where their invasion may be slowed: the understory of a tree, for example. The tree roots tend to go down as a tap root and, for example, thyme has smaller spreading roots. Both plants can live in harmony.

Third, many herbs, especially in Texas, will be healthier in the heat of the summer if they have scattered shade rather than full sun. In the winter, when the leaves fall, herbs will thrive in the full sun. Tree limbs also provide a certain amount of heat retention lending cold resistance to plants located below them. Also, planting under trees can be more space effective.

Fourth, Herbs can be a living ground cover which help suppress weed growth. The picture shows how bee balm has kept down the growth of oxalis weeds.



Landscaping can use evergreen herb plants around the foundation of a house. Because here may be mostly shade, herbs that do not flower might be a good choice. Evergreens such as oregano, thyme, and rosemary make a good cover for bare walls. The walls radiate heat in the winter sun, helping to shelter the herbs as well.

For vegetable gardens, use non-invasives to interplant. Onions, leeks, garlic, basil, dill cilantro and parsley. In larger landscapes, especially in full sun, choose colorful herbs. Mexican mint marigold has two-foot-high plants with lots of long-lasting yellow flowers. The Herb of the Year, Yarrow comes in a wide variety of colors that can be scattered over gardens to blend with like or contrasting colors, late spring through fall. Rosemary which blooms intermittently, attracts lots of honey bees. Native Bulbs - Each spring the roadsides and prairies across Texas slip into the soft fragrant cloak of native bulbs. Beginning in late February and early March, wild onions spring up and send out their sweet fragrance to attract early nectaring in-

see the first blooms of the coming

Drummond's onion (Allium drum-



sects and wildflower hunters anxious to season.

mondii),

Pink nodding onion (A. cernuum), both flowering onions are edible, unlike some other native onion-family plants like Zigadenus nuttallii, which can be fatal if ingested.





<u>Wild hyacinths</u> (Camassia scilloides) make their show in March.

A close non-edible relative, <u>false garlic</u> (Nothoscotum bi-valve), an early bloomer, sometimes sending forth sweetly scented white blooms during brief winter warm spells.





<u>Rain lilies</u> (most common, the <u>giant prairie lily</u> Zephranthes drummondii) bloom after it rains at any time from spring to fall.









Copper lily (Habranthes tubispathus) pops up in summer and fall.





<u>Southern swamp lily</u> (*Crinum americanum*) will bloom intermittently from July to November (referred to as an aquatic lily, it will do very well in most regularly water landscapes).







Spider-lilies (Hymenocallis lirisome and H. caroliniana) bloom from April through July







Feb. 2024

"We can complain because we have rose bushes with thorns,

or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses."

Abraham Lincoln

Several wonderful volunteer herb society members gathered around 10 AM on a warm winter day at the SA Herb society's spot at the Botanical Gardens. The later time was set a few months ago due to worries of cold weather, but that was not the case this day since the high was expected to reach 80 degrees. Joy and Gloria were early birds and had gotten a head start weeding as the rest of the weeders arrived; even Marsha was on time! They started the morning with only the tools they brough but were finally supplied with buckets, a large sack for weeds, a broom and a shovel. The garden looked good overall, lots of blank

space with mulch in between the plants, which were mostly in nice mounds.



The rosemary, upright germander (pictured), and copper fennel are the plants doing the best in the garden. The weeds working to win over the space and slightly succeeding are mint and oxalis. Joy moved some mint to the barrel to try and keep it self-contained since it is such a hardy herb. As weeders were working away lots of school children were charging through and not even stopping to look around. Maybe it's due to everything being way too green and no identifying signs are visible which might encourage them to stop and look. Hopefully we can work on this so it could be more enticing for people and encourage them to see what is in the garden.

Among other plants that are doing well is the parsley and rue, has deep turquoise blue green growth on top. The oregano is coming back the stems that were cut down last month. They are cut like this for a reathough as the theory behind herbs is that you can grow them in dense mounds, which in turn keeps weeds from growing up in the garden. This is



ways the case, but sometimes nature just takes its path. For example the rose escapee is doing well. think it has come from seed to join our side of the It wasn't meant to be on our side of the fence, but doesn't seem to mind a change of scenery and is quite well.



As for additions to the garden, we need to request winter savory since this grows well all summer and makes a little shrub that is an evergreen perennial herb. It has

dark green leaves with small spiky white flowers and looks similar to oregano. Dried it has mild peppery flavor with notes of marjoram and mint. One addition was taken care of by the lovely volunteers who took the time to harvest marigold seeds from this garden. Last month, heads of marigolds were harvested and then dried for the purpose of replanting. To mark the spot in the garden golf tees were used so we do not weed out these plants next month. Two spots were marked as seen in the picture and the seeds were sewn all around the golf tee. Hopefully some new growth will be seen next time that aren't weeds as there are some bare spots from plants that did not survive the winter. Marsha got a saw to cut out the stumps of the larger herbs that are now gone. The lemongrass was but too low previously so very little growth is returning there as well.



Sage is among the thriving plants in the herb garden and the question arose on the difference between Jerusalem Sage and Berggarten Sage. <u>Berggarten sage</u>, scientifically known as Salvia officinalis 'Berggarten,' is a type of sage that is prized for its ornamental value. It has large, rounded leaves that are a soft graygreen color. Berggarten sage is often used in landscaping as a focal point or as a border plant. It is also edible and can be used in cooking like common sage. Its botanical name, Salvia, means good health and salvation. The species Officinalis refers to an herbal store or pharmacy. Hence, it is used in medicinal treatments for digestive issues, depression, and memory loss, including Alzheimer's disease, which is a great reason to consume it regularly! Cooks and gardeners alike are in-

debted to this evergreen perennial for the unique, pungent flavor and aroma that its gray-green leaves produce. 'Berggarten' is more compact than the species, forming a 2-foot-tall by 3-foot-wide bush with woody stems that may be trimmed back to newly emerging growth or strong stems in spring. In early to midsummer, it sends up purple flower spikes. It boasts attractively rounded leaves and, like the species, has both ornamental and culinary qualities in an herb garden. It tolerates alkaline soils but not wet winter conditions. The blue flowers make this a really attractive type of sage, but you can also use the fresh leaves throughout summer in the kitchen. *Jerusalem sage* (*Phlomis fruticose*) is a fast-growing, warm-season plant that reaches three to four feet tall with an equal spread. The semi-woody evergreen plant has fuzzy, grayish-green, textured leaves and bright yellow, wooly blossoms in late spring through early summer. The blooms form a cluster of rings around the stems on a vertical stalk arranged with one flower on top of another, producing an interesting effect. Its flowers attract butterflies and hummingbirds. It can be used in an herb garden as an accent, in raised planters or containers, or in vegetable gardens. The flower heads and seeds can be dried and used in flower arrangements. The stems and leaves are covered in thick woolly hair; the silvery-green leaves are fragrant, and their bright blooms attract bees, butterflies, and birds. As a tea, it is taken to soothe throat and stomach, aid digestion, aid in weight-loss and cramps.

After continuing to weed away the large quantaties of oxalis everyone was chatting and enjoying themselves and each others company. Cindy even shared that one of her goals is to have enough sweet basil in a garden bed that she can lie down and roll in it, but she doesn't have enough growing in her bed to do this. We alal offered to come video tape the event and she said we could show the video at her funeral; good plan! In life sometimes we have to stop and roll around in whatever makes us happy and hopefully we have some friends around to cheer us along. All the friends left made plans to go to Tycoon flats which has out door seating and lots of hanging plants everywhere with a huge menu of almost all hamburgers. Pictures had to be taken of these glorious hamburger masterpieces and other delicious meals. It was overall a great day to appreciate the roses among the thorns.



TO DO IN THE MARCH GARDEN *

"I have found, through years of practice, that people garden in order to make something grow; to interact with nature; to share, to find sanctuary, to heal, to honor the earth, to leave a mark. Through gardening, we feel whole as we make our own personal work of art upon our land." - Julie Moir Messervy, The Inward Garden

The first of March is typically the last frost date.

This is an unusually warm winter so we may have seen it January 15,2024.

HERB GARDEN

Thin annual seedlings planted in February. Plant transplants of annual or perennial herbs and label

cultivars for identification: parsley, French thyme (which does better in S.A.'s hot months than English thyme), oreganos, and Mexican mint marigold. Basil seed, which needs warm soil (day/night temps, above 60 degrees.) Plant ginger roots shallow in an area where they will receive afternoon shade. For edible ginger, purchase firm roots from the produce section of your local grocery store. - *HERBS: A Resource Guide for San Antonio*

GARDEN

Harvest spinach, leaf lettuce, collars and other greens one leaf at a time as you need them

for salads.

Side-dress onions with 1 cup of slow-release lawn fertilizer or 2 cups of organic fertilizer per 10 feet of row. Sow sweet corn, snap and lima beans and cucumber seeds. Plant watermelons, squash, seed

potatoes, carrots and all types of beans. Gardening tips - Have you ever pre-sprouted your potatoes? This technique will give you a jump on the growing season. It is kind of like starting your vegetable seedlings inside. Just place your seed potatoes in a warm (70 degree or so) spot with a little indirect light about two weeks before you intend to plant them. When the sprouts are about 1/2-inch long, it is time to cut the potatoes into seed pieces, dip in sulfur and plant.

If you suspect a late frost is on the way and you want to protect your small tomato transplants, try this. Fill a gallon size plastic milk jug with water and place it on the north side of the plants, as close to the plant as possible. During the day, the water will absorb heat and then during the night it will release the heat to provide several degrees of frost protection.

Oust APHIDS! Consider adding nasturtiums (aphid's favorite snack!) to your flower bed.

When the nasturtiums get attacked, just yank them out and destroy them, leaving your

other plants in fine shape.

Plant warm-season annuals and vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers, petunías and Dahlberg

daisies, but protect the plants if frost (or hail storm) is predicted.

Sow bush lima beans, pole lima beans, cantaloupe and watermelon seeds.

If weather is looking good, this is a good time for planting cantaloupes, watermelons and

cucumbers Remove freeze-damaged vegetables from your garden to prevent disease.

Consider geraniums for a splash of color on the patio or balcony. They can handle full sun until temperatures increase. Then move them to a location with less sun.

Cold-sensitive plants can be placed on the patio now (check weather forecast). Be prepared to protect them if a late freeze threatens.

Place Gro-Web on the cages for protection from wind and cool nights

For an effective butterfly garden, select nectar flowers that bloom at different times.

Ground temperature is warming up, and hot-season crops can be sown. Consider planting Southern peas, pumpkins, peanuts, squash and okra.

BIRDS Spring is an exciting time for backyard bird watching as some of our familiar friends migrate home and join those who stayed all winter. Watch for beautiful *warblers as* they secretly journey through our yards during the first few weeks of May. Grab your binoculars, and you may catch a glimpse of one flitting about tree branches or checking out your birdbath mister. Keep an eye out for nest-building and nestling-feeding behaviors as *bluebirds, wrens, chickadees and woodpeckers* take to the nest and raise their young. Put bird feeders and birdbaths near protective cover, such as trees and shrubs. After cleaning your birdhouses, put a few s

Depending on weather & sightings, it's time to clean & set out <u>hummingbird</u> feeders!

Goldfinches are changing to their breeding plumage now. Keep providing thistle and sunflower seeds for another month before they head north.

FLOWERS Divide summer and fall blooming perennials, including cannas, mallows, fall asters, mums and perennial salvias.

Geraniums, dianthus, and petunias (salvia plants can be set out too) are good color plants for the sun during this transition from cool weather to hot.

ROSES Selecting and planting new roses should be done as early as possible. The best bushes (strongest) go to the early buyers and those bushes that are planted quickly have the best chance of surviving. Establishing a good root system before the plant leafs out and avoiding all chemical fertilizers for the first month ensures the plant won't dehydrate when the warm temperatures arrive. (Fanicks has roses now. Choose a site, dig a hole, then go buy the rose.) Our first fungal attack in the Spring will be from powdery mildew followed a month or two later by black spot. Both can be prevented by pre-spraying bushes when they are cut back and before much foliage is established, with something like *Daconil* or *Triforine* (formerly *Funginex*). *Daconil* may do a better job when outside temperatures are no higher than the 80's. (Neem oil: "Rose *Defense*", and others can be used if temperatures don't get up above 90).

It is <u>not necessary</u> to spray for insects until they appear. APHIDS are the chief insect pests at this time and they can be controlled with almost any good insecticide (sprayed just on the new foliage where the insects are feeding). If established roses were not fertilized in late Feb., they should be fed at once. One WEED pulled now prevents umpteen in April. If we have very many weeds, we may not be using enough mulch. Be sure to water before and after spraying and feeding.

Revitalize leggy salvia, pomegranate, crape myrtle, vitex, ceniza and other shrubs by removing the old stem at ground level. Leave

three to eight young stems. Begonias can be set out in the landscape. Bronze-leafed, pink-flowered begonias will do well in full sun. Pansies, stocks, calendulas and other cool-weather blooms decline quickly if they dry out. Keep them well-watered.

Let potting medium of geraniums dry between waterings For an effective butterfly garden, select nectar flowers that bloom at different times.

ROSE APHID Antidote: Take 1 orange peel, coarsely chopped, 1 tbsp. of baby shampoo, and 2

cups of water then put in a blender and blend on high for 10 -15 seconds. Strain out the

pulp into a coffee filter, then pour the liquid into a handheld mist sprayer. Get out your

hose and blast your roses with a high-pressure spray nozzle to dislodge the aphids. Then

mist spray the plants... and it's adios aphids.

YARD To revitalize your lawn, aerate and top-dress your lawn now with a 1/2 inch of compost. It's too early to fertilize lawns

Fertilize fruit trees with 1 cup of slow-release lawn fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter.

Spread it around the drip line. Prune the tallest, thinnest canes of nandina to 2" to encourage thicker bushes Fertilize pecans with 21-0-0 or other high-nitrogen fertilizer on 30-day intervals early

March through early May

Feed deciduous trees and shrubs as they resume growth. Prune crape myrtles in mid to late March for shaping. Do not cut their tops off.

Replenish the mulch of young trees. Place it in a donut shape so the mulch is over the roots

but not against the trunk (at least 3 inches away)

Thin peaches and plums to one fruit every 6 inches when they reach dime size.

Wait to fertilize your lawn until you have mowed real grass twice. Fertilizing too early only benefits the weeds.

*The document we take this information from is organized by four week sections. To keep that organized the same way, we have changed the fonts from Comic Sans to other fonts, then bold to non-bold. We then organized by topic, so you do not have to drill down through the whole document just to see what to do for flowers or birds.

Hope that this will help you read through more quickly. On review, it is looking a little crazy. Next time will just go from bold to not bold to delineate, we'll see if that works better

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WEED AND GLOAT

Come weed with us at the

Botanical Gardens! Feel welcome to come to join us this month in the sunshine. Next Weed and Gloat is scheduled for Mondav March 25 We meet at 9 A.M. Contact robinmaymar@gmail.com for Gear we need to bring

The San Antonio Herb Society does not advise, recommend or prescribe herbs for medicinal use; Information is provided as an educational service and the San Antonio Herb Society cannot be held liable for its content. Please consult a health care provider before pursuing any herbal treatments.

Herb Society Board

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SALAD DAYS

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Email: naturesherbfarm@att.net Website: naturesherbfarms.com

Rainbow Gardens

8516 Bandera Rd, San Antonio, TX 78250 210) 680-2394 https://www.rainbowgardens.biz/



Did You know SAHS Members get a 10% off discount at these local businesses?





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