



Compost Matters

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July/August 2004

Around the Backyard Bin



Weather in Texas! So unpredictable! Just as you start making plans to build an ark, the sun comes out and not a drop of rain falls for weeks. Meteorologists reported that June 2004 was the second wettest June in North Texas recorded history. The City's Urban Forester, **Renee Burke-Brown**, measured the rainfall around the Environmental Discovery Center and found that the garden received 11 inches of rain. The native and adaptive plants that have had to deal with too much water and then a lot of dry weather are looking dynamite. This can be attributed to three things; selecting the proper plants, placing them in beds of clay soil that had been amended with compost and then covering the beds with mulch. Thanks to **Ramiro Ortiz and Sarah Cox-Davis** for watering the trees and plants during July.

Volunteers **Claudia Dubuisson, Kate Whidden, Fernando Aragon, Lonna Jochetz, John Moore, Ramiro Ortiz, Janet Hurley, Erin Hoffer, Candace Fountoulakis, Gregg Shields, Ramiro Ortiz, Brenda Steib, Jeff Dickerson and Sharon Meines** met on **Saturday, June 5, July 10 and July 17** for the monthly garden workday to complete the planting of the garden, cleaning out the shed and completing the chrysalis along the Butterfly Life Cycle Walk. The children's garden raised beds were weeded and had compost and soil blend mixture

MASTER COMPOSTER MEETING



If you are an organic gardening enthusiast or are interested in organic garden practices then you need to be at the next Master Composter meeting on **Thursday, August 5, 2004, from 7:00-8:30pm**. The speaker will be **Greg Rohde**, owner of Rohde's Nursery located in Garland. Greg has long been known for his establishment of organic programs and his approach to organic landscaping using compost to prepare beds for native and adaptive plants. At the meeting he will be discussing the use of compost to maintain our landscape during the summer months and steps to follow to prepare for fall. The meeting will take place at the **Parkway Service Center, 4120 West Plano Parkway, Training Room A**. Mark your calendar now and plan to attend!

tilled into the existing soil. Many thanks go to **Myron Hirschman** for delivering compost, soil blend and mulch to the garden for the scheduled projects. These beds will be planted with pumpkins and other vegetables that will be used at the **Kids In the Garden Fallfest** scheduled for **September 25** in the Environmental Discovery Garden. Our next scheduled workday is **Saturday, August 7, 8:00am – 11:00am**, so please mark your calendar. **Contact Sharon Meines by email, sharonm@plano.gov or phone 972-769-4313** to let her know of your willingness to help.

From the Compost Marketing and Education Coordinator



It has been full steam ahead during the spring and summer months with volunteers participating in many children's programs and special events such as Spring Into Gardening, Juneteenth celebration, Plano Pure sales and the Fourth of July parade down Independence Pkwy. Thank you all for your support. I hope you had some fun along the way. I know that I have had fun working with you. Now we are looking forward to the new school year that is just a couple of weeks away and making our plans. Heather and I are readying outreach programs with P.I.S.D., private schools, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, home schoolers and visitors to the Environmental Discovery Garden. If working in the garden is not something you enjoy during the summer, perhaps you might be interested in writing, typing, copying, or gathering up craft materials for the Discovery Boxes and new classes that are being developed. If you have a dramatic flare, you might want try your hand at writing new scripts for Wonder Worm. If you're an artist, several props we use in training need to be redone. If you like to teach adults, we offer Yardwise and Compost 101 or Vermi-composting 101 classes.

I have included four new articles in this newsletter that I think you will enjoy. I selected a plant and a tree to write about that are found in the Environmental Discovery Garden. I also listed some very good websites during my surfing that you may not know about. Janet Hurley is our first guest writer. In her article, she describes what she has done to revive her dying sweet gum tree with the magic bullet – compost and jet propelled water.

Sharon Meines

UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, August 5 Master Composter Meeting

Speaker: Greg Rohde
7:00pm – 8:30pm
Parkway Service Center
4120 West Plano Parkway
Training Room A

Saturday, August 7 Garden Workday

8:00am – 11:00am
Environmental Discovery Garden
4120 West Plano Parkway

Saturday, September 11 Compost 101

9:00am – 11:00am
Parkway Service Center
4120 West Plano Parkway
Training Room A

Tuesday, September 21 Worm Composting 101

7:00pm – 8:30pm
Parkway Service Center
4120 West Plano Parkway
Training Room A

Saturday, September 25 Kids In the Garden Fallfest

9:00am – 12:00pm
Environmental Discovery Garden
4120 West Plano Parkway

Thursday, Friday & Saturday November 4, 5 & 6 Master Composter Training Tell your friends!

Environmental Discovery Garden Tree of the Month - Golden Raintree



The **Koelreuteria paniculata** or **Golden Raintree** is native to Japan, Korea and China and has adapted well to Texas soils. It is a deciduous shade tree that grows 20-35 feet tall and has a spread of 15-20 feet. This upright, open-branching tree has beautiful, yellow flowers in the early summer and distinctive seed pods and yellow leaves in the fall. It typically has a compact, rounded crown.

Bright yellow flowers bloom in large terminal clusters in late spring to early summer, covering the entire tree. The flowers are followed by decorative, distinctive seedpods that are paper-walled, lantern-like capsules. The leaves are alternate, compound, 8-14 inches long and are medium-green to almost blue-green on top. The leaves drop early in the fall after turning a yellow to yellow-orange fall color. The bark ranges from a silvery gray color to a grayish brown. The texture becomes coarser with age.

Golden Raintree is easy to grow in moderately moist and well-drained soil and does not need heavy fertilization. It is easy to propagate by seed. Collect the seed from the mature, brown seed capsules, plant in containers and store indoors in the winter for protection. Move the container out-of-doors in the spring. You can also store the seed at 44F and plant directly into beds in spring.



Plant of the Month - Salvia greggii

Salvia greggii or **Autumn Sage**, is a true member of the sage family and is considered a native flowering perennial. It has wonderful foliage whose spicy fragrance becomes obvious when you brush against it. It grows well in any local soil – limestone, clay and sandy – if it is well drained. The flowers, only an inch in size, are extremely colorful and in constant bloom from spring until hard frost. It blooms in a variety of colors such as orange, pink, red, white and purple. It is a natural for use in containers, masses or borders and attracts hummingbirds and butterflies.

Plant **Salvia greggii** in early spring or fall. It prefers full sun to part shade. Work compost into the native soil prior to planting to ensure the soil drains well. Water as necessary to prevent soil dryness, but do not over-water or keep wet. You may fertilize once a year using a premium-quality, slow release fertilizer. It grows 1-3 feet tall and 3 feet wide. There are no serious insect or disease problems.

Special Volunteer Events Worth Mentioning

May and June were very busy times for the Master Composters. Volunteers attended a banquet, marched in a parade, taught children about composting, vermicomposting, and organic recycling in the garden, sold Plano Pure and spread the good news about the benefits of composting and the Plano Pure products.

The Plano Community Awards Banquet held on May 6, 2004 at the Plano Centre was the culmination of a year's work and a time when Master Composter volunteers were recognized for their service to the community. A wonderful dinner and program were given in appreciation for the tireless efforts volunteers put forth to make the City's Environmental Waste Services programs so successful. **Janet Hurley** was recognized as Master Composter Volunteer of the Year and **Fran Bolin** received the Rookie of the Year Award. **Harry Casto** and **Pam Farmer** received Distinguished Service Awards for outstanding contributions to the program. The Master Composter **Advisory Board** members were recognized for their service to the organization.

Master Composters participated in the success of the Spring Into Gardening event on Saturday, June 12 at the Plano Municipal Center. They helped set up, serve breakfast and lunch, sell Plano Pure, demonstrate how to build a compost pile and talked about the benefits of Plano Pure products. Volunteers included **Ramiro Ortiz, Kate Whidden, Dan McNeill, Erin Hoffer, Sarah Cox-Davis,**



Claudia Dubuisson, Fernando Aragon, Janet Hurley, Pam Farmer, and Ben Crawford.

On June 19, several Master Composters participated in the Juneteenth celebration at the Douglass Community Center. Volunteers **Kate Whidden, Dan McNeill, John Moore** and **Deb Bliss** enjoyed talking with all the guests about composting and vermicomposting while enjoying mouth-watering barbeque with all the fixin's. Although it poured rain all day, it didn't dampen anyone's spirits.

Barbara Harrison, Candace Foutoulakis and **Sarah Cox-Davis** aided in classes held in the garden for children from the Therapeutic Recreation Center, Kids R Kids Preschool and Bent Tree Preschool. **Kate Whidden** held two vermicomposting training classes at her office. Thanks ladies, for spreading the word about composting!

Several volunteers marched in the Plano Fourth of July parade to support the Keep Plano Beautiful campaign. They included **Dan McNeill, Kate Whidden, Patty Taylor, Sharon Will, Barbara Harrison** and **Sarah Cox-Davis**. Sample bags of Plano Pure were handed out to the crowd.

Many Master Composters performed outreach services by working in the HHW Center during May and June. Those volunteers include **Harry Casto, Yolanda Chang, Dan McNeill, Grace Errington, Ben Crawford, Susan Hughes, Emma Bookout, Judi Gradt, Betty Post, Kim Le, Heping Yue** and **Erin Hoffer**.

New Master Composters

Three volunteers are now certified Master Composters with the State of Texas and were recognized at the Plano Community Awards Banquet. Congratulations go to **Claudia Dubuisson, Wilson Yu** and **Sharon Meines**. Upon completion of an additional twenty hours for the City of Plano, they receive a compost thermometer for their continued community outreach work.



Say Cheese!

Thanks to **Sarah Cox-Davis** and **Candace Foutoulakis** for capturing the beauty of the garden and events that are held there. Pictures in this issue were taken by **Sarah**. **Candace's** pictures were used in a previous issue.

Websites

Here are a few websites that are very helpful if you want to learn about composting, native / adaptive plants and wildlife in the North Texas area. Next time you are surfing the internet, check these sites out.

mastercomposer.com

nwf.org

aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu

enature.com

dallas.tamu.edu

If you know of a website that the Master Composter volunteers would be interested in, please email Sharon at sharonm@plano.gov and it will be included in the next newsletter.



The Sweet (Gum) Smell of Success

sending 10 to 15 bags of grass and weeds back to Myron for future composting. After the top layer was removed the compost was applied at about 3 inches in depth around the entire tree.

Myron had made a deep watering device. He used steel pipe and a few fittings to inject water underground. The challenge with this device was letting the high pressure of the water do the work. But once you got the hang of it, it was pretty fun to do. The idea was to inject water about 2 feet underground, forcing the compost down into the root zone. This procedure was done for about two weeks; then I let nature take its course.

Three months later the tree has begun to show remarkable improvement. Recently I trimmed off a couple of the dead branches and noticed that there were new limbs growing. I was totally amazed. I had already noticed that the tree had a lot more leaf growth than years past, but I wasn't expecting new limb growth so soon.

Plano Pure really works. I believe so much in the product and the process we just did that I am planning on doing the same thing with a 20 year old crepe myrtle I have that has not bloomed for the last two years.

– Janet Hurley

Our guest writer is Janet Hurley. Read her success story in saving a Sweet Gum tree in her front yard.

During a winter garden workday Myron Hirschman and I were talking about one of my trees. Myron said, "You know we could do what Malcolm Beck did with his pecan trees, spread 3 inches of compost around it and deep water it. I'll bet we can save that Sweet Gum." So the challenge was on.

In March I had 3 cubic yards of compost delivered to my house. We used about 1 cubic yard of compost around the tree and the rest I used to topdress my yard. However, before we could use the compost around the tree we had some work to do. We tilled all the soil and turf around the tree, removed all the grass and weeds from the top layer, and then began to apply the compost. This was backbreaking work. I ended up



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