

Imagination Grows Best When Out on a Limb

If the grass is looking a little greener in and around Wood County, it's not just because spring is on the way. In part, it's due to a few hardworking souls, the Wood County Master Gardeners. As enthusiastic a group as any, master gardeners have a deep appreciation and active interest in just about everything that can be planted, including lawns, trees, shrubs and

50 hours of volunteer service within a year of completing the lessons.

The volunteer commitment is done in conjunction with the local county extension office. The type of service undertaken varies with the needs of the community and is overseen by Texas Agri-Life Extension Service employee and Wood County Extension Agent Clint Perkins.

Park in Quitman, the Winnsboro Garden Club and countless other sites.

To date, there are 54 trained and active members in Wood County's Master Gardeners Program, with another 23 trainees enrolled in class. After completing their initial training, maintaining the master gardener's certificate is more relaxed, with only 12 hours of volunteer work and six hours of continuing education credits required annually.

The volunteer work comes in many shapes and forms, depending on the needs of the community and the talents and abilities of a master gardener. Individuals host and participate in plant clinics and displays at public events, conduct or present at workshops, work with 4-H youth, or develop their own community garden projects.

When added up, the local impact is significant. For example, this past year Wood County Master Gardeners presented a mock check worth \$35,445.90 to the Commissioners Court of Wood County. This represented the value of the 2,838 hours of labor on community projects in 2007.

Pam Riley, an old hand at gardening but a relatively new master gardener, has been the driving force behind a rather ambitious project-in-the-making, which all of the master gardeners have embraced. The vision includes building on the natural beauty of the park to develop the Governor Hogg Park Arboretum and Botanical Gardens, which will contain all manner of woody and leafy plants to be used for education and study. Right now, Riley explained, the wooded areas attached to the park are "a diamond in the rough," as exquisite native trees and manmade trails are already in place. The project's scope, nonetheless, will be big.

There are four distinct phases to



Quitman Mayor Sam Lange and Master Gardener Pam Riley help break ground at the Governor Hogg Park Arboretum and Botanical Gardens.

flowers. But it's not just their shared love of flora that sets them apart; it's their dedication to community.

To be a master gardener is to also be an avid and involved volunteer. To earn the coveted title of master gardener, an individual must undertake intensive training, sponsored by the Texas Cooperative Extension, which includes a minimum of 50 hours of horticultural instruction. To pay for those lessons and earn the Texas Master Gardener certificate, a candidate must then use their knowledge and contribute at least

In Wood County, that's where the "greener" grass comes in. In 2007 the group dedicated more than 2,837 hours working on projects aimed at beautifying the region and educating others. In Mineola there's been much work on developing a Nature Preserve Sensory Garden and a Wildscape Garden. The gardeners have also worked extensively in a national Earthkind rose trial, which is being used to develop more carefree roses. They also have put many hours into colorful plantings at Governor Jim Hogg City

developing the arboretum and botanical gardens, and the first part is well under way. It began with many hours of clearing undergrowth and brush, which was done with a significant donation of time and labor by James “Eddie” Derryberry, among many others. The second phase has already begun, as the gardeners gather materials to complete what will be the welcoming face of the project. Plans for this phase include building raised beds of Earthkind roses, planting stands of azaleas and also developing beds for a few annuals for spot color. The largest feature to welcome guests will be a traditionally inspired gazebo, which will act as a place to rest tired feet and also house educational materials.

The third phase will draw visitors into the interior of the arboretum along various paths sprinkled with tree markers to name and characterize the varieties. This part of the project also promises to be a little more whimsical when the planned children’s discovery garden is added. Hopes for this include a bubbling fountain and a selection of plants that lend themselves to touch and feel.

The last planned construction phase of the project is probably the most ambitious of all and involves building a pavilion with pull-down sides, which will allow it to be used in a multitude of ways. The idea would be to host various groups and classes and provide a meeting place for the master gardeners and possibly other



The Wood County Master Gardeners provide a wealth of community benefits, as evidenced by a mock check presented to the Wood County Commissioners Court by Master Gardener Pam Riley and Wood County Extension Agent Clint Perkins.

civic groups. This would also be a place to potentially generate revenue as a site rental for parties and weddings, with the money going toward other projects at the gardens.

The first four phases of the project are set to be completed by late 2009, but that timetable will be largely dependent on raising money from Wood County businesses, civic groups and residents.

However, Perkins and Riley agree, there will always be work to do; and the project will be just like any garden, a living project that will never really

end. They, along with the other master gardeners, also have many ideas of their own that will add elements of interest and points of education that will include creek improvement projects, artful benches, picnic tables and possible sculptural elements. And, they are looking for more.

“We are always looking for ideas and input,” Perkins said. “This is for the residents of Wood County and the people of Texas to enjoy and to be used to increase their knowledge of the plants in Northeast Texas.”

Many hands and minds have already touched this project, and much of the enthusiasm that has been building was sparked in the eyes of children. Riley tells the story of the “Butterfly Guy” Tony Delia, who gave a program to a sixth-grade science class at Quitman Elementary. Teacher Sevetra Pankey then developed a class program. The kids were pulled in to plant host flowers for native butterflies, and those blooms now add flights of color around the historic Stinson House from early spring to late fall.

For Riley, their enthusiasm was the inspiration that made the plan for the Arboretum and Botanical Gardens burst into bloom.

FRIENDS OF THE ARBORETUM

The group, a 501(c) nonprofit organization, needs donations of materials, labor and money. For more information on lending a helping hand, call Wood County Master Gardener Pam Riley at (903) 967-2820 or Wood County Extension Agent Clint Perkins at (903) 763-2924.

Monetary donations can be mailed to:
Friends of the Arboretum
P.O. Box 1395
Quitman, TX 75783

The park is at 100 Governor Jim Hogg Parkway in Quitman.



Are You Up To Speed on Power Cord Safety?

ARE LAMP, EXTENSION, TELEPHONE AND OTHER CORDS PLACED OUT OF THE FLOW OF TRAFFIC?

Cords stretched across walkways may cause someone to trip—and the wear and tear could expose wires in an electrical cord, creating a dangerous shock hazard. Whenever possible, arrange furniture so that outlets are available for lamps and appliances without the use of extension cords.



Hiding an extension cord under a rug can cause a fire.

Extension cords should not be used as a substitute for permanent wiring. If you must use an extension cord, place it on the floor against a wall where people cannot trip over it.

ARE CORDS OUT FROM BENEATH FURNITURE AND RUGS OR CARPETING?

Furniture resting on cords can damage them. Electric cords that run

under carpeting can overheat and cause a fire. Remove cords from under furniture or carpeting. Replace damaged or frayed cords.

ARE CORDS ATTACHED TO WALLS, BASEBOARDS, ETC., WITH NAILS OR STAPLES?

Nails or staples can damage cords, presenting fire and shock hazards. After disconnecting the power, remove nails and staples from cords. Check wiring for damage. Use tape if necessary to attach cords to walls or floors.

ARE ELECTRICAL CORDS IN GOOD CONDITION, NOT FRAYED OR CRACKED?

Damaged cords may cause a shock or fire. Replace frayed or cracked cords.

DO EXTENSION CORDS CARRY NO MORE THAN THEIR PROPER LOAD, AS INDICATED BY THE RATINGS LABELED ON THE CORD AND THE APPLIANCE?

Overloaded extension cords may cause fires. Replace No. 18 gauge cords with No. 16 gauge cords. Older extension cords using small (No. 18 gauge) wires can overheat at 15 or 20 amps. Change the cord to a higher-rated one or unplug some appliances if the rating on the cord is exceeded by the power requirements of the appliances plugged into the cord.



DON'T LET YOUR CLOTHES DRYER SHRINK YOUR WALLET

Give your dryer—and your clothes—a longer life by treating your appliance with care on laundry day. Here's how:

- One simple chore can speed up drying time, cut your dryer's energy use, prevent a fire and prolong the life of your machine: Clean the lint filter after every use. Simply remove the lint. Tip: If soap and fabric softener have built up on the screen, wash it with soap and water. Occasionally vacuum the chute that houses the filter.

- Use rigid, not flexible, duct work to help your dryer vent efficiently and to comply with building codes. Unfasten the duct from the dryer once a year and vacuum it.

- Lubricate the flap of the exhaust vent on the outside of your house once a year. Use a vacuum or lint brush to clear the vent so air can easily pass through it. A clogged vent can cause a fire.

- Cut down on drying time if your clothes constantly come out wrinkled. That means you're overdrying.

- Add dryer sheets before turning on the dryer. Tossing them in after clothes are warm can stain the clothes.

- And don't forget "solar" clothes drying—hang them on a clothesline and let nature do the work.

SOMETHING FOR NOTHING

Free Ways To Lower Your Electric Bill

- Place lamps in corners to reflect light from two walls instead of one. Light-colored walls reflect more light than dark walls, so less light is needed. Use task lighting, focused where you need it, rather than lighting an entire room.
- Shiny reflector pans under your stove burners help focus the heat more efficiently. Tight-fitting lids on pots and pans produce results faster by not letting heat escape, allowing you to use less heat and less water. You can turn the heat off earlier and allow food to finish cooking with the residual heat, since the heat is retained longer.

WHAT TO DO IF THE LIGHTS GO OUT

When severe weather causes power outages, employees of Wood County Electric Cooperative (WCEC) begin working immediately to restore service as quickly as possible. Primary lines serving hundreds of customers are serviced first, and then the secondary lines serving just a few customers are serviced. Medical facilities and individuals on life-support systems are given top priority.

When your lights go out, look outside and see whether your neighbors are also in the dark. If they're not, check your fuse box or circuit breaker to see if you can locate the problem.

If the outage has affected your neighbors, call WCEC at (903) 763-2203. Don't assume that others have reported the outage.

Outages that occur in severe weather, or that last for an extended period of time, can place a heavy burden on the system at the moment power is restored. To prevent an overload and possibly another outage, take these steps:

- Leave only one inside light on.
- Turn off your thermostat.
- In cold weather, close windows and drapes to save heat. Gather your family in one room on the warm side



of the house. Close the doors to the rest of the house and use blankets to insulate the windows.

- Make sure your kitchen range is off, both the surface and the oven. Never use it for heat.

- Turn off all unnecessary appliances.
- Avoid opening the freezer door. A full, freestanding freezer will keep food at freezing temperatures about two days; a half-full freezer about one day.

- If you see a downed power line, **STAY AWAY!** And call your electric cooperative at once!

Leave your front porch light switched on so WCEC employees will know when your power has been restored.

When power comes back on, slowly switch your appliances and lights back on and gradually return your thermostat to its normal setting.

thermostat at the temperature you'd like, and your furnace will heat your home as fast as it can.

Another myth regards the efficiency of setting your thermostat down when you don't need heating or cooling, such as at night or when no one is home. This myth states that a furnace works harder than normal to heat your home back to a comfortable temperature after the thermostat has been set back, resulting in little or no savings. This is not true, as has been proven by years of research and field observations. The longer your house stays at a reduced temperature when heating—or at an increased temperature when cooling—the more energy and money you'll save.

APPLIANCE TAX HOLIDAY ON HORIZON

If you have an appliance purchase in your future, you might want to hold off until Memorial Day weekend. From 12:01 a.m. on Saturday, May 24, to 11:59 p.m. on Monday, May 26, certain energy-efficient products will be sold without the state sales tax.

You could realize a substantial savings, especially on larger products such as air conditioners or refrigerators—that is, if they qualify under the Energy Star program.

Energy Star is a joint effort of the U.S. Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency. Earning the Energy Star means a product meets strict energy-efficiency guidelines set by the agencies.

The products qualifying for the exemption are:

- Air conditioners priced under \$6,000 (room and central units)
- Clothes washers (but not clothes dryers)
- Ceiling fans
- Dehumidifiers
- Dishwashers
- Light bulbs and fixtures (compact fluorescent)
- Programmable thermostats
- Refrigerators priced under \$2,000

Qualifying products will display the Energy Star logo on the appliance, the packaging or the Energy Guide label. Energy Star does not rate clothes dryers because there is little difference in energy use among all models.

There are no limits on the number of items that may be purchased during this new sales tax holiday, and an exemption certificate is not required.

The tax-free holiday also applies, with certain provisions, to Internet and catalog sales of eligible products. Layaway plans can be used to take advantage of the sales tax holiday, within certain parameters.

You can see lists of products that qualify for the tax holiday at www.energystar.gov.

THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR THERMOSTAT

Your home's thermostat controls how long your heating or cooling system operates. You can save energy and money by learning how this simple device operates.

One common myth is that the higher you set your thermostat when you return home, the faster your furnace will heat up your house. This isn't true since most furnaces deliver heat at the same rate no matter how high the thermostat is set. So just set your