New Sanctioned Project

By Teresa Slack

At our last meeting, we voted to take on a project at the College Hill Middle School to help students there. This is in conjunction with a “Plant Beautification”: project they are working on. Annette Lachowsky has agreed to moderate this project for us. She gave a presentation of what the project would include at our meeting. Please let me know if you would like to help with this. As I said at the meeting – to teach kids about horticulture is at the top of my list of what Master Gardeners love to do! We would like to get together to discuss a plan for this project, so let me know if you can help.

And remember, this is a SANCTIONED Project.

Talks at the Library Programs

We have added Talks at the Collins Senior Center to our Talks at the Library this year. Shelia, committee chair has done a wonderful job of putting the programs together. A few of the programs: Alice gave a wonderful talk on garlic; Judith showed us how to have a keyhole garden, and Andrea talked on tomatoes & composting.

If you have any questions regarding anything in this newsletter, please feel free to call (870) 779-3609 or visit Room 215 in the Miller Co. Courthouse, 400 Laurel.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Caraway
County Extension Agent - Agriculture
JWC:jds
It seems that Spring has finally Sprung! We have certainly had enough April showers to bring an abundance of May flowers. Everything seems to be so bright and pretty. Everyone also says we will be complaining in August about the lack of rain. Well, we will just see about that.

With May and warmer months approaching, we are gearing up for our busy season. There is a lot going on. You can read about everything here in the newsletter. There is plenty to do for everyone. We have several new sanctioned projects that will be going on during the summer months. If you are not sure about these new projects, just ask. We will see you are steered in the right direction.

So as the weather gets better and better, it is time for all of us to get going.

As I have said before, just find your passion and jump right in. There is something in Master Gardeners for everyone.

Happy Master Gardening!

Teresa Slack

Tips for Foiling Slugs
*Don’t overfeed young plants in the spring, as this encourages soft growth, which slugs love to eat.

Encourage natural predators. Plant trees to act as roosts and berry-producing plants such as holly to entice thrushes into garden.

Create a pond to provide a habitat for frogs, newts and toads, all of which consume unfeasibly high numbers of slugs each night.

---

Sunflowers to the Rescue!

Submitted by Rita Nichols

Helen Keller knew enough about the wisdom of this bright and beautiful plant to share it with others. While she understood and celebrated the sunflower’s ability to follow the movement of the sun, she could not have known of its power to cleanse the earth. Thanks to the wonders of science, we do now, and it is a beautiful and useful wisdom!

The sunflower, or Helianthus annuus, from the Greek helios, meaning “Sun,” is a powerful plant in the world of industry & art. There are few people in the world who would be unable to recognize its shining yellow face in a garden or field. This bright, cheerful flower has given us a delicious and hardy seed, a versatile cooking oil, leaves for cattle feed, a stem strong enough to make paper, and of course, much beauty. It has also, as of late, brought us something even more special: the ability to remove harmful toxins from our soil, helping us to more safely handle the earth around us and grow food for ourselves and our communities.

The sunflower is one of many plants that are now known to aid in “phytoremediation,” a process that employs various types of plants to remove, transfer, stabilize, and/or destroy contaminants in the our soil, water and air. Compared to other cleanup methods, such as soil excavation or pumping polluted groundwater, phytoremediation has become a clean, cost-effective and environmentally-friendly way to reclaim and reuse land that has been tainted by poisonous chemicals and heavy metals.

I was first introduced to phytoremediation and the role that sunflowers play in that process after my housemates and I were to put a home garden in an area we knew to be moderately contaminated with lead. We did not know much about the science behind it but figured it was a good first step in making our garden a healthy, pollutant-free space. What we discovered was quite remarkable. The first year we did a soil test, we learned we had a low to medium contaminant level. That meant we could get away with growing and eating fruit bearing vegetables like tomatoes, eggplant, and snap peas, with little to no risk (we opted not to grow anything but sunflowers, though, that first year). Only one year later, after planting the sunflowers, we had no recognizable levels of lead in our soil. That year we planted our first bountiful urban home.

“Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadow. It is what sunflowers do.”

--Helen Keller

Sunflowers are not only able to absorb lead, but other dangerous heavy metals as well.

Continued on page 4
Piney Hills LA MG Trails & Trellises Garden Tour

The Piney Hills MGs will host their garden tour on May 14th, 2016, from 9:00 a.m. til 3:00 p.m. Four lovely gardens in Minden, Louisiana, will be available to enjoy as well as a variety of vendors and the MG annual plant sale. Check out their website at www.phimg.com to see photos of the gardens in the beginning and as they develop. You will not want to miss the MG Plant Sale. Vendors will also be set up to allow you to get that perfect ornament or plant for your garden.

To purchase your $10 ticket in advance, call 318-371-1371 (email rdwhiterx@yahoo.com or gjc4750@bellsouth.net). On the day of the tour, tickets will be $12.

Red Dirt Master Gardener Minutes

April 14, 2016
REA BUILDING

The meeting was called to order by President, Teresa Slack. Andrea Thomas made a motion to accept the minutes and Alice McMillan seconded the motion. The minutes of the March meeting were approved as printed in the newsletter. The Treasurer’s report was approved and will be filed for audit. Andrea Thomas encouraged members to continue online reporting of volunteer hours.

Unfinished Business - Committee reports were given. Charlotte Neaves reported that all is fine with the Ogden Workday. Gayle Renfro reported that the workday was successful on the Miller County Beds. Members may work on flowerbeds at the Courthouse Fridays & Saturdays as group or anytime-preferably not alone.

Sheila Keever reported that Talks at the Library and More is going as planned. The first Talk for the Senior Citizens Group was completed. Future Talks will include Dr. Jim Keever (exercises to prevent back trouble); Andrea Thomas & Judith White & Nancy Biggar will also present programs. Members are encouraged to bring plastic jars for a Kids’ Program-SPROUTS. The Produce Manager from Albertson’s will also be a speaker.

Annette Lachowsky reported on a successful meeting about a project with students at Fairview Elementary. Next, President Teresa Slack presented a thank you card and gift to Kathy Boyles for serving as Secretary for the past two years.

New Business - Teresa announced that the Executive Committee had approved two new sanctioned projects: 1—The College Hill Middle School Program EAST where several students have asked our organization for guidance in selecting plants and planting flower beds around the school. Annette Lachowsky reported on meeting with the teachers and students and she will head up this project. Judith White made a motion to accept this as a sanctioned project for 2016 & Sue Lambert seconded the motion. The motion was approved. 2—The Four States Agri-Expo was also approved by the Executive Committee as a sanctioned project. The motion made by Lynn Willing-Bond & second by Paula Griffith. The motion was approved as a sanctioned project beginning in 2017.

The Back to Nature Project (a sanctioned project) is scheduled for June 9 and will be held at John Turner’s farm. Jennifer Caraway announced that donations are needed for purchase of 300 t-shirts & food for the event. The 4-H Fishing Derby will be held July 7 at the Ferguson Park.

Gayle Renfro announced that applications for the John Turner Scholarship are due April 18 at Arkansas High School.

Teresa Slack, Pres., announced that according to Janet Carson and the Master Gardener State Rules & Regulations, the Farmers’ Market Cart cannot be continued to be used as is due to commercial advertising on the cart. Judith White made a motion for the organization to buy a new cart and apply signage for Master Gardeners and the University of AR Extension Office. Paula Griffith seconded the motion, & the vote was passed by a majority.

The Basic Training Committee will meet on Friday, April 15 at the Courthouse. The Bowie County Master Gardener Plant Sale will be held Sat., April 16 at Trail Head Park in New Boston, TX. Pam Rayburn announced that a Market cleanup day will be April 23. Members may call Pam to sign up for volunteer hours at the Market in May.

Andrea Thomas presented an informative program, “All About Tomatoes.”

The meeting adjourned.
Respectfully submitted,
Jan Lavender,
Secretary
Sunflowers to the Rescue! (Continued from page 2)

Just for You … Our New Master Gardeners – A program to celebrate you and encourage you to grow from an Annual to a Perennial Master Gardener. This program, being offered at locations around the state, is open to our new MGs and their Mentors only. If you finished your classroom training between June 2015 & May 31, 2016, please join us at one of these locations:

Mon., June 20th, El Dorado, St. Mary’s Episcopal Church, 9:30-12:30

Tues., June 21st, Clarksville, Johnson Co. Fairgrounds, 9:00-12:00

Tues., June 21st, Little Rock St. James, 2:30-5:30 p.m.

Wed., June 22nd, Batesville, UACCB Auditorium, 9:30-12:30.

All sessions will feature: Janet Carson, University of AR Extension Horticulture Specialist & MG State Coordinator and Dr. Lelia Kelly, Professor of Mississippi State Univ. Extension Consumer Horticulture Specialist & MG State Coordinator.

To register online, visit: http://forms.uaex.edu/registrations/MG/annuals-perennials/Registration.asp

It is important to note, we didn’t just plant sunflowers. We also amended our soil with compost and manure, which not only helped the sunflowers grow big and strong, but also aided in the process of phytoremediation and lead abatement. We were also fortunate to have started with relatively low levels of lead in our soil.

Almost as important as planting the sunflowers, though, was what we did afterward. After the sunflower season ended, we did not permit our sunflowers to decompose in our garden space or put them in the compost, as that would only have returned the contaminants into the newly cleansed land. Instead, we took them to the dump, and though the levels of lead concentrated in their stems, leaves, & flower heads would have been relatively low, we labeled them “hazardous materials,” just to be safe.

Sunflowers are not only able to absorb lead, but other dangerous heavy metals such as arsenic, zinc, chromium, copper, and manganese.

Probably the most astounding example of phytoremediation was the use of a type of sunflower to clean up contaminated soil in the Ukraine following the Chernobyl disaster, one of the worst nuclear power plant accidents in history. Other communities from far and wide have learned about and employed the magic healing of sunflowers. “Project Sprout,” based out of Tulane City Center in New Orleans, focuses on planting bio-energy gardens that include plants like sunflowers as a way to remediate soil, yield a crop for bio-fuel production, provide green-collar job training and to support urban revitalization in neighborhoods of New Orleans that suffered devastating damage from hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Sunflowers have an amazing capacity to not only transform the health of a space in your community, but also add beauty. If you’re looking to clean up your soil, or just want to enjoy the beauty of these flowers in your garden, here are some great varieties to try:

**Soraya** — a nice bright orange sunflower that grows to about 6 feet with a single stem.

**Ring of Fire** — a multicolored starburst sunflower that’s around 3 to 4 feet tall.

**Russian Mammoth** — a beautiful yellow flower that can grow to be 8 feet tall!

**Velvet Queen** — red and orange with burgundy undertones and grows to an average of 5 feet.

From: Farmers Almanac - Home and Garden

---

Basic Training Meeting

Teresa leads another great Basic Training meeting. Almost everything is in place for Basic Training, except the trainees.

Foiling Slugs

*You could grow a sacrificial offering, perhaps a tasty lettuce or two, in your borders. Be sure to pick off the culprits.

*Piles of sweet bran under hostas create something of a mollusk free-for-all at night. Then just pick them off the piles in the morning.
Volunteer Time

By Andrea Thomas

Let’s report our hours. Did you help with the Talks at the Collins Senior Center? If you were a presenter, count the time you prepared/ worked on the presentation and/or powerpoint; be sure to count time used making handouts. Report that time under Talks at the Library; this is sanctioned hours.

Did you go to the workday for the Miller County Courthouse Flowerbeds? Report that time under MC Courthouse Beds; this is sanctioned hours.

Did you go to the workdays for the Nashville Farmers Market and Demo Garden? Report that time under Nashville FM and Demo Garden; this is sanctioned hours.

Did you go to the clean-up workday at the Gateway Farmers Market? Report that time under Gateway FM; this is sanctioned hours.

Did you go to the Basic Training meeting? Report that under Basic Training – Volunteer.

Did you go to the Texarkana Downtown Community Gardens workdays? Report that under Texarkana Downtown Community Garden. This is sanctioned hours.

Did you go to the monthly meeting? You get 1 hour for the business part of the meeting, report it under Monthly meeting business.

Did you bring one of the wonderful dishes we had for the meal? You get to count the time you were in the store picking up items to make that great dish. (You cannot count travel time to the store or time visiting with your friends while in the store). How long did it take to prepare your dish? You get to count that time also. Did you come early and help set up for the meal? You also count that time. All this time will go under Hospitality/Social.

Education

Did you stay for the monthly meeting program Andrea presented on tomatoes? That’s 1 hour education. Report under monthly meeting program.

Have you been to any seminars on gardening (flowers, vegetables, etc.)? All of this time can be reported under Seminars.

Have you been to a public garden (as Garvan Gardens, Dallas Arboretum, Rose Garden in Shreveport or Tyler, etc.)? Report that under Garden Tours. Your neighbor’s, friend’s, cousin’s, etc. garden does not count; it must be public not a private or individual’s garden.

Have you been reading Horticulture Magazines or Books? You can report 1 hour each month for this activity.

Have you been watching a Horticulture program on TV or listening to a horticulture program on the radio? You can report 1 hour each month for this activity.

Travel Time

Now the rule is that you can not count travel time; well there is an exception to this rule. Should you be transporting items for a project, you may count the time loading, unloading, and moving/transporting the items. Some examples: hauling compost or mulch for the Court- house flowerbeds or Downtown garden. Now only count the time you are transporting the items. Bringing/transporting personal gloves, hoe, shovel, pruners, etc. to a project does not count.

If you have any questions on reporting your hours in the on line system, please give me a call 903-832-8111 or send me an email at7550@yahoo.com & I will do my best to help.

Slug-Resistant Plants

Slugs have voracious appetites but they are also fussy eaters – there- in lies an answer to a slimy problem. The good news is that there is a selection of plants that slugs & snails will steer clear of.

Slugs avoid plants that are tough, hairy or bitter. They’ll choose lettuce over chicory, Brussels sprouts over sprouting broccoli, & chrysanthemums over dandelions. Then there are plants with hairy, glossy or waxy leaves, which prevent their tongues scraping away the surface. Also unpopular are those with pungent-smelling foliage, such as lavender. The fragrance is contained in vessels that fracture when touched to release essen- tial oils, which must be like gargling perfume.

The following plants are slug resistant. Of course resistance doesn’t mean immunity, but this list helps repel slugs without extra cost or chemicals:

- Aquilegias – Astibes
- Astrantias – Begonias
- Crocuses – Euphorbias
- Ferns – Fuchsias
- Grasses – Hardy geraniums – Roses
- Hellebores – Hydrangeas
- Japanese anemones – Lady’s mantle – Sedums
- Lavenders – Lillium henryi – Pelargoniums – Penstemons

Hollowed out lemon and orange peels, halved empty egg shells and ice cream cones work well as seed starters. Simply put soil in the peels, egg shells and cones (flat bottoms work well) and plant your seeds in them. When ready, plant the whole thing, “pot” and all!
Twisty, Curvy Plants Difficult to Use in Landscape

Twisty curvy & weeping plants are fun to look at, but hard to use in the landscape. They are so unique and special that they must have a special spot to really work. Most should be used as a planned focal point, since they definitely draw one’s attention. Usually, one is enough in the landscape as more than one is too distracting.

What do I mean by twisty curvy plants? These are plants that have contorted and twisted stems. Commonly used plants like this include contorted hazelnut and corkscrew willow.

The contorted hazelnut (Corylus avellana ‘Contorta’) also goes by the name Harry Lauder’s walking stick. It is curiously twisted on a grafted stem. This plant grows 8 to 10 feet tall, but grows very slowly and can be pruned to keep it within limits. The habit is quite rounded to show the extremely contorted and twisted stems. Although a cultivar of the hazelnut commonly used for nut production, the contorted variety rarely produces nuts. They send up lots of suckers, which have to be pruned back yearly.

The corkscrew willow (Salix matsudiana ‘Tortuosa’) is popular in arts and crafts. This unusual specialty plant is a small to medium-sized oval tree with an interesting contorted or “corkscrew” appearance in its branching & leaves. The overall habit is oval, with narrow branch angles and contorted small branches. It grows 20-40’ high and has medium green colored leaves with medium-fine texture.

Weeping plants are different from contorted ones, yet also are unique enough to need a special place in the landscape. There are many different weeping plants on the market.

The most commonly found are Weeping Willows (Salix alba), Weeping Cherries (Prunus subhirtella var. pendula) and Weeping Mulberries (Morus alba ‘Pendula’).

Consider a Weeping Dogwood (Cornus florida’Pendula’) or a Weeping European beech (Fagus sylvatica ‘Pendula’).

For something really different look for weeping evergreens. Each plant is so unique that it is hard to pick a favorite. I like Weeping European larch (Larix decidua ‘Pendula’).

There are also weeping white pine, weeping Colorado blue spruce, and weeping eastern arborvitae.

Consider a twisty curvy or weeping plant for your garden, but remember that they are very special plants. Their unique features require special consideration. Failure to take these into account can lead to disappointment. A weeping tree can become a major asset in or a plant that looks oddly out of place.

University of IL Extension

Welcome Our New 4-H Agent to Extension

There’s a new face in town. You may know her from the Ag Learning Center, where she was Director. Samantha Kroll joined the Miller County Extension Service as 4-H Agent, May 2, 2016. We are very excited to have her on our team. She comes to us with a wealth of knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm. Please join with us as we welcome her to our Extension family!

Samantha has a Master of Science degree from Southern AR University and has been involved in some facet of agriculture her entire life. She and husband Cliff have one son, Guy Cooper. They live on a farm and have broiler houses and cattle that keep them busy. 2-year old Guy Cooper is already following in momma’s footsteps, helping raise cattle and a hog named Sweet Potato.

November 1 – 4, 2016 Registration is now open.

The planned speakers will engage and educate you. On the tours you can visit many glorious public, school and residential gardens, as well as the two sports facilities near the hotel. The Tarrant County Master Gardeners plan to offer “good old-fashioned Texas hospitality and look forward to having y’all visit our country.”

For more information, schedule, and registration online, click https://2016southernregionmg.com or call our office at 870-779-3609 and we will be happy to mail this schedule and information to you.