

POTPOURRI



The Austin Herb Society Newsletter

May 2010

May is busting out all over with interesting events. Here are some important dates for your calendar.

May 4, 2010

The May presentation by sponsor Melanie Van Aken of Heron's Nest Farm .

Melanie van Aken from Heron's Nest Farm will be our speaker in May. She is a source of things herbal for eating, bathing and keeping you healthy. I know it will be very useful and fun. Heron's Nest Farm is also one of the farms in the Blanco Lavender Fest.

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**New Event Announcement from the Travis County Master Gardeners Association:**

## **Gardening for Butterflies and Hummingbirds**

Friday, May 7, 2010 1:00-2:30pm

Demonstration Garden at AgriLife Extension Office of Travis County

1600 B Smith Rd , Austin 78721

Gardening for Butterflies & Hummingbirds is appropriate for anyone wanting to incorporate the correct plants into the garden to attract these beauties into your surroundings. Learn plant food sources, host plants, and nesting places for the most common butterflies and hummingbirds in Central Texas .

This seminar is free and open to the public. It is presented by the Travis County Master Gardeners Association, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County. For information, see [www.tcmastergardeners.org](http://www.tcmastergardeners.org) or call the Travis County Master Gardener's help desk at (512) 854-9600.

## 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Lavender Fest

May 15 & 16, 2010

Lavender Products Vendors Music

Cooking Demonstrations

Guest Speakers Vintner Luncheons

Concessions Wine Tasting & Tours

And Much More....

Hours 10-6 pm Saturday 12-6 pm Sunday

Parking \$5.00

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## JOIN AHS FOR A FIELD TRIP

Saturday, May 22nd

Our annual Member's Garden Tour will be a little different this year. As we had no volunteers who wanted to show their gardens, we are going to start at Judith Craft's house for breakfast at 9:00. Then we will carpool from there out to the Indigenous Women's Center, aka Alma de Mujeres, right across the road from The Crossings. It is a beautiful 23 acre property with a medicine wheel herb garden, lodge, cabins and a lovely piece of Cypress Creek. We will have a guided tour of the herb garden by Maria Elena Martinez and then a potluck lunch at the Lodge. I will pass around the sign-up sheet again at our meeting May 4 so everyone can sign up to bring breakfast, lunch or desert. I will also pass out direction sheets then and will have more at Judith's. If you need more info contact me at home, 894-0767 or by e-mail, [haverybell2000@yahoo.com](mailto:haverybell2000@yahoo.com). Pam Bell

As you can see May is busy for herb lovers. I hope you have marked your calendar for these events.



Due to requests from herb lovers all over the country, HerbDay will officially be celebrated on the first Saturday in May going forward, starting with Saturday, May 1, 2010. More people in more parts of the country have a larger variety of herbs growing at this time of year than do in fall. Since HerbDay is a grass roots movement and belongs to the people, the coalition that got the event started wanted to support the populace in taking ownership of HerbDay by moving it to a date more conducive to a greater number of celebrations across the country. If you already have an event slated for October 2009, please go ahead and have it. Let's keep the momentum going to make the celebration of herbs and their uses an ongoing movement.

In fact, everyone is encouraged to celebrate HerbDay any time they want. If you prefer to continue hosting your HerbDay event in autumn or if summer works better for you, please feel free to do so and continue to list your event in the Organize an Event section of this site. Visitors ask year round for information on events in their area. We will continue to add new useful information as time goes on.

Let's make HerbDay each and every day of the year!

[from <http://www.herbdays.org/>]

HerbDay is a coordinated series of independently produced public educational events celebrating the importance of herbs and herbalism. HerbDay was conceived of by five nonprofit organizations with interests in herbs and herbalism (the HerbDay Coalition) to raise public awareness about the significance of herbs in our lives and the many ways herbs can be used safely and creatively for health, beauty care, and culinary

enjoyment. Greater familiarity with herbs will increase informed use of herbal products and build public support for maintaining personal choice in the use of botanicals.

The HerbDay Coalition is comprised of the [American Botanical Council](#), [United Plant Savers](#), the [American Herbal Products Association](#), the [American Herbal Pharmacopoeia](#), and the [American Herbalists Guild](#).

On HerbDay key industry members and the herbal community join together to present a nationwide message that is cohesive, honest, and positive about herbs and herbalism.

The vision of HerbDay is realized each year when thousands of Americans have access to this message.

HerbDay will continue to grow and spread (like any good, healthy plant!): Officially, HerbDay 2010 will be on Saturday, May 1, but each and every person who loves herbs is encouraged to celebrate HerbDay on any day of the year.

**Susan Norwood introduced our April speaker.** We learned to respect SOME bugs!



and the subject...

**Good Bugs, Bad Bugs'' presented by Sam and Leslie Myers of the Master Gardeners Association**





## Ants In The Pants

by Mary H. Mills

As a young woman, I was fascinated by these industrious little marvels of the insect world. I even wrote a paper in biology class in high school on the extraordinary little creatures. But that was then, when I was in Alaska, and ant infestations were far away. It is easy to admire at a distance.

Now residing in Texas I have spent a lot of time thinking about how to make these remarkable creatures live somewhere other than in my gardens. I would like to get them away from my feet, legs, arms and pants when I am working in the garden. Even the smallest, almost impossible to see ants leave a large blister when they bite. (where does all that fluid they inject come from?)

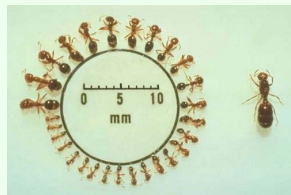
I have often done the Ant-Two-Step, the Ant Rumba and the Ant Stomp, jumping up and down and dancing wildly in my garden. I began searching for solutions to these distressing reoccurring events. Right off the bat I discovered there are many kinds of ants.

### **At the top of the list in Texas when the subject of ants comes up are the demonic Fire Ants.**

No wonder.... It is estimated that fire ants inhabit over 320 million acres throughout the southern U.S.

And remember, there are a variety of native ants and other imported ants as well. There are Carpenter Ants, Acrobat Ants, Pharaoh Ants, Little Black Ants, and Pavement Ants. More interesting are the Crazy Ants, Caribbean Crazy Ants and Crazy Raspberry Ants. I wonder what makes them "Crazy"?

Then there are the Odorous House Ants, White Footed Ants and Thief Ants. And, (gasp.) there are even Ghost Ants. And finally there are



impostor ants like ants commonly called "Velvet ants".

Velvet ants are not ants at all, but a specialized group of insects belonging to the wasp family Mutillidae. Mutillid wasps can be found in Texas during the summertime in both urban and rural habitats. They are often referred to as velvet ants because the females are wingless, antlike and often covered with a velvety "fur".

The experts recommend you know which ants you are dealing with to effectively control them. (Check out "Genera of Texas", a handy field guide to Texas ants published by Texas AgriLife Extension for more information on this subject.)

This looked like a life-time committed study but I pushed on. At the beginning of my study of how to control the ants in my gardens I collected the following organic ant-repellent recommendations:

### **ORGANIC- Including Many Herbal Repellants...**

Pouring 2 to 3 gallons of boiling water onto a mound will kill about 60% of the ants, but the others will move to another location. Note that the boiling water will also kill any vegetation coming into contact with the water.

Ants dislike lavender (*Lavandula*), pot marigold (*Calendula officinalis*), African marigold (*Tagetes erecta*) Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) Pennyroyal (*Mentha pulegium*) and chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*).

Lupin blooms, crushed and rubbed on the bottom of fruit trees early in the year will stop ants climbing the bark.

Tansy under fruit trees, roses, raspberries. Deters flying insects, Japanese beetles, striped cucumber beetles, squash bugs and ants.

Ants hate moving over chalk or pepper. Spread liberal amounts of either around the garden. Use cayenne pepper if possible.

Diatomaceous Earth or DE is a great, non-toxic deterrent for all manner of insects. It acts like ground glass on the skeleton structure of insects

like ants, cockroaches, fleas, and some other pests, but won't harm beneficial insects or animals.

**Orange Oil: (d-limonene)** Mix a few ounces of this per gallon of water: a teaspoon of liquid soap and about three or four ounces of molasses. Just mix it all together and drench the mound. You may need to mix up a few gallons in order to fully drench a large mound. This will "melt" those little boogers... (this seems cruel!)

Other organic and natural methods include mound-drench products comprised of botanical and biological materials.

I tried many of the recommended organic solutions and either I did not identify the correct species of ant or I was not persistent enough in my attempts. After several more Wild Ant-Dance episodes, I had enough! I had come to the conclusion that there are creatures that you cannot just let live in your environment.

Enough!!!

I planned to KILL them...Preferably with something that does not kill me too. I am deeply interested in various MURDEROUS methods and study constantly on the subject.

**Less than Organic methods:**

Baking yeast is lethal to ants. Mix it with a sugar solution and spread it on pieces of bark placed around the garden. (Lethal? sometimes this idea is somewhat satisfying).

Camphor, naphthalene and kerosene will quickly dispel ant nests. (While rubbing the red bumps on my legs, I might be tempted to light a match...)

There are hundreds of commercial Ant Bait products that promise success if children and pets don't find the bait first.

I plan to continue exploring this subject. The more I learn about the extent of ant colonies, I teeter on despair. In the meantime I am suspicious of and avoid any item sitting on the ground that could harbor a colony of ants. I am

vigilant when I begin digging anywhere to check for tell tale signs of any mounds or holes in the ground. When I miss the clues I continue to perfect my Ant-Stomp and Ant Brush Off- Dance skills.

### **Prevention of ant stings**

Look for fire ant mounds and take care not to stand on or near them. Teach children about fire ant hazards. Alert visitors to your landscape that fire ant mounds are present. Wear protective clothing during outdoor activities that might take place near fire ant nests. Wear boots or tuck pant legs into socks. Control ants where they occur in areas used frequently by people and pets. Use insect repellents on clothing or footwear. These treatments may temporarily discourage foraging ants.

If your cautions do not work and you have done the "Fire Ant Twist", try these:

### **Treating Fire Ant stings**

**Remove the stinging ants.** Because worker ants use their jaws (mandibles) to gain leverage to sting, they are fixed tightly to the skin or clothing. Merely jumping into water or running water across ants from a spigot will not remove them. The best method is to rub them off briskly by hand or using a cloth.

**For minor stinging incidents.** With the only symptoms being pain and the development of pustules, stings can be treated with over-the-counter products that relieve pain and prevent infection. I found that a cotton swab soaked in ammonia and pressed against the ant bit area will relieve some pain.

A number of serious multiple stinging incidents have occurred indoors in Texas.

[\[http://www.extension.org/pages/Fire\\_Ant\\_Stings\]](http://www.extension.org/pages/Fire_Ant_Stings) **For severe stinging incidents.** If a sting

causes severe chest pain, nausea, severe sweating, loss of breath, serious swelling, or slurred speech, the person should be taken to an emergency medical facility immediately.

## The Green Corn Project

In February our speaker was Mitch Mills, on the Board of The Green Corn Project.

The Green Corn Project brings information about becoming a little more self sufficient in our digital age with the support of enthusiastic and energetic volunteers.

Bud and I were intrigued. We signed up to volunteer on April 24 for the last “dig in” for the year.

In a few hours these volunteers can begin the process of turning unproductive backyard soils into rich, organic, garden soils that will support the production of year - round fresh food for a family. To date they have created 150 gardens and gardeners in Austin and are still counting.



A finished bed.



In addition one of the volunteer leaders, David Huebel, demonstrated how to create a double dig garden bed.



He dug out soil, and



loosened the next layer of soil.



Moved soil from a new row to fill the first row.



then added compost.

This soil preparation gives these gardens a real good start.

The garden was planted with vegetables and herbs. Herbs were planted with the vegetables and in garden areas around the school building. It was especially rewarding to see the elementary school children working in the four beds. They cleaned, prepared the beds and planted. They asked a lot of questions and learned the names of many of the vegetables and herbs they were working with. Many of the volunteers were also learning a lot, including Bud and I.

I hope the children all can be present for harvest and food preparation. Many took home plants with their mothers and grandmothers to plant at home.

This is a wonderful organization that deserves our support. They supply all the tools, compost and plants for the gardens.

## **Austin Herb Society Sponsors**

We appreciate the support of our generous sponsors, many of whom offer discounts to AHS members.

You will find more information on our sponsors at [www.austinherbsociety.org](http://www.austinherbsociety.org).

\* indicates a 10% discount

\*\* indicates a 15% discount

### **All Good Things \***

453-0639

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### **It's About Thyme\***

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### **Purple Gate Herb Farm**

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### **Wild Spirit Botanicals and Bodywork,**

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