



## President's Corner

Spring is really on a roll now. I am really pleased with the way my true southern plants made it through the winter; the Celeste fig already has little figs. A temporary cover has seemed to help a lot on these cold nights

We had three work sessions and one class last week. The first work day on Monday for the tomato project was very well attended and we had a delicious lunch provided by Debbie Ward. This is really going to be a significant effort and together with our new building, it will make our corner of the fairgrounds interesting and impressive. Please keep up with the tomato project calendar which Pennie has posted on <http://www.rheacomg.com/>. Just click on the Tomato Project heading on the right. Please join us whenever you can for the work days. Monday, April 18 is the next

workday.

I would like to say **Thank You** to our dedicated group of volunteers. You are making this all happen, and it is amazing. I can't wait to see what the hundreds of tomato plants look like this summer.

We also had a good morning at the hospital courtyard last Friday. This is a beautiful garden and is a nice place to sit and talk when visiting at the hospital in stressful times. The weeding and sprucing up work at the Spring City Depot was held Saturday morning even though the temperature was 40 degrees and the wind was 15 mph. See the picture below for those who attended. We finished in a record 2 hours. Thanks again to everyone who is helping out.

*John*

John Kueck  
Master Gardener Association President



## April Master Gardener Meeting

Our next meeting will be held on **April 21 at 7:00 p.m.** at the **Ag Center in Evensville**. This meeting is being held in conjunction with the Master Gardener class on Urban Forestry. If you would like to attend the class, please arrive at 5:30 p.m. If you only plan to come for the business session, please arrive at 6:45 p.m. **We will have a business meeting at 7:00 p.m.**

## April Gardening Tips

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- Look for some of the exciting new cultivars of hydrangea arborescens such as Incrediball and Invincibelle Spirit. Invincibelle Spirit is a new pink form that takes a few years to become well established in the garden, but it will be a showstopper.
- Prune spring-flowering shrubs (azaleas, flowering quince, Forsythia and Loropetalum) soon after they finish flowering, but only if they need it. Selectively cut old or unruly branches by reaching deeply into the shrub leaving no visible stub, making the cut just above a joint. This pruning method will keep them from looking like meatballs.
- A good option for Loropetalums that have outgrown their space is to tree-form them. They can easily be limbed up by removing lower branches.
- Kerria japonica, also known as Japanese kerria or yellow rose of Texas, often has dead branches. Follow them to the base to cut them. Remove older branches the same way to keep the plant looking good. Older, overgrown or neglected plants can be cut to the ground for rejuvenation.
- Azaleas often show symptoms of lace bug and spider mite infestations during the hot months of summer. This damage can be prevented by a one time early application of the systemic insecticide imidacloprid. This insecticide should be poured in liquid form around the root system as the flowers fade, spreading the active ingredients throughout the plant tissue where it remains effective through the growing season. Bayer Advanced Tree and Shrub Insect Control is a common brand that contains this safe and effective insecticide. Always follow label directions when applying an pesticide.
- You can direct seed easy-to-grow flowering annuals and vegetables. Some easy flowers to grow from seed include marigold, zinnia, sunflowers and cosmos. Beans, peas, corn and okra are some easy direct sow vegetables, while dill, basil and cilantro are some easy direct sow herbs.
- Try the annual moon vine, Ipomoea alba, this year to attract sphinx moths to your garden. Nick the hard seed coat carefully with nail clippers and soak in water overnight to hasten germination.
- Spring is a good time to freshen up the mulch in your landscape. Remember not to pile it around the trunks of your trees and shrubs. If using a pre-emergent herbicide, be sure to apply it before spreading your mulch to prevent the sunlight from breaking it down. It also forms a more effective barrier when allowed to bond with soil particles. Remember it is not necessary to fertilize well-established trees or shrubs. If you are trying to encourage faster growth on new plantings, a balanced granular fertilizer scattered on the soil surface is effective. Be careful not to overdo it. Tree spikes or drilling fertilizer into the root zones is unnecessary and expensive.
- Cut back any woody perennials that may need it like rosemary, rue, lavender, Santolina and Artemisia. If done before the danger of frost has passed, new growth may appear and a freeze can kill that new growth and sometimes the entire plant.

## February Master Gardener Meeting Minutes

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The regularly scheduled meeting of the Rhea County Master Gardeners was called to order on Thursday, February 18 at 7:30 p.m. at the Rhea County Ag Center and Fairgrounds. Thomas Greenlee opened the meeting and then called on Pennie Hendrick to preside in John Kueck's absence.

Pennie reminded everyone of our upcoming "tomato trials" with responsibilities to prepare beds, soil and straw bales, weed, etc. There will be a rotation of those who have volunteered to assure no

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volunteer would be over burdened. Thomas will coordinate our schedules for various duties and publish a calendar showing dates, responsibilities on those dates and a list of phone numbers of all volunteers so if someone cannot serve, they will be able to get a substitute. Again we will be working with raised beds, straw bales and soil.

Help will be needed for spreading gravel, starting the straw bales, tilling the ground, etc. These projects will be done on one day, and another time we will actually plant the tomatoes in the three media.

Work on our building will continue and Thomas circulated a sign-up for those interested in volunteering on it as well as those who would be interested in providing meals for those work days. Thomas reminded everyone that preparing meals counted as volunteer hours just as much as physical work on the building.

There is \$5,000 in the budget for this year to work on the building. There is another \$5,000 to improve the entrance road which all agreed is a priority.

Work hours can be earned by helping with the 4-H float for the Strawberry Parade on May 7. Pennie then gave the details of a possible booth for the Festival. Discussion of the pros and cons of both time and finances to participate in the Festival was held and the final decision was to not have a booth this year since we have so many projects on the calendar already this spring and summer and we need not "burn anyone out". It was noted/discussed that the Master Gardeners could participate in other ways to make the public more aware of the program such as a booth in front of the Garden Center at Lowe's or other appropriate high traffic areas that offer garden supplies and plants.

### Upcoming Events:

- Celebrate the Earth on May 17 at Ag Center and Fairgrounds
- Master Gardener graduation on May 19 at Kinzalow's
- Rhea County Fair on August 9-13
- Farm City Day on October 4

Respectfully submitted,

*Linda*

Linda Blevins for Faith Young, Secretary

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## **March Master Gardener Meeting Minutes**

Tomato test trials are going to be held across Tennessee and in other places such as Wisconsin. UT Extension is contracting with someone to raise seedlings for the entire state. We will be growing 540 plants behind the new Master Gardener building. The tomatoes will be grown in the ground, in raised beds and in straw bales and perhaps some in containers for display at events. We will not be told the names of the varieties to avoid pre-conceived opinions during the testing!

Thomas Greenlee is managing the project. He will be arranging for the plowing and tilling for ground planting and will also take care of all spraying needs throughout the season.

Work days will be scheduled to begin in early April for various steps of the project including preparing the 40 straw bales. The bales will take a month to prepare. They will be soaked with water and fertilizer and later on cooled with water after they become hot. Assignments will not be made for these general work days but all are encouraged to participate as able.

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Thomas will send out a day-to-day work schedule for those who previously volunteered to help, to begin in early May. Work assigned can be done at any time of the day unless a general work day is going on. Individuals are responsible for doing their own substituting if they are unable to participate on the dates assigned. Tasks will include weeding, watering and checking for pests. If pests are found, we are to identify them ourselves, recommend a remedy and email Thomas right away with this information. There will also be a board at the site listing current problems and issues to be mindful of.

Celebrate the Earth will take place on May 17 at the Ag Center and Fairgrounds. We will be doing presentations and answering questions on growing tomatoes. 4th and 5th graders from all of Rhea County will be attending. Volunteers will be needed to make posters and to do the presentations. It would also be good if some could grow tomatoes in containers at home to bring to the event, even though the plants will not be well developed yet. John will send an e-mail to everyone about this project and about participation opportunities.

Karen Winters would appreciate some help doing needed work at the Depot in Spring City. She has done most of the trimming already. The City has designated \$100 for the project. This \$100 will need to cover soil, mulch, Round-up and rose plant replacements. Karen will contact John with a date for the workday for early April.

The hospital has asked that the courtyard be weeded. They want to take a photo in a couple of weeks for their newsletter and do a write-up. Linda and her husband have done the pruning already. Linda will contact John with a date for the workday.

Sincerely,

*Judy*

Judy Bancroft for Faith Young, secretary

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